

ALL STORIES
COMPLETE



AUGUST

10¢ DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE



POST-MORTEM AT PIMLICO

A MR. MADDOX NOVELETTE
by T. T. FLYNN

THE PUZZLE OF THE TERRIFIED DUMMY

A NOVELETTE OF THE DEAN
by MERLE CONSTINER

AN ACME INDEMNITY OP STORY
by JAN DANA

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1402 - Massive Initial Ring for men. Brilliant diamond and 2 initials on genuine black onyx; heavy 14K yellow gold mounting.



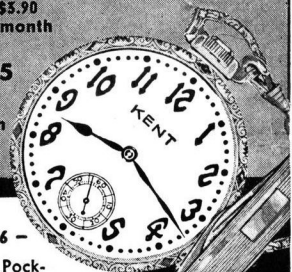
\$2250
\$2.15 a month

D220 - 2 matched brilliant diamonds and simulated sapphire or ruby in heavy 14K yellow gold ring for men.



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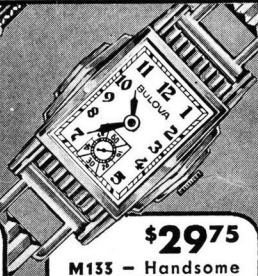
J906 -

Kent Pocket Watch with 7 jewels; chrome case. Knife and chain included.

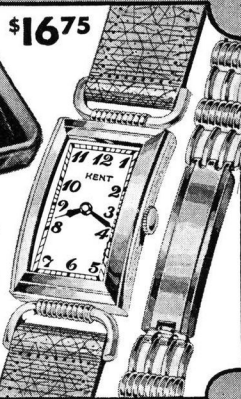
Goddess of Time \$2975
R154 - Tiny Bulova Watch. 17 jewels; 10K yellow rolled gold plate case.
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\$2975
M133 - Handsome Bulova Watch with 15 jewels; 10K yellow rolled gold plate case.
\$2.88 a month



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A183/C94 - Bridal Set with 6 brilliant diamonds. Rings designed to match in 14K yellow gold.
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\$1675

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P160 - Ladies' Watch. K124 - Man's Watch. Both with 7 jewels; 10K yellow rolled gold plate cases. Both come complete with strap and bracelet.

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S.W. Sweet

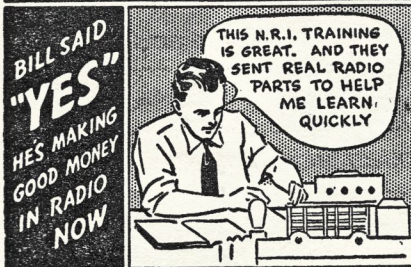
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YES- I'M CONVINCED THAT I CAN MAKE GOOD MONEY IN RADIO. I'M GOING TO START TRAINING FOR RADIO RIGHT NOW!

NO- NOT ME. I'M NOT GOING TO WASTE MY TIME. SUCCESS IS JUST A MATTER OF LUCK AND I WASN'T BORN LUCKY.



BILL SAID "YES" HE'S MAKING GOOD MONEY IN RADIO NOW

THIS N.R.I. TRAINING IS GREAT. AND THEY SENT REAL RADIO PARTS TO HELP ME LEARN QUICKLY



YOU CERTAINLY KNOW RADIO. MINE NEVER SOUNDED BETTER.

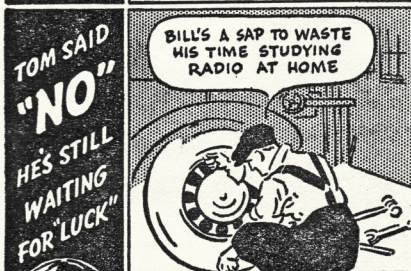
I'VE BEEN STUDYING RADIO ONLY A FEW MONTHS AND I'M ALREADY MAKING GOOD MONEY IN MY SPARE TIME

THANKS



OH BILL! I'M SO PROUD OF YOU. YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO

YES! I'VE GOT A GOOD JOB NOW AND A REAL FUTURE. THANKS TO N.R.I. TRAINING



TOM SAID "NO" HE'S STILL WAITING FOR "LUCK"

BILL'S A SAP TO WASTE HIS TIME STUDYING RADIO AT HOME



SAME OLD GRIND -- SAME SKINNY PAY ENVELOPE -- I'M JUST WHERE I WAS FIVE YEARS AGO



GUESS I'M A FAILURE -- LOOKS LIKE I'LL NEVER GET ANYWHERE

YOU'LL ALWAYS BE A FAILURE, TOM. UNLESS YOU DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. WISHING AND WAITING WON'T GET YOU ANYWHERE



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Trained Radio Technicians make good money and you don't have to give up your present job or leave home to learn Radio. I train you at home nights in your spare time.

Why 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, 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, Loudspeaker 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.

Many Make \$5 to \$10 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

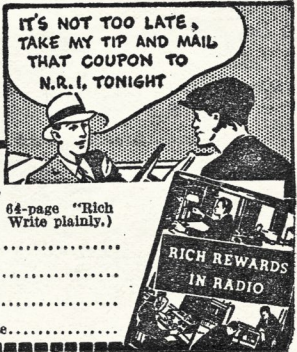
The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets—start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your Course I send plans and directions which have helped many make \$5 to \$10 a week in spare time while learning. I send special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. YOU ALSO GET A MODERN PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT.

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Act Today! Mail the coupon for my 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." It points

out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my Course in Radio and Television; shows more than 100 letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President Dept. IHS9 National Radio Institute Washington, D. C.



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10¢ DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE



EVERY STORY COMPLETE

EVERY STORY NEW—NO REPRINTS

Vol. 37

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Jump after the Dean into the middle of

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Cover—"The Platinum-Haired Girl Was Changing the Plates"
From *Death in the Center*.

Black-and-white illustrations by John Fleming Gould

Watch for the September Issue

On the Newsstands August 5th

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WHETHER you are 16 or 40 years of age, Electricity offers you a real future. . . Don't waste your best years in a low pay untrained job, or worse yet, never sure of even a poor paid job. Get into a real live, money making field where thousands of men make \$30, \$40, \$50 and up a week in the fascinating field of Electricity. Prepare today for a good job in a field that's full of opportunities for trained men.

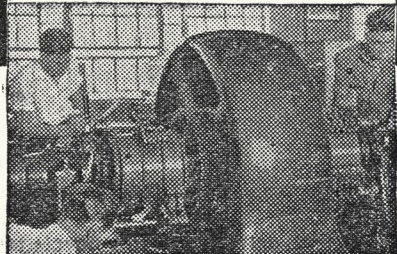
Learn by Doing . . . in 12 Weeks in the Big Chicago Coyne Shops

The remarkable "Learn by Doing" method used in the great Coyne Shops trains you to master Electricity and its many branches in 12 weeks. Actual shop work—not a correspondence course—you don't have to recite. You are trained by actual work in modern daylight shops on the finest kind of Electrical equipment, under personal supervision of expert instructors. That's why Coyne Training prepares you as a real Practical Electrician in such a short time.

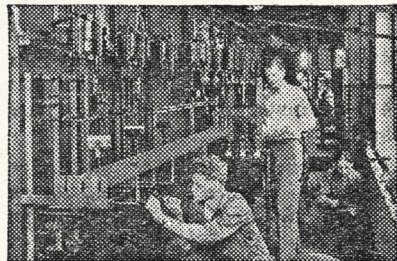
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THE SEPTEMBER THRILL DOCKET



FOUR great detective-action novelettes by four of your favorite top-flight crime fictioneers!

The Hearse from Red Owl—that's the title of JOHN K. BUTLER'S new Steve Midnight mystery—another adventure in the thrill-crammed career of L. A.'s hard-luck hacker.

It had been just another dull Monday night, and I wasn't counting on any trouble. I'd finished work about seven, checked in my cab at Red Owl's central garage, turned over the meter money to Pat Regan, and now I sat at the counter in Joe's Cafe with a conscience as clear as if I'd spent the past thirty years in a Tibetan Monastery.

That's the first paragraph of this smashing yarn—and it won't take three more to see how little a clear conscience can mean when the gods of trouble decide to make you one of their own. Ninety cents short was what Steve's boss claimed his accounts were—and it should have been a ninety million bucks for all the grief it brought him. Murder, blackmail, the cops on his neck, to say nothing of an already none-too-good reputation blasted to further depths—all for nine

measly thin dimes. It's BUTLER at his best!

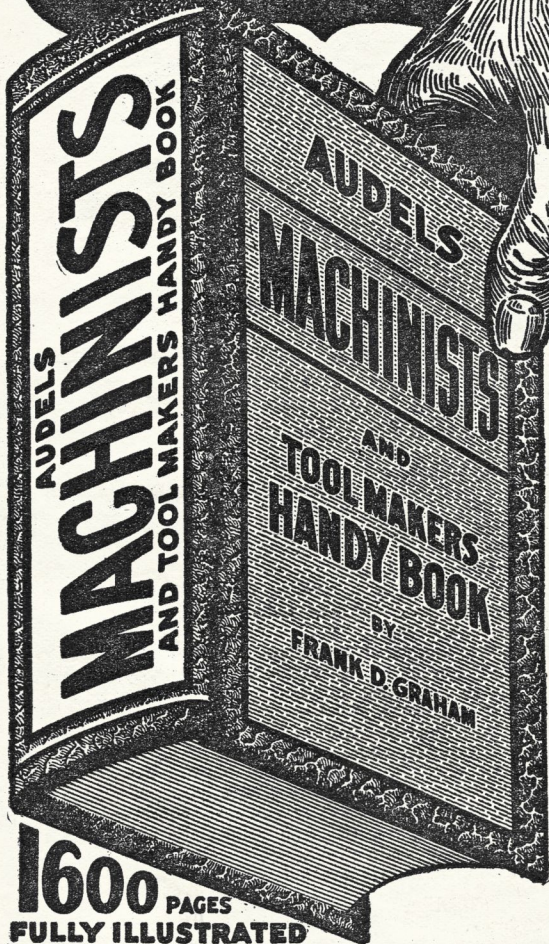
Killer Stay Away from My Door brings back Bill Brent, alias Lorna Lorne, the hard-boiled heart-balm pinch-hitter on the *Recorder*, in another gripping murder sequence. Aunt Martha's Marmalade forms the toothsome culture in which the bacteria of homicide spawn and flourish this time. The nonesuch newshound, stuck for the sake of his soul on the advice to the lovelorn column, crashes out of his realm of salve and soft soap and sugar into the purleius of police reporting, where his own heart interest lies, and cracks down on a crime maze that began with a dead letter and ended only in an exercise of handwriting on the wall executed by a corpse and translated by a ghoul. FREDERICK C. DAVIS spins the yarn—and how!

The Dead Do Tell, by WILLIAM EDWARD HAYES, and *The Parrot Squawked*, a psittacosis sell-out by WALTER RIPPERGER, plus a short by O. B. MYERS complete this great issue for SEPTEMBER.

It'll be on sale at all newsstands AUGUST 5th!



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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 personal experiences with chisellers and con men of various sorts. It is our intention to publicize—withholding your names, if you wish—the information you have passed on, paying \$5.00 for every letter used. No letters will be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope, nor can we enter into correspondence regarding same. Address all letters to The Racket Editor—DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, 205 E. 42nd St., N. Y.

A NEW one—or an old one with variations—is always cropping up to plague the honest storekeeper. This one doesn't have to be worked in a grocery store—drug, cigar or hardware emporium and many more offer the chance for similar bamboozlement.

New York City, N. Y.

Dear Sir:

Here is a nice little petty racket that is worked on unsuspecting grocers.

A well dressed and distinguished looking man enters the store. He wears no tie and his collar is open as if he had just gotten up from his easy-chair to go to the store. He has a list of the goods he starts to order and they are always the most expensive items in stock. The amount ordered is usually \$5.00 or over. In the middle of his ordering a woman walks in and is greeted very cordially by the man. They have quite a conversation, and all through it the woman acts very humble to the man as if he were some one very important. He tells her to send her brother to him and he will give him a job and mentions several other things that make him look important. He finishes ordering his groceries and asks the clerk to send them right around giving an address of a fairly respectable apartment house about a block away. Of course they are to be sent C.O.D. Then he leaves after reminding the woman not to forget to send her brother around and that she shouldn't worry about not having the rent. After he is gone the woman buys a loaf of bread or some other small article and engages the clerk in conversation. Her trend is naturally to boost the man who has just left. She tells that he is a millionaire and that he owns the house in which she lives and several other houses as well. All in all she paints a wonderful picture of the man, just to impress the clerk of course. Then she also leaves. The clerk in the meantime goes about filling the order for the man. Just as he has the order completed the man comes in again, having timed it perfectly. He tells the clerk that a package has just come for him parcel post and it is C.O.D. and he had just deposited all his cash and his wife went downtown and the mailman won't take a check so would the clerk be good enough to lend him \$6.66 for about 20

minutes. (The amount is usually small and an odd figure.) To add insult to injury, if the clerk is foolish enough to give him the money, he will notice the package of goods and asks if they are his. He says as long as he is going right home he will take the package and bring all the money in together. If the clerk is smart enough to refuse him he may ask him to cash a check. If he fails to get any cash at all, as a last resort he will try to talk the clerk into letting him at least take the groceries. There are several different forms of this racket but the results are all the same.

Russell P. Stagg.

A GOOD looking woman makes the most successful racketeer under some circumstances. Here's one who caught a group of men flat-footed.

Dear Sir:

Snyder, Oklahoma.

This may be a variation of an old racket—but with sex appeal added! And it put me out of business.

I was running a weekly (and weakly) newspaper in a town of about 600 population a few miles from a city of 12,000 when a plump, lively brunette called and offered to buy considerable advertising space in my paper, providing she could resell it at a profit in the larger town nearby.

I furnished a letter of introduction (at her request), cautiously adding that all checks must be made to the paper. But once in action, the lady sported a letter authorizing her to collect in full and requesting advance payment. And collect she did, forging my endorsement to checks when necessary, and skipping out with about \$100 for two days' work (to say nothing of beating hotel, cafe, and cleaners' bills).

I notified the state press association immediately and spoiled one or two prospects for her, but my erstwhile "representative" never was caught—and probably pursues the same racket in other states.

The business men she hooked maintained a sheepish silence as to her methods of approach, but insisted on publication of advertising they bought. The expense of the large special edition necessary "broke" the newspaper and put me to looking for a job.

Guy Phillips.

THEY CALL ME THE "CHARLES ATLAS" OF PEORIA!

by H.W.

Photo of an Atlas Pupil. This story is based on an actual letter, in Mr. Atlas' files.



YES SIR! People call ME the "Charles Atlas of Peoria," which is my home town. They've named ME after the man who won the title "World's Most Perfectly-Developed Man!" And they are not kidding. They wouldn't DARE. Not with the fighting build, bulging muscles, smashing strength I've got now—the body that made me CHAMPION of the crowd!

But a short time ago I was a weakling—the "sissy" who took a back seat every time other fellows began showing their muscles. I had to sneak away whenever they did feats of strength. I *knew* what it meant to be the sorriest-looking specimen of the bunch. I wanted a real he-man build more than anything. I determined to get it. And I DID!

Here's How I Got My New Physique

Well, after a little while, my friends rubbed their eyes and looked at me twice. They couldn't believe I was the same person! Because I WAS a different person. And you can't blame me today for getting a big kick out of seeing that "What-a-Man!" look in their eyes whenever I strip for gym, beach, or around the swimming pool!

How did I do it? What made me "The Charles Atlas of Peoria?" The answer is—Charles Atlas HIMSELF! His marvelous method of "Dynamic Tension" made a NEW MAN of me. And now read what Charles Atlas himself has to say to YOU:

I'll prove that YOU, too, can be a NEW MAN! And it only takes 15 minutes a day *Charles Atlas*

Fellows, I know what it means to be skinny, fishy, half-alive. I myself was once a 97-lb. weakling. Ashamed of my body. Afraid to stand up against anyone else, knowing what a beating I'd take. Then I discovered "Dynamic Tension"—the amazing method that changed me from a frail nobody into winner of the title, "World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." And now the secret that worked miracles for me has worked them for thousands of others.

In just 15 minutes of your spare time every day (right in your own home) my "Dynamic Tension" method can give YOU a new body. I can give you a solid armor of whipcord muscle. I can put smashing strength into your arms. Tireless stamina into your legs. Strong shoulders, deep chest, firmly-muscled abdomen that will make others exclaim, "There goes a HE-MAN!"

What 15 Minutes A Day Can Do For You

And "Dynamic Tension" digs down inside your body, too! If wrong living and lack of proper exercise have weakened you—here is the best natural "medicine" on earth. Just give "Dynamic Tension" 15 minutes daily. I'm ready to PROVE every word I say about it. Prove it to you first with actual photographs and letters from men I have made over. Then prove it with an actual TRIAL that will OPEN YOUR EYES—a trial that costs you NOTHING unless it really works!

FREE BOOK "Everlasting Health and Strength"

My famous book, "Everlasting Health and Strength," shows in actual photographs exactly why "Dynamic Tension" is your first step to new health, brimming strength, and the handsome build of a champion. This great book is my FREE GIFT to you. Rush this coupon NOW! Address me personally:—CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83H, 115 East 23rd St., New York City.



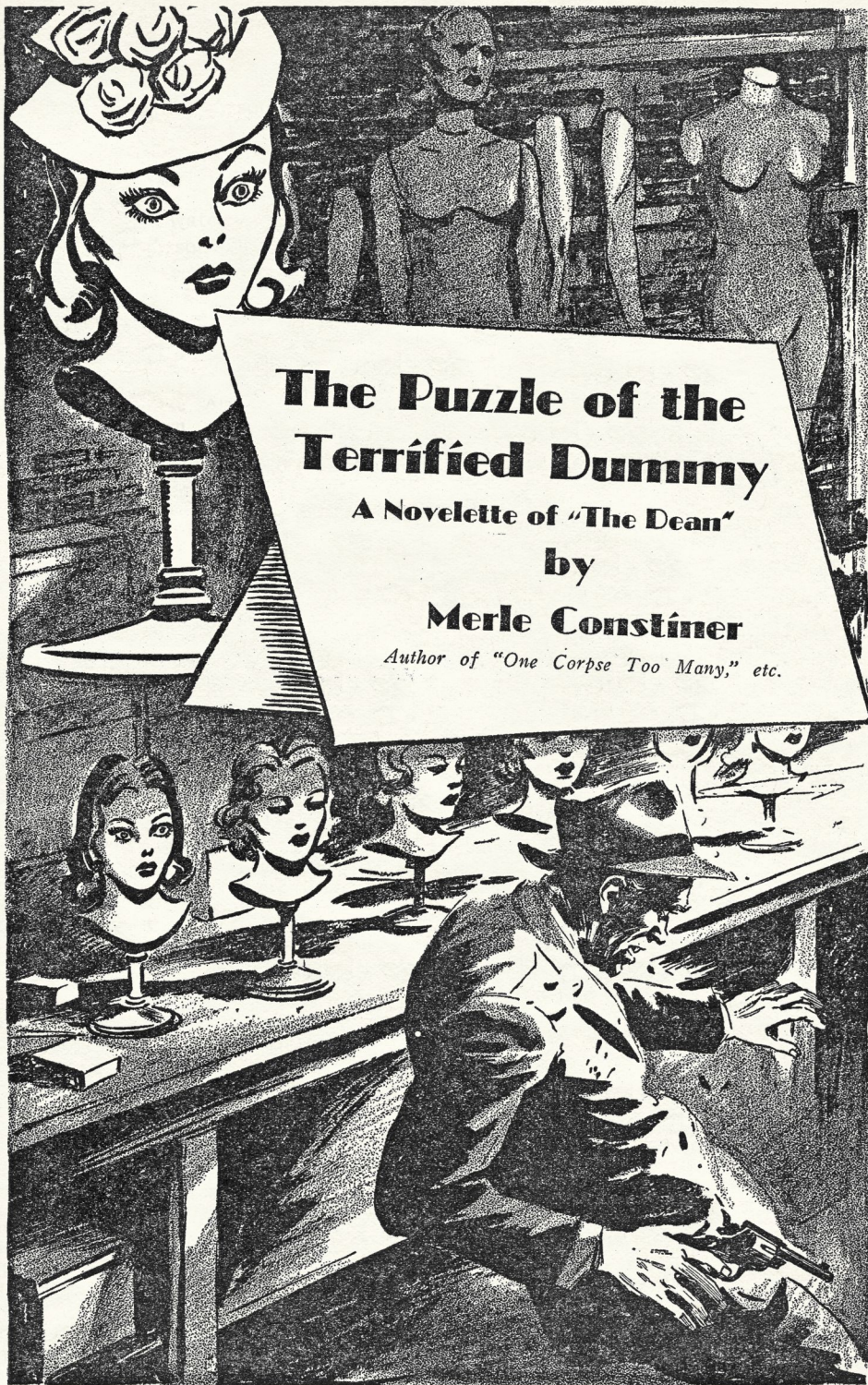
Photo of CHARLES ATLAS, holder of title: "World's Most Perfectly-Developed Man."



**CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83H
115 East 23rd St., New York City**

I want the proof that your system of "Dynamic Tension" will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength"—and full details of your TRIAL OFFER.

Name (Please print or write plainly)
Address
City State



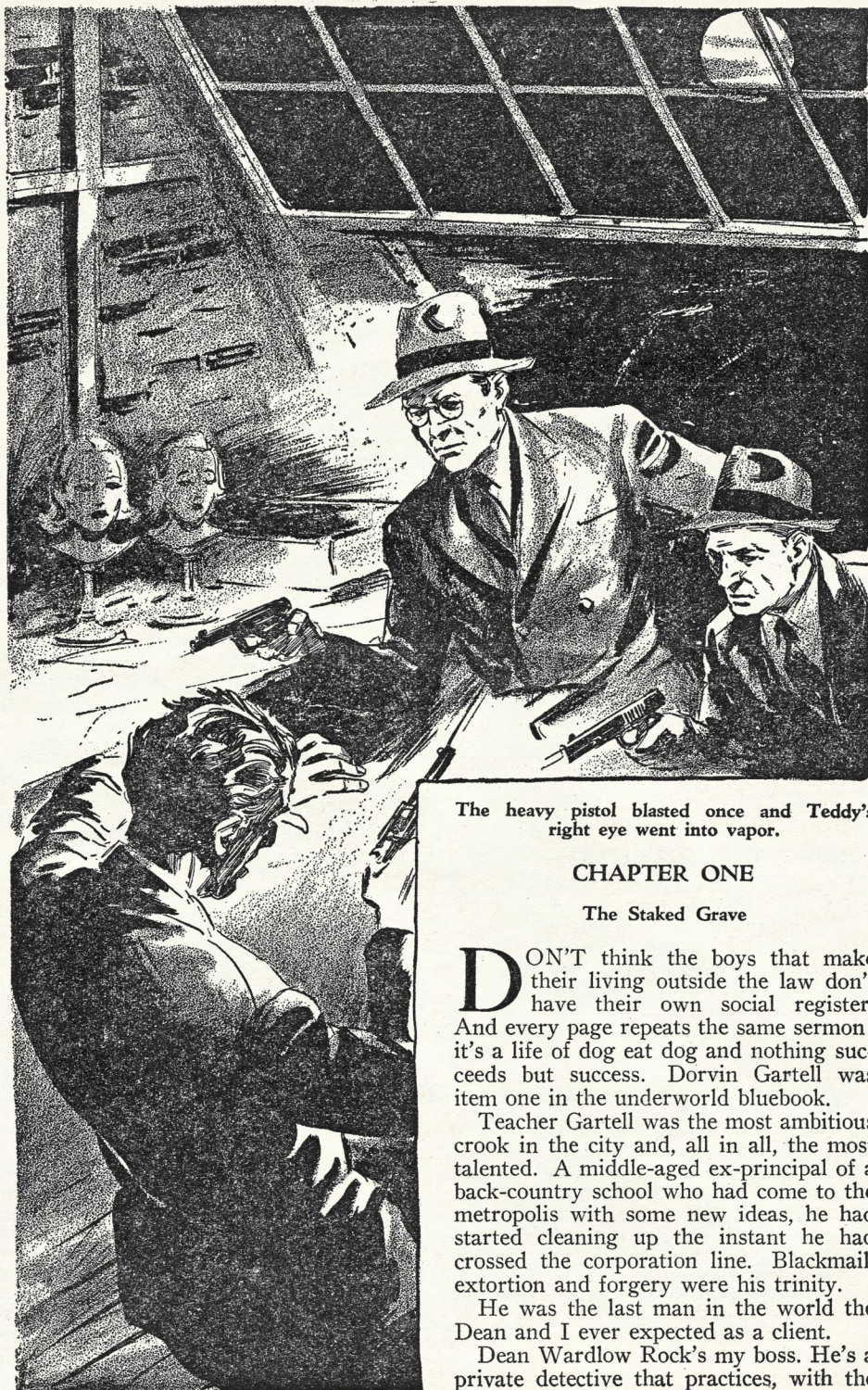
The Puzzle of the Terrified Dummy

A Novelette of "The Dean"

by

Merle Constiner

Author of "One Corpse Too Many," etc.



The heavy pistol blasted once and Teddy's right eye went into vapor.

CHAPTER ONE

The Staked Grave

DON'T think the boys that make their living outside the law don't have their own social register. And every page repeats the same sermon: it's a life of dog eat dog and nothing succeeds but success. Dorvin Gartell was item one in the underworld bluebook.

Teacher Gartell was the most ambitious crook in the city and, all in all, the most talented. A middle-aged ex-principal of a back-country school who had come to the metropolis with some new ideas, he had started cleaning up the instant he had crossed the corporation line. Blackmail, extortion and forgery were his trinity.

He was the last man in the world the Dean and I ever expected as a client.

Dean Wardlow Rock's my boss. He's a private detective that practices, with the

sub rosa sponsorship of the police commissioner, as a professional fortune teller. He's easy talking with a foggy manner that makes him seem battier than the Carlsbad Caverns, and carries a shoulder gun, a Magnum .357 that does business with a muzzle velocity of about a quarter mile per second. The Dean picked me up when I was down and out and gave me a job. I've been with him from that day to this, and from that day to this he's been as big a riddle to me as one of his favorite Chinese scrolls. We have a dingy apartment, not squalid, not swanky, in an old brick rooming house down in the slums. The turnover it does would knock your eyebrows off. The chief's interests include about everything, Assyrian lithoglyphs to glass blowing, but his real obsession is divination.

Me, I just know two things. Guns and locks.

We had just taken our bedtime showers and were relaxing a bit in our office-bedroom before we turned in. The Dean lolled in his broken down Morris under the green student's lamp, deep in a tome on fabulous medieval monsters. I was on the edge of my bed, a bowl of crackers and milk on my lap. It had been a routine, noneventful day and we were both bored.

Suddenly the Dean became excited. "May I break in upon your reverie? I've just come across a new word. New to me, that is. It's a thing of beauty and a joy forever. I don't see how up to now I've managed to get along without it. Gad, language is a wonderful thing!"

"What is this word?" I asked warily. "Am I old enough to hear it?"

"Therianthropic."

"I'm sorry. But you're lecturing to an empty hall."

"The word is therianthropic," the Dean repeated patiently. "It means combining human and bestial form. Like a centaur."

"Like Jo-Jo the dog-faced boy?"

"That's right. It's a valuable word to know. There are times—" He paused. An intent look came into his eyes. He was listening.

Then I heard it. The soft opening of the kitchen door. The light footsteps across the linoleum. "Haw!" exclaimed a smug voice suddenly from somewhere

behind our backs. "May I come in?"

The entry was typical of Dorvin Teacher Gartell: over-subtle, cautious and illegal. He was a plump little man in funereal blue serge. He had a loose nervous mouth and bushy senatorial eyebrows. He bubbled physical allure. Women, and men too, for that matter, went for him on sight. I didn't like him. Behind his bulging eyes lay the dark sneer of perpetual contempt for his fellow man. He just couldn't get out of his mind for an instant how good he was.

"I surprised you, didn't I?" he purred. "First thing you knew and here I was!"

The Dean was ominously quiet.

"Just a little joke. And besides, this visit must be confidential. No publicity." Teacher Gartell glowed charm. "Back doors are more private than front doors."

"What's this confidential visit about?" I asked.

Gartell seated himself on a chair, pulled it up close to the Dean's knees. "Well, here we are at last." He winked slyly at the chief. "I've been waiting for this for a long time. You and me together, working in the same harness! You know," he rolled his frog-eyes—"you know, I've never mentioned it before, but you and I, Mr. Rock, have a lot in common. I've often thought about it. We're, you might say, replicas of each other. We both have genius, both are erudite, we both work with our eye on the old bank account. There's no doubt about it: Dorvin Gartell's a thumbnail Wardlow Rock!"

IT WAS wonderful to watch the Dean. Blood drained from his lips in white rage. He remained silent.

"What was it you wanted?" I enquired.

Teacher Gartell took a slip of paper from his billfold and laid it on the arm of the Dean's chair. The paper was about three inches wide and about eight inches long. It lay on the flat surface with a crimp, as though it had been curled around a pencil or something and then straightened out. The Dean motioned to me. I reached out and picked it up.

"What is it, Ben?" he asked.

"Well," I answered, "it's a check. It's perfectly blank."

Teacher Gartell attempted to look owl-ish. "Turn it over. Read what's on the back!"

There was a note scrawled on the reverse. I read it aloud: "*They're all gone, all three. Let's wind up this business. I've got the shooks. That's all. It's unsigned.*"

Gartell amplified. "It must be a mistake. He means he's got the shakes—and I don't wonder. There's big money in this, Mr. Rock. Honest money. But—"

of that!" He screwed up his face to indicate concern. "I deduced the sender."

I interrupted. "You did what?"

"I deduced the sender. It must have come from my floor, the third. There was only one other office on that floor—and it, at the present, is not doing business. I'm referring to the Amberton Mannequin Company. It's beginning to sound sweet, isn't it?"

The Dean spoke laboriously to me. "Ben, tell the visitor—"

Three moneyed mannequin-makers die "accidentally" within a year, a scared sexton begins to see vampires in the graveyard, and the gift-card-poet husband of an heiress gets heebie-jeebies. Then, a sculptor with the shakes assembles some "shooks" and digs two graves, while his wife gets drunk and digs ditches, and a pair of imported punks run murder-rampant. Who but the Dean could make sense of a case that's battier than the Carlsbad Caverns?

The Dean frowned at me. "What's he wheezing about?"

"Search me," I said with heavy emphasis, "I think the man's completely therianthropic!"

Teacher Gartell became insistent. "You better tie in with me. Let me tell you the story about that note. I have a little office in the Elman Building. Ramshackle and old-fashioned but genteel. The building has no mail chute. We put our outgoing letters in an open box outside our door. The janitor collects them from each office just before mail time and takes them to the street, to the curb box." He hesitated and went on.

"Last Thursday the janitor knocked on my door and handed me an envelope. He was just about to drop it into the box, he said, when he happened to notice that I had forgotten to stamp it. Well, I thanked him and laid it on my desk. After a while I got looking at the address and it didn't strike any memory chord. I couldn't place this party. I slit the envelope and took out this note"—Teacher Gartell cast down his eyes—"I had committed a grievous error. A gross breach of ethics. The janitor had been confused. He had brought me another man's mail. I had opened a stranger's letter. Think

Teacher Gartell cut in on him. "I've heard you were eccentric, Rock, but I didn't expect anything like this. I don't appreciate your manner a bit. You act as though you were too good to talk to me. It's Ben ask him this, Ben ask him that. Do you want in on this thing or not? Answer me directly." He whipped out the words as though he were talking to a half-bright child.

"All right." The Dean smiled at him. "A direct question deserves a direct answer. This is it: get out of here so we can burn a couple of sulphur candles and fumigate."

Scorn smouldered in Gartell's eyes. "You're ordering me out?"

"I am. You've got some filthy squeeze in mind. I don't know what it is but I don't want any part of it. You can't play it yourself or you would never have come to me. You're a crook and a not very smart one at that. You're playing us for suckers. You think we're a couple of wrap-ups.

"Giving me all that story about the janitor and the unstamped letter. I'll tell you how you got that note. You stole it like any street gamin. See that curl in the paper? That's where you've left the mark of your trade. You prowl the foy-

ers of apartments and office buildings and rifle mailboxes of outgoing mail. Those letters that promise to have checks in them, you take home with you. There you get to work. You take the check out without breaking the seal on the envelope. Later you will replace it and mail it intact. As it was. It isn't the check you want but the information the check contains. You copy the signature. The face tells you where the person banks. Later you will get a check from that bank, fill it out for a generous sum—you have a way of even finding out the depositor's balance—and forge the name. You pass the check with little difficulty. No one knows how it happened—"

"The crimp in the paper," I asked. "I don't get it."

"The envelope looked as though it had a check in it. As a matter of fact, the writer simply used his personal check pad for notepaper—I've done it myself. Gartell took it home, inserted a thin wire tool under the top corner of the flap at the back of the envelope. There's a little space there where the glue doesn't reach. He caught the paper in the tool, twisted around and around and slid it out. It's a professional sleight. Anyone can learn it."

TEACHER GARTELL'S face grew hard. "So I did. O.K. I admit it. So what of it?"

The Dean waved his hand at me. "That's your cue, Ben. Turn off the dictaphone."

I went into the bathroom, closed the door and counted to seven. We don't have any dictaphone.

When I came out Teacher Gartell was gone.

"Sit down," the Dean said, "while I get organized. That imbecile left me tangled." He furrowed his eyebrows. "This business will take a little filtering."

According to the news accounts of the past year, Amberton was just another way of saying hard luck. The Amber-ton were like the old poem, gone were all the old familiar faces. There had been three of them and they were one of the town's few traditional families. Actually, they had been a pretty tepid tribe and would never have hit the front page if

they hadn't begun to kick off so regularly in such strange ways. The Amberton Mannequin Company had been started as a tricks-and-novelty house back in the eighties by old J. Waldo who had founded the business in his basement workshop by turning out satin shamrocks for Irish lapels and penknives with fancy handles.

When his two sons came into the business they made some changes—they specialized. For the past eight years the Amber-ton produced but one item: a cut-rate *papier-mâché* mannequin for the small town trade. Back-street department stores and small shops from the Great Lakes to the Gulf featured sleazy models in grimy windows on Amberton heads, torsos, calves and hands.

The Amberton estate was plenty wealthy. For eight years they had been running a monopoly.

The avalanche of disaster had started a year or so ago with the death of Bart, the oldest son. Bart, the police report affirmed, had returned from a billiard match when death tagged him. Stopping his car in the drive, he had got out to open the garage doors when he thought he observed a prowler at the basement door. There was an old Spanish-American War revolver in the car compartment. He took out the gun, held it over his head and fired a shot in the air to frighten the intruder. At least that was his intention. The gun went to pieces like a hand grenade. The police gunsmith later explained it as caused by "an untrue alignment of cylinder and barrel produced presumably by defective—" etc. His father, old J. Waldo, was sitting in the car and witnessed the whole thing. He testified as to the episode.

Lee, the second son, died two months later. Hunting rabbits. The breech of his shotgun blew up in his face. Police reconstruction, with the aid of Mr. Amberton, Sr., who was on the party, proved it an accident. It seems that Lee, who was in his cups, had rested the barrel on the thawing ground and had picked up a muzzle full of mud.

The violent demise of old J. Waldo, himself, came six months later and wiped out the clan.

The death of Amberton, sire, appeared

at first to be a run of the mill accident: an oldster searching for a leaky gas pipe in the cellar of a vacant house with a match—and finding it.

But this case proved not so simple. Investigation disclosed two facts. There was no gas in the house, the flow having been previously cut off at the curb. Moreover the old man had definitely, beyond any shadow of doubt, not used a match in his quest—but a flashlight. It was difficult to explain. The newspapers were still yelling their heads off.

"I've been trying to keep out of the Amberton case," the Dean reflected. "The method of murder employed is, of course, transparent but the affair has a certain unholy quality about it that repels me. From beginning to end—"

"Just a minute," I said. "Let's take this a little slower. What's this about the method of murder?"

"The guns, the pistol and the shotgun, were doctored with Nobel's oil. They must have been. It's devilish."

It was a new one on me. Firearms are my big yen. "Nobel's oil?" I asked. "I've never heard of it. What is it—some hex ointment?"

The Dean guffawed. "You know it very well indeed. You just don't recognize it by its proper name."

I objected. "I don't believe it. What about the old man in the cellar? More oil?"

The Dean's face became abruptly grave. "I'm afraid so, Ben." He stared at his blunt fingertips. "Well," he said at last. "This is none of ours. Let's go to bed."

We were, however, thwarted once more. We had hardly clicked out the light and closed our eyes when there was a hammering on the reception-room door like the Yukon thaw. I cursed. "Drunks. It's too late for palm reading. Let them bang."

"No." The Dean switched on his bedside lamp. "No. Let them in. I remember that gavel fist. It's the law."

IT WAS. Lieutenant Bill Malloy and Captain Kunkle. They burst into the room like a couple of berserk barkers. Bill Malloy was the smartest cop on the force. He was so smart, in fact, that he made the

Dean uneasy. He bore a perpetual gripe against the Dean—based on the Dean's access to the police commissioner—and the Dean resented Malloy's advantages of a well organized department. They were as jealous of each other as a couple of chick peacocks with their first tail coverts. Captain Kunkle was pompous, garrulous, and would co-operate with anyone as long as it paid him headline dividends.

The Dean sat up in bed, got the snipe of a poisonous Cuban cigar into action, and waited.

Captain Kunkle angled his heels, strained the chest buttons of his tunic, and gave forth in an oratorical voice that sounded like a fish peddler yelling in a well. "When, in the course of events, I run into the supernatural I am, quite naturally, somewhat at a loss." The captain's jowls beaded perspiration. "Mr. Rock, we do, I pride myself, our work well. But spirits and demons are outside the metropolitan jurisdiction—"

The Dean shook his head in bewilderment. "I wonder how he does it."

"It seems," I suggested, "that certain demons are throwing a crime wave—"

"It's nothing to joke about!" Captain Kunkle glowered uncertainly. "Take my wife's sister. She lost a diamond earring. Mrs. Haggerty, our neighbor, is a seventh daughter. She said just look behind the geranium. Well, there it was! You can scoff if you like—"

"Listen," the Dean cut in. "Observe me. I'm in bed. Preparing to go to sleep. Don't meander. What's this about your wife's sister?"

The captain made a new start. "No. Not her. That was just an illustration. To get you in the proper frame of mind."

Malloy took over. "Rock," he asked, "do you believe in vampires?"

"No."

"Neither do I. So let's do business. Maybe I can clarify the captain's statements. Here's what he's driving at. You're supposed to be an authority on black magic. We want your advice." Lieutenant Malloy chose his words carefully. "The sheriff's office has just received a report of a strange act of vandalism and turned it over to us. Maybe you remember hearing about the Amberton deaths? The bodies, the three of

them, were buried out near S-Iron, the old family homestead, in a little country churchyard. We've never completely dropped that case." He took a big breath. "Well, tonight it popped up again. The sexton, wandering around among the tombstones, got the shock of his life. Someone had desecrated old Waldo Amberton's grave, had driven a wooden stack smack down into the center of it! How do you dope it?"

"There is but one explanation." Captain Kunkle elbowed his way back into the conversation. "Vampire. Though you may not suspect it, Mr. Rock, I'm a bit of a litterateur in odd moments. What I mean is, I read books. Take the vampire. Lord Byron says: 'The freshness of the face and the wetness of the lip are the never failing signs of the vampire.' Now that's a perfect picture of the late Mr. Amberton, Senior. There's one way, and only one, to remove the menace of a buried vampire. The vampire marauds after death. That way is to drive a stake in the grave. As I've been telling Lieutenant Malloy, the way I figure it is this—"

"Foosh!" The Dean snorted rudely. "It's perfectly human. Offhand, I'd say this: that the stake was driven into the soft earth of the grave by someone who wanted to make sure that there was a coffin actually there. Do you see? A sort of a sounding rod."

Malloy batted his eyes. "I think you've got it!"

"Could be." Captain Kunkle faltered. "But who—"

"And now, gentlemen," the Dean concluded the party, "good evening, if you please."

After they had gone, his big face crinkled in a grin. "I've got them walking on their heels! They're hauling a load and don't know where to deliver it. It's a great life, Ben!"

I washed my wrists and neck in cold water, crawled between the sheets and was instantly asleep. Almost as instantly, I woke up. "Listen, boss," I urged. "This is too good to keep. I know the answer to everything. It came to me just then in a dream and don't laugh. Would you like to hear it?"

The Dean's calm gentle voice came

quietly through the dark room. "I'd be delighted."

"Well, it's this way. There isn't any case at all. Ha! Old man Amberton was the murderer. Bart and his pistol and Lee and his shotgun—both times the old man was on hand keeping a weather eye cocked. The old man kills off his sons and then commits suicide. There haven't been any killings since then, have there?"

"No. But there will be. Your solution leaves out the staked grave. And—very importantly—the man with the shooks."

"You mean shakes."

"I mean shooks."

"Nuts. Wait and see. This business is finished."

That night Teacher Gartell was murdered.

CHAPTER TWO

Corpse in Trust

THE next morning the Dean got up in a playful mood. When I'd ask him about the case he'd say what case, and when I'd refer to our last night's visitors he'd pretend he didn't remember. It got me down. I never could take ribbing before breakfast. I withdrew into myself, as they say in the books, and held it through bacon and eggs and three cups of coffee. And still the Dean kept up his clowning. It looked as though I were going to have to take a walk to cool off.

The telephone call from Homicide snapped him out of it.

The department experts were in the Elman Building offices of Amberton Mannequins. They were devoting their time, attention and affection to the corpse of Dorvin Gartell. It appeared to be a baffling situation and they felt they had reason to believe that we were not entirely unaware of certain contributing circumstances. Would we be good enough to grab our hats and run over? Lieutenant Malloy desired to interrogate us.

"That settles it," the Dean decided. "We'd better go. We're in it now whether we want to be or not. It's our own necks now—and I don't mean from the police." He closed his eyes, frowned. "What do

you know about movies? Neighborhood houses. From the managerial standpoint?"

"Nothing, suh. Nothing at all."

"Then I'll have to handle this. Pray for the best."

"I don't like to criticize," I remarked gently. "But it seems to me that if you really intend to mess in this thing you've muffed a golden opportunity."

The Dean looked startled. "How so?"

"Gartell," I explained. "He held all the clues of entry. You should have asked him one question: to whom was that envelope addressed?"

"Goodness." The Dean showed relief. "You had me caulked for a second. Don't worry about to whom the letter was addressed. We'll find out *who wrote it*. That's what's really functional."

He drew the phone to him, lifted the receiver, gave the operator an unlisted number. Almost immediately he was talking to the police commissioner's private secretary.

"Miss Blythe!" he exclaimed. "How are you? So you've been intending to call *me*. I'm indeed flattered . . . What? . . . Oh, you're having a party and you want me to suggest a fortune-telling game?" I listened with my mouth agape. The Dean takes his divination seriously. It's hokum, and he'd be the first one to admit it, but he doesn't feel it should be practiced by incompetent amateurs. One sure way of striking his tinder was to refer to the ancient art as a frolic. His eyebrows drew together. "You want an icebreaker, eh? I know just the thing. Why not try viscera? The Romans did a nice job of fortune telling with chicken intestines . . . What? What did you say? I see. Don't get excited. Maybe you're right. Now here's what I wanted to ask you: Is there anyone, anyone at all, connected with the Amberton case who is an artist?" He beamed. "Fralely Wilkes, 378 Front Street. Thanks."

