

APRIL

ALL STORIES  
COMPLETE



# 10¢ DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

**DONNEL  
DAVIS  
BRANDON**  
*AND OTHERS*



WAR BONDS AND STAMPS  
FOR VICTORY

**A HORSE OF  
ANOTHER  
KILLER**

A MR. MADDOX  
NOVELETTE BY  
T. T. FLYNN



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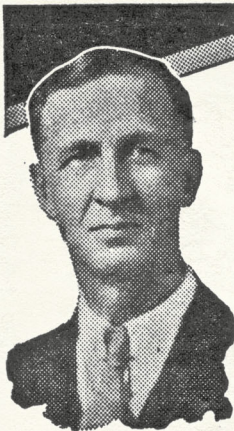
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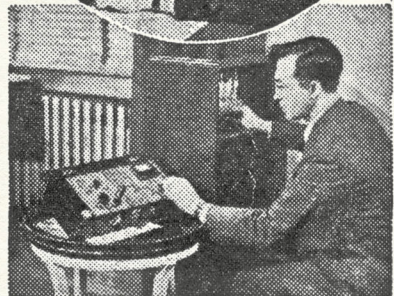
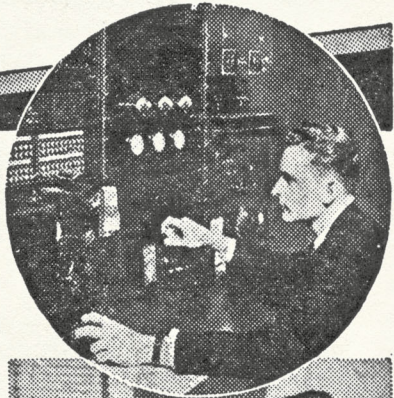
Others are taking good-pay jobs with Broadcasting Stations. Hundreds more are needed for Government jobs as Civilian Radio Operators, Technicians. Radio Manufacturers, rushing to fill Government orders, need trained men. Aviation, Police, Commercial Radio and Loudspeaker Systems are live, growing fields. And think of the NEW jobs Television and other Radio developments will open after the war! I give you the Radio knowledge required for jobs in these fields. **"The N.R.I. Method" Helps Many Make \$5, \$10 a Week Extra While Learning**

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

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Now!**



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Mr. J. E. Smith, President, Dept. 3DS9  
NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE, Washington, D. C.

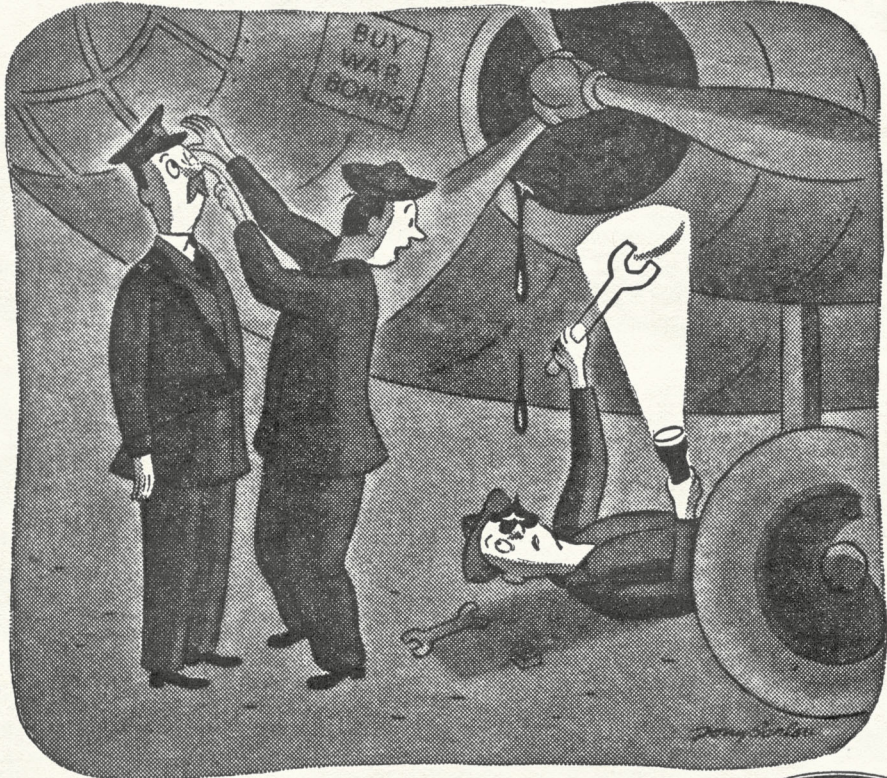
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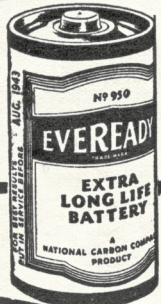
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# 10¢ DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE



EVERY STORY COMPLETE

EVERY STORY NEW—NO REPRINTS

Vol. 42

CONTENTS FOR APRIL, 1943

No. 1

### 3—THRILLING MURDER MYSTERY NOVELETTES—3

*Feedbox Special: Put your bet on*

**A Horse of Another Killer—A Mr. Maddox Novelette.....T. T. Flynn 8**

When you follow the bland Buddha of the bangtails to Kentucky for the great match race between Sandmore Red and Cold Creek—and watch the big bookie get all set to make a killing, only to have someone beat him to it with a gory murder that turns the Bluegrass to crimson, and leaves Maddox floundering neck-deep in homicide.

*Feel the chill touch of*

**Fingers of Ice—A Colonel Kaspir Novelette.....C. P. Donnel, Jr. 64**

As they reach out to close their clammy grip on their own killer's throat and put the finger on the solution of the most baffling case ever handled by that extraordinary counter-espionage agency—Section Five.

*Sign up for Prof. Tracy's class and learn why*

**Too Many Have Died.....Norbert Davis 86**

In the grisly mass-murder program that wiped out 500 lives at one fell kill-swoop and left the little prof in the unenviable position of sole nominee for Corpse No. 501 unless he identified the assassin before he struck again.

### 2—SMASHING SHORT DETECTIVE STORIES—2

*Listen for a shot on a*

**Quiet Street.....William Brandon 48**

Where a man walked to a lonely death—a case of brutal murder which brought to trial one Michael Blake, who was innocent . . . and the only man in that crowded courtroom who thought so.

*Find the fortune buried beneath the*

**Ashes in the Valley.....Mark Lish 61**

The five thousand crisp ten-dollar bills that miserly Jasper Kane planned to use to gain control of drouth-ravaged Valleytown—the chance of a lifetime for a sensible man like Jasper, unless he turned out to be a little too sensible.

AND—

*We want to know if you are*

**Ready for the Rackets.....A Department 6**

In this revealing series giving the lowdown on currently popular swindle-schemes. Here's a chance to test your ability as a reporter and win \$5.00 at the same time.

**The May Thrill Docket..... 6**

Some of the sure-fire hits scheduled for production in the next DIME DETECTIVE.

**Cover—"He Got Me Just As I Fired From the Hip"**

From *Fingers of Ice*.

Watch for the May Issue

On the Newsstands April 2nd

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# THE MAY THRILL DOCKET

WHAT would you do if you woke up one morning to learn that a multi-millionaire industrial tycoon whom you had never even met, had named you as correspondent in the divorce suit he was waging with his beauteous blond wife who was just as much a stranger to you as her husband?

That was the fantastic spot in which Bill Brent found himself—for he'd never laid eyes on Victor Sprague, much less come within kissing distance of his spouse, the glamorous Gloria.

FREDERICK C. DAVIS, in *Home Sweet Homicide*, follows the course of confused love that evolved a not-so-simple slay-pattern in the fastest-moving novellette yet in this perennially popular series. The hardboiled newshound who unwillingly doubles in brass as his paper's passion-pundit finds himself plunged neck-deep in theft, blackmail and murder before the first phone call from his lawyer stops ringing in his ears. His only out is to solve all three crimes, find a substitute inamorato for Gloria and pacify the belligerent Sprague in twenty-four short hours—or else.

DALE CLARK gives us *Death Is From Taxes*, another smashing novelette about Plates O'Rion, the pint-sized legal photographer, and his sultry daughter, Sal. The latter had a yen to see how the upper crust lives and dragged her old man in tails and white tie to the Sataw shindig. All she learned was that rich men bleed just as easy as people from the other side of the tracks when a knife or bullet penetrates the epidermis—and Plates didn't even get the picture he went after. Though the murder negative he used as a substitute probably paid off better in the long run.

W. T. BALLARD introduces you to Doc Ryne, "*A Heel of the First Water*," but a likable heel at that, and his sidekick, Banjoeyes, in a blitz-paced yarn of big-time gambling in which death or diamonds depend on the flip of a card.

Then there are stories by DUANE YARNELL and others.

This thrill-jammed MAY issue will be on sale APRIL 2.

## 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 chislers 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.

SUSCEPTIBLE to the fair sex? Think twice before you stop, look and listen, thus permitting yourself to be lured into a pay-cash-or-pay-penalty hot-spot.

As witness the unfortunate case below, in which a pick-up turned into a trap for a fall guy!

Philadelphia, Pa.

Racket Editor  
Dime Detective Magazine  
205 E. 42nd St., New York, N. Y.

Dear Sir:

One of the slickest rackets pulled off on a friend of mine worked this way.

He is a traveling salesman. One night about ten as he was approaching a small town about 200 miles from his base he saw a good-looking girl beside the road, thumbing for a ride.

He stopped his car and invited her in. They chatted a bit, she telling him that she lived in the town which they were approaching.

As they entered the outskirts of the town she turned to him and quietly said, "If you don't give me fifty dollars I'll scream and say that you attacked me."

My friend was shocked but what could he do? He had picked the girl up; he was a stranger—no one knew him here; he didn't even know where the police station was located.

He paid her the fifty simoleons.

At a later date comparing notes with other Knights of the Sample Case he found that it was a prevalent racket throughout the country.

Moral: Don't pick up pretty girls at night approaching strange towns. It's too expensive.

Philip Levine





# 3¢ A DAY HOSPITALIZATION PLAN

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PAID!**

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Don't allow Hospitalization expense to ruin your life savings. Insure NOW at low cost . . . before it's too late! The famous North American Plan provides that in case of unexpected sickness or accident, you may go to any Hospital in the U. S. or Canada under any Doctor's care. Your expenses will be paid for you in strict accordance with Policy provisions.

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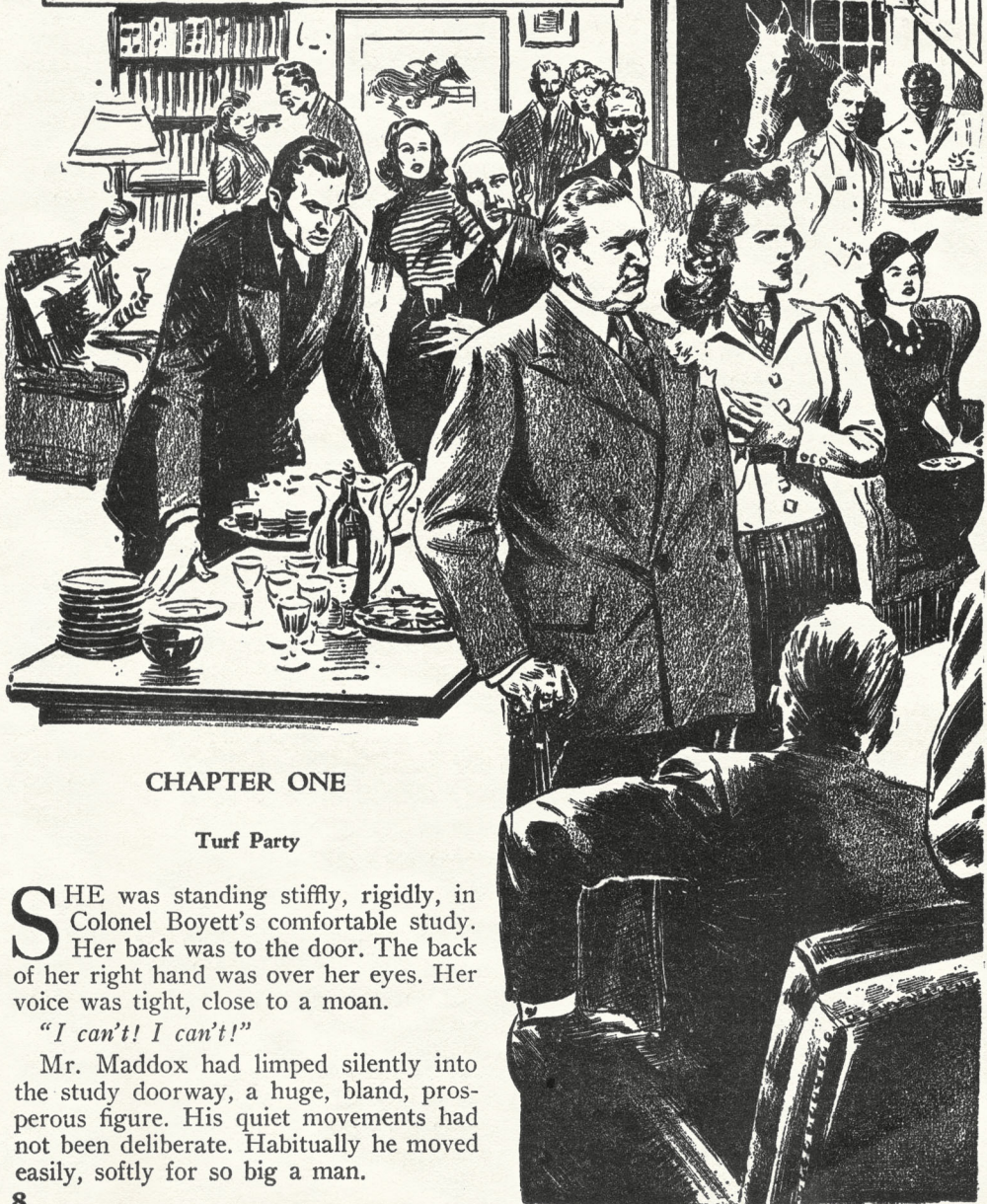
**RUSH THIS COUPON for BIG FREE BOOK**  
GIVING COMPLETE FACTS

# A HORSE OF ANOTHER KILLER

A Mr. Maddox Novelette

By T. T. FLYNN

Author of "Murder in a Dead Heat," etc.



## CHAPTER ONE

### Turf Party

SHE was standing stiffly, rigidly, in Colonel Boyett's comfortable study. Her back was to the door. The back of her right hand was over her eyes. Her voice was tight, close to a moan.

*"I can't! I can't!"*

Mr. Maddox had limped silently into the study doorway, a huge, bland, prosperous figure. His quiet movements had not been deliberate. Habitually he moved easily, softly for so big a man.





"Colonel," someone called out, "how do you know the man was murdered?"

Also, there was a certain amount of noise in this immense Kentucky Bluegrass farmhouse. Colonel Boyett (a Kentucky Colonel) had something like twenty-two house guests tonight, plus visiting neighbors. It was Colonel Boyett's famous annual Turf Party, which lasted at least a week each year.

This year the Turf Party was notable. The final day would see a match race on

the farm's big training track between the two top three-year olds of the year.

Colonel Boyett's horse was Sandymore Red, son of the great Santander Red. The other horse was Cold Creek, bought as an unpromising yearling by Carlson Nivens, the California industrialist, for six hundred dollars. The two horses had made racing history in the year just ending. Few turf experts were bold enough to say which was the better horse.

Colonel Boyett and Carlson Nivens proposed to settle the matter with the match race, for side bets rumored to be large, the winner donating all money to Army-Navy Relief. Interest was nationwide, rising to fever heat in these several remaining days before the race. Other breeding farms over the countryside were filling with visitors, come to see the great race.

Guests were dancing to phonograph music in the big recreation-room, hard by. Laughter and talk were abroad in the big house this third night of the party and the first night of Mr. Maddox' visit.

Mr. Maddox regarded the girl in the study with startled attention. She was alone, yet the back of her hand seemed to be shutting out some unpleasant sight.

The four words were all she spoke. Her hand came slowly from her eyes. . .

Mr. Maddox limped on into the study. His chuckle was a masterpiece of delighted ruefulness.

"I'm too old to dance and I've a lame ankle to boot. I wonder if the Colonel has a book which would entertain an old wreck until bedtime."

His voice startled her. She whirled toward him. Before Mr. Maddox finished speaking, he noticed the chalky pallor of her face, the misery, the jump of fear in her look.

**S**HE was a Miss Carole Rockwell, if he rightly recalled. There had been a good many faces, names, since he and Oscar had stepped from the Colonel's polished station wagon late that afternoon.

"Why—there are enough books here," she said. Her voice husky, unsteady at first, grew more normal as she finished. "I—I came in here to look for a book myself."

She expected him to believe it, too. Mr. Maddox' broad, bland face had never beamed more cheerfully.

"Maybe we can help each other. Let's see what Boyett's got on his shelves."

Mr. Maddox grasped his black ebony cane by the middle and used the tip as an indicator along the shelves of books which filled two sides of the room. The girl moved over beside him.

"'The Theory and Results of Telegony Selection,'" she quoted one title. "What on earth is that?"

This was the heart of the Bluegrass breeding country. Colonel Boyett's Santander Hill breeding farm was famous in the world of thoroughbred horses. Such matters as telegony formed the basis of dinner table arguments, heated differences of opinion.

"Telegony," Mr. Maddox explained, "is a never-proven theory that the characteristics of Horse Number One can be detected in a colt sired by Horse Number Two, when the same mare has had colts by both sires."

"It's—it's interesting, isn't it?" the girl said, looking on along the shelves.

Mr. Maddox looked at her keenly. He doubted that she had heard all of his explanation. Her mind was not on the books or on him.

But he was Joe Maddox, bookmaker for better than thirty years at all the great horse tracks of the country. He had met them all, rich and poor, old and young, wise and foolish. He had seen them hysterical with joy. He had taken the last smiling drink with a man who had killed himself half an hour later from sheer despair.

Thirty years of it! You grew philosophical, learned to watch, wait, let trouble shape itself.

This girl had a tortured mind. Some reason other than a book had brought her into this quiet study.

"Here's 'The Arabian Strain in the English General Stud Book,'" said Mr. Maddox wryly. "And 'Memoirs of Jockey Leech.' The books are all pretty horsey, I see."

"That last book will do," she said quickly. "The—the one about the jockey. . . Thank you."

She took the thin blue volume. Her

smile Mr. Maddox was to remember later, and the lift of her head, the almost imperceptible squaring of her shoulders as she walked out of the study.

Well, things like this happened. For an instant you had a glimpse behind the mask of another human being. Then the contact was broken, conventional existence closed in.

Mr. Maddox limped out of the Colonel's horsey library without the book he had not wanted in the first place. The house party was in full swing, centering in the huge recreation-room known from coast-to-coast among the elect as Colonel Boyett's Paddock.

Cold Creek the following Saturday.

Here in the Paddock Room, Sandy Red himself stood stuffed, mounted, uncannily life-like, even to the eager, wise lift of his head. His glass eyes watched the passing years, the great and near-great of the turf world in which he had figured so largely.

MR. MADDOX stopped before the stall, ignoring the dancers at his back, the guests all around. His bland gaze met Santander Red's fixed look, and he spoke aloud, as one old friend to another.

"The first hundred grand I made as a

*The whole country was waiting the result of the match race between two great champions of the turf—Sandymore Red and Cold Creek—and Mr. Maddox, the bland Buddha of the bangtail circuit, was on hand, all set to make a killing . . . till someone beat him to it. It was at the height of Colonel Boyett's pre-race party that the ex-playboy Phil Sedan turned up dead, the Kentucky Bluegrass turned to crimson—and Maddox found himself knee-deep in murder with that fly-cop-in-the-ointment, Detective Cassidy, hot on his trail.*

Walls of the long room were fieldstone. Dark beams crossed the low ceiling. Furniture was deep, comfortable, upholstered in good honest saddle-polished hide. Old turf prints of horses and jockeys long dead hung about the walls. Burning logs glowed and crackled in an immense stone fireplace at the far end of the room.

But the *pièce de résistance*, the touch that no guest ever forgot, was the box-stall lined with waxed, polished wood, which opened into the room from the center of the right-hand wall.

Clean fresh straw covered the stall floor. The feed box was always full. Standing behind the closed lower half-doors of the stall was Santander Red, the great stallion into whose blood lines all the progeny of Santander Hill Farm were fused.

Men still spoke of Sandy Red as of royalty. To the handicappers and the racetrack fans, Santander Red had been dead these twelve years. But he lived again in Sandymore Red, who would run against

bookie went down the rat-hole laying against you, Sandy. And it was worth it. I hope your oats are sweet and your pastures green."

A hearty hand clapped Mr. Maddox on the shoulder. Colonel Boyett's roaring hearty voice asked: "Not drinking, Joe? . . . Here, boy! You there, Sulphurious! Bring the gentleman one of those hot buttered rums on your tray!"

"What, no mint juleps?" Mr. Maddox chuckled.

"No quarrel with honest Kentucky bourbon, suh!" roared the Colonel. "I have a glass of bourbon every morning before my ride. But rum's the stuff, m' boy! The old buccaneers knew it. Puts hair on the soul and fire in the heart! This is fifteen-year rum out of my own Jamaica casks. The real nectar of the gods! If y' won't believe the blasted writers on the subject, suh, believe my rum when you taste it!"

Colonel Josh Boyett was a sporty old buccaneer himself. He looked it with his

shock of white hair, close-clipped white mustache against a saddle-brown face. He was a big man, who lived and loved life in a big way.

The Colonel was sixty-two. He looked an honest fifty. His heart, his zest were in the twenties.

Mr. Maddox tasted the drink, handed him by a grinning Negro in stiffly-starched white jacket and unpressed, patched pants. The pants looked suspiciously like they had seen stable duty during the day. Santander Hill Farm was above bothering about the little impeccabilities of life.

"Terrific," conceded Mr. Maddox after he sampled the drink.

"Well, it's damn good, anyway," the Colonel said, eyes twinkling. They both chuckled.

"Who," Mr. Maddox asked, "is Miss Rockwell? Can't seem to place her."

"No reason why you should," said the colonel. "Carole's m' new secretary. Had her about two months. Sweet little filly, isn't she?"

"No doubt of it."

"Going to have her around the rest of m' life," confided the Colonel with satisfaction. "She's engaged to Bob. That's why she's here. Want to have her around while Bob's over there in Africa tossing bombs on the blasted Eyties and Huns. Some day she'll be mistress of Santander—and she doesn't know a fired knee from a mud calk. Joke on us, isn't it? But she'll learn, she'll learn. . . . Speak out when you want something, m'boy."

The Colonel moved away, leaving Mr. Maddox staring blankly after him.

**C**OLONEL BOYETT had been married at a mature age. His son, Bob, now in the middle twenties, was almost as dear to the Colonel as Santander Red had been, and Sandymore Red now was. Perhaps a trifle more, if you cared to speculate rashly.

Mr. Maddox took a deep drink of the buttered rum. So the girl was the future mistress of Santander Hill!

What could you make of her strange manner, stranger words in the study? She had everything, apparently. Bob Boyett, tops among young men. The Colonel's approval, affection. Santander Hill. Posi-

tion, tradition, more than enough money.

What could be sinister in all that? Mr. Maddox shook his head, spoke to the proud horse in the immaculate box stall.

"Can't handicap a filly, can you, Sandy? They don't hold true to form."

The wise gleam in Santander Red's glass eyes might have been a trick of the lighting. But several minutes later, near the other end of the room, Mr. Maddox had no doubt about what he glimpsed through glass French doors, up two steps and giving into the entrance hall.

Carole Rockwell, wrapped in belted camel's hair coat, scarf about her head, was leaving the house. Leaving hastily, with a glance almost furtive through the glass into the Paddock Room.

Mr. Maddox drained his glass and put it on the nearest table. He was bland, casual as he limped toward the French doors. The taped ankle was healing fast, but he still favored it with a limp and the ebony cane.

The overcast night had a bite, hinting of snow. Mr. Maddox turned up the collar of the topcoat he had hastily donned.

Behind him the house windows were bright, cheery. In front of him, past parked automobiles of local guests, the pale curving ribbon of driveway went down the gentle, tree-girt slope. Running out of sight were ghostly lines of white-washed board fences, dividing the bluegrass pastures.

Over to the left, proudly out in the open, were the big white horse barns, sharing equal honors with the house itself. Beyond the barns was the fine mile training track.

Back of the barns, behind a belt of trees and shrubbery, were the smaller staff houses, outbuildings, storage sheds, haystacks.

Carole Rockwell was not in sight. The dark night was quiet. The bobbing light of a lantern moved around the corner of a barn and vanished inside the barn. For want of any other clue, Mr. Maddox walked that way.

He could not have told exactly why he was out here in the night. That extra sense of trouble, perhaps, trained fine by thirty years of bookie adventures. The chalky pallor, the misery, fear in the girl's first look. And her hurried furtive exit

into the crisp night so soon afterwards.

Far off on the highway an automobile horn blew. Equally far off in the other direction a dog barked. Mr. Maddox stopped, thinking he heard the murmur of a voice off to the left, where the driveway swung between house and barns, running back through the screen of trees to the staff houses.

Listening, he heard only the distant dog. Mr. Maddox skirted the edge of the driveway, a big drifting shadow on the dead grass, limping slightly.

The dark loom of an automobile took shape ahead. It was a station wagon, parked on the edge of the driveway. No sign of life about it.

A gust of chill wind made Mr. Maddox shrug up the collar of his overcoat as he stood looking, listening, half a dozen steps behind the station wagon.

The wind did more. It tumbled bright red little sparks on the hard-packed gravel beside the car. It left the brief dull-red glow of a cigarette or cigar end from which the gust had scoured the sparks.

The glowing tobacco was on the left side of the car. Quietly Mr. Maddox continued on the grass and came abreast of the right side of the car, peering keenly in.

The surprise was his. A man sitting on the right side of the front seat stared silently out at him. They were not two feet apart. Mr. Maddox stopped, and chuckled ruefully.

"You startled me," he said.

The man was alone. He did not reply. His hat was pulled low. He seemed to be thinking, eyes staring out the car window and down at the ground.

"Are you asleep?"

Mr. Maddox suspected the answer even as he reached in to the man's shoulder, and he was right.

No sleeping man would have such dreadful slakness of flesh. Not even a drunk. Mr. Maddox shook the shoulder he gripped.

The head rocked limply forward, hat sliding loosely to one side. Mr. Maddox snatched for a clip of paper matches in his coat pocket, and had no suspicion the flaring light was the most unlucky event of his life.

THE man was dead, of course. Dead only a few minutes, for he was quite warm. He was a young man, thin-faced, with a narrow blond mustache. He was a stranger to Joe Maddox, and not one of the house guests, as far as Mr. Maddox could recall.

The match burned down. Mr. Maddox lighted two more, reached through the window with the other hand and opened the stranger's overcoat.

He was looking for blood, the mark of a shot or a knife, and he found nothing. He lifted the loosely-worn hat. Neatly combed, pomaded hair showed no evidence of a blow.

But the man was dead, here on the right side of the station wagon seat. The glowing cigarette end was on the other side of the car, where someone sitting behind the steering wheel must have tossed it.

Mr. Maddox limped around the front of the station wagon. He had to light still another match to find the now-dark cigarette end.

It had burned down past the brand name. Red lipstick stained the white end. Mr. Maddox pinched off the warm tip.

He was suddenly sick at heart. Not for himself. Not for the dead man. Not so much for the girl who had left this lipstick-smearing cigarette. She deserved her own special brand of pity.

A great and grand gentleman was due for a mortal blow. The Colonel was absolutely unprepared for this. He had displayed only pride, affection for his future daughter-in-law. He could not have suspected she was anything but happy, serene.

A blow to Bob Boyett, off there across the sea, was a blow to the Colonel. All the great hope and future of Santander Hill would suffer from this.

Mr. Maddox reached for his well-stuffed billfold. He was wrapping the cigarette end in a bill thumbed out at random when he saw the lantern carried out of the barn again. The bearer came toward the station wagon.

For an indecisive moment Mr. Maddox hesitated while he stuffed the wrapped cigarette end in a pocket of the billfold. Realistic caution of a man who often rubbed elbows and did business with the

fringes of the underworld took command.

Explanations would have to be good if Joe Maddox were found here beside the dead man. The truth would deliver the first blow to an old friend. If Joe Maddox evaded—well, anything could happen. He was a bookie, open to suspicion.

Mr. Maddox turned back across the driveway, over the grass toward the nearest wing of the house.

The station wagon was between his retreat and the approaching lantern. He was off in the night, well beyond vision, when he halted and looked back, grimly hopeful. A man was carrying the lantern. It just might be that the man knew about the body.

The bobbing lantern skirted the back of the car. The bearer stopped and put a match to a cigarette. He was a Negro. He darkened the lantern.

This looked better. Mr. Maddox heard the station wagon door open, heard the chassis creak as the man got in behind the wheel. The engine started.

A slow hard smile of satisfaction spread on Mr. Maddox' broad face as the cold motor speeded a time or two, then idled. A match flared on the front seat. And then the Negro's wild yell of dismay and fright burst on the night.

Mr. Maddox swore softly and headed fast for the front of the house, without regard for the lame ankle. That stable hand, still yelling as he bolted out of the station wagon, was certainly no candidate for guilt.

That left Joe Maddox out in the night and unaccounted for. He might have made the house in time, but for the automobile which came fast up the driveway, headlight beams striking far ahead.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Body in the Station Wagon

MR. MADDOX panted, "Damn!" with heartfelt resignation.

He had passed the corner of the house—but time and distance were against him. The headlights were swinging on the curve of the driveway. They would reach out in a second or two and spot him hurrying fast to get into the house.

It would look as if Joe Maddox had

been surprised as he fled from the dead man. Which was exactly the truth, however innocent Joe Maddox was. It could be very deadly truth.

A brace of seconds before the light struck him, Mr. Maddox wheeled around and started back the way he had come.

The lights caught him that way. He slowed, peered inquiringly as brakes went on and the automobile stopped abreast of him. The front window rolled down.

"I thought it was a lost cow at first," a barbed voice said out the window. "Did they toss you out of the house, Joe?" "Cassidy!" Mr. Maddox exclaimed.

He had never uttered a sourer word. He had never felt such a surge of dismay, of certainty that luck might be running against him.

Cassidy was a Masterton man.

You had to be Joe Maddox, a bookie, a part of the racing world, to know what that meant. The Masterton Detective Agency guarded the conscience, ethics, actions of the American Turf. At all major race meets Masterton men weeded out dips and touts, kept close watch on the vast sums of cash money that passed in and out of the pari-mutuel windows.

The Masterton men did more. They watched racing stables, owners, trainers, stable hands and jockeys for signs of dishonesty. They were under strict orders to arrest any bookmaker taking bets at any track.

Masterton men were a scourge to all bookmakers—and the long-standing feud between Joe Maddox and Cassidy had become a classic of the American Turf, to those few who knew.

"It's me," Cassidy said sarcastically as he stepped out of the car. "I might have known you'd be here for the race, Joe. How-come you're gawking around alone in the night?"

Mr. Maddox thrust a fat black cigar hard into the corner of his mouth. He spoke urgently.

"I stepped out for some fresh air. Someone over toward the barns started yelling *murder*. I was heading there to see what's wrong."

"Murder?" Cassidy exclaimed.

"Yes!"

"Nuts! It's quiet as a gassed owl!" Which was true enough. The badly

frightened Negro had bolted inside the first barn and his cries had stopped.

"I heard him," Mr. Maddox insisted. "We'd better see what's wrong."

"I got more to do than listen to your hot air," Cassidy snorted. "Let's get inside the house and promote a drink. That wind's got an edge."

"Listen!"

Loud excited voices came from the nearest barn. A flashlight, then a lantern appeared. Cassidy looked. His manner changed.

"Maybe something is wrong," he muttered. "You say somebody yelled murder?"

"Sounded like it."

"Let's go see!"

"I'll step back into the house and tell Colonel Boyett," Mr. Maddox decided. "My ankle's bad. You're all the bloodhound that's needed."

Cassidy bolted toward the lights. Mr. Maddox allowed himself a grim bit of satisfaction as he limped into the house. Cassidy was a perfect witness to the fact that Joe Maddox had been hurrying from the house to the scene of trouble.

**T**HE gaiety in the big Paddock Room was almost a shock after death in the night. Mr. Maddox' big, bland figure attracted no unusual attention as he walked the length of the room with cane and slight limp, unlighted cigar in left hand.

Colonel Boyett had just stopped to chat with a thin, wiry man whom Mr. Maddox did not recall. The Colonel had his usual gusto.

"Maddox, shake hands with Charley Banton." The Colonel dug a jovial elbow into Mr. Maddox' side. "Charley slept through dinner and just came out of his room. Too many mint juleps. They'll do it, m'boy!"

Mr. Maddox' big hand was warm from the pocket of the overcoat he had left in the hall. Banton's hand was cool. Too cool. In recent minutes Banton's hand had been well-exposed some other place than a warm bedroom or any part of the comfortably warm house.

Not a line of Mr. Maddox' broad bland face changed. "Ready to try the mint juleps all over again?" he chuckled.

"I've still got a bit of a head," Banton said with a thin smile.

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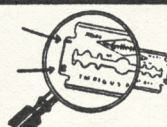
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2. APPLY LATHER or Brushless Shaving Cream while face is wet. If lather is used, dip your brush in water frequently



3. TWO EDGES double blade life. Marks indicated above identify edges, enabling you to give both equal use and get extra shaves



4. CLEAN BLADE in razor by loosening handle, then rinsing in hot water and shaking. Wiping the blade is likely to damage the edges

He was in the middle thirties, rather sporty looking. Lips were thin, smile was thin. His lean face, a little too sharply pointed at the jaw line, looked like he could say "no" and mean it. The sharpness of face produced a shrewd, hard look.

Mr. Maddox lifted the unlighted cigar to his mouth. The movement brought his head down, eyes for an instant on Banton's feet. The shoes showed a slight trace of recent moisture that could have come off damp grass.

"I can recommend the Colonel's rum," Mr. Maddox said heartily. "Have a stiff drink of rum, take a turn outside in the fresh air—and you'll be a new man in no time!"

"I'll try the rum and stay inside," Banton told him. "I'm not a fresh-air addict."

Well, there you were—as neatly packaged a lie as Joe Maddox had ever turned up.

"You've a new guest," Mr. Maddox told the Colonel.

"Capital! You'll excuse me, Banton?"

Mr. Maddox walked away with the Colonel and spoke to him under his breath.

"Some kind of trouble over by the barns. Your guest is Cassidy, from the Masterton Agency. He's gone to see about it."

The Colonel seized Mr. Maddox' elbow.

"Trouble at the barns! Not fire—or anything wrong with Sandymore?"

There you had the two fears even Colonel Boyett could not escape. The red tragedy of a barn fire usually meant a death trap to horses caught inside. And of course there was always the chance that something might happen to Sandymore Red.

"I thought I heard a colored man shouting something about murder."

"Oh, murder, eh?" the Colonel said with relief. "Impossible. We don't have such things around Santander Hill. I'll go out and quiet that foolishness. Blasted stable boys celebrate every year while we're having the Party!"

"I'll stay in and nurse my ankle," Mr. Maddox decided as he helped the Colonel into a topcoat.

ONLY when alone in the front hall did Mr. Maddox let the full harsh gravity of the matter harden his broad face. Colonel Boyett would find a dead man. But what else would he find?

Not the cigarette end marked with lipstick. Not Banton's cold hand, proving Banton had also been furtively out of the house.

Those two things with their ugly edge of suspicion were safe in the keeping of Joe Maddox. But the dead man remained. Joe Maddox now carried a heavy burden. Colonel Boyett mattered, of course. Bob Boyett mattered more.

How could Joe Maddox report that Bob's girl had been out there by the dead man? And the foxy-faced Banton outside, too? How could he tell about that moment in the study—and the furtive exit of Carole Rockwell in a few minutes, out to the station wagon where her discarded cigarette sparked and glowed beside death?

It would be hard enough for the Colonel. It would be harder for Bob to hear that murder had touched his girl, and be helpless to rush back to her.

The music was gay. The guests were happy. The French doors opened and Oscar stepped into the hall from the Paddock Room, half-filled glass in his hand.

"Swell party!" Oscar said owlishly.

Oscar had lived the hard way. He was a wizened, cynical, hardboiled little man. But Oscar was loyal, and a wizard at figures, betting sheets, handling the rapid-fire barrage of horse bets that came in over the telephones when Joe Maddox was making a racetrack book.

"I warned you about this visit," Mr. Maddox reminded coldly. "You're soused."

"S'lutely not!" Oscar denied airily. "Jus' happy, Joe. Want you to be happy. Here—have drink."

"Can you understand murder?" Mr. Maddox demanded curtly.

"Eh?"

"There's been a murder outside! Merry hell is hung around our ears! I need you sober, quick!"

Oscar blinked and gulped. "Why'd you kill him, Joe?"

"Don't," Mr. Maddox warned with cold emphasis, "even think that again! I



didn't kill anyone! But Cassidy just got here! I don't know why he came. He's out with the body now. I'm not sure what's going to happen."

Cassidy's presence hit Oscar like a wave of ice water. He sobered visibly. He groaned.

"Now I know it's trouble! What do we do, Joe?"

"Keep your mouth shut from now on!" Mr. Maddox ordered. "I want you to walk into the Paddock there and keep an eye on a man named Banton. Don't take another drink. If you louse this up, heaven help you! Cassidy won't. Understand?"

Oscar handed over his glass.

"Cassidy!" he mumbled. The little man took a deep breath. "Show me the guy you want watched, Joe—an' forget him!"

CAROLE ROCKWELL was in the Paddock Room among the other guests. Many of them were familiar names in business, social, turf circles over the country. Many were from the countryside roundabout and the two nearby towns. Not all were wealthy or well-known.

The Colonel knew everyone. Social prestige meant little at Santander Hill. Turf knowledge, horse savvy mattered more with the Colonel. An outstanding jockey or trainer was apt to get more attention than a bank account or a great name.

If you didn't like it, you probably wouldn't be invited to the Turf Party anyway. Santander Hill made its own rules.

Mr. Maddox studied Carole Rockwell keenly as he went to her.

In the Colonel's study, Carole had seemed pretty enough. Brown hair swept back and up above her ears. Her nose had more than a trace of freckles. Long lashes, blue eyes, a clean leggy look made her seem the outstanding filly that the Colonel believed her to be.

Here among the guests she was prettier than ever, flushed slightly, smiling. It was hard to believe trouble had touched her in any form.

"You evidently didn't like the book," Mr. Maddox suggested as he stopped beside her.

Carole looked up at him. Her smile was

bright. "I just couldn't get interested."

Mr. Maddox towered above her, huge, assured, amiable. A large diamond ring glinted richly, coldly on the big hand which still held the unlighted cigar.

"The same with my book," Mr. Maddox said blandly. "I finally stepped outside for some fresh air."

"I should have thought of that," Carole said with the same bright smile.

"Probably a good thing you didn't," Mr. Maddox told her. "There seems to be a little trouble over by the barns. The Colonel is out there now."

Her smile did not change. Rather it seemed her thoughts had jumped away and left the smile behind to hold Mr. Maddox' gaze.

It was enough for Joe Maddox. He'd been a big-time bookmaker too long, had rightly read too many pretty deceiving faces.

The abrupt clangor of an old-fashioned brass dinner bell beat through the music, the talk and laughter. The Colonel was ringing the bell. Former guests knew it as the signal for quiet in the great Paddock Room. Noise died away.

Cassidy and the Colonel were standing on the terrace end of the room, inside the French doors. The Colonel's close-clipped white mustache looked like a blond bar on his saddle-bronzed face. He spoke with an unaccustomed gravity and harshness.

"I regret what I must tell you all. A guest has been found dead outside. Some of you knew him well. Phil Sedan. Substantial evidence seems to exist that he was murdered."

That stunned them. Then exclamations, questions burst out. Men and women alike moved toward the end of the room where the Colonel stood.

Mr. Maddox was no less startled by the dead man's name. Phil Sedan had lost three million inherited dollars in eight years via blondes, booze, bets, lawsuits and general foolishness. The end of all that had been fitting, too.

The day Phil Sedan had gone bankrupt, he had been taken to a New York hospital with a raving case of D. T.'s. Since then he had dropped from public notice.

Joe Maddox had never covered Phil Sedan's reckless horse bets. About two

years ago he had seen the man in a Belmont box with four or five pretties from the show girl belt.

That day, two years back, Phil Sedan had been clean-shaven and padded with puffy flesh. Tonight in death he had a blond mustache and was thin and fit looking. No wonder he had seemed a stranger.

"I didn't know Phil Sedan was staying here at the house," Mr. Maddox confessed under his breath.

"He wasn't," Carole said, not taking her eyes off the Colonel.

"You knew him?"

Carole shook her head. "Marcia Dunaway, at Cross Gates Farm, said they were expecting him this afternoon."

Another vigorous clang of the brass dinner bell blocked further questions. Renewed, strained quiet fell over the big room.

"Unfortunately," Colonel Boyett stated, "the sheriff is ill. A deputy is coming in his place. Meanwhile, I've asked the gentleman beside me to represent Santander Hill in this unfortunate matter. Some of you doubtless know Mr. Cassidy as a detective from the Masterton Agency. He'll take charge for the present."

**T**HE solid, red-faced man who spoke was Carlson Nivens, owner of Cold Creek. "Colonel, how d'you know the man was murdered?"

Cassidy made the reply, and his words had a slow bite. He was big, grizzled and stubbornly grim, as was his habit when trouble broke hard and he was not certain what to do.

"Something about the size of an ice pick was shoved into the guy's heart, Mr. Nivens. That's murder in anybody's backyard. What we've got to find out quick is who's had an ice pick, or something about that size. Can anyone help out?"

Flat silence followed Cassidy's request. Second by second the silence dragged out. Furtive and uncertain glances began to go from person to person.

A twisted little smile touched Mr. Maddox' broad face. You could always count on Cassidy. With a few words Cassidy had sown suspicion and destroyed the solidarity and the assurance which linked

all guests under Colonel Boyett's roof.

From now on everyone was going to watch everyone else. Cassidy's words would hang among them, breeding poisonous doubt.

Carlson Nivens reacted promptly. Somewhat belligerently, the California businessman spoke what everyone was thinking.

"Are you suggesting that the man was murdered by one of us?"

"He's dead," Cassidy retorted heavily.

"I didn't ask you that!" Nivens reminded brusquely.

"I'm going by the facts," Cassidy said stubbornly. He lifted a big hand, ticked points off on the fingers. "The man hadn't come in the house here as far as Colonel Boyett knows. He drove over from Cross Gates Farm and met someone outside that he knew."

"How d'you know it was someone he knew?" Carlson Nivens demanded. "The man was found dead, wasn't he? Don't tell me corpses have started talking around here."

Cassidy's face began to redden.

"I didn't say he talked. But Sedan's money is still in his pockets. His watch is on his wrist. He wasn't seen around the barns. No one at the barns heard anything that sounded like trouble. Figure it out. Why should a man come here tonight and get killed by a stranger, who didn't even go through his pockets afterwards?"

"It's not my place to figure anything out," Carlson Nivens stated flatly. "I merely want to know whether all of us are under suspicion."

"I doubt if Mr. Cassidy meant to suggest exactly that," Colonel Boyett put in uncomfortably.

Cassidy's face had grown redder. He hunched his shoulders and looked more stubborn.

"Facts is all I'm interested in," Cassidy said heavily. "The body doesn't show any sign of a struggle. Whoever shoved the weapon into the man's chest knew him well enough to get close and do it right. They must have talked together. When the law gets here, plenty questions will be asked, especially of those who knew Phil Sedan."

