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MAY

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by

C.P. DONNEL JR.



3-COMPLETE SERIES CHARACTER NOVELETTES-3

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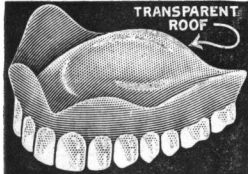
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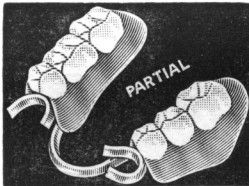
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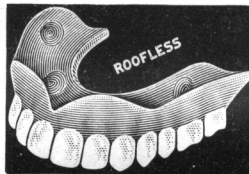
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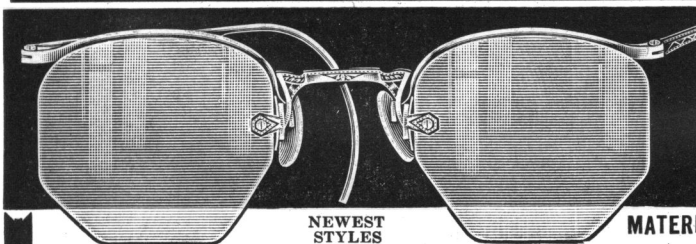
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Signal Corps

"I am now a Sergeant in the U. S. Army, Signal Corps. My duties cover Radio operating, maintenance of Army Transmitters and Receivers, operating Teletypes, handling duties of the Chief Operator in his absence." SERGEANT RICHARD W. ANDERSON, U. S. Army (Address Omitted for military reasons.)

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Nearly every neighborhood offers opportunities for a part time Radio Technician to make good money fixing Radio sets. I give you special training to show you how to start cashing in on these opportunities early. You get Radio parts and instructions for building test equipment, for conducting experiments that give you valuable, practical experience. My fifty-fifty method—half working with Radio parts, half studying my Lesson Texts—makes learning Radio at home interesting, fascinating, practical.

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MAIL THE COUPON. I'll send you a Sample Lesson and my 64-page book FREE. Learn about my Course; the types of jobs in different branches of Radio. Read letters from more than 100 men I have trained so you can see what they are doing, earning. MAIL THE COUPON in an envelope or paste it on a penny postal. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 2ES9 National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.



BROADCASTING STATIONS (top illustration) employ Radio Technicians as operators, installation, maintenance men and in other fascinating, steady, well-paying technical jobs. FIXING RADIO SETS, a booming field today, (lower illustration) pays many Radio Technicians \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week extra in spare time.

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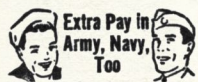
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10¢ DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE



EVERY STORY COMPLETE

EVERY STORY NEW—NO REPRINTS

Vol. 39

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We want to know if you are

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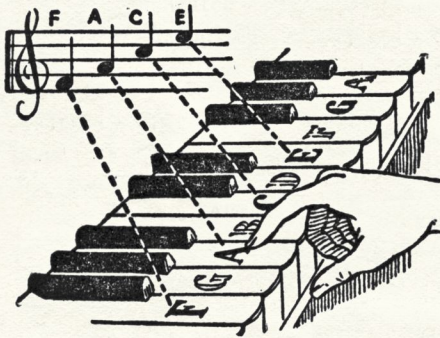
Black-and-white illustrations by John Fleming Gould

Watch for the June Issue

On the Newsstands May 6th

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

Check here if under 16 years of age.

*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional models.

THE JUNE THRILL DOCKET

A CORPSE for Cinderella—that's the title of PETER PAIGE'S smashing new Cash Wale novelette in our next!

It all began with the dog who liked beer. That was in the bubble-dancer's dressing-room where Benny Fox, producer-author of *A Prince For Cinderella*, which was due to titillate a resplendent first night audience in exactly fifteen minutes, raved:

"What is happening to me shouldn't happen to Hitler! On opening night yet! Listen, Cash, as a personal favor and for one hundred dollars, will you do it? Will you bodyguard Lorelei?"

Lorelei said: "Don't ask him if he'll do it. For one hundred bucks Cash Wale will sell his soul to the Devil and throw in his right eye for a bonus."

The lovely lady was damn near right—as you'll discover when you get going on this great new yarn about the half-pint shamus. *Is There An Undertaker in the House* is the first chapter—and from the opening till the end when Cash finds himself an air-raid warden it's guaranteed entertainment of the thrill-a-paragraph brand.

Bookie Barnes—in whose ten-ton behemoth of the highway you rode in *Over a Barrel* back in the March issue—is back to take you on another midnight jaunt up the Post Road with a corpse that *wasn't* a corpse for company. *Murder Without Death* is the title of this smashing new novelette of the men who drive the mammoth semi-trailers by night along the concrete danger trails. Bookie had carried plenty of weird freight in his career but this was the first time he'd hauled a coffin, the rightful occupant of which, refused to ride therein and instead, insisted on sitting beside the driver of its hearse.

The Dean is going to be back, too, to take you haunt-hunting on the trail of a bashful ghost. And there'll be other novelettes and shorts by favorite crime-fictioners to make the JUNE issue something pretty extra-special.

It'll be on sale MAY 6th!

Ready for the Rackets

A Department

Racketeers and swindlers of all sorts are lying in wait for you, eager to rob or cheat you of your hard-earned cash. All you need to thwart them, guard against them, is a foreknowledge of their schemes and methods of operation. Write in, telling us your own personal experiences with chiselers and con men of various sorts. It is our intention to publicize—withholding your names, if you wish—the information you have passed on, paying \$5.00 for every letter used. No letters will be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope, nor can we enter into correspondence regarding same. Address all letters to The Racket Editor—DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, 205 E. 42nd St., N. Y.

FROM Columbus, Ohio comes the account of a racket—not a petty one by a long shot—that we have encountered before with variations. It has been worked on furriers, manufacturing jewelers, dress designers and others. Men's tailors are not the only ones who should be wary of the set-up which follows—

Columbus, Ohio.
January 14, 1942.

The Racket Editor
Dime Detective Magazine
205 East 42nd Street
New York City.

Dear Sir:

There is a pair of slickers acquiring themselves quite a winter wardrobe at the expense of tailors in this part of the country.

A friend of mine owns a men's furnishing store which handles nothing but the very best quality in suits and overcoats. One day recently, a man whose manner was gentle and friendly stopped in the store and tried on several suits. Very carefully, with the fastidiousness of Beau Brummel, he directed the alterations that were to be made upon the three suits he had selected from the most expensive stock. Each suit was priced at \$75 and he made a down payment of \$15. His face was a study in self-confidence as he asked, "When is the earliest possible time you can have the suits ready?"

My friend hesitated a minute, mentally figuring the time it would take the tailor to make the necessary alterations. "Let's see, it is now 11 a. m. The suits should be ready by 4 o'clock this afternoon, I'm sure."

The "customer" handed my friend a calling card saying, "Just call me at that number." Mr. Saunders—the name inscribed on the card—was staying at one of the better class hotels in our city.

The suits were ready by 4:15, so my friend called Mr. Saunders at the hotel and told him he could call for them. It developed that Mr. Saunders was in conference.

(Continued on page 8)



Will You Let Me PROVE I Can Make YOU a New Man?



LET ME START SHOWING YOU RESULTS LIKE THESE

<p>5 inches of new Muscle</p> <p>"My arms increased 1 1/2", chest 2 1/2", forearm 7/8".—F. S., S. W. Va.</p>	<p>What a difference!</p> <p>"Have put 3 1/2" on chest (normal) and 2 1/2" expanded."—F. S., N. Y.</p>
<p>Here's what ATLAS did for ME!</p> <p>John Jacobs BEFORE John Jacobs AFTER</p>	<p>For quick results I recommend CHARLES ATLAS</p> <p>"Am sending snapshot showing wonderful progress."—W. G., N. J.</p> <p>GAINED 29 POUNDS</p> <p>"When I started, weighed only 141. Now, 170."—T. K., N. Y.</p>

CHARLES ATLAS

Awarded the title of "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" in international contest—in competition with ALL men who would consent to appear against him.

This is a recent photo of Charles Atlas showing how he looks today. This is not a studio picture but an actual unretouched snapshot.



Here's What Only 15 Minutes a Day Can Do For You

I DON'T care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add **SOLID MUSCLE** to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system **INSIDE** and **OUTSIDE**! I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!

What's My Secret?

"Dynamic Tension!" That's the ticket! The identical natural method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens—my way. I give you no gadgets or con-

traptions to fool with. When you have learned to develop your Strength through "Dynamic Tension" you can laugh at artificial muscle-makers. You simply utilize the **DORMANT** muscle-power in your own God-given body—watch it increase and multiply double-quick! into real solid **LIVE MUSCLE**.

My method—"Dynamic Tension"—will turn the trick for you. No theory—every exercise is practical. And man, so easy! Spend only 15 minutes a day in your own home. From the very start you'll be using my method of "Dynamic Tension" almost unconsciously every minute of the day—walking, bending over, etc.—to **BUILD MUSCLE** and **VITALITY**.

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"Everlasting Health and Strength"

In it I talk to you in straight-from-the-shoulder language. Packed with inspirational pictures of myself and pupils—fellows who became **NEW MEN** in strength, my way. Let me show you what I helped **THEM** do. See what I can do for **YOU**! For a real thrill, send for this book today. **AT ONCE, CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83T, 115 East 23rd St., New York City.**

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83T, 115 East 23rd St., New York, N. Y.

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."

Name..... (Please print or write plainly)

Address.....

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

(Continued from page 6)

He directed that the suits be delivered by messenger.

When the store's messenger arrived at the hotel, Mr. Saunders was sitting in the lobby in the middle of a group of several men. He got the room keys from the hotel clerk, gave them to the boy and asked him to take the three boxes up to his room. The messenger laid the three boxes containing the suits on the bed in the room, locked the door and returned to the lobby. Mr. Saunders was still apparently engaged in deep conversation. The messenger waited several minutes for the "conference" to break up before presenting Mr. Saunders with the bill for the \$210 balance that was to be paid on delivery. Mr. Saunders took out a check book and made as if to write a check. "I'll give you a check in payment," he said.

"But I am not permitted to accept a check," the messenger told him.

"In that case," Mr. Saunders ordered in a smooth, kind voice, "I'm afraid you'll have to go back up to the room and get the suits and return them to your employer. I'll call in the morning and pick them up myself and pay the balance in cash."

When the messenger returned with the suit boxes, my friend became curiously suspicious. He opened the boxes and found his suspicions well-founded. In the boxes he found three pieces of torn blanket. Mr. Saunders had had an accomplice hidden in the room when the messenger deposited the suits there and left. The accomplice hurriedly removed the suits and replaced them with the pieces of blanket. He then took the suits across the hall to his own room, from which he checked out at about the same time Mr. Saunders did—no later than five minutes after the messenger had departed.

Henry Mershon.

AND from Cleveland, Ohio comes the following account of a swindle which has been worked on other merchants besides jewelers. It's always a wise idea to make sure just what's in the wind before letting a stranger make or receive calls over your private phone or you may find you've been an unwitting party to a sucker trap.

Cleveland, Ohio.
January 2, 1942.

The Racket Editor
Dime Detective Magazine
205 E. 42nd Street
New York City.

Dear Sir:

This racket undoubtedly takes the cake. It clearly shows to what extent a criminal mind, using trickery and deception on un-

suspecting victims, can accomplish. I know, it was worked on me.

She was tall, and lithe, with languid blue eyes. As I glanced up from the work at hand, she threw me a bewitching smile. "Something for you, Miss?" I asked pleasantly. "If you please," she answered. "I'd like to look at some diamond rings." Seeing an immediate sale, I hurriedly displayed several trays of rings for her inspection. After inspecting several rings with an expert eye, she selected one, mounted with a large, blue white flawless stone. It was of one and three-quarters carats. "What is the price of this ring?" she asked sweetly. "Three hundred and seventy-five dollars," I assured her. "I'll take it." Handing me fifty dollars, she said, "Charge the balance." I guess my face registered a look of amazement, for she hastily added, trying to allay my fears, "My name is Goldie McMahon. Father is president of Corn Exchange." She had named one of the larger banking institutions in the city. "You may call him for your convenience," she reminded.

"Thank you, Miss McMahon. It's customary to have credit established before any sales can be charged," I answered. She had reached into her purse, and handing me a small white calling card, she said, "You'll find father's private phone number on that card."

I called Mr. McMahon, whom I knew casually. He answered that it was perfectly all right to let his daughter have the ring. That he would settle the account later. She left, taking the ring with her. It was not until sometime later that I found out I had been swindled.

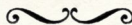
When no attempt was made to settle the account, I called Mr. McMahon. His voice registered surprise, and consternation, when I reminded him of the debt he'd incurred. "But I have no daughter," he remonstrated. I stammered an interjection. "No 'but' about it, I have no daughter," he answered angrily. A few minutes later, I was ushered into his private office, at the Corn Exchange Bank. Then I found out what had happened. On the day the purchase had been made, Mr. McMahon had been interviewing a prospective customer. A Mr. Wendle Caraway, relative to an important real-estate deal. "Mr. Caraway," Mr. McMahon said, "made a previous call over my phone. He simply stated that his wife was to call him back later." Then, when I called, Mr. Caraway had answered the phone, assuring me it was perfectly O. K. to let Miss McMahon have the ring.

I found out to my sorrow how the time element in a perfectly executed crime can spell success for crooks.

Clever? I'll say!

Sincerely yours,

Chester F. James.



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Genuine-Late
UNDERWOOD
NOISELESS

Now
\$44.85
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MFRS. ORIG. SELLING PRICE \$125.00

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 Latest achievement in typewriters! Provides writing perfection with **SILENCE**. For those who want the advantages of a quiet home or office. This Underwood eliminates the nerve shattering clatter common to many models. An aid to better work because it allows clear thinking, reduces fatigue, improves accuracy. This typewriter disturbs no one, for it is almost impossible to hear it operate a few feet away. You get all the features of an Underwood **PLUS Noiseless typing**

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I back this machine with my personal 2-yr. guarantee that it is in A-1 condition and will give first class service. Over 30 years of Continuous Service and Fair Dealing backs this guarantee.

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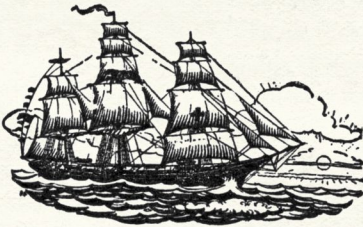
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Looking down, he saw the
sprawled, broken body of the
chauffeur.

MURDER IN THE FAMILY

A Marquis of Broadway Novelette

By

John Lawrence

Author of "Murder, Come Back to Me," etc.

CHAPTER ONE

Bushwhacked!

THE Marquis was sitting, waiting, in McGuire's maroon convertible—on Fifth Avenue, in the extreme lower corner of the Broadway section.

The comfortable old bus was headed north, drawn in before a department store, into which the redheaded McGuire had vanished in search of a birthday present for a nephew.

It was the wildest sort of a chance that made him spot Dixie DeJong at all. He was dully fingering the money left in

his wallet following McGuire's quick touch for twenty. It was a gray, windy day. The noon-hour crowds swarmed on the streets. Trying deliberately to pick out an acquaintance in the throng would have been impossible. But the Marquis' somber blue eyes, accidentally drifting across the rear-view mirror above him, centered DeJong's swarthy, harshly-carved face and burning black eyes as clearly as in a painted miniature. He had just emerged from a skyscraper office building—the Hambly Towers—obliquely across the street, was stepping nimbly between parked cars out to the roadway.

The Marquis tingled from head to foot. He jumped, slid across, his head whipping round out the driver's window. The tall, bitter-mouthed youngish-looking grifter had turned and was walking rapidly away, modish in long green covert topcoat, green-and-gold silk handkerchief-scarf, dark green snap-brim and fawn spats.

No time for decision was necessary. The Marquis' small, black-gloved hand was snatching at the convertible's door-handle instantly, his eyes burning. He piled out, stumbling—and DeJong hopped into a double-parked Buick a quarter block down. Evidently the motor had been left running for, before the Marquis could hop through even the first line of heavy traffic that blocked him, the Buick's door had been banged and the car shot away.

Swearing, his temples flushed, he jumped back hastily up to the convertible's running-board to at least catch the license number, realized that it was one of the series issued to the U-Drive-It people—and DeJong suddenly whirled at the next corner in a long, sweeping left turn, almost piling up traffic as he coolly spun over toward Madison.

After one thin-eyed instant, the Marquis plunged back into the convertible. He found his wallet still clutched in his hand, flipped it open to show his gold badge neatly pinned inside and, even as he jammed down on the starter, waved the wallet at the department store's doorman. "Redheaded—chubby-faced man—Mr. McGuire—when he comes, tell him *DeJong—DeJong*—he'll know what it is—tell him I saw him and took after . . ." He spun the car out into traffic. He darted two blocks north to the next east-

bound street, then swung across eastward in turn.

He damned McGuire's nephew as he shot past Madison, head turtling. This was McGuire's specialty. The redhead could have twisted and scurried up and down blocks and fingered out the Buick in the space of minutes. All the Marquis, inexpert, could do was to drive straight on, hoping to catch a glimpse of the grifter down one of the cross streets or catch him going northward somewhere between here and the river.

He did not see any sign of him at Madison, or Park. At Lexington he sweated, trapped by a light, began to realize the futility of his wild dash as he coasted over the tracks on Third—and then, when he was a hundred yards short of Second, saw the harshfaced DeJong sail by unhurriedly ahead, on Second, going uptown.

He said, "Ha!"—goosed the convertible, sent it clawing over and up the wrong side of the street, waved the wallet out the window at the traffic cop as he came abreast and curled into Second and, by the time he had churned up into the Fifties, his deep-set eyes were glued to DeJong's license plates a half-block ahead.

NOT till then did he really dissect what he was doing. His only idea had been to chase the thief down, and force him into the curb and get his hands on him. Now, strictured in a street solidly choked with El pillars, trucks, busses and ordinary traffic, he had time to review it hastily—and that plan suddenly seemed insolvent.

Not that he didn't itch to lay him by the heels. DeJong was one of three or four people whom the Marquis actually feared to see in his precious Broadway district. An educated Tenth Avenue toughie, DeJong had started out as a mobsters' lawyer in the Bronx, had wrangled violently with a tough client regarding fees, had presently begun running into lead shower baths on dark corners and, because he refused to open up to the police, had found himself disbarred.

That had taken the wraps off his real talents. Within a week the body of the client was found floating, but neither then nor at any other time was DeJong even close to indictment—for anything. He

had himself carefully organized before he started, with a phalanx of politicians, and his razor-sharp legal knowledge was equaled only by his cold deadliness and boldness. Within a year, he had become the second known gunman to hold up the famous floating crap game and was presently credited with a string of bank-messenger robberies in Wall Street in which two private policemen were killed

ly Drouillard had had to retire on half pay. Come to think of it, *that* had been the result of a floater—issued by Cassidy and ignored by DeJong. Drouillard and another had been sent round to convince DeJong of the unwisdom of such ignoring—but the bitter-mouthed grifter had been prepared. He had planted a couple of politicians in his apartment and when Drouillard arrived had refused to admit

"Copper: I don't want trouble with you. So just take your foot in your hand and get back to Broadway where you belong." Thus ran the note left by that wily grifter, Dixie DeJong, after bushwhacking Lieutenant Marquis of the Broadway Squad on the Long Island estate where the little czar of Mazda Lane had trailed him. But, with badge and gun missing—and reputation at stake—the Marquis goes on to get mixed up in the amazing adventures of a million-dollar menage where the "daily double" meant arson and murder.

and which bankrupted an insurance company. He was suspected, but that was all—just as he was suspected uselessly of a whole calendar, including a mammoth bond-forging ring which the federals uprooted on the eve of operation. He was dynamite because he was both brainy and deadly. No underworld squealers had ever been able—or dared—to finger him. He was, in short, a prime candidate for the Broadway Squad's original technique of building fires under undesirables, and ordinarily a "floater" would have been in order—a swift and vicious invitation to get out of town.

But there was the long-unsettled maddening score of Patsy Drouillard.

That checked the Marquis—checked him relatively, that is. He clung tightly a half-block behind the Buick—till they reached Fifty-ninth, where DeJong angled over and swept up onto the Queensboro Bridge. DeJong had shot Patsy Drouillard. This dated from the time when Lieutenant Cassidy commanded the Broadway Squad and the Marquis, like Drouillard, was merely a rank-and-file member. DeJong had shot Drouillard, coolly and insolently. Not killed him—just smashed his leg with a bullet. But the leg had never healed properly and present-

him without a warrant. When Drouillard knocked him kicking into a corner, he had coolly drawn a gun, shot Drouillard's leg from under him and offered his partner the same—as the politicians appeared.

Legally, the Squad was helpless. And from then till he finally departed for Chicago six months later, DeJong never moved abroad without a legal bodyguard of six. The incident had been such a blow to the legend of the Squad's vicious invincibility that Broadway had had a crime wave. All sorts of thieves decided to stop being terrified into line, began thinking that the Broadway Squad wasn't so tough, that they were only twenty-two individuals after all. The chaos had more than a little to do with Lieutenant Cassidy's subsequent retirement and the Marquis' elevation to command. It had taken the Marquis almost two years to straighten the district out, to re-establish the vitally necessary paralysis of fear in the wolves and grifters that hovered over the world's greatest sucker-mine.

By the time they had decanted off the bridge and rattled through Queens, it was grimly obvious that a simple bum's rush out of town was flaccid treatment for the grifter ahead. Just what *to* do to him, he couldn't quite figure out as yet. And, at

that, a little caution before starting to do anything might not be a bad idea.

CONSIDERATION of that penetrated the Marquis' quick thinking as it became apparent that Dixie DeJong was heading for the Grand Central Parkway, through Kew Gardens. There was no reason to suppose that the thief had parked his razor-sharp brains back in Chicago. Certainly, he must have weighed the possibility of being picked up by the Squad, prepared in *some* way for it.

And there was the thought also that no petty larceny would bring DeJong all the way to New York—and into even the corner of the Broadway district. Whatever he was doing, it could be neither honest nor picayune. It could be richly worth while to go along, if it were conceivably possible to get a peek into whatever racket he was operating. And—apart from stopping him, forcing him from the Buick and shooting him between the eyes—no immediate alternative course occurred to the Marquis, anyway.

He dropped back when they were on the comparatively bare Parkway, then closed in again as they finally dipped down near Hempstead. He miscalculated and overshot the cross-island road, thinking DeJong was heading out the Turnpike, but he stopped, backed, fell in behind the speeding Buick again in plenty of time and was holding him just about where he wanted him when they turned into the South Shore Drive.

They drove through the Islips without slackening or hesitating before DeJong showed any signs of getting near his objective. Then, as they ran into the twisting section of the highway that was flanked by large, wooded estates, the Buick began to decrease speed.

Warned, the Marquis hesitated between lagging farther back and pulling up closer. If he were too close, a sudden stop might expose him, but if he were too distant, DeJong would be out of sight almost constantly around curves.

He shot around the bole of a giant maple that elbowed out literally into the roadway—and DeJong was just angling off the road eighty yards ahead, to the shelter of overhanging willows. Good fortune put a small criss-cross between the

Marquis and the slowing Buick and he turned quickly into it, ran twenty yards up the dirt lane and parked in roadside grass.

He got back to the hedge at the corner of the lane, snatched his hard hat from his rubby black hair and peered round just in time to see DeJong leave the Buick and stride quickly toward him. However, DeJong was not looking at the Marquis, but peering thin-eyed at the fringes of the estate whose tall trees hung out over the road.

At a certain spot, DeJong stopped, peered carefully in through the darkening woods, hesitated, threw a quick look up and down the road, then boosted himself atop what seemed to be a wooden fence, swung his fawn spats over and dropped inside, vanished.

When the Marquis reached the point of his disappearance, he found a small padlocked wooden gate. Inside the gate there was a winding path that was swallowed in among the thicker woods.

He stood there waiting, listening, for minutes, obsessed with curiosity. Enough wind stirred to obscure the sound of whatever progress DeJong was making. The Marquis reached a black-gloved hand for the gate, found he still clutched the wallet, pocketed it and swung himself noiselessly over. Again he stood listening, smoothing the tight black silk scarf at his throat, shrugging the chesterfield smooth on his blocky little shoulders. He transferred the service gun from his hip to his tight coat pocket, started delicately down the winding path.

He stopped short around the second bend as he perceived a small tool shack at the side of the path, posted with *No Trespassing* signs. He was always vaguely uncomfortable out of the city and especially so here on Long Island where he lacked any vestige of authority and where the local law, more often than not, was bitterly hostile to city cops.

He hesitated—and the glint of something golden, lying in the path just beyond the little tool shed caught his eye in the fading light. His forehead V'd and he stepped silently to it—and looked down at a gold double-eagle.

He stooped to pick it up.

Too late, he heard the whistling of the

long, knotted branch in DeJong's hand, as the grifter leaped from hiding, saw DeJong's stony face. He tried to dodge, stumble away, but the limb was too long. The heavy hardwood knot at the end slammed down on his expensive hard hat—and the Marquis blacked out in a roar of sparks.

When he came to, he was back in the convertible, slumped over the wheel.

HE STARED out, uncomprehending, sick and giddy. It was fully dark outside now. He could not conceive where he was—and then the whole galling picture swept back as his head cleared.

Fury and stinging shame shook him. His gloved hands went to his round, hard head, found the egg at the top of his skull and he winced as he touched it. Bushwhacked! He had been sucked in and bushwhacked like the rawest rookie! He fought frantically for a minute to struggle through pain and haze. Then his head jerked round, his teeth clenched and he snatched at the handle of the door. How long had he been out?

He snapped the car's lights on to look at the clock—and saw his broken hat on the seat beside him.

Propped on the crown, lying open, was his black wallet. In the black grosgrain lining of the wallet, there were now merely two pin holes.

His gold badge was gone.

He went white, then crimson, then white again. Then he spotted the folded note stuck jauntily in the stamp pocket of the wallet, snatched it out to jerk it open and read with swimming eyes.

Dear Copper: I don't want trouble with you, but if you want it you can have it. What I'm doing is none of your damn business and if you want to play smart, just take your foot in your hand and get back to Broadway where you belong. Otherwise, boy will I have fun with this tin and heater.

The Marquis snatched at his pockets, his face gray. His gun, of course, was also gone.

He was almost feverish, partly with rage, partly with near-panic, as he clawed out McGuire's spare pistol from the side-flap pocket. He flung himself out and

raced madly back to the wooden gate.

From there he could see that the Buick was no longer where it had been parked. He strained his burning eyes into the dark woods, ached in indecision. Now he could not even be sure that the cunning grifter had not merely used *this* spot as a dead-fall—that his real mission was not far, far from here. His only hope was in DeJong's historic, insolent boldness.

Two flat sounds, like the clapping together of hands, drifted from far away through the woods.

His head jerked up. The sounds were puzzling, indeterminate—but they were at least sounds. He swung half over the gate, hesitated—then realized chilly that he had nowhere else to go anyway and piled over onto the path. He ran up it, sweating, pencil flash in one hand, McGuire's pistol in the other.

The path ran on forever, it seemed, twisting and turning. He found nothing, heard nothing. He shut his mind desperately, refused to think what the sardonic, scheming DeJong could do with his badge and gun—and do *to* his painfully-maintained dignity and prestige on Broadway. There was no limit to the agonizing possibilities that the thief's diseased imagination could devise. In anybody's hands, they were dynamite. In DeJong's—a time-bomb. If he had to murder the harsh-mouthed, bespatted grifter in cold blood, it was almost worth while—if he got his property back. Fate had cooked up a superlatively agonizing, monstrous jest. Any cop losing such things to any crook would face trouble. The Marquis, losing them to Dixie DeJong, could expect disaster—if he could not somehow drive in and retrieve them at once—before they could be put to use.

Then—when he had plunged and stumbled for more than ten minutes—the cream of the jest.

From a point fifty yards to the Marquis' left, through the solid woods, came a sudden roaring pow! like a burst paper bag in his ear, jerking him to a stop. Glass tinkled.

Almost instantly, a rosy glow began to seep through the thick woods—and then the harsh crackling sound of fire rose up.

HE CAUGHT his breath—and the rising glow shone through chinks between trees, lit up a way through the maze. He turned and darted, side-skipping nimbly as he raced toward the mounting fire.

He burst out into a semi-circle of cleared space in which stood a small, yellow-painted cottage. Flame was licking out of every crack in the house and shooting high out of the fieldstone chimney. The glass was all out of the windows and the door sagged on one hinge, wide open. Inside was an inferno.

An unpleasant sour smell hung on the air.

He ran out and around toward the front, stumbled and thumped to his knees over a huge, yellow-painted cylinder hidden in grass. It pointed up to a little valved nozzle at the top—bottled, illuminating gas. This was what must have touched the little tinder-dry box of a cottage off so quickly—someone had loosely filled the place with gas and then tossed in a match.

He stumbled on—and then was in front of the place, looking in. His hair suddenly stood on end.

Inside, the mass of orange-red flame almost filled the cottage—but there were a few inches just over the threshold that the fire left untouched. In that space, the lower part of a man's leg, and his foot and ankle, showed.

The ankle had a fawn spot on it.

He hesitated only one astounded second—and then dived across the smoldering, ground-level porch. The heat hit him like a wall, but he plunged across the sill, grabbed the ankle and, closing his eyes, turned and flung himself back, dragging the body of Dixie DeJong with him. Smoke and the hot breath of the fire bit at his lungs and he coughed agonizingly—and then he was back in the cool, dragging a sleeve across his streaming eyes.

Little tongues of flame licked at DeJong's green topcoat. The grifter's hair and eyebrows were gone, his face blackened. The Marquis reached down, jerked the coat front, ripping off the buttons, flattened it out on the ground and beat out the flame with his foot.

In snatching for the coat's pockets, he noticed the twin holes in the side of

the dead grifter's long, naked skull.

It checked him for an instant—the giddy realization that here was murder—the flashing revelation that someone must have shot the harsh-mouthed thief, thrown him inside and started the fire to confuse the crime. But the startling impact was on only half his mind, the other half was still feverishly absorbed in recovering his badge and gun. He pawed to get at the pockets of the still-smoldering topcoat. They were flat and empty. He flung the coat wide open.

The fantastic truth was instantly apparent.

Every pocket hung inside out. The killer had cleaned his victim before throwing him into the fire-trap. The Marquis' racing fingers encountered only complete emptiness. Every last article that DeJong had carried, was gone.

He sat back on his heels, his eyes stunned and hollow.

Realization swept over him like a wave. The killer—the person who had shot DeJong and tried to cremate him—had his, the Marquis', gun and badge, had taken it from the dead grifter!

Fate had topped herself. Now he was suddenly in the fantastic position of having to find the killer—the murderer who had shot DeJong—shot him, it suddenly dawned, as memory of the two flat claps he had heard from the roadway swarmed back—with a silenced gun.

CHAPTER TWO

Murder by Appointment

FOOTSTEPS suddenly ran out into the clearing from behind him.

Simultaneously, the long, eerie wail of the district fire-alarm siren began to mount in the distance, in the tempo of three short blasts, then one long one.

A harsh voice yelled at the Marquis, "Don't move! Put your hands up!" and he turned to face three running figures, led by a chauffeur whose gray whipcord uniform coat was flapping open. His gaunt face and pale yellow eyes and hair shone queerly in the fire-glow. He had a short club in his hand. Behind him came a woman of thirty-five with an exquisite figure and bright blond hair around

her shadowed face, followed by a gangling dark youth of twenty-odd with a long head and untidy dark hair.

"Take it easy," the Marquis said. "I'm Lieutenant Marquis of the New York police."

The chauffeur checked dubiously, looked at the woman. She stepped forward, small hands in the pockets of a blue silk housecoat. She had a round, pretty face, with two dimples in her cheeks and bright blue eyes—and a round, determined little chin. She asked breathlessly: "May we see your badge, please?"

The Marquis' eyes jumped to hers. For an instant, he thought he saw a sardonic light under her blond lashes, but the jumping firelight could have been responsible. "I don't usually carry it with me," he said. "But I have credentials. . ."

"Holy Moses!" the chauffeur gasped suddenly. "Don't touch your pocket—you! Look—there on the ground behind him—a dead man!"

The woman gasped, took a step back—but her eyes jumped back to the Marquis' face. "If you are an officer, you'll

understand, I'm sure. You'll have to let Fisk search you for a gun."

The Marquis' face was turgid. He took McGuire's spare gun from his pocket quickly, showed it to them. "Lady, fun's fun. . . Keep away from me, you—" as the chauffeur, unable to check himself, stumbled forward, "or I'll put a bullet in your leg.

"This dead man is a known crook. I was driving along the highway and saw him hop your fence. I came after him and while I was prowling the woods, he was shot and thrown in here and the place fired. I've offered to show you my credentials and I'm not in a mood for people to get tough with me. Your local law will be here in a minute—" He jerked his head toward the highway where the distant clanging of a fire engine and the whining of sirens was already becoming audible. "Now kindly answer my questions. Who lives here? Whose place is this?"

Her eyes were not frightened or greatly startled. She hesitated, staring at him, then said: "I am Mrs. Milton Thaddeus.

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My husband and my two stepchildren live here with me."

"How many servants?"

"A cook and two Filipino boys."

"And him." The Marquis nodded at the chauffeur.

"Yes."

The Marquis' brain raced, as the clanging of the fire truck bell began to draw close, followed by two or more sirens. He looked over at the tall, long-headed youth. The youth was now leaning against a tree, staring with tired shiny eyes at the roaring flames and beside him there had materialized a short, dumpy girl with dark skin and horn-rimmed eyeglasses.

"These—these are Mr. Thaddeus' children, Darrell and Cynthia," the blond woman said hastily. "Darrell—can't we do something? If—if it gets into the trees—"

The boy's dull, toneless voice said wearily: "There's nothing we can do. The fire laddies will be here faster than I could get a hose over to the outlet."

The dumpy girl's voice, unexpectedly high, added: "There—listen—they're turning in now."

The Marquis said, "Please—all of you—come and look at this man—quickly," and, as they came reluctantly towards him, "His name is Dixie DeJong." He spotted the blackened face of the corpse with his pencil flash. "Do you know him—or have you seen him before?"

They stared down, shaking their heads in turn. By the time he had forced definite noes out of them all, the blazing headlights of the fire department, and the ear-splitting clanging were already coming through the trees. Apparently there was a road fifty yards off to the east of the cottage.

The blazing fire truck screamed to a halt in moments. Helmeted figures boiled off, shouting, came running through the woods with portable floodlights. Others followed one by one—or obeyed the yelled orders of the first two. For a moment, the group around the Marquis was ignored. Far back the blaring of automobile horns was a wild symphony as the incredibly efficient Havensport Volunteer force—the individual members warned by the code blasts of the siren as to the loca-

tion of the fire—caught up one by one to the instantly-despatched fire truck. In the space of seconds, the clearing was swarming with running men, the long snake of a hose being rushed through the woods.

Then a figure in blue whipcords and brass buttons ran into sight and the Marquis asked quickly: "Is that one of your local cops?"

"Yes—yes, that's Sergeant Guyer," the woman told him.

The Marquis shouted at him, waved him urgently over and the chinless, long-nosed officer came scowling. He shouted over the din, "Be with you in a minute, Mrs. Thaddeus. Got to get this under control—" and broke off, jaw sagging as the Marquis turned his flash downward again.

He hung back an instant, then hurried forward. The Marquis jerked the flash to an assortment of cards in his black-gloved hand, showed them and bawled in the other's ear: "I'm Lieutenant Marquis of the Broadway Squad. I was off duty and driving along—" He repeated what he had told the woman.

The sergeant nodded distractedly. "Who shot him?"

"I don't know. Maybe I can help you find out."

"Doc Birdsall has to be notified. Gar, this is murder." He swung back and yelled, "Joe!" at the top of his lungs.

The Marquis caught his arm. "Who is Birdsall? The coroner? I'll call him for you from the house."

The anxious-faced Guyer nodded again. "All right. Thanks."

The Marquis said quickly to the long-headed youth, "Will you take me up to the house?" and the other nodded, turned and began to lead the way through the woods.

THEY broke out onto a road, now solidly choked behind the fire truck with a long, curling chain of headlights. They turned their backs to the procession, walked quickly up the Tarvia ribbon.

There was a comparatively cleared, long, rising acre of ground at the far side of the road, dotted with small, pointed pine trees. The whole swept up to a high hill a quarter mile ahead and, silhouetted against the skyline above was a rambling,

comfortable-looking house, twinkling with lights.

The Marquis asked as the din faded behind: "How do you suppose a professional thief got here? There wasn't anything to steal in that cottage—or was there?"

The gangling, weary youth shook his head. "No. It's just one of the guest houses."

"How long have you had your servants? Might any of them have shady acquaintances?"

"Oh, no," he said listlessly. "Carlos and Jamie are new, but they worked for years for a friend of father's. Fisk's been with us a long time. Althea, the cook, came with Viola."

"Eh?"

"The Filipino boys are only with us a year, I say. The cook was with Viola's family before she married Dad four years ago. We've had Fisk six or seven."

Sinkingly the Marquis faced the probability—that the killer was now miles away. Once his little trick was done and the cottage touched off, the woods would have swallowed him, covered him to the highway. And yet, some root of the matter must be here, among the personalities on the place. It was inconceivable that DeJong would blindly walk into a meeting on grounds in no way connected with either himself or the ambushing murderer.

"Someone in the house must know something about this."

The youth palmed a lock of thick dark hair out of his eyes. "Yes, I shouldn't wonder." They were in gloom now. Only distant glow from the headlights a hundred yards behind shed radiance on the road. The weary youth's voice was suddenly vaguely bitter. "I'm just trying to think. It's not impossible that I may have done it—killed this man, I mean."

The Marquis blinked. "You?"

"Yes. My mother, you know. She was in and out of asylums all my life—or at least while we were with her. I'm undoubtedly tainted. Actually, I've been half expecting something like this to happen for years."

"But you said you didn't know the dead man."

"Oh, yes, I say that *now*. Maybe I just

don't remember anything about it."

"Do you remember where you were when you first saw the fire?"

"We heard it before we actually saw it. Heard the blast, I mean. I was just coming out of the plunge, after talking with Dad. It went off just as I got outside. Cynthia was on the terrace and she said, 'Listen! Something's happened at Number Three,' and then Viola came down from upstairs and we all ran down."

"Then how do you— How could you—" The Marquis set his jaw grimly. "What is this? If you were with your sister—"

"She's not my sister—my half-sister."

"Well—whatever—if you were close enough to her for speaking when the place was touched off, how could you be down there doing the touching?"

"Touching?"

"Yes, yes. The killer shot DeJong, searched him, threw his body inside that house. He had a cylinder of bottled gas, which he either had already let loose in the house or which he then did. Then he tossed a match or something in and went away."

"Oh." The youth looked down at the road for five paces, sighed. "Well, I guess I couldn't very well have done it then, eh?"

"I don't see how. And you say your sis—your half-sister—and your step-mother were up there in the house when the blast went off?"

"Oh, yes. They appeared within a minute and we all started—"

"Where did the chauffeur come from? He was leading you all."

The youth's head came up. He said in a surprised tone: "Why, so he was. I don't know—I guess he joined us from the garage. He lives over the garage. I didn't notice."

He raised his head as they came up to the brow of the rise and called: "Carlos—Jamie—come here."

THE Marquis, startled, saw two vague patches of white move in the darkness ahead, converge on them. He shot a beam from the pencil flash and saw two small, shining-faced Filipino youths in spotless white coats. They were as alike as two hickory nuts, with dark, long-

lashed watchful eyes staring unblinkingly. "Where were you when Mrs. Thaddeus and Miss Cynthia and I started down toward Number Three? Did you hear the explosion?"

"No, please. We were in kitchen preparing plates for dinner with cook."

The Marquis said in consternation: "All of you? You were all together in the kitchen?"

"Yes, please. Till we hear the siren."

Darrell's tired voice asked: "Fisk wasn't with you? Or was he?"

They shook their heads.

The Marquis sweated inwardly. In one stroke, seven of the eight possible suspects in the house had been sheared away. *Only* the chauffeur was left.

Then he blinked. "Wait a minute." He stopped as they stepped up onto the little plateau. "Your father didn't go down with you? You say you were talking to him when—"

The weary youth giggled. "That would have been a sight. He was as naked as a plucked chicken. I wasn't talking to him, I'd just *come* from talking. It was as I shut the door from outside that I heard the blast. Dad's in the plunge."

"Where is that?"

"I'll show you."

The road turned here at the top of the hill, fanning out at the same time into a wide graveled space before a three-car garage. In the gloom, colors were hard to distinguish, but the garage seemed to be of cream stucco with flamingo tile trimming. Three windows high above the garage were lighted. The Filipinos melted away toward the end of the house.

The house—larger than it had looked from the valley—was terraced on all sides, seemed shallow, but long. It, too, carried out the Spanish motif, in color and in outline. The road led them up two steps onto the tiled terrace and light shone out from French windows all along the length of the house. There was a recessed, arched doorway in the center and the Marquis turned automatically in, but Darrell said: "No. This way is easier. Or do you want to phone first?"

"I'll see your father first. Maybe you'll do the phoning for me meanwhile."

"All right."

They went the full length of the terrace.

