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MAY

10¢ DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE



**A STIFF IN TIME
SAVES NINE**
*A BILL BRENT
NOVELETTE* By
FREDERICK C. DAVIS

T. T. FLYNN
A MR. MADDOX STORY

C. P. DONNEL JR.
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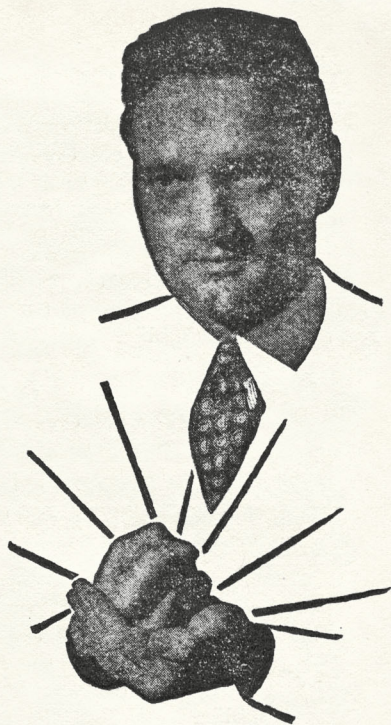
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10 DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE



EVERY STORY COMPLETE

EVERY STORY NEW—NO REPRINTS

Vol. 45

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AND—

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

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Cover—"Null and I and the hose became entangled in a thrashing mass."

From *Who Owns Boriska?*

The June Issue will be out May 10th

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WHY should the swarthy Chico and his platinum blond playgirl suddenly turn kill-crazy over sugar? What weird chain of circumstances led the strange duo to run amok over a few jars of guava jelly? And why should a man with jam and marmalade on his table sit down and munch a piece of dry toast before he died? DAY KEENE, in *The Sweet Tooth of Murder*, gives you the answers next month as he races you through the mazes of as startling an action mystery as you'll run across in a decade of gibbous moons.

And FREDERICK C. DAVIS follows hard on the heels of this issue's Bill Brent-Lora Lorne thriller with *Boomerang Scoop*, another yarn of the *Recorder's* newsroom nonesuch and the beauteous fly in his ointment, Val Randall. For a minute there Bill thinks he's back in the police-news fold where he belongs and Val is going to have to carry on as grandma but the Elbridge libel suit explodes in his bitter face and blasts him back to that grisly pile of advice-to-the-lovelorn mail with a murder boomerang.

D. L. CHAMPION gives a new twist to an old adage in *Shake Well Before Dying*, another gripping Inspector Allhoff novelette. Simmonds' and Battersly's amputated angel of doom presides from his swivel chair at as ingenious a medico-legal murder-solving as we've ever encountered between quarts of his prize mocha-mud.

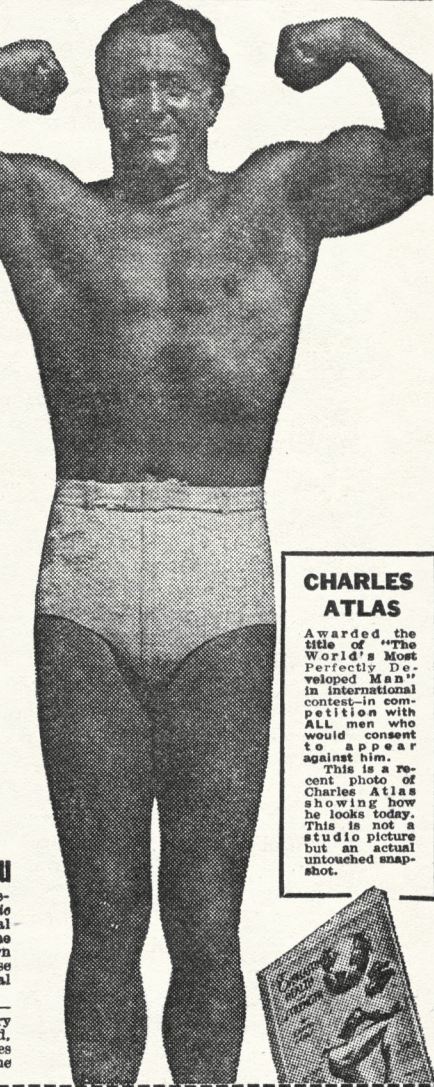
Plus exciting short stories by GEORGES CAROUSSO, NELSON A. HUTTO and others.

This great JUNE issue will be on sale MAY 10th!



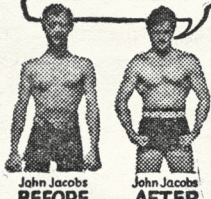






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A STIFF IN

A Bill Brent Novelette

CHAPTER ONE

Murder by Mail

IT WAS an innocent act, an act so trivial and commonplace that Bill Brent did it automatically while his troubled mind brooded over other matters. He had merely paused at a green mailbox on the street corner to drop a letter into the slot. As soon as he'd done it, however, it began producing peculiar results.

Turning to trudge on toward the *Recorder* building, where he labored at onerous tasks as a member of the city staff in uniquely poor standing, Brent found his way blocked by an overcoated man hulking big as a giant.

"Hold it, Bub," the man said ominously.

The afternoon was an unpleasant one, with thin snow falling in the damp twilight and an inch of slush on the pavements, and Brent didn't feel his best. He was full of despondent rebelliousness. This dangerous mood had begun rankling in him almost a week ago, day by day it had grown worse, and at the moment one of the things he definitely had no use for was somebody getting in his way and calling him "Bub."

"Go milk a duck," he suggested sourly.

Attempting to brush past, he met a horizontally uplifted arm as unyielding as a railing of three-inch steel pipe. At the same time Brent glimpsed the flash of a silver badge.

"Nonna that, Bub!" The big detective dropped his huge hands into his pockets where, Brent suspected, one of them became wrapped around a service revolver. "I said hold it."

"I've got no time, friend," Brent protested. "I've got things on my mind, Jack. Why the hell should I hold it, buddy?"

"You'll see, Bub."

Puzzled, and not liking it, Brent saw the massive detective signal a second man standing watchfully against the central postoffice building on the corner. The second man, also a stranger to Brent, but undoubtedly also a dick, pushed inward through the swinging doors. Through the panes Brent observed him speaking to a clerk behind one of the grilles, then dodging into a telephone booth. The clerk disappeared and half a moment later came into sight again at the mouth of the driveway which flanked the postoffice. Carrying an empty mailbag in one hand and a ring of keys in the other, the clerk hurried to the green box on the corner. He unlocked it, with an accusing glance at Brent, and began scooping out handfuls of mail.

Brent saw the man ready to spring on the terrified girl. His right arm was raised and he was gripping the handle of a heavy poker.



TIME SAVES NINE

By **FREDERICK C. DAVIS**

Author of "Clinic for Corpses," etc.

For months now Brent had suffered in his degrading post as Lora Lorne, the Recorder's heart-throb specialist—a job that would have driven to distraction the combined brains of Messrs. Freud, Jung and Adler. But the latest missives directed to Miss Lorne's wisdom-dispensing niche were more up his alley, which was crime-reporting—a blow-by-blow account of the events leading up to the Shearson murder by the gal who was in at the kill and for whom an entire police force was searching.



THE mere sight of mail in quantity always gave Brent a sensation of nausea for the reason that his odious job on the *Recorder* inflicted him with floods of it. Unpleasantly he watched the postal clerk rapidly examining one envelope after another, front and back, and discarding them into the canvas bag. Brent speculated upon this.

"Hah!" he said pungently. "I begin to catch. Russo's having himself a brainstorm."

The soundness of Brent's inference was proved a moment later when Captain Russo himself approached. Evidently the captain had been available at some place nearby, most probably in the *Recorder's* city room which was only a block away, and the second detective's telephone call had brought him here at once. It was uncanny how closely Captain Russo resembled the cadavers with which he associated as chief of the homicide squad. He'd encountered a great many of them in the course of his morbid career and they'd made him chronically sad. Pausing like a ghost in the thin snowfall, he looked upon Brent with tired eyes and profound melancholy.

"Russo," Brent greeted him, "it's my well-considered opinion that the Wallace case is driving you to desperate and foolish extremes. In other words, you've gone nuts."

"Maybe," Captain Russo answered, his hollow tones sounding like a voice issuing from a tomb. "For your sake, I hope so. But somehow I doubt it. And if I'm right, you're in for trouble."

"Such as?" Brent acridly inquired.

"Charges of harboring a fugitive," Russo informed him mournfully. "Criminal conspiracy. Compounding a felony. And accessory after the fact of first degree murder."

"I thought so!" Brent exclaimed. "You've dreamed up a notion that I'm aiding and abetting Ronna Wallace to write her letters to the *Recorder*."

"That's it, Bill," Russo agreed morosely, "and if it's true, you're going out of circulation permanently, beginning now."

While the postal clerk pawed over the contents of the mailbox in search of the letter he'd just posted, Brent reflected that Russo's grim attitude in the matter was understandable. Within the past week the Ronna Wallace affair had developed into the most sensational case—and to the police, the most harassing—in the city's criminal history. Miss Wallace had not only evaded arrest in what appeared to be a juicy love-nest killing, but also was contriving, by means of letters mailed to the *Recorder's* famous heartaches column, to tell her inside story to the public day by day while an army of cops scrambled like mad in futile, city-wide attempts to find her.

The case had broken just a week ago. The victim was Steven Shearson, forty, a man of

important connections. He had been found with his skull split almost in two in the attractive little apartment on Grover Street where Miss Ronna Wallace, his secretary, lived. The weapon was a samurai sword captured at Guadalcanal by a Marine, a friend of Miss Wallace, who had sent it to her as a trophy of war. Previously it had hung on the wall of her living room, but when first seen following the murder its blade was filmed with wet blood and its hilt was gripped in both Miss Wallace's fists while she stood over the dead man.

Not waiting to explain anything, Ronna Wallace had precipitately fled her apartment. Developments had shown that she had remained somewhere inside the city since then, but no one, including the police, could say precisely where.

The erotic aspects of the homicide had set a million tongues to wagging. It was no secret to the other occupants of the small building where Miss Wallace resided that Steven Shearson frequently had visited her apartment, mostly of an evening. Found beside his cooling body was an overnight bag bearing his initials and containing such items as socks, shirts, underwear and, most suggestively, pajamas, also initialed. Just the previous night, Mr. Timothy Armitage, owner of the city's biggest department store, had formally announced the engagement of his daughter, Margaret, to this same Mr. Steven Shearson. To judge from appearances, Miss Wallace had resented this so violently as to resort to the sword. The result was scandalous.

Although Ronna Wallace had somehow put herself beyond the reach of the police dragnet, she hadn't remained silent. Within twenty-four hours she had mailed the first of her special delivery letters to the *Recorder*, which promptly had printed it on the front page.

HER letter had been addressed to Lora Lorne, the mentor of the *Recorder's* celebrated passion column. It was the first time an alleged murderess in hiding had ever confided her troubles to Lora Lorne, but Miss Lorne's specialty was *l'amour* and all its attendant tribulations, and no one questioned that this near decapitation was a case in point. Her grandmotherly advice was usually solicited by dissatisfied wives, philandering husbands, maidens whose footsteps wandered, young mothers in need of husbands and an endless parade of torch-carriers, and so everyone considered her eminently qualified to harken to a murderous mistress also. Miss Wallace, however, was seeking counsel only incidentally. Chiefly she was using the *Recorder's* love column as a vehicle for placing her life story before the public.

The *Recorder* had published enthusiastically

every word Miss Wallace had sent to them, and she had sent plenty. No less than four of her special delivery letters had arrived the first day following the murder, each a chapter of a narrative which she was continuing daily with four or five more letters. High voltage stuff, it had had a galvanic effect. The whole town was talking about it, the *Recorder's* circulation was spurring upward phenomenally and the police department was going wild. And since the elusive Miss Wallace's revelations were being sponsored by one of the best known love-seeresses in the business, Miss Lorne's mail had never before been so freighted with importance.

"Ah!"

The exclamation recalled Brent from his reflections. The postal clerk, steadily digging into the accumulation of mail in the green box, had pounced on a letter. Captain Russo frowned at it morosely. It was addressed to Lora Lorne.

"What of it? There's probably a letter for Lora Lorne in every mailbox in town," Brent said, speaking with the knowledge of painful experience. "This one's not from the Wallace doll. The handwriting isn't anything like hers. Besides, there's a return written on the back—three initials and an address. Check it if you like, but you're way off the beam here, Russo."

Inclined to agree with him, Captain Russo returned the letter to the postoffice department. The clerk went back to another handful of letters and Brent resumed his disgruntled musing.

Ronna Wallace was playing it smart. She hadn't made the mistake of mailing her letters from any one part of the city. Instead, she'd posted them in unpredictably scattered neighborhoods so as to avoid any trap the police might set for her. For six days now she'd got away with it perfectly.

Russo, growing more and more resolved to spike her, had assigned men to hundreds of strategic points under instructions to watch those green boxes, and had armed them with a description of Miss Wallace, although it was a vague one at best. A huge order, this. In fact, it would have taken more than the entire force to case every mailbox in the city. Scores of young women had been stopped, questioned and subjected to the same searching process which Brent was undergoing now, but so far all of them had turned out to be somebody other than Ronna Wallace. It had got under Russo's lifeless hide. He kept a suspicious, spooky stare turned on Brent.

"It would be just like you," he said lugubriously, "if you snagged onto some sort of clue to that woman's whereabouts, to turn all hell upside down to find her. Then you'd keep her under wraps and coach her to write those

letters for the sake of making a five-alarm story for your paper and a monkey out of me."

"I would," Brent admitted, "but wherever that doll may be, I know from nothing, same as you. She's running this show entirely on her own."

THE clerk had come up with another letter. A spectral light flickered in Russo's gray eyes when he saw that Brent's name and home address were scribbled on the back of the envelope. Then he turned it over and his eyes went dead again.

"That's the one," Brent said wryly, "to the Collector of Internal Revenue, isn't it? I'm paying my income taxes, which is not illegal."

Disgustedly returning the letter to the clerk, Russo saw that the box was empty now. With a wraithlike gesture to the two detectives, he simply turned away. The dicks went back to their hopeless vigil and Brent dogged the captain. Evidently he and Russo had the same destination—the *Recorder's* city room.

They trudged side by side through the slush, Russo offering no apology. The reason for that, Brent reflected, must be that the captain still suspected him. There was no sound reason for it, except that Russo was close enough to his wits' end to grab at any small hope, however far-fetched. After all, this little incident hadn't shown that Brent was *not* neck-deep in skulduggery with a fugitive murderer. The fact that he'd dropped a letter into one mailbox didn't prove that Ronna Wallace hadn't dropped another letter into another mailbox with Brent's connivance.

Brent didn't resent Russo's suspicions. In fact, he thought Russo had a swell slant there and he only wished it were true. Then, at least, he would be on the inside. As it was, he'd developed into a key figure in this sizzling murder story, as sweet a case as ever he'd seen, and at the same time he was being rigidly shut out of it by inimical powers beyond his control. Such treatment of a reporter of such outstanding talents as his own, he considered, was an outrage.

Ronna Wallace, however, was handling it nicely enough on her own. That, of course, was one reason Russo had focussed his doubts in Brent's direction. She was building up her story so skillfully that it seemed as though an experienced writer must be working with her. Moreover, since Brent had injected his unwelcome self into the choicest homicide investigation of the past several years, it was natural that Russo should suspect him of whooping up this one.

Knowing better, however, Brent gave the Wallace babe full credit. She had a head on her and talent for making with the words, enough so that she'd put herself well on the

way to beating a hot-seat rap. She'd already driven both Russo and the D.A. half wacky, and if only she could stay out of their reach and keep writing her very effective letters to Lora Lorne, she would pile up such great sympathy for herself that it would be next to impossible to assemble an impartial jury to try her. All of which Brent approved, with a newspaperman's admiration for anything meriting eight-column headlines, except that he smouldered resentfully because, perforce, he had next to nothing to do with it.

CHAPTER TWO

Script-Tease

AT THE glass entrance of the *Recorder* building, Brent and Russo were halted by a man who was just then coming out and who made haste to buttonhole them.

"Ain't you found her yet?"

His voice squeaked. He was thin and stringy. He looked all dressed up and unaccustomed to it. His name was William Heisinger and he was the janitor of the little apartment building where Ronna Wallace had lived—a janitor who cherished more than a perfunctory professional interest in his tenants. Ever since Miss Wallace had taken it on the lam, Mr. Heisinger had frequented headquarters and the *Recorder* city room in search of news of her.

"Ain't you found her yet?" he asked again, his Adam's apple sliding up and down in an elegant green-striped collar.

"No, we ain't," Brent said, elbowing past him. "We'll let you know."

He climbed iron stairs with Russo. As they pushed through the swinging doors of the city room, a man's head appeared above the littered heights of a rolltop desk in the far corner—a head that looked hard and was. It belonged to Garrett, the *Recorder's* city editor, whose heart was also stony. He greeted Brent and Russo with an expression of intense expectancy fading into one of disappointment colored with animosity.

"For God's sake, Russo," he complained, "quit haunting this place! What do you want here, more arguments?"

"The D.A. and I are still going to find a way to make you stop using that woman's stuff, Garrett," the captain answered, "and until we do I'm going to get a look at it before it's printed."

"Hell's hinges!" Garrett said. "You've already tried to stop us twenty ways from breakfast. You'll never make it. Instead, our lawyers have stopped you cold. Remember? The local police have no jurisdiction over the mails in transit. Letters correctly delivered to us are our property under federal law.

We've got a court order restraining you from seizing Ronna Wallace's story prior to publication. We've every right to publish non-libelous matter voluntarily submitted to us for that express purpose. It's your headache and our good fortune. Will you please get out of my hair?"

"No," Russo said, in the tones of a zombie. "My business is catching murderers. This one is due to make a slip. The sooner I catch her the sooner she'll quit screwing my case all to hell with her little pencil. Has today's final chapter turned up yet?"

Garrett plucked a galley proof off his spike and pushed it into Brent's hands. "So far today, only three specials from Wallace. The end of the third is marked, 'More coming.' One's still on the way, maybe two. She's working up to something hot now, and we need it. Get busy and write your grandmotherly comments on this installment."

With bitter interest Brent ran his eyes down the column of type. It was, as Garrett had pointed out, somewhat short. Engrossed in it, Brent again felt keenly his own enforced disbarment from each day's eagerly awaited developments. The extent of his participation was merely to compose a short, daily introductory paragraph saying nothing much.

Ronna Wallace's surreptitious practice evidently was to stuff half a dozen scribbled pages into an envelope and mail it at the first good chance. As often as not the last page in any given envelope ended with an incomplete sentence. Today's installment wound up like that, at a tantalizing point: *And now I'll tell you about a strange thing that happened one night when . . .*

Intently wondering what the hell had "happened one night when," Brent heard the telephone ringing and Garrett's voice rising exultantly.

"It's there?" Evidently some obliging clerk in the central postoffice was calling with news that another consignment of Ronna Wallace's copy had just turned up. "Mailed from substation J? No wonder it's late—that's 'way out the hell and gone by the waterworks. Send the boy right over!"

RUSO gazed at both of them, deadpan and adamant, and turned quietly back to the swinging doors. The move alarmed Garrett and Brent. Undoubtedly the captain was heading for the postoffice down the block. Was it possible that he had obtained some sort of legal paper that would prevent the delivery of Miss Wallace's latest and most intriguing letter? The thought electrified them. Garrett caught up his topcoat and trailed Brent across the city room, both of them intent on dogging Russo.

"Wait a minute—please!"

The anxious call came from the rear of the city room where a young man had been sitting quietly, unnoticed. Now he was hastening toward Brent and Barrett. They gave him an impatient glance and hustled on without pausing.

Pushing through the swinging doors, he caught up with them on the iron stairway. He was twenty-two, handsome in a callow way and had a manner of earnest righteousness. The letter-writing fugitive's younger brother, his name was Chester Wallace. Like the solicitous janitor, William Heisinger, he had spent endless hours fidgeting about headquarters and the city room in earnest expectation of news of Ronna.

"You oughtn't to go on printing all that stuff," he complained, hurrying down with Brent and Garrett while they chased Russo. "Honestly, it's not right. I think it's almost indecent."

Neither Brent nor Garrett had time to argue with a youth of delicate moral perceptions who obviously had no realistic appreciation of his sister's news value.

"Please, won't you stop publishing Ronna's letters?" he pleaded, rushing along with them. Still receiving no satisfaction, he became indignant. "Well then, I'll find a way to *make* you stop!"

Still Brent and Garrett ignored him in their haste. His cheeks took a pink flush, he frowned obstinately, and he kept pace with them. They were outside the building now, and Russo was just ahead, gliding through the slush and the deeper twilight like a phantom. They spurted, grabbed his arms and stopped him.

"Russo," Garrett said in a voice chillier than the descending night, "don't tell me you've got a new court order counteracting ours. I won't believe it. Your idea was to talk that letter out of the delivery boy's hands before he could reach us."

"It might have worked," Russo answered with sepulchral calm. He seemed too frail to cope with the March wind blustering along the darkening street, but actually he was unshakably dogged and tenacious. "I want to see that envelope before you get a chance to pull any tricks of your own. If it should happen to show any signs of its source, you'd destroy that evidence simply for the sake of keeping me off Wallace and stringing out your story. Wouldn't you?"

"Certainly he would," Brent said, answering for Garrett. "But let me remind you of something, my frustrated friend, in case you've become so desperate as to forget it. Tampering with the United States mails is federally frowned upon."

Russo shrugged, his joints seeming to creak like a skeleton's, and went on. Brent and Gar-

rett flanked him, searching both sides of the street for the special messenger who must come in this direction. So far there was no sign of him. Neither, Brent noticed suddenly, was there now any sign of Chester Wallace. Whether the fugitive's brother had turned back or hurried ahead during their pause with Russo, Brent couldn't guess. He was simply gone.

The three of them turned into the alleyway at the rear of the postoffice. It was a high-walled lane leading through to the next cross-street. The only light here was a dim glow radiating from the pebbled-glass windows. Brent saw a rear door opening halfway along the passage and a messenger boy stepping out, but when the door closed again the boy became almost invisible.

Instantly he howled: "Ow-w!"

His voice carried such a sharp note of anguish that Brent, Garrett and even Russo were shocked to a standstill. Vaguely they saw the boy dropping to his knees and clawing at the wall while a second figure, shapeless and black, grappled with him. Then they heard swift footfalls splashing in the slush and receding along the alleyway.

"Come back here!" Russo screeched.

He dragged a gun from somewhere inside his coat as Brent spurted toward the door. Russo fired twice and each shot was an ear-numbing blast. He went flitting along the alleyway in pursuit of his man as Brent bent over the messenger. The boy had fallen flat in the slush, face up. His coat had been torn open in the brief struggle, revealing dark stains on his shirt. Garrett bent beside Brent, trying to find the kid's pulse and staring at the stab-wounds—at a particularly vicious gash in the boy's neck.

Russo's gun thundered again at the far entrance of the passageway. Brent and Garrett saw him silhouetted, standing on straddled legs, peering up and down the other street. As he turned back they hastened to join him.