"That will probably include quite a

few of us," Colonel Boyett remarked.

"We might as well start now," Cassidy said, looking over the gathering. "Who's been outside in the last half-hour?"

"I met you out front," Mr. Maddox reminded, and immediately he was the center of attention.

"I know," Cassidy said impatiently. "Who else was outside?"

Across the room a lady spoke nervously.

"My daughter and I arrived less than half an hour ago. B-but we don't have ice picks at home. We use ice c-cubes."

Her flustered statement caused a nervous ripple of amusement. Colonel Boyett gave her gallant assurance.

"Yourself and Miss Marilyn are not under suspicion, ma'am, even if your pockets were filled with ice picks. Mr. Cassidy didn't refer, I'm sure, to guests who came directly into the house."

Cassidy said nothing, but Joe Maddox could have told them. Not even the Colonel himself was safe from Cassidy's suspicions.

"Anyone else leave the house in the last hour?" Cassidy persisted.

No one answered. Cassidy looked them over glumly.

"I'll ask you all to stay inside until the sheriff's office takes charge," he told them. "And I'll add a piece of advice. The man was murdered. It's a serious matter to withhold information. I'll be glad to talk privately to anyone who's got an idea what was behind the killing."

That ended the tense little session. Mr. Maddox had to suppress a snort as the guests scattered back through the long Paddock Room.

Cassidy was not going to be popular with these now uneasy visitors to Santander Hill. Any talk with Cassidy would suggest that murder clues were being given the grizzled Masterton man.

Carole Rockwell moved away. Mr. Maddox let her go. He was thinking hard. Phil Sedan, dead here at Santander Hill, piled mystery on mystery.

Why had the man come out of obscurity to witness the match race between Cold Creek and Sandymore Red?

Phil Sedan had never owned a horse, never been counted a horse fan. He had bet huge sums recklessly on the races, but he'd thrown more money away on

cards and roulette. A horse race had been something to bet on heavily while surrounded by friends, blondes and the public eye.

You could handicap all known facts about Phil Sedan—and the answers didn't explain his presence in the Kentucky Bluegrass tonight. Didn't explain why he'd been killed as soon as he'd arrived at Santander Hill. Didn't explain why Carole Rockwell denied knowing the man, and yet had slipped furtively out of the house and left her smoldering cigarette tip beside the body.

Mr. Maddox had moved, big and thoughtful, toward the other end of the room. He stopped in front of Santander Red's box stall. It was hard to believe the big horse was not alive.

"You're gone, Sandy," Mr. Maddox mused. "So is Phil Sedan. I wonder what he could be telling you now about it all."

Santander Red could not answer. Neither could Phil Sedan. Or could he? Life was queer, death was queerer. Who knew what crossed the borderline where the dead looked back at the living. An idea struck Mr. Maddox and galvanized him with hard purpose.

If he was right, Phil Sedan's death was not the end and not the beginning. There would be more. There would have to be more, now that Phil Sedan was dead.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Reverend Howkin of Pokey Run

MR. MADDUX was up early in the morning. A crimson sun was just thrusting above the frosty pastures. The sky was clear. The day would be brisk and delightful.

But the day would not be delightful for the other house guests—and Joe Maddox heaved his vast form out of bed with a sense of urgency that had increased with sleep.

This was Thursday morning. Last night the carefree gaiety of the Annual Turf Week at Santander Hill had expired.

The questions that Cassidy had promised had been asked last night when deputy sheriff, county attorney, county coroner, and assistants, together with local newspapermen, had arrived.

It had been about as Mr. Maddox expected. Joe Morris, the deputy, was an earnest man who spoke with a broad Southern drawl. He had been a local farmer most of his life.

Dr. Kidwell, who was county coroner, in addition to his private practice, was a silvery-haired, wise and kindly old country doctor.

Phalen, the county attorney, was a younger man, aggressive, ambitious, probably able enough. He and the deputy could have handled a local shooting or theft.

Neither man knew the background of a former Eastern playboy like Phil Sedan. Both officials were overly polite and considerate of the big names, personalities under Colonel Boyett's roof.

Phil Sedan had not entered the house. Guests all denied being out of the house. So some prowler, stranger, must have killed Phil Sedan. Walter Phalen, the aggressive young county attorney, did make one polite request.

"Everyone please stay on until Saturday, as planned. Can't tell what will turn up—or what we will want to ask you."

This morning Mr. Maddox' broad face was pink from the razor as he left the bathroom and yanked the covers off Oscar's bed. Oscar staggered up, rubbing his eyes. He went to the window and looked out.

"It ain't hardly daylight, Joe!"

"Time to punch the clock," Mr. Maddox said, donning his shirt. "I want you to keep watching Charley Banton."

"I watched that guy last night until I was bug-eyed! He didn't do anything."

"Maybe he will today."

"Do what?"

"How do I know?"

"If we got any sense, we'll scram," Oscar said sourly. "Dough won't be bet on this match race like you figured, Joe. We shoulda gone straight to New Orleans. There's a big boom there this winter. Money'll be dropping off the bushes. Everybody'll be there. It'll be a honey of a horse meet."

"You heard me."

"I heard you," Oscar said sulkily. "But I don't have to like it."

Guests already at the long breakfast table did not look too cheerful when Mr.

Maddox joined them. Colonel Boyett brightened visibly as the broad smiling face came into the room.

"Good to see someone on their toes!" the Colonel's roaring hearty voice greeted. "Here, sit by me, Maddox! Sing a song, tell a joke! Do something to cheer these folks up! Never saw such a bunch of long faces in m'life!"

"Emotional hangovers," Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Try a stiff tot of your rum all around—and a double rasher of bacon and eggs for my plate. Then I'd put everyone in a saddle and start them cross-country."

"Ha! Knew you had ideas as soon as you walked in! Sulphurious! Glasses all around and a decanter of Jamaica! Then tell the barns to saddle horses! Going to ride, too, Maddox?"

"Can't risk my lame ankle, Colonel. I'd like to get into Martinsburg this morning, if a car is going that way."

"Station wagon's going in half an hour for supplies. Mind taking it? My personal car's running short on gas allowance."

"Just get me there," Mr. Maddox chuckled.

**I**N Martinsburg, the county seat, a rich patina of the past lay over tree-shaded streets, old red-brick houses. Two cotton mills and a metal-working factory helped bring prosperity to the town. But the mills seemed there only on sufferance. First, last, always this was the Bluegrass horse country. You could see it in the cloth banners above the four sides of Court House Square, lettered: *MARTINSBURG, HOME OF SANDYMORE RED.*

You could hear it in the talk around the Square, sense it in the holiday air, gripping the town as out-state visitors began to appear on the streets.

From a booth in the largest hotel, Mr. Maddox telephoned Barney Lee, on the Sports Desk of the *New York Call*. He could have telephoned from Santander Hill—and he might have been heard talking.

"Joe Maddox?" Barney Lee's voice said over the wire. "Calling from Kentucky? Don't tell me what you're doing there. Which horse will take that gallop Saturday?"

"If I knew, I'd make a dollar," Mr. Maddox chuckled. "You remember Phil Sedan, that young playboy several years back?"

"Oh, him! I saw on the wire this morning he got croaked at Colonel Boyett's farm. What gives on it, Joe?"

"Your press wire had it all, I guess. What's Phil Sedan been doing the last two years?"

"The guys around the office here asked the same thing when they heard."

"No dope on him?"

"Sorry, Joe. He faded off the Main Stem until he turned up on the wire this morning as a stiff. Which of those dogs shall I toss my ten-spot on Saturday? I hear the California horse ain't got a chance."

"Who's saying so?" Mr. Maddox asked alertly.

"Who says anything?" Barney Lee countered airily. "I've had a dozen tell it in the office the last couple days. Last night there's an argument in Sam's place, on Broadway. Joey Lutz, the matchmaker, says he's got it strictly that Cold Creek didn't stand the shipping so well. Besides, he was lame and the stable didn't tip anyone."

"Rats!"

"Quote you in the column this afternoon?" Barney asked instantly.

"No!"

"Aha! Must be something in that smoke about Cold Creek!"

Mr. Maddox scowled as he bulked in the telephone booth and considered.

"Go ahead, quote me," he decided. "I haven't seen Cold Creek yet, but I've got it from his owner and Colonel Boyett

that Cold Creek's in good form. Maybe it'll stop a few loudmouths like Joey Lutz from sounding off. Put that in, too, if you want."

"I wouldn't give Lutz a chance to sue for the publicity," Barney Lee said. "Thanks, Joe. The column needed something on this match race. Hal Pine will be there Saturday to give us a wire story, but that's not doing me any good now. Anything else I can do for you?"

"Yes. Make an effort to find out what Phil Sedan's been doing the past two years. You can reach me at Colonel Boyett's. I'll pay wire or telephone charges."

"O. K.," Barney Lee agreed.

Outside the telephone booth Mr. Maddox wiped his forehead, looked around, scowled, and stepped back into the booth. He dialed a number with the receiver on the hook, said loudly: "Long distance, please."

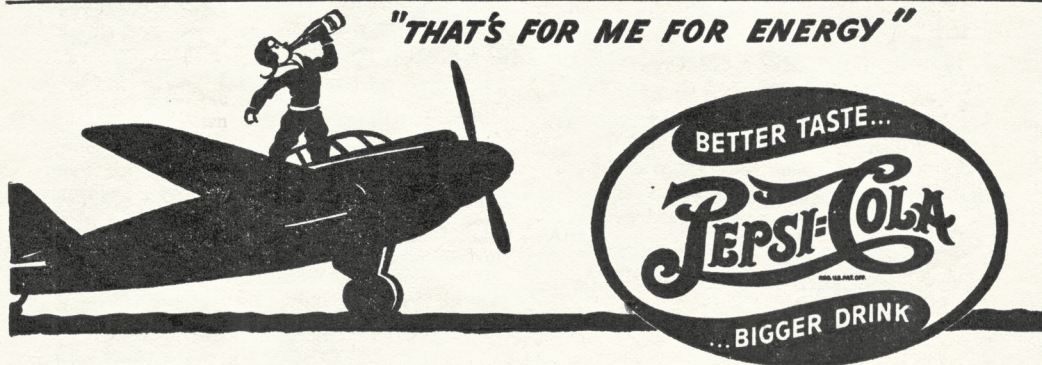
The door was ajar an inch. Mr. Maddox waited a dull thirty seconds, and suddenly shoved the door open and stepped out. Two steps to the right brought him up with the lean, lanky man who had moved close to the booth, and started walking away when the door opened. His big hand dropped on the man's shoulder.

"Holy Joe Daley, as I live and breathe!"

The lanky man brushed at the shoulder. From under bushy gray eyebrows he surveyed the vast, bland bulk of Joe Maddox. His bony, ascetic face, split by a big nose, was disapproving.

"Friend," he said coldly, "you have the wrong person."

"Could be," Mr. Maddox chuckled.



"Live around in these parts, friend?"

"I am the Reverend Rathburton C. Howkin, of Pokey Run Church, West Virginia," the lanky stranger said with dignity. "Join us for an hour if you're ever passing through on Sunday, friend. I bid you good-day."

"I'll bid you aces and call you with a phoney hair-piece," Mr. Maddox said cheerfully.

The Reverend Howkin lifted an arm quickly and tried to step back. Mr. Maddox' big hand was faster. He got the hat and with it an artfully graying toupee that perfectly matched the bushy gray eyebrows.

The high-domed, bald head so suddenly revealed made startling change in the Reverend Howkin. His bony face looked longer. He was thin-lipped, hard-looking, almost sinister as he uttered a stifled oath and snatched for the toupee.

"**YOU'RE** hiding a wonderful chunk of ivory under that hair, friend," Mr. Maddox chuckled as the toupee went back on. "I'll lay you eight to two it'd make the folks on Pokey Run take to the bushes."

His hair restored, the Reverend Howkin again was ascetic-looking. But his politeness had vanished. His comment was strictly Main Stem.

"I should paste you in the mush for that!" he said furiously. "Keep your fat paws to yourself after this!"

"I've heard Holy Joe Daley was touchy about his onion top," Mr. Maddox chuckled. "In case you don't know, Little Aggie McCoy pointed you out at the Havana Races a few years ago. You were the Reverend Jediah Crooks, Gospel-giver to the stable hands and jockeys, and loaded with sure-fire tips right out of the feed-bag and stable prayer meetings. Doing well at it, too, with the farm-belt tourists, Little Aggie said. I never forget a face, you mug."

"So what?" Holy Joe Daley gave surly answer.

The smile faded from Joe Maddox' broad bland face. He was suddenly big, menacing.

"So the next time I find you loafing around my telephone booth, it won't be my mush that gets pasted. Scram, you greasy

Gospel-faker! I never did like your kind of racket!"

Holy Joe Daley muttered something and stalked away. Mr. Maddox watched him leave the hotel lobby, and then turned back to the telephone booth. He thrust a fat black cigar into his mouth and was chewing it as he gave a number in Jersey City, New Jersey.

There was some delay. When the call finally went through Mr. Maddox said: "Sam Stone? . . . This is Joe Maddox. I'm in Kentucky for that match race. The Eastern books getting much dough on it?"

Sam Stone was one of the bigger Jersey bookmakers, interested mainly in lay-off money from smaller bookies over the East and South.

"Plenty," Sam said promptly. "I hear important dough is coming out there at the race."

"I'll do better than a hundred grand among the visitors if I'm guessing right. Sam, d'you know Holy Joe Daley?"

"Nope. Why?"

"Never mind. Remember Phil Sedan?"

"I took fifty-five grand off him at Saratoga in three bites, the last year I made a book there," Sam Stone said with relish.

"He's dead."

"He died when his dough ran out," Sam Stone said cynically. "Guys like him have to have a flash roll."

"What's he been doing the last two years?"

"I wouldn't know."

"You getting much money on Cold Creek?"

"Why?" Sam Stone countered, caution suddenly in his voice.

"Don't go cagey on me, Sam. I smell a rat."

"It stinks!" Sam Stone all but exploded back over the wire. "There's a whisper from Miami to Boston that Cold Creek didn't stand the shipping. The dough is going on Sandymore Red. Too much of it. Neighborhood bookies are unloading on us here in Jersey. We got too much dough on Sandymore Red now—and it keeps coming. Got to take it to keep right with the smaller books. You heard the talk there in Kentucky?"

"Nary a whisper. I got it from New York a few minutes ago."

"One of our men is coming there now to get the lowdown," Sam Stone said. "But I don't like it, Joe."

"Try to get a line on Phil Sedan," Mr. Maddox urged before he hung up. On the way out of the hotel lobby he questioned the desk clerk. "Is the Reverend Howkin registered here?"

"Room 306," the clerk said promptly.

**R**IDING back to Santander Hill in the station wagon, Mr. Maddox sat in grim thought. The sun had brought warmth. Dry weather indicated a fast track and a great gathering of spectators Saturday.

But something was wrong. Phil Sedan's death was an omen. Barney Lee and Sam Stone had added to the growing puzzle.

Joe Maddox was not a miracle man. But thirty years of the big horse tracks made a man wise in honesty and crookedness. You met the best and the worst, developed instinct about horses and people.

The race Saturday between Sandymore Red and Cold Creek was a great sporting event. During the year millions of turf fans had bet on the two horses. Experts had printed thousands of words to prove one horse or the other the wonder horse of the year. Now on the private track of Santander Hill the great argument would be decided over a stiff mile-and-an-eighth race. Two great horses, two great owners sporting enough to hold the race and donate huge side bets to Army-Navy relief.

Colonel Boyett had invited Joe Maddox to make a book for the large side bets which guests of Santander Hill and surrounding estates would make. Today Colonel Boyett would tell friends that all profits Joe Maddox might make would go to war relief.

It was a great sporting event—and behind the scenes something was wrong. Ominously wrong.

"Drop me at the barns," Mr. Maddox told the driver when the station wagon reached the long tree-lined driveway at Santander Hill.

Cassidy was standing outside the first barn. He came to meet Mr. Maddox.

"Your stooge Oscar had some hard luck," Cassidy greeted cheerfully.

"Must have been bad to make you feel so good," Mr. Maddox decided. "What happened?"

"Horse threw him. Knocked him cold as an ice cube."

"How is he? Where is he?" Mr. Maddox asked with instant concern.

"In bed. Miss Rockwell was riding that way and saw his horse running away. She brought him back. Got a match, Joe?"

Mr. Maddox handed over a clip of matches and shook his head ruefully.

"Oscar's been around horses for years, and I'll bet this is the first time he ever crawled on one. Should have had better sense. Keep the matches. I'll go in and see how he is."

"I'll go with you," Cassidy said, falling in step. "Fine day, Joe."

"More or less. Have they found out any more about Phil Sedan?"

"It'll come."

"As soon as I see Oscar, I want to talk with you about that, Cassidy. There's some angles I don't like."

"It's lousy with angles," Cassidy agreed. "Think you can help?"

"I've got a hunch there's more to it than you'd think."

"I wouldn't be surprised," Cassidy said calmly.

Oscar was in bed, propped up by pillows. The side of his face was scratched. He looked pale. Sight of Mr. Maddox and Cassidy did not seem to make him feel better.

"Too bad," Mr. Maddox said, limping to the side of the bed and shaking his head.

"I ain't the first one who ever fell off a horse," Oscar said defensively. "Take your belly laugh—and then run that buzzard Cassidy out."

Cassidy was closing the door. He slid the night bolt. His smile was broad, a trifle unpleasant as he came to the bed.

"Run me out, huh? Now ain't that too bad?" Cassidy said. "Joe, you've got a nice heavy cane. Let's see it."

Cassidy's grin was thin-lipped as he reached for the cane. Mr. Maddox stepped back.

"Why the interest in my cane? Why'd you bolt the door?"

"Run him out, Joe," Oscar urged from the bed. "A gander at that map of his gives me another pain in the head."

"This'll make you feel worse," Cassidy said with the same unpleasant grin. He brought out a revolver from a shoulder holster.

"Take it easy!" Cassidy advised. "This is business. I mean to go through with it! Joe, toss that cane under the bed, or I'll take it if I have to slug you."

CASSIDY had never looked more unpleasant and determined. Mr. Maddox put the cane under Oscar's bed. His broad face was blandly watchful.

"Play your cops and robbers, Cassidy. You can't be much more of a lug."

From his coat pocket Cassidy took the clip of matches Mr. Maddox had given him.

"Yours, Joe!"

"Well?"

"I've used up two packs of cigarettes asking lights around here since last night," Cassidy said. "I shoulda thought of you first, Joe. But you were so smooth you got by me."

Mr. Maddox stared at the match clip. His bland expression did not change—but dismay stirred inside as he guessed what Cassidy was driving at.

"Paper matches dyed green," Cassidy said, and the tight frosty smile was back on his solid face. "The only clip of green matches on the place! I've got six used match ends that came off the same clip, or I'm a liar! Found 'em out by that station wagon and the dead man last night!"

Oscar's mouth opened in soundless dismay.

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Cassidy, I seem to remember picking that clip up in the Paddock Room last night, after we were told about the dead man. Are you trying to hang me with a dead match that anyone could have been carrying around?"

"Nuts!" Cassidy said rudely. "You were outside when I drove up last night! How do I know what you were doing before I saw you?"

"Exactly," Mr. Maddox agreed blandly. "How do you know? Have to take my word for it, I'm afraid. It's a natural thing to pick up a match clip at a party. Have a cigar."

Cassidy's face reddened. His jaw set

stubbornly. "Turn around, Joe! I'm going to frisk you!"

Mr. Maddox put the cigar in his own mouth.

"Help yourself—and then get out. Oscar, watch that he doesn't plant anything on me."

Cassidy frisked quickly, taking everything from Mr. Maddox' pockets. He glanced through memorandum book, eyed two letters, was scowling as he opened the billfold.

"Just dough," Mr. Maddox stated. "Hand it back before your fingers get itchy."

"I've seen bookie dough before!" Cassidy said grimly. "Plenty of it's been offered me. All of it looks the same. Big dough that comes easy. The bookies don't look so big when I drag 'em before a judge."

"I wouldn't know," Mr. Maddox reminded. "You never had me before a judge."

Cassidy flipped through the thick wad of bills. He explored the pockets of the billfold. He unwrapped the folded bill he found in one pocket. Suspicion flashed on his face.

"A cigarette snipe wrapped in a hundred-dollar bill! Lipstick on the end! What's the idea, Joe?"

The sigh Mr. Maddox emitted was vast and gusty.

"Sentiment, Cassidy. A little affair of the heart. You wouldn't understand, not having a heart."

"You ain't chased a dame in the twenty years I've known you," Cassidy snapped. "If a big scow like you went soft now, the lady would faint with laughter. Come on, what's the idea of the lipstick and tobacco wrapped in a hundred?"

Mr. Maddox sighed again. "She touched it with her pretty lips."

"Pretty lips, hell!" Cassidy said in exasperation. "You know what I think?" Cassidy shook the cigarette end in front of Mr. Maddox. "I think this snipe has got something to do with that dead guy last night!"

The sweep of Mr. Maddox' big hand plucked the cigarette from between Cassidy's fingers, crushed it, dribbled shredded tobacco and paper to the floor.

"Now you don't have to think," Mr.



Maddox said blandly. "It might be fatal."

Cassidy blew up.

"A tub of lard like you don't push me, Joe! Another move like that and I'll slug you and slap a murder charge on you!"

"And make it stick?"

"I'll make it stick until after the race Saturday!" Cassidy threatened furiously. "I'll throw your name on the press wires for murder! Maybe I'll make it stick for good! Sit on that bed while I look around the room! If you really want trouble, give me an argument about it!"

For a moment Mr. Maddox lost his composure. Angry himself, he snapped: "Look around—and then scram or I'll call the Colonel and have this out! Just so much of a dumb copper and I've had enough!"

Mr. Maddox sat heavily on the bed. Oscar hunched against the pillows. Cassidy frisked the room with savage earnestness. He found nothing that would help him.

"Scram," Mr. Maddox said.

Cassidy glowered. "What'd you want to talk over about that killing last night?"

"Scram!"

CASSIDY walked out. Mr. Maddox fished the cane from under the bed, limped to the door, made sure Cassidy was not loitering outside.

"Put me in the headlines for spite, will he? The lug!"

Oscar sat up on the edge of the bed. "Why wrap a cigarette butt in a hundred-buck bill, Joe?"

Mr. Maddox scowled. Then a slow smile spread on his broad face.

"I found it by Phil Sedan last night. Might have given it to Cassidy if he hadn't got nasty."

Oscar groaned. "I thought it was something like that, Joe! I sweated blood for fear he'd look around this bed!"

"Why so touchy about the bed?"

Oscar reached back under the covers. He brought out some ten inches of thin, round metal embedded in a red wooden handle.

"I found this just before I got in bed. Did you put it in my drawer by mistake, Joe?"

Mr. Maddox plucked the thing from

Oscar. It was a screwdriver, ground narrow, almost razor-sharp on the end. Dried dark stains halfway up its length were undoubtedly blood.

"This was in the dresser?"

"In my drawer," Oscar said accusingly. "Colonel Boyett was behind me when I opened the drawer to get a handkerchief. That red handle was sticking out from under my pajamas. So I said: 'Somebody left a screwdriver here in the drawer.'"

"You what?"

"How'd I know what it was?" Oscar asked uneasily.

Mr. Maddox reached for his handkerchief and mopped his forehead. "What happened?" he inquired quietly.

"I had it in my hand before I guessed what it was—an' I almost fainted," Oscar confessed unhappily. "It made a clatter in the drawer when I dropped it."

"Gets worse!" Mr. Maddox muttered. "What did the Colonel do?"

"Said one of the servants'd get it later. He wanted me in bed quick until a doctor looked me over. Soon as he was outa the room, I got that screwdriver into bed out of sight. If I hadn't, Cassidy would have found it. . ."

They looked at each other. Mr. Maddox mopped his broad face again.

"Cassidy would have had us both cold," he said. "I never saw this thing before! It's a plant! Cassidy may have had a tip to search the room!"

Oscar hunched on the edge of the bed in bold green-striped pajamas. He was jumpy, apprehensive.

"Who did it, Joe? The guy who killed Phil Sedan?"

"Probably. Got any idea when it was put there? Last night? This morning?"

"This was the first time I looked since I unpacked yesterday afternoon."

"Then a servant, a house guest, or one of the visitors last night could have put it there. What were you doing on a horse?"

"Banton went riding an' I had to follow him. A horse ain't like it looks from the grandstand, Joe. Miss Rockwell saw my horse running away with an empty saddle. She rode over an' found me. I was knocked cold as a gooseberry."

Alertly Mr. Maddox asked: "You were

following Banton—and she was riding in the same direction? Did you see her with him?”

“Nope. She was alone.” Oscar swallowed. “What are we gonna do with that screwdriver?”

“Get it out of this room!” Mr. Maddox put the red-handled screwdriver inside his coat, changed his mind and put it in a hip pocket. “How do you feel?”

“Terrible! Like Cassidy’s breath is down my neck!”

“You’ll live,” Mr. Maddox decided with scant sympathy. “Get dressed. You’re leaving.”

Oscar brightened. “New Orleans?”

“Martinsburg! You’re to get a room on the third floor of the Planter’s Hotel. A man calling himself the Reverend Rathburton Howkin is in 306. Watch him. Keep out of his sight as much as possible. Howkin won’t know you. I’ll tell you about him while you’re dressing.”

“I want to get outa the state, Joe!”

“Cassidy’d like to see you lam. Get dressed before you hear Cassidy crooning murder!”

Oscar groaned and got off the bed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Threads of Murder

**T**HE sun hung warm in a blue sky. The day was one to stir the blood, lift the spirits, put a man on his toes. Mr. Maddox walked solidly out of the house toward the big white horse barns.

Not another guest at Santander Hill looked so distinguished, so prosperous and carefree. The loosely tailored suit was expensive and looked it. The big diamond on Mr. Maddox’ left hand winked and glittered richly in the sunlight. His broad, amiable face gave no hint that Joe Maddox had been struck by the same uneasiness and suspicion into which Cassidy had thrown other guests last night.

Joe Maddox had been hit a little harder, in fact. He knew Cassidy. The big Masterton man, talking to Colonel Boyett’s guest last night, was only a detective to them. Cassidy, at a mutuel racetrack, watching for bookies, was worse. But Cassidy, tracing cold-blooded murder, was quite another matter.

Joe Maddox would get no help, no mercy from Cassidy if one unshakable fact pointed to Joe Maddox as the killer of Phil Sedan. The sharpened screwdriver would have been more than enough. Cassidy would bring his own brother to trial if the facts warranted.

Over on the mile training track harrows and drags were grooming the surface to perfection for Saturday’s great race. Men were building rows of plank seats along the home stretch. In a nearby pasture frisky yearlings cantered. Across the broad fields guests could be seen in the saddle.

Mr. Maddox looked at those distant riding figures and wondered darkly which one, if any, had put the red-handled weapon in the dresser drawer.

The shadowy barn interior was quiet, save for low crooning sounds in a box-stall on the right. The sound was halfsong, half-chant, low, monotonous, strangely gentle, soothing. Occasionally a word was recognizable. Mostly it was as unintelligible as gibberish.

Mr. Maddox looked in the stall door. A mare inside was standing motionless. A kneeling, white-haired Negro was bandaging her right front leg, crooning as he worked.

“Hello, Meatball,” Mr. Maddox said. “Bless God! Hit’s Mistah Joe!”

The Negro stood up, white bandage draped around his neck, medicine bottle protruding from hip pocket. He was old, stooped, little and shriveled, with kinky white wool and a red-gummed, toothless grin that split wide his wrinkled black face.

He was Andrew Jackson Jefferson Davis. He was Meatball Davis, who had been an exercise boy when Tod Sloan booted them home and Bet-a-Million Gates, Pittsburgh Phil and other famous plungers were familiar sights in the betting rings of the big horse tracks.

“How’s Sandymore today, Meatball?”

“Sho’ now! Jest like his pappy, Sandy! Rarin’ t’ go!”

Mr. Maddox chalked that question off. Meatball would know better than Mack Rader, the trainer, or the Colonel himself.

“What do you think about that dead man last night?” Mr. Maddox asked.

Vagueness dropped like a curtain over Meatball's wrinkled face. His hand unobtrusively went inside the open neck of his shirt. A dirty tobacco sack always hung from the string around Meatball's scrawny neck. What the sack held only Meatball—and perhaps the ancient voodoo gods—knew.

"Don't think nothin'," Meatball said vaguely.

"Queer how the body happened to be in the station wagon," Mr. Maddox suggested. "Cross Gates Farm people stayed at home last night, playing bridge. They say Phil Sedan stepped out for a walk. By road it's over five miles here. No one knows whether he walked here, or a car picked him up."

"'At station wagon jes' sit there all evening. Hit don't pick up nobody."

"So I understand," Mr. Maddox said idly. "The law says an ice pick or something stabbed him. I wonder if it was an ice pick."

"If the law say so, hit must be so."

"A good sharp screwdriver would stab almost as well as an ice pick."

"Hit would for a fac'," Meatball agreed, and his wrinkled mask of a face told exactly nothing.

But Meatball was ill at ease. Mr. Maddox had known the old darky a long time, but he could not tell what was on Meatball's mind. Perhaps only superstition, fear over murder happening close at hand last night.

"Be worth a lot to me to know the truth," Mr. Maddox said in the same idle manner. "Is Miss Rockwell around the barns?"

Meatball brightened. "Missy come th'ough. Spec' you find her in the no'th barn."

"So you call her Missy?"

"Yas, suh!"

"Like her a lot then, don't you?"

"Yas, suh!"

"She doesn't know much about horses."

"Das a fac'," Meatball agreed, red-gummed smile splitting his black face. "But she got a mighty fine heart what understandin's. She got breedin'."

Which was about tops in praise for Meatball. He had lived a long time, seen a lot of folks. He'd lived with the great-hearted thoroughbreds, born to give

their best, to keep giving until lungs, hearts or legs failed the undying spirit bred in them.

MR. MADDOX turned Meatball's praise over in his mind as he went in search of the girl. It only complicated mystery, made harder what he was about to do.

The three big horse barns at Santander Hill were well spaced out in the shape of a U, minimizing fire hazard. The U opened to the south and the sun. The barns broke the cold winds. Space inside the U made a perfect promenade for cooling-out horses after breezing on the track.

Carole Rockwell was in the north barn at Sandymore Red's box stall. The horse was nuzzling out against her shoulder, and she was petting him. Sandymore saw Mr. Maddox coming and lifted his head, pricking ears. Carole turned quickly.

She was slender and young in jodhpurs and brushed-wool sweater, hair looking wind-tossed and tumbled. If her silent petting of Sandymore Red was eloquent, so was her reaction to the big figure of Joe Maddox coming to her.

The reach of her hand to Sandymore Red's neck was instinctive. It gave her the look of being cornered, touching the horse for companionship.

"Bob Boyett would like to see you this way with Sandymore," Mr. Maddox said, smiling faintly.

"Would he?" Carole said.

"I think so. Bob's a fine boy."

"Yes," Carole said, watching him.

"Too fine to know you dropped a cigarette beside that station wagon and Phil Sedan last night," Mr. Maddox said thoughtfully.

Her hand took convulsive grip in Sandymore Red's mane. Startled dismay widened, darkened her eyes. The horse sensed something wrong. His head lifted, ears pricked harder.

"Aren't you talking rather silly?" Carole asked.

Her steady voice brought a flick of admiration in Mr. Maddox' look. But he was hard now, as Joe Maddox could be hard.

"Murder's never silly, young lady," Mr. Maddox reminded curtly. He was brusquely honest with her. "The Colo-

nel's been my friend for years. Bob was in short pants when I first knew him. I've thought a lot of him ever since. . ."

Her eyes stayed large and dark. She still gripped Sandymore Red's neck, and she listened without argument.

Mr. Maddox looked her over. He liked what he saw outwardly, sensed inwardly. The liking stayed buried in the hard somberness.

"D'you think I want either of them hurt?" he demanded. "What are you hiding from them? What kind of a mess have you gotten into that makes you say, 'I can't, I can't,' as you did last night in the study?"

That got to her, bringing the chalky pallor back on her face, the misery and fear to her dark, wide eyes. She swallowed hard.

Mr. Maddox could have sworn that Sandymore Red had understanding. The horse nuzzled her shoulder. She patted him, and she swallowed again, and did not deny what she had said last night in Colonel Boyett's study.

"Are you always so suspicious of remarks strangers make to themselves?" Carole asked. Her voice, surprisingly, was quiet and controlled.

Mr. Maddox sighed inwardly. He had his answer. Bob Boyett and the Colonel were not to be a bond between them. She made Joe Maddox a stranger, at arm's length.

"You were facing the study window," Mr. Maddox recalled. "The back of your hand was over your eyes, as if you'd seen something. The study window looks toward the barns, and the station wagon that was parked out there last night. What could you have seen outside the window? Did you see a man who was going to die—after you slipped outside a few minutes later?"

"You wouldn't be prying now and asking questions, if you were sure I'd done anything last night," Carole said, watching him.

"So you were outside last night?"

Carole bit her lip. "I didn't say so! You said so!"

"Was I wrong? You didn't admit being out when the guests were questioned last night."

Carole eyed him in defiant silence.

"The deputy sheriff and others who came last night might believe any story you told," Mr. Maddox said. "You're engaged to Bob Boyett. You're the future lady of Santander Hill. The Colonel will protect you. All that means a lot around here."

"I'm sure it does," Carole said.

She was not triumphant or defiant. She merely admitted a truth Joe Maddox had stated. The chalky pallor, all the dark misery in her eyes were still there.

Mr. Maddox thought of Meatball's words. "She got breedin'." She had, indeed. She was as game as the finely trained, sleek thoroughbred whose smooth neck was quiet, trustful under her small hand.

"Listen to me, kid. Think it over hard," Mr. Maddox said evenly. "I'll help you for the sake of Bob and the Colonel. If you won't play ball, blame yourself for what happens. Murder is murder."

"Could it be anything else?" Carole asked colorlessly.

"That Masterton man, Cassidy, doesn't care a thin dime about Bob or the Colonel. Doesn't matter to him whether you're mistress of Santander Hill or in court on a murder charge," Mr. Maddox said, and his warning grated with emphasis. "Once Cassidy knows you were outside last night, he'll be after you, hard!"

"You'll tell him I was outside last night—and try to prove it?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"You seem to be the sort of meddler who would," Carole said, lifting her chin. "Shall I go in to the Colonel with you now and get it over with?"

**M**R. MADDOX eyed her for a moment. His vast middle heaved in a gusty chuckle. He couldn't help it.

She didn't know about Joe Maddox and Cassidy, about the clip matches, the screwdriver. He'd come here with all the advantage. She'd faced him down, hadn't admitted anything, thrown his advantage back in his teeth. Her bluff had a touch of the gallant, the magnificent. For Mr. Maddox was convinced it was bluff.

But she had him stymied. He couldn't be the one to bring the hurt and trouble home to the Colonel. He couldn't use

her to divert Cassidy from Joe Maddox. Another man might, Joe Maddox couldn't.

Carole's quick frown was puzzled. "What's so funny about it?" she asked stiffly.

Charley Banton walked into the barn before Mr. Maddox could answer. Banton saw them together, hesitated and came to them.

"Been looking for you," he said casually to Carole. "How's Sandymore?"

"He's fine."

"Great!" Banton smiled, although he looked tired and under strain. "Maddox, I understand you're taking bets on the race. Want a thousand on Sandymore?"

"You're on."

"What odds?"

"Even money."

Banton appeared satisfied. Mr. Maddox noted the bet in his memo book. Broad face smiling, he said: "Last night I didn't catch where you were from."

"Hollywood," Banton said. "I'm with Acme Films. Director. I've heard of you from a friend of mine out there. Jack Suter, the agent."

"He clipped me several thousand the last time I was on the Coast," Mr. Maddox recalled. "Miss Rockwell, I've enjoyed the talk. I hope everything turns out all right."

Smiling, Mr. Maddox left her with the uncertainty of what he might or might not do. Truth was, he himself was little better off. Banton now was a further puzzle.

Hollywood directors did not as a rule indulge in murder or murder contacts. The Hollywood Goldfish Bowl made them wary of the slightest touch of scandal. But Banton had been outdoors last night about the time Phil Sedan was killed. He'd not admitted the fact to Cassidy. This meeting in the barn with Carole Rockwell was the first indication that the two of them were more than casual acquaintances. They might have planned this meeting away from prying eyes, neither of them suspecting Joe Maddox would turn up. The truth was anyone's guess at the moment.

Mack Rader, the trainer, stood in the open sunny sweep between the barns. Mr. Maddox went toward him, barely

using the ebony cane. His ankle felt good today.

"There's talk in the East that Cold Creek didn't stand the shipping so well and Sandymore is a stand-out to win. Heard anything about it?" Mr. Maddox asked.

Like so many trainers, Mack Rader had come up the hard way, stable boy, successful jockey, now successful trainer. His thin face bore the sharp hard marks of weight-making and holding his own through the tough hard jockey years.

Mack was still tough, he was hard; but he was a clean liver, a clean trainer in a hard, competitive game. Mack always sent a Santander Hill horse in to win. Now Mack snorted.

"The old malarkey, Joe! Always some wise guys laying out the hot air to prove how smooth they are!"

"How do you make the odds on this race?"

Mack grinned.

"Even money, if I have to be honest about it. With my dough riding on Sandymore, of course. What odds are you laying?"

"Even," Mr. Maddox said. "Unless I hear different." He stood big, thoughtful for a moment. "Might be a good idea to keep an extra eye on Sandymore until the race is over."

"Meaning?"

Mr. Maddox shrugged. "Just a hunch."

"After that business last night, I'm having everything watched around here," Mack said. "What do you make of it anyway?"

"I'd like to know."

"So would I," Mack muttered. "It looks bad, happening outside the house and near the barns. Joe Morris, the deputy, and Walter Phalen, the prosecutor, did some tough talking out here last night. They said it couldn't have been anyone from the Big House, so what did the barn crew know about it!"

"No ideas at all?"

"Why should any of my men go after a guest whom they'd never seen? It won't make sense."

"Doesn't seem to," Mr. Maddox admitted, and as he walked back toward the house, limping only slightly, he had a baffled foggy feeling.

SANTANDER HILL, you might say, had become the center of mystery striking in from all angles like threads of a web. Murder at the center, over there in the driveway where Phil Sedan had sat dead on the station wagon seat.

And the threads went out . . . to Banton, the Hollywood director . . . to Carole Rockwell, future mistress of Santander Hill . . . to Joey Lutz, the Broadway matchmaker, and those out over the country who were whispering that Cold Creek hadn't a chance to win Saturday.

The threads went out to Holy Joe Daley, in Martinsburg . . . to the horse, Cold Creek, at a nearby farm . . . to the screwdriver left in Oscar's drawer . . . to Colonel Boyett's guests, uncertain, uneasy with the mystery hanging over them.

Cassidy prowled the web like a grizzled, angry spider, testing strands to find one that led to guilt. And Joe Maddox was blundering around in the web, not knowing what moment he'd be enmeshed and pounced on by Cassidy.

The sun was bright in the blue midday sky. Mr. Maddox was bleak, cloudy inside as he entered the house and dispatched a telegram to Louis Gottsall, incurable horse fan and overworked third vice-president of Acme Films.

Luncheon guests still had suppressed curiosity about the murder. Carole Rockwell was quiet and composed. Her look was level across the table at Mr. Maddox. She made no attempt to re-open the subject. Cassidy was not around.

After lunch Mr. Maddox made a decision. His ankle seemed strong enough for a saddle stirrup. He had a horse saddled and rode over to Cross Gates Farm, owned by John Dunaway, whose Detroit business was motor equipment, and hobby thoroughbred breeding on the four hundred-odd acres of Cross Gates.

Colonel Boyett had said that John Dunaway, busy with war orders in his plant, would not be in Kentucky for the race Saturday. Mr. Maddox rode the back paths, came past the single large horse barn at Cross Gates. He was surprised to find Dunaway in front of the barn giving orders to three men unloading baled hay from a truck.

Dunaway, stocky built and always energetic, had on khaki riding pants and

scuffed leather windbreaker. He was smoking a short-stemmed pipe. His memory bridged the gap of a year and a half since he and Joe Maddox had met at Santander Hill.

Mr. Maddox' broad face was smiling as he dismounted and they shook hands.

"I understood you wouldn't be here this week," he said to Dunaway.

"Shouldn't be here," Dunaway replied energetically. "Got here this morning—and the devil of a mess I found. One of our guests murdered last night and everyone upset over it."

"Quite a mystery, including the fact that it was Phil Sedan," Mr. Maddox said. "What's the fellow been doing the last two years? He seemed to drop from sight."

"Devil only knows," Dunaway said vigorously. "He telephoned from Chicago and asked Mrs. Dunaway if she could put him up through Saturday. We knew his father better than we ever knew him, but Mrs. Dunaway told him to come along. He was properly grateful when he arrived. Said he was doing fine, seemed to have no complaint about the past, and let it go at that. Our people stayed in for bridge last night. Sedan decided to take a walk. The next Cross Gates heard of him was a telephone call from Boyett's place saying he was over there, dead. We've been in touch with his former lawyers. They haven't an idea what he's been doing. His body's in town—and no one seems to know what to do with it. Devil of a thing to have happen."

"I suppose his luggage has been well searched."

"Sheriff's man came by last night and looked through the one bag Sedan brought. Not a thing inside to show where he lives. It's mighty mysterious, Maddox. If he wanted to go over to Santander Hill, why didn't he borrow a car and drive over, instead of walking that distance? Or he could have taken another horseback ride."

"Another ride?"

Dunaway nodded. "He got here in time for lunch and took a ride in the afternoon, Mrs. Dunaway tells me."

"Where'd he go?"

Dunaway shrugged. "Back over the farm, Mrs. Dunaway said."

"Who went with him?"

"He rode alone." Dunaway's look sharpened. "Think the ride might have had something to do with his death?"

"Rather hard to see how it could have," Mr. Maddox decided. Dunaway's nod agreed with him, and Mr. Maddox changed the subject. "A passing car might have given him a lift to Santander Hill last night."

"Whalen, the prosecutor, suggested it last night when he was here, I understand," Dunaway said. "He meant to look into that angle. Haven't heard what luck he's had. By the way, if you're taking any bets on the race, there's some money among our guests that needs to be placed. We're all backing the Boyett horse, of course. Have to stay with our own on this."

"I'll take it while I'm here," Mr. Maddox decided.

He had a little over three thousand dollars more on Santander Red to win when he rode away, a vast solid figure on the sizable quarter-bred horse that had been provided for him.

In a way he was no better off than when he had come. Mystery was steadily thickening over the last two years in Phil Sedan's life. Mr. Maddox had the gnawing irritable feeling that the two blank years might explain much.

Phil Sedan's horseback ride yesterday afternoon might also be worth investigating. It had not been mentioned until now.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Mr. Maddox Investigates

**M**ACK RADER was in the open giving old Meatball some orders when Mr. Maddox returned to Santander Hill barns. The little trainer stepped over and stared solemnly at the horses as Mr. Maddox let his huge figure gingerly down from the saddle.

"He doesn't seem to have a sprung back," Mack decided. He shook his head. "I was afraid, though."

Meatball's red, toothless gums opened wide and let out a cackle of mirth.

"I bet 'at horse know he been carrying a powerful load!" Meatball laughed.

Mr. Maddox chuckled with them as he gave the reins to Meatball and asked: "Did anyone notice a rider over this way yesterday afternoon who could have been Phil Sedan?"