"There you are." He hung up and grinned. "There's the man who wrote the note. Get ready for the street. We're going into action."

THE hotel just missed being a flop-house. I had passed by it dozens of times before but, to tell the truth, this

was the first time I had ever noticed it. It was just a single row of rooms, down an alley, over a squalid all-night drug-store. A homemade cardboard sign in the front window said: *Special Rates for Resident Guests*.

We felt our way up the half-light of the odorous stairway to the second story. A dim matting-carpeted corridor stretched from the dirty bay window that fronted over the street, back into the murky gloom of the building. A line of varnished, numbered doors ran down one side of the hall; the other was blank plaster wall. A blowzy dowager, her foot in a plaster cast, was sitting at a card table in the light of the bay windows. She had a box of chocolates, a pekinese and three tattered magazines in her ample lap.

The old lady watched our approach with beady, suspicious eyes. "And what," I asked, "brings us to this dump?"

The Dean ignored me. He turned to the beldame, his hat lifted about four inches above his head. "The fascinating proprietress of this hostelry, I presume?"

No comment.

I could see the boss was flustered. His glance lit on a magazine. "Whiling away the tedium with the pleasant pastime of reading, I observe. They're old copies, I see, but still vigorous. That serial, *Ashes of Heartbreak*, is a sad sweet tale. It gets under your skin, doesn't it? Surprising ending."

The old lady began to steam. "That's what's burning me up," she said in an alcoholic tenor. "A bum leaves this here in a room. I pick it up and read it. It's six months old. I'm stuck. They ain't no way I can ever find out how it come out."

"I'd like to tell you about," the Dean said genially. "But I'm in a bit of a hurry. Does Miss Georgia Rountree reside here?"

The old lady wavered. "We don't never put out no information about guests."

"Sorry." The Dean looked sad. "In that case, we'll be going."

"Hold it," she said. "Room 12."

"Thank you." The Dean grew serious. "One good turn obligates another. Now about *Ashes of Heartbreak*. The young doctor comes home from his jungle expedition with the white goddess in time

to prevent his innocent wife from marrying the polo playing villain and thus committing bigamy. Valah, the white goddess, marries Bruce, the cattle king, who is rescued ten minutes before his electrocution by the deathbed confession of his wastrel identical twin brother. It is a very happy ending."

Room 12 was back at the end of the hall by the fire escape. The Dean rapped on the panel.

A man opened the door. He was in his vest and shirtsleeves and wasn't too pleased at seeing us. There was a frank, direct boyish look in his blue eyes and his short-cut, strawcolored hair was rumpled in boyish disorder. Just the spirit of wholesome youth. He looked like what you'd come up with if you'd seen any college campus in the country—but for one thing: there was a little brass-knuckle scar on the tip of his chin. Hardly noticeable—but I'm tenderloin born and raised myself and I know one of the lads when I see one.

"Miss Rountree?" the Dean asked.

The boy stepped back and let us in.

The tiny room was frilled and ribboned like an old-fashioned valentine. There were lace antimacassars and pink satin bows on all the furniture. An imitation Spanish shawl was draped over a wardrobe trunk and a handful of wilted violets floated in a teacup on the dresser.

The brunette sat on the foot of the bed. She was sleek and smooth and vital. She couldn't have been a day over eighteen. She was openly interested in our arrival.

The Dean bowed. "Miss Rountree? I'm sorry to break in on you like this but I have something that I think might intrigue you." He handed her a card. The card said: *Barnstaple Amusements, Inc., Chelsey D. Barnstaple, State Personnel.* Miss Rountree read it carefully.

"We're expanding our chain. Taking over locations here in town. Shake out the deadwood. I have your name on my list as an experienced usher, or usherette, if you prefer, and understand that you are now without work. Could you act as captain and handle a crew of, say, six?"

MISS ROUNTREE bobbed her head. "And how! I could. And do I need the job, mister!"

"Splendid!" The Dean considered. "That fixes everything up." A shadow of hesitancy flickered across his face. "We usually demand references. However, I think we can waive that formality. For the sake of the record, why did you leave your last job?"

Bitterness came into the girl's eyes. "I'll tell you, but if you're from out of town it'll be Greek to you. In the last year there have been in this city three rather terrible deaths. An old man and his two sons. The newspapers have been stirring up a lot of commotion. They've got it keyed up to a civic scandal." She paused. "It was this scandal that got me fired."

The boy with the scar listened silently. He rolled a cigarette, handed it to her, lit it, and rolled one for himself.

The girl went on: "The deaths, one at a time, showed up an unusual mixup. The old man had a heart attack, it seems, several years back. He thought he was going to die. He made arrangements. He turned his entire wealth over to his sons and lived on his salary as president of the company. The rest of his property—which was a small checking account, he willed directly to the granddaughter of an old boyhood friend. Me." The boy stirred restlessly. "That money was left in trust. I was to get it when I married and settled down."

"Well!" the Dean ejaculated. "Nuptials should prove no difficulty to such a charming—"

"Wait a moment." Georgia Rountree was into her story now, hardly aware of her audience. "It gets worse and worse. The Ambertons had no blood heirs. The two sons left no wills. Their money reverted to their father. With the old man's death I became heir not to a small checking account but to the total fortune. The sole Amberton heir." She pulled down the corners of her mouth and glanced about the room. "I'll take your job. I've never seen a penny of the money and never will. There's a catch in it. The will says that I have to marry but the trustees won't let me. They have the power of rejection."

"I see," the Dean said gravely. "I see." He turned to the lad. "This, perhaps, is the gentleman in prospect?"

The boy looked mean. "That's right, you're staring right at him. They're crooks. They don't like me because of my profession. They say it's a loafer's job."

"And what," the Dean asked, "is your profession?"

"Sentiment writing."

"I beg your pardon?"

The girl eased him out of it. "Hugh writes beautiful poems. Those lines you see on gift cards, poems for birth announcements and mottoes for shut-ins." Miss Rountree's eyes misted. "He has a sweet sensitive soul. They can't keep us apart."

The Dean reached for the doorknob. "Hold a tight bridle and don't do anything rash. This thing will straighten itself out. Good luck. I have to run along and see a man about a sudden demise. You'll hear from me."

Relaxed in the soft cool cushions of a taxicab, I got the old pump handle working. "A funny thing. That Georgia Rountree's a new one on me. I've never heard of her before and I followed the whole thing pretty closely in the newspapers."

"Her name never hit the press. She's been kept in the background." The chief looked at his huge silver watch. "I've known about her for months. Picked up her story from a friend who turns the chopper at the Bijou Theater. She was an usher there and when the sensation broke they dropped her like hotcakes." The boss had his own sources of information: elevator operators, bellhops, bartenders and messenger kids. He'd done many a favor and collected many a valuable tip.

"Gift card poet!" The Dean sighed. "What next?"

"Who is this Fraley Wilkes?" I asked.

"A designer. One of Amberton's designers."

"What does he design?"

"Mannequins, I surmise."

I stirred this around in my mind. It left me blank. "Tell me," I persisted. "How did you know an artist wrote that note of Gartell's? You didn't even pick it up."

"Didn't need to. It was written in *conté crayon*. An artist's favorite. It's

a composition of clay or chalk and makes a much blacker line than an ordinary pencil. Couldn't miss it."

"I don't like this job," I griped. "I didn't like it from the beginning. We're lucky if we get to first base. I despise amateur murder. Amateur killers are half-nutty, if you ask me."

"They certainly are," the Dean agreed heartily. "But this is not amateur crime. It's cold professional slaughter. For profit. Arranged and carried out by veterans. There are experts in this picture—or I shall be greatly surprised."

TEACHER GARTELL had been optimistic when he had described the Elman Building as old-fashioned and ramshackle. It had become so old-fashioned and ramshackle, in fact, that the self-respecting business district had moved away from it with its fingers to its nose. The Elman Building, once in a prosperous commercial neighborhood, was now surrounded by a nest of poolrooms, taverns and pawnshops. The once elegant doorway was pillared on either side by grimy acanthus leaves, stone-carved in deep relief, and the foyer was laid with cracked Italian mosaic. A policeman in the lobby directed us to the third floor. There was no elevator.

The Amberton Company had held down a suite of three rooms: there was the lavatory, the big barnlike office proper and an enclosed alcove with a kidney desk and a broken down daybed where old J. Waldo had relaxed in his pasturage and listened to the sweet music of typewriters banging out orders on the other side of the thin partition.

The assembly was waiting for us in this alcove.

Lieutenant Malloy sat with his knee hitched over the corner of the desk. He was not in a particularly pleasant humor. With him were two men. He introduced them. The most striking—elephantine, square-jawed, with speckled hands and pouchy eyes—was Madison Collins, promoter of crackpot inventions. His companion, a little wiry clothes-tree with a sallow, bloodless face, was Lamar John St. John, exclusive dentist. These two were the chosen trustees of the Amberton estate.

There was a fourth man. He reposed on the daybed in a drunken posture of contorted jubilation. It was Teacher Gartell. The top of his head smashed with a brutal blow, constituted what the medical brethren refer to as a "wet specimen."

"Gad!" I said in the Dean's best tone. "It's the thumbnail Wardlow Rock!" No one paid any attention to me.

Coffins seemed to be the wheelhorse of the group. "What's this mean?" he snarled. "We've been waiting for you at the insistence of this officious officer, hah, for an hour and eleven minutes and thirty-one seconds. Why, I couldn't tell you. From your general appearance I should say that you couldn't contribute anything to anything—even information. What's your excuse for holding us up?"

The Dean studied him with interest. "First things first," he answered shortly. "I've been off on a junket." Suddenly, without warning, he turned beetling brows on the dapper dentist. "Did you kill this man?" he demanded.

St. John recoiled with horror. "No! No indeed!"

"Do you have a piece of soap in your pocket?"

"Of all things! Why should I—"

Malloy cut in. "We can do without the monkey business," he declared angrily. "This is no place for a comic. These gentlemen are not here to be insulted. Now here's the lay—let's see you crawfish out of it. These offices have been vacant for some time. The company is moving into more modern quarters uptown. This morning a window washer lets himself in with a pass-key and finds this stiff. I call up Mr. Collins and Mr. St. John. They're directors in the firm and trustees of the estate. I've promised them an early solution."

The Dean listened attentively.

"This corpse is Dorvin Gartell," Malloy announced. "He has a record as long as your underwear. Any policeman that sees him any place at any time takes a second look. Last night Patrolman O'Connor, off duty and taking a short-cut home from a euchre party, passed him in the alley behind your rooming house. Officer O'Connor stood in the shadows and watched him. It looked like he went into

the back entrance of your building."

"He did," the Dean admitted promptly. "He wanted to retain me. For what, I never heard. I gave him the bum's rush."

Madison Collins broke out in a bullish roar. "That won't do. You're giving us the run-around. I've heard about you, Rock. Charlatanism and chicanery." He shoved out his jaw. "What's behind all this?"

"Well," the Dean answered thoughtfully. "I'll give it to you as I see it. Absolutely free of fee. First, someone is working a diabolical shuttle. That's the secret to the entire set-up. Second, a safe is about to be robbed—what safe, I can't tell you. Third, there have been four murders so far but the essential murder, the key murder, has yet to take place. Fourth—"

"That's all." Lieutenant Malloy flushed. "You can leave now, the both of you. But stay handy."

THE sign over the big arched gate said *Venner Brothers Lumber*. We drove into the yard, left the cab and walked to a long warehouse where a man in gold rimmed glasses was checking a clip-board of yellow sheets.

"Where can I find Mr. Venner?" the Dean asked.

"Which one of us? There are nine." The man's eyes were bright, intelligent.

"It's this way," the Dean explained. "I'm Sectional Directing Adviser of Divisional Unit Three of the Recreational and Vocational Guidance Committee and I have to read a paper." He simpered. "May I take about three minutes of your time?"

"We'll see," Mr. Venner said. "Start off."

The Dean dragged out a ragged envelope and a splintered pencil and prepared to take notes. "Item: what is a shook?"

"Oh, I get you now." Mr. Venner entered into the spirit of the occasion. "You're writing a speech. Well, friend, a shook is a knockdown box. What I mean, it's the pieces of boards sawed up and bundled, ready to assemble: ends, sides and all. They're easier to move that way, take up less space. Shooks are made, in the main, from scrap. They have

to be kiln dried or they mold and warp. Fiber is pushing them off the market."

The Dean lifted his eyebrows. "Is that so? You don't sell many then?"

"Not a bundle in months." Venner considered. "Whoa! We did get an order a week or so ago. A nubby little order for twenty-five 2's that wasn't worth fooling with. Customers usually buy them by the carload."

"Now that's interesting!" The Dean made a vague motion with his pencil. "Why such a small—"

Venner spat. "Fellow said he wanted them for bird houses. His hands trembled like a leaf all the time he was talking to me. In my personal opinion—and you can put this in your speech—he was screwier than a bushel of old bedsprings!"

At luncheon over green turtle soup and veal pie, I demanded an invoice. "Boil it down," I suggested. "And what have we got? No client, no prospect of fee, no real crime that actually concerns us. We do a lot of running around at our own expense, ask a lot of questions and get nowhere."

"I wouldn't say that," the Dean objected blandly. "That interview with Venner practically put the thing in the bag."

"You're too much for me!" I tried to bait him. "If you ask me, we're going in circles."

"No, Ben," the Dean protested affably. "No. We're not going in circles. Venner broke the big point. Why did Fraley Wilkes want shocks and not regular boxes? Answer: they're less conspicuous and easier to move." He bared his big teeth. "An ideal way to dispose of a corpse. I wonder it hasn't been done before!"

"You mean cut it up in sections and put in boxes?"

The Dean jerked with distaste. "No. Not that. Much more simple. Easier, cleaner, and no labor at all. Which brings up a visit with Fraley Wilkes, himself—which should prove interesting."

Number 378 Front Street was the worst wing of a dilapidated duplex on a backstreet swarming with children. The clamor from a nearby boiler factory was

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Use Thin Gillettes. Think what you save!
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deafening. Hucksters were calling out their poultry and vegetables, housewives were bawling and gossiping from balconies and windows. It wasn't the atmosphere I'd have chosen for an artist.

The wren that let us in was Vera Madigan.

She gave us each a hard look. She didn't remember me.

I remembered her, though. Vera and I were kids together back in the old slaughterhouse neighborhood. That is, we'd started together—I couldn't keep up the pace. When she was ten she was running with girls who were fourteen, when she was fourteen she was hanging around the depot pointing for Joey Slagle's crap game. She really rushed from then on. Stories came back. Night club entertainer on the South American wheel.

Everybody that knew Vera liked her. She was loyal, generous and honest. She was, however, afflicted with a double curse: simple-minded and too good looking for her own good.

"Do I have the honor of addressing Mrs. Fraley Wilkes?" the Dean asked gallantly.

"That's me." She gave him a million dollar smile. "Come in. Mr. Wilkes isn't in just now but I want to ask your advice."

The Dean bowed. "I've always wanted to see an artist's studio."

She laughed. "The studio's not here. It's down at the Elman Building. In the attic." She led us into the living-room and indicated chairs. We sat down and looked around.

IT WAS the weirdest den this side of the city morgue. Three life-size *papier mâché* mannequins—one salmon, one gilt and one slate green—undraped and unblest, stood against one wall. Anyone with half an eye could tell that Vera had been the model. There was a decanter set with a wrenched lock on an end table by the horsehair sofa. Along the mantel ledge, like a row of rotten oranges, were lined eight shrunken Jivaro heads. The bare wooden floor was littered with cigarette stubs and odds and ends of lacy lingerie.

"I'm Wardlow Rock," the Dean began. "And this is my assistant."

"Charmed." She nodded vaguely. She'd lost but little of her beauty with the wear and tear of life. She was still lithe, supple-limbed. She sat poised and erect. From the dainty turquoise heels of her cloth-of-silver pumps to the metallic Grecian curls of her blond head, she radiated composure and serenity. "You're men," she remarked brightly. "You can help me. I'm trying to make a decision. Shall I have a chime doorbell or a brass knocker or both?"

The Dean was bewildered. "I don't quite get— Oh! I see. You're fixing your home up a bit."

"Not this rat hole," she corrected scornfully. "I'm talking about the other place. The new place. My birthday present."

"I guess I'm not very well posted," the Dean responded. "What about this birthday present?"

"We've lived in this shanty ever since we've been married," the blonde explained. "Now Fraley's got a good job, there's no need for it. I've been coaxing and begging to move in a nicer, cleaner neighborhood. Finally, he's agreed. He's bought me a cute little Cape Cod cottage with green shutters and everything. It's out in the Oak Grove allotment."

"A little lonely out there, isn't it?" The Dean was like a setter at the flush.

"Yes. It's lonely but I'll like it. It'll be a change."

"A change indeed!" The Dean agreed absently. "Where's Mr. Wilkes at the present, by the way?"

"Out there. At the new house. He goes out for a few hours every afternoon. He won't tell me what he's doing. He's getting something ready for me. Some sort of a surprise."

"Think of that!" The Dean arose with a flourish. "It's been quite an experience, this little visit, and I hope to have the pleasure of your company yet again."

On the street his face went stony bleak. "It's pretty terrible, Ben, isn't it? We musn't fumble."

"Where now?" I asked.

"Home. I expect we have a client waiting for our return."

The client was there, all right. Seated in the reception-room on the Dean's rare ante bellum love seat. Big Madison

Collins with his speckled hands and cunning pouchy eyes. A few hours had changed him. The bellow had gone out of his lungs, he was harried, eager to please.

The Dean grabbed the advantage. "This is hardly credible. You! I'm busy now. I have no time to banter personal hostilities."

Collins smirked fatuously. "I was a little rough this morning. I apologize. Let's let bygones be bygones. Mr. Rock, you're a crack investigator. I want to hire you." He cocked his head. "I want to know about St. John and that piece of soap."

The Dean guffawed. "You don't trust your fellow director?"

"Just about as much as he trusts me," Collins sneered. "What kind of soap did you have in mind?"

"Any kind." The Dean was annoyed. "As long as it's plastic. Probably ordinary yellow bar soap. And it's no joke. When it makes its appearance there'll be hell to pay. It's the start of the end. After that comes the murder and the looting."

Collins' eyes glowed venomously in their baggy folds of skin. "You should be impounded," he decided. "You rave like a madman." He got to his feet. "I've changed my mind. I can't use you. It'd be dangerous to be associated with you."

The Dean followed him complacently to the door. "I'm sorry you feel that way," he purred, "because you've hired me. We've had a meeting of the minds and that's a contract. Now. Let me give you some advice: Be mighty careful what you do and how you do it. Good afternoon, sir."

CHAPTER THREE

The Shooks

THE Dean grinned. "We gaffed him, Ben. Our first client. This case needs about three more. The more the better, say I."

He settled back in his broken-down chair and reviewed the situation. "There it is. The whole devilish affair. The complete outline. All the essential facts. It's ghastly, isn't it? There's nothing to

do now but to wait. We won't wait long."

"Are you telling me that you can make sense out of—"

"More than sense, Ben. Plan. Well organized, smooth running plan. Look back. One thread holds the entire affair together: *nitroglycerine!*"

"Nitro!" I exclaimed. Light was beginning to dawn.

"That's right. Nobel's blasting oil, incorrectly referred to as nitroglycerine, is actually a trinitric ester of the trivalent alcohol, glycerine, and contains no nitro groups. But that is beside the point. Bart's pistol and Lee's shotgun were simple murder traps. A small charge of nitro, say in an ampule inserted halfway down the barrel, turned the guns into hand grenades. That was the way it was done, you can be sure. The repetition of explosion from pistol to shotgun is too big to swallow as coincidence."

It seemed obvious when you got the idea. "What about the old man and the flashlight?"

"That was the episode that clinched it in my mind. Explosive had proven too successful for the killer. Here he tipped his hand. He overdid it. Let me reconstruct it for you. The killer obtains J. Waldo's flashlight. He removes one of the several cells and puts in its place a neat little package containing a fulminating cap and explosive, connected to the flashlight's circuit. He re-screws the butt of the fiendish instrument and returns it to its familiar place." The chief whitened. "All the old man had to do was to slide the switch. You know now the sort of people we're playing with!"

He paused and studied my face. "You catch about the soap now."

"Yes," I answered, "I do." Locks and tumblers have always been my hobby. For several years they were my profession. I was kind of trouble-shooter for a small safe factory. That's how come I'm with the Dean.

Many's the wrecked safe I've gazed at. Now, there are several methods used by the yegg for blowing a box but, style and opportunity permitting, he favors the soap-and-razor-blade technique. If there's a crack in the door setting, no matter how tiny, he jams a razor blade into it, forces it wider, makes a little trough of soap and

pours his soup in the crevice. That's all he needs. Bambo! the safe's open. "Yes. I see what you're getting at," I repeated. "But no one's cracked any safe yet."

"They will, Ben. They have to. They have to lay their hands on a paper. A blackmailing paper. They're after Georgia Rountree's wealth. Not part of it, not a few paltry dollars—but the total fortune!"

With that, he got out an old alarm clock he was repairing for Mrs. Duffy, our landlady, and shut up like a clam. These gaps between fireworks were the hardest part of a case for him. He had to steel himself to inaction. Finally, with a grunt, he slapped down his forceps and pliers. "Hold down the office," he said. "I'm going out to check on Mrs. Fraley Wilkes' birthday present. I think I'm right but I can't afford to take a chance. A life depends on it."

He'd hardly left before Lieutenant Malloy eeled in.

"Where's the boss?" he asked.

"Have a seat, sir," I said. "If you observed the placard by the entranceway as you entered you know that we offer readings in pedomancy, libanomancy, rhabdomancy—"

Malloy took it with suspiciously good grace. "It's living with Rock that does it," he remarked. "Some day your brain will pull up stakes and hit the road and the white-coated tailors out at Belleview will take your measurement for a sporty canvas jacket. Where's the bigshot?"

"Gone. And don't ask me where."

LIUTENANT MALLOY thought this over. He got out a stubby pipe, mended with adhesive tape and rubber bands, and chewed the stem. "Ben," he said in a melancholy voice. "I'm going to tell you something I wouldn't tell anyone else. Why am I doing it? I don't know. Maybe because you're sitting there a picture of myself in my youth. Young, happy-go-lucky. They're going to kick me off the force, take away my shield and pension! I'm not thinking about myself, I'm thinking about Martha and the kid."

I was interested in spite of myself. "Why is that?" I asked.

"It's this Amberton case. They want results." He spread the palm of his

capable hand, dolefully examined its calluses. "Wardlow Rock's responsible. He's got Captain Kunkle needled up. Give me a tip, Ben. He tells you everything."

"Ha!" I snorted. "He tells me nothing. The last time I heard this story your wife's name was Esther and the time before that it was Molly." I got an inspiration. "I'll make a trade with you." I'd seen the Dean deal with him and something usually came of it. "Here's my tip: this is a professional setup. What I want to know is: do any of the principals in this case have a record down at headquarters?"

"Yes," Malloy said reaching for his hat. "The mannequin model, Vera Wilkes. Shoplifting and shilling, charges dismissed ten years or so ago."

It didn't do me any good. I wanted to know about Georgia Rountree's boy friend, the lad with the brass knuckle scar, the gift card poet.

The Dean returned smug and self-satisfied from checking his guesses. He'd had a busy and varied two hours. By exercising a little daubery he had managed an interview with the contractor that just completed building the Cape Cod cottage out in Oak Grove. Fraley Wilkes, the contractor said, was a swell guy to work for—didn't hold up the work by changing the plans every day or so. Just one thing. He had them leave the game-room in the basement unfinished; he wanted to surprise his wife. He was an artist and he wanted to do the whole job himself, paint the walls, tint and mix and pour the colored cement for the floor.

The Dean then went out to Oak Grove. The little white cottage with its green shutters nestled at the end of a lane, down in a little hollow. The boss stood on a knoll and scrutinized it. Wilkes' coupe was at the back door so the Dean was careful not to approach too close.

"A Mrs. Tompkins who lives across the pike," the Dean related, "was more than eager to gossip about her new neighbor. A week or so ago Fraley Wilkes drove by her house with a clumsy-covered bundle lashed to his bumpers. Those were the shooks going to the new house. Every afternoon, thereafter, he passed her porch twice. Going, with an

empty car, and returning—with a big wooden box beside him on the front seat. Day in and day out, the same thing. Ghoulish, isn't it?"

"Just what's happening?" I asked.

The chief tossed me a quick irritated glance. "You don't know? Preparation for murder. Fraley Wilkes wants to kill someone. He builds the house. Leaves the basement with a dirt floor. He totes in a load of knockdown boxes and starts digging a grave. He does it by stages, every day he works a little and carts off a box of earth. When the tomb is finished, the basement will be clean. Then, when the time comes, he'll make his kill, lay the corpse in the hole, pour his gay colored cement for the game room floor. It's simple and foolproof—or so he thinks."

I felt sick. "How can we stop him?"

The Dean appeared untroubled. "No need to get excited. Nothing will happen until the proper time." He smiled. "Everything's under control."

Here, he drew the line a little too fine. Events were to prove that the case was already breaking under our nose.

ABOUT eight o'clock that evening we snared our second client.

We were sitting in the gray-and-violet twilight, our windows open to the summer swelter, listening to that vespers harmony of a night awakening city which the Dean loved so well, when Georgia Rountree blazed through the doorway. Doctor of dental surgery, John St. John, of all humans, crowded at her elbow.

Miss Rountree stopped dead still and stared at us. She was a snappy little thing rigged out in a saucy Glen Garry bonnet, a fold of gay Scotch tartan looped from her shoulder. I could almost hear her heart beat.

"You're right," she exclaimed softly. "That's the man! Shall I call the police?"

"Sit down, sit down." The Dean pressed them genially. "I gather there's been a misunderstanding. Possibly I can clear it up. That's my craft."

They stood rigidly in the center of the room, ignoring his excessive hospitality.

St. John attracted the limousine trade. You knew why when you listened to him talk. He had a de luxe, gilt-edge lisp with a distinct trace of arrogance. "Call-

ing the police will do us no good," he affirmed. "This man has a pipeline directly into the commissioner's office." He touched his mouth delicately with over manicured fingertips. "We'll have to out-think him. Which should be reasonably easy." He leered icily at the chief. "Sir, this young lady informed me that a man of your description visited her this morning with an absurd proposition of employment. I had no difficulty in visualizing this man as yourself. I charge you with fraudulent intent and demand an explanation. I am trustee to this child's material and spiritual welfare."

The Dean yawned. "That isn't the way I heard it. The last time I talked to Miss Rountree she declared you gentlemen were crooks who hadn't given her a penny of her rightful inheritance and who were preventing her marrying her heart's choice, a lad named Hugh."

The girl flushed. "Why bring that up? That's all over. Mr. St. John and Mr. Collins *want* me to marry Hugh now. They contacted me this afternoon. As a matter of fact, they're rushing me a bit."

"Of course they are," the Dean said agreeably. "They're scared. They're being blackmailed into it. There's a syndicate, a cartel, taking over this business."

The dapper St. John drew himself up haughtily. "You're giving Miss Rountree entirely the wrong—" Suddenly he wilted. "It's the truth!" he admitted. "We are being blackmailed. I can't make any sense out of it. I don't see how anyone can gain anything!"

"I can see," the Dean remarked.

The girl was listening attentively. A hard look came into the corners of her mouth. "All my life I've been kicked around," she announced. "From now on the place is under new management. I'm running my own affairs. I don't know what all this double-talk's about but I'm going to find out." She faced the Dean. "I wouldn't trust you around the corner but somebody's got to step in and clean this up. Will you?"

"I will!"

She was still angry. "Good. If the Amberton estate comes to me I want it without strings, without obligations, to be completely and totally mine! When can you start to work?"

"Now." The Dean got out his Cuban cigar. "Tell me, Doctor, you were present when the Ambertons were buried. Did you actually see J. Waldo lowered into his grave?"

The dentist shook his head. "Of course not! Not him. The other two. You remember Mr. Amberton, Senior, was killed in that cellar blast. He was pretty badly battered. Mr. Collins and myself decided to have him cremated. His ashes are in a crypt down at the crematory. And don't get any ideas in your head about a substitution of corpses. There was none. The body was battered but easily recognizable. It was easily certified by a consultation of Mr. Amberton's physicians."

"There's an error some place," the Dean insisted. "About the grave. I understood—"

"No. You're mistaken." An idea struck him. "It just occurred to me. There is a grave, but of course it's vacant. The Amberton cemetery lot has in its center a larger pyramidal tombstone placed there and lettered many years ago by Mr. Amberton. It was intended as a common headstone for himself and his sons. Each of the three sides bears the name of a member of the family. Lee, Bart and Waldo. Waldo's grave is, as I have explained, unused."

The Dean turned to me. "You see?" he said triumphantly. "I was substantially correct. That explains Captain Kunkle's vampire." To the girl he advised: "Go home and get a good night's sleep. This case will be finished by midnight."

ABOUT four minutes after they left, the telephone rang. I caught it. It was Dr. St. John again. "I'm talking from your corner drug store," he whispered. "Can you hear me. Miss Roundtree's just outside the booth and I don't want to raise my voice. There's something important I failed to mention."

I motioned frantically to the Dean; he stepped over and shared the receiver with me.

"I'm afraid I glossed a little in our conversation," St. John continued. "There was no necessity of getting Miss Roundtree worried. They blew the safe."

"So I surmised." The Dean's voice boomed into the mouthpiece. "Where is this safe?"

"Hello, Mr. Rock! The family safe out at S-Iron, the old homestead, where Collins and I are quartering *pro tem*."

"Who had access—"

"Collins and I each knew the combination—as trustees. Madison had the key to the inner door, I had the key to the strongbox. They cut the door with a torch and blew the box."

"I won't ask you what they took," the Dean remarked dryly. "Because you wouldn't tell me. I'll look into it. Good-night."

He hung up carefully and closed his eyes. There was a circlet of perspiration across his forehead.

"Ben," he said, "I'm afraid we've slipped. They've been too quick for us. Get out to Front Street and tell Vera Wilkes to leave town instantly. See that she does. Put her on the bus. Any bus. She can come back tomorrow. Then meet me out at the new Cape Cod cottage. I'm going to Oak Grove!"

"It'll be a pleasure," I said.

The Front Street district isn't a particularly friendly place at night. No folks sitting on doorsteps or standing around lampposts talking and laughing. Just a smoky row of sullen houses on a dimly lighted back street. Mist and damp from the nearby wharf seeped through your clothes, curled about your shoulder as you walked. A blue neon tavern sign offered the sole illumination. The pavement took a dogleg bend and number 378 sat in the crotch—back in the shadows.

The Wilkes' side of the dilapidated duplex was dark—the far side was lighted to a fare-you-well. The old building glared from its recessed gloom like a malignant old bum with a patch over one eye.

I knocked on the door, got no response, circled to the lighted wing and tried again there.

The door flew open. Like it was on a spring. A giant plug-ugly with a gorilla jaw and a beer barrel chest stood smiling at me. He was as high as Ben Franklin's kite. He was dressed in a fluffy Lord Fauntleroy collar; velvet knee breeches clung to his hairy calves. "Come in,

brother," he said. "Always room for one more." His big fingers grabbed my lapel, yanked me in, slammed the door behind me.

I looked around me bug-eyed. Two ponies dolled up in rompers were leap-frogging around the room and yelling. A scrawny guy in a baby's sun suit, with a Japanese dragon tattooed on his chest, was playing marbles on the carpet with a fat lady in a middy blouse and bloomers.

My hairy host mounted a tricycle and ding-dinged out to the kitchen. I got the idea. It was a kid party.

The fat lady scrambled to her feet and came over.

"I'm sorry to crash in this way," I apologized. "I just want to enquire about your next-door neighbor—Mrs. Fraley Wilkes. She doesn't seem to be at home. Could you tell me where I might find her?"

"She's here," she said. "In a way."

The fat lady led me over to a corner of the room. A couch had been pulled around facing the wall, out of the hustle and bustle. Vera Wilkes, the Amberton model garbed in a cute little red calico school-dress, lay blissfully asleep. Dead to the world.

"What's wrong with her?" I asked.

"Out. She's passed out."

It didn't sound like Vera Madigan I remembered. "What are you people drinking?" I asked curiously. "Chloral hydrate?"

The fat lady giggled. "It's Preston's party. Preston's in charge of drinks. He's making everybody drink his favorite. Boilermaker-and-his-helper."

Boilermaker-and-his-helper is a long-

shoremen's combination: whiskey with a beer chaser. "Alack and welladay," I sighed. "Watch over the child. Don't let her leave this room. Can you keep her here all night? Good."

They didn't want me to leave but I managed to escape.

SO that was that. I knew the Dean would raise a rumpus when I told him but I could see nothing else to do. I consider myself a judge of such things and in my unbiased opinion Mrs. Fraley Wilkes was belted down until dawn—and the boss himself had said that the case would be over by midnight.

Things were building up to a climax. I got to thinking about Hugh, the gift-card poet with the brassknuckle scar. I stopped in front of the tavern and looked at my watch in the blue light. I was ahead of schedule. Why not take a flier on my own? If I rushed I could make it.

I decided to pay a quick visit to Stable Boy's.

Stable Boy ran a bucket-of-blood card-room behind a delicatessen over on Third. He kept his joint closed tighter than a ten cent clasp knife to the local boys and catered to outside trade, to journeymen with bankrolls. Stable Boy couldn't tell the difference between a Percheron and a rocking horse—he wasn't raised in that kind of a stable—but he knew the migrations of every transient crook that stepped over the county line. He got his moniker from a saucer-sized cauliflower ear.

The Stable Boy was an Artesian well of information if you had an in. I had an in.

I pushed my way through the grimy



door, into the little store. The lookout, a paunchy kid in a greasy apron and chef's cap, sat behind the counter practicing card palming. He looked up and batted his eyes.

"Tidings, Fatso," I greeted him. "You know me. Take your foot off the buzzer. And don't let Stable Boy catch you at your manipulating or out you'll go on your mush."

The kid winked insolently. "This Thurston stuff is for my private life. Pass friend. The boss is in the back." He lifted a counter flap.

I stepped past him, edged around a big refrigerator, crossed a back hall and entered a scabby looking door marked *Lavatory*.

The card-room was partitioned from the very bowels of the building. It wasn't large—there were but a dozen or so wire legged tables—but the play and the little bar really paid dividends. The place was a kind of sanctuary and its habitués really forked over for the privilege of hanging around. It was security. It had never had a brawl and was proud of its record. Tonight's business was in a lull, it was a little early for the midnight rush. Stable Boy's patrons were day-sleepers.

My host was in a booth in the corner chatting with a couple of customers. I leaned on the bar and waited. He detached himself and came over.

"Well, well." Stable Boy's hideous malformed face broke into a happy grin. "Ben Matthews. How goes the knobs an' dials?"

"I'm out of that racket," I laughed. "I'm a shamus now."

Stable Boy frowned ponderously. "Is that so? Ben, this ain't hardly the place for—"

I cut him off. "Will you help a friend?"

His beefsteak forehead wrinkled in struggling indecision. He nodded.

"First, it's a college-looking boy with a cold blue eye and a scar on the tip of his chin. Do you make him?"

"I ain't never seen him but I make him. You don't want no part of that, Ben. Keep clear," he whispered. "It's poison."

"Second, is there a peterman in town now that uses *both* soup and a torch?"

"Wow!" Stable Boy showed relief. "Why didn't you say so? You want a job did." Before I could prevent him he beckoned to the lads in the booth. They came over suspiciously genial. "Meet a friend, boys." He took a key-ring from his pocket, handed it to me, pointed to a door marked *Private*. "Use my office, gents," he offered. "It's soundproofed."

THEY looked me over. The smallest, a vicious little parrot-beaked thug in an oversized milk chocolate double-breasted held silent. His buddy, a pimple-cheeked skeleton with marcelled hair and bad front teeth, shrugged. "Why not?" he grated. "What can we lose?"

The "office" was characteristic of its owner. A turkey red carpet, a sway-backed swivel chair, and a battered roll-top desk constituted the entire furnishings. The wall surface, every square inch from baseboard to molding, was thumb-tacked with photos of prize fighters and wrestlers. Every square inch, that is, except for a garish oil painting of a flock of sheep in a snow storm. I gave the chromo a quick gander out of the corner of my eye.

I couldn't help being interested. I had hung it there myself. That's how Stable Boy and I had first met.

The yegg in the baggy suit took the keys from me and locked the door. He gave his pal the go-ahead with his eyebrows. "O.K., Teddy."

"What," demanded Teddy, "was you wanting of us?"

It wasn't getting off to a sociable start. "Boys," I began. "I'm in the safe and lock business, you might say. I want to get into a safe and I can't handle it. Ha!"

The response was frosty.

I fumbled for openers. "What I'm getting at is this—where could I pick me up some helpers?"

The little hood with the baggy suit started to speak but his partner hushed him with a wave of the hand. "And whose box are you fixin' to blow?"

"You're strangers," I answered. "You wouldn't know if I told you. It's out at an old home called S-Iron. Where a family named Amberton used to live."

They looked like someone had suddenly drained off their blood.

"Well, shamus," the little man snarled. "You've gone and done it. You've lifted your top. We place you now. You work for Wardlow Rock."

Terry murmured thoughtfully: "And the man said this room was sound-proofed!"

The next thing I knew I was flat on the floor. The boy in the brown suit pulled a *savat* on me. It's a lumberjack's trick. All in all I've done my quota of barroom fighting but this was my first experience with Canuck style. This feet-fighting technique is plenty mean. One instant he was standing there looking me in the eye and the next, something—his heel—smashed into my ankle like an eight pound sledge. It's foolproof—it doesn't telegraph.

By the time I got to my knees, they had out their blackjacks. The next few seconds were pretty bad. They never let my mind clear, my consciousness get set.

Then it came. The split second breathing spell. The room focused itself before my eyes. I was propped in the corner.

They were standing over me—all set to run the string.

I reached out my hand, touched the frame of the garish sheep-in-the-snow painting. I gave the picture a shove, swung it out a couple of inches from the wall.

Just before I slipped into a stupor, I caught the sound of loud excited hammering on the door.

Stable Boy poured peppery brandy down my throat. He had a sashweight under his arm and his monstrous face was twisted in a mixture of sympathy and anger. The thugs had gone. Fatso, the lookout, leaned against the doorjamb, an automatic shotgun against his knee.

Stable Boy lifted me gently to my feet. "I leave 'em go," he announced ominously. "With a warning." He straightened my coat. "I make a mistake. Don't hold it against me, Ben. We're still friends, eh? We been friends a long time."

We had been friends a long time. Ever since I had been working for the safe company and I had come out and installed that wall safe for him behind the chromo. Burglar alarm attached: two buzzers, one out front in the delicatessen, one upstairs under Stable Boy's bed.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Frightened Dummy

I CAUGHT up a slice in my cheek with court plaster, washed off a few of the worst abrasions with iodine, and started out to meet the Dean. I didn't anticipate a cordial reception. The Dean had never encouraged independent investigation on my part. When I balanced injuries received against information obtained the result was uncomfortable. I figured I'd have to do some fancy explaining. As things turned out, the boss hadn't even missed me.

I flagged a cab at the corner. The driver took one stare at my battered face and gunned his motor. "Whoa!" I grated. "Or I'll cave in your window. I'm in no mood for a steeplechase. You've got a fare." I opened the door and climbed in. "Oak Grove. I'll say when."

Oak Grove allotment was plenty desolate. I paid off my charioteer, watched his taillights hit hell-for-leather down the road—back to civilization. He'd figured himself in for a stickup. I stumbled around in the brush and located the entrance to the Wilkes' lane.

The cottage lay in a woody depression. It gleamed whitely through the ghostly plumes of shrouding trees. Somewhere in the distance swamp frogs were cutting loose in weird muted minors. I forced my way through a tangle of briars to the front porch.

The Dean emerged from the blackness. "Well, Ben," he said grimly. "We've slipped. There's been another killing." He fumbled in his coat, got out the butt of a plumber's candle, lit it. "Come in. It's well worth looking at."

Inside there was the smell of drying plaster and new paint. We passed down a narrow hall, through a kitchen gleaming in white porcelain and chromium. The Dean grasped the knob of the basement door. "Down here, Ben. Brace yourself."

The cellar was square and dank. Unfinished walls and a dirt floor. In one corner a stack of cement sacks and a short-handled hoe stood by a mixing trough. A bundle of boards—what was left of Mr. Venner's shooks—was piled neatly in another corner. One of the

shooks, assembled into a box, lay in the middle of the room. It was half full of fresh earth.

Two shallow pits had been dug in the dirt floor. The Dean held up his candle. "Here we have the answer to everything. It's not nice." He didn't seem to be downhearted about it.

One pit was empty. In the other was a man. He wore a brown velvet smoking jacket, a cerise sport shirt, and green corduroy slacks. He lay on his back. His beret was placed sprightlily over one eye. The far side of his face was a wreckage of blasted flesh and bone.

"It's Fraley Wilkes, the artist," the Dean explained. "He'll never design another mannequin."

"You seem a little jovial about it."

"I am, Ben, I am. They doublecrossed him and gave him a dose of his own intention. In that shattered brain pan is a small brain that once considered itself a master criminal. Fraley Wilkes was outclassed." He paused.

After a moment, he continued. "Fraley Wilkes laid plans. And plans within plans. And a hatchet sneaked up and got him inspite of it! He now adorns the tomb he dug for his wife."

"For Vera!" I was horrified.

"That's right. Don't tell me you don't grasp it. It's transparent—and has been from the beginning."

"Then Fraley Wilkes knocked off the Ambertons?"

"No. He didn't. He was an opportunist and as the murder sequence unrolled he saw how he could turn it to his advantage. He had blackmailing information. He got that information, by the way, by driving that stake into the grave marked J. Waldo. This was all he needed. The result confirmed his suspicions. He was ready to put on the heat. And he did."

THE Dean frowned. "You still don't get it? The extra pit here is the giveaway. Now listen: Georgie Rountree, a movie usher, suddenly inherits a tremendous fortune. There is something in the will about marriage. Fraley is naturally a ladies' man. He believes a heavy suit can win Georgia from her gift-card poet. He has this advantage to start: Georgia goes for artists and poets. Wilkes is well

established. Hugh isn't. Everything is ready to burgeon." The Dean parted his lips in a silent laugh. "Then the cartel, the syndicate, moved in on him." He gazed down at the body. "And when they did they filled out their own death warrants."

"Who filled out whose death warrant?" There were heavy steps on the stairs and a bull's-eye flash caught us full in the face.

"Lieutenant Malloy!" The Dean greeted him affably. "Alright, sir. You will find this interesting. It's something to write down in your notebook."

Malloy growled as he came forward. He had a companion with him—the nervous cabbie who had driven me out.

"I knowed we'd catch him!" the cabbie shouted. "He said he'd cave in my windows. He was aimin' to heist me but I bluffed him!"

Malloy sighed. He thumbed the cabbie back upstairs. "Go out in the yard and wait for us. It's a false alarm." His face purpled when he noticed the corpse. "What brought you to this catacomb?" he demanded of the Dean. "You're worse than a vulture. How do you find them?"

"Don't question me now," the Dean said. "This business is ready to erupt. I'm going. Meet me at S-Iron in about three hours. I'll have it ready to turn over to you."