"He's gone," Russo moaned like a lost soul.

A match flickered in his bony hands and he stopped. They found color in the slush. At least one of Russo's bullets had drawn blood. The captain shifted quickly, fired another match and this time plucked something wet off the sloppy pavement. They went into a huddle over it—the little leather pouch with a shoulder-strap which the messenger had been carrying when he'd stepped out the door. Undoubtedly it had contained the latest Wallace letter then, but now it was completely empty.

THE city room bustled with tense activity. but Brent was no part of it. In his cubby-hole, a partitioned space relegated to the remotest corner, and no roomier than an adult's casket, he brooded in miserable solitude over

a mound of correspondence addressed to Lora Lorne while the *Recorder's* news machine hummed in high over the brutal attack on the messenger and the theft of the crucial Wallace letter.

It was making banner headlines. The messenger had died while being rushed to the hospital. Although Russo had quickly flashed a general alarm, no sign of the killer had been found. Police headquarters was reported to be rumbling with furious blasphemy and the FBI was moving in. All this, however, left Bill Brent almost untouched. Necessarily he busied himself with a mess of amatory dopes yelping for Lora Lorne's inspired guidance.

He glared at the young woman who adorned the desk in the reporters' section which formerly had been his own. She was a tree-ripened brunette named Valerie Randall. Under Garrett's fond tutelage she handled the headquarters trick, or attempted to do so, and thereby she was distinguished as the only police reporter in the Fourth Estate who worried about the scarcity of nylon stockings. At the moment her lovely nose was shiny and she was chewing the rouge off her luscious lips. Brent rose grimly, intending to point out to her how deplorably she was bungling her job and how much better he could do it in her place. Promptly, Garrett's flinty tones bawled across the city room, stopping him and causing him to grit his teeth in frustration.

"Grandma! With five thousand other things on my mind I have to remind you! I need a Lorne column, but now!"

Wretchedly Brent went back to work, hearing guffaws from the other reporters and a titter from Miss Randall. It was scarcely a secret to the rest of the staff, but the world in general didn't know that Brent, God save him, was Lora Lorne. For month after month now he had sweated and suffered in his degrading billet as the *Recorder's* heart-throb specialist. His soul-trying task day after day was to get out two columns of type under that copyrighted "house name" with the object of extricating Miss Lorne's half-witted family of thousands from an infinite variety of passionate predicaments. It was impossible to do such a job properly—it would have stumped a committee composed of Freud, Jung, Adler, the Welfare Society, Traveler's Aid, the W.C.T.U. and Emily Post—but having an ingrown conscience, Brent did his level best while loathing it with all his miserable being.

Until Brent's advent as Lora Lorne, her erotic wisdom had been perpetrated by a succession of female busybodies who'd dabbled in other people's destinies without giving it a second thought. Brent was the first male

ever to wear Lora Lorne's corsets and the first Lora Lorne ever to be driven to distraction by herself.

Garrett had sentenced him to this ridiculously tragic sort of professional purgatory as a punitive measure. The *Recorder*, having brought Brent from New York under contract as a special police reporter, had found itself dealing with something more than it had contracted for—Brent's nature, which suited his looks. Six feet and two hundred pounds of rugged masculinity, including a nose once crushed against a Princeton goal-post, he was inclined to devote himself less to newsgathering than to a sociological study of all the available bars and boudoirs. Having, as a consequence, missed too many editions, Brent had been condemned to the rapture pillar by Garrett, and he was still laboring under the forlorn hope of someday winning a pardon from that inflexible martinet.

That day was not yet. And the hell of it was that nothing ever alleviated Brent's thankless chore. Due to the acute shortage of newsprint, the *Recorder* had cut down on other features, had eliminated the less popular comic strips, had even refused large ads of certain types, but the Lorne column hadn't become a single line shorter. In fact, Brent lived in dread that Garrett, as a further measure of discipline, might command him to enlarge it. Accordingly, he retreated into his Siberian exile and began digging glumly into the Lorne correspondence which formed an inexhaustible heap on his table.

A MOMENT later his mind had wandered from the pink, heliotrope-scented missive lying before him and he was poring over a copy of today's milk-train edition. Ronna Wallace's latest offering was boxed on the front page. Topping it was a cut of the non-existent Lora Lorne depicting her as a white-haired old dame with a face as sweet, round and crinkled as a cream-puff. In her introduction Miss Lorne had held forth in her best soap-opera manner: *And what had this unfortunate, hunted young woman been about to disclose in the letter which disappeared in the red-stained hands of the savage-hearted murderer of an innocent boy?*

For Ronna Wallace's essay today still ended with that tantalizingly incompleting sentence: *And now I'll tell you about a strange thing that happened one night when . . .*

Brent trudged across to Garrett's desk, frowning.

"Has it occurred to you that the murder of the messenger puts an entirely new light on the Shearson killing, chum?" he inquired acidulously.

"It has," Garrett grated at him, busily slashing a blue pencil across a page of Val

Randall's hard-done copy. "Scram, Grandma."

"As a police reporter of invaluable experience whose services are badly needed here," Brent went on, "I'd like to point out that it couldn't have been Ronna Wallace who killed the messenger in order to get back one of her own letters. It was somebody else who'd gone kill-jittery from thinking she was about to spill something plenty hot, see?"

"That doesn't necessarily tie it in with the Shearson murder," Garrett pointed out.

"I think it does," Brent persisted. "A desperate slayer's on the loose, so I figure the Wallace doll's probably innocent after all."

"What difference does it make," Garrett retorted, still not looking up from his urgent work, "so long as we keep the story cooking?"

"What difference, you ask!" Brent was scandalized. "Aside from the fact that an innocent babe's being hounded toward the death-house, it's the payoff, the sizzlingest part of the story yet. If Ronna wasn't actually the one who tried to halve Shearson with that Japanese sword, then something big's behind it."

"What the hell do you want to do?" Garrett snapped at him. "Prove she's as pure as a buttercup and in that way kill her life story, the hottest feature we've ever handled? Nix! I'll leave it to the cops and hope to God they'll

keep on bumbling it for weeks longer. You listen to me, Grandma. Stick to your knitting and your busted hearts and keep your kindly old mitts off this case. Are you going to give me a column today, Miss Lorne, or have you quit?"

Brent turned away muttering maledictions. There had been a time when Brent himself might have been as callous as that, but no longer. The Lorne column, much as he detested it, had humanized him. Unlike Garrett, he had become incapable of letting somebody suffer needlessly for the sake of a headline. But as for quitting the column flat in order to devote himself to this case, he couldn't. Breaching his contract would mean getting his socks sued off him and being blacklisted by every paper in the country. Besides, a court trial would reveal to a sniggering world that he was Lora Lorne, which would mean unbearable humiliation. Like a beaten mongrel, Brent went back to his doghouse.

But again, in another moment, while today's Lorne column went undone, he took to mulling over the Shearson-Wallace affair. Pawing under heaps of unanswered Lorne letters, he found the *Recorder* of six days ago which contained the fullest story of the case. It also featured six pictures. One was a

**I put the hex on scrubby shaves
With Thin Gillette, the blade that saves!
In record time my face feels swell
And looks right in the pink as well!**

*Precision-made to fit your
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portrait of Miss Wallace, a soft-focus job, years old and evidently a poor likeness of her present self. The cut of Steven Shearson showed him to be dapper, smiling and gray-templed. The other four cuts were a gallery of the other principals in the case. One was the fugitive's brother, Chester. Another was a young man who might be called her unofficial fiancé, Leonard Conley. There was also Miss Margot Armitage, the delicately classy and socially high-test doll who had suddenly found herself betrothed to a corpse.

Finally there was Daniel Meed, Shearson's former deputy, who had now taken over his job as the local chief inspector of production for the Army. Under each of these four pictures the same two words were printed—*Alibi Proven*, which had reflected most unfavorably on Miss Wallace.

CHAPTER THREE

"Help Wanted" for Murder

"GRANDMA!" This, of course, was Garrett howling again. "Shake it up!"

Brent gazed with deep revulsion at the stacks of Lorne letters awaiting his sibylline attention. Doggedly ignoring Garrett, he went back to a few lines which interested him in that week-old *Recorder*:

Questioned, Daniel Meed admitted that differences had recently risen between him and Shearson concerning their work as Army production inspectors. The police have not revealed the cause of their difficulties on the grounds that it is information of a secret military nature. However, Captain Russo of the Homicide Squad is satisfied that it has no bearing on Shearson's violent death.

Brent muttered to himself: "He is, is he?" Scowling at his smelly piles of letters, he added emphatically: "The hell with you, Miss Lorne!" and rose abruptly. For a full week now he'd been fenced out of this juicy case, except for his inconsequential comments on Miss Wallace's stuff, and it had become more that he could take.

He trudged toward the swinging doors, conscious that Garrett was glowering forbiddingly at him. "Get back in there, Lora!" his city editor bawled, but Brent tramped on and out, trying not to think about the drastic punishment he was inviting.

On the stairway Brent collided with William Heisinger, the solicitous janitor. During the past week every member of the city staff had grown accustomed to bumping into Mr. Heisinger every time they turned around, and here he was again. And again he asked his persistent question: "Ain't you found her yet?"

"Look, pal," Brent said impatiently. "Take it from me, when the cops find her they won't keep it a secret."

He brushed past and kept going until he entered the waiting room of Captain Russo's office in police headquarters. There he found, again assembled for questioning, those most intimately connected with the dead Shearson and the elusive Wallace. Russo was busy with somebody behind a closed door and three men were waiting—Daniel Meed, Leonard Conley and Chester Wallace.

"You," Brent said, poking a finger at the fugitive's brother. "Where did you disappear to just before that messenger got shivved?"

Chester Wallace bridled and retorted: "I don't think it's any of your business."

Letting it go at that, Brent looked closely at Leonard Conley. He was obviously a 4-F. His flat chest suggested bad lungs. In addition there were evidences of neurotic overtones—eyes that were too bright, a mouth unnaturally pinched and emotional reactions on the erratic side. Resenting Brent's searching gaze, he began to get his hackles up.

Brent passed him by, reflecting that here was a guy so touchy that he got mad when somebody just looked at him the wrong way, so how would he have reacted if he'd found out that another guy had been doing all right with his girl?

Daniel Meed's gaze at Brent was more annoyed than challenging. He was not in uniform. His was a civilian job. He worked for the Army but was not part of it. A squat man with grizzled, gray-touched hair and sullen eyes, he didn't welcome it when Brent pulled a chair to face him.

"From the *Recorder*." Brent went on with a straight face, "Tomorrow Ronna Wallace's stuff is going into those troubles between you and Shearson. You'd be wise to let us in on your side of it as far as you can without giving any information to the enemy."

Meed sat up. "I'm not afraid to do that. I can't talk for publication, but I can give you something off the record. Why shouldn't I? I'm covered by an unbeatable alibi."

"I know about the alibi. You spent that whole afternoon going from one plant to another on the opposite side of the city and you've got plenty of witnesses." Taking a shot in the dark, Brent added glibly: "Ronna says you were doing that to check up and put yourself straight with Shearson."

Meed squirmed. "This is strictly off the record, understand? Shearson claimed there was a leak somewhere. Certain plants with bad production records seemed to be getting inside tips on the way we were reporting them to Washington. At least Shearson was pretty sure of it."

"Why?"

"A couple of them called up and kicked, wanting our reports toned down. The Army could cancel their contracts and leave 'em in the soup, understand? Well, how'd they tumble to the dope Shearson was writing to Washington confidentially? Either our plant inspectors were talking too much, he said, or else the leak was right there in our office. He damned near accused me of selling out. Hell, it burned me up! I'm honest, understand? So I went out to check all along the line and while I was doing it Shearson got his head split open like a soft-boiled egg."

"What about those plant inspectors?"

"They're clean, every one of 'em."

"Then where's the leak?"

"Don't say *is*—say *was*," Daniel Meed answered. "There's no leak any more. Since I took over Shearson's job I haven't found so much as one little hint of a leak, not one scintilla. Got that?"

"Was it Shearson himself then?" Brent inquired. "Or Ronna Wallace?"

"Hell, no," Meed said emphatically. "Absolutely on the up-and-up, both of 'em. I can't explain it, but that's the way it is. Strictly off the record, understand?"

BAFFLED, Brent saw the inner door opening. Out came Margot Armitage, looking ethereally huffy, flanked by two impressive men, one being her merchant father, and the other her attorney. She was, Brent surmised, a very pampered, very spoiled and very willful young woman. During his days as a police reporter, Brent had learned that women were by nature intensely personal to the point of utter lawlessness. Too many of them, he'd found, were capable of committing homicide in a fit of jealousy and of thinking afterward that it served the rat right. Was Margot Armitage one of those? If so, Ronna Wallace was as good as fried to a turn right now, because Miss Armitage was backed by powerful influences and her prominent family's millions. Brent had no adequate opportunity to estimate her, however. She swept straight through the office without a sideward glance and was immediately gone, protected at every step by her father and her lawyer.

Captain Russo cast a dead eye about his waiting room and announced in a funeral tone: "The rest of you may also leave." He stood sadly while Meed, Conley and Chester Wallace hastened out, and fixed Brent with a speculating stare.

"Alibis!" he moaned. "I never saw a case with so many alibis. All four had 'em when Shearson got it, and all four have another one for tonight, and every one of 'em is iron-clad."

"The kid brother, too?"

"Remember the big dick at the mailbox?"

Russo said hollowly. "He was still watching it. Chester knew him and stopped to ask him if he couldn't please make the *Recorder* quit printing his sister's letters. It was silly, but that's what he did, and he was right there with my man when they heard my cannon blasting in the alley."

"My God!" Brent said. "Then who did kill the messenger?"

"Nobody," Russo mumbled, returning to his inner sanctum. "He wasn't murdered. He was practicing to be a knife-swallower and his hand slipped."

Scowling in perplexity, and reminded of Garrett's inexorable demands for a Lorne column, Brent headed hastily back in the direction from which he had come.

At the entrance of the *Recorder* building, he found a teen-age boy hastening ahead of him. From the boy's shoulder dangled one of those little pouches carried by Special Delivery messengers. Brent trailed him across the lobby, up the iron stairs and into the city room. The whole city staff halted in their work to watch as the messenger wound up rather breathlessly at Garrett's desk, proffering a heavily stamped envelope and panting: "Sign here!"

Garrett snatched at it with Brent at his shoulder. Both of them registered disappointment. It was addressed to Lora Lorne, but not in the handwriting of Ronna Wallace. Instead, Miss Lorne's name was block-printed. Nevertheless it was a special, and Garrett hastily ripped it open. After once glance at the enclosure he whooped.

"This is it!"

Definitely it was. Beyond question the enclosure *had* been written by Ronna Wallace. It consisted of half-sheets of paper exactly the same as all her other letters, and the uneven script could belong to nobody but her. Moreover, the first page of this consignment took up her story at precisely the point where it had been left hanging in mid-air.

"'. . . A strange thing,'" Garrett began reading aloud, "'that happened one night when I was asleep in my bedroom—entirely alone, I may add.'" He broke off to shout at nobody in particular: "Stop the presses! This is *it*!"

"What the hell!" Brent said. "Somebody killed the messenger in order to steal this letter and then sent it right on to us anyway!"

HIS deadline stared Brent in the face and he was barely making it. Having contrived a Lorne column with the aid of paste-pot, shears and typewriter, he hurried it to Garrett's desk at the last minute and was rewarded with a scowl. Then with a copy of the *Recorder's* freshest edition under his arm, he trudged back into his cubbyhole like a

pariah and plunged into troubled concentration.

Ronna Wallace's latest letter—mailed this time from the central postoffice—had been added to her printed narrative. Calm consideration proved it to be much less exciting than had been anticipated. Today's installment of her story read:

And now I'll tell you about a strange thing that happened one night when I was asleep in my bedroom—entirely alone, I may add. Although a very sound sleeper, with a clear conscience, I was restless on this particular night, and something woke me up with a cold start. Was it a sound in the living room? I got out of bed, intending to see. I was scared—my heart pounded as I went to the closed door. I was sure I could hear someone sneaking around in there, and then I was chilled by a surprise. The door wouldn't open, although I pulled on it with all my strength. There I was, locked in my bedroom in the middle of the night, and all alone, with someone prowling around on the other side of the door!

I sat on the bed, shivering with fear and wondering. Then it seemed that the noises were gone. Finally I dared to try the door again—and then I received another cold shock. This time, with the very first turn of the knob, it opened easily!

What did it mean? I looked around the living room and found that nothing had been stolen. Nothing had been disturbed at all! There wasn't a single sign that anyone had really been there. Yet I *had* heard strange sounds and I *hadn't* been able to open the door.

Back in bed, still shivering and afraid, I dropped into a doze, but now and then I'd wake up and lie there listening and wondering. Each time I did this I became more and more uncertain. Had it really happened? Or had it been just a dream?

It probably had been a mouse, Brent told himself disgustedly, and dampness had made the door stick.

So far Ronna Wallace had handled her story admirably from the standpoint of suspense. On the first day she'd opened with a colorful description of how it felt to hide in terror, a charge of murder hanging over her head, while hundreds of relentless cops scoured the city for her. Then she'd switched off to an account of her childhood, her reputable parents, her fine upbringing and her first innocent affairs of the heart. Now and then she'd interpolated a few sidelights on her current situation and, very cleverly, she had never once entered a plea of innocence or a confession of guilt. She was making her readers wait and they were gnashing their nails in hordes.

In her installment of day before yesterday she'd met Steve Shearson for the first time.

He seemed so charming and friendly when I was introduced to him that night at the Flamingo Club, and when he asked me to become his secretary. . . . Oh, if only I had had some way of seeing into the future, of knowing then that I would see him for the last time in my own apartment, lying horribly dead at my feet, on the very day following his engagement to another girl!

She'd confessed how fond they'd grown of each other while making the rounds of the hot-spots by night after working together all day, but there was still no definite admission that their romance had gone all out. She was still pretty far from the afternoon of the murder.

Until now she'd spun out an absorbing tale without actually saying much. Nevertheless she had won sympathy for herself in wholesale lots, and she left Brent wondering where the hell she was holed in.

"Think, Brent!" he urged himself. "Deduce!"

Just how had she begun her flight from justice? Brent went back to that point in the *Recorder's* news columns.

Continuing his story, Heisinger, the janitor, said he heard violent noises in the Wallace girl's apartment directly above. He hurried upstairs to investigate, he told the police, and just as he reached her door it was jerked open. Miss Wallace stared at him in frantic agitation, then rushed past. Through the doorway Heisinger saw the corpse of Shearson lying on the living room floor. At once he telephoned police headquarters.

Brent pictured her frantic flight. Where could she go? How could she make herself safe from the cops? Certainly she hadn't headed for a hotel. Early in the game Russo's men had covered all the city's hotels and accredited rooming houses without result. Neither had she run the foolish risk of seeking shelter with any of her friends. Her best bet, Brent felt, would be to consult the classified section of the *Recorder* and rent a spare room in a respectable private home. She'd take one requiring no references and, of course, give a fictitious name.

What then? She couldn't sit there day in and day out writing letters. That, while the Wallace stuff was appearing simultaneously in the *Recorder*, would be entirely too suspicious. She'd have to do it somewhere else, and meanwhile, no doubt, she'd be in and out of her room as if working at a job. Where, then, would she do her scribbling? While riding endlessly on buses? No, in that case she'd have to do it under the very noses of the other passengers. In the reference room of the public library? Not that either—she'd surely be seen there, too. Where then?

BRENT gave it up momentarily and tried another tack.

What would she use for money, how could she continue to pay her rent? The murder had occurred in the middle of the week, and this meant that Miss Wallace had collected her salary as Shearson's secretary some four or five days previous to her flight. Obviously she'd lammed with only the cash she'd happened to have in her purse at the time. Since then, of course, she hadn't dared to write a check. At the same time she certainly planned to stay exactly where she was for as long as possible. The answer to this one was comparatively easy—since she'd probably given her trusting landlady the impression that she was working, and since she needed an income, too, she would actually get herself a job.

It would have to be a special kind of job, one for which she would be accepted without references and at face value. Moreover, the course of her day's work would have to give her an opportunity to produce those letters. Waitress? Maid? Receptionist? Retail clerk? None of these filled the bill. Again Brent came to a dead end and tried another approach.

One thing he'd noticed at the very beginning. Wallace was a secretary, and a good one, so her handwriting should be of the swift, smooth sort. But instead, her script juggled unevenly on the page, as if somebody were constantly jostling her elbow. Had she written, then, in a moving car? Had she become a saleswoman in the field? No, obviously she couldn't drive a car and write letters at the same time. Yet Brent felt certain she'd written them while in motion. While walking, then? Possibly, but how could she write letters while trudging the streets, without its being noticed, and what kind of job would that be anyway?

What else about those letters? Wallace hadn't made the mistake of buying special delivery stamps, which might have invited suspicion. Instead, she'd used two-cent stamps, plastering them on the envelopes in sufficient quantity. The envelopes were the cheap, sulphite variety obtainable at any dime store. The paper was also cheap—but there was another odd fact. Wallace used ordinary typewriter sheets torn in half. Why half-sheets? So she could better conceal them while writing, of course. But conceal them how?

Brent cogitated earnestly, unaware of the bustle of the city room. Evidently Wallace had a job of no great responsibilities which sent her to various sections of the city one after another, involved much walking and gave her a chance to scribble en route. Very few jobs could fill those specifications. No doubt Wallace had sought this particular one because it had offered those very same ad-

vantages which were her peculiar need. How had she connected with it? The *Recorder's* "Help Wanted" section, of course! Immediately Brent began pouring over the want-ad columns published on the day of Wallace's flight.

He paused over a good possibility, then went back to it as the best if not the only one. The ad had been inserted by the local power and light company, under the "Female Help Wanted" heading: *Stenographers—Typists—Bookkeepers—Adding Machine Operators—Meter-Readers. . .*

Brent's hand grabbed at his telephone and instantly froze. It was entirely too possible that Russo had tapped the *Recorder's* trunk lines. In case he'd actually hit on a hot trail, Brent was far from willing to tip his mitt. He bounced up, stuffing the week-old *Recorder* into his pocket, and headed for the cigar store on the corner opposite the postoffice.

Customers trailed him into the shop and he wedged himself into a telephone booth. Calling the electric company, he found, to his gratification, that the personnel manager was working late.

He was Brent of the *Recorder*, he said over the line, and the paper was about to begin featuring a war-time series on women now filling jobs formerly held by men. For example, the company was now using female meter-readers, wasn't it? Yes, the personnel manager answered, they had six or eight. Brent wished to select one and make her rounds with her in order to gather material. Since he'd bring a photographer along, the chosen gal must be photogenic. Did the company have one like that? They had, indeed. However, the best looking one was also the one who was newest at the job. She'd been reading meters for only a week now.

"That doesn't matter," Brent said quickly, his temperature rising. "What's her name? Where's she live?"

"Just a moment." Brent aged five years while waiting. "Nora Lacey," he was told. "Number 564 Jefferson Street."