"Haven't heard anyone mention it," Mack Rader said, and he turned as one of the stable hands called to him from the north barn.

"Miss Rockwell went riding yesterday afternoon, didn't she?" Mr. Maddox guessed, and took suspicion away from the question by adding, "She might have noticed any stranger out riding."

"Missy don' go ridin' yesterday," Meatball said.

Mack Rader was leaving them, but he heard Meatball's remark and turned. "What's the matter with your memory, Meatball? You saddled a horse for her about the middle of the afternoon, yesterday. Miss Rockwell rode for an hour or more."

Meatball scratched his kinky white wool. "Dat's a fac', ain't hit?" he admitted in surprise. "Ol' Meatball gittin' too ole."

"You aren't too old to forget the payday crap game," Mack Rader said good-naturedly. "Joe, don't ever touch the dice with him. Meatball's got a voodoo bag on his neck that gives dice orders."

Smiling, the trainer walked away. Mr. Maddox stared silently, quizzically at the white-haired, wrinkled little Negro.

"Why lie about her ride, Meatball?" he asked softly.

"Who, me, Mist' Joe?" Meatball asked in vague surprise. "No suh! Jes' ole Meatball gittin' old."

"Meatball!"

"Yas, suh, Mist' Joe!"

"You wouldn't want to have a cigar and talk things over?" Mr. Maddox asked gently.

Meatball's claw-like hand slipped inside the open neck of his shirt. He clutched the dirty tobacco sack hanging there.

"Ain't much on talkin', Mist' Joe," Meatball mumbled vacantly. "Gittin' too old to talk. Jes' old Nigger Meatball dat white folks let stay around. 'Scuse me, suh, I gits de saddle off."

Mr. Maddox let him go and headed for the house. Meatball knew something. Phil Sedan had gone riding yesterday

afternoon. Carole Rockwell had gone riding. Ten to one they'd met. But Meatball wasn't going to talk.

Given time, it might all come out. This was Thursday afternoon, fast passing. Tomorrow was the day before the race. . . Joe Maddox might be in Martinsburg jail by then.

A call from the telegraph office in Martinsburg was waiting when Mr. Maddox entered the house. A reply from Louis Gottsall was read to him over the telephone.

"Charley's checks never bounce if that's your worry. Fine fellow. Wire if you want my five G's on the Boyett horse to win. More around studio if you can handle."

Mr. Maddox hung up, waited for the wire to clear, put in a call straight through to Gottsall at Acme Films.

Luck gave him a quick connection. Gottsall was breezy, sarcastic.

"So you get worried about Banton when you hear he's an Acme Film man and check on him? Now maybe you're worried about my five G's, the way you telephone me quick!"

"Your G's are on the book," Mr. Maddox chuckled. "I'm curious as to why you're not backing the California horse."

"Do I have to like him?"

"Have you heard the rumor that Cold Creek didn't ship well?"

"So you know it there on the spot?" Gottsall said with satisfaction. "Take from me another five G's on Sandymore Red."

"You're on him for ten thousand," Mr. Maddox said promptly. "And that talk about Cold Creek is hot air. He shipped well. Still want to go against him for ten grand?"

"Now you'll switch me, huh?" Gottsall charged. "I'll stay with the red one. There's thirty-fourty thousand more around the studio on him if you're game to handle it."

Louis Gottsall could not see the uncertain scowl Mr. Maddox gave the telephone. He had no way of knowing the money was so lopsided on Sandymore Red that any bookie would worry. His good-natured jeer reached across two thousand miles of trans-continental telephone wire.

"You worried about the Boyett horse having an edge, Maddox? I thought you were the bookie who takes any amount of money, any time!"

Mr. Maddox looked down at the big diamond ring on his left hand. The ring was his luck, his symbol of prosperity. It was good for a fair bankroll when the changing fortunes of a racetrack book cleaned him.

"I'm the bookie," Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Any or all of fifty grand on either horse. Wire me how much."

"I'll guarantee you fifty thousand more on Sandymore Red," Gottsall promised, and seemed to feel good about it. He was chortling as he hung up.

Mr. Maddox scowled at the silent telephone. "Am I a sucker?" he asked under his breath.

THE telephone could not answer. The voice that did answer was Cassidy's voice, barbed.

"And *what* a sucker!"

"Do you always have to be underfoot, snooping?" Mr. Maddox commented, turning.

Cassidy had stepped into the front hall from the Paddock Room. He looked at the telephone and at Mr. Maddox.

"I should see the day when you take horse bets in the open under my nose!" Cassidy said sourly. "If it was my house, I'd have you tossed down the back steps!"

Bland enjoyment lighted Mr. Maddox' broad face. "It's for sweet charity," he said. "Like it, you dope. That race Saturday is the only reason a dumb flatfoot like you would be allowed inside the back door. Got a match?"

Cassidy handed over a clip of matches. Mr. Maddox lifted his eyebrows. "No green matches?"

Cassidy reddened. "Where's your stooge?"

"Oscar went on an errand."

"Where?"

Mr. Maddox returned the matches and drew appreciatively on the thick black cigar he had lighted.

"I wouldn't want it to get out," he admitted. "The Colonel might not like it. Reflection on his hospitality, you might say."

"Rats!" said Cassidy impatiently.



"Where'd he go? Come on, come clean."

Mr. Maddox' broad face beamed through a lazy smoke wreath. His voice dropped to a confidential note.

"Just between us," he confided, "Oscar went looking for some green clip matches. I like 'em."

Cassidy looked like a grizzled bull stung to anger. "Joe, you'll sweat before this business is over!"

Cassidy turned on his heel. Mr. Maddox' chuckle followed him out the front door. Cassidy might have laughed himself if he'd known how Joe Maddox really felt.

The book was worrying Mr. Maddox. A race book had to be in balance. Total bets on horses other than the winner should be enough to pay all winning bets.

If all money was on one horse, and that horse lost, the book won heavily. If the horse won, the book lost heavily. Sooner or later a book out of balance was caught and cleaned. Unscrupulous bookmakers jumped town, did not pay off. Joe Maddox always paid.

The money he'd taken so far was all on Sandymore Red. Even the California money. Gottsall had guaranteed fifty thousand more on Sandymore. Not a dollar so far on Cold Creek.

If Sandymore Red lost, the money would be profit for the Relief fund. If Sandymore won, Joe Maddox would have to pay off, dollar for dollar, out of his own pocket. The whisper on Cold Creek looked bad. Somebody knew something, was trying something.

The small bets out over the country were like trickles of water, growing, gathering volume. The fifty-cent bets, the dollar bets, the five-dollar bets totaled into thousands and hundreds of thousands as the small bookies laid-off with the larger bookies, and they in turn laid-off with the big operators like Sam Stone, in Jersey City.

Mr. Maddox could visualize the rising flood of cash money on Sandymore Red, to win. He held far more than his share of it. Too much for any peace of mind he had left after Phil Sedan's death.

**A** LITTLE later in the afternoon Colonel Boyett made it worse. Mr. Maddox was briefly relaxing in one of the deep

leather chairs in a corner of the Paddock Room, sipping a long whiskey-and-soda, thinking hard, when the Colonel found him.

"Been doing some business for you, m'boy!" the Colonel stated in his near roar. "Took some bets for you from my friends!"

Mr. Maddox winced. "Have much luck?" he asked, without enthusiasm.

"I make a fine bookmaker's runner! Told 'em your profits were going to the Relief fund and they'd better put their money with you!"

"How much on Cold Creek?"

"Twenty-four thousand two hundred on Sandymore, m'boy. Not a dollar on Cold Creek. Like to see any of m' friends fail to back Sandymore!"

The Colonel clapped Mr. Maddox on the shoulder. "We'll make your visit a big success! Here's the names and amounts. I'm having word passed that all bets are to be placed with you!"

Mr. Maddox drained the glass and stood up. "I can use some Cold Creek money, too, Colonel."

"Bound to be a little of it around. My friends listen to me, though, and bet on Sandymore. Have a lot more for you tomorrow. By the way, Cassidy asked me where Oscar is. Seems to want him rather badly."

"No doubt," Mr. Maddox agreed bleakly.

When the Colonel left him, Mr. Maddox went to the whiskey decanter on a nearby table and put three fingers straight on top of the whiskey and soda. Then he went to the telephone and called Sam Stone, in Jersey City, and got him.

"Sam, I've got some lay-off money on Sandymore Red."

Sam Stone was hardly polite. "Don't make me laugh, Joe! I'll hear that song in my sleep tonight!"

"No dice?"

"No dice!" Sam said flatly.

"Who'll take it?"

"Nobody, Joe. All the books are out of line. They sliced the odds to pieces on Sandymore Red today—an' it only made the talent certain the Boyett horse is a stand-out to win."

"I've promised even money around here."

"Stop it!"

"Can't. Even odds are right."

"I'm glad I ain't you—and I'm sorry I'm me on this," Sam Stone said bluntly. "Jig Jones will be there this evening. Help him find out what's behind all this! I'll lay you a hundred to one the books are due to be skinned!"

Mr. Maddox jammed an unlighted cigar into his mouth.

"I'm sure of it!" he growled. "I just had an idea that may help the bookmakers."

"What is it?"

"Look in the morning papers."

The idea was simple. Colonel Boyett approved when he understood. In less than half an hour. Mr. Maddox was able to telephone Barney Lee, on the Sports Desk of the *New York Call*.

"Joe Maddox again, Barney."

"Think of the devil and he rings! Got the winner of that race for me, Joe?"

"The talk that Cold Creek didn't ship well is all over the country."

"Must be true then."

"Take down this statement, and then telephone Colonel Boyett and Carlson Nivens and verify it," Mr. Maddox said dryly. He read into the telephone: "Colonel Josh Boyett and Mr. Carlson Nivens wish to make a joint statement that the horses Cold Creek and Sandymore Red have within the past twenty-four hours worked to their peak condition of the year."

"This statement is made to counteract rumors about either horse. Colonel Boyett and Mr. Nivens wish to emphasize again that the match race Saturday is purely a sporting match between themselves and their horses. In the same spirit, one hundred thousand dollars will be wagered by each gentleman. The winner will donate half his own bet plus his winning bet to Army-Navy Relief. Mr. Nivens and Colonel Boyett wish to emphasize that both horses will go to the post in perfect condition, or the race will be canceled by mutual agreement."

"Wow!"

"Can you print that, Barney?"

"Can I?" Barney almost yelled. "Watch me, after I verify it! No reflection on you, Joe, because I'll have to verify it!"

"Can you get it on all the Press wires? It's an open statement."

"It'll hit the wires, although I hate to share it. Here's a trade for it, Joe. You asked me about Phil Sedan in the past two years. One of our men says he saw Phil Sedan several months ago on Market Street, in Frisco. At least he was sure of it, in spite of the fact that the man had changed a lot."

"Our man called him Phil Sedan, and got a cold eye back. The fellow said his name was Hopwood, and he walked away. Our man forgot about it until he heard Sedan was killed. Now he's sure he was right. Strictly quiet to you, Joe, we're checking in Frisco for a trace of the man who called himself Hopwood."

"Let me know what you find out, Barney."

"All right. Confidentially, though."

Mr. Maddox hung up. His feelings were mixed. Another knot of mystery had appeared. Why should Phil Sedan have used another name? San Francisco was pointedly close to Hollywood and Charley Banton. . .

The telephone rang. Mr. Maddox jumped, so far had his thoughts strayed as he stood there. He'd had again the overwhelming feeling he was floundering in a web with Cassidy waiting to pounce.

He lifted the receiver. Oscar's keyed-up voice said: "Want to speak to Mr. Maddox!"

"I told you to lay low and keep your eyes open! What is it?" Mr. Maddox said shortly.

"You want some news or don't you?"

"If it's no better than other news I get—no!" Mr. Maddox retorted. "Are you in any trouble?"

"I should hang up!" Oscar said peevishly. "Do you want to hear about Miss Rockwell and the Reverend Howkin?"

MR. MADDUX grunted as if he'd been punched. Then under his breath into the telephone he was explosive.

"She met Holy Joe Daley? Are you sure?"

"I got eyes, ain't I?"

"Where? When? What'd they do? . . . She was here at the barns this afternoon! I saw her myself."

"Maybe it's her ghost," said Oscar

dourly. "Anyway, something that looked like her went into the guy's hotel room. I'm across the hall, next door down, an' Holy Joe is in his room, when she knocked. By the time I got the door open, all I saw was a skirt entering his room. But I got a good gander at her through the door crack when she came out about ten minutes later. She went down in the elevator. Daley waited a couple of minutes and walked down the stairs in a hurry. I followed him. He met her again on the other side of the Square. They went to a guy waitin' in a parked automobile. They got in and all three drove off."

"So!" Mr. Maddox growled. "D'you know who the other man was?"

"It was gettin' dark, Joe. I got a flash at the license plate and copied the number down right, I think. I was standin' by the court house. I walked in and found a guy staying late in his office who looked up the license number. The car belongs to a man named G. T. Miller. His address is Box 89, R. F. D. 3. That mail route goes out on the Cedar Grove road."

"Who's Miller?"

"The guy in the court house said Miller owned some race horses," Oscar volunteered.

That sparked memory.

"Doc Miller!" Mr. Maddox all but exploded. "He's got a small place somewhere in this part of the state! Can't be anyone else but that slippery old thief of a halterman! Might know he'd be hooked up with a crook like Holy Daley!"

"Where does the dame fit in with them two, Joe?" Oscar asked uneasily.

"I'll know before long," Mr. Maddox promised grimly. "Go back to the hotel and keep watching."

"Joe! In New Orleans—"

Mr. Maddox cut the connection on Oscar's plea. He looked at his watch. Night had fallen outside. In the Paddock Room a radio was playing. Life stirred nigher in the big house as guests gathered inside for the evening. Colonel Boyett's roaring voice came from the dining-room. Mr. Maddox found the Colonel giving directions to Judge Turkey, his dignified Negro butler.

The Colonel had named the butler years before. One could guess why. Judge

Turkey had all the dignity of a long-legged, stately head-gobbler. He was second only to the Colonel himself in running the Big House at Santander Hill.

Judge Turkey, flanked by two white-coated helpers, was scanning the china, the crystal, the old sterling on the long dinner table as Mr. Maddox spoke blandly to the Colonel.

"Have to miss dinner, I'm afraid, Colonel, if there's a chance of borrowing a car."

"Hell's fire, m'boy! We're having one of my prize peanut-fattened, hickory-smoked hams! Cook's been lacing it with honey all afternoon in the oven! Man with your appetite can't miss this dinner!"

Regret came in a near-groan from Mr. Maddox' vast mid-section. His mouth watered for a great slice of that honey-laced ham. But he thought of Phil Sedan, the screwdriver, Cassidy, Holy Joe Daley, and he insisted: "Have to go if you can manage the car."

"Got the car if it's that serious," the Colonel said sympathetically. "Let's see . . . Carole and her friend Banton took the coupe to town. The sedan's about out of gas tickets. Mind using the station wagon?"

"Capital! I didn't know Miss Rockwell and Banton were close friends."

"Guess there was no reason to mention it," the Colonel said. "Matter of fact it was Banton who introduced Bob to Carole. She had a small part in a movie Banton was directing. She was slated for bigger parts, Banton tells me. But she decided she'd rather have Bob than a Hollywood career. Sensible little filly, ain't she? You might say that Banton's her guest."

"I see," Mr. Maddox said, and he turned and caught Judge Turkey listening with a queer, fixed intensity.

Judge Turkey waved at his helpers. "Git along to the kitchen, you two!" He followed them out of the room, tall and stiff with importance.

Mr. Maddox decided to remember Judge Turkey's intent interest—then he put the black butler out of mind and hurried to his room.

Kit bag yielded a small, powerful flashlight and a pocket-sized automatic. Mr.

Maddox hesitated, put the gun back. He was a big, grimly intent man, using the heavy ebony cane only slightly as he left the house.

## CHAPTER SIX

### No Ration on Trouble

**M**R. MADDUX knew the country around fairly well from previous visits. Secondary roads put him cross-country some miles to the Cedar Grove road.

Bright headlights thrust light ahead of the speeding station wagon. The dark night rushed in behind, and the station wagon seat was shadowy and curiously lonely. It was almost possible to see Phil Sedan still sitting there, silently staring into space.

Nerves were not a weakness of Joe Maddox. But tonight he was keyed-up. The murder, the mystery, the threat, had suddenly focused, unpleasant, ominous.

The last thing Joe Maddox had expected was a hook-up between Carole Rockwell and Holy Joe Daley. Bob Boyett's girl, the little filly who'd won the Colonel's heart—hooked up with a shabby crook like Daley!

Mr. Maddox snorted. He was coldly furious. He'd been soft about her. He'd hesitated, given her the breaks, let her get by with murder. Actually she seemed to be getting by with murder.

The flashlight beam picked out 43 on a metal mailbox beside the road. Farther along another box was numbered 47. Mr. Maddox drove on.

This Cedar Grove road was black-top, rather narrow and winding through sharply rolling, well-wooded countryside. Land over this way was poorer than around Santander Hill. The wealthy thoroughbred breeders had not located through here.

It was good enough for Doc Miller. The man was scrawny and stoop-shouldered, graying goatee giving him a foxy look. Winter and summer he wore old-fashioned Kentucky hardboots. His cheek always bulged with a huge chew of tobacco.

Miller was a patch-pant halterman, with a string of broken-down platers.

The medicines Doc had dealt in had earned him the name. He'd been an expert with the hypodermic, a mixer of strange drugs, nostrums, dopes. He was an expert at "Slow Pills" and "Fast Pills."

Lazy undercurrents of gossip in the racing world had credited Doc Miller with racing a traveling drugstore. His horses had gone in hopped and loaded, fast or slow, as Doc compounded.

Many an old wreck of a plater, doped to the ears, woke up on an unexpected afternoon and blazed under the wire a fancy longshot when Doc's expert mixtures exploded on schedule somewhere near the stretch turn. Many a poolroom operator and bookmaker screamed with anguish when Doc Miller's hidden bets had to be paid off.

The saliva tests had dealt Doc and his kind a mortal blow. These days the tested saliva of the winning horse told whether dope had been used. The drugstore stables had fallen on evil days. Their nerved and fired and patched-up old platers had stopped winning races.

But Doc Miller had all his old skill. He was still a thief at heart. Hook him up with a greasy crook like Holy Joe Daley and you had a bad combination. Mix in a girl like Carole Rockwell and all she stood for at Santander Hill, throw in Phil Sedan's murder, and you had a heartbreaking puzzle.

Add to all that the great match race only a few hours away, the whispering campaign about Cold Creek, and you had a situation that angrily lifted the hackles of an old track veteran like Joe Maddox.

A fool could guess now how things were shaping up. The truth was going to crush the Colonel—and the Colonel would be the first to demand the truth if he suspected.

**B**OX 89, on top of a rotting post canted out of line, was rusted, weathered. A rutted lane went out of sight behind a small hill covered with tangled scrub. The place fitted Doc Miller and his shabby racing stable.

Mr. Maddox, still coldly furious, wrenched the wheel and drove fast into the property.

A belt of trees lay beyond the scrub-

covered hill. The lane grew no better. Bumping, swearing at one extra-violent lurch, Mr. Maddox drove farther from the road than he'd expected. He was on lower ground between rolling ridges when the lane turned sharply and he was at Doc Miller's house and stables.

Not much of a house, for all its size and two-story height. Unpainted boards were weathered dark. The horse barn was a line of stalls, racetrack style. The weedy yard was littered, house was dark, barn seemed empty of horses. Even the shabby horse van, up on wooden blocks, tires and wheels removed, had a look of neglect.

Mr. Maddox switched off motor and headlights and got out, scowling. He'd expected to find the lot of them here. Where else could they have driven to from Martinsburg in Doc Miller's car?

Sagging house steps creaked under his weight. Mr. Maddox roughly tried the front door. It was unlocked. In a better temper he would have waited outside in the fast chilling night. Now he shoved the door open and stalked inside, pressing the flashlight button.

The door slammed shut behind him. A brusque voice ordered: "Stand still or you'll get hurt!"

The man had stood out of sight behind the opening door and had shoved it closed. His shadowy figure was there as Mr. Maddox cut the light off and lashed back with the heavy ebony cane.

He hit the man, brought an exclamation of pain—but fast as he moved, the man jumped faster, lunging inside the cane, driving a shoulder hard against him.

Mr. Maddox staggered. His full heavy weight came down on the twisted, injured ankle. The twisting ankle brought a gasp of pure agony from him. He tried to get balance on the white fire into which the ankle had turned.

A stunning blow on the side of the head sent him staggering hard on the ankle again, and dazed him. Mr. Maddox dropped the useless cane. The flashlight snapped on, pointing upward, as he tried to grapple.

The light showed a gun barrel rising to strike him again. It gave him a flash of a shadowy face. There was all of a long second for the bitter truth to drive home.

Then the hard steel of the gun barrel struck him again. The ankle pain faded out. The shadowy, hard-lipped face vanished.

Mr. Maddox' last blotted thought was savage regret that he'd under-estimated Charley Banton. He hadn't expected Banton, of Acme Films, to be lurking here with a gun. . .

**B**OOT heels clumped hard back and forth. Old floor boards creaked. Pain pulsed in Mr. Maddox' bad ankle and in his head. He looked up at a smoky lamp on a table. His eyes followed a grotesquely changing shadow from the moving man.

For a moment he was foggy as to why he should be stretched flat on a hard floor. Those clumping boots made him think of the crooked old halterman, Doc Miller. Then Mr. Maddox remembered, and he muttered an angry oath as he struggled up.

A boot shoved him back on the floor.

"You want the other side of your head bashed with a boot heel? Keep flat there, Maddox!"

From the floor Doc Miller looked tall in the heavy leather boots. Graying pointed chin whiskers made his face look longer, gave him a sly, goaty, threatening look.

"Where's Banton?" Mr. Maddox asked.

"Who?"

"That crooked movie director!"

Doc Miller pulled at his goatee. His jaws moved on a wad of chewing tobacco. "So you had to come messin' around, Maddox? Might have knowed you'd make trouble!"

"Trouble is right!" Mr. Maddox said. Anger heaved him to a sitting position again, head throbbing and dizzy. "You won't get by on this one, Doc! Just try it!"

Doc Miller stepped nimbly behind Mr. Maddox. Giddy, watchful, Mr. Maddox turned to ward off another kick.

Instead of a boot in his ribs he felt a pricking sensation in the back of his shoulder. His head was not working too well. It took him a moment to realize what was happening.

"That'd get a horse! Guess it'll get

you!" Doc Miller said behind him with sly satisfaction.

Mr. Maddox looked far around and saw the dirty hypodermic needle coming out of his shoulder. His eruption of rage was worthy of Joe Maddox at his best. Big hands slapped back behind Doc Miller's booted legs.

A terrific heave snatched the feet off the floor. Doc Miller crashed down beside Mr. Maddox with a startled squall of dismay.

"Try to dope me, will you?" Mr. Maddox said savagely.

He was still sitting there on the floor as big hands heaved Doc Miller off the floor, slammed him down again. The hypodermic stabbed at him. Mr. Maddox' arm knocked it away.

Savage, fast, he mauled Doc Miller, hauling him close, smashing a huge fist in above the gray goatee, then in again against the jaw.

Doc Miller quivered and collapsed. Mr. Maddox lumbered to his feet, and he groaned and lurched to one foot. The bad ankle had swollen. Weight on it was agony.

"I guess," Mr. Maddox decided through his teeth, "I can make the station wagon on one foot! Let's see if you've got a gun!"

Doc Miller was out cold as Mr. Maddox knelt beside him with a grunt and frisked him. There was no gun. The inside coat pocket held billfold and snapshot. Mr. Maddox started to toss the snapshot aside. Then he snatched it close, staring.

He turned so that light from the smoky lamp fell full on the picture. The background looked like a California beach. The man and the girl had been swimming. The girl's bathing cap was in her hand, she was laughing at the camera.

The man was the old Phil Sedan, puffy, dissolute-looking, as in the days when he was throwing his money away and picking pretties.

In the Paddock Room, after the murder, Carole Rockwell had denied knowing Phil Sedan. In the snapshot she looked highly happy to have Phil Sedan's arm around her.

"Sedan could pick 'em, anyway," Mr. Maddox muttered. "I'll bet fifty to one

that Bob Boyett never saw this picture!"

Mr. Maddox started to stand up. He was strangely weak, getting giddier, and when he looked down at Doc Miller he knew why. The hypo had taken a little time to work, but Doc Miller could slow any horse, and he'd slowed Joe Maddox.

"Ought to break your old neck!" Mr. Maddox said thickly.

He knew he was swaying, was going to collapse on Doc Miller, and he couldn't stop it. . .

**S**OMETIMES you had nightmares, and you woke up and smiled about them. Mr. Maddox had a nightmare that went on and on. Now and then he had a drowsy interlude of awakening.

Once he heard Doc Miller's rasping querulous voice. Another time he fought for recognition of a second familiar voice, and he forced his eyes open and saw the high-domed bald head of Holy Joe Daley gleaming in a shaft of sunlight.

Holy Joe looked sinister in that shaft of sunlight, and he was saying: "That dope of yours will kill him!"

Doc Miller's voice answered with sly assurance. "Never kilt a horse yet, 'less I wanted to. I'll keep him like this awhile longer, till we're sure we won't need him."

Another voice said: "He'll make plenty of trouble!"

"I don't mean for him to make no trouble—ever!" Doc Miller said. "When I'm ready he'll keep sleepin'!"

"That damned hypo of yours gives me the creeps," the third voice said.

Doc Miller snorted.

"Never give you the creeps when I used it on a horse. Time to give him another one. He stirred a minute ago."

Doc Miller came through the nightmare again, face hazy, goatee bristling, hypodermic in his scrawny hand. Struggling against it was like fighting a great soft force that smothered one into helplessness.

The needle stung slightly. . .

Holy Joe's bald head and the shaft of sunlight faded. It was daytime—but what day? Mr. Maddox floated off into the nightmare through which dead men occasionally capered and broken-down race horses ran wildly, and Carole Rockwell

lay in the arms of a dead man and laughed, and Doc Miller marched about waving his dirty hypodermic.

Driven by an urgency that he had to do something which only Joe Maddox could do, he fought to escape the nightmare. When the hazy horror finally lifted again, and he tried to move, Mr. Maddox found himself tied flat on his back by arms and legs.

The room was in focus. Doc Miller was sitting by the smoky lamp inspecting papers. He stood up and came to the cot where Mr. Maddox was lying. His goatee moved jerkily as he munched on tobacco.

"Do you good to stay awake an' keep me company," Doc decided. "You might as well lie still. I'll be here watchin' you."

Mr. Maddox shook off more of the lassitude. "How long have I been here?"

"'Bout long enough to get that race outa the way. Tomorrow's Saturday." Doc spat on the floor. "Too bad you're so stiff-necked about easy money. You could of come out fat on this, yourself, just by keepin' your mouth shut. Wouldn't have cost us anything."

"Murder always costs, Doc."

"You talkin' about Phil Sedan?"

"Yes."

Doc Miller spat again. His goatee waggled under a gleeful grin.

"That ain't worrying us. Too bad she done it—but it was just the thing to bring her in line." Doc looked like a goaty old philosopher as he pursed his lips and observed: "Funny how things work out. All Hopwood wanted was a favor—"

"Who?" Mr. Maddox interrupted.

"Well, call him Sedan," Doc said. "Hopwood's the name we been callin' him by. He wanted a favor outa this gal, and he was fixed to do her a favor back. She got wild and killed him, figuring it'd make her safe, I guess. It only put the hooks into her right, so we could handle her."

Doc was enjoying himself.

"You see," he said, "she didn't have no idea three of us had rode him to the gate at Boyett's place. We knowed exactly who he was going to see an' what he aimed to say to her. When we heard he'd been kilt, we knew who'd done it an' why she done it, and we knew what to do about it."

"So?" Mr. Maddox muttered. He lay

motionless under Doc Miller's scrutiny. A slow bland smile of disbelief spread over his face.

"I think you're lying," Mr. Maddox decided. "What kind of a favor could Phil Sedan do Miss Rockwell?"

Doc reacted irritably.

"You know dern well I'm tellin' the truth!" Doc snapped. "You found her picture in my pocket! There was other pictures an' letters. Got 'em all there on the table. Hopwood was too smart for her. He left the letters with us. Took one in to show her for a sample. Guess she thought the rest was in his pocket." Doc chortled. "She got fooled, an' had a murder to explain, with pictures an' letters to prove why she done it. Made her cold turkey for us."

**M**R. MADDUX lay without expression. The air around Doc Miller felt pretty filthy as facts and fancies fell into place. Murder had been done. But blackmail had preceded the killing, and blackmail had followed it.

Helpless on the creaking cot, the smoky lamp flickering and Doc Miller chortling like an evil old ghoul, Mr. Maddox got his first clear understanding of the girl who'd reached to Sandymore Red's neck for comfort as she stood at bay before Joe Maddox.

She was the Colonel's little filly. She was old Meatball's "Missy, who got breedin'."

Whatever her past or her crime or her fear of the future, she'd taken the load of it like a game little thoroughbred. And all Doc Miller saw in it was fear that made her take orders. Mr. Maddox built the picture swiftly in his mind.

"You want a crooked race tomorrow," he guessed. "And you've got Carole Rockwell where she'll crook it for you. Sandymore Red is to lose, isn't he? Can't be any other way if it's sure-fire."

"It's as sweet a set-up as I ever seen," Doc Miller admitted. "Hopwood told all about it the other night. He knowed she was living at Santander Hill. The letters an' pictures he'd saved gave him the idea how to put the race in the bag an' clean up a pile of money. Only two horses in the race. All the girl had to do was get one of my slow-pills in the Boyett

horse before the race. Hopwood had the letters an' pictures that'd probably mess up any marriage she aimed to make at Santander Hill. If she played ball, she got everything back and nothing said."

"And now?"

"Same deal," Doc said virtuously. "Had to ride her out here with a blindfold over her eyes an' show her we had the stuff to deliver. She'll get her letters an' pictures after the race, an' nothing ever said about who kilt Hopwood. All we want is a slow-pill in that Boyett horse just before the race, an' then we'll fade out, satisfied."

"She going to do it?"

"What'd you do, with the sheriff holdin' a murder warrant and waitin' for your name? What's a little pill and one horse race when you're a young gal with a long life ahead? She seen the light."

Mr. Maddox stared at the smoky lamp. He was not shocked. He'd seen too much of good and bad in the past thirty years as a big-time racetrack bookmaker. Who was Joe Maddox to pass judgment on how a blackmailed girl should balance her past and her future with the present?

If he felt any emotion, it was regret that such a girl and such a horse should be dirtied and damaged by the touch of men like Doc Miller. You could lose money and you could make money. You could fail and you could come back. But a smear on the bright bloom of decency and straight-shooting was a hard thing to remove.

A great horse like Sandymore Red, bred and trained to give his best, deserved better than one of Doc Miller's slow-pills at a great moment in his racing career.

A girl like Carole Rockwell, with the pride and the honor of Santander Hill before her, deserved more than the corrosive memory and regret which she would take down through the years.

In the deep secret corners of his thoughts, Joe Maddox had carried through the long years one staff of strength which he never talked about, but which he followed.

You could not have honor without honor.

"It's a nice set-up," Mr. Maddox said slowly. "I don't know how a shyster like you managed it. You men are evidently

behind the rumors about Cold Creek not shipping well. It's driven a lot of money over on Sandymore Red. You must have a hook-up with some big books that will cash in when Sandymore loses."

"No hard feelings for name callin'," Doc said generously. He was garrulous tonight, a little drunk, Mr. Maddox guessed, on the prospect of big money tomorrow.

"Hopwood" an' his pardner, Coonie Riggs, run one of the biggest books out West," Doc said smugly.

"Coonie Riggs!" Mr. Maddox exclaimed. He relaxed and mused: "Several years ago Coonie Riggs couldn't raise five grand. I knew him from away back. A lot of people have wondered where Coonie got that bankroll to start operating big a couple of years back. Phil Sedan went bankrupt about then. He must have hidden a sockful of dough and used it to bankroll Coonie. No wonder he changed his name and laid low. Phil Sedan, as a bookie, would have made the headlines—and questions might have been asked."

"They knew how to make money. I've done plenty other business with 'em," Doc said. "Coonie Riggs'll stay in business without Hopwood."

"Does Holy Joe Daley have a cut, too?"

"Works for them. Just luck I happened to have a farm here. My horses is at New Orleans, but ain't any questions asked about me bein' around here for the Big Race."

"Most of them don't know you like I do," Mr. Maddox said heavily. "I take it you men didn't have anything to do with the screwdriver planted on me."

**DOC MILLER** scratched his head. "Screwdriver?" he said, and he shrugged. "I ain't a carpenter."

"Now I get an idea how Banton happened to be here when I walked in," Mr. Maddox muttered.

Doc Miller grinned.

"Thursday night you was lyin' here on the floor like a bashed apple off a tree. If you hadn't spoke about that movie director, we'd still be wondering what happened. Phil Sedan had said Banton was at Santander Hill an' a friend of Miss Rockwell. Sedan knew him."



"Banton was looking for those letters," Mr. Maddox guessed.

"He was," Doc said. "We found out quick that same night. Banton followed my car and Miss Rockwell out of Martinsburg. When he found where she came to see her old letters to Phil Sedan, he walked to the house here an' got set to use the gun an' get the letters for her."

Doc cackled. "Banton thought it was me when he jumped you. When he found out who he'd slugged, it worried him so he went home. Now he thinks he kilt you, Maddox. We got a rope around his neck same as we got on his girl friend. Coonie Riggs says he aims to use it later on, out on the Coast. Banton'll be a handy man to dance to Coonie's tune in Hollywood. An' he'll dance, too, thinkin' there's murder over his head that ties in with the girl killing Phil Sedan. He's mighty near in a collapse over it."

"I'm not dead," Mr. Maddox reminded.

Doc Miller stroked his goatee. His teeth showed.

"Not yet," he said. "You think I'd be talkin' this way to you if there was a chance you'd be out and around blabbing later on?"

"I see," Mr. Maddox said slowly.

"Thought you already saw," Doc said sociably. "Want a drink?"

"No!"

"Want another hypo? You won't do so much thinkin' thataway. Sort of lets you get it all easy and nice. Won't worry you a bit when you don't wake up."

"I'd rather worry."

"Suit yourself. I like company at night like this." Doc came over to the cot. "I'll take that diamond ring now. I seen it on you years ago and wisht I had it."

"That ring's my luck," Mr. Maddox warned evenly. "It never brought luck to any man who took it. Quite a few have tried."

Doc worked the ring off and stepped back toward the lamp, admiring the cold glint of the diamond.

"I'm makin' my own luck," he declared.

"Maybe," Mr. Maddox said. "There'll be a search for me, you know. Colonel Boyett will want to know what happened to his station wagon."

"Guess he's already found it in Martinsburg where we left it," Doc said. "Ain't anybody going to look for you out on this old farm. You can bet Banton won't tell where he left your body."

Oscar knew Joe Maddox had been interested in Doc Miller's farm. Oscar should have been curious long before now. But this was Friday night. Oscar hadn't done anything.

Mr. Maddox strained at his bonds until his face purpled. The cot creaked. Doc Miller looked over and grinned.

"Might as well take it easy, Maddox. I'm handy with knots."

Mr. Maddox was weak and sweating with the useless effort. Doc finished looking at the letters. He put them in a manila envelope and stepped to a pile of old newspapers on a corner table. He thrust the envelope out of sight in the folds of one of the papers at the bottom of the pile.

"Always hide my money like that," he confided. "Never lost a dollar yet. Folks ain't got the patience to look through a stack of old papers right under their nose."

"You'll have a fire some day," Mr. Maddox growled.

"Ain't had one yet." Doc yawned. "I got to go into town early. Be back for a look at you before we drive over an' watch the race." Doc showed his teeth in a thin grin. "If you wake up afore I'm back, hold your horses. I'll git here and fix you again afore we go to the race."

Doc took the hypodermic from beside the lamp.

"Not that damned thing again!" Mr. Maddox exclaimed with a wave of revulsion.

"Ain't a man in the country can put you to sleep any smoother," Doc soothed with a touch of pride. "A dose that'll fix you for good won't feel any different."

This might be the dose. Doc was grinning. Struggle was useless. Mr. Maddox had will power enough not to waste breath. But great beads of sweat started out on his haggard unshaven face as Doc leaned over and pushed the needle in.

Moments later when the soft dopy haze closed in Mr. Maddox was still wondering if this was the time Doc would get rid of him. . .

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## They're Off!

SOMEWHERE in the nightmare Mr. Maddox began to choke and strangle. He fought wildly against the terror, the horror of suffocation. . .

Black gnome-like features swam out of the haze and took form before his face. The apparition was mumbling and crooning in a low voice. Then behind it a second black face became visible.

Mr. Maddox' eyes opened wide. Coughing, he recognized the familiar room. He saw the wrinkled intent face of old Meatball, and Judge Turkey was watching intently over Meatball's shoulder.

Meatball's claw-like hand gripped several chicken feathers which looked as if they'd been dipped in fine snuff and ignited. Meatball was muttering, mumbling as he waved the nauseous smoke in Mr. Maddox' face.

It was almost worse than a nightmare. "S-stop it!" Mr. Maddox gasped, turning his head away. "*Pheewww!*"

"It worked, bless God!" Judge Turkey said solemnly.

"Nigger, be quiet!" Meatball ordered. "'Course hit work, on de drunk and de sick, effen you got de know-how. Mistah Joe, we is here in time. De talkin' voices done tole ol' Meatball you ain't dead like Judge Turkey done tell me."

"I hear yo' Missy gettin' told he is dead by her friend from Hollywood," Judge Turkey muttered.

"You brang ol' Meatball here—now I do all de talkin'!" Meatball said sternly. "Mist' Joe, he just a house-nigger nephew of mine. You is goin' home to de Big House. Ol' Meatball come to get you. . . Judge Turkey, where a knife?"

"I ain't bring no knife, Meatball!"

"Fool house-nigger never cut nothin' but table food!" Meatball grumbled. "Hold easy, Mist' Joe!"

Meatball reached down inside his belted trousers and stooped over the cot. A moment later Mr. Maddox' ankles were free, and then his right arm. When the cords holding his left forearm were cut, he lifted his head and saw what Meatball was using.

It was a black-handled screwdriver,

freshly ground to knife-sharpness at the end.

Mr. Maddox sat on the edge of the cot as the weapon vanished inside the trousers. He and Meatball looked at each other.

"So!" Mr. Maddox said.

Meatball looked very withered, very old as he reached inside his shirt and touched the dirty tobacco sack.

"White folks hang ol' Nigger Meatball, it don' matter, Mist' Joe," he said humbly. "I hear de man threaten her in de night. I fix him an you is ready to go home now?"

Judge Turkey turned from the front window. "We is caught! White folks comin' in a car!"

Mr. Maddox lurched for his ebony cane which lay across the corner table. The injured ankle almost gave way before he made it. He thrust a hand in the pile of papers. Letters and pictures were still there. Mr. Maddox put the envelopes inside his rumpled coat.

Meatball turned from the window. "Help Mist' Joe hide in de back room!"

There was nothing else to do. Meatball darted for the back of the house. Judge Turkey's support got Mr. Maddox back through a dining-room to a kitchen. He guided Mr. Maddox into a little store-room off the kitchen. Meatball had gone outside.

A small curtained window let light in on them, and on empty boxes and cartons.

They heard an automobile drive up outside. Doc Miller's voice angrily demanded: "Nigger, what you want around here?"

Meatball replied humbly.

"I is lookin' for work, Cap'n. De white gen'man what limpin' to de road, say does I wait, maybe I gets a job."

"What's that?" Doc Miller yelled. "A white man limpin' to the road? A big feller that needs a shave?"

"Yas, suh!"

Peering cautiously out of the window, Mr. Maddox could see the sedan and the three men boiling out of it. Doc Miller, Holy Joe Daley, and the plump, overdressed Coonie Riggs.

Doc Miller dashed to the front of the house. His boots tramped heavily in the front room, then into other rooms.

"He's gone!" Doc Miller said excitedly.

"And all those letters are gone, too!"

The outburst of swearing was from Coonie Riggs. Then, outside again, Doc Miller spoke harshly to Meatball.

"What else did he say to you?"

"Tol' me not to forget him, suh," Meatball said meekly.

Holy Joe Daley demanded: "How long ago was it?"

"'Bout ten minutes, suh. He's limpin' bad."

"Maybe he was hiding in the bushes when we came in! We've got a chance to catch him there or down the road!" Holy Joe snapped. "Bring the nigger! He knows too much, now! Get in the back seat, you!"

Meatball did not protest. The sedan turned fast and sped away.

"They'll kill Meatball so he won't talk," Mr. Maddox muttered.

"Meatball always do what best," Judge Turkey said solemnly. "You is ready to go home, suh?"

"I'll try to walk to the road."

"We hide de car in de old wood lane cross de back pasture," Judge Turkey said. "'Tain't so far, suh."

THE distance actually was about a quarter of a mile. Mr. Maddox made it with the help of Judge Turkey, and groaned with relief as he sank heavily in the front seat of an old battered sedan.

A bumpy ride over old ruts put them on a back dirt road. It was almost one o'clock by Judge Turkey's watch, and in the first half mile a front tire blew out with a loud report.

Judge Turkey wrestled the car to a lurching stop. "I put on de spare, suh."

"Hurry!" Mr. Maddox almost groaned. "I've got to get there before the race!"

Judge Turkey hurrying was still slow. The ankle was so bad Mr. Maddox could not help him. When they finally rolled on, the time was past one thirty. The race was scheduled for two thirty, and they had miles of cross-country roads to cover.

"Let me get all this straight," Mr. Maddox said. "You heard Mr. Banton telling Miss Rockwell where I was?"

"Meatball tell me to listen all I can, an' I listens, suh. Mistah Banton tell Meatball's Missy you is dead, an' she cry. But when de law calls from Martinsburg this mawnin' and say the station wagon you took is found there, Meatball say you ain't dead or the law know so if the station wagon was took back to town. Meatball say we go look for you."

"Why?"

"Meatball's Missy don't feel so bad if you ain't dead, suh."

"I see," Mr. Maddox muttered. "Meatball thinks a lot of her, doesn't he?"

"He say Missy be de next gran' lady of Santander Hill, suh. Got to look out for her."

"You know he killed Phil Sedan!" Mr. Maddox said abruptly.

"Don't know nothin', suh. Meatball do all the talkin'. He mighty old an' got the know-how 'bout everything."

Road traffic was heavy when they turned into the main road to Santander Hill. When they came in sight of the track, long rows of cars were parked on the turf. Thousands of people were massing on foot about the mile oval.

Mr. Maddox looked grimly at the gay sight. They'd come to see a great sport-



ing race—and they'd see a drugged horse lose miserably.

"Help me to my room through the back of the house, and then get the Colonel," Mr. Maddox ordered.

Negro servants stared curiously at the haggard, disheveled, unshaven guest who limped through the back door with Judge Turkey's help.

Charley Banton came out of his room just ahead of them. He saw Mr. Maddox. His jaw dropped. He turned white.

"Come into my room!" Mr. Maddox said grimly.

"My God!" Banton said huskily. "I thought—"

"I'm not a ghost!"

Judge Turkey left them alone in the room.

"I've got the letters and the pictures, Banton. What's your side of it? Talk quick!"

Banton mopped his face.

"If I ever get out of this, I'll keep my fingers crossed and stay home!" he groaned. "It started when Carole had bit parts in the studio and met Phil Sedan. He was in the money and he took an interest in her. He decided a big wardrobe and coaching by several of the biggest teachers in Hollywood would pay out for her. He insisted on playing Uncle, as a business investment if she wanted. Carole was just a kid. She talked it over with me. I said O. K. if she could keep her nose clean and make it a business investment. She had it that way—but she saw a lot of Sedan and wrote him foolish, grateful letters. He lost his money and dropped out of sight, and that seemed to be the end of it."