Malloy gave him a hard look, set his jaw and nodded "I don't know why I'm doing this but I will. I'll take a chance. Scram." He halted us halfway up the stairs. "Better drop in at your apartment. Mrs. Duffy, your landlady, has been burning the wire to the Missing Persons Department ever since you left the joint. She's off her handle with excitement. She says she has to see you."

On the way back to the apartment, I told the Dean about my trip to Stable Boy's. It was gall in my mouth but the report had to be made. He listened attentively. "It got me nothing but a mauled face," I wound up. "I should have let well enough alone."

"To the contrary. Any information is advancing information." He put it in simple words: "Don't you see what you've done? You've divided the crime into two stages. You've tossed a match

into the powder keg. They'll swing into action now. In the open. Quick and mean and deadly. They know we've smoked them out."

"I hope they do," I said. "I'd like to meet that boy again with the musical comedy double-breasted."

"You will," the Dean promised. "You will." He paused, cut his eye at me. "To change the subject slightly, there's a glaring discrepancy in this mess and no one seems to have noticed it. I can't understand how Malloy muffed it. It's this: why did that rural cemetery hire a new sexton? What happened to the old one? Sextons are rarely discharged. It's usually a lifetime job—like a night watchman's."

"Boss," I answered, "no one's said anything to me about new and old sextons. You must have information that I don't have."

"Nonsense!" The Dean broke into his most irritating lecture-room style. "I'll fortify my statement. Kunkle and Malloy come to us hotter than a forest fire with yarns about vampires. The sexton out at the Amberton cemetery had had the shock of his life; he's discovered a stake driven into J. Waldo's grave. Now J. Waldo is not buried there and as sexton he, of all people, should know it. Ergo: this is a new sexton. He has been hired *since* the death of the last of the Ambertons. I repeat, what became of the other sexton?"

Mrs. Duffy was sitting in her bay window. Watching for us. When Mrs. Duffy was in her crow's nest it meant that things were spouting and sperm at that. She was out in the hall to meet us as we crossed the threshold.

Drenched in lilac perfume and quivering with ribbons and rosettes, she blocked our way. "Say no!" she whispered in tremulous excitement.

The Dean gazed at her fondly. "Say no to what, Seraphina?"

"Say no to the woman on the telephone. She had a loud voice and hiccoughs right in your ear. My female intuition doesn't trust her. She's designing. Say yes to the sweet boy with pretty eyes. He's wholesome."

"I'll try to remember it." The Dean smiled. "What's this all about?"

We finally got the story straight. It seemed that Vera Madigan Wilkes had

had an awakening. She'd come to, left the kid party with its boilermakers-and-helpers and was doing the town on a one-woman spree. She was lonesome—she wanted us to join her. She'd called three times: once from a duckpin alley, once from a fire station, and lastly from a cat show at the armory. Her inebriated interests were active and diversified.

"What about the other? The boy with the witching eyes?" the Dean asked.

She pointed dumbly. "In there. In your reception-room waiting for you. I made him wait."

HUGH PEYTON received us blandly. Again I had that fleeting impression that we were confronted with a hotshot gambler. The boy could really put on a dead pan.

The Dean dropped his hat on an ottoman and held up his palm. "Just a minute. Before you say a word. If you address me this is going to cost you money. This consultation is entirely formal and entails the customary proportionate fees. Is that acceptable?"

The young man nodded. "Of course." He pretended to fumble for a beginning. "You didn't deceive me one bit this morning, Mr. Rock," he blurted out. "I knew you were an operator—a professional seer—the moment I laid eyes on you! I'm extremely psychic myself. I didn't know what your game was—and still don't—but I've patronized fortune-tellers all my life and I've never found one who wasn't as honest as the day is long!"

The Dean winced. We gave the kid the hawkeye and I swear you couldn't read a thing. He was as gullible as a child—or he was taking us for a glide on the old scenic railway.

"And what is the purpose behind this visit?" the Dean enquired warily.

His answer hung fire. "It's about Georgia. She keeps having the same dream over and over. It must mean something." He whipped a ragged, paper-bound pamphlet from his pocket. The booklet was entitled *La Gitana—Dreams Unveiled*. "Now Georgia dreams about marriage. Let me read you this: 'To dream of marriage is the worst of omens. The vision foretells death.' That sounds pretty bad, doesn't it? Does it mean

that Georgia is going to die? Just what is there to this dream magic?"

"You asked for it," the Dean said. "So I'm going to give it to you. Divination is my trade. Oneiroscopy, the study of sleep images and their interpretation, is one of the most ancient of all branches of prophecy. Flammarian the astronomer, Aristides the magnetiser, Plutarch and Cicero, are only a few of its distinguished exponents. The Egyptians considered dreams as communications from the goddess, Isis. Thybus holds that their predictive value is vastly overrated. He places the ratio of prophetic efficacy at about one in a hundred. I myself would place it even less. The marriage dream-hallucination is actually a variation of the *incubi-succubae* legend. Or such is my personal conviction. The traditional *Oneirocritica*, or dream-books, a feeble relic of which you appear to be carrying with you, cannot be summarized in a thimble as you are endeavoring to do. Many intricate influences make up the interpretative quality of dreams: colors, numbers, astral phases, gems. The whole pattern is required." He squinted at his client. "Dreams, I may add, are not admissible as courtroom evidence. They make absurd alibis."

The gift-card poet stiffened. "I'm afraid I don't understand—"

"If you're really interested be at S-Iron, the Amberton mansion, before midnight. I'm throwing a seance."

Hugh Peyton got to his feet. "Thanks. I'll be there." He made a motion towards his billfold. "How much do I owe you?"

The Dean shrugged it off. "Wait until tomorrow. There's no hurry"

For a long moment after he had gone, the Dean stood gazing at his hatband. "That's a suave young man," he mused. "But he's not quite as smooth as he thinks he is. What did you make of the dream hocus pocus, Ben?"

"It sounded to me," I said, "like a guarded threat."

The Dean started. "Absolutely! That's exactly what it was. Remember the empty pit in the cottage basement?"

THE Elman Building was stark and deserted in the luminous moonlight. We groped our way into the shadowed

cavity of its foyer. The Dean flicked on his pencil flash to get our bearings, shot the beam across the cracked tile floor, around the peeling walls, up to the ornate barrel-arched ceiling. The place was filthy, unsavory. "What we want to see is the attic—Wilkes' studio." The boss was tense in spite of himself. "We'll have to take this mighty carefully."

The building was unlocked, wide open to prowlers. The owners of the Elman Building had a liability on their hands and didn't much care what happened to it.

We climbed three flights of sagging steps, passed the darkened windows of the abandoned Amberton offices, and located a little door at the end of the top hall. "This must be it," the Dean decided. "It's all yours, Benton."

The door was locked. And I mean really locked. I could have picked it but the operation would have taken me ten or fifteen minutes. So I did the simplest and quickest thing. I moved over to the hinge side, slipped out the hinge pins, and lifted the entire door from its frame. "There you are," I said as I set it against the wall. "Burglars have an old adage: locks are only made for honest people."

The Dean was speechless. "Gad!" he whispered. "I didn't intend for you to wreck the place. I hope Malloy doesn't materialize. This would be hard to talk away."

Where a modern building would have had an upper floor, the Elman Building had an attic. It was little more than a roughed-in air space between the top story and the roof. The unpainted flooring stretched without partition or wall from the front of the edifice to the back, and from side to side overhead, the tent-like rafters followed the contours of the roof, hips and eaves and dormers. Down at the far end, in a corner beneath a slanting skylight, was Fraley Wilkes' workshop.

"He chose this place," the Dean explained, "because it gave him a good north light. It's eerie, isn't it?" He switched on a hanging bulb.

Eerie was the word for it. Two long broad tables, set at right angles, formed an L-shaped workbench. A half-dozen *papier mâché* mannequin heads presum-

ably intended for millinery shops—cluttered one end. The other was littered with sculptor's impedimenta, tools, a hunk of clay. A row of sectional life-casts, torsos, busts, thighs, arms, lined the wall. "Unless I'm greatly mistaken," the Dean remarked, "it was here that Teacher Gartell was murdered."

I was easily convinced. "So Fraley knocked him off?"

The Dean evaded. "One thing we overlooked at the time in Gartell. His profession. He was a forger, a specialist in inks and pencils. Obviously he too reconstructed the author of the note as an artist, recognized the script as being done with *conté crayon*, tracked it to Wilkes. Gartell made the mistake of trying to shake him down."

I found myself inspecting the row of dummy heads. The longer I looked, the funnier I felt. Something wasn't right.

The heads were entirely completed, smoothed, painted and ready to ship. Each was exactly like the others; a *moderne* masklike face, long, narrow eyes, drooping sensuous lips almost Oriental. As my glance shifted up and down the row somehow it always seemed to return to one particular head.

"Listen, chief," I said at last. "You'll have to excuse me for this. I guess I've got nerves. But take a look at that third dummy from the end. It makes me uneasy. It looks like the rest and yet it don't. I can't explain it but there's some-

thing about it that looks scared."

The Dean was over it in a flash. "It is different," he agreed promptly. "The left eyebrow has been painted a little broader with a more exaggerated arch. That's what gives it that frightened effect." He took the mannequin in his hand, studied it a moment, wrapped in concentration. Then he did a strange thing: he knocked the ashes from his cigar on the figure's eyebrow, smeared it lightly with the ball of his thumb.

The outline of a jagged scratch appeared beneath the glossy black paint.

"So that's what happened! It was more brutal than I thought." He replaced the mannequin, swept aside the litter of tools and examined the table's edge. A big patch of the surface had been recently scrubbed—clean.

"Fraley Wilkes held him—probably with a wrestler's grip—with his skull on the edge of the bench. An accomplice beat out his brains. Gartell was butchered like an ox and that was the way it was done."

"Look at this," he said tensely. Delicately, he removed a fuzzy yellow hair snagged into a splinter of the table top. "That does it!"

"Low bridge!" I warned. But I was too late.

THEY came across the bare floor, Teddy and his beaknosed pal, walking on their toes like ballet dancers. There

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was an ugly hunch to their shoulders. I knew it was payoff business. The baby in the baggy doublebreasted was bad medicine. He held his gun plastered to his hip—none of that amateur straight arm stuff—and the gun itself was like a label on a poison bottle: no sight, no trigger guard. Teddy, his rotted front teeth bared in anticipation, waved a .38 with a two inch barrel. I've been around enough to recognize upper bracket triggermen when I see them in action.

"It's the jackpot!" The little hood grinned. "We've got 'em together."

The lad with the marcelled hair was gaping about the studio. "Geeze!" he broke out. "Lookit, Armand! What's them things on the table?"

"Heads," the Dean announced lightly. "Sent over from the hospital. They boil them down for their teeth and bones. Makes very nutritious dog biscuit."

Teddy blanched. "Ain't that awful! There oughta be a law—"

Armand cut him off. "He's ribbing you." He turned to the Dean. "So you're Wardlow Rock!"

"That's right," the Dean agreed pleasantly. "Who are you? I don't recall your faces. You must be beginners."

The beaknosed gunman rose to snap the bait. "That's what you think! We're from out of town."

"Ah." The Dean nodded thoughtfully. "Imported. That explains your rudeness. It explains many other things too . . . You see, Ben," he addressed me, "this breaks the case into two stages. The Amberton killings and the safe. These rats were brought in to rob the trustees' safe."

That touched off Teddy. He let loose with a curse and a volley of three at the rapid. One of the slugs ripped the boss's collar, another whacked the floor and the third struck the iron bench vise and went screaming in a ricochet through the glass skylight. The Dean's hand came from beneath his armpit holding his big black Magnum. He moved leisurely and casually, like a three cushion shark chalking up for a run. Actually, it was so fast that the eye couldn't follow it. The heavy pistol blasted once and Teddy's right eye went into vapor. His awkward body whipped to the floor as though it had been jerked with a chain.

I cleared my gun.

Armand was in a quandary. He made the mistake of changing his target. I caught him with two quick ones and my bulldog packs authority.

Gunsmoke and cordite fumes filled the hot room. My ears were ringing with the detonations. The Dean holstered his weapon.

"Corrective shooting!" he exclaimed. "Range finding! I don't see how he lived as long as he did. What did he expect me to do? Send him a trigonometric report of my position? That's the trouble with those hack-sawed barrels. They can put them out fast enough but they can't lay them on the line. I've often said and I repeat—" He reached up and turned off the hanging bulb.

It was then I heard the footsteps on the stairs.

The steps hesitated and then resumed their climb. A high moon, striking through the skylight, laid a shaft of blue across the twisted bodies of the gunmen. It was like the spot in the theater—everything beyond the lip of the luminescence was blinding black. Our visitor reached the top step and started a faltering advance in our direction. I've been raised in a catch-as-catch-can school and have some mighty definite prejudices. I like to see what is going to happen to me. I felt over the Dean's shoulder and snapped on the light.

Vera Madigan Wilkes stood there, weaving and blinking. Her cute little Grecian curls were as immaculate as though she had just left the beauty shop—but outside of that she looked as though she had been grappling with a tornado. Her red calico schooldress was rumpled and mussed and there was a smear of crude oil on her elbow. She snubbed Teddy and Armand and smiled at us. She was twice as pretty as ever and drunk as a sweepstakes winner on the morning after.

"Good grief! What have you been doing?" the Dean demanded.

She made a few vague passes at straightening the pleat in her dress. "I've been working. I've been over on Second Avenue with the night shift taking up street car tracks. That's labor. Sometimes I'm glad I'm just a girl." She

peered about the room. "Where's Fraley? I want him to make another statue of me." She got an idea. "Let's get him to make statues of all of us."

The Dean flinched. "Me—a mannequin?" He deliberated. "Fraley, I take pleasure in announcing, will not be here tonight. Now listen, my dear, I have plans for you and you're not going to like them. I'm going to take you home to my landlady. She will give you a hot bath, two cups of black coffee and put you to bed."

VERA went along docilely enough. In the cab, the Dean pinned up the front of her dress and tucked her in the corner. "These fun projects are pretty strenuous, aren't they?" he commented. "Tell me this, does Fraley object?"

"I don't think Fraley cares but Madison doesn't like it. He says he's afraid it'll get back to his customers and nobody wants a *papier mâché* model of an alcoholic."

"Oh. So you know Mr. Collins. Are you by any chance acquainted with the heir?"

"Georgia? Sure. I've met her at Fraley's studio parties. I like her. But I don't like her husband."

The Dean gave me a quick, smug glance "You mean Hugh? I thought—"

"No one knows about it but me. I heard about it from a friend in Florida. They were married in Miami two years ago. Hugh won't let her make it public. The will says she can't inherit unless her husband has a steady job."

The Dean hacked. "Such a will! And such different versions I've listened to—all of them untenable and intrinsically illegal!" He glowered. "We'll settle this nonsense."

Mrs. Duffy welcomed the model to her bosom like a coast guard cutter bearing down on a castaway. "This, Seraphina," the Dean remarked, "is Vera Wilkes. She needs your warmhearted attention. She's weary. She's been over on Second Avenue taking up street car tracks."

Mrs. Duffy was impressed. "What a cruel way to earn a living! That proves she's honest and innocent." Mrs. Duffy flurried toward the tea kettle "Just leave her to me. I'll fix her up, poor child."

We took a look-see in our apartment while we were there. There was a note under our door. It had been scrawled in great haste and said:

Come out at once. Money no object. You were right. My life's in jeopardy. Don't let me down now.

Madison Collins

"He's trying to salvage," the Dean bit out. "But he's a little late."

Out on the street, I confessed: "I must be dimwitted. There's plenty about this I don't get. Item: Fraley Wilkes certainly knew that J. Waldo was cremated, that he wasn't buried with the boys at the cemetery. Yet, according to you, he drove a stake in the empty plot to see if there was a coffin in it. Also, according to you, he found something that confirmed certain suspicions of his. What were those suspicions and what did he find?"

"He suspected there was a coffin in that grave and that was what he found."

"Good grief!" I ejaculated. "The old sexton. Someone knocked off the old sexton and—"

"Buried him in a casket?" The Dean laughed. "You're macabre-minded. This business is getting you down. No, Ben, it's nothing like that. That coffin, and its occupant, are just where they belong. The cemetery books—or an exhumation for that matter—would prove it."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Shuttle

S-IRON, the old Amberton mansion, sat back off the road, a lilac wind-break concealing it from public view. We drove straight past its vine-hung gateposts. "The village first," the Dean said. "We'll catch it on our return. First things first. We'll stamp out every spark of this devilish affair."

The hamlet, a clump of thirty or so weatherbeaten cottages was just about extinguished when we reached it. It was a cozy little place with turfed brick walks and the aromatic scent of mossy shingles. We pulled up to the floodlight of the filling station. The proprietor answered our horn reluctantly. "Who," the Dean enquired, "hires and fires the sexton?"

The attendant peeled back the tinfoil from a candy bar. "Squire Keeler. Fourth house on the left." He munched thoughtfully "Ain't no use applyin'. We got us a man."

"Do I look like a sexton?" the Dean shot out angrily. He made a quick recovery. "We're inspectors from the health board. There have been complaints. Sanitation, you know. I'm afraid you people are going to have to transplant your graveyard about a mile down the road. Good evening."

That left him boggled.

Squire Keeler had all his buttons. You could tell that the minute you talked to him. He met us at the door in bifocal glasses and a foolish looking nightgown but the Dean wasn't misled. He knew caliber when he encountered it. "I'm sorry, sir. I didn't know you had retired."

The squire waved us into the living-room. He was a bachelor. There was a hotplate on a priceless rosewood desk. A third of the room was taken up by a huge canopy bed with a pile of empty tin cans under it. Open, annotated books lay everywhere. A bitch setter with a litter of puppies watched us from a silken eiderdown quilt in the corner. "And now, gentlemen, what can I do for you?" Squire Keeler got out a giant calabash pipe.

The Dean produced a card, proffered it to our host. The card read, *Ino. Slack, Tennessee Marble*. The squire took the card politely, twisted it into a tight curl and tossed it on the floor. "Introductions are unnecessary—and they are often unreliable."

The Dean studied him warily. "Why do you have a new sexton?"

Squire Keeler puffed placidly. "We have no new sexton."

"Now that," the Dean said bluntly, "is a baldfaced lie. Facts refute you. You're trifling in a serious affair, sir. Am I to understand that you yourself are involved?"

"It's bad, eh?"

"Very bad indeed."

The squire sighed. "Then I'd better tell the whole story. I'm a miserable liar. So I'll stick to the truth. Dave Reams, our old sexton, and my old

friend, is somewhere on this broad continent, on its highways or byways, in a homemade trailer. He's beyond contact and beyond impeachment. What I'm about to say can do him no harm. Dave got his golden opportunity—he cashed in on a little piece of sod. Accepted a big bribe and retired. The lucky devil!"

Great clouds of fragrant smoke ebbed about the squire's angelic cheeks. He went on. "It started some time ago—a week before the first Amberton boy died. One morning old Dave had difficulty in finding his favorite spade. It had been moved from its regular place in the tool-house. A few days later the sod began to die on the Amberton plot. Bart was killed and was buried. For a month Dave fooled around trying to revive that square of sod. He was just getting it green when the spade was stolen again. The sod began to turn yellow. Lee died. The same thing happened all over again and J. Waldo went to meet his maker. Dave began to get scared." The J. P. paused.

"The night after the last death old Dave got to worrying about the thing in bed. He arose, dressed, lit his lantern and went out to the cemetery to look around. He caught a man doing a strange thing. Who the man was and what he was doing, old Dave wouldn't tell me. The man pledged him to silence with a bribe of four thousand dollars. That's the whole truth, so help me, and I hope you can make something out of it."

"I can," the Dean asserted grimly. "Shall I tell you what the man was doing?"

The squire batted his pop eyes. "If you will be so generous, sir, I'll reward you with that lemon spotted pup in the corner. I've been hardly able to sleep—"

The Dean grinned. "We're in a rush. No baggage space for dogs tonight. The man had just finished turning the Amberton headstone when old Dave discovered him. He'd just shifted it a third turn."

WE DISMISSED the taxi at the Amberton gateway and entered the grounds. "Get off that gravelstone drive," the Dean ordered at once, "and walk on the grass. This place is a covey of killers tonight—and set to hair trig-

ger." The matted lilac hedge, seven feet tall at least, walled in the yard from four sides like a wicker barricade. In the center of the lawn, a figment in a hazy nightmare, crouched the great black mansion with its rambling wings and mansard roofs. "We'll just explore around a bit," the Dean suggested. "It saves inconvenience in the long run. There might be an overflow."

A careful search convinced him that the grounds were safe. It was, I might add, as nutty a prowl as I have ever made. The Amberton tribe must have been a select grade of crackpots. The estate was cluttered with birdhouses, big and little, high and low. "Why all the fripperies?" I asked.

The Dean laughed. "The old man's handicraft. He liked to make this stuff and entered it in boys' hobby shows. Probably under a fake juvenile age. He had a set of award ribbons that he cherished like a miser. Believe it or not!" All at once he froze. "So that's it!" he said.

There was a tiny pergola type shed set on piles in the center of a stagnant lily pond. We had noticed it on our first round. Now we returned to it. A rickety rustic bridge arched from the bank to its door. We crossed over. There was a clumsy brass padlock as big as an Oregon apple hanging from the hasp. A blind Chinese could have opened it with a pair of chopsticks. I bent the nib on my fountain pen and had it cracked before the Dean knew what it was all about.

The playhouse in which J. Waldo fled the world and let his second childhood jump the fence was as neat and orderly as an old maid's hope chest. There was

a little shelf of books: *Knick-knacks for a Rainy Afternoon*, *How a Boy Can Help Around the House*, and such stuff.

"It appears," I observed, "that death caught him in production. Hey! What's this? What was he making?"

Three objects were laid out on the bench. A pair of gunsmith's pliers, a glass test tube half filled with an oily liquid and nesting on a pad of cotton batting—and a revolver cartridge. The cartridge was a Magnum .357. The bullet had been removed and the powder emptied into a pile on a square of paper.

Perspiration beaded the Dean's forehead. "So that's what they have planned for me! I'd hate to snap a firing pin on that!"

"How could J. Waldo—"

"Forget J. Waldo. Come on. Let's go inside. I'm in the right mood to present my compliments."

Madison Collins was huddled in the shrubbery at the bank end of the bridge. "Oh! It's you." He produced a pretty poor imitation of surprise. "I saw a light on the water and came out to check up. You were inside? Then you saw that bullet. It's ghastly, isn't it? Someone's preparing some sort of trap. I stumbled on it by accident—that building's never used anymore—and that's why I left you that note to come."

"Of course," the Dean said vaguely. "You're a promoter of inventions, you could grasp its full significance. By the way, just to keep the record straight, who has the key to that pergola?"

"It hangs in the kitchen."

The Dean's teeth showed in a mirthless smile. "It would! Let's go in and sit



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down. I want to talk to you about a will."

Before we reached the porch, the chief slowed down. "I'd like to get this clear," he said innocently. "Just whom do you suspect—and of what?"

Collins answered with a surge of hate. "I suspect St. John. Of what, I don't know exactly. Of rifling our safe, for one thing."

"Is that so? What was in it?"

"That's the funny part. There was nothing in it but a sealed envelope and that belonged to *him*. He must have wanted to get it out and use it without my knowing it. You see, it takes both of us to get the strongbox open."

The Dean perked up his ears. "An interesting conjecture." He shook his head. "But we'll have to discard it."

WHEN the two trustees took over the old mansion they did themselves mighty well. As bleak and eccentric as S-Iron was from the outside, you got a surprise when you crossed its threshold. The interior was comfortable and modern and friendly to the eye. The Amber-ton men had money to spend on solid mellow living and knew how to do it. Huge deep chairs and gleaming wainscoting. A brace of crossed epees above the cavernous fireplace and bullhide rugs on the planked floor.

"Very nice," the Dean commented. "I'd like to have a membership here myself."

Collins stiffened. "Doctor St. John and myself—are simply tenants. We pay our rent, like anyone else, into the estate."

"Certainly. Certainly. I'm familiar with routine. I almost said stratagem." The Dean changed the subject with a wave of the wrist. "Are visitors allowed to sit on these chairs? I have questions to ask."

"Let's go back to the study," Collins suggested. "It's a little more secluded. We won't be disturbed."

That's what he thought.

The study was already in use. We walked in on a conference. Dr. St. John, massaged and powdered and, it seemed to me, rouged a little, lounged behind the desk nibbling the tip of an onyx penholder. A handkerchief had been draped over the table lamp, swathing the room

in obscurity. Georgia Rountree sat across from him. You could barely make out her figure in the half-light, her little Scotch cap on her chic round knees. I got the impression that the dentist had just said something funny and that the girl was laughing.

The next instant I knew that I had been mistaken. She was not laughing. She was sobbing.

The Dean lashed out and whipped the handkerchief to the floor. The walls sprang up in a glare of light. "What's taking place here?" he demanded venomously. "No need to answer. I think I know." He turned to the girl. "This man's been blackmailing you, hasn't he?"

St. John was unruffled. "Oh, it's you," he said. "The mountebank." He had a maddening way of slurring his words. "Are you aware that you are invading the privacy of—"

"I am," the Dean snapped out. "And such is my pleasure. I am at this moment awaiting the arrival of the police to make my charges formal. I will, at the proper time, charge you with possessing, or pretending to possess, an incriminating document, or photostatic copy of the same, by means of which you have been exerting criminal pressure upon this child."

Madison Collins looked befuddled. "What in the world is that supposed to mean?" A car pulled into the grounds, braked beneath the *porte-cochere* outside the window. The big man left the room.

He returned with Lieutenant Bill Malloy and Hugh Peyton, the psychic poet. Malloy's shrewd eyes sized up the assembly. He wasn't any too sociable. "This kid a friend of yours?" he asked the Dean. "I picked him up loitering by the gate. He said he was waiting for you. That you were holding a seance!"

"I am," the Dean affirmed. "In fact, I've already begun it. I was saying—"

"St. John broke in. "You can't do this, Mr. Rock. It's unethical. You're violating a professional confidence. I'm your client."

"Not so," the Dean denied happily. "You can't trap me there, sir. It was Miss Rountree who desired my services." He turned to Lieutenant Malloy. "Are you ready? Prepare yourself. This is the

end." He waited a second for the proper effect. "Doctor St. John is your man."

Malloy was cautious. "Can you make out a case? No tricks."

"Can I? Listen. St. John had grandiose ambitions for wealth. He killed the three Ambertons—in the correct sequence—by using nitroglycerine. The old man's flashlight carried a charge that would lift a freightcar. The sons were slain by a simple device: the insertion, probably with dental plaster, of an ampule of nitro in the barrels of their guns. Out in the pergola he is working on a similar toy for me. Let me tell you—"

Hugh Peyton made his contribution. "I don't exactly see," he observed, "how you have any evidence. What I mean is, when an explosion is over—blooey! everything is gone. What's left?"

"Plenty," the Dean said. "Most importantly there's always the *source* left. High explosive is like poison. It's a suspicious thing for a layman to have in his possession."

ST. JOHN put on his most arrogant sneer. "Don't be a buffoon. Are you implying that I have nitroglycerine in my possession?"

"Not nitro," the Dean responded pleasantly. "Dynamite. It's not generally known but most criminally obtained nitro is produced from ordinary stick dynamite. The process of derivation is extremely elementary. A matter mainly of solution. The typical composition of ordinary dynamite is sodium nitrate forty-five per cent, wood meal twelve, carbonate and moisture three—and nitroglycerine forty per cent. Professional criminals obtain dynamite usually by looting storerooms of quarries, or other places where blasting is going on." He addressed Malloy. "Any reports of loss?"

Bill Malloy had a camera mind. He never forgot a name, a face or a fact. "Yes," he said thoughtfully. "I place it. One box swiped out at the railroad cut. About a month before the first Amber-ton murder. Go on. I find myself interested."

The Dean continued. "There's bulk and danger in the possession of dynamite. Where, St. John asks himself with an affected lisp, shall I store it away to be used

as I need it? Why not bury it in J. Waldo's cemetery plot?"

The room was deathly silent. Miss Rountree watched him fascinated. Hugh Peyton started to speak, checked himself. Madison Collins listened, fishmouthed. Dr. St. John, of all of them, was at ease. The dentist was really a money-player. The tougher it got the less he seemed to care. This should have been the danger signal but we muffed it.

"Cutting the sod, turning it back to dig, and replacing it caused the grass on the cemetery plot to yellow," the Dean explained. "Old Dave Reams was suspicious. You paid him four thousand dollars to pack up and leave town."

St. John interrupted lazily. "There's no dynamite in J. Waldo's grave—"

"Oh, but there is!" The Dean contradicted him flatly. "The headstone is three-sided—as you yourself told me. You've given it a third turn and rotated the plot order. J. Waldo's name now actually marks Lee's grave. You thought by this means you could lock your secret in forever. Fraley Wilkes investigated. He drove a stake into the fresh earth and discovered Lee's casket. You murdered him for this. You should have slain old Reams. His testimony can hang you."

The next two seconds were amazing. Suddenly, without warning, Madison Collins swung an army automatic into view and blasted his partner out of his chair. Malignant and determined, his shovel jaw thrust out, he stood there pouring the entire clip into his associate. It caught us completely unaware.

"There's a revolver in that desk drawer," Collins explained shortly. "He was reaching for it."

We found the pistol in the drawer all right, but if Collins had seen the dentist move he had better eyes than I had.

"I'll take that gun." The Dean smoldered. He laid the two weapons on the corner of the desk. "This case is only half finished and I intend to complete it without interruption. Will everybody quiet down!"

Confusion blanked out his voice.

Vera Madigan Wilkes, with Mrs. Duffy's boa about her neck and enough mascara on her eyelashes to oil a two-ton truck, wove gaily through the door—

way. Still as tight as a bowstring. She advanced straight towards the Dean.

The boss gave her his full attention. "You're supposed to be at home under the covers."

She objected. "Not me. I'm not sleepy. Mrs. Duffy broke out some cold medicine and we killed the bottle. I put her to bed." She blinked about the room. "Hello, people!"

No one answered her.

"It's the brain behind this business," the Dean continued, "that we're after. St. John was just a working partner. Trustee Collins, inform me upon this point: What exactly are the stipulations of J. Waldo's last will and testament?"

COLLINS hemmed and hawed. "To be frank, the conditions are a little embarrassing to Miss Rountree. You see, while Mr. Amberton felt indebted to her father, he didn't—ahem—have the highest regard for the daughter. If Miss Rountree was single at the death, her money was in trust with St. John and myself. If she was married, it was to pass directly under the guardianship of her husband. Waldo didn't consider her competent to handle her own affairs."

"Mr. Peyton," the Dean announced gently, "you appear to have a fortune in your hands. Does the information come as a surprise?"

Again that poker face. "You talk," Hugh said. "I'll listen."

"That won't do," Malloy broke in. "You claim he has the right to handle the money and yet he's living in poverty."

The Dean nodded. "You've put your finger on the crux. He's a wealthy man and doesn't know it. The true text of the will's been kept from him. It was Miss Rountree's idea. She's the arch criminal in this setup. She connived with St. John. She held back from him—and later from Collins—the fact that she is married. She is an animal of prey and her natural impulse is to act alone. When the will was read she learned that she had acted wisely. St. John was on her side, Collins could be loosened up. Hugh, however, blocked her plan."

Vera moved unsteadily over and put her arm around Georgia's waist. "I don't believe it."

"Well, it's true. Isn't it Mrs. Peyton? You mapped out the whole affair. Foolishly, you put some of it in writing—perhaps in a note of instruction to St. John—which he promptly salted away in the safe. He knew you for what you are—a homicidal she-demon. He used this documentary indiscretion of yours to keep his werewolf on the leash—if you'll excuse a bit of rhetoric. The existence of this paper threatened your plans. You imported Teddy and Armand and got together a little cartel. Your gunmen blew the safe, returned the letter to you. That was the signal for action. You had slipped your leash. You were out to run your own affairs, to rid yourself of the guardianship of a husband.

"You had your own irons in the fire. You had snared Fraley Wilkes in the delusion that you intended to marry him. He prepared two graves—one for his wife and one for Hugh Peyton."

Georgia Rountree's lower lip trembled. "You shouldn't say such mean things. I love my husband. He has a beautiful soul. You make me sound so unpleasant. These things aren't really true, are they? I mean, you really don't have any proof, do you?"

"No," the Dean admitted sadly. "I have no proof."

Malloy hunched his shoulders. "You're talking yourself into a slander suit. This girl's got money now. I'll be getting along—"

The Dean detained him. "Don't leave yet. We're just warming up. Would you be interested in the murder of that third rate crook—Teacher Gartell?" Malloy faltered. The Dean said seriously: Georgia Rountree Peyton killed him. With her own dainty hands—and *this I can prove.*"

Hugh Peyton, pale as a sheet, listened with a dead pan. Vera and Georgia stood huddled rigidly. Madison Collins sagged.

"Let's hear the evidence," Malloy ordered.

"First, the setup," the Dean said. "Gartell went to Wilkes' studio to pressure him about some shooks. Don't interrupt. Wilkes threw a nelson on him, held his head on the work bench. Georgia clubbed him with a mallet. A wisp of wool from that Highland tartan she's

wearing got caught on a splinter. That's interesting in anybody's court. Look for her fingerprints on Gartell's shoes. She helped carry him downstairs. She'd take the lighter end."

That did it. Vera and the brunette went into a scrambling cat fight. At first I thought it was over Fraley Wilkes but then, stupefied, I saw what it was all about. Georgia had St. John's gun from the corner of the desk and was struggling to get it into line. The muzzle floated past me, past Malloy, centered on the Dean.

The model closed in, clinched. There was a muffled report. Georgia slumped to the floor.

Vera touched up her Grecian curls, hiccupped. "Those things don't scare me," she remarked brightly. "I've seen plenty of them."

The Dean stepped to the body. He parted the plaid at the girl's shoulder. "My best proof. I never got a chance to tell her about it," he said bitterly I never saw him so griped. "See. She has her tartan pinned with an ordinary spray-

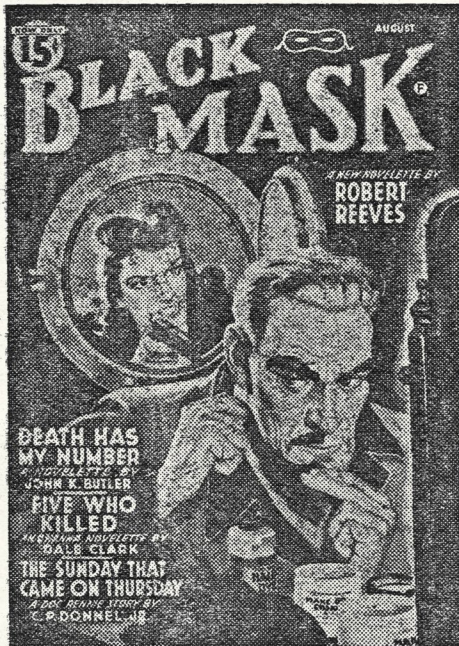
pin. She's removed the original brooch with its cairngorm. Because it was bent. As she was scuffling with Gartell in Wilkes' studio the brooch gouged the surface of one of the finished mannequins. It was a telltale scratch. They had no time to destroy the *papier mâché* head. Wilkes picked up a brush and touched over it in black paint. You see—"

Hugh Peyton stared at the chief, slow comprehension dawning in his expression. "I get it now," he said, "why you wouldn't let me pay you off this afternoon. You're after heavy dough."

The Dean bowed. "Exactly. You are now heir to the Amberton monies. I have worked as your agent. If you'll remember our conversation—when you retained me—we decided fees should be customary and proportionate to service rendered."

He grinned at the mannequin model. "You did a brave thing. I'd like to know you better. Let's go someplace and relax."

"Any place," she agreed, "where I can pick up a boilermaker."



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DING DONG BELLE

A Peter Kane Story
by
Hugh B. Cave

A gorgeous model, clad only in a bathing suit, found slain in a ping-pong parlor on a wintry night. That was a puzzle to Detective Moe Finch. But to his thirsty friend, Peter Kane, it was a challenge—and well-worth a beating—to puncture that windbag of the Force, the "great" Moroni.

DETEKTIVE LIEUTENANT Moroni was in a mood. "And you, Kane, you keep your nose out of this!" he snarled. His fat neck was red against the collar of his pink-and-white striped shirt, and his big face was puffed. "You hear?"

Kane grinned drunkenly through the amber sheen of his beer glass. "What intrigues me," he murmured, rolling his eyes at the buxom beauty in oils above Limpy's bar, "is that the gal was undraped at the time—or anyway, in a bathing suit. A bathing suit in the middle of winter, friend—"

"You keep out of this, Kane!"

"And playing ping-pong, of all things! Ping-pong in a white bathing suit at midnight, in the middle of winter. Why that's—"

"It ain't ping-pong any more," Limpy declared gravely. He was a little man who seldom smiled. He'd been pickpock-



Dolores Trent was found dead under one of the dark green tables.

et, cop, night-club owner, had lost half a knee in the war, and this quiet, high-class liquor trough on Stuart Street was Kane's favorite hangout. "They call it table tennis now," he declared. He poured Scotch and placed it beside Kane's beer. The beer was a chaser.

"And I'm warning you, keep out of this!" Moroni snarled again. "I had my fill of you when Moe Finch was in his prime, Kane. I got more to say now, and I'm tough!" He slapped his glass savagely on the bar and turned away.

"Dear, dear," Kane murmured. The phone was ringing and Limpy hobbled along back of the bar to answer it.

It was a queer case when you thought about it. Kane thought about it. The girl's name had been Dolores Trent before she married the Anderton bankroll, and as Dolores Trent she'd been on the covers of a lot of magazines. A lot of people had paid out nickels, dimes and quarters just to take her home with them. She'd been framed and placed on mahogany bureaus. She'd been thumb-tacked to fraternity-house walls. She'd made old men young and young men reckless.

Day before yesterday at three o'clock in the morning, a newspaper photog named Hulett had found this gal's husband dead on the stairs in the Goodwin Building. He'd followed the dead man's blood up the stairs to the table tennis parlors on the floor above, and found Dolores Trent Anderton dead under one of the dark green tables—in a ravishing white bathing suit.

Kane wished he were back on the cops. This kind of case stirred the bloodhound in him. He gulped his Scotch and swayed a little and realized he was drunk. That was all right, too. As an agency dick he was seldom sober. He disliked being sober.

Limpy said: "For you, Kane."

It was a girl's voice and it called him Peter. The voice jarred him. He lowered his gaze quickly from the oil painting above the bar, because the painting was lewd and that sort of art was way out of line when you talked to a girl like Anne Finch. He'd been in love with Anne before she acquired the Finch. He'd been on the cops then, with a glorious future.

The liquor had licked him with both the future and the girl.

He listened and said, scowling: "Moroni was just here. He must have figured you'd call me. He warned me to keep out of this."

The girl said: "Then I won't need to beg very hard, will I?" Her voice was low and cultured, as always. It was as soft and clean as Anne herself, but Kane caught the tremor in it. He guessed she was pale and desperate.

"Meaning?" he countered, not knowing what else to say.

"You've never turned down a Moroni challenge yet, Peter!"

"This is different," Kane muttered. "He's a lieutenant now."

"Then—you're afraid of him?"

That did it. Kane's mouth twitched and a dull red crept up his jaws. He was drunk—he'd been drunk for days—but there was a part of him the liquor never touched, and the girl had reached that part with a thrust that cut deep.

"Afraid of Moroni?" Kane snarled. "The hell I am! Where are you?"

She told him where she was.

"Wait there," he snapped.

Limpy said with a sigh: "Now look, Kane. Look what you done to my phone! Now how will I explain that to the telephone people?"

Kane poured a drink and downed it. It gagged him and he made a face. He slapped his last dollar bill on the bar to pay for it. "Tell 'em Superman was in," he leered, and went out.

SHE looked just the same. He hadn't seen her in six months, but she was the same girl with the same warm brown eyes and sensitive mouth and straight, slim body. The sight of her did things to him. He never could look at her without remembering the night three years ago she had told him she loved him, and always would love him, and never could marry him. Life with a perpetual souse, she had told him, was not her idea of security.

He'd been drunk that night. He'd spent the next two weeks in an alcoholic fog, and groped out of the fog at last to find her married to Captain of Detectives Moe Finch, his boss and best friend.

Soon after that he'd quit the cops to go to the Beacon Agency as a private shamus. He and Finch were still friends, but there was a difference. Kane didn't try to define the difference—he just knew it existed.

She put her hands on his arms now and said, "You're drunk, Peter," and Kane said defensively, "I like to be drunk." They never talked of that other thing.

She drew him into the apartment and shut the door, steered him to a chair in the living-room. She was worried. Her eyes had a hunted, desperate look and her hands shook as she reached for a cigarette. Kane lit it for her, stared at her and waited.

"It won't be the first time you've helped Moe out of a spot, Peter."

There was no answer to that. He just shrugged.

"This time," she said, "it means his career. Moroni's been waiting for a big, sensational job like this. You know."

Kane knew. He knew that the man she was married to was just a big, sober, hard-working cop with no flair for showmanship. When Moe Finch muffed a job, the papers tore him apart. When he cleaned up a city sin-spot or sent a killer to jail, the newspapers' silence was ear-splitting. Moe Finch had never learned to yell from the house-tops. He was good but not brilliant.

The newspapers were promoting Moroni for Moe Finch's job. Moroni the Mouth, the Great I Am. Moroni the swaggerer.

If Moroni solved the mystery of the girl in the bathing suit, he was in.

"Did Moe ask you to call me?" Kane demanded.

"No, Peter. He asked me not to." She took the cigarette from her lips and looked away from him, the lips trembling. "Moe says he's determined to sink or swim on his own, this time. You've held him together for three years. You've kept him up there. It can't go on, he says."

"He's a sap."

"Then you—you—"

"He's the biggest damn fool in the world," Kane growled, "with the biggest heart and the biggest conscience." He

reached for a newspaper on the divan, and scanned the headlines. "What do you know about this case?"

"The girl, Dolores Anderton, used to be a model."

"I know that."

"Wednesday evening, she and her husband went slumming with another couple. That isn't in the papers because the other two, the William Singens, were influential enough to hush it. The Singens took Dolores and her husband home at one A. M., then went home themselves. That's all they know. At three, this newspaperman found the Andertons in the Goodwin Building, dead."

"How'd he happen to be in the building at that hour?"

"He has a studio there."

Kane studied his fingernails and wished he had a drink. His brain worked better when lubricated. The trouble was, he had to lubricate it often, because his system was pickled and the effect of each new drink quickly wore off. He was so sober now that it hurt.

He said: "These Singens—who are they, pal?"

"William Singens is one of the vice-presidents of Anderton's machine-tool company. With Anderton dead, he'll move up."

"Anderton boozed a lot, didn't he?"

"Moe says he did."

Kane stood up. He had an idea this job was going to unravel him. It was a boat race. Moroni had the official oars and a long head-start, and Moroni, though still blessed with more bluster than brains, had learned a lot about rowing since the old days. It was going to be a hell of a hard job to scuttle Moroni's boat this time.

"I'll give it my old-time best, pal,"

Kane said. He reached for her hand and held it a moment, then looked into her eyes, pulled a deep breath into his chest and abruptly turned away. His best, he promised himself would be good.

WILLIAM SINGEN'S private secretary was a pert little chick with Jean Harlow hair and a way of using her eyes and voice that shrank a man down to size. Kane wished he had his old police badge to impress her with. Lacking

it, he sat and munched his tongue while she phoned his name in to her employer.