At this end of the house, the hill dropped away. They went down eight or nine steps, to another slender terrace cut in the edge of the deep slope, turned along a few steps and were in front of a heavy door with a tiny glass diamond leaking light in the center. Now the Marquis could see that the establishment was built on a razorback ridge. Below and behind the house, the ground dropped away again as it did in front—dropped down to the shore of the ocean. The roar of surf came up from below as Darrell led the way through the heavy door into a brilliantly-lighted steamy-warm swimming pool.

The pool was being churned. For a moment, what was churning it was indistinguishable. Then it became a small, naked man, swimming furiously some wild variation of the crawl stroke. He reached the far end of the pool, made a racing turn and came lashing back towards them, head down, eyes screwed tight shut, entirely oblivious of their presence. The Marquis backed away to avoid the thunderous splashes, but the weary-faced youth put his head down and megaphoned, "Dad!"

The splashing ceased instantly, and the small man trod water. He had a round little face under bushy, wiry dark hair, a small dark goatee and a mustache. He looked up with sparkling gray eyes from the green water and said, "Well!" then swam rapidly to a tiled ladder in the side of the pool and skipped nimbly up—a pink, hairless, slight figure, with only a modest tummy. He snatched a purple terry cloth robe from one of the flat marble slabs that were spaced around the pool, wrapped himself in it and stepped into straw slippers. Oddly, now that the purple robe was around him, the Marquis realized there was a purplish tinge to his hair and beard.

"Rather an odd way to introduce a visitor, isn't it, Darrell?" he said a little breathlessly. He towed head and face vigorously with a towel picked from a pile as he came towards them. "I hardly—"

The youth sighed. "Number Three is burning down, Dad. A man was in it—shot."

The little old man stared, his mouth sagging. "*What?*"

The youth hung his thumbs in vest pockets and his moody dark eyes indicated the Marquis. "This man is—who did you say you were?"

"Lieutenant Marquis — Broadway Squad—New York. I'll tell your father what's happened, if you'll do the phoning now—or can I phone from here?" he added, as he spotted a small wall phone flanked by a string of tabbed buttons.

"No. That's just a house phone."

THE old man sank swiftly onto a corner of a slab, as the youth went off along the side of the pool. "What in God's name . . . ? You really mean—a man—shot?"

"Yeah. A professional thief named Dixie DeJong. Do you know him?" the Marquis said.

"Good God, no. How? Who shot him? What—"

Then a dawning, scared wonder slowly widened his eyes. He jumped up. "Great Scott—could it have anything to do with— Great Scott! That fellow after the other house burned—"

The Marquis' forehead V'd. "Other house? You had another house burned?"

"Yes, yes—two months ago—Number One in the east quarter section."

"And?"

"Some fellow—I don't know who—called me a day later. He offered to—to sell me information."

"About what?"

"I don't know! I don't know! I took him for a crank—told him to write me a letter—he's been bothering my secretary at my office since—"

"He must have given you some inkling what he had."

"He did—but it was absurd, ridiculous—that someone in my family was trying to 'put a fast one over on me.'" His gray eyes looked gauntly into the Marquis' somber blue ones. "It—of course it's too absurd to mention." His voice faltered. "My—my family I-love me. They have no cause to . . ."

"Who inherits your money?"

"Eh? Why—why they all get some, of course. But they can have all the money they want, now."

"Tell me about this other fire you had."

The old man's eyes were worried.

"Why—why, it was just a fire. I used the cottage to—well, sort of as a little extra office sometimes. When I wanted to work undisturbed here. It just caught fire and burned."

"It wasn't touched off?"

"Good Lord, I don't think so. It started in the middle of the night. We thought it might have been from a cigarette or something."

"What did the insurance people think?"

"Insurance? I didn't have any—haven't now—on the guest houses. What are they worth? A few hundred apiece. No, no. My God, this is terrible. You—you don't really suppose that someone is—well, planning to harm me? Maybe—maybe they are and this—this intimating that my family—maybe it's all a blind." Sweat came out and beaded his round little pink forehead. "But who? Who would *want* to harm me?"

"How much do you know about your chauffeur?"

The old man's eyes were glassy. "Fisk? He's been with me for years. Excellent around cars. *He* has no cause to harm me."

"I didn't say he had. How do you get your mail here?"

"At the post office. We have to drive in for it."

"Who usually gets it? I mean drives in for it?"

"Why—Fisk, of course. What in the world are you driving at?"

"I wish I knew," the Marquis said grimly. "The only possibility that occurs so far is: Suppose your anonymous caller did know something. Suppose he did write you a letter. Suppose someone in this house *has* got plans and somehow intercepted that letter. Suppose the letter contained something that would indicate that he did know what he was talking about—something that would convince you you should meet him—and maybe even set a date for this afternoon down at that guest house."

"Good—good Lord," the old man stammered. "It—but it couldn't be. They none of them want—but even if it were, why do you pick on poor Fisk? The mail is always put on the hall table—anyone of them could—ah, good heavens, my own family! I don't believe it!"

He sat down abruptly on the slab and two big tears rolled down his cheeks. "What's the matter with me?" he cried desperately. "Why can't I have a family like other men? I'm a family man! I want a normal family life! Yet—yet all these things happen."

"All *what* things? There's been others?"

"No, no. I mean all my life. My first wife—Cynthia's mother—ran away with an actor—they both were killed in an auto accident. And my second wife—utterly insane. We tried for years—got her the best treatment—always she'd relapse. And she was unfaithful to me when she *was* sane. I—I had to divorce her—me, who hates divorce worse than—who despises the very name. . . And now—now you tell me they—one or more of them are planning something to harm me!"

"I didn't say that. But there's something funny going on here—or don't you think that murder and arson indicate anything?"

He jumped up again, his face strained and bitter. "Of course they do. By George, I'll—" He whirled and went over to a panel in the wall, jabbed a button. A small door slid open—a tiny elevator. "Come up with me while I dress," he said hoarsely. "I'll show them! I'll—I don't know what I'll do—" He broke off miserably. "Something."

"You go ahead and get dressed. I'll see you later. Does this take me up to the house?" He indicated the small door at the end of the pool through which the languid Darrell had passed a few minutes back.

"Yes. Meet—meet me in the living-room in five minutes."

He vanished and the door slid closed. The Marquis started for the door, then decided better of it and turned back the way he had come.

CHAPTER THREE

Death Trap

WHEN he again mounted to the veranda-terrace, he was in time to look far down the road and see two or three cars starting up around the fire truck, heading up for the house. Evidently the fire was out. There was no longer any

glow visible from Number Three.

He crossed the terrace. He was making no conscious effort at noiselessness but his rubber-soled shoes made virtually no sound. Still watching the cars approaching—he presumed the police had thick-headedly decided to bring the dead body up here for the coroner—he stepped down in the darkness near the garage—and his head whipped quickly around.

The garage's upper story was reached by outside stairs. There were a few pine trees clumped about the foot of those stairs. From a point behind the pine trees, half-whispering voices were audible—speaking quickly, although he could not catch the words.

He backed round the corner of the terrace, pulled into shadow—as the pretty-faced, determined-chinned Viola Thaddeus emerged swiftly, staring down the road at the oncoming lights. She hurried across the graveled semi-circle, ran up onto the terrace and walked quickly to the arched doorway, vanished inside the house.

The Marquis' eyes, strained, saw the dark figure of someone going up the outside flight of stairs of the garage—presumably Fisk and also presumably, the person with whom Viola Thaddeus had been exchanging the quick whispered words.

He waited only a moment and then, because the headlights were already dancing up the rise, crossed swiftly to the flight of stairs and went up. This time, he was deliberately quiet, thinking furiously.

He paused at the top of the stairs, on the little postage-stamp platform, ducked to peer under the nearly-drawn blind on the door's window.

Inside, the chauffeur was kneeling in a far corner of the room, before a bookcase. Books were pulled out and scattered around. Even as the Marquis looked, the blond, gaunt-faced man's long hands snatched at them, hastily restored them to the bottom shelf.

The Marquis' forehead knotted. He waited till they were all replaced—and then knocked.

Inside, instantly, the chauffeur's voice called: "Come in."

The Marquis pushed in. Fisk was across the room from where he had been kneel-

ing, casually filling a pipe from a tobacco pouch. The Marquis closed the door at his back, looked round the book-filled room. There was a littered roll-top desk off to his left, just inside the door. Ponderous volumes were held between bronze book ends—surprisingly, he noticed Poor's and Moody's annual ratings of corporations, and among the littered sheets of penciled papers on the desk there was a slide rule.

"I was just wondering where you were at the time that house was touched off," the Marquis said.

"I?" The yellow eyes of the chauffeur glowed. "I was down front there, looking down the road, matter of fact. I think—I'm not sure—that I heard the shots that killed that man. Fifteen minutes or so before the fire broke out. I couldn't figure what they were but they seemed to come from that direction—like two boards hitting together. I was even half thinking of going down to investigate."

"Uh-huh." The Marquis strolled across the room, small, black-gloved hands in tight chesterfield pockets. "There was another matter, too—what you were whispering to Mrs. Thaddeus just now down in the bushes here."

He turned his back as he said it carelessly, let his eyes range over the top shelves of the bookcase.

To his further surprise, there were a round dozen treatises on economics and scores of mathematical textbooks in the shelves. He noticed it only in passing, however, as he let his gaze drift down to the bottom, to the books which he had seen the chauffeur hastily replacing. He squatted down.

Fisk said harshly: "Mrs. Thaddeus was giving me some instructions about washing her car. *Keep your hands off those books, damn you!*"

The blurted warning came too late. The Marquis had neatly whipped two or three large volumes out and slid his hand in behind where they had stood. His gloved fingers closed on an irregular oil-silk bundle and he drew it out, stood up.

There was a drawstring around the neck of a purple oilsilk bag and the whole with its contents, had been rolled flat. The Marquis' somber deep-blue eyes looked dully at the pasty-faced chauffeur's hot yellow ones. "I saw you disposing of this in a hurry as I was outside there," he told him. "You don't mind if I take a look?"

SWEAT came out on the chauffeur's long upper lip. He stood dumbly, his throat working, as the Marquis undid the bundle—and disclosed a shiny blued-steel .32 revolver, with a silencer screwed into the muzzle.

The Marquis said very softly: "Oh, brother."

Fisk's face twitched. He blurted: "Wait—now, wait. I—I'll tell you what happened."

"You'll tell me the slugs in DeJong's brain will match this gun?"

"I—I think so. Now, wait—listen. I—I found that—in the woods. I *did* hear those silenced shots, like I said. I went down there ahead of the others. The explosion came when I was just down the hill. I—I hurried on. When I got in the woods, I saw you searching the guy. I thought you'd killed him and I ducked

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back. I stepped on that—that gun. Then the others came running down the hill and I—well, I joined in with them.”

“Where was the gun then?”

“Inside my pants.”

“But even after you knew I was a cop you kept it. Just a souvenir hunter, eh?”

“No, no,” the blond chauffeur ran a shaking hand over his head. “I—I’ll tell you the truth—but you’ve got to keep it to yourself.”

“Go on.”

“You will? You’ll swear not to tell the old man?”

“I’ll swear to have you behind bars in twenty minutes if you stall any longer. Go on and talk—but fast.”

“I—all right. It’s that damned dame. She’s driving me nutty.”

“What? What dame?”

“Vio—Mrs. Thaddeus. I—she’s gone crazy. She thinks I’m a fortune teller. She—a few months ago she saw my books. I’m studying economics by mail—trying to get a degree. She—well, she asked my advice about investments. I was crazy enough to work it out for her. She must have made some money, because she came back again and again. Like a dope, I gave her my opinion and—well, it seemed like I couldn’t be wrong. She made plenty. Now I can’t make her believe I’m not a magician. She’s money mad. She gets wildcat tips from somewhere—stocks I couldn’t check up on in a million years. She’s so damned dumb and greedy that she thinks I’m stalling her and she’s making life hell for me—”

The Marquis shook his head. “No. This is *too* damned goofy. You better start over again with something *somebody* could believe.”

“I don’t care if you believe it or not,” Fisk blurted bitterly. “It’s so. She’s threatened me with hell and damnation if I don’t act as her personal crystal-gazer. She thinks she’s stumbled on a gold mine—she won’t listen to anything else. Now she’s threatened to tell the old man I’ve been trying to make her—and she’s just dizzy enough to do it. The poor old guy—he’s never got a break from a woman in his life—I don’t want her—hell, he doesn’t trust her very far in his heart because she’s so much younger—he’d think that I *had* made her, see?”

“You might as well finish,” the Marquis said. “What’s all this got to do with the gun?”

“Well, when I found it there, I smelled it and I knew it had been fired. I figured it must be the one the guy was shot with. So it suddenly occurred to me—if I could put her in a hole I’d have something to fend her off with—make her behave.”

“Hole? What kind of a hole?”

“That—that’s what I was doing just now. I wiped it off and then I got her out there in the dark and made her handle it. Her prints’ll be all over the damned thing. She’s so stupid she doesn’t realize what it’s all about yet. I just asked her if she’d ever seen the gun.”

THE Marquis stared at him, grim-jawed. “I’ve heard some fantastic cover-ups but never anything like that.”

“Cover-up? What in God’s name would I be covering up?”

“Murder, maybe. Or even perhaps the way things really are between you and your precious Viola. If her prints are on there, it’s a fair bet she knocked off DeJong.”

“*She* did? You’re insane. What the hell would *she*. . . ?”

“Maybe because DeJong knew about your—your and her—plan to kill the old man and get together on his money?”

“Money? My God, she’s got half as much as he has—a million anyway.”

“What? She has?”

“Certainly. If I wanted to make a play for her, I wouldn’t be interested in what *he’s* got. What do you think she plays the market with? Buttons?”

“Maybe she doesn’t feel that way about it. You said she was money mad. Maybe she’s determined to get his as well.”

For an instant, there was a startled look in the chauffeur’s yellow eyes. Then he shook his head. “No. She couldn’t have shot that guy, anyway. She was behind me when the killer touched the place off.”

The Marquis raked the tall chauffeur’s yellow eyes for a full minute. “Damn it,” he ground, “if there was as much as one grain of sense in your pipe-dream, I’d think you made it up. But how could anybody make up that—”

The wall phone by the bureau tinkled. The Marquis' eyes jumped to it—a twin of the one he had seen in the swimming pool. "Wait a minute!" he snapped as the chauffeur went to answer. "Who's that calling?"

"How do I know? They got these things in every damned corner of the place."

"All right. Answer—and be careful."

The chauffeur put the little disc-receiver to his ear and said, "Yes. . . Yes, ma'am. . . Yes, ma'am, right away," and hung up.

"Well?"

"It was Miss Cynthia. She says the coroner and the local police want me down in the living-room right away."

The Marquis hesitated another full minute. Then he said grimly: "All right, chum. I'll go along with you for a little. But don't forget I've got this little item." He flipped the oilsilk again into place around the gun, put it inside his coat and went over to the open door.

"Come on."

THERE were five cars scattered about the gravel half circle now. Far below, the fire truck's headlights slanted across the field in the valley. It was starting to go home, backing and tugging.

They went across the terrace and into a central foyer. Halls led to right and left and there were rooms opening onto each side of the foyer. In one, the Marquis caught the glimpse of a long, linen-and-silver covered table—evidently the dining-room. They went down the left-hand hall toward the end of the building above the swimming pool, passed a library done in red-leather and black oak, and—were in a crowded room with windows on three sides at the end of the house.

There were two more uniformed local policemen whom the Marquis had not met—one a genial hayseed with pink hair and eyes, the other a bulldoggish squat man who seemed to be in charge—a Lieutenant Grigg—and the coroner—a skeleton-faced doctor named Birdsall. An enormous three-hundred-pound Irish cook stood with the Filipino boys in a row along the front windows and the Thaddeus family stood around a grand piano, all but the purple-bearded little patriarch.

Everyone was talking in low, quick tones and within a minute of the time the Marquis had shaken hands with those he did not know, Thaddeus came strutting in, dressed in pepper-and-salt gray suit and maroon tie, a white piping to his vest.

The coroner said officiously: "Now, if you will cooperate with me, we must find out all each of you know about the death of the man in the next room and the fire."

For half an hour, he asked questions, got answers that were all familiar to the Marquis. The chauffeur, Fisk, his yellow eyes on the Marquis, told of hearing the explosion when he was in the garage and of having merely joined the trio as they rushed down. He said nothing about the gun now heavy inside the Marquis' chestfield.

The inquiry had obviously run almost to a dead end when the Marquis suddenly remembered Dixie DeJong's car. He came up off the wall against which he was leaning as though electrified. DeJong had driven here in a car. Certainly he had not driven away in it. It must be somewhere out there on the highway, nearby.

The realization came just as the coroner stood up and said hopelessly, "Very well. I shall hold an inquest in the courthouse tomorrow or the next day and I shall have to ask you all to be there. Thank you for your patience," and the meeting broke up.

The Marquis, starting out, found his arm gripped quickly by the little goateed Thaddeus. "Lieutenant—you mustn't go," he said desperately, and his gray eyes were haggard. "I—I want to talk to you—you must stay for dinner."

"All right. I'll be back in a few minutes. I want to get my car—I left it on the highway."

He wriggled free, caught a lift with the first of the outgoing police cars and within ten minutes was back in the old convertible in the lane outside the Thaddeus estate.

He stowed the oilsilk bundle in a flap pocket, sat there impatiently, till the others were all out of sight, then backed swiftly and began to hunt up and down the roadside.

The Buick that had brought DeJong out was gone.

In twenty minutes, he had covered both sides of the highway and one or two side lanes, within any possible radius from which DeJong could have walked in the time he had. The Buick was not there, nor were there any possible hiding places for it—other, of course, than adjoining estates.

Someone had driven the Buick away.

Who?

That incredible question badgered his already dizzy mind, as he finally drove feverishly back through the woods toward the Thaddeus house. Somebody must have been in that Buick *with* DeJong! Or—or was it conceivable that the killer himself—after he had touched off the fire. . . .

The string of numbers—the license plate of the Buick on which he had held his eyes from the moment he had spotted DeJong on Fifth Avenue till he had arrived here—bloomed in his mind. He raced the convertible up the hill, braked it harshly and hurried back into the arched doorway from the terrace.

The four Thaddeuses—the dumpy Cynthia, the languid, hollow-eyed Darrell, the plumply pretty-faced Viola and the forlorn-looking little goateed old man—stood in the foyer, sipping drinks. A tray with shaker and glasses was nearby.

Thaddeus sprang forward. "There you are. Will you have a drink? Dinner's waiting."

"I have to phone first," the Marquis said.

"Eh? Well—right down the hall—the library there by the cellar stairs."

The Marquis hurried along to the red-leather-and oak library, found the phone on the leather table and quickly hunted the New York City directory for the number of the U-Drive-It concern.

He ran into a setback. After he had called them and carefully repeated the license number of the Buick and given his shield number, he asked: "To whom did you rent that car this afternoon?"

He was told doggedly and presently, with increasing firmness: "I am sorry. We cannot give that information over the phone. No, I am sorry. You may be who you say you are but we cannot tell from a phone voice."

He hung up, flushed and furious, called another number—the little theater ticket agency off Times Square that was the unofficial meeting-place of the Squad.

He got McGuire and cut off the red-head's stream of protests about being deprived of his car, with: "Take this license number down and get over to the U-Drive-It. Find out who rented it from them and call me back here—as fast as you can."

He went back to the hall and was just being relieved of his chesterfield and tight black silk scarf by one of the Filipino boys when Darrell Thaddeus, at the window staring out toward the sea, suddenly caught his breath.

"Hey!" he said. "There's a light in the boathouse."

THE pink dimple-cheeked Viola, in a pale-blue silk dress and twisting a diamond pendant in her fingers choked and blurted: "What? Why, there couldn't be!"

They all rushed to the window, then to the arched door—identical with the one on the land side of the house—that led out to the front terrace. The Marquis, following after them, asked quickly: "Why? Shouldn't there be one there?"

He was answered by them all: "No. The electricity was turned off—there's some short circuit in the wall wiring."

Out on the terrace he stared down. The boathouse—a squat, pagoda-like structure on stilts—was barely discernible a few rods down the beach, reaching out into the water. In one upstairs window a single dim light shone.

Thaddeus, gasping, said: "Great Scott—who can be there? Must be some trespassers. Darrel—you go and—"

"I'll go," the Marquis said.

They went with him, breathlessly, around to the side of the house where the steps led down to the intermediate terrace. He hurried down and then down past the swimming-pool door to the longer flight that presently debouched him at beach level below. There were a few trees here, cutting off his view. He went swiftly around them—and stopped momentarily, straining his eyes.

He ducked down swiftly. There was a moving shape just short of the boathouse.

The stars were out overhead now, giving a vague luminosity to the skyline and he tried to catch the shape against it, but it was impossible. The shape moved into the dark shadow of the boathouse. He caught the rasping sound of boots on boards.

He snatched the gun from his hip, started silently across the loose sand, keeping low, in hopes of invisibility.

He was within ten yards of the stilted wooden structure when it happened.

There was a sudden short cry from within the dark looming bulk ahead of him—and then a frantic, ear-piercing scream and then a terrific crash.

Then silence, save for the mutter of the surf.

The Marquis hesitated only a second, then jabbed the button on his flashlight. He ran onto the board catwalk, playing the light over the little building. A wide flight of wooden steps rose up sheerly in front of him, to the second story, while the catwalk bent around it at each side to run on out to the end of the boathouse. Above him, at the top of the stairs, the door of the upper quarters stood open.

He ran up the stairs, the flash probing in one hand, gun in the other, threw light into the one huge pleasant room that filled the upper level. There was beige carpet over the whole floor, deck chairs and lounges, nautical decorations on the blue-enameled walls. He spotted the window—at the front right—from which he had seen the light shining out. Understanding of a sort dawned on him. The window shades—each window had two shades, one dark, one light—were drawn down. The bulge behind the one in question was undoubtedly a flashlight, arranged to throw light *out*, but not *in*. Why . . . ?

He was so close to stepping into the yawning hole just over the threshold that cold sweat bathed him as he slapped a gloved hand hastily against the door jamb to jerk himself back. Hastily, he whipped the beam of light down to show the gaping oblong aperture in the floor. It was a hastily prepared trap. Over to one side, inside the door, leaned a wide trapdoor, whose hinge-pins had been removed. Around the edge of the huge mouth at his feet, the ragged saw-tooth

edges of the carpet showed how hastily it had been cut out.

Looking down through the hole on hands and knees, he saw the sprawled, broken body of the chauffeur, Fisk, his staring yellow eyes looking upwards from squarely between his shoulder blades. His head was completely turned around. There was only a small gash in his cheek. He lay on the gently heaving deck of a trim mahogany cabin cruiser.

THE Marquis jumped back, ran down the stairs. Looking up, he could see the heads of those he had left on the veranda of the lighted house above. He gestured urgently with his flashlight as he ran down the steps and around the catwalk to the side door of the boathouse.

It was open and he stepped inside to a similar catwalk. The tide was exceptionally low. Evidently there had been a basin dredged here so that the boat would not be stranded at low water. Now the deck of the cruiser bobbed so far below the level of the catwalk that he was wary about trying to jump down.

He saw the scrap of white showing between the clenched fingers of the chauffeur. By lying on his stomach, one foot hooked round a stanchion on the dock edge, he inched far enough over so that he could reach the already cooling wrist of the gray-whipcorded Fisk. There was no pulse. The man had died instantly.

He stretched desperately to get both small black gloved hands on the dead man's clenched fist, pried it open with difficulty—and came away with a crumpled bit of paper.

He squirmed back up, flattened it on the catwalk, read it in the beam of his flash.

Dear Mr. Detective: If you want to know why DeJong was shot and the fire started to burn him, try looking in the desk in the boathouse.

There was no signature.

It was fully a second before full comprehension really hit home to him. This note had been intended for him, the Marquis! Someone had typed it out—and left it where he had been supposed to find it. Only ghastly, wild mischance had seen to it that the chauffeur had stumbled on it

first—and decided to nose into it himself! This trap had been hastily set for *him*, the Marquis, by the killer—and the killer must be nearby!

He crawled hastily erect, hurried back out the catwalk, looked up.

There was no evidence that those above had understood his signal. No one seemed to be on the way down.

He ran back toward the steps—and just as he reached them, a white-coated Filipino appeared far above, at the top. Seeing the Marquis, he stopped and made a megaphone of his hands to yell: "Please—the telephone for the lieutenant!"

The others drifted to the head of the stairs, as he nodded and ran up. Hurried questions came at him as he finally mounted the last terrace, breathing a little heavily. He told them grimly, "Fisk is down there—dead—it was a deliberate murder trap. You'll have to call the cops back here—and the coroner," and strode through their gasps.

He hurried down the hall and croaked, "Yeah?" into the open phone.

McGuire said petulantly: "Well, that Buick was rented to Dixie DeJong. He gave his address as the Crescent Hotel. So what?"

"Crescent!" the Marquis choked. That was one possible hope he had overlooked—the chance of tying a local address to DeJong!

"Well? Hello? Do you want me to do anything else?"

"No, no," the Marquis said hastily. "I—just stay where you are."

He hung up, stood in a wild fever of indecision—as the goateed, frantic-eyed little Thaddeus hurried in, looking hunted and terrified. "Did you—do you mean Fisk is—is *dead*?" he gulped.

The Marquis barely heard him. He was suddenly transported with the idea of getting to Dixie DeJong's hotel room to dig for the foundations of all this fantastic drama—and equally torn by realization that the murderer was here—in this house or close nearby.

Thaddeus repeated himself desperately. The Marquis set his teeth and said, "Yeah." He stepped aside. "Go on and phone your local police. I—" He hesitated, sought the other's gray eyes. "Listen—wait a minute—" as the miserable old man

reached tremblingly for the instrument. "I've got to make a quick trip somewhere. You'll have to look after yourself till I get back. Keep one of the cops here if you like, as a bodyguard. Something's just come up—I have to run in to the city for a minute. But I'll be back as soon as I can. If you've got a gun, get hold of it, shut yourself in a room and let nobody near you till I return, if you can manage it."

"Oh, my God—you mean he—that *I'm* to be—that *I'm* in danger?"

"I don't know. It looks that way. Maybe I'll know when I get back. Get those cops here. I'll stay till they come, but then I'm beating it—whether they like it or not."

CHAPTER FOUR

Room 1408

THEY didn't like it, but the bulldog-gish lieutenant was evidently too awed by the Marquis' Broadway reputation to do more than protest violently. The Marquis clipped his story at the uniformed trio—the same ones who had been here before—and hurried out.

Racing back to the city, he tried to set the whole wild picture up in his mind: Dixie DeJong, coming here from Chicago, larceny bent. What was his racket? What was he shooting at? Was there truth, after all, in the original hypothesis that he, DeJong, had somehow got wind of plans to harm the old man? And that, in attempting to shake down the schemer who planned this harm, he had underestimated his viciousness?

The death of the chauffeur proved nothing—except that the chauffeur was not himself guilty of laying the trap! Ergo, it was almost certain that he was not guilty of the other murder and arson! Who, then?

Twice, he almost slowed down to turn back, as the stinging realization tormented him that the truth was back at the house he had just left. One of the house's occupants *must* be involved in the murderous scheme—even if—yes, even if there were an outside accomplice who effected the actual crimes. Which of them? The pink-and-white, money-greedy Viola? The

languid, neurotic Darrell? The nondescript, owlish Cynthia? Or one of the servants?

And what were they driving at, anyway? Whom would the death of the old man benefit?

Maddeningly, they would all benefit in the conventional way. There was no way of pinning it down closer, unless he could take them one by one and sweat the heart out of them. Perhaps if he had had them in the city where his authority existed—or even if he were not himself in jittery fear of his badge and gun turning up in the wrong place—he might have tried even that.

If he could only find the underlying secret that activated this whole nightmare—find some clue to it in Dixie DeJong's room!

By the time he finally reached town, hastily shuttled over and down to the Vanderbilt Avenue entrance of the Crescent Hotel, he was sweating in impatience. He flung the convertible into an open space a few yards from the lighted marquee, hurried into the quietly-gaudy hotel and sailed across toward the desk.

The pinched-faced room clerk looked anxious and answered his quick query with: "Why, yes. Mr. DeJong is registered in 1408. Shall I announce—?"

"No. Never mind. I'll surprise him."

"I—er—I don't believe he's in, sir. But Mrs. DeJong is."

The Marquis choked. "What?"

"I say Mrs. DeJong is in, sir. Perhaps I'd better—"

"No, no." The Marquis swallowed. "I—uh—I'll surprise Mrs. DeJong. Old friends and all. . . ." He hurried for the elevators.

He was halfway there when Olafson, the brightly-beaming, stupid-looking head house detective wandered out from behind some potted palms and said in surprise: "Why, hello, Marty. What are you—"

The Marquis stopped, pulled him hastily aside and said quickly: "Lend me a pass-key Ole—and I'll owe you any favor you can name. I'll promise to keep you out of trouble but I can't take you up with me."

The other's face was troubled, but he finally grudgingly drew a master key from

his pocket. "Gosh sakes, Marty—be careful. This isn't a Broadway dive, you know."

Three minutes later, the Marquis was softly inserting the key in the door of Room 1408.

IT GRATED a little and he hesitated. There was light under the door.

Nothing happened. He thought he could detect breathing within. He got McGuire's gun into position under his clamped arm, eased the key in the rest of the way, pocketed the key, holding the doorknob turned, then, gun in hand, stepped inside in one long, smooth motion, around the door, closing it swiftly behind him.

A woman lay on the bed in a soiled and crumpled pink slip. She was asleep, breathing heavily. Her skin was dark and she was thin and gaunt. She was on her side, as though trying to get her face close to the low coffee table on which stood two gin bottles—one empty and tipped over, the other containing two or three inches of the colorless liquor.

Only a low bridge lamp at the head of the bed was alight. He reached behind him and snapped on the brilliant overhead cluster. The woman did not even change the tenor of her breathing. He stepped over, twisted his head round so as to look squarely into her face—and his breath went out.

The woman's face was long, cut in deep lines. But the contours of the lines were utterly weary and languid. She had an almost invisible growth of hair on her face and her head-hair was stringy, dark brown. The Marquis hastily fingered open an eye. The eye was dark brown, glassy at the moment, but the general resemblance of the woman on the bed to the youth back at the Thaddeus house was so shocking as to be unmistakable.

This woman was Darrel Thaddeus' mother—Mrs. Thaddeus the second.

He went closer, said: "Mrs. Thaddeus." It made no impression.

That wasn't the only thing that made no impression. He jiggled the bed. He yelled at her, got a wet towel and doused her with cold water. Presently, in exasperation, he picked her up bodily, a long-legged, utterly inert scarecrow of liquor-

reeking flesh, carried her in and slid her into the bathtub, turned the cold shower on full.

She slept peacefully in the tub. He finally became alarmed that she would drown, had to give up, take her back to the bed and towel her, put her between blankets.

Exasperated, sweating, furious, he snatched up the phone. He called McGuire at the ticket agency, told him to hurry over, then started through the drawers of the room.

The drawers were empty, save for one set of soiled underclothing belonging to the woman, and a few toilet articles. One dress only hung in the closet, one cheap cloth coat and a black velvet turban. One pair of scuffed shoes was on the floor, with a small, empty black overnight bag.

He spied her purse where it had fallen behind the bed, crawled under and retrieved it to examine its contents. There were eight crumpled one-dollar bills, cosmetics—and a small newspaper clipping. The clipping, from the back pages of some newspaper unfamiliar to him, read: *ROCKAWAY STATE PARK SUPERINTENDENT SENTENCED. Dr. Girdlestone Draws Five Year Term On Bribery Counts.*

The clipping merely repeated the headline—that this Dr. Girdlestone had been convicted a few days previously for accepting bribes from certain drug jobbers, to order their products exclusively for the institution which he headed.

BEWILDERED, the best the Marquis could figure was that the institution must have been one of those to which the woman on the bed had at one time or another been committed. Possibly the now-discredited doctor was a personal acquaintance.

There was nothing else in the purse of any importance or, for that matter, anywhere in the room. There was no sign whatever of any belongings of Dixie DeJong.

He was aghast, confused, tormented, as it grew on him that he had gambled on the wrong procedure—thrown away all this time to no purpose. He should never have left the house on this wild-goose chase. Perhaps later, when the woman emerged from her alcoholic coma. . . .

Soft knuckles played on the door and he went over to admit McGuire's chubby, intent face. The redheaded detective came quickly inside, started to speak, went dumb as he saw the woman and then as he realized she was unconscious, said quickly: "Hey—if you're still interested in that Buick you had me chasing around about—I just noticed it downstairs now, parked outside the Vanderbilt Avenue entrance."

The Marquis' breath blew out. "What? Where? Show me!" And then, as the redhead reached for the doorknob: "No! You stay here." He jabbed a black-gloved finger. "Take care of her. She's so crooked she's nearly dead. See if you can bring her to. I'll be back in a few minutes. Outside the Vanderbilt entrance, you say?"

"Yeah. You can't miss it—towards Forty-second."

He ran out, dropped hastily back to the lobby and scuttled across the lobby, out.

The Buick sat, south of the marquee about the same distance as the convertible sat north. He ran over, grabbed the door handle, fully expecting to have to pick the lock, but the door was open. The keys hung in the ignition. He slid in, breathing quickly, closed the door behind him to avoid attracting attention.

He whipped down the door of the glove compartment.

It was empty. He swallowed, sat grim-jawed a minute, noticed the hanging keys and snatched them out, hurried round to the luggage compartment and unlocked it, raised the lid. It, too, was empty.

Numb and disappointed, he went back to the front seat—and found the briefcase under the straw cushion on the driver's perch.

His fingers almost trembled as he wrenched the lock open. The case contained a few assorted papers. Hastily, he dumped them out on the seat, snapped on the dashlight and began going through them.

The first thing he drew was a brown envelope with a glassine panel, from the Traders Trust Company. He could see the watermarked backs of pale green checks inside. Hastily, he drew them out—and his eyes went intent.

All of the thin sheaf of checks were canceled, had been signed by Milton Thad-

deus and duly cleared by the bank.

The top one was made out to Apex Indemnity (Bonding Division) for thirty-odd thousand dollars.

The second was payable to the telephone company, for nine dollars and sixty cents. There was one to a stationery store for eighteen dollars, one to a tailor for one hundred and thirty and one to a barber for sixty. With bewildered hot eyes the Marquis ran through the rest of the sheaf, finding them utterly meaningless—and then he came to the last one.

It was for one hundred and seventy dollars, payable to the Hambly Towers Corporation and marked on the back: *Rental: August 1—31.*

He breathed softly, snatched for the rest of the papers.

One—among a mass of obscure bills and receipts—was an ancient, dog-eared statement from a cable company, fully eighteen inches long. It covered services over a period of two years up to June 1939—a long list of really staggering amounts apparently cabled to Nice. The Marquis' respect for the little purple-bearded man grew as he realized the sums of money he apparently handled. The total of this particular deal, or whatever it was, ran to seven figures. But what held the Marquis' eyes was the address at the top: *Room 1265, Hambly Towers.*

In other words, Milton Thaddeus' office was in the Hambly Towers—the building from which the Marquis had seen DeJong emerge early in the afternoon—the point at which he had first picked up his trail.

It took no great deductive ability to put two and two together here—to realize that DeJong must have prowled Thaddeus' office and pilfered these things—perhaps at random. Why? And how?

A quick calculation told him that it was almost impossible that Thaddeus could have been in his office at that hour—since he had been out at Havensport for some time before the Marquis and DeJong arrived there. Was then, the office empty and deserted and had the Chicago grifter just picked the lock and walked in, scooping up whatever was loose?

That didn't make sense. Thaddeus did business—large business. People of his affairs did not leave offices casually closed on business days.

And at long last, he finally fused. It sprang out of his subconscious memory—the recollection of Thaddeus' casual mention of a secretary and threats being received by her.

The minute he hit on it, he knew as certainly as his own name that he was coming close to the end of the trail. He tingled all over, jerked erect and slid over under the wheel of the car.

Then the churning in his mind relaxed far enough to remind him that this wasn't his own car. He piled out, started quickly for the convertible, nothing else in his mind except to get quickly down to the Hambly Towers.

HE SUDDENLY realized that it was after eight o'clock. No business office would be open at this hour.

But—his hunch would not be denied. Reason to the contrary notwithstanding, he burned with certainty that he would find the key to this whole puzzle at that office. He hesitated, trying to rationalize it—but without much success.

He thought suddenly of the check to the bonding company and hurried back into the lobby, hastily dialed the home number of one of the Apex Company's investigators whom he knew.

"Yeah, sure, I know old Thaddeus. What about him?"

"I don't know what about him. I'm just curious to get a line on him."

"Well, morally, I couldn't help you. But financially, he's tops. He made his money out of the Chicago Electric Products originally—he and one other guy started the concern—but o' course he became inactive ten years ago, although he still holds a big chunk of stock. Since then, he's built up holdings in half a dozen gilt-edge companies."

"How much is he worth, all told?"

"Oh, say two or three million."

"Who is he having you write a bond on—especially for that much money?"

"Who? Oh hell, that's not a *who*," the other laughed. "He had some stock certificates burned in a fire out on his estate and of course to get new ones issued, he has to get a bond written."

"Oh."

"His wife has a tidy chunk of dough, too, I understand."

"Yeah, I know. Well, thanks."

Outside again, he made one last try to be rational about the urge toward the Hambly Towers, but the inner drive was too strong. He hurried to the convertible, piled in—and in ten minutes was sliding in to the curb beside the office building.

The watchman was reading a magazine, sitting on a stool over what seemed a pulpit with an open ledger on it, just inside the door. Now in his own territory, the Marquis brushed aside his suggestion that he sign in and snapped: "I'm Lieutenant Marquis—Broadway Squad. Is anyone in 1265—Milton Thaddeus' office?"

"Eh? Oh, yeah—yeah. The little blonde is there." He smirked. "You got a date with—"

"Never mind that. What little blonde? Who is she? Mr. Thaddeus' secretary?"

"Yeah, of course. Name of Anni—spells it A-N-N-I. No need to get huffy. . . ."

The Marquis hurried away from him as an elevator door slid open across the lobby. He was swooped to the twelfth floor—and deposited almost squarely in front of the one lighted office in the whole corridor—the one marked: *Milton Thaddeus Enterprises*.

There was no invitation to enter, but he palmed the knob softly, turned it without sound—and stepped inside.

HE WAS alone in a little waist-high coop. Beyond a gate in the coop was a spacious, airy office, with two cork-topped tables over against the window, a swivel chair between them. There were filing cabinets along the walls on either side of the hall door—and there was a closed, lighted, private office door at one end of the room. He was alone in the room, but from behind the closed door at the end, the quick, wordless sound of a woman's voice came.

By the time he had slipped through the gate and to the private office door, he had recognized the queer rhythm of her talk—she was phoning.

Before he could bend down or get in position to overhear a word of the conversation, there was a muffled ring inside as the talker hung up the phone and, before he could retreat, the door burst open and a blond girl hurried out.

She gasped, "Oh," as they almost collided, stumbled back, the back of one hand to her lips, her cobalt-blue eyes wide and frightened.

"I'm sorry," the Marquis said quickly, and told her who he was. "I thought the office was empty."

"C'est—c'est bien," she stammered. "It is all right." She tried to smile. "I, Anni, am here."

"Yeah, I'd like to ask you some questions."

"Quest-tions? But yes! Quest-tions about w'at?"

She took her hand from her mouth. She was blond, but not in the way, for instance, that Viola Thaddeus was blond. In the first place she was young—a sort of moist, peach-bloom youngness. She had the traditional tiny waist and hands and feet of the Frenchwoman, but in between her body swelled ripely. Her hair was soft and silky and corn-colored, her blue eyes intense and starry, her mouth rich and full. She clasped her hands in to her waist leaning forward like an anxious child, searching his face.

"Have you been in touch with your employer—Mr. Thaddeus—this afternoon?"

"No, m'sieu. 'E 'as gone to the country."

"Yeah. I understand some anonymous caller has been trying to get in touch with him for a couple of months."

She hesitated, a little worried shadow in her eyes.

The Marquis assured her: "It's all right. I've just come from Havensport. Mr. Thaddeus told me."

"Well, yes, there has been a man—but then, in Mr. Thaddeus' position—"

"Sure. How about today around one o'clock? You were here in the office?"

She nodded.

"Do you know the name of DeJong? Have you ever heard it?" He described the burning-black-eyed grifter.

"No. I have never heard of him, or seen him."

"He was in this office at one this afternoon. He stole some papers. On a guess, I'd say he got into Mr. Thaddeus' desk—or yours."

Her eyes went wide, one hand going to her full breasts. "He—you say 'e was in this office?"

"Yes. Around one o'clock. How come you didn't see him?"

HER eyes were frightened, bewildered—and then they lit up. "Ah! I know! I went down to Mr. Lang's office—he is our lawyer—on the floor below. Thees—thees man might have come in then—I was gone ten or fifteen—"

"All right. Now listen. There have been some things happening out at Mr. Thaddeus' estate—two men have been murdered."

The color drained from her peach-bloom face. "Murd—murdered! You—you are joke, m'sieu!"

"I am not joke. There is reason to think that some elaborate and subtle plan is coming to a head out there—and it may be going to climax with Mr. Thaddeus' death."

"Oh—no! No! It cannot. . . . Who would want to . . .?"