Banton mopped his face again.

"The other afternoon Carole came to me and said Phil Sedan had telephoned her to ride a horse out toward Cross Gates and talk with him. She'd just come back from the ride. Sedan had saved letters and pictures that looked and read like she'd been one of Phil Sedan's girls. Plenty of others had. His reputation, the evidence he had, and his lying testimony would make hash of any future here at Santander Hill.

"Phil Sedan told her to think it over and meet him outside the house that evening. I told her I'd wait outside, and if

she wanted me to tackle Sedan I'd take over. I saw her meet him. They sat in the station wagon and talked for several minutes. Carole left him and met me near the back of the house. She was terribly upset. Sedan would have his way or else. I told her to go in the house, and I went after him. Maddox, he was there in the station wagon, dead! I thought Carole had killed him. I was trying to think what to do when I saw you coming, and I had to get away."

"What killed him?" Mr. Maddox asked.

"A screwdriver through his heart!"

"So *you* found it?"

Banton nodded unwillingly.

"And put it in my room?"

"I had to do something with it. I was thinking of Carole and myself. You'd caught her off-guard in the study, you'd found Sedan dead, and it looked to both of us like you were nosing around suspiciously and were dangerous. We still don't know who killed him," Banton said huskily.

"Not an idea?"

"No! But another man got in touch with Carole. He was Sedan's friend. He had her letters and he accused her of murdering Phil Sedan. He said it could be settled if she'd still play ball with them."

"I know," Mr. Maddox said wearily. "So you tried to be clever and get the blackmail evidence—and slugged me instead, and got blackmailed yourself over it."

"How did I know you were going to come to that house?" Banton licked his lips. "When I saw you there on the floor I guess I lost my head. I didn't think you'd recognized me. I got out before I was in a hell of a scandal that would wash me up in Hollywood."

"And really found yourself threatened with a scandal when you heard I was dead."

"I hope," Banton said huskily, "you never go through the hell I've been through over it!"

**M**R. MADDUX started to answer him, and then looked at himself in the mirror. He shrugged off the haggard unshaven reminders that stared back at him.

"I don't know what's going to come

out of this," he said heavily. "Keep your lip buttoned tight, young man, and let me do the thinking. You might make it worse than it is."

"But if you've got the letters—"

"Phil Sedan was still murdered," Mr. Maddox reminded curtly. "I'll talk to you later."

Banton left, still badly shaken. Mr. Maddox limped into the bathroom, hacked the stubble off his face with furious strokes, and changed hurriedly into another shirt and suit. He transferred the manila envelope to the fresh suit. He was buttoning the coat when the door burst open and Cassidy shoved Oscar in ahead of him.

"Heard you were back?" Cassidy snarled. "Where you been, Joe? Why'd you park this guy in town and vanish?"

"He's been sweatin' me ever since he found me in town," Oscar said. "I told him I didn't know nothing."

Oscar looked like he'd had a bad time. His glance was full of desperate questions. He nodded slightly at Cassidy and shrugged hopelessly.

"I kept thinkin' I'd hear from you," Oscar said. "Wasn't any use taking Cassidy with me to hunt you."

"Rats!" Cassidy snapped. "You couldn't look Joe up because I was at your heels! What's this all about, Joe?"

"D'you really want to know?"

"I'm asking you!"

It had seemed to Mr. Maddox that he'd never have another moment of chuckling humor like this. He made the best of it.

"I was playing paper chase and waiting for you to catch me," he told Cassidy. "You didn't, so I came home. One side, flatfoot. I'm going out to see the race."

Cassidy took it hard. He was red-faced and muttering to himself as he went out the door. Oscar stayed.

"I was scared stiff, Joe! I couldn't shake him an' do anything! What happened?"

"Tee-total hell! Help me outside!"

No one was in front of the house when they emerged. Down the slope past the barns they could see the great seething throng of spectators around the track. Handclapping, cheers, marked the two thoroughbreds and jockeys moving toward the starting point.

"The Colonel's been wild to see you," Oscar said. "He's got a hatful of dough for you on Sandymore Red. If Sandymore wins, you're cleaned, Joe."

"I'm afraid so," Mr. Maddox said heavily. "Well, it won't do any good. Hurry up. I'm going to stop the race. It's crooked. Sandymore Red's been slipped a slow-pill."

"Holy cow!" Oscar gulped. Then he brightened. "If he loses, we *don't* lose! We win, Joe! We don't get cleaned!"

"Jerk the larceny out of your heart!" Mr. Maddox ordered coldly. "I'm telling the Colonel his horse has been slipped a slow-pill. That's all I'll ever say! He can do as he likes!"

"Well, if he calls it off, we scratch the bets," Oscar decided philosophically.

Using the cane and support from Oscar's shoulder, Mr. Maddox hurried. He hadn't counted on the crowd that had massed behind the seats. He made slow progress through the crowd. By the time he and Oscar reached the short cleared aisle between seats reserved for the Colonel's guests, the two horses had turned and were close to the starting point. People were coming to their feet.

Colonel Boyett's tall figure rose at the end of the front row. Mr. Maddox made the last few steps so recklessly that he winced at each step. His hand brought the Colonel around.

"Maddox! Great guns, man! Where've you been? Got a lot of money for you! Took a long distance message for you from a man named Sam Stone in New Jersey. Said he had plenty of Cold Creek money, thanks to you, and he'd take any lay-off money you had!"

Carole had risen at the Colonel's side. She stood there now, slim and pale. Charley Banton was beyond her, and Mr. Maddox knew that Banton had forewarned her. He spoke for the Colonel's ears and her ears only.

"Better stop this race, Colonel. I've reason to believe your horse has been given a slow-pill."

That hit the Colonel hard. His hand gripped Mr. Maddox' arm. "Are you certain?"

"I think so. Got here as soon as I could."

"Who did it?"

Carole's eyes were on him. They were big. They were waiting for the blow. Mr. Maddox gave her a level look. He was like a big, bland Buddha as he answered the Colonel as only a gentleman could answer who lied for good and sufficient reasons.

"I haven't the slightest idea who did it, Colonel. But you still have time to call the race."

"Be embarrassing, be a blow to everyone!"

"It'll save your hundred thousand side bet," Mr. Maddox reminded.

"Still hate it. Won't seem sporting."

"I wouldn't," Carole said. Her voice was clear. There was a light in her eyes. Mr. Maddox couldn't fathom. "Let Sandymore run," she told the Colonel.

"Just as you say, my dear." The Colonel actually looked relieved. "We'll forget this, Maddox. We won't alibi if Sandymore loses."

Mr. Maddox shrugged. He was weighing a sudden faint ray of hope when a massed roar of excitement lifted from the spectators. . . .

**T**HE drumming pound of driving hoofs carried the two running horses past them. It looked like an even break. Sandymore Red had drawn outside position. His jockey held him toward the rail. Stride for stride he held position with Cold Creek around the turn.

Binoculars were leveled. People were climbing on the seats. The tightening excitement of it caught at Mr. Maddox and carried him close against the track rail, all else forgotten for the moment.

Down the back stretch the two horses ran like one. From first stride to last, it was to be one of those races that men would talk about in years to come. No clever handling of pace. No jockeying for position. Evenly matched, evenly weighted, they were running it out from start to finish—and let the best horse break the other.

The sheer drama of it brought silence to the waiting crowd. They had come to see a race. They were seeing more than a race. They were seeing the hearts and the fighting spirits of two great horses being pushed to the breaking point.

Mr. Maddox reached for a cigar. The

front coat pocket was empty, and he stood massive and intent, watching for the first falter that Sandymore Red would make. Any stride now, dope would begin to drag Sandymore back and back. . . .

Both jockeys rode into the far turn using the whip. The two horses were still running as one as they bored deeper into the turn.

And suddenly Mr. Maddox knew. The faint ray of hope he had put aside bloomed bright and thankful.

He looked from the running horses to the girl standing slim and straight beside the Colonel. She was on her toes. Her hands were clenched. But she was not worried. She was not fearful. She was waiting here at the finish line for the horse whose nuzzling muzzle and smooth neck had given her strength when she faced Joe Maddox in the barn.

Meatball's "Missy"—the next grand lady of Santander Hill—was waiting without guilt, without fear for her Santander Hill horse to come down the stretch.

She had never intended to dope him. She meant to take like a thoroughbred all the disaster that Doc Miller, Coonie Riggs and Holy Joe Daley could bring to her.

And they'd bring it if possible if Sandymore Red won and they were cleaned as Joe Maddox would be cleaned.

Mr. Maddox lost interest in the race. A greater race had been run and won by the Colonel's little filly. Was her name going to be linked with murder now?

Old Meatball, listening to Phil Sedan threatening her in the night, had taken his own way of saving her. Meatball had been tragically wrong. He might be the one who had hurt her most. But there must be some way, without protecting murder, to keep her clear of all the mess.

Mr. Maddox sighed. Old as Meatball was, he was just a stable nigger who'd messed things up.

Now the crowd was wild—women were screaming in delirious excitement, men were shouting as jockey whips lashed the two horses neck and neck through the stretch.

Cassidy shouldered beside Mr. Maddox. There was too much noise to speak.

Big and blank-faced, Mr. Maddox watched the horses rush toward him under the slashing whips. Neither horse was

breaking. But there was a wild free-running smoothness to Sandymore Red's stride that decided the winner for Mr. Maddox before he could clearly see.

**T**HE horses flashed under the finish wire and past him. He'd been right, and he was glad. Now there'd never be any doubt about Meatball's "Missy," although Joe Maddox had lost his bankroll.

The Bluegrass horse had won by inches. In the uproar Mr. Maddox turned to Cassidy, and he found Cassidy urgently tapping the Colonel's arm for attention. Mr. Maddox stepped close to them as Cassidy spoke.

"The sheriff's office just telephoned! Three white men and a colored man were killed in a car wreck on the Cedar Grove road! They say the colored man worked for you! His name was Meatball Davis!"

"Meatball dead?" the Colonel roared. "What was he doing with three white men over on the Cedar Grove road?"

"Don't know," said Cassidy. "One of the white men is named Miller. He owns a small racing stable. I think I know him. People in another car saw the wreck. They say Miller drove abreast of them on a down-grade, and all three white men looked over at them, hard.

"They say Miller drove on down the grade wide open and recklessly. At the bottom of that grade a bridge crosses North River. Miller's car swerved at the bridge, crashed through the guard rail on the bank and went into the river. It's deep there. None of the men came up. The people in the other car say it looked like the steering wheel of Miller's car was jerked hard over. They can't explain how

it could have happened, unless the men were blind drunk."

Mr. Maddox stepped over beside Carole as Cassidy talked. He gave her the manila envelope and he spoke close to her ear.

"Better burn everything in there quick! It's all there, I guess. Meatball came after me. He heard Sedan talking to you at the station wagon the other night. He tried to help you. He went with those men while I got away today. I guess he figured the river would settle everything."

Carole looked at him speechlessly.

"Meatball was old. He was trying to do everything for the best," Mr. Maddox said. "Let's make it the best for him. We'll forget everything, eh?"

The Colonel was answering Cassidy.

"Can't think what Meatball was doing with those men! I hate to lose him. He was a good nigger! Favorite of yours, wasn't he, Carole?"

Carole nodded. Her eyes were wet as she looked away from Joe Maddox, and up at the Colonel.

"We'll always remember Meatball here at Santander Hill," she said unsteadily. "He—he deserves it!"

The Colonel's arm went around her. She was standing there inside the Colonel's arm when Mr. Maddox turned away and put a hand on Oscar's shoulder.

"Help me in the house," he told Oscar. "I want a drink! I want a dozen drinks!"

"It won't bring back the bankroll," Oscar said glumly.

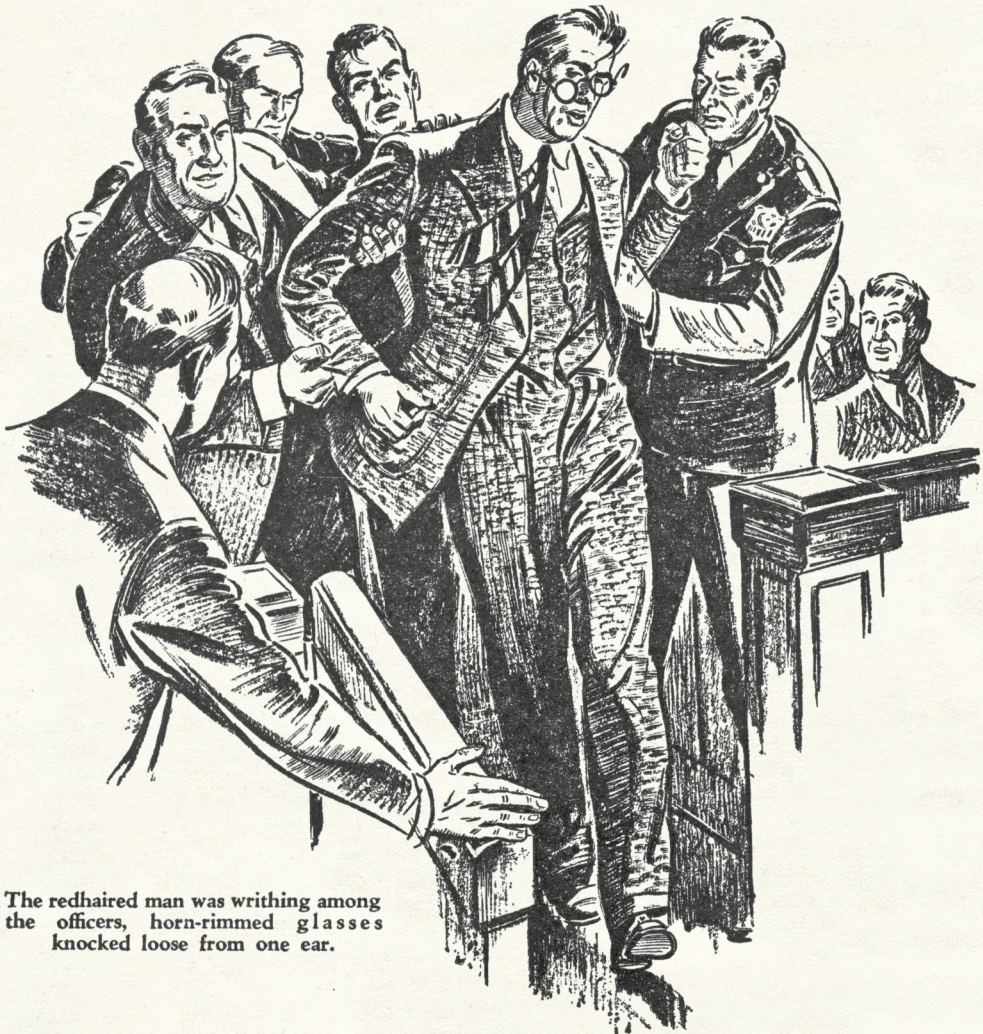
A smile grew and spread on Mr. Maddox' broad face as he hobbled off beside Oscar.

"Blast the bankroll!" he said. "It was worth it! I want to celebrate!"

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



**IT TAKES BOTH  
WAR BONDS AND WAR TAXES  
—FOR VICTORY!**



The redhaired man was writhing among the officers, horn-rimmed glasses knocked loose from one ear.

# QUIET STREET

By

**WILLIAM BRANDON**

*Author of "Poddsrow's Nose," etc.*

*Michael Blake was on trial for his life—and the testimony was so damaging that the jury scarcely heard the defense. Even Blake's own lawyer believed him guilty. And then a strange thing happened in that crowded courtroom . . .*

**T**HE tall man walked alone down the quiet street, the sound of his measured footsteps hollow in the night. The moon slid his shadow before him, austere and thin and topped by a Homburg hat.

He stopped at a door set flush with the sidewalk and knocked. The noise of knocking was loud in the silence.

A moment later, two shots cracked,



slamming hard and deafening into the stillness, and the tall man lurched and fell and his hat rolled, bobbing, to the curb. His voice could be heard crying, and his body threshed in the bright moonlight. There was a final shot and he was quiet.

**T**HESE were the prosecuting attorney's words. He drew the picture as certainly as though he had seen it and there was no doubt of its accuracy. He was an exact man, always carefully aware of what he was about. It was significant, the painstaking precision with which he had built up this particular scene, which was of no crucial moment in the trial.

The police report testified that a cab driver had dropped the tall man at the corner of Main and Elm sometime after midnight. Certainly then the tall man must have walked down the street from the corner, his shadow, in fact, before him. The moon would have been low at that hour, at the tall man's back. An almanac established this.

The ballistics report stated that the first two bullets had entered the tall man's back and pierced his body, to embed themselves in the door before which he was standing. He must therefore have been facing the door, and it was logical to assume he had been knocking. Further, a neighbor had been awakened by the shots and spoke of a hazy recollection of hearing loud knocking, previous to them. Finally, the medical examiner reported that it was the third and final bullet, striking the brain, that had caused death. From the first two bullets would come intense pain but not necessarily unconsciousness—so this, too, was a part of the picture.

The prosecutor had gone to a great deal of work for relatively unimportant effect in collaborating these various detailed facts, but they were only a few facts of the thousands he had aligned for his use in this trial. He believed in facts.

**I** ONCE walked along the same clean moonlit street with Mary. The evening was warm and kids were still playing around the swings on the corner playground. We could hear them yelling Sundown, Sundown, and Mary bent her head, listening.

She said: "Do you remember Sundown? . . . That seems like a long time ago." We walked along and she pulled off her little hat and carried it in her hand and shook her hair free about her shoulders. "We had a lot of fun on good old East Walnut Street, didn't we, Mike?"

"Yes," I said. "Mary—"

"I wish we could have always stayed kids. Like Peter Pan."

"Yes. Listen, Mary—"

"Or if you could just wave a wand now and go back to being kids, and playing Sundown and Run Sheep Run, and the bats flying around the street light. . . . Wouldn't that be great, though?"

"Yeah, swell. Listen, Mary, we've got to get this thing straightened out."

She said in a nice voice: "There isn't a thing to straighten out, Mike. It's all settled."

"It seems to me there's everything. We've been married five years. We were happy until this thing came up. We can't leave each other. We aren't like these couples that can separate and get divorced. We mean too much to each other."

She gave me a sidewise look, her head bent, her black hair fallen like a veil across her cheek. She put her hand on my arm. "I appreciate your talking like that, Mike. It comes hard to you, doesn't it? You were never very sentimental or poetic."

I knew she was thinking about Janie. I said: "I can't say what I feel. I don't want you to leave me, Mary."

She dropped her hand from my arm. "I'm sorry, dear. It's settled. We can't change it now. We've been all over it a hundred times. Let's not talk about it again now."

We reached her door and stopped on the sidewalk. The door was set flush with the walk, similar to a row of doors along both sides of this street, doors that led into red brick three-story houses, all joined together, all exactly alike.

I said: "We just break it up like this. Is that it?"

"Good-night, Mike," Mary said. She held out her hand. She was composed and determined and entirely natural. "Good-bye, Mike."

It was like the dates we used to have,

saying good-night in front of her house, but the poignancy of those good-nights was bitter and angering now. She was more beautiful than she had ever been. I didn't take her hand. I turned around and walked away.

\* \* \*

Question: Your husband was angry when you left him?

Answer: Well . . . yes, of course. I said he didn't think we should separate.

Q.: He was angry?

A.: Yes.

Q.: He cursed you, he struck you?

A.: Oh, no. That would be ridiculous.

Q.: Why would it have been ridiculous, Mrs. Blake?

A.: Mike isn't the kind to act like that.

Q.: We have heard testimony describing your husband as a man with a strong temper, I believe. On June 28th, last, the defendant smashed a window in his house with a chair, according to testimony previously given this court. On February 2nd, last, Mrs. Blake, wasn't a telephone repairman called to your home, where you were then living with your husband, to repair a telephone damaged by the defendant in a fit of rage?

A.: I remember that, and it wasn't any fit of rage. Mike was—was dancing to the radio . . . He was playing the fool, acting up, and he slid on a rug and fell against the telephone stand.

Q.: I see. And the smashed window?

A.: He was . . . he was trying to catch Janie, our little girl. She pulled a chair in his way and he . . . he sort of pushed it aside.

Q.: He sort of pushed it aside and it broke a window? . . . Isn't it true, Mrs. Blake, that he picked up the chair and hurled it aside, with such force that it went through the window?

A.: If you want to say it that way.

Q.: We're not trying to say it any particular way, Mrs. Blake. We only want the truth. Now, you have just said your husband was trying to catch Janie, your little girl. Will you tell the jury why he was trying to catch her?

A.: He was going to spank her.

Q.: I see. And how old is your little girl, Janie?

A.: Almost five, now.

Q.: So, in truth, the defendant was so enraged at this four-year-old child that he smashed a chair and a window in his furious haste to catch her and whip her? That is the truth of it, is it not? Of course it is. And yet you are intimating to this court that your husband was not the kind to strike in anger? Tell me, Mrs. Blake, were you treated by a Dr. Cartwright, at his office at 414 South Buckeye Street, on the morning of July 3rd, last?

A.: Yes.

Q.: Will you tell the jury what you were treated for?

A.: I . . . I don't remember.

Q.: Wasn't it for bruises and contusions on your arms? Wasn't your right arm hurt so badly you were temporarily deprived of its use? Please answer, Mrs. Blake, yes or no.

A.: Yes.

Q.: Were these bruises inflicted by the defendant?

A.: Yes, but they weren't—he didn't mean it. He was only trying to keep me from going out to—to do something I shouldn't—and he caught hold of me, and he didn't realize—

Q.: I see. To return, Mrs. Blake, to the night you left your husband, when you say he was angry and yet did not display his anger, because, you say, he is not that kind. . .

**J**ANIE came from an orphanage. She was three years old, almost four. She had black hair and dark blue eyes, and sturdy, straight little arms and legs. She had excellent manners and a remarkable composure and a shy smile. People seeing her with Mary would pinch her cheek and say she looked exactly like her mother.

Our own child died at birth. We got Janie the next year and it helped quite a bit.

We both liked Janie. Everyone liked her. The orphanage gave her to us on probation. We wanted to conclude the adoption within a month after we'd known her, but the orphanage, Mr. Diderot of the orphanage, told us we would have to wait a full year. We were the ones on probation, not Janie. Mr. Diderot had

to be satisfied we would make the right parents. Before the year was up we made another effort to adopt her. Mr. Diderot wouldn't have it. We told him we had already forgotten she wasn't our own child, and we said we were afraid something might happen that would take her from us. He assured us nothing would happen. We were meeting our test nicely, he said. He approved of us. At the end of the year there would be no difficulty over the adoption.

\* \* \*

Q.: Mr. Blake, you have just testified under direct examination that on the afternoon of June 28th, last, you did not attempt to whip your foster-child, aged five years, that you did not smash a window in your house with a chair, in an effort to catch her and whip her, and that you have never treated her with anything except the utmost kindness and paternal devotion. That is correct?

A.: Yes.

Q.: In testimony heard by this court only an hour ago, your wife asserted that you had committed these acts on the day defined. Was she, then, deliberately lying?

A.: No.

Q.: Now, Mr. Blake, just a moment. First you say you did not commit these acts and next you tell us your wife was not deliberately lying when she testified you did. Even you must see this is somewhat contradictory. . . Now suppose you tell us the truth.

A.: She thought I did, but I didn't.

Q.: She thought you did, but you didn't. That is what you said?

A.: Yes.

Q.: Can you clarify that for us?

A.: Yes, I can. I was at work that afternoon, as usual. I worked until after five. When I came home Mar—my wife was sore at me. I didn't know why and she wouldn't tell me. She wouldn't speak to me. I'd never seen her like that before. . . .

MARY went into the bedroom and I followed her in there. I said: "Well, for God's sake, tell me what I've done! I—" She went out of the bedroom,

walking past me as if I wasn't there, and went into the little room we used for a library. My schoolbooks were stacked in there and she stood by them, looking down at them absently, tracing a finger in the thin film of dust on the topmost one. She had been crying and her eyelids were red, and a hot anger showed in the white, bloodless patches across her cheekbones. The finger running back and forth across the book was trembling.

I followed her into the library and stood at her shoulder. I raised my hands to touch her and she moved away quickly and started into the dining-room, and then she turned suddenly and faced me. She held the fingers of her right hand with her left hand. She looked a little like a school-teacher on the point of coldly telling one of the kids to stay in after school. An extraordinarily good-looking schoolteacher, in a gray wool dress, and a ribbon in her black hair.

She said: "Come in and look at Janie." Her voice was shaking.

"Janie? Good Lord, something's not wrong with—" She was leading the way, not listening to me, and I followed her. I had thought when I first came home that she had only lost her temper over something around the house, burning the roast or having a pie turn out with the bottom crust soggy, or something on that order, and was taking out a go-to-hell mood on me, the nearest innocent bystander. Any husband will know what I mean. But I had seen within a couple of minutes that it was more than that. Whatever it was, it was obvious that it was something that had struck Mary as outrageous beyond her experience. Un-speakable. But I hadn't thought about Janie.

The kid was in bed. It was early for that, but she had gone to sleep. She woke up sleepily and looked at me through a lock of her black hair, black and soft as Mary's, and grinned and said, "Papa." Mary shook her head fiercely and there were tears in her eyes. She pulled the covers down, murmuring to Janie while she did it, and she drew the kid's nightgown away from her shoulders and back and Janie winced and whimpered when she was touched. There were red welts across Janie's back. One of them had

cut the skin and drawn a little scarlet string of beads of blood. The stripes were greasy with boric acid ointment.

My stomach felt like it was contracted into a knot. I said: "What the hell is that?" My breath ran out on the second word and I whispered the last of it.

Mary tucked Janie under the covers again and the kid held out her hand to us the way she would do when we said good-night. She was already asleep again, and still whimpering a little while she wriggled down under the blankets. Mary didn't speak until we were out of the room.

Then she said, "Oh, Mike," and grabbed my arms and held herself close to me and cried, her head bent against my chest. "Mike, Mike, why did you do it?"

"Look." I held her away from me and put a hand under her chin and made her face me. "Why did I do what? What is all this? What the devil's happened around here?"

"I don't know," Mary said, struggling to keep from sobbing. "I wish I did. You were drunk, Mike. You must have been drunk."

"Drunk? When? I haven't been drunk since I was fifteen."

"When? This afternoon. When I—when I came home and you—"

"I've been in the lab all afternoon, crackpot. If I've been drunk it was from overwork. What are you talking about? What's happened to Janie's back?"

Mary looked at me levelly for a long moment and her tears went away. She said at last: "I went next door to see Helen a minute this afternoon. I was there about half an hour. Janie was supposed to be taking her nap. When I came back I heard—I heard noise here in the house and I came in and you were whipping her. You were whipping her with the dog's leash. I tried to make you stop, and Janie was screaming, and you acted like a madman . . . and then you went out of the house, and a minute later Mrs. Meeker came in from across the street and said she'd seen someone break a window here and she wondered if something was wrong, and I found that you'd thrown a chair through a window. I . . . then I . . ." Her voice stopped on her.

I said something, I don't remember what it was. Probably, "You're crazy!" My brain was stunned, at a standstill, unable to comprehend. I said: "I tell you I've been working all afternoon! Damn it, you know that! I haven't been off in the daytime for a year! How could I have been home? And if I had been, why in the name of God would I be whipping Janie? Good Lord, I'd cut my throat first! . . . I tell you, I was in the lab all afternoon—working! Do you think I've lost my mind?"

She said, low, trembling back in her throat: "Mike, I saw you. Don't lie, please don't lie. You were drunk, you've been working too hard, you—"

"*You didn't see me!* Damn it, I tell you I was not at home this afternoon, any time! Don't you think I know where I was?"

"I saw you, Mike. Don't you think I know you when I see you?"

I made an effort to get back to reality, common sense, out of something tenuous, stubbornly dreamlike about this incredible scene. I said with great reasonableness: "Look. This is ridiculous. Go call up Tony, ask him if I wasn't in the lab all afternoon, watching that new Reedmier precipitation. Call him up, settle this idiotic—wait a minute . . . I forgot. Tony wasn't back in the lab today. . . I just remembered . . . I worked by myself all day." Mary's face was white but not surprised. It was as though she had scarcely heard what I had said—as though there could be no point in her listening to whatever I could say. Her certainty was secure and ironbound—she had seen me in that house that afternoon, apparently either canned up or crazy, and that I was lying about it only sickened her more and that was all.

Why shouldn't she be positive I had been at home that afternoon, if she had seen me? She was as positive about it as I was that I had been at work. I knew I had been at work, and yet she knew she had seen me at home.

There was an instant while I wondered if it would be possible to doubt my own reason, and I conceived a distant, fog-white impossibility, that I had actually not been at work but had only thought I had been . . . and then the doubt was

gone as quickly as it had come, with an impatient cuff from my mind, which was entirely rational and lucid and which knew where I had been that day—in the lab—and which refused to consider belly-wash such as projected ectoplasm, a flash of amnesia, or the onset of schizophrenia.

But the doubt was to return another time or two, in desperation at hunting an answer, before the thing was done with . . . and other doubts as well.

\* \* \*

Q.: So, Mr. Blake, it is your contention that you did not return to your home that afternoon, to brutally whip the child you and your wife were planning to adopt, and it is your wife's contention that you did. You have no explanation for the fact that your wife saw you in the house, in the very act of beating the child Janie, and you have no evidence or testimony corroborating your presence at your place of employment, the Mincken Research Laboratories.

A.: Yes. That's right.

Q.: Doesn't it seem obvious to you that one of you, either you or your wife, must be lying?

A.: No. I believe Mar—my wife, but I also believe in my own senses. I've almost lost my mind trying to figure it out . . . but there isn't any answer, unless you want to believe in ghosts. I couldn't have been in two places at the same time. It could have been someone impersonating me, but there wouldn't have been any reason for anyone to—

Q.: Just a moment—impersonating you to your own wife?

A.: I tell you, I don't know. I don't know what else it could have been.

Q.: Mr. Blake. Let me ask you a simple, honest question. You need not answer it unless you wish. This is a remarkable story you have given us here. Now please look at this jury. Do you think this jury will believe any such tale?

A.: No.

Q.: I quite agree. Furthermore, don't you think it will strike this jury as rather odd that your counsel allowed you to present this farce in cross examination, rather than in direct questioning? Very well, strike it out . . . It doesn't matter,

it doesn't matter. . . I presume, Mr. Blake, that this ghost of you, or this impersonator, who could pass for you in the eyes of your own wife, returned? Wait, don't answer yet. We don't want to waste this court's time. Let's wrap it all up together. I presume this amazing ghost returned on the morning of July 3rd, last, and inflicted the bruises on your wife's arms, for which she was treated by a Dr. Cartwright on that same morning? That he kept returning from time to time—always when you were at work, with no witnesses conveniently at hand, however—and that he was always in a fit of rage, and that your wife—who also refused to believe this apparition anyone other than yourself—stuck it out through these ugly repetitions until, at last, the orphanage from which you had obtained the child Janie, having heard of this apparition through its investigators, decided you and your wife were not fit parents for the child, and notified you they would take the child from you, at which your wife finally left you, and that, within a week after this separation, when Mr. George Diderot, of the orphanage which was about to take back the child Janie, called to see your estranged wife in answer to her plea for a last talk with him, to beg him for one more chance to keep the child with her—that when Mr. Diderot called at your estranged wife's house—the home of her parents—late one night this same ghost shot him and killed him? In other words, that this same ghost is guilty of the crime of which you stand accused? And of the varicolored misbehavior leading up to that crime? Is that so, Mr. Blake?

A.: I didn't say it was a ghost. I said I didn't know what it was.

Q.: Well, we won't call it a ghost. We can afford to stretch a point, I think . . . too. . . We'll call it this thing that looks like you and acts like you and takes your place and does things—including murder—when you're someplace else—unwitnessed. This—this thing—did all this?

A.: Yes.

Q.: But you didn't?

A.: No. I did not.

Q.: This—this thing—is the guilty party?

A.: Yes.

Q.: This thing that looks like you—red hair like yours, tweed suit like yours, horn-rimmed glasses like yours, hat like yours—this thing that acts like you, this thing that might well *be* you, except of course, that you were someplace else, unwitnessed, this thing that is so close to being you, yourself, that you are the only one who knows any difference—this thing that, after all, *was* actually you, yourself, *was it not*—You need not answer, Mr. Blake.

A.: I want to answer. I wasn't the only one that could tell any difference. Janie knew it wasn't me. She—

Q.: You will limit your answers to questions asked, please. No doubt you were about to tell us again that the child Janie was not afraid of you, even after her beating. The court has heard that touching bit. But I am only too happy to enlarge upon it. Children are a bit like dogs, I have heard. They are loyal, loving and true. Nothing can quite beat back that shining devotion in the heart of a child—or a dog. Not even brutal, merciless beatings, not even murderous rages, not even murder, murder, itself . . . Since we have mentioned the child Janie, however, let us speak of her a moment. You have said you loved her dearly. Surely then you had some favorite game you must have played with her? Stories, songs—

A.: Yes. In the evenings—

Q.: Yes. Please go on.

A.: She liked to sing *Hi, Betty Martin*.

Q.: *Hi, Betty Martin*. Yes. Can you tell the court how it goes?

A.: *Hi, Betty Martin, tiptoe, tiptoe . . . Hi, Betty Martin, tiptoe . . . fine . . .*

Q.: Are you able to go on, Mr. Blake?

A.: Yes.

Q.: Is that all of the song?

A.: Yes.

Q.: And was there, perhaps, a little dance connected with it?

A.: Yes. We . . . we would dance around.

Q.: I see. Did you, Mr. Blake, did you sing this little song with the child Janie on the immediate evenings following June 28th, last—the day of the child's first whipping?

A.: I did.

Q.: And the dance? The little dance, Mr. Blake?

A.: She couldn't. She was . . . she was too sore . . . she was hurt . . .

Q.: She was hurt so badly that she couldn't dance for days? As you watched her pitiful, aching little efforts, Mr. Blake, tell me, how did you feel, Mr. Blake? . . . That's all.

MY attorney had told me he had his reasons for not wanting to bring out the unexplainable and clearly unbelievable double identity story in direct examination, but in letting the prosecutor bring it out instead. I suppose because he thought it would smell even worse of a fix if I told it with my own counsel's pseudo-sympathetic witness stand coaching.

I say pseudo-sympathetic because it was not hard to see that my attorney would give outside odds I was guilty. At least that's the impression I got.

Another funny thing: I couldn't remember my lawyer's name. I knew it, naturally. But the whole damned thing was like a dream. My lawyer was only my lawyer, the prosecutor the prosecutor, the jury the jury, the judge the judge. Names, faces, nameless, faceless people in a nightmare. There was only one other real person in it: Mary. I watched her each day and hung on to watching her, because that was honesty and reality. I did not speak to her. I always wanted to ask her about Janie and how she was, but it wouldn't look right to speak to her. I remember that my attorney surprised me one day by asking her for me and passing the news on to me that Janie was all right and she missed me and Mary still had a faint hope the orphanage might let her keep the kid, although she really knew better.

From time to time my lawyer would lean over from rustling his papers and say: "Don't worry. You'll be all right." He said it with a casual, brusque, detached distaste. A ritual, probably, part of the professional service to each and every client. I have an impression he was an old man, puffing, elderly, white-haired and absent-minded, and where the prosecutor had facts, facts, facts, by the

wagon load, picture after picture painstakingly constructed on neat documented facts, my lawyer had trouble remembering the names of the principals in the case. His mind was sloppy. He counted on his fingers. He seemed to pay scant attention to the trial as it went along. Don't worry, he would say. You'll be all right. He had a man working for him, an investigator, some sort of an assistant. They talked to me day after day, asking question after question, questions that had nothing to do with anything. They would sit in my cell and play chess while they listened to me.

The dream went on. I gathered it was ending; I thought my attorney was summing up. He was talking about psychology. Then I saw that he was not summing up; he was explaining the relevancy of a line of questioning, and Mary was on the stand again. There was a huddle around the bench and my lawyer came to our table and moved me to another chair and went back to the bench and the huddle broke up and he began talking again loud enough to be heard.

"A person sees things in parts . . . A person sees salient features . . . A silk hat makes a man a banker . . . A straw hat makes the man a farmer . . . The secret of the quick-change artist . . . It's the same suit of clothes, it's the same man . . . The salient feature, the feature to which your attention is drawn, is different . . . The eye sees in fragments, the mind sees in fragments . . . memory constructs . . ."

There was a sudden noise of shouting near me, and bailiffs and detectives shoving back and forth, and a confusion that crashed upward for a brief moment and fell away under the pounding of the judge's gavel and a deep voice yelling. The courtroom was on its feet.

A little knot of officers moved toward the bench from the rail, dragging a tall redhaired man, who was fighting them. His horn-rimmed glasses were knocked loose from one ear.

My attorney strode toward them, waving his arms and the tumult rose again and again the judge stilled it and my lawyer was bellowing: "This is not my cli-



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ent! This is not my client! This is not the defendant!"

The redhaired man was writhing among the officers. He punched out a free hand and one of them went sprawling. They all jumped him and held him up straight and stiff, and he strained to break away.

"This is not my client!" my lawyer was yelling. He pounded on the witness chair and shouted at Mary: "Tell us now! Is this man your husband? I tell you, he is not! What do you know of this man?" He pounded the witness chair with his fist. "Who is this man, Mrs. Blake?"

The redhaired man fought to break away again.

"Of course he is my husband," Mary said. She was a little scornful. She knew it was some courtroom trick. She would have helped me if she could.

Immediately the redhaired man was quiet. My lawyer turned around and waved to the knot of cops to move back to the rail, and when they were out of the way he pointed a finger at me.

"Then who is that man, Mrs. Blake?"

MARY'S face went slowly pale. She said: "I thought . . . I thought you were only trying to make me doubt. I—"

"Never mind what you thought, Mrs. Blake. Which of these two men is the defendant?"

The redhaired man was still now and it was not hard to see he was wearing a wig. It was not a good fit. I recognized him then for my lawyer's assistant, the investigator.

Mary pointed to me. "He is."

"Correct," my lawyer said, in a kind of crow. "When you have time to study them, together, and calmly, it's not hard to tell, is it? But in confusion, in excitement, in the midst of a struggle, a beating of your child, a violent, raging argument, a few brief moments of sudden and surprising and shocking behavior, it is not so easy to tell.

"I will point out that the defendant has three prominent characteristics. He is tall. He wears horn-rimmed glasses. He has red hair. Those three characteristics, Mrs. Blake, are the only points you actually *looked at and saw* about the man

who came now and then to your home, always when he knew your husband would be working alone, always waiting until he could come in while you were gone for a moment so that you, seeing him when you returned, would be surprised at the first glance even to see him there in the house—and finally, always to be doing something, when you would see him, that would carry you on from that initial surprise to horror, to shock, to anger, all these things to last until he was gone, so that, in the whole time, your mind would never be able to look at him calmly and wholly.

"I venture to say that even I, in a red wig and horn-rimmed spectacles, could deceive you under such psychological conditions, and further—"

An argument started among the lawyers and the judge at this point and I had some idea the judge might be raising hell with my lawyer and his assistant about the trick they had pulled, but it was something else. My attorney mumbled something later on about the judge giving permission beforehand for the stunt. It showed the judge also thought it was a good point. It helped me. It gave the first vestige of credibility to the story I had told, although the prosecutor would probably try to make it look as though Mary had been in on the trick and had deliberately named the wrong man for the benefit of the jury. But you couldn't hurt Mary with that jury; it was too plain that she wanted to give nothing but the truth; she had waived her exemption; and that she couldn't keep from trying to help me either, when it was all right. The jury liked that. The funny thing was that she believed I was guilty. Just as she believed that I had whipped Janie and slapped Mary herself around the morning she had found me, she said, at home again and drunk. A morning that I had been at work.

My lawyer's drama had made a good impression, that was true. It was an interesting trick, and the jury liked it. But it would take more than a trick to counterbalance the prosecutor's facts, his mountain of facts. I thought I knew what my attorney was after. To create a little doubt, any small spot of doubt, that might



work to get me only a life sentence instead of execution. That would be a triumph for the defense in this case. The trick itself, I thought, showed he had no hope at all of winning the case but was playing only for that moral victory of saving my neck. That's what you hire a good criminal lawyer for. He doesn't keep score by acquittals, but by the hopeless cases he's saved from the death penalty. He knows you're guilty. That doesn't make him feel there might be anything unethical about cheating justice to save your neck, because he tells himself he is opposed to capital punishment. That makes it all square.

"Don't worry," the old man puffed at me, out of an absent-minded purple face, ruffling his papers. "Don't worry. You'll be all right."

AND then suddenly the defense was presenting some facts. The investigator, whatever his name was, the tall, thin sharp-nosed man, the nervous chess player, must have been still collecting his facts while the trial was going on. I'm sure my attorney didn't have them all the way through.

The first fact was, in a way, the most sensational one.

They had never found the gun that had killed Mr. Diderot—the murder gun, it was called—and my elderly attorney's first simple fact was establishment of the murder gun's ownership.

There were microphotographs from Police Ballistics of the three fired bullets and of the three fired cartridge cases, which had been found in the gutter across the street. They were from a .38 caliber Colt automatic.

Before he called his first surprise witnesses my attorney distributed prints of these microphotographs among the jury.

The first witness was a red bulging woman, Mr. Diderot's housekeeper from the orphanage. There were a number of preliminary questions about her name, her job, her duties, Mr. Diderot's habits, his precise authority at the orphanage—except for a remote board of trustees, he controlled it completely—and more than an hour of other minor tiresome questions, delivered in my attorney's elderly, tiresome way.

Then he was inquiring about Mr. Diderot's belongings. His clothes, his car, his umbrellas, his golf clubs, his fishing rods, his guns. . . .

"Mr. Diderot owned a .38 Colt automatic, did he not? Well, you've told us you don't know the names of guns. . . . Did he own a gun that looked like this?" He held up a .38 Colt automatic.

"Yes, sir, he did. He had one just like that."

"Did he shoot with it?"

"He shot a hawk with it once. It was a chickenhawk and it was coming down by the chicken yard behind the Institute and Mr. Diderot ran in the house and came out with this gun and shot it and killed it. My, we were all that surprised, and Mr. Diderot was too."

"Sure," my lawyer said, huffing and turning around again to his table. "Sure enough. That would be good shooting." He held up a gold watchchain. "You have described Mr. Diderot's jewelry. Is this chain the one you described as his good one?"

"Yes sir, it is. It's the very one."

"Look at it closely, please. I want you to be absolutely sure."

"Oh, I couldn't be wrong about it. It's his. It's got the bullet hanging on it. Right there."

"No, that isn't a bullet. It's a cartridge case."

"Well, whatever it is, it's the one that killed the hawk. He picked it up after the gun threw it out after he killed the hawk and he had it hung on his good watchchain."

"You're positive this is his chain? And this shell is from his gun? You're positive?"

"Indeed I am. I know that chain like I know my thumbnail."

So my attorney marked the chain as evidence and asked it to be recorded as an exhibit, and then he brought up ballistics experts, three of them, one after the other, and after they had identified the cartridge case hanging on the watchchain, and the new batch of microphotographs my lawyer now held in his hand, and after they had testified that in their unanimous and expert opinion the gun that had killed Mr. Diderot had been the same gun that had killed the hawk—

his own gun—my lawyer passed out the second group of microphotographs to the jury, and newspaper reporters raised hell in the courtroom disturbing its decorum by trying to get out to telephones.