Brent voiced his heartfelt thanks and squeezed out of the booth in a fever. Standing there, he checked his logic. He pictured a girl in work clothes walking from back door to back door of house after house down the block, first in one section of the city, then in another. Like a postman, she'd be taken for granted, one of the unnoticeables. She'd carry a loose-leaf book of forms into which she'd enter the figures of each meter she read. No one would think it strange to see her jotting something down as she moved along. The book would be just about the right proportions, half the size of a typewriter sheet. A sentence or two dashed off between houses would add up to considerable wordage in a

day. And as for the most recently employed female meter-reader's name, Nora Lacey was almost an anagram of Ronna Wallace—so close that Brent's blood pressure began hitting the ceiling.

He became warily conscious that he was mumbling to himself while still standing just outside the phone booth. Moreover, the adjacent booth was occupied. Brent took a hard look at the young man inside it. He was swarthy, perching there with the receiver at his ear and eying Brent sharply while not saying anything. He avoided Brent's stare and said quickly into the transmitter: "*Oh, por Dios, señorita, sí, sí!*"

Frowning, Brent left him there and paused outside the store for one final check. Dragging the week-old *Recorder* from his pocket, he scanned the "Rooms For Rent" column. There it was, sure enough, not far from the electric company's insertion: *Choice, Pvt. ent., sep. bath, \$10 wk., quiet working girl pfd. 564 Jefferson.*"

Was it possible that Brent had put his finger on the fugitive for whom a thousand cops had been searching an entire week? He didn't dare to think so yet, but he went off, and fast.

CHAPTER FOUR

Lamming My Way?

JEFFERSON STREET wasn't far. In an old residential section rather close behind the retail district, it was tree-shaded in summer, middle-class respectable and somnolent. Approaching 564 cautiously, Brent found it to be a Victorian brick house secluded behind a hedge. Near the driveway was a side door, apparently the "*Pvt. ent.*" referred to in the ad. A window beside it was lighted. About to prowl down the drive, Brent stopped short. The door was opening.

He faded against the hedge, eying the girl who hurried out. She wore oxfords, slacks, a short leather jacket, a kerchief tied over her hair and horn-rimmed glasses. Without seeing Brent she passed within four feet of him as she turned into the street. If she was Ronna Wallace, Brent reflected uneasily, she didn't resemble her printed portrait now. She was, however, well worth tailing. He sidled back onto the sidewalk as she hastened ahead in the gloom.

Misgivings gave him pause. He had a queasy sensation that there was something alive in the deep shadows all around him. His eyes searched suspiciously, but found nothing, and he started off regardless, so that the girl wouldn't slip him.

She led him rapidly into an even quieter neighborhood six blocks away. At a corner she paused and glanced around. Brent's tem-

perature soared again when he spotted a mailbox on a post. He would have given odds of a million to one that the girl in slacks would drop a letter into that mailbox within thirty seconds, and she did exactly that. Then she quickly doubled back.

Brent faded against a tree and let her come. This time she'd taken a chance by mailing a letter so close to her hideaway. Why had she risked it? Brent could guess. She hadn't seen the late edition of the *Recorder*, but only an earlier one in which her day's narrative had ended with that incomplete sentence. In addition, she must have heard the radio announcement of the murder of the messenger and the theft of her last letter. Probably she'd just now sent the *Recorder* another draft of the missing paragraphs, and perhaps a few more. If so, time would tell. Brent waited until she was almost abreast of him, then emerged from the shadow to swing into step. Instantly she paused, gasping.

"Take it easy, Miss Wallace," Brent said quietly. "I'm not going to turn you in."

She wailed softly, "Oh-h!" and then asked in a challenging tone: "Who are you?"

He took her arm and swung her into motion. She stared at him fearfully through her lenses. In answer he grinned.

"I'm a pal," he assured her. "I've a hunch you didn't kill Shearson. You didn't, did you?"

She said in scarcely a whisper: "Oh, no-o, no-o."

"Let's talk it over, then," Brent suggested, still steering her along, "in your room, where we can be safe."

The next moment he halted. The driveway of 564 was just ahead. A man was hurrying out. A vague figure, the man turned his back to Brent and the girl and strode on. In a moment he was gone. The girl was scared, anxious to get off the street. She tugged at Brent. He urged her along again, down the driveway. She pushed through the side door first, and abruptly stood stock still, a quavering moan in her throat.

"Good God!" said Brent.

They stared down at the man lying sprawled in the center of the floor. His topcoat had wrapped itself around him, as if in a struggle, and his dark felt hat had fallen off. The top of his head was messy. Repeated, savage blows had brained him. The weapon lay beside him, a long, heavy flashlight, part of Miss Wallace's meter-reading equipment. At first glimpse Brent knew he was as dead as ever he'd get.

"It's José!" Ronna Wallace gasped.

It was also, Brent saw, the young Latin he had spotted in the next phone booth in the cigar store.

Quickly, Brent stooped over him while Ron-

na Wallace remained paralyzed, staring in terror. Recalling that one of Captain Russo's bullets had at least nicked the murderer of the messenger, Brent hunted for a wound on the dead body. He found none. In the inside pocket of the corpse, however, he found two things. One was a wallet containing a thick pack of banknotes, a card identifying José Espada, and a number of dope-sheets on the bangtails. The other was a bank book. Brent confiscated this and left the billfold on the cadaver.

A rapping sound startled Brent. The girl twisted about in terror, staring at an inner door. The knock had come from there. Someone was standing on the other side of the door. Knuckles tapped again and a woman's voice said through the panels: "Miss Lacey! I heard noises. Is anything wrong in there?"

Urgently Brent closed a firm hand on Ronna Wallace's tense arm.

"You thought you were taking it on the lam a week ago," he said under his breath, turning her forcibly toward the outer door, "but baby, you didn't know the half of it!"

BRENT curbed his car in the thick of the retail district and trudged into a hat store. When he emerged, three minutes later, he was wearing a new snap-brim and carrying his old hat in a paper bag. Sliding back under the steering-wheel, he tossed the bag over his shoulder.

"Put it on," he said. "Stay there in the dark."

In the rear-view mirror he observed Ronna Wallace rising from the floor where she'd huddled for the better part of an hour while he'd toured the city aimlessly. The hat gave her a little trouble—it came down to her ears. She huddled in a corner of the rear seat, invisible to passersby.

"Keep thinking," Brent urged her. "How did José Espada trace you?"

She whispered: "But I've already told you, I don't know!"

Brent, nevertheless, could make a good guess. Espada had been casing the *Recorder* plant. Since the paper was printing Ronna Wallace's letters he had naturally suspected, just as Captain Russo had, that some member of the staff must know where she was hiding. He'd tailed Brent first into the cigar store, where he'd eavesdropped, then to Jefferson Street. Seeing Miss Wallace leaving her rented room, with Brent spying on her, he'd dodged into it to await her return.

"You still think his motives were friendly?" Brent inquired.

"Oh, yes!" the girl in the back seat whispered. "While he lived in the same building with me he used to drop in often. He was evicted four months ago, though, and

since then I hadn't seen him, until tonight. I was just as glad. It's rather difficult handling an amorous Latin. He phoned now and then, though. I'm sure he still liked me."

"Then he came to warn you tonight," Brent said. "Against me or somebody else. If somebody else trailed him to your room it was practically an undercover parade, but it could have happened. We saw a man dodging out of the driveway just as we went back. Who was he? Your landlord?"

"I didn't have any. Just a landlady, and there weren't any other roomers, either." She added anxiously: "It must've been the man who'd just killed José! But I've no idea who it could have been."

Brent started the car and swung from the curb. "Keep working on it," he pressed on her again, "while I find out what's cooking."

Parking in front of the *Recorder* building, he signaled her to remain quietly where she was. He became wary when he saw Valerie Randall hustling in ahead of him. Evidently Ronna Wallace's landlady had discovered the South American corpse in her spare room immediately and Val's excitement was one of the results. Her lovely rayoned legs led him to Garrett's desk in the city room.

"It was Wallace's hideout, all right!" Val announced breathlessly. "Russo found half a dozen envelopes already stamped and addressed to Lora Lorne in Wallace's handwriting. She'll probably never send us another, worse luck."

In an affectionate tone which he never used to anyone else, Garrett asked: "Who was Espada?"

"Bad record," Val answered, consulting her notes. "Never worked. Lived by his wits, was broke half the time. Lately, though, he was in the money, maybe from gambling, maybe from something else."

"What about the others this time—Meed, Conley, the Armitage girl and the kid brother, Chester?"

"You'd never believe it, but three of the four have watertight alibis again. Meed was caught off base by this one. They're still checking on him, but he may be O.K. too. If so, Russo will go definitely bats."

"Where does Russo think Wallace is now?"

"He isn't saying. He's just seething. If I know the signs, something's due to explode with a loud bang."

Waiting to hear no more, Brent pushed out, but at the top of the iron stairway he encountered an obstacle that stopped him. Again it was the solicitous janitor, William Heisinger. Of course Heisinger was about to inquire again now, of all times: "Ain't you found her yet?" Brent spoke first.

"Get outta my way!"

Reaching his car, he found the girl in the

oversize man's hat still sitting obscurely in the rear seat. Without speaking to her, he drove off. When he stopped this time it was in front of his own apartment building. For a moment, while he scanned both sides of the gloomy street, up and down, he sat with a chill of ironic realization shuddering through him. He was now actually perpetrating all the crimes of which Captain Russo had previously and groundlessly accused him—most reprehensibly, that of harboring a fugitive wanted for murder!

"If Russo hasn't got this place covered I'll never understand it," he muttered, "but I don't see any dicks ogling us from the bushes. Let's go."

RONNA WALLACE got out with him, Brent's old hat teetering on her ears. They forced themselves to saunter. Once behind his own door on the second floor, he pulled in a deep breath of relief. The apartment consisted of two comfortable, masculine rooms. Brent steered Miss Wallace into the bedroom because it had only one window looking out on a court. She plucked off the hat and her glasses and eyed him. She was a lovely young woman. Brent wished the circumstances were cozier.

"Why are you doing this for me?"

"I still believe in Santa Claus," Brent told her grimly. "I fondly hope that by cracking this case I'll earn myself a better job on the Recorder. There's no time to waste. If you've any idea who really used that sword on Shearson—"

"But I haven't!"

"What!" Brent stared at her. "You mean all those letter of yours are leading up to exactly nothing?"

"I wouldn't say that," Ronna Wallace remarked. "I'm doing all right, considering."

Brent nodded sourly. "I wish to God I was doing half as well for myself as you are. If I should get grabbed right now, I could write a bale of letters and I'd still wind up sitting on two thousand volts."

He fished out José Espada's bank book and scowled over the dates of a series of deposits. Until about three months ago these had been sporadic and of various amounts. At that point, however, Espada had begun making deposits of \$50 and \$100 frequently, three or four times a week. The last one had been made just a week ago, on the date of the Shearson murder, and there had been none since.

"Our best bet is that leak on Shearson's reports to Washington," Brent said. "As I understand it, his inspectors didn't make constructive suggestions to the plant operators—they simply inspected and reported confidentially. Shearson's inside stuff was worth

plenty to the manufacturers who were falling down on their production. Espada was probably selling it to them at so much per tip-off, and his take added up. The question is, how the hell did he open up his pipeline?"

"But he couldn't have done that!"

Brent stared at her hopelessly. "Tell me why not."

"Because the stuff was handled very carefully to guard against that very danger," Ronna Wallace answered. "You see, the plant inspectors made daily reports to us. Steve correlated them and dictated digests to me. The originals were kept in the office safe with the carbons of our reports to Washington. Nobody but Steve and Dan Meed and me could possibly get at them."

"O.K. Those reports went to Washington by mail, so that's out as a possible leak. Did they ever go outside your office in any other way?"

"Why, yes, but even so. . . . You see, Dan brought in the plant reports at about three o'clock every afternoon. Steve dictated to me all the rest of the day. Since the steam was turned off in the building at five, I usually took my notebook to my apartment and went on working there."

"Ah!" Brent said.

"But that's out, too!" the girl insisted. "When I finished, I put everything in a file cabinet—my notes and the reports, too, including the carbons—and locked it. The file was inside a closet, and I locked that door also. And whenever anything was inside the file, I kept those keys with me always, even slept with them under my pillow."

"Were they under your pillow on the night when you thought you heard somebody prowling in the living room?"

"Absolutely."

"Was there ever a time when the keys were not with you?"

"Why, I didn't carry them during the day because I always took everything back to the office first thing in the morning, leaving the file empty."

BRENT got out of his chair. "I can feel my fanny getting hot already," he growled, pacing. "Why did Shearson come to your apartment in the evenings so often? Was it work or love?"

"Steve and I were good friends, but that was strictly business. He'd stopped taking me out when he met Margot Armitage, which was all right with me, because when the war's over I'm going to marry one honey of a Marine, the one who sent me the sword."

"Yeah? Look, I've grown a little cynical," Brent said, not adding that it was Lora Lorne who'd made him that way. "What about that overnight case with Shearson's pajamas?"

"Perfectly innocent!" Miss Wallace cried at him. "For a while Steve had to make a lot of quick trips to Washington, so he kept that case at the office, always packed. Recently things had smoothed out, so he wasn't traveling any more. About a month ago he started to take the case home, but stopped in at my apartment on the way and left it there—forgot it. In fact, both of us kept forgetting it until the day after Steve's engagement was announced, when he decided he'd better take it home. It's terrible what nasty minds lots of people have."

"But this time—the last time," Brent pointed out, "he showed up in your apartment in the afternoon. How come?"

"To get that case." Miss Wallace's answers came with such facility that Brent was convinced she was either truthful or the most adept liar he'd ever encountered. "Something happened to the heating plant at the office that day. Steve dictated for less than an hour and it got too cold to type. I took my notes home and started to transcribe them, but it was cold there, too—the heat was usually off weekdays until five—so I decided to go to a movie to warm up and do the work that evening instead. I locked the stuff in the file as usual and left, and a couple of blocks away I met Steve heading for my apartment. He was on his way home and wanted to pick up his overnight case, so instead of going back with him I gave him my key and asked him to leave it with Mr. Heisinger. But when I got back from the movie I found the key in the lock, where Steve had left it. I went in, automatically taking the key with me—and found him."

She shuddered, covering her face with her hands.

"Then?" Brent cued her.

"I—I must have gone out of my mind with shock. Suddenly I realized I was screaming. That made things happen. All at once Mr. Heisinger was standing there, staring at me across Steve's body and saying: 'You killed him, you killed him.' I couldn't say anything, but I saw how horribly bad it looked. I just had to get out of there, so I yanked the door open and ran and kept going. I guess I lost my head, but in a little while I got it back again."

"You did, but good," Brent agreed. "Let's get this straight. Tell me once more—"

A sharp buzzing sound broke into his words. The girl gasped, clamping a hand over her mouth, and Brent paled. He quickly closed the bedroom door on her, drew in a deep, fortifying breath and opened the entrance.

He had feared the worst and this was it—Captain Russo.

With his dead eyes Russo gazed steadily at Brent as he stepped in. Spectrally he floated to a standstill, looking about with sad curiosity. He wagged his cadaverous head and sighed, as if obliged to do something now which would make him even more sorrowful.

"Bill," he inquired in his hollow tone, "which of your pals has a size six head on which he wears a size eight hat?"

"That's my particular chum," Brent said, his attempt at banter not quite coming off. "He's the pin-headed boy from the circus."

"Is he here now, Bill?" Russo moaned.

Brent tried to smile. "Last I heard they were using him to help build airplanes, on

**YOU CAN'T
HURT MY
FEELINGS!**

**I KNOW IT
- I USE
STAR BLADES!**



account of he can stick his noggin into small places."

"You stick yours into even tighter ones, I think," Russo said. "Mind if I see who you've got in the bedroom, just in case she happens to be on my wanted list?"

"Go as far as you like," Brent muttered.

He hoped Russo would let it go at that. The fact that Russo took him exactly at his word was a matter he regretted. He tightened as Russo moved, then he moved faster. Placing himself between the captain and the bedroom door, he said, "Very sorry," and struck out once. He pulled his punch a little, fearful that if he didn't Russo would go flying off in all directions, a scattering of dry bones. But it was enough. Russo spun about and flopped down. He was knocked cold but looking no deader than usual.

Brent snatched the door open and grabbed Ronna Wallace's arm. She squeaked with consternation as she sidestepped Russo's limp form. Once having swung her into the hallway, Brent feverishly kept her going as fast as her feet could fly.

Popping out of the building and scrambling for his car, Brent saw a dark figure break into action in the shadows across the street. He had the engine roaring and the tires spinning, with Miss Wallace fluttering in the seat beside him, when the dick dashed into the open. Brent weaved the car into the nearest intersection just as the detective's gun blasted. The bullet traveled in Brent's previous direction as he veered sharply at a right angle. Jamming the accelerator down hard, he gripped the wheel and coldly sweated, thinking grimly that even if he were caught there would be one good thing about it—as an inmate of the death-house he'd never again, thank God, have to write another Lorne column.

CHAPTER FIVE

Lam to the Slaughter

GROVER Street lay a block ahead when Brent's car sneezed, wheezed and dragged a dead motor. The fuel gauge needle, he saw with a groan, was so far below the empty mark as to mean positively. He kicked out the clutch and let the car drift into the gutter under its momentum. Yanking the hand-brake on hard, he marveled coldly that he'd been able to scam this far without having the whole radio squad on his tail, although actually it was no great distance.

"What'll we do?" Miss Wallace babbled. "Oh, what'll we do now?"

"You needn't worry," Brent assured her. "Thanks to your literary efforts you'll never get toasted." For that very reason, however,

he reflected, Russo would take it out on him mercilessly. "But we can't keep under cover much longer. I was taking a gamble on heading for your apartment in the next block. It's cased, of course, but could we possibly sneak in the back way, or something?"

"It—it's on the ground floor," Ronna Wallace said, her teeth chattering, "with an areaway behind it and a door to the basement."

"Worth a try," Brent decided. "Lead the way—once around the block first, and keep your peepers peeled for a guy wearing bulldog shoes."

They skirted close to the buildings, heads down, saying nothing. To an observer they might have seemed to be a man and wife getting a bit of fresh air before turning in. Passing the front of the apartment house where Miss Wallace had lived, Brent scanned every shadow. No detective was in evidence, but he didn't doubt that one was lurking somewhere nearby.

They turned, then turned again and the girl whispered: "Just ahead." Abruptly she rabbitied into a narrow passage, Brent dogging her. The areaway behind the building was a dark well echoing their quiet footfalls. Waiting a few moments to make sure their move hadn't been spotted, they shifted to a lighted doorway at the base of cement steps. Through the dust-filmed panes they peered into the furnace room. It was deserted.

Brent scarcely dared to hope that the door would open when he turned the knob, but it did. Inside, they heard a radio playing at some nearby point. Then it was switched off and the girl caught her breath. Poking a thumb toward a closed door beyond, she whispered in Brent's ear: "Mr. Heisinger." Hurriedly they tiptoed past it to a stairway. It led them into the hall of the floor directly above. Miss Wallace hastened to a blue door, fishing a key from a pocket of her slacks.

They eased through. Brent caught the girl's hand reaching for the wall-switch. "Not yet!" he cautioned her. "And don't speak above a whisper." He groped across the room, pulled the blinds of two windows down to the sills, then felt his way back to thumb the switch. It was a colorfully feminine apartment, all tidy except for an ugly stain in the center of the rug.

"Now sit down and be quiet," Brent suggested wryly.

Having some thinking to do, he prowled noiselessly about while she watched him, puzzled and fearful. Presently, frowning, he opened the entrance, let it close itself, opened it again and tried the outer knob. It had a spring that wouldn't let it stand open. The lock was one of the tumbler type that could be turned freely from the inside but wouldn't operate from the outside without a key. He

transferred his attention to the closet containing the file cabinet. This door was locked, as Miss Wallace had left it. She produced more keys from her slacks pocket and Brent used them.

Both the lock on the closet door and that of the cabinet, he found, functioned perfectly. In the drawer lay Miss Wallace's notebook and a sheaf of typed pages with their carbons. The incomplete report concerned the Standard Machining Company and gave details of executive inefficiency, wasted materials and sub-standard products—an official opinion for which Standard no doubt would have paid a pretty penny in order to scramble to correct these faults before having its contracts cut from under it, with scandal, by an Army that wasn't fooling.

Moving on, Brent frowned over the girl's desk, including her typewriter and the telephone.

A plan forming in his mind, he whispered: "Type. Type anything. Just keep that machine working for a while. It helps me to think."

PLAINLY she suspected him of mental aberration, but she complied. The keys clicked briskly under her agile fingers. Brent paced soundlessly, reflecting that long before now Russo had recovered consciousness and by this time had certainly ordered the entire police department to dragnet Brent. Very probably, also, he was tearing the roof off the *Recorder* plant. With Brent having proved himself to be an accomplice of the captain's long-sought fugitive, Russo was no doubt profusely accusing Garrett of criminal conspiracy. Obviously, in addition, Russo would be on the alert to pick up a lead in case Brent should attempt to get in touch with his city editor. Brent decided, with a snap of his fingers, to make the most of it. He signaled Ronna Wallace to stop typing.

"Call the *Recorder*. Ask for Garrett."

She whispered: "But why?"

"We'll both be in the soup damned soon unless we can bait the real killer, and that's what you're about to do."

"The real killer? But how? Do you know who it is?"

Brent looked astonished. "Certainly!"

"What!" Unconsciously the girl's voice rose. "Then for gosh sakes—"

Desperately Brent clamped a hand over her mouth and kept it there while she eyed him in fright.

"Would you mind shutting the hell up?" he said vehemently. "You want everybody in the building to know you're back here? Want 'em to phone headquarters first and spoil our play?"

She was able to wag her head a little.

"Then pipe down and do as I say. Tell Garrett who you are, but not where. Say you've got it all doped out now. This is the hoe-down, see, and you're going to spring it. You've figured the killer and you're going to lay it right on the line. Understand?"

Again, wide-eyed, she shook her head. She didn't understand.

"Do it anyway," Brent whispered at her. "Don't pay any attention to what Garrett says, but be sure you make yourself perfectly clear to him."

The girl pried his hand off her mouth. "I won't do it! It's Chester you suspect. It was right in the paper how he's been hanging around the *Recorder* city room all week. You think he's there now, so he'll hear about this call you want me to make. Nothing doing! I won't trap my own kid brother."

"Listen!" Brent hissed at her. "Chester has an alibi, hasn't he? My God, he's got *three* alibis. What're you afraid of, then? You make that call right now or I'll do it for you."

Ronna Wallace blinked, thought it over, nodded and reached for the directory. She dialed the number as Brent agitatedly circled the room, asked for Garrett and got a connection at once.

"This is Ronna Wallace calling," she said in the professionally bright tones of a secretary.

Brent could picture consternation breaking out in the city room. Even at his distance from the phone he could hear Garrett's voice grating in the receiver. Ronna muffled the transmitter frantically.

"He says Captain Russo's there!"

"Fine!" Brent whispered. "Go into your act."

Although mystified, she obediently began following Brent's stage directions, speaking in a clear, normal voice. Brent imagined Russo scrambling to cut in on the line. Garrett's rasp interrupted frequently. Brent grinned wryly and kept his fingers crossed.