"That's what I want to find out," he said tartly. "Now just be quiet a minute and listen. This man DeJong came from Chicago and went out to Mr. Thaddeus' estate this afternoon. He is a big-time crook, with a brain like a steel trap—a lawyer turned wolf—a killer and a con- niver. What he went out for, we don't know, but he was met there by someone, evidently cut off before he could reach Mr. Thaddeus—killed. Be still till I finish."

"It may be that he was the one who has been calling Mr. Thaddeus these last few weeks—and did get to talk to him once. That time, Mr. Thaddeus says, he gave him a veiled warning against his—Mr. Thaddeus'—family."

"Today—before DeJong went out there—it looks as though he came here and rifled this office, picked up certain things—canceled checks, memos, bills. We have those things now."

She gave a little moan, turned and fled into the inner office she had just quitted. "Oh, let me look! I do not know how—"

She ran around the wide, ornately-carved walnut flat-topped desk in the modest office, tugged at the drawer handles, one by one. None of them opened. She looked up frenziedly. "But—but—how . . .? Thees desk—only Mr. Thaddeus has the key."

"Locks wouldn't mean anything to this bird," the Marquis assured her. "Never mind that. The thing I want from you is this: You must be pretty close to Mr. Thaddeus' affairs. How long have you worked for him?"

"Three years."

"You never knew the second Mrs. Thaddeus then?"

Her strained eyes widened. "But no! She—she was insane."

"Yeah. On and off, till he divorced her. We've discovered that DeJong brought to her to New York with him. Why, God only knows, but he must have been planning to use her in his racket somehow. We have *her* also—but she's in an alcoholic daze and until we can get her out of it we can't question her."

The girl put her palms to her forehead, her blue eyes bewildered and frantic. "I—oh, I do not understand thees thing—" She suddenly jerked her head toward the door, put a soft hand on his arm. "Wait—wait! Let me get Mr. Lang. I think he is still in the building. Maybe he will comprehend?"

"He's here now?"

"I—I think—" She hurried to the door, through the gate. "Wait—I will be right back."

She vanished out into the hall. The Marquis went over and tried the drawers of the cork-topped desks, found nothing that he could construe as important. When she hurried back in, five minutes later, her face was flushed, her eyes hot. "He—he is weeth a client. He will be here right away."

"All right. But what I want to get out of you is: Do you know of any reason why Mr. Thaddeus' family would want to kill him—apart from his money of course?"

"But—but no!" she stammered, aghast. "There *couldn't* be any reason."

"Then how about this as a last possibility—would the former Mrs. Thaddeus, now poverty-stricken, conceivably want to kill him? Could she gain by it—or has she enough resentment against him to do it?"

"But—but I do not know! I do not see how she could gain—but I have never seen her nor 'eard from her."

"This is what I'm trying to scheme

out: If someone *could* get her steamed up to kill your boss, is there any way a third party—this DeJong—could profit?"

Her eyes were muddy, uncomprehending. She cried helplessly: "Oh, I—I do not know. Please—" She put a quick hand on his lapel, begged helplessly: "Wait till Mr. Lang comes. He might know—" She looked desperately at the door. "Oh, why doesn't he—where is he?"

"All right. We'll wait."

She looked anxiously at the phone. "Maybe—" she blurted breathlessly, "maybe I should phone Mr. Thaddeus."

"Wait till we see this lawyer first," the Marquis said quickly.

A minute went by—two—three—five.

The girl wrung her hands, watching the door.

When ten had ticked away, she burst out: Oh, he is a pig, that Mr. Lang. I will get heem, if I have to pull heem. . . ." She ran out again.

She did not come back.

IT WAS minutes before the Marquis woke up.

Then he suddenly got it—and piled off the cork desk on which he had been perched. He ran out into the hall. It was dimly lit, silent.

He hurried for the stairs, ran down to the next level. He saw no lighted office in any of the cross-corridors. He began to run, ran up and down every one. There was no lawyer named Lang on the floor.

When his hasty jabbing finally brought the elevator to the floor and he flung his raging question at the boy, the youth gawked.

"Naw, we got no lawyer name of Lang in the building, that I know of."

"Did you take that Anni—the blond girl—down just now?"

"Hey? Yeah—about five minutes ago. She was in a hurry."

The Marquis dived in, sick and furious. "Get me down—fast! Fast, damn it! Did you see which way she went?"

"N-no, not me."

She was, of course, not in sight when he sprinted out into the street.

But it was not till he reached for the neatly-folded white handkerchief in his

chesterfield breast pocket to wipe his sweating forehead that he fully realized how superbly he had been duped.

He jerked the square of white linen out—and grabbed hastily, as something heavy and metallic came with it. He gasped, backed quickly into the bar of light from the lobby—and stared glassily, astounded. He held an exquisite diamond pendant, on a thin platinum chain. The diamond must have weighed twenty carats—its worth high in five figures.

Even then, he did not comprehend it. This whole thing was going completely mad. He groped feverishly. Was this some sort of wild, left-handed bribe the girl was offering him to permit her to escape, or—

Through the swarming fog in his brain, he suddenly recalled that the brittle blond Viola Thaddeus had worn a pendant to-night. Presumably she had a weakness for them. Maybe this was one she had given her husband to have repaired and the little blond Anni had somehow got her hands—

He spotted a drug store a few doors away, ran to it, and piled into a phone booth. He put in a quick call for the Thaddeus house, chafed and sweated while the line buzzed and squawked interminably.

It was not till—after brain-dizzying delay—the operator's voice announced, "I am sorry. That line is out of order," that the real explosiveness of it dawned on him.

He hung up—and then it hit him.

He jumped erect, open-mouthed, flung himself from the booth. Then he stopped hastily, as the incredible, desperate possibility swarmed up. He plunged back in, sweat coming out in beads on his forehead, snatched the receiver up to call the chief of the Havensport police—and then, even as the long-distance operator answered, he remembered that he could not confide in anyone.

He slammed down the instrument, threw himself out and raced for the convertible, dived back in, whirled it around and started back out to Long Island like a madman.

The whole fantastic picture fell into place. All but the one piece. Dixie De Jong—his trip from Chicago—the insane

former wife of Thaddeus. The *not* insane—except on one subject—present wife of the little purple-bearded millionaire. The intercepting of Dixie DeJong, the cold-blooded, instantaneous murder of the grifter before he could open his mouth—the neatly contrived fire—yes, even that was suddenly stunningly clear as he flung the convertible over the bare roads. The attack on himself—the accidental death of the chauffeur in his stead.

And now the question had to be reconsidered: *Had* the chauffeur really been snuffed out by accident? Or had he been killed deliberately to suppress the thing that the Marquis now suspected was the nub of this whole boiling—the details of the deal which had originally started the parsimonious, money-hungry Viola Thaddeus dealing in stocks?

Centered around that, he suddenly saw the whole swarming little cluster of destruction, desperation and greed. Even—yes, even this final desperate play to which he had driven the innocent-eyed blond *Anni—and her accomplice.*

He jammed the accelerator to the floor as he poured down off the Parkway, finally raced across the Island and again spun into the South Shore Drive. It was a miracle of luck that no speed cop interfered with him. No siren or warning in the world could have stopped him at this point. It might well have come to bullets.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Payoff

BY SHEER good luck, he did not even get a whistle until he was at the very gates of the Thaddeus estate. Then a snarling, long whine, a half-mile behind him, told him his trail had finally been picked up. But it no longer mattered. He whirled into the open, tree-banked roadway, shot up the long rising Tarvia. He caught his breath as he got close enough to see one police car still in the gravel semi-circle up beside the house.

A uniformed cop—the Sergeant Guyer he had encountered earlier—poked anxiously out onto the terrace as he slid the convertible to a stop in a shower of gravel and flung himself out.

“Where are they? Where is Mr. Thad-

deus—and the rest?” he pounded at the astounded man as he jumped the steps.

“Eh? Why—why Mr. Thaddeus has locked himself in his room—with a gun. He says you told him to. He won’t let anybody—”

“How long since you saw him last?”

“Maybe an hour.”

The Marquis groaned, hurried for the door. “Where are the rest? The children? Mrs. Thaddeus?”

“The boy and the girl are—are in there. Mrs. Thaddeus is gone down to meet you where you told her.”

The Marquis whirled. “*What?* Where I told her?”

“Why, yeah—down at the number two guest house.”

Sweat bathed the Marquis. “Where is it?” he cried hoarsely. “Where is this number two—”

“Down there—on the beach.”

“Show me.” The Marquis snatched his arm—and then suddenly stopped dead, sweating, swaying in wild indecision. “Or no—no—you go down and get beside her—hurry—run—bring her back here as fast as you can.” His voice broke as the stupid cop blinked, resisted. “Go on, you fool—or you’ll have another corpse here in minutes.”

“Well, you—”

“I’ve got to get to Mr. Thaddeus. This is the payoff—it’s within seconds. Go on, or I’ll gun you, so help me!”

The other made a queer throat sound, turned and ran off as the Marquis plunged inside.

The startled, long, weary face of the boy, Darrell, one lock of hair down over his eye as usual, emerged from the living-room as the Marquis whipped into the foyer. Behind him, the spectacles of the owlsh Cynthia glittered. He flung at them, “Which is your father’s room? Where is he?” and raced up the stairs and to the end of the third story that was directly above the swimming pool, as they directed.

He pounded on the door, calling, “It’s me—Marquis, Mr. Thaddeus. Open up—hurry,” and sweat rolled down him till the timid, pinched-faced little tycoon edged the door open a crack, one blood-streaked eye peering out.

From somewhere outdoors came the

shrill, urgent blasts of a police whistle.

THE Marquis snapped, "Come on—hurry up," and grabbed the little man's arm, fairly threw him headlong down the hall ahead of him. Thaddeus almost sobbed.

"No, no—please—what is it?" he bleated. "What's happened? Let—"

"Your wife got a call that I didn't make—telling her to meet me down in the guest house. The copper's there now—he must have found something. Your secretary Anni . . . for heaven's sake, come on. This whole thing's going to pop now and I want you safe under my wing."

The old man's teeth chattered, but he stumbled along. They ran down the stairs and out onto the front terrace. The two youngsters were already there. The long-faced Darrell flung round, his dark eyes for once bright and shining as he jabbed a long finger down the beach in the opposite direction from the boathouse.

"Look! Something . . ."

The Marquis followed his pointing finger. All he could see for an instant was the thrashing flashlight beam, presumably belonging to the cop he had sent down there. Then the beam settled—on a woman lying unconscious on the ground. The whistle shrilled again—and broke off in the middle into a fit of coughing.

"Come on—all of you," the Marquis bit.

"No, no," the frightened old man's voice pleaded. "Look—there's a house phone down there. We can call—"

"No," the Marquis snapped and snatched his arm again. "Darrell—show the way—run!"

The long-faced youth hesitated just a second, then his long legs loped ahead of them. He led out to the terrace, across and past the garage and into a path through the woods that sloped precariously down the face of the hill.

Even before they were halfway down to the looming little house below, the sharp, evil smell of propane gas floated up to them. Cynthia's shrill little voice cried out: "Wait—gas!"

"Wait nothing," the Marquis roared. "Get down there. It won't hurt you in the open air."

They plunged and stumbled to the bot-

tom. The still coughing cop jabbed his flashlight down at the prone huddled figure of Viola Thaddeus.

Her throat was scratched and bleeding. The Marquis knelt quickly, found her pulse strong. Her diamond pendant was gone. She had something clutched tight to the bodice in one hand and the Marquis' heart turned over as he saw the glint of gold from between her fingers.

"She was—in there!" The coughing sergeant flung his light beam momentarily into the tiny guest house—identical with the one that had been in the woods, save that it was painted Nile-green and overlooked the ocean. It was the back door that they faced. "Lyin' on the floor. The place was full of gas. What the hell did you do to her?" he drove at the Marquis.

"I didn't do anything, chum," the Marquis said through tight teeth. "She was supposed to be killed—pulled down here by a fake phone call from someone masquerading as me. I guess the party didn't dare chance a shot and thought the gas explosion when it was touched off would kill her by itself."

"But—but why didn't they touch it off?"

"You'll see that in a minute—as soon as the gas clears out so we can go inside."

Darrell Thaddeus' voice, now hoarse, blurted: "But—but you mean . . .? Why would anyone want to kill Viola?"

"Because of a business transaction, son. The first transaction in stocks she ever made."

THERE was an instant's silence. The Marquis licked his lips.

The old man suddenly cried: "No—wait! You—you're wrong somehow. Her first transaction was one with me. I know, because I had to explain exhaustively about the market—Stock Exchange prices—what they mean and all."

The sergeant's flash beam moved over to the shrinking old man. The Marquis shifted his own, leaving the prone woman momentarily in the dark. He groped hastily—and wrenched the gold badge clear of the woman's grasp, pocketing it as he stood up.

"Just what was the transaction, Mr. Thaddeus?"

"Eh? It was simple enough. I needed

a little ready cash for another operation. I turned over a block of stock to her as security for a loan, with the option of keeping the stock if she wished."

"What kind of stock?"

The old man hesitated. "I'm afraid I can't tell you that. If it got around that I had relinquished control of it, the price might skid. It's a sound company—never fear. As a matter of fact, the price has advanced considerably since we made the transaction."

"And she still has the stock—you endorsed the certificates over to her?"

"Yes, of course."

"But they were never sent in for registration to her on the books of the company."

"No. I've just explained—that would make the deal public knowledge. I could have borrowed from a bank if I had wished that."

"How much was the stock worth? How much money involved?"

"Eh? Oh, six hundred thousand dollars, I believe. But what in God's name has that to do with anything?"

"Just this—because of that deal, your wife was supposed to die—right here—tonight—with me framed neatly for the murder."

"Framed? How? Who framed?"

"Your secretary, Anni."

"What? No, no—you must be mad."

The Marquis threw the diamond pendant down on the ground, centered light on it. "She slipped that in my pocket in New York an hour or two ago—and fled."

"But—but why would she—"

"Because her accomplice—or perhaps boss is a better word—in this racket—told her to. And then the said boss—or accomplice—cut the telephone wire here so that I couldn't get in touch even if I

divined the setup in time. This lady was supposed to be found with some of my property—er—in her hand. I was supposed to have lured her down and robbed her violently, then touched the place off, following the example set in killing De Jong.

"As a matter of fact, this murderer was either very lucky or very shrewd. Because it's not impossible that I *could* have been tabbed with the killing of DeJong—I've got a long-time grudge against him. And even the chauffeur might have been credited to me."

The baffled sergeant's voice was distracted as he begged hoarsely: "Cut out the stalling. Who did kill DeJong—and the chauffeur?"

"The same party who arranged *this* little act that we broke up at the last second. The party DeJong came all the way from Chicago to blackmail hell out of. And—the party who was so broke that it was impossible to pay off, except in murder."

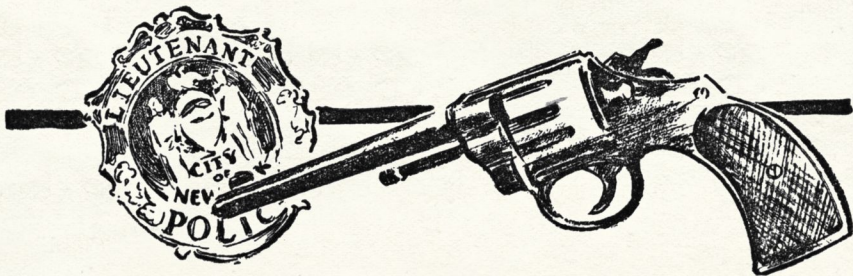
"B-broke?" the sergeant stammered. "Who? Nobody's broke around here."

"Is that so?" the Marquis asked gently. "Brother—how wrong you are."

THEY were standing in a little pool of reflected glow from the two flashlights.

The Marquis said: "I'll be perfectly frank—I never would have been smart enough to dig it out for myself. But I didn't have to. I had one of the shrewdest, wiliest brains that ever moved inside a crooked head do most of it for me. When DeJong arrived here to do his blackmail, he didn't just let it go at that, as an ordinary crook would have. He decided to look over the ground carefully, so he wandered himself down to Mr. Thaddeus' office—and looked the place over.

"Nobody but DeJong would have been



so careful to overlook no angles. And nobody but DeJong would have spotted the situation that he did. And even when the evidence of it was all in my hands—the things he took at the point of a gun from Thaddeus' office this afternoon—even then, I almost didn't see it."

Thaddeus' broken voice cried out: "But my wife! You haven't told us who was trying to kill my wife."

"Nobody was trying to kill your wife," the Marquis said.

The old man gasped. "What! But you just said—"

"Oh—this woman? She isn't your wife. Hell and damnation, she isn't even your mistress. I don't know what you'd call her. What *do* you call her?"

He said it almost casually, turned and nodded his head at the little green guest house. "Sergeant—I guess that gas has cleared sufficiently now. I imagine you'll find the final link all set up for you in there—the answer to how all these people had alibis at the time the other house was touched off. Take a careful look at the bell arrangement on the little house phone. I'll eat it if there isn't a match or two stuck under the little hammer."

He jumped, whirling, as the little purple-bearded old man finally cracked.

Thaddeus half-screamed, half-sobbed, "*Damn you—oh, damn you!*" whipped the gun from his sleeve and fired blindly.

The Marquis, even in that instant went weak with relief as he found he had succeeded in bringing his service gun to light—in the tycoon's hand. He flung himself aside, aiming carefully with McGuire's pistol—and the thing jammed without firing!

His heart went to ice as the now jerking, hysterical old man whipped the service gun around to follow him, pumping out roar and flame as fast as he could pull trigger. A line of fire went down the Marquis' leg as he scrambled frantically. Hastily, he flung McGuire's pistol—to smash the old man squarely in the mouth.

The slow-witted sergeant, at last alive to the realities, could not restrain his fire. Even as the Marquis dived for the staggering tycoon's ankle, Guyer's gun banged. His first bullet drove through the old man's neck, and the second ripped a bloody path through his skull as Thaddeus

pitched forward—to crash on his face.

FIVE minutes later as they stood waiting for Darrell to put in a final call for the local officials, the sergeant was still crying desperately: "But why? How did he get broke—if he was broke? And this blackmail . . .?"

"He went broke because he sent all his dough to France. Evidently he had been siphoning it off for two years—presumably on a series of such secret deals as the one he made with her—" He jerked his head at the still unconscious woman. "The subtlety of the trick is that, while raising cash on his holdings, he prevented the stocks being transferred out of his own name. Everybody thinks he still owns them. They still show on the books of the various companies as *his* stocks—"

"I get that, all right, but why—"

"Why? Because the guy's a family man. It seems to be his hobby, you might say. Not one family, or two, or even three. Maybe he would have gone on working up new ones till he ran down. At this point he was preparing to take on a fourth—this blond French babe, Anni. Evidently they were planning to skip to *her* country. That's why he gradually got all his money over to France—and then just when he was ready to jump—the Germans marched into that part of France and confiscated all the dough he'd so carefully accumulated there.

"And ever since then he's been helpless, hog-tied, practically broke. It was the devil's own luck that he suddenly thought of a scheme to get hold of at least enough so he and his Anni could duck out—just at the exact time that Dixie DeJong got hold of the thing out in Chicago that would take every dime of it away from him. I'll put it in words of one syllable.

"What Thaddeus was doing—and which is easy enough to prove is this: He set that fire in his guest house two months ago and then reported that certain securities were destroyed. I'll give you ten million to one that the securities he listed are the same ones that Mrs. Thaddeus is hiding away in some safe-deposit box—or maybe even here. The idea was that Thaddeus, as the stockholder of record on the books of the company simply had to arrange a bond to cover the company and

he would be issued new stock. And why should anyone doubt, or even investigate, the great Thaddeus on such a deal? The point was that, once they issued him the new stock, he could walk into the nearest stockbrokers' office and sell it, walk out with a fortune—and the shares Mrs. Thaddeus has would be worthless.

"It would, undoubtedly, have worked—except that DeJong showed up. Perhaps he got an idea of what was going on—not that he needed it—but just to strengthen his hand when he made his demand for dough.

"Naturally, Thaddeus had no dough to give him. But worse than that, he stood a good chance of going to jail instantly if DeJong felt like it."

"For what, for God's sake?"

"For bigamy, stupid. This second wife of his was crazy as a bedbug. He had her in and out of asylums all his life. The last time he got her out, she was probably just as buggy as ever—but he wanted to divorce her and marry the present incumbent. I figure he bought her out of the joint—greased a crooked superintendent

to declare she was sane. The superintendent has since gone over on other graft charges and I imagine that's what started DeJong looking over his records.

"The payoff, of course, is that, with very little effort, that last release of the woman could be reversed. Legally, I'm sure she's still as crazy as a bedbug. With the superintendent a known crook, the courts out there would be easy to convince that the woman never regained her sanity at all.

"And that would make her insane at the time Thaddeus divorced her. Only—you can't divorce an insane person in Illinois under any conditions whatsoever, so she just ain't divorced. She's still his wife."

The sergeant breathed hard for minutes. "Cripes," he blurted finally. "It's a lucky break for us you happened to stumble into this thing. God knows how we'd have ever cracked it."

The Marquis patted his gun in one pocket, felt his badge in the other. "Don't mention it. Glad I could do you a little favor, Sergeant."

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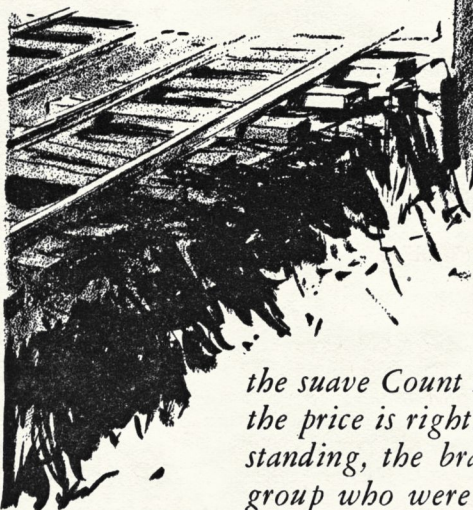
Author of "Have One on the House," etc.

CHAPTER ONE

A Break for a Bum

GUITERREZ was perched precariously on a high stool in front of the restaurant's main cooking range. His tall chef's hat was pushed down over one eye, and his face was creased into an expression of grimly fierce

One of the boards vibrated, next to Latin's ear, and he fired instantly.



"Would you mind murdering a man for me, Mr. Latin?" inquired the suave Count Fiolo. "Not at all," replied Latin, "if the price is right." And on this note of mutual understanding, the brandy-guzzling sleuth joined the little group who were searching frantically for the missing Jupiter Zachary—to make sure he stayed that way.

concentration. He was stirring the contents of a big aluminum kettle with a wooden spoon a good two feet long. He made each movement with as much care as an artist painting a masterpiece.

There were other people in the kitchen, quite a lot of them. Busboys and pantry-men and assistant chefs and dishwashers. They walked softly and talked in whispers and gave Guterrez a wide berth. The old master was mean enough normally, but when he was cooking he was awful.

He looked up now suddenly and yelled: "Who the hell opened that back door?"

"I did," said Max Latin.

Guterrez teetered on his stool, glowering. "You, you crook! Are you still running around loose? What's the matter with our police force, anyway? They hardly ever pinch you any more. Have you bribed them all?"

"Nearly," Latin admitted. He was a tall man, lean and dark and trim-looking. He had greenish eyes that tipped a little, cat-like, at the corners and an expression of blandly cynical self-assurance. "What's that you're cooking?"

"Gumbo," said Guterrez. "*Gumbo Guterrez.*"

"Is it on the menu tonight?"

"It is not. It's too good for my lousy customers. It's for the waiters and kitchen-help exclusively."

DICK, the headwaiter, came in through the metal-faced swing door that separated the kitchen from the main dining-room. He was a wizened little man, and he was wearing an apron that was large enough to furnish cover for three people his size.

"Listen, lame-brain," he said to Guterrez. "Why don't you get down off that stool and act like you had some sense?"

"Go away," said Guterrez. He ladled up a spoonful of the kettle's contents and sipped at it and then muttered to himself threateningly. He took a very small pinch of spice out of one of the cans on the shelf above the range and dropped it into the kettle. He stirred with fanatical care, still muttering.

"Look," said Dick. "I've got a special steak coming up. A five dollar number. You're supposed to be watching it."

"Shut up!" Guterrez screamed. "I am

composing *Gumbo Guterrez!* It's a work of genius! Nothing must interfere with my concentration!"

"The steak is for Mr. Saltonwaite," said Dick.

"Go to hell! Take Mr. Saltonwaite with you!"

"He's a good customer," said Dick.

Guterrez turned around slowly. "How many times must I tell you that this restaurant doesn't have any good customers? They are all pigs."

"Well, they've come to the right place then," said Dick. He picked up a butcher knife and began to play mumble-peg on the wooden top of the steak table. "Hello, Latin. Who's that droopy-looking dope behind you?"

Latin looked over his shoulder. "What's your name?"

"Boston," said the man. "That's what everybody calls me, I guess."

He was standing close against the back door with his shoulders hunched up close against his skinny neck, as though he were trying to take up as little room as possible. He had a draggled brownish mustache, and his lips trembled in a timidly apologetic smile under it. His eyes were a weak wavering blue. He was wearing an old suit coat fastened up the front with safety pins and overalls with canvas patches on the knees. He needed a shave and his face was dirty and his hair stuck up in clumps through the holes in his shapeless hat.

"I bet they call you worse than that sometimes," Dick observed. "Where'd you pick it up, Latin?"

"I found him out in the alley," Latin said. "He was trying to dig some food out of the restaurant garbage cans. He's hungry. Can you fix him up something decent to eat?"

Guterrez turned his head. "Is that true, bum? Are you hungry?"

Boston nodded quickly. "Yes, sir. I guess I'm pretty hungry."

"Could you eat a lot?"

"Yes, sir. I sure could, I guess."

"I've got just the thing for you," said Guterrez. "Nels! Put a set-up there at the end of the steam table. Coffee and salad—and a steak knife."

"And a what?" Dick demanded. "Listen, stupid, are you going to give this old

rummy Mr. Saltonwaite's special steak?"

"Yes," said Guterrez, getting down off the stool and heading for the steak broiler. He pulled the door down and peered inside. "It'll be ready in a minute. Nels, hurry with that set-up. Bum, go over and wash your hands and face at that sink there." He seized a long-handled fork and prodded at the sizzling steak in the broiler.

"What'll I tell Mr. Saltonwaite?" Dick asked.

"Tell him to go home. Tell him I don't like him."

"You don't even know him," Dick said.

"I don't like him anyway," Guterrez answered. He slammed the door of the broiler and turned around and yelled: "Get out!"

"O.K.," Dick said. "I'm going. But Mr. Saltonwaite will raise hell." He pushed the swing door open and went into the front of the restaurant.

GUITERREZ opened the broiler and prodded the steak again, and it spattered back at him lusciously. One of the busboys rattled plates and cutlery at the end of the steam table. Boston, his face gleaming and his ragged hair slicked back, sat down there and moistened his lips in anticipation.

Dick poked the door open. "I told you," he said. "Here he is."

Saltonwaite thrust past him and into the kitchen. He was skinny and stooped and bald, with a little pot-belly like a half-inflated balloon. He still had a napkin tucked into the top of the vest of his neat blue business suit. His wrinkled face was flushed with rage.

"What's this?" he demanded shrilly. "What's this, Guterrez? Where's my steak?"

"It isn't yours any more," said Guterrez. "It belongs to the bum."

Saltonwaite waved his pipe-stem arms. "I ordered that steak specially! You can't do this to me, Guterrez!"

"Oh, yes I can," said Guterrez. He proved it by hooking the steak out of the broiler with the fork and carrying it, still spattering, across the kitchen and plopping it down on the plate in front of Boston. "Eat it."

Boston gulped. "If it belongs to this

gentleman here, I wouldn't wanta—"

Guterrez leaned over him. "Eat—that—steak!"

"Yes, sir," said Boston, frightened. He cut hurriedly into the steak.

Saltonwaite licked his thin lips, watching. "This is a crime, Guterrez! This is outright theft!"

"Sue me," Guterrez invited.

"My steak," Saltonwaite mourned. "My beautiful, beautiful steak that was specially ordered . . ." He lifted his head and sniffed alertly. "What's that I smell?"

"If it's bad, it's probably yourself," Guterrez told him.

"Oh, no," said Saltonwaite, sniffing again. "I think . . . I know! Its gumbo! Yes, it is! It's cooking right here in this kettle!"

"Get away from there!" Guterrez shouted. "Leave that alone! That's not on the menu! It's not for the customers!"

"I want some," said Saltonwaite, leaning greedily over the kettle.

"You can't have any! Get out of here!"

"No," said Saltonwaite stubbornly. "I want some of this gumbo."

"Dick," said Guterrez in a dangerous voice. "Hand me that butcher knife."

Saltonwaite looked around with a desperately cunning gleam in his eyes. Suddenly he snatched a canister from the shelf over the range and held it tilted just over the kettle.

Guterrez screamed like a man in agony. "Don't! Stop it! That's sugar! Don't pour it in the gumbo, or you'll ruin it!"

"I want some gumbo," said Saltonwaite, wiggling the canister warningly. "Do I get some?"

"Yes!" said Guterrez. "Get that sugar away from it!"

"I want a lot," Saltonwaite bargained. "Two big bowls."

"Yes!" Guterrez promised. "Yes, yes, yes!"

SALTONWAITE put the canister back on the shelf and patted his hands together in a dignified scholarly way. "Please see that I am served at once. And remember—two full bowls." He strutted back through the swing door.

"You see?" Guterrez said accusingly to Latin. "You see the kind of customers you have in your damned restaurant?"

I won't work here any longer! Don't argue with me! I'm through! I quit! I resign!"

"Write me a letter," Latin invited.

He pushed the metal door open and went into the front room of the restaurant, and it was like entering the violent ward of an asylum. Even this early all the closely placed tables were crowded with customers who were voraciously intent on their food. They ate whatever was put before them, whether they had ordered it or not. They didn't care. They had no reason to. All the food Guitierrez served was superb. He was really almost as good a chef as he claimed to be.

Besides its food, the restaurant certainly had no other attractions. It was bare and dingy and crowded and noisier than a street fair on Saturday night. A mangy horde of waiters banged and slammed around and swore at each other and the customers. The cash register clanged and a juke box shrieked in agony from one corner.

Guitierrez wasn't posing. He hated his customers. When he cooked something he wanted to sit and savor it and congratulate himself. He didn't want to sell it. He was an artist. He tried to make the place as uncomfortable as possible in the hopes his fans would get discouraged and stay away. They didn't.

Latin was used to the uproar, and he sat down in his special booth, the last one of the line against the wall near the kitchen door.

Dick came back from serving Saltonwaite his gumbo and stopped beside Latin's table. "That screwball in the kitchen gets nuttier every day," he observed. "One of these days they're gonna haul him off to the funny house and let him bake mud pies for the rest of his career. What do you want to eat?"

"Brandy," said Latin.

Dick took a bottle and a glass from somewhere under his voluminous apron. "Oh, I knew that." The bottle was a fresh one, and he tore the foil off the cork with his teeth and spat it on the floor. "This stuff has gone up. It costs seventeen-fifty a fifth now, so don't go splashing it around. He pulled out the cork, still using his teeth, and put the bottle and the glass down in front of Latin.

"Don't you want anything else though?"

"Not now," said Latin. "Save me some of that gumbo."

"I'll put a bowl in my pocket," Dick promised. He went back into the kitchen.

CHAPTER TWO

Down Payment on Murder

"PARDON me," said a gently smooth voice. "If you please. Pardon me." "All right," said Latin, looking up. "What for?"

"For disturbing you. If you please, may I sit down?"

"Go ahead," Latin said.

The man slid into the seat on the other side of the table and sat there smiling at Latin in a courteously pleased way. He was tall and broad-shouldered and very tanned. He was so handsome he didn't look quite real. His eyes were a deeply limpid brown. He had a thin close-clipped mustache and perfectly waved black hair. He wore a tan gabardine suit and a tan shirt and a darker tan tie. They had all cost money—a lot of it.

"I am Count Fidestine Fiolo," he said. "You are Max Latin, the private inquiry agent, are you not? I am indeed very happy to meet you."

"Thanks," said Latin.

Dick came out of the kitchen and leaned over the high back of the booth. "You sure pick up some crummy characters, Latin," he observed critically. "Where'd you find this study in brown?"

"Never mind," said Latin. "Bring another glass."

Dick produced one from under his apron. "Remember what that brandy costs. Guitierrez says if you don't stop puttin' away so much, you'll have to switch to a cheaper brand. You're runnin' the joint in the red." He went back into the kitchen again.

"Have some brandy?" Latin asked.

Count Fiolo smiled charmingly. "You are so kind. Thank you, I will." He watched Latin pour the brandy. "Are you an honest man, Mr. Latin?"

"No," Latin answered.

"Are you dishonest? I mean, actively so?"

"Yes," said Latin.

"Ah," said Count Fiolo in a pleased way. "Then we can talk as equals. I, too, am dishonest. Very dishonest. Is that hard for you to believe?"

"No," Latin admitted.

"Good!" said Count Fiolo. "We understand each other already. I wish to hire you to undertake a highly confidential task for me."

"Go ahead," said Latin, pouring himself another glass of brandy.

"All right. Have you ever heard of a man named, most unpleasantly, Ebenezer Zachary?"

"No."

"He was the president of the Planet Iron Foundry—also the sole owner."

"Was?" Latin repeated.

"Yes. He's dead, I'm happy to say. He took a long time to assume that status. I was getting most impatient. He had six strokes and still refused to die like any decent person would. I was seriously considering poisoning him when the seventh finished him. He left two sons."

"So?" said Latin idly.

"Yes. Unfortunately. Their names are Mars and Jupiter. Ebenezer made a hobby of astronomy—hence the peculiar names. Mars Zachary has a daughter named Hester—an only daughter."

"Oh," said Latin.

COUNT FIOLO nodded eagerly. "You are beginning to understand already, eh? Ah, you are very clever. The Planet Iron Foundry is an enormous business. It is worth two or three million dollars."

"The plot being," said Latin, "that you marry the granddaughter and wind up with the iron foundry."

"Correct," said Count Fiolo. "Only it is not quite that simple, I assure you. Else I would not be here, much as I enjoy your company—and the brandy."

Latin poured him another drink.

"Thank you," said Count Fiolo. "You are very kind. There are two obstacles in the way of my—ah—happiness. One of them is Hester, the granddaughter's physical appearance. She has pimples, buck-teeth, and halitosis. It is really a dangerous undertaking to kiss her. But that isn't all. She is also flat-breasted and bow-legged. Frankly, the thought of marrying her appalls me. I give you my word

that the prospect of it gives me nightmares and I have to drink a great deal of brandy to compose myself."

Latin poured him a drink.

"Thank you so much," said Count Fiolo. "We understand each other."

"Not yet, we don't," said Latin. "What do you expect me to do about Hester? Are you trying to hire me as a substitute?"

"No," said Count Fiolo regretfully.

"No, I'm afraid that wouldn't be practical. I will have to bear that burden alone. It will be awful—but three million dollars— No, there's another matter I wish you to look into. Would you mind murdering a man—I mean, of course, as a last resort?"

"Not if the price is right," said Latin.

Count Fiolo waved his hand. "That will be taken care of, I assure you. I will be very generous with my wife's money as soon as I get it. And that's the trouble. There might be a delay before I could get it. Months, even years. That would be terrible, would it not?"

"Oh, yes," said Latin. "And you piling into bed with Hester and her halitosis night after night—"

"Please!" Count Fiolo begged, shuddering. "I cannot even bear the mention without . . . Ah, yes. Some more brandy. You are so kind. As I was saying, there are two obstacles. One is Hester, and the other is Jupiter Zachary. He is Hester's uncle. Ebenezer Zachary left his whole estate jointly to his two sons with the proviso that they were not to separate it or divide it but were to run it and share it equally."

"That sounds all right," said Latin.

"No," said Fiolo. "Oh, no. Because Jupiter Zachary is what is commonly known as a stinker. He hates everybody and everybody hates him, when they can find him. Just now, they can't."

"Can't find him?" Latin asked.

"He has disappeared. That is nothing unusual. He often does. He gets mad and goes away, and then pretty soon he gets hungry and comes back home again. You see, Ebenezer Zachary kept absolute control of all his money. He gave each of his sons twenty-five dollars a week and that is all. He made them work twelve hours a day, six days a week, in the foundry to

get that. He wouldn't allow them to get any other jobs. If they tried it, he would bring pressure on their employer and get them fired. He hated them and they hated him and each other, too."

"A nice family," Latin commented.

"No," Count Fiolo contradicted. "Definitely, no. But that is aside from the point. Ebenezer left his property to them *jointly*. If either one dies, all of it goes to the other. If either one should go away, the remaining one can run things as he pleases. But if they are both here, then both have an equal say about everything."

"That would be bad?" Latin hazarded.

"But, yes," said Count Fiolo. "They cannot get along with each other at all. They do not even speak. Whatever one wanted, the other would vote against. Remember, neither can take one cent out of the profits of the foundry without the consent of the other."

"It would be a good thing then if brother Jupiter kept right on being hard to find?"

"I must be certain he does," said Count Fiolo earnestly. "I cannot risk marrying"—he drew a deep breath—"Hester unless I have that assurance. Will you find Jupiter and make sure he doesn't come back?"

"I'll give it a ring," Latin agreed.

Count Fiolo smiled and nodded. "Then it is all settled and we are in agreement. I will expect to hear from you at the

earliest possible moment. Haste is vital. I assure you. I will have a great deal of difficulty delaying the wedding much longer. You can get in touch with me at the Copa Negra Club."

"Don't hurry away," said Latin. "There's a little matter of finances. We won't strike a bargain on the whole deal until I see what I can see, but let's talk about a retainer now."

"But of course!" said Count Fiolo enthusiastically. "How stupid of me! Would a thousand dollars be enough?"

"Yes," said Latin.

"I will write you a check."

"No," said Latin.

"I will give you my note."

"No," said Latin.

"I can give you fifty-three dollars and fifteen cents in cash."

"Now you're talking," said Latin.

Count Fiolo sighed. Reluctantly he produced a handsomely embossed leather wallet and took all the bills out of it. He found two nickels and five pennies in his change pocket and stacked them neatly on top of the bills.

"That's the down payment," Latin informed him. "I'll be around for some more by-and-by."

"You are so considerate," said Count Fiolo.

"Oh, yes," Latin agreed. "By the way, are you sure you can handle Hester's papa

The advertisement features three comic-style panels at the top. The first panel shows a man shaving with the word "DATE!" written above him. The second panel shows a man shaving with the word "GREAT!" written above him. The third panel shows a man and a woman smiling together with the word "RATE!" written above them. Below the panels is a large box of Probak Jr. Blades. The box is labeled "20 PROBAK JUNIOR BLADES" and "20 FOR 25¢ 4 for 10¢". A small box at the bottom of the advertisement says "RECEPTACLE FOR USED BLADES INSIDE!".

**You Get Slick Shaves Every Time
With PROBAK Jr. Blades...Twenty
For A Quarter!**

RECEPTACLE FOR
USED BLADES INSIDE!

20
PROBAK
JUNIOR
BLADES
20
FOR 25¢
4 for 10¢

—Mars Zachary—even if Jupiter Zachary stays out of sight?”

Count Fiolo smiled. “Certainly. He is very fond of me, indeed.” Fiolo pointed to the money on the table. “Besides, I am giving him bridge lessons.”

Latin nodded. “I’ll bet you are.”

“He is so stupid,” said Count Fiolo, shrugging, “that it is not even necessary for me to cheat—very much. Good-night, Mr. Latin. It was such a pleasure dealing with you.”

“Good-night,” said Latin absently.

Count Fiolo went away, and Latin sat still and relaxed in the booth, staring absently at nothing, frowning a little. After awhile he held the brandy bottle up against the light to see how much there was left in it and then poured himself a carefully small drink.

“Young man.”

“Yes?” said Latin.

Saltonwaite was standing beside the booth, staring down at him accusingly. He had both hands folded proudly and protectively over his small pot-belly, and he was still wearing his napkin. He cleared his throat with a sharp little bark and said: “I saw you conferring with that fortune-hunting gigolo just now. What did he want?”

“Some of my brandy,” Latin answered. “Do you know him?”

“I regret to say that I do. I was careful not to let him see me because he always either insults me or tries to borrow money from me or both. I disapprove of his manners and morals and appearance and intention to marry Miss Hester Zachary.”

“You should tell him about it.”

“I have. It has very little effect. You are Max Latin, and you call yourself a private inquiry agent, and you are the undercover owner of this restaurant.”

“Well, how do I do,” said Latin. “I’m glad to know me.”

“This is not a matter for levity, as you will find if you proceed any further with any schemes you may have hatched up with Count Fiolo. At one time or another you’ve been arrested for almost every crime in the calendar, but you’ve never been convicted of anything.”

“A man is innocent until he is proven guilty,” Latin said righteously.

“I doubt if that maxim applies to you,” said Saltonwaite. “I doubt it very greatly. You haven’t been convicted because you’re very clever, but this is the place to stop. I am an attorney, and I drew up Ebenezer Zachary’s will. I warn you, it’s puncture proof. And I warn you further that if you and Count Fiolo make any attempt to alter it or change its effect you’ll both be sorry. This will is going to be executed exactly as it was written. If you try to tamper with it in any way, it will be my very pleasant duty to see that you go to prison for a suitably long term.”