So Mr. Diderot had been killed by his own gun and wherever that pointed it was not at me, and the prosecutor, cross examining, was obviously doubtful and unsure of himself and wondering, in his thorough way, about his facts.

He could not shake the witnesses, and it disturbed his entire plan of attack to have to connect me with Mr. Diderot's own gun. But he was only agitated, and far from defeated. His facts told him I was guilty, and since that was so he and his assistants would find facts to demonstrate that I must have gone out to Mr. Diderot's orphanage, thirty miles out in the country, and stolen the gun from his house with which to kill him later on. It weakened his case just enough that there was no doubt left about my attorney winning it in his own peculiar way, by saving my neck. I would be assured of no worse than life now, unless the prosecutor conjured a miracle, and that nettled the prosecutor, because he was determined to see me executed, as the law provided.

Later on my attorney called one of the young women who ran the orphanage under Mr. Diderot's direction. He spent a great deal of time establishing the fact that this girl kept a diary, and he produced the diary and announced he would offer it in evidence, and he read from it at length. There wasn't anything in it to embarrass the young woman, who was stringy and had pimples. It was the kind of diary which recorded the weather and what was had for dinner.

Then the defense presented its second principal fact.

"Still reading from the witness' diary," my attorney said, "I quote the entry of June 28th, last. 'Mr. Diderot was gone into the city all day.' And the entry of July 2nd, last, and the following day also, 'Mr. Diderot has been in the city again. He stayed overnight. He hasn't looked well lately. Maybe he is going in to see a doctor.' These entries are correct? Mr. Diderot was in the city on those particular days?"

"Yes, he was."

And more witnesses from the orphanage. None of them kept diaries, none of them could remember with exact certainty, but they were pretty sure Mr. Diderot had been in the city on those dates. They were more confident about July 2nd and 3rd than about June 28th, because it was unusual of Mr. Diderot to be away just before the Fourth; on the Fourth there was always a fireworks display and a playlet and entertainment of various sorts, and Mr. Diderot should have been seeing to all the necessary preparation.

So that was that, and it was not until the next cast of witnesses that the goal of these facts began to come clear.

The next witnesses were employees of a cheap hotel on the East Side. They said they had had Mr. Diderot in their hotel on those days in the summer he had been in the city. They remembered Mr. Diderot for three reasons—he was higher class than most of their patrons, he seemed to be unwell, and, principally, one of the employees, a combination bell-boy-porter-cigar-counterman, had seen him in disguise.

\* \* \*

Q.: Now, what exactly do you mean, disguise?

A.: Well, he'd been acting funny. He'd come in and stay a while and then he'd go out, and when he'd go out he'd have his coat up around his ears and his hat down over his eyes, and his clothes would be different, and he acted sort of crazy. So once when he was in I thought I'd have a look. I act like the house detective too, see.

Q.: All right, get on with it. What did you mean by disguise?

A.: Well sir, I went up to his floor and down the hall to his room and had a look. Through the keyhole, see.

Q.: Well, come on, come on, what did you see?

A.: I see him standing in front of the bureau, looking into the mirror, putting on a hat and trying it one way and another. And he was in disguise.

Q.: I ask you again, what do you mean by disguise?

A.: He had on a red wig and horn-rimmed glasses.

**T**HERE was excitement again after that, confusion behind the rail and around the bench, and while it was still going on my attorney, with his aged, weary, blundering air, produced a Gladstone bag that had been checked at the depot, and witnesses from the orphanage identified the bag as Mr. Diderot's, and an attendant from the depot identified it as having been checked by a man answering Mr. Diderot's description, and then it was opened and found to contain a tweed suit, like the ones I usually wear, and a brown hat, like the one I've worn for three years, and a pair of horn-rimmed glasses and an expensive red wig.

It could have been the end of the trial there, I think. My attorney's final facts were anti-climax, and dry and tedious. They concerned over a dozen new witnesses—lawyers, lawyers called from Chicago and New Orleans, trustees of the orphanage, banking officials, figures, columns of figures, wills, executors, or-

phanage regulations . . . You wondered how my lawyer's investigator had run all this down and then you knew it hadn't been so hard, once he knew about the disguise and the visits to town on those particular dates, because he would have known then that Mr. Diderot had had to have a reason.

It was simple. Mr. Diderot had discovered that Janie was named in a will, and the amount directed to her was large. For a time he had been in the position of holding this information alone, and it had occurred to him that he could, with a little trouble, take advantage of it.

For some time the orphanage had been trying, as they usually did with foundlings, to trace Janie's parentage, but it was not until our year of probation was almost up that Mr. Diderot had certified her parentage and, a little later, learned of the bequest she was heir to. The bequest was in negotiable form, unattached, and that meant that Janie's guardian would come into sole supervision of the money she inherited, until Janie became of age.



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In his position at the orphanage, Mr. Diderot would have been this guardian, before Mary and I took Janie out. In his position at the orphanage, which Mr. Diderot enjoyed without interference from the, for the most part, disinterested trustees, it would not have been hard for him to have transferred the money to his own use, over a period of a few years or more.

But, we had Janie and, in a short time, we would be legally adopting her. The regulations of his institution would not allow him to take Janie back from us without cause. He knew that we, ourselves, would not give him this cause. So he had gone to great pains to provide it in our place.

It is possible the years he had spent with the orphans at his place, years in which he would have grown used to giving punishment, had atrophied his normal instincts for children. I think it would have had to be more than that—I think he was probably a little insane. Beyond the sadistic beating he had given Janie, he must have known what he would do to the kid and to Mary and me. He must have been unable to reason normally, or he might have wondered at the cash value of a home and a family.

But he certainly had had a grasp of psychology. Both child and adult. While he may have been sure that he could pass for me before Mary, in a chaotic minute or two, he knew better than to try to fool Janie.

When he had whipped her he grabbed her from behind and he didn't let her see him. Janie never had any idea who had whipped her, and I don't believe Mary ever let her know it was supposed to have been me.

**T**HE jury gave a verdict of acquittal without leaving the box. Probably they all still thought I had killed Mr. Diderot that night, but now they considered it justified.

The prosecutor shook my hand warmly. He was deeply touched and said something about not wanting to be quoted, but this case was unique and while no circumstances condoned murder, still he himself had children, and he wouldn't want to be quoted, but in his solemn opinion Mr.

Diderot's murder had been like the hand of fate and a higher power, and better undisturbed by mortal law, although he wouldn't want to be quoted.

With Mary in my arms and Janie, for the first time, brought down to the courtroom, I didn't hear very much of what he said.

But I did think, in the same puzzled and somewhat uncomfortable way I've thought of it since, about the hand of fate and the higher power he spoke of. The rest of the world may have still thought that I killed Mr. Diderot and that I was justified. But I knew I hadn't killed him and so I couldn't dismiss it like that. I couldn't dismiss it at all.

And thinking of fate, and guilt, the inscrutable and immortal way of these things, I have wondered . . . I have wondered about the redhaired man who looked like me, the redhaired man whom Mr. Diderot had created so cleverly, and I have wondered if there could be such a thing as having created that shadowy personality too well . . . so perfectly that it might have become a separate entity of its own and, for a revengeful moment, might have come to life. . . . for a moment long enough to slide across that empty street, casting no shadow in the moonlight, and destroy its creator.

I'm not sure exactly what I mean. Of course it's all supernatural nonsense anyway. Some day some minor thug will probably confess Mr. Diderot's murder, committed for some entirely different reason from anything at all connected with us. . . .

The way I reconstruct it is this: Mr. Diderot had just stopped before the door of Mary's parents' house on that dark quiet street, when a thug—or just a bum wanting a handout, but who Diderot *thought* was a thug—accosted him. Diderot pulled his gun on the man and there was a struggle between the two of them, in which Mr. Diderot was shot. Then his assailant, terrified at what had happened, made sure Diderot was finished off and then did a quick fade-out, taking the gun along to prevent the police from getting their hands on it.

That's probably what actually happened. But I'd prefer to believe the other theory, somehow.

# ASHES IN THE VALLEY

By Mark Lish

*Fifty thousand dollars! He'd found it and it was all his. It meant the chance of a lifetime for a sensible man. And that was Jasper Kane all over—sensible, no matter what it cost him, even up to fifty grand.*

**G**REEN glimmered upward through dull browns, and on the instant Jasper Kane was kneeling to claw pine-needles from an oiled-silk package, torn just now by his hobnailed boot to let its contents wink and set his pulses throbbing.

Feverishly he tore at the bundle, loosing a crisp cascade around his knees, pawing a hasty pile between them while he searched the mountainside for possible witnesses. Even in that moment the question of ownership was altogether settled in the mind of Jasper Kane. Had any burst upon the scene with claims, Jasper would have sprung to defense with the fervid sincerity of a wasp protecting its home.

Sure no one was near, he calmed and settled himself to count, the contact sending thrilly little tingles into his fingers and up his arms in much the same sensation another might have experienced at clasping the right woman's hand.

The figure grew and soared, and when all the bills were in the second pile he began over, numbly unable to grasp and believe. But counting was easy, since the bills were of a single denomination, and his second count only verified the first. He stacked them in neat piles, caressing



Jasper spread the bills out on the bed.

rumpled corners into smoothness, gradually adjusting himself to the enormity of his find. 5,000 ten-dollar bills! Fifty thousand dollars! Why, this meant. . . .

He rose and shook his fist toward the fertile valley he knew lay beyond and below dense timber that cut off his view. Neat farmsteads, well-kept fields that normally were lush and highly valued though just now parched and barren in the wake of unaccustomed drouth, the trim little drowsy town in the valley's center, the single one-horse bank with Amos Bender dozing, probably, behind his desk inside . . . He'd light a match under all that complacent drowsiness, would Jasper Kane, now that he had fifty thousand dollars to work with.

Loading the back of his jalopy with the firewood he had thrown down the mountainside, he speculated on the presence of such a treasure in a hiding place so meager, shuddering at thought of how long the money . . . *his* money . . . might have lain there protected only by a few pine-needles, with people from the Valley trampling all around and over it—picnicking, gathering wood, collecting Indian relics or odd rock-fragments to clutter old-fashioned parlors. It was like Valley folk, he reflected, to find all sorts of junk like that while overlooking fifty thousand dollars.

Crooked money, probably, cached by some hard-pressed big-time robber whose return had somehow been prevented. The affair of last summer, perhaps, when those quiet strangers—federal agents, to Jasper's certain if accidentally acquired knowledge—had roused the Valley to mystery-novel pitch by confiding in no one. That thought made him uneasy. He listened carefully for approaching cars, heard none, and thumbed hastily through a stack of the bills. No, serial numbers and bank-sponsorship varied widely, rendering the bills untraceable. He was perfectly safe in spending—rather, *using* them.

**C**HUGGING down the Valley, even the dust that whipped around his windshield formed a rosy veil, through which Jasper examined possessions soon to be his. Mortgaged, every acre of this and every stick—Amos Bender's fortune tottering at ruin's brink and drouth's disaster bearing the Valley down. The chance

of a lifetime for a sensible man with fifty thousand dollars. . . .

Halfway to Valletown he passed a sleek coupe at the roadside, one tire flat, the man beside it lifting a hand which Jasper Kane ignored. "No tools, likely," thought Jasper. "Well, why don't he *carry* some?"

But the man's hawk features tugged at memory, plaguing him. Ah! Federal agent, the leader of last summer's pair! Instantly the suspicion that was as much part of Jasper Kane as his toenails sprang on guard. The fellow must have come over the mountain, passed Jasper's jalopy parked on the highway. Had he stopped . . . spied? *Why* was he back in the Valley?

Jasper shared the Valley's almost superstitious respect for Uncle Sam's mantrappers, and misgivings would not down. Let's see: those fellows applied themselves only to certain cases. Federal matters: foreign skulduggery, kidnapings, narcotics, counterfeiting . . . counterfeiting! Could that be it—his treasure worthless, even dangerous to possess? Well, he was himself something of an expert where money was concerned—he'd check these against genuine bills. . . .

Mentally he went over his own small store of ready cash—small because Jasper Kane believed in keeping his every resource at work bringing in more—and found no tens. Oh well, he'd stop at Amos' bank and trade a couple of fives.

Visiting the bank stiffened Jasper's fortitude. Coming out he was resolved to risk any reasonable hazard, if only to humble, later, the sassy spriggins Amos Bender kept behind a teller's window—son of widowed Amelia Fair who once had laughed at suitorship of Jasper Kane. Long ago Jasper had suggested employment of himself behind that window. Amos had only smiled in that tolerant way of his. "The Valley'd feel uneasy, Jasper—end by going back to sock and cupboard banking," he'd said.

In the sanctuary of bachelor quarters Jasper spread the bills across his wide bed and scrutinized them, carried several to a front window and got his dime-store reading glass. Detail by detail he examined and compared, and after twenty patient minutes found the thing that dashed

his hopes. A strolling man by a lamppost, in front of the pictured Treasury Building. On *his* bills, a blotch near the man's left hand, like something carried—on the bill from Amos Bender's bank, nothing! A small discrepancy, but enough to open the gates at Alcatraz. . . .

He lifted rage-clenched fists, to stand glaring between them out the window. For a moment the pair of figures on the street were figures only, moving vaguely through a haze of blasted plans. Then clearing vision identified them: Amos Bender and the hawkfaced federal man, coming directly here!

**H**E snatched up the bills by the window—in spite of his terror cannily tucking the single "good" one into a pocket without noticing he had folded another with it—and fled in wild haste to the bedroom. Found . . . *caught* in possession!

Thin story—wouldn't stand a chance—Valley hatred—*federal* authority—brisk knocking—too bulky to hide—

Through a bedroom window he glimpsed the backyard leaves he'd raked

to burn. He snatched the counterpane's corners to make a bundle easily spilled, and ran. A match, and dry leaves popped and crackled, flames licking swiftly into the pile's green crown. . . .

Calm now, sure of his safety, Jasper walked around the house to greet the men at his front door.

"Been a mistake, Jasper," Amos Bender explained. "That ten young Fair gave you, while ago—may I see it?"

Too late, Jasper realized he was handing over two bills. Still, possession of a *single* counterfeit meant little. . . .

"Yep, this is it," Banker Amos was saying, relief in his voice. "Don't know *how* it got mixed with young Fair's cash. I'd spotted it and reported, and Stevens here dropped by to pick it up. Counterfeit, Jasper—see the fellow by the lamppost? On this *good* bill of yours he's carrying something—looks like a dinner bucket—but on this bad one they left that out. See?"

But Jasper couldn't. Smoke from his backyard bonfire was rolling around the corner, filling his eyes with tears.



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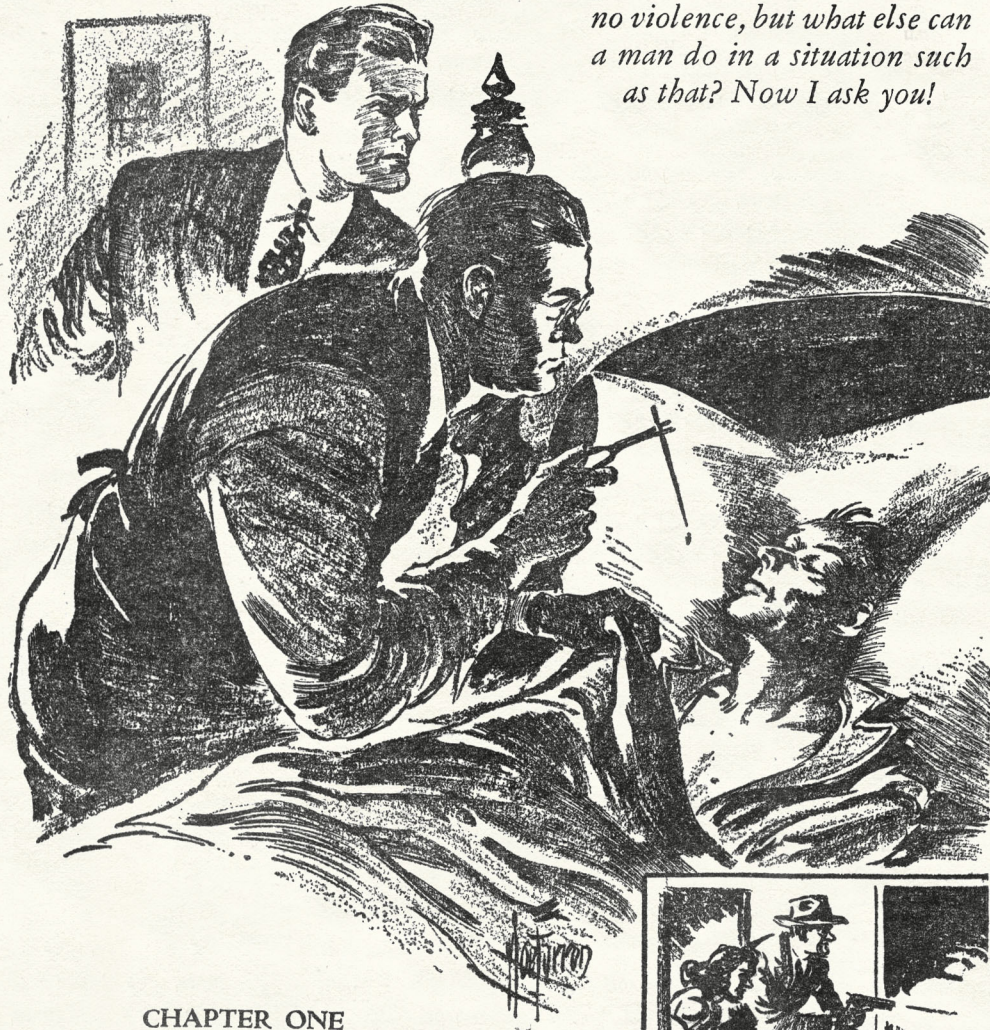
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# FINGERS OF ICE

By **C. P. DONNEL, Jr.**

*Author of "The Sweet Waters of Death," etc.*

*It all began with the business of Alfred Jorgensen and his sister Berthe who was not his sister. Then, of course, I killed Alfred. My boss, Colonel Kaspir of Section Five, had specifically stipulated that there was to be no violence, but what else can a man do in a situation such as that? Now I ask you!*



## CHAPTER ONE

### Fire Frame-Up

**T**HE popular conception of counter-espionage is shooting spies against a wall at dawn. Actually, the real art of counter-espionage is knowing who to let alone, and how long.

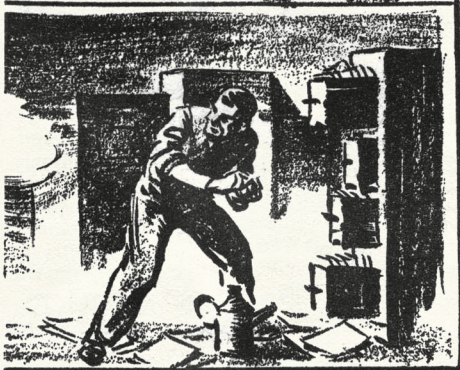




**A Colonel  
Kaspir  
Novelette**



The tweezers held a long needle . . .  
on the tip of it hung a drop of blood.



"Don't pick 'em till they're ripe," is the motto of Col. Stephen Kaspir, chief of Section Five. He means dead ripe, too.

It's a sound enough theory, but terribly wearing on the people who must practice it. Particularly when they are convinced, as Maude and I so often have been, that Colonel Kaspir is waiting too long.

Maude swears that Kaspir prefers to nurse a case until he can hear her nerves and mine twang like a plucked fiddlestring. Maude has been with Section Five longer than I—Kaspir borrowed me from Army

Intelligence in '40 and never returned me—and she should know.

But then, women are inclined to take these things too personally. Being a man, I do not hold it against Kaspir that gray hairs have multiplied prematurely at my temples during my association with him. I am reasonably content. Apart from the larger issues involved, working with Kaspir means working with Maude until, barring accidents, the end of the war. After that I have certain plans for Maude which I suspect she suspects.

But there are moments, I must admit, when the thought of duty on some shell-riven battlefield appeals strongly to me. However perilous your situation there, you would hardly be expected to prowl the midnight halls of a mental sanitarium with murder at your shoulder, as I did when we were hunting "die lezt feldzug;" nor are you apt to blunder, as I did, upon such objects as the block of ice and its content.

It all began, although we did not realize it at the time, with that business of Alfred Jorgensen, the purported Scandinavian, and his sister Berthe, who was not his sister.

Jorgensen was the lean, colorless night custodian of a certain government building in Washington—the same building, by the way, wherein the rosy-cheeked, seductively plump Berthe pounded a typewriter by day. Berthe frequently worked nights, too.

They shared a tiny flat in Southwest Washington, within pistol-shot of the old brownstone ex-boarding house which has served Section Five as headquarters ever since Kaspir began to weave together that most peculiar of counter-espionage agencies late in '39.

The stolid Alfred had little social life. Berthe, on her few free nights, stepped out with a tall, black-browed, youngish man named George Mitchell, a male nurse and ward attendant from Bailey's Retreat, that widely known sanitarium for well-to-do mental and nervous cases on the eastern outskirts of Washington.

All this, and more, Maude and I learned the first week after we were assigned to the Jorgensens. How Kaspir got on to the Jorgensens in the first place, how he learned that Berthe's real surname was

Hauser, and that she and the undistinguished Alfred were living in sin, I do not know. Since he made no boasts about his acumen in spotting the pair, I suspect that they were called to his attention by Maj. Gen. Altemus Tancred, of Army G-2, with whom Kaspir maintains a prickly sort of co-operation.

I say we learned more. We learned that Alfred and his buxom Berthe were engaged in a task so stupendous, and so apparently senseless, that we were inclined to doubt our own evidence.

"HMMM," went Colonel Kaspir profoundly, when we reported our findings. "Hmmm." This was intended to convey that the Jorgensen matter was crystal clear to him, but that he preferred not to disclose his interpretation of it to us underlings for some obscure reason of his own.

Maude's superb violet eyes snapped. She crossed her long, shapely legs and patted the floor with an impatient foot.

"Very interestin'," murmured Kaspir, avoiding her eye. "Hmmm." He tipped his bulk to a dangerous angle in his ancient swivel chair and hoisted his feet to the desk top. From this position he stared at the spotty ceiling, his full moon of a face thoughtful, his Cupid's-bow mouth pursed as though saying "prune."

This was pure bluff, and fooled neither of us. Maude was annoyed. She lit a cigarette and popped shut her gold case with a sudden energy that made Kaspir jump. From her red lips came an explosive puff of smoke.

I could not find it in my heart to blame Kaspir. Why Alfred and Berthe should be grinding away at the incredible task of copying, and in triplicate, the names of our soldiers and sailors in service abroad, plus the names and addresses of their next-of-kin, eluded me completely.

Had they been interested only in the number of men we were sending to foreign fronts, and the disposition of various units, I could easily have understood. But this preoccupation with the fact that the parents of Private Bill Jones, of the Umpty-Seventh, were Mr. and Mrs. John Jones, residing at such-and-such a number on such-and-such a street in What-you-maycallit, Kansas, was too much for

me. As it plainly was for Colonel Kaspir.

Stored in their flat, Maude and I had found duplicate lists, on Government onion-skin paper, of nearly half a million men and their next-of-kin. What they had done with the third set of lists we were unable to learn.

Maude demanded finally: "What now, Steve?" She transfixed our horizontal chief—at that angle he resembled an overturned water-tower—with a compelling glance. "Shall we bring them in for questioning?"

"What for?" inquired Kaspir of the ceiling. He would not look up.

"Oh, rubbish!" Maude bounced to her feet, smoothing out the skirt of her white sharkskin suit. She resettled the picture hat on her golden blond hair and turned the battery of her eyes on me.

I shrugged my shoulders helplessly. Colonel Kaspir had crawled into the hole of his ignorance and pulled it in after him. In such a situation he is inaccessible until he reappears with an answer to the problem and brags openly that he knew it all the time.

Kaspir sat up unexpectedly and thrust a big paw into the desk drawer where he keeps his chocolate cherries. He planted two in his mouth and champed noisily. Through the syrup he said: "Don't pull 'em in yet. Wait."

"For what?" This from me, sharply.

I startled him. He almost admitted that he didn't know. His little sky-blue eyes told me that much. Just in time he smothered the emergent truth with a hiccupping sound.

"Till I tell you." He flushed in Maude's glare. To cover his confusion he picked up a sheet of paper and scowled at it. "Run along," he ordered juicily. "I got things to do." For emphasis he snatched up a pencil stub and made marks on the paper.

This was the pay-off. Kaspir abhors paper work and never touches any unless bullied into it by Maude. This present maneuver was the equivalent of a mule planting his forefeet and resisting to the death any attempt to make him budge. We left in a huff, to resume our surveillance of the Jorgensens.

We could not, however, wait for Kaspir's cue before pinching the Jorgensens.

Things happened. The Jorgensens suddenly abandoned their laborious copying of the next-of-kin files. One night Berthe, ostensibly working late, made several trips between the building and her flat, by taxi, with a suitcase.

The explanation was fairly obvious. For some reason the game was up and the Jorgensens were removing all the files possible in a single night. But how did they expect to conceal the gaps which must certainly be noticed by the day force the next morning?

Maude and I arrived at the answer simultaneously. There was no time to waste in waking Kaspir and discussing the matter. Even now it might be too late. We left our hideaway and let ourselves into the dimly-lit wing which now held only the files and Alfred Jorgensen. Maude slipped off her high-heeled shoes and her stockinged feet padded silently beside my crepe rubber soles as we mounted the stairs to the file rooms. The door of one of the rooms was open a crack, and we saw a light.

The stench of kerosene was strong. Alfred Jorgensen was going methodically about his work. Every third file drawer he would open, and into it tip the spout of the big oil can he carried.

He was not ten yards away when I stepped into the room, pistol in hand. With due respect to Jorgensen, I must report that he hesitated only an instant when he saw me, although my arrival must have given him a ghastly shock.

**T**HERE was something deadly in the planned efficiency of his movements. Very deliberately he set down the oil can and, without taking his eyes off me, fished something from his coat pocket.

Behind me, Maude loosed an inarticulate sound of apprehension. I said: "Don't use that matchbox."

Jorgensen took out a match.

My reaction was pure reflex. The automatic danced in my hand as I emptied it at him. The reports, in that low-ceilinged room, blended into a single thunderous sound that momentarily addled my brain. Then Maude was jostling me as we both hurried forward.

Jorgensen was on his hands and knees. We did not stop there. The chance bullet

that had ignited the matchbox had, by the grace of good luck, carried it several feet beyond him and the oil can. Maude would have trod the flames out with her stocking-footed feet had I not pushed her aside and done the job with my shoes. When the little fire was out we just stood there, trembling.

"Ah," went Jorgensen softly. Believe it or not, we had, for the moment, forgotten him. We turned just in time to see him topple sideways. He finished up on his back. One of my bullets had taken him under the left eye. He was not a pretty sight. And he was—I knew it even before I went to him—dead.

Maude averted her eyes and said without expression: "We'd better call Steve." She started out. I followed numbly. The words, "I've just killed a man," kept marching across my mind. I wondered why I was not in the grip of some overpowering emotion.

Had this thing ever happened to me before? I could not remember. Imagine being unable, even temporarily, to remember a thing like that! I, Mike Kettle, late of the editorial department of the *Baltimore Sun*, a sedentary, sensitive sort of person who, before he was inducted into Army Intelligence in '40, had never even killed a chicken. And now, here I was, wondering! The absurdity of the situation struck me, and I laughed aloud.

Maude's hand touched my elbow. The violet eyes were worried but comprehending. My laugh, echoing from some dim corridor, followed us downstairs.

We found the switchboard and Maude, plugging in expertly, dialed Kaspir's hotel. She began with: "Steve, Jorgensen's dead. Mike had to shoot him." I bethought myself of her shoes and went to fetch them. Their colloquy must have been brief, for she was standing when I returned.

"Steve wants us to meet him near the Jorgensen apartment, right away," she said, and took the shoes. Her eyes searched my face. I replaced the automatic in the shoulder holster that always makes me feel like a stage gunman in a cheap melodrama.

"I'm all right," I said shortly, in answer to the question in her eyes. I was annoyed with myself. More than anything

in this world, I desire to shine in Maude's eyes. But I haven't the flair for action. Even Kaspir, for all his bulk and bumbling, develops a certain feline grace and devil-may-care manner in moments of crisis.

But me—that laugh in the hall upstairs had been almost hysterical.

It was both comforting and humiliating to have Maude slip her arm through mine as we left the building and went out into the warm spring night. Such is Maude's art, however, that before we had gone half a block I was convinced that she was clinging to me, not supporting me. I felt protective—and better. Finally we found a cab, it was close on 3 A.M. then, and sat silent as we sped through the deserted streets.

Kaspir was there before us. Ghostly and gigantic in the white linens he dons at the first hint of warm weather, he materialized from a doorway a few houses below the converted resident in which the Jorgensen flat was one of many.

"C'mon," was all he said. We followed him into the narrow lobby and up the shoulder-wide stairway. It did not occur to me until later to wonder how he had known the house. All feeling seemed to have deserted me. I was only vaguely interested in what he was about to do.

Outside the Jorgensens' door on the third floor, a door Maude and I had used more than once while the Jorgensens were absent from home, Kaspir rumbled: "Where'd you say they keep the stuff?"

"In the kitchen," I told him. The closet under the sink was stacked high with the copied lists, a kitchen cabinet was heavy with them.

"To the left as you enter," added Maude. Her shoulder, touching my arm, was trembling.

Kaspir, frowning under his battered Panama, lifted a foot. Under the impact of his size 13 shoe the sturdy door did not splinter, it simply gave up and opened, and I was still meditating upon this phenomenon when I found myself crowding him down the inner hall to the kitchen.

Berthe Hauser was kneeling by the sink, arranging the newly-stolen files atop the copies, when Kaspir floundered in with me literally on his heels. Kneeling, she looked around. She was a handsome,

full-bosomed girl. She neither started nor paled. She straightened up slowly and said: "What do you want here?"

Kaspir went over to the closet under the sink. She had to move aside to let him pass. His kneejoint cracked as he kneeled. He pulled out one of the master lists, part of the suitcase loot, and ran his eye over it.

"What do you want?" she repeated. I could see her pulling herself together. Her lips were thinner now, less provocative.

Kaspir, getting up, loomed over her. He gestured with a large hand toward the open kitchen window, which looked out over a canyon of backyards toward the center of Washington.

"You can see the flames from here," he said gravely.

Thinking it over now, I realize that Kaspir said the one thing that could have diverted her attention from the business of strengthening her defenses against us. Her eyes automatically followed the direction of his hand. For a full half-minute she stood rapt, staring, apparently mesmerized by the suggested picture of a burning building. So confident had she been that Jorgensen would succeed in firing the place that she could not believe, for the moment, that Kaspir was lying.

**B**UT there was not even a sky-glow. Finally she tore her gaze from the window. "Where is Alfred?" she said. Her voice had gone up a tone or two. Indecision, anger, fear, frustration were gathering like storm-clouds in her large eyes. I was definitely uneasy. For all Jorgensen's machine-like courage, this woman was a far more dangerous proposition. There was a fanaticism about her.

"My friend here, Captain Kettle," replied Kaspir, "dropped in on your pal Alfred tonight. He found Alfred doin' childish tricks with an oilcan and some matches. In fact, Alfred was so persistent that Captain Kettle had to. . ." Kaspir made a pistol barrel of his forefinger, cocked a stubby thumb, and with his mouth made a noise like a champagne cork popping. It was a shoddy bit of horseplay, yet oddly effective. "Where'd you hit him, Mike?" he inquired.

"In the face," I said, following his lead

blindly. "Just below the left eye." I swallowed. Then I winced. I could see it coming. Germans can't understand frivolling with weighty topics like burning records or killing a man. It was not the fact that she was beaten that broke Berthe Hauser's emotional dam. It was the thought that she and the chilled-steel Alfred had succumbed to a moon-faced fool like Kaspir (he gives a remarkable imitation of a babbling idiot) and an obvious weak sister like me (I imagine I looked fairly pale and haggard at that moment).

So Berthe Hauser let down her hair and cursed us. She cursed us slowly and rather thoughtfully at first, and in English. Then her unraveling nerves betrayed her and she slid into German, a language admirably adapted to vilification.

Yet even as her voice hit the hysterical upper register, I became interested. So did Kaspir, I could tell by the set of his shoulders and the intent thrust of his jaw.

There was a red thread of menacing prophecy in this woman's obscene ravings. My own German is indifferent, but it seemed to me that she was threatening us and all we represented with a new, specific *something*—some move that would nullify all our successes and keep Germany at the top of the heap.

"Die lezt feldzug"—she repeated it half a dozen times. Which means "the last campaign," or, if you like, "the last front."

I admit that, on the face of it, it sounds like one of those overblown Goebbels catchwords full of sound and fury, and signifying nothing.

But not as delivered by Berthe Hauser. The passionate assurance that shook her voice each time she mentioned it, the almost religious fervor in her face communicated itself to me even while I told myself that I was an impressionable fool to be so impressed.

"Die lezt feldzug"—the last front—whatever, and wherever this final campaign of Germany's was to be, Berthe Hauser, who was most evidently no fool, was perfectly sure it would succeed, believed in it so completely that she was willing to point her words with the most emphatic exclamation point of all. . .

The sudden cessation of her voice left

us, I think, momentarily entangled in our thoughts. It was only two steps to the bedroom and she took them before we could stop her. Kaspir came out of his trance with a start, but his growl had barely left his lips when the shot was fired.

In the little instant of silence before the smell of gunpowder floated into the kitchen, the bedsprings in the next room creaked like a feeble after-curse as they received Berthe Hauser's body. Kaspir bounded into the bedroom like a terrier.

I had no desire to go in. Instinctively I turned to Maude. She was sitting on a kitchen chair, making heavy weather of the business of extracting a cigarette from her case. Our eyes met over the match I held for her. Cigarette between her lips, she said, "Mike, I. . ." and could say no more.

Kaspir shuffled out, scratching his neck. He tipped the Panama far down on his forehead and said from under it, very positively: "She wouldn't've talked anyhow." He meditated. "Not her," he said. He looked vaguely at us.

"Well," I said, "it's finished." This futile effort to put a cheerful face on things got just what it deserved.

Kaspir said, in the controlled tone of a man on the brink of exasperation: "Just exactly what in the hell is finished?"

Flushing, I let this go unanswered. What *had* we accomplished? Two deaths. The emptiest sort of triumph, in that we knew now precisely what we had known before: that the Jorgensen pair had been obtaining apparently valueless information from official records. No more.

We knew also that Germany was planning something new and dire. But where, and how, and when she would strike. . .

I saw Kaspir put away, with an effort, the thought of "die lezt feldzug." "I'll call Tancred," he mumbled. "Get him to send around some o' his boys and clean up this mess." He fumbled in his baggy pockets for a cigarette. "Let's get back to headquarters."

The other occupants of that apartment house must have been drunk or doped. Not a door was open as we trudged downstairs. On the sidewalk Kaspir threw up his head and sniffed the dawn-smell. I glanced up and down the street. A man

carrying what looked like a lunchbox passed under a street-light a block away. He was walking with the quick step of an early riser who is late for work. Yet. . .

"Le's walk," suggested Kaspir, and Maude nodded gratefully. The air seemed doubly fresh after that apartment and what had happened in it.

A FEW minutes later Kaspir turned his key in the front door of Section Five's headquarters and we followed him up the musty stairs to his office on the third floor. We disposed ourselves as comfortably as possible about the room, and by tacit agreement there was no conversation. "Die lezt feldzug" was the new refrain in my brain. It brought visions of helmeted marching men and rumbling cannons and screaming Stukas. But where—and when?

Maude kicked off her shoes, stretched her graceful length along the ratty old couch on which Kaspir sneaks catnaps, and lost herself in her thoughts and her cigarette. Kaspir, after fidgeting for ten minutes, seized the phone fiercely and got General Tancred out of bed. He presented Tancred with a deliberately muddled account of our night's work and then hung up before the peppery general could bring his vocabulary to bear.

On impulse I looked up a number in the phone book. I dialed Bailey's Retreat and got a crisp, mature feminine voice.

"When George Mitchell comes in," I said, "will you ask him to call this number?" I made up a number and gave it to her.

That figure under the street light, as we were leaving the Jorgensen place, had looked strangely like Berthe's boy-friend.

"Mitchell is here now," said the mature voice. "He's on duty in the men's ward."

"I think you'll find he's been out for the evening," I said. Kaspir wrinkled his brow at me. He was interested.

"And I think you're drunk," said the voice severely. "I've been at this desk since eight o'clock, and the ward door is within twenty feet of me. Are you insinuating. . ."

"Go look," I prodded. "See if you're as smart as you think."

That got her. Over the wire I could

hear her quick, angry step, the turn of a key in a door. Then her voice faded back in, saying: "Some drunken friend of yours, I suppose, Mitchell. Tell him to stop bothering me."

Then a heavy, sleepy masculine voice said: "Listen here. . ."

I hung up softly and shook my head at Kaspir. "Berthe's boy-friend," I said. "Thought I saw him on the street. But he's been on duty all night."

Kaspir looked patient. He leaned back once more, feet on the desk, and closed his eyes. His first snore aroused Maude. She slid her feet into her shoes, collected me with her eyes, and motioned toward the door. I nodded.

As we tiptoed out, Colonel Kaspir interrupted his snoring to mutter, without opening his eyes: "Git back here around noon. We gotta. . ." The rest trailed off unintelligibly.

I went to sleep that morning still chewing away at the matter of, "Die lezt feldzug," and awakened six hours later with the words still festering in my mind. Had anyone suggested to me, as I dressed, that in less than eight hours I should have completely forgotten "die lezt feldzug" and all its implications, I should have called him crazy.

But then, I had not yet become involved in the exceedingly strange and somewhat terrifying business of John Delaney Mackison, the millionaire philanthropist, and his League of Post-War Agencies for World Harmony.

Nor could I have foreseen that I was to be present at the passing of a very dear and valued friend.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Death Strikes Incognito

I WAS knotting my tie when the telephone rang.

"Captain Kettle?" I recognized that brisk voice. "Mr. Mackison would like to know if you can have lunch with him at one."

I glanced at the clock. It was quarter past twelve. I was about to accept when I recalled, as though I had heard it years before, Kaspir's mumbled: "Git back here around noon."

I said I was sorry, that I would try to drop in on Mr. Mackison during the afternoon.

This eventuality had evidently been foreseen. "In that case," said the brisk voice, "Mr. Mackison will expect you for dinner at seven." The speaker hung up. It was James Smith, my uncle's secretary.

I pondered that call while I finished dressing. It was not like Uncle John to seek my company. There had been a coolness between us ever since, a year before, he had somehow discovered that I was investigating, in line of duty, his League of Post-War Agencies for World Harmony. He could have spared himself and me that resentment. It was simply a routine affair, that investigation, conducted at Kaspir's request. We were looking into half a dozen similar groups at the time, since the most vicious of subversive organizations have a habit of operating under the most sweetly innocent of titles.

But Uncle John took it hard. A perfectionist, he could not bear to think of his beloved League tainted by even the breath of suspicion. I could hardly blame him, though. Anything more virginally innocent than the League would have been hard to imagine, as our investigation showed. It had branches in half a dozen large cities, and to its meetings flocked university professors, retired ministers of the gospel, reformers, and the like, to spend their time discussing grandiose and impractical plans for a post-war cultural renaissance. The League was being backed jointly by Uncle John and Mrs. Nellie Worthington Wade, a godly woman of impeccable background and large fortune. Together, they put up noble sums for the League's expansion, and together they believed in its ultimate success with a faith worthy of a more practical cause.

It was James Smith who injected the only business-like note into the whole dreamy affair. He was a small, neat, unobtrusive individual who delighted in accuracy and records and timetables, and in the two years he had been with my uncle had proved just the man to keep the League from collapsing under the combined weight of its inexhaustible funds and insufficiently outlined purposes. Uncle John had made him secretary of the League, and for the past year Smith had

spent virtually all his time at its home offices on F Street.

So Uncle John wanted to see me. Well, I would take Maude along—Uncle John had an eye for a pretty woman—and it was just possible that the dinner would turn into a love-feast that would re-establish our old status. I hoped so, for I liked Uncle John.

I filed Uncle John for future reference, and in the cab on the way to headquarters renewed my attack on "die lezt feldzug." But my most profound reasoning and deductions failed to produce. I decided finally to dismiss the thing as the bitter ravings of a hysterical woman. But Berthe Hauser's face, her tone, would not let me. She had been so sure. . .

"Where you been?" grunted Kaspir ill-naturedly as I entered his office.

I glanced around the room, surprised, as I made some perfunctory explanation of my tardiness. I would have been less formal had it not been for the impressive nature of the gathering. Beside Kaspir's desk sat General Tancred, looking, as usual, as though he had come off that morning in someone else's uniform. He was pulling thoughtfully at a lobeless ear, and his peaked face looked tired and his small, shrewd eyes were dull.

Flanking Kaspir on the other side, upright and carefully groomed, sat Duff-Dawson, of the British Embassy, who is the unofficial head of British Intelligence in this country. He was a breathing reproof to Tancred's rumpled khaki and Kaspir's tent-like linen suit with its smudges of cigarette ash. He looked fresh from the hands of a masseur and valet, but I noted that his round face had lost much of its ruddy glow, and his humorous brown eyes much of their sparkle, since he and Kaspir had first worked together on the case of the Hoke Gibraltar.

AT Duff-Dawson's elbow lounged a chunky, vital, dark-haired man whom I recognized as Evans, of the F.B.I. From the sofa Maude, a cool goddess in white piqué, smiled at me, and I went and sat beside her. She smelled good.

I took the temperature of the meeting from Kaspir's face. It was not favorable. His eyes wore the mulish expression they take on when he has been worsted in an

argument, or when he feels he has made a fool of himself.

General Tancred said, in a voice like a slow-burning fuse: "Is that all you know, Kaspir?"

"Yep," said Kaspir on a stubborn note. I gathered that he had just completed an account of the events of the previous night.

"And you expect us," said Tancred, not without acrimony, "to furnish you with a handsome, ready-made solution." He tugged harder at his ear: a danger signal.

"I thought maybe you fellers could give us a lead," admitted Kaspir reluctantly. I was amazed. Under ordinary circumstances he would cut off his right arm before seeking aid from Tancred. Parenthetically, he would also gladly sacrifice that arm to assist Tancred, both for patriotic reasons and personal satisfaction, although—to carry this grisly figure of speech through—he would cut his throat before he would admit this to Tancred.

"You admit that this Hauser woman was raving when she mentioned this 'feldzug' thing," said Tancred. The fuse had burned. He exploded without warning. "Godalmighty, Kaspir, you don't even know what she meant! How can you expect us—we're busy men—to drop important work and join you in some witch-hunt?"

"Die lezt feldzug," said Kaspir slowly. "That means 'the last campaign,' or 'the last front.' It's something big—something big and ugly. And—well, you fellers didn't hear the woman say it."

General Tancred reached for his cap. His face softened. I felt sorry for Tancred. His outburst had been chiefly the jangling of tired nerves. He is a brilliant man and a badly overworked one. He said, more equably: "If I hear anything, I'll let you know."

I nerved myself against a sarcastic retort, but Kaspir merely said, too casually: "You fellers noticed a lull in town lately?"

A thoughtful silence. Evans, the F.B.I. man, spoke first. He said: "Yes. I don't suppose it's any news to you, but we've noted that nearly a dozen German agents—regulars here—have faded out of town during the last two weeks. Of course, we'll pick up their trails eventually, but it'll probably mean several weeks' work.



One thing we're fairly sure of is that they're not concentrating anywhere. They're scattering, so it may be just some little jobs."