"But it's true!" the girl cried. "I really do know who killed Steve." As Brent gestured toward her typewriter she added quickly: "I'm writing it—I'm right in the middle of it, and it's going to blow the whole case wide open. Just wait for my next letters, Mr. Garrett." Then she wound up automatically with a blithe, "Good-by now." But having disconnected she gazed at Brent in doubt. "Listen, won't they be able to trace that call?"

"That," Brent informed her, "is the idea."

"I don't get it! We're asking the police to come and grab us!"

Brent nodded. "Meanwhile we hope somebody else will get here first, and in case he does you'll be filling out the picture by pounding that machine. Go on! 'Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their party!'

Anything, but keep that typewriter going!"

Brent saw her biting her lip, little tears glimmering in her eyes, but she obeyed. While she hit the keys rapidly, he retreated across the stained rug and faded into the bedroom.

Lighting no lights, he sat on the bed, telling himself that the chances were a thousand-to-one the gamble wouldn't pay off. His strap-watch ticked off a full minute in the darkness while Ronna Wallace's typewriter clattered on. He wondered just how long it would take a squad car to get here. Not long, and Russo would come close behind it. The murderer of Steven Shearson, he reasoned, must know that. Quick action was indicated. But a second minute was ticking away now and still—

BRENT jerked to his feet. A different sort of click had sounded in the living room, a single, flat snap. At the same instant the lights in the living room had disappeared. And next Ronna Wallace, no longer typing, gave out a thin cry of terror.

Everything was black. Brent eased to the connecting door. There, just inside it, he'd noticed, was another wall-switch controlling the bedroom lights. His left hand found it. But even before he'd thumbed it he shouted across the living room in a commanding tone that crackled.

"Drop that poker!"

The lights flashed on behind Brent then, sending a shaft across the living room. Midway between him and Ronna Wallace at her desk, a man was moving quickly on tiptoes. His back was turned to Brent. He was springing on the girl. His right arm was lifted and, Brent saw with horror, he was actually gripping the handle of a heavy poker.

The glare of the lights behind him threw the man into a panic. He leaped forward, slashing the poker down at the girl. Behind him, Brent dived into a flying tackle, and jarred against the man as the poker chopped. Deflected, it whacked onto the typewriter. Brent was on his knees now, tottering, with the man twisting about to get at him. As he bounced up, the poker cut viciously across the left side of his head.

The jolt blinded Brent. With his eyeballs full of flaring flame, he recalled seeing some kind of face and he drove a fist at the spot where it had been. The impact of his knuckles telegraphed to his staggering brain the pleasant news that he had never landed a sweeter punch. Still, it seemed to have no effect. The man should have gone down and out, but the next moment, his vision clearing, Brent found himself grappling—with Garrett.

"Cut it!" Garrett rasped at him.

Brent backed off with a dizzy sigh. The room was now full of light and people. Next Brent made out Chester Wallace in one cor-

ner. His sister was wrapped in his arms, gibbering with fright. Also present, Brent saw dimly, was Val Randall, who was standing and gasping, and Captain Russo gazing mournfully down at another man lying inert in the center of the carpet.

"That's him!" Brent blurted, pointing to the figure on the floor. "That's your killer! The fugitive I harbored was an innocent gal. It puts us both in the clear. Wrap up your murderer and stow him in the cooler."

Nobody was listening to Brent. Garrett was jawing at Val and Val was babbling something at the same time. Chester Wallace still hugged his sister while Ronna shivered. Russo just stood and looked very sad.

"What's the matter, don't you get it?" Brent raged at him. "Can't you see it had to be Heisinger?"

Russo wagged his head over the unconscious William Heisinger, whose jaw hung open loosely, having taken the full power of Brent's punch.

"Never mind the blueprints, Bill. Obviously Heisinger's the man who dipped into the file cabinet here and sold the dope he filched from those reports. He sneaked in at night to do it, locking Miss Wallace in her bedroom so she wouldn't catch him. One night she actually heard him. Yes, I get it."

"Sure you can say that now, with the rat lying cold right under your nose!" Brent growled. "But until a few minutes ago you'd missed it, even though it couldn't have been anybody but Heisinger. His furnace room is directly below this apartment. He could hear Ronna typing. Every time she came and went, he knew it. And all janitors have pass-keys!"

Russo appeared to feel that this explanation on Brent's part was superfluous.

"The whole thing was so easy for him," Brent hurried on. "During the day, when Ronna was away, the file was empty and its keys were here. Simplest thing in the world for Heisinger to make a duplicate. During the night, when Ronna was asleep, he simply used his pass-key to come in, lock her in her bedroom and open the closet. Then he used the duplicate to open the file and help himself. When he'd left, after making his notes, everything looked untouched. But that one day a week ago was an exception."

EVERYBODY but Russo was talking at once, Heisinger was still out and nobody seemed to be listening to Brent.

"On that day," Brent continued doggedly, "Ronna worked here in the afternoon. After she'd gone, Heisinger sneaked in again. This time he was caught cold when Shearson stepped into the apartment. At the very least it meant a stiff federal rap for Heisinger. He saved himself from that with the only weapon

within reach, the Jap sword. Then he let Ronna walk into the murder picture. While Ronna stood right here over Shearson's body in the middle of the room, Heisinger suddenly appeared. It's a spring door that can't be opened from the outside without a key, so naturally Heisinger had used his pass-key. That was a mistake on his part. Later, when talking to the police, he tried to cover it up by lying, saying he hadn't come any farther than the hall. That's what tripped me, and if I hadn't harbored a fugitive I'd never have picked it up."

Now Garrett and Val were in a vociferous huddle with Ronna Wallace.

"Afterward, Heisinger haunted the city room so he could sneak a look at our galley proofs in case she began spilling something that might point to him. She did that tonight when she mentioned the mysterious episode of the prowler. Heisinger had to get at her next letter before anyone else. That led him to the murder of the messenger."

Brent stooped dizzily, pawed at Heisinger, pulled his trousers up one thin, limp leg and indicated a patch of gauze and plaster.

"That's where your bullet nicked him, Russo. Other troubles began piling up on him. José Espada had acted as his go-between, delivering the information that had been stolen by Heisinger, and they probably split fifty-fifty. But Espada liked Ronna. To him it was obvious who'd stolen her latest letter. He cornered Heisinger, grabbed the letter and mailed it to the *Recorder* again. He didn't want Ronna rapped and he was trying to find her. He followed me to her hideout to tell her that Heisinger was the real killer and Hei-

singer brained him there. The reason I led Ronna back here was to check all this brilliant reasoning and bait Heisinger into making another desperate try to cover himself."

Finding himself still talking to a vacuum, Brent waded across the unconscious killer and pulled at Garrett's shoulder.

"You heard me! What was Val doing while I was cracking this case? Worrying about synthetic girdles, no doubt! This was Lorr Lorne's yarn in the beginning, sort of, and now it's entirely mine. I'm back on the police trick, Garrett, and God knows I've earned it!"

Garrett shook him off, turning back to Ronna Wallace. "By all means!" the city editor said to her enthusiastically. "Go right on with it! Tomorrow your story jumps to the day of the Shearson murder. You tell how you thought it out day by day and finally decided, with great courage, to set a trap for Heisinger—entirely alone, of course. Taking full credit, without mentioning anyone else, you describe how you nailed the killer. And after your series is finished, Miss Wallace, consider yourself holding a new job, one you'll be able to handle beautifully with your writing ability—a special crime reporter for the *Recorder*."

The strangling sound that came from Brent's throat was so awful that Garrett actually looked worried about him.

"What's the matter, Brent? You sick? Did Heisinger really hurt you?"

"Me, I feel fine," Brent snarled. "Why the hell shouldn't I? Look at all the good I've done for myself. Until tonight I've worked my guts out and got nowhere, trying to get my old job back from just one dame, and now, thanks to nobody but myself, there are two!"

WINGS OVER HELL

A Novel By Stuart M. Emery

"I think I pinned that ribbon on you myself, Mallory. They say I don't make mistakes when I read my man—and from now on you can't afford to make any. You've got the Devil's own job to do in forgotten skies where Hell's own angels fear to fly!" Be sure to read "Wings Over Hell," a truly unforgettable novel of invasion skies over Italy!

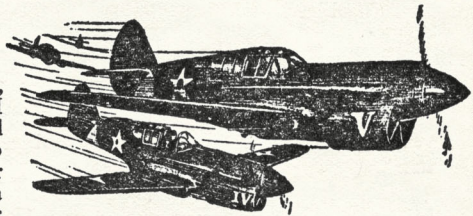
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THE DOCTOR DEALS

By **RICHARD DERMODY**

Author of "The Doctor's Treatment," etc.



A
Doc Pierce
Story

Derryberry is standing there holding a gun on us. He has Doris Bates by the waist and she is bound and gagged.

"This is a sweet racket, pony boy—a religious pitch and a real estate caper, cooked up together," the Doc tells me. So we become goat worshipers, disciples of the Reverend Jerry Terry Derryberry—a crazy way to get a haybelly on your bankroll!

WE ARE at a slow mope when we hit the top of the hill. The way the Doc is puffing and wheezing I figure he will crack his windpipe. I step around a turn in the path and what I see nearly bowls me over.

A dame is standing on a flat rock about ten feet away. She is a medium-sized filly maybe twenty years old with big brown eyes and wavy hair. She is done up in slacks and blouse of heavy yellow silk and she shows

more curves than a rollercoaster. I never expect to see a job like this in the middle of the Kentucky hills.

The Doc waddles around the bend and lets out a wheeze that blows the leaves along the ground. The dame spots us and hops off the rock like it is a hot griddle. A second later she is floundering in the brush.

When she takes this dive I notice she is wearing a pair of sandals that hook over the toe with a strap. She jumps to her feet but the sandals cross up again and she does another flop.

The Doc shoves me back and bends over her. "I hope you are not hurt badly, my dear," he says.

The dame rolls over and tries to smile. "I'm sorry to be so silly," she says, "but you startled me."

The Doc grins. "We are harmless citizens. We just attended the race meeting at Louisville and are heading east. We took the wrong road and, as it was getting late, we decided to follow this path hoping to find someone who could direct us."

The dame looks puzzled. "Then you don't know?"

The Doc opens his swayback coat so his white vest shows, takes off his black skimmer and parks on the rock. "I know that you are injured," he says. "I am Doctor Pierce of New York City. Let me have a look at that ankle."

OF COURSE the only degree the Doc ever gets in his life is when the cops put the arm on him and ask a lot of embarrassing questions but he is a pretty good rough-and-tumble sawbones, at that. He runs his big mitt over the dame's slim pasterns.

"As my young friend here, Mr. Allan, would say," he tells her, "you have bowed a tendon. In other words, you have a severe sprain but no bones are broken." He gets to his feet. "Of course we will assist you to your home."

The dame looks scared. "Oh, no," she says. "You can't. He wouldn't like it."

The Doc shrugs. "We can't leave you here. And you must not walk on that ankle."

The dame stares at his big, red face. "Perhaps it is for the best," she says. "I feel that I can trust you."

This does not surprise me. The Doc makes a good living for many years because people trust him. I grin at her. "How about me?"

She smiles. "You have a hard face for a young man, Mr. Allan," she says. "But I think you can be trusted—with a third party present." Her face sobers. "Where did you leave your car?"

"In that cowtrack at the foot of the path," I tell her.

She speaks slowly. "You must do exactly as I say. Go back down the path and drive your car between the twin boulders directly across the road. You will find another car but there is plenty of room."

The Doc and the dame are still parked on the rock when I get back. I take the Doc to one side. "Listen," I tell him. "I don't like this setup. There is a wagon in the bushes behind those boulders that set somebody back about fifteen grand."

The Doc grins. "Take it easy, pony boy." He turns to the dame. "Our charming companion is named Doris Bates," he tells me. "Doris and her widowed mother are living in the valley just beyond under rather peculiar circumstances. I have asked her to delay her recital of these circumstances until your return."

Doris turns these big brown lamps on me. "Have you ever heard of the Reverend Jeremiah T. Derryberry?"

"Just a moment, my dear," the Doc says. "My question is perhaps irreverent, but what does the T. stand for?"

Doris shakes her head. "I don't know."

The Doc grins at me. "Five will get you fifty it is Terence."

"I don't believe it," I tell him. "Nobody would hang a name like that on a helpless brat."

The Doc chuckles. "Jerry Terry Derryberry," he says. "It's wonderful." He turns to the dame. "Go ahead. You have our earnest attention."

Doris smiles and then her eyes darken. "It is amusing to you," she says, "but it is stark tragedy to me. Derryberry, or the Sage, as his followers call him, is an evil creature. Sometimes I can hardly believe that the man is human."

"Well," I tell her, "I trust he is not human. He sounds like the corniest gag I ever hear. If this Jerry Terry Derryberry business is on the level I am ready to turn myself in."

Doris takes me by the arm. "You don't know how wonderful it is to talk to normal people again. I have spent three weeks in this awful place."

The Doc cuts in. "Let's have the story. It's getting dark."

DORIS stares off into the distance. "Daddy left a lot of property, over a hundred thousand dollars. Mother has always been a weak person. Since Daddy died she has—well, she has become a little silly. You must understand. She is not crazy. Just foolish and weak.

"When the Reverend Derryberry came to town, she joined his group. At first I thought it was a harmless interest. When she told me

she was turning all her property over to him I did not believe it."

The Doc narrows his eyes. "What's the pitch?"

Doris looks puzzled. "I don't understand."

"Look," I tell her, "what's the guy's caper? How does he build your old lady up for this score?"

She shakes her head. "It's such a fantastic thing," she says. She turns to the Doc. "You can't understand until you see for yourself. Help me down into the valley. Tonight they are dancing the Saraband to the Goat. When you see that, you will realize what I am going through."

The Doc grins. "The Saraband to the Goat—a phony religious pitch. I haven't seen one in years." He gets up. "Money, pony boy," he says to me. "I smell money."

"I smell trouble," I tell him. "But maybe there will be a couple of laughs around, at that." I get to my feet. "Do I carry the baggage?"

"Of course," the Doc says. "But remember this is business."

I lean over and lift Doris in my arms. She is not such a bad bundle. She slips an arm around my shoulder and I step along like a hackney.

WE ARE almost at the bottom when this fire lights up. Doris gives a little jump and I nearly drop her.

"We must hurry," she says. "The ceremony will begin in a few minutes."

The brush grows right up to the edge of this little clearing where the fire is blazing. We stop in the shadows about fifteen yards from the fire and what I see bugs my eyes out of my head.

A couple of dozen people are hopping around the fire in a long line like a chain gang. They are all wearing these yellow slack-and-blouse outfits and at first I have trouble telling the guys from the dames. The Doc lets his breath out in a low whistle.

"What an amazing spectacle," he says.

Doris is shivering and I set her down. "The man with the drum," she says. "That is Derryberry, the Sage."

I have been hearing this thumping for the past couple of minutes. Now I see this tall guy with a bushy black beard. He is standing on the other side of the fire tapping on a flat drum in his hand. I notice a black hole in the hill behind him. "What is that?" I ask her. "A cave?"

"Yes," she says. "There are three caves. The center one is where the Goat is kept. The Sage and the Guardians live there. The rest of us sleep in two caves a little way up the hill, the men in one and the women in the other."

"Well," I tell her, "if I do not see this nobody can make me believe it. What do those goofs around the fire think they are doing?"

"They are worshiping the Goat," she says. "In a moment the Guardians will light the torches in the cave and you will see the Goat."

Two lights spring up in the dark inside of the cave behind the fire. There is a thin curtain across the front but we can see through it. It is a life-size statue of a goat and it shines like gold. "What is it made of?" I ask the dame.

"We never see it except at night and through the curtain," she says, "but the Sage says it is solid gold."

The Doc chuckled. "Tell me, Doris," he says. "What does your mother get in exchange for turning her property over to this Sage, or Derryberry, or whatever his handle is?"

"He owns this valley," she tells him. "All of these people have turned over their property to the Sage and each of them gets title to a few acres of the land. They take an oath that they will share all the benefits of the valley equally."

The Doc chuckles. "A religious pitch and a real estate caper, cooked up together. This Derryberry is a hot operator." He thinks for a minute. "What benefits does he tell them they will share?"

"That is the fantastic part of it," she says. She leans forward. "The Sage is going to speak. You will hear him tell the story himself. He always tells it on nights when they dance the Saraband."

THE tall guy with the beard has stopped patting the drum. He lifts his hands and turns toward the cave. He has one of these rumbling voices that you can hear for a block.

"Behold the Goat," he says.

The goofs stand still, lift their hands and bow at the statue. Derryberry turns on the voice again.

"Countless ages ago," he says, "this valley, the Cradle of the Goat, was the center of all knowledge and all power on the earth. The Goat, ancient bearded symbol of fertility and wisdom, has waited through the centuries for those destined to become worthy of this power and wisdom. With him have waited the golden images who lie under the soil of this valley." He lifts his hands.

"After many years of searching, I found this valley. It was given to me to raise the Goat from the earth that held him. I used my savings to buy this valley according to the laws of the land. Now you are sharing it with me. We have taken the sacred oath. 'From each according to his blessings; to each according to his needs.' We must toil

and strive and study. We must become worthy to fulfill the ancient prophecy." He drops his hands and steps back to the entrance of the cave.

The goofs all get up and start filing past him so he can pat them on the head. The Doc gets up on his feet. "Take us over to the Sage," he tells the dame. "I think we will become members of this little flock."

I take him by the arm. "Look," I tell him. "Have a little sense. The ponies will be galloping in a couple of days. With the roll we are packing we can run those Pimlico bookies loop-legged."

The Doc chuckles. "I have a little plan in mind. If it is successful we will have enough dough to give those bookies the worst time they've had since the year of the Big Wind."

The Doc knows I am a sucker for his little plans. "O.K.," I tell him. "But let us not linger here. I wish to attack those bookies while their dough is crisp and fresh." I pick up Doris again and follow the Doc across the clearing.

A fat bag with pop eyes rushes up to us. "Oh, Doris," she says. "I have been so worried. Are you hurt?"

The Doc pulls off his black skimmer and bows at the fat bag. "Nothing serious, Mrs. Bates," he tells her. "Just a sprained ankle." He glances at the tall guy. "We did not wish to interrupt your little ceremony so we waited until you had completed it."

DERRYBERRY has a big, hook nose, and little, bright, black eyes. He reaches up and strokes his beard. "We are grateful to you for restoring our sister," he says. He shoots a dirty look at Doris. "But our sister knows she should not bring strangers into this valley. This is sacred ground."

The Doc moves over and looks Derryberry right in the eye. "This was an emergency," he says. He bows. "I am Doctor Pierce and this is my associate, Mr. Allan."

The tall guy bows back at him. "I am sorry we cannot offer you hospitality," he says.

The Doc shakes his head. "We hope for much more," he tells him. "Mr. Allan and I have long been students of the occult. We wish to join your group and share the ancient wisdom."

Derryberry frowns. "That is impossible," he says. "There are many rigid requirements to be met."

The Doc reaches into his clothes and hauls out his leather. "I understand that all property of members is placed in a common fund under your supervision," he says smoothly. "As it happens, Mr. Allan and I have our entire holdings in cash." He riffles a stack of bank-notes under Derryberry's beak. "We have between us about twenty-five thousand

in cash. Will that fulfill your requirement?"

Derryberry glitters his eyes at the lettuce. He makes a slow reach and gathers it in. "It is sufficient." He holds out his mitt to me.

I start to let out a squawk but the Doc pokes me in the ribs. "Give, pony boy."

I figure the Doc knows what he is doing but I am not happy as I watch my roll disappear into Derryberry's clothes. I have a hunch it is the last time I will see it.

"What is the procedure now?" the Doc asks.

"You will spend the next three days in meditation," Derryberry says. "On the third day I will make a trip to the courthouse and have a deed drawn for your portion of the land. That evening I will return and we will hold the ceremony of initiation." He turns to one of the goofs. "Show our new brothers to the sleeping-quarters." He raises his hands again and goes into the cave.

The goofs crowd around us and I never see such a collection of odds and ends. They are all sizes but Doris is the only one who is not packing plenty of age. They don't say a word but they look at us like we just come out of a cage. Finally the goof Derryberry tells to put us away, comes over and takes the Doc by the mitt. "Come, brother," he squeaks.

This goof is a skinny party with no teeth and a fringe of white hair around his bald skull. On the way to the cave he tells us his real name is Socrates and that he lives a few hundred years ago in Greece.

"Well," I tell the Doc, "the way you toss our bankroll around I am beginning to think you figure you are Diamond Jim Brady or maybe Pittsburgh Phil."

The Doc chuckles. "I put the boomerang twist on that roll," he says. "It will come back."

THIS cave the he-goofs hive up in is about forty feet long by fifteen wide. The floor is sandy and the roof is dry. A bunch of little oil stoves are sitting along one wall and about a dozen folding cots are stacked in a corner. The place is lighted by a couple of old buggy lamps with big, brass bowls on the bottom.

Socrates hands us a couple of cots and half a dozen blankets.

"How about some groceries?" I ask him.

He shows me a pile of tin cans about ten feet high. "We have nice spring water, too," he tells me. "Right there in the bucket." He turns around and starts to scuttle out.

"Just a moment," the Doc says. "Tell us what you do to pass the time."

The goof pats his skinny mitts together. "We are always busy," he says. "We meditate and we listen to the Sage, but most of the time we dig."

The Doc keeps his face straight. "What do you dig for?"

Socrates peeks over his shoulder. "The golden images," he whispers. "The golden men. They are out there under the ground. We dig all day. Soon we will find them."

I grin at the Doc. "A couple of weeks digging all day and doing this roadwork around the fire every night and you will lose your hay-belly."

The goof shakes his head. "We watch at night. The golden men walk in the valley in the dark." He giggles. "Last night I saw one of them. I saw where he went back into the ground, too. But I won't tell you." He cackles and runs out of the cave.

The Doc pulls his flask off his hip. "Bring over a couple of those tin cups and the bucket," he says. "We will take on a few doses of bourbon before we dine."

A couple of minutes later I feel better. "Look," I tell him, "I can't figure how these suckers stay in circulation long enough for Derryberry to put the arm on them. Why don't their relatives shake them down long ago?"

The Doc grins. "They are just a fancy brand of sucker, pony boy," he tells me. "You put these goofs in ordinary clothes and plant them back in their home towns and you could not tell them from the Rotary Club or the Chamber of Commerce." He takes a swallow out of his cup. "We must work fast. I think this pitch is ready for the payoff. That is why he grabbed our dough. He is operating on a strictly legal basis but he knows the Law will give him a bad time if they catch up with him before all those deals are completed. Once he has cashed in all the suckers' property and handed out deeds to the land he is in the clear." He chuckles. "Derryberry couldn't stand the sight of all that cash. He knew it was bait but he had to take it."

"I could stand the sight of my roll right now," I tell him. "I hope and trust I will see it again."

The Doc pats me on the shoulder. "You will see it," he says. "And it will have a hay-belly."