“I’ll think it over,” Latin said. “Maybe I can work up a fright if I give myself time enough.”

SALTONWAITE pointed a rigid bony finger. “You will find that I am a very relentless man.”

“Do you want to relentless some more gumbo?” Dick asked, coming out of the kitchen with a bowl of it in his hand.

“Yes!” Saltonwaite snapped. “Carry it more carefully! Stop shaking it like that! Don’t let it get cool!”

He followed Dick away, hovering over him and the gumbo as anxiously as a mother hen with a lone chick. Guterrez came out of the kitchen and leaned his arms on the back of the booth and stared down glumly and silently at Latin.

“Do your feet hurt?” Latin inquired.

“Look, Latin,” said Guterrez. “I don’t mind minor crimes like robbery and blackmail and stuff, but murder is an entirely different kettle of fish.”

Latin turned around and jerked back the moth-eaten drape against the wall at the end of the booth, revealing the shiny bright circle of a microphone. He snapped the slide switch on the cord above it.

“You’re not supposed to listen in on that unless I signal you. I put that in there to get evidence in case I needed the testimony of some witnesses. I didn’t rig it up just for your entertainment.”

“Don’t avoid the issue,” Guterrez ordered. “What about this Count Fiolo? Are you going to knock that poor Jupiter gent off like he wants you to?”

“For fifty dollars?” Latin scoffed. “Do you think I’m crazy?”

“No,” said Guterrez. “But you’ll have me that way before long. Just supposing

Jupiter should have a fatal accident any day now. What then?"

"Why, I'd have an alibi."

"What?" Guitierrez asked.

"At the very time the accident happens, I will be sitting right in this booth having a brandy. You'll testify to that."

Guitierrez drew a deep breath. "Do you know what happens to people who swear to phoney alibis in a murder case? They get put in jail for a long, long time."

"We have a very nice penitentiary in this state," Latin told him. "All the modern conveniences. You'll like it."

The swing door squeaked a little, and Boston put his head through the opening timidly. He looked around and saw Latin and Guitierrez and edged himself through the door.

"I'm all done now, and I guess I better be goin' along. I sure thank you, Mr. Guitierrez, for the meal. And you, too, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Latin," said Latin.

"Yes, sir. Thank you, too. I sure wish I could ask another little favor of you."

"What, bum?" Guitierrez demanded.

"Well, that gumbo," said Boston apologetically. "That sure smells mighty fine. I reckon it'd taste pretty good to a fella that was hungry."

"Are you still hungry, bum?" Guitierrez asked incredulously.

"Me? No, sir. Oh, no. I just thought it'd be awful nice if you'd give me a little of that gumbo to take along to Jupe."

"To who?" Guitierrez said.

"To Jupe," Boston repeated. "To my pal, Jupiter. That's his name."

LATIN was taking a drink. His hand jerked, and some of the brandy slopped on the table. Latin wiped it up carefully with his napkin.

"Jupiter," he said casually. "That's a name you don't hear very often. Is there any more to it?"

"Huh?" said Boston. "Oh, I dunno. He says his first name is Jupiter, so I call him Jupe because he's my pal. I'm pretty worried about Jupe. I guess he don't feel very good about now."

"Why not?" Latin asked.

"Well, he went out stemming—pan-handling—downtown and somebody gave him four bits, and he bought four tins of

canned heat and got himself in quite a stew."

"Why, that's terrible," said Latin. "That's awful. Certainly we'll give you some gumbo to take to Jupe. In fact, I'll go with you when you take it. I'm afraid Jupe might be seriously ill, and we want to see that he gets—the best of care."

"I'm beginning to feel a little sick myself," said Guitierrez faintly. "Latin, now please . . ."

"Get me the telephone," Latin ordered.

Guitierrez sighed and went away, dragging his heels.

"Well, now," said Boston hesitantly. "It ain't necessary to take any trouble, Mr. Latin. Jupe won't be honest-to-God sick. He'll just have a hangover. He drinks canned heat all the time. It don't seem to hurt him none."

"You never can tell," Latin observed.

"Where is he now?"

"Down in our little packing-box shack by the railroad cut south of town."

Guitierrez came back carrying a portable telephone. "Latin," he said pleadingly. "Now listen—"

"Go put some gumbo in a milk bottle," Latin told him, plugging the telephone in at a switch under the microphone. "Save some for yourself."

"I don't think I'm very hungry any more," said Guitierrez.

Latin dialed a number. The line clicked after the first ring, and a voice boomed joyously in his ear. "Hello, there! Happy's All-Night Garage! Snappy service—any time, anywhere!"

"This is Latin, Happy."

"Latin, my boy! Hooray! It's good to hear your voice! You're feeling fine, I hope?"

"Very fine," said Latin. "I want a car, Happy. One you wouldn't recognize if someone should happen to show it to you."

"Ah-ha! Dirty work, hey? That's the old pepper, Latin! I hadn't heard from you for so long I was afraid you'd turned honest on me. Why, this is the best news I've heard since Hirohito got the hives! I've got just the thing for you, my boy. A new Buick coupe registered in the name of Elmer Quinwipple. Do you know who Elmer Quinwipple is?"

"No," Latin admitted.

"Neither do I! You know why? Because there ain't any such person! I'll send it right over!"

CHAPTER THREE

Black-Out

THE coupe fled silently across the slender span of a concrete bridge. On the other side, Latin pulled off the highway and slowed down. Gravel spattered under the fenders, and the car rocked smoothly over the washboard roughness of the road shoulder.

"About here, I guess," said Boston. "This'll be fine."

Latin put on the brakes and stopped. He switched off the bright swath of the headlights and got out. The wind was chill and thick with the promise of fog, and he turned up the collar of his light topcoat.

Boston came around the front of the car, admiring it. "Ain't never ridden in a car like this before. Sure nice. Mighty pretty, too."

"I'll tell Mr. Quinwipple you liked it," Latin said. "Have you got the gumbo?"

"Sure. Right here. Maybe—maybe I better run along ahead and just sort of prepare Jupe for your comin'."

"Why?" Latin asked.

"Well, Jupe's funny. He's got kind of a mean disposition. He's likely to sort of rear up and sass people, especially when he's got a hangover. Oh, he's got a good heart. Fine fella, Jupe is—educated, too. But he's a mite short-tempered. I think maybe he was disappointed in love or something."

"Or something," Latin agreed. "Don't worry. He'll like me. Everybody says I have a charming personality. Which way do we go?"

"Well—there's a path right beside that bridge apron. But I'd feel better if you'd let me tell Jupe you was comin' first, so he won't go heavin' rocks at us like he did the last time I brought a fella home. You could sort of sit on the bridge railing and look at the view. It's mighty pretty, Mr. Latin."

They were on the first lift of the hills, and the city spread below them in a deep semi-circle following the line of the bay,

like an incredibly garish, brilliantly colored blanket. The red and green and blue of neon lights painted the whole sweep of the sky with their smeared colors. Automobile headlights scuttled and jumped and jittered like lively bugs. Traffic noise was a low hum that rose and fell a little in its minor key.

"I sure like that view," said Boston. "It makes a fella think—"

A siren began to keen, thin and very faint. Instantly another sounded, closer, and then another and another and another until there was no distinguishing their individual voices. They screamed without pause—on and on and on until the night began to pulsate with their warning.

"What's that?" Boston asked shakily.

"Air raid," said Latin.

Below them, the city was answering the command of the sirens. It began to black-out in sections, working from the outskirts inward. The lights that formed the small squares that were blocks snapped off, and the city drew in on itself protectively. The little headlight bugs stopped scuttling around and disappeared. The neon faded thinner and thinner and was gone.

The sirens stopped. Their echoes carried a little, and then there was no sound anywhere.

"Oh, gee," Boston said in an awed whisper.

There was no city now. It was hidden, waiting.

"I never seen anything like that before," said Boston. "It's kinda scary, ain't it?"

Latin cleared his throat. "Let's go."

"Huh?" said Boston. "What?"

"Business as usual," said Latin.

THE white loom of the bridge apron felt cold and smooth under his palm, and he groped downward with his foot until he located the slant of the path. It was rough with little foot-holds like steps kicked in it.

Latin went downward carefully, bracing himself against the cement abutment, and the night seemed to grow darker and colder around him. He reached the bottom, and gravel from a railroad bed rolled loosely under his feet.

Boston's feet thumped beside him. "Say,

about that air raid. Hadn't we better sort of—sort of hide?"

"We're as safe here as anywhere else," Latin told him. "Probably safer. Which way?"

"There's a little ravine up this way."

He was a vague shambling shadow, and Latin followed him along the slick parallel gleam of railroad tracks.

"About here," said Boston.

Latin felt brush rake lightly at the skirts of his topcoat, and his feet sank a little in soft ground. The sides of the ravine were steep and high, and it was like walking in a very deep, crooked trench.

"Right beyond this bend," said Boston. "Jupe! Hey there, Jupe!" His voice echoed emptily. "He ain't showin' no light nor nothin'. I guess maybe them sirens scared him, although he really ain't a guy that scares very easy. Oh, Jupe!"

Latin could make out the faint outline of a shack pushed in against the bank, sway-backed and shapeless, not much larger than a good-sized packing case.

Wood creaked and scraped against hard earth as Boston tugged at a panel that served as a door. Stifflingly thick, warm air moved against Latin's face.

"Come in," Boston said. "Watch your head. I guess Jupe ain't here. I guess maybe he went to panhandle some dough for some more canned heat."

Latin struck a match, shading it very carefully with his palms. The shadows swerved and danced along stained bare walls, swept in quick flicks across the low ceiling. The light touched the edge of a ragged pile of blankets.

"Why, there he is," said Boston. "He ain't even woke up yet. He musta got more canned heat than I thought, I guess. Hey, Jupe! Wake up!"

Latin stepped closer, still holding the shaded match. The man was sprawled on his back on top of the blankets, and the match flame reflected in twin glitters from his open unmoving eyes.

"Why, say—" said Boston, and then gulped.

Latin raised the match high for a quick calculating look around the bare room and then blew it out. He was carrying a .38 Colt Police Positive in a shoulder holster under his suit coat, and he took the gun

out now and held it poised in his right hand, listening tensely.

"Say, Mr. Latin—" Boston whispered. "Jupe looked to me like he—he—"

"He's dead," said Latin.

Boston made a noise breathing. "Oh, gee. It don't seem hardly possible canned heat—I mean, he drinks it all the time, and it never did this before."

"It didn't do it this time," Latin answered. "Somebody stuck him with an ice pick."

"Wh-what?"

"Did you see that little red mark—like a big period—on his forehead just above his right eye? An ice pick did that. Somebody drove it right through his skull into his brain. If you've got a strong arm that's an easy way to kill a person."

"Oh," said Boston numbly. "An ice pick in his head . . . Stickin' in . . . Oh! I'm gonna—gonna be sick—"

"Quit that!" Latin said sharply. "You go and report his death. Do it right now. Here's a nickel. Go to the nearest telephone and call the police and tell them it's murder."

"I'm scared, Mr. Latin. I guess I'm so scared I'm paralyzed. I don't wanta go out there in the dark, and there's an air raid on and a fella with an ice pick—"

"You stay here. I'll go."

"No!" Boston said quickly. "Not with—Oh, no! Couldn't we just—stay together?"

"No. Go on. Get going."

"I—I don't think—"

"Hurry!" Latin ordered.

"Oh, I'll hurry," Boston mumbled. "I'll run so fast—"

HE STUMBLED over the doorstep, and then his feet beat a raggedly thudding tattoo down the ravine. Latin waited until the echoes died, standing still, listening with his head tilted in concentration.

After a long time, he dropped the Police Positive into his overcoat pocket. He groped his way blindly across the room toward the pile of blankets and knelt down beside it and struck a match.

The dead man's face looked yellow, waxily drawn. He could have been almost any age—young or old or in the middle. He was thin and not very tall,

and his eyes were a pale blue shot with red veins. He was wearing a ragged blue serge suit and tennis shoes with holes in the toes.

Latin began to search him, working very expertly and rapidly. He turned up a beer can opener, a spool of thread, a jack-knife with a broken handle, and a limp sack of cigarette tobacco. The match burned his fingers, and he dropped it, swearing to himself in a whisper.

He waited for a moment, listening, and then struck another match. He hit paydirt this time. The inside pocket of the dead man's coat was fastened shut with two big safety-pins. Latin loosened them and pulled out a limp dog-eared wallet. In it he found a driver's license, an identification card, a draft registration all made out in the name of Jupiter Zachary.

Latin blew out the match and put the wallet carefully in his own pocket. Lighting another match, he continued his search. He could find nothing else at all on the dead man that would serve to identify him.

He put the last match out and started to get up, and then he froze that way, half-crouched, his head turned toward the gray-black oblong that marked the door. Very slowly he slid his hand into his coat pocket and brought out the revolver.

The seconds dragged, lengthening interminably. Latin straightened up and made the door in two cat-like steps. He slid out into the fresh coldness of the night, flattened himself against the wall of the shack.

Gravel rolled and rattled out on the road bed, and then a blurred voice suddenly split the deep silence, shouting jubilantly: "*Oh, she'll be coming 'round the mountain when she comes! Too-ot! Toot! Choo-choo! She'll be coming 'round the—*" The voice dropped to a hoarse grumble. "Now where the hell is that ravine? Right here somewhere . . ."

More gravel rolled, and brush crackled. The hoarse voice swore feelingly and then shouted: "Jupe! Boston! Where are you?"

"Who's there?" said Latin.

"Huh?" said the hoarse voice. "I'm here, that's who. What *you* doin' here? You ain't Jupe nor Boston. Show a light."

Latin didn't obey. He cocked his revolver instead. The small cold click carried plainly in the stillness.

There was a quick little rustle in the air and then a *tock* next to Latin's ear. One of the boards in back of him vibrated just slightly.

Latin fired instantly. The powder made an orange flare against the night, and the echoes rolled deafeningly and redoubled as Latin fired again, shooting low at what he guessed was the center of the ravine.

The echoes drummed and faded away. Latin waited, revolver poised in his hand. There was no further sound, no movement, until far away and faint the hoarse voice shouted: "*Oh, she'll be driving six white horses—*"

The voice faded eerily and was gone.

Latin swore to himself in a bitter monotone. He struck a match and looked at the wall of the shack. An ice pick was sticking in a board about six inches from where Latin's head had been. It was just an ordinary ice pick, the kind given away as an advertisement, and on its yellow wooden handle were the words: Acme Ice Company—We'll Cool You Off.

"Yes, indeed," said Latin thoughtfully.

He dropped the match and crushed it under his foot. He left the ice pick where it was and felt his way carefully down the ravine to the railroad tracks. He waited for a while there, but he could hear nothing and see nothing, and finally he blundered along the cut until he located the bottom of the steep path he and Boston had come down.

He climbed laboriously up to the highway. There was no light anywhere, and the fog had crept in over the city like a vague white veil. The Buick was still parked on the shoulder. Latin walked back across the bridge and headed for the city.

CHAPTER FOUR

Tell It to Homicide

HE HAD gone about a hundred and fifty yards when he heard the putter of a motor behind him. He stopped then, looking back, holding the revolver concealed under the front of his topcoat.

Two vaguely blue slitted lights came out of the night.

"Hey, chum," said a voice. "You ain't supposed to be walkin' around in the open durin' a black-out."

Latin could see the car now. It was about the height of a wheelbarrow and no more than twice as long. It had no top. Two soldiers were sitting in the front seat—one driving and the other holding a rifle upright between his knees.

"I know," Latin said. "But this is very important."

"A matter of life and death, I don't doubt," said the soldier-driver glumly.

"Of death, anyway," Latin said. "I have to get back to the city at once. Give me a lift, will you?"

"It's against regulations," said the driver.

"So it's against regulations!" said the other soldier. "So now you want to get a promotion, I suppose? So now you're gonna be a general, huh? Maybe this bird is a fifth columnist or a parachute trooper or somewhat. We oughta ride him with us so we can watch him. Get in the back seat, chum."

Latin climbed in and sat down on the hard seat. The jeep started off with a sudden jump.

"Watch what you're doin', dummy," the soldier with the rifle said.

"The clutch slips," the driver informed him.

"So sure it slips! If it didn't, you'd tear it out by the roots. And drive on the pavement!"

"It don't make no difference to this buggy where it drives."

"It makes a difference to me, though!

You want I should get all my teeth shook loose?" The soldier looked over his shoulder at Latin. "We only patrol this road as far as the city limits. You'll have to get off there."

"O.K.," said Latin. "Thanks."

"You know," said the driver, "I figure this ain't a raid at all. I figure this is one of them armed reconnaissance flights, where the guys go prowlin' around to see what they can see."

"Oh, you got the dope, huh?" said the other one. "I suppose Hitler or Hirohito wrote you a letter?"

"I got brains."

"Since when? And keep on the pavement I told you!"

"Who's givin' orders?"

"I am! You want a bat with the butt of this rifle?"

A siren croaked somewhere ahead of them and then caught its breath and cut loose with a full-throated wail. Seconds later others joined it, and the whole night screamed with their sound. They stopped as suddenly as they had begun.

"One minute," said the driver. "All clear."

Lights began to pop up, and motors churned and roared as traffic started again.

"This is where we drop you, chum," said the soldier with the rifle. "The city limits are right ahead. You can catch a street car at the end of the line nearby."

"We should look at his identification papers," the driver suggested.

"So I suppose he wouldn't have fake ones if he was a spy? Anyway, I can tell he ain't, on account of I'm a spy expert. I can smell 'em."



with meals...or snacks



"What do they smell like?"

"Snakes."

The jeep pulled up at the side of the road, and Latin got out.

"Thanks, boys. If you ever get down to Carbon Street stop in at Guterrez' place and have a free meal."

"What?" said the driver quickly. "What was that?"

"A free meal," said Latin. "I'm in the Reserve, and I may be called up any time now, but if I'm not there just tell Dick, the headwaiter, that Latin sent you."

"Well, man!" said the soldier with the rifle enthusiastically. "Well, hell, now! Thanks, chum!"

LATIN came up the street and turned into the little alley that led back alongside the restaurant. His shadow danced jaggedly ahead of him in the dimness, and then a voice said: "Latin."

Latin spun around and dropped on one knee, jerking his revolver out of his coat pocket.

"Tish and tosh," said the voice. "You're getting jumpy, Latin. I told you your conscience would catch up on you one of these fine days."

Latin stood up slowly, and Inspector Walters, Homicide, strolled out of the shadows. Walters was tall and gaunt and ugly, and twenty years of jousting with murderers of one kind and another had left him with an acid stomach condition and practically no faith in human nature.

"You have a permit for that revolver among your souvenirs somewhere, no doubt?" he asked.

"Yes," Latin said. "Do you want to see it?"

"No. It would just make me sad. I'd like to have a short chat with you, if you can spare me a few moments."

"Come on," Latin invited.

They went in through the kitchen door of the restaurant. Guterrez was perched on his high stool again, but he was turned the other way now, with his back to the range, his chin propped glumly in his hands. When he saw Latin with Walters he made a choking noise in his throat, and his face took on a sickly greenish color.

Latin winked at him and shook his head slightly.

"Uh!" Guterrez gasped, making a valiant effort to recover himself. "One bum is all I feed a night, Latin. You'll have to take this one to a soup kitchen."

"There'll come a day," said Walters, nodding at him meaningly and following Latin through the swing door and into the main part of the restaurant.

The black-out apparently hadn't had any effect. The place was just as crowded and even noisier, if possible, than it had been an hour before. Dick appeared beside Latin's booth as soon as he and Walters had seated themselves. He produced the brandy bottle from under his apron and put it and one glass on the table.

"Have some?" Latin asked Walters.

"No."

"You bet he won't," Dick seconded. "This is a strictly high-class joint. We don't serve cops. You better eat something pretty soon, Latin."

"Bring me some gumbo."

"Nope," said Dick. "Guterrez threw it out. He said it brought him bad luck tonight."

"Tell him to make some more."

"I'll tell him," Dick said, heading for the kitchen. "If you hear an explosion, it won't be a bomb. It'll be Guterrez saying no."

WALTERS leaned back, sighing. "I like this place. It reminds me of a zoo. Now here's a little matter I'd like to take up with you, Latin. There was an unidentified bum—known only as Juve—murdered tonight in a little shack in a ravine back of the railroad cut on Highway 44 north of town. He was stuck fatally with an ice pick."

"I know," said Latin. "I found him."

"Why?" asked Walters.

Latin looked at him over the brandy glass. "What?"

"Why?" said Walters patiently. "Why did you find this bum?"

"I found his pal, an old guy named Boston, digging around in the garbage cans out in the alley tonight. Guterrez gave the old guy a meal. Then Boston said he had a friend that was sick out in the shack, so I gave him some food and took him out there."

"Why?" said Walters.

Latin shrugged. "Just charity. I

thought maybe Boston's pal might be really sick, and I wanted to help him if he was."

"No," said Walters judicially. "No, I don't think we can use that one. Think up another."

"It's the absolute truth. You can ask Guiterrez or Dick or anybody around here."

"I can," said Walters, "but I'm not going to. I should waste my time."

"How did you know about the murder?"

"Not from you reporting it, you can bet. Your pal Boston got himself pecked on the head with a blunt instrument and knocked six ways for Sunday. He was picked up and brought into an emergency first-aid station north of town, and he had quite a tale to tell about ice picks and stuff. He also said you were a nice fellow, so that knock on the head must have addled his brains. What were you prowling around with those two bums for, Latin?"

"I don't like your attitude," Latin told him. "It was charity, like I said. I'm practically full of the milk of human kindness."

"You're full of brandy and baloney. Do you know who killed that bum?"

"No."

"Do you plan on finding out?"

"Yes."

"Are you going to tell me when you do?"

"Maybe."

Walters got up. "All right, little man. But just remember that I know something about you that no one else does."

"What?"

"I know the reason why you never get convicted of any of these things you're pinched for. It's very simple. It's because you aren't guilty. You bend the law around like a pretzel, but you never quite break it. Taken all in all, you're generally almost honest."

"You spread that rumor around," said Latin, "and I'll sue you for slander."

"Latin," said Walters, "do you hear a little crackling sound under your feet? That's the ice you're walking on. It's getting awfully thin. You have something for me tomorrow, or it's going to break and let you down into some very, very

cold water. I'm not fooling either."

"Goodnight, now," said Latin.

Walters nodded. "Tomorrow. Don't forget it, or you'll have a worse headache than that brandy is going to give you."

He went toward the front of the restaurant, and Dick appeared beside the booth carrying the portable telephone.

"Somebody wants to talk to you. Don't ask me why."

LATIN plugged in the switch and lifted the telephone off its stand. "Latin speaking."

"Say, Mr. Latin, this here is Boston. You remember me, I guess, don't you?"

"Fairly well," said Latin. "What happened to you?"

"Well, it was sure funny. I come up that there little path by the bridge, and there was a fella lookin' inside your car. He had the door open, and he was kinda half-inside and half-out, and he was singin'. I swear he was, Mr. Latin. He was singin' about somebody comin' around a mountain."

"I heard him," said Latin. "What did you do?"

"Well, I snuck up on him and hollered real fierce, 'Get out of that car!' figurin' to scare him."

"Did it?" Latin asked.

"Not so's you'd notice. He come at me like a mountain cat and hit me about seven times in the head with something awful hard and knocked me down and stomped me a few times."

"Then what?" Latin inquired.

"Well, I guess he went away. I was kinda unconscious, and he wasn't there when I got up. I started staggerin' back toward town, and one of these fire-bomb watchers seen me and picked me up and brought me to this here first-aid station in a school house. They won't let me out of here, Mr. Latin."

"Why not?"

"Well, they say I maybe got a concussion, and I got to lie down and be quiet. I guess I'll have to do that, Mr. Latin. Looks like they mean what they say. I'm sure sorry about all this, Mr. Latin. I hope that singin' fella didn't steal nothin' out of your car."

"No, he didn't. Everything's all right.

You just relax, Boston. I'll come around and see how you are tomorrow."

"You will?" Boston asked eagerly. "You'll sure enough do that, Mr. Latin?"

"Sure enough."

"I'm mighty thankful . . . Say, that nurse is takin' the telephone away—"

The line snapped and then began to hum emptily as the connection was broken. Latin depressed the breaker bar, let it up again, and dialed a number.

"Hello, there!" Happy's voice bellowed. "Happy's All Night Garage! Service with a smile—anywhere, any time!"

"This is Elmer Quinwipple."

"Who?" said Happy. "Oh, yes! And I hope you're joyful and all in one piece, Mr. Quinwipple! What can I do for you, my good sir?"

"I left my car parked out on Highway 44 near the bridge across the railroad cut. Will you run out and get it when you're not busy?"

"Yes, indeedy! Right away, if not sooner! Will you be wanting it again tonight, my dear Mr. Quinwipple?"

"No," said Latin. "I thought I might give a fellow a ride in it, but he was sort of—called away unexpectedly. Thanks, Happy."

Latin hung up and reached for the brandy bottle. He held it very carefully over his glass and tilted it, but nothing poured out.

"Another seventeen fifty shot to hell," Dick observed, appearing with an enormous china bowl cupped in both his hands. "Say, you don't suppose Guiterrez is sick or something, do you? He didn't even throw any dishes on the floor when I asked him to make this. He just said something about giving the condemned man anything he wanted to eat for his last meal. What was he talking about?"

"I hope I don't know," said Latin.

CHAPTER FIVE

Death Wears a Top Hat

THE Copa Negra Club was on the second floor of a downtown building over a cut-rate clothing store, but anyone who didn't know that would never have guessed it was there. No sign advertised it, and its windows had been painted black on

the inside so that no light could escape. Its entrance was a narrow colonial type door with a dim blue light burning chastely over it.

Latin hammered the polished brass knocker, and the door opened instantly and swiftly. An English-style butler complete with sideburns and a swallow-tail coat bowed and stepped back and bowed again.

"Please come in, sir."

The hall was small and thickly carpeted with lights tilted up against the dark-paneled walls to make the ceiling appear higher.

"Your coat, sir," said the butler. "Your hat."

Latin gave them to him, and the butler passed them along to a girl in a neat black maid's uniform and got back a brass check which he handed to Latin.

"The elevator, sir."

He pressed a button, and one of the panels slid back and revealed an elevator lined with chrome and black glistening leather. Another girl in a maid's uniform was waiting in it, and she curtsied neatly when Latin entered. The elevator rose smoothly and stopped without the faintest jar, and the door slid open.

A man in an expensively tailored dinner coat bowed impressively low in front of Latin. "A very good evening to you, sir. May I show you to a table?"

"Is Count Fiolo here?" Latin asked.

The other man stopped looking pleased. "We got a very special stairs to throw process servers down. Are you one?"

"Not just now," said Latin. "I'm—"

"My dear Mr. Latin!" said another voice. "This is such a great surprise and such a very great pleasure!"

"Is it?" said Latin blankly. "Who are you?"

The man was no more than five feet tall, and he looked as round and soft as a butter-ball. He, too, was wearing a dinner coat, and he teetered up and down on his toes and beamed and made pleased chuckling noises.

"But don't you remember? I am Andriev. I am the personal friend of the great *Señor* Guiterrez. Ah, many times I have eaten the deliciousness of his supreme food. You make me so happy by coming here. You shall have our very,

very best. I, Andriev, promise it personally."

"I came to meet Count Fiolo."

"Yes, indeed! The Count is entertaining friends this evening. It is an occasion, you understand." Andriev winked and smirked at him confidentially. "It is to celebrate his coming marriage. His campaign is successful. It is settled. The girl is incredibly rich, but the face—" Andriev closed his eyes and shivered realistically. "The Count is very brave. I, Andriev, would not have the courage. This way, please, Mr. Latin."

He led the way along a hall and through an arched doorway into the main dining-room. It was enormous. Tables were banked in endless tiers around the black polished square of a dance floor. An orchestra gleamed and purred out stately jazz, and the dancers, all bare shoulders and bald heads, twirled solemnly counterclockwise. There were no jitterbugs present. It was all as impressive and high-toned as an embassy ball and Latin, always alert to such matters, decided that the prices would be pretty impressive, too.

Andriev headed around the top of the banked tiers and was starting down the wide, deeply carpeted steps that descended to the dance floor when Latin tapped him on the shoulder.

"Does he come here often?" he asked, pointing.

"Mr. Saltonwaite?" Andriev said. "Oh, yes. He comes for the *Squab Andriev*, which is really beautiful beyond dreams. I confess to you, Mr. Latin, that it is actually *Squab Guiterrez*. The great Guiterrez gave me permission to use his recipe, and the success has been colossal. I live in constant gratitude."

Saltonwaite was sitting all alone at his table, a somber and preoccupied figure against the gayety around him. He was holding a squab in both hands and gnawing away as though his life depended on it. It couldn't have been more than two hours since he had filled up on Guiterrez' gumbo, but that wasn't cramping his style any now.

"He must have taken some exercise recently to work up that appetite," Latin observed. "Do you know how long he's been here?"

Andriev snapped his fingers imperiously. "Pierre!"

A waiter jumped to attention in front of them.

"That one," said Andriev. "Saltonwaite. How long has he been here, Pierre?"

"A half-hour, sir."

"O. K.," said Latin thoughtfully. "Thanks."

ANDRIEV led the way on down the stairs and turned in at the first tier of tables. Count Fiolo jumped up from a table that held the place of honor on a direct line across from the bandstand.

"But Mr. Latin! My dear friend! I am gratified beyond words!"

He was wearing a navy blue tuxedo, and he filled it out as exquisitely as a tailor's dummy. He looked incredibly handsome and virile and dashing, and there were at least ten women at tables nearby who couldn't keep their eyes off him. He shook Latin's hand. He beamed at him. He patted him on the shoulder proudly.

"You are so kind to honor me. And now I want to present you to my betrothed. My very own loved one, this is Mr. Max Latin, with whom I have a basis of mutual understanding and trust. Mr. Latin, this is my heart, my life. This is my glamorous future—Miss Hester Zachary."

"Oh, you," said Hester Zachary. "Now, Count, you shouldn't say those extravagant things."

"Say them?" Count Fiolo echoed. "I shout them from the housetops! I call all the world to witness the beauty I have captured!"

"Oh, you," said Hester Zachary, simpering. "I'm awfully pleased to meet you, Mr. Latin."

She was wearing, of all things, a formal gown without any shoulder straps. Latin looked twice to make sure, and it was really so. Her nose was shining brightly and her eyes boggled out in a deliriously happy daze and she did have halitosis. Her hair was pulled up on one side and down on the other.

"Is she not wonderful?" Count Fiolo demanded.

"Yes, indeed," said Latin soberly.

"Oh, you," said Hester. You men.

Mr. Latin, I want you to meet my mama and papa."

"My dear, dear parents-to-be," Count Fiolo expanded. "Mrs. and Mr. Mars Zachary."

"Charmed," said Mrs. Zachary. She was small and scrawny, and in spite of that she looked like her corset was too tight. Hester had inherited her buck teeth and her shiny nose from the distaff side.

"Are you in society?" Mars Zachary asked.

"Mr. Latin is a member of the city's most exclusive inner circle!" said Count Fiolo. "He is indeed well-known."

"Yes," Latin admitted. "I have quite a record."

"We're going to get into society," said Mars Zachary. He was middle-sized and vaguely limp-looking. His hair swirled in a sticky cowlick on the top of his head, like an Indian's headdress. He had a broodingly sour expression and a manner that was furtive and defiant at the same time. He looked like he wasn't very sure he was enjoying himself.

"Don't say that," said Mrs. Zachary.

"Say what?" asked Mars.

"That we're going into society."

"Why not? Aren't we?"

"Don't argue, Mars. Will you join us, Mr. Latin?"

"Well, I don't know," said Latin. "I hadn't intended—"

Andriev saved him. He came bustling up, all smiles, and said: "My dear Count, you really must excuse me if I intrude myself. I am so honored that Mr. Latin has visited us. I took the liberty to mention it to my employer. Will you excuse yourself from this charming group and step this way with me for a moment, Mr. Latin? Will you be so kind?"

"Why, yes," said Latin. He nodded to the Zacharys. "I have a little business to attend to. I'll see you later, Count."

"Yes, indeed," said Fiolo, slightly less enthusiastic.

Andriev led the way around the dance floor and back past the long gleaming bar and knocked twice on a narrow door almost hidden by a thick blue drape that swept gracefully down from the ceiling. There was no answer to the knock, and Andriev said smoothly: "Step right in, please, Mr. Latin."

He opened the door, and Latin entered a square dark-paneled room that had no windows and was furnished only with a very small spindle-legged desk and two straight-backed chairs. The door closed softly behind him.

"Hi, Latin," said the woman behind the desk.

"Well, I'll be damned," said Latin with feeling.

"Don't boast about it. How are you, kid?"

"Surprised," said Latin.

THE woman laughed. She was fat, but there wasn't anything soft about her. She was as square and solid as a block of concrete. She was wearing a tailored gray suit, and she had gray hair. There was a diamond on her left hand the size of a dime, and it was a real one. Her features were regular enough, but they'd seen some service. She winked one slightly bloodshot eye at Latin.

"How do you like my new business?"

"You don't own this dive, do you, Rosie?"

"Rosemary, if you please. Rosemary McClure Fitzgerald. Me and my partners own it, yes."

"Who are your partners?"

"About half the people in the city hall," said Rosie blandly. "I've learned a thing or two, in my time, that comes in handy when you want partners. How do you like the tony atmosphere I dreamed up? I tell you, we got strictly class here, kid. I lay it on with a trowel, and the old bald-headed bats you saw outside love it so they practically drool every time one of my waiters bows to 'em. You know I had to enroll them waiters in an etiquette school? It's a fact. It cost me fifty dollars apiece to get them learned to talk through their noses."

"It was worth it," said Latin.

"Sure. I got the idea from learning my girls to act like little ladies. Was *that* a job! Sit down, Latin. You and me are going to have a pow-wow. Still drink this?"

She produced a bottle from under the desk and turned it so Latin could read the label.

"You bet," said Latin.

Rosie found some glasses in the desk

drawer. "You're an expensive cuss. This costs about a dollar a drink, you know that? Here."

"Thanks," said Latin. "You've had a little fender and body work done on yourself, too, haven't you?"

"Hell, I been hammered by every massager in town. Look Latin, are you my pal?"

"For fun or for money?" Latin asked.

"Both."

"Yes and no," said Latin. "Make me an offer."

"All right. I'm holdin' the baby for Count Fiolo."

"How is that?" Latin inquired.

"Like this. He comes from the same neck of the woods as Andriev, one of them countries around Poland. He got out with nothing but a spare pair of pants when Hitler came in. So he came over here and sort of dragged along the bottom giving old dames bridge lessons and such. He ran into Andriev and started to hang out here. He ran up quite a bill and bounced a few checks, so I decided to give him the brush-off. Have another drink."

"Thanks," said Latin.

"But I didn't," said Rosie. "Because I discovered that about half the dames that were my tea dance customers were comin' here on the off-chance he'd ask them for a dance. I mean, the guy slays women and no joke. So I thought I'd get my money back, and I kept him around here while I looked up a good prospect. I found what I figured was a swell one. You just met her."

"I remember," said Latin, taking a drink.

"Did you ever see the like?" Rosie said, shaking her head. "Sometimes I'd even feel sorry for Fiolo if he wasn't such a rat. What did you and he hatch up at your restaurant tonight?"

"How did you know he saw me there?" Latin asked.

Rosie said: "I've advanced him five thousand dollars. I've got his notes five for one. That baby is worth twenty-five thousand smackers to me. I keep an eye on him, and when he starts having conferences with a sharpshooter like you I begin to get the quivers. What's the gag?"

L ATIN looked into his brandy glass thoughtfully for a moment and then shrugged. "He's afraid Jupiter Zachary will show up and keep Mars Zachary from drawing any dough out of the Planet Iron Foundry to give to his daughter to give to Fiolo."

"Yeah. He's been itching over that. I tell him the dame will get the dough sooner or later anyway, but that don't comfort him much. He says if he is going to live with that face he has to have cash compensation right now and all the time. That will be really a heller."

"Fiolo said the property was left to the brothers jointly."

"Yeah. I got a copy out of the probate records and had my lawyers look at it. They say they never saw the likes. Saltonwaite drew it up. Do you know him?"

Latin nodded. "Yes."

"He put everything in that will but the kitchen sink. My lawyers doubt if that joint stuff is legal in a bequest, but it's so foxed up they think it would take ten years to break it. The will itself provides a whopping sum to pay Saltonwaite to fight for it if anyone tries to contest it. I think that's the reason for the funny stuff. He figured that joint stuff would make it so damned unhandy for the brothers—hating each other like they do—that sooner or later one of them would take a ring at busting the will, and then Saltonwaite would cut himself a real nice piece of cake. Did you ever see him cut a piece of cake or anything else, by the way? My God, that man can eat!"

"I noticed," said Latin absently. He had just gotten an idea, and his eyes were narrowed and greenish-looking in the dim light.

"This joint stuff," said Rosie. "I wish I'd known about that before I got Fiolo tangled up with Hester. Look Latin, I'm starched shirt and very ritz now, and I can't afford rough stuff or to have my name knocked around in the papers. Fiolo is sure to beef on that twenty-five thousand dollars, although it's reasonable enough. I took a long chance. I'll give you fifty per cent of all above five thousand you can collect on his notes to me."

Latin looked at her. "You've made a deal, Rosie."

"Jupiter Zachary is the boy to look out

for, Mars is just dumb, but from what I hear Jupiter is meaner than hell."

"Don't worry about Jupiter," Latin advised.

"I'm not. That's your job. Go away now, Latin. I don't want to know what you're going to do next. I have en—"

The lights went out. They didn't flicker or give any warning. They just went out all at once.

"Another air raid?" Latin asked.

"Hell, no," said Rosie. "We don't worry about air raids. I got this place blacked-out like a tomb. Some dope pulled the main switch in the basement."

"My God!" Latin exclaimed suddenly.

HE WHIRLED around and slammed into the wall and bounced back. He found the door on his second try, jerked it open. The club was a vast black cavern with voices rising in an indignant querying babble and the orchestra still banging along slightly off-key.

Latin dove headlong into a man who grunted and said: "Here, now. No panic. Bad form, you know."

Latin pushed him away, bumped into the bar. He got his bearings and ran blindly along the edge of the dance floor until he stepped on something soft that ripped and a woman threw her arms around him and screamed in his ear.

Several other women screamed, too. The orchestra petered out with a few brassy wails.

Latin got the arms loose from his neck and pushed. He hit a railing and pin-wheeled over it.

Latin climbed up over another railing and then a third. He paused tensely there, breathing hard.

"Saltonwaite!" he called. "Saltonwaite!"

There was no answer, and Latin knew he was no more than a couple of yards from Saltonwaite's table. After a second he struck a match. Saltonwaite was still sitting at the table, and he was still holding the remains of the squab in his hands. His mouth was greasy from the last bite that he had taken and that he would never taste. The yellow handle of an Acme ice pick stuck out straight from his skinny chest just over his heart.

Latin dropped the match one way and

jumped the other way, drawing the Police Positive from his shoulder holster. There were people moving and swearing and screaming all around him in the darkness. He felt along the railing and found the main stairway by falling down three steps. He kept right on going down.

"Now, Hester," said Mars Zachary's voice suddenly, close to him. "Stop it."

Hester shrieked like a lost soul. Latin grabbed out in the darkness and got her by one bare bony shoulder.

"Where's the Count?" he demanded.

"He's gone!" Hester shrieked. "I kissed him and he ran awa-ay. He said he wasn't coming back—"

"Mr. Latin!" Andriev's voice wailed. "Mr. Latin, what are you doing, please?"

Latin let go of Hester and reached out blindly and got him by the throat. "Where's the back door—quick?"

"Across the d-dance floor to the right of the b-bandstand. What is the m—"

Latin put his head down and charged across the dance floor like a one-man flying wedge, leaving a profanely howling, threshing wake behind him. He tripped, got up again and went through an invisible doorway. He hit the third step down, kept his feet by a miracle of balance, and kept on going.

HE WENT through the outside door without even knowing it was there. Wind was suddenly fresh and cold in his face, and his heels clicked hard on rough paving. He whirled to his right and saw faint light from the street outlining the alley mouth. A quick shadowy figure was running that way, dodging and twisting.

Latin jerked his revolver out and fired, shooting high. "Stop!" he yelled.

The shadowy figure put on a fresh burst of speed, and then a voice in front of it said calmly: "That'll be far enough, son. Hold it."

The shadowy figure stopped, and its arm flipped up and down again, incredibly fast. All in the same split-second there was the sharp rip of tearing cloth and the bursting flare of a revolver report. The shadowy figure bounced backwards and then went down in a sprawling heap.

Latin walked forward cautiously. "Walters."

"What the hell," said Walters. "This

monkey heaved an ice pick at me—pinned my coat right to the wall. I ripped it getting loose. This coat cost me fifty-three dollars."

Latin knelt down by the sprawled figure. "Things like that wouldn't happen if you minded your own business and quit following me around."

"I'm minding my business when I follow you around, and don't forget it. Who is this ice pick expert?"

"He's the boy who killed that bum down by the railroad cut tonight, then tried the ice pick trick on me. He also just finished off a lawyer by the name of Saltonwaite."

"What's all this?"