He waited. The surroundings were magnificently modern and he was their only occupant. He stood up, said "May I?" and snaked a newspaper off the girl's desk. It was full of pictures.

That was the hell of this mess, the pictures. A newspaper photog had discovered the bodies and taken enough pictures of them to make him happy for life. They were good, too. They were sensational. They made this the biggest murder case in a decade.

He discovered something in the paper that Anne Finch had not told him. Both the girl and her wealthy husband had been shot with a thirty-eight. The same thirty-eight. The gun was missing.

Moroni had passed that out to the newsboys. "Detective Joseph Moroni, ace sleuth of the city's police department, revealed this morning . . ."

Kane threw the paper aside with a snort. He smoked a cigarette, squashed it. His mouth was dry and he needed a drink. The liquor that was already in him was beginning to sour, and he had a headache. He looked at the clock and scowled at the pert little chick behind the desk. She ignored him.

Twenty minutes he'd waited. He was stewing. Then the inner sanctum door opened and he stood up, strode forward.

He stopped. He was face to face with the man who'd come out of there, and the man was Moroni. Moroni's face was a thundercloud.

They were Dempsey and Firpo, confronting each other. Moroni filled his barrel chest with air and let it out in a swift, noisy stream, jabbing a fat forefinger at Kane's face. "I told you to keep your nose out of this, Kane! By God, if you pull any tricks on me this time—"

Kane took out a handkerchief and elaborately wiped his face. "You spit too much." He tossed the handkerchief into a wastebasket beside the desk. Moroni lurched about and strode back into the sanctum, slamming the door.

What was said in there, Kane couldn't know. The phone rang on the waiting-room desk and the blonde answered it. She said, "Yes, Mr. Singesen," and hung

up. She looked at Kane, her dark red lips faintly scornful.

"Mr. Singesen will be in conference the rest of the day," she said.

Kane glared at the sanctum door and slowly unclenched his fists. His knuckles were white. "Round one," he muttered.

Round one had gone to Moroni.

HE WONDERED if Moroni had phoned Mrs. Singesen at her Chestnut Hill home and told her to throw him out, too. It was a pretentious place with an acre of winter-dead lawn and a driveway that curved between lanes of soldier-straight poplars. He punished the bell. A maid with a blank face and a large blank bosom opened the door and blinked at him.

Kane said unctuously: "I am Mr. Hadley. Mr. Singesen sent me with a message for Mrs. Singesen."

The maid thought it over. She let him in. She changed her mind about halting him in the hall and let him into the living-room, which was almost too large for an Elks' convention. "Wait here, please," she said.

Kane prowled. He stopped beside a table on which lay a pair of gloves. They were a man's evening gloves and lay on a bright red rectangle of cardboard that bore the words, *Wop Willy Offers*.

He reached for the red cardboard and changed his mind when a door opened across the room. He turned. "Ah," he said. "Mrs. Singesen!"

She was no chicken, this Mrs. Singesen. She had several auxiliary chins and she wore a nondetachable life-preserver of blubber around her middle. The motif was nautical; embroidered anchors on a navy blue dress that hugged the hull-like armor-plate. She was designed to plow through heavy seas, this lady.

She frowned at him, fluttering her eyelids, and Kane said: "I'm investigating the Anderton affair, Mrs. Singesen. Your husband suggested that I come here and talk to you."

"Indeed!"

"He tells me that you two were out with the Andertons Wednesday evening, and—"

"One moment, Mr. Hadley," she said. Kane scowled at the broad of her back

as she headed majestically for the hall.

He heard the dial-clicks of a telephone and guessed what she was doing. She'd been tipped off, then, that Peter Kane might come calling. Kane rolled the name Moroni under his tongue and in less refined surroundings would have expelled it vehemently. He stepped back to the table and snatched up the bright red oblong of cardboard. It was in his pocket when the woman cruised in from the hall.

She dropped anchor a few feet from the door, hipped her hands and delivered a broadside. "I have just spoken to my husband," she snapped. "You are without doubt the private detective we were warned about! You are Peter Kane!"

Kane sighed. With some ceremony he put his hat back on his head and headed for the door.

"And don't dare show your face here again!" the woman lashed. "Of all the underhanded, sneaky tricks—why, in all my life I—"

"Lady, lady," Kane growled, "you're not slumming now." With what dignity he could muster, he went past her and out.

THE bright red folder was a menu, and was something special. The menu you usually got in Wop Willy's was a greasy typewritten sheet covered with fly-tracks as big as moose-prints. This was different.

Kane held it against the wheel of his car and studied it. It was Wednesday's menu. Wednesday had been Wop Willy's eleventh anniversary. Wop Willy's was a dump on a North End sidestreet.

Kane slipped a pint bottle of rye from the glove-compartment and shut his eyes while the whiskey gurgled down his throat. He looked at the last inch in the bottle and decided to save it, decided not to and killed it. He felt better. He thought of Mrs. Singen and laughed, and that was a step in the right direction.

He drove downtown to the North End, parked his car and went into Wop Willy's where among other things you could buy the best spaghetti and meatballs in town.

A waiter smiled and said, "This way, Mr. Kane," and the checkroom girl smiled, too. Kane shook his head and

said, "Willy." He went upstairs. He went along a hall up there, past the men's room to a door marked private, and knocked. A pleasant, cultured voice told him to come in.

Willy Sakarian was not a wop, he was a Greek with his B.A. from Harvard, but this was a wop district and Willy knew his business. He was small and swarthy, with beautiful teeth and beautiful blue eyes. He had the build of a sixteen-year-old girl, a handclasp gentle and soothing.

Willy had a gold mine here. He served cheap, noisy entertainment and the city's finest food. He lured the wealth that went slumming. He was grateful to Kane for a lot of ideas that had panned out and made him more money.

"You been reading the papers, Willy?" Kane asked him.

Willy nodded. As though by magic, a fifth of Scotch, a syphon of soda and two gleaming glasses appeared on his desk. He said while pouring: "The Andertons were here Wednesday night, Kane, with another couple. They came about eleven, left at one. Anderton himself was ugly drunk." He pushed a drink toward Kane's hand. "But if you hope I can tell you why they wound up the way they did, with that girl playing table tennis in a bathing suit—I can't."

"I was hoping you could."

"One thing did happen. Dolores Anderton had a drink with one of the boys in my band. I didn't like it, but it was her idea and what could I do? Her husband didn't like it, either. He never took his eyes off them. When she went back to her own table, he wouldn't speak to her. I was watching, I saw it. Soon after that, they left."

Kane rolled the Scotch under his tongue. His headache was gone and he was thinking better. "You speak to the boy in your band afterward?"

Willy shrugged. "Why should I?"

"Is he here now?"

Willy shook his head.

"Well," Kane said, "it may be nothing, but I got to start somewhere, and fast! Who is he?"

"Fred Patten. Nice kid, about twenty-five. He was down on his luck and asked for a job, three-four months ago. Said he

could sing. I let him sing and never even heard him, he was so eloquent on the piano. He lives—" Willy pulled out a desk drawer and dipped into a neat row of file-cards—"at eighty Morris Street. No phone. Used to be a struggling artist. But wait a minute, Kane." Willy put down his drink, scowling. "Something else happened."

"Ah!"

"The Anderton woman used to be a model. You knew that, of course."

"I knew."

"Well, Carl Dolce was here Wednesday night, too. Carl Dolce, the photographer. She talked to him, and Anderton didn't like *that*."

"Hmm," Kane said. He stood up. "I'll look into that, Willy. Has Moroni been around here?"

"Not yet."

"You encourage me," Kane muttered. He had another drink, a quick one, standing, and put a hand on Willy's shoulder. "Thanks, pal. The more I know you, the better I hate Yale." He thought that was a dumb crack, but Willy found it funny and was still grinning when Kane closed the door.

CARL DOLCE did covers for the magazines. Photographs of beautiful girls skiing, beautiful girls eating grapefruit, beautiful girls looking beautiful. He was a furtive, pop-eyed little man of unguessable age, with a prodigious reputation. His studio was the last word.

Kane hiked into the chrome and plastic reception-room and leaned on the desk. He said to the pale young man there: "Like to see Mr. Dolce. Police business." That was cutting the corners pretty close, but Carl Dolce was known to be a difficult man to get close to, and time was precious.

The pale young man shook his head. He said Mr. Dolce was not in. He said he didn't know when Mr. Dolce would be in. He talked with a slight lisp and was very arty.

"Tell you what I want, then," Kane scowled. "Some of those pictures Dolce took of Dolores Trent before she was married."

The young man was perturbed. "I'm sorry, sir, but Mr. Dolce took all those

pictures out of the files yesterday afternoon and—" He pulled up short. His face crimsoned and he seemed angry with himself. "You'll have to see Mr. Dolce," he said curtly, dropping the arty accents.

Kane said, "Sure." His eyes had a glitter in them and he wore a wolfish smile. "Just where does Dolce live?"

The young man glared, eloquently silent.

"O. K.," Kane said. He leaned across the desk and slid a phone book toward him, opened it and found the name without any trouble. "Carl Dolce," he read aloud, "three-four-one Riverway . . . Thanks, pal."

He didn't ask the pale young man if Moroni had been around. He was reasonably sure that Moroni hadn't, and felt for the first time that he might have at least a Chinaman's chance of crossing the finish line first.

"We're in the stretch, fella," he told himself. "It's time to go all out!"

He drove hard out to Riverway. Three-four-one was a horseshoe-shaped apartment house of red brick and ivy, old and ornate. The apartment number was thirty-one, which meant third floor front. There was no response to Kane's steady pressure on the bell.

He tried the foyer door and it was unlocked, and his leather heels beat a tattoo on the tile floor to the elevator. So Carl Dolce had cleaned Dolores out of the files, had he? This was a lead. It was so hot it smoked.

But the door of Dolce's apartment was locked, and persistent knocking brought no answer. Kane curled his lips around an oath. He folded his fist around the knob and shook it savagely, swore again and went down the stairs. "If I were Moroni," he muttered, "the guy would be sitting on the steps waiting for me."

He kicked a long-handled broom leaning against the wall, and it fell with a clatter, and a voice in the hall said petulantly, "Hey!"

"Ah," Kane said, braking himself. "The janitor!"

The fellow was big enough to be two janitors, and had a face as empty of guile as a goldfish bowl. Kane picked up the broom and carefully replaced it.

"You're just the man can help me," Kane declared.

"Huh?"

"I'm looking for Carl Dolce. It's important."

"Him," the janitor said. He rolled his eyes and gazed at the ceiling. "Him! You think I know where he is?"

"Well, you work here."

"Listen," the janitor said. He came closer and lowered his voice to a chummy halftone. "When I try to find him, he is never here. Yesterday I go up to his apartment no less than twenty times, to give a registered letter I sign for. I could leave it in his mailbox, sure, but he is funny, sometimes he does not look in his mailbox for days at a time. So all right. I go up there twenty times. I don't catch him. So then, at half past two o'clock this morning, when I am fast asleep, he knocks at my door downstairs to ask me will I burn some rubbish for him in the incinerator!"

Kane let his breath out slowly. "A very queer duck," he agreed. "And did you burn the rubbish?"

"The rubbish he gives me at half past two o'clock in the morning? No, not yet."

"Ah," Kane said. His hand slipped into his pocket, hungrily, and then he remembered, with a pang, that he had spent his last dollar in Limpy's. Liquor he decided ruefully, would be the ruin of him yet. "Friend," he said, his own voice confidential and cozy, "do you know *why* Mr. Carl Dolce sneaked down to your door at that unearthly hour?"

"Huh?"

"Yuh didn't peek at that rubbish, hey?"

"It was tied up," the janitor scowled.

"So! It was tied up. And you didn't untie it! Look, friend." Kane leaned closer, hypnotically staring. "You and I, we'll have a peek at that package, right now!" His leer spoke volumes. "Mr. Dolce is a photographer, friend, and photographers take some very interesting pictures!"

The janitor opened his eyes very wide. Kane had a mental picture of him peering furtively into a penny-arcade peep box, turning the crank very slowly to make his nickel last longer. They went

downstairs. The big fellow plucked a package from the incinerator and stared at it.

"You have to open it," Kane reminded him.

"Y-you open it!"

"Sure," Kane grinned. He snapped the string and peeled off layers of newspaper. A very careless fellow, Mr. Carl Dolce. The pictures were intact, not even ripped through once.

There were at least two dozen of them and they were warm. Kane pawed through them, one by one—photographs of Dolores Trent in abbreviated bathing suits, of Dolores Trent in sport clothes and evening gowns. Of Dolores Trent in nothing. Very alluring, very seductive, with the stamp of art upon them. Especially upon those of Dolores Trent in nothing.

Kane shoved the pictures into his pocket and warped a scowl across his face. A very severe scowl. He glared at the janitor, who looked back at him puzzled and uneasy.

"These," declared Kane severely, "are not for the public eye. I'll take them with me. Official business," he added, clearing his throat. "The word, friend, is mum."

He went upstairs and out, the janitor too awed to stop him. He wondered how to go about getting hold of Carl Dolce, and decided to return to the apartment every hour until his efforts produced results. This was one lead Moroni was not likely to stumble upon. Therefore he had nothing to fear on that score.

Meanwhile, a few words with that piano-player might be of value.

MORRIS Street is an odd little thoroughfare in the heart of the old business district. It is a dead-end lane of tenements. It is a dislocated wing of the red-light sector, surrounded by aged, dignified, once pretentious office buildings. Number eighty was a three-decker tenement.

There was a barroom next door.

Kane counted the loose change in his pocket and found he had eighteen cents. He hiked into the barroom and drank three nickel beers, placed the remaining three pennies in a pile on the bar and

haughtily walked out, leaving them there. He climbed the aged steps of number eighty.

The tenants' names were penciled under the bells beside the door, and the name of the man he sought was under the top-most bell. Kane climbed to the third floor and was thirsty again. He knocked. The impact of his fist swung the door open.

He leaned over the sill and knocked again, on the open door, and got no answer. He shrugged and walked in.

No one challenged him.

There were three rooms and they were in keeping with the house itself, gloomy and gray. Yet they had a certain personality. This was supplied, Kane realized, by the pictures on the walls, by a colorful hand-painted spread that was thrown over the studio couch. He was puzzled.

He remembered Wop Willy's words to the effect that Fred Patten was a struggling artist, and that explained it. The atmosphere was vaguely arty. But Fred Patten was not here.

The place smelled of cigar-smoke that had a familiar, choking reek. A sodden cigar-end lay on the edge of a table. Kane went back to the door and peered at the lock and realized why the door had opened when he knocked. The lock was broken.

"Moroni's been here," Kane decided. It was only a guess, but the cigar smell was strong, and Moroni was famous for his grisly taste in tobacco.

He looked around. On the table lay a Southern Air Lines folder designed to lure winter-weary northerners to the paradise isles of the West Indies. A sun-burned female rode a surfboard on its cover. Inside, on the margin, someone had done some figuring with a pencil.

It seemed unimportant. Everything else in the place seemed unimportant. Kane tired of the arty atmosphere and went out. He was so thirsty that his throat made small whistling sounds when he breathed, but his pockets were empty and his credit in this part of town was not tall enough to reach the suds on a glass of beer, even.

He walked around the corner into Nason Street and hiked across to the Goodwin Building.

It had been quite a structure in its day. Now it was occupied by a couple of sign painters, a rubber stamp manufacturer, a rug repair plant and Jerry Verall's Table Tennis Parlors. The signs outside told him this. Another sign said, *Studio space for rent*. Kane climbed the broad wooden stairs on which the body of Anderton had been discovered. Chalk-marks made by the cops were still in evidence. He tried the door of the table tennis parlors and found it locked.

He was disappointed. The idea of a gorgeous girl in a white bathing suit playing ping-pong at midnight in the middle of winter still intrigued him. The cops, he thought glumly, were always keeping him out of places he wanted to go. He scowled at the lettering on the door.

It read: *City Table Tennis Center. Jerry Verall, Prop. Registered T. T. A.* "Hey!" Kane said softly, "Hey!"

HE LEFT the building and hiked down the street to a drug store, thumbed through a telephone book and found the name and home phone number of Jerry Verall. The name itself had a familiar ring. He supposed he'd seen it on the sports pages, because table tennis was an up-and-coming pastime, getting a lot of publicity. He stepped into the booth and remembered again, ruefully, that he was broke.

"Brother," Kane said soberly to the clerk, "I find it necessary to make a few phone calls. I have no nickels. I have nothing to change into nickels. But I have a watch, a very fine watch. You take the watch. You lend me three or four nickels with which to make phone calls. Can do?"

The clerk peered at the watch. He turned it over and read the engraving on the white gold case. "To Lieutenant Detective Peter Kane, for outstanding service. B. P. D."

"Gee!" the clerk said.

Kane made his phone calls. Three of them—the last to Willy Sakarian. He grinned at the clerk and walked out, as contented as though he had just wrapped himself around a fifth of the finest Scotch. He walked back to his car and drove to Wop Willy's, in the North End. It was now half past eight, and dark.

Kane went into Wop Willy's by way of the rear door, which was open. The door was open because Willy Sakarian had promised to open it. Kane climbed the stairs, went along past the men's room and entered Willy's office.

The slender Greek stared at him without smiling and said, shaking his head: "I'm sorry, fella. Moroni's here."

Those three nickel beers turned over in Kane's stomach. No other part of him moved except his fists. They curled into hard, white lumps.

"Five minutes after you phoned, Kane, the big slug walked in. He's downstairs with a couple of his men."

"Waiting?" Kane muttered.

"Waiting."

Kane walked the floor of Willy's office. He was sore now. He was sore with himself for having muffed the golden opportunity, sore with the croupier of his luck for having led him to believe he was winning. Losing was tough. Losing on the last throw of the dice was tougher. Losing when the future of an honest, sober, trusting pal like Moe Finch depended on you—when the swellest girl in the world had honored you with her faith—losing then was a numbing shock that twisted something deep inside you.

Kane felt the barb in that sensitive part of him that was never touched by the quantities of liquor he consumed. His lean face lost color and his eyes glittered. "Listen, Willy," he said. "You're doing me a favor!"

Willy listened. He didn't like it, and shook his head, scowling. He said: "Moroni will eat you up, Kane."

"You do what I say!"

"You want me to? You're sure of it?"

Kane pushed him toward the door.

Willy Sakarian went out, shaking his head. The door closed behind him and Kane went to work, hauling out the drawers of the desk, tossing papers around. In three minutes Kane had made a lot of progress. The office was a shambles, and he was snorting through the mess like a bull in a crystal-shop.

A snarling, guttural voice bellowed from the doorway, "All right, you! Hold it!" and Kane turned to see Moroni holding a gun on him.

Willy Sakarian was there at Moroni's

elbow, and Willy was wringing his hands hysterically. "You see?" he wailed. "You see what he's done? He charged in on me and ordered me around! He said he was the police!"

"So you're the police now, Kane," Moroni snarled. He paced into the room, his big face oozing a leer of triumph. "This time, smart guy, you've gone too far!"

KANE stood stiff, defiantly glaring. He hoped the act was good because it was his last throw of the dice, his last chance. He didn't have to fake the trembling of his hands—that was genuine. Other things were genuine too. His disdain for the big dick who ploughed toward him. His determination to take a poke at that leering face, no matter what it cost.

He swung, and Moroni looked surprised. You had to belt that monkey-map more than once to change its shape. It was tough as granite. Kane swung again, awkwardly, and was knocked sprawling by an elbow to the side of his head.

He picked himself up, shook his head. His eyes were wild and he looked drunk, but at this stage of the proceedings he was more sober than he had been in weeks. He breathed hard and noisily, his hair hung in his eyes, but he was sober.

He said savagely: "You can afford to be tough, Moroni. You and your body-guard!"

"Sure," Moroni sneered. He swung a fist and Kane drunkenly swayed away from it, in slow motion. Kane fell over a wastebasket and landed in a heap against the legs of the desk. Papers spilled out of his coat pocket.

Not papers. Photographs.

Moroni's eyes bugged. He pounced with surprising agility for one so big. He scooped up the pictures and pawed through them, the two cops crowding closer to peer over his shoulders. Willy Sakarian stood in the doorway, quiet now, sadly gazing at Kane.

Moroni stared at the undraped Dolores Trent and greedily sucked his lips. He said: "Well, well, Kane. You've been holding out on me!"

"You go to hell!" Kane snarled.

"Such language, Kane. Where did these come from?"

"Try and find out!"

Moroni pocketed the pictures and favored Kane with a thoughtful stare. "You shouldn't fight cops, Kane. People who fight cops get beat up all to hell. Legally, too." He grinned at his two henchmen. "You guys saw Kane slug me, didn't you?"

They nodded. Kane got to his feet and backed against the wall, breathing hard.

The two cops moved in on him with nightsticks, and Moroni said ominously: "I *have* seen guys go to the hospital for getting rough with the cops, Kane. They suffer from the damndest things, too—fractured skulls, busted ribs, kidney trouble—it's awful. But those pictures are hot. Where'd you get 'em?"

"You go to hell!"

The cops went to work on him, and there was very little Kane could do about it. He couldn't slug back, that would have left his head wide open to the rain of nightsticks. Kane crouched with his head under his arms, braced himself.

In the doorway, Willy Sakarian covered his beautiful blue eyes with his hands and uttered little moaning sounds.

Kane went to his knees, cursing. He called Moroni every name on the roster. He invented new names and snarled those. His arms felt like telephone poles, and he spat blood.

"The pictures, Kane," Moroni said patiently. "I want to know where they came from."

Kane rolled to the floor and glared up at him. He'd had enough. He'd put up a show, made it look good—more would be too much. "Carl Dolce took them," he groaned. "She used to work for him."

"That's better!"

"He was trying to destroy them. I got them away from him."

Moroni's leer was wolfish. He sucked air through his teeth, looked down at Kane and rubbed his big hands. "So why did you come barging in here to tear Willy's office apart?" he demanded.

"I had to know how hard-pressed Dolce was for dough. He owns a slice of this place. His papers are here."

Moroni's scowl was enormous. "Carl

Dolce owns a piece of this dump? That's news to me, Kane!"

"A lot of things are news to you," Kane muttered, shielding his face.

Moroni could afford to take that lightly, and did. He grinned. "Go right ahead and snoop, Kane," he said. "Me, I'm a cop. I'll get my information from Dolce himself—the easy way." He patted the pocket that held the photographs. "Be good, Kane. I could be tough with you for all this, but I never kick a man that's down. Seldom, anyway." He put his heel against the end of Kane's tail, and shoved. "So long, sucker!"

Kane slowly stood up. He was a mess. His arms ached like ulcerated teeth and his head throbbed. He swayed to the desk and leaned there, and stared at Willy.

"You better go downstairs, Willy, and keep an eye open," he said.

Willy nodded. He went out.

Kane said softly, under his breath, "So long, Moroni!" and reached for the telephone.

IT WAS a tense little gathering. Keiley of the *Post* was there, languidly filing his fingernails. Murchison of the *Telegram* perched on a corner of Moe Finch's desk and asked innumerable questions to which no one else paid any attention. Sisson and McArdle, veteran news-hounds from the city's other two papers, leaned forward on their chairs and tossed pennies against the wall.

Moe Finch kept his mouth shut and tried to look wise, which was not easy because Moe Finch had a face as wide-open and guileless as his heart.

The door opened and Kane walked in.

Kane was not alone. With him was a dark-haired, good-looking young man who was so scared it was pathetic. Kane had a hand on the young man's elbow, and after marching him across the threshold and pushing the door shut, Kane gave the young man a shove, toward Moe Finch's desk.

"You were right, Captain," Kane said. "Here he is."

Moe Finch looked at the young man. He looked at Kane. Not knowing what else to say, he said, "Ah!"

"Shall I tell the boys about it, Captain?" Kane murmured.

"Do," said Moe Finch.

Kane leaned against the desk. "Well, gentlemen." He paused to push his fingers through his hair. "Would one of you guys have a drink on you?"

One of them had, and Kane put a large dent in the contents of a pint of bottle. It was newspaperman's rye. It hit his stomach and exploded, and he clung to the desk for support. But when the first cruel dizziness had passed, he felt tons better.

He began over again. "Gentlemen, there were certain aspects to this case that led Moe—that led Captain Finch to some definite conclusions. First, Dolores Trent was wearing a bathing suit and was slain in a table tennis parlor at midnight. You boys made a lot of that, because it was unusual, it bordered on the fantastic. There could be only one explanation for it."

The newsmen held their collective breaths.

"Captain Finch figured out the reason for it," Kane said, leering. "But that wasn't enough. It didn't tell him who was responsible for the girl's presence in the table tennis parlors at that hour. So . . ." He rubbed his tongue with the back of his hand and gazed soulfully at the man with the pint. The pint was produced again, and Kane put a second large dent in it. "Bad cold," he said. After corking the bottle he placed it on the desk.

"So at Captain's Finch's suggestion I found out from one Jerry Verall, head of the local T. T. A., the names of all those who have keys to the table tennis place. Sure enough, one of them—this lad here, Fred Patten—was an artist."

The newsmen stared at Fred Patten. The young man shuddered, clung to the desk with both hands.

"Investigation revealed," Kane continued, well-oiled now and thoroughly enjoying himself, "that Dolores Trent used to be very fond of this boy here. Last Wednesday night, while slumming with her husband and another couple, she had a chat with him at Wop Willy's. Investigation also revealed, gentlemen, a Southern Air Lines brochure in Mr. Patten's lodgings. The missing link!"

It made sense to no one but Kane. Even the eyes of Moe Finch were filled

with question-marks. But the newsmen were too intent upon Kane to be watching Moe Finch.

"At Captain Finch's direction," Kane declared, "I telephoned Southern Air Lines and talked to their advertising department. Sure enough, they had commissioned our struggling young artist, Mr. Patten, to paint a picture for them. What kind of picture, gentlemen? Why, one with glamor! One with romance! What else but a picture of a lovely young woman in a very yummy bathing suit, playing table tennis against a background of southern sun and palm trees!"

The gentlemen of the press needed no more. As one, they took in air. As one, they wolfed at Fred Patten, backed him into a corner. Kane elbowed them aside and held up a hand.

"I can tell it much more simply than he can, gentlemen. Much more briefly. Mr. Patten was given the assignment to paint the picture we've been talking about. Wednesday night, when Dolores Trent slumped at Wop Willy's, he told her about it. They'd been fond of each other, those two. Miss Trent knew all about Patten's ambitions to be an artist. She offered to pose for his picture—to meet him later, if she could dodge her drunken husband.

"She did meet him. But her husband was not as dumb as she thought. He was wise. He followed her. And now, Patten, if you'd tell the boys what happened . . ."

THE young man raised a sweat-drenched face and tried to look at the half-circle of wolves that hemmed him in. He was a very sick young man, numb with terror. But there was something clean and decent and desperate about him that softened the newsmen's faces even as they crowded him.

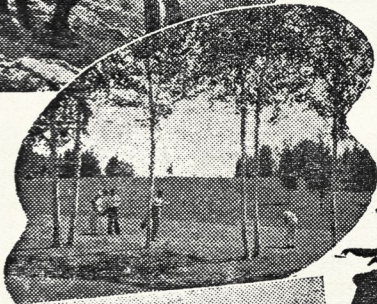
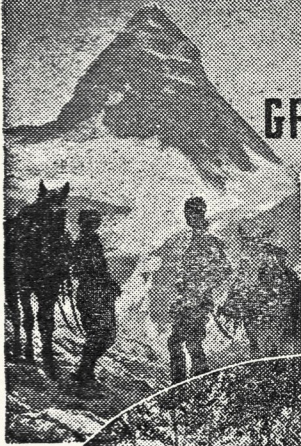
"She—she was wearing the bathing suit under her dress," he said. "We went over to Jerry Verall's place and she started to undress. There was nothing wrong about it. Some artists can fake a picture but I can't. I have to have a model. But he—her husband—rushed in while she was undressing. He was drunk and he had a gun."

Patten looked at his feet and swal-

(Continued on page 54)

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(Continued from page 52)

lowed a sob that was not for the benefit of the newsmen. "He called her a—he called her names, and shot her. I went crazy then. I grabbed him and we wrestled all over the place, and the gun went off and he fell. He wasn't dead. I suppose he was fatally wounded, but I didn't know. I just knew *she* was dead, and I was a scared. I took the gun and ran. After I left, he must have crawled out and fallen down the stairs."

"And the gun?" said Kelley of the *Post*. "Where's that?"

"I threw it in the river."

The newsmen took notes furiously. Their pencils raced, and made a noise like hens scratching in a barnyard. Peter Kane plucked the almost empty pint off the desk, gazed owlishly at Moe Finch, and killed it.

Murchison, of the *Telegram*, said: "I don't get your angle in this, Kane. You're not a cop any more. How come?"

"Captain Finch," Kane said solemnly, "is handicapped around here. He has to contend with the bullheaded blunderings of Moroni, and gets damned little co-operation. He asked me, as a favor, to do the roadwork for him. I'm unimportant. You can leave my name out of it."

"That right, Captain?"

"Why—ah—suit yourself," Moe Finch said.

"What do you think this kid will get, Captain?"

Kane answered that. He stepped up to Fred Patten and put a fatherly hand on the young man's arm. "I think he'll get a damned good lawyer," Kane said. "and if you boys are halfway human, you can win him the public's sympathy. He's a good kid and—"

There was a commotion in the hall. The door clattered open and into that room full of well-fed newspapermen surged Moroni. Moroni, the I Am.

The newsmen blocked Moroni's view of Kane, of Fred Patten. The Brain saw only Moe Finch and the press. He dragged a small, wasplike man into the room with him, flung the man forward. He and the man were handcuffed together.

"Boys," he said, flushed with pride, "take a good look at this guy! His name

is Carl Dolce. You're looking at the man who murdered Dolores Trent!"

The silence was ear-splitting, but Moroni paid no attention. "Stick around, boys," he said, "and watch me slap a confession out of this guy!"

Carl Dolce was terrified. He squirmed against the desk and looked beseechingly at Moe Finch, rolled his large round eyes at the newsmen. "It isn't true!" he wailed. "Just because I got rid of some pictures that were in my files—I tell you it isn't true! I didn't have a thing to do with it! I just didn't want to have those pictures around if anyone questioned me, after what happened. Oh my God, I—"

"Shut up!" Moroni snarled. "I'll do the talking!"

Kelley of the *Post* snickered. Moroni gaped at him. The *Telegram's* Mr. Murchison said, "Dear, dear, such a commotion!" in a voice as mocking as an echo. Moroni widened his eyes and looked confused.

With Kelley in the lead, the press filed past Moroni to the door. He yelled at them and they paid no attention. He turned red, waved his arm. The press walked out.

On the verge of apoplexy, Moroni swung on Moe Finch for an explanation, and saw Kane. He stopped short. Understanding rushed into his eyes, and up his fat neck rolled a wave of crimson.

"You!" Moroni choked.

"Me," Kane leered. "And this, Moroni, is Fred Patten. Fred's already confessed. And I wouldn't get rough with Fred if I were you, Moroni. The newspaper lads definitely won't like it." He plucked the empty pint off Moe Finch's desk, drained the last amber drop of its contents onto his tongue.

Moroni, red to the roots of his hair, unlocked the manacle that linked him to Carl Dolce. He clenched his fists and blocked Kane's path to the door.

"You think so?" Kane said gently. "It won't be as easy as last time, fella. I only take a beating like that when there's a need for it."

Moroni faltered. Kane leered at him, plucked the empty bottle off the desk and tenderly placed it in Moroni's hand. "You look," Kane said, "as if you need a drink. Have one, pal, on me."

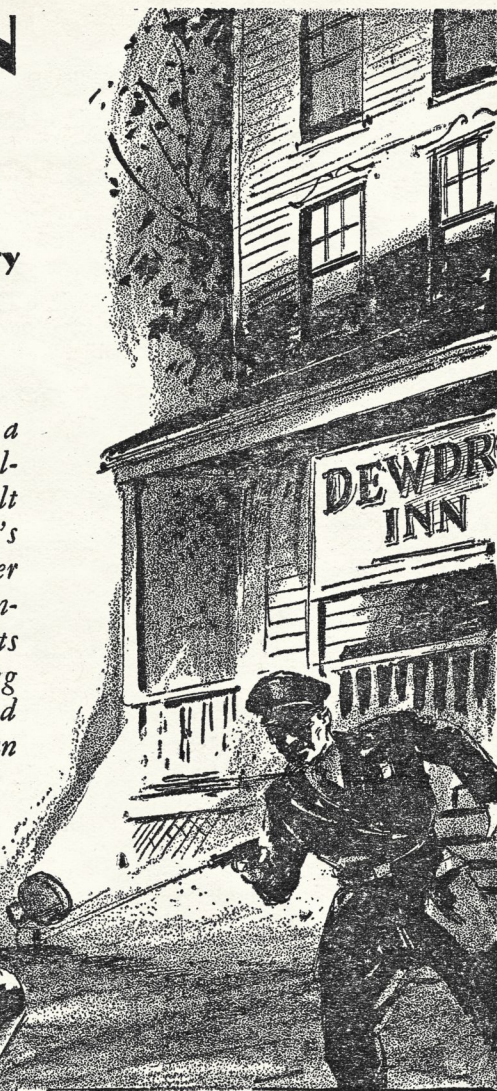
DEATH IN THE CENTER

An Acme Indemnity Op Story

by Jan Dana

Author of "Cheese It—The Corpse!" etc.

Joe Klingman would have been a perfect model of what the well-dressed corpse will wear—if his belt hadn't been missing. So Acme's inquisitive op steps into the murder picture in which Mona, the Commercial House' waitress (and its most appetizing dish), is being framed—and almost gets rubbed out of the scene himself, by an artist in crime.



When he wouldn't stop, I had to give it to him.

THE first time I saw Joe Klingman was when big Mamie, of Hell's Kitchen, New York, introduced us. I had been sleuthing for Acme Insurance less than two years then. He—well, he had been an aristocrat of the heisters since the nineteen twenties. He had lifted a string of pearls from an opera star that we insured for a hundred thousand dollars and he wanted to negotiate. I was green, and nervous and inept, but I managed to carry it off—gave him the

company's ten G's and got the necklace. You might say I saw him more than once—there were two or three meetings, but they were all part of the deal, and I call it once.

The second time was in a lineup at headquarters. Not that they had anything on the dapper little gray-eyed thief—they never did get anything on him—but he was picked up in a dragnet. I didn't have to. Every ranking cop in New York knew his trim little figure, his Bond Street clothes—he really imported them from England—his carrot-colored hair, his jaunty little strut.

But he got it into his head that I had done him a favor and—this was the third time—when I ran into him several months later on Broadway, he insisted on taking me on a party. It was a three-day affair and began with his taking me up to his suite in the Ritz and showing me, among other things, his ten thousand dollars' worth of clothes.

And this was the fourth time. This—in the upper end of New York State, in the sleepy little town of Watford (pop. 1,000, they hoped) in a square little matchbox shed, was the fourth time and what occurred to me first was that he had lost a lot of weight.

He lay on sort of a canvas trestle, naked and dead, his little gray eyes dull, staring up at the electric lights in the shed's ceiling. His little body was warped and blue and skinny, every rib standing out. His upper lip was split and torn, putting a sneer on his owlish little face and showing the jagged stumps of his even, small teeth that the bullet had smashed. The blood had all been cleaned away. I rolled him up onto his side and looked at the clean little hole where the slug had gone in over his small hip, and then the two punctures alongside his warped spine. His hair was dyed blue-black, but the carrot color had begun to show at the roots. I let him down, stood back and dragged a cigarette from my pocket.

The tow-headed, nervous, twenty-year-old undertaker's assistant sprang forward with a light. I asked, "Where are his clothes?" and he pointed to a pile on a stool by the trestle's head.

I looked them over. Joe had not been

broke. The small oxfords were custom made, the shirt-and-shorts combination was of the finest silk, as was his cream silk shirt. He had a poplin necktie—all these things were stiff with dried blood—a brown lightweight hat, and a brown herringbone tweed suit that I remembered from five years ago. It had the Bond Street label and was built to fit snugly under his armpits and the belt loops were wide, in the English fashion. Not that he ever wore belts, as I remembered it—suspenders, galluses were his preference, although there were no suspenders in sight here. No belt either, for that matter.

The undertaker's youth told me: "They took his money and his watch and two rings off'n him. The deputy-sheriff has them."

"Anything else? They take anything else? No? Well, thanks."

I went out into the late afternoon sunshine, wondering how the little guy had kept his trousers up.

THE pale, black-eyed deputy-sheriff, Harvey Nellis, was just clanking down the steps from the post-office next door, his jet eyes questioning on mine. He wore blue whipcords, black Sam Browne belt, black boots and spurs, no less. "It's him, all right, isn't it?"

"Yeah. It's him. Where did you bag him?"

"Out to the Dewdrop Inn—it's kind of a roadhouse. You want to see it?"

"Well, I dunno. I was working on a case over in Elmsville and my boss wired me to come over here and identify the stiff, when he heard you'd dropped him. Maybe I should get back."

"You can't get back. I was just over to the garage and your car's got a burnt-out bearing. Come on, this'll only take a little while."

I finally assented and he hastened to get his car—a dark-blue sedan with a large gold crest on the doors—and we drove eight miles to the highway, then two or three more miles west.

The roadhouse was an old four-story, spacious frame house needing paint on its turrets and cupolas. It stood almost flush with the highway. A side road that T'd into the highway ran along beside it,

rising sharply into a tangle of trees. There were woods across from the Dew-drop and, in fact, in every direction. There was a wide gravel parking space at the rear of the building, reached by a little concrete lip that spanned the road-side ditch.

We nosed up the side road, swung across and stopped in the parking space, and he explained as we climbed out: "I come in here last night—I always drop by around twelve—and I'm just out of my car when that door in the corner here opens. He comes out onto the porch. I knew I recognized him from somewhere, but it don't come to me where. Then he walks down the steps and out onto the road and I think that's funny—him not having any car here, and not being nobody that lives around here—so I said, 'Hey, wait a minute, mister,' and went over to put the light on him.

"Then I recognize him—from that police dodger like I told you—but he must have got a flash of my uniform, because he gulps something, knocks the light out of my hand and turns and goes off like a streak, trying to run up the road. I yelled at him to stop, but he don't stop—so I give it to him. He goes down and rolls in the ditch right about there," he pointed, "dead. I get to him, just as Mike Buranelli—he owns this joint—turns on the floodlights."

A VOICE up in the sky over our heads said fretfully: "And why wouldn't I? I hear those shots and how do I know what's going on?"

We looked up. There was a dormer window in the slant of the roof above, and a wizened face like a monkey's hung over the sill. It was the color of walnut-juice, with shoe-button little dark eyes, surmounted by a puff of white hair that stood up like a bush. He said, "Wait a minute," and disappeared. A minute later, the corner door of the roadhouse opened and he came out—a stocky, hard-jawed Italian, with gaudy arm bands on his candy-striped shirt, rolling a cigar in his loose mouth. "Listen, Harve—when are you going to let me open up again? I got to make a living, damn it, and this—"

"Maybe tomorrow night," the deputy

told him. "By the way, you haven't seen that damned Chas"—he pronounced it as spelled—"Ledly, have you?"

"No."

"Well, if you do, tell the pup that he's got to make a statement to the coroner whether he likes it or not."

"Hell, Chas is all right, Harve. If he says—"

"Yeah, you'd think he was all right—the money he spends in your joint. Tell him what I say."

The Italian shrugged.

"Who's this Ledly?" I asked as we climbed back into the car. "Is he concerned in this?"

"Yeah. He's a damned young loafer. His father owned one of the best grape-farms around here, till he died last year. Since then Chas's been selling the land off in strips, as fast he needs drinking money. He was here last night. His car was parked over there—right by the ditch beside where I brought this Klingman down. Chas was on his way out to get something out of the car just as I was shooting and he must have seen at least part of it, and he's the only sign of a witness I got. Only he swears it was all over before he got to where he could see anything. He just don't want to be bothered. The goddam pup's hiding out on me."

"Hiding out?"

"Well, maybe he ain't. He got away from here last night in the confusion, and then didn't go home all night. And he hasn't been home today, up till the time you showed up, anyway."

"That's kind of funny, isn't it?"

"I dunno if it is or not. He often goes off on two or three day drunks. Only this is a hell of a time to pick."

WE TOOLED back out to the highway, sped back toward Watford. He suddenly asked: "This Klingman was a pretty big-time holdup guy, wasn't he?"

"He was, you know. He was a headache to all the insurance companies—not only ours."

"Yours—Acme—didn't have no reward on him, or anything, did they?"

"Did, but took it off. The last job of his that nicked us was a stickup of

White, Moon & Snow, the New York jewelers, two years ago. If you'd nailed him within six months after that, you could have collected five grand. After six months, my boss, Preeker, figured there was no chance to catch any of the loot unfenced, so he canceled it."

We drove a mile in silence, then he suddenly blurted: "How about a job? Do you suppose he'd give me a job on the strength of knocking off Klingman?"

"You don't like it up here?"

"They don't like me. Their idea of law-enforcement is a good hearty slap on the wrist. Because I shot the guy down, half the town won't speak to me this morning. When my uncle gets back, they'll probably make him bounce me."

"Your uncle?"

"He's the sheriff. When he got elected, I was doing all right for myself on the East St. Louis police force. He wrote me, asking me to come and be his chief deputy. I was sap enough to go for it—you know, born around here and all like that—and now every damn time anything comes up all these yokels go into the silence against me, treat me like I was Pontius Pilate or something."

I looked at his thin-lipped, bony little white face, his small white hands. He was a pretty deadly-looking small portion at that.

I said: "I'll speak to Preeker, but I doubt if there's any openings right now."

"Do what you can," he urged. "I got to get away from these hicks before they drive me completely nuts."

We jogged back into Watford. It was a one-street town—a valley bottom between two long, rolling hills. There were no sidewalks, but the road was surfaced with crumbling tar. All the buildings were frame. Its boasted population of a thousand looked like an overlay to me, for it was grape-farming country and hardly anybody seemed to live in the town itself.

"Will you be pushing on right away?" he asked me.

"As soon as I can get my car. All I came over for was to identify him for sure—and I've done that. Wait—drop me at the garage."

The garage—a vast red barn that had not entirely lost the character of a former incarnation as a blacksmith shop—

was directly opposite the frame Farmers' & Growers' bank, above which Nellis had a little office. He parked in front of the bank and strolled across with me. "The inquest is tomorrow," he said wistfully. "You wouldn't want to stay around and see me give evidence . . .?"

"Sorry. I was on a job in Elmsville that I've got to get back to."

We went into the vast, dirt-floored barn. My convertible stood in the dim light over against one wall. Nobody was in sight. A back door in one corner was an open square of light, showing weed-grown yard and, at a distance, an old-fashioned comfort station.

We were no more than inside when a car's motor gunned on the street behind us, and we stood aside hastily as a light gray Chevie coupe bounded in and shot to a stop in the center of the gloomy barn.

Harvey Nellis swore startledly. "By God! There he is now. There's Chas!" He started away from me, as a ruddy-faced, plump blond youth in a rumpled gray hound's-tooth sport jacket, loud tan slacks, saddle shoes, popped out of the Chevie. "You—Chas!"

THE youth seemed to shrink as he saw Nellis bearing down. He had little fat-squinted yellow eyes, an indulged, flushed face and thick moist lips. His eyes were red-rimmed and vaguely furtive and his skin was red in the V of his tie-less polo shirt.

"Where the hell you been?" the deputy-sheriff barked at him. "What's idea?"