THE next couple of mornings the goofs shoulder picks and shovels and march off to the diggings right after breakfast. There is nothing for us to do but sit around and meditate. We do not see much of Derryberry as he spends most of his time in his cave. I get a good gander at this pair of Guardians and they are no bargain in my book. They are big and beefy and they look mean. Every time I try to peek into their cave one of them parts the curtain and gives me a dirty look.

I put in a little work on Doris. Her ankle

is better but she cannot walk on it so she sits around on a rock in the sun most of the day. She turns out to be a nice kid but by no means smart. The second afternoon the Doc joins us.

"How far is it to a town?" he asks her.

"Crawford is about twenty miles from here," she says.

"Good," the Doc says. "Do you think your ankle will stand a trip over the hill tomorrow?"

She looks excited. "I'm sure I could make it. Are we leaving?"

The Doc glances at me. "Give her the keys to our car." He turns to the dame. "Listen carefully, Doris. I want you to leave before Derryberry departs tomorrow morning. Go to the best hotel in Crawford and stay in your room until the day after tomorrow. If we have not joined you by then, you must go to the sheriff and bring him here." He reaches in his clothes and hands her a couple of fifties. "This will take care of your expenses. We will bring your mother with us."

Doris is trembling a little, but she is game. "I will do exactly as you say." She looks up at him. "You will be careful? You won't get hurt?"

The Doc smiles. "I do not approve of violence, although I fear there will be a certain amount of it necessary. But you may be sure we will not be hurt—not unless I have lost my touch."

Doris heads off to the hill the minute the goofs leave for the diggings the next morning. I feel better. It is good to know we have someone on the outside looking after our interests.

Ten minutes later Derryberry comes out of his cave. He is wearing a business suit and he carries a bulging briefcase. He looks around for us but we are planted behind a bush on the hill above him. He hesitates for a few seconds but finally he trots off toward the hill.

The Doc looks at his watch. "We will give him half an hour."

The Doc never tells me the details of his little plans but I figure I am entitled to a couple of answers at this point. I glance over the equipment he has laid out on a rock—two pick handles, a coil of rope, a cup of water and an empty coffee can.

"Well," I tell him. "I suppose we bop the Guardians on the skull with the pick handles and truss them up with the rope. But how do we get close enough to them?"

The Doc picks up the coffee can. "Did you observe those old carriage lamps in our cave?" He opens the can and shows me a handful of gray powder. "Those are carbide lamps. When carbide is dampened with water

it produces an inflammable gas. If this gas is confined it will explode. We are going to bomb the Guardians out of the cave."

THIS homemade pineapple works like a dream. We set fire to the curtains across the entrance to the cave and then toss in the coffee can. The Guardians come stumbling out and I bop them one-two. We shove them together and wind the rope around them until they look like a garlic sausage. Then we roll them into a corner of the cave.

This cave is maybe half the size of the one we have been parking in and it is fixed up very comfortable. There is a big brass bed in the back with the Goat parked on one side and a desk on the other. The Doc walks over to the desk.

"Unless I am mistaken we will find enough evidence here to put Derryberry at our mercy," he says. "He will be glad to make a deal with us when he returns." He starts pulling out the drawers and shuffling papers. I walk to the other corner and take a look at the Goat.

Of course I never believe this statue is solid gold but I am a little surprised when I find out it is nothing but tin covered with gilt paint. I rap on it with my knuckles and the Doc jumps about a foot. "What's that?" he says.

"This Goat," I tell him. "It is hollow."

"Of course," he says. "I should have thought of it." He shoves the desk drawers back in and walks around the brass bed. "There is nothing of importance in the desk. Derryberry is as smart as I figured him to be." He taps on the statue. "Have you got a can-opener in your pocket?"

"I've got a corkscrew," I tell him.

He grins. "There are six jugs of bourbon in that desk. We will have use for the corkscrew later." He runs his hands over the statue. "The head," he says. "It twists off like a cap on a toothpaste tube."

As I reach up and take hold of the horns

I hear this step behind me. I turn my head and freeze.

Derryberry is standing there. He has Doris Bates by the waist and a bandana is tied around her wrists and another one around her mouth. He is holding a gun.

"So you have solved the mystery of the Goat, Doctor Pierce," he says softly. He pushes Doris over to the bed and she slumps down. He reaches into his pocket, throws me a big clasp knife and backs around against the wall. He jerks his head at the trussed-up Guardians on the floor.

"Cut my boys loose," he tells me. He smiles at the Doc. "I found your accomplice, Miss Bates, trying to start your car. Miss Bates is by no means an accomplished motorist."

I am watching the gun. I start slowly across the floor toward the Guardians. The Doc snaps at me.

"Hold it, pony boy. Don't cut those ropes."

Derryberry's bushy brows go up. "You are hardly in a position to give orders, Doctor Pierce."

The Doc smiles. "I am afraid you are being impulsive," he says. "Perhaps we should examine your position."

Derryberry narrows his little eyes until they are just slits. "My position is excellent," he says.

The Doc nods. "At the moment," he says. He points at the Guardians. "Your boys have been subjected to rough treatment. If they are freed they may commit an act of violence." He lowers his voice. "You are a clever man, Derryberry. Too clever to get into a position where you may become a fugitive from the Law." He smiles. "You and I are not men of violence. We are men of intellect—businessmen. You have a neat, little deal here and I have dealt myself in. I am sure we can reach some sort of an agreement."

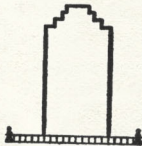
Derryberry is thinking. He reaches a hand

(Continued on page 79)

TEST SIGHT

TASTE RIGHT

If the ladder is placed against building, how far up will it reach?



ANSWER.

It will reach exactly to the top of the building.



THE SOONER

Hialeah didn't excite Mr. Maddox so much this trip. It was gay and colorful, but he kept remembering the train wreck on the way down and the terrified young girl who had stumbled into his berth. Poor kid, she didn't come out of it alive—and yet, could the wreck have caused such a bashed-in skull or made her confess to the big man before she died: "I'm afraid! I want to get out of here! I've been afraid for so long..."



CHAPTER ONE

A Dream Come True

MR. MADDOX had a nightmare. In fact, it was the hoary-headed grandfather of all nightmares. His bed whirled wildly around. Or was it the ceiling which whirled? Mr. Maddox was not conscious of reasoning out such trifling details as he catapulted through space.

Tangled in the bedclothes, Mr. Maddox rammed the bedside window with the rear of his broad anatomy. He distinctly felt and then heard the glass crash. In fact, glass was crashing all over.

Limp, bruised and all but broken, Mr. Mad-

dox was slammed, bedclothes and all, down into the bed once more. And then a body landed on him. A woman screamed in his ear.

"Wha'—wha'—wha's matter?" Mr. Maddox blurted dazedly.

His big, groping hand struck a woman's bare shoulder. Nightmare or no nightmare, it was a woman's bare shoulder, in bed with Joe Maddox where it had no business to be.

THE DEADER

By T. T. FLYNN

Author of "Hayseed Homicide," etc.

"Who're you, sister?" Mr. Maddox gasped indignantly.

"I'm the lady across from you!" she gasped. "Oh, my God! What's happening? We're dying! I want to get out of here! I'm afraid! I've been afraid so long!"

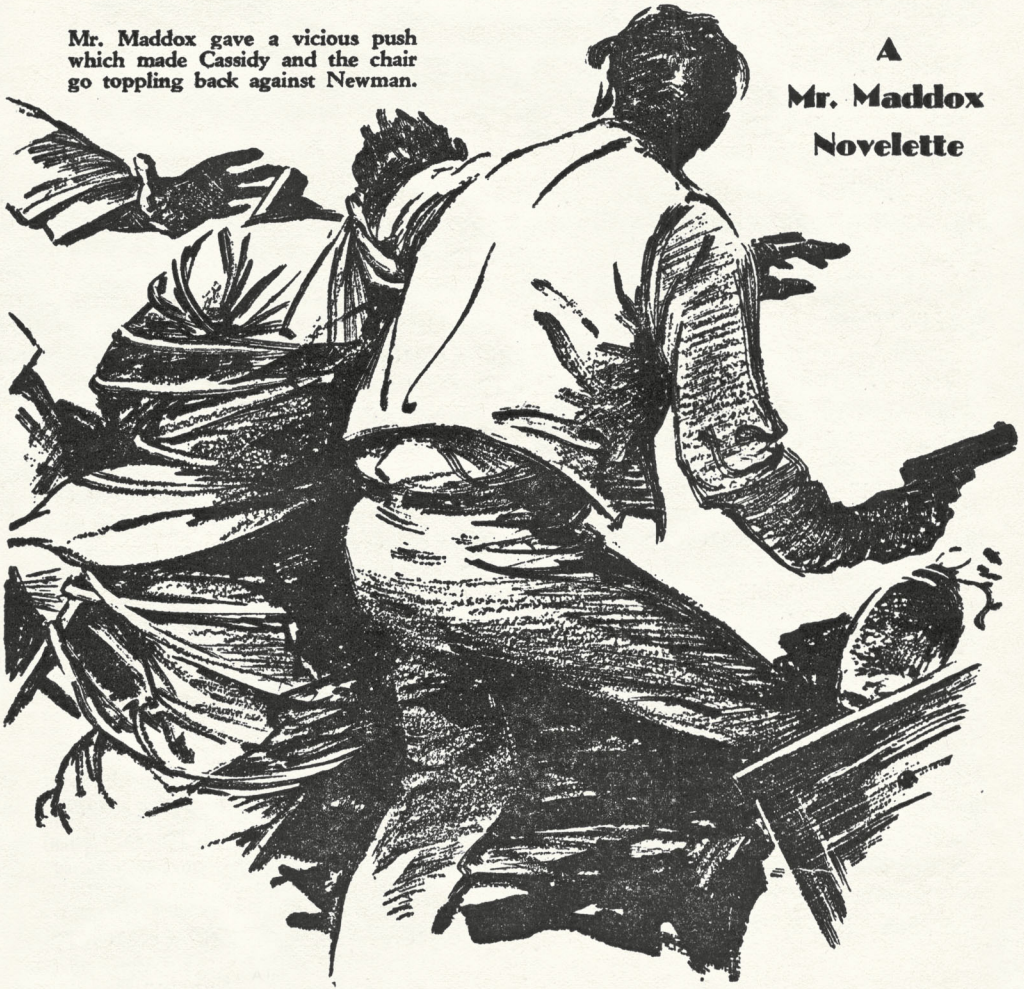
Her weight vanished suddenly. Mr. Maddox groped for her. Evidently she had left his bed. His head struck something hard and his brain protested against any further attempt at thinking.

The lady across . . . The lady across . . . The lady across—aisle. . . . *Aisle! Across the aisle!*

Mr. Maddox struggled to a sitting position. His bed had come to rest at an alarming slant. Cold air was rushing through the broken window. Cries of fright and ghastly groans came through the darkness. Men were shouting. Women were wailing.

"I *would* have to dream a thing like this," Mr. Maddox said aloud, shakily but savagely,

Mr. Maddox gave a vicious push which made Cassidy and the chair go toppling back against Newman.



A
Mr. Maddox
Novelette

"and then wake up and find it's true!"

He remembered everything now. He was on the Miami Limited—in Lower Eight. At least, he had been bound for Miami when he went to sleep. Oscar, his wizened and shrewd assistant, had been in Upper Eight.

"Oscar!" Mr. Maddox called.

Upper Eight did not answer. Mr. Maddox untangled himself from the bedclothes, gingerly put bare feet on the sloping car floor, and stood up between the heavy berth curtains.

His exploring hands found no sign of Oscar in Upper Eight. A man plunged past in the aisle, bumped hard into Mr. Maddox, and careened on. Some of the uproar was subsiding. Mr. Maddox began to think logically.

THERE had been a terrible wreck, of course. The stout, steel Pullman car seemed to have survived the disaster in fair order.

Sorting back through the nightmarish impressions, Mr. Maddox decided the Pullman must have rolled down a high bank. Now it was resting far over on one side, the front end lower than the back.

Since there was no window in the upper berth, Oscar must have been pitched inward. Mr. Maddox thrust an inquisitive bare foot out into the aisle. A yelp of pain escaped him as another man stepped on his toes.

Down there in the blackness, Oscar's dazed and angry voice protested.

"Stop walkin' on my face!" Oscar said.

Mr. Maddox groped toward the voice. He found Oscar several feet away on the aisle floor, sprawled against the opposite berth. Mr. Maddox grabbed with both hands and heaved Oscar upright. The little man tried to struggle. Mr. Maddox gritted at him: "Don't pull a goof act on me! This is Joe! Joe Maddox! Get in my berth here. I think we can get out through the window."

Now that he was wide awake, Mr. Maddox could see the pallid starlight outside. He hurriedly wrapped blankets around one brawny arm. With that protection, he knocked jagged glass out of the window frame.

He piled the blankets over the lower sill and carefully eased his bulk out into the fresh, cool night. There was enough starlight to show a high weed-grown embankment slanting far up to the rails. Pullmans lay down the steep slope like tossed jackstraws. Several of the cars were standing almost on end.

Other passengers had already escaped from doors or windows. Trainmen's electric lanterns were winking back along the jumbled line of coaches. At the front of the wrecked train, steam roared dully from the engine's safety valve and drifted along the embankment in ghostly, gray veils. The pre-dawn air had a bite.

"Pass out my clothes and get yours out of your berth," Mr. Maddox ordered as he clung outside the broken window. He added: "We can help better if we're dressed."

Much later dawn came, all gold and crimson above the eastern horizon. But the scene of the wreck held little beauty. The disjointed, shattered train lay along the gouged and torn embankment like a slain monster. Windows had splintered. Steel had been hammered, bent, broken. Passengers had been hurt, some only slightly, a smaller number seriously. A few were dead.

The nearest town was many miles away. Before help arrived, the train crew and the able-bodied passengers had cleared out most of the coaches. The survivors, hastily and partially dressed, some wrapped in blankets, huddled in groups outside the coaches or moved about staring at the damage and the swampy forest which lay all around.

Mr. Maddox, having done all that he could, lighted one of the fat, black cigars which had survived in the breast pocket of his coat. He pulled a blanket Indian-style around his broad shoulders and stood on the railroad track. He was bruised, sore, and very grateful to be alive when Cassidy, the big Masterton Agency detective, climbed up the bank and joined him.

"**W**ELL, Chief Wahoo," Cassidy greeted, "if you had a feather in your hair and a bow and arrow we could go hunting." Cassidy saw a cigar in the breast pocket of Mr. Maddox' coat and helped himself. "A mess, isn't it, Joe?" he said, fumbling for a match. "I guess we're lucky."

Mr. Maddox nodded. "Sabotage?" he asked.

"Broken rail. God only knows if it was tampered with. The FBI will look into it."

"Five dead," Mr. Maddox said heavily.

Cassidy nodded. "One out of your car, I think."

"Don't know," Mr. Maddox said. "I've been too busy to notice much of anything."

"A woman," Cassidy stated.

"Tough," said Mr. Maddox, shaking his head.

Oscar limped gingerly toward them on the railroad ties. The little man's shirt collar was open, his mashed brown felt hat perched askew on his head. Blood smeared the front of Oscar's natty tan overcoat. His grimy right cheek was bruised, his right eye was swollen.

"If this was buzzard's roost, you two would be at home," Oscar remarked.

Mr. Maddox thrust a big forefinger at Oscar's tan overcoat. "What's that, blood? Were you hurt?"

"I helped a guy who hit some glass." Oscar tenderly felt his bruised cheek. "Before that I fell out of my berth on my head," he

said. "An' then everybody in the car ran back an' forth across my face."

"I'd pay to watch that," Cassidy said. He looked hopefully at Oscar's features. "No hobnailed shoes? No lumberjack spikes? Well, maybe I'll live to see it."

Oscar gave Cassidy a sour look. Old feuds rankled between them. "Joe," Oscar said, "wasn't that a lousy break the girl across the aisle got?"

"Haven't seen her."

"She's up ahead there by the baggage car, under a blanket."

"Hurt?"

"Dead."

"That's bad," Mr. Maddox commented regretfully. "She seemed like a swell—" He broke off as memory clubbed him. "How the devil can she be dead? She was in my—"

Mr. Maddox stopped talking and shrugged. Cassidy gave him a quick look.

"It always gets the ones you'd like to see escape," Mr. Maddox said thoughtfully. "She was a cute kid. I noticed her several times. Are you certain it was the girl across from us?"

"Dames," said Oscar, "don't slip my mind that easily. Take a look at her."

"I think I will," Mr. Maddox said.

Cassidy blew a smoke ring and watched the breeze swirl it past Mr. Maddox' broad, bland face. "Joe, you started to say something about her. I didn't catch it. Where was she?"

"Across the aisle from us."

"That wasn't what you started to say."

"Must have been," Mr. Maddox said blandly. "What else could I have said? Maybe it's your ears, Cassidy. You feel all right?"

Cassidy put the cigar in the corner of his mouth. He cocked the end up. "I feel fine," he said. "I'll have a look at her, too. Nothing else to do."

Cassidy said it casually. He was apt to be most active and full of unpleasant surprises when he was casual.

CHAPTER TWO

Accidentally on Purpose

MR. MADDOX re-canvassed his memory as they walked along the railroad track. That nightmare was still vivid, gruesome.

But the Pullman berth *had* turned over. Mr. Maddox *had* fallen on the berth ceiling. The girl across the aisle *had* been in the berth with him. She had spoken to him. She had said she was the lady across the aisle. He had gripped her bare shoulder, heard her fright, her panic.

Five blanket-wrapped bodies had been placed side-by-side on the damp grass of the

railroad embankment. "The second one," Oscar said.

Mr. Maddox lifted the blanket on the second body. Cassidy bent over and looked, too.

"She sure hit something hard," Cassidy said with professional detachment. "Crushed the top of her head. I'll bet she never knew what hit her."

Mr. Maddox lowered the blanket. He preferred to think of this black-haired, fresh-cheeked girl as she'd been the afternoon before, sitting across the aisle. She could not have been much more than twenty—fresh, vivid, vital with youth and interest. He remembered little details, the curve of her head as she sat reading, the way she occasionally looked out of the window with absorbed interest, the self-possessed detachment with which she had regarded admiring male glances.

Cassidy spoke to a harassed-looking brakeman who came up and took a stand by the bodies.

"Know who this girl is? This second one?"

"They'll be moved in a few minutes, and identified in Rushville," the brakeman answered wearily. "Everybody's going to Rushville. We'll have a train ready there for the ones who want to go on."

"You going on, Joe?" Cassidy asked as they climbed back up to the road bed.

"I started to Hialeah. Might as well get there as quickly as I can," Mr. Maddox decided.

"You're losing dough, I guess, until you get that racing book of yours open for horse bets again," Cassidy suggested.

"Pop Harvey has had my racing string at the track for two weeks," Mr. Maddox retorted blandly. "Don't mention horse bets while I've got purses to win."

"I'd get a laugh out of that on any morning but this," Cassidy retorted. "Your horses, Joe, and you, too, would fall dead if one of them won a race." Cassidy's look was speculative. "I'll be with you in Miami, Joe. Keep your nose clean or look out."

"My nose," said Mr. Maddox, "was never in better shape."

"I hope so," Cassidy said, and the way he said it had an ominous sound.

FIVE days later in Miami, Mr. Maddox was moodily struggling with a conscience. Each day for five days, he had struggled harder. But the conscience flourished.

In Rushville, after the train wreck, Mr. Maddox had successfully kept away from newspaper reporters who sought colorful details. He had submitted to an examination by a railroad doctor. He had taken the trouble to learn that the dead girl's name was Faith Herron.

Her railroad ticket had been purchased in

New York. Her purse, which had been located in her berth, held some eighteen hundred dollars in travelers' checks. That was all. Faith Herron apparently had been traveling without any identification other than her name on the travelers' checks.

Mr. Maddox was aware that the signed application for the travelers' checks undoubtedly had included an address. Such details were the business of the authorities. Joe Maddox's business was to get to Miami, and to keep his name out of the newspapers.

But now, five days later, conscience was lusty and insistent. Mr. Maddox had tried to tell himself that he might have been mistaken. After all, he had been asleep when the wreck occurred. He had been dazed, rattled. He could have imagined some of the details. Who could say where nightmares end and dazing facts begin?

Mr. Maddox had reviewed the facts many times. The answers were always the same. Faith Herron had been alive after the Pullman had turned over and had stopped moving.

She had been frightened, but she had been able to talk coherently. She had been able to leave Joe Maddox' berth and hurry away. But Cassidy had been right about one thing. The girl could not have moved or spoken after her head had been crushed.

Slice those facts any way you fancied, and the answer was the same. Murder. In the darkness and the excitement, with all evidence pointing to an accidental death, the girl had been murdered. Conscience cried that Mr. Maddox could have pointed all that out on the day of the wreck. At that time it might have been possible to bag the murderer quickly.

Mr. Maddox had shut his mind to those first uneasy proddings of the truth. Newspaper publicity was the one thing a big-time bookmaker like Joe Maddox shunned like the plague.

If he had stirred up a murder mystery, everything would have rested on his testimony that the girl had been in his berth unharmed, speaking to him after the Pullman stopped moving. Her mysterious death would have made headlines across the country—with Joe Maddox' name topping hers.

Then and now Mr. Maddox chilled at the thought. But conscience was worse. An uneasy hunch about Cassidy topped everything with a growing foreboding.

Cassidy, that big, grizzled Masterton detective, had stayed in Rushville. Racetracks were Cassidy's business. He was one of the crack Masterton Agency men retained by the big race ovals to stop bookmaking, spot pickpockets, be alert for crooked races.

But first, last, and always, Cassidy was a trained detective, instinctively watching for some breach of law. Thinking back, Mr. Mad-

dox could see that Cassidy had been alert since the moment on the railroad track when they had talked of the girl's death. Cassidy had sensed something wrong. One dollar would get you ten of Joe Maddox' money that Cassidy had been probing ever since, trying to find out if Maddox had slipped somewhere.

THE matter of Oscar's overcoat did not help. It was just before noon, the fifth day after the wreck, when Mr. Maddox walked into the hotel suite which overlooked broad Biscayne Boulevard and sparkling Biscayne Bay.

In shirtsleeves, Oscar was sitting at a long table covered with betting sheets, expertly taking race bets over two telephones.

"Howzit going, Joe?" Oscar asked as he put one telephone down and snatched the receiver of the other. "Yeah," Oscar said. "Sure . . . A hundred to place an' two hundred to show, on Low Knocker, in the second. Yes, *sir*, Mr. Carter. Right here all afternoon as usual. An' glad to see you down from New York and rememberin' Joe Maddox." Oscar hung up.

"Applesauce," Mr. Maddox growled. He had gone to the window and was staring out glumly.

Oscar reached for a cigarette. "Since when are you applesaucin' a horse fan like Jack Carter? You've made a good dollar off him every year. If it wasn't that he could afford it, I'd be ashamed to cover his dough on some of the punk hides he likes."

"Tell him so," Mr. Maddox retorted without looking around.

"What's eatin' you?" Oscar demanded. "Every day it gets worse."

"I feel lousy."