"I wish I thought so," said Kaspir rudely. Evans looked as though he wished so, too. He hadn't sounded any too confident.

"Of course," put in Duff-Dawson tactfully, "Himmler's lads are trying to start another Jihad—a Holy War against us—in North Africa. But. . ." He looked at Tancred, who nodded.

"We've got that in hand," said Tancred. "At least, we think we have. Perhaps"—he was being, for him, almost diplomatic now—"perhaps that's what your young lady had in mind, Kaspir."

"Nope," said Kaspir flatly. "That ain't it." He snorted. "That's penny-ante stuff." The tone and words were unfortunate. Duff-Dawson looked embarrassed. Tancred bristled visibly. He clapped his cap on his high-domed head and his jawline hardened. He opened his mouth, shut it again.

Evans said blandly: "Maybe we can get together later on, when we have more facts in hand."

"Maybe," said Kaspir, with a notable lack of enthusiasm. "We'll see," he said sourly, as Tancred and Evans started for the door.

Tancred took his leave without ceremony. Evans bowed slightly and smiled before quitting us. Duff-Dawson lingered.

There was a curious atmosphere of uneasiness, of frozen minds and indecision and low spirits in the room. Kaspir stared at his desk blotter, chin pressed into a thick pancake of flesh on his chest.

I realized suddenly how much we all depended upon Kaspir's vitality, upon even his overweening self-confidence that too frequently added up to mere bump-tiousness. Now that it was gone, we missed it and wanted it back. I felt dull inside, and helpless, yet without the will to rally my forces and tackle whatever it was that was weighing down upon us. Besides, what was there to tackle?

Maude had caught it, too. She was looking at me, but she did not seem to see me. Only by an effort did I produce an expression of polite interest when Duff-Dawson addressed me directly, and

then I missed most of what he said. I said, "I beg your pardon" so abjectly that he grinned and looked mollified.

"Mere irrelevant chit-chat, Kettle," he said apologetically. "I was trying to make a pleasant sound in this haunt of shadows. What I said was, your Uncle John Mackison is becoming quite a gadabout. He called on me twice today—office and home. Missed me both places, I regret to say. I was impressed when I heard about it."

As for me, I was astounded, although Duff-Dawson and my uncle are old friends. The point was that Uncle John, aside from infrequent visits to the League offices, had hardly set foot beyond his own doorstep in several years.

"I'm dining with him tonight," I said. "Any message?"

"None necessary." Duff-Dawson's smile broadened. "I've saved the startling news for last. He left word with my man that he'd call on me again—at my apartment—tomorrow morning at nine."

"Prob'ly wants you to cash a check for him," suggested Kaspir inanely, from the depths of his slump. Duff-Dawson chuckled. He said smoothly: "Long night last night. Going home to sneak a siesta—which at my age means a three-hour nap." He looked dead beat. His job these days is not an easy one.

I INVITED Maude to dine with me at Uncle John's, and she accepted with an alacrity that raised my spirits a notch or two. I included Kaspir in the invitation. He refused in a way that told us he had decided to be a martyr about something, and he capped his ill-humor by implying that while we deserted him to go roistering at Uncle John's, he would be carrying on at the office alone and unaided.

Knowing perfectly well that had he had anything for us to do he would have ruined our dinner party without compunction, we were not impressed. We were about to leave—Maude was going to the hairdresser's and I wanted another nap before wading into a meal at Uncle John's—when Maude turned suddenly in the doorway.

"Steve," she said, very seriously, "what have you made out of that business of copying the lists? Have you been able to

get any idea just what they were about?"

It was a question I myself had wanted to ask but had not dared. Kaspir's reaction was instantaneous. He simply looked up. He didn't say a word. He just glared at us until, acutely uncomfortable, we left him to his thoughts.

"He vants," said Maude loudly, as we passed through the outer office, "to be alone." But she did not sound as if she thought this was very funny, and her cheeks were flaming red.

The nap did for me what the hairdresser did for Maude. We were both in better spirits when I called for her at her hotel. I was gallant with a corsage of purple orchids for her. She was gorgeous in a light evening dress, red turban, and short ermine jacket. She insisted upon walking, since Uncle John's big white town house was only a matter of a few blocks away. She stepped out strongly beside me along the crowded sidewalk, and I swelled with pride as more than one pair of masculine eyes lingered on her.

We were within a block of Uncle John's when a brisk voice behind us said: "Good evening, Captain Kettle."

James Smith joined us. He was on his way home to my uncle's house from the offices of the League. He was the picture of efficiency with his neat gray flannel suit and black brief-case. He was most obviously taken with Maude, and his sharp little gray eyes became quite human behind his gold-rimmed spectacles.

I inquired about Uncle John's health, and he told me that the old gentleman had been somewhat troubled of late with nervous indigestion. Smith, worried, had called in Tremaine, the nerve specialist, who had recommended a light diet, less worrying over world affairs, and long afternoon naps. My uncle, Smith said, appeared to be benefiting from the program.

This clinical report carried us up the broad stone steps of Uncle John's imposing residence, and Smith let us in with his key. Tolliver, Uncle John's English butler, hastened forward reproachfully when he heard us talking in the hall, and as he took Maude's jacket he informed us that the master of the house had not come downstairs yet. It seemed that Uncle John had had some trouble getting to

sleep, and Threegan, his valet, had decided to let him sleep until the very last minute.

Tolliver was ushering up into the library when the sound of feet on the stairs made us turn. Threegan is a long-legged man, and he was in a hurry. Something in his saturnine face stepped up my pulse.

Threegan went straight to Smith and bowed his bald head close to Smith's close-cropped blond fuzz as he said something in a low tone. Smith said, "Nonsense!" and glanced at me. Maude and I moved closer to them.

Threegan said, heatedly and with less than a valet's normal deference: "I assure you, Mr. Smith. . ." His lean cheeks were scarlet from exertion and emotion. "I assure you. . ."

Smith said sharply: "Then call Dr. Tremaine at once." Threegan legged it off down the hall, Tolliver waddling energetically in his wake.

"Threegan is unable to awaken your uncle," said Smith. He spoke calmly enough, but I saw his hands begin to shake. There was hesitation, almost fear, in his face. He looked at me in mute appeal—he seemed to wish to be relieved of responsibility. I said: "Come on."

I took the steps two at a time. For all her high heels, Maude kept up with me. Smith, with his short legs, made a poor third. At the top of the stairs we had to wait for him to show us the room. He ran diagonally across the hall, pushed open a heavily-paneled door, and stood aside for us to enter. The utter stillness in the room was somehow alarming.

I bent over Uncle John. His frail figure looked small in that great bed. His Roman nose was arched peacefully at the high ceiling, and his frontal crest of white hair was at once perky and pathetic. His eyes were shut. I could see no sign of animation in his face. I seized the thin shoulder in the watered silk pajama coat and shook it gently. "Uncle John," I called.

I stepped back, looking at the coverlet for the reassuring rise and fall of the chest. I could see no movement of the coverlet. In that moment I could distinguish, behind me, the quick, nervous exhalations of Smith from Maude's slower, steadier breathing.

Maude said, "Mike, let me. . ." and I let her past. Her slender, red-nailed fingers curved themselves upon Uncle John's bony wrist and for a full minute none of us moved. She said doubtfully, without turning: "I'm not sure. For a moment I thought I felt a very faint beat or two." Again she sought the pulse. The silence this time seemed without end. I was conscious that Threegan was in the room, although I had not heard him come in.

Maude lowered Uncle John's arm gently to the coverlet and straightened up, hands clenched. "I'm afraid. . ." she began. But she was still doubtful.

Threegan's voice said softly: "Dr. Tremaine was at home. He'll be here in a minute or two. His house is quite near." He hesitated. Then, in an odd, choking voice: "I was right in the next room all the time. The door was open. I never thought . . . I was reading," he concluded bitterly, as though he would never read again.

The genuine affection and sorrow of the man came home to me forcibly. I questioned Maude with my eyes as I said: "We don't know that he's dead, Threegan." Maude nodded. "Merely because you can't get the pulse doesn't necessarily indicate death," I added.

"Isn't there anything we can do?" This from Smith, who had finally gotten up courage to approach the bed.

Maude shook her head. "I'd rather not," she said, "with the doctor already on his way."

**T**HERE seemed to be nothing left to say. The stillness swelled to awkward proportions. Threegan, by the door, seemed paralyzed. His eyes tormented me. He had been with Uncle John since the death of my aunt nearly twenty years before, and there was a bond between them stronger, in its way, than my own ties of blood.

Then came footsteps on the stairs, and a second later I think we all relaxed a trifle as Dr. Latham Avery Tremaine strode into the room. It was as though we had made a burden of our doubts and fears, and set it, by mutual consent, upon his shoulders.

Dr. Tremaine looked amply qualified for the load. A big man, nearly the size

of Kaspir, he had a squareness about his face and jaw that is lacking in Kaspir's plumper contours.

Tremaine nodded briefly at us as he passed. We closed in behind him. I think we were all holding our breath.

Tremaine's big frame seemed mammoth as he bent over the small figure on the bed. One big, square hand curved confidently about Uncle John's wrist. He held the wrist only a matter of seconds. I winced as he dropped it and thumbed back the eyelids, yet his touch was gentle enough. He peered into the eyes. Then he turned from the eyes, and one hand turned down the coverlet while the other slid inside Uncle John's pajama coat and came to rest slowly, like a bird alighting, over the heart region. I felt my own heart thumping furiously, and heard the rustle of Maude's gown as she moved nearer me.

Dr. Tremaine withdrew his hand and looked around at us, so quickly and sharply that I almost retreated a step. I said shakily: "What is it, Doctor?"

But he was no longer looking at us. He was unbuttoning the pajama coat, baring the bony chest. He leaned over and seemed to be staring at something. I craned my neck, all I could see was a tiny reddish mark just to the left of the breastbone.

"Bag," said Dr. Tremaine. Someone—Smith or Threegan—pushed the doctor's bag into my hand, and I passed it on to him. He took out, not the stethoscope I was expecting, but a largish pair of shining tweezers. These he applied to the mole-like mark on my uncle's breast. I began to feel a little dizzy. Maude's hand closed on my arm.

Then a wave of something very like nausea passed over me, and through the confusion in my mind I heard, vaguely, the sound of a body collapsing. Maude's sharp nails nearly pierced the cloth of my sleeve. I looked around. Smith was on the floor, very limp, in a dead faint.

Dr. Tremaine's left hand pulled the coverlet up over my uncle's face. His right was still holding the tweezers. And the tweezers were clamped on the long, shiny needle, almost the size of a small skewer, that he had extracted from my uncle's left breast. Skewer is the word, for it must have skewered the heart, it had

been driven straight in. "I suggest," said Dr. Tremaine evenly, "that someone call the police."

"Not the police," I stammered. Dr. Tremaine's eyebrows rose a quarter-inch. "Not the police," I repeated, more firmly.

Someone else was talking. It was Threegan. "Not a soul," he said, and his voice was hollow and solemn, like a sound in a cathedral, "not a soul entered this room after Mr. Mackison took his medicine and went to sleep." His eyes, fixed on the bed, seemed hypnotized.

"Medicine?" said Tremaine sharply. "You mean the sleeping draught I gave him yesterday?"

Threegan nodded. Tremaine set the tweezers and needle on the bed table and stepped into the bathroom adjoining the bedroom. I heard the click of glass, and he reappeared almost immediately with a medium-sized bottle of dark liquid in his hand. "This may have been tampered with," he said, harshly now. "And why"—he riveted his large black eyes on my face—"do you object to calling the police?"

### CHAPTER THREE

#### *Invisible Killer*

**F**UMBLING, I produced my Section Five credentials. Tremaine seemed satisfied. "If there is any way I can help. . ." he said.

I nodded thanks, asked Maude to phone Kaspir, and considered Tremaine's offer of assistance gratefully. Tremaine, although I suppose you would call him a "society doctor," had none of the lush mannerisms of that ilk. He looked as hard and sure as a machine tool. Yet the man had fire in him, I am no physiognomist, but even I could see stormy depths in his eyes which suggested that some of the stories about his past might be true. He came from the Boston family of his name, but had been kicked out by his people for some indiscretion or series of indiscretions concerning the nature of which the Washington gossips were divided. He had turned first bitter, then ascetic, and taken up medicine—studied abroad and made something of a name for himself on the continent and in London, then returned

to this country, defiantly, to build up a Washington practice. He had never become reconciled with his family, nor had he married. Aside from his practice, he went out little, yet he was a man of parts. He was known as a talented musician, and persons fortunate enough to be invited to the small and rare dinner parties he gave reported that he was an excellent amateur magician and likewise a convincing mimic of Washington's great and near-great.

All in all, I thought, a good man to have with you in a pinch. I watched him pick up the recumbent Smith with no visible effort and lay him on a sofa.

Maude returned, an odd light in her eyes.

"Steve says for you to take charge," she said. "He's busy."

So I took over the investigation of the murder of my uncle—for murder it most certainly was. I cannot truthfully say that I shone in this role. In less than fifteen minutes I had exhausted every line I could think of. The sum of my results was precisely nothing. The facts were quite plain and utterly unbelievable.

My uncle had turned in for his regular nap about 4 P.M., first having taken a single teaspoonful of the gentle sedative Dr. Tremaine had given him only the afternoon before. (In passing, I may say that the bottle of sedative Dr. Tremaine brought from the bathroom was later analyzed and found to be harmless. It had not been tampered with.)

Threegan, according to his custom, had retired to the den adjoining the bedroom, leaving the door open. There he had read until after six, when he had gone in to awaken my uncle.

Threegan was not only willing but anxious to swear that no one could have entered my uncle's room without his knowledge. The window was cracked open for air, but the idea of anyone scaling the outside of the house in broad daylight and in plain view of pedestrians was laughable.

Smith, conscious now but still weak from the shock of watching that needle being withdrawn from my uncle's heart, had corroborated Threegan's assertion that my uncle had no enemies beyond a few captious critics of his League, and

that these would hardly descend to murder. Smith himself had been at the League offices all day, and could prove it.

Tolliver, for the hour prior to our arrival, had been in the kitchen with the cook and parlormaid.

Dr. Tremaine was positive in declaring that my uncle had been dead only a few minutes when he arrived; in fact, his life must have been draining away at the very moment when Maude and Smith and I were entering the house.

It was unthinkable that Threeegan had killed his master. Yet who but Threeegan. . . ?

It came hard to tell Threeegan that he was not, under any circumstances, to leave the house for a while. The misery in the man's eyes almost plugged the words in my throat.

Threeegan took it better than I had expected, saying only: "I know you don't believe I killed him, Captain." I was relieved. A more passionate protestation of innocence might have shaken my belief in that innocence.

The investigation died on my hands. We considered the sad little chores that follow death. There were people to be notified. James Smith was most insistent that the first be Mrs. Nellie Worthington Wade, the estimable vice-president of the League and long my uncle's co-worker in various pre-war charitable enterprises. Smith was curiously insistent about calling Mrs. Wade, and when pressed for his reason he confessed to the firm belief that she and my uncle had a private understanding amounting to an engagement. At my suggestion, it was Smith who called.

Maude and I chatted with Tremaine while Smith was putting through the call to the Wade home. It was Tremaine who broke off in the middle of a sentence to stare apprehensively at Smith. The little secretary had gone white—so white that Tremaine half rose from his chair. But the little man did not faint—he clutched the phone tighter and said angrily: "You must tell me where Mrs. Wade is. I will not be put off this way. This is a matter of a death."

We were all listening now. The air of the den had suddenly charged itself with tension.

Smith got his answer. He said, "Thank you," and hung up. For a second or two you could see the fear settling in his bones, chilling and silencing him.

"Mrs. Wade," he said at length, huskily, "suffered a complete mental breakdown this afternoon. It was found necessary to remove her to Bailey's Retreat. She has had some sort of shock, they believe, and her mental and nervous condition is regarded as grave."

I SAW Maude's white hand fluttering at her throat. Tremaine frowned tremendously. A slow prickling crossed the nape of my neck and I damned myself for reacting like an old woman. Simply to be doing something, I said to Smith: "Let me use that phone a minute." He got up in a dazed way and moved to another chair.

I had intended to call Kaspir, but at the last second my pride intervened. My nerves were in no state for a bout with Kaspir, who judging by his message to Maude, was in one of his less co-operative moods.

Maude was watching me closely. I covered my indecision by dialing Duff-Dawson's number. After all, he was a friend of Uncle John's—an old friend.

The telephone rang a long while and I was on the verge of hanging up when a familiar voice, strongly on the middle-class British side, said: "Yes. . . ?"

"Jepson, this is Captain Kettle," I said. "Is the Major in?"

Duff-Dawson's man said: "Just a minute, Captain, I'll see. I just got in myself." I had to wait only a short while. "He's having a bit of a nap, Captain," said Jepson. "He's been overworking himself lately. Is it anything important?"

For some reason I found the words hard to say, for there was a tight feeling in my throat. When they came out, they were almost a yelp. "Wake him up!" I said. "Wake him up!"

"Yes, sir." Jepson was puzzled. Maude and Tremaine were looking at me exactly as we had looked at Smith when he was calling the Wade residence. I made no effort to compose my face. My pride had abandoned me, and I no longer cared about anything—anything but hearing Major Geoffrey Duff-Dawson's hearty voice.

Jepson was gone quite a while, so long that when he returned to the phone I was no longer excited, but curiously calm and resigned. When he had finished stammering out his news, he said weakly: "Shall I call a doctor, sir? The Major has been going to Dr. Quade, but Dr. Quade recommended he see Dr. Tremaine, although. . ."

"Don't call anyone," I said. "Just wait."

Dr. Tremaine and Maude were already standing. Dr. Tremaine said quietly: "My car's outside."

I got a grip on myself. The effect of Tremaine's personality, his strength, was amazing. I was able to order Smith, and in a calm voice, to take charge of the Mackison establishment until I returned. As we climbed into Tremaine's convertible coupe, I made a last-minute stab at optimism. "Did Major Duff-Dawson have any—well, minor condition, that might account for him fainting?"

"Not a thing." Dr. Tremaine became professional. "Overworked, that's all. Nerves overstrained. Common disorder in Washington these days." We shot out into traffic. Tremaine drove with the same deftness I imagine he would have shown in a surgery. "I didn't even bother to examine him," he said. "Quade had done all that. All I did was give him a tonic and a sedative and tell him to go back to Quade if he needed any more advice." He stopped short. "A sedative!" he exclaimed, less professionally. "I wonder—somehow, Captain, I have an idea—but we'll see. . ."

Duff-Dawson's apartment, of the type that in London is called a service flat, was on the second floor of a new building in the east end of town. Jepson had the door open as we ran up the stairs. Tremaine was prepared this time. He was opening his bag as we mounted the stairs, and as we entered the apartment I saw that his stethoscope was already in his hand.

I said to Jepson, panting at my heels in the hall: "Call Colonel Kaspir. His number is. . ."

"The colonel called a minute ago," said Jepson. "He's on his way here now."

Need I go into details about the subsequent events in Major Duff-Dawson's bedroom?

He was lying on his back when we entered, and there was about him something grimly reminiscent of the position of Uncle John. I recalled, shrinking, his laughing reference to the "siesta" he had planned to take.

It seemed as though Dr. Tremaine barely touched Duff-Dawson's breast with the stethoscope before he tossed it aside and went into his bag.

I turned my head away.

When I summoned the nerve to look again, Tremaine was up, his square face paler, less assured. He was holding the tweezers, but not looking at them. The tweezers held a long, shiny needle. On the tip of it hung a single drop of blood.

In the hall a deep-toned clock chimed eight times.

I heard Maude, in the hall, exclaiming: "Oh, Steve. . .!"

FROM the doorway Kaspir said harshly: "How about it, Doc?" His nostrils were flaring, his moon face had somehow settled into blunt angles, but around his mouth was the green look he gets when he is about to be airsick.

"How long's he been dead?" Kaspir demanded.

"A comparatively few minutes," said Tremaine.

"Same's the old gent, I suppose?" said Kaspir. There was a time when a remark like this would have infuriated me, but I have learned that Kaspir barks most gruffly when he is in deadly fear of disclosing some very real and deep emotion.

"Exactly." Tremaine was curt. Kaspir's manner at times seems deliberately abrasive. Yet his next remark, even considering the urgency of the situation, seemed more than usually tactless.

"How's for runnin' along now, Doc," he said. "I got some things to talk over with Mike Kettle here."

Tremaine flushed. "I assume you will see to the arrangements." He was keeping himself well in hand. He waved toward the tweezers and needle. "I'll leave these," he said. "Call if you need me."

"Sure." It dawned on Kaspir that he had been a trifle cavalier with Tremaine. He actually said: "Sorry I got your back

up, Doc. But things are happenin' in our business that can't afford to wait."

Tremaine supplied. "I suppose so," he said. He glanced toward the bed. "I hope. . ." he began, then hesitated.

"We'll get the guy," said Kaspir. I tingled at the careless finality of the words.

When Tremaine was gone, Kaspir moved into the living-room. "O.K., Mike, let's have the whole story."

He listened with what was, for him, admirable patience to my carefully circumstantial account of our finding Uncle John. I launched into the afterpiece. When I came to the part about Smith calling Mrs. Wade, and told him what Smith had learned, he said: "Hey!"

I shut up. Maude said tightly: "Steve, just what in the devil is the matter with you?" Kaspir was up now, pacing the floor. He came and stood over me. The first thing he did was unship a heavy automatic from his hip and shove it into my hands. "You two beat it out to that Retreat place," he said slowly. "Tell Bailey—he knows me—I said he's to give you whatever you want. What you're gonna want is a look at Mrs. Wade. What you're gonna do is see that nothin' happens to her—supposin' that nothin' already has."

Maude said: "Steve, what are you going to do?"

"I'm gonna go sit in the bedroom a few minutes. You got any objections?"

"None whatever." Her tone was mild.

"Then listen. Don't go bargain' right up to Bailey's in the cab. Get out a little ways off and walk up. Get hold o' Bailey right away. He's got an apartment on the ground floor. Get him to cue you into the woman's ward P.D.Q. I think he'll do it. If he don't, tell him I'll raise the damndest row around Washington he's ever heard in his life. Now beat it."

At the door, Maude said: "You know we're sorry about Duff-Dawson, Steve. Remember, Mike and I were fond of him, too."

I fully expected Kaspir to explode at this harmless bit of sentiment. Instead, he only said, "Run along, you kids," and closed the door quietly behind us.

We were starting down the stairs when Maude found that she had left her bag in the apartment. I went back for it. When

I returned empty-handed, she asked the obvious question.

I lied. I said I had been unable to find the bag. Somehow I couldn't tell her, just then, that when I had stood outside the door of Duff-Dawson's room, I had heard Kaspir, through the door, making a low sound that at any other time I would have said was a chuckle. Since Colonel Kaspir would hardly have been laughing beside the corpse of his best friend. . . . Well, I just hadn't felt like going in.

WE STOOD in the dark reception-room looking on the inner courtyard of Bailey's Retreat, waiting while the night nurse roused Dr. Bailey. I had had difficulty in making the night nurse understand why we preferred to wait in the dark.

The discreetly barred window was open about six inches. I tried it, and found it would go no higher. We were standing in a silence that burned like a slow candle when Maude touched my arm and I heard the low voices in the courtyard below.

I caught only a few words, but they were enough to send a thrill up my body that shook me physically. That was because they were German. "Unter die hande". . . was all I could catch—the rest was a soft gabble that died away. I pressed my face against the glass, but the angle was such that I could not see the speaker. A soft footfall below, then all was quiet.

"Under the hand?" said Maude in my ear. "Under what hand, Mike?"

I shook my head. I was horribly restless. Maude followed me into the hall just in time to meet Dr. Horace Bailey, owner and psychiatrist-in-chief of Bailey's Retreat. He was in dressing-gown, pajamas, and a high state of irritability.

By the time Dr. Bailey's flat refusal to let us enter the women's ward had been beaten down by a liberal use of Kaspir's name and some dark hints about unfavorable publicity, I was perspiring in streams. The elevator which wafted us to the second floor seemed the slowest machine I had ever ridden.

At the end of an echoing hall Dr. Bailey turned a key quietly in a broad door with a peculiarly shaped handle. We stepped

into a darkly shining inner hall with many doors. In a small office at our left, from under a shaded desk lamp, a nurse in white cap and blue cloak rose and came forward to meet us.

"Mrs. Wade?" said Dr. Bailey.

"Resting quietly," she replied.

"How long ago did you see her?" asked Maude.

The nurse looked to Dr. Bailey for her cue. He nodded. The nurse glanced at her wrist-watch. "Less than ten minutes ago, on my nine-thirty inspection."

"Check her again, please," said Dr. Bailey. "Take this young lady along." He was less hostile now.

Maude and the nurse went down the hall. They were back in a minute. I could see the relief in Maude's eyes before she spoke, and I felt as though someone had stopped tightening a strap around my chest.

"Shall we go?" said Dr. Bailey hopefully.

But I was not through. "Can anyone enter this ward without being seen by you?" This to the nurse.

She said coldly, before Dr. Bailey could speak: "Only through the door you came in by. And I assure you I would see them."

"How about windows?" I persisted.

"The windows are barred," she said, adding quickly, "in the interests of the patients' safety." I opened my mouth to speak, but Dr. Bailey divined my question. "The condition of the bars is inspected each morning and night, Captain." He turned to the nurse. "You will let no one—no one, understand?—enter the ward tonight without my personal permission."

Then we were in the echoing outer hall again. I said: "Doctor, is there anyone among your employees who speaks German?"

I think it was the first hint he had had of the general nature of our visit. I am sure his mind instantly produced headlines of a ruinous scandal. Hesitantly, almost meekly, he answered: "Yes. Oscar Grubner, the furnace-man and night engineer."

There was something else, something elusive, in the back of my mind. Maude stared as I stopped dead in the middle of the hall. Finally I remembered. "Is

there a man named Mitchell on duty here tonight?" I asked.

"I have every reason to believe he is," said Dr. Bailey, with a flicker of spirit.

"I'd like to have a look at him," I said.

"And, Doctor. . ." I didn't know quite how to say it. I had an uncomfortable feeling that so far I had been sounding like Colonel Kaspir at his worst. I am not normally an overbearing person. But I had been worried. Kaspir had been most emphatic about Mrs. Wade.

"Yes?" invited Dr. Bailey.

"Please don't think I'm enjoying this." It was lamely put, but it had its effect. Dr. Bailey smiled a pale, human smile, his first of the night. He led us to the far end of the hall and turned his key in a door identical to that of the women's ward. "Mitchell," he called quietly.

A tallish man in white coat, dark trousers, and white tennis shoes materialized in the half-lit doorway without a sound.

"Yes, Dr. Bailey?" His incurious eyes glanced at Maude and me.

"Everything is all right, Mitchell?" said Dr. Bailey.

"Everything is quiet, Dr. Bailey," said Mitchell. He waited.

"Thank you, Mitchell." Dr. Bailey drew the door shut.

"Where is Grubner's room?" I asked.

"In the basement," he answered promptly. "He should be asleep now. He's only called for emergencies in the spring and summer."

"I'm going to ask you a great favor," I said. "Will you be so kind as to wait here—in the hall—and see that Mitchell does not leave the ward?"

He thought this over at some length before he said, "Yes." He gave us directions for finding Grubner's room. When we left him by way of the stairway at the end of the hall, he was leaning against the wall, his cigarette glowing like a tiny danger signal.

**M**R. OSCAR GRUBNER, the furnace-man, was not in his room. I opened the door when my muffled knocking failed to elicit an answer. The bed was rumpled. And still warm.

We stepped back into the long, dimly-lit, slightly dank basement corridor, which seemed to run the whole length of the



building. There were many doors. I tried one. It opened. The light inside came on automatically as the door opened, and Maude and I faced an imposing array of brooms, mops, dustpans, vacuum cleaners, and cans of floor wax. Maude laughed, out of sheer nervous relief.

I set my jaw. I was going to find Oscar Grubner if I had to stick my nose into every service closet and coal hole in the whole cellar. The next door was a larger affair, broader, and not flush with the wall like the first. Its handle was cold. I had an idea as to what was inside, but I had to make sure. Again the opening of the door switched on a light—several lights, in fact.

Beside me Maude shivered in the cold blast that met us as we looked in. It was the refrigeration plant, just as I had thought. Frosted pipes marched across the wall near the ceiling. It was a large room. From hooks in a far corner hung several sides of beef; beside them, shelves of bottles, presumably medicines or ingredients of medicines that needed refrigeration.

And on the floor, directly across from us, against the far wall. . .

I walked over to it, and for a matter of seconds I could not speak or think. I could only stare. Maude drew up at my side. She was silent, too.

It was not the cake of ice that had this peculiar effect on us. It was what it contained. I knelt to make sure that the thing was not an optical illusion.

My eyes had not deceived me. It was a hand frozen into that block of ice—a woman's hand, apparently severed at the wrist—a graceful hand, the fingers poised like a mannikin's. On the fingers—yes, they were rings, rings set with jewels that shed dancing lights through the ice cake.

"Mike, remember what we heard outside the reception-room?"

It returned to me like a blow in the face: "Unter die hande"—"under the hand." What hand could the speaker have meant but this one? A wave of excitement and exultation set my hands a-flutter. I spotted a pair of icepicks in a wall bracket. I drew one out and attacked the block of ice almost feverishly. This well-preserved hand was, somehow, my racing heart told

me, the key to the many strange things which the past few hours had held, and I was going to have it out and examine it if I had to freeze myself stiff in the attempt.

I chipped away until I had bared the fingertips. I touched them gingerly. They were hard as plaster.

Maude begged: "Let me at it a minute, Mike." I hesitated, then put the icepick in her hand as I realized that she needed some muscular exertion to counteract the effect of the temperature. She went at it hammer-and-tongs.

A voice behind us said: "You are very busy, eh?"

The small man who spoke held a small revolver. This, I knew, must be Mr. Oscar Grubner.

Behind Grubner, tall and placid, stood George Mitchell. He looked thoughtful.

The smaller man glanced at Mitchell as though awaiting orders. Mitchell said in German: "Keep them here, Oscar, while I visit Mrs. Wade." With that he was gone. Grubner backed against the partly closed door and shut it with his shoulder.

Although Maude said some very complimentary things later, I fear I can take no credit for what I did. I did it as mechanically as a man brushes his teeth; inspired, I suspect, by a sense of frustration and anger that combined to produce a false courage. Slowly and deliberately I reached for my hip pocket.

"Keep your hands in front," ordered Grubner sharply.

I said, without interrupting my motion: "That thing you've got wouldn't kill a cat."

It was very quiet for a second. There was a dreamlike quality about the whole business. I saw Grubner's finger tighten on the trigger, and the report and the blow on my shoulder came together as I ducked. He must have missed me with his second shot.

I shot from the hip. I am such a rotten shot, at best—equally bad from hip or bent-arm. I squeezed the trigger only once.

A look of utter astonishment spread across Grubner's knobby little face like ripples on a pond. It was still there as his knees buckled.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## Race with the Strangler

DR. BAILEY, leaning against the wall opposite the men's ward, wheeled as Maude and I raced up the steps. He started to speak, then saw the gun in my hand, the wild excitement in Maude's eyes.

"Mitchell's been in the basement," I gasped. "He's going to Mrs. Wade's room."

Dr. Bailey drew himself up. "Mitchell hasn't left the ward," he began indignantly. "He . . ." He cut it short. Without explanation he turned and ran down the hall. Maude and I caught up with him just as he was turning his key in the door of the women's ward.

"Stay where you are," he ordered the nurse, as she leaped up from her desk. He led us down the hall, past the silent doors behind which the patients slept.

We entered a large room with bay windows, evidently the ward's recreation hall. Across this room we hurried. It was almost completely dark. Dr. Bailey stopped beside what appeared to be a sort of vertical, circular trapdoor, set waist-high in the wall. He motioned us behind him, and, in a whisper, told me to put my gun away.

Our eyes were just becoming accustomed to the darkness when a faint creak advertised the opening of the trapdoor. There was a brief scabbling sound. Then a tall figure—a figure in dark trousers and white tennis shoes—appeared like a magician's rabbit from the trapdoor. And Dr. Bailey grabbed him.

The subduing of George Mitchell was one of the quicker and more effective bits of manhandling. It came to me later that Dr. Bailey, like virtually all psychiatrists, had served a part of his internship in the violent ward of some state mental hospital, where the art of self-defense is a matter to which considerable attention is given.

It could hardly have been twenty seconds before the white tennis shoes described a giant arc in the darkness and Mitchell landed flat on his back with a stunning crash that made my own bones ache in involuntary sympathy. Dr. Bailey yanked Mitchell to his feet. The man was shaken and whimpering.

"Hush!" whispered Dr. Bailey severely. "You'll waken the patients." He bent one of Mitchell's arms behind him with an interlocking grip and began to march him out of the ward. "Who would have thought of the fire escape?" mused Dr. Bailey, half to himself and half to us.

It was only then that I remembered that most sanitariums possess—in place of the ordinary fire escape, which would be difficult for disturbed patients to negotiate—tubular slides, built into the walls but otherwise much like the slides in a children's playground. Into these, in case of fire, the patients are put, one by one, and gravity takes them down and out of an opening in the outer wall to fresh air and safety.

George Mitchell's method was, then, the very essence of simplicity. To leave the men's ward he would slide to the ground. To return, he would do what he had done to enter the women's ward: crawl up, getting traction from the rubber soles of his shoes.

The nurse popped out of her office as we approached the door. Her eyes became saucers when she saw whom Dr. Bailey was escorting, and how.

"Good-night, nurse," said Dr. Bailey gravely. There was a twinkle in his eye as we rode down in the elevator. It vanished a few minutes later when, in his office, I told him about Grubner, but it returned when I worked up to my climax about the hand in the ice.

He was patching up the fleshwound in my shoulder at the time. I saw his lips compressed as though by some strong emotion. "I'm afraid," he said finally, "that if you're attaching any sinister significance to that hand, Captain Kettle, you are due for disappointment. That hand belongs to Ignacio Dalgi, the surrealist painter, the man who does the melting clocks and polar bears with violins for paws. He arrived this afternoon for his annual check-up and brought the ice-cake, with hand inside, along for a model. It is a plaster hand, of course, but the jewels are real." Dr. Bailey cocked an eye at the bandage roll in his hand. "Mr. Dalgi," he said, "is in constant fear that he may become completely sane."

Maude's laugh held a hysterical note. Cheeks hot, I argued: "But I heard those

men—it must have been Grubner and Mitchell—talking outside the reception-room, something about a hand. ‘Unter die hande,’ one of them said.”

“Prob’ly talking about Mrs. Wade,” said Colonel Kaspir, and enjoyed to the utmost the effect of his dramatic entrance. There was a warm light in Kaspir’s eyes, and a jauntiness about his bearing that told me his spirits had returned to their normal high level. “Ain’t there some expression about ‘unter die hande kommen’?” He was addressing himself to Mitchell, who sat slumped and sullen in a corner of the office. “Meanin’,” continued Colonel Kaspir, “that Mrs. Wade had come here like a lamb to the slaughter?”

Mitchell nodded glumly.

“You’re a lucky lad, Mitchell,” said Kaspir. “Supposin’ you’d got to the old lady’s room and got your hands around her throat. We might ha’ had to hang you. As it is, you got a sportin’ chance o’ gettin’ forty years.”

MITCHELL glowered. Kaspir surveyed him benignly, almost with affection. “If you’re sittin’ there nursin’ any grandiose dreams about ‘die lezt feldzug,’” he said, and we saw Mitchell start at the expression, “let me assure you right now there ain’t gonna be any. It’s been called off. By me.”

I saw the blood leave Mitchell’s cheeks.

“You were takin’ your orders from Smith, I suppose?” said Kaspir, and raised his hand signal-wise to quiet our exclamations. “Oh, all right. It don’t matter. He’s been spendin’ the last hour pourin’ out his little soul to me—after I persuaded him some.” Kaspir’s big face shone dully in the light. Something in his attitude seemed to be getting on Maude’s nerves, for she looked away, and her lips were drawn and angry. Then I remembered. For all his success—whatever it had been—in the matter of “die lezt feldzug,” it was fairly crude stuff for Kaspir to be taking the whole thing so airily less than six hours after Tremaine had drawn that needle from Duff-Dawson’s heart.

Kaspir poured his bulk over a chair and lit a cigarette. He was almost indecently talkative. I resented it fiercely as the recollection of Duff-Dawson’s body

grew in my mind. Yet I was burning with curiosity.

I said shortly: “What about ‘the last front’?”

I think he divined my reaction, and Maude’s, to his mood. His face darkened a trifle. “Tell you about it when we get back to town,” he said.

Dr. Bailey was helping me on with my coat.

“Thanks,” I said.

“Thank you,” said Dr. Bailey, with an explanatory gesture toward George Mitchell. I felt better. At least I had had a part in saving Mrs. Wade’s life.

There was a cab waiting. We spun back to town in silence. After we deposited Mitchell in one of the new cells at the F. B. I.—for Section Five is not so equipped—Kaspir gave the driver the address of Duff-Dawson’s apartment.

“I told you it was big and ugly,” said Kaspir. He was solemn now.

We were in Duff-Dawson’s living-room. Kaspir was sitting forward in a morris chair, elbows on knees.

“We’d been barkin’ up the wrong tree,” he said. “I’d been seein’ the thing, like I imagine you two did, as some sweep-in’ military maneuver in some unexpected place. Element o’ surprise, that sorta thing. Well, it was bigger than that. And simpler.” He looked from me to Maude. “What’s the best break our Hitlerite friends could get right now, or at any time in the near future?”

It was so obvious, in that moment of revelation, that I was almost ashamed to say it aloud. Maude said softly: “Well, I *will* be damned.”

Kaspir nodded. “Yep,” he said, “that’s it. Peace. A negotiated peace. Any sort o’ peace that don’t have ‘Total Surrender’ in it. Yep, ‘The Last Front’ was gonna be the biggest propaganda drive of all—a drive to convince the whole world that Germany, while quite capable o’ holding out for years, is willin’ to call it stalemate and negotiate peace.”

“So they were using my uncle, and Mrs. Wade?” I said.

“Exactly. Smithy was the brains o’ the thing. He was settin’ up League offices around the country and makin’ damn sure to keep them harmless and able to stand investigation. Then, at the last moment,

he was gonna send key men in, and, under cover o' the good reputation the League has built up, get off a perfect hell of a blast of publicity in favor of a negotiated peace, till it would look like half the country had its tongue hangin' out to do business with Germany. And that sorta thing don't die out easy, either." He shook his big head slowly. "There's always enough crackpots and soft-hearted muddleheads to carry the banners and do the dirty work for guys like Smithy and his crowd . . . believin', all the while (and that's the worst of it) that they're doin' the right thing. . . ."

"Then Uncle John must have got on to the fact that something was wrong?" I mused. "And when Smith heard Uncle John trying to get in touch with me, and then going to see Duff-Dawson, he must have figured it was time to act?" The thing was opening up now.

"You're catchin' on fast, Mike," Kaspir spoke without sarcasm. "It ran somethin' like this. Your uncle gets suspicious. Smithy gets wind of it. He tips the Jorgensens. Remember how they quit that long-range copyin' and tried to pinch as many of the rest of the files as they could in one night. That was the first move. Then your uncle tries to get in touch with Duff-Dawson. That shows he's ready to make things tight for 'em. So they have to knock him off. And, fearin' he may already have spilled some stuff to Duff-Dawson, they fix him too.

"And," continued Kaspir, "when Smithy finds out that Mrs. Wade has been carted off to Bailey's rest-cure with nervous shock, he naturally assumes that your uncle let her in on his suspicions. So naturally they figure they'd better cook her goose too, before she comes outa her trance and spills the beans."

Maude objected: "But I still don't see where those lists of next-of-kin stand in this thing, Steve."

"That," said Kaspir gravely, "was the smartest, and dirtiest, and generally most nauseatin' part o' the whole show. When the League busted out with its propaganda, each one o' those folks, with kids overseas, was gonna get a strong letter tellin' them their boys life was bein' needlessly endangered by a lot o' geopoliticians, because Germany is willin' to make peace

any time. Figure for yourself the effect o' that stuff—when it's put out by an agency backed by such reputable names as John Delaney Mackison and Mrs. Nellie Whatsername Wade."

"But how did you get on to Smith?" I said. "He didn't. . . ."

"By the back door, you might say." Kaspir smiled thinly. "Once I doped out the murder angle, it was 1-2-3 that Smithy was involved. So I just sailed around and interviewed Smithy in a kind o' brusque way, and when he found out I knew about the murders, he sort o' folded up. All brain and no guts, Smithy."

I nodded, remembering his genuine faint when Tremaine took the needle from my uncle's heart. A bloodless little devil, James Smith. "But he had no part in the murders," I said. "I'm sure of that."

"You should be," said Kaspir. "You were there when they were done."

"O.K." said Maude resignedly. "We give up."

"The whole thing, o' course," said Kaspir, "was window-dressin' to make us believe Mackison and Duff-Dawson were dead when Tremaine was called in. But they weren't. Tremaine had slipped them a sedative that would lay out a water-buffalo, prob'ly some o' that heavy barbiturate stuff that slaps respiration and pulse down to where you can't spot 'em unless you're a doctor. So you call a doctor. It's no mere coincidence that you get Doc Tremaine. He was tooin' the line, waitin' to sprint in an' do his stuff."

Maude said, very faintly: "Steve, you mean that Tremaine. . . ?"

"Yep, I do. Tremaine comes fully prepared. He's a cold fish, that boy, and quick with his brain like his hands. He bends over your uncle, Mike, and what do you see? You see him feel your uncle's heart. It's a perfectly natural thing for a doc to do. What you don't see is Tremaine palmin' that needle and slidin' it in sort o' easy, between the ribs.

"What happens? You're already prepared to believe, on Tremaine's authority, that your uncle is dead. So when he pulls that needle out, not thirty seconds later, and announces that your uncle is dead, who's gonna doubt it? But your uncle wasn't dead. He was as good as dead, because his heart had been pierced

through. The bleedin's internal in a wound like that, and between the wound and the barbiturate, your uncle passes away quietly under that cover Tremaine pulled over his head."

"But Tremaine!" Maude foundered.

"Tremaine's got a twist in his brain. His family kicked him out. He hated his family. He hated his country. He went and got mixed up with Smithy's crowd in Germany somewhere. I s'pose they promised to make him the High Panjandrum of North America when the New Order got in, like they do most o' the other suckers. Incidentally, I saw Tremaine again tonight, after you kids left. I called him up and he came back over here. We had a little chat, and he got to feelin' so tough that I finally had to call some o' the boys and have him carted off to the hatch. O' course, it's partly my fault he went off his rocker, but that ain't weighin' on my conscience any."

Maude sighed. "You're going to tell us eventually how Dr. Tremaine happened to go off his rocker, as you put it. Why not now?"

Kaspir grinned. "Well," he said, "I just led him back to the bedroom" . . . he made a short gesture with his thumb . . . "and asked him to have another look at Duff-Dawson. And when Duff-Dawson sat up in bed and said howdy to him, it seemed to kind of upset him."

Maude said, out of the fog: "No you don't, Steve. I was watching from the doorway. I saw Tremaine draw that needle from Duff-Dawson's heart. There was no flummery about that."

"Nope." Kaspir's grin shortened. "It was a closer thing for Duff-Dawson than I care to think about. There was no flummery about it. It was just a little quirk o' nature that beat Tremaine in Duff-Dawson's case—somethin' so remote that he hadn't even bothered to consider it as a possibility. Oh, Duff-Dawson's got a hole in the right place, all right. But he's sittin' up and takin' nourishment." He stood up.