The plump youth's voice was hoarse. "I been over to Elmsville on business. I tell you—I *didn't* see nothing last night, Harve."

"You're damned well going to say so under oath, then. You ain't saving yourself any trouble that-a-way. You—"

Across the street, the thin ringing of a phone became audible—and I realized it must be the one in Nellis' office above the bank. He swung back scowling, listened a second, then swore fretfully. He swung back on the plump, flushed blond youth. "You wait here till I see what that is," he told him.

As he strode hastily out the front

door, a bald head ducked in through the square of daylight at the back of the barn, revealed itself as Pop, the overalled garageman. He came in, adjusting the strap of his overalls, and the blond Chas Ledly asked him hastily: "Pop—how soon can you pack these brakes? I got to drive in to the city."

"I dunno." The grease-stained, bald-headed oldster looked over at me. "This gentleman's car—I got to put in a new bearing. Unless he can wait till tomorrow . . ."

"Sorry. I can't," I told them.

The blond youth swore petulantly, re-opened the door of the car, squeezed hastily in. "What time will you be through with his?" he shot testily.

"Eight—nine o'clock, maybe."

"I'll bring mine back then. I'll pay extra," Ledly said quickly—and was already perking the Chevvie backwards out the open door. He spun it out onto the street, shifted, shot away and vanished down the street, turning at the first corner.

I strolled out just in time to see Harvey Nellis come shooting down the covered stairs from his office, his bony little face flushed and furious. He saw the tail of the gray Chevvie whip around the corner. He ignored me, ran and jumped in his own blue sedan, shot away in pursuit.

I turned back inside the garage and asked the old man: "You say it'll be ready in a couple of hours?"

"Yeah. About."

"Where can I get a wash-up and some dinner, while I'm waiting?"

"Well, about the only place's the Commercial House, up the street. You want I should bring your car up there when it's ready?"

"That'd be swell."

IT WASN'T much from the outside—a sagging, three-story frame box with a porch running its whole width, supported every few feet by wooden pillars. It was the last building on the left-hand side of Main Street. I went in. Nobody seemed around, but there was a register and a miniature desk in the cubbyhole lobby and off to the left I saw the dim layout of linen-covered tables through

a door. To the right was, I supposed, the lounge—full of sagging leather furniture and spittoons. The fly-specked clock over the desk said it was five minutes after six.

Presently, to my banging of the bell, a girl in a white kitchen uniform came out, rubbing sleep from her eyes. She took my two dollars, gave me a brass-tabbed key, advised me the bathroom was at the end of the hall and promised to send up some cracked ice. I could get food in under a half-hour, I was informed.

I had a couple of drinks in my third-floor room, after I had washed up. I was looking out the window—onto Main Street still—when I saw the gray Chevvie, with the blond, red face of Chas Ledly come up the street and turn into a dirt road, almost exactly opposite where I was standing. I watched it thread the long road, out of view part of the time, behind long rows of grape-vines, up the slope toward the little red brick house that stood against the skyline at the top. Evidently he had eluded the deputy-sheriff, for there was no gold-crested blue sedan on his trail. Also evidently he lived there, for I saw his car vanish into the garage.

I sat and thought, till the daylight faded.

When I finally sat down to dinner in the dining-room—alone—I was still in the same relative position. I could see the stretch of vineyards only as ghostly twilight now, though, and there was a single gleaming light in the red house atop the hill.

I gave up thinking for eating. The girl who had given me the room turned out to be also the waitress and I ordered with half my mind on the food and half on the slow-dawning realization that *she* was kind of a cozy dish herself. She had a plump, fair-skinned little body, long-lashed blue eyes and a sort of urchin's face, and her legs were really a collector's item. It took me a while to realize all this, because she had done about everything to herself that rouge, mascara, eye-shadow and lipstick could do in the way of harm. Her hair was long and silky and would have been beautiful if she hadn't dyed it platinum. And she had ripe, full

lips, under the gaudy splash of war paint.

I got going with her between courses. She told me that her father had owned the hotel but that he had the wanderlust and had just up and gone away some years back, that the bank now owned the place and that she and her brother looked after it, for wages.

I started to give her the oil. "Well, now, a pretty girl like you—"

She gave me a sparkling little smile—and then looked over my head and her face got anxious and mutinous. She said something I couldn't understand and started quickly for the kitchen.

I looked quickly where she had looked—the door into the rotunda. A dark youth was standing there, tie-less, in a blue double-breasted suit. He was tall and bony, but he had a handsome, fretful face and bushy coal-black hair. There were fever spots in his cheeks and his blue eyes were a little wild. He snapped, "Mona!"

She went reluctantly over. He snatched at her wrist and jerked her outside, out of my line of sight, and out of my hearing.

She sailed back in, a minute later, red-faced, biting her lip.

"Was that the brother?" I asked.

She nodded wordlessly.

"He doesn't seem to have many manners," I growled.

Her eyes shot to mine anxiously. "He—oh, he's a darling, really," she assured me. "It's just—well, he gets foolish ideas."

"How?"

"About me going out and staying out late. Hammond—my brother—thinks—well, he thinks silly things."

"Hmmm. Where do you go in this town for excitement?"

"There only is one place. I was there last night. He'd forbidden me to go there and he didn't—didn't like the boy I was with. I didn't think he'd find out and—well, a girl has to have some fun and there's so few boys that ever ask me out, and—well, there was a shooting and, of course, he learned about it."

"Oh. You were at the Dewdrop Inn."

"Yes. Wasn't it terrible? The—the man was shot right beside my friend's car and—"

"Wait a minute. Do you mean that

young Chas Ledly is your boy friend?"

She flushed. "No. Of course not. I have no boy friend. I was just out with him. I wouldn't want *him* for my boy friend, thank you."

She seemed offended, though I don't know why. She vanished into the kitchen again.

I was having my dessert—deep-dish apple pie with hard sauce—when the bald-headed Pop, the garageman, appeared in the doorway and told me my car was outside. I thanked him, paid him and he went away, leaving me my keys.

I had just finished my second cup of coffee and was staring out the open window beside me when the shots came.

I KNEW they were shots, because I could see and hear them—three spiteful licking flashes, crackling high up on the hill, seemingly beside the red brick house on the skyline.

You can't be a sleuth—even an insurance sleuth—for twelve years without having some curiosity about shots. I got up and hurried out onto the veranda, stepped off onto Main Street.

The girl's white dress caught my eye. She was standing off at the end of the porch, crouched, the back of one hand to her mouth, her eyes straining into the blackness toward the hilltop.

She saw me and cried out whimperingly: "Please—will you take me up there?"

"Sure. Hop in."

There was commotion all up and down the street and before we could turn into the road, two cars were racing up ahead of us. Others fell in behind us. "I thought you said he wasn't your boy friend," I said curiously.

"Oh, my God it isn't Chas I'm worried about. But if Hammond lost his head and—"

She didn't say any more till we had reached the top and spun into the barnyard.

"What happened?" I asked one of the knot of earlier arrivals around the back porch.

"Hammond Sperling shot Chas Ledly—" The speaker choked off as he saw the girl hurrying beside me.

I snarled everyone out of my way and

we pushed through a kitchen and into a front hall that stank of bread dough. There was an ancient upright piano with yellowish keys, a settee, a highboy in the hall. On the settee lay the ruddy-faced Chas Ledly—only he was no longer ruddy-faced. He was buff and his eyes were open, glazed, staring frantically at the ceiling, and perfectly motionless. Harvey Nellis was down beside him, on one knee, had flung open his hound's tooth sport coat, pushed up his blood-sopping polo shirt to show the hairless white chest beneath. A patch of flesh just under his breast-bone was burst and split and blood had streamed all over his belly. It was almost dried now.

The blue-uniformed deputy snapped his head around to bark: "Get out of—oh, it's you."

The fretful-faced, fanatical-eyed Hammond Sperling stood pressed back against the wall, his face like lead, his hands against the plaster wall. The girl burst into racking sobs, ran over and flung herself in his arms. "Hammond! Hammond! You didn't—"

"No," he croaked. "No. I didn't do it."

HARVEY NELLIS got up, leaving an automatic pistol on the floor where he had been kneeling. His pale, dark-eyed face was brittle and harsh. "Of course you did it. What's the use talking like that? I caught you with the gun in your hand." He pointed down.

"But I didn't shoot him. I—I came up here to see Chas. I—I came up from the other side. The front door—he nodded at it behind him—"was open, and I came in. Then I heard the shots and ran out. I heard him cry out, kind of sobbing, 'Buranelli, Buranelli!' as he was being shot."

"Buranelli, eh? But *you* had his gun in *your* hand."

"I—I ran out and there was nobody in sight. I—I must have grabbed it up without knowing."

"What do you mean you came up from the other side? How could you come up from the other side?"

"My—my car down below the ridge," the boy almost sobbed in his desperation. "I—I wanted to sneak up on him—not let

him run out on me." His frantic eyes flailed round the room. "But not to kill him—I swear it. I was just going to give him what for. He took Mona out and kept her out—"

"Let's see your car."

We went out the front door. Queerly, there was no one at all on this side of the house. The house sat, I now found out, squarely atop the razorback ridge. There was no front yard. We stepped off into a small peach orchard, turned left, and immediately I felt the ground slope under me.

"Careful," Harvey Nellis warned. "It sheers off pretty steep here."

We went round to the side of the house, through a few trees, and were on the steep, down-slanting other side of the rise.

Forty feet below, a street light shone down on cement—a road cut into the side of the downslope. A last year's sedan of popular make sat with just its rear end showing in the blue light.

"You parked there and scrambled up the hill?" Nellis asked incredulously.

"Yes, yes—but I swear I didn't kill—Buranelli did it, Harve! I swear I heard Chas yell his name as he was shot."

"And what does *that* mean? You know as well as I that Buranelli was the last one in the world to kill Chas. Come on. Let's go back."

"Aren't you even going to question Buranelli about what he was doing *here*?" the girl demanded shrilly.

"Yes, yes," the deputy said wearily. We went back to the front stoop and into the front hall. There were three or four farmers crowded into the hall. Nellis snarled at them, stepped over and closed the door in their faces.

To do this, he had to let go the handcuff he had snapped on Hammond Sperling's wrist. Up till this minute I had not even known he had shackled the youngster.

He looked at me. "Will you watch that he doesn't get away while I use the phone?"

"Sure. I'll take care of him."

He opened the door and I heard him ask the roomful of curious onlookers: "Did anybody see Mike Buranelli up here?"

A voice said: "Yeah, sure. He came up when we all came, I guess. But he left, just a few minutes ago."

"What! Did any of you come up with him? Or actually see him come up?"

Nobody answered, up till the time the door closed.

I turned back, picked up the murder gun from the floor and looked at the pair of them. The girl stood quietly beside Sperling. "Well, it looks like you're kind of cooked," I observed chattily to the feverish youth.

He jerked his eyes up from the dangling handcuff. "What? But—but didn't you just hear—Buranelli—"

I shook my head, pulled out a crumpled pack of cigarettes. "Theoretically, perhaps that would help you out. But Buranelli is a wise guinzo. The proof is all against you—despite that yell. About the only thing to get you clear would be a confession on his part—and you know how likely that is. The only thing that would make that dago cough up would be a knife point against his throat—and I don't see anyone likely to do that here."

Their scared eyes jumped to meet each other. I put a cigarette in my face, lit a match and held it in my cupped hands while I added, "No. Guilty or innocent, it looks to me like you're cooked," and bent my head to light my cigarette.

All I heard was the queer little moan that came from Hammond Sperling as he sprang at me. They must have talked it over with their eyes while I was lighting the cigarette but I didn't see that. I didn't see him spring, either, for that matter—just heard him—and then heard the clank of the handcuff as it whistled at my head. Then the room exploded in fiery pinwheels, I was knocked over against the settee, my knees crumpled and I pitched down on the dead man, fell off onto the floor.

I WAS only out a minute or two. I came to on my hands and knees, with Harvey Nellis' wild cursing ringing in my ears. I shook my head clear just in time to see him dive out the front door, raging: "Those damn pups! I'll—"

I staggered up, stumbled over to the door and out after him. I was giddy and

sick a little. I got round the corner of the house in time to see him standing at the brow of the hill, a gun glinting in his hand, and to hear him yell downwards: "Come back here, you, or—" He fired twice. I heard the bullets whang metal below. Two other blue-uniformed youths were running around from the back of the house—evidently other deputies who had been drawn to the scene. Harvey Nellis swung round and snapped at them; "Get me that gun on the back seat of car."

I didn't get what he meant, until one of them—a stringy blond youth with a stupid face—raced off, immediately raced back, cradling something in his arms. I heard him pant: "Now, Harve—do you have to. . .?"

The white-faced little Nellis snatched the thing up, fairly going falsetto in his rage as he shouted down, "Your last chance—come—" and whipped the thing to his shoulder. Then I realized it was a tommy gun, and I flung myself, gasping, at him.

Blue crashing roar danced and racketed at the gun's end. I heard the crash of glass below, the whang-whanging on metal. I flung my arms around the brittle little devil, tommy gun and all, lifted him from his feet, so the gun went racketing off at the sky, till he stopped it. Below, I heard a car's starter whirr into life, heard the sharp snort of the exhaust as it took off. The little deputy squirmed and fought frantically in my grip, shrilling at me: "Leggo—damn you—obstructing—accomplice—murderers—"

I flung him from me, jerked the hot nose of the gun so that it tumbled on the ground as he staggered back. His eyes were black fire in the darkness as he panted hoarsely: "What do you think you're doing? Damn you, I'll burn you, too!"

"Don't be a damned fool," I told him. "You don't use tommy guns on kids like those. If you'd killed them, the people here'd string you up. Snap out of it—I thought you were an experienced coper."

"I thought you were, too," he raged wildly. "What's the idea, letting them get away?"

"They took me by surprise—I didn't

think they were the type. But they don't know enough to get far. Do you know their license number?"

One of the blue-clad deputies in the darkness said quickly: "I know it."

"Then go and put out the alarm for them—get the state troopers."

He ran off, not, apparently, thinking to question my orders. The white-faced little Nellis opened his mouth to call him back, but evidently thought better of it and closed it with a snap of his teeth.

"Did you see if Buranelli is here?" I asked him. "I've got a hunch you should question him."

"He's not here," he snarled sulkily. "He left."

"A smart cop wouldn't overlook him. Why don't you send one of your boys—"

His teeth snapped again. "I'll take care of Buranelli." He looked round at the stringy youth behind him, spun on his heels and snapped, "You take charge here till the coroner comes, Pete," and strode off toward the rear of the house.

I had to pretend I wasn't going with him, and start to stroll back toward the front of the house. It was minutes before I could slide out in the darkness, circle the house and get to my car. Fortunately, the show had begun to pall on a couple of others and I was not the only one leaving, so I got away.

But it was a good forty minutes before I pulled off the highway a quarter of a mile from the Dewdrop Inn and hid my car in a clump of trees.

I was actually out of the car before I became aware that my gun was gone from my hip—that the crazed youth and his sister must have lifted it back in the murder house when I was knocked dizzy. I got a spare one from the dash compartment, hurried on into the blackness.

IT WAS blackness. There was a street light a hundred yards the other side of the Dewdrop, but it was round a wooded bend and might just as well not have been there for all it helped me. The night was like a thick, blinding blanket. After I had gone two hundred paces—I had to keep one foot on the road and one in the grass to keep on a straight course—

I could just barely see the outline of the roadhouse against the sky. There was not a light in it from cellar to garret.

I paused cater-corner from it, listening with every sense, but there was just enough rustling wind in the trees to make slight sounds inaudible, even if there were any.

I stole across—and you'll understand how thick the blackness was when I say that I ran face first into the radiator of a car standing on the front lawn—in *behind* the hedge that bordered the highway. The radiator was hot.

I crouched down, agonizing for fear the slight noise might have been heard, but apparently it wasn't—if, indeed, there were anyone around to hear it. I crept slowly round to the side of the car—it was a maroon coupe as nearly as I could judge—and the driver's window was open.

By poking my head actually through the driver's window, I could make out a pale, slumped face on one corner of the seat—and could catch the faint breathing.

I got my flashlight out, covered it with my fingers, put my hand in the window and down inside the door and squirted a faint glow.

The faint glow was all I needed. I saw the wizened monkey face of the Italian, Buranelli, with a bloody gash across his temple. He was slumped down, unconscious, but the regularity of his breathing said he was not seriously hurt.

There was a broad, plain black leather belt lying across his knees and—in a second flash—I realized that his vest had been turned up and that the top button of his trousers was undone. He had no belt on.

Not till then did I hear any confirmation of the fact that I was not alone. Then it came—a thin metallic screech from the back yard.

I was ducking down, and around that house, in something under a fraction of a second—and I was just barely in time.

A second little screech came just as I rounded the corner of the house to the parking lot, almost on hands and knees.

And—less than three feet in front of me—a figure seemed to rise out of the ground.

I gulped down breath, as I saw the

faint glint of leather and brass, and heard the breathing of the uniformed man.

Then—from a point across the parking lot, a girl's voice moaned: "You've got to turn the light on a second, Hammond. I can't—"

The figure in front of me took a quick stride—and then it all happened in seconds.

HARVEY NELLIS' voice said hoarsely, "All right. I'll give you light," and a powerful electric torch blazed on in his hand, spotting the open door of a stable that I had not noticed before, among the trees at the side of the parking-space. Before the open door of the stable stood the light sedan I had last seen on the sidehill road. It's bullet-riddled rear was towards me. The platinum-haired girl had managed to change her white kitchen dress to a red blouse and blue skirt and she was down on one knee, a Massachusetts license plate under her arm, unscrewing the New York plate on the car's rear holder. Hammond Sperling stood beside her, the handcuff still dangling from one wrist—and in the second that the torch blazed he swung around.

In one hand he held the automatic he had taken from me, in the other the murder gun. His face was mad with fright. He jerked up the guns.

The uniformed Harvey Nellis in front of me braced his legs—and I dived.

In mid-air I yelled, "Don't shoot, Hammond—I can prove that you're innocent—" and I landed on the startled deputy's back like a ton of bricks.

His gun thundered under my clutching hand. The boy by the car could not prevent himself firing once, but the bullet went nowhere. The white-faced little deputy and I crashed down, head over heels, as I got a hand on his gun. He was snarling, grabbing, biting at me, shrilling, "Damn you! Get away! That murderer. . ."

His torch had fallen, and rolled, still pointed a blazing finger of light that illumined the whole scene. I finally snatched and yanked the gun out of the half-mad little demon's hand, sprang up and away as he lashed out venomously with his foot. Then I had my own flash out and was backing away, centering him

with both the flash and my spare gun.

"Don't move!" I warned him, "And you kids—don't do anything foolish. You're in the clear now. I know you didn't kill Chas Ledly."

The girl burst into frantic sobs. The youth blurted hoarsely: "But—you mean Buranelli? He isn't here."

"He is here—parked in the front yard without his belt on. But he didn't do it."

The youth gasped. "But who—who did murder—"

"The same tricky, deadly little rat that murdered—yes, I said murdered—Joe Klingman. This specimen here."

The white-faced, half-sprawled little deputy's black eyes were frantic fire. "Murder?" he cried wildly. "Listen to him—murder! A known crook—a deadly one—he tries to escape—you're insane!"

"I'm not insane, chum. He was a known crook, yes. But the gag about his trying to escape is a lot of hooey. You shot him in the face, the side and the back. That spells that he tried to escape—*after* you shot him, yes. And those pants he had on wouldn't stay up on him a minute without either a belt or suspenders. Shut up," as he tried to say something.

"My guess is about like this: you spotted Klingman, put a gun on him and held him up for a frisk. Don't tell me a wise apple like Joe would run from a copper's gun at any time, anyway. You frisked him and you found something. Only—you didn't have time to hide it on you and it was too awkward to carry, so you cached it in the nearest place, which seems to have been Chas Ledly's coupe, so you wouldn't be caught when the lights came on.

"But you made two mistakes. One was in not realizing that Buranelli, from his little eyrie up there, saw the whole thing. The other was in not keeping your hands on Chas Ledly. Ledly went off on a drunk and left you stranded. And not only that but he found the stuff you'd hidden, went to Elmsville, apparently to try and dispose of it, couldn't, came back and Buranelli, who'd also been curious about what you stowed in the car, contacted him. Buranelli got to him before you did and got the loot away from him—maybe on a promise to fence it for

him, or simply by heisting him for it. He got in just ahead of you—you were waiting at Chas Ledly's house for him when he came home tonight.

"Apparently you had a long palaver, and it wound up by your shooting him—with his own gun. That spells struggle and his yelling out Buranelli means you were trying to force him to tell you where the loot was. I shouldn't wonder if the autopsy shows you tortured him.

"All of which is lousy and rotten, but would make you just an ordinary rat. What makes you a filthy one is that you took advantage of this kid's accidentally stumbling into the picture to not only frame him, but do your best to murder him so the frame would stick and you'd be in the clear. I suppose you figured to kill Buranelli, too, later—you were a little rushed and just had time to snatch the belt off him and put it on—"

I dived forward and jabbed my hand up inside his tunic, got hold of his belt and yanked it as hard as I could.

It broke, jerked out away in my hand—and flashing diamonds, emeralds sprayed out on the gravel.

For a second it distracted me. "By God!" I choked. "It's the White, Moon and Snow loot. Joe *didn't* fence it after all!"

It was the girl's warning scream that saved me. She shrilled, "Look out—he's

got—" and I jerked my eyes back to the writhing little deputy-sheriff just as he jerked a second gun from inside his tunic. Don't ask me why I was such a fool as not to search him. Things had just been happening too fast.

He got in one shot at me—and I felt white-hot fire shoot through my cheek. Then the gun in my hand exploded—and it nailed him in the chest. He was half to his knees and it simply toppled him over backwards. I took no chances, shot again—and his feet flew up in the air.

But the louse got one more in me—in the side—and it was like a jolt from a locomotive. I tried to take a step—and my knees buckled and the scene began to swim. I crashed down on hands and knees, but before I conked, they tell me, I managed to scrape in all the jewels, and the zippered money belt that Joe Klingman had carried the small fortune in, got them under me protectively—and went to sleep.

It wasn't so bad, at that. I spent my convalescence in the Watford Commercial House and when I finally did leave, I had to sneak out in the middle of the night, on account of the girl, Mona, had begun to get ideas.

On top of that, when I got back to the office in New York, I actually saw my sharp-nosed, dollar-pinching little boss, Preeker, smile.



WAGONS AWAY!

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FRAULEIN JUDAS

by
C. P. Donnel, Jr.

Rhys-Eccles and I felt pretty relieved that the war industries report was finished and ready for Washington. We hardly expected any trouble from Gestapo agents here in the Virginia mountains. And that's where we were wrong. It all started with that kid having a tummy ache on the picnic....



Miss Ogilvie had found Effie lying unconscious at the foot of the stairs.

CAMP GREENWOOD is for people who like to rough it in log cabins with French windows and tiled baths. It occupies a lush clearing halfway up Apple Orchard Mountain in the soft, purple Blue Ridge range northwest of Lynchburg, and the fried chicken served in its pine-paneled dining-hall is not a dish, but an experience, like love at first sight.

Over a platter of this unrivaled chicken, Martin Rice scowled at me. Not a personal scowl. Simply an expression of his attitude toward the human race, of

which I happened to be the nearest unit.

I countered with a smile. Rice and I had every reason to be gay. The Rhys-Eccles Report, offspring of Martin Rice's peculiar brain and my own crudely efficient typing—born paragraph by paragraph over three days and nights of paralyzing mental labor—reposed in my inside pocket and crackled reassuringly as I speared another chicken breast.

Tomorrow—Monday—we would leave Camp Greenwood for Washington. There I would deliver Martin Rice and the Rhys-Eccles Report into the hands of Colonel Stephen Kaspir, chief of Section Five, who would start them on their way to Great Britain. In Britain the Rhys-Eccles Report would undoubtedly start something.

My smile broadened as the chicken breast parted obediently under the affectionate stroke of my knife. Martin Rice was alive, the Rhys-Eccles Report was completed, and Colonel Kaspir was a false prophet. He had predicted trouble. It had failed to materialize. No shots from ambush, not even a hellish attempt to sabotage my typewriter ribbon.

I would prick him with that one tomorrow. "No," I would say sweetly, "not even an attempt to sabotage my typewriter ribbon." And he would squirm.

Kaspir had hinted, through chocolate-stained teeth, of possible action by one Maria Hencken, who, I had gathered, was a sort of Gestapo superwoman. Description of Maria Hencken? "None available," Kaspir had muttered, twiddling pudgy fingers and wagging his fat head dramatically.

Maria Hencken indeed! My lip curled as I surveyed the dining-hall for perhaps the fiftieth time in three days.

TAKE Professor Davis and his little girl, for instance, who had been on our train and ridden up in the station wagon with Rice and me Friday afternoon. A hawk-nosed man in his late thirties, Davis was a widower, and his fortified black eyes softened only when he addressed his daughter. His eyes were soft now as he cut up a piece of chicken for the child, and his mid-Western voice was a caressing murmur as he said some-

thing to her across their table. The child, a pallid little thing of ten or eleven, small for her age and shy almost to mutism, watched her father with large, luminous eyes. Her right arm, recently fractured in some playground mishap, was in a sling, and the triangle of black silk that narrowed to her chin intensified her pallor.

Then there were the Misses Alicia and Alethea Ogilvie, gaunt, gray-haired twins nearing sixty, addicted to long khaki skirts, mannish coats, and floppy straw hats. They came up from Norfolk each year at this time (it was May) to paint the laurel blossoms which lay like snow over the spur hills about the camp. Of forbidding aspect in the mornings, the Misses Ogilvie, I had noted, mellowed amazingly by dinner time. Annie, the rawboned mountain woman who cleaned the rooms, ascribed this mellowness to bottles of gin which, she informed me resentfully, the Misses Ogilvie kept locked in their trunks.

And, finally, there were the Hinkles, John and Martha, as thoroughly anesthetized by love as any bride and groom I have ever seen. Their assault on the chicken was punctuated by long, ineffable looks. John Hinkle, big, blond, serious, was a telephone company official from somewhere in Delaware. Martha was dark, sleepy-eyed, exotic. Her figure, as outlined by a sweater suit, was something a man might die for, and Hinkle was obviously ready to make the supreme sacrifice at a moment's notice.

And that was all our company, aside from the servants and Oliver Sparklet, the owner, manager, desk-clerk, social secretary of Camp Greenwood, pink of cheek and oppressive with innkeeper's charm.

MY EYES returned to Martin Rice, now scowling at his plate. A tiny gamecock of a man, white hair rising from his narrow skull like an angry crest. A face ever ridden by the memory of that night in London when a stray bomb, whistling down through the clouds like a satanic judgment, had taken his wife, his daughter, and his left arm.

A shadow at my shoulder, a whiff of eau-de-cologne introduced Oliver Spark-

let. He treated Rice and me to a heavenly smile. Rice grunted in pure, unadulterated ill-humor. I raised an eyebrow.

"You'll join the picnic, of course," Sparklet beamed.

"Not interested." This from Rice in clipped accents of disapproval.

I said, "Picnic?"

"We go each Sunday afternoon to Lichened Rock," explained Sparklet aluringly. "I cook the steaks myself."

"Who's going?" I made it offhand.

"Everyone." Sparklet included the whole dining-hall in a womanish wave of his plump hands.

"You go," snapped Rice at me. "I have work—"

"In that case," I cut in, disappointed, "I'd better—"

"I said you were to go, Potts." It was a command. I flushed. But I was—for Camp Greenwood's benefit—Rice's secretary, so what could I say? I nodded to Sparklet. He passed on to the Ogilvies, who accepted with old-maidenish squeals of delight.

Rice stuck out his single, blue-veined hand. "Give me the report." He had sense enough to keep his voice down.

I shook my head. His eyes flamed.

"Give me that report." His voice rose. I glanced quickly around the dining-hall. No one was watching. I whipped out the master copy as surreptitiously as possible, thrust it at him under the table. He got up, stuffing the dozen typewritten sheets into his coat pocket. I jumped up and followed him outside, boiling.

On the flagstoned veranda he faced me, peppering me with short, hot words before I could tell him what I thought of his idiotic action in the dining-room. He made it very clear that he looked upon Kaspir and me as imbeciles—that our fears concerning the Gestapo were childish—that he, Mortimer Rhys-Eccles, resented this three-day seclusion under the name of Martin Rice, and that his opinion of our Government Intelligence and Counter-Espionage services was—

I interrupted angrily, reminding him that future British policy would be vitally affected by the report—that any Axis agent would give his ears for a five-minute perusal of it. "Furthermore," I threw at him, "that report may eventual-

ly affect my country as well as yours. I can't permit you to take chances."

He subsided to a tone of quiet contempt. With exaggerated deference he told me that he simply intended to sit in his room and review it in detail—that my presence would only distract him—that if there were any last-minute changes we could make them together that night.

I agreed to join the picnic on two conditions. The first: that everyone else in camp went. The second: that he would promise to lock both the hall door of our two-room suite and the French window giving on our private porch.

He exploded into an exasperated affirmative and stalked off to the big guest cabin.

I rejoined the others in the lounge of the main lodge, and at three thirty we all went down to the guest cabin for blankets and wraps. Rhys-Eccles had been as good as his word. The door was locked. He unlocked it peevishly, returned to his big chair and lost himself immediately in the report. On my way out I closed the door and rattled the knob suggestively until I heard him stamp across the floor and turn the key.

WE STRAGGLED lazily up to Lichened Rock, only half a mile from camp. From the rock the forest dropped away beneath us to Wheat's Valley, and the valley stretched like a toy panorama into the warm afternoon haze.

We loafed in the ripe sunlight. Little Effie Davis climbed around the rock, followed by her father's anxious eyes. The Ogilvies sketched. The Hinkles disappeared hand-in-hand up a leafy side trail, returning while Sparklet and I were laying a fire under a grill set into a cleft of the rock. In the dying rays of the sun we ate our excellent meal.

Two incidents marred the party.

Little Effie Davis complained, in her semi-audible whisper, of a tummy pain. Miss Alethea Ogilvie solicitously insisted upon accompanying the child back to camp, ordering Professor Davis to stay and enjoy himself. Overwhelmed, Professor Davis gave in.

The other incident came about three-quarters of an hour later, just as a golden moon-rim showed in Gunstock Gorge.

Heavy feet crashed along the trail. Someone was running, gasping. The raw-boned Annie burst into the circle of firelight, an apparition of disheveled hair and wild eyes. Her first dozen words sent Davis and me streaking back to camp, plunging recklessly ahead by the wavering beam of a flashlight I had snatched from Sparklet.

Annie's words sent us first to Davis' suite on the second floor of the guest cabin. Miss Alethea Ogilvie hovered distractedly over the bed. On the bed lay little Effie Davis, cheeks like skimmed milk, a great purple bruise down one side of her small face.

Davis bent over the child. Miss Ogilvie, almost incoherent from terror and gin, blurted out her tale.

She had brought Effie back, laid her on the bed. The child, already better, had sipped water, declined medicine, quickly dozed off. Miss Ogilvie had gone to her own room, next to the Davis suite, and sat there with the door open, in case Effie should awake and call out. Downstairs she could hear "Mr. Rice" moving about.

Some fifteen minutes later Effie had appeared at Miss Ogilvie's door, a handkerchief tied peasant-fashion around her head, a doll in her good arm. She said she was all right and was going downstairs and play on the front veranda. Miss Ogilvie heard her go down the steps. Almost immediately there was a cry, a rustling noise, another cry, then the sound of running feet. Rushing down, Miss Ogilvie had found Effie lying unconscious near the foot of the stairs, the handkerchief torn from her head and exposing the great bruise. Her assailant was nowhere to be seen, nor could Miss Ogilvie tell which way he ran out.

Miss Ogilvie had run down the hall to our suite to seek help from "Mr. Rice." The door was open. "Mr. Rice" was in the big chair, apparently asleep. She had shaken him by the shoulder several times, until she realized . . .

Then she had screamed until Annie ran down from the main lodge. Together they got Effie, now mumbling something about a "big man" who had struck her, upstairs again, and Annie had run for Lichened Rock.

I left Miss Ogilvie, dived downstairs

to our suite. Rhys-Eccles was quite dead, his scrawny throat rasped reddish-brown by whatever had strangled him. Three minutes of frantic searching convinced me that the Rhys-Eccles Report was gone. Not that I didn't have a carbon copy in the money-belt around my waist, but what good, now?

I left Rhys-Eccles to his calm contemplation of the ceiling and tore for the main lodge and its telephone. It took me five dancing, cursing minutes to get through to Kaspir in Washington. He mumbled something about a military plane and said he'd be at the Lynchburg airport in less than three hours. I ran to the servants' quarters and snatched Joe, the Negro handyman-chauffeur, away from his supper with the rotund black cook, ordering him to get out the station wagon at once. Fortunately he knew the airport. As I hurried back to the guest cabin the station wagon whizzed past me and its tail light sank away down the mountain-side like a falling star.

Circling Rhys-Eccles' still figure in a second and more thorough search of our rooms, I found nothing of importance. In his steamer trunk, insolently undisturbed, were the three hundred-odd typewritten reports which his fine machine of a mind had condensed, in three days and nights, into the Rhys-Eccles Report, for which His Majesty's Government was waiting impatiently.

I dropped helplessly into a chair and lit a cigarette. It seemed impossible that I had known Rhys-Eccles—and Colonel Kaspir, too—for only four days. It seemed more like years.

MY WEST COAST assignment had ended in a blaze of glory the previous Tuesday when Weber had walked into my arms in the lobby of a San Francisco movie theater, a stroke of dumb luck. That afternoon I was ordered back to Washington. I boarded the plane determined to ask for a transfer to Propaganda the minute I hit the capital. I'd done enough in Frisco to convince me that Counter-Espionage was not my racket.

Captain Ed Bell, my immediate superior, met the plane at the Washington airport Thursday morning. He stuck out

his hand. "Nice going, Kettle. Thought you told me you'd never make an Intelligence man?"

"Pure dumb luck." I said it wearily, knowing he wouldn't believe me.

"Horsefeathers!" He clapped me on the shoulder. He looked around. The other passengers were almost to the gate.

"Kaspir wants you," he said, half under his breath. "I've got your orders here." He shook his head as I extended my hand. "Verbal orders."

"Who's Kaspir?" I'd never heard the name before. "What does he want me for?"

"I don't know." Bell was embarrassed. "As near as I can find out, it's a new department, hush-hush as hell—kind of a bastard by Treasury out of State. Some sort of liaison tie-up with the British. Overlaps into C.E. work now and then. I know one thing though."

"Go on," I said grimly.

"Kaspir's the white-haired boy around Washington just now," said Bell, with inter-departmental jealousy. "What he asks for, he gets. Took Williams and McCreary off us last week."

"What are they doing now?" I was startled. They were top men in our line.

Bell blushed. "I don't know." He looked around again. "At least, I'm not supposed to."

He bent even closer to me. "I did think I saw Williams this morning," he said darkly. "Driving a cab. What do you think of that?"

"How're my chances of getting into Propaganda?" I said hastily.

Bell stiffened officially. "Here are your orders, Kettle."

When he finished his spiel I just looked at him. His mouth twitched. "No kidding," he said, and walked off.

So I took a cab downtown and caught a bus. When I reached a certain corner I got off and ambled along a row of old, tall, brownstone houses until I found the number Bell had given me. A colored houseboy in a white coat answered my ring. It seemed to be a boarding house. But as the boy led me up to the second floor I noticed a bulge on his right hip. At the foot of the dark wood stairway leading to the third floor he stopped, jerked his thumb upward.

"Last door down, boss." His accent was that of an uneducated Virginia Negro, but—

"New York University," I said on impulse.

His puzzled look made me feel like a fool. Then he smiled and shook his head. The puzzled look had been an act.

"Columbia Law School," he said, smiling, and turned away.

Still following Bell's instructions, I mounted to the third floor, entered the door at the end without knocking, to find myself in a crudely equipped office that obviously had once been a bedroom. There was an inner door. It was shut. I was reaching for its knob when a man's voice, high, neighing, gusty with passion, cut through its flimsy panels.

"Where did you put 'em?" demanded this neighing voice. I stopped dead.

A woman's voice, low, angry, answered: "Where you won't find 'em. And you know why."

Brief silence, during which I could visualize the antagonists glaring at one another.

The man's voice went up a quarter-octave. "I order you to tell me—"

"Fiddlesticks!" High heels clicked across the inner room. I jumped back and to one side. The door flew open and a tall woman flounced out. A second glance showed her to be a superb blonde, beautifully turned out, probably thirty. Under her plentiful but skillfully-applied make-up her face was scarlet with anger. To my amazement she flung herself down at a typewriter desk and began to pound the keys of an old Underwood. I coughed introductively. She looked around quickly.

"Who're you?" she demanded pettishly.

This was too much. "I'm beginning to wonder," I barked.

"Then you must be Mike Kettle," she retorted. "What're you waiting for? He's in there." She shrugged a shapely shoulder toward the half-open door. Whereupon she ignored me and the Underwood began to chatter like a mad thing.

THE doorway filled slowly with a man. From a small, precise mouth set in a great moon face the same neighing voice,

now controlled and courteous as a politician's, said: "Welcome to Section Five, Lieutenant."

Momentarily speechless, I bowed.

"Come in." The figure turned on its heel, showing a back broad as a barn door.

I paused irresolutely in the doorway, hand on the knob. A swivel chair squealed in agony as the owner of the neighing voice dropped into it.

"Don't bother to close the door," said Colonel Kaspir, with some bitterness. "She'll only listen at the keyhole."

The typewriter had stopped. Behind me the blond woman snorted contemptuously.

Kaspir waved a fat hand toward a straight wooden chair, and, as I sat down, lost himself in thought, eyes closed. I seized the opportunity to take stock of my new boss.

Weight about two-eighty, but the fat hands and round face make him look tubbier than he really is, I decided. Suit of good tweeds, expensive shirt, grotesque tie. But untidy. Looks as if he'd been held down and clothes put on him by force.

"Nursemaid job," said Kaspir suddenly, eyes opening full on mine. "You can typewrite, can't you?"

"I was an editorial writer on the *Sun*," I replied with dignity. Then a forlorn hope. "That is why Propaganda is really my—"

"Lot o' reports," said Kaspir. "Took 'em months. Their men, our men, working together." This meant nothing. I noticed his teeth were stained, as though with tobacco juice.

"This feller Rhys-Eccles'll do it, though," continued Kaspir, nodding solemnly in admiration of Rhys-Eccles. "All brain, no brawn." He smacked his lips. "Put 'em all together. That's where you come in."

His voice trailed off. I realized incredulously that he believed he had told me everything, that my instructions were now complete, and that the interview was over.

"Oh!" Kaspir's face lighted up, his middle finger snapped against his pulpy palm like a small firecracker. He had remembered something. "Hencken."

"Hencken?" I don't know why I bothered to ask. I suspected that the answer would mean nothing, and it did.

"Yep, Hencken." Kaspir was impatient now. He jiggled in the swivel chair, which cursed him. "People over there"—he waved in the direction of the rising sun—"give a good deal for Rhys-Eccles' results, o' course. We've heard some woman named Hencken is due to try for 'em—you'll have to watch out—"

His train of thought was obviously miles past me, but I leaped figuratively for the caboose. "May I have a description of this Hencken woman?"

He leaned forward, highly pleased at my grasp on the matter in hand. "None available," he said, staging a pantomime with fingers and head to emphasize the utter unavailability of a description of the woman Hencken. "Just have to do the best . . ."

"Where do I—" I began desperately. If whitecoated attendants had rushed in and thrown Kaspir into a straitjacket at that moment it would not have raised a single pulsebeat of surprise in me.

Kaspir rose, all six and a half feet of him. "Rhys-Eccles demands quiet—no distractions. Camp Greenwood. Got tickets here." He rummaged in his pants pockets. "He'll be Martin Rice, author. You'll be Potts, his secretary"—still digging deep—"Get it? Your name's Kettle. You'll use Potts. Easy to remember?" A laugh rumbled up from his ample belly. Both hands came up clutching wads of what looked like waste paper, and a roll of greenbacks tumbled to the floor. Kaspir frowned down at it. "Maude!" he bawled.

NEITHER of us had seen the blond woman poised statuesquely in the doorway. Now she stepped forward with a purposeful swing of her rangy hips. She retrieved the money, slapped it down on the desk. From Kaspir's hands she snatched the crumpled papers. She sorted them swiftly, efficiently, and handed me two railroad tickets. She faced Kaspir. "May I put in my dime's worth now?" she inquired, plucked eyebrows arched.

"Why, of course!" Kaspir was genuinely hurt at the implication that he was a petty tyrant.

Maude turned fine brown eyes on me. "A joint British and American commission has just completed a survey of our war industries," she said. "Potential production, potential aid-to-Britain—that sort of thing. Dull but extremely important."

I sighed with relief as the room's atmosphere became tinged with sanity.

"It adds up to three hundred-odd separate reports," went on Maude. "They need a digest of this material in London at once. Rhys-Eccles is a political economist and a bit of a mental freak. They brought him along just for the job. He's to go off to some quiet place with these reports. They say that in three days he'll be able to come up with a four or five-thousand word summation which will give the British government a basis for immediate formulation of policy."

"Section Five has been assigned to look after Rhys-Eccles. We're sending him up to Camp Greenwood in the Blue Ridge. You'll go along to do his typing, give him whatever assistance you can, and see that he lives to finish the job."

Kaspir was pacing up and down inspecting his fingernails. "I told him all that," he put in, bored.

"Keep him alive?" I said.

"Just this," said Maude. "The Gestapo people most certainly know of the commission's work. We have reason to believe they're keeping an eye on Rhys-Eccles. We even have information that an agent named Maria Hencken has been assigned to obtain his summary. About Maria Hencken we know nothing."

"Nothing," neighed Kaspir from the window, with gloomy pleasure.

"Rhys-Eccles is at the Tuart Hotel under the name of Martin Rice. You'll be George Potts, his secretary. Pick him up tonight at eight. Your train leaves at eight thirty. Take a portable typewriter, of course. You'll find Rhys-Eccles difficult. Put up with him as best you can. And if anything should happen—"

"Call me," said Kaspir over his shoulder. I scribbled down the private number Maude gave me.

"Now run along and be a good boy," ordered this surprising woman, bestowing a motherly kiss on my forehead as she pushed me gently toward the door. The

kiss sent a tingle down to my heels. Outside, in the hall, I paused to stuff the tickets into my wallet.

"Now," I heard Kaspir say menacingly, "where did you put 'em?"

Maude's voice was full of shrewish satisfaction. "I threw 'em every one out of the window."

Kaspir's shrill moan rattled the door. "The whole box?" he screamed.

"If you think, with your figure," said Maude acidly, "that you're going to sit in that office and stuff down those nauseating chocolate cherries all day . . ."

I hurried away to preserve what remained of my reason. The Negro house-boy-Columbia law graduate let me out. His intelligent mouth broadened at my dazed expression, but his "Good-day, suh," was strictly in character.

THAT was how I met Colonel Stephen Kaspir, the strange head of Section Five. Now I sat beside Rhys-Eccles' cooling corpse. Voices in the night told of the return of the rest of the picnic party. I went out to take charge of things until Kaspir arrived.