"It's that train wreck," Oscar guessed as he answered another telephone call. "You got a jolted liver or somethin'? No, not you, mister," Oscar said into the telephone. "I was talkin' to another guy in the room here . . . Yeah, it's the truth, ain't it? Livers are goin' bad again from the liquor they're peddlin' these days."

Oscar recorded another bet, hung up, inhaled from his cigarette and chuckled.

"Anyway, I got a break out of that train wreck. I lost my overcoat."

"I thought you wrapped it up and brought it here to Miami to be cleaned," Mr. Maddox said absently.

"About an hour ago the valet telephoned up and said he'd lost my overcoat," Oscar said with relish. "He asked what it cost new, an' sent up the dough without a groan. Is that a break?"

Mr. Maddox turned from the window, "He didn't even ask you to wait a few days while they tried to find the coat?"

"Nope."

"Three days since you sent it down," Mr. Maddox calculated quickly. "Hardly enough time to get it cleaned. But you get paid off cash in a hurry. I'll lay you five-to-one the price you told the valet would buy a new suit and a new overcoat."

"A hat an' shoes, maybe," Oscar concluded, unabashed. "Did I ask him to lose my clothes? That was a swell coat. I thought a lot of it."

"I smell a rat. A dead and ripe rat!" Mr. Maddox growled with sudden conviction. "I'm going to talk to that valet."

"Look, Joe! Don't try to get my coat back. I'm satisfied."

"That's exactly what I'm going to do," Mr. Maddox stated grimly. "Or know why I can't. Nobody takes an overcoat in Miami. Everybody's trying to get rid of one. Who would want yours?"

"I got my dough. I'm happy," Oscar protested.

Mr. Maddox was already stalking out, his broad face set with determination. His parting remarks made no sense to Oscar, who knew nothing about the conscience, the accusing facts behind it, or Mr. Maddox' guess as to what Cassidy was doing.

"You've got blood from that wreck all over your overcoat, too!" Mr. Maddox said forcefully. "It may be blood around your neck, you dope! Or my neck!"

"What's the idea of a crack like that?" Oscar called in a startled voice.

Mr. Maddox slammed the door and kept going.

VALET SERVICE in the hotel basement was steamy-hot, filled with the intermittent hiss of pressing irons, the pungent smell of steam and cleaning fluid. Nick, the man in charge, was small, alert, olive-skinned, black-haired, and somewhat oily in features and manner. His toothful smile greeted the vast and prosperous-looking Mr. Maddox, from suite 512.

"Oh, yesss," Nick said, and he rubbed moist palms in beaming pleasure. "The ov'coat that was lost. Yesss. Lost. Too bad, sir. Gladly I pay for the ov'coat. Yesss."

Mr. Maddox passed a handkerchief over his broad, pink face which was beginning to perspire.

"Yes, hell!" he said coldly. "I know the overcoat's lost. I'm aware you paid for it. Where was it lost? We want it back."

"Yesss. Very good price, too, and gladly I pay for ov'coat. Yesss."

"Stop hissing at me," Mr. Maddox growled. "Where did that overcoat go after you received it?"

Nick's flashing smile grew more dazzling. "Why, we send ov'coat to cleaners, sir. Yesss. Everything to cleaners, sir. We do not clean ov'coat here."

"What cleaners?"

"Bayfront Cleaners. Clean ev'thing for us."

It's the patented filter with its 66 mesh-screen baffles, that whirlcools the smoke—retains flakes and slugs—absorbs moisture—minimizes raw mouth and tongue bite. When filter is discolored, it has done its job. Discard it and put in a fresh one—costs only ONE CENT. Enjoy the benefits of Frank Medico Pipe, Cigarette and Cigar Holders.



"And the overcoat didn't come back from the Bayfront Cleaners?"

"Oh, no, sir. Too bad. I pay good price for ov'coat." Nick's smile grew a trifle strained. "High price. Ov'coat was in bad shape. All bloody. Yesss."

"Yesss," Mr. Maddox hissed back before he realized what he was doing. He snorted irritably. "You've got me doing it, too." He made a note in a small, leather-bound memo book. "Bayfront Cleaners, eh? Well, I'll make them sweat while I get to the bottom of this business."

Nick's oily face had also started to perspire. He wiped it. The toothy smile had vanished. Small, dark eyes were clouded with sudden worry.

"Bad!" he exclaimed. "Oh, my, yesss. I pay gladly too. How I help ov'coat being lost? I pay high, and now you make trouble, sir. I lose my job maybe. Please! Be satisfied, sir. Yesss?"

"No," said Mr. Maddox coldly. "Anything more you want to say?"

"Yesss! No! No!" Nick stammered unhappily. He again wiped his perspiring face. The handkerchief dangled from the moist hand he thrust out in appeal. "No trouble, please, sir. I pay more money even now to make good people of our hotel happy. Yesss?"

"I'll take the overcoat," said Mr. Maddox curtly, "or I'll raise more hell than you ever thought existed. Think it over."

The manager of the Bayfront Cleaners, a plump and cheerful man, personally attended to his large and distinguished visitor. He got out ledgers, records, called in his head cleaner and the man who removed spots. His conclusion was regretful.

"The overcoat just didn't get to us, Mr. Maddox. Our checking system is unusually efficient, I flatter myself. We do a great deal of work for out-of-town visitors and have to be careful. We hardly ever lose anything. Usually when we do, we can trace the article and make recovery without trouble. The records would show if the overcoat came into the plant. With blood on it, as you describe, our spotter would have handled it, and remembered it. We're insured, of course, and gladly make good the value of any lost article. But we must have some record of receiving it. Your hotel valet should have his receipt."

Mr. Maddox had listened patiently. His smile was wry but cordial as he stood up.

"Thanks for your trouble. I'm satisfied you didn't receive the overcoat. Sorry to have bothered you this way."

Mr. Maddox went back to the hotel through the flooding noonday sunlight. Up north, snow and sleet were scouring the cities. Here in booming, surging Miami, jammed, crowded, gay with all types of uniforms and a tidal

wave of prosperous tourists, anyone should have been satisfied in the golden sunshine. Mr. Maddox was grim and disturbed.

The accusing facts about the dead girl prodded his conscience. The disappearance of Oscar's bloodstained overcoat was even worse. A premonition of trouble ready to strike was getting worse.

Joe Maddox was not a superstitious man. In thirty years of taking racetrack bets from rich and poor, honest and crooked, in every large racing center of the country, he had learned that superstition rarely paid off.

But he was also aware that all actions, good or bad, usually balanced. The crooks sooner or later wound up behind the eight-ball. If the law didn't get them, some angle of the underworld did. The greedy got too greedy. The chumps got what a sucker usually deserved. The guilty walked with a guilty conscience. When a squareshooter broke the rules, he was wide open to disaster.

Joe Maddox prided himself on being a square shooter. Now, as he returned to the hotel suite before going out to Hialeah track for the afternoon, he could almost feel the hot breath of retribution warming the broad base of his neck.

CHAPTER THREE

Wheel Chair Wager

OSCAR'S greeting as Mr. Maddox walked into the suite did not help.

"What phony racket are we mixed in?" Oscar demanded. The little man's shrewd, wizened face was tight with tension. He sat hunched over the litter of betting sheets, one hand on a ringing telephone.

"Forget it," Mr. Maddox advised. He took a bottle of rare Scotch whiskey and a tall glass off a low wall table, and built himself a drink with icewater out of a thermos pitcher on the same table.

"Yah!" said Oscar bitterly. "How can I forget it when some guy pays big money for my messed-up overcoat?"

Mr. Maddox choked on the drink. Oscar answered the insistently ringing telephone and took another race bet. Mr. Maddox stood deep in thought, glass forgotten in his big hand, as Oscar hung up.

"Who paid money for your overcoat?"

"An' you lammin' out of here talkin' about them overcoat bloodstains bein' around our necks!" Oscar reminded bitterly. "I been like a mouse on a hot pan. First I think you're tryin' to give me the creeps for a rib. Then—"

"The overcoat!" Mr. Maddox snarled. "What about the guy who paid dough for your overcoat?"

Oscar leaned back and took a deep breath.

"You musta burned that valet plenty, Joe. He comes up here himself. If I ever seen a bum who was sorry for himself an' scratching for an out, I had him here. He's sweatin' an' all but chewin' his fingers. He makes a clean breast. The overcoat ain't lost. He sold it."

"To whom?"

"Lemme tell it, will you? The dirge he sings to me is that a guy comes three days ago and tells him confidentially that there should be an overcoat turned in from our suite with bloodstains on it. An' a certain detective agency wants the coat to use in a case they're workin' up. A private case, see? No questions asked—no talk wanted!"

"He didn't name the agency?"

"Nope. Anyway, that's the story. The dick knew we had this suite. He knew about my coat. He put it reasonable to this Nick. 'Who wants an old stained overcoat?' he asks Nick. 'It'll clean out right. If it's lost, the owner will take the price of it an' do nipups. Clothes get lost all the time. What's the risk if we slip you three hundred cold cash for the coat? You can pay the guy double an' still have foldin' money left. It's a favor to the guy who owns the coat. A favor to Nick, the valet. A favor to the detective agency.'"

"That dirty crook downstairs!" Mr. Maddox grated.

"He swears the detective said if he didn't take the three hundred, they'd get a court paper an' take the coat for nothin'," Oscar continued. "This Nick took a snifter at the dough the guy was wavin' under his nose, got weak at givin' up the coat for no dough, an' took a chance. Now he's afraid he'll get pinched, fired, or caught cold between some gang killin'. He left the rest of the three hundred with me an' almost flopped on his knees beggin' for an O. K. If that guy wasn't tellin' the truth, Joe, I never seen it. He was sweat-in' like a spring shower."

"Yesss!" Mr. Maddox said savagely.

Oscar looked over his shoulder before he realized Mr. Maddox had said it. "I thought he was hauntin' me," Oscar said weakly.

Mr. Maddox finished the Scotch and put the glass on the table. He paced to the window, to the door, back to the window. Oscar took two more bets off the telephones in quick succession, and then blurted: "What's it mean, Joe?"

"Did he describe the detective?"

"Yeah. I wrote it down." Oscar read off a slip of paper. "Guy about Nick's size. Plenty sun-tanned. Blue single-breasted suit. Panama. Kind of a big mouth, with a gold tooth upstairs on one side. Gold seal ring on his left hand. The valet says he'd know him anywhere."

"Either Nick' lying or he's got a camera eye," Mr. Maddox decided. He bit off the

end of a thick cigar, jammed the cigar into his mouth and then forgot to light it. "Wasn't Cassidy at any rate," he muttered. "Do you know whether that big flatfoot has hit town yet or not?"

Oscar shrugged. "Joe, what kinda dice are bein' rolled? What's my overcoat got to do with anythin'?"

"Telephone the Masterton Agency's local office," Mr. Maddox ordered. He started to pace the room again.

OSCAR made the connection, thrust out the handset, and turned to answer the other phone.

"Masterton Detective Agency," a woman's voice stated.

"Is Detective Cassidy in town?" Mr. Maddox asked.

"Just a moment, please."

He waited more than a moment. A man came on the wire. "You want Mr. Cassidy?"

"Yes."

"Who is this, please?"

"This," said Mr. Maddox, scowling, "is Mr. Gillfily. Abner Gillfily. I want Cassidy."

"Gillfily? Gillfily? Ah, yes, of course. Mr. Gillfily, what makes you think our Mr. Cassidy is in town?"

"Well, isn't he?"

"I'll have to check on that, Mr. Gillfily. Where are you calling from? I'll telephone back in a few minutes."

"Do that," Mr. Maddox requested cordially. "I'm calling from the fishing pier. I just saw a fish that looked familiar and I wanted to see if Cassidy had taken a hook." Mr. Maddox slammed the receiver down on strained silence at the other end.

"So what?" Oscar demanded.

"Big mystery about Cassidy." Mr. Maddox struck a fist into the other palm. "I had a hunch! Looks like I'm right. That Masterton office is covering for Cassidy. They're not admitting he's in town. The big flatfoot is cooking trouble."

"For us?"

"Who else, seeing the way your overcoat was snatched from the valet. Three hundred for it probably still leaves Cassidy screaming. But if he gets hot on a case, he'll shoot the works."

"I don't get it," Oscar said. "I ain't done nothin'. You ain't done nothin'."

Mr. Maddox mixed himself another drink. "I will now give you the facts of life," he told Oscar, and he proceeded to do so. The facts about the wreck, the dead girl, and Cassidy's probable suspicions.

Oscar's thin face went through a gamut of emotions as he listened. His voice sounded choked when he spoke. "You think Cassidy's

got an idea *you* killed her?" he managed to ask.

"Probably you," Mr. Maddox said. "She must have bled a lot. Your overcoat had blood on it."

"But I helped a guy! You remember, I run into that Pullman ahead of ours, scratchin' matches to find a dame who was yellin' to get out. An' I meet this guy with blood all over him tellin' her to shut up an' he'll get her out. But he's a stretcher case himself almost. He started to keel over an' grabbed me. Busted glass had cut him bad. So I help him outside an' never mind my overcoat. Then I go back an' get the dame. All she's got is a sprained ankle. For that," said Oscar heatedly, "somebody makes to stick me with murder! Why didn't you tell about that dead girl while you had the chance? What was it she said to you—she'd been afraid a long time?"

Mr. Maddox nodded. "She must have been running away from something," he said. "And she was being followed and she didn't know it. The man must have been riding in that same Pullman with her. When the wreck occurred, he had a perfect murder set-up. All he had to do was locate her in the darkness, smack her down, and who would suspect she hadn't been killed in the wreck?"

"You think a man killed her?"

"Would she be afraid of a woman for a long time? Would a woman think fast and sock her on the head that way?"

"Sounds like a man," Oscar admitted. "How'd he ever find her in that dark Pullman?"

"He could have heard her voice," Mr. Maddox guessed. "He could have heard her talking to me and jumped her as soon as she got out of my berth. Didn't you hear anything while you were on the floor?"

"Everybody in the train was runnin' over my face," Oscar said, still irritable at the memory. "But I think I heard her talkin' to you. Joe, why don't you give on this? Drop around to headquarters. Say you've been thinkin' about the wreck, an' just had a hunch the girl could have been murdered. That'll be reasonable. It'll put you in the clear. You can laugh at Cassidy an' his screwball ideas."

"I've been thinking of it," Mr. Maddox admitted. "This afternoon I'll decide what to do."

"Then it may be too late."

"I doubt it," Mr. Maddox said. "I'm not clear yet about some things. Why didn't Cassidy collect your overcoat himself?"

"Could be he wasn't in town that day."

"Could be," Mr. Maddox admitted. "But three hundred cash forked over without a yelp doesn't sound like Cassidy or the Masterton Agency. Not unless they've been given an unlimited expense account by the railroad or the girl's family." Mr. Maddox shook his head as

he picked up his expensive, fine-weave Panama. "And without my testimony, I can't figure the railroad or anyone else shooting the works on an expense account. I'll think it over."

MR. MADDUX was going out when Oscar called him back.

"I forgot," said Oscar. "Here's a five-hundred-bet I turned down. On Willy-be-Good, in the fourth, to win. A dame named Henrietta Newman telephoned it in. I never heard of her. She said she's sick an' can't bring the cash in."

"How did she hear of us? Who told her we had a book at this place?" Mr. Maddox demanded alertly.

"I asked. She said a friend on a newspaper told her, but if there was anythin' wrong about it, she wouldn't say who he was. She left this address and telephone number. If you stop by before the race, she'll have the cash. She can't get out to the track an' bet it herself."

Mr. Maddox considered. This sort of thing happened all the time. Friends recommended friends to call Joe Maddox.

"I'll get her money on my way out to the track," Mr. Maddox decided. "I'll call you back if I don't."

"Might be smart not to take it," Oscar suggested. "Willy-be-Good handicaps to take the fourth race at about three-to-one."

"She'll be back if she wins. See you this evening."

Mr. Maddox ate a skimpy lunch before heading for the track. Conscience and the happenings of the morning had ruined his appetite. He scanned another newspaper as he ate, searching for further mention of the wreck or the dead girl. The paper had nothing.

Half a block off Biscayne Boulevard, out in the residential section, Mr. Maddox stood for a moment sizing up the house where the five-hundred-dollar-bet waited. It was a sprawling, white stucco bungalow in a large yard. A red-tiled roof and iron grillwork at the windows were framed by tall palm trees.

Miami was full of such homes, not lavish, not cheap. Many were owned by winter visitors who had more elaborate homes in the North. A woman living here probably could afford a five-hundred-dollar-bet with no angry husband later protesting his wife's gambling losses.

The front door was slightly ajar behind a screen door when Mr. Maddox pushed the bell button. A woman's voice called: "Who is it, please?"

"Mr. Maddox, about that telephone call."

"Oh! Will you come in?"

Mr. Maddox entered.

SHE was a young woman and she sat in a wheel chair near the front windows of a small and cheerful living room. Mr. Maddox guessed that once she probably had been quite stunning. Now her blond hair was drawn tightly back in an old-fashioned knot, and her thin face had an almost death-like pallor.

His shrewd, sympathetic look noted eyes shadowed by pain or illness. Her thin shoulders drooped under a blue bedjacket. Mr. Maddox was not aware that his huge and prosperous figure, his broad, warm smile were like a charge of vitality and cheerfulness entering the quiet room.

"If you've changed your mind about betting, it's quite all right," he told her.

"Oh, no. I want to. It's—it's something to think about," she said, smiling wanly. "Won't you sit down? I'll get the money."

She wheeled the chair around toward a mahogany secretary. Her efforts were so awkward that Mr. Maddox jumped up, offering: "Here, let me help you."

She nodded, and as Mr. Maddox pushed the chair he thought wryly that this was the first time in thirty years Joe Maddox had pushed a wheel chair to collect a race bet. A twinge of pity made him wonder if he should take the money.

From a brown leather purse she gave him hundred-dollar bills. Five bills. Half an inch of money remained in the purse. None of the bills seemed small. Mr. Maddox forgot the twinge of pity. Sick or well, this young lady could afford her amusement.

"It's Mrs. Newman, isn't it?" he asked as he wheeled her back to the front windows.

"Yes," she said, and she hesitated. "Can't you forget my name? My husband would be embarrassed if people knew I was betting so much." Her wan smile asked understanding. "I know betting is foolish. But it gives me a little pleasure. And—and it's my business, isn't it?"

"Entirely your business," Mr. Maddox assured her, and he chuckled. "A lot of horse fans feel the same way."

"Gossip travels fast," she said.

"I don't gossip," Mr. Maddox said amiably. He stood by the windows, entering the bet in his memo book, and asked idly: "Who gave you my name?"

"Are you sure it's all right that he told me?"

"Quite sure."

"I heard Roy Rolph mention your name. Do you know him?"

"Everyone around the Miami tracks knows Rolphy," Mr. Maddox said. "He writes one of the liveliest sport columns in the game. Rolph must have tipped you to bet on this horse, Willy-be-Good."

"Well, yes," she admitted. "But I wouldn't

want him to know that I'm betting so much."

"Not a word to him," Mr. Maddox promised.

He was looking out the window at a passing automobile. Something about the set of the driver's hat, the way the man stared hard at the house as he drove slowly past, made Mr. Maddox come to sharp attention.

He stepped closer to the window, watched the sedan slowly approach the corner and steer to make a U-turn.

"Is something wrong?" the woman asked.

"Nothing."

"You looked queer, staring out the window that way."

"My car just passed," Mr. Maddox said blandly. "I'll have to go. By the way, should anyone ask if you've placed a bet with Joe Maddox, it might be best to let him wonder."

"I will."

"You'll hear from me if you win."

Mr. Maddox was already leaving the room, almost too hastily for politeness. He wanted to run, to be out on the sidewalk when the small sedan came rolling slowly back past the house.

CHAPTER FOUR

"Double, Double, Toil and Trouble"

HE WAS almost to the sidewalk when the sedan returned. He heard the clutch go in, as if the driver had a sudden impulse to stop. He was biting the end off a big cigar when his glance met the man behind the steering wheel.

Mr. Maddox jerked the cigar from his mouth. His broad face beamed. "Cassidy!" he called.

Cassidy stopped the car. His muscular face looked surprised. Behind the surprise was something else. Cassidy masked whatever it was and said: "Are you always under foot, Joe?"

Mr. Maddox opened the car door. "Going my way, pal?"

"Where is your way?"

"The way you're going," Mr. Maddox chuckled, and got in.

"I'm going to the track."

"So am I," said Mr. Maddox. "Saves me a bus ride. I miss the gas I used to burn up. Lost fifteen pounds lately by walking."

"You still look like a bag of lard," Cassidy said kindly. He turned into Biscayne Boulevard. "And you get around, Joe. What's cookin' back in that house?"

"Sick friend," said Mr. Maddox sadly.

"What kind of friend?"

"A lady."

"What's wrong with her?"

"Fsk, tsk," Mr. Maddox clucked. He light-

ed the cigar, beamed at Cassidy. "I should ask for a doctor's report when I call. She's in a wheel chair."

"Now ain't that too, too bad," said Cassidy. He drove in silence. His profile had a certain grim set of satisfaction. "Was she hurt in that train wreck?" Cassidy asked suddenly.

Mr. Maddox yanked the cigar from his mouth. His broad face remained bland. "So that," he said, "was why you were tailing me."

"I wasn't—" Cassidy stopped. "Maybe that was it, Gillfilly," Cassidy said, and added coldly: "The office traced that telephone call. Mighty anxious to pump information about me, weren't you, Joe?"

"Providence," said Mr. Maddox, "protects fatheads. But I get worried about you, Cassidy. Now that we're frank, chum, what about that overcoat?"

"What overcoat?"

"I wouldn't have guessed you were sucker enough to part with three hundred dollars for nothing."

"Three hundred?" said Cassidy. His scowl sought Mr. Maddox' face. "Go on. What about the three hundred?"

"I should let you keep falling over yourself," Mr. Maddox said. "But I've got a heart. Take my word for it—you're going to prove yourself a terrible fathead."

Cassidy spat out the window. A cold grin turned up the corner of his mouth. "Your heart's as big as a marble," he said.

"Have it your way. Now what?"

"I'm going to watch that lousy plater of yours, Kopper King, run last again," Cassidy said. "Nothing else on my mind, Joe. Or maybe you've got an idea what should be on my mind?"

"You haven't got a mind."

Cassidy laughed. "I told you to keep your nose clean, Joe. How does it feel, pal?"

Mr. Maddox rubbed the end of his nose thoughtfully. Cassidy was packed with solid, satisfied confidence. Cassidy seemed to think he knew something, which he had no intention of revealing. It was unusual, too, that Cassidy had shown no great chagrin at being surprised in front of the stucco bungalow.

Mr. Maddox sank deeper into musing silence. He hadn't thought of the girl in the wheel chair in connection with the train wreck. Even now he didn't. But Cassidy's remark stirred some vague memory. Probably it was imagination. He could have seen some similar girl in the movies or magazines.

HIALEAH track today was like a super-oasis of palms, colorful flowers, deep green grass under the golden bath of winter sunshine. Mr. Maddox expanded as he mingled with the thousands of race fans.

They were here from all the wide world. Rich man, poor man, beggarman, thief, beautiful girls, attractive women, stylish fashions. Many young men in uniform were quite plainly back from hard and dangerous service, hungry for relaxation and amusement.

Cassidy walked in front of the grandstand with Mr. Maddox, and asked with a certain grim amusement: "Worried, Joe? Or swallowed your tongue? You ain't had much to say."

"Guess," Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Are you going to be busy this afternoon or do I have to wear you around?"

"I'll have time to keep an eye on you," Cassidy said. "They got mutual windows here for the talent to bet through, Joe. No bookie bets. Or do you remember?"

"I seldom bet," said Mr. Maddox. "Good-bye, Cassidy."

As soon as he was away from the block-faced Masterton detective, Mr. Maddox stopped smiling. They both had been fencing with words. What was behind it, Mr. Maddox did not know. He was beginning to expect the worst. Cassidy was too confident. He had the train wreck on his mind. The hot breath of retribution seemed stronger on Mr. Maddox' neck. All this could have been avoided if he had made a clean breast of everything the morning of the wreck.

"Never again," Mr. Maddox muttered aloud. "No more secrets! The next time I'll give, and give quick!"

He walked slowly through the milling crowd trying to recall what was familiar about the young woman who had bet five hundred on Willy-be-Good in the fourth race. Friends spoke to him. Several tried to talk. Mr. Maddox nodded absently, kept moving and thinking.

The first and second races were run. Nine horses paraded to the starting stalls for the third race. Mr. Maddox hardly saw them. He was thinking about the train wreck, the dead girl, Oscar's bloodstained overcoat.

Did Cassidy and the Masterton Agency think the blood on Oscar's overcoat came from the dead girl? Did they think they could prove it by laboratory tests? Oscar was innocent. But Cassidy was confident. And back to that pale, wan, young woman in the wheel chair. She *did* seem familiar. But where? Why?

Mr. Maddox' eyes were glazed with the intensity of thought as the third race was run. He walked out back of the clubhouse as the horses stormed through the stretch and the thunder of encouraging voices rolled from clubhouse and grandstand.

"The hell with it!" Mr. Maddox suddenly exclaimed, smashing a fist into his palm violently, disgustedly. "I don't know her! Don't

want to know her! Hope I never do know her! The hell with Cassidy too!"

The outburst made him feel better. Good humor returned. He lighted a cigar, cocked it at a jaunty angle, walked back into the clubhouse where lines of winning ticket holders were forming at the cashier windows.

"The hell with it!" Mr. Maddox chuckled—and then he snatched the expensive cigar from his mouth.

He stopped and stared with eyes almost bulging. He turned and followed the figure of a young woman who was walking to cash a winning mutual ticket.

She was a stunning blonde, rather thin, and all too familiar. Wash off the makeup, take the red off her fingernails, throw away the chic hat, forget the trim sports suit, and Joe Maddox had seen her before.

Comb her blond hair back tightly, put a blue bedjacket around her shoulders, a wan smile on her face, and Joe Maddox had seen her in a wheel chair. At least he thought so. That blond hair! That thin and pretty face!

"Can't be!" Mr. Maddox muttered aloud.

He stood back and watched her collect from the fifty-dollar window. She passed near him as she walked away, tucking a sheaf of bills into her purse. She saw him standing there, big cigar clenched tightly in the side of his mouth.

Her glance touched his broad face, hesitated. She frowned slightly as if some thought had jumped into her mind. And then she walked on without any sign of recognition. If she had ever needed a wheel chair, there was no sign of it now in her brisk walk.

"Can't be!" Mr. Maddox muttered again. "Positively, absolutely can't be. Or can it?"

A hand slapped Mr. Maddox' shoulder. He jumped, and as he turned, Cassidy asked sarcastically: "Well, can it, Joe?"

MR. MADDOK' eyes narrowed. "Can what?"

"You're walking like a dope, talking to yourself." Cassidy was grinning broadly. "Worried, Joe? Something on your mind you'd like to talk about?"

"Beat it, you vulture!" Mr. Maddox snapped.

Cassidy almost swaggered away. He had never seemed so cocky, so sure of himself. The girl had disappeared toward the front of the clubhouse. Mr. Maddox walked there, a big, frowning, intent figure.

Some minutes later he saw her moving toward a mutual window. Betting on the fourth race had started. Mr. Maddox ploughed through the crowd and stepped up to the adjoining window in time to hear the girl speak.

"Two tickets on number three, please. To win."

The ticket seller at Mr. Maddox' window asked impatiently: "What'll it be?"

"Eh? Oh! Number three, on the nose, I guess," Mr. Maddox said.

From the corner of his eye he saw the girl give his big figure a brief look. She frowned, as if again recalling something. Mr. Maddox had not opened his program. He turned to the fourth race, looked at the name of number three horse.

"Willy-be-Good!" he said almost prayerfully. "She bets the same horse! And she's seen me before. Can't hide it."

No man at the track today was more distinguished, assured and prosperous than Joe Maddox. From expensive Panama to broad, ruddy face and vast, well-fed mid-section, he was a personality. The gleaming diamond on his left hand might be a trifle large for good taste, but somehow the big, flashing stone seemed to fit Joe Maddox.

The fat, black cigar he chewed restlessly was the only sign that his nerves were getting jumpy. A man did not cover race bets for more than thirty years without developing an acute perception of impending trouble.

The girl joined a pudgy, sunburned man who wore dark glasses, a brown sports coat, tan slacks, light tan sport shoes. They stood out in front of the clubhouse. She nodded back toward the mutual windows. The man looked that way, rising on his toes a little to see better. He lifted a hand and absently rubbed his ear as he looked.

Mr. Maddox stood well back behind other people, cigar suddenly motionless in his mouth. That gesture of rubbing the ear was familiar. He had seen it somewhere before. The pudgy figure was familiar.

Mr. Maddox had a quick, sharp conviction that if the dark glasses were taken off, he might recognize the plump, sunburned face. The feeling was elusive. He could not quite decide where he might have seen the man.

The prancing, mincing thoroughbreds paraded to the post behind the red-coated outrider. Bright racing silks of the jockeys were vivid splashes of color in the sunlight. Beyond them, scarlet flamingos paraded on the deep green grass of the infield.

It was a stirring sight. Mr. Maddox ignored it. He had reverted to the glassy-eyed state of trying to capture an elusive memory.

Absently he noted that Willy-be-Good was not the tote-board favorite after all. The horse was third in the betting, at five-to-one. That was a minor matter. But it added significance to the fact that this girl at the track was also betting on Willy-be-Good. She was not merely following the crowd's choice.

Willy-be-Good won the race and paid twelve-forty. The lady in the wheel chair had won twenty-five hundred dollars from Joe

Maddox, and would also get her five hundred dollars back. Or was it that trim, brisk girl with the pudgy stranger who had won the money?

MR. MADDUX went to a telephone and called the Newman number. He scowled with suspense as he heard the telephone ring and ring. Then the receiver was lifted.

"Yes?" a woman's voice said.

"Mrs. Newman?"

"Yes."

"This is Mr. Maddox."

"Oh! Is anything wrong?"

He could visualize her in the wheel chair by the telephone. Her voice sounded the same. A great load of worry rolled from Mr. Maddox' wide shoulders.

"Your horse won, at five-to-one," he chuckled. "Roy Rolph knew a winner when he tipped you this one."

"Why—why I won a lot of money, didn't I? When will I get it?"

"Sometime this evening, and I'm glad you won," Mr. Maddox said.

It was the truth. Joe Maddox had never been happier to pay out money. It was a beautiful day after all. A man could laugh at Cassidy, could laugh at all the doubt based on nothing more than fancied resemblance between two women.

Mr. Maddox was still in that frame of mind when he walked back to the paddock to watch the saddling of Kopper King. Pop Harvey, his trainer, spectacles canted precariously on a thin nose, answered Mr. Maddox' question cautiously.

"Maybe the King'll show or take fourth money, Joe. He's worked right well lately." Pop Harvey spat. "Anyway, a race'll tighten him. Might be best not to bet him today."

Mr. Maddox noticed the bronzed, rather good-looking face of Roy Rolph, the sports columnist, among the spectators. He left the paddock and joined the man.

"Nice choice you had in the last race, Rolphy."

"Don't kid me, Joe. I dropped a ten-spot on the favorite."

"You tout your friends on Willy-be-Good and then bet another horse?" Mr. Maddox chuckled.

"I never tout anybody," Roy Rolph said. "Can't afford to. But if I was tipping that last race, it wouldn't have been Willy-be-Good. I'd have bet him strictly as goat. Who said I liked him?"

Mr. Maddox stopped smiling. "Is that on the level, Rolphy?"

"Sure it is. Somebody been kidding you?"

"I guess so. Girl by the name of Newman."

"Never heard of her."

"She's sick. Uses a wheel chair. Lives on

the north side, just off Biscayne Boulevard."

"I don't know any ladies in wheel chairs," Roy Rolph denied flatly. "I don't know what it's all about, Joe, but write me out of it."

"I think I will," Mr. Maddox said. He walked back into the paddock where Pop Harvey had just given instructions to Kopper King's jockey. "Pop," Mr. Maddox asked, "how can a girl be in two different places at once?"

Pop adjusted his steel-rimmed spectacles and peered through them. "She can't," Pop retorted. "Not unless she's two different girls, or she's got an alibi for one place that can't be busted."

"That," said Mr. Maddox, "is an idea. I'll look into it."

"Don't know what you're talkin' about, but go right ahead," Pop said obligingly.

Mr. Maddox went back to the telephone. He called Oscar at the hotel. "Anything new?" he asked.

"I don't need nothin' new," Oscar replied glumly. "I see Willy-be-Good took his race. Did you get that dame's dough?"

"Yes. Five hundred."

"I hadda hunch she'd cost us box car cash," Oscar commented sourly. "Look! Have you decided to go to the cops?"

"I'm thinking about it. Keep your mouth closed if Cassidy shows up."

"You lookin' for him to make trouble?"

"I'm looking for anything from now on," Mr. Maddox said. "Cassidy was here at the track a while ago. I don't know where he'll be next. He's up to something."

"Joe! I don't like this!"

"If I liked it any worse I'd leave town," Mr. Maddox said as he hung up.

He went in search of the trim, chic girl and her pudgy escort. He found them. Hours later, with the last race run, he still had them in sight.

They were in an automobile, a flashy sports coupe, finished in two shades of blue, that rolled faster than it should through the home-ward-bound automobile traffic.

CHAPTER FIVE

Murder Odds

MR. MADDUX was the solitary back seat passenger of an old black jalopy that had a knocking motor, tattered upholstery, thin tires, and perhaps three gallons of gasoline in the tank, if the dashboard gauge was correct.

The chauffeur was a long-legged, sooty-black, sad-looking Negro known from Rockingham track in New England to Tia Juana track in Lower California as Daily Double Dan, or Big D.

When Big D hit the Daily Double for a

large payoff he blossomed forth as a sartorial masterpiece, an ebony peacock, strutting high, wide and handsome.

When times were hard, Big D sold the gaudy hats and zoot suits and finally pawned his solid gold store teeth. At such times Big D's toothless, sunken face made him look as lugubrious as he felt. In addition he lisped badly without his teeth. Now, trailing the flashy sports coupe, Big D lisped hollowly over a lean shoulder: "Thith gath gauge thcarthes me, Mithtuh Maddocth."

"I'll scare you worse if you lose that car ahead," Mr. Maddox warned.

"I'm thcared, anyway," Big D said miserably. "Thith ith my thithter-in-law'th car. Thithth friendth came with her. My thither-in-law will be thithth timth ath mad after she takth them home on the buth."

"We discussed all that," Mr. Maddox reminded sternly. "For a hundred bucks you promised a car that would run to any part of the town."

"Yeth, thuh."

"You swore that a hundred bucks would put you into the Daily Double tomorrow and your worries would be over."

"Yeth, thuh, Mithtuh Maddocth, thuh! But I'm thtill thcared, thuh," Big D groaned. "That thithter-in-law of mine ith a mean one."

"Keep that blue car in sight for a hundred dollars worth, or I'll scare you worse than your sister-in-law," Mr. Maddox promised coldly.

Big D, trying to make a touch at the track, had been the one chance to get solitary transportation and no questions asked. Mr. Maddox had played a hunch that the girl and her escort would be driving home. Now it was worth the hundred to have them in sight.

Cassidy had not appeared again during the afternoon. At the moment, Mr. Maddox did not care what Cassidy was doing. He had remembered where he had seen the pudgy man.

The first clue had been the plump face, newly sunburned. The second clue was when the man wiped dust off the dark glasses and revealed a fading bruise just under the left eye.

The rest followed logically. Sunburn meant recent arrival in Miami. A bruised face recalled the train wreck. Memory had cleared magically. Mr. Maddox recalled a plump figure standing in the Pullman doorway, thoughtfully rubbing an ear.

Only that gesture and a vague recollection of the figure remained in his mind. It was enough to set him tight with tension, grimly determined to find out if this couple had any connection with the girl in the wheel chair.

"Thith motor ith hot," Big D complained.

"And she thteerth like a front tire ith low."

"I'll ride on your back if you stop!" Mr. Maddox snapped.

"Yeth, thuh, Mithtuh Maddocth, thuh!"

The blue sports couple went east on Seventy-ninth Street. At Biscayne Boulevard Mr. Maddox was surprised when it did not turn south. He had expected to be led somewhere near the home of the young lady in the wheel chair. The blue car went on across the long Seventy-ninth Street Causeway over Biscayne Bay, and turned south along the shore drive toward Miami Beach.

There was traffic enough to make their steady trailing unnoticed, considering the jalopy and the driver. But Big D groaned: "Thith motor ith thtarting to mith. Itth hot."

"Burn it up but don't lose that car!"

"Yeth, thuh. But my thithter-in-law—"

"I'm closer to you than your sister-in-law is," Mr. Maddox reminded icily.

"Yeth, thuh. You thertainly ith, Mithtuh Maddocth, thuh," Big D sighed. He bent stiffly over the wheel and nursed the missing, knocking engine.

THE blue coupe was far ahead when it turned off the shore drive. It was just barely in sight, two blocks away, when it swung into a private driveway. Mr. Maddox was out of sight on the back seat as the jalopy rattled past palms, shrubbery, flower beds, surrounding a large Mediterranean-style mansion. The blue coupe had been driven back into the garage where it obviously belonged.

Mr. Maddox made note of street and house number.

"Back to Miami," he directed. "There's a place just off Biscayne Boulevard where I want to stop."

Halfway across the City Causeway leading back to Miami, the motor gasped, coughed, died.

"Thith ith where we thtop, Mithtuh Maddocth," Big D said miserably. "The gath ith gone. My thithter-in-law ith out of ticketh. We are thtuck."

"It could be worse," Mr. Maddox commented with resignation. "Here's your hundred, and another ten to get a tow. I'll walk until a taxi picks me up."

Mr. Maddox walked almost a mile along the causeway before an empty taxicab answered his hail and carried him on to Miami. He got out at the Biscayne Boulevard corner as night was closing in.

Mr. Maddox was starting toward the Newman house, when he halted abruptly, stared at a familiar car parked at the corner.

It was Cassidy's small sedan. Cassidy was not in sight. Mr. Maddox swore softly. He hesitated, half minded to return in the morning. Then, broad face hardening, he went on

up to the door of the white stucco bungalow.

Lights were on inside. A man opened the door slightly to see who was ringing. "You're the bookie," he said at sight of the big visitor. He opened the door wider. "Come in."

Mr. Maddox stepped inside. "I'd like to see Mrs. Newman. You're Mr. Newman?"

"That's right." Newman's wide mouth was smiling as he closed the door. "I hear you've got good news for us."

A gold tooth gleamed on the upper left side of his mouth. He was darkly tanned. Mr. Maddox looked with quick interest and noted a heavy gold seal ring on the third finger of his left hand, just as Nick, the valet, had described.

Gold tooth, heavy tan, and a seal ring. This was the man who had paid three hundred dollars for Oscar's overcoat. Everything fell into a pattern.

Cassidy must be in the house. Newman must be a Masterton detective, working with Cassidy. Mrs. Newman was stooging for them—if she was Mrs. Newman. Cassidy had baited a neat trap. Insult piled on injury as Mr. Maddox thought of the two thousand five hundred dollars they'd won with the five hundred bait.

Cassidy must be waiting to make an arrest as soon as the winning money was paid. No wonder Cassidy had been cocky, sure of himself. It was a doublecross of a gentlemen's understanding that Cassidy would worry about bookmaking only at the tracks.

"I'll have to see Mrs. Newman," Mr. Maddox said blandly.

"I'll call her. Come in and sit down." Newman led the way into the cheerful living room. "You brought the money?"

"I'm here to ask for money," Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Mrs. Newman should be interested in helping Mother Gillfilly's Home for Aged Children. A worthy cause, sir, if there ever was one."

"Mother Gillfilly?" The man lost his smile. "What about that bet on—" He sucked in a breath. "*Aged children?*"

"With gray beards," said Mr. Maddox. "But if you want a payoff, here it is!"

His big fist smashed into the dark-tanned face.

THE man careened off a chair, hit the edge of a small wall table, and bounced off the wall so hard that the house shook.

A yellow pottery vase rolled off the table and shattered on the floor. Newman shook his head groggily. Blood gushed from his nose. He spat blood from a mashed lip. His eyes were glassy.

Mr. Maddox massaged bruised knuckles with the other palm. His look was hard, voice harder.

"Cassidy, you louse!" he called. "Come out and get some of the same!"

Newman stayed in a groggy crouch against the wall. His eyes were clearing. He reached inside his coat. Mr. Maddox jumped at him. That gesture under the coat meant a gun and nothing else.

For a man so big, Joe Maddox moved with astonishing speed. The gun, a dark blue automatic, was coming out in Newman's hand as Mr. Maddox reached him. Another blow might not stop it. Mr. Maddox caught the hand, ducked aside as Newman fired.

The ear-splitting report blasted across the front of Mr. Maddox' coat. Fiery muzzle gasses drove through the fabric to his skin.

For an instant he thought the bullet had entered. It was cold-blooded killing. Savagely he twisted the gun muzzle up to one side. Newman fought to get it back. He had a wild, desperate look. He was gasping. The blood-smearred mouth was snarling.

"Betty!" he called. "Quick, Betty! Brain him!"

Mr. Maddox fought to keep the gun muzzle away, and looked over his shoulder.

The girl was close, fully dressed and limping. She was able to swing a small automatic she carried. Mr. Maddox tried to dodge. Newman lunged against him, holding him there.

The top of Mr. Maddox' head seemed to explode. The second blow she struck was just as bad. Newman's blood-smearred face seemed to expand through sudden haze. He tore the automatic free, dodged to one side, reached the center of the room as Mr. Maddox groped after him.

"Ben! Don't shoot in here again!" the girl cried shrilly. "You want the whole neighborhood in here while we're doing this?"

"I'll kill him!" Newman gasped.

"Ben! You're crazy! Listen to me! We've got him! You're going to kill him! But use some sense about it! Isn't it bad enough the way things have gone already?"

The pointing gun fascinated Mr. Maddox. So did the girl. Her blond hair now might almost be called exciting. She had used rouge and lipstick since he'd last seen her. The spring suit she had put on looked expensive, exclusive. She limped on a bandaged, apparently sprained ankle.

Nothing about her flushed, angry face suggested wan sickness or the wheel chair. And her resemblance to the girl at the track was startling. A little thinner, face a trifle sharper, but the bandaged ankle and limp were the only convincing differences.

Mr. Maddox felt groggy, confused. Masterton detectives didn't go in for cold-blooded killing. Something was all wrong. The facts did not explain all this. Or did they, if you judged the facts from another angle?

Newman slowly relaxed. He groped for a handkerchief and wiped blood off his mouth. He glowered at the red-smearred linen.

"I'll kill him!" he promised thickly.

"Sure you will, Ben! But get him out of sight until we're sure no one heard that shot! We can't make any mistakes now! I'm sick over the way things have gone already!"

"See if he's got that money. If I'm good enough to pick a winner, I want the money."

She moved in cautiously from the side, small automatic ready in her hand. Gingerly she took Mr. Maddox' thick billfold from inside his coat.

"You'd think we were broke, the way you worry about a horse bet at a time like this," she told Newman crossly. "Yes, it's here. Several thousand dollars, I think."

"Never mind counting it."

"I'm going to phone Jane and Dick," she said. "They must be home from the track now."

"Tell 'em I said to get over here quick. And keep an eye on the front door while I get this man out of sight." Newman gestured with the gun. "Back through the door there, Maddox, and keep quiet!"

"A lucky horse bet and an overcoat!" Mr. Maddox muttered. He shrugged and walked back through the doorway.

They went into a back bedroom. Mr. Maddox stopped in startled surprise inside the doorway. A smile broke across his broad face.

"If I didn't see it, I wouldn't believe it," he said. "Greetings, pal."

CASSIDY was seated and securely tied in a straight-backed chair. He was gagged and he was red-faced and glaring as Mr. Maddox moved in ahead of the prodding automatic.

"This," Mr. Maddox chuckled as he stepped around the chair, "is the high spot of my life, Cassidy. Now I can die peacefully."

Mr. Maddox was still chuckling as he gave a vicious push which sent Cassidy and the chair toppling against Newman.

Mr. Maddox hadn't turned his head to see where the gun muzzle was. Death brooded in this cheerful Miami bungalow as surely as the sun ever rose and set. Calculated, determined death for Joe Maddox, and evidently for Cassidy, too. This was the last chance.

Mr. Maddox' bulk had never moved so fast. His crouching lunge took him behind Cassidy and the toppling chair. They formed a brief

and partial shield in the split-second of Newman's surprise.

The man fired wildly at where the chuckling, talking prisoner had been. He missed the big, ducking figure. Mr. Maddox followed the chair. His left arm speared out ahead of the leap he made. The left hand struck the gun aside as it spewed another shot.

The chair and Cassidy crashed to the floor. Mr. Maddox stepped on Cassidy and struck the hardest blow he'd ever thrown.

The big, bunched fist caught Newman's cheek with a sodden, solid impact. It split the cheek and shook Mr. Maddox to the shoulder. It knocked Newman back against the bedroom wall. This time the automatic clattered to the floor. Newman sagged there, mouth open as Mr. Maddox reached him. This time Mr. Maddox hit the point of the jaw. Newman collapsed.

The girl's shrill protest came ahead of her. "Ben! You fool!" she called.

Mr. Maddox jumped to the bedroom doorway. He reached it as the girl came through with her small automatic. She screamed as the vast figure met her. It was no trick at all to slap a hand to her gun, wrench it away, and toss her on the bed.

"Stay there, sister!" Mr. Maddox warned. "Is Ben dead?" she wailed.

"He'll have his chance to die later."

She began to shake with hysterical sobs.

Mr. Maddox was breathing heavily as he caught the larger gun off the floor and put it, with the smaller one, in his coat pocket. He opened a pocket knife and cut the cords which bound Cassidy to the overturned chair.

"The first time I ever saw you where you belong, you buzzard," Mr. Maddox panted. "I hate to do this."

Cassidy rolled away from the chair and stood up with a groan. He yanked the cloth gag away from his mouth and tenderly felt his middle. "You shoved me into the middle of that shooting on purpose!" Cassidy charged. "Almost got me shot! Then you deliberately jumped on my belly! It felt as if a truck had landed on me!" Cassidy glared resentfully.

"I swear I didn't mean to step on your stomach. I was trying to step on your face," Mr. Maddox said. "Now, you doublecrossing fathead, what are you doing here? I know you didn't get Oscar's overcoat from our hotel valet. That rat on the floor did. Paid



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the valet three hundred dollars to slip it out. All this is over that dead girl in the train wreck, isn't it? You've been digging into that. And if you don't know it yet, she was murdered. She fell over into my berth, and she spoke to me after the coach came to a stop. Someone killed her right after she left me. And it wasn't this man Newman. His tan shows he's been around Miami more than a week. In fact," said Mr. Maddox, "I'm pretty sure who killed her—but I can't prove it."

"MAYBE I can," said Cassidy. "Why didn't you tell about that girl, instead of clamping up when we were talking about her on the railroad track?"

"Maybe I wasn't sure of it."

"Maybe you didn't want to rub so close to murder," Cassidy sneered. "I know you, Joe. You let enough slip to make me curious. I looked into the matter. Our office in New York traced her travelers' checks and found out who she was."

"Who was she?"

"Herron was her right name. She'd been private secretary to a guy named Blair. Know of him?"

"Never heard of him."

"Neither had I," said Cassidy. "Just a guy who made a million or so manufacturing clothing. A good guy. He taught a class every Sunday at church."

"And then he killed his secretary?"

"Blair died from an attack of indigestion. His health had been bad. He willed five thousand to his secretary, made several other bequests and left the rest to a couple of nieces whom Blair didn't exactly approve of. He'd been thinking of changing his will after one of them married a man whom Blair disliked—a bridge shark who gambled for a living. Our New York office got all that from Faith Herron's aunt, with whom she lived."

"I'm beginning to see a light," Mr. Maddox said slowly.

The girl on the bed had stopped sobbing. She was listening tensely.

"So did I when I heard the rest of the report," Cassidy said. "This Faith Herron liked her boss. She was grateful for the five grand he willed her. But she got the idea something was queer about his sudden death. She went to the married niece and suggested an autopsy. The bridge-shark husband warned her that outsiders got into trouble butting into matters that were none of their business."

"Faith Herron had no proof that Blair had been poisoned. But she had a hunch, and she didn't like the way the niece's husband had acted. The nieces had known they might be cut out of the will. Blair's will forbade cremation. If someone had poisoned him, the only

way to make sure an autopsy would never be performed would be to shut up the one person who suggested it. Get it?"

"I'm ahead of you," said Mr. Maddox. He was watching the girl on the bed biting her lip hard. She did look sick now.

"All that came from Faith Herron's aunt," Cassidy continued. "Faith Herron thought several times that she was being watched. She began to be afraid. Last week she decided to come to Florida and forget it. She was killed in the train wreck. The aunt didn't suspect anything, of course."

"Stop me if I'm wrong," Mr. Maddox said, looking at the girl on the bed. "One of the nieces was on the same train. The Herron girl had been watched."

"One of the nieces was on the train. Also the husband of the other niece. She married shortly after Blair's funeral," Cassidy said. "For once I got a break on a case. The railroad took names and addresses of every passenger in the wreck. New York telephoned me the maiden and the married names of the nieces. The Herron girl had been killed so smoothly I guess there seemed no use in trying to hide names which might be checked. On the railroad list, I found the name of the guy who married the second niece. He'd been riding in the same coach with Faith Herron. In the car ahead was the other niece, his sister-in-law."

"When I fitted all that together, I was getting warm. But I couldn't figure where you came in, Joe. I came on to Miami. Both nieces and husbands were living in Blair's former house over in Miami Beach. But one couple was driving over to this house. We found they'd just rented it, furnished. Today I caught you coming out of here. It looked bad."

THE man on the floor was stirring. Mr. Maddox took the small automatic from his pocket and handed the other to Cassidy.

"Oscar ran back into the Pullman car ahead of ours, and helped a man who had blood all over him," Mr. Maddox said. "The fellow told Oscar he'd been cut by glass. I saw that same man at the track today. He didn't show any sign of bad glass cuts. Just a bruised eye. Suppose the blood that was on him came from Faith Herron when he killed her in the dark aisle? Suppose he went into the next car to help his sister-in-law? Suppose Faith Herron's blood got on Oscar's overcoat? Oscar lit a match and saw the man's face. If that man was near enough to Faith Herron in my Pullman to catch her a few feet farther along the aisle and kill her, he might have been near enough to hear her talking to me. Suppose later on it occurred to him that I might

(Continued on page 78)

WHO OWNS BORISKA?

By C. P. DONNEL, Jr.

Author of "The Big Four," etc.

CHAPTER ONE

No Trial for Error

NORMALLY as impulsive as April weather, Colonel Stephen Kaspir, my chief in the counter-espionage bureau known as Section Five, can on occasion display

the poker-faced patience of a cat at a rat-hole.

The occasion this time, and the rat-hole, was the *Boulangerie Lafayette-Rouen*. This delightful bakery, operated by a sloe-eyed Spaniard calling himself Lorio Ruiz, was the source of the daintiest French rolls and pastry in Washington.

The Lafayette-Rouen was also the source of several efficient murders and a quantity of not-so-efficient espionage, for it was the working headquarters—Kaspir's term—of the Washington Gestapo. It was further distinguished as a bone of bitter contention between Colonel Kaspir and that shrewd, acid, over-worked little man who heads G-2.

This friction produced flame late one frigid February afternoon in the dingy apartment of one Toller Cassatt, a bread baker at the Lafayette-Rouen. Over Cassatt's iron bedstead Major General Altemus Tancred glared at Kaspir like a peppery little David fronting up



Kaspir put a huge foot on the edge of the bed and the sheet-covered corpse of Toller Cassatt rocked like a baby in a cradle.

**A Colonel
Kaspir Novelette**

to a very large and very stubborn Goliath.

Cassatt himself did not hear the argument, for there was a sheet over his face and he had passed beyond mortal strife. Cassatt was a suicide, complete with farewell note and powder-burns. Thus ends many a minor Nazi agent. The Gestapo disposes of its small fry as casually and heartlessly as, to quote Kaspir again, "a bloody sow devourin' her bloomin' young."

"Tomorrow," announced General Tancred, "I'm going to collect that whole stinking Lafayette-Rouen crowd. Should have done it a year ago, but I listened to you. 'Leave 'em alone,' you said. Well, I've left 'em alone—long enough. This" . . . he nodded at the bed . . . "is the pay-off. It's sheer insulting arrogance, Kaspir. Those lice must think they're in Berlin. They hold their own trials, execute their own men whenever they feel like it. God knows what this fellow did to get the ax, but . . ."

"I don't believe that," said Tancred quietly. "Fact." Kaspir sounded offhand, which was pure bluff. He was alarmed. I happened to know that he had gone to immense pains, including shameless politicking in high places, to save the Lafayette-Rouen crowd from arrest by G-2 and another Government agency which was aware of what the Lafayette-Rouen really was.

"Fact," repeated Kaspir. "The Lafayette-Rouen's virtually existin' on my bounty. Little fellow there named Zelli. . ."

"Saboteur and murderer," cut in General Tancred rancorously.

". . . drops in and sells me information now and then . . ."

Tancred gaped.

". . . that ain't worth a damn, of course. Vague stuff. Very carefully out-o'-date stuff. But I pay—good money. That keeps Zelli and Ruiz and Gaudette happy. They think we're sleepin'. But one o' these bright days they're

The Gestapo had made one slip in the Sibilger affair—she was still alive prophesying Germany's doom and giving Adolf weeping fits. But this time there would be no mistake—Kaspir had been shot and was lying critically ill in a hospital; Arthur, a Section Five agent, had been "accidentally" run over and there was nothing to interfere except an overworked Mike Kettle and a Bible opened to a chapter from Isaiah.

"He was the fellow who shot Mrs. Murphy," said Colonel Kaspir thoughtfully. "I been wonderin' about that."

"Wonder all you like," said General Tancred grimly. "But I tell you this—any further executions will be by due process of law, our law. Tomorrow the whole gang comes in, from Ruiz right down to that Negro porter."

"Arthur'll be annoyed," murmured Kaspir. "Arthur?"

"The porter," said Colonel Kaspir gently. "He's one o' my boys, you know, General."

General Tancred, who had not known, swelled dangerously.

"Besides," said Colonel Kaspir at the psychological moment, "we've got a lot of dough sunk in the Lafayette-Rouen."

THIS was news to me. I raised an eyebrow at Maude, who was effacing herself in a far corner of the room. She shrugged her shoulders. It was news to her. It was also news to General Tancred, so shocking that he rejected it on principle.

gonna get so cocky that they'll lead a trail straight to where they been gettin' their orders."

Tancred, tugging irritably at a lobeless ear, exploded: "Great God, Kaspir, are you still harping on that man-higher-up theme?" He glanced apologetically at Maude. "I tell you," he continued, a shade less vehemently, "Ruiz is—"

"Ruiz is nothin'!" It was Kaspir exploding now. His great moon face under the wide-brimmed hat was darkly ruddy and his baby-blue eyes crackled. "I knew Ruiz in Barcelona in '37. He was a punk—a gunman and knifeman. But no brain." He thrust out his lower lip. "I admit I thought I'd gone bingo when we gathered in Rassuden and Nordensten and Pentecost and their bunch. But things have happened since then—things that Ruiz and his strong-arm boys never doped out. How about that troop-train in Illinois, Tancred?"

Tancred, white around the mouth, remained silent. There was nothing to say. The horror of that wreck was too fresh in his mind.

Kaspir seized his advantage. "That was doped out right here in Washington, Tancred. I tell you, there's a man in this town grinnin' internally over that train wreck right this minute."

General Tancred is intellectually honest. He said: "Well. . ."

"Maybe he's sweepin' streets. More likely he's got a good Gov'ment job—you know how Adolf likes his agents to be self-supportin' where they can. Like the Lafayette-Rouen bunch spongin' on me for worthless information."

"I suppose," said General Tancred meanly, "that since you have paid out so much to the Lafayette-Rouen, you must by now have at least a dim idea as to who this mysterious Mr. X—"

"Not a glimmer," said Kaspir frankly. "And I been movin' heaven and earth to get one. By a negative process I've learned one thing, though."

General Tancred was unable to hide a reluctant eagerness. He made an interrogating noise.

Colonel Kaspir put a foot like a shovel on the edge of the bed and the sheet-covered corpse of Toller Cassatt rocked like a baby in a cradle.

"He's the feller," he said, "who orders things like this done." For emphasis he leaned over and tapped Cassatt on the chest as a doctor sounds a phthisic. He tapped hard, and from the corner of my eye I saw Maude wince. Tancred's mouth tightened. "I don't know what this Cassatt did wrong, but I got an idea. And the idea I got I don't like one little bit. This Cassatt shot Mrs. Murphy—killed her right next to my headquarters. Why? Because she looked like somebody else. He'd been ordered to kill Boriska Sibilger. He thought he had. Only he'd missed the right house by one number and got a woman who looked like Boriska. And we let it go as an unidentified woman, hopin' they'd think they got Boriska."

"About this Boriska Sibilger. . ." began Tancred, knitting his pale eyebrows.

But Kaspir was clinging to the tail of his train of thought and would not be shaken loose. "And they thought so. They thought they'd got her. Chances are, a report went in to Berlin to that effect. Why d'you suppose they did an about-face and executed our little hero on the bed here?"

I TOOK my hands out of my pockets because they had begun to tingle as though they were going to sleep. The mention of Boriska Sibilger did it. Maude crossed the room softly and stood at my side.

"Because," said Kaspir gravely, "they've learned—and I'd like to know how—that it

wasn't Boriska who was shot in the back. And that makes the head man—yep, Old Man X himself—look foolish. And he don't like it. So he orders Cassatt bumped off to warn the Lafayette-Rouen mob not to make any more mistakes. And by the same token. . ."

General Tancred snorted. "A phony proph- etess. A wild-eyed woman who predicted Hitler would be killed in '42—"

". . . by the same token," repeated Kaspir, "I figure this head man is takin' over the Sibilger case himself. And that gives me but-terflies in the tummy. Because Old Man X is good, Tancred, and until you've got to the bot- tom of that troop-train wreck you can't con- tradict that. If he starts after Boriska—"

"Suppose there is an X. Suppose he does. What of it?" Tancred fidgeted.

"My friend," said Kaspir loftily, and Tan- cred drew breath, "I ain't sayin' Boriska's got a pipeline to Heaven. But I am sayin' this—down around the Balkans, where we ain't doin' so well right now, they believe in her, the Rumanians and Bulgars and Hungarians—the whole lot. She's been right too often. And if we can get her safely to Istanbul and let some of those Balkan newspapermen see her and know she's alive, and she begins to predict—which she will—that Germany's washed up, it'll be worth a dozen divisions and ten million words of propaganda to us. There's Gypsy blood all through the Balkans, Tancred. They go for that stuff."

"You sound," said General Tancred tightly, "as though you go for it yourself, Kaspir. I never thought you'd fall for a crystal ball. . . Besides, why didn't Himmler have her killed when he had her in Dachau?"

"I asked her that," said Kaspir gravely, "and she told me. They kept her alive hopin' she'd pop up with a forecast that things would start breakin' better for Germany in the near future. They even tried to persuade her. But she wouldn't. She can't prophesy anything but what comes to her."

"You're asking me, seriously, to believe that Himmler and the Berlin gang swallow her sort of stuff?"

"I'm not askin' you. I'm tellin' you. Why was it that after her '41 prophecy about Hit- ler's death, Adolf himself had weepin' spells and had to go to Berchtesgaden? Half of 'em are mystics now, Tancred. They got no God, so they're gropin' after anything they can. What about Hanussen?"

Tancred's head came up. I saw him waver- ing. Kaspir had saved his heavy artillery to the last for the greater effect. The world knows that Hitler and Hitler's inner circle clung to Hanussen and Hanussen's prophecies until Hanussen became a voice of doom. Then they killed Hanussen.

Colonel Kaspir pushed down once more on

the bed and the stiffening form of Toller Cassatt seemed to come alive once more, as though Kaspir's words had made him restless. Kaspir removed his foot from the bed-edge, began to put on his overcoat.

"How," he said, so gently that I knew he was playing a trump card, "would you like to meet Boriska, General?"

General Tancred's eyes lit up. He glanced at Maude and me, then back at Kaspir.

"I paid \$20,000 to various parties to get her out o' Dachau," said Kaspir, still softly. "She ought to be worth a look just as a curiosity, eh, Tancred?"

"Well. . ." said General Tancred.

"She won't be in town much longer," continued Kaspir, dropping the words like bait along an animal-run. "A cousin o' hers is arrivin' tonight from Hungary. She'll fly with Boriska to Istanbul and stand by her there when the fireworks start." He turned to Maude and me. I suppose you'd like to see her, too."

It was a deliberate probe of a sore spot. When I recovered, I said, as coldly and disinterestedly as I could: "If you think we're able to stand the strain."

"Hey!" said General Tancred. It was a question.

"Yes," said Maude bitterly. "Captain Kettle and I have never seen her, General."

FOR five weeks Boriska Sibilger had occupied a room on the second floor of our headquarters. For five weeks Kaspir had been adamant both to hints and direct requests that we would like to meet her. Besides Kaspir, only Joe, our Negro houseboy, and a hefty, square-faced nurse named Mamie Moran had been allowed in Boriska Sibilger's quarters.

It was ignominious, and Kaspir knew it. For three years or more Maude and I have been closer to Kaspir than any member of Section Five. We are, in fact, his headquarters staff, to whom fall the tasks of putting up with his temperament and doing the dirtiest of the myriad little odd-jobs that comprise the larger business of counter-espionage. And yet he had never allowed us even to approach the door of Boriska Sibilger's room. She had been in the house for nearly a week before we were even aware of her presence there.

"O.K.," said General Tancred. "I'll phone the office and let them look after this thing on the bed. Straight suicide, of course. Ill health."

"Good." Kaspir managed not to sound too relieved. As we left the room I heard him saying to Tancred: "By the way, General, you'll lay off the Lafayette-Rouen crowd a while longer, won't you? You see, if Old Man X makes another move toward Boriska, he'll have to use that bunch, and—"

Tancred stopped dead in the hall. Maude and I halted at the head of the stairs to listen.

Tancred glanced at his wrist. "It's five o'clock," he said. "I'll give you exactly twenty-four hours, Kaspir. That's final. And if the Lafayette-Rouen crowd pulls anything in that time, on your head be it." He meant it, too.

"Agreed." Colonel Kaspir spoke confidently, but I caught the undertone in his voice. A prolonged double-bluff such as his play with the Lafayette-Rouen bakery tells on the nerves—even Kaspir's. He had been unbearably peevish of late, and for the first time I understood why.

As we clumped down the stairs I began to regret some of the things I had been thinking about Kaspir. It came to me that the weight of his responsibility had been many times heavier than I had realized. Also, that Maude and I, out of pure pique, had been too inclined to dismiss the matter of Boriska Sibilger as one of those queer whims in which Kaspir indulges from time to time—whims which out of vanity he will defend to the death even when he knows he has overplayed his hand.

Now Boriska Sibilger was coming into focus in the scheme of things. Kaspir had not been blustering—he had meant exactly what he said about her being worth a dozen divisions and tons of propaganda.

It was even possible that he had understated the case. No more dangerous fallacy exists than the belief that Rumania and her friends are ready to rush over to our side at the crook of a finger and an inviting whistle.

Tancred knew as well as Kaspir—and in the matter of Balkan politics Kaspir has no peer—what the Balkan situation has been. It has been bad. Very bad. The Germans have been "in" there too long and too deep. The possibility that they may "arrange" a shift in Balkan sympathies (not unlike the "surrender" of Italy) has cramped and rendered uncertain our whole Mediterranean policy. We have no chance of a final cleaning-up in the Mediterranean until the positions of Bucharest and Belgrade and Sofia are fixed beyond all possible doubt. And this sort of waiting costs lives.

My impatience to see Boriska Sibilger grew by leaps and bounds.

In the street, with the cold dusk closing around us, Kaspir said: "Oh, by the way. . ."

He was addressing Maude.

"You better grab a cab to the airport," he said.

"Just for the ride, I suppose?"

Kaspir thrust a hand into his inside coat pocket and, after a session of fumbling that threatened to last into the night, brought forth an envelope. He handed this to Maude.

"That's her picture," he said. "She'll be on the five-forty plane from New York. Tell her

who you are and bring her back to headquarters pronto."

I looked over Maude's shoulder as she pulled a photo halfway from the envelope. Maude's face was a study.

"She'll be wearing fancy dress, I take it," said Maude thinly. The picture was a three-quarter length of a strong-faced, black-haired, handsome woman in a gaudy peasant costume. "And," she continued, a heavy sarcasm creeping into her tone, "if it's not asking too much, just who in—"

"It's the cousin," said Kaspir irritably, as though he had explained her mission in detail many times. "Name of Sarana Ferencisz." His eyes narrowed. "And she'll be dressed better'n you are. At least, she'll not be wearin' dyed rabbit—"

Maude's short and very expensive fur jacket is a garment to which Kaspir has taken one of his windy and unreasonable dislikes.

Maude settled her smart hat firmly on her blond hair. Her violet eyes were dark with exasperation. She was beautifully dressed, and she knew it.

"In that case," she said, "I'd better hurry. This will be a treat." She was furious at the unexpected errand, for her curiosity with regard to Boriska Sibilger was, if anything, greater than my own.

She strode off, after the barest hint of a farewell nod to General Tancred and me. Kaspir was pointedly excluded from the courtesy. The set of her shoulders and the swing of her long, well-turned legs somehow conveyed her resentment. I watched her go because it is always a pleasure to watch Maude move.

General Tancred looked oddly at Kaspir. "Let's go," he said.

CHAPTER TWO

The Eyes Have It

THE old brownstone ex-boarding house in southwest Washington, which has been the headquarters of Section Five ever since Kaspir organized the Section late in '39, looked even more forbidding than usual in the fading light.

Kaspir let us in with a latchkey, and we stood a moment in the hall while Tancred shrugged himself out of his heavy khaki jacket. When my eyes became accustomed to the deeper darkness of the hall, I jumped as I realized that the blob of white at the foot of the stairs was Joe, ever silent, ever watchful. He was not coming forward until he was perfectly sure who we were, and this almost melodramatic caution brought home to me, as much as anything, some idea of the gravity with which he and Kaspir viewed Boriska Sibilger's presence in the house.

Kaspir said: "Joe—"

I saw Tancred give a start as Joe moved.

"Yes, Colonel."

Joe was with us now. He took General Tancred's coat. Under Joe's white canvas serving jacket were two guns in shoulder holsters. I could just make out their outlines.

"Everything quiet?" said Kaspir.

The familiar mustiness of the place was in my nostrils now. It has been a second home to me ever since Kaspir borrowed me from Military Intelligence early in '40 and failed to return me. But tonight I failed to enjoy the sensation. Something in Kaspir's tone, something in Joe's attitude, had effected a change in the atmosphere. Even Tancred, more or less a familiar of the building, noticed it, for he stood with his arms folded and his pinched face intent, as though he were listening for something.

"One brush salesman," said Joe.

"Legitimate?"

"I think so." Joe nodded. He thought. "Oh, the office supply company called, Colonel. They're sending around the new desk and chair this evening or tomorrow morning, depending upon what help they can get, but they said the filing system would not be available for—"

"Yes, yes, yes," interrupted Kaspir rudely, dismissing the matter. Yet a day before, he had been pacing the floor and orating about the delay. It was characteristic of Kaspir, under the tension of a waiting game, to seize upon some trifle and make a perfectly ridiculous fuss about it for days on end. I suppose it helped him, just as it helps a high-strung elephant to sway and grunt and scream and wave its trunk. But the wear and tear on the nervous systems of those obliged to be present is extreme. Nor had it sweetened Maude and me to know that Kaspir needed a new desk about as badly as he needed mumps. He never kept anything in the old one but sticky boxes of chocolate cherries, out-of-date railroad timetables, and several dog-eared copies of *La Vie Parisienne*. And once Maude, rooting in the back of a drawer in search of a pencil, had discovered a whole loaf of French bread so dry and hard that it might have been a relic of the French Revolution.

Joe stood aside as Kaspir started up the stairs. Joe usually makes a play with the old-family-retainer routine for General Tancred's benefit—Joe holds a law degree from Columbia, by the way, and his rank and pay are identical with my own—but this time he had nothing to say.

We followed Kaspir down the half-lit second-floor hallway to the rear of the house. Kaspir rapped gently on a door. It opened, and the doorway filled with an immensity of white uniform. Nurse Moran was perhaps

four inches shorter than Kaspir, but quite as broad. I had the impression that she could have blocked a General Sherman tank without effort.

"She all right?" rumbled Kaspir.

"Quite good." Nurse