Latin said: "It's all about a joint called the Planet Iron Foundry, which is worth a lot of money these days. It was owned by a man named Ebenezer Zachary. He had two sons who didn't like him or each other, either. The old boy had some strokes and got sort of dotty in the bean and evidently came down with an attack of the regrets. He let Saltonwaite persuade him that the thing to do was to bring his boys together by forcing them to cooperate in running the foundry. Saltonwaite drew up a will that was supposed to arrange that, and it was really a lulu.

"You see, Saltonwaite had his eye on the profits of the iron foundry. He knew the two sons, Mars and Jupiter Zachary, wouldn't cooperate for love or money, and he had all the legal strings tied up so fancily that he was in the driver's seat. The boys would have to use him as their mutual go-between and interlocutor, and that would be very nice for Mr. Saltonwaite."

"Jupiter!" said Walters suddenly. "Jupe! Was that bum who was killed in the railroad cut Jupiter Zachary?"

"No. This bum lying here is, and he's good and dead. You nailed him right in the ticker. You see, Jupiter was just as smart as Saltonwaite and a lot tougher. He dreamed up a very nasty little scheme that would put him right on top of the heap and give him a chance to stamp on his brother's fingers. He picked out an old bum by the name of Boston and stabbed the poor guy. Boston resembled Jupiter, and Jupiter put all his identification papers in Boston's pocket so Boston's

body would be identified as his. I don't think that was Jupiter's first job of murder, by any means. He's too expert with ice picks to be a beginner."

"Identification papers?" Walters said. "Let's talk about them for a minute. There weren't any identification papers on that bum in the railroad cut. Where are they?"

LATIN nodded toward the sprawled body. "I'll bet they're in Jupiter's pocket."

"I'll bet they are, too," said Walters. "Because you just now put 'em there."

"Did you see me?"

"No," Walters admitted glumly.

"Then don't be so suspicious. Jupiter knew how dumb his brother is and how anxious he is to get some big dough so his women-folks can make a splurge. He knew Mars would jump at the chance to identify the murdered bum's body as Jupiter so he'd have a free hand at collecting the foundry's profits. Then, some fine day, Jupiter would walk up and tap his brother on the shoulder."

"Oh-oh," said Walters.

"Yes. From then on Jupiter would sit back somewhere out of sight and collect ninety-nine per cent of the profits while Mars did all the work. It was slick and quick, and if it didn't work why there was just an old bum dead, and who would give a damn? Not Jupiter, you can bet. Give him time to cover up, and you could never have proved that murder on him in fifty years. But his scheme went all hay-wire when Saltonwaite saw him at my joint. Saltonwaite knew him, but he didn't give the faintest sign of it. Saltonwaite is a slippery old devil, and he knew there was dirty work going on. Now he had Jupiter in the same crack that Jupiter had Mars."

"Hell's fire," said Walters. "What a bunch of cold-blooded babies."

"And how. Jupiter had to go on with it. He mentioned his own name to me, trying to build up his murdered-bum plant, and I sat in on the game a lot quicker than he expected. He couldn't figure me out at first. He thought maybe I was really just interested in feeding a sick bum."

"Little did he know *you*," said Inspector Walters.



FOOTPRINTS ON THE CEILING

A Colonel Kaspir Novelette

By C. P. Donnel, Jr.

Author of "Pressure Island," etc.

The Rumor was one of the ugliest ever circulated in Washington—concerning, as it did, one "Mr. Smith" behind whose forehead meshed the gigantic gears of our war effort—and it had to be scotched before it damaged public morale. So they called in Colonel Kaspir of Section Five, who came forward with the strangest strategy of his career.

CHAPTER ONE

The Rumor

THERE are people in Washington today who term the incident of Madame D'Herelles the most wantonly brutal, the most shockingly vengeful piece of Fifth Column work yet perpetrated in the United States. And there are some who, remembering her kindnesses, still make a dolorous pilgrimage once a fortnight or once a month to see her. Among these pilgrims is Colonel Stephen Kaspir, chief of Section Five, who has no reputation whatever as a sentimentalist.

Unless you are among those who enjoyed the lavish hospitality of Madame

A knife had ended Alanson's tour of duty with Section Five.



D'Herelles, her name is probably blankly unfamiliar to you. Nothing was ever published about the manner of her passing from the Washington scene.

For that matter, nothing has ever been published, in the American press, about The Rumor.

It was a big rumor, and by far the ugliest of this year notable for ugly rumors—too ugly, in fact, to be juicy. Confirmed gossips did not nibble at it twice, for it left a dry, bitter aftertaste, like the aftertaste of malarial fever.

Most rumors are social coin in Washington, assets exchangeable for cocktails, dinners, and even, in extreme cases, the favors of ladies. But this one, as swivel-tongued individuals quickly discovered, was most emphatically a liability, good only for a tongue-lashing or a punch in the nose. One ill-advised embassy hireling who mouthed it aloud at a Press Club smoker immediately lost two front teeth, and was later interrogated, with chilling insistence, by two young men from the F.B.I. From his bruised lips they learned what they already knew: nothing.

The Rumor was about Mr. Smith, which is not his name. You know "Mr. Smith" as a radio voice which makes periodic reports to the nation on our war effort—a radio voice which has, in a few short months, become the third, if not the second, most important radio voice in the world. The capitals of the world tune in to hear "Mr. Smith"—even as they do when the President, himself, is on the air.

But did you know that behind "Mr. Smith's" forehead mesh the gigantic working gears of our war effort? Did you know that it is his brain which is functioning as the timer for such potent cylinders of our war engine as the White House, the W.P.B., and the Army and Navy Departments? That it is his brain which now has these cylinders beating in the smooth and terrible rhythm which is driving us ahead with irresistible speed and power? Perhaps you did. But there were men in Berlin and Tokyo and Rome who knew it before you did. And thereby hangs my tale.

THE Rumor arrived at Section Five under awesomely official auspices, its bearer being none other than the G-2

brass hat, Major General Altemus Tancred himself.

Tancred's reluctant respect for Kaspir was equaled only by his unconcealed dislike for every facet of Kaspir's many-sided personality. In return, Kaspir treated Tancred with a gruesome lack of tact which sustained their relationship on a high level of hostility.

That Tancred should have condescended to visit the old brownstone ex-boarding house in southwest Washington which has been the headquarters of Section Five since early in '40 was in itself a testimonial to the status of "Mr. Smith."

We—Kaspir, Maude, and I—had arrived in Washington that morning by airliner from Chicago, where Kaspir had dealt sharply with a gentleman named Winkle who had been corresponding indiscreetly with a Mr. Togijara.

At the Chicago airport some enemy of mankind had informed Kaspir of a new remedy for airsickness. It consisted of repeating aloud, at the approach of nausea, some soothing poem.

An hour out of Chicago, Maude and I and every one of our dozen-odd fellow passengers knew "Trees" (the Kaspir version of the Joyce Kilmer original) by heart. Two hours out (the air was bumpy) I felt as though each word had been engraved permanently on my brain with a rivet gun.

Incredibly enough, however, this thing worked. And Kaspir, who usually spends his airborne hours commuting wanly between his seat and the lavatory, now became offensively hearty and actually began stuffing himself with chocolate cherries. And I, who had been looking forward to an uninterrupted session with Maude, suddenly found the aroma of cherry syrup so overpowering that I was forced to hustle my squeamish stomach aft no less than four times.

Maude, regal in mink-trimmed black broadcloth, poised her classic head at an aloof angle and refused to notice Kaspir, until he proffered a chocolate cherry. Whereupon she struck it from his hand and applied her quivering nose to a vial of smelling salts. Whereupon Kaspir transferred his attentions to others in the plane. We glided in over Washington just in time to prevent his being lynched

by a drumhead court martial composed of all on board.

At the airport cafe Maude and I, hollow-eyed irritable, sipped black coffee while Kaspir stowed away a gigantic breakfast. We taxied at once to headquarters, pausing only at a drugstore to allow Kaspir to purchase a gaudy box of chocolate cherries and a five-pound sack of English walnuts.

In the musty front hall of headquarters, Joe, the Negro houseboy, told us we could expect General Tancred any minute.

"What's eatin' Tancred?" demanded Kaspir, trying to conceal his surprise.

"He didn't say." Joe's bland eyes flickered just a trifle and Kaspir, who for all his bumbling manner never misses anything, snorted.

"But you gotta good idea?" he insisted.

"I have," said Joe. "It could be only one thing."

"Well," began Kaspir impatiently, "whatinell's keepin' . . . ?"

The doorbell interrupted him, and Joe left us to do his duty. Joe holds a law degree from Columbia, and his white serving jacket conceals a .45 automatic, but his "Come right in, gentleman," was delivered with a pure Virginia Negro accent.

"Oh, don't give me that minstrel routine, Joe," we heard Tancred say irritably. He came in, a small, paunchy man with a shrewd little face flanked by round, almost lobeless ears.

Of the two men with him, I knew one, a stocky individual with the unobtrusive manners of an undertaker. This was Dave Primrose, late of the White House Secret Service detail, more recently attached to the person of "Mr. Smith."

Our third visitor I had never seen before. He was as tall as Kaspir (who is six feet six) but in place of Kaspir's barrel-like bulk he ran to broad shoulders and slim hips. He had a square, pleasant face topped with close-cropped red hair, and his blue eyes were friendly.

"Kaspir," began Tancred, "I want you to meet—"

"Let's go up," broke in Kaspir rudely, and lumbered up the stairs, his rotund form mountainous in the baggy tweeds he affects. The rest of us stood aside for

Maude and fell in behind her. Behind me I heard Primrose inquire of Tancred, "Is he always like that?" and Tancred's spiteful, "No, usually worse."

KASPIR was dumping walnuts into a wooden bowl when we reached his office on the third floor rear, Maude cocked an apprehensive eyebrow at me—wondering, I knew, what line Kaspir would take with Tancred this time. In a minute we found out. Today Kaspir was being athletic. He picked up a fair-sized wooden armchair with one hand and held it out carelessly to Tancred. "Here," he directed, "have a seat by the desk." The gambit was painfully obvious. Tancred would have to use both hands, and puff and strain . . .

"Allow me, General." It was the tall, redhaired man interposing. His long, freckled paw slid past Tancred and seized the chair back. "Thanks." He nodded to Kaspir and relieved him of the chair. Using only one hand, he placed the chair by the desk with no visible effort.

Kaspir frowned, plucked a walnut from the bowl and folded his great hand about it. There was a splintering sound as the shell yielded to the pressure.

"Nuts?" Kaspir held the bowl out to Tancred, who shook his head. There was no nutcracker in the bowl. Maude also refused, glaring. Primrose said: "No thanks."

The tall man, however, took one. I thought I saw a glint in his eye, an almost imperceptible twitch of his wide mouth. He held the heavy-shelled nut between a long thumb and forefinger and contracted his hand. There was a crisp sound as the shell split evenly along its seam. The meat dropped intact into his palm. Kaspir turned a sullen pink. He has tried to do this, and can't.

Tancred watched the byplay impatiently. "If you're through showing off," he snapped at Kaspir, "perhaps we can get to business." He introduced Primrose and the redhaired man, who was a Doctor Somebody.

"My—er—secretary, gentlemen." Kaspir pointed to Maude, who crossed her long legs and smiled. His thick thumb indicated me. "Lieutenant Kettle, one of my—you call 'em operatives, don't you,

Tancred, just like in the storybooks?"

Tancred exploded. "Oh, for God's sake, sit down, Kaspir!"

Kaspir obeyed meekly and promptly, a pleased light in his eyes, his great moon face smug. He had got Tancred's goat. Now we could get to business.

"I suppose you've heard the rumor," Tancred opened. "By the way, you've got a radio here, haven't you?" He glanced at the redhaired doctor. "We wouldn't want to miss—"

"There's a table model in the outer office," I told him.

"Nine thousand eight hundred and sixty-four rumors," said Kaspir provocatively. "Which one you nursin' now, Tancred?"

The Secret Service man answered slowly and frigidly: "The one about my new boss cracking up."

A tingle crept up the short hairs of my neck, and I heard Maude's gasp. Kaspir's baby-like eyes widened a trifle, and he pursed his cupid's-bow mouth. We all knew who Primrose meant. He meant "Mr. Smith!"

KASPIR relaxed ever so slightly. "Nine thousand, eight hundred and sixty-four times," he said bumptiously. "Good lord, man,"—this to General Tancred, who bristled like a porcupine—"ain't you too old to be gettin' butterflies in your tummy over—"

He broke off abruptly, and in the dead silence his eyes, narrowing, jumped from Tancred's face to Primrose's, then to that of the tall doctor. When he spoke again, leaning forward, with his palms against the desk edge, the last trace of his skeptical manner was gone.

"How much o' that rumor is true?" he asked harshly.

Tancred stared at his blue-veined hands. "More than I care to think about," he answered soberly. He glanced at his wrist watch. "Say," he exclaimed, "bring that radio in here, will you? He'll be on in three minutes."

As I went to fetch the radio, I recalled that this was the day of "Mr. Smith's" initial "Report to the Nation," the first of the three scheduled, the first on the new phase of the war effort.

Returning, I heard Tancred saying to

Kaspir, apparently in reply to a question, ". . . and terribly depressed. All the vitality seems to have gone out of him."

"Does he realize it?" demanded Kaspir fiercely. Tancred shot a glance at the redhaired doctor.

The doctor nodded. "Definitely." His lean hand rasped across his square chin. "I might add," he said, with no hint of professional nonchalance in his tone, "that he is making a very gallant and remarkable effort to overcome it, as you might expect. But, in view of the already tremendous strain upon him, this additional effort is almost too much."

"Shhh!" This from Tancred, fiddling with the radio.

Five seconds later we were listening to the voice of "Mr. Smith." Before that speech was five minutes under way, I found my fists clenched and my whole body tense and straining, just as you thrust yourself forward at a race, as though by so doing you could help your man along.

I glanced around the room. Tancred, biting his lip, was watching Kaspir's face. Maude was leaning forward, elbows on knees, chin in her cupped hands, her fine violet eyes dull. The cigarette between Primrose's lips had gone out, and he was glaring at the radio as though somehow it was responsible for what we were hearing. The redhaired doctor, sprawled out in his chair, stared at the ceiling, his blue eyes as deep and inscrutable as the rest of his freckled face.

Kaspir was making a great show of being unimpressed, but his pallor betrayed him as surely as did the occasional nervous flaring of his nostrils.

The speech went on. Here and there we caught a flash, like the glimpse of a country lane from a fast train, of fire and warmth and confidence. But for the most part, even the most optimistically phrased passages were deadened, and rendered tortuous, by the effort in "Mr. Smith's" voice. And (worse!) here and there the voice became that of a man who is losing faith in himself and his cause—although after each such lapse the speaker, as though realizing it, would rally his forces and produce a minute of blood-warming, spine-tingling confidence.

But the finale! Written as a stirring

appeal to the nation for fresh courage and renewed faith, it sounded as uninspiring and mechanical as the "click" which came when Tancred stretched out a pale hand and switched off the radio.

"You understand now?" said Tancred, in hollow triumph, to Kaspir. The question was wholly unnecessary.

KASPIR ignored him and turned to the redhaired doctor. "What's your angle on this, Doc? Seems like it's your nut to crack, not ours. Tonic, complete rest for two weeks, change diet—that sorta thing."

The redhaired doctor smiled thinly. "I thought so myself, at first." He left it at that.

Kaspir swelled, reddened. The sight of Tancred's glum face seemed to infuriate him.

"Godalmighty, Tancred!" he burst out suddenly. "Can't a guy get a touch o' liver without you fellers seein' boogey-pictures of the end o' the world?" He shifted his guns to Primrose. "Dammit, Dave, I should think your crowd 'ud have more sense than to get steamed up over . . . How long's he felt this way? Not more'n a month. I saw him a month ago, and he was—"

"About three weeks," supplied Primrose, taking offense at Kaspir's tone. "But that—"

Tancred took over, pulling one lobeless ear in a characteristic gesture. "For your information, Kaspir—since we've come to you—all indications have been of mild depression caused by overwork and overstrain. Loss of appetite, irritability—the regular signs. That is why Admiral Bensingers consulted my friend here." He indicated the redhaired doctor. "The doctor agreed—with reservations."

"The reservations," added the doctor, "increased in number when I found that the patient did not respond in any degree to the customary treatment. In fact, he—"

"The depression has grown steadily worse," said Tancred flatly. "He is fully aware of it—and of its implications. He has been getting all the rest possible under the circumstances, although—"

"I suppose," interrupted Kaspir, "it never occurred to one o' your great minds to come right out and announce that he

don't feel so good, and that he'll have to pull a stretch in bed. People'll swallow anything, you know, even the truth."

"It did occur to us, Kaspir." Tancred's sallow cheeks flushed. "We're not all complete idiots, you know."

"Then—"

"Read this," directed Tancred expressionlessly. He drew a folded paper from the side pocket of his rumpled coat and slid it across the desk. Kaspir ran a hasty eye over it, beckoned to Maude and me. Reading over his shoulder I felt Maude, beside me, shivering as though with cold.

Frankly, I was unimpressed. It was nothing but a mimeographed propaganda sheet, in Portuguese, setting forth in lurid detail what we had just been discussing. Apparently aimed directly at the South American capitals, it was brief but trenchant.

"The man behind the new American war effort has himself lost heart," it concluded. "He has given up the struggle. Desperate efforts are being made in Washington to conceal this fact. Do not be misled by them. Insist that your diplomats see him and talk with him themselves. We do not ask you to believe us. Let your representatives speak with him, then believe their own ears and eyes." It wound up with the usual guff about the invincibility of the Axis powers. I'd seen dozens of pieces like it, of course. But none taking this particular line and singling out an individual.

Kaspir flung the thing back to Tancred. "We've all read tons o' this toilet tissue," he sneered. "Somebody's capitalizin' on a rumor. So what?"

"Just this," answered Tancred quietly, and for some reason I knew he was about to demolish Kaspir's attitude. "We confiscated a batch of these things the other day, all done up in envelopes and addressed to South American embassies and offices. Dave Primrose turned them over to the F.B.I. And the F.B.I. discovered a surprising thing, Kaspir."

"All right," challenged Kaspir. "Surprise me."

"You remember that gang we caught in Montford two months ago?" asked Tancred.

"You mean the America-Now-and-Forever-Heil-Hitler lads?"

"Yes. Big batch of subversive literature on the premises."

"Go on," directed Kaspir, with mock weariness.

"We destroyed their mimeograph machine on the spot."

"So what?"

"This"—Tancred tapped the propaganda sheet—"was mimeographed on that machine."

KASPIR'S reaction was all Tancred could have desired. He shot up from his chair, which toppled over with a crash. His jaw was loose, his eyes astonished. "What?" he bellowed.

"Fact," said Tancred, still sourly. "Some smart youngster in the F.B.I. happened to compare this with the samples we confiscated in Montford. No doubt about it. Done on the same machine."

"Then—"

"This letter was set up and mimeographed at least eight weeks ago," said Tancred shortly. He sucked a rubbery underlip, tugged again at his ear.

Kaspir said apologetically to the red-haired doctor: "I begin to see your point, Doc."

"Exactly." There was no rancor in the doctor's voice. "When a hostile agency is able to predict a man's ailment five or six weeks before he or those nearest him are aware of it, it begins to look as though—"

"Don't tell me," begged Kaspir. "I heard enough. What's your best guess then, Doc?"

"I have none—now," replied the doctor. "My first—er—guess was a poisonous drug. That was Bensinger's theory, too, but . . ." His voice trailed off.

Primrose was shaking his head. "Can't be. We've eliminated that possibility." He stood up and rammed his hands into his pants pockets. "Kaspir," he said, "we've checked and analyzed every bit of food 'Mr. Smith' has taken for over two weeks. We've checked the water supply, investigated grocers, analyzed samples from pots and pans."

"Cigarettes?" said Kaspir.

"Good God, yes!" Primrose's laugh was brittle. "Even the air in his bedroom and office. Watched all employees. Cut down the visitors' list until we're afraid

to cut it any further. Nothing helps."

Kaspir, lying back in his swivel chair, inspected the pink roses on the ceiling paper.

Maude said: "Shaving cream, toothpaste, medications?"

Primrose smiled bitterly. "Elementary, lady. Do you know what one of my jobs is now? Each morning, Torby—he's the fellow who straightens up 'Mr. Smith's' office—eight years at the White House, by the way—each morning Torby and I take twenty minutes over that vacuum water bottle 'Mr. Smith' keeps on his desk, the one he uses during the day. While Torby's rinsing it out with boiling water, I'm getting out the special jug of analyzed mineral water from which we fill it. I pour the mineral water into the vacuum bottle myself. Torby—with me following—takes it straight to the boss's desk. When the boss leaves the office in the afternoon, Torby—with me watching—puts the vacuum bottle in the safe. Next morning, same routine. I tell you this simply to give you a rough idea of the pains we're taking. Besides . . ." He looked to Tancred.

"If they can get slow poison to him," said Tancred, "why not quick poison instead? Why not plain assassination?"

Kaspir rocked forward, put his elbows on the desk. "Hypnotism," he suggested, with a faint ring of triumph.

"You do these gentlemen an injustice, Colonel." It was the red-haired doctor again. "That happens to be my specialty."

Kaspir looked his surprise.

"I'm a psychiatrist," said the doctor. "We all have to know something about hypnotism. It so happens that I've gone ahead with it experimentally. You can take my word for it"—I took it immediately, for the man's manner was utterly compelling and convincing—"that it's not hypnotism."

Kaspir drew a long breath. "Then why," he asked, a little wildly, including our three visitors in the question, "did you fellers come to me?"

Tancred was up now, his black eyes snapping ill-naturedly. "Because," he answered, "we've applied all available sane and reasonable minds to this matter, with no luck. So we thought we'd give you a shot at it. Besides, you've got a lot of

funny friends around the country. If you get anything, let Primrose or me know at once."

"Why?" inquired Kaspir innocently, drumming on the desk top.

General Tancred did not deign to reply. He stalked out, his pinched face purple, and Primrose stalked after him. The red-haired doctor, a wraith of a smile about his mouth, shook hands with Kaspir and me and bowed to Maude before he let his long legs carry him after his colleagues.

Kaspir looked at the hand the doctor had shaken. It was white in patches, but the blood was returning slowly.

"Smart guy," he said pettishly, and I knew he had tried his crusher grip on the doctor.

"I thought he was darn nice," said Maude belligerently. "Well, Steve, where do we go from here?"

"I kinda thought of droppin' in on Baritone Mamie this afternoon," murmured Kaspir vaguely. "Tackle some o' those pet Poles o' hers. They hear a lotta stuff." He spoke without conviction. "Besides," he added, brightening, "maybe she's got some o' that Veuve Cliquot left . . . Give 'er a ring, will you, Maude, and ask her will she put us up for the weekend?"

Maude tossed me a helpless look and sat down to the telephone. "I wish that nice, red-haired doctor were going to be there," she said, with calculated malice.

"That walnut stunt he did," said Kaspir, stung. "Showy." He plucked a nut from the bowl, clamped it between thumb and forefinger. His face flushed as his hand strained. The nut split evenly, even as the doctor's had.

"Not a bad feller at all," he said, delighted. "'Ja catch his name, Maude?"

"Rennie," answered Maude. "Dr. Walter Rennie."

CHAPTER TWO

Baritone Mamie

JUST before we left for Madame D'Herelles' place at Chevy Chase that afternoon, Tancred telephoned. Kaspir was at the barber's, so I took the message. Tancred let me have it all unsweetened.

The public reaction to the "Report to

the Nation" had been very bad. The State Department had already had discreet but significant questions from the British embassy. Worse, representatives of half a dozen South American countries, obviously under pressure from their capitals, had been politely insistent upon an interview with "Mr. Smith"—"as soon as possible." And there was a new rumor abroad: that today's "Report to the Nation" had been a faked recording.

"Tell Kaspir," concluded Tancred's wheezy voice grimly, "that we've gone overboard on this end."

"Overboard?" I asked.

"Yes, overboard. Invited the whole shooting match to attend the next broadcast and see the man for themselves."

"But that's only a week from today!" I gasped.

"Exactly, Lieutenant. So tell your man to stir his stumps."

"HI, MAMIE."

"Stefen! My dear Stefen!" Madame D'Herelles' plump, powdered arms pulled Kaspir's head down. There was a squashy kissing sound. She released him, to pounce on Maude, "My darrrling! You are lofelier than ever! Iss she not, Stefen? Do you still adore her, Lieutenant?"

Fortunately Madame D'Herelles does not insist on answers. She swept us along the broad hall, Kaspir daubing at a blotch of lipstick, Maude with an unexpectedly shy glance at my red face.

Kaspir gazed after the waddling form of our hostess. Even black velvet could not conceal the fact that Madame D'Herelles is inches close to being as broad as she is long. "Pardon me, boys," he said, half under his breath, "is this the Chattanooga choo-choo?"

Luckily this outrageous remark was lost to Madame D'Herelles in the flood of her own remarks. The burden of her lament, as nearly as I could gather, was a lengthy explanation of why, with seven servants in the house, she had had to answer the door herself. She paused at the bottom of a broad stairway. "Osca'!" she bawled hoarsely. "Osca'!" She bent an ear toward the upper part of the old Georgian mansion.

"Maybe he's coming," she said. She

patted the thick tire of badly dyed blond hair which encircled her round head like a washed-out halo. "He iss not feeling so good today. One of hiss bad days. He iss thinking of Warsaw," she explained. I will not attempt to reproduce fully her French-cum-Litvak accent.

A lean, elderly man with hollow eyes, so thin that his big hands and feet looked doubly outsize, appeared at the top of the stairway, started down with a heavy, lifeless tread.

Kaspir said, quick and low: "Wanta talk to you soon's possible, Mamie."

"Library," said Madame D'Herelles, barely moving her lips. "About twenty minutes." Then aloud to the descending skeleton, who, I saw now, wore an approximation of a footman's uniform: "The luggage is on the porch, Osca'. You feel all right to carry it?"

The man nodded, marched past us without a word. His footfalls thudded like those of a man twice his weight. Madame D'Herelles watched him with sympathetic eyes. "I tell him he does not haff to work," she complained. "But he says, 'I work or go crazy.' So I let him work." She shook her head. "He lost much in Warsaw. He iss sorry hiss life was not included." She patted Maude's arm, cocked an arch eyebrow at Kaspir. "I go now to help Anna—that iss my maid—help the cook make canapes, but I will be in the library in twenty minutes. Osca' will show you your rooms, Stefen. I put you and the handsome"—a lush glance at me—"lieutenant together. You don't mind, eh?"

We said certainly not, and she rolled off. The silent Osca' returned with the bags and led us upward. In the spacious chamber assigned to Kaspir and me, by the bureau, shone a champagne bucket on a stand.

"That's Mamie for you," said Kaspir affectionately, yanking the bottle from the ice and going to work on the cork.

"Here's to the Madame," I suggested, when he handed me my glass.

"Let's drink one to Osca' instead," said Kaspir. "Long may he work."

This didn't sound like Kaspir, somehow, but I let it pass without comment and drank. Kaspir was definitely twitchy today. Tancred's late message had upset

him, although he would not admit it.

I drank hurriedly, for I wanted a second glass and Kaspir's conscience does not apply to wine. He poured it grudgingly, then tilted the bottle for his own third. I was raising my glass when a sudden contraction of my stomach muscles, a leap of the pulse, made me whirl toward the door. The wine slopped on my bare wrist and I shivered.

OSCA' was there. Despite those large feet, I had not heard him enter the room. He was staring at us. The man's forehead was magnificent—the forehead of a scholar—but under it the features were skeletal. His eyes were large and luminous. Oddly enough, his attention seemed directed more at me than at Kaspir. I had an uncomfortable feeling that I had seen Osca' somewhere before.

Kaspir spoke without turning (so he *had* heard Osca' come in!): "Turn on the heat, will you, Osca'?"

The pictures danced on the walls as Osca' tramped across the room. He fiddled with the radiator, rose and looked at Kaspir.

"Think we'll have any luck this trip, Mike?" said Kaspir conversationally, addressing me but looking at Osca'.

Before I could answer, Osca' nodded slowly, like a toy mandarin.

"That'll be all, Osca'," said Kaspir shortly.

Osca' marched out. As he passed Kaspir I was amazed to see a human twinkle in his hitherto-dead eyes. To Kaspir he breathed, "How's he doing?" with a minute inclination of the head that most certainly meant me. Kaspir smiled and nodded, as though to say, "Oh, pretty well."

At the door Osca' stopped and held up both hands with the fingers spread apart, then two fingers of one hand. I thought at first of the "V" for victory sign, then realized that the signal meant twelve. Twelve what? Twelve o'clock?

But the gesture had conveyed more than that to me. Kaspir, watching, saw the dawn of comprehension in my eyes. I knew now who Osca' was. Kaspir shook his head to cut off the exclamation I was about to make, and strolled to the window and raised it. I joined him.

"That's Alanson," I said, incredulous. "Yep." He twisted the champagne glass slowly between his fingers. "Taking a sabbatical. He seems to remember you."

Alanson had been assistant professor of Romance languages at Harvard during my undergraduate days, and I had been his earnest, if not very competent, student. He was a moody bird with the gift of tongues. He was popularly supposed to speak eleven languages, and actually, I learned later, spoke fourteen.

"Borrowed him off Tibby Bigelow late in '40," murmured Kaspir. "We cued him back into this country on a shipload from Lisbon. He gravitated here to Mamie's about four months ago. First class gent. Only man we've got who can understand most of what's said in this house."

"You can't mean that you suspect Madame D'Herelles of—"

"Good God, no!" Kaspir sounded genuinely shocked at the idea. "But think what a happy huntin' ground this joint is for the other crowd."

I hadn't thought of it in that light. But of course, in the heterogeneous collection of foreign derelicts and pensioners who passed through Madame D'Herelles' charitable hands, there must be a certain percentage of bad eggs. It made me hot to think of it.

However much people laughed at Madame D'Herelles, her cubic figure, the pathetic artificiality of her tarnished gold hair, her hoarse voice and ill-kept nails, and the creaking machinery of her sprawling household, there was no one in Washington to accuse her of hardness of heart or tightness of purse-strings.

She was the widow of a Toulon Frenchman, one of the industrial giants of the late 20's. Around 1935 he had met and married Mamie Jablonsky, who was then a concert singer known only to the smaller concert halls of middle Europe.

In 1940, when the supposedly great men of France were turning into despicable figures of clay and straw, D'Herelles was one of the few who threw all his available money and influence into the final war effort. When France fell, his shrift was short.

How Mamie D'Herelles escaped his fate, only she knew. She arrived in the United States to find herself, to her sur-

prise, still a wealthy woman, for D'Herelles' interests in this country had been large. She had purchased this estate on the edge of Chevy Chase and thrown it open to the vast and shifting class of folk whom Hitler had turned into wanderers on the face of the earth. Czechs, Poles, and Free French formed the majority of her beneficiaries, and they ranged from ex-cabdrivers to authentic Middle European princes and princesses with royal eyes and no baggage.

Nor was Mamie D'Herelles' charity confined to room and board and cash hand-outs. She functioned as a sort of unofficial adjunct to our overworked Immigration Bureau, fought the State Department for passports for her charges, and, once they were in this country, never lost sight of them. And on two occasions, I recalled now, her sharp little eyes had perceived the wolf behind the sheep's clothing and she had notified Kaspir. And we had added to the growing collection of Gestapo small fry behind our bars.

Kaspir's uncharitable nickname of "Baritone Mamie" for our hostess was the result of one of her less successful bursts of energy, in which she had tried to help launch a young Polish pianist by appearing as guest soloist at his debut. In the middle of her first number Madame D'Herelles realized that her voice had dropped an octave or two since the fall of France. She had stopped at once and announced to the astounded audience, "I am making a damn fool of myself," and waddled off the platform, not without a certain dignity.

Standing there at the window, I had to chuckle at the recollection of this episode. Kaspir read my mind. He said: "I told Mamie she oughta get a good plumber to go over her pipes." He glanced at the thin gold watch on his beefy wrist.

"'Bout time," he said. "Let's gather in Maude and go down."

IN Madame D'Herelles' lofty-ceilinged, untidy library Kaspir opened the ball with a frankness that floored me.

"Mamie," he said. "Pennsylvania Avenue's gettin' hot these days." He blew his cheeks into a ruddy balloon and went "pop!"

Meaningless as this sounds, Madame

D'Herelles understood him perfectly. She pursed her own rouged lips. "I heard some'sing," she admitted cautiously.

"Who ain't?" Kaspir's fingers drummed on the brocaded arm of his chair. "I was hopin' you *knew* some-thin'. I'm tellin' you straight, Mamie, we're up a tree."

"Do you not think, Stefen," said Madame D'Herelles gently, "that if I knew some'sing I would come quick and tell you?"

"Sure." Kaspir, abashed, shifted his ground. "Who's eatin' here now?" he inquired, still drumming.

Madame D'Herelles smiled. "I seldom know, these days. Six—maybe eight—maybe ten, beside yourselfs."

"Charlie Doll still here?" Kaspir is not pretty when he tries to look arch.

"But certainly!" Madame D'Herelles actually preened herself. "What would I do without him? He iss my secretary, my major-domo, my—he is indispensable, Stefen." The black eyes flashed. "You don' think, Stefen. . . ?"

I remembered "Charlie Doll," which was as close as Kaspir ever came to the name. He was Major Kyrlo Dolle, late of the Polish army—an intense, silent young man obviously suffering from shell-shock or some other war neurosis. He was about half Mamie D'Herelles' age.

"Good God, no!" Kaspir's vehemence was reassuring. "But he gets around a lot, and I just thought—"

"This *affaire* of Pennsylvania Avenue," said Madame D'Herelles, her guttural voice softening, "iss it really so bad, Stefen? Iss this new man really depressed—decouragé? I tol' you I heard reports, but one hears so many. . ."

"Yep." Kaspir plunged his hand into a bowl on the table, came up with a walnut. He sat turning it between thumb and forefinger.

I saw a strained, impatient expression cross Maude's face. I knew what she felt. I wasn't at all sure of the wisdom of this line Kaspir was taking with Madame D'Herelles. The Madame was all right, of course, but there were undoubtedly others in this house not fully accounted for. And Kaspir had not lowered his voice.

A discreet knock at the library door.

Madame D'Herelles interrogated Kaspir with her bushy, graying eyebrows. He nodded vaguely.

"*Entrez, Kyrlo,*" she called. A new note in her voice brought me a look from Maude. There were rumors abroad about Madame D'Herelles and young Dolle—the usual thing—but until this moment I had scorned them. Now I wondered.

ENTER Major Kyrlo Dolle, darkly handsome, but with something of Osca's dead look behind the eyes. Even the sight of Maude, whose blond perfection usually sends Slavs into spasms of heel-clicking, hand-kissing, and tender glances, failed to elicit from him anything but the most perfunctory of polite greetings.

Madame D'Herelles indicated Kaspir with her eyes. "*L'affaire* Pennsylvania Avenue," she said simply. "He wants our help."

The merest flicker of interest lighted Dolle's eyes momentarily. "A report," he said (his English accent was superior to that of Madame D'Herelles), "which I preferred not to believe."

"You can start believin' it any time you like, Charlie," said Kaspir dourly. "You'll be safe enough."

"Then I am most sorry." Dolle took a cigarette from an ormolu box beside Madame D'Herelles, tamped it thoughtfully. It was as though he had expended all the interest he was capable of expending on a single topic. He told Madame D'Herelles, in French, that their house guests were beginning to come downstairs, and that the cocktails. . . .

"Seen this one, Mamie?" Kaspir had been occupied with getting the walnut into position. Dolle looked distinctly annoyed at the interruption.

"Lookit!" said Kaspir. The muscles of his hand and wrist quivered. We were rewarded by a crunching sound, immediately followed by the spectacle of Kaspir bounding into the air like a performing bear.

"Damn!" shouted Kaspir, wringing his hand. "Damn!" He ceased dancing and gesticulating long enough to pluck from his thumb a sharp sliver of shell. He poked the wounded thumb into his mouth and mumbled through it. Then he drew

it out and inspected it. A large bead of blood was welling up.

Maude smiled seraphically, and I was enjoying it, too. But our pleasure at Kaspir's mishap was destroyed by a singular occurrence.

Madame D'Herelles' throat squeezed out an odd, choking noise. We turned just in time to see her fat, animated face go slack. The whole flabby mass of her relaxed in a faint.

Instantly Major Dolle became a thing of fire and fury. "You fool!" he screamed at Kaspir, his dark face contorted. The tone was so vicious that I jumped up. But Major Dolle's attention now belonged wholly to Madame D'Herelles. He rushed to a side table for brandy, and brushed Maude aside as he knelt by Madame's chair and put the glass to her lips.

Madame D'Herelles recovered speedily, but I could see that she was badly shaken. The pallor brought out liver-colored circles under her eyes, and her trembling mouth suggested her real age.

When he saw Madame coming around, Dolle bethought himself of his violence to Kaspir. His apology was fulsome. Madame, it seemed, was unable to stand the sight of blood. He had fears for her heart. His own nerves, too—the war, you know. Colonel Kaspir would forgive him?

"Sure, sure," said Kaspir, to stem the flow of words. He had a handkerchief around his thumb now. He was watching Madame D'Herelles—not, I noticed, with proper solicitude, but speculatively. Kaspir is regrettably callous to all human suffering except his own.

Madame D'Herelles was also apologetic. It was awkward of her to frighten us that way, but ever since France, the mere sight of a drop of blood. . .

Under other conditions I might have suspected Madame D'Herelles of theatrical shenanigans aimed at the sympathy of Major Dolle. But her collapse had had all the earmarks of the genuine article.

When Madame was able to walk, we went out to meet the other guests. They were a strange assortment, most of them newly arrived from the breadlines and terrors of Europe.

The table talk that night was rare and wonderful. I thought longingly of the old days on the Baltimore *Sun*, before

world events had yanked me from an editorial sanctum and pitchforked me into Section Five, that oddest of odd counter-espionage bureaus. What I could have done with a typewriter and even the least of those stories told at the table of Madame D'Herelles! But tales of incredible horror and incredible courage are a dime a dozen these days.

Despite the stories and the excellent food and wines (with Alanson, late of Harvard, being deft with dishes and decanters) there was a weight upon my spirits that not even the champagne could lighten. I could see the same thing in Maude's face, even as she laughed at the sallies of a giant Czech with a spade beard.

I thought of the radio speech, of Tancred's worried face and grim message on the phone. We had so much to do, so little time, and not a handle whereby to grasp this thing.

I glanced down the table at Kaspir. His bull shoulders were hunched yearningly toward a pretty little mademoiselle, a distant cousin of a distant cousin of the late M. D'Herelles. Suddenly I was disgusted with my own incompetence, and Kaspir's fumbling, and with the world as a whole. And this feeling rode me like an old man of the sea throughout what should have been a gay and amusing evening.

It was well past eleven, and most of the party had already retired, when Kaspir's mouth spread in a trumpet-like yawn that he made no effort to hide. Behind Madame D'Herelles, who was leaning on Major Dolle's ever-ready arm, we ascended the broad stairway, step by slow step.

CHAPTER THREE

Footfalls at Midnight

ONCE inside our room, Kaspir made no move to undress, and shook his head when I started to peel off my coat. "Make a noise like you're goin' to bed," he whispered, and refused to elaborate.

So we went solemnly through an absurd routine that made me feel like a low-grade idiot. We dropped shoes on the floor. We conversed as two men sharing a room might reasonably converse while preparing for bed. Kaspir was mad-

deningly thorough, even to contriving proper sound effects on the bathroom fixtures. At length, after much creaking of bedsprings (a listener outside might have thought Kaspir was doing flip-flops on his bed), we switched off the lights and lay there in the silent darkness, Kaspir's cigarette alternately burning bright orange and dying to a dull red between puffs.

Once I thought I heard angry voices on the servants' floor overhead, but the altercation, if it was an altercation, subsided quickly. I was just dozing off when I heard the familiar heavy footfall of Osca', apparently descending the back stairs. Our room was in the rear of the house.

The sound galvanized Kaspir into life. "What's he makin' all that damn racket for?" he whispered, furious.

Osca' (for there was no doubt in my mind as to who it was) was approaching our door now. Kaspir was on the edge of his bed. He deliberately ground his cigarette into the rug with his heel.

Heavy as the footsteps were, they were somehow muffled. They did not stop at our door, as Kaspir had evidently expected. They went on up the hall in the direction of Madame D'Herelles' suite.

Kaspir sighed, apparently with relief. "Guess Mamie must've rung for him," he whispered. "He'd have had to answer." But he didn't sound as if he believed it.

We both crept to the door. The footsteps continued for perhaps a dozen halting paces, then stopped. The silence and darkness twisted my nerves taut. I wanted to yell to relieve the tension.

Kaspir opened the door, turning the knob as you might unscrew the detonator of a shell. There was a soft noise up the hall, as though someone had dropped a pillow.

But Kaspir was staring down at the polished oak floor directly in front of him. In the half-light I saw footprints, messy footprints—muddy footprints.

Muddy footprints hell! Bloody footprints!

Kaspir left me. For all his bulk, he can move quietly as a cat. When I could make my trembling knees function, I set out after him, treading close to the wall to avoid the horrid, foot-shaped blotches. It

looked as though a barefooted man carrying a badly leaking can of red paint had passed that way.