I relayed Miss Ogilvie's account of the attack on Effie Davis and the finding of Rhys-Eccles' body to Colonel Kaspir as soon as we had laid him on the bed in Rhys-Eccles' room. It was two A. M. and he had just arrived, wobbling into the guest cabin supported by Maude, resplendent in mink over a dazzling dinner gown, and Joe, the chauffeur. Kaspir was in full evening dress, very rumpled, and there were spots on his shirtfront.

Maude said crisply to Joe: "Bicarbonate of soda. Plenty of it."

She turned to me. "Plane-sick all the way from Washington. When he got out at Lynchburg he got ground-sick. In the station wagon he was car-sick."

She wheeled on Kaspir, who lay with his eyes shut, his broad face the color of a mud beach at low tide. "Have a chocolate cherry?" she cooed cruelly, throwing off the mink wrap and filling the room with the glitter of sequins. "Well, what happened, Kettle?"

So I told everything. Kaspir struggled up on an elbow. His eyes were on the sheeted figure in the big chair, but I could feel him listening. When I got through

he rolled himself to the edge of the bed.

Maude smoothed the sequins over her hips. "Well," she said to Kaspir, "what about it, Steve? Do we form a posse and beat the woods for the masked intruder?"

Kaspir pursed his lips contemptuously. When he spoke, it was to me, an unintelligible mumbling accompanied by a village-idiot waving of the hands.

"In English," said Maude resignedly, "that means 'where is everybody now?'"

"Professor Davis and Effie are in the room overhead, of course," I replied. "The others are all in their rooms. The Ogilvies are next to the Davises. The Hinkles—that's the bride and groom—are in the suite next to this one. The servants are in their own quarters. Sparklet, the owner, has rooms at the main lodge. I told him to stay there."

Kaspir spoke clearly now. "What else did you do?"

"Not a thing, except call you," I returned defensively. "Murder's not in my line. My specialty is propaganda."

Kaspir chuckled delightedly. "We'll make something of Kettle yet." He was on his feet now, a monolith of black broadcloth and smudged linen. The weakness seemed to have passed.

"I hope so," I said sourly. "Something in Propaganda preferred."

"Balderdash," said Kaspir goodnaturedly. "You haven't seen a lady bareback rider in camp, have you?"

"Not a spangle of one." What could you do but humor the big maniac? "Unless its Mrs. Hinkle. Why?"

"Hinkle?" said Kaspir. "First name?"

"Martha."

"Hmmm!" He addressed the silent Maude. "Heard today that the Hencken female used to be a circus performer—"

His bulk became suddenly animated, so unexpectedly that Maude and I both jumped. He minced over to the big chair and twitched the sheet from Rhys-Eccles with a magician's flourish. Bending with a grunt, he peered into the dead man's face. Then he drew a forefinger down the stiff left cheek, like a man sampling wet paint, and stared myopically at the fingertip, clucking softly to himself. I glanced sardonically at Maude. To my surprise, her expression was no longer scornful. She was watching Kaspir intently.

Kaspir flung the sheet carelessly over Rhys-Eccles' peaked face and turned to the paneled wall beside the chair, his back to us. The next instant he walked with short steps over to the French windows and flung them open, sticking his head into the night, still clucking. He withdrew his head after a minute and slammed the French window. A pane of glass fell in gleaming shards at his feet.

"Clumsy, eh?" He was beaming. He looked at the big chair. "Poor little guy. Not much to live for now, except his job. Done that."

He addressed me directly. "Keep Maude amused. Gotta see some people." And he left the room, apparently under the impression that because he was tiptoeing he was making no noise. The door banged behind him like a studio sound effect.

Maude looked pityingly at me. "You're bearing up better than most," she said. "He gave one man Cheyne-Stokes breathing." She passed me slowly in an aura of gardenia perfume and once more brushed my forehead with her lips. Again I tingled. She sat down on Rhys-Eccles' bed, crossing her admirable legs. "Listen," she said.

So we listened, and my muddled brain conceived the notion that Rhys-Eccles was listening, too. I had a feeling that if I removed that sheet I would find a mocking smile on his thin lips.

Colonel Kaspir was very busy. We needed no television set to follow his progress through the guest cabin.

He clumped up the steps and went to the Davises' suite, directly overhead, first. His chat with Professor Davis was mild and brief. Next we heard him knocking at the Ogilvies' door, and for a few minutes high, harsh, undistinguishable words caromed about the whole cabin. The door slammed.

Then the stairway shook again and he pounded on the Hinkles' door down the hall from us. He involved himself in a neighing altercation with John Hinkle that gradually simmered into whispers.

Next he poked his head in our door and Maude, after a long look at the grimace on his face, got up.

"Come on," he neighed gaily. "We're all going up to Effie's room."

I'LL never forget that brief quarter-hour in "Effie's room," which was really her father's.

In the first place, it was strangely like a courtroom, with the child herself, propped up in bed, chalk-white except for the bruised area on her face, as the judge. A little red wrapper around her shoulders hid most of the long-sleeved, old-fashioned nightgown she wore. The white edge of the plaster cast around her right wrist framed the wrist like a cuff inside the black silk sling.

Kaspir sat mountainously on the bed beside her, fingering a heavy oak walking stick belonging to Professor Davis. As the company straggled in, the Ogilvies heavy-eyed but apparently sober, the Hinkles oddly apprehensive, I noticed that Professor Davis shifted, too casually, to a position beside John Hinkle, and that Hinkle was breathing hard.

Kaspir drew a bead on John Hinkle with the walking stick.

"Left the picnic awhile, didn't you?" he asked unpleasantly. His blue eyes glinted. "Effie," he said very gently, his other hand touching the child's thin shoulder, "Mr. Hinkle was the man you saw leaving Mr. Rice's room—the man who knocked you down—wasn't he?"

Effie's eyes were riveted on Hinkle. We could barely hear her "Yes."

Hinkle's laugh was a feeble effort.

"I want," said Kaspir with flute-like clarity, "that report."

But Hinkle was gone, tearing himself from Professor Davis' frantic grasp, upending an Ogilvie sister as he dived for the hall. Davis was after him like a fighting hound. Kaspir, clutching the oak stick, materialized beside me and shot after them, screaming "Close the door!" I ran after Kaspir, jerking the door shut.

Davis and Hinkle were struggling on the floor at the head of the stairs as Kaspir and I reached them, a tangle of thrashing fists and feet. Kaspir took what I instantly saw to be very bad aim with the walking stick. Before I could catch his arm it hissed downward. A dull sound of wood on scalp and bone.

"Ah!" said Kaspir, straightening himself and looking down at the unconscious figure of Professor Davis. He stretched out a long arm, helped Hinkle up. "Stay

with him," he said to Hinkle, indicating the prone Davis. "Also," he added, turning away, "thanks."

We re-entered the bedroom. I was quite resigned now. Somebody was crazy. I only hoped it was Kaspir, not me.

Kaspir lumbered over to the bed. "Your father's quite safe, Effie." His ironical tone was like a slap at the child's face. An Ogilvie sister stepped forward angrily. Maude held her back.

"Let me see that arm of yours, Effie," demanded Kaspir, stretching out his left hand. His right still gripped the stick. Then I went sick inside.

For Kaspir snatched the plaster cast-enclosed arm from its black silk sling and was battering the plaster to pieces with the handle of the walking stick—

I can't remember the rest in detail, but I do remember something flashing in Effie's free hand and Kaspir screaming, "Little devil!" and his great hand snaking out and closing around her little throat.

Then there was turmoil among the spectators as Kaspir and the child flopped across the bed in an absurd, squirming battle that was awkward but deadly.

It ended with Kaspir flinging Effie heavily against the headboard. The impact dazed her. We crowded around the bed as Kaspir rolled off and got to his feet. I heard Maude gasp. The Ogilvie sisters clung to each other, whimpering.

The struggle had ripped away the upper portion of Effie's nightgown. A single glance explained many things to me: why Effie always wore long-sleeved dresses and little cape-like coats, why she spoke in a whisper, why woolen stockings always encased her spindly legs.

For Effie Davis was a woman. Her torso, bare, made that very plain. And her thin arms were weirdly muscular.

A midget, if you like, but a woman.

Kaspir paid no attention to her, even when she stirred, sat up, and cursed him shamelessly in a shrill, evil voice.

He was plucking bits of plaster from the Rhys-Eccles Report, newly freed from the plaster cast that had encircled Effie's "broken" arm. He said quietly: "I suppose that thing out in the hall is your husband, eh, Maria?"

Effie's reply, describing her relationship to Davis, was unprintable.

"HANDKERCHIEF business, you see o' course," mumbled Kaspir thickly through a ham sandwich. He gulped two mouthfuls of scalding coffee. "Powder on the old boy's cheek. That gin-swizzling female don't use it. Clean plaster on cast, too. And porch. Got that?"

Maude's sequins rattled venomously as she tossed pad and pencil to the bed, lit a cigarette, and fixed Kaspir with a grim, uncompromising eye. "Tell it straight and I'll take it down," was her ruthless ultimatum.

The relaxed hulk of Kaspir filled the big chair lately vacated by Mortimer Rhys-Eccles, who had been removed and deposited on the bed in my room. The Hinkles were present by invitation. Upstairs the Ogilvies slumbered alcoholically. Behind the main lodge, we knew, Annie and Joe sat with shotguns before the strong door of the vegetable dugout, serving as a detention cell for Maria Effie Davis Hencken and her "father."

Kaspir looked diffidently at Maude.

"Oh, all right," he said mildly. He put the sandwich down, leaned forward. Maude reached for the pad, poised the pencil above it in her slender crimson-nailed fingers.

"Little she-Judas strangled Rhys-Eccles, o' course," began Kaspir. "See a lot o' midgets doing bareback stuff—acrobatics—in circuses around Germany, Poland, Hungary.

"Old Miss Gin-Swizzler lays Fraulein Judas on bed after coming back from picnic. Miss Gin-Swizzler goes to own room. Little she-Judas eases outa bed, slips off plaster cast, slides down porch support to Rhys-Eccles' porch—" He nodded toward the French windows. "Taps on window," he said.

"Who'd Rhys-Eccles open French window for but child? Lost his own in London. Likes children. They probably knew that—reason they used little Judas-devil. He opens window, lets her in, sits down in chair. She, affectionate, goes coyly around back of chair, slips arm around his neck. About time Rhys-Eccles begins to wonder where plaster cast on arm is, little she-Judas tightens arm around his neck—braces herself against back of chair.

"You saw that arm. Like wire rope."

Maude's pencil flew across her pad. The Hinkles were hunched forward in their chairs.

"Garroted, Rhys-Eccles was, by that little arm. But he fought. Banged Fraulein Judas' head against wall. But he caved in. She took report, shinnied back up to own room, unlocking hall door of this room before she left.

"Face badly bruised, though. Must be explained somehow. Ties handkerchief around head to hide bruise, replaces cast on arm, goes to old Miss Gin, tells her she's going out to play. Goes downstairs. Stamps feet, cries out, tears handkerchief off, lies down, swears she's been struck down by mysterious man. Bruise visible now. Ha! Simple!

"Rest's easy. Davis and little she-Judas get rid of old cast, make new one around Rhys-Eccles Report.

"Powder was give-away. Fraulein Judas had to powder up to look pale and frail. Left some on Rhys-Eccles' cheek when she"—here Kaspir was human enough to shudder—"cuddled her cheek against his. Also some on wall when face banged against it. And how could child with broken arm tie handkerchief around head, unless she used 'broken' arm?"

"But why that scene with Mr. Hinkle here?" I protested.

"Davis armed," growled Kaspir. "Wary, too. So told him Hinkle was man—get ready to help. Very pleased to, Davis was. Wonder what Davis' real name is. Maybe Washington knows."

He yawned cavernously. The Hinkles got up, silent.

"Siddown," ordered Kaspir hospitably. They sat. "Chat with Maude and friend Kettle-Potts here." He glanced at his watch. "We leave at daylight, and that's only an hour."

He yawned again. "Little nap," he murmured apologetically and ambled into the next room.

"There's only one bed in there," I called hastily, cringing at the thought of what reposed on that bed.

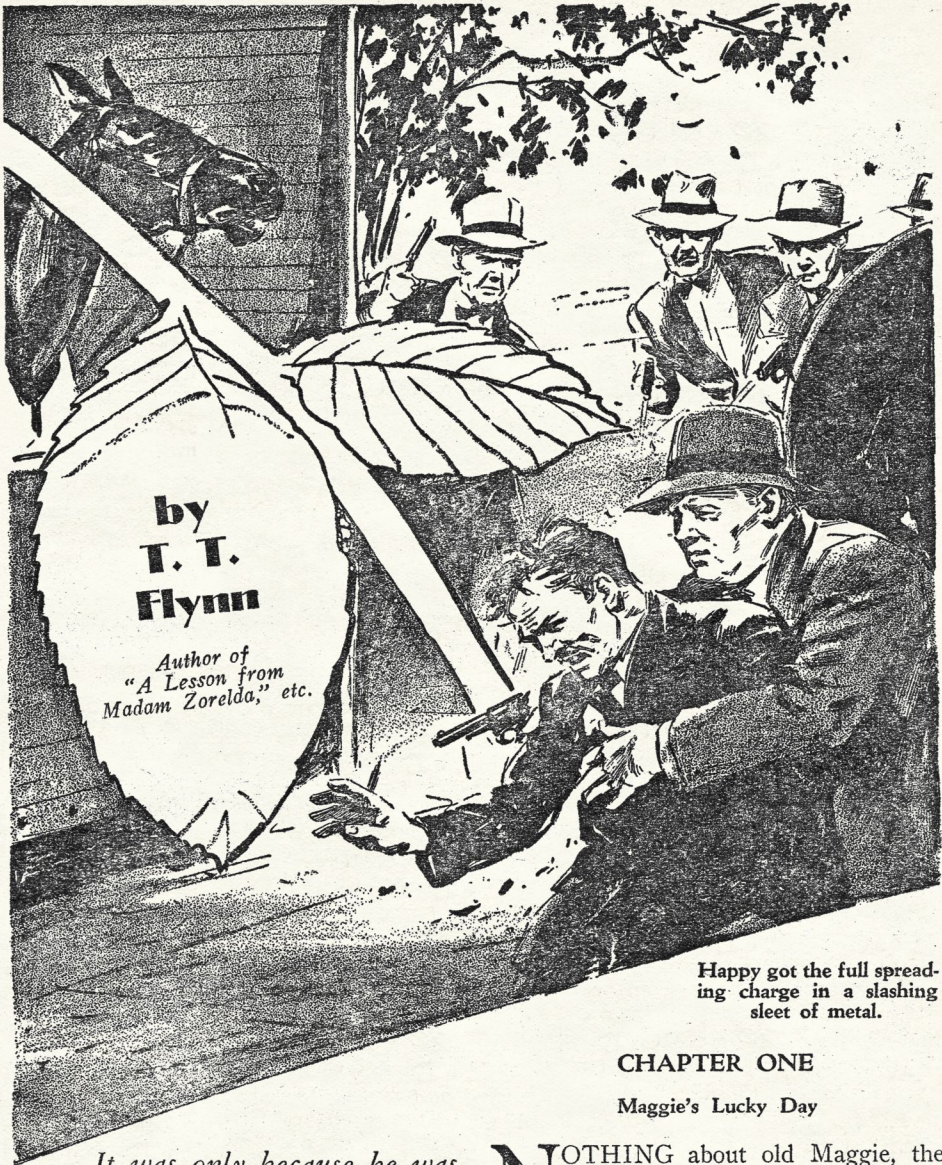
Kaspir turned benignly in the doorway. "Won't disturb him," he said, drawing the door to behind him.

Through the closed door we heard the bed creak. "Move over, old boy," said Colonel Kaspir. Then all was serene.



**POST-MORTEM
AT PIMLICO**

A Mr. Maddox Novelette



Happy got the full spreading charge in a slashing sleet of metal.

CHAPTER ONE

Maggie's Lucky Day

It was only because he was big-hearted that the bland Buddha of the bangtail circuit agreed to take a dollar-bet from Maggie, the flower seller, on an 80-to-1 plater in the 6th at Pimlico. But though it turned out to be Maggie's lucky day, it left Maddox facing a murder rap, with his nemesis, Cassidy, itching to make the pinch.

NOTHING about old Maggie, the flower-seller — absolutely nothing — could possibly have warned Mr. Maddox.

There she stood on that rainy Baltimore street corner as she had stood in past years. The same forlorn old hat with the red wax rose in front, the same flat brown basket of flowers, the same wrinkled, wistful face that looked unchanged each spring when the horses ran again at Pimlico and Joe Maddox, the veteran bookie, was briefly in town.

Tonight as Mr. Maddox emerged from

the after-theater rush in the corner restaurant, Maggie's plaintive cry competed with the honking of automobile horns, clanging street car bell, rush and hurry of homeward traffic through the raw spring drizzle.

"Flowers! Pretty flowers. . ."

Mr. Maddox reached for half a dollar.

"Luck for you, Maggie. It's no night for an old lady to be standing in the wet."

The red wax rose bobbed and shook as Maggie ducked her head.

"And many of them to you, sir. Would you be havin' the time to take a bet from an old lady like me?"

"A bet?" repeated Mr. Maddox in astonishment. "A horse bet?"

Maggie's gnarled fingers counted pennies, nickels, dimes, until the half dollar was a dollar.

"The sixth race tomorrow," said Maggie and her old eyes were eager. "Knight Sing is his name."

Chagrin showed on Mr. Maddox' broad, jovial face.

"Tossing your money on the bangtails, eh? And then peddling in the rain late at night. That goat Knight Sing never won a race and never will."

"Only a dollar," Maggie quavered eagerly. "And a pretty flower for your buttonhole to bring me luck."

Mr. Maddox shook his head as he accepted coins and flower.

"Never again," he warned. "It'll be on my conscience."

Even Oscar, back in the hotel suite, had a conscience. Oscar's sharp, shrewd, sarcastic face puckered in distaste when Mr. Maddox ordered the bet entered on tomorrow's book.

"That old dame at Fayette and Howard?" Oscar said. "Joe, you've got a nerve taking pennies from her on a glue pot like Knight Sing. Why didn't you fan her off the idea?"

"Ever cure a horse hound by waving away the money?" Mr. Maddox shrugged. "She'd have found someone else. After the goat loses, I'll give her back the dollar."

It was that harmless—a one dollar bet with Joe Maddox, who would have taken ten thousand without a change of expression on his broad bland face. Next morning in the rush of telephones ringing,

odds being figured, bets taken and entered, old Maggie's pennies were forgotten.

The drizzling rain stopped before noon. By track time the spring sun was bright on the race crowd gathering by street cars, automobiles, taxis and on foot.

Pinlico track was on the northwest edge of Baltimore. And if the wooden grandstand and clubhouse looked shabby and old against newer racing plants over the country, the shabbiness had all the dignity, the pride of Maryland bluegrass traditions.

Today Maryland and Washington society, senators, congressmen, high government officials were in the clubhouse and boxes. And among all that distinguished company, none was more impressive than the big figure of Mr. Maddox. One look and any stranger could mark a man of standing and consequence. Friends, clients had only to note the big glinting diamond on the left hand, the jovial smile on the broad face, to know that Joe Maddox was in the money and taking bets. Any amount on any horse.

But important money was not offered until after the third race. Colonel Jephtha Montgomery stopped Mr. Maddox in the paddock with the blunt, brusque manner that was as much a part of the colonel as the graying, military mustache.

"Can you handle five thousand, Maddox?"

MR. MADDUX stood smiling for the barest moment while he considered. The colonel was more than the retired cavalry man that he looked. He was a Maryland Montgomery, wealth, born to the knowledge of fine horse flesh and owning his share of it himself. The colonel could afford to lose five thousand—but you could be sure his judgment was canny.

"Any amount, Colonel," Mr. Maddox assented. "The sixth race, I suppose, on your Somali Sue?"

"Right," the colonel agreed brusquely. "And I'll accept your word that none of the money will go on the board to squeeze the odds."

Mr. Maddox checked an equally brusque reply. Here was pride to the point of snobbishness. Pride that would never unbend to a bookie—even to Joe Maddox—with whom the colonel had occasionally

done business for upwards of fifteen years."

"Your Somali Sue is sharp and ready to go, Colonel. She figures to win. You're not allowing my book much protection."

The colonel's manner remained frosty. "That's your affair, Maddox."

"On the nose, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"You're on Somali Sue, five thousand to win," Mr. Maddox said calmly.

Colonel Montgomery's curt nod took it as a matter of course. But in a telephone booth a few minutes later, Mr. Maddox was sharp and hurried to Oscar.

"What about Somali Sue in the sixth?"

"She's the favorite. Nice backing, Joe."

"I just took five grand on her."

"Holy cow, Joe! Now we hold the sack! Better put three grand in the machine and hold the price down."

"I said I wouldn't. Call Joe Samuels in Washington and Billy Clymer in Jersey City and lay off."

"Washington and Jersey both have got too much on Somali Sue now," Oscar said peevishly. "She figures to take it. You make sucker promises and we take a beating, Joe. Where's the percentage?"

"Call it advertising," Mr. Maddox said, and hung up, none too happy himself.

But the girl who was waiting for him as he stepped out of the telephone booth looked even less happy. Mr. Maddox noticed her tense look before she spoke.

"Have you talked with Phil Fanning?" she asked, with a French accent.

"Fanning?" Mr. Maddox repeated—and suddenly he was interested. "Phil Fanning? Frisco Phil Fanning?"

The girl said, "Oui," and then, "Yes," as if she thought French and spoke English with more difficulty.

She was small and not exactly pretty, with that merry tilt to her little nose and a wide generous mouth. But an observing old bookie long used to racing society in Florida, Long Island and California could note chic and manner that belonged in the cream of any clubhouse group. At a guess she would be from diplomatic circles in Washington.

"I didn't know Phil Fanning was here at the track," Mr. Maddox said mechanically.

He could have said more. He could have expressed amazement that Phil Fanning was alive. The very name resurrected memories thirty years old. Frisco Phil Fanning! The Golden Boy!

In horse barn tackrooms the oldtimers still talked of Phil Fanning, who had been able to look any thoroughbred in the eye and know that horse's heart. Frisco Phil Fanning, the California Golden Boy, greatest plunger of the turf after the legendary Pittsburgh Phil.

In a few youthful years Phil Fanning had meteorized from obscurity to the wealthy nemesis of the bookie rings. Betting coups engineered by Phil Fanning had never since been equaled.

And then as suddenly as he had appeared on the turf horizon, Frisco Phil had vanished. And he had not been cleaned. He had not dropped into obscurity as proof that "all horse players die broke."

The girl nodded hurried assent to Mr. Maddox' question.

"Oui, Phil Fanning." Her left hand that went to Mr. Maddox' arm had a large solitaire ring on the third finger. "He will see you. He will want to bet. Please—you will not?" She caught her breath. "It—it must not happen."

"I don't know Phil Fanning," Mr. Maddox told her. "I doubt if he knows me. What makes you so sure he'll look me up?"

Her shrug was pure Gallic. She indicated the big diamond ring that Mr. Maddox wore. "That," she said, and laughter flashed briefly as her small hands made an exaggerated gesture indicating a large fat man. "He will know you."

Mr. Maddox chuckled.

"So even strangers can spot me? What's behind all this? You're mysterious."

The laughter vanished.

"Please! I have believed what I hear of Joe Maddox. Now I ask you—say to Phil Fanning it must not be."

"All right. And I hope it's for the best, sister."

"Thank you."

SHE was gone into the racing crowd before Mr. Maddox realized he hadn't asked her name or whether he would see her again. She left mystery and memories

of those great past years of the turf when Joe Maddox had been young.

And yet when Phil Fanning did appear Mr. Maddox was caught off guard. The fourth race was over. Mr. Maddox was returning to the clubhouse from the grandstand boxes when a stranger stepped out of the crowd heading for the payoff windows and accosted him.

"Aren't you Joe Maddox?"

One look at the seedy, threadbare old man, at the cheap straw hat, the lined face and pouched eyes, and it took an effort to avoid curtness.

"I'm in a hurry just now. Some other time, eh?" Mr. Maddox said hastily.

The old man kept step with him. "I'm Phil Fanning. Maybe you've heard of me."

Mr. Maddox stopped. Memories had tricked him. The Phil Fanning he had been visualizing had been hardly thirty, expensively dressed, smiling, confident. But that had been a long time ago. This seedy old man, looking all of seventy, was no part of the California Golden Boy.

Unless it was something in the boozy, bloodshot eyes. Unless it was pride, shame, or a flare of spirit when the old man spoke Phil Fanning's name.

"Heard of you?" Mr. Maddox said, and somehow he managed pleased astonishment as he offered a hand. "Who hasn't heard of Phil Fanning? I used to read every word about you when I was a youngster just getting around the tracks."

The old man drew a breath. Shoulders straightened a bit. "Those were great days, eh?"

The pleased smile was an effort. It was like watching a corpse trying to stir. Frisco Phil Fanning was no more. The California Golden Boy would never live again. This old man was a ghost haunting the past, resurrecting only pity. His handshake had been unsteady. His shirt collar was frayed. You could guess the recent whiskey reek. He was an old booze pot who talked of the past and buried it as he talked.

But Joe Maddox was a kindly man. His broad, bland face remained friendly.

"Those *were* great days. Look me up some time and we'll have a talk. I'm glad to have seen you."

"Wait," the old man said. His hand

came out with a hundred dollar bill. "I know your reputation as a bookmaker, Maddox. I've a small bet—"

"Sorry. No more bets today."

"I was counting—"

"You've done badly with the horses lately, haven't you?" Mr. Maddox said bluntly.

Phil Fanning flushed and answered with dignity. "I won the last ten bets I made, sir!"

"When?" Mr. Maddox prodded.

"Thirty-two years ago," Phil Fanning said huskily. "This is the first bet since then. And I've got to get it down." A thin hand went to the same arm the girl had caught. Fanning was abruptly as desperate as she had seemed. "Hear me, Maddox? I've *got* to get this bet down with a bookmaker I can trust!"

Mr. Maddox took the hard-boiled way.

"Don't kid me, Fanning. You need money. You can't afford to risk a hundred on any horse. This isn't thirty-two years ago. This is today. The game is different."

"A horse is always a horse!"

"Sometimes he's a jockey and a trainer and the mistakes of the other stables," Mr. Maddox reminded firmly. "Put the dough back in your pocket and play safe."

"Are you trying to tell me about horses, Maddox?"

"No," said Mr. Maddox frankly. "There's the fifty-dollar window that will sell you a couple of tickets. But I'm out."

"That won't do. I'm asking you, Maddox. Will you cover this bet in the sixth?" The money was pressed into Mr. Maddox' hand.

"No," Mr. Maddox refused with curt finality.

Phil Fanning turned away. The slump was back in his shoulders. He walked as if the recent liquor were in his legs again. And he was still in sight when a dangerously calm voice spoke at Mr. Maddox' shoulder.

"What a nerve—snatching bets within pitching distance of the mutuel windows. I had a hunch I'd hang it on you this spring, Joe. Where's the dough he shoved in your hand?"

"I smell rat," Mr. Maddox said as he turned. "What stable did they give you a hole in, Cassidy?"

"Don't make a pass at your pocket with that money, Joe, or I'll rough you."

CASSIDY'S stocky, grizzled, figure was alert and ready to block any move Joe Maddox made to avoid arrest. Cassidy's smile was rich in satisfaction at having finally caught Joe Maddox accepting handbook bets at a mutuel track.

Cassidy was one of the Masterton Agency detectives who combed the track crowds for touts, pickpockets and con men who flocked where money moved fast in the open. But Cassidy's specialty was spotting track bookmaking which diverted money from the mutuel windows and cost the track its percentage.

"So you'll rough me?" Mr. Maddox said.

"You heard me, Joe. Open up that right fin and try to talk yourself out of it."

"I'm an owner," Mr. Maddox reminded coldly. "I've got a stable here at the track. No cheap flatfoot pushes me around."

"Those four-legged ash cans you ship around the country aren't a racing stable. They're a lousy alibi," Cassidy snapped. "Open up the mitts, Joe—or so help me I'll collar you right here in the crowd."

"I should let you—and sue you birds up and down the backstretch," Mr. Maddox said. "But I'm busy and I'd as soon see you looking like a fool as read about it." Mr. Maddox held out his closed hands, said, "Abacazada!" and opened them.

Cassidy made sure no money was palmed, even to a quick frisk of coat sleeves. His face grew red.

Mr. Maddox grinned and then chuckled.

"It was worth it, Cassidy. Nobody can be as dumb as you look. Now keep out of my hair."

Mr. Maddox was still chuckling as he walked away. But a thoughtful frown followed as he thought of old Frisco Phil. And if Mr. Maddox had looked back at Cassidy the frown would certainly have deepened.

Cassidy was standing there and smiling. And when Cassidy smiled like that he was dangerous. But Frisco Phil was on Mr. Maddox' mind.

Thirty-two years away from the turf and back now, old beyond his years. Booze rotten, shaking as he tried to place a

measly hundred dollar bet with a strange bookie. And why a bookie here at the track when the mutuel windows would take a hundred without a second thought? Why Joe Maddox?

The girl only tangled it more. Why had she hunted up Joe Maddox? Why didn't she want old Fanning to bet? She had money. She looked as though she had always had money? Why her interest in a hundred dollar bet?

Mr. Maddox shrugged it all away. Anything could happen at a horse track. A smart man minded his own business. And not until the horses paraded for the sixth race did Mr. Maddox recall old Maggie and her one-dollar bet on Knight Sing.

Watching from the clubhouse, Mr. Maddox decided that a sorrier plater had never been unloaded from a gyp halterman's horse van. A four-year old, without a win to his record, Knight Sing even had a goaty look as he plodded through the mud at the tail of the line.

Sammy Castle, the jockey, was an unknown bug boy off the half-milers. The race was a mile and a furlong for thousand dollar claimers. When the assistant starters expertly headed the field of ten into the stalls of the magnetic starting gate, the odds board had Knight Sing seventy-eight to one. And Mr. Maddox would have offered ten dollars to a dead mutuel ticket that Knight Sing would bring home the heel mud of all nine other horses.

Somali Sue, the Montgomery entry, was entered with thousand dollar plasters only because she was an in-and-outer who hadn't shown much lately. But Colonel Montgomery's five thousand wager was the tip-off that the race was in the bag for the Montgomery stable.

THE crowd roared with the starting bell. Somali Sue broke fast. Knight Sing struggled into the turn through a barrage of flying mud thrown by seven horses ahead. Mr. Maddox smiled ruefully for old Maggie and her one-dollar bet and strolled back into the clubhouse for a cigar. He was going down for thousands on this race but he didn't have to watch it happen.

The counterman made change for the

cigar and said: "It'll be Somali Sue. They've been laying for a spot like this."

Mr. Maddox nodded and stood savoring the cigar while the crowd out front boosted the horses down the stretch and under the wire.

"Dollar says it's Somali Sue," the clerk offered hopefully.

"I should be your sucker," Mr. Maddox declined.

They both looked as an elated young man burst back into the clubhouse and called: "Knight Sing by half a length! Eighty to one—and I've got a fiver on him! Whoops!"

The clerk's jaw dropped. Mr. Maddox whistled softly and then walked away. Upsets like this made the sport of kings tops in interest and excitement. Colonel Jetha Montgomery's sour discomfiture would be worth seeing. But old Maggie's delight promised the most. Mr. Maddox decided instantly that Maggie would get full odds instead of bookie odds. She would get better than eighty dollars.

But that evening after dinner Maggie was not on her corner. The big redfaced officer on duty shook his head when Mr. Maddox questioned him.

"She ain't been around tonight. Sometimes stays away. She might have caught cold from that rain last night."

Mr. Maddox rubbed his jaw. "I might cheer her up. Know where she lives?"

The cop showed his surprise that a man like Mr. Maddox would visit an old flower peddler like Maggie. But he was immediately more friendly.

"Sure and that'd be kind. I'm just callin' in and Sergeant Hinkle will be knowin' where she lives. He had a beat in her neighborhood last year. It's over beyond Camden Station somewhere."

The sergeant's detailed information guided a taxi driver to a neighborhood where rows of shabby brick houses with white stone steps rose flush from the sidewalks. Back near the corner boys were yelling around an empty clanging ash can. Radios blasted talk and music through open windows. Householders on the stone steps watched Mr. Maddox walk into the dark narrow alley where the driver had stopped.

Garbage reeked on the damp air off the harbor. A scurrying rat made Mr.

Maddox jump and swear under his breath. This was squalor one seldom saw between fine hotels and landscaped race-tracks. Or thought about when buying old Maggie's pretty flowers.

Back in this alley, the desk sergeant had said. A little brick building that had been a coal shed and was now two separate rooms, with two doors opening on the alley. Knock on the second door.

The building was only a dark blob in the murky light seeping from the street. Mr. Maddox stopped, peering uncertainly and reached for matches to make certain he was right. And in that moment he heard the slight, unmistakable creak of a door hinge and the click of the lock.

"Are you in there, Maggie?" Maddox said loudly enough to be heard through the door.

Two matches from the clip spluttered into flame. The door was closed. The front of the old converted shed had no windows. Just two weathered, warped doors, both closed, both without sign of light inside.

The matches burned down and out as Mr. Maddox knocked. The door rattled loosely and nothing happened. No sound or movement inside. Yet the door had creaked, the lock had clicked. This door. This lock. Mr. Maddox knocked again and spoke louder.

"Maggie! This is your bookie! I've got some money for you!"

The answer came in a sharp undertone from the darkness behind Mr. Maddox.

"Don't make no noise! Stand still!"

CHAPTER TWO

A Rose for Mr. Maddox

A HARD JAB in the back could only have been a gun muzzle. Mr. Maddox stood motionless and growled under his breath. He should have known better than to come up a dark alley in this part of town. Like a fathead he'd stood talking money for the furtive night to hear.

"A bookie with money?" the low voice said at his shoulder. "How much?"

"Eighty dollars for the old lady who lives in here," Mr. Maddox said with resignation. "And for that much you won't get an argument. Move that gun

from my back and I'll give you the eighty."

"Take it easy. I'll get it,"

An automobile passed the mouth of the alley. The boys were still yelling in the street. The empty ash can clanged hollowly. People still were talking on those white stone steps along the street. The taxi was waiting a few feet from the alley mouth. And it all might be miles away for the good it did back here in the darkness.

Mr. Maddox eased his arms up and made no move as a hand reached around his broad chest and took the fat billfold from his inside coat pocket.

"What horse did she bet on, fellow?"

"Knight Sing, in the sixth."

"How much?"

"A dollar."

"Don't kid me."

"Where would she get much more than that?" Mr. Maddox growled. "You've got the dough. Why don't you scam?"

"O. K. Don't move."

The gun left Mr. Maddox' back and there was no warning as it slugged him. Twice evidently. He felt the first blow knocking him staggering against the door. There was a moment of dazed wild rage and then blackout.

When Mr. Maddox opened his eyes he was in blackness without sound. Utter blackness into which he stared while pain and memory clashed in his head.

For a fantastic moment he wondered if this blackness and silence were death. Then an automobile horn sounded in the distance. Mr. Maddox stiffened, heard the horn unmistakably again and felt stiff lips form a grin of relief. It was too much to visualize automobiles and horns beyond the grave.

He was on his back. Wood was under him. Mr. Maddox braced out with his hands to sit up and found his left hand clasping another hand.

And hair wanted to rise on Mr. Maddox' head. The limp fingers he held were inert, chill, clammy, so that his hand snatched back.

The match clip was still in his pocket. Several matches scratched at once gave a burst of light.

The hand was there, the coat sleeve, the body beyond, lying on its side. The

pallid face and partly opened eyes might have been studying Joe Maddox lying so close on the floor.

The low-ceilinged, shabby little room held an iron cot, wooden table, worn rocking chair, rag rug, light cord and bulb. Mr. Maddox heaved his bulk to unsteady feet and snapped on the light.

The man was dead. There on the floor was the rusty stove poker that had killed him. Blood stained the rag rug and a bit of the clean scrubbed floor. He was a stranger. This little flower-filled room was strange. Flowers everywhere about the room exuded cloying funereal sweetness. Flowers in cheap water glasses, cracked cups, saucers on the table, glass pickle and olive jars hung on the walls with string and bits of old ribbon. Flowers of all colors, some withered, some fresh, as if this room had long been prepared for death.

A red rose was bright and gaudy in the dead man's left hand. Mr. Maddox stooped and took it. Wax, as he had suspected. The ancient hat where the rose belonged was not in sight—and old Maggie also was gone.

Wrist watch gave ten minutes to eleven. Almost two hours had passed since the taxi had stopped at the alley mouth. Mr. Maddox absently shoved the wax rose in his coat pocket, and then noticed his left hand and blurted an oath.

THE ring was gone! That massive gold band and big diamond had been stripped from his finger. And with it had gone Joe Maddox' luck, his visible symbol of success, his source of ready cash when the bankroll was cleaned. Turf fans from coast to coast knew Joe Maddox was in the money and ready for business when the big diamond flashed cold light from his finger.

"The dirty rat!" Mr. Maddox said explosively.

Billfold and ring might have been taken by this sallow-faced, well-dressed stranger. And might not have been.

If he was the thief, why had he dragged Joe Maddox inside? Why would the old woman have let him?

Mr. Maddox looked down at the poker. The end was bent at right angles. That bent point striking down would have the

bone-piercing effect of a steel spike. Even old Maggie could have killed with such a weapon if the man were not looking.

But his hand had reached her hat. Couldn't he have stopped her? And why, with one man dead, hadn't Joe Maddox also been killed?

Mr. Maddox dropped to a knee and searched the body. Pockets had been emptied. A light arm holster was empty.

Baffled, angry, Mr. Maddox stood up, growling: "One hell of a mess!"

Old Maggie was gone. Billfold and diamond ring were gone. A door in the back of the room creaked as he opened it and the outside air rushed in.

Mr. Maddox turned back, noticed his hat on the floor and caught it up before he darkened the room and felt his way cautiously out into the night behind the little building.

Quiet lay over the neighborhood. Lighted windows visible earlier in the evening now were dark. Eyes adjusted to the night, the line of houses took shape across backyard fences and Mr. Maddox found himself in a handkerchief-sized backyard bounded on one side by the alley he had entered and at the back by another alley.

Moving cautiously he found the back fence and a wooden gate that opened freely to his push. And because there was no reason to go back, he kept going.

He came out on a different street, around the corner from the alley mouth where he had left the taxi. His head felt a little better as he walked to the corner, turned to the right, and passed half a dozen sets of stone steps before he could be certain that the taxi had driven off.

No telling how long the driver had waited before leaving. The noisy boys, the people on the white stone steps were gone. No one was thinking about murder or the bulky stranger who had walked into the alley and vanished.

But when they did think . . .

The first chill hit Mr. Maddox in that moment. Just who was going to believe Joe Maddox had been slugged while standing in the alley and then carefully dragged inside old Maggie's little dwelling and left peacefully beside the body of a murdered man?

Sweat sprang on Mr. Maddox' broad face as the picture took shape. He could

have been heisted of his money and diamond and been believed at once. He could have hurried back out of the alley in a few minutes, reported a dead man in the room and had little or nothing to explain.

But now, hours later!

In two hours a well-known racetrack bookie could have killed a dozen men up that alley and two dozen reasons could be found for the violence. A bookie was never very far from the fringes of the underworld. Many of them had close underworld connections. It was taken for granted by police and public.

Who among the hardboiled men at police line-up would waste time wondering whether big Joe Maddox or frail old Maggie had killed the stranger with that poker?

Try and tell them the dead man had dragged Joe Maddox in there unconscious and then been killed himself. Try to explain why dead man and earlier victim were side by side on the floor two hours later.

Try it!

OSCAR was sarcastic over a tall frosted Scotch and soda when Mr. Maddox got back to the hotel suite.

"Was it a blonde or a bottle—or maybe the Morning Line and business don't mean anything any more."

"Pipe down! I want plenty of Scotch and a bottle of iodine," Mr. Maddox snapped, hauling off his coat.

"So it's a suicide cocktail now? Nothing doing, Joe. Sleep it off if you got to come in crummy drunk and drink iodine."

Mr. Maddox hurled the coat onto the bed, snatched Oscar's frosted glass and drained it.

"Do I look drunk? Do I look like I been down the line tonight?"

"You look like hell!" was Oscar's verdict.

Mr. Maddox reached for the Scotch bottle.

"I should look worse. If they don't prove I killed a man tonight, it won't be because they don't try."

Oscar's eyes snapped wide. His voice rose in pitch.

"You killed a man, Joe?"

"I didn't say I killed him," Mr. Maddox growled. "Maybe I did. Maybe not.

How do I know? Get me that iodine. My head's cut."

Oscar's habitual sarcasm vanished as he reached for the Scotch bottle instead.

"Who was he, Joe? What happened?"

"Don't know who he is. Don't know how it happened," Mr. Maddox said grimly. He paced the room telling what had happened and finished grumly.

"I didn't help it by walking away. The cop on Fayette Street will remember me. The hack driver will have plenty to say when the body is found. Neighbors saw me walk into the alley. A rookie cop could find me without much trouble."

Oscar lighted a cigarette. His hands were unsteady. His voice was a groan.

"Why'd you lam then, Joe? It's put you square behind the eight-ball."

Oscar's misery had its usual tonic effect. Mr. Maddox' broad face smoothed into bland, wry humor.

"I was behind the eight-ball anyway. The cops would have tossed me in the tank and I wouldn't have had a chance to do anything. I had ideas to think over."

"Ideas to think over—with the cops at his heels," Oscar bitterly addressed his empty glass.

Mr. Maddox took the red wax rose from his coat pocket and stared at it.

"Maggie's hat was there—so Maggie must have been there. He was grabbing for her or he wouldn't have torn this rose off her hat. Now what happened to Maggie?"

"What happened to eighteen hundred bucks in your billfold and your diamond ring?"

"And Colonel Jeptha Montgomery's check for five thousand," Mr. Maddox reminded.

Oscar stabbed a finger. "Joe—that check! Maybe Montgomery wanted it back."

"A lousy guess," said Mr. Maddox promptly. "Don't bother me. That dead man snatched this rose off Maggie's hat—so he was standing close to her and facing her before he died."

"So how does that help you?" Oscar said glumly. "He grabbed the rose off her hat and she socked him with the poker, cleaned everybody's pockets and beat it. You won't see that old dame peddling flowers any more."

Mr. Maddox ignored the comments and slowly turned the rose over.

"He must have been close enough to reach her throat or her arm, or knock her down or hold her helpless. She's no bigger than a gnat. A boy could handle her. But all he did was get a hand to her hat. Does that make sense?"

"Who says it has to make sense, Joe? He was killed with her poker, wasn't he?"

"He had this rose when the poker hit him," Mr. Maddox mused. "And he was struck on the back of the head. He was taller than she was. She couldn't have done it."

Oscar's mouth opened. He stood staring at the rose and moistened his lips.

"Couldn't you have done it, Joe, uh—not knowing what you were doing?" Oscar caught the look on Mr. Maddox's face and hastily added, "Or maybe she planted that flower in his hand."

MR. MADDUX tossed the rose onto the dresser.

"I didn't kill him. I don't think Maggie killed him. Someone else was in that room when I came along the alley. Someone who didn't want his presence known. He closed the door quietly when he heard me coming."

"He had to open the door so you could be brought in," Oscar pointed out. "See what that means, Joe? Two guys had to be working there together. Say—they had a fight over your money an' your diamond! One of them socked the other with the poker and beat it!"

Oscar looked hopeful again until Mr. Maddox quashed him grimly.

"Then who was fighting Maggie? What happened to Maggie? What were two men doing at that alley room of hers in the first place?"