"You see," he said, "Duff-Dawson happens to be one o' those peculiarly constructed folks that's got his heart on the wrong side."

*There's a new and unwilling . . .*

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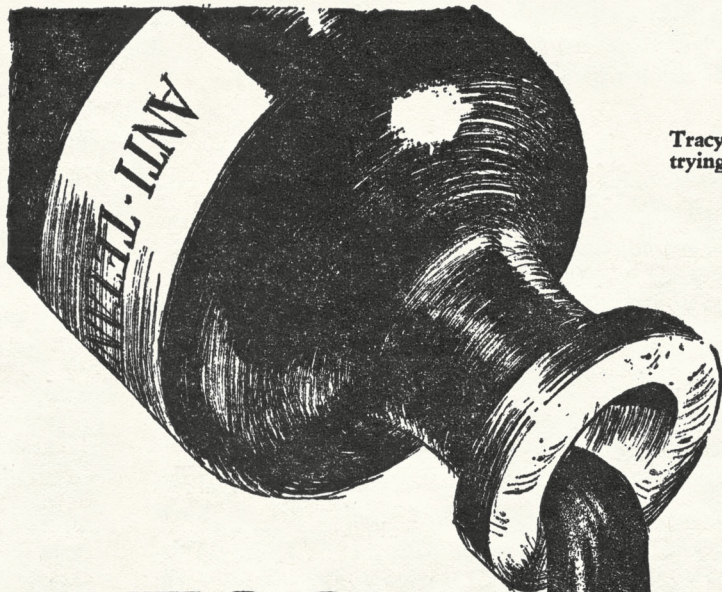


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Tracy thrashed on the ground, trying to get hold of the gun.

# TOO MANY HAVE DIED

By  
**NORBERT DAVIS**

*Author of "You Can Die Any Day," etc.*



## CHAPTER ONE

### Killer Incognito

PETER TRACY stepped out through the arched doorway of the Administration Building and took a big breath of fresh air, because he needed it. He was having hallucinations. He was beginning to see faces, faces and more faces going around in a sort of a nightmare whirlpool. All of them were young faces—awed and eager and anxious to imbibe of the knowledge the said Peter

Tracy was supposed to ladle out to them in graduated and digestible doses.

He had been seeing the faces—actually and in person, one at a time—all morning and afternoon. The faces, when properly attached, belonged to students of Boles University, and Peter Tracy was a member of the faculty of same, much to his surprise.

He was chubby and slightly below medium height, and he had a round, ageless face of his own and eyes that peered through rimless octagonal glasses with bland innocence. He wasn't wearing a

hat, and his hair was mouse-colored and had a stubborn little clump that jutted out behind like a plume in spite of brushes, barbers, and goose grease.

Now he took a limp and wrinkled pamphlet out of his coat pocket and ran one forefinger down the columns on a page until he came to the following:

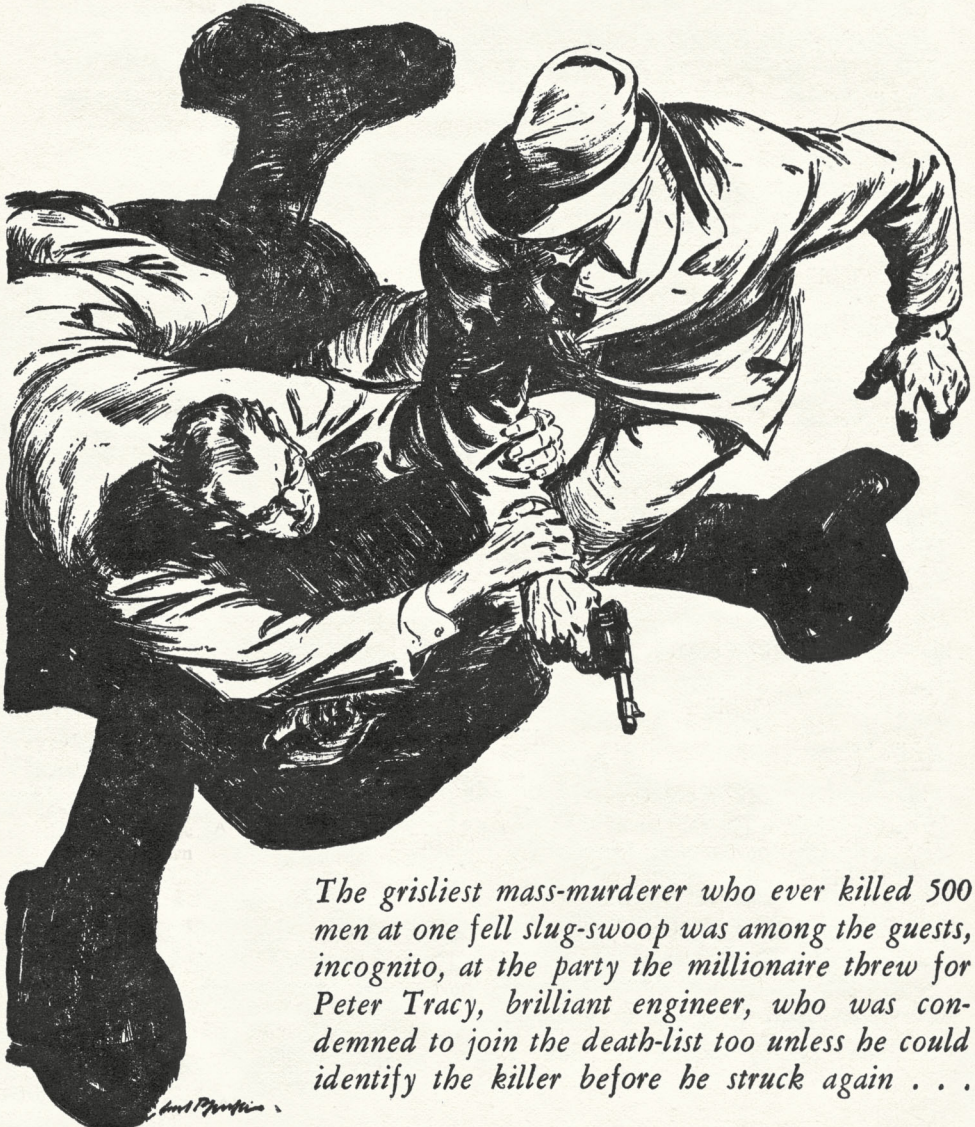
Eng. Adv. San. Prac. (Tracy) . . . MWF  
10 . . . 3

This was not Esperanto or even double-talk. It was the University's way of informing students that they could take Practical Advanced Sanitary Engineering

from a man named Tracy on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 10 o'clock in the morning and get three credits for doing it, if they passed. Tracy turned the page and found another item.

Prefab. Const. Tran. (Tracy) . . . TTh  
10 . . . 2

This one was easy and meant that the same Tracy would tell you all about the construction and transportation of pre-fabricated units on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10. Tracy sighed and looked on another page.



*The grisliest mass-murderer who ever killed 500 men at one fell slug-swoop was among the guests, incognito, at the party the millionaire threw for Peter Tracy, brilliant engineer, who was condemned to join the death-list too unless he could identify the killer before he struck again . . .*

Dia. Mon. Sys. Mod. As. (Tracy) . . .  
MTWThF 11 . . . 5

This said that the man Tracy was ready to instruct you in Modern Asiatic dialects and monetary systems every day in the week, except Saturdays and Sundays, at eleven o'clock and that you could have five credits if you could stand it.

Sanitary Engineering, pre-fabricated construction, and Asiatic languages and money do not seem, at first glance, to be very closely related to each other. However, if you were building some barracks in an impenetrable swamp surrounded by impassable jungle in the middle of an ocean full of Japanese submarines, you might find they would all come in pretty handy. At least the United States Army thought so, and hence Peter Tracy was a professor.

He sighed again and put away the pamphlet and then went down the broad steps and strolled jauntily across the twilight quiet of the campus square. The air was fresh and cool against his face, laden with the drowsy tang of burning leaves. Tracy began to whistle loudly and badly. He was one of those people who can't carry a tune, but he didn't know it. He believed he had an excellent tonal and rhythmic sense and had often regretted he hadn't taken up music as a career, particularly when bombs dropped on his construction projects.

**H**E **C**R**O**S**S**E**D** the boundary of the campus and turned into Melrose Avenue, alive with the pallid early-evening glow of neon signs and traffic that squawked and squeaked and moved jerkily. Students of all kinds walked fast alone and talked fast in groups that eddied and swirled along the sidewalks.

Tracy went three blocks and turned again into the shadowy peace of Chaucer Street. The houses were old here, withdrawn in their dignity behind long lawns and thick shrubbery, and Tracy had the impulse to nod at them approvingly. He liked them. They had been here a long time and endured a lot, and they were still going strong.

There was a man standing in front of the fifth house from the corner. He was holding a broom as though he were making up his mind what and where to sweep

with it when he got ready to sweep but not right away. He was thin and stooped, and he wore a tweed jacket and khaki pants and a gray hat with a hole in the side of the crown. He had a dour, furrowed face and a ragged brown mustache.

"Hello," he said. "You're from China and way-points, and your name is Tracy, ain't it? I'm Bagby. I'm the fireman and janitor and what-the-hell around the joint here."

"Glad to know you," said Tracy.

Bagby nodded. "Sure. Tracy, have you ever been in jail?"

"Oh, from time to time," Tracy said.

"I mean, seriously. I mean, did you ever serve time in a penitentiary for a felony or like that?"

Tracy shook his head slowly. "Not that I recall."

Bagby scratched his mustache. "Well, do you know a little slim fella about five feet four with a round face sort of on the greasy side and a black sheik's mustache and a dimple on his chin? He's got nice brown eyes and a kind of bashful smile, and he walks real dainty—like a cat with its feet wet."

"Don't know him," said Tracy.

"You could get to know a fella like that very easy in a penitentiary. That's where them kind of fellas spends lots of their time. That's why I asked you was you ever in one. He knows you."

"Could be," Tracy admitted.

"He don't know you well enough to suit him, though. He was askin' me questions about you."

"Was he?" Tracy asked idly.

"Sure. He didn't hear nothing that'll keep him awake nights. You honest don't know him?"

"No."

"Then you better find out what he wants before you run across him by accident. He's a shooter."

"Shooter?" Tracy repeated.

"Yeah. That don't necessarily mean he has to have a gun to operate. He'll use a knife or a lead pipe or anything else that comes handy. He's on the dope, too. Oh, he don't go around sniffin' and twitchin', but he uses a little bit to steady him when he thinks he needs it."

"Sounds like a very charming person," Tracy observed.



Bagby leaned on the broom and eyed him speculatively. "You got me bothered, Tracy. You don't look to me like you're speedy enough to play pitty-pat with this bird. He's a nasty customer, and you walk around with an awful slap-happy expression on your puss. You ain't by any chance as dumb as you act, are you?"

Tracy nodded soberly. "I'm afraid so."

"Oh," said Bagby, with a sort of surprised interest. "I see. Well, so I ain't gonna worry about you no more. You just go ahead and skin your own skunks. Good-bye, Tracy."

"Good-bye, Bagby."

Tracy went on up the walk toward the house that lolled squat and gloomily comfortable behind a guard of four oak trees. Leaves tapped and rustled dryly over him as he climbed the steep steps to the porch. The colored glass panel in the door gleamed cheerily orange and blue, and he stepped into the warmth of a narrow, dark-paneled hall. The fluted strips of glass that hung from the old-fashioned chandelier moved and tinkled a soft welcome to him.

STRONGER light came out of the square doorway that led to the study, and as Tracy walked quietly past it, a rounded and sonorously majestic voice said: "Good evening, Mr. Tracy."

"Good evening, Mr. Montgomery," Tracy said.

He went up the narrow stairs and along a hall carpeted with a faded red runner. Unlocking the last door on the south side, he went into his room and closed the door again before he turned on the light. He looked slowly around. Everything seemed normal, and there was no one else in the room now, but someone had been and just recently. The odor of perfume was quite noticeable. It smelled like expensive perfume.

Tracy's eyes focused suddenly on the heavy walnut dresser. There was a gun lying on top of it in the center of the stiff linen doily that served to cover some of the scars and cigarette burns in the dark wood. The gun belonged to Tracy, but it didn't belong on the dresser, and he hadn't put it there.

He walked over and picked it up

thoughtfully. It was an automatic pistol, and it looked like a German Luger, but it wasn't quite. It was a Japanese Nambu 7 millimeter officer's model. It wasn't loaded. Holding it in his hand, Tracy opened his flat steamer trunk and looked inside. His clothes were all there and in order, but not in the same order as he had left them.

Tracy dropped the pistol on top of them and closed the trunk. Turning out the light, he left the room. The hall was still empty, but he could hear a radio playing in one of the other rooms. He walked softly down the stairs.

"Do come in and join me," said the rounded, sonorous voice.

Tracy entered the comforting brightness of the study. It was a square room, vast and high-ceilinged, lined with shelf after shelf of books that looked as though they had been read and liked and read again. There were two deep leather divans with lamps arched over them and matching leather chairs and a thick-legged table piled with neat stacks of magazines.

The man with the voice was lying flat on one of the divans with a newspaper spread over his face. He made a neatly graduated mound there, coming to a gently rounded prominence in the middle and sloping off at either end. He wore black, pointed shoes and gray spats. He blew on the newspaper, and it puffed up with a sudden crackle, floated away like a parachute, and then subsided reluctantly on the floor.

"Dinner will be served shortly," he said. He had a globular head as hairless and smooth as an egg and blue eyes that looked like lacquered, polished buttons.

Tracy sat down and stared at him in silence.

"Mr. Tracy," said the fat man, after a long moment, "I sense a certain latent hostility in your manner. Has something displeased you?"

"Yes, Mr. Montgomery," said Tracy. "Someone searched my room while I was gone."

Montgomery pursed his lips. "I see. That sort of thing can be very annoying when carried to extremes. Do you think I'm the guilty party?"

"I don't know. Are you?"

"No," said Montgomery. "I don't claim, you understand, that I would be above such a thing if I thought there'd be any profit in it, but in this case I'm entirely innocent. I give you my word. Are you convinced?"

"No."

Montgomery sighed. "I see I shall have to resort to logic and deduction. Mr. Tracy, I am the proprietor of this rooming and boarding establishment, and as such I have an interest in maintaining its pure and spotless reputation. That would suffer sadly if I did any unauthorized tampering with the possessions of my paying-guests. Besides, if I *had* searched your room, you wouldn't have found it out."

Tracy merely stared at him.

Montgomery sighed again. "You seem a reasonable person, noticeably lacking in frustrations and complexes, but I fear your residence in the mysterious East has made you unduly suspicious unless you are an international spy or saboteur or some such. Are you?"

"No."

"Then why should anyone want to search your room?"

"Why should janitors want to tell me fairy tales?"

"Bagby?" Montgomery inquired. "That was no fairy tale he told you. There was a man here inquiring about you in a suspiciously casual manner. Also, Bagby is a very good judge of a certain type of character. He used to be a professional criminal himself. He used to blow safes until as a result of a slight miscalculation he blew himself through a brick wall and retired from business. Bagby says the man inquiring for you was a killer—a man who hires himself out to do murder for a price. Do you know him?"

"No."

"Do you have any enemies?"

"Yes. A couple of hundred million of them."

Montgomery smiled. "You mean dear Adolf and his various assistant villains? I was referring to personal enemies who would be likely to lay out a couple of hundred dollars to have the pleasure of reading your obituary."

Tracy shook his head. "No. I'm such

a nice fellow that everyone who knows me loves me dearly."

"You'd better count up again," Montgomery advised. "Criminals never work for fun."

"How do you know?"

"I was a criminal lawyer—I use the adjective advisedly—until the evil machinations of my jealous rivals in business resulted in my disbarment. It was a lamentable miscarriage of justice. I had not, as was alleged, bribed the jury in this particular case. I had no need to. I had bribed the witnesses for the prosecution, but you can understand why I couldn't enter that fact as a defense. . . . Won't you come in and join us, Miss LaTru? It's rather drafty out there in the hall."

A GIRL lounged into sight and leaned in a lazily graceful way against the doorway. Her mouth was very red and moist-looking, and she held a cigarette with an inch-long ash expertly in one corner of it, squinting one heavily mascaraed eye against the smoke. She was slim and quite tall for a girl, and she wasn't more than twenty-one or twenty-two. She had brassily golden hair that hung to her shoulders in a long sleek bob. In spite of all the camouflage, she was really very pretty.

"Hi, Counsellor," she said. Her voice was low and hoarse.

"Good evening," Montgomery said. "This gentleman is Mr. Peter Tracy. This is Miss Gloria LaTru, Mr. Tracy."

"Hello," said Tracy thoughtfully. Gloria LaTru was wearing perfume—a lot of it. It was the same kind of perfume the person who had searched Tracy's room used.

Gloria LaTru took the cigarette out of her mouth and snapped the ash on the rug. "This ain't so good, Counsellor. This bird looks pretty young and spry, and he ain't exactly repulsive, either."

"Thanks," said Tracy. "Shall I take a bow?"

"Never mind," said Montgomery. "Miss LaTru, I don't like to appear unduly dense, but just what has Mr. Tracy's appearance or lack of it got to do with either you or me?"

"Pappy picked this joint because it was a faculty boarding house and supposed

to be full of old fuddie-duddies," Gloria LaTru explained. "He ain't gonna like it when he finds out Pete flops here."

"I suppose by Pete you mean Mr. Tracy," Montgomery said. "But who is Pappy?"

"My li'l ole sugar-daddy."

"Oh," said Montgomery.

Gloria LaTru nodded at Tracy. "It ain't that I got anything against you, Pete. In fact, I think you're kinda cute in a negative way, but li'l ole Pappy is awful jealous. He gets himself all in a dither if I just smile at anybody that ain't at least a hundred years old."

Montgomery said: "This Pappy has some—ah—control over your actions?"

"Well, sure. I told you he's my li'l ole sugar-daddy. He's putting up the dough for me to go to college with."

"Why?" Tracy asked, interested.

"To learn me to be an actress. Ain't that a sketch, kids? Can you picture me as an actress? Man, I'd sure panic the populace. But ever since Pappy dug me out of the pickle factory, he's been at me to get refined, and I guess maybe this is about the least painful way to do it. I think maybe I'm even going to like it around here."

"I'm sure you will," Montgomery told her, "if Pappy allows you to stay. If he does, I'm afraid he'll have to put up with Mr. Tracy's presence on the premises. You may inform him that appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, Mr. Tracy is a bonafide member of the University's faculty."

"Yeah?" said Gloria LaTru. "What brand of bilge do you give out with, Pete?"

"Just junk and stuff," said Tracy.

"Hardly that," Montgomery denied. "Have you ever heard of the American Volunteer Group, Miss LaTru?"

"Nope."

Montgomery sighed. "Have you ever heard of the Flying Tigers?"

"Oh, you mean those babies that used to fly against the Japs before Pearl Harbor? Sure! You mean, Pete is a flier with that outfit?"

"It no longer exists," said Montgomery. "It is now part of the United States Army Air Force. But there were other people besides fliers in the Group.

Mr. Tracy was one of them. He is an engineer—a specialist in construction and transportation and sanitation and such matters. He is now instructing would-be officers in the University under the sponsorship of the War Department."

"Gee," said Gloria LaTru. "He don't look smart enough for all that, does he? Did you ever kill any Japs, Pete?"

"I never saw any," Tracy answered, "closer than two miles away—straight up."

"You got bombed, huh?"

Tracy nodded. "Every afternoon at two sharp."

"Were you scared?"

"You're damned right," said Tracy.

A thin, small, discouraged-looking youth looked in the doorway and stated sadly: "Dinner's ready about now."

"Mr. Penfield has not come down yet, Samson," Montgomery told him. "Will you call him, please?"

"Is Penfield the bald little guy who tip-toes through the halls?" Gloria LaTru asked. "Looks something like a mouse?"

"He is small," Montgomery said.

"Also screwy," said Gloria LaTru. "He squeaked at me."

"Mr. Penfield is very shy," Montgomery told her.

"He sure shied at me. Let's feed. Give me your flipper like in society, Pete."

She took Tracy's arm in a warmly possessive grasp and pulled him toward the door.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Glamorous Gloria

THE TABLE was long and narrow under a huge chandelier that dripped a cascade of dusty crystal pendants. Gloria LaTru and Tracy sat opposite each other in the middle, and Montgomery and Penfield sat at either end.

"It seems a little lonesome now," Montgomery said. "Things will liven up when Treat and Totten and the rest return from their vacation and the semester starts."

"Who are Treat and Totten?" Tracy asked.

"They are research assistants in anatomy."

"In what?" Gloria LaTru demanded.

"Anatomy."

"I'll keep an eye on them," she promised. "They won't get away with any home work around me. Say, Penny, what do you do for a living?"

Penfield was caught with a mouthful of potatoes and pork chop, and he made pitiful little choking noises and blushed fiery red. He was a small, squeamish man, bald except for a kewpie-like spiral of colorless hair on top of his head.

Montgomery came to his rescue. "Mr. Penfield is an assistant professor in the history department. He's a noted authority on early Grecian folk-lore. He has written several texts that are used extensively."

"Gee, an author!" said Gloria LaTru. "Will you autograph me a book, Penny?"

"Gl-gladly," said Penfield, regarding her with a sort of dread fascination.

Samson, the discouraged-looking youth, came in to remove the dishes. He wore thick glasses, and his trips back and forth from the kitchen had fogged the lenses until they looked like twin blacked-out portholes.

"Hey, Goliath," Gloria LaTru said. "Can you see through those cheaters when they're gummed up that way?"

"No," Samson answered.

"Then why don't you clean 'em off?"

"There's nothing around here I care to look at," said Samson, returning to the kitchen.

"Whee!" said Gloria LaTru. "I got snubbed, I bet."

"Samson is a student at the University," Montgomery explained. "He earns his meals by waiting on table here. He is studying political trends and world economics now, and it depresses him."

"Do you expect any other roomers besides Treat and Totten?" Tracy inquired.

Montgomery nodded. "Two more, that I know of. Miss Andrew—she's an associate professor in bio-chemistry—and a Mr. Brazil."

"What does he do?" Tracy asked.

"I really don't know. He sent me a telegram the other day and asked me to reserve a room for him. He gave some very excellent references—financial ones. I suspect he's interested in some sort of graduate work."

The swing-door into the kitchen squeaked open, but instead of Samson a plump, gray-haired woman appeared and smiled at them in a welcoming way. She wore a crisp white apron over a black dress that rustled slightly when she moved.

"This is Mrs. Harkness," Montgomery said. "She is our chef. The chops were delightful, Mrs. Harkness, and the custard was really superb."

Gloria LaTru said: "Swell. I'm full as a goat."

Mrs. Harkness bobbed her head, beaming. "Thank you. I do so want you all to enjoy your food. If there's anything special any of you like, I wish you'd tell me. I'll try my best to please you."

She disappeared back into the kitchen.

"She's nice," said Gloria LaTru.

"Yes," Montgomery agreed casually. "She's really the most charming murderess I've ever met, I think."

"The most charming what?" Tracy asked.

"Murderess. She split her husband's head with an axe. He really deserved it, though. He had a wart on his nose, and besides he beat her."

"Why didn't she just leave him?"

Montgomery shook his head. "Oh, no. If she had done that, he would certainly have divorced her, and divorce is against Mrs. Harkness' principles."

"Oh," said Tracy. "Did you defend her?"

"Yes," said Montgomery. "And a very nice job I did, too."

"Did you bribe the jury?" Tracy inquired.

"No."

"The witnesses?"

Montgomery winked at him. "Guess again."

"The judge?"

"Right," said Montgomery.

"You must have been a handy man to know in your time," Tracy observed, standing up. "Now if you'll all excuse me, I'll run along. I have an appointment downtown at eight."

"Aw, Pete!" said Gloria LaTru. "Stick around, kid. I'm lonesome, and there's a swell little beer joint down on Melrose where they have a juke box and a place to dance."

Tracy shook his head. "Sorry. Not tonight."

"Tomorrow night, then. Huh, Pete?"

"O.K.," said Tracy.

"Mr. Tracy," said Montgomery, "you may leave in confidence that certain—ah—occurrences will not—ah—recur. And, if I might be so bold as to advise you, I would suggest that you proceed at reduced speed and with all due caution and on lighted streets."

"I'll make out," said Tracy. "Good-bye, all."

TRACY pushed through the heavy bronze doors of the Exchange Club and entered the hushed quiet of its small lobby. An attendant in a white coat trimmed with gold braid came forward and bowed deftly.

"Yes, sir?"

"I had an appointment with Mr. Stillson," Tracy told him. "Mr. Bartholomew Stillson. Is he here?"

"Yes, sir. He's in the lounge. Down the hall—the second door on your right. May I take your coat and hat?"

Tracy gave them to him and walked down the hall on a carpet so thick and springy it had a luxurious life of its own. The lounge was a long, dim cavern with flames sputtering greedily around the huge log in the fireplace at the far end of the room.

Bartholomew Stillson was hunched forward in a chair, staring gloomily into the fire. He bulked heavily in the shadows—thick and broad-shouldered and tall—and his hair glistened silvery-white. His face had a grim, determined strength in it, even now in repose. His jaw was massively wide, and his blue eyes were hard and wary and determined.

"Hello," said Tracy.

Stillson jerked around to look at him. "Who are you?"

"The name is Tracy."

Stillson stared at him blankly for a second and then reared upright in his chair and bellowed: "Elmer! *El-mer!*"

Elmer was an older and more suave replica of the attendant in the lobby. He materialized noiselessly in the service door at the side of the room.

"Yes, Mr. Stillson."

Stillson pointed a thick forefinger at

Tracy. "Look! Why didn't you remind me he was coming tonight? What's the matter with you, anyway? Why don't I get some service around this mausoleum?"

"You didn't tell me to remind you."

"I did so!" Stillson bellowed fiercely.

"You did not," Elmer contradicted in a calm but positive way.

"When shall I come back?" Tracy asked.

"Come back nothing!" Stillson shouted. "Come in here! I'm getting old and senile. I can't keep my appointments straight any more. I promised to go over to some damned director's meeting at the Seaforth National tonight, but that can wait for awhile. Elmer, go bring some of my brandy. Tracy, my boy, come over here and sit down and get warm. How are you? I'm glad to meet you. You look enough like your old man to be his twin brother."

"That's a compliment," Tracy said.

"It is, son, and don't you forget it. When your old man died, this country lost one of the finest scholars and teachers it will ever have. I loved the old rascal even if he did flunk me and get me bounced out of college. I owe everything to him. Why, if I'd stayed in college I might have got a degree and become a professor or some damned thing! As it is, do you know what I am, Tracy?"

"What?" Tracy asked.

"I'm a millionaire. It's a fact. I'm a real, honest-to-God millionaire. Would you believe it?"

"Yes," said Tracy.

Stillson shook his head groggily. "Well, it sure baffles me at times. I never thought I'd be worth a damn. But anyway, what's all this I hear about you taking a job teaching in Boles University?"

"Just for a semester, I think."

"Well, that's not as bad as it could be. But what did you want to take a job like that for? I wrote you seventeen times to every place I could imagine you might be stationed when I heard you were with the A.V.G., and when I heard the Group was going to be taken into the Army and you might be coming back here, I cabled you a dozen times. I've got a job for you, son. I've got a hell of a fine job for you. What're you doing at Boles University?"

Tracy said: "I'm a civilian employee of the Army at the moment. I was assigned to teach there."

"What're you going to do after you get through?"

"Go into the Army as an officer."

"What kind of an officer?"

"A First Lieutenant in the Engineers."

"Well, why?" Stillson demanded.

"I want to go back to China."

"He wants to go back. . . ." Stillson repeated, stunned. "After dodging bombs for three solid years, you want to go back and do it some more? Are you crazy? You need a rest! You've got to take a job with me! I'm building air fields and Army barracks and hospitals and training camps from Halifax to Hell, and I got to have some expert help!"

"I'd rather be in the Army, thanks."

Elmer came back with a decanter of brandy and served it in shimmering crystal goblets and disappeared again.

STILLSON held his goblet out toward the fire and swirled the brandy in it. "I can see that this is going to take some thought. I can see that you are as screwy as your old man, if not more so. This is very valuable work I'm doing, son. I'm right in there punching with the old war effort, and a lot of it is all new to me. I know something about construction, but not about this kind. You do. How long is a semester?"

"About four and a half months."

"And this one starts next week? O.K., then. I've got that long to make you sensible. I'll get you to work for me if I have to slam you over the head with your own slide-rule. You aren't married, are you?"

"No," said Tracy.

"That's it!" said Stillson triumphantly. "You need a wife, Tracy. I can see that. A wife would soon talk you out of any nutty notions about going to China. I'll start looking for one for you right away. I've got some fine prospects in mind. I know! I'll have a party, by God! I'll invite them all and let you take your pick!"

"Maybe the one I picked wouldn't like me."

"Don't be dumb," Stillson ordered. "Any girl would jump at you like a shot.

Now, when are you going to move in?"

"Move in where?" Tracy asked.

"Into my joint, of course. I've got a whole damned castle up on a hill north of town. It's so big I rattle around in it like a peanut in a hogshead. I have to come down here to the Club all the time to keep from going loony. You move in and keep me company."

"I appreciate it," Tracy told him. "And thanks a lot. But I'd rather stay down near the University. I've taken a room in a boarding-house at 1212 Chaucer Street. It's under the name of Montgomery in the directory."

"You're a hard guy to do business with," Stillson said gloomily. "You don't co-operate worth a damn. But I'll persuade you. I'll put my mind on it. And wait until you see the girls I'm going to dig up and the party I'm going to throw for you! You'll fall like a busted elevator. Now look, Tracy, I'm sorry as all get out, but I've got to go over and listen to those bankers mumble in their beards. It was an awful thing—forgetting our appointment—and I apologize a thousand times."

"It's all right," said Tracy. "I didn't have anything to do, anyway."

"Elmer!" Stillson shouted. "*El-mer!*"

"Yes, Mr. Stillson," said Elmer quietly.

"Fix Tracy up with a club guest-card. Peter Tracy, Boles University. You stick around here now, Tracy. There's everything you want to amuse yourself—billiards, bowling, gym, swimming pool—I'll give you a ring tomorrow or the next day. 1212 Chaucer—Montgomery. Yeah, I'll remember it. See that he's amused, Elmer. Good-bye, Tracy. It was a hell of a pleasure to meet you. I've got to run. Good-bye."

His feet thumped hurriedly down the hall for about twenty paces and then thumped back again.

"Tracy," he said from the doorway, "I want to ask you a personal question."

"Go ahead," Tracy invited.

"Is that your best suit?"

"Why, yes," Tracy admitted, looking down at his sober blue serge.

"I thought so. I didn't imagine you'd find many places to buy good clothes in China. So far you've refused everything

I wanted to do for you, and you can't turn me down on this. I insist. Here." Stillson snapped a card across the room. "That's my tailor. He's a wizard. You go to him and get fixed up. I want you to look your prettiest when your future wife sees you for the first time. And don't forget my party, either. I'll call you. Good-bye."

His feet thumped away.

"Mr. Stillson is a very busy man," Elmer said. "He's the director of more than a dozen companies, and the war has added tremendously to his responsibilities."

"I know," Tracy said, picking up the tailor's card and putting it in his pocket. "I'm going to take him up on the clothes offer. This suit is five years old if I remember rightly. I had to leave most of my stuff in China."

"You won't be disappointed," said Elmer. "The tailor is very good. Mr. Stillson even sent me there to get a suit. My wife says it is the best-looking one I ever had. Is there anything I can get you now, Mr. Tracy?"

"No, thanks. I've got to go along home in a minute."

"Please wait until I make out your guest-card. It will take just a short time. Have another glass of Mr. Stillson's brandy. It's really excellent. I find that it is especially soothing when consumed in front of an open fire."

Tracy smiled. "All right. I'll have another."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Nocturnal Attack

TRACY dismissed his taxi at the corner of Melrose and Chaucer and strolled along through the moving shadows toward the Montgomery house. He felt warm and relaxed and comfortable, and he was humming slightly off-key when he turned in the front walk. He stopped humming abruptly when a man stepped out of the darkness under the four oak trees.

"Peter Tracy," said the man, as though he were checking a name off a list.

Tracy had felt this same frozen horror once before, when he had opened the

front door of his bungalow and found a king cobra coiled in the middle of the living-room floor. He could not see this man's face, but he had a quick and daintily precise way of moving that was chillingly reminiscent of the snake, and now an automatic made a darting, dark gleam in his right hand.

Bagby's voice said suddenly: "Drop that gun, fancy-pants, and stick up your hands!"

The man with the gun whirled to face the sound, and Tracy jumped for him. He got a double-grip on the wrist of the hand with the gun in it. He whirled himself, then, and bent forward, trying to throw the other man over his shoulder.

The other man had cat-like agility. He didn't throw. He tripped Tracy instead, and the two of them slammed down hard on the ground and rolled over and over again with Tracy still holding onto the wrist, and then the other man kned him in the stomach with his full weight behind it.

Tracy doubled up with a soundless cry of agony. The wrist and hand slid out of his grasp, but they left the automatic behind. Tracy threshed and groaned on the ground, trying to get hold of the gun, trying to get up.

There was a flat, spating sound and a thud on the ground, and then feet ran away in a hurrying, quick whisper that faded instantly. Somebody put an arm under Tracy and heaved him up to his feet.

"Did he knife you?" Bagby asked.

"No," Tracy gasped. "Knee . . . stomach."

"You're lucky," Bagby told him. "He popped me one right in the mouth." He made a sucking sound and then spat something white. "That was one of my best teeth. Hey! Where you going?"

"Chase. . ."

"Come back here, you dope. You couldn't run ten feet in the shape you're in, and anyway you might as well try to catch moonbeams as that guy. He had it all laid out. He blew around the house and through the gate in the back fence and down the alley. He's two blocks from here by now."

Tracy straightened up slowly and painfully. "Why didn't you shoot him?"

"Me?" said Bagby. "Say, I didn't have no gun. I don't dare carry one. I'm on parole. They catch me with a gun, and I'd be slapped away in the sneezer for the rest of my natural life as a habitual criminal."

"Why didn't you warn me?"

"How do you like that?" said Bagby. "I save the guy's life, and he wants to give me an argument about how I did it! I didn't know whether to believe what you told me this afternoon or not. I thought maybe you might actually know the guy and not want to admit it. I spotted him hanging around here waiting for you, so I waited, too. When I saw he really meant to blast you, I yelled."

Tracy kneaded his stomach gingerly. "Thanks."

"Well, it's about time."

"Was this the same man who was asking about me?"

"Yeah," Bagby answered. "Say, what's this all about, Tracy? Who's out to put the twitch on you?"

Tracy drew a deep, exploratory breath. "It's just crazy. It doesn't make sense. I haven't got any personal enemies that I know of. I haven't even been in the United States for three years. I'm just exactly what I claim to be—a civilian employee of the Army assigned to teach here at Boles University."

"You ain't got any military secrets tattooed on your toe nails, have you?"

"No!" said Tracy. "I wouldn't know a military secret if it bit me!"

"Something almost did," Bagby observed. "Is that his gun? Let me see."

Tracy handed him the automatic.

"Yeah," said Bagby. "Like I thought. It's one of those Spanish mail order babies. Lots of shooters use them. After they knock you off, they just drop the gun beside you and scam. There's no way to trace the gun, and if they catch the guy even ten feet from your body they can't prove he shot you unless somebody saw him doin' it."

"I didn't believe there were actually any people like that."

"Where you been all your life?" Bagby demanded. "There's plenty of 'em. It don't take no brains to be a killer. You just have to be cold-blooded and fast on your feet. These here professionals, they

don't go in for fancy-work. They don't put poison on pins or ground glass in your soup or any dream stuff like that. They just shoot you and run. You'd be surprised how few of 'em get caught at it, too. Here, take this gun back. I don't want it."

TRACY put the automatic in his pocket. "The whole business is still insane. Maybe the man who is after me is a maniac."

"Not him," Bagby said flatly. "He was a little hopped up on marijuana tonight—did you smell his breath? But he ain't by no means nuts. He was after you in person. He knows who you are. He knows you come from China. He told me that when he was tryin' to pump me this afternoon."

"What did he want to know about me?"

"He was just scouting. He wanted to be sure you lived here, and if you ate here, and did I know if you went out at night much, and did you have a dame, and all such like that. I answered him with a lot of double-talk."

"But why should anyone want to kill me?"

Bagby regarded him thoughtfully in the darkness. "Do you wanta find out?"

"Well, certainly!"

"I can locate this guy for you, but I ain't gonna do it if you're gonna turn him over to the cops. I'm no squeaker."

"How can you locate him?"

"I got ways. I can find anybody in this burg that's on the wire."

"On the wire?" Tracy repeated.

"Crooked," Bagby explained. "I mean, any professional. Amateurs I don't fool with. But this guy ain't. He's an old hand."

"Well. . . ." Tracy said doubtfully. "What good would it do to locate him? I'm not one of these brave and bold boys who like to set themselves up as targets for people."

"Oh, we'll fix that. You got any dough?"

"A little."

"Two or three hundred bucks you can spare?"

"Yes."

"O.K.," said Bagby. "We'll just offer



the guy more for talking than the guy that's hirin' him is offerin' him for shooting you. He'll talk. That's the trouble with them killers. They're dishonest. I'll see what I can do tomorrow. I got to go now and put a hot water bottle on this tooth of mine."

"Well—thanks again."

"You can buy me a beer for Christmas," Bagby said. He went around the corner of the house, heading for the back door.

Tracy went up the steps to the porch and groped in the gloom for the front door knob. The light inside was not burning now, and he opened the door and stepped into the warm, thick blackness of the hall. He felt along the wall beside the door, seeking the switch, and then he stiffened warily, turning his head a little.

Very quietly he took the automatic out of his pocket and then took two long steps forward in the darkness and thrust the gun out straight ahead of him. The muzzle prodded into something soft and yielding, and there was a sudden painful gasp.

"Stand still," said Tracy.

"Puh-Pete," said Gloria LaTru. "It's just—just me."

"You're just about enough, too," said Tracy. "What are you doing sneaking around here?"

"I wasn't! I heard something . . . Pete, what happened outside?"

"Bagby and I were just playing fun."

"You—you poked me right in the stomach. It hurt. What did you poke me with?"

"A gun."

"Oh! The same . . . I mean, is it loaded?"

"It is," Tracy answered. "And it's not the same one you found in my trunk. What were you looking for in the trunk?"

"I didn't! I never—"

"Do you want me to poke you again?"

"No! Pete, I—I lied to you kind of."

"Am I surprised," said Tracy.

"Well, I did work in a pickle factory once, but that isn't where Pappy found me. He found me in court. I was—was charged with shop-lifting. Pappy got me released on probation and—and—"

"And," Tracy finished. "This is all very interesting, but what about my trunk?"

"Well, Pappy doesn't give me any money at all. He lets me buy anything I want, when he's with me, but he never gives me any money of my own. I thought you were an old dopey professor, and that there might be something in your trunk that you'd be so absent-minded you would not miss, and that I could—could—"

"Steal it and pawn it," said Tracy.

"Yes, Pete. I'm awful sorry. I'm scared of guns. I lifted that one out of your trunk all right, but I was afraid to put it back in again for fear it might shoot or something. I didn't steal anything, Pete. Honest. And I won't bother any of your stuff again. Aw, don't get mad and go tell on me, please."

"O.K.," said Tracy wearily. "But I don't want to hear of anyone else around here missing things."

"They won't. Honest, Pete. I promise. You ain't mad at me now, are you?"

"No," said Tracy.

"Do you—you like me, Pete?"

"Oh, sure."

"Pete."

"What?" said Tracy.

"You're still gonna take me to the beer hall tomorrow night, ain't you?"

"I suppose so."

"Pete."

"What?"

"Would you like—to kiss me?"

"Not right now," said Tracy. "Run along."

Gloria LaTru said: "You're sure a surprising character, Petesey. You look dumb, but you ain't. I think you're pretty sharp, myself."

"Go away," said Tracy.

**H**IGH heels made suddenly sharp taps on the front porch, and someone came in the hall and said in a disgusted voice: "Saving electricity again!"

The light switch snapped, and the chandelier jumped into sudden brilliance.

"Well!" said the woman in the doorway. "In fact—well, well, well! Can this be true? Things and stuff going on in dear old Montgomery's respectable boarding house?"

She was tall and bony and gray-haired, and the skin on her face was tanned to the shade of new saddle-leather. She wore a tailored blue suit, and she was carrying

a black traveling case in her right hand.

"We live here," said Gloria LaTru.

"So do I," said the woman. "My dear, if I had as nice an anatomy as you have, I'd wear a lace nightgown like that, too, but not in public under a bright light."

"Oh!" said Gloria LaTru, suddenly remembering. "Oh!" She whirled around and ran headlong up the stairs.

"My, my," said the bony woman, watching her. "How did she ever get into this home for the aged and decrepit?"

There was a shrill, startled squeak from the hallway upstairs. Feet pattered along it, and then Penfield appeared at the top of the stairs. He was bundled up in a moth-eaten blue bathrobe, and his face was white and stiff with shock.

"A woman!" he said. "In the hall! In—in a nightgown! At least, I *think* it was a nightgown! I never saw anything like —" He saw the bony woman and ducked back out of sight.

"Penfield!" she called.

Penfield's head protruded cautiously around the newel post.

"Introduce us," the woman ordered.

"Miss Andrew, may I present Mr. Tracy?" Penfield said hastily. "Mr. Tracy—Miss Andrew." He ducked back out of sight again.

Miss Andrew nodded to Tracy. "I'm bio-chemistry. What are you?"

"I'm sort of spraddled around between engineering and modern languages."

"You're one of the new War Department boys, eh?"

"Yes."

"Good," said Miss Andrew. "You're what we need around here. The University was accumulating too much old ivy on the walls and too much old ivory in the professors' heads. I'm sorry I interrupted your little jam session. You should hang out a warning sign."

"I was trying to get rid of her," Tracy said.

"Then you must be even dumber than you look," said Miss Andrew.

"You don't know her."

"I've got eyes, though," said Miss Andrew. "I didn't notice you hiding your head when she ran upstairs, either. I'll bet she's going to liven things up around this imitation of a tomb."

"If she only stops there," Tracy ob-

served, "everything will be dandy. Good-night."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Chinaman's Cunning

IT WAS dusk the next day when Tracy came dragging his heels up Chaucer Street, too tired even to whistle. During the day he had interviewed another couple of hundred students anxious to enroll in his proposed classes. It seemed that there was no end of them. As a matter of fact this was worrying the University authorities, too. They hadn't anticipated that so many people would be so anxious to pick up the pearls of wisdom that fell from Tracy's ruby lips. Tracy had experience and practical knowledge. The students wanted to hear about that. They were tired of theory, no matter how high-flown and brass-bound it might be.

Tracy was turning into the walk of the Montgomery house when a voice from across the street called: "Hey! Hey, son!"

Tracy turned around warily. A mailman humped under a bulging leather bag, limped across the pavement toward him.

"Are you goin' into Montgomery's, son?"

"Yes," said Tracy.

"Take these two letters, will you? They are for Treat and Totten."

"I don't think they're here yet," Tracy said.

"Just leave 'em inside the door on the table, then. It'll save me a few steps, son, and my feet are awful sore. Will you?"

"Sure," said Tracy, accepting the two long manila envelopes.

"Thanks, son. What's your name?"

"Peter Tracy."

"Tracy," said the mailman. "Tracy at Montgomery's. Nothing for you today, but I'll remember who and where you are. So long."