Under a shaded wall lamp opposite Madame D'Herelles' door I found Kaspir. He was kneeling beside something. Even before additional light sprang from the small pocket flash in his hand, I knew what I would see, and my throat tightened.

A knife had ended Alanson's tour of duty with Section Five. I sickened as Kaspir, cradling the dome-like head in one big hand, exposed the wound to the beam of light from the other. It was ghastly plain why Alanson had not cried out. A single sweep of a sharp blade had severed the windpipe, then curled back and upward to nick the jugular vein.

I felt a sudden pang of shame. Here was a man near sixty who, mortally wounded, had been able to march his dying body down a flight of stairs and along a long hall, for some grim purpose of his own. And here was I, young and unmarked, on the verge of collapse. I stiffened, and the slow tide of anger put new strength into my buckling knees.

Kaspir thrust his tiny metal flashlight into my hand. The wavering beam passed over the wall above Alanson's body. Before I could check it, a grunt of astonishment escaped me. Kaspir grimaced like a gargoyle for silence. I pointed.

Someone had dipped a finger in Alanson's blood and left a sign. It was crudely drawn, but then the swastika is a crude sign.

Kaspir seized my wrist, directed the flashlight beam once more at Alanson's head. His fingers went to the gaping mouth. My stomach heaved. For a split second I thought he was trying to pull out one of Alanson's teeth. But when his hand came away, I saw it held what seemed to be a folded slip of paper, damp with saliva but not bloody.

Behind us, the flat voice of Major Dolle said: "Who has killed Osca'?"

KASPIR was up in a single bound, and a single stride took him to the major. Dolle's left hand flew to his hip. But Kaspir was not attacking. He was merely insisting upon silence. He gripped Dolle's arm, said something in his ear.

I saw Dolle nod, start back obediently for his room, which was at the far end of the hall, beyond ours. Kaspir motioned to me. We trod softly after Dolle.

To reach Dolle's room we had to pass the intersection of an "L" of the old house. From the shadows here stepped Maude. Dolle stopped, staring at her.

Maude began, "I heard—" Like Dolle, she was in a dressing gown over pajamas.

Kaspir whispered urgently: "Get your duds on and come to Dolle's room." He pointed to the door. Maude turned away without a word.

In Dolle's room Kaspir raised his voice above a whisper for the first time. "You know who got Osa', I suppose." It was not a question, but a statement.

"I can give an excellent guess," said Dolle evenly, reaching for a silver cigarette case on the bureau. For all his calm, however, there was a hard, excited light behind his eyes.

"You gotta gun?" demanded Kaspir.

Dolle put the cigarette case down, opened a bureau drawer and produced a long-barreled automatic of some foreign make.

"You wouldn't object to cuttin' yourself a slice of the Gestapo, would you, Charlie?" said Kaspir gently, as one offering a juicy bone to a dog. "They're still in the house, y'know."

Dolle's hand, closing on the automatic, began to tremble.

"Get out the back way, quick's you can," ordered Kaspir. "Maude'll be along in a minute. You can take the back, Maude'll cover the front." His hand went up against Dolle's protest. "She's a better shot than you are, Major. Do as I say, now. Kettle and I will do the inside work. If they come your way, let 'em have it. But I don't think they'll get that far."

He opened the door with a peremptory sweep of his arm. Dolle hesitated, stepped out. Maude joined us, in slacks and topcoat, her eyes questioning. Kaspir handed her his own pet, a flat, light .32 automatic. He pushed her after Dolle, who was starting for the back stairs. "The major'll explain," he whispered. "Go with him."

"Come on," whispered Kaspir to me.

I caught his sleeve. "Let me get my gun," I said. If Kaspir's theory about the

murderers of Alanson were true, it would never do to embark on the hunt unarmed.

"Gun, hell!" grunted Kaspir disgustedly. "Come on." And with that he started back for Alanson's body. I followed, highly uneasy.

I have seen Kaspir do callous and even brutal things during my association with him, but his actions of the next few minutes topped them all. Had we been attacked, I doubt if I could have raised a hand in our defense, for I was weak and sick.

First, he twitched the shade from the small hall light near Alanson's body, and in the naked glare of its bulb the body, and its trail of footprints, became things of added horror.

Next, without a word to me, he opened Madame D'Herelles' door and entered her room, closing the door behind him. Through it I, shivering in the night air, heard his voice, rough and insistent—then Madame's, sleepily hoarse.

The door opened and Madame appeared, in peignoir over nightgown. Kaspir loomed behind her. "Look," he said, and pointed over her shoulder.

It was several seconds before Madame's eyes, blinking in the sharp light, saw what he meant.

I AM no weakling, and Kaspir's physical strength is immense, but I do not exaggerate when I say that for two or three minutes Madame D'Herelles, middle-aged and apoplectic, came very close to being a match for the two of us. No fainting this time. Neither did she cry out. But she slaved and struck at us as we held her back from her bedroom window, and twice she broke away and nearly hurled herself through the glass. It was sheer blind panic at the sight of the blood, verging on insanity.

Finally we, or rather, Kaspir, succeeded in flinging her on the immense Louis XIV bed from which he had roused her, and she became calmer.

At this point Kaspir, seated physician-like on the edge of the bed, with a precautionary hand on Madame's bulbous shoulder, began to talk. It was the most amazing balderdash. I didn't hear all of it, for between breaths he sent me into the bathroom to hunt up a sedative.

He was still talking when I returned, after an exhausting session with Madame's thousand odd face creams and lotions, with some small blue pills that looked like sodium amytal. He was reeling off Polish and French names and asking Madame about them. For a man who couldn't pronounce "Kyrlo Dolle," he showed an astonishing familiarity with many tongue-twisting titles and places. As nearly as I could tell, he was inquiring about many of the people whom Madame had aided in this country, and about their origins. He seemed to be probing about in her subconscious mind, trying to strike some profitable vein. Not exactly the method I would have chosen to soothe a woman whose nerves were shot to pieces.

But Madame only stared numbly at him, her eyes large under the crazy disorder of her hair.

I thrust the capsules under his nose, but he pushed them away. Madame's eyes were glazing with sleep, the drugged sleep that follows a devastating emotional blow-up. Right in the middle of one of Kaspir's long-winded passages her jaw dropped, and from her flattish nose issued an unmistakable snore.

Kaspir jumped up, disgust written large on his face. I was past wondering at Kaspir's actions or reactions. I was a stooge in a nightmare now. If Kaspir had ordered me to dive headlong from the window, I think I would have done it unquestioningly, in the belief that I would wake up later.

"Give her a couple hours," muttered Kaspir, frowning down at Madame. He hooked his thumbs in his vest pockets and teetered on his heels. He was dejected, and, if I read his eyes correctly, puzzled.

"I don't suppose it means anything to you," I said, with lofty sarcasm, "but there's a Heinie with a knife loose in this house somewhere."

"Oh, him," said Kaspir carelessly. "I'll fix him later."

For some reason this fool remark touched my temper. "Maude's outside," I flared, "and Dolle. Suppose—"

"Say!" Kaspir's face lighted up. From a vest pocket he drew the folded slip of paper he had discovered in Alanson's mouth. He unfolded it and hurried over

to a table lamp. "Lookit," he said, studying it under the light, his brows drawn together.

Curiosity downed my impatience momentarily. I joined him. Behind us, Madame D'Herelles snored on.

"Whaddaya make of it, Mike?"

It was a prescription. Printed at the top was the name of a well-known Washington eye, ear, nose and throat man. But the words and symbols written below, in purple ink, meant nothing to me.

"Listen, Mike!" Kaspir's finger bit into my arm, which went numb to the nails. "Get downstairs on the phone and call Tancred."

"Tancred?"

"Dammit, pay attention." This so loudly that Madame stirred in her sleep. He fell silent until her snores became rhythmic again. "Yes, Tancred. Find out where that Rennie's stoppin'." He pushed the prescription into my hand. "Read him this junk over the phone, best you can. If it's what I think it is—" He was almost shaking with excitement now. "While you're doin' that, I'll have a look around Alanson's room."

This unexpected but welcome eruption of enthusiasm, coming when it did, fired me. We left the room together. Kaspir's first move was to replace the shade on the bulb over Alanson, and I was grateful as the stark outline of the body, with its gory swastika above, softened in the dim light.

"Come up as soon as you finish," whispered Kaspir and lumbered off toward the back stairs.

I made my way down the broad sweep of the front stairway, clutching the prescription, and back to the library.

Tancred must have been up, for he answered his phone on the first ring. "Kaspir got something?" he asked eagerly, when I had identified myself. From his tone it was obvious that his end of the investigation had not progressed. I told him we didn't know yet, and his "Oh" was hollow and hopeless.

"Rennie?" he said, in reply to my next question. "He's here. I'll put him on."

MY conversation with Rennie was brief. He interpreted the prescription for me without hesitation. I went up

through the house to the servants' floor, stopping at our room to pick up my own automatic. I located Alanson's room without difficulty, for the door was open and the light on.

"Wha'd he say?" demanded Kaspir softly, kneeling by a wastebasket with both hands full of trash. By the bed, a brownish puddle showed where Alanson had been when the knife was applied.

I closed the door quietly and told him.

"What?" He goggled, for all the world like an angry frog.

"It's a prescription for cough syrup," I repeated patiently. "Rennie says it's one of the old standbys."

Kaspir was on his feet in an instant. He snatched the paper. "I'm gonna talk to that Rennie," he grated. "Listen. Stay in this hall out here. If one o' these flunkies starts roamin' around, conk him and lay him in here." With that he was gone, before I could argue the point.

There was nothing to do but obey. I took my shoes and patrolled that stygian hall for two mortal hours. Several times I trod on dry, hard ridges—Alanson's trail, now coagulated.

Dull? Not exactly. Once, about thirty minutes after Kaspir had left, I heard a quick footfall (not Kaspir's) in our hall below. I sneaked halfway down the stairs, but by then there was silence. Soon afterward I could have sworn I heard a flurry of movement in one of the rooms below, but again the silence fell so quickly that I could not be sure.

It was about fifteen minutes after that that I heard—no mistake, this time—the thing that sent my hackles up in pure, undiluted fear. I slipped down to the foot of the stairs.

In one of the rooms (I could not tell which one) someone was walking with heavy, hesitating footsteps. Not loud, but heavy. Heavy, hesitating footsteps, exactly like. . .

But Alanson was dead!

I am ashamed to admit that I did not investigate. I followed my initial, panicky impulse, which was to spring back up the stairs. I paused halfway up, panting, my hands and brow clammy.

No more footsteps. All quiet now. I waited, straining my ears until I was almost dizzy. Two minutes passed. Five. I

sat down, weak-kneed, only to leap up, clutching my gun desperately, as a dark figure materialized at the foot of the stairs. I shrank against the wall and raised my automatic for a crushing blow.

"Quit playin'," muttered the dark figure peevishly, a second before my arm descended. "C'mon."

"Wait a second." I seized Kaspir's shoulder. "Did you hear someone walking?"

"Walkin'? Where?"

"You'll think I'm crazy," I whispered, "but it sounded the way Alanson sounded when he passed our door tonight. It was somewhere near Madame D'Herelles' room."

"That's where we're goin'," muttered Kaspir, still peevish, as though I should have known. "We'll have a look-see."

I gave up and followed him into Madame's room. She was about as we had left her, sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion.

There were half a dozen floor and table lamps in that room, and Kaspir switched them all on. The blaze of illumination hurt my eyes, and I narrowed them against the glare. Kaspir sat down beside Madame D'Herelles and jiggled her shoulder. "Mamie!" he called. "Wake up!" In his hand was the prescription for cough syrup.

Madame stirred and tried to turn over on her side to get away from his voice.

"Wake up, Mamie!" Kaspir slapped her fat cheek lightly. A strangled protest rose in my throat. After what Madame had been through—

"Shut up," growled Kaspir. He took her jaw, wobbled her head. "Wake up, Mamie! Wake up!"

Madame D'Herelles blinked, threw a fat arm across her eyes to shut out the light.

Kaspir pulled the arm away. "Wake up!"

She rubbed her eyes. "Wake up!" urged Kaspir, holding the prescription, open, a little way from her face. "What's this, Mamie?" He shook her again. "What's this?"

She was awakening now. I could see her pupils contracting in the strong light as the room came into focus for her. She started to mumble something. Suddenly

her eyes fixed themselves in a stare that sent a chill into my stomach.

She was staring at the ceiling, and in that moment I saw the dawning light of reason fading from her eyes, to be replaced by a very different expression.

I tilted my head back to follow the direction of her gaze. Even as I gasped, my thoughts flew back to the heavy footsteps I had heard from the stairway. I knew now what they had been.

Across Madame D'Herelles' white plaster ceiling, from the door of the bathroom past the door by which we had entered. . . ! I looked again, to make sure. Unless I was crazy (which was a definite possibility now) someone had walked across the ceiling of Madame's room—someone with large, bloody feet!

Kaspir saw the new expression settling upon Madame D'Herelles' face. He shook her frantically, stuck the prescription blank almost against her nose. "Who is this for, Mamie? Who is this for?"

A momentary gleam in her eye. She spoke, quite clearly, a name.

Then she returned to her contemplation of the ceiling. Kaspir repeated the name she had spoken, but she was silent now, and smiling.

That was the new expression: the bright, vacant smile of an idiot!

"We're gettin' outa here," said Kaspir, and pulled me from the room.

CHAPTER FOUR

Worse Than Poison

OBERVE me now: Lieutenant Mike Kettle, of Section Five. It is about four A.M. Madame D'Herelles is still lying on her back in bed. She is smiling up at me.

I am on a stepladder. In my hand is a paintbrush. Before me, on the ladder apron, is a bucket of white paint which Kaspir somehow procured from the chauffeur at the garage. The household still sleeps as I ply my brush over the footprints. Madame smiles as though in approbation.

Kaspir and Maude are in the library, telephoning. My job is a tedious, back-aching affair. I don't know why I am doing it, save that Kaspir told me to.

"What have you done to her?" A dark-haired, swarthy girl, with hot eyes and a certain sultry beauty, is in the doorway. In her hand, bearing steadily on me, is an automatic. She glances from Madame D'Herelles to me, back to Madame D'Herelles, who still smiles.

"What have you done to her?" There is a definite menace in her tone. Ordinarily this apparition, the open threat of the gun, would frighten me a little. But this night has placed me temporarily beyond shocks or surprises or fear. I ease one hand inside my coat and grasp the butt of my own gun. Shoot or be shot. Woman or man.

The girl's hot eyes see my move. In a detached sort of way I note that her hand is tightening around the trigger. She is about to bring me down.

Something flashes against the girl's dark head from behind, making a sharp, uncompromising sound against her skull. My gun is out now, but she is crumpling, face forward.

"That must be the damn maid," says Colonel Kaspir, sticking his great round face around the door. It was the barrel of his gun that had struck her down. "Hurry up, Mike," he says irritably. "Maude's bringin' a car around front. We're goin' to town."

I paint on, hurrying. "Where's Dolle?" I inquire.

"The hell with him. We're in a hurry," says Kaspir.

MAUDE drove us to town. I gathered from her driving, and from one or two of her curt remarks to Kaspir, that she was in a black rage at having been left outside on guard while Kaspir and I were busy inside the house.

I dozed on that trip, too weary to ask questions. I wondered vaguely whether Kaspir would leave Dolle guarding the rear until daylight.

Tancred and Rennie and Primrose were on the sidewalk in front of Tancred's hotel, their faces pale in the dawn. They crowded into the car and we shot away. Tancred attempted to learn from Kaspir where we were going, but Kaspir was in one of his airy, noncommittal moods, so Tancred soon lapsed into an angry silence.

We sped over dew-damp streets into southwest Washington, Kaspir humming under his breath and patting his foot. Tancred took this attitude as a personal insult, but I knew Kaspir was worried.

I thought at first that we were bound for our headquarters, but half a dozen blocks away, Maude slowed the car to allow Kaspir to see the house numbers. "Here," said Kaspir finally, and she put on the brake.

"Come on, Mike," said Kaspir, climbing out.

Tancred said sulkily: "Hadn't we all better—"

"Nope," said Kaspir. "You wait right here."

It was a lofty brownstone house made over into walk-up apartments. Kaspir thumped upstairs to the second floor, stopped to look at a card beside a door.

"Andrew Torby," it read.

Torby! That was the name Madame D'Herelles had uttered just before she began to smile.

Kaspir laid his splay thumb against the bell-button and held it there until the door was opened by a large man with blue jowls. He wore striped pajamas.

"What do you want?" His beefy face was suspicious.

He stopped there, because Kaspir had him by the throat.

Torby's right hand moved swiftly, but Kaspir's left caught it. Kaspir drove his knee forward and upward into Torby's groin.

We had to help Torby down the narrow hall to the tiny living-room, and support him while he was sick into a waste basket. He moaned as, the spasm of retching over, we let him down on a couch. Kaspir sat down beside him. Kaspir was white around the mouth.

"I ain't gonna waste any time on you, Torby," said Kaspir. He held out the cough syrup prescription. "Where do you take this to be filled?"

Torby shook his head. You could see by his eyes that he knew what Kaspir meant. You could also see that he had no intention whatever of answering.

Kaspir wasted no time in further questioning. Torby's shake of the head had reduced the situation to a very simple proposition.

Kaspir's hand shot out and gripped Torby's throat once more. Torby's hands clawed at Kaspir's wrist, but his strength had left him.

"You're outa luck, boy," remarked Kaspir conversationally. "Because I'm just so damn anxious to find out about this little piece o' paper that I can't wait."

The pressure was still on. Torby's face was purple now, and he was making noises in his throat. His eyes were bulging.

Kaspir let him go. He fell back, massaging the red streaks left by Kaspir's fingers. He mumbled something.

"What?" asked Kaspir, a hand cupped to his ear. "I missed that."

Torby tried again. This time we got it. "I demand to be arrested," he croaked.

"The old refrain," said Kaspir genially. He was deathly pale now. His face, beside Torby's, was like a peeled potato beside a beet. "Where do you take this little slip o' paper to be filled?" he asked again, and his hand took a fresh grip on Torby's throat. I had to turn away. The sound was bad enough without having to watch Torby's face go purple again.

I heard no word, but Torby must have made some sign of capitulation.

"Go down and get the others, Mike," said Kaspir. So I went down and ushered them up. As we trooped down the narrow hall we heard Kaspir saying: "You're an ingenious feller, Torby. But I don't think Primrose'll like you any more. This bein' a democracy, you're liable to lose your job. You got one o' the things here?"

Torby nodded.

"Get it," ordered Kaspir. "Go with him, Mike."

I followed Torby's faltering steps into a two-by-four bedroom. From behind a picture he hauled a flat metal box. We returned to the living-room, and the others crowded around as I opened the box.

It held two lozenges, translucent and almost transparent, each perhaps an inch in diameter.

"Now, where'd you get these?" demanded Kaspir. His amiability vanished as a mulish look appeared in Torby's eyes. He held up his right hand before Torby's sullen face. "I ain't a bit averse to performin' in front o' spectators," he said, and advanced a step, his china-blue eyes

stormy. "Matter o' fact, I think—"

Andrew Torby, late attendant at "Mr. Smith's" office, answered hastily and huskily. "At _____'s Pharmacy."

I recognized the name as that of a small neighborhood drugstore not three blocks from our headquarters."

"Who from? Always the same man, I suppose."

Torby nodded again to save his throat. "The night man," he said.

"How do you use 'em? I gotta pretty good idea," said Kaspir, "but I think these gentlemen 'ud find it more convin-cin' if they heard it from your own ruby lips."

TORBY glanced uneasily at Primrose, whose hard eyes were boring into him now.

"At first," he muttered, staring at the floor, "I used to warm one and stick it to the inside of the water carafe every day."

"The carafe!" exploded Primrose. "You mean the vacuum bottle on the boss's desk—the one he drinks out of every day?"

"Yeah. And after you made me start sterilizin' the carafe with hot water every morning, it was easier." A malicious edge sharpened Torby's husky voice. "Once the bottle was hot inside, all I had to do was slip one of these in with my thumb—while you were getting the drinking water ready, Mr. Primrose."

"They dissolve slowly in the water, I suppose?" cut in the redhaired doctor smoothly, as Primrose flushed.

"Yeah, I suppose so."

"Suppose"—warned Kaspir.

"I don't know nothing about them except what I was told to do," cried Torby hoarsely. "All I know is my orders. Every week I'd get one of those prescriptions in the mail. It had a different prescription on it every time. I'd take it to the night man at _____'s Pharmacy and he'd slip me a box with a half-dozen of these in it." He pointed to the lozenge in my hand. "Whatever code was on those prescriptions, I didn't know nothing about it."

"Major Dolle mail you the prescriptions?" demanded Kaspir. Silence. "Did he?"

"Yeah."

The redhaired doctor took the lozenge from me, broke it, put it to his tongue, then smelled it.

"Probably one of the barbiturate group," he said. "Done up with some solution to make it stick fast to a slick surface like the inside of a carafe." He touched his tongue with it again. "A very clever bit of compounding, Colonel Kaspir. Tasteless in water, odorless, dissolves slowly and evenly, I dare say. Virtually invisible in the carafe."

"Poison?" asked Primrose.

"No," answered the doctor. "A little worse." His face was grave. "A drug that, little by little, day after day, works with a slow, cumulative effect. Induces nervousness and, after a week or two, a pronounced depression, very hard to fight against and impossible to conceal." He handed me the broken lozenge and I replaced it in the box. "Yes," said Doctor Rennie, "that was undoubtedly it."

"The—er—cure, Doctor Rennie?" asked General Tancred. "Will it—er—how long will it take?" He had the forthcoming "Report to the Nation" on his mind.

Rennie smiled. "Quick and easy, General. Three days should be more than enough, now that we know what the trouble is."

"Ha!" exclaimed General Tancred. His pinched face seemed to fill out before our eyes—"like a prune in water," as Kaspir described it later.

"You found this prescription at Madame D'Herelles' house?" asked the general of Kaspir. "How, and where? And who put you on to Torby?"

"A little bird," said Kaspir sweetly. "And don't look at me in that hungry way, General. He aint gonna sing no more—for nobody. And by the way," he added innocently, "when we left Mamie's this morning there was some kinda scrimmage goin' on among the servants. Somebody might ha' got hurt. I'd suggest you take some men out there and clean up the mess before it gets into the papers."

BY special invitation, Tancred, Primrose, and the redhaired doctor were guests at a small affair in Kaspir's office on the day of the second "Report to the Nation." They arrived just as Kaspir

switched on the radio in his office.

You remember that second address, I'm sure. Clear, vital, ringing—the speech of a man made strong by infinite faith and courage. It had a profound effect on the South American delegation who sat opposite "Mr. Smith" as he spoke into the microphone—a profounder one, I should guess, upon certain officials in Berlin responsible for flooding South America and Allied capitals with pamphlets similar to the letter Tancred had confiscated.

When it was over and we dipped our noses into some Scotch, Tancred leaned back in his chair. "That was a fine mess we found at Madame D'Herelles' place last week," he murmured, eyeing Kaspir.

"Really?" Kaspir was all attention. "Just what did you find, General?"

"In the hall"—Tancred ticked the items off on his fingers—"a footman with his throat cut and a bloody swastika over him. In Mamie D'Herelles' dressing-room was that feller Dolle, dead as a doornail with a knife between his ribs—"

"Major Dolle!" cried Maude and I together.

"In the bedroom was Mamie D'Herelles herself," went on Tancred smoothly, eyes still on Kaspir. "She was picking at the covers and smiling, her mind all gone.

"But the strangest thing of all," concluded Tancred, "was on Mamie D'He-

relles' ceiling. Someone had walked across that ceiling—someone with bloody feet. You saw nothing of those footprints, I suppose, Kaspir?"

"The day I see bloody footprints on a ceilin'," retorted Kaspir, "I'm gonna send for our friend here."

"At your service any time, Colonel," said Rennie, and Tancred rose to leave.

WHEN Himmler's show was plantin' agents in France in '35," began Kaspir, when he and Maude and I were alone, "they scored one ten-strike. They planted Mamie Jablonsky right in D'Herelles' bed. D'Herelles was in on things—a big shot. You can figure how valuable Mamie was to her side. When they shot D'Herelles, Mamie 'escaped' to this country and set up in business helpin' the victims of that 'feelthy Adolf.'" He mimicked Madame D'Herelles' guttural voice.

"She really helped 'em, too," went on Kaspir. "Lady Bountiful. It made 'em trust Mamie. So much"—his face darkened—"that they confided in her a lot of stuff about who helped 'em on the other side, before they made the United States. Then Mamie would make up a little list and send it over to her pals in Berlin—

"Alanson—that was Osca', Maude—got a bee in his bonnet over Mamie and came to me. We got him in at Mamie's. He managed to intercept a couple o' those

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lists. And Alanson and I, we nursed Mamie along.

"Until this 'Smith' business busted—" said Kaspir. He broke off short and snorted. "Tancred and Primrose wonderin' why poison wasn't used. . ."

"Well, why wasn't it?" asked Maude.

Kaspir snorted again. "S'pose they'd poisoned 'Smith.' What permanent good 'ud that do 'em—except make the whole world a little madder and a little more determined to—"

"I see your point," said Maude.

"But if he was to begin to look bad, to look discouraged and depressed, *then* they'd have something that 'ud make itself felt in every capital from Buenos Aires to Moscow.

"So when Tancred tackled me after the first broadcast, I figured on tryin' Mamie first, she bein' our nearest, best, and biggest bet. I'd been wonderin' about Charlie Doll, too.

"You see, Alanson was on to something. He conveyed that in the room that afternoon—remember, Mike? My guess is that he found one o' those prescriptions in Charlie Doll's room and was gonna bring it to me at midnight.

"But Charlie Doll missed the prescription—that's a legitimate inference—and had ideas about who had it—ideas that, unfortunately for Alanson, were correct. So Charlie went to Alanson's room and tackled him on this topic that night after we went upstairs. Alanson must ha' slipped the thing into his mouth when Charlie attacked him. Charlie knifed Alanson, and left him for dead.

"An' Alanson, bein' a gutty gent, got up and walked downstairs. He was aimin' for our door, Mike, but he was too far gone to spot it."

"That much I believe," I said. "But explain the swastika. We were out in that hall in a minute. Dolle couldn't have—"

Kaspir looked long-suffering. "Did it occur to you, Mike, that Alanson might have scrawled that swastika in one last effort to let us know who'd got him?"

I SAW the end o' paper stickin' outa Alanson's mouth," went on Kaspir confidently, "and Doll saw me take it. And the minute I jumped Doll in the hall I knew he was the one who'd done Alan-

son in. Remember him reachin' for his hip, Mike?"

"But Alanson wasn't shot," I objected.

"Ever see a picture of an S.S. man in uniform?" inquired Kaspir acidly. "Knife worn on left hip.

"So I sent Charlie Doll out on guard," continued Kaspir, up now and pacing the floor. "That showed I trusted him.

"When the prescription turned out to be cough syrup, I put you on guard, Mike, and called Rennie myself. I told him about Mamie's blood-phobia. He told me another shock might make her talk.

"So I went back to Mamie's room and was standin' there in the boudoir, chewin' my nails and tryin' to dope out a Number Nine jolt for the old girl, when in pussy-foots Charlie Doll.

"Charlie shoves a knife against my ribs and invites me, very polite, to hand over that paper I'd found on Alanson.

"So I removed"—Kaspir's eyes twinkled—"said knife from Charlie Doll's hand, *toute suite*. Bein' flustered at the time, I must ha' returned his knife to him point first." Kaspir smiled.

"You killed Dolle?" Maude gasped.

"Yup. An' then I saw how Charlie might help me with Mamie.

"So I took off my shoes and socks and dabbled my little pink tootsies in the puddle Charlie was so obligin'ly furnishin'. Ever squish around in blood, Maude? Just like cylinder oil. Then I proceeded to put the prints o' my dainty dogs along the ceilin' where they'd greet Mamie's eyes as soon as she came to."

Maude swore aloud. I said: "We give up. How did you walk on the ceiling?"

For answer, Kaspir seized two small wooden office chairs by their backs and swung his huge body aloft into a handstand, one hand gripping the back of each chair. Our office ceiling is high, but his feet reached it easily. Then, using the chairs as a man might use a pair of crutches upside down, he walked across the room, raising a chair and moving it forward with each step on the ceiling.

Kaspir swung himself down, red and panting. Maude and I stared at the ceiling, at the dusty prints left by his shoe soles on the flowered ceiling paper.

"See?" inquired Colonel Kaspir, refreshing himself with a chocolate cherry.



Only stiff-necked pride made the blind ex-cop sell pencils rather than accept help from his former fellow-officers while waiting for his pension. But he had to admit he'd earned the 10-Grand reward when he risked his life to save a pretty playgirl from her kidnapers.

PROWL BY NIGHT

By Alan Anderson

JOHAN MULVIHILL tapped his way down the sidewalk. The old man was wary. He'd been reprovved, warned, threatened. Now they were through fooling.

The boom of the depot clock halted him. 11 P. M.! It was too early for the night club patrons to be arriving, for most of the theaters weren't out yet. John Mul-

vihill's keen ears collected the myriad night noises of the city. The sound he sought did not materialize.

He tapped on, the metal nib of his cane striking sharp and clear against the sidewalk. There was a lone taxi parked at the curb and the driver stood beside the hood of it. When John Mulvihill came abreast of the cab he stopped.

"Hi!" he called cheerily. "You're early, son. You won't find fares here at this hour."

The awed cabby swore softly, asked: "How do you do it?"

"Why, it's Joe Walsh."

"How'd you know it was me?"

"Your voice, son, your voice."

"Yeah? Well, how'd you know there was a car here?"

John Mulvihill chuckled. Why destroy a never ending mystery? Why tell Joe, or any of the cabbies, that a car at the curb caused the raps of his cane to hurl back a tell-tale echo? Why explain that a car parked in that district with the motor cut off was bound to be a taxi—public parking being prohibited there?

Joe Walsh said: "Meeker's out to get you."

John Mulvihill's grin vanished and a worried frown furrowed his brow. "I know," he admitted. "Have you seen Meeker?"

"No," Joe said. "You better lay off tonight. Meeker doesn't want to—"

"I know," said the old man unhappily. "See you later!"

He tapped on. Thoughts formed and faded. Well, they'd told him off. He'd asked for it. But he had promised nothing. The old man moved along more jauntily, his cane flashing a swift semicircle before his feet to give off a drumlike double beat.

Suddenly a pungent perfume smote the old man's nostrils and the grin reappeared on his lips. He slowed. The smell sharpened, began to fade. John Mulvihill stopped and unerringly faced the three couples pressed against the wall of the Jolly Joy Club.

"Evening, Miss Polly," said the old man as he doffed his hat.

Polly Parsons' companions gasped in disbelief. The blond heiress glowed with triumph. "I told you," she said. "We didn't make a sound. Steve Vail, you owe me ten bucks."

"Black magic," said a man, and Mulvihill heard the crinkle of bank notes.

"Meet the gang, Pop," said Polly.

"Howdy, folks," greeted John Mulvihill.

"Pop's my prince charming," Polly Parsons said. "He fished me out of the

river when I was a little brat with buck teeth. Pop was a police sergeant then. He was on the Middle Bridge when he saw me fall off the dock. Pop dove a hundred and ten feet and dragged me out. He got a Carnegie Hero Medal for it."

The abashed John Mulvihill felt his leathery cheeks burn. He shifted uneasily, said, "Aw, Polly!"

"Go on in, gang!" Polly ordered. "Order me a straight gin, Steve."

"Ye Gods!" Steve Vail gasped. "She drinks straight gin!"

MULVIHILL heard feet shuffle through the ornate entrance of the Jolly Joy Club, caught the flap-flap of the swinging doors. He felt Polly slyly tuck the ten spot into his side coat pocket. For once he was too eager to avoid an argument with Polly to make her take it back.

"Look, Pop!" Polly said. "You're tops with my old man. Why don't you get over your stinky pride and come live with us? And what do I hear about Meeker being out for you?"

"Who's Meeker?" asked the old man with mock innocence.

Polly Parsons' slipper tapped the sidewalk with anger. She said: "If I thought for a second that you had to—"

"I don't," Mulvihill hastened to lie. "I just do it to keep busy."

An excited feminine voice bawled from the entrance of the club for Polly to hurry in and see Steve tally 100,000 on the pinball machine. Because that feat was Polly's current ambition, she hastened to say good-bye to Mulvihill and dashed into the club.

John Mulvihill hesitated. But it was still early, and Polly would be at the far end of the club playing the pinball machine. The old man entered the barroom, turned right with his cane pointed that way. He found the bar and hoisted his foot on the rail of it.

"Small beer, Nick," he ordered, hearing footsteps behind the bar.

"Hello, old timer," said Nick Dixon. "Meeker's—"

"I know! I know!"

There was the rustle of a starched skirt and a woman said: "Five brandies and a straight gin. Sloe gin, I guess."

Nick Dixon corrected her. "Just ordi-

nary gin for Miss Parsons' drink."

"New here?" Mulvihill asked the waitress.

"Just for tonight," the girl said. "Grace has a cold."

John Mulvihill produced the ten spot, asked: "Will you give this to Miss Parsons and say it's from Pop?"

"Why sure," said the waitress.

The old man polished off his beer and got out fast. The sidewalk was crowded, couples liking to catch a breath of cool night air before entering the smoke filled clubs flanking the street. Mulvihill moved off. He struck his cane with more vigor and the staccato warning opened a lane through the crowd. Many spoke to him. He answered cheerily.

No sound betrayed the presence of Dan Meeker. John Mulvihill stopped. Soon the after-theater crowd on the sidewalk would troop into the night clubs and squander their money in merrymaking. It was the time to make hay. The old man felt frustrated.

Nervous fingers plucked Mulvihill's left coat sleeve. "Hey," whispered a voice, "Meeker's two blocks away handling traffic."

"Why, thank you," said the grateful old man.

The Good Samaritan vanished. John Mulvihill reached into his inner coat pocket and pulled out ten automatic pencils which he fanned out in his left hand. He held them head high as he tapped down the sidewalk.

"Buy a pencil!" he cried. "How can you dope the racing form without a pencil? How can you get the chorus girls' phone numbers without a pencil? How can you write on the rest-room walls without a pencil? A dollar a copy, folks."

It was a sales talk cunningly keyed to the mood of the crowd. Men guffawed, women chuckled. John Mulvihill began to sell his pencils. He'd disposed of five when a big hand closed on his shoulder.

Sergeant Dan Meeker said: "We warned you, John."

"Somebody said you were two blocks away," said the old man. "And I didn't hear those big feet of yours."

"I been standing in a door front," said Meeker. "And I got me shoes with crepe soles."

An indignant crowd gathered. "You big bully!" stormed a plump little woman. "Arresting a blind man! You should be ashamed of yourself."

Dan Meeker's beefy face flamed and embarrassed sweat streaked his cheeks. "Aw, it ain't my fault," he said. "I ain't the mayor."

AN ANGRY rumble swept through the throng. Meeker was vastly relieved when a prowler car stopped to determine the cause of the gathering. He helped Mulvihill into the front seat, climbed in back. The sedan rolled rapidly away.

"A man said you were two blocks away," said John Mulvihill unhappily.

"Who was it?" Meeker growled. "I will beat his dirty ears off. Rattin' on a blind man is one scurvy trick."

The sedan stopped at the precinct station and Meeker helped the old man into the building. A mighty hand seemed to garb John Mulvihill by the throat as they entered. The place was as familiar as an old shoe. He heard the murmur of voices from the muster room, the splat of tobacco juice scoring on a spittoon. The sounds and smells were the same, even to the snores of a drunk sleeping off a jag in an obscure corner.

"Just like the old days," said Mulvihill, a quaver to his voice.

Dan Meeker's eyes misted. He tried to cover up his soft heartedness by becoming brusque. "You're a pig-headed old goat," he cried. "Me an' the boys told you we'd see you through till things got ironed out."

Precise footsteps approached and Lieutenant Bronson said: "Sorry, John. It's a shame that the political boss of this city hates your guts. He hasn't forgot that you sent his brother up for a twenty-year stretch."

"I'd do it again, Roy," said John Mulvihill stoutly.

"See here, John," said Roy Bronson. "In three months you'll be eligible for your pension again. Why don't you let us—"

"No!" said the old man fiercely.

An angry silence settled over the headquarters as the men from the muster room tiptoed out. They all knew the story. Mul-

vihill had gone to live with an ailing sister in Florida before her death. The political boss had discovered an ancient law prohibiting pension payments to any person outside the state. The old man had to return to the state for a year before his pension could be resumed. It was cruel and heartless but legal.

His attempt to earn a frugal living had been frustrated by a city ordinance prohibiting blind persons from peddling under the apparent motive that it prevented risk of accident and was needless because the blind received a federal-state pension. Thus, with diabolical shrewdness, the boss had his revenge against John Mulvihill without discriminating against the blind or pensioners as a class.

Dan Meeker said: "Me an' the boys'd face hot lead for you, John. But we can't risk suspension. We got families."

The front door opened. Lieutenant Bronson said: "Here's a friend of yours I sent for when I knew you were stopped."

"Hello, John," greeted Henry Parsons.

John Mulvihill smote the floor with his cane. "It's no use, Henry," he avowed. "I'll not live at your place."

Henry Parsons favored the assembled policemen with a helpless shrug of his shoulders. "Let me drive you home," he suggested. "I go right by your place."

"Got any pencils left, John?" Meeker asked.

"You bought seven," said the old man. "So'd the rest of you buy more than one."

THERE was a brief silence. Mulvihill shook off Henry Parsons' helping hand, tapped his way to the town car at the curb and climbed in. The banker sat down beside him.

"What'll you do now, John?"

"Got a stake hid in my cookie jar," said John Mulvihill, not mentioning that it was only eleven dollars.

"Polly's my only child," said Henry Parsons. "We still don't know what to do with her play cottage now that she's grown up. It's a tidy little place. Fifteen by twenty with a bath."

The old man grunted. He knew the story by heart. Suddenly he recalled a puzzling circumstance, said: "Why should a man trick me into getting arrested?"

Henry Parsons listened to Mulvihill's indignant explanation, could offer no possible solution. The car stopped in front of a shabby apartment house and the chauffeur hopped out and opened the door. The old man climbed out and turned in time to block Parsons' exit.

"I'll think it over," he promised.

It was the first time he had even condescended to consider the matter. Henry Parsons settled back into the seat, said simply: "Polly and I would be almighty happy if you accepted."

Mulvihill stood on the sidewalk until the car sped away. That furtive tug on the sleeve, the whispered reassurance gnawed at his brain to baffle and worry him. He climbed the short flight of steps searching for an explanation. The door was ajar. He crossed a tiny entrance foyer and turned right to the head of the stairs leading to the basement.

John Mulvihill entered his inexpensive basement apartment. The steam pipes crisscrossing the ceiling made the place hot and humid, and the cold water faucet in the bathroom leaked with a monotonous drip, drip, drip. The old man parked his hat on the table and kicked the door closed.

That was when he sniffed the cigarette smoke. He stood very quiet and heard a chair creak softly as the person in it moved. His friends were quick to identify themselves so as not to startle him, so the brief silence presaged danger.

"What you doing here?" asked Mulvihill firmly.

A man laughed without humor, a harsh laugh of self-satisfaction, and John Mulvihill identified the voice.

"You're the man who told me the coast was clear."

"Yeah. It drew Meeker off his beat didn't it?"

Mulvihill felt his pulse quicken so suddenly that a vein in his forehead fluttered.

"A stickup!" he said. "You stuck up a night club."

"Dope! It's too early to tap the till of a night spot."

The old man knew that. He'd hoped to bait the man into bragging about whatever misdeed he had performed. The cigarette smoker did not rise to the bait. Mulvihill said, "What do—"

"We're going places," interrupted the man. "Got a job for you."

"I'm not leaving here," said Mulvihill.

The floor boards groaned as the man left the chair. The old man poised his cane like a rapier, retreated a step. The cane was knocked sideways and the bony back of an open hand lashed across John Mulvihill's mouth. It hurt. He reeled back groggily with the salty taste of blood hot in his mouth.

"I hate cops," the man snarled. "I hate their guts. They say you hung up a record sending guys up the river when you were a cop."

THE cane was snatched from John Mulvihill's grasp and the heavy head of it crashed over his left ear. There was a sudden arc-like brightness at the base of his brain as he dropped to his knees. Three times the cane whipped across his back with a shocking numbness.

"Now let's go," said the man. His heavy breathing filled the room.

John Mulvihill staggered to his feet. "No," he said. "No. I won't go."

"Why you dirty—" began the man, and broke off as the boom of the depot clock came through the small windows beneath the ceiling. Midnight!

"You can beat me to a pulp," avowed the old man. "But I won't leave."

The man eyed him with grudging admiration. "I think you will," he said very softly. "You like Polly Parsons, don't you?"

John Mulvihill caught his breath. He balled up his fists and advanced a step before realizing the futility of resistance. "I'll go," he said. "Give me my cane—kidnaper!"

He grasped the head of the cane firmly. But the kidnaper stayed behind him with his hands on the old man's elbows. They walked to the rear of the corridor and climbed up to the alley in back of the building. A car stood there with its motor running.

"Where the hell you been, Lefty?" asked the driver.

"Pipe down!" Lefty growled.

John Mulvihill was shoved into the rear of the sedan. He sat down and ran his fingers over the mohair upholstery. It was in good condition. He listened to

the motor. It sounded like an eight. There was no piston slap or any other irregularity.

Lefty climbed in back, said, "O.K., Tony!"

The old man settled back as the car rolled away. Lefty had told him, "They say you hung up a record. . . ." If Lefty was a local boy he'd have known the Mulvihill record. The careless use of first names supported the belief that they were out-of-towners.

The car had the conventional gear shift, so it wasn't one of the newfangled hydrodrives. A switch clicked, there was a hum, and band music blared from the roof loudspeaker to blot out street noises. Tony took turns at a snail's pace so there would be no tell-tale tilt or sway.

After perhaps ten minutes the right tires of the car scraped a curb as they rolled to a stop. Tony tuned down the radio before he got out and opened the rear door. The old man climbed out and faced the direction the car was headed.

Two vague, contradictory odors assailed his sensitive nostrils. One was fragrant and appetizing, the other dank and dismal. John Mulvihill identified them at once. A mild breeze cooled his cheeks.

Lefty came up and took his arm. Somewhere straight ahead a street car clanged and rattled down the rails, and Mulvihill alone detected a soft grinding noise through the metallic clatter.

Lefty steered him to the sidewalk. Mulvihill rapped out with his cane as they started forward. Lefty shook him, snarled, "Nix!" The old man carried his cane but bore down harder on his leather heels. His footfalls rang clear, dulled, rang clear again. Lefty shook him so hard that his teeth rattled.

"Walk quiet!" he warned.

Tony came up and grabbed the old man's free arm. The three of them turned right, advanced four steps to a stone stairs. Five wide steps brought them to a porch. A key grated a lock, a door opened on creaky hinges. Mulvihill was shoved forward and stepped on a rug or carpet. The door was closed, locked and bolted.

A board creaked somewhere above their heads and a soft voice called, "Got him?"

"Yeah, boss," said Lefty.

THE resonance of his voice proved them to be in a narrow hallway. Mulvihill was guided right to a staircase, also carpeted. He mounted warily with his right elbow brushing the wall. His arm passed over the sill of a window half way up. Then he was being led across the carpeted second floor hall into a room spiced with Polly Parsons' expensive perfume.

"They've hurt you!" Polly cried. "Why you filthy swine—"

"I'm all right," said the old man evenly. "I'm fine." He wiped the trickle of blood from the corner of his mouth. "Did you light up the five gold stars on the pinball machine, Polly?"

"Geeze," said Tony, "the old goat's a cool number."

"He's sharp," said the soft voice of the boss.

"Friends of yours, Polly?"

Polly said: "They're masked."

"Time to call the Jolly Joy Club, Polly," said the boss.

"And don't try to pull off the adhesive we got stuck over the number!" Lefty warned.

Mulvihill heard the spin of the dial, then Polly said, "Let me speak to Steve Vail, please? He's a tall young man with red hair and a little mustache."

There was a pause, and the boss said, "Make it good!"

"That you, Steve? This is Polly. I got awful sick in the ladies' room, Steve. I got sick all over my nice new dress. I couldn't come out like that, could I? I slipped out the window and took a cab home. I'm home now. I still feel vile. Mind if I go to bed, Steve? Gee, thanks, you're a grand guy."

"Nice work," said the boss as Polly hung up. "Get the picture, old timer?"

"Yes. You planted a car in the alley by the window. The alley's roped off at night and you knew Meeker would run you out. You slipped Polly a Mickey Finn and she passed out in the ladies' room. You slipped her through the window into the car."

"You're sharp," said the boss.

"How'd you know Polly'd be there when the ladies' room was deserted?"

"It didn't matter. Lefty can disguise himself as a dame. He could have got her out."

It was a brazen lie, but the old man let it pass, said: "You're sharp yourself. Too sharp for a local boy."

Lefty growled, said: "This guy is cagy. Maybe we—"

"Shut up!" said the boss. "He's the perfect go-between. What chance would he have of shaking off you guys? You can watch every move he makes."

"A blind ex-cop for a go-between!" said Tony. "What a laugh."

"He'll play ball," said the boss. "You wouldn't want these punks to muss Polly up, would you, Pop?"

John Mulvihill had to take a deep breath to keep his voice steady. "No," he said.

"We want eighty grand seven days from now," said the boss, his soft voice hardening. "In ones and fives. Parsons is to give out that Polly's on a trip. No cops or G-men. Catch?"

"The money'll make a big package."

"That's O.K. We'll give you delivery orders at the end of the week. If you blat, you know what happens to Polly."

"Come on, Pop!" Lefty ordered.

"Keep your chin up, Polly!" urged the old man.

"Sure thing, Pop!" said Polly with pretended heartiness.

Both Lefty and Tony took the old man down to the car. The breeze still bore the two vague odors. They got into the car and drove for perhaps fifteen minutes before stopping.

"There's a drugstore here," said Lefty. "Go call Parsons."

Mulvihill climbed out. By the time he found the entrance to the drugstore the sedan had turned a corner a block away. He walked into the store, called: "I'm blind. Will you take me to a phone booth?"

A gentle hand guided him to a booth. Mulvihill fished out some coins. He sat there a long time steeling himself for the ordeal ahead. He'd have preferred to be broken on the rack than to be the harbinger of such calamitous news. Finally he summoned the courage to call the toll operator and ask for the Parsons country estate.

THE old man came out of the booth drenched with nervous sweat. He inwardly cursed himself for a stubborn old

fool. If he'd had taken the play cottage long ago, Meeker wouldn't have been pulled off his beat. He found no comfort in the possibility that the kidnap might perhaps have been achieved without him.

Mulvihill learned that his apartment was within easy walking distance. He went there and brewed a pot of coffee. The depot clock tolled one A. M. as he sat assembling his meager facts. Tony or Lefty would be lurking somewhere nearby. They could take shifts in watching him and there'd still be two men at the kidnap house.

By nine the next morning John Mulvihill had decided upon a plan of action. He went up to the office of the apartment house with a ten-dollar bill clutched in his hand so all could see. It wasn't the date the monthly rent was due, but he often paid it well in advance.

He entered the office and slipped the bill into his pocket. Mrs. Sims sat at the desk shuffling papers. Mulvihill made sure that the door was ajar. Then he went to the desk, whispered: "Invite me for breakfast! Make it loud!"

It took a few seconds for the startled Mrs. Sims to regain her wits. Then her big voice shook the pictures on the wall. "Just in time for breakfast! Go back and sit!"

Mulvihill nodded approvingly. He often breakfasted with Mrs. Sims. He went into the living-room and closed the door. The old man groped his way to the phone, dialed the operator.

"I'm blind, ma'am," he said. "Will you get me the weather bureau?" She did so, and the old man asked: "What was the wind last night?"

A patient voice said: "Steady north wind at four miles an hour from sundown until three A.M. when it shifted—"

Mulvihill interrupted the recital with thanks. He hung up, reckoning excitedly. One of the odors he had discerned had come from tomato soup. The canned soup factory was in the central city section. That placed the kidnap hangout on the south side of town.

A man doesn't live sixty-eight years in a city without making a lot of connections. When he was a rookie he had deadheaded with motorman Charles Totman, now

president of the street railways. The call took time because of a lot of inter-company calls Totman made.

John Mulvihill hung up feeling heartened. An old rattletrap trolley with a dragging brake shoe had passed through the south side at 12:17 via Peachtree Street, an east-west through street four blocks south of the soup cannery.

Mulvihill had headed into the wind when he sniffed the soup and heard the trolley rattle past. Therefore the kidnap street intersected Peachtree. He wasn't sure how far the soup aroma would fan out. But the cannery was on 50th Street. He narrowed his search to the area south of Peachtree between 40th and 60th.

Mingled with the soup aroma had been the dank stench of gas clinging to freshly turned earth. Mulvihill called a friend at the gas company who in turn phoned a pal in maintenance. A gas main section had lately been installed on 53rd Street between Peachtree and Walnut!

John Mulvihill warmed with triumph. He had located the block, knew the side of the street. His next problem would be to duck the man sent to watch him. Then he'd be free to search for the hangout.

He went back into the office with the lame explanation of ducking a creditor—a pastime of most of the tenants. The none too bright Mrs. Sims clucked sympathy.

THE old man returned to his apartment. He secured the shades, locked the door and hung his hat on the knob. He got out an army .45 Colt, cleaned and loaded it. The tool chest provided a box-opening tool shaped like a crowbar but only six inches long. He parked the gun and tool beneath the radiator with three extra clips. Then he cut a stamp-sized piece of adhesive from a roll and stuck it on the edge of the kitchen table.

John Mulvihill sat down and considered the problem of getting rid of the shadower. He couldn't solve it by ducking around playing tag, for he might be picked up again or the man might phone the boss to put him on guard or even remove Polly to another hide-out.

It was noon before he found the answer. He then set the glassless alarm clock for nine o'clock, curled up on the

couch and soon he went sound asleep.

He was up at nine greatly refreshed by the sleep. He went to the ice box and removed a pound of butter from the wax wrapping. It wasn't pleasant to take straight, but the old man wolfed it down.

He sallied out into the night headed away from his usual haunts. At the first bar he tossed off six whiskies in a jiffy. He then sauntered back to the men's room and entered a toilet cubicle where he stuck his finger down his throat, wagged it, and got rid of the drinks without being nauseated. By ten-thirty he had visited five bars, repeated the performance with a total of twenty-eight ounce shots—almost a quart.

The butter prevented the walls of his stomach from absorbing any of the liquor. He was cold sober, acted very drunk. Several times on the street he feinted rushing into the stream of traffic in the hope that the shadower would take him in hand. Each time a considerate citizen yanked him to safety.

At eleven the old man started home staggering, reeling, belching and acting the typical souse. He charged into his apartment leaving the door open and sprawled out on the couch. He snored lustily, then subsided into a quieter sleep.

It was fifteen minutes before he heard the shuffle of feet advance down the hall. The man stood in the doorway for a full minute. Mulvihill made little bubbling noises as he breathed. A low voice said: "Stinko! And no wonder."

The door swung closed and the lock engaged. He heard the man do something to the door. Then heavy footsteps faded down the hall and up the stairs and the front door banged.

Mulvihill got up. He put the .45 and extra clips into his right coat pocket, the miniature crowbar in the left. He took the bit of adhesive and stuck it over the nib of the cane to subdue the raps of it.

The old man stepped out into the deserted corridor. He stood still listening. There wasn't a sound. He turned to the door and felt along the edge of it. A wad of still warm gum formed a seal between door and frame. He reset it.

Mulvihill left by the back way, dashed across the alley and passed between two buildings to the street beyond. He found

a cab there, rode in style to 54th and Peachtree. Then he strolled down to 53rd Street and posted himself on the southeast corner.

Almost immediately a trolley car came down Peachtree Street and ground to a stop. It discharged a group of noisy young folks. The old man heard snatches of conversation about a picnic at the shore. Then the youngsters disbanded.

Three of them crossed the street, passed John Mulvihill and strode down 53rd Street on the side the hangout fronted upon. The old man started after them, rapping his cane against the pavement but making little noise.

THEN abruptly he knew he was abreast of the kidnap house. He moved with the smooth precision he'd decided upon. Adroit staggering to the left like a drunk brought him up against the front wall of the house sooner than he'd reckoned and he grunted at the impact.

He stood there for a full five minutes. The youngsters had vanished from sound, and Peachtree Street was silent. The hush deepened. John Mulvihill inched along the wall until he came to the corner of the house. He turned. Two feet from the corner his shoulder brushed something and his hand groped out to encounter two thickly insulated wires. He ran his hand down one and found that they entered the house a foot from the ground.

The old man bent double with his left hand touching the wall a foot above the ground. He advanced about five feet when his hand encountered a glass pane. A rectangular cellar window almost flush with the ground! Mulvihill crouched there.

The window was locked. The old man fingered the edge of it, discovered that it was hinged at the top, swung inward. He got out the tool and gently pried at the base of the window. The latch pulled from the wood and tinkled on the floor below. John Mulvihill turned around and backed through the window feet first.

He dropped lightly on flexed knees, tensed. Not a whisper of sound came from above. The old man circled his cane, cased the basement. It was not littered with the usual odds and ends, proving that it had been occupied a short time.

The stairs were against the back wall. He went up with stealth, found the door at the top unlocked. He sighed in relief. Forcing the lock might have made noise. He opened the door and sniffed the new linoleum of the kitchen. The distant murmur of voices reached him.

The old man turned left and reached another closed door. He opened it and the voices came to him loud and clear.

"Quit beefin'!" Tony snarled. "The old goat's out. I slips a Mickey in his drink at one of them bars."

John Mulvihill caught his breath. Then he realized that Tony was lying. The old man had held a shot-glass with his thumb and forefinger flush with the rim of it to avoid the risk of striking his nose too good front teeth with the heavy glass, and he knew no one could have slipped a Mickey in his drink.

The old man faced a crisis. He reached out and put his foot down on a carpet he now knew covered the entrance hall. If he could find a light outlet he could unscrew the bulb, insert a coin and possibly blow the fuse. It would be risky. The fuse might be designed to carry the heavy load needed for electrical appliances. The possibility of the men having flashlights was a risk he could not avoid.

John Mulvihill returned to the basement. He went to the window, groped to the right of it and heard the low hum of

the electric meter. He found the metal box, opened it. Then he went back to the bottom of the stairs counting his steps with care. He counted back, came right to the meter box again.

The old man took out his .45 and thumbed off the safety. His face was feverish, his hands cold, but otherwise he was calm and steady. His left hand dipped into the box with the middle finger extended to avoid the risk of contacting the terminals and getting a shock. The milled head of a fuse grazed his finger.

He calmly unscrewed the fuse. Then he turned fast, ran on tiptoes to the cellar stairs. It was an incredible display of judgment; his raised right foot meeting the bottom step precisely. He went up with silent speed with his cane clamped under his left arm.

THE grumble of angry voices came from the second floor. The old man darted through the kitchen and into the carpeted hall. He stopped and wiggled out of his shoes, pushed them against the staircase. Then he glided to the bottom of the stairs and pressed his back against the wall.

"Where the hell's the flashlight?" Lefty growled from a second floor room.

"It's in the car," said Tony, and swore.

Lefty said: "Got the doll O.K., boss?"

"I got her," said the boss.



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DETECTIVE TALES

There was a meaty thud and Tony howled with rage and pain, yelled: "Look where you're goin'."

Mulvihill heard the two men come out into the second floor and collide again.

Lefty said: "Raise that shade on the way downstairs! It's darker than the belly of a whale in here."

"You an' that trick radio of yours," said Tony. "You should have run it on its batteries."

"Stop yammering!" called the boss.

Tony said: "Stay in back of me, see!"

The top step creaked and the old man heard Tony's finger nails scrape along the wall.

The exasperated voice of the boss called: "Light a match, you dopes."

"Geeze!" said the abashed Tony. "I never thunk of that."

John Mulvihill raised his left hand to his mouth and spoke softly into the palm of it. "Don't light a match, Tony," he said in a ghostly voice that seemed to come from the walls.

He heard Tony and Lefty suck air in unison. Then there was an ominous silence so prolonged and intense that they could hear the confused sounds of a party several houses away. The top step creaked. Only the keen hearing of John Mulvihill could tell that Tony had backed up into the hall.

The old man spoke into his palm again. "Don't move again!"

Silence again—deep and deadly. John Mulvihill slacked his jaws to better his hearing. He laid his cane on the carpet and cupped his left ear toward the top of the steps. He was conscious of the faint creak of a leather belt as one of the men's belly strained against it.

"What's wrong?" called the boss.

"It's the blind man!" cried Mulvihill from the corner of his mouth. The fury of demons possessed him and he threw back his head and laughed with sheer ecstasy. He sobered at once, called softly: "Only the tables are turned now. I've lived sixteen years in the darkness. You've only had a minute of it. How do you like it?"

"He's nuts!" Lefty croaked.

"Don't light a match!" Mulvihill warned. "I can hear it before it lights."

He heard Tony choke down a lump in

his throat. Then came that nerve-shaking silence. Then a board creaked almost imperceptibly as one of the men shifted his weight.

"Don't pull that gun!" Mulvihill snapped.

Tony gasped in dismay, then whimpered with fear. How had the old man known he'd gone for his gun? It was uncanny, inhuman. Tony's face beaded with cold sweat as he stood there with his right hand rammed into his hip pocket. He was afraid to move a finger. Lefty stood behind him trembling.

"Funny, isn't it?" said the old man softly. "You're the ones who are blind now, and I'm the one who can see."

The soft rasp of a match came from one of the rooms above. Mulvihill had his pistol aimed, almost fired. Then came a brief flurry of sound and Polly Parsons cried out in triumph: "I got his matches! I got his matches!"

The boss cursed, blundered into a chair and sent it crashing. Mulvihill tensed. But the men at the top of the stairs were too terrified to move—stood as if hypnotized. Sudden death lurked in the darkness, and they had no stomach for it.

Mulvihill picked up his cane from the carpet with his free left hand and probed out for the banister post. The adhesive-covered tip connected with the post and kept the cane from slipping. Mulvihill gave a gentle shove. The entire length of the railing groaned, and after the short, deathly periods of stillness, the sound filled the house like the thunder of an avalanche.

Tony screamed like a woman—shrill and piercing. He dragged out his gun. There was a deafening report, a brief stab of flame, and splinters leaped from the railing. Mulvihill slid down the wall as he fired in reply, then leaped forward to land noiselessly beside the railing post.

Upstairs Tony screamed. Lefty fired at the spot the gunblast had revealed the old man to be. The old man fired twice in return. The reports hurt his ears. He felt, rather than heard, Lefty fall on the upper hall.

"Tony!" called the boss in a fear-strained voice. "Lefty!"

Deepening silence was his answer. Then a window flew up with a bang. Polly Par-

sons cried: "He jumped out the window. Watch yourself, Pop, watch yourself!"

Mulvihill hesitated. Outside a man screamed, then cursed, and gravel crunched close to the house. Upstairs Polly was crying, "Operator! Operator! Get me the police, quick!"

The cops came, swarms of cops that overflowed the house and spilled out across the yard. Dan Meeker found the old man and parked him in a chair in the living-room.

Lieutenant Bronson said: "There's a guy with a broken ankle outside."

"He's the boss," said the old man. "The others?"

"Cat meat. One took two slugs through the head. The other had his chest ripped open."

Polly Parsons came in yowling, "Who's got a drink? Gimme a drink somebody! Gimme a drink before I shake an arm off." She sniffed, blubbered a little, then bawled, "Dad! Oh, Dad." Her crying was muffled after that and Henry Parsons kept saying, "There! There!"

After a while somebody got everybody

a drink and John Mulvihill told the yarn as revealed by the boss. "Only they had a girl accomplice," he said. "She could park Polly on the couch in the ladies' room until the coast was clear for the men to come in the window and take her out. Better question that new waitress."

Bronson said, "You bet."

Henry Parsons said: "I'm glad you get the reward, John."

"What reward?" asked the old man.

"The ten thousand dollars I was going to offer for the capture of the kidnapers as soon as I got Polly back. Now don't tell me that I didn't intend to!"

John Mulvihill couldn't very well do that. He rubbed his jaw, asked timidly: "How much rent you want for that play house?"

"Let's go home and talk it over," said Henry Parsons.

The old man's voice choked up. "Home," he mumbled. "Home."

After the three of them had gone, the cops stood around blowing their noses and pretending smoke had smarted their eyes.



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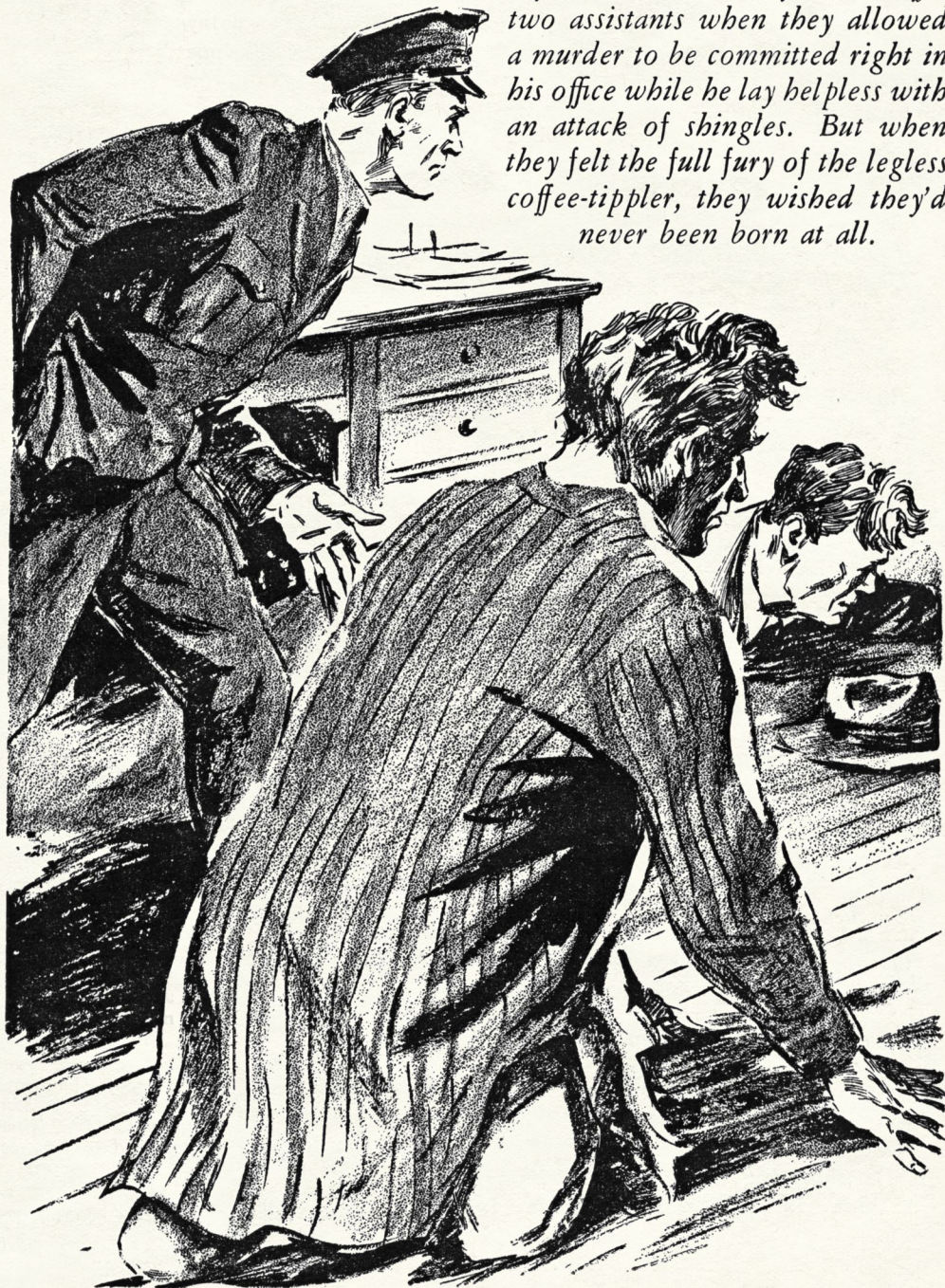
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TELL IT TO HOMICIDE

By **D. L. Champion**

Author of "A Bed for the Body," etc.

Life became bleak for Allhoff's two assistants when they allowed a murder to be committed right in his office while he lay helpless with an attack of shingles. But when they felt the full fury of the legless coffee-tippler, they wished they'd never been born at all.



An Inspector Allhoff Novelette



Allhoff reeled into the room in a gray nightshirt like a half-pint ghost.

CHAPTER ONE

Homicide While You Wait

I WAS a half hour late. A domestic difference concerning the purchase of new furniture had held me up. From eight thirty until nine o'clock I had argued an unsteady and futile negative. At 9:01 I had capitulated, written out a check which my wife had borne tri-

umphantly, like a captured pennon, to the department store.

Hence, I arrived at Allhoff's chronologically late, spiritually low, and filled with wonder at how those ancient potentates who kept whole harems ever retained their sanity, or, for that matter, their hearing.

I plodded up the rickety stairs that led to Allhoff's slum apartment. The dim hallway smelled of age and dampness.

Beyond that a remote unpleasant obligato odor informed me that another rat had died somewhere within the building without benefit of either clergy or incineration. This fragrance, however, was normal enough. The fact that the acrid aroma of vitriolic coffee did not prevail, was not.

At the stair-head I pushed open the door and the hinges creaked like the bones of a rheumatic skeleton. I entered the room and looked about. A gray rug of dust covered the floor. At the side of the window, through whose dirty pane light struggled ineffectually, Allhoff's laundry formed a pallid weary hill. Dishes, equally unwashed, were pyramided in the sink. Beneath, a lidless garbage can erupted miasma. A cockroach waddled away from it, replete with breakfast.

Battersly, tall, youthful and rather handsome in his patrolman's uniform sat at his desk. His eyes, dark and vastly too old for a man under forty, stared dully at the comic strip held before him. He looked up, saw me, and sighed heavily.

I glanced over at Allhoff's desk. The swivel chair before it was empty. The electric plate which held the percolator was unlit. This, at nine thirty in the morning, was phenomenon indeed. I caught Battersly's eye and lifted my brows inquiringly.

Battersly jerked a thumb in the direction of the bedroom. He said in a low whisper: "He's in bed. He's sick."

The frown which corrugated my brow, the sigh which escaped my lips were engendered by no sympathy for Allhoff. Rather, a deep and abiding concern for Battersly and myself. Allhoff, glowing with ruddy health, was bad enough; Allhoff, querulous and dictatorial in a sick-bed was something to strain the endurance of Gibraltar and the patience of Job.

I said very softly, very hopefully: "Is it serious?"

Battersly shook his head sadly. "Shingles."

I crossed the room to my desk, removed my hat and coat. A heavy depression was upon me. I disapproved of Allhoff's shingles for two reasons. First, it wasn't serious, second, it was damned painful. Allhoff's sadistic temper without the stimulus of pain was maddening. With the agonizing spur of shingles to drive him

to bitter epithet, similar profanity—I contemplated the situation and trembled.

I said, still in a whisper: "When did it happen?"

"Sometime early this morning. The doc left a few minutes ago. I think he's asleep now. He swore he was awake all night. Say, Sergeant, what *are* shingles?"

"I'm no expert," I said. "But I know they're not critical. However, they're damned painful. Sores that break out on the body, usually caused by an upset nervous system. No one, I'm sure, ever died from them. That's what you wanted to know, isn't it?"

HE DIDN'T answer. He had no opportunity. From the half-open door of the bedroom came a roar vaguely imitative of a lion with its tail caught in a mangle. Allhoff's voice filled the room like laryngitic thunder. For the first minute he called upon several deities to witness his sorry plight. Then, from the sewers of his vocabulary he dug up several choice adjectives and applied them impartially to Battersly and myself. Toward the end of the paragraph he reverted to simpler and printable English.

"Am I to die in agony, unattended and without coffee?" he shrieked. "A quarter to ten in the morning and I've had no coffee. Battersly, you idiot, bring me my coffee."

Battersly stood up and approached the bedroom door with all the confidence of Marshal Petain signing the armistice. He thrust his head through the jamb and said: "Inspector, the doctor said you wasn't to have coffee."

Allhoff cleared his throat so savagely that I am willing to wager it was recorded on the Fordham seismograph. It seemed, in several hundred words, that the doctor's mother had not only been unclean and immoral, but that she had also indulged in several practices which would have raised the eyebrows of Krafft-Ebing.

There was an epilogue, too, which stated flatly that Battersly's intelligence would have received no homage from some of the lower primates. Then came a ringing line in conclusion which shook the rafters and announced categorically that Inspector Allhoff would have his coffee in spite of hell, high water, the stupidity of subor-

dinates or the injunctions of any jerk medico who doubtless had taken the veterinarian's course by mistake.

I got up and switched on the electric plate. Battersly filled the percolator. Allhoff muttered to himself. I, with no success whatever, tried to convince myself that coffee in the stomach of a shingles sufferer would prove fatal.

I carried the coffee pot and the thick chipped cup of cafeteria gray into the bedroom. The chaotic disorder in there surpassed the disarray of the other room. A cracked green shade covered the top half of a grimy window pane. A rickety chair stood at the side of the bed, Allhoff's trousers draped drunkenly over its back. His shirt, which never would have been used in a soap ad, lay on the seat. His coat had been deposited neatly upon the floor.

The counterpane, which at the time of the Civil War, had been a pale blue, was now torn and black. The pillow on which lay Allhoff's tousled head looked like crumpled soot. His hot agate eyes stared up at me from the bed. Pain gave added bitterness to his gaze. His lips were parted, revealing yellowish teeth. He looked very much like a man about to snarl. He did.

He snatched the coffee from my hand. He drank it like a Death Valley prospector stumbling upon an oasis, when his canteen has been empty for a week come Tuesday. He made a horrible noise with his mouth which sounded like something between the hissing of a snake and a death rattle broadcast through static from a gallops.

He slammed the cup down on the chair bottom. He said, as if he held me personally responsible: "These damned shingles. They hurt like hell. They itch like hell. They're driving me mad. I shall be damned short tempered today."

"No," I said, with all the irony I could summon, "not really?"

Allhoff's announcing that he would be short tempered was as startling a piece of information as Hitler announcing he would have a hostage shot. However, he didn't answer me. He closed his eyes and emitted a groan. I tried my utmost to register sympathy. The only thing I achieved was a grin.

ALLHOFF opened his eyes, saw me and his face twisted with wrath.

"Don't think," he shouted, "that because I'm ill the work of this office will be neglected. We're still functioning—and better than any other bureau in the department. Only now, I expect you guys to do a little work for a change. Is there anything due this morning?"

He groaned again and twisted around in the bed as if to adjust his body in a more comfortable position. I went outside to the other room and picked up my desk pad. Battersly, sitting at his desk, like a school boy afraid of the master's anger, looked at me inquiringly. I shook my head.

I returned to the bedside. I consulted my pad and said: "There's this guy Wayne in the Westerly case. He's supposed to be here in about fifteen minutes."

Allhoff nodded. "All right," he said. "Give me the details."

I thumbed the pages of my book. "Westerly," I told him, "was killed three days ago. Homicide seems to think the case is open and shut."

Allhoff summoned up some energy through his pain. He snorted contemptuously, "Homicide!"

I hurried on before he could formulate several thousand words on the subject of the Homicide squad. "This Westerly," I said, "had a brawl with a guy called Robinson. Arthur Robinson. Overheard by two of Westerly's servants. Threatened to kill him unless he did something Robinson demanded he do within three hours. Robinson returned three hours later. The maid entered Westerly's study, found him dead. Robinson in the room."

Allhoff groaned again. I paused and looked at him. He signalled me to continue.

"There was a gun on Westerly's desk. His own gun. One round missing, found by ballistics in Westerly's brain. Robinson says he'd just entered the room and found the body. He refuses to talk about the subject of the quarrel between the pair of them. Personally, I agree with Homicide. I—"

"In the prime of my health," snapped Allhoff, "I am not interested in your opinions. Now what about this guy, Wayne?"

"Wayne got in touch with the Commissioner through a mutual friend. Says he's got something that indicates Robinson is innocent. Commissioner told him to see you at ten today. It's ten now. What'll I do when he arrives? Bring him into your delicate pink and French ivory boudoir?"

He glared at me. He bit his lip and his fists clenched. "Well," I said, "what are you considering? Where we shall receive our customer?"

"I'm considering," he said bitterly, "how I can frame you, get you kicked out of the department with the loss of your pension. By God, I swear, I'll do it someday. Now listen to me. I'm too damned sick to see anyone. You and Battersly can listen to Wayne's tale. Leave the door ajar. I can overhear whatever's said in the other room. You do whatever questioning is necessary. I'll listen."

"All right." I cocked an ear as I heard creaking footfalls on the stairs. "I guess that's him now. I'll attend to it."

He snorted again as I left the room. I gathered it was derision at the idea that Battersly or I could attend to anything without his assistance.

I sat down at Allhoff's desk as two men came into the room. One of them stood uncertainly before me and announced, "I'm Gregory Wayne. This is a friend of mine who came along. Mr. Timmons."

I bowed. Wayne was short and rather pudgy. He had a round, chubby face and a pair of immensely naive blue eyes behind a pair of thick glasses. Timmons was tall and gaunt. He wore his right arm in a black sling and a suit cut as if it had been tailored in Times Square by a cutter who knew several actors making less than forty dollars a week.

I GESTURED toward two chairs. "Sit down, gentlemen. Inspector Allhoff is lying down. He's not feeling well. However he can overhear us. Now, Mr. Wayne, what's on your mind?"

The pair of them sat down. Timmons on Wayne's right. Wayne licked his lips and glanced about. It seemed to me he was a trifle nervous. His blue eyes blinked rapidly.

"Well," I said, as he didn't speak, "you have some evidence, I believe, which indicates that Arthur Robinson did not kill

Wallace Westerly. Is that correct?"

Wayne looked at me, transferred his gaze to Timmons, and said: "Well, no, as a matter of fact, I haven't."

I looked at Battersly and blinked. "But," I said, "I understood that the Commissioner said—"

"Wayne made a mistake," said Timmons. "He found out that his information was incorrect. Didn't you, pal?"

Wayne nodded with what looked like eagerness. "That's right," he said. "A mistake."

I shrugged my shoulders. On the face of it, it had seemed to me that Homicide had a cold case against Robinson anyway. "All right," I said, "then, I guess there's nothing more to be said. Is there?"

"Why, no," said Timmons, rising, "we just dropped in since we had the appointment. We—"

Allhoff's voice came through the bedroom door like a blast of a battleship's guns.

"You fool, Simmonds. You idiot. Ask him what evidence he had and how he found out he'd made a mistake."

I gestured apologetically to the pair of them. Timmons sat down again.

"Well," said Wayne hesitantly, "I heard only yesterday that Westerly had another enemy. A man who'd tried to kill him once before. Then only this morning I learned that the fellow who told me all this was kidding. See?"

"Then," roared Allhoff, from the bedroom, "what the devil did you come down here for?"

Wayne glanced nervously at Timmons. "Well," he said and it seemed to me there was an odd note in his voice, "I really hadn't intended to. But early this morning, I was driving downtown. Driving west on 54th Street, when I saw a police officer I happen to know. I stopped to speak to him. Told him I had an appointment here but I'd decided not to keep it. He advised me that I should."

That I could appreciate. Every officer on the force knew better than to cross Allhoff. Probably the copper had figured that if someone stood Allhoff up on a date the whole department would be hearing about it directly or indirectly for days.

"So," went on Wayne, "I left the officer, kept my appointment at the Put-

nam Building, then picked up my friend Timmons and came down here, just to tell you I was wrong. I didn't want to keep you expecting me and not show up."

That sounded all right to me, save, perhaps, for Wayne's garrulity in the matter. I stood up. "All right, gentlemen," I said. "I guess that satisfies the Inspector. I suppose you may go now."

Allhoff screamed from the bedroom that he was satisfied only in respect to a certain portion of porcine anatomy. He added: "Let them wait a minute. I want to think."

We all sat in stupid silence while Allhoff's brain functioned. I sighed heavily. I had known he was going to be more trying than usual today and he certainly was starting out right. I was positive that there was nothing more in his head at the moment than a well-phrased curse. This little byplay went under the general heading of impressing the customers.

"HEY," came the voice from the bedroom, "that guy there with Wayne—has he got his hands in his pockets?"

I glanced over at Timmons. His left hand rested on his knee. His right, of course, was in the sling.

"No," I said. "Neither has he got his feet on the chandelier. However, he is wearing black shoes and his right arm is in a sling. And what, Mr. Holmes, do you deduce from that?"

There was a moment's silence. Then Allhoff erupted like Mount Vesuvius to the accompaniment of all the jungle drums in Africa.

"Cretins!" he bellowed. "Dolts. Drooling idiots. Grab him. Grab that Timmons guy. Arrest him. Grab him quick!"

Neither Battersly nor I moved. We looked at each other, agreed tacitly that Allhoff's pain was driving him across that last borderline of insanity where he had dwelt so long. Then I turned my head again in the direction of our visitors.

Timmons was standing up. He was looking at Wayne with black eyes, cold and relentless as the Arctic Sea. Wayne blinked bluey back at him. The color receded from his chubby face. He said: "Timmons, for God's sake—"

"You," said Timmons, spitting out each word as if it were a metallic watermelon

seed, "are a low-down double-crosser!"

There were two sudden explosions. Smoke flowed oddly through the fabric of Timmons' black sling. Wayne slid gently from the chair to the floor. His own blood preceded him there. For an instant I sat stunned.

I heard a thud from the bedroom as Allhoff rolled out and hit the floor. A moment later he reeled into the room in a gray nightshirt, looking like a half-pint ghost. Timmons sped to the doorway, tearing his arm from his sling as he did so and revealing the automatic that the bandage had concealed. I, at last, broke the amazed paralysis which was upon me and started after him.

I had moved less than a foot when my shoe cracked against the leg of Allhoff's desk and I fell heavily to my knees. Now, Battersly dragging his gun from its holster, sprang to his feet and raced after Timmons. Allhoff waddled across the room and crossed Battersly's path almost at the doorway. Sweat stood out on his brow indicative of the pain he underwent. He staggered for a moment, groaned, clapped a hand to his head, and toppled over in slow motion. He lay on his back breathing heavily at the side of Wayne's corpse.

Battersly charging along behind him was moving too speedily to check his pace. His moving foot came into sharp contact with Allhoff's body and threw him off balance. He tried desperately to hold himself up, then failed. He fell heavily over Allhoff's body.

He got up clumsily, looked down the empty stairwell and then at me. I shook my head. Pursuit was futile now. Timmons was already in a taxicab and a good eight blocks away. Battersly reholstered his gun. Together we bent down and picked up Allhoff. We carried him into the bedroom and laid him on top of the dreary bedspread.

His face was wracked with pain. His breath came in short gasps. Sweat gleaming on his face gave it an odd expression. His flesh looked like glazed citrus fruit. He clenched his fists for a moment and bit his lower lip. He took a deep breath and I knew it cost him an effort to speak.

"A corpse," he said bitterly. "A corpse in my own office! A man murdered in my

apartment." He propped himself up on one elbow and suffered a moment's Gethsemane before he could continue. "Troglodytes!" he said. "No, by God, you can't be such half-witted fools." His little eyes grew narrower. He fixed us with them. "Did you do it on purpose to embarrass me?"

I gaped at him. "Do what on purpose?"

"Let that murderer kill Wayne in my office? You did it to make a fool of me. Me! With a corpse in my office!"

I sighed and shook my head. "Allhoff," I said with remarkable patience, "why don't you get some rest? If you'll think it over you'll realize it was impossible for anyone to know that Timmons had a gun in his sling."

Allhoff rolled his eyes, made a horrendous noise in his throat and for a moment I thought he was going to foam at the mouth.

"I knew it!" he screamed. "You lunatic. I knew it. Why couldn't you?"

"How on earth could you know it?"

"I knew it the instant I heard Timmons was wearing a sling. Hell, it was obvious. Wayne's suddenly changed story. His nervousness. Plus the fact that he threw us two clues dealt off the cuff. God, he was asking for our help! And you let him be killed. And in my office!"

BY NOW I had reached the conclusion that Allhoff's concern was much greater regarding the geography of the killing than the killing itself. The fact that Wayne was dead didn't touch him much. The fact that Wayne had been killed in his office was a direct blow at his prestige.

Battersly scratched his head. "Inspector," he said, "what do you mean that Wayne was asking for help. He never said anything like that."

"The hell he didn't," snapped Allhoff. "He said he was driving west on Fifty-fourth Street, didn't he? Said he stopped and spoke to a copper whom he knew."

"Well," I said, "so what? It's quite conceivable he *did* know the copper on that beat."

"It's not conceivable he knew any copper who'd let him drive west on Fifty-fourth Street," yelled Allhoff. "It's a

one-way street, east-bound. The even numbered streets are east-bound. The odd, west. My God, a police sergeant who doesn't know that! Then what about his date in the Putnam Building. Do you know where the Putnam Building is?"

"No," I said. "I can't quite place it."

"Of course not. Because it isn't there."

"It isn't where?"

"It isn't anywhere, you fool! It was torn down fifteen years ago when they put up the Paramount Theatre. Wayne was saying those things to draw our attention to the fact that something was screwy. Expecting to find a modicum of intelligence in my office, he took that way of informing us that Timmons was forcing him to change his story."

I thought that over carefully. I came to the reluctant conclusion that Allhoff was right.

"Is that why you asked if Timmons' hands were in his pockets? You figured he may have been holding a gun on Wayne?"

"Of course. The instant I heard about the sling I knew the answer. Now, we've got a corpse and a mystery on our hands. And there's something else."

Groaning, he swung his body around and faced Battersly. I grew apprehensive. If there had to be an immediate target for Allhoff's savagery, I preferred to be that bull's-eye myself. At me, he became only insanely angry; at Battersly, he went berserk. I steeled myself. From the wild expression in his eyes I knew it was coming.

"You!" he said and it sounded worse than the foulest oath. Battersly's face was suddenly drawn and white. A shadow came over his eyes and he took an involuntary step backwards. "You," said Allhoff again, "you and your clumsy legs. You don't deserve a pair of legs. You could've got that guy. But you fall over me! You filthy cowardly oaf!"

He paused and drew a deep breath. I wracked my brains for something with which to divert him. Battersly stood with his back against the wall in both a literal and figurative sense. Then like a bomb on an open city came the blast. Allhoff, trembling like a man with fever, rattled all his vocal cords, and hurled mouthfuls of slime at Battersly. He cursed, raved, ran-

ted. He invented catchwords that would have stunned a philologist.

He beat his fists against the side of the bed until the mattress rocked like a cradle. Protruding from the bottom of his nightshirt where his thighs should have begun, were two leather tipped stumps. These flailed frantically against the soiled counterpane, beating a frenzied tattoo of hysterical hatred.

I caught Battersly's eye and signaled him out of the room. He fled, Allhoff's blasting vocabulary pursuing him, like a pack of hounds in full cry. I stood there, bearing the brunt of it, until at last Allhoff, utterly exhausted fell back upon the grimy pillow. I pulled the covers over him. I left the room, the sound of his stertorous breathing sounding in my ears.

Battersly sat at his desk. His face was buried in his arms. I sighed heavily as I filled my pipe. I found myself wishing I could afford the luxury of a nervous breakdown.

CHAPTER TWO

A Willing Witness

THE SITUATION which was driving me quietly mad, had its genesis several years ago when Battersly was a raw recruit and Allhoff an inspector with two legs. We had learned that a couple of thugs for whom we were searching were hiding out in a rooming house on upper West End Avenue. We had learned further that a Tommy gun on the stairway commanded the door in the event of a raid.

Battersly's assignment had been to effect a rear entrance and disable the gun's operator at zero hour—when Allhoff came clattering in the front door with the raiding party. Battersly had carried out the first part of his assignment all right. Then, becoming suddenly panicky, had run up the stairs and waited too long before attempting to engage the man at the machine gun.

The net result of this maneuver was that when Allhoff came charging in the front door he was greeted by a hail of bullets, at least a dozen of which lodged in his legs. Gangrene followed that and amputation was next.

Although the Civil Service code proscribed such odd characters as legless inspectors in the department, the Commissioner was of no mind to lose his best man. Through some devious bookkeeping device, he arranged that Allhoff still draw his full pay, that he live in this slum because of its proximity to headquarters, and that he still devote his talents to the solution of those cases which taxed the brains of the rest of the department.

Allhoff, for his part, had made a single grim demand—that Battersly be appointed as his assistant. The Commissioner had agreed. From that day Allhoff, who had lost a little of his mind along with his legs, had exacted a full and bitter revenge. Battersly had never been permitted to forget that error of years ago. Allhoff's hatred for the younger man made the heart of Hitler seem a soft and yielding organ.

I was the innocent bystander that had been hit by the truck aimed at someone else. Since I had come up with Allhoff, since I was reputed to know him better than anyone else, I had been sent over here with Battersly. In theory I was supposed to look after the paper work. Actually, I was supposed to pour cans of oil on the troubled waters whenever Allhoff went berserk. Every night, I prayed for a transfer as a Pole prays for freedom. With precisely the same result.

The boys from the morgue came up and took the Wayne corpse out in the meat wagon. Battersly and I sat in complete silence. In the bedroom Allhoff poured caffeine into his system and brooded. The simple fact of his being silent was boon enough for me. The morning passed slowly and without development. Allhoff didn't speak to us and we certainly weren't suckers enough to talk to him.

Battersly and I returned to the tenement after lunch perusing a copy of the afternoon paper which contained the story of Wayne's death. It was publicity I was positive Allhoff wasn't going to relish. Figuring that, I discarded the paper before I entered the flat.

I peeped into the bedroom to find Allhoff staring at the ceiling. His brow was wrinkled as if he were in deep thought. He still did not speak.

Then, a little before two o'clock Alicia

Dorman came in. She was tall, blond and beautiful. She looked as out of place in Allhoff's drawing room as an ermine wrap in a sewer. Her eyes were blue and deep as a bucket of turquoise. Her lips, full red and provocative. She glanced around the room, wrinkled a tiny nose and said, in a voice that tinkled like an ecstatic bell: "Is Inspector Allhoff in?"

"To no one," yelled Allhoff from the bedroom. "I'm thinking about a murder case."

I MADE an apologetic gesture to the blonde. Battersly stared at her like a farm boy at the *Police Gazette*. Her full red lips parted in a smile. She said, in a voice which carried into the bedroom: "Which murder, Inspector? Westerly's or Wayne's?"

There was a moment's startled silence. Then Allhoff's voice rose like an explosion.

"You fools!" he yelled. "Bring that woman in here."

That nettled me. I escorted the blonde into the bedroom. I said: "You will excuse the condition of the room. The Inspector has shingles. He's been unable to wash the bedspread this year. However, you needn't worry. Germs are afraid of the Inspector. They—"

A feminine presence did not stay Allhoff's tongue. In three words he insulted both my mother and myself. He showed his teeth at the blonde. If you knew him you were aware that this was his politest smile; if you didn't, you would have received the distinct impression that he was rehearsing the alter ego of Dr. Jekyll. He indicated a chair with his hand. The blonde drawing her skirts gingerly about a pair of magnificent thighs, sat down.

"I am Alicia Dorman," she said. She opened her bag and took from it a cigarette which had been clinched. She lit and blew a cloud of smoke in Allhoff's face.

He propped himself up in bed and poured himself a cup of coffee. He said: "What do you know of the Wayne murder?"

She looked at him archly. "Oh," she said, "I know who killed him."

For the first time in his life Allhoff put down a filled coffee cup without tasting the brew. He said, excitedly, "Who?"

I watched his eager little eyes and reflected that he was shot with luck. Without any effort on his part a clue to the ignominious corpse that had fallen on his own floor was about to drop into his non-existent lap.

"Timmons," she said. "Harry Timmons."

Allhoff nodded his head excitedly. "Yes, yes, what else do you know?"

"Why that's all," said Alicia Dorman. "That's everything I know about it, Inspector."

Allhoff's brow clouded. "Then how do you know that?"

"Why, Inspector, I just read it in the afternoon papers."

I chuckled. Allhoff glared at her. She returned his gaze with ingenuous blandness. She took the last puff of her cigarette, smoking it down so fine that it almost singed the rouge on her voluptuous lips and before Allhoff could speak, she said calmly: "I also know who killed Wallace Westerly."

Allhoff's eyes narrowed again. "All right," he said, "I suppose you mean Arthur Robinson and you read that in the papers, too."

She shook her head. "This man, what's his name? Robinson? He didn't kill Westerly."

Allhoff still suspicious of another gag, asked warily: "Who did?"

She stamped a high heel down on the cigarette butt she'd dropped on the floor. The smile and the softness went out of her face. The sweetness had gone from her voice as she said with ineffable bitterness, "My husband."

I could see Allhoff's muscles tense. He came to the point like a setter. "Why?" he snapped.

"Jealousy," said the blonde. "He was jealous of him."

"Who," said Allhoff, "was jealous of whom?"

"My husband was jealous of Westerly. I loved Westerly. I hate my husband. My husband found out that I'd been seeing a lot of Westerly and he killed him."

Allhoff looked at her for a long time and appraisingly. "You're sure of this?"

"Positive."

"What's your motive in coming here?"

"I'll tell you," said Alicia Dorman and

her voice rippled with hatred, "I want my husband to die for killing my lover. I want him to be killed in turn."

"Proof," said Allhoff. "Can you prove it?"

"That's your job. I know my husband killed him. I tell that to you. It's your job to find the evidence."

ALLHOFF took a deep breath. His brow was wrinkled. "Do you merely *think* your husband killed Westerly or do you know?"

"I know," said Alicia Dorman vehemently. "I *know*. I *know*."

"How?"

"Because he told me he knew what was going on between Wallace Westerly and myself. He told me he would revenge himself on Westerly. Then a day later Westerly is killed. Of course, my husband killed him."

"All you're giving me," said Allhoff, "is motive. There's an equally good motive for Robinson. Moreover, Robinson was at the scene of the crime."

"I know that. But I'm telling you my husband killed Westerly. You're a detective, aren't you? Knowing who the murderer is, you should be able to find the evidence to convict."

Allhoff nodded. "All right. I'll send my men out to your house to look around. I'll grill your husband. If Homicide thinks Robinson killed Westerly the chances are it was someone else anyway."

Alicia Dorman's eyes narrowed. "Wait," she said. "Don't send your men out until tomorrow night. It's my husband's lodge night. He won't be in. It'll be easier if he doesn't know you suspect him. Besides, I'm afraid of him. I think he tried to follow me here tonight."

"Why?"

"He doesn't trust me. He often follows me. I changed subways three times to shake him off."

"Taxis are easier if you're being tailed," said Allhoff.

"I don't use taxis."

Allhoff looked at her expensive outfit. "Why not? I gather you can afford it."

"I watch pennies," said Alicia Dorman. "I didn't always have an easy life. I don't mind spending money on clothes and jewelry for myself. But I won't throw it

away. Subways are good enough for me. I smoke cigarettes down to the end. I'd sooner have cash in the bank than the memory of the good time it bought me."

I lifted my eyebrows.

"If my husband knew I came here, that I've told you these things, he might even kill *me*. He's jealous and crazy when aroused. He might even kill *you*, Inspector."

"Better men have tried," said Allhoff. He lifted his voice to make sure Battersly overhead him. "Only one has even partly succeeded."

Alicia Dorman stood up. "Very well," she said, "you'll send your men out tomorrow night to look over the house?"

Allhoff nodded. "All right," he said. "I'll play it your way. If I fail to find anything I'll play it my own. I should be very happy if Robinson were innocent, since Homicide thinks he's not."

She nodded and walked to the doorway. Allhoff threw a sudden question at her. "Did you ever know Wayne?"

She shook her head. "Never heard of him until I saw that story in the paper."

She strode regally out of the room. Battersly's gaze followed her hungrily.

I went out of the room, leaving Allhoff to his shingles and his meditation. I didn't know what was going on in his head. But it seemed to me that he was eminently more interested in Wayne's death than Westerly's. Wayne's came under the head of a direct challenge.

It was a little after four o'clock when the phone rang. I answered it, listened and went into the bedroom to report.

"Hey," I said, "they've sprung Robinson. One hundred grand bail. Are you interested?"

Allhoff took his eyes off the ceiling. "Vitality," he said. "Who sprung him?"

"Honest John McLeod," I told him.

"Get him," said Allhoff. "Send Battersly for him. I crave an audience with that Scotsman. Leap!"

CHAPTER THREE

A Couple of Clues

THE ADJECTIVE preceding Honest John McLeod's name was no ironic sobriquet. He was a gaunt gangling

Scotsman, dour as the highlands that gave him birth. He was an avid man where an honest dollar was concerned. He would not lift a finger for a tainted one.

He followed Battersly into Allhoff's bedroom. The constant air of melancholy peculiar to him hung over his head like a halo. He nodded mournfully to Allhoff. He said, with a distinct burr: "You sent for me, Inspector?"

"I did," said Allhoff. "What about this Robinson bail?"

"It was raised," said Honest John McLeod who saved words as carefully as he saved dollars.

"I know damned well it was raised," said Allhoff. "Who raised it?"

"I did," said McLeod as if he were paying full cable rates on the sentence.

"Don't be so damned garrulous," said Allhoff. "I mean who paid your fee?"

John McLeod looked about the room. He stared at Allhoff vacantly and said: "I'm sorry to hear you're ill."

"Listen, loose tongue," said Allhoff, "what can you tell me about Robinson's bail?"

John McLeod considered this for a moment. "This much I can tell you. Robinson sent me to his office to get one of his partners to pay the fee. It was a rather odd circumstance. One of the partners, Reddie, was away in a nursing home with a breakdown. Happened just before I got there. The other, a fellow called Williams, seems to be missing. No one's seen him for two or three days. Anyway, since the firm's checks need the signature of at least two partners, it was no dice. So we didn't get the fee from Robinson's office."

McLeod smiled faintly. He looked as if he had just let Allhoff in on the secret plans of the German High Command. He said, "I hope your health gets better soon, Inspector," and turned abruptly toward the door.

"Listen," said Allhoff, "I didn't ask you who failed to pay Robinson's bail fee. I asked you who did."

Honest John McLeod shook his head. "I have passed my word," he said.

"To whom?"

Honest John McLeod looked reproachful. "Inspector," he said, shaking his head, "what sort of a trap is that? I have

promised my client that no names shall be mentioned."

I watched Allhoff closely. I fully expected him to lose his temper, to threaten McLeod with every rap in the book from spitting on the sidewalk to high treason. To my surprise Allhoff smiled blandly. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he said, "if you won't talk, I guess there's no way to force you. By the way, Simmonds, will you put on another cup of coffee? Battersly, go along and help him."

I stared at him and suspicion welled up in me like heartburn. True, I'm not as young as I was once, nevertheless, I am quite capable of putting on a pot of coffee unassisted. Besides, there was something a trifle too smug in Allhoff's smile, something too oddly acquiescent about him.

I left the room, followed by Battersly. I half-closed the door. I took up my position outside it and peered through the crack below the upper hinge.

ALLHOFF said, very softly: "Oh, McLeod, you know something about guns, don't you?"

McLeod nodded. Allhoff reached for his holster which was hanging over the back of the chair. He took his police special from it and handed it to Honest John McLeod. "The safety catch," he said, "there's something wrong with it. Take a look."

McLeod took the gun, held it by the butt, muzzle pointed to the floor and examined it. No sooner had he cast his first glance at the safety catch, than Allhoff let out a howl which could have been heard in Columbus, Ohio.

"Simmonds, Battersly! He's threatening me. With my own gun. Put that down, McLeod. You'll never get away with it. Merely because—"

Battersly charged into the room before I could move. He pounced on McLeod like Sam Rover recovering a fumble for dear Old Siwash. He wrenched the gun from the Scotsman's hand. He said to Allhoff: "Shall I arrest him, sir?"

He looked like such a beaming little hero, I could have kicked him. From where he had been standing it had been impossible for him to have heard Allhoff's remarks to McLeod. He was doing a first

rate job of stooging for Allhoff and all the while feeling heroic about it.

McLeod frowned. He and Allhoff looked at each other with an air of complete understanding. McLeod said: "I suppose you're prepared to book me for everything up to attempted murder?"

"Everything," said Allhoff blandly.

McLeod sighed. Allhoff made his point crystal clear. "There are no witnesses," he said. "It's your word against mine. They usually believe coppers."

McLeod nodded. He seemed to bear no malice. Rather he appeared to be annoyed with himself for falling into such a simple trap. For a moment I was tempted to enter the room, announce I had observed the whole scene. The prospect of Allhoff's wrath dissuaded me.

"I passed my word not to mention it," said McLeod doggedly. "It's a nasty mess, Inspector."

"If it's your damned Scotch conscience that's bothering you," said Allhoff, "I'll let you satisfy it on a technicality. You promised not to *tell*. Write me your client's name on a piece of paper. That'll do."

McLeod wrestled silently with his conscience. Finally, he overcame it. He took a piece of paper and a pencil from his pocket. He wrote something down and handed the paper to Allhoff. He turned and strode to the bedroom door.

"Inspector," he said and his burr rippled through the room, "there are times when I consider you lacking in ethical qualities."

Which put him in complete accord with everyone else in the department.

I CAME down to work the following morning to find a convention in Allhoff's bedroom. Seated gravely at Allhoff's bedside was Doc Hennessy, the police surgeon. Standing at his side, registering annoyed concern, was the Commissioner himself, flanked by his aide and his secretary. Battersly, impressed and at attention, stood by the doorway.

Allhoff was propped up on the pillows. His ugly face still registered pain not un-mixed with indignation.

"I tell you I'm all right, sir," he was saying. "Good God, sir, a man was killed in my own office. I can't let them get away

with that. I've got to keep on the job."

The Commissioner took the cigar from his mouth and glanced at Hennessy. Hennessy shook his gray head. The Commissioner followed suit and shook his own.

"No," he said flatly. "I won't have it. You're a damned good man, Inspector, and I need you. I won't permit you to jeopardize your health. You're to stay there in bed, doing absolutely nothing until the doctor says you're fit for duty. Do you understand?"

Allhoff glared at him. He said, ungraciously, "Yes, sir."

"Moreover," went on the chief, "I know you, Inspector. I'm going to post a man on the door downstairs to see that you obey orders. He will be told to see that you don't leave the house. Further, I'm going to padlock those phones in the other room. I don't want you moving a brain cell until you're well. Haggerty—"

The aide stiffened to attention.

"Get some of those little padlocks. Put them on the Inspector's telephones. See that—"

Allhoff moved uneasily on his pillows. There was dissatisfaction in his gaze.

"But, sir," he protested, "I'm in the middle of a case. Not only the man who was killed here, but that Westerly business. I—"

"You've a staff, haven't you?" snapped the Commissioner, looking at Battersly and myself. "Let them handle it. You told me you're supposed to search that Dorman house for evidence. All right, let them do it. Sergeant Simmonds?"

"Sir?"

"You're in charge of this Dorman-Westerly case. See that the house is searched today. But keep the inspector out of it. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, sir."

He nodded and marched out of the room. The aide and secretary followed him with the elan of a pair of storm troopers.

Allhoff glared after them. When the door slammed he turned on me savagely.

"That report," he snapped. "The one on Robinson and his partners that just came in. Battersly was reading it to me when the Commissioner arrived."

I grinned and shook my head. "No," I

said, "I'm in charge. You heard the boss tell me so. You are to rest."

"You!" shrieked Allhoff. "You're not fit to be in charge of a privy. Damn you, I won't ask you to help me get out of here, or to help me use the phone. Those were specific orders. But he didn't say you couldn't talk to me. Read that report and tell me what's on it."

Our eyes met. I made no move toward my desk where the report lay. "Listen," said Allhoff, softly and menacingly, "you know what I could do to you if I wanted to?"

I knew all right. He could endanger my pension rights by swearing to a dozen things that had never happened. He could work me overtime every day. He could, under certain circumstances, send me into a nest of thugs with no chance in one hundred of my survival. I sighed and turned to the desk.

"All right," I said, "what is it you want to know?"

"Robinson," he said. "About his partners and that letter. It's on my desk."

I PICKED up the onionskin copy and read it quickly. I abridged it for him. "Robinson," I said, "gets out of jail to find a registered letter notification in his mail box. He calls at the post office for his letter. It is from his missing partner Williams. Williams states that if anything happens to him the other partner Reddie, is at fault. He says he may be murdered or kidnapped. A friend was to mail the letter if Williams disappeared. Apparently he disappeared."

"Ah," said Allhoff, "it's getting clearer."

I looked at him with disbelief. "What's getting clearer?"

He ignored my question. "Anything else there?"

"Only that Robinson reported the letter to the cops at once. There's an alarm out for this guy Reddie."

"All right," said Allhoff. "So much for that. Give me that stuff on Westerly again."

I exhumed the clipped sheets of onionskin from the litter on my desk and took them into the bedroom. I gave him the details of the murder, all of which he already knew.

He interrupted me in the middle. "Never mind that. Did they find anything in the house? Papers, documents? Anything that might be at all significant."

"There was nothing significant to Homicide," I told him. "What papers they found pertained strictly to business."

"Get them for me," he snapped. "And another thing, find out who does the accounting work for us. Who's the best guy we have?"

I frowned at him. "An accountant? For what? Westerly ran his own business. A produce business. What the devil do you want an accountant for?"

"I love accountants," said Allhoff blandly. "Or if you don't like that explanation, consider it the whim of an ailing man." He lifted his voice and shouted at me. "Damn you, get me the name of the department's best accountant. Get me the stuff they dug up from Westerly's place."

He poured himself a cup of coffee from the percolator at his side. I went across the street to headquarters.

I returned with the name of an accountant and a sheaf of papers. Allhoff snatched the latter from my hand and perused them intently. He left Battersly and myself in peace for a good half hour.

"Hey," he called suddenly, "there's a wire here for Westerly from Frisco. Came a day before the killing."

"So?"

"It says: 'Have everything ready. Will ship when you say so.' It's signed 'Barkley and Greene.'"

"Well," I said with heavy irony. "That's just wonderful. It probably concerns a crate of cantaloupes."

"That is just what it doesn't concern," said Allhoff. "That's why it's significant."

That made about as much sense as the Japanese onslaught at Pearl Harbor and I said so. Allhoff sighed exaggeratedly.

"Leave me alone," he said, "I'm a sick man. Get the hell out of here and investigate Dorman. Now, right away."

"Not until tonight," I said. "Mrs. Dorman said her husband would be out then."

Allhoff lifted himself on the pillows. "Don't question me," he roared. "I said now. I want to be alone."

Tell It to Homicide

I smiled my sweetest smile at him. "I'm in charge of the investigation," I told him. "If you doubt me call the Commissioner."

A HALF-HOUR later a uniformed policeman with a face that had been fashioned in Kerry County marched into the room. He took something metallic from his pocket and announced importantly, "I'm under orders to padlock the dials on these phones. Then I am to stand guard outside. The inspector is confined to quarters."

I grinned at Battersly as I heard Allhoff swearing angrily in his pillow.

About nine o'clock that evening a maid admitted Battersly and myself to the Dorman residence. A moment later we were ushered into the presence of Alicia Dorman.

She shook hands with me. She said, nervously: "Go through the whole house. I don't know of anything specific that you might find. But there must be something. A criminal always leaves a clue, doesn't he?"

That was the beautiful theory of a layman. However, I didn't disillusion her. I shrugged my shoulders and walked out of the room toward the stairway. Battersly followed me. We went upstairs and began the frisk.

We began, reasonably enough, in Dorman's room. With little hope and no enthusiasm at all I went through Dorman's desk. Battersly gave his attention to the closet. I groped my way through piles of innocuous papers and was about to give up altogether, when Battersly's startled voice struck my ears.

"My God, Sergeant! Look!"

I swung my head around to see Battersly holding what seemed to be a soiled shirt at arm's length and staring at it in a sort of triumphant horror.

"It's a shirt," he said. "A shirt with blood on it. And here's a wallet bearing the initials *W. W.* They were stuck behind an old suitcase. There was a letter there, too."

I took the letter from his hand. It was typewritten and it stated quite plainly that the signer was going to see Dorman's wife whenever he felt like it, threat or no threat. It was signed Wallace Westerly.



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"And the wallet," I said, "undoubtedly Westerly's. There must have been something in it, Dorman wanted. He took the whole thing."

"Sure," said Battersly, "and the shirt. See, he didn't dare send it to the laundry. It's a cinch, now. And we solved it. Allhoff had nothing to do with it."

"Nothing at all," I said with grim satisfaction. I wrapped the exhibits in newspaper and we went downstairs.

I led the way into the library where we had left Alicia Dorman, then pulled up short. Alicia Dorman stood enveloped in the arms of a man. Their lips were together and they clung in passionate embrace. I was about to cough discreetly when the man released her.

He said: "I can't imagine who called me. But the moment I thought you were in trouble, I came. I—"

I gave out with my cough. The pair of them spun around and looked at me. The man, I observed, seemed apprehensive. Alicia Dorman's poise did not desert her.

"An old friend of the family," she said. "Haven't seen him for years. Did you find anything, Sergeant?"

I nodded. "Plenty," I said. "But I'd rather not discuss it now. What we've found we're taking back to the office."

She smiled sweetly. She summoned the maid who escorted us to the door.

The following morning Allhoff pretended to be unimpressed with our evidence. He heard our story in glum silence, gulping coffee the while.

"They picked up this guy, Reddie," he said. "A report came, in this morning. A copper spotted him from the description at a bus station. Reddie pulled a gun when the cop tried to make the pinch. They shot it out with the result that Reddie's in the Larchmont nursing home."

I grinned. Obviously, he was breaking his neck to change the subject.

"Battersly," he said. "There's a letter on my desk in the other room. Take it at once to Larchmont. See this guy, Reddie. Give it to him and wait for the answer."

"Now listen," I said, "what do you care about Reddie? We're supposed to be working on that Westerly killing. Remember? Reddie is—"

Tell It to Homicide

Allhoff glared at me and drew a deep breath. "Battersly," he yelled, "get going. Run on those damned sound legs of yours. Pick up your muscular feet—"

Battersly snatched up the letter and ran. "You," said Allhoff to me, "will round up Robinson and the Dormans. Get them here as quickly as possible.

"For what?"

"I'm going to solve a murder case."

I regarded him quizzically. I thought of the stuff Battersly had found in the Dorman closet. "You're going to solve it?" I said with heavy irony as I put my coat on and left the room.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Demon's Revenge

A HALF hour later the Dormans arrived. Ten minutes after that Robinson came up the stairs. I started as he came in the room. For Robinson was the same man I had seen holding Alicia Dorman in his arms last night. For a moment I thought of communicating that information to Allhoff. However, he seemed so cocksure that I held my tongue.

Allhoff's tiny bedroom resembled Grand Central Terminal at the rush hour. Arthur Robinson sat on the edge of the sagging bed looking as if he fully expected a bedbug to climb up on his lap any moment. Alicia Dorman occupied a rickety chair. Her husband, frowning and ill at ease, perched precariously on the top of a battered steamer trunk.

Allhoff, himself, was propped up on two pillows. His hands were beneath the sheets and as he looked around the room he did not move.

He looked at me and said: "There are at least a couple of murders I'd like to explain to the assembled citizenry. Pour me a cup of coffee, Sergeant."

I poured some coffee from the chipped percolator which had been placed at the side of the bed. Allhoff withdrew his left hand slowly from the covers and took the proffered cup. He gulped the liquid with a sound which would have made Mrs. Post swoon. I watched him appraisingly. If he intended pinning Dorman's guilt upon him publicly, then taking credit for

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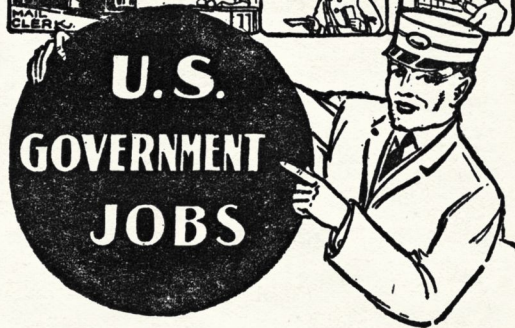
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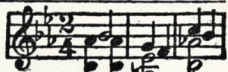
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the evidence which Batterly had dug up, he was, to my glee, going to make an egregious idiot of himself.

Everyone in the department from the Commissioner down knew quite well that Allhoff had been officially confined to quarters, that his phone had been padlocked. It was impossible for him to claim he had discovered any evidence himself.

Allhoff handed me his empty cup. He thrust his hand back under the sheets as if it were cold. He said with mock humility: "Of course, in this case my movements have been circumscribed. However, I have done what little I can from my mattress which is more than any other copper can do with the whole damned town as his playground." He paused.

"Naturally, the first thing I did was to get in touch with Barkley and Greene of San Francisco. I—"

"Wait a minute," I said, "how could you get in touch with anyone? How—"

"It occurred to me," he interrupted calmly, "that Westerly, a produce merchant, would not be getting any produce shipments from San Francisco in the wintertime. Hence that wire did not seem to refer to Westerly's business. So I got in touch with Barkley and Greene and discovered they were private detectives."

I glanced around the room. Arthur Robinson studied his nails as if they held the secret of the universe. Mrs. Dorman stared intently at Allhoff. Her husband said querulously: "What the devil does it matter who Barkley and Greene are?"

"Barkley and Greene," went on Allhoff, "were working on an assignment for Westerly. They were checking a Mary Gooddale, a former habituée of Frisco's underworld. They checked very successfully. Didn't they, Mrs. Dorman?"

Alicia Dorman met his gaze steadily. She said: "I don't know what you're talking about."

Dorman was sitting bolt upright. "My God," he said suddenly, "you mean Westerly was right all the time. He was—"

"He was so right, it killed him," said Allhoff. He took his left hand out of the bed and signaled for more coffee.

"From the description which Westerly gave his private detectives, it wasn't difficult for me to realize that Mary Gooddale

Tell It to Homicide

and Alicia Dorman were the same person. You see, Westerly who never approved his pal Dorman marrying Alicia had often tried to tell him that Alicia was a tramp. Like most lovers, Dorman wouldn't believe it. Westerly set out to prove it for him."

I took the pipe from my mouth. "In view of the fact that Westerly and Alicia Dorman loved each other, that's palpably ridiculous."

"You are consummately gullible," he said. "That is a high class phrase meaning sucker."

Again I took the pipe from my mouth. "Put it back in again," said Allhoff. "With your mouth shut these lovely people might think you intelligent. Now listen: Westerly hated Alicia Dorman. So much so he was about to expose her to her husband. He got the dope, or was just about to get it. He sent for Alicia. He told her about it. He told her to tell Dorman the truth or he would. So she killed him. There you are. Motive and everything."

I blinked. Motive? Maybe. Everything? Not by a long shot. I said as much. I added: "Primarily you can't get behind the evidence we have against Dorman. Or even the fact that Robinson was on the scene of the murder."

"Robinson is easy," said Allhoff. "When he heard of what Westerly was about to do he threatened to kill him. Later when he went back to see him he found Alicia had already done it."

"Why?" I yelled exasperated. "Why should Robinson stick his nose in? What the devil did he care what happened to Alicia Dorman—" Then I remembered last night's scene and shut my mouth.

"Hell, man," said Allhoff grimly, "he was in love with her."

Dorman's face was very white. His wife stared at Allhoff.

"How on earth can you know that?" I asked.

"Several reasons. The principal one is that Alicia denied knowing Robinson. Yet when I got in touch with him last night, told him she was in grave danger, he was most concerned. So much so that he called on her immediately."

I almost bit the stem of my pipe

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through. "You got in touch with him? How? How the devil—"

"Besides she put up his bail. And she isn't very free with money by her own admission. Moreover—"

BATTERSLY'S entrance interrupted him. He came, breathless and excited into the room.

"Inspector," he said, "Inspector, what do you think? I went up there and—"

Allhoff gave him a look which would have frozen mercury. "Shut up."

Battersly swallowed. "But this is important. I saw that guy, Reddie. I—"

"Now," Allhoff interrupted, "we have a pretty good case. A motive, coupled with the fact that Dorman will admit Westerly constantly stated that Alicia Dorman was a tramp and said that he would prove it. Too, we have her lie about not knowing Robinson. It's a good circumstantial case that should convince a jury. Unfortunately, juries being sentimental idiots rarely send a woman to the chair—"

He broke off as Alicia Dorman dropped a cigarette to the floor and ground it out with her heel. She flicked open the catch of her bag and stood up, and suddenly there was an automatic in her hand. She said in a voice like breaking glass: "If I've killed one man, Inspector, I can kill two. I'm leaving here when you're dead. No private detectives will ever catch up with me this time."

As I thought it over, it occurred to me it was a fool-proof situation. If I saved his life he was in my debt. If I grappled with the woman too late he was dead. Either way I won. I hesitated no longer. I dove down into my shoulder-holster and moved toward Alicia Dorman. I had my gun in my hand when the shots rang out.

There were two of them. One sped over my head and ate into the plaster of the wall. The target of the second I did not immediately recognize. The baffling fact of which I was at once cognizant was that neither shot had been fired by Alicia Dorman nor myself.

Alicia's automatic was on the floor. Blood dripped from her wrist down upon her shoe. There was a black hole in the counterpane of Allhoff's bed. He withdrew his right hand from beneath the

Tell It to Homicide

sheets and there was a smoking Police Special in it.

He fixed the Dorman woman with triumphant eyes. He said, brutally: "Sit down, tramp."

She sat down. Her upper teeth were sunk deep into her lower lip. Yet she made no outcry. Futilely she essayed to stem the flow of blood from her wrist with a fragile handkerchief.

"A doctor," yelled Robinson. "I demand you call a doctor."

"That wound won't kill her," said Allhoff. "It would be stealing money from my friend the State Executioner." He looked over at me and added conversationally, "I got this little idea from our friend Timmons and his sling. Neat, eh?"

"But the evidence," I said. "That stuff Battersly found."

"Battersly is an oaf," snapped Allhoff. "Mrs. Dorman played us all for oafs. She planted that stuff herself. You see, she killed Westerly. Then she discovered her lover was being charged with a crime she had committed. That wouldn't do. So she hit on the device of killing two birds with one stone."

"Go on."

"By planting the crime on her husband, she automatically got rid of him, collected his dough and sprung her lover, Robinson, at the same time."

A single look at the faces of Alicia Dorman and Earl Robinson convinced me that Allhoff was talking true. But how the devil he had done it was utterly beyond me. After all, he had been confined to his rooms as effectively as if he'd been in jail. As for the telephone—

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I walked into the living-room and examined the padlock on the dial. It was intact. Allhoff was clumsy with his fingers. If he had picked it there would be signs. I came back into the bedroom unhappy and bewildered. Allhoff lifted his coffee and tossed it off like champagne.

"If you'll call that idiot downstairs who's supposed to be guarding me," he said, "you can deliver these two prisoners to him. Then send Dorman home. He needs aspirin."

The downstairs copper took Alicia Dorman and Robinson across the street to book them. I put Dorman in a taxicab. I returned to Allhoff's bedroom. Allhoff stretched his hand out to Battersly.

"You have my signed document."

Battersly nodded. He took a long envelope from his pocket and handed it to Allhoff. Allhoff opened the envelope and read what was inside.

"Good," he said. "I thought he'd do it. That cleans up everything."

"Listen, Inspector," said Battersly desperately. "I've just got to tell you, sir."

"That Reddie is Timmons?" said Allhoff. "Is that what you've been trying to tell me?"

Battersly's jaw fell down. I sighed and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"My brain reels," I announced. "Why is Reddie Timmons?"

"It's quite elementary," said Allhoff. "Reddie is Robinson's partner. So was Williams. Williams has disappeared. Reddie visits Robinson in his cell. Robinson has already seen Alicia Dorman so he knows that this guy Wayne is coming to see me. Robinson tells Reddie that Wayne is the one man who has evidence to save him from the chair."

"All right," I said, "Who's Wayne?"

"A stooge of Alicia Dorman's. She didn't intend seeing me personally. She sent Wayne to spur us to digging up evidence against her husband. When Wayne got killed she had to take over herself."

"What about Reddie?" I said.

"Reddie is a crook. I thought he might be when Robinson couldn't get bail from his own office. That's why I sent an accountant over there. Reddie has been robbing the firm for some time."

"So?"

Tell It to Homicide

"So," said Allhoff impatiently, "it stands to reason that Williams found out about it. Possibly gave him a chance to make restitution. Realizing Reddie was desperate, he wrote a registered letter to Robinson, telling him Reddie was responsible if anything happened to him—Williams. Doubtless gave it to a friend to mail if Williams disappeared."

I NODDED my head. "Now I get it. Reddie killed Williams. He knew of the letter. Figured with Robinson in jail he would have time to get hold of the letter himself and destroy it."

"At last," said Allhoff, reaching for the coffee cup, "your limited intelligence functions. When Reddie hears this man Wayne is going to spring Robinson, he finds out where Wayne lives and goes to see him, forces him at the point of a gun in his sling to tell me that cock and bull story."

"There's still a hole," I told him. "Why doesn't he kill Wayne at once? Why let him come here?"

"My God," said Allhoff, "are you a complete moron? If Wayne never showed up, I'd investigate, wouldn't I? It was much better to let him come here, disarm us with his story and then kill him. That's what Reddie planned. If Robinson gets that letter, the exposure would have brought Williams' death right down on Reddie's shoulders, he figured he might as well burn for two murders as one."

"So," said Battersly, "when you knew Reddie had been picked up you figured he was Timmons."

"That I did," said Allhoff, basking in his triumph. "I sent you up with a confession that he'd killed Williams for him to sign. I called his attention to the fact that since there were no witnesses to that murder, he might claim self-defense, or, anyway, have a better chance of beating it than the murder of Wayne. I promised him I wouldn't testify against him for killing Wayne."

I knitted my brow. "What the devil did you care about the confession on Williams? If Reddie burned for Wayne, wasn't that enough?"

Allhoff grinned maliciously. "Those monkeys across the street will swoon when they know I already have that con-

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fession. They're worrying about the case."

"But you can't do that," I protested. "You can't let him get away clean with the Wayne murder. He might beat the rap on the other one."

Allhoff grinned horribly.

"I only promised *I* wouldn't testify. I said nothing about you and Battersly. You saw it, didn't you?"

I said: "I didn't think of that."

"Neither," said Allhoff, "did Reddie." He looked at us over the edge of his cup.

"Suppose I'd really taken a rest as the Commissioner suggested. You and Battersly would have felt like a couple of red-faced idiots when you burned Dorman, wouldn't you?"

We didn't answer. Then something occurred to me that I had forgotten.

"You couldn't have possibly done all these things," I said, "while you were lying in that bed. You spoke of getting in touch with people. Yet, obviously, you didn't leave the house or use the phone."

He sat up in bed and grinned maliciously. "Who says I didn't use the phone?"

"Stop clowning," I said testily.

ALLHOFF narrowed his eyes thoughtfully for a moment. Then he said: "I can get numbers on that phone without touching either the padlock or the dial. What do you think of that?"

Battersly stared at him for a moment and said: "I don't believe it."

Allhoff threw back the covers. He slid out of bed and stumped into the living-room. He pulled himself up into his swivel chair. He put his hand on the receiver. He turned to Battersly, his little eyes hot with hateful malice. He said: "How much don't you believe it?"

Battersly looked scared before Allhoff's gaze. But he stood his ground. "I don't believe it at all."

"Very well," said Allhoff. "If I call the Commissioner's office without touching either the padlock or the dial, will you speak to him? Will you tell him he's a fat-headed fool?"

I sensed a trap. "Allhoff," I said sharply as Battersly hesitated.

"Shut up," snarled Allhoff. "He called me a liar. Now I'm calling him. Will you do it, you yellow hound?"

Battersly flushed. He nodded his head

and said, "Yes," in an almost inaudible voice. Allhoff grinned and took the receiver from its cradle.

He held his forefinger over the two contact points upon which the receiver had rested. He tapped one of them lightly and in perfect rhythm. Pausing between each series of taps, he repeated the process seven times.

He waited a moment and held up the receiver so that we could hear the ringing sound at the other end of the line. A moment later, a voice, which I recognized as that of Burns, the Commissioner's secretary, answered.

"This is Inspector Allhoff. I'd like to be connected with the Commissioner."

"Hello, Inspector," said Burns. "The Chief's tied up on another wire. Will you hold it a moment?"

"Delighted," said Allhoff. He turned a grinning triumphant face to us.

"For God's sake," I said amazed, "how do you do that?"

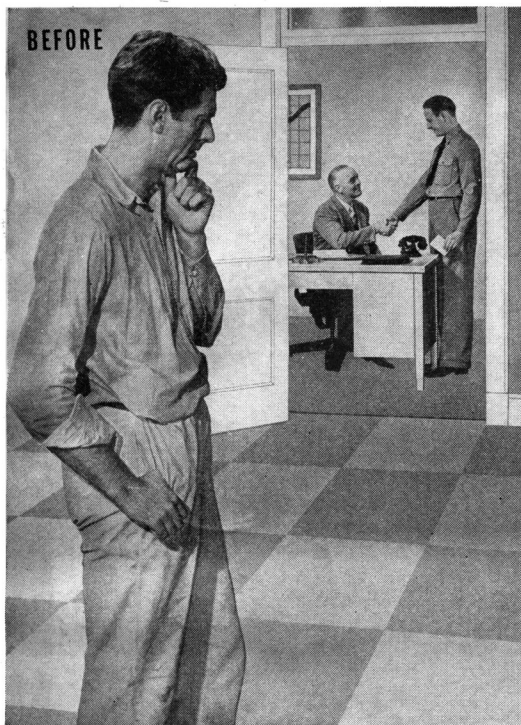
"Your knowledge of the workings of a dial phone," said Allhoff, "is equalled only by your knowledge of anything else. You don't need to touch the dial to get a number. You can do it with the hook. There are ten contacts on a dial phone, one for each finger hole. If the hook is pressed and released once for each number you want to call, if the manipulation is spaced absolutely evenly, you'll get the number. The hook makes and breaks the same ten contacts as the moving dial."

I heard a familiar voice come over the wire. "Yes, Inspector, this is the Commissioner."

"Good afternoon, sir," said Allhoff sweetly. "Patrolman Battersly asked me to call you. He wants to speak to you."

He swung around and handed the receiver to Battersly. Battersly's face was deathly white. He took the phone in nerveless fingers. He stood there in complete silence for a moment. Then as Allhoff's yellow eyes bored mercilessly into him, he said in a thick strained voice: "Sir, you are a fat-headed fool."

He hung up as Allhoff rocked with laughter. That laughter echoed about the room like something mad and evil as we waited for the return call which was going to bring a departmental trial to Patrolman Battersly.



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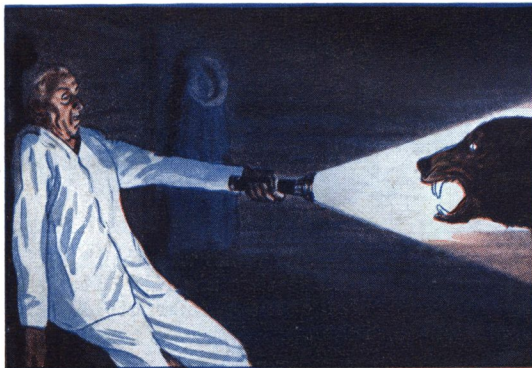
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