"They—they knew you were coming. Maybe the old girl was in on a deal to clean you," Oscar guessed uncertainly. But it was only a guess. Oscar's confidence trailed off in the next breath. "Maybe the cops'll find out, Joe."

"Maybe. And if they don't they'll want me to take the rap." Mr. Maddox smashed a big fist into a big palm. "And I don't take another mug's rap if I can help it. That old sister knows what happened. When I find her I'm in the clear."

"Sure, just go out and find her, Joe," said Oscar soothingly. "She's only got Baltimore, Philly, Washington and the harbor to hide in. And she may be dead. Winning an eighty-to-one long-shot is enough to kill an old granny if she didn't get knocked off for some other reason."

Mr. Maddox went into the bathroom, started water into the tub and was removing his shirt as he came back out.

"You almost had an idea then," he conceded. "That dollar she bet on Knight Sing is the reason I left without reporting the body. Somebody had that sixth race in the bag today. She knew it when she bet the dollar. And if her visitors tonight didn't have a part of that sixth race, I'll open a Chinese laundry."

"How would she figure in that race with one dollar?" Oscar demanded.

Mr. Maddox was down to shorts, showing beef and muscle where most people thought fat larded the big prosperous looking frame. His shrug denied doubt.

"I don't know where she figured—but she figured. I turned down another bet on that sixth race today and now I'll lay any odds that man knew the winner too. Knight Sing ran to make a price on the board. The wise money went down somewhere else. Telephone Washington, Philly, Jersey City, Chicago and Tom Bennett, in Frisco. Find out if any of the books got burned on Knight Sing today."

Mr. Maddox sang in the bathtub, hummed as he hurriedly shaved, was whistling past his teeth as he came out for fresh linen and another suit.

"Get that Chicago call through next," Oscar told the operator, and spoke peevishly to Mr. Maddox. "You're too damn cheerful, Joe. I couldn't raise Billy Clymer. Steve Ricci was the best I could do in Jersey."

"That dope! He's crooked."

"We ain't doing business with him. Ricci says most of the Jersey books got bent some on Knight Sing. Not bad, but they all felt it. Washington and Philly the same way."

"See about Chicago and the Coast," Mr. Maddox directed and fell to whistling through his teeth again as he hurriedly dressed.

Oscar hung up on the Chicago call.

"Coatsie Harris says some of the Loop

books would have been squawking plenty if they'd have had to pay all of Knight Sing out on track odds. They had too many insured bets as it was."

"I'll talk to Tom Bennett if you get him."

THE telephone rang back a moment later. Oscar answered—held it out. Mr. Maddox was jovial in his greeting to the Coast—and then blunt.

"Any signs out there, Tom, of a stinker on Knight Sing, in the sixth today at Pimlico?"

Oscar leaned forward, eyes narrowing, as words began to crackle in the receiver.

"How much?" Mr. Maddox asked. And a moment later: "That all anyone knows? . . . Thanks, Tom, I'll let you know."

Mr. Maddox looked blank as he hung up.

"Did they get squeezed on the Coast?" Oscar asked sharply.

"Plenty. Con Holcomb and the Brodsky brothers took a clipping in L. A. and Hollywood. The play was scattered and too much of it on the nose. But the books thought a long-shot hunch was going around, like sometimes happens, and didn't send any comeback to the track or lay off here in the East. And when they had to pay off on Knight Sing, they screamed. Tom says the Coast books are out four hundred to a half a million, even at book odds."

Talk like that was Oscar's daily work as he sat at the telephones and betting sheets. Elbows on the work table, shrewd eyes alert, Oscar calculated: "Split that half-million on the Coast two ways. Half for the dopes who took a chance on a long-shot—and half smooth money that knew what it was doing. Two hundred and fifty grand out there. Do the same in Chicago and through the East here . . ."

They stared at one another.

"Half a million at least," Mr. Maddox said quietly.

"Seven-eight hundred grand," was Oscar's opinion.

"And spread out all over the country—not heavy enough to be noticed much in any one spot," Mr. Maddox said, and all his control could not keep back excite-

ment. "Half a million clean-up on one book—if it happened."

"Sure it happened, Joe! There ain't enough long-shot dopes in the country to lay all that money on a lemon like Knight Sing. He wasn't making a first out. He wasn't coming back after a layoff, with a good past record to dope him on. He was a four-year-old that never showed anything but dog meat! Somali Sue was due to take the sixth. I'd have bet on her myself. Even with thousand-dollar claimers over a route, there wasn't any reason for money showing all over the country on Knight Sing like it did."

Mr. Maddox drew a long breath. He was grim once more as he scooped cigars from a box on the table and stuffed them in his breast pocket.

"I'm in a hell of a fix if it's so. You don't get money placed like that from coast to coast without plenty of savvy and organization. And a half-million take on one race isn't broccoli. Anybody who gets in the way of dough like that gets rubbed out."

"Like that fellow tonight?"

"Like that fellow tonight," Mr. Maddox agreed. "If I'm not back tomorrow, keep the book going and don't answer questions. I'm in New York and you don't know when I'll be back."

"Joe, don't," Oscar said. And Oscar was not excited, not loud. The shrewd little man had never been more desperately pleading as he leaned across the table.

"Joe, if all this is right, you're asking for the works. Take a chance with the cops. *They'll* give you a chance. You go butting into a setup like we're guessing and it's curtains the minute they're wise to you."

"One thing I'd like to know."

"What, Joe?"

"Why should a man who had a million once be down to a dirty shirt and a hundred dollar bill when he knew where another million was?"

Oscar's blurt was disgusted. "For cripes sake lay off the double-talk! This is bad!"

"It could be worse," Mr. Maddox said. "I might be pinched by now. If I come back on a shutter, look up old Maggie and buy me a flower."

Oscar swore helplessly and Mr. Maddox was chuckling as he left the suite. But the broad bland face was on the hard side and thoughtful as Mr. Maddox walked briskly to the garage where his big blue sedan was parked.

CHAPTER THREE

Mademoiselle Is Missing

SOME forty miles of four-lane highway lay between Baltimore and Washington. And these days Washington had become the city that never slept, the polyglot center of world activity and intrigue. The low rumbling roar at Mr. Maddox' destination might have been the impatient city rousing for another hectic day.

But it was only the presses of the *Morning Clarion* and a tousle-haired office boy upstairs said that Tom Wiggins, the Sports Editor, had just gone home.

"Or maybe he's around at the Press Club bar," the youth volunteered after a look at Mr. Maddox' disappointed frown. "Wait'll I ask his babe. She's still digging her society dirt inside that door."

An indignant retort came from behind the partly-open door. "Whose babe, you slender pup?"

"She hears everything an' prints it," the youth grinned—and he opened the door with exaggerated deference.

"Gentleman to see Mr. Wiggins. Would you by any chance, Miss Davenport, know Mr. Wiggins' whereabouts at this time?"

"Scat!" said the girl who had been typing in the little office. She saw the commanding presence of Mr. Maddox in the hallway and came to the door with an apologetic smile.

"It's a running feud with Eddy," she explained. "Mr. Wiggins won't be here until tomorrow. Will you leave a message?"

Mr. Maddox formed his judgment before she reached the door. She was informal and likable in a lamé evening dress. Her wrap was carelessly on a chair by the typewriter and a copy pencil had been absently thrust in her blond hair.

"A message won't help me," Mr. Maddox said. "But someone familiar with Washington society might do the trick. I'm Mr. Maddox, a friend of Tom's."

"Mr. Maddox? The—the—"

"The bookie."

She laughed.

"Come in, Mr. Maddox. Tom bought my evening purse with money he won from you during the Bowie meet." She caught the wrap off the chair. "Tom could find you a broken-down wrestler, but he won't be much help with Washington society. I'm Anna Davenport—and I do nothing but society. Can I help you?"

Mr. Maddox looked like a big, bland and cheerful Buddha as he relaxed in the chair.

"I'm looking for a young lady, Miss Davenport. I don't know her name or where she might be living or even for sure that she's in Washington. But if she's here, I want her."

Anna Davenport lifted nice eyebrows.

"In other words you want the needle in the haystack—and you're not sure that the needle is even there."

"Just about that," Mr. Maddox admitted.

"What makes you think she is in Washington?"

"She talked good United States with a French accent. It's possible she has some contact with the diplomatic bunch."

Anna Davenport took a small ivory cigarette holder and a cigarette from her purse and bent to the match Mr. Maddox struck.

"French accents are a dime a dozen these days. Can you describe her?"

"She's small and her nose tips up and her mouth is fairly wide. She has a sense of humor. I didn't notice her hair."

"What man ever does?" Anna Davenport smiled. "We could find a thousand girls in Washington to fit that description. Can't you do better?"

"The diamond in her engagement ring cost plenty."

"Excellent! She's engaged. No wedding ring?"

"Not that I saw."

"Any particular restaurant or night club she favors?"

"I saw her only once—in the clubhouse at Pimlico today."

"Did you notice whom she was with?"

"She was alone when I talked with her." Mr. Maddox considered. "Her last name might be Fanning. Might not. It's only a hunch."

"Well, it's something," Anna Davenport encouraged. "Let's see what we have. She's young and engaged, probably American with a French accent and goes to the races. And since you saw her at Pimlico, she might live in Baltimore, Philadelphia or even New York."

"She might," Mr. Maddox had to admit. "I wanted to see Tom Wiggins, on the chance some of the Washington sportswriters might have been around the clubhouse and knew her or someone she was with."

"Those lowbrows would have noticed her if she was pretty," Anna Davenport admitted. She thought for a moment and abruptly picked up a newspaper beside the typewriter, looked in the sports section and clucked with satisfaction.

"I remember hearing Tom say he'd sent Colly Haywood to Pimlico today for pictures. Here's the front of the clubhouse. Does one of the faces belong to your young lady?"

"Not clear enough," Mr. Maddox said after a close scrutiny.

"Colly brought back several pictures, I'm sure. Wait, I'll get the originals. If we can find her face, I have an idea that might help."

MR. MADDUX whistled softly through his teeth as he waited for her to return. By now the body back in Baltimore might have been found. Already the Baltimore police might be hunting Joe Maddox for murder. The hotel would know his garage. The garage had his car license number. The Maryland state police, Washington city police might be searching for car and driver. And it was murder . . .

Anna Davenport hurried back in with four news photos and a large reading glass.

"The top two are the clubhouse. Try them with the magnifying glass," she urged, and watched with interest as Mr. Maddox carefully scanned the magnified faces of the crowd massed in front of the clubhouse.

Hundreds of faces; here and there among them were people whom Mr. Maddox knew well.

"Here!" he said suddenly, and penciled a light circle in one spot near the right

edge of the picture. "All you can see is her head—but that's her."

Anna Davenport looked through the glass and admitted: "She has a nice face. I don't know her but a friend of mine who knows everybody in town was at the races today. Let's see if she's at home."

Anna Davenport made four telephone calls before she was able to say: "Her party is at the Russian Rendezvous, on Connecticut Avenue. Would you care to take me over there and let her look at this picture?"

Mr. Maddox' eyes were twinkling with admiration as he stood up.

"You're wasting good time on an old stranger, Miss Davenport, but I appreciate it."

"If I could only pick winners this easily."

"I'd be cleaned in a hurry," Mr. Maddox chuckled as he held her wrap.

Late as it was, the nightclub was still filled. Mr. Maddox waited inside the entrance while Anna Davenport took picture and reading glass to her friend's table. She was gone not more than five minutes. She returned triumphant.

"We always get our man. She is Suzanne Faudre and her father was a breeder of race horses in France."

Mr. Maddox stopped square on the sidewalk which they had reached. He was oblivious of the uniformed doorman holding a taxi for them.

"Charles Faudre!" Mr. Maddox said with a note of reverence Joe Maddox seldom had for anything. "A breeder? *The* breeder, you mean. Sassoo, the Derby winner for the Earl of Markham was a Faudre horse. And Star of Islam that Harvey Broughten turned down three hundred thousand for as a four-year-old was one. And Styxnight, that the Aga Khan gave to the late King George as the most valuable gift he possessed was another."

"Goodness, I didn't get all that information," Anna Davenport said as Mr. Maddox remembered and helped her into the taxi. And when they started, she continued: "I did find out that Suzanne Faudre got away five minutes before the Germans arrived. Her father wasn't so lucky. They had some money due in this country and Suzanne came over here to

collect it. She has a small apartment here in Washington and goes out very little. Her telephone is listed. You can get in touch with her without any trouble. And if I do say so, I think finding your needle in our haystack was very clever. I'll take a bow."

"Take two of them and a thousand thanks," Mr. Maddox chuckled.

"I'll take something else if you don't mind. This sounds like a good story—and I *am* a newspaper woman, you know."

The street lights made them plainly visible to one another. She was watching his face—and she saw only amusement.

"Bookies," Mr. Maddox chuckled, "aren't good stories. People who bet don't care to read about them—and people who don't bet are annoyed. Take this Faudre girl. She spoke to me today about a bet. I didn't get her name or address and I want to see her again. You see, there's nothing to it."

Anna Davenport was smiling brightly, as if unaware of the bland evasion.

"It doesn't have to be much for my column. You have no idea the trifles we print. I'm sure if I talk to Miss Faudre I can get something. The way we located her would make a nice bit. You wouldn't mind?"

Mr. Maddox knew he was hooked. Tom Wiggins' "babe" was as clever as they came and she sensed something. One scrap of lost poise would sharpen her suspicion.

"I'll give it to you," Mr. Maddox chuckled. "There was a murder—and I thought she might know a man who knew something about the murder."

"I see you'd be a washout on society bits," Anna Davenport laughed. "And I'm warning you I may see Miss Faudre tomorrow. We didn't agree that all this was to be off the record."

"And it's too late to agree?"

"'Fraid so."

"No hard feelings," Mr. Maddox said amiably. "If I see her in the morning before you do, I'll warn her what to expect."

THEY parted back at the newspaper office on that smiling understanding and Mr. Maddox was thoughtful as he walked away. She was smart. She owed Joe Maddox nothing and if she got one

real hint, she might be more dangerous than the police.

The parking lot office had a telephone book that listed Suzanne Faudre in an apartment on M street, not far from the Russian Rendezvous. Parking space around the corner from M street was the best Mr. Maddox could do; and the late hour was more apparent in this neighborhood as he walked to the address.

The building had only three stories. The weathered stone front was age-darkened, rather shabby, and had no desk inside the door, no night clerk to ask a stranger's business.

Suzanne Faudre's name was on a mail box. She lived on the top floor. And as the small automatic elevator whirred slowly up, Mr. Maddox contrasted this setting with the comfort, the luxury this girl must have known in France.

And because he was Joe Maddox, who understood people as well as horses, Mr. Maddox was disturbed, regretful as he rang at her door. Suzanne Faudre had crossed the Atlantic and found no peace, no escape from trouble. Proof of it had been on her young face at Pimlico.

He sounded the buzzer several times, since she probably was asleep. And the door was yanked open with suddenness that made Mr. Maddox jump—and left him standing there amazed and flabbergasted.

"Step in, Joe. Make yourself at home," was the greeting Mr. Maddox got. Cassidy, of the Masterton Agency, was the one who delivered it.

Cassidy's right hand was in his coat pocket. Mr. Maddox could guess the gun Cassidy gripped in the pocket.

The big detective had stepped softly to the door and jerked it open, expecting trouble. Now Cassidy took his hand out of the pocket and his smile had the welcome of a grizzled fox pleased and sure of the kill.

"Out late tonight, eh, Joe?" Cassidy said as he stood aside for the visitor to enter.

Mr. Maddox noted that Cassidy closed the door immediately and put his back against it.

"I get spells when I don't sleep," Mr. Maddox explained cheerfully.

"Too bad," Cassidy sympathized.

"Helps to get out and visit around, I expect."

"It's a sure cure," Mr. Maddox chuckled. He listened for other sounds in the apartment, heard nothing. He looked through an open doorway into a small living-room and no one else was visible.

"Drive over alone from Baltimore, Joe?"

"I thought so at the time," Mr. Maddox said, and inwardly he damned Cassidy fervently and thoroughly.

Cassidy couldn't have been expecting Joe Maddox to show up at this Washington apartment in the middle of the night. And yet Cassidy had not seemed too surprised. He seemed well satisfied that Joe Maddox was here.

"Who's with you?" Mr. Maddox asked.

"Who were you expecting, Joe?"

"Miss Faudre, obviously. It's her apartment, isn't it?"

"Know her, do you, Joe?"

"Would I be here if I didn't? Where is she?"

"Any particular business with her tonight?"

It was worse than cat and mouse, with Joe Maddox as the mouse. Another time, another place Mr. Maddox could have handled Cassidy adequately. Now that dead man back in the squalid Baltimore alley was like a grisly weight on nerves and caution.

"Look, you ham flatfoot, stop stalling," Mr. Maddox said suddenly. "I came here to see the young lady—so what? She's interested in horses and so am I. Where is she?"

Cassidy glanced at his wrist watch.

"Horse talk at two ten in the morning, Joe? All the way over here from Baltimore after midnight to talk horses?"

"What else would we be talking?"

"Fine, we'll talk horses," Cassidy said. "Right in there, Joe. Take that overstuffed chair by the bedroom door."

MR. MADDIX stepped warily into the living-room. "Cassidy, you're too—" Mr. Maddox shut his mouth hard on the rest and stared at the overstuffed chair by the bedroom door, and around the living-room, and stepped over for a quick glance into the bedroom.

The chair was overturned. A floor

lamp and ash stand had been knocked over. A rug corner was turned up, as if dragging feet might have caught the edge.

Bed covers in the next room had been tossed on the floor. Two traveling cases and their contents were all over the bed. Dresser drawers were pulled out.

"What the hell?" Mr. Maddox exclaimed.

Cassidy had dropped pretense. His blocky face was hard, voice harder as he motioned to the bedroom doorway.

"Step in there and look at the bathroom, Joe."

The bathroom door was open and the light on. A damp towel had been tossed into the bathtub. A dry hand towel lay over the tub edge. Both towels showed blood smears.

Cassidy had followed and his voice had a crack and a threat. "Well, Joe?"

Mr. Maddox took one of the fat black cigars from his breast pocket, gave Cassidy the refusal of it, and slowly bit off the end. Sometimes the odds went to pieces, the bad breaks came endlessly, until a man felt whipped and ready to quit. But Joe Maddox was too old a hand to show it on his face.

"Where is she, Cassidy?" he asked quietly.

Cassidy's hard voice whipped back. "I'm asking you, Joe!"

Mr. Maddox stared at the blood spots. His thoughts were back at the Pimlico clubhouse, back to the tense, strained look that did not belong with a merry tipped-up little nose and generous young mouth.

Suzanne Faudre's share of bad breaks had come over there beyond the sea. Yet she could still worry about an old booze-soak like Frisco Phil Fanning. She had lost everything, trouble had been with her today—and now this had happened to her.

And suddenly the troubles of Joe Maddox did not seem too much after all. Mr. Maddox swung on Cassidy, eyes cold, and spoke past the cigar.

"I just got here, Cassidy. You tell me what happened to her! Tell me what you're doing here in the first place!"

"Don't stall, Joe," Cassidy said roughly. "You're up to your ears in this. Do you spill it here—or do I have to call the wagon and let 'em work on you downtown?"

Mr. Maddox took the cigar from his mouth and spat.

"I'll get the cops here myself. Where's the telephone?"

"In the living-room," Cassidy snapped, moving out of the doorway. "Tell 'em that Cassidy, of the Masterton Agency, wants a warrant for Joe Maddox and he's being held here for their arrival."

Cassidy followed into the living-room, stood hard and watchful by the telephone as Mr. Maddox looked in the directory and began to dial headquarters. As the third number was dialed, Cassidy reached suddenly and broke the call.

"So you were going through with it, Joe?"

"Watch me."

"Never mind. We're old friends, Joe. We can talk this over."

"You always were a lousy bluffer, Cassidy. Neither of us hurt the girl. What brought you here?"

Cassidy grinned and plucked one of the fat cigars from Mr. Maddox' coat pocket.

"I just beat you here," Cassidy admitted. "I wanted a quick frisk of the joint—and I found this." Cassidy gestured at the overturned chair and the bedroom. "That blood in the bathroom is fresh."

"She's been hurt—maybe killed."

Cassidy shrugged off that possibility. "She was in Baltimore when I left. We're checking on her."

"Then who got hurt here?"

Cassidy shrugged again. "We got her purse for a few minutes, Joe, and got impressions of several keys and her address. I drove over here to look around."

"So it's a track case and big enough for the Masterton Agency to be bearing down hard." Mr. Maddox studied Cassidy's face. "It must have started at Pimlico. Was it Knight Sing taking that sixth race?"

Cassidy's flare of suspicion confirmed the guess.

"What do you know about that sixth race, Joe?"

"I was surprised, too. I'd have bet on Somali Sue."

"You didn't have a piece of it?"

"Not even a suspicion."

Cassidy's suspicion remained.

"You've never been tapped with a

crooked race, Joe. The vet caught Knight Sing after the race and gave him the works. There wasn't a sign that he had been hopped up. But he won against all the form."

"It's been done before."

"Sure, and wise money has been bet all around the country—like this time."

"A clean-up, eh?"

CASSIDY'S growl had a baffled note. "I'd hate to bet you didn't know it. Where's your diamond?"

"Back in Baltimore, I hope," Mr. Maddox chuckled.

"Yeah," Cassidy said. "So what brings you to this particular damn apartment at two in the morning?"

"You wouldn't believe me, Cassidy."

"I'd better believe you, Joe."

"Step in the bedroom while I talk. I'm still worried about that girl." And Joe Maddox had never been more bland and frank than his confession in the bedroom.

"Remember that old fellow you saw talking to me?"

"Yes," Cassidy said warily.

"I'd never seen him before. He wanted to bet a hundred on the sixth race. I told him to buy tickets. But his hundred never showed on the board. Tonight I got to wondering how much he'd known about Knight Sing. This Miss Faudre knew him. So I drove over here to ask her who he was. Nothing to it, you see. You wouldn't know where he is, Cassidy?"

"I would not!" Cassidy snapped. "Interested in Knight Sing, was he?"

Mr. Maddox was poking through the articles on the bed. He answered mildly without looking up.

"I said he wanted to bet on the sixth. Knight Sing wasn't mentioned. I just had a hunch. You know who this girl is?"

"Her name's Faudre."

"Her father was Charles Faudre, the French breeder. You know, Sasoo, Styx-night—"

Cassidy blurted his astonishment. "Are you sure of that?"

"Reasonably so."

Mr. Maddox stepped to the dresser and picked up a small, leather-framed photograph that had been knocked over. His startled recognition was hidden by the way he stood.

Cassidy followed him with a hard edge once more in his voice.

"Then what the devil is she doing out tonight in Baltimore with Frenchy Brossert?"

Mr. Maddox wheeled around. "Frenchy Brossert?"

Cassidy chopped back: "You don't know anything about that, either, Joe?"

"Certainly not! That heel! That rat! I was at Santa Anita year before last when his auto went off the Arrowhead road and killed Constance Wayman, the Gros-Pic star. I heard all the dirt they couldn't prove: that it was probably murder instead of a wreck, that Connie Wayman had hinted she was afraid of Brossert blackmailing her, and she'd have something to say about it if he tried." Mr. Maddox scowled. "Three years before that the Jockey Club barred Brossert for life as owner and trainer because of his crooked stable."

"The Masterton Agency caught him," Cassidy said. "And you'd be surprised at the best people who were still glad to have the sporty Count de Brossert around. His title is real even if he is a rat."

"What's he up to now?"

"We'd like to know, Joe. What's that picture you're holding?"

Mr. Maddox passed over the picture. "Know him?"

The young man in the leather-framed snapshot wore riding boots, V-necked sweater, carried a riding crop and the wind was in his hair and he was laughing at the camera. Cassidy frowned and tossed the picture on the dresser.

"Never saw him before. I'm through here. This place has already been frisked. What about that old bum and the sixth race? He didn't look like he could raise ten dollars."

"Miss Faudre may know something. Where is she?"

"I wouldn't know now," Cassidy said, and his blocky face was calculating. "Do you know anything else, Joe?"

Mr. Maddox was worried, uncertain. "Wouldn't I tell you, Cassidy? Those blood spots worry me. What are you going to do?"

"Go back to Baltimore and mind my own business," Cassidy growled. "Maybe some of Brossert's crooked friends were

looking for money, jewelry or some papers while Brossert kept her occupied in Baltimore. Better forget it, too, Joe. The police won't be nice if they think you had anything to do with this."

"Even the Masterton Agency would be in bad. We just forget about it?"

"That's right," Cassidy agreed, and obviously was annoyed at the reminder he had been caught off base in Suzanne Faudre's apartment.

They went out together. Each was silent as the elevator carried them down.

"I'll be seeing you," Cassidy said gruffly as they left the building—and then Cassidy grunted with annoyance as a girl stood up from a bench beside the front steps and spoke to Mr. Maddox.

"Isn't it nice that Miss Faudre is up so late?" Anna Davenport asked lightly.

In her evening wrap she was as stunning and harmless as a bit out of her own society column. And Mr. Maddox could almost feel the noose she might be guiding toward his neck.

CHAPTER FOUR

Bo-Jack Tells a Tale

BUT none of that showed. Mr. Maddox towered over her, hat in hand, bland and unconcerned.

"Too late, young lady. Miss Faudre won't be answering any more questions tonight."

"I'm very persuasive, Mr. Maddox."

"You'll have to be if you get her to even answer the door or the telephone," Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Too bad you had this trouble for nothing."

"At least I can try," she said easily. And she entered the building.

Cassidy seethed: "Who the devil is *she*? Holding out on me, Joe?"

"She helped me find Miss Faudre's address. It made her curious. She's after a story for her paper."

Cassidy swore.

"It could be worse," Mr. Maddox comforted. "She might have a key to the apartment."

Cassidy swore again.

"You're a Jonah, Joe! Suppose she gets in there and calls the police?"

"That," said Mr. Maddox cheerfully, "is your worry, Cassidy."

And Cassidy swore a third time. He was in a black humor as they parted at the corner. And Mr. Maddox lost his smile as he made for the automobile with long strides.

Two thirty now, and time was running out fast on Joe Maddox. Perhaps faster even than he knew. The Davenport girl was clever and resourceful.

And Cassidy was worse. The grizzled Masterton detective was a fox and a wolf. Two decades of knowing the man was enough to spot Cassidy's evasions. Not a word out of Cassidy tonight about old Maggie or knowledge of Frisco Phil Fanning.

Yet Cassidy and the Masterton Agency were working hard on that clean-up on Knight Sing. They were tailing Suzanne Faudre. They might be covering old Phil Fanning. They might know much about the old flower woman. The net they were trying to spread might already be closing circumstantial evidence about Joe Maddox. Cassidy had evaded, concealed. Cassidy was up to something.

Rhode Island Avenue was the next street over. A block north on the Avenue streets came together in a circle, and from the circle Massachusetts Avenue led to the broad, beautiful plaza in front of the Union Station. Mr. Maddox parked in the plaza, hurried into the vast, white stone station, shouldered into a telephone booth and put in a call for Loughvale Farm, estate of Colonel Jephtha Montgomery, west of Reisterstown, Maryland.

There was some delay. Toll coins were requested, and the irritated voice of Colonel Montgomery rasped in the receiver.

"Joe Maddox, Colonel."

"Who? Maddox? At this hour?"

"Sorry, Colonel. Your check for five thousand has been stolen. I thought you'd better know—and I'd like to speak to your son, please."

"Blast my check! You could have notified me in the morning! And what does my son have to do with it?"

"He'll doubtless explain."

Colonel Montgomery's voice went dangerously calm.

"Maddox, are you drunk? Cary has been in bed with a badly sprained ankle. He has no interest in my check!"

The telephone booth was hot. Mr. Maddox was perspiring. He wanted to swear and instead he spoke amiably.

"I wanted to ask your son about a Miss Faudre. D'you know her?"

"Know her?" the colonel barked. "Certainly I know my son's fiancée! Look here, Maddox, I don't understand all this! Just what might be your interest in Miss Faudre?"

Only a proud, brusque man could be so angrily offensive. And Mr. Maddox laughed.

"That's what I wanted to know, Colonel. Now get your boy to the telephone before you're sorry. Carry him if he can't walk. And don't give me any more of your damned snobbishness. It won't help tonight."

Colonel Jephtha Montgomery was probably apoplectic at such talk from his book-maker. A stifled sound or two hinted at it. But the colonel was not a fool.

"I'll get Cary," he said curtly.

MR. MADDUX mopped his face and swore under his breath. You couldn't figure the odds on meddling with the hearts of two youngsters.

Young Cary Montgomery had the love of fine thoroughbreds in his heart. The laughter in the photograph on Suzanne Faudre's dresser was like him. The picture and her engagement ring had justified this call. Now, unless Joe Maddox was wrong on all the signs, Cary Montgomery was going to be jolted. But Cassidy, the Masterton Agency and the police might jolt him harder.

Young Montgomery's anxious voice was in the receiver a moment later. "Maddox? What's this about Suzanne?"

"Son," said Mr. Maddox, "can you tell me why she would be seeing a man named Brossert tonight?"

Cary was hardly twenty-five, but the frosty blade of Montgomery pride met the question.

"Aren't you presuming, Maddox?"

"Brossert," said Mr. Maddox calmly, "was barred by the Jockey Club a few years ago. Murder and blackmail were whispered against him in the death of Constance Wayman, the movie actress. He's a rat with a title and a front. Masterton detectives are watching him now. How

about Miss Faudre's friendship with him?"

"I don't know the man," Cary Montgomery said tightly.

"Has Miss Faudre mentioned Phil Fanning?"

"No! Will you come to the point? Where is Suzanne now? She was returning to Washington this evening."

"I'd like to talk with her," Mr. Maddox said. "If you reach her first, keep her around until I see her. Lock her up if necessary."

"I want to talk with you, Maddox! Where are you?"

"I'll be busy," Mr. Maddox said, and hung up and left the stifling booth, thinking hard.

Facts about Suzanne Faudre were a little clearer. Her engagement to Cary Montgomery meant wealth once more, social position, freedom from worry. And she was in trouble and young Montgomery knew nothing about it.

Mr. Maddox was red-eyed, sleepy and his head hurt as he drove back to Baltimore. And the facts churning in his mind were harshly clear and hard with threat.

First—that murder rap for Joe Maddox was more certain each passing hour. Behind it were the threatening questions of old Maggie, the betting clean-up on Knight Sing, the mystery threads of Frenchy Brossert, Suzanne Faudre, Frisco Phil Fanning.

The Pimlico grandstand was a dark mass against the night sky, the horse barns were quiet before the dawn activity when Mr. Maddox showed his owner's badge to the gate guard and drove back to the tackroom where old Pop Harvey, trainer of the Maddox horses, should be sleeping.

Pop Harvey was snoring on his cot. A shake brought him upright, flailing arms wildly.

"Hold it, Pop," Mr. Maddox chuckled in the darkness.

"I dreamed I was throwed on the stretch turn an' the field was runnin' over me," Pop grumbled sleepily. "Christmas, Joe, what time is it? Where's a light?"

"It's almost morning and we'll talk in the dark. Are you awake?"

"Wait'll I get a swaller of tonic." A bottle gurgled. Pop coughed, smacked

his lips over the heady smell of good corn whiskey. "Shoot, Joe. That'd wake up a dead man."

"I wish it would, Pop. What are they saying around the barns about Knight Sing?"

"You get burnt on that'n too?"

"Not in the bankroll."

"You're the only one that didn't,"

Pop grumbled. "The word was out Somali Sue was ready to go. It busted all the stable hands flat. Wasn't enough money left to start a crap game tonight. They're still wondering what kind of stretch-juice Dink Blodgett pumped into that plater."

"What did Blodgett say?"

Pop's bottle gurgled again. Pop choked and coughed before he could answer.

"They musta fed the horse this stuff. Dink Blodgett swore he didn't have a dollar bet an' cussed because he didn't."

"How about his stable hands?"

"I asked," Pop said shrewdly. "They had tickets on Somali Sue too. That old Bo-jack nigger who works for Hadley Farms Stable in the same barn was the only lucky one. Had him two combination

tickets on Knight Sing. He was lendin' money to the other niggers all evening. Dollar out—dollar an' a half back on pay-day."

Mr. Maddox was instantly alert.

"So old Bo-jack cleaned up? Where is he?"

"Sleepin' in one of the Hadley stalls, I reckon."

"Get him over here quietly, Pop. I want to talk to him."

POP pulled on some clothes and left with a flashlight. Mr. Maddox bit off the end of a cigar and waited restlessly until Pop returned and said, "Here he is, Joe."

The light showed a big gaunt Negro in the doorway. Mr. Maddox could remember two decades back when Bo-jack had been an old-timer around the horse barns, with hair already white. Now old Bo-jack was stooped and shuffling, with a lifetime of track lore behind his sunken eyes.

The light went off and Mr. Maddox spoke quietly in the dark.

"How'd you happen to bet on that Blodgett horse, Bo-jack?"



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"Jus' had me a idea, Mist' Joe. Jus' a idea like ol' Bo-jack gits now'n then."

The match Mr. Maddox struck and held to the cigar showed the old Negro staring blankly, patiently. That was his story. He'd stick to it through any amount of browbeating and questioning. The tack-room went quiet, the cigar end glowed red in the dark as Mr. Maddox puffed and considered.

"Bo-jack, we've met around the barns for a long time."

"Hit's a fac', Mist' Joe," Bo-jack agreed humbly.

"Ever hear that I wasn't a square-shooter?"

"Never heered so, suh."

"If a man was to help me and he needed help later on, he'd get it."

"Hit's indeed so a fac', does you say so, suh."

"It'd help me to know why you bet on that 'Blodgett plater.'"

Pop Harvey coughed uncertainly in the silence that followed. Old Bo-jack's little cackle of laughter broke the pause.

"You is smart, Mist' Joe. Old nigger don' fool you. I bet my money 'cause I heered de man talkin' who know. Come with 'at Knight horse in de truck day befo' yest'day, he did, an' take er drink an' speak out to Mist' Dink Blodgett.

"Tie de tongue down,' he say. 'An' don' use no whip. Dis ain't no whippin' horse.' An' Mist' Blodgett say, 'Dis ain't no horse anyway. Somebody is crazy an' it ain't me.' An' de man say, 'Tie de tongue down, you fool, an' don' use no whip an' he win for you.' An' de yother man say mean-like, 'Don't matter no mind. He tie de tongue down an' he see about de whip or he know what happen.'"

"By golly, they did tie his tongue," Pop Harvey muttered. "A tongue strap and no whip. That don't sound like the horse was hopped. It sounds like somebody who knowed his business was givin' orders to Dink Blodgett."

"Knight Sing was vanned to the track the day before the race," Mr. Maddox mused. "Two men came with him—and Dink Blodgett got his orders straight. And one of the men knew how to get a winner out of that no-good plater."

"Yas, suh," Bo-jack agreed humbly. "He de man who know. Does I have me

er hundred to bet, I bets hit on dat man's say-so. I min' de time when he tole Mist' Sam Lucas to run Pygmalion in front all de way an' Pygmalion sure to win de Hudson stakes."

For a moment there in the dark little tack room Mr. Maddox felt something like gooseflesh. In twenty-five years the Hudson Stakes had not appeared on the Saratoga Springs card. Pygmalion was an English-bred horse that had died in the same railroad wreck that had killed Sam Lucas, who had trained for B.K. Barberry, the steel man—when Joe Maddox was a youngster. It was like hearing ghosts walk.

"Frisco Phil Fanning!" Mr. Maddox jerked out with conviction.

And old Bo-jack humbly agreed. "Yas, suh, Mist' Joe. You is smart. Ol' Bo-jack knowed him. De horse he like is de horse Bo-jack like. He de man who always know."

"My God!" Pop Harvey burst out. "Frisco Phil Fanning? Ain't he dead?"

Old Bo-jack's low cackle of laughter came again.

"Ain' no ghost drink at a pint of likker like he done. An' does he come back ghostin', he still de man who win for ol' Bo-jack."

"Pop, it's Frisco Phil," Mr. Maddox said. "God knows what all the answer is. But he's back. I spoke to him under the grandstand yesterday. Bo-jack, Knight Sing was entered as a Blodgett horse. But he was vanned in at the last moment and Blodgett didn't seem to know much about him. That right?"

"Hit's a fac', suh."

"Who was the other man who came with Frisco Phil?"

"Don' know, suh. Might ask de truck man. He broughten another horse tonight to Mist' Budwell Holmes. Sleepin' in de van now, he is. Talk say Knight Sing gonna be took on to 'Gansett in dat truck."

"Keep an eye on it," Mr. Maddox said promptly. "Tell Pop Harvey if it starts to load. And I won't forget this."

POP HARVEY waited until the old Negro shuffled away. Then, almost with awe, Pop said: "Frisco Phil! What's it mean, Joe?"

"Plenty," said Mr. Maddox heavily.

"Dink Blodgett and Bud Holmes are two gyp haltermen who haven't been a jump ahead of their feed bills and shipping since the saliva tests made it risky to hop their horses. Now Dink gets slipped a sure-fire winner guaranteed by Frisco Phil—and the same van brings another horse tonight for Bud Holmes."

"I'm bettin' on him when he runs," Pop decided promptly. "Looks like another sneezer comin' up. Holmes has entered a horse named Brasbabe in the third tomorrow. Fourteen hundred claiming race, three years and up, non-winners this year, mile and forty yards."

"I think you're right, Pop. The stewards and the talent will be watching Dink Blodgett. But Holmes can spring a hot one and get odds. And the devil only knows who's using those two gyps for a front."

"Frisco Phil's hitting 'em again," Pop guessed promptly. "Christmas, Joe, I never thought I'd see a high-flyer like him in action again."

Mr. Maddox chewed the cigar. His eyes were hard in the darkness.

"Frisco Phil's best days were peanuts to this, Pop. Frisco's a bum today and looks it. But he still knows horses. Somebody's giving him cakes and coffee money and using him. I'm trying to spot the angles. It's big. Big enough for murder."

"Murder, Joe?"

"One murder at least that'll be laid on me," Mr. Maddox said grimly. "And God knows what else. Plenty of hurt and unhappiness for anyone who gets in the way. If I can find where those horses were vanned from, I might be able to do something."

Mr. Maddox' growl was baffled. "But I haven't got enough time. If the cops aren't looking for me now, they will be any hour. It's a hell of a mess. You watch that van. It may take Knight Sing back where he came from."

"Anything else, Joe?" Pop asked slowly.

"Nothing you can do, Pop. I'll see you later."

Baltimore was still asleep when the big blue sedan whispered back downtown. Mr. Maddox felt sodden with weariness. Pain in his head grew worse as he tried to think. The angles so far only made the

picture grimmer. Nothing he found out would clear Joe Maddox of murder.

On a sudden decision Mr. Maddox stopped at a hotel where he was not known. He paid for room and bath, told the clerk to garage the automobile, left a call for eight A.M., and pushed a five dollar bill across the counter.

"I'm tired, son, and you can save me some trouble," Mr. Maddox told the clerk. "Try all the other hotels and see if a man named Brossert is registered. Or a Miss Faudre. Leave a note in the rack telling me what you find."

A few minutes later Mr. Maddox was snapping off the bed light. Almost instantly he was asleep.

The insistent telephone brought reality again. Mr. Maddox blinked at sunshine pouring through the window. So the cops hadn't closed in on Joe Maddox yet. The headache was gone. New energy was back.

"O. K., sister, I'm awake," Mr. Maddox told the operator. "And get this long-distance call through right away. William Clymer, at the Hidalgo Apartments, Jersey City. If he's not there, get him no matter if he's in China. Got it? . . . Fine. Put on Room Service."

Room Service answered and Mr. Maddox ordered rapidly.

"Orange juice, coffee, toast, four eggs and a double rasher of bacon. Get a barber up here in ten minutes. And I want a white shirt size 17, 36 sleeves; a pair of size twelve black silk socks, underwear for a forty-six waist, and the morning papers and any messages. Got all that?"

Mr. Maddox was whistling as he hurried into a hot tub. The telephone brought him heaving out, snatching for a bath towel.

"Your party is waiting in St. Louis," the operator said. "Just a moment, please."

Billy Clymer's yawning voice came on the wire.

"Joe, do you have to get me out a little after seven? I got in from Chicago after midnight."

"Go back to sleep and I won't tell you what's going to break today," Mr. Maddox invited.

Billy Clymer was wide-awake at once.

"Something I ought to know, Joe?"

"Did you get a report on Knight Sing yesterday?"

BILLY CLYMER was a top man in the Jersey Syndicate that took big bets and lay-off money from all over the country. Now Clymer's reply held anything but sunshine.

"I was still getting calls about it before I left Chi last night! How much white meat did you lose?"

"None. Which shows it's safer to be close to dynamite," Mr. Maddox chuckled. "They kept the money out of Baltimore. Billy, I've got a hunch Knight Sing ran his race straight."

"It's a lousy hunch," Billy Clymer differed. "Not the way dough was laid out on that bum. They knew what they were doing. We've spotted over a dozen of the punks who backed Knight Sing. They're all smoothies."

"Who's pulling the wires?"

Billy Clymer's colorless threat was not an illusion over the wire.

"It'll be too bad when we find out. What was that you said about something breaking today?"

"Another hot one may go today."

"Sure about that, Joe?"

"It's a hunch. Maybe I'm wrong."

"We'll make you wrong," Billy Clymer said in the same flat, hard voice. "I'll have a couple of boys at your hotel in an hour or so. They'll take care of everything. Who's the jockey and owner?"

"Keep your slug-mugs out of this," Mr. Maddox ordered bluntly. "I've been in this game thirty years without helping toss a race and I don't start now. I told you I had a hunch Knight Sing won straight. The books were outsmarted. Maybe the play was crooked other times. Maybe it'll be crooked again. But I've got another hunch that the horse going today will run straight too. So leave him alone."

Billy Clymer was angrily incredulous.

"You tell me another slug is coming and then say hands off! To hell with that, Joe! What's the idea of calling me if you won't come clean?"

"I want to know who's behind it, Billy. Get me twenty grand come-back money and I'll back the horse off the board at the last minute so the books will be protected."

"Twenty grand!" Billy Clymer snapped. "I can have it fixed for a hundred if you lay off being so lousy pious! Gimme the horse and forget it."

"No strong-arm stuff if the horse is running straight. I'll have him backed down on the board—and that's all. Take it or leave it."

"Twenty grand to keep your conscience happy!" Billy Clymer groaned. "All right, Joe—I'll take it. Where do you want the money?"

"Send it to Oscar, at the Hotel Dundalk."

"Soon as the banks open it'll be there, Joe. Don't make any mistakes. If the books get gouged after putting up that much dough, they won't like it."

Billy Clymer did not sound very threatening. He didn't have to. Joe Maddox understood. Clymer wasn't the best or the worst of the big bookies. But they were all hard. They had to be. When they put out money, they wanted results.

"*A merry life and a short one. . . .*" Mr. Maddox hummed, and caught up the bedspread and used it like an Indian blanket as a knock announced Room Service.

A bell hop came in with packages, newspapers and a message in an envelope. A white-coated barber followed with his kit. And the barber had almost finished a quick shave when breakfast arrived.

Wrapped in the bedspread Mr. Maddox attacked the breakfast tray with gusto, leaving newspapers and message until later. The bacon was just right, the eggs were perfect. Sitting there Mr. Maddox reveled in the illusion of peace and well being.