He went limping on down the street, and Tracy went up the front walk toward the house. He looked around, but he couldn't see Bagby anywhere, and he went up on the porch and through into the front hall. There was a loud burst of laughter, dominated by Gloria LaTru's contralto giggle, from the study. Tracy looked in.

"Pete!" Gloria LaTru greeted enthusiastically. "Look what I found! These are Teeter and Totter!"

She was sitting on one of the leather divans, like a queen holding an audience, and two men had pulled up chairs close in front of her.

One of the men jumped up now and stood at exaggeratedly rigid attention. He was very tall and thin, and he wore horn-rimmed spectacles balanced precariously on the end millimeter of his nose. He thrust a skinny right arm out straight, palm-down.

"The name is Treat," he barked. "Heil Hitler!"

"Heil Hitler," Tracy answered. "Here is a letter for you."

The second man got up and bowed six times rapidly. He was short and round and he had a pudgily pink face.

"The name is Totten," he said. "Oh, so-o-o. Banzai Hirohito, prease!"

"The accent is on the second syllable," Tracy informed him. "Here's a letter for you, too."

"Of course their names are really Treat and Totten," Gloria LaTru said. "But I think Teeter and Totter are more fun, don't you, Pete?"

"Sure," said Tracy. "Do I get introduced to your other admirer?"

The man was sitting back in the corner in the shadow, and he was smiling in a politely amused way. He had a round, smoothly olive face and black, lacquered hair. His teeth were very white and even.

"Oh, yes," said Gloria LaTru. "This is Mr. Brazil. This is Pete Tracy, Mr. Brazil."

Tracy nodded. "Mr. Brazil—of Brazil, I presume?"

"Peru," said Mr. Brazil.

"Mr. Brazil of Peru," Tracy corrected. "I'm very glad to know you."

"I assure you that it is mutual," said Mr. Brazil.

"AH-HAH!" Treat exclaimed, waving the envelope in the air. "Ah-hah! I made it! I enter our armed forces as a sergeant as of next month! Totten, you worm, just wait until I get you in my awkward squad! Squads right! Shoulder arms!"

"In the future," said Totten loftily, "when you find it necessary to address me, Sergeant, kindly say 'sir'."

"What!" Treat shouted, outraged. He snatched the envelope out of Totten's hand. "A commission as a Second Lieutenant! Conspiracy! Fraud! Tracy! What is our Army coming to? Can you imagine making a drooling moron like this an officer?"

"You forget," said Totten, "that I have had four years of advanced military training."

"Advanced military horse-radish," Treat said rudely. "Let me see . . . Ho! Infantry! No wonder! Anybody can be an officer in the Infantry! All they do is run around and sleep in ditches! I'm in the Air Force!"

"Gnats," said Totten. "Flies. Buzzards. The Infantry is the Queen of Battle."

"Pooey! Tracy, give this idiot a lecture on the rudiments of modern military strategy!"

"You two fight it out," Tracy advised. "Personally I prefer the Engineers."

"The man is mad, Totten," said Treat. "Obviously," Totten agreed. "An advanced mental case. He should be confined."

Montgomery appeared in the doorway. "Mr. Tracy, you are wanted on the telephone. You'll find it right under the stairs, there."

Tracy wormed himself into a tiny, slant-roofed closet lined with plasterboard that was decorated with pencil-written telephone numbers and appropriate comments on same and picked up the receiver.

"Yes?" he said.

"Bartholomew Stillson speaking. Tomorrow night."

"What's tomorrow night?" Tracy asked.

"The party I'm giving for you! Up at my place on the hill. Come any time after eight. I'm sorry for such short notice, but I couldn't have it over the weekend because there's a big USO blow-out coming off, and everybody is going to that. You can make it tomorrow night, can't you?"

"I think so."

"Well, you've got to come, Tracy! You should see the girls I've collected for

you! I told them all you were a war hero, and they're waiting with bated breath and starry eyes! You'll have a dozen to pick from!"

"I'll be there," said Tracy.

"O.K. Good-bye, Tracy."

Tracy hung up and squirmed out of the closet. Gloria LaTru was waiting just outside the door.

"Who was that, Pete?" she asked.

"A guy," said Tracy.

"Where you going tomorrow night?"

"Out."

"With another dame, huh?"

"Why don't you mind your own business?" Tracy inquired.

"Aw, Pete. Don't be mean. You're going to take me to the beer parlor tonight, remember?"

"Yes," said Tracy wearily.

Montgomery came out of the dining room. "Dinner is served now, if you're ready."

"Where's Bagby?" Tracy asked him.

Montgomery shook his smooth head. "I don't know, really. Probably lying in the gutter somewhere dead drunk. I haven't seen him all day. Shall we eat?"

"Come on, Pete," said Gloria LaTru. "You sit by me."

**T**HE BULL and BOAR was a beer hall with collegiate variations. It was a narrow, noisy room devoid of all pretense at decoration with a short service bar at one end, a juke box in the middle, and rows of heavy-topped tables along each wall. The waitresses wore white starched uniforms, and they were all co-eds working their way through the University. If you tried to tip one of them you were liable to get your face slapped, and if you attempted to make what are known as advances you were lucky if you escaped with some minor injury like a fractured skull. The management had no objections if you wanted to get drunk in the place, but the customers did. At the first wobble, you got the heave-ho from such assorted football players and shot putters as happened to be present.

The place was crowded and the juke box was tearing away at a tune when Tracy followed Gloria LaTru in through the front door. The noise was deafening.

"Cute, huh?" said Gloria LaTru.

"Wait until I see which tables Etta is serving. I met her when we were registering. Etta!"

A small, dark girl in a waitress' uniform slid through the squirming press of dancers around the juke box.

"Hello, Gloria. Sit over at this table."

They sat down at a table near the door, and Etta said: "Is this he, Gloria?"

"Yeah," said Gloria LaTru. "This is Pete."

"What'll you have?" Etta asked. "A couple of beers?"

"Whatever is right," Tracy answered, a little dazed by all the sound and fury.

Etta went away and came back again with two quart bottles of beer and two tall glasses. "Sixty cents," she said. She took the change from Tracy and hesitated.

"Go ahead," Gloria LaTru urged.

"Mr. Tracy," said Etta, "I want to get in that class of yours in Modern Asiatic dialects."

"Oh," said Tracy vaguely. "Do you?"

"Yes. I'm a language major, and I'm sure I can handle it, and I want to take the course. But they won't let me."

"Why not?" Tracy asked, surprised.

"They say it's just for men who are going into the Army. They won't admit any girls."

"Oh," said Tracy. "I didn't know that."

"Well, won't you make an exception for me, Mr. Tracy? It won't make any difference, really. You've got too big a class already for recitations."

"Have I?" Tracy inquired.

"Why, yes. You've got a hundred and fifty-three registrants for the course now. If you called on students to recite, you wouldn't get through the class roll twice in a semester. You'll have to lecture."

"Lecture?" Tracy echoed, horrified. "Me?"

"Yes. I'll sit in the back of the room, and I won't bother anyone. It certainly can't do any harm if I just listen, can it?"

"No," Tracy admitted. "I really don't know much about this business, Etta, but I tell you what you do. You fill out a class card and leave it on my desk—I'm in 203 in the Administration Building. I'll just slip it into my files and register you in the class. Nobody's told me anything about not admitting girls. If they do, I'll

say I've already promised to let you in. If anyone asks you about it, you say the same thing. We'll edge you in some way."

"Oh, thanks!" said Etta.

"I told you Pete was a good guy," Gloria said.

"Call me if you want me," Etta said. "I'll be in your class on Monday, Mr. Tracy."

**G**LORIA LATRU poured beer expertly into her glass. "Have a beer, Petesey, and stop looking so sad."

"Lecture," Tracy said numbly. "That means I have to stand up there and talk for an hour every day."

"You'll do O.K.," said Gloria LaTru. "You're sharp like a razor, Pete. You'll slay 'em. Drink some beer now, and then we'll have us a dance. I want to see—"

An automobile horn blasted lengthily once and then again from the street outside. It was a heavy, expensive, commanding sound that penetrated clearly through the din of the juke box.

"Oh!" said Gloria LaTru, staring wide-eyed at Tracy. "That's Pappy!"

The horn blew twice more.

Gloria LaTru stood up. "I—I've got to go, Pete! He's gonna be mad. . . . Don't come out with me!"

She ran quickly to the door and went out. Tracy sat frowning for a second and then got up and followed her. He didn't go out into the street. He stopped in the shadow of the doorway and stared with one hand up to shield his eyes.

The car looked like its horn sounded. It was a big club coupe—long and sleek and black, gleaming with chrome. Gloria LaTru was getting into it, and Tracy caught just a glimpse of the driver's face. It was thin and lined, tightly aristocratic, with a precise gray mustache. Then the door thumped behind Gloria LaTru, and the car rolled smoothly away down the street.

Tracy watched it until it turned a corner and disappeared. He was still frowning, and after a moment he went back into the beer hall and to his table. Mr. Brazil was now sitting where Gloria LaTru had been. He showed his white teeth in a smile and said: "Good evening, Mr. Tracy. Please sit down."

Tracy lowered himself slowly into his

chair. He picked up his glass of beer and sipped at it in a thoughtful way, watching Mr. Brazil.

"I wanted to talk to you," said Mr. Brazil, "and I think this is a very nice place to do it. There is so much noise it would be impossible for anyone to eavesdrop on us. I don't think you believed me when I said I was from Peru, did you?"

"No," said Tracy.

"I'm not, really, although I am a South American by adoption. I'm a member of the Japanese colony on the coast just below the bulge of Brazil."

"I can't buy that, either," said Tracy.

"No? Where do you think I'm from?"

"Wu-Chei Province in China."

"You are very observant," Mr. Brazil complimented. "And quite correct, too. So it won't be necessary for me to waste time establishing my identity. I will proceed at once with the business at hand. You remember a town called Lao-Tsu?"

"No," said Tracy.

"You are also discreet, I see. You know the town. You designed and supervised the construction of a secondary base hospital and rest camp for walking-wounded there."

"Did I?" said Tracy.

"Yes. You finished it in June of 1940. I had occasion to purchase some medical supplies for that hospital. I bought some anti-tetanus vaccine for use there. That is, it was sold to me as anti-tetanus vaccine. Actually it was a concentrated solution of tetanus bacilli."

"What?" said Tracy, startled.

Mr. Brazil smiled thinly. "Yes. Anyone who was given that supposed vaccine was virtually certain to die horribly with lock-jaw. Over five hundred slightly wounded soldiers died just that way before we found the source of the infection. Lock-jaw, you know, has quite a long period of incubation, and the wounded were coming in very fast."

Tracy's lips twisted. "Who would. . . ."

"Who would do such a thing?" Mr. Brazil said. "The Japanese, of course. It was one of their horror tricks—to make Chinese soldiers distrustful of their doctors and their hospitals and also to eliminate numbers of veterans who were only slightly wounded and would be back

fighting soon. I want to repeat: I was the one who purchased that supposed vaccine."

"I see," Tracy said slowly.

"If I were Japanese," said Mr. Brazil, "I would commit suicide. But I am Chinese and hence a little more intelligent. I am looking for the man who sold me that vaccine. The Japanese, of course, paid him to substitute the tetanus virus for the genuine vaccine."

"Yes," said Tracy.

"I bought it from a man named Kars. Do you remember him?"

"Why, yes," Tracy said. "He's dead. He was killed in an accident on the Burma Road just before I came back to this country. I was there when it happened. We were going into Lashio. He was riding in the truck just ahead of the one I was riding in. His truck went off the road and rolled down into a canyon. He was killed instantly."

"I know. That was before the Road was closed. You took Kars' body into Lashio and saw that he was buried there. You took his papers and personal effects and sent them back here to the United States. You sent them to a post office box in this city which had been rented under the name of William Carter."

Tracy nodded. "That's right. Kars had an identification card that said to notify this Carter in case of any accident, so I wrote him a letter and sent Kars' stuff to the address given. Have you located Carter?"

"No. There is no such person. It's a false name. But someone collected Kars' effects from the post office before I could get here."

**T**RACY said slowly: "Well, if Kars is dead. . . ."

"He was only an agent. Ostensibly he was hired by the Chu Sing Importing Company. That is a firm of two Chinese partners which operated in Singapore before the invasion. The partners are dead now."

"Did the Japs kill them?" Tracy asked.

"No," said Mr. Brazil. "I did. They were traitors. Before they died they told me that this vaccine deal had been made through a man named Ras Deu in Calcutta. He is supposed to be some sort of

a broker. I went to see him. He did not wish to talk to me, but he changed his mind after I cut off two of his fingers."

Tracy swallowed. "I can understand that."

"However, what he told me was worth nothing. It led me back to where I started. Kars was furnishing Ras Deu with capital to act as purchasing agent. You see that three-cornered set-up—Kars and the Chu Sing Company and Ras Deu—was designed to confuse any legal investigation and to conceal the identity of Kars' principal. Neither Ras Deu nor the Chu Sing partners knew the principal's identity. He is the man who took Kars' effects from the post office box, and I am very sure that he must be in this city somewhere. Now I wish to ask you some questions."

"I'll tell you anything I can," said Tracy.

"Thank you. What did you find when you searched Kars' body?"

"Nothing but a few personal effects—and very few, at that. I remember thinking about it at the time. He had a watch and a pen-knife and a good ruby ring, and he was carrying quite a lot of money. But he had no papers or letters at all—not any. I thought that was strange. He had an American passport with British and Chinese visas. He had a couple of check books—one from a bank in Singapore and the other from a bank in Delhi, I think. He had no business cards or anything else but money in his wallet—except that identity card saying to notify Carter."

"I was afraid that would be the case," Mr. Brazil said slowly. "Men like he was are very careful not to carry anything that would get them into trouble if they are arrested and searched. But I was hoping there might be something you saw that would give me a hint."

Tracy shook his head. "No."

"I wish you would try to remember everything—anything. You need not hurry about it. I will be here for some time, I think. You see, until I find another, you are my best clue."

"I am?" said Tracy.

"Yes. You wrote to this man who sometimes calls himself Carter. He knows you were there when Kars died. I happen

to know that Kars was horribly mangled in the truck wreck and died instantly, but this fake Carter can't be sure of that. He can't be positive that Kars didn't talk to you before he died—confess something, rave something in delirium. Knowing the kind of a man this fake Carter must be, I think he will take steps to see that you don't reveal anything you might have heard."

"Yes," said Tracy. "He might do that."

Mr. Brazil stood up. "I would be careful if I were you, Mr. Tracy. If you recall anything that might be of help in my search, please tell me. I bid you good-night."

"Good-night," said Tracy.

He sat still for a long time after Mr. Brazil had gone, frowning down at his glass of beer, ignoring the tumult that went on around him. He understood now a great many things that he hadn't before, but understanding them didn't make him feel any better. In fact, he felt worse. He fumbled around in his pocket and found a grimy briar pipe. He had found long since that smoking this pipe indoors made him unpopular, but he needed its comfort now. He inhaled lungs full of acrid smoke and studied the situation.

"Hi," said Bagby. He slid into Gloria LaTru's chair, picked up her bottle of beer, and took a long, thirsty drink out of it. "I found him. Name is Joel Winters. He's home now. You wanta go see him?"

"Very much so," said Tracy.

"Got any dough on you?"

"No, but I've got about three hundred dollars in traveler's checks."

"They're O.K. I can get 'em cashed if we need to. Come on."

Bagby up-ended the beer bottle again and then led the way out of the beer hall and up the street to the corner of Third. There was a taxi stand there, and Bagby and Tracy got into one of the waiting cabs.

"Kester and Call," Bagby directed.

The driver looked back over his shoulder. "They roll pretty rough down there this time of night."

"We're rough people," said Bagby.

The driver shrugged. "O.K. It's your funeral."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Death Deals Double

THE DISTRICT around Kester and Call was one place that was completely enthusiastic about dim-out regulations. People in those parts liked it dark. There were no outside neon signs, and the cafe windows had been painted over until they looked like bleary, blank eyes. The street was a narrow, steep-walled trench full of shadows that moved and muttered or were suggestively silent. The police patrolled in radio cars here—four to each car—and there was a reinforced riot squad on duty at the East Station two blocks off Kester twenty-four hours a day. There were no soldiers or sailors on leave anywhere around. The neighborhood was out-of-bounds.

"Don't think I'm gonna wait here for you," said the taxi driver. "I got some sense."

"Run home to mamma," Bagby advised, paying him. "That's a buck eighty-four you owe me, Tracy. Come on."

They walked on into the dimness of Call Street. The door of a beer parlor opened and erupted riotous music and two drunks who fought in a squalling, furious tangle in the middle of the sidewalk. Bagby stepped over and around them without a second glance.

"Reminds me a little of Port Said," he remarked.

"Have you been there?" Tracy asked, surprised.

"Oh, sure. You got your gun, ain't you?"

"The one I took from this bird we're going to see."

Bagby stopped. "What did you bring that one for? You couldn't hit a barrage balloon at ten paces with it. Why didn't you bring yours?"

"I haven't got any cartridges for it—and what do you know about it, anyway?"

Bagby shrugged and walked on. "After you beefed to Montgomery, I thought maybe I better look around myself. I wouldn't want you to be nailed with a trunkful of hashish in the joint—not while I'm livin' there. That gun of yours is a Jap pistol, ain't it?"

"Yes. One of the A. V. G. pilots gave

it to me. It belonged to a Jap bomber pilot he shot down."

"You know now who first searched your room, don't you?"

"Yes."

Bagby walked on in silence, and Tracy finally said: "Well?"

"I ain't got a thing to say," Bagby affirmed.

Tracy hesitated. "Do you think she and this Winters. . . ."

"Nope. He's a cheapie. He never bought anybody—including himself—the kind of clothes she's got. What I mean, they cost dough. Hold still a minute, now. I'm going to light a match."

The match head snapped on his thumb-nail, and he cupped his hands around the spurting yellow flame and held it up in front of his face for a second and then blew it out.

"Yeah," a voice whispered out of the shadows.

"You sure?" Bagby asked.

The man's face was a pallidly furtive smear. "Yeah. He's havin' a bit of tea. I smelled them reefers."

"Is he alone?"

"I ain't seen nobody."

"O. K. Here." Bagby reached out in the darkness. "Now blow."

The pallid face drifted away and was gone.

Bagby said: "This Winters is touching himself up a bit with marijuana, so you better sort of get that gun ready. He might be jumpy. In this way. Watch your step. That's six eighty-three you owe me; now."

"Who was that you talked to?"

"Name of Weepy Walters. Used to be a touch-off—a fire-bug—before he got the jumps. I told him to watch. Don't talk any more."

They went back through a narrow passageway in swimming blackness.

"Door here," Bagby whispered. "Stairs beyond it. Our guy is sittin' behind the second door on the right in the hall upstairs. Be quiet."

Door hinges made a small sliding sound. Tracy brushed against Bagby's back and then found the first step with his foot. They went up silently, stepping together, and light began to make a faint glow ahead. They came up to the level of the

hall floor, and the light turned into a small, dusty bulb over a curtain-masked window at the end of the short hall.

"Back way out," Bagby murmured.

"About a twelve foot jump into another alley. Here." He touched the pistol in Tracy's hand meaningly and then pointed to a closed door.

Tracy stepped sideways, raising the gun. Bagby nodded approvingly and then scratched gently on the door panel with his finger-nail.

**T**HERE was no sound from within.

"Maybe he's passed out," Bagby whispered. "I hope."

He knocked once, sharply, on the door. There was still no answer. Bagby touched the door knob gently. He looked at Tracy and formed the word "unlocked" with his lips. He was frowning. He made a little motion with his hand, and Tracy stepped further to one side.

Bagby nodded, looking worried. He stepped sideways himself, against the wall, and then reached over and turned the knob and kicked the door with his heel. The door swung clear open and thumped lightly against the wall inside the room. There was no light.

"Winters," Bagby said quietly.

No one answered. Bagby wiped some perspiration from his forehead and then took a match from his pocket and held it up for Tracy to see. He snapped the match on his thumb and flipped it around the door jamb into the room. It painted a quick streak in the darkness and then snuffed out.

"Uh!" said Bagby breathlessly.

"What?" Tracy asked.

"He's dog meat," Bagby said. "Inside—quick."

He slid inside the room himself and closed the door as soon as Tracy had cleared it. He fumbled in the blackness, and then the electric light switch snapped under his hand.

The man called Winters was lying on his back on top of the narrow, rumped bed. He had taken his coat and tie off, but he was fully dressed except for them. He was staring in mild, sightless surprise at the ceiling, and his mouth was open just a little. There was a triangular rip in his shirt-front over his heart, and blood



had made a rust-colored stain around it.

"Right through the ticker," said Bagby. "It was a friend of his. Somebody that come in and talked to him all nice and cozy until he was relaxed and then let him have it with a knife."

"Somebody who thought the same thing you did," Tracy said. "That he'd talk to me—if he was paid."

"Maybe," said Bagby. "Guys like him—they got lots of people who don't like 'em. You take it all nice and calm, I must say."

"I've seen dead people in car-load lots."

"Oh. Well look, Tracy. I can't report this. The cops will slam me into the sneezer even if they know I didn't do it on account of they don't like me."

"How about the man outside—Weepy?"

"He won't talk. I know some things about him that would surprise you—and the cops, too."

"Let's go, then."

"Where?" Bagby asked cautiously.

"Back home. I've got an idea—"

"Don't tell me!" Bagby urged. "I don't want to know what it is. From now on, I'm an innocent bystander. Falling over corpses sort of spoils my sleep. Just wait until I wipe my prints off the door and the light switch."

**I**T WAS five minutes of eight the next morning when Gloria LaTru ran down the stairs into the front hall of Montgomery house and stooped with a little gasp when she saw Tracy waiting for her in the doorway of the study.

"Pete!" she said breathlessly. "You made me jump! You ain't mad, are you? About last night?"

"No," Tracy answered. "I want to talk to you."

"Well, I can't now, Pete. I've got an eight o'clock class, and I overslept, and if I'm late the first morning it meets it'll make a bad impression—"

"Just a second. Who is Pappy?"

"What, Pete?"

"Who is Pappy?"

"Aw, Pete. You wouldn't go and say anything to him or—or anything—"

"Tell me his name."

"Well, it's Oliver Johnson. Pete, he's awful jealous. Please don't—don't—"

"You'll be late to class," Tracy said.

Gloria LaTru stared at him for a moment, chewing on her soft under-lip, and then ran on out the front door.

Tracy looked over his shoulder. "Mr. Montgomery, have you a city directory?"

"Right here," said Montgomery. "I just located it for you. Would you like me to give you a bit of advice?"

"No," said Tracy.

Montgomery sighed. "I was afraid you wouldn't. Perhaps it wasn't very good advice anyway."

There was only one Oliver Johnson in the directory. He was listed as the owner of a wholesale plumbing supply business on the west side. Tracy wrote down the address in his notebook, tore out the page, and took it upstairs. He knocked on the second door along the hall.

Mr. Brazil opened the door. "Yes, Mr. Tracy?"

"Will you do a favor for me?" Tracy asked. He extended the page from the notebook. "I'd like to know a little something about this man—his description, his finances, the kind of a car he drives. Can you find out?"

"Surely," said Mr. Brazil.

Tracy went back downstairs, and Samson served him his breakfast. Fifteen minutes later, when he came out into the hall, he found Mr. Brazil waiting for him.

"Oliver Johnson," said Mr. Brazil, "is in precarious financial circumstances at the moment because of priority difficulties in his business. He has been seeking a position in a defense factory. He is about five feet four inches tall, bald and fat, and he wears thick glasses. He drives a '36 Ford sedan."

Tracy stared at him blankly.

Mr. Brazil smiled. "There is no magic involved. I merely made inquiries of certain people over the telephone while you were eating."

"Thank you," Tracy said thoughtfully.

"Not at all. Mr. Tracy, would you like to have me find out who Pappy is?"

Tracy looked at him. "Yes, I would."

"All right," said Mr. Brazil. "It may take a little time. Please don't let these other matters distract your mind too much from the man, Kars, and his tetanus vaccine."

"No," said Tracy.

He went out on the front porch. Bagby was sitting on the steps, hunched dejectedly forward with his coat collar turned up around his ears.

"Seen the paper?" he asked.

"No," Tracy answered.

"If you should look at it—in the right place—you would see that the police found a party named Winters in a joint off Call Street last night and that he was kind of dead. You would also see that this Winters was wanted in six states, and by the F.B.I., for various stunts he had pulled here and there. I just mention this in passing. I never seen the guy, myself. I never even heard of him. Nice day, ain't it?"

"Very nice," Tracy admitted.

THERE was a long curving drive up to the house that sprawled awkward and massive over the top of the hill. The curtains were drawn across the windows, but occasional little twinkles of light gleamed through like the distant sparkle of jewels, and there was a medley of voices and laughter and the smooth rhythm of a dance orchestra.

"The joint is jumping," said Tracy's taxi driver, pulling in front of a line of parked cars and stopping beside the front entrance. "What they celebratin'?"

"I wouldn't know," Tracy said, getting out and paying him.

Tracy went up the steps, and the massive front door opened before he could touch the chime bell. A terrifically tall butler peered down at him over the bulge of an enormous starched shirt front.

"Your name, sir?"

"Peter Tracy. I'm the cause of all the fuss here."

The butler permitted himself to smile. "Mr. Tracy! We're so happy you've arrived. We've been waiting for you. If you will just step into the bar—that door—I'll locate Mr. Stillson."

Tracy hesitated in the doorway he had pointed out. Bartholomew Stillson really believed in doing things up in first-class style. This was no temporary party bar. It looked like a high-powered cocktail salon, and it was nearly as large. It had a full size bar with stacks of glasses and bottles, and it also had a lot of customers at the moment. Men and women shoved

and shouted cheerfully at each other and the three busy bartenders. Noise and billows of cigarette smoke thrust against the ceiling.

Tracy didn't know anyone and didn't know just what to do, so he stood there, watching. And then he did see someone he knew. On the far side of the room, standing alone against the wall. A tall, very thin man with a lined, aristocratic face and a precise gray mustache. It was Pappy. And not any Oliver Johnson of the defunct plumbing business, either. This was the genuine article. This was the man who had picked up Gloria LaTru at the *Bull and Boar*.

He was looking bored in a well-bred way, and then he noticed Tracy. He stared full at him, unwinking, for ten seconds, and then the skin seemed to whiten slightly across his high cheekbones. He began to move unobtrusively along the wall toward the door opposite Tracy.

Tracy began to move, too, edging through the crowd to head him off. The orchestra in the other room suddenly hit a couple of clashing chords and then galloped full-tilt into a conga. The crowd shoved and swirled away from the bar eagerly, and Tracy was caught in it and pushed along willy-nilly. He lost sight of Pappy, and then in the doorway of what was evidently the ballroom he shook free of the crowd and started back into the bar.

"Tracy! Here! Wait!"

It was Bartholomew Stillson. He was cornered over behind the orchestra in a group of women, and he waved his thick arms in wildly beckoning gestures.

Tracy flipped a hand in reply and went on into the bar. A few thirsty guests were gulping the last of their drinks, but Pappy wasn't among them. Tracy saw another door and went through it and along a hall into a lounge.

The lounge was empty, but one of the drapes against the end wall moved and swished slightly.

Tracy went over to it and pulled it aside. The tall french window in back of it was ajar, and he stepped through it into a formal, sunken garden. White gravel walks radiated in geometrical precision, and Tracy stared down the nearest

one, squinting his eyes to see in the dim, diffused shadows.

A shot made a sudden dull thump in the night. Tracy stopped short, turning his head first one way and then the other, trying to locate the sound. Running feet skittered along one of the graveled paths near him.

Tracy started to run himself. He turned one right-angled curve, pounded down another stretch of empty path, turned sharply again. He stopped, then, skidding his heels with a little grating sound in the gravel.

Pappy was sprawled out on his face, across the path, all limply awkward now. Blood made a darkly spreading pool under his head, and the faint light reflected dimly from the revolver beside the relaxed fingers of his right hand.

**T**RACY knelt down slowly beside him. "Is he dead?" a voice asked softly.

Tracy jerked his head up, startled.

Mr. Brazil smiled at him and nodded. "I see you found him without my help. Was it necessary to shoot him?"

Tracy said: "I didn't. . . ." He stood up. "What are you doing here?"

"I came seeking you," said Mr. Brazil. "Is he dead?"

"Yes."

Mr. Brazil sighed. "I was afraid so when I saw him. His name, aside from Pappy, is Patrick Moore—in case you didn't know. It is also sometimes Carter."

"What?" said Tracy blankly.

"Yes," said Mr. Brazil. "He is the owner and founder of the Borneo-Blasu Export Company. He is the man who hired Kars. He is the man who arranged the deal with the Japanese to sell me that fake vaccine."

Tracy stared at him, unbelieving.

"Yes," repeated Mr. Brazil. "He is the one. I verified his connections once I started on his trail at your request. He was well-hidden, but I have quite extraordinary powers when I wish to use them. Did you know he was Carter?"

"No!" Tracy exclaimed.

"I really didn't think you did. That's why I came here seeking you. I was afraid that if he recognized you and you started questioning him or following him he would take some—ah—steps."

Tracy shook his head groggily. "I was trying to get hold of him tonight, but just because I wanted to talk to him about Gloria LaTru."

"He didn't know that, you see. He thought you wanted to talk to him about vaccine and Kars and China. He was very frightened. He thought he was caught."

"I didn't shoot him," Tracy said, still numb with the shock of the knowledge he had so suddenly acquired.

"No. That was just my way of speaking. The wound is a contact wound, and there is powder-burn on his forehead and temple. He shot himself."

Tracy stared at him narrowly.

Mr. Brazil's white teeth gleamed. "No. I did not shoot him. I would not be so kind as that."

Stillson's voice bellowed from the lounge: "Tracy! Tracy! Where the hell are you?"

"Here," Tracy said.

Stillson's big form came blundering through the darkness. "What? Where . . . Oh, there you are! What are you hiding out here for? I don't blame you for dodging the rat-race I cooked up inside, but I've got a gross of girls . . . Tracy! What—what's that?"

"A man named Moore," said Tracy. "He shot himself."

"Moore! Pat Moore! Shot. . . ."

"Do you know him?" Tracy asked.

"Know him! Hell, yes! Known him for years! Shot himself! Good God! I heard he was having some money trouble, but he was always such a cold, superior sort of a guy I never thought . . . Shot himself! Tracy, what—what'll I do now?"

Mr. Brazil said: "Perhaps you'd better make some arrangement so none of the guests come out here."

Stillson stared at him. "Who are you?"

"A friend of mine," Tracy said.

Stillson wiped a big hand across his face in a harassed way. "Oh. Friend of Tracy's is a friend of mine, but . . . Good Lord! Committing suicide in my garden! And this damned party! Yes, yes. I'll go and stop them—say something— Stay here, Tracy, will you?"

"Yes," Tracy said.

Stillson blundered away, mumbling to himself in an undertone.

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## CHAPTER SIX

### Murder Showdown

**T**HE HOUSE on Chaucer Street loomed dark and still in the shadows, and Tracy went slowly and quietly up the front steps and into the entrance hall. A bulb glowed faintly in the chandelier, and Tracy went on quietly up the stairs.

He went on past his own door and stopped in front of another. He turned the knob noiselessly. The door was unlocked, and he pushed it open and stepped into the bedroom beyond. The furniture made vague shadows in the darkness, and the bed loomed white under the windows. There was a sudden quick rustle of covers, and then Gloria LaTru said breathlessly: "What—who—"

"It's just your pal," said Tracy. "It's just little old me."

"Puh-Pete! What—what are you—"

"Don't get excited," Tracy advised. "I just want to tell you something—quite a few somethings." He moved closer to the bed, felt for and found the night-light and snapped it on.

Gloria LaTru was sitting bolt upright in the bed, her hair swirling around her shoulders, her eyes enormously wide in the white tautness of her face.

Tracy said: "Maybe your name is Gloria LaTru, and maybe Pappy picked you up in a police court, but he didn't send you here to get cultured or to learn to be an actress. He sent you here to spy on me—to get me to fall for you if you could—so I'd keep my mouth shut about a certain deal in China. How are you, you little rat?"

"I don't—don't know what—"

"Don't bother to lie. You're out of a job as of about an hour ago. Your pal, Pappy, thought I was catching up on him, so he blew his brains out."

Gloria LaTru screamed. Her eyes rolled back hideously, and her head fell back against the pillows and rolled loosely against the gleaming gold of her hair.

"Skip the act," said Tracy. "You can't. . . ."

He stared at her with a queer, sick numbness creeping inside his brain.

"Gloria," he whispered.

## Too Many Have Died

There was a sudden patter of feet along the hall, and Miss Andrew, bony and tall and ferocious in a white cotton night gown, burst in the door.

"What goes on here?" she demanded.

Tracy pointed. "She—she—"

Miss Andrew leaned over the bed. "I should think she is! What did you do to her?"

"I—I said—"

"Don't stand there and mumble! Get down on the telephone! Get a doctor!"

Tracy turned and ran out of the room. Penfield popped out of another room and shrilled at him: "What? What is it? I heard a scream!"

Treat and Totten appeared simultaneously at the head of the stairs.

"What's cooking?"

"Who yelled?"

Tracy brushed past them and ran down the stairs. He squeezed into the telephone booth and dialed the operator.

"Emergency hospital," he said when she answered.

Another voice answered at once: "Emergency hospital."

Tracy said: "Send an ambulance to 1212 Chaucer Street. It's very urgent. 1212 Chaucer Street."

"All right."

Tracy hung up the receiver. He could still feel the numbed pain in his brain. It was as though he were two different people—one watching the other with a sort of amazed curiosity. He fumbled at the telephone directory, and opened it to the S pages. The type blurred and swam before his eyes, but he found Bartholomew Stillson's number and dialed it.

"Yes?" said a voice.

"I must speak to Mr. Stillson," Tracy said. "This is Peter Tracy. It's very urgent."

There was a pause, and then Stillson said wearily: "Hello, Tracy. What is it?"

Tracy said: "Does—did Patrick Moore have any family? A wife. . . ."

"No. His wife's dead. He's got a daughter. Named after him. I mean, named Patricia. She's in the east at a dramatic school or something. I'm trying to get in touch with her. Why? What's the matter with you, Tracy?"

Tracy didn't even attempt to answer.

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## Dime Detective Magazine

In a haze, he hung up the receiver and squirmed out of the booth. Treat and Totten were waiting at the foot of the stairs.

"What gives here?" Treat demanded.

Penfield shrieked from the top of the stairs: "I'm going to leave this house! I won't stay here and—"

"Shut up, pipsqueak!" said Miss Andrew, appearing suddenly beside him. "That bum of a Tracy said something to Gloria that made her faint and gave her hysterics and I don't know what else!" "It was a mistake!" Tracy said. "If I could just speak to her and—"

"Oh, no!" said Miss Andrew. "You've done enough! Don't you come up here!"

"He isn't going anywhere," said Totten menacingly.

"Except maybe to the morgue," Treat seconded. "Just step into the study here, Tracy, and sit down and keep your mouth shut."

"Or would you rather we carried you in?" Totten inquired coldly. "Just start up these stairs and see how quick it happens."

**T**HE TAXI ground up the long gravelled drive in second gear and stopped in front of the wide steps. The taxi driver looked over his shoulder at Tracy.

"Say, ain't you the same guy I drove up here earlier, when there was a party goin' on?"

"I guess so," said Tracy, getting out.

"Well, the party's over now, chum."

"I know," Tracy said absently.

He went up on the porch and pushed the bell beside the big door. Inside chimes sang softly and smoothly. Tracy waited, and then finally the door opened slightly, and Stillson peered out at him.

"Tracy! What. . ."

"Can I come in?" Tracy asked.

"Well, sure. But what are you doing . . . I mean, come on in! There's nobody around. I let the servants go. I never did like this dive, and now I'm good and sick of it. I'm going to live at the club. This way."

It was a small study with a business-like flat desk against one wall.

"Sit down," said Stillson. "You look like hell. What's the matter with you?"

## Too Many Have Died

Tracy sat down slowly. "Did you locate Patrick Moore's daughter?"

"No," Stillson said. "I called that school back east, and they said she'd left for home two weeks ago. But she's not at Moore's apartment."

"She's in the hospital," Tracy said dully. "Under the name of Gloria La-Tru."

Stillson's mouth opened. "What?"

"Yes. She won't see me. Would you tell her when you see her how sorry I am?"

"What?" Stillson said blankly. "Sorry . . . What're you talking about, Tracy?"

"It doesn't matter. Just tell her."

"Well, sure. But . . . Are you sure you are all right, Tracy? You'd better have a drink, maybe."

"No," said Tracy. "I'll just smoke my pipe, if you don't mind. . . ."

He pulled it out of his pocket, and a white card came out with it and fluttered to the floor. Tracy picked the card up and looked at it indifferently. It said: SMITHKIN STYLED SUITS. Tracy moistened his lips, staring at the three words. With an enormous effort he pulled himself together.

"I've got to run along. . . ."

"Sit still," Stillson ordered. He was holding a blunt, ugly revolver in his right hand. "You're awfully damned dumb, aren't you, Tracy?"

"Yes," said Tracy.

"What finally put you wise?"

"I never looked at this card when you gave it to me," Tracy said. "Kars didn't have any papers on him, but he was wearing a Smithkin Styled Suit, and you make a habit of playing big-shot by sending your friends and employees and what-not to that tailor. Of course, it could be a coincidence, but. . . ."

"No coincidence," said Stillson. "Kars was my man. And Ras Deu. And the Chu Sing boys. They all danced when I pulled the strings."

"And Patrick Moore, too," said Tracy.

"Sure. I own the Borneo-Blasu Company. Moore was just a well-bred dimwit who acted as my front-man. I pulled that Jap vaccine deal through the Borneo Company, and Moore nearly went screwy when he found out what it was. I didn't



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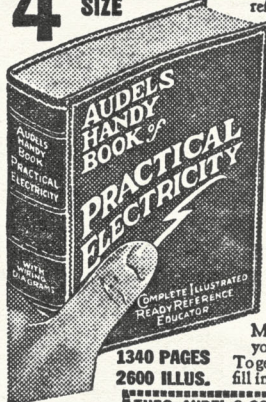
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like it too well myself, but I was spread out too thin, and I needed a lot of cash right away, and the Japs had it."

"That's why you tried to hire me—why you were so fond of me. You wanted me under your thumb in case I knew something or guessed something."

"You didn't think it was because of your big blue eyes, did you?" Stillson asked contemptuously.

"You hired Joel Winters, in case I didn't bite on any of your helpful offers. You killed him when he failed to finish me off."

"Sure."

"You killed Patrick Moore, too. He was in a panic, and you spotted it and guessed why. You just stepped out of the ballroom and intercepted him when he came out of the lounge. Then you ducked back into the ballroom and went around and out the lounge again. It was very simple."

"It's always simple," said Stillson, "if you're smart. Got anything more to say?"

Tracy stared at him. "You can't—get away—"

Stillson was smiling. "Sure, I can. I've got a million bucks. Two suicides in one evening will be going a little heavy, but the police will gag it down, because they have to. They can't buck me. They don't dare. Too many men have died for me to stop now, Tracy."

A TELEPHONE bell buzzed softly. Stillson backed to the desk, holding the gun on Tracy, and picked the instrument up with his left hand.

"Yes?"

He was holding the receiver a little ways away from his ear, and in the dead silence Mr. Brazil's voice sounded thin and tinny and diabolical.

"Mr. Stillson, I am the man you talked to in your garden tonight after you killed Patrick Moore. I am also the man to whom you sold some fake tetanus vaccine."

Stillson went rigid, and a thick, wordless sound issued from his mouth.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Brazil's small voice. "You see, I investigated Mr. Moore for Mr. Tracy, and then I kept on investigating the Borneo-Blasu Company—not



## Too Many Have Died

in person, of course, but through my agents—and I found many strange things, including you. I have the proof. It is being forwarded by special courier to the Chinese Ambassador in Washington. He will present it to your State Department. Doubtless the War Department and the Department of Justice will also be interested. I really meant to kill you, Mr. Stillson, in a most unpleasant manner by giving you some of your own vaccine, but I think this is so much better. You are so proud of your power and wealth and position. You are so happy when people speak of you as the rough and ready millionaire with the heart of gold. I wonder what they will call you tomorrow? I wonder if you will have the courage to face that? It will be so interesting for me to see what you do. Now give the telephone to Mr. Tracy.”

Stillson moved like a mechanical man. His arm straightened out limply and lifelessly, and Tracy took the telephone.

“Yes?”

“I am at the Montgomery house, Mr. Tracy, and there is a friend of yours with me. I have told her many things she did not know. Her father told her that you had asked for a bribe when her father tried to sell you some construction materials for my country and that you had threatened to involve her father in some scandal when he refused to bribe you. She was going to spy on you—to try and find out what you planned. That is why she pretended to be a crook. She thought you were one and that she would gain your confidence easier if you thought she was. She is still very sad and very shocked and very angry about what you said, and you will have to tell her many times that you are sorry and that you love her before she will forgive you, but I do not think that you will find that too difficult. Leave Mr. Stillson now. I do not think he wishes any company at this time.”

Stillson was still standing rigid, but his face was queerly gray and dead now, and his eyes bulged horribly. His lips were moving, and there was a little shiny thread of saliva on his chin. Tracy watched him for a long moment and then put the telephone down and walked quietly out the door.

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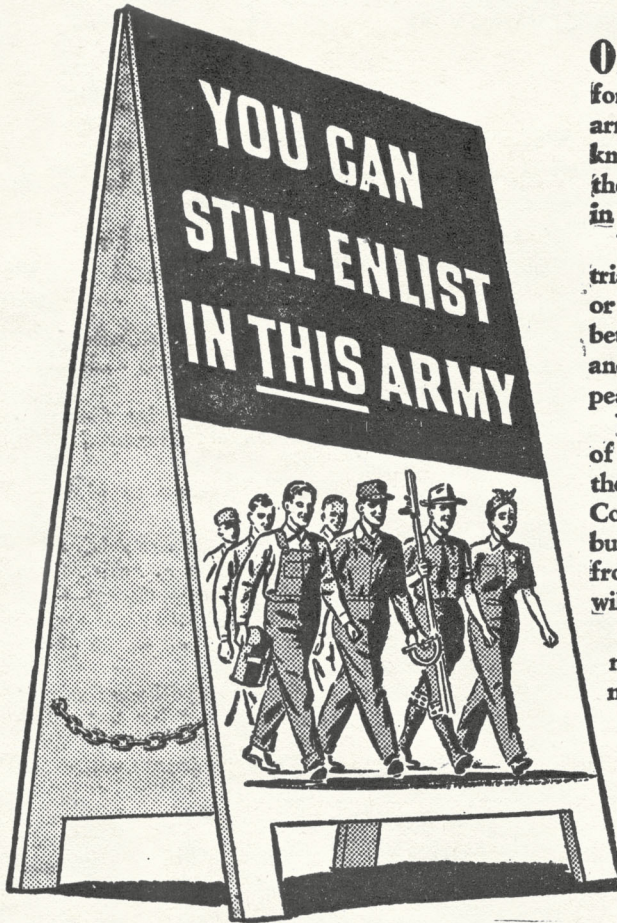
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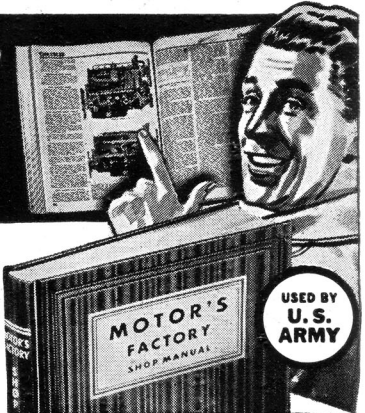
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