His deep breath of contentment was genuine when he finally stood up and reached for the clean linen. A few minutes later, rested, bathed, well fed, Joe Maddox once more was the big, bland, vastly impressive bookie.

One thing only was missing. Mr. Maddox scowled as he glanced at the finger from which the big diamond had been taken. But that was a matter to be settled. A final pause to light one of the fat black cigars and Mr. Maddox opened the envelope that the night clerk had left for him.

Miss Faudre and Mr. Brossert were not registered at any hotel.

Mr. Maddox said, "Damn," without animosity and swiftly perused the newspapers. There was no mention of the body having been found.

For a moment Mr. Maddox drew

thoughtfully on the cigar and eyed the telephone. The police might have Oscar now, might be watching his telephone. Calling Oscar was a risk that might mean quick arrest.

Mr. Maddox picked up the telephone.

CHAPTER FIVE

Mr. Maddox Takes a Trip

OSCAR answered and his voice went up to a wild note. "Where you been, Joe? What you been doing?"

"I've been asleep. How's everything?"

"Asleep?" Oscar cried bitterly. "And me putting in a night like I have! Four o'clock, Joe, this Colonel Montgomery and his son bust in on me with blood in their eyes!"

Mr. Maddox whistled. "The Montgomerys, eh?"

"They want you! They want a guy named Brossert! They want a skirt named Faudre! Then they want you all over again, Joe! The young guy is hopping around on a cane and looking like he's going to make a pass at me any minute! They call numbers in Washington an' around here in Baltimore and ask for this Miss Faudre."

"Did they call the police?"

"Everything but that—an' I'm lookin' for it any minute after they come back from breakfast. Or maybe while they're out. And that Masterton cop, Cassidy, comes to the door around seven asking for you. And he ganders at them and starts fishing with questions."

"What'd the colonel say?"

"He gave Cassidy a freeze-out, like he didn't want anything known about the Faudre girl. And Pop Harvey telephoned a couple hours ago."

"You dim-wit, why didn't you say so? What did Pop want?"

"He's a screwball, too, this morning," Oscar said disgustedly. "Pop went on a tear last night. He was soused to the ears and singing barbershop chords. All I could get out of him was that he an' the driver killed Pop's last quart after day-break, and to tell you the man drove in last night from Loughvale Farm, out by Reisterstown."

Mr. Maddox' well-being and composure blew up.

"Loughvale Farm? That truck came from Loughvale Farm—Colonel Montgomery's place?"

"How do I know what place it is?" Oscar said peevisly. "I'm tellin' you what Pop Harvey said." Only then did Oscar get the full connection. "Joe, is that the Montgomery place?"

"It is. Are the Montgomerys coming back after breakfast?"

"I guess so. They're gonna see you or bust."

"If they get there before I do, tell them I'm coming!"

Mr. Maddox slammed down the receiver, jammed the cigar back in his mouth and was glowering as he made for the elevator. Pop Harvey must have awakened the truck driver and stayed with him drink for drink. And drunk or sober, Pop's information could be trusted.

That meant Bud Holmes had gotten his horse Brasbabe from Colonel Montgomery. And if Brasbabe, why not Knight Sing? When Mr. Maddox thought that far, nothing else was reasonable, nothing made sense.

A quick taxi let him out at the Dundalk. He was halfway across the lobby on his way to the elevators when his name was called.

"Just a minute, Joe."

Cassidy had been waiting in one of the deep lobby chairs. Cassidy needed a shave. Dark circles were under his eyes. He had evidently been up all night and looked soiled and haggard beside the clean-shaven, freshened assurance and the barbered blandness he got in reply.

"I knew something would spoil the morning," Mr. Maddox commented. "Why don't you crawl under a board, Cassidy?"

"Just getting in?" Cassidy asked.

"Just," said Mr. Maddox. "I hear you were up at the rooms looking for me. The answer is still no, whatever it is."

"Yeah?" said Cassidy. "There ain't any answer, Joe. Let's go. My car's around the corner."

"Too bad you waited, Cassidy. See me some other time. I'm sorry but I'm pretty busy right now."

"You'll be busier," Cassidy said. "This is a pinch, Joe—for murder."

Mr. Maddox kept his smile. But he

could feel the face muscles going stiff. In all the years he had brushed elbows with Cassidy around the country, the big detective had never looked quite like this. Cassidy had a heavy, bulldog grimness underlaid with something that was almost regret.

"Murder?" Mr. Maddox said.

Cassidy nodded.

"Don't try to stall, Joe. You're only a jump ahead of the Homicide men from headquarters. Neighbors found that body. He was a local guy named Smootsy Daniels, who used to take horse bets around town here. So they got in touch with our local office to see if he hooked up with any crooked work at the track. And a cop told another cop last night about the big guy with a diamond ring who was going to see the old lady who sold flowers on his corner. We got that description, Joe. It was good enough. Let's go. I want to talk to you before the Homicide men work on you."

Mr. Maddox had lost his smile, but not his composure or his irony. "What's gone wrong with your Brossert case?"

"Come on, Joe. I'll ask the questions."

Mr. Maddox jabbed a finger against Cassidy's chest. "Look, flatfoot, I'm going upstairs. Ask your questions there—or let the cops do it. Coming?"

Cassidy could have stopped the move toward the elevator. His hand made an involuntary movement to do so and then did not. Cassidy followed to the elevator.

THEY rode up in silence and entered the suite. Oscar came out of a chair in his shirtsleeves and eyed them uneasily.

"No word from them yet?" Mr. Maddox asked.

Oscar shook his head.

"The body's been found. Cassidy was waiting downstairs to make the pinch."

"I was afraid of it," Oscar said heavily. He moistened his lips. "Did you tell him you didn't do it, Joe?"

"It'll be a waste of breath but I'm going to. Sit down, Cassidy. Here's what happened up that alley last night. . . ."

Cassidy sat, listened as Mr. Maddox paced slowly and told about old Maggie's bet and what had happened at her alley room.

"Take it or leave it," Mr. Maddox finished with a shrug. "I've been trying to

find out what happened. Oscar, did those men say how long they might be gone?"

"I hung up after talking to Pop an' they said they'd go out and eat and be back later."

"They eat a lot or they're doing something else," Mr. Maddox growled. A sudden thought struck him. "Did they overhear any of that telephone call?"

"How could they?" Oscar snapped his fingers and looked sheepish. "Maybe I did repeat the name of the farm back to Pop to make sure I had it right."

"That was all they needed to know." Mr. Maddox smashed a fist into the other palm. "Breakfast, hell! They won't be back!"

Cassidy was leaning forward intently.

"Why won't they be back, Joe? Who were those two men? I've seen one of them around the clubhouse. What were they doing here?"

"Looking for Brossert and that Faudre girl. Where are those two?"

"I don't know," Cassidy grunted. "The men tailing Brossert got a flat tire last night and lost him. The girl was still with him—and she hasn't showed up at her Washington apartment. I've telephoned half a dozen times."

"So you're stuck," Mr. Maddox guessed.

"Who said so? Look, Joe, how does this daughter of Faudre, the French breeder, happen to be chummy with that old bum at the track yesterday?"

"Ask her."

Cassidy reddened. "This won't get you anywhere, Joe. Come clean with me and I'll do the best I can for you on that murder charge."

"But it'll still be a murder rap. The more I tell you, Cassidy, the less you'll need me. How about trading with you? I've still got a chance to make a few moves if I can get out of town fast. You can come along."

"Nothing doing," Cassidy refused promptly. "The agency is working with headquarters and I've got to turn you in. Lay it on the line here and I'll do what I can for you. But we ain't going anywhere but headquarters." Cassidy got to his feet. "What'll it be, Joe?"

Mr. Maddox sighed regretfully.

"Too dumb to be smart when you've got

a chance. All right, Cassidy, have it your way."

Mr. Maddox moved faster than most strangers would have thought possible for a man of his bulk. And at that Cassidy saw the fist coming and ducked almost fast enough. But not quite. Knuckles exploded along his jaw and knocked him staggering, half-dazed against the wall. And Mr. Maddox was on him, pinning his arms, jerking out to Oscar: "Get his cuffs on his wrists!"

Oscar recovered enough to obey. Cassidy's glare of anger forced Mr. Maddox to clap a hand over Cassidy's face. Oscar had to swing his weight on the arm Cassidy got free. Steel was on both wrists a moment later and Cassidy bawled: "You'll get the works for—"

Mr. Maddox stopped the rest with his hand again and heaved Cassidy's struggling figure back from the doorway.

"Towel!" Mr. Maddox gasped to Oscar.

Oscar tied the towel over Cassidy's mouth, and then blurted: "You're crazy, Joe! What a hell of a mess this'll be now!"

"Murder's worse!" Mr. Maddox panted. "Take it easy, Cassidy, before you get hurt!"

Cassidy was raging behind the towel. But he had stopped struggling. It was easier to get him over to the closet and push him inside.

"Sit down, Cassidy! You're going to be in there for some time!" Mr. Maddox shut the door, caught up a chair and propped the back under the doorknob and plunged for the bedroom.

Oscar followed. His agitation grew worse as he saw Mr. Maddox burrow into a kit bag and bring out a pistol.

"Joe, for God's sake, don't blow your top like this! Listen, Joe, take a drink and talk it over! You can smooth Cassidy down someway an' get a good lawyer! What are you gonna do with that rod, Joe?"

The pistol vanished under Mr. Maddox' belt. He eyed a skinned spot on his knuckles, rubbed it and growled: "Stop shaking! They won't hang you for this! Cassidy didn't have a warrant. Call Billy Clymer's office in Jersey and tell 'em that I can't take care of that come-back money.

I'll try to take care of the horse. Then scam where you won't be found easily."

"I'll go with you, Joe."

"I'll do better alone. Get the bankroll out of the safe as you leave. I won't need any of it."

"You only took another hundred last night, Joe. That won't get you far."

"Who said I was going anywhere? Beat it like I told you and keep your nose clean." And from the doorway Mr. Maddox said, "Good luck," and went out alone.

PASSING out through the lobby was its own ordeal. Each stranger might be a Homicide man. The taxi Mr. Maddox took to the garage where the blue sedan waited was not much help. He was being hunted. Time had run out on Joe Maddox. Minutes now were borrowed.

The Reisterstown road passed near the track where in a few short hours the horses again would be running. And by then Joe Maddox might be locked up, through for good with horses, tracks, all that had seemed worthwhile in the past years. Queer how an old flower woman and her one-dollar bet could have done this to a man who knew all the tricks of a hard-boiled game.

Out in the country Mr. Maddox drove fast and his broad face was hard. A man like Colonel Montgomery did not fit into all this. But neither did Suzanne Faudre.

Father and son had sounded innocent, upset over the telephone. They had driven into Baltimore hunting Joe Maddox and Suzanne Faudre as men without guilt would do. Then they had heard Oscar mention their farm and had left.

Mr. Maddox struck the steering wheel impatiently and swore aloud. If he could have found old Maggie, Suzanne Faudre or Frisco Phil! The Montgomerys offered little hope.

Some years back Mr. Maddox had driven out to Loughvale Farm on bookie business. This morning the countryside was as he remembered it, rolling and green under the spring sun.

Some three miles off the highway the whitewashed plank fences of Loughvale Farm made neat lines about the bluegrass pastures, and the brick horse barn was as neat as the old Georgian mansion of ivy-mantled red brick.

Maple trees lined the driveway. A coupe was parked before the house, and as Mr. Maddox came up fast from behind he saw that the coupe carried District of Columbia license plates and a girl was glancing through the back window at his approach.

D. C. tags and a girl promised Suzanne Faudre. Mr. Maddox stopped abreast of the coupe—and then stared with chagrin as, slim and trim in a summer suit and small straw hat, Anna Davenport stepped out and greeted him cheerfully.

"We do seem to keep moving about, don't we? Are you expecting the Montgomerys?"

Mr. Maddox joined her between the two automobiles. "So they're not here?"

"Do you know where they are?"—she asked.

She could not have had much sleep, if any, but she looked briskly fresh and competent. And Mr. Maddox was blandly without expression as he met her look. "I don't know anything. You're not over here for your health, sister."

"Good guess." She was smiling faintly. "You know what happened in Miss Faudre's apartment last night."

"What happened?"

"The Washington police are asking," Anna Davenport said with the same faint smile. "The maid went in with a pass key this morning and found the place ransacked and blood spots in the bathroom. She called the police and they were there when I telephoned once more. I didn't have to be kicked to hurry over there and find out what was happening."

"What was happening?"

"They were sure Miss Faudre had been injured, perhaps killed. But they had no idea where the body was and they were trying to get some idea where to start looking for it."

Still blandly without expression Mr. Maddox said: "So after talking with you, they're looking for me."

She caught her lip between nice teeth for a moment, then shook her head.

"You and your friend didn't bring a body out. Perhaps I was foolish in not saying anything. But you see, I had just done some more telephoning and learned that Miss Faudre had become engaged to Cary Montgomery two days ago. So I

drove over here to talk with him. The maid says that Colonel Montgomery and his son are expected. I've been waiting about half an hour. And now—do I get my story from you?"

"You said you were a very persuasive young lady," Mr. Maddox commented. His smile deepened to a chuckle. "You are. I owe you plenty. After I have my talk with the Montgomerys, I'll surprise you with a story."

"Is that a promise?"

"Promise," agreed Mr. Maddox. "And while we're waiting, I'll walk around to the stable and look at the horses."

SHE nodded. It was not hard to guess that she wanted to wait here for first speech with the Montgomery men. Mr. Maddox was smiling grimly as he walked back to the horses. The story would be too big for her society items. But the newspapers would have it anyway and she had earned it.

Top sections of stall doors were open. Several horses were looking out. Straw was being pitched from a stall near the other end. A forkful almost struck Mr. Maddox as he reached the doorway. The Negro youth inside grinned apologetically when he saw the stranger.

"Scuse me, suh. Didn't see you."

"All right, boy. Is this the stall Brasbabe had?"

It was a stable nigger and Mr. Maddox was used to them. He had guessed right. There was no hesitation in the grinning reply.

"Sure is. Went down to Pimlico las' night. Gonna win him a race today."

"Maybe not."

"Yas, suh. Sure will. Ought to see him run on de training track over at Cap'n Hill's place. Brasbabe run better'n 'at Knight Sing that done took our Somali Sue yesterday. Cap'n Hill gittin' mighty lucky."

"Boy, are you talking about Cappy Hill, from Kentucky?"

"Yas, suh."

"And Cappy Hill owned Knight Sing?"

"Cap'n Hill mostly train an' keep horses, suh. Don't know who own 'at Knight Sing or Brasbabe."

"Doesn't Brasbabe belong to Colonel Montgomery?"

"No, suh. Cap'n Hill's horse."

"What was Brasbabe doing here in Montgomery's stable?"

"Cunnel say Cap'n Hill short on stall space."

"Where is Hill's place? He wasn't around here several years ago."

"Bought him 'at old Scoggins farm two years ago, suh. You drives to 'at first crossroads an' goes right or walks de path through our pasture. Ain't far."

"Show me where the path starts," Mr. Maddox said.

The path started at a gate not far behind the stable. Buildings on the other farm were visible not more than half a mile away. Mr. Maddox gave the boy a half-dollar.

"Boy, my car is in front of the house. Don't tell the young lady waiting there where I've gone. Wait—here's another dollar to help you forget me."

"Ain't never seen you, suh. Ain't gonna see you till you walks back an' opens my eyes."

"Good. I'll open them with another dollar if they stay closed."

Mr. Maddox' broad face had betrayed none of his inner excitement. Now it carried him along the pasture path with long strides. Cappy Hill's name had been enough. From that whiskey little rascal one could expect anything.

Back in the palmy days of outlaw tracks Cappy Hill had been a jockey who knew all the crooked tricks from saddle batteries to bogging a good horse in a pocket. Later as a gyp halterman Cappy had specialized in broken-down horses that could be patched up to win once more. Finally Cappy had settled in Kentucky to board and train horses for other haltermen.

Talk a year or so back had said Cappy had moved to Maryland. Now Cappy Hill—and Colonel Montgomery! Mr. Maddox spat and walked faster.

HE COULD tell when he got on Cappy's land by the rundown fences and close-grazed grass. Horses, to men like Cappy, were animals that ran. Only fools spent more than necessary to keep them running.

Then from a rise of ground the farm



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**DETECTIVE
TALES**

buildings could be seen dilapidated and in need of paint. Fences around the little training track were sagging and half down. Clean-lined thoroughbreds out on pasture grass were the best sight. Good or bad, broken-down or ready to go, those dainty, hot-blooded running horses warmed the heart.

Exercise boys rode two horses toward the training track as Mr. Maddox came up behind the barn. And inside the barn a voice was swearing in high-pitched anger.

"Told you to keep away from the house! You ain't the first dirty little stable bum I've beat sense into! Git them hands down!"

A whip swished and cut—the victim whimpered with pain. High-pitched swearing was spaced by grunts as the blows laid on.

Mr. Maddox reached the open end of the barn and took in the scene with a glance. The undersized stable kid being laced with a riding whip was white, ragged and dirty enough, with shirt sleeves cut off at the shoulders.

Eleven or twelve years, Mr. Maddox guessed, undernourished, overworked and hoping to be a jockey. The bony, bow-legged, little man beating him had scraggly gray-streaked whiskers and fluent profanity that covered Mr. Maddox' approach to his back.

Mr. Maddox caught the whip as it swung back. His other hand clamped on the old man's scrawny neck.

"Bad business, Cappy," Mr. Maddox warned coldly. "One of these kids'll knife you some day. Beat it, son."

The boy knuckled tears across his streaked face and ran back into the barn. Cappy Hill erupted fresh profanity and raged: "Leggo my neck! I'll cut you with a knife myself! Who'n hell are you?"

Cappy Hill twisted with whiskers bristling, eyes popping with anger. Not until a second look did he recognize the intruder. "Joe Maddox! What'n hell d'you want?"

"Where's Frisco Fanning?"

"Don't know who you're talkin' about! Git outa here! I ain't got business with you!"

Mr. Maddox had plucked the whip away. He prodded the handle against the smaller man's chest for emphasis.

"I'm in a hurry, Cappy. Where's Fanning? We're going to talk about Knight Sing and Brasbabe."

"Knight Sing?" Cappy Hill's look turned cunning and jeering. "Ask the judges at the track or Dink Blodgett who run that horse. Ain't anyone but a sore-headed bookie can squawk about that win! I tied his tongue down an'—"

"Frisco Phil tied the tongue down," Mr. Maddox corrected. "Where is he?"

"Keep your damn hands offen me, Maddox!" Cappy's dodge failed to evade the big hand that caught his neck again.

"A cheap little crook like you never spread the dough that was placed on Knight Sing," Mr. Maddox said coldly. "Who backed that play? What's Colonel Montgomery got to do with your horses? Do you spill it to me or do you want the cops asking questions about that dead man?"

Cappy's eyes turned venomous again as he looked up from the hand on his neck. "I don't know nothin' about a dead man, Maddox!"

"Or that flower woman?"

"Ner that old bag either!"

Mr. Maddox galvanized into energy. "Know she was an old woman, do you? Know all about her, do you? Then you know who killed that man in her room and heisted my ring and money! We'll get it now and get it quick!"

"Here's what you get!" a clipped voice said. "Lay off Cappy and back up there against the wall!"

CHAPTER SIX

Frisco Phil Fanning

MR. MADDOX looked over his shoulder before the voice finished. A dozen steps away in the sun-drenched barn doorway a stocky young stranger was coming with a revolver.

Cappy Hill squalled with fright as Mr. Maddox hurled him staggering at the doorway and followed faster than seemed possible in a man so big, bulky and apparently clumsy.

The revolver shot blotted out Cappy's squall. The bullet hit Mr. Maddox' left arm like the numbing strike of a club. And Cappy Hill reeled into the young gunman and knocked him off balance and

Mr. Maddox hit them both with the bull-like charge.

A second wild shot past Cappy sent scorching powder particles against Mr. Maddox' broad cheek. And Mr. Maddox hooked a big fist over Cappy's graying hair and smashed knuckles square into the gunman's upper lip and nose.

The knuckles backed by Mr. Maddox' plunging weight all but lifted the man off his feet as he went back. The shock of it jolted back to Mr. Maddox' shoulder. And he swept Cappy Hill aside to get at the man who dropped in a daze, bleeding from flattened nose and pulped lips.

He was trying to sit up when Mr. Maddox snatched the revolver, lifted it to club down and changed his mind. A shove drove the man down again.

"Take it easy!" Mr. Maddox panted.

Cappy Hill had scurried around the corner of the barn. Mr. Maddox let him go and made a quick frisk of the man on the ground. The .38 revolver had been in a shoulder holster. A billfold inside his coat was fat with money. Mr. Maddox flipped it open and thumbed fifties and hundreds.

"Must be dough in your racket," Mr. Maddox panted.

His thumb felt a suspicious bulge in the change pocket. A moment later he had the big diamond ring that had been tucked in there out of sight. Joe Maddox' lucky ring.

Mr. Maddox' left arm was starting to hurt. The wound was bleeding down his arm and the arm itself would not be much good in a short time. And Mr. Maddox ignored it as he turned the diamond so that the sun flashed coldly brilliant from the facets. With a final deep breath Mr. Maddox put the ring on his finger and growled: "It's lucky—but not for you, brother! Get up!"

The sullen young man was obeying when the frightened break of the stable kid's voice came from a hiding place somewhere up in the hay storage.

"Look out, mister! They're comin'!"

Mr. Maddox yanked the young man close and swung him as a shield as two men came running from the house. They were well-dressed, smooth-looking, and a Cassidy or a Joe Maddox could spot the type in any crowd. And if they parted and circled out warily, it was not because they

had doubts of what they were going to do. They could get at him better from different angles.

"Take a dive, Happy!" one of them shouted.

"Try it!" Mr. Maddox snarled at his man's back.

The two exercise boys were galloping their horses back to the trouble. But when they sighted what was happening, they reined the horses well out from the end of the barn.

"Dive, damn it, Happy, an' we'll get that guy!"

Happy's profanity was lurid through his blood-smear lips. "Watch what you're doin'! He's got a gun on my back!"

Mr. Maddox had been adding the odds faster than he had ever figured a field of horses. The old house stood some distance from the back-country road. The barn was still farther from the road. Fields and pastures on all sides isolated the place as effectually as walls. And more men might be coming.

Mr. Maddox spat.

"Come on back in the doorway here, lug!"

He had three or four shots in the revolver. His own automatic had a full clip. But it was not much to hold them off. Slowly Mr. Maddox backed his captive into the yawning doorway where no one could get a shot at them from the side. And he was thinking of the other end of the barn when the hidden stable kid shrilled warning of the danger Mr. Maddox suspected.

"Shotgun behind you!"

Shotgun! You couldn't miss with that! Mr. Maddox dived to the stable floor without looking around. He was still dropping when a shotgun at the other end of the long barn roared deafeningly. And Mr. Maddox felt shot pellets striking through his clothes like needles of fire.

But they were only scattered pellets flying below the main string of shot. Happy got the full spreading charge in a cutting, slashing sleet of metal. His scream of pain was bloodcurdling.

MR. MADDUX sprawled in the scattered straw and filth of the dirty stable floor and scrambled around to face the back of the barn. Cappy Hill was a

bowlegged, whiskery gnome back there frantically pushing a shell into a single barrel gun.

Mr. Maddox opened fire from the floor. At the second shot Cappy Hill gave a convulsive jump, dropped the shotgun and dodged toward a side door that was hidden by stall partitions.

Dirt splattered viciously against Mr. Maddox' cheek as an automatic slug from outside struck close to his head. Swearing, he clawed over to the right into the dubious safety of an empty stall.

The guns outside were blasting through the doorway. Bullets were slamming and splintering into stall boards. Horses further back in the barn were whinnying with fear and plunging about in their stalls, trying to escape.

One high-strung, frantic thoroughbred broke through the canvas barrier that held him in his stall. Then a second and a third did the same and the three horses bolted madly about the interior of the barn.

"If I ever get out of this, I'll buy into an old ladies' home!" Mr. Maddox promised savagely, and he thumbed the safety off his own automatic and moved on his knees to the front of the stall with cold deliberation.

But as he made the move, the men outside stopped shooting to reload or run in close to the doorway where they could blast him out of the stall. They didn't know he had the automatic.

Two snorting horses bolted past and rushed outside. And Mr. Maddox spotted the shadow of a man coming along the side of the barn to the doorway. He fired an instant later when the rash bulk of the figure showed itself.

Wood splintered just above the man's head and Mr. Maddox damned the angle at which he was shooting. The man had leaped back out of sight and now he bawled: "Joe! Joe Maddox!"

"Cassidy!" Mr. Maddox answered with sour disbelief.

"Put up that gun!" Cassidy yelled. "You damn near shot me then!"

"It should have been done long ago!" Mr. Maddox snapped. "If you're not helping those rats, come on in!"

Cassidy had a black, hard look as he stepped cautiously inside with a gun in his hand. But when Mr. Maddox stood and

stalked warily out of the stall, Cassidy looked in amazement and began to grin.

"If you'd grunt, I'd swear you were a hog, Joe! What were you trying to do? Dig a hole an' crawl in?"

"Laugh, you hyena!" Mr. Maddox retorted irritably. "Where did you come from? Where are those guys?"

"Collared," said Cassidy, sobering. "And one of them's damn near blind and tore up into raw meat by a shotgun. Did you do that, Joe?"

"I wish I had," Mr. Maddox growled. "Cappy Hill did it when he tried to cut me down from the other end of the barn. If I didn't cripple the little snake, I'll never like myself again. What the devil are you standing here for, Cassidy? Those guys are getting away! You want them, not me!"

"Yeah?" said Cassidy, reaching for Mr. Maddox' gun. "We want you all—an' we've got you all. Fork over, Joe. Homicide men from Baltimore and two state road police are out there. You aren't slippery enough to make it this time."

Mr. Maddox surrendered the automatic and Cassidy took it and stared at the other hand.

"Where'd you get your ring? And ain't that blood on your hand?"

"The rat that had my ring shot me. He's the one Cappy Hill cut up. You were too bull-headed to take my story, Cassidy! Now get it out of him—and find out where that old woman went! And then get to the bottom of this racket Cappy Hill's running with Colonel Montgomery. Or did you have any idea?"

"I get an idea now and then," Cassidy snapped. "I had that door in your room half kicked out when the headquarters men came looking for you. They'd traced you by asking questions around the corner where you ate evenings and the old lady sold flowers. This Colonel Montgomery and his son came in the hotel as we were leaving and I got a line on where you must be. We picked up the state men on the way out here and were hunting you at Montgomery's when a man called Montgomery's phone from this place and said you'd be killed if help didn't come quick."

"Don't tell me someone around here was trying to help me," Mr. Maddox snorted.

(Continued on page 108)

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(Continued from page 106)

"Let's see if we can find Frisco Phil Fanning. He's the key to a lot of this."

"Who?" Cassidy said, staring.

"Frisco Phil Fanning!"

"You're hurt worse than I thought. You're light in the head," Cassidy said without hesitation. "Frisco Phil's been gone so long there's whiskers on his memory. Come on, Joe, can you make it to the house?"

THE stable kid came down a wooden ladder near the center of the barn. He was still excited to the point of stammering.

"There's an' old g-guy in the house they call Frisco! An' an old lady too! I seen her at a window! That was why Cap'n was beatin' on me! Frisco's been stayin' drunk but they act like he c'n give orders too w-when he wants to! I've heerd him, an' even Cap'n listens!"

"Thanks, son," Mr. Maddox said. "See me when I've got a little more time and I'll show you what I think of that warning about the shotgun." And to Cassidy Mr. Maddox said quietly: "That old bum who tried to bet a hundred with me is Frisco Phil. And smart as he ever was with horses. I don't understand it—but if he's here, let's get the answer."

"I don't believe it," Cassidy said. "Not Frisco Phil." And in Cassidy's voice was a note of awesome disbelief.

By common consent they both hurried toward the big dilapidated house. And Cassidy had been right. There was plenty of help. Two plainclothesmen who would be from Baltimore headquarters. The two state men. And Colonel Montgomery and Cary Montgomery. All there—all gathering outside the house in shade from towering old trees.

Only the two exercise boys were missing. They must have ridden back across the fields when they saw the state uniforms. Cappy Hill was there, sitting on the grass and groaning as he held a towel under his shirt where a shoulder wound was bleeding.

The man Cappy had shot was stretched flat on the grass with a trooper working on his wounds. The other two gunmen were handcuffed and sullen. Mr. Maddox had

expected them to be, but his eyes widened at sight of old Frisco Phil with his arm around Suzanne Faudre and the two of them talking to Cary Montgomery and the colonel.

One of the Homicide men and Anne Davenport were questioning old Maggie, whose hat looked more forlorn than ever without the bobbing red rose in front. She was shaking her head stubbornly when she saw Mr. Maddox coming, and she broke off the conversation and called to him.

"It's needin' my money I'll be, with all this trouble. Have you got my money, young man?"

"Every nickel of it, Maggie. It was a lucky day for you. And will you be talking about that dead man in your room or won't you?"

"I will not," said Maggie, "and this pretty face from a newspaper and Charley Tobin that I've known since he sold papers on my corner will not be makin' me."

"She always was stubborn when she set her mind," Charley Tobin said with exasperation. He was a tall young man with sharp eyes that looked Mr. Maddox over.

"That him?" Tobin inquired of Cassidy.

"This is Joe Maddox," Cassidy assented.

"O. K. We take him for murder."

"Just a moment, gentlemen. I think I can settle this."

Mr. Maddox looked narrowly. The speaker was Frisco Phil, still seedy, threadbare and haggard. But sober now. And he didn't sound like a bum, didn't stand like a bum as Suzanne Faudre came to his side again and slipped her hand through his arm.

Old Frisco Phil patted her hand. They looked at one another. And the look, more than something Mr. Maddox suddenly caught in both their features, was enough to justify Mr. Maddox' exclamation.

"Young lady, if you're Suzanne Faudre—then he's Charles Faudre."

She said, "Oui," and patted Frisco's arm again, and her smile had an inner glow that made mockery of her yesterday's trouble.

"I brought this on myself," old Phil Fanning said and he was composed and resigned. "Maddox, you know how I made my first money. Neither you nor

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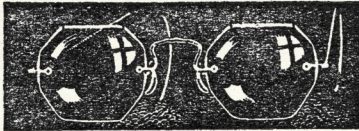
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anyone else knew that when I disappeared I went to France under another name and settled to breed horses.

"The great blood lines were there in Europe," Frisco Phil said, and he was talking to Mr. Maddox as to one who understood exactly what he was saying. "I loved horses. I understood them. That's how I could win on them. And as Charles Faudre I bred them as I'd always wanted to do. I bred for the greatness in the great blood lines so that the best in thoroughbreds would be better when I left it."

MR. MADDOX nodded. You had to love the turf for long years to get the vision of which Phil Fanning was speaking.

"I had my success," Fanning said quietly. "And then the armies came and wiped it out in a few days. All that I'd done, all that friends of mine nearby had done. Great stallions and mares shot, crippled, driven off to pull wagons and probably end up plowing fields. Suzanne got away in time. I—I stayed and saw it happen."

"Tough," Mr. Maddox said quietly. Old Phil Fanning smiled sadly.

"Hardly the word, my friend. It disillusioned me about men. They didn't deserve great horses. I got out of France with just enough money to get back home. I was through. All I wanted was to drink and forget it. But I couldn't keep away from horses. I went to Florida and worked around the stables. The stable hands who took my advice won their bets. Cappy Hill came to Tropical Park with some horses, heard about it and recognized me by this small scar at the side of my nose. One of his horses did that to me over thirty-five years ago. He thought whiskey was my trouble but he respected my judgment of horses enough to hire me. One job was as good as another as long as I could keep drinking and forget."

Frisco Phil sighed.
"Cappy was a thief at heart. He always was. But when he asked me about horses I told him. It didn't matter, not even when I knew he was betting on them, even to running them under other owners. I didn't know that a man named Brossert was his partner in plans he was making or that

Post-Mortem at Pimlico

Colonel Montgomery was talked into putting up some of the money that Hill needed at first. Or even that my daughter was more than casual friends with Colonel Montgomery's son, who changed a flat tire for her the one time she drove here against my wishes to see me."

Colonel Montgomery's face turned red as he caught Cassidy's hard look.

"Damn it, man, I can explain what I have done satisfactorily to the Pimlico stewards. I advanced money, a little over twenty-five thousand to be exact, on Hill's property and what horses he owned. I would have been glad if he had defaulted. Cary had decided he wanted this farm."

"The Masterton Agency is only interested in crooked work around the tracks," Cassidy said softly. "Fanning, you were saying—"

"I can say it briefly now," Frisco Phil said, standing straight and putting his hand over his daughter's hand. "Hill and this Brossert worked together. Hill furnished a horse that would win in some way, honest or dishonest. Brossert bet the money away from the track so that the odds stayed favorable. They made quite a bit of money after Colonel Montgomery's loan gave them cash to work with. They wanted more. They wanted millions. I didn't know that until Knight Sing was entered for his race. And then because he had to be certain I was right, Hill admitted in part that large sums were to be bet on Knight Sing. He warned me they didn't want any leak about Knight Sing's chances of winning. They didn't want any money bet on the horse at the track."

Frisco Phil shrugged.

"Other men's bets did not concern me. I went into Baltimore, drank too much and stopped to talk with this lady who sold flowers. It had become a habit when I was near her corner. She loved flowers as I had cared for good horses. Several times I had told her to make bets on other horses and they had won. She believed me when I told her on an impulse to have something on Knight Sing yesterday."

"She bet a dollar," Mr. Maddox said.

Frisco Phil smiled faintly.

"So she told me. I wish it had been more. When I met Suzanne at the track yesterday and heard that she was engaged



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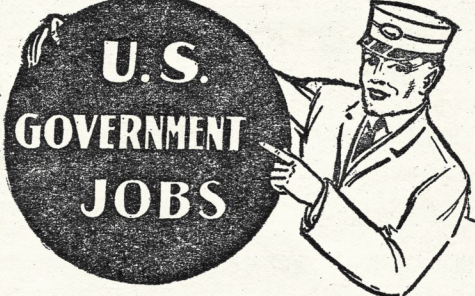
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to Colonel Montgomery's son, I borrowed a hundred dollars from her to bet myself."

Frisco Phil smiled slightly again as he looked at the brusque military bearing of the colonel.

"Suzanne's father was not exactly a credit to the Montgomerys and their friends. In a few minutes I stopped thinking about the past and began to think of Suzanne's future. I had no money. Suzanne had very little. I had to get money quickly. Knight Sing was the chance. But by then I understood it would be dangerous for me to be caught backing Knight Sing on the Pimlico board. I told Suzanne and she described you, Maddox, as a bookmaker Colonel Montgomery had pointed out to her. And then almost immediately Suzanne regretted and begged me not to invite trouble by showing any interest in Knight Sing."

"Joe Maddox didn't take your bet there at the track?" Cassidy asked alertly.

"No," Frisco Phil said, and Cassidy looked disappointed. "And I didn't know another bookmaker I could trust to pay off on that race. So I began to buy ten dollar tickets at intervals so the money would show gradually on the board. And I found that Suzanne had been right. I was stopped by that chap over there called Happy. He had a gun in his pocket. He made it plain I would do better to leave with him at once.

"And I'm afraid I still didn't understand the danger. I tried to explain why I wanted those tickets. The only result was a ride back to the farm here, a painful scene, threats, abuse, and demands

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Post-Mortem at Pimlico

that I give the name of everyone I had talked to about Knight Sing. I had already said that my daughter and this lady who sold flowers were the only ones to whom I had mentioned the horse. And then I learned that I had really put them both in danger. No talk about the race was wanted. It might ruin future plans.

"I didn't even know what they might do to me. But when there was a chance of leaving the house just after dark, I did so, cut through the fields to the highway and was given a lift in a stranger's automobile. I was going to Suzanne's house in Washington. I stopped to warn Maggie Summers. She was not on her corner. A newsboy told me where she lived."

"And they came for her," Mr. Maddox said.

FRISCO PHIL passed a handkerchief over his forehead and carefully wiped his palms.

"They came for her," he said quietly. "One of them. I was talking to her when he knocked and Maggie opened the door and he pushed in. He didn't see me standing behind the door. He caught her by the throat when she started to cry out. I knew

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30x5.25-17	2.45	1.15
28x5.25-13	2.45	1.15
28x5.25-19	2.45	1.15
30x5.25-20	2.50	1.15
31x5.25-21	2.80	1.15
31x5.50-17	2.75	1.15
28x5.50-19	2.75	1.15
28x5.50-19	2.75	1.15
30x5.50-19	2.75	1.15
6.00-16	3.15	1.45
6.00-17	2.85	1.15
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then he would probably kill her. A stove poker was the first thing I could catch up. I hit him hard—he was so much younger and stronger.”

Frisco Phil sighed.

“I hit him hard—and he was on the floor dead. It—it just happened. I was afraid he might have a companion waiting nearby. Maggie Summers and I went out the back door. I was stunned. I wanted to get to Washington and talk it over with Suzanne before giving myself up. Maggie Summers agreed to come with me. We took a bus. Suzanne had not returned but she had given me a key to her door and we went in and waited.

“And they came for me there. Suzanne had been approached by this man Brossert before she left the track. He wanted to talk about me. He suggested I might yet become wealthy again. Suzanne was foolish enough—or brave enough—to have dinner with him so that she might find out anything that might concern me.”

Frisco Phil patted his daughter's hand.

“We have been told Suzanne was not to be harmed last night. But when I escaped, when the man I had killed was found by his companion, Brossert was notified. He tricked Suzanne. He brought her here. And they guessed that I might come to Suzanne's apartment in Washington and looked for me there and found us both and brought us here. We have been rather hopeless, gentlemen. You see, I could not be allowed to give myself up to the police because of the publicity that would follow. And I could not be threatened into helping them further, because I wanted to give myself up. It seemed that the three of us might disappear as the best way out for Hill and his friends. They were waiting until the races were over today to decide what to do.”

“I wouldn't have told on him,” old Maggie said defiantly. “Not after bringing all the trouble on himself by helping an old lady like me.”

Mr. Maddox had noticed Anna Davenport taking notes. He looked at Cassidy as Cassidy snapped: “You're saying there was nothing phoney about that sixth race yesterday?”

“Not that I know of,” said Frisco Phil. “Knight Sing was a good horse if he was trained and ridden right. They made a

great deal of money on that race, I understand, and nothing can be done about it.”

“Kidnapping will settle them,” Cassidy said curtly.

“I want a word with Mr. Fanning,” Mr. Maddox said quietly. And when they let Frisco Phil step aside with him, Mr. Maddox said: “They're going to make a lot more money on Brasbabe today, aren't they? The bookmakers are really due to be cleaned this time.”

“I believe they think so,” said Frisco Phil. “I understand from talk this morning that every dollar they can scrape together is being bet by agents all over the country. They have no doubt from what I have told them, and what they have seen of Brasbabe, that he will win.”

“Will he?” Mr. Maddox asked narrowly. “It means a lot to me. Fanning.”

No doubt of it, old Frisco Phil was younger by ten years at least. A different man, with his head up and his look unreadable but strong and confident.

“I don't want this known, Maddox.”

“Agreed, if you insist.”

“They don't know that Brasbabe is blind in the left eye and will quit every time when the jockey tries to take him over to the rail with horses running on that side. He has to get out ahead and stay there or run the hard way toward the outer rail where he isn't crowded. That's why he's never had any luck and is known as a quitter. He's number six in a ten-horse race today, according to the scratches we heard over the radio. The jockey will take him to the rail fast and he'll quit. I was going to tell the boy what he had to do to win. But now—”

“Now he quits—and Cappy Hill and his pals get cleaned. Cappy even loses this farm to Montgomery.”

“I believe so. I would bet on it.”

“What Frisco Fanning bets on is good enough for Joe Maddox,” said Mr. Maddox with a growing smile of relief.

And Cassidy noticed that sudden good humor as they turned back and called: “You get the breaks this time, Joe—but wait.”

Mr. Maddox chuckled.

“I can't wait for you, Cassidy. Those flat feet slow you too much. I've got business to do and no time to lose after this arm is fixed.”

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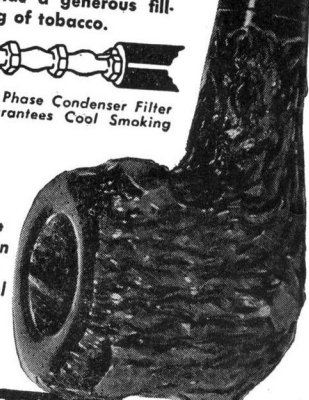
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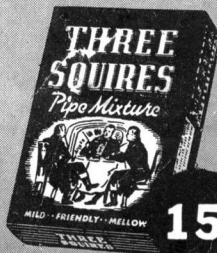
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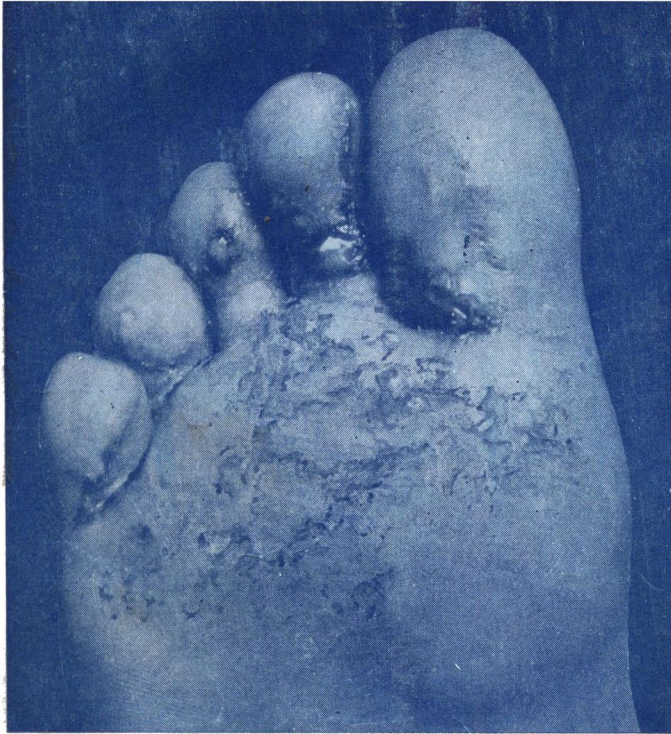
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ATHLETE'S FOOT



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According to the Government Health Bulletin No. E-28, at least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is both contagious and infectious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

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The germ that causes the disease is known as Tinea Trichophyton. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to destroy the germ, whereas, upon contact, laboratory tests show that H. F. will kill the germ Tinea Trichophyton within 15 seconds.

H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. H. F. gently peels the skin, which enables it to get to parasites which exist under the outer cuticle.

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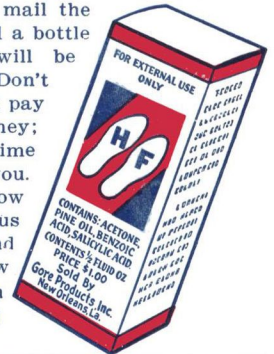
As soon as you apply H. F. you may find that the itching is relieved. You should paint the infected part with H. F. each night until your feet are better. Usually this takes from three to ten days.

H. F. should leave the skin soft and smooth. You may marvel at the quick way it brings you relief. It costs you nothing to try, so if you are troubled with Athlete's Foot why wait a day longer.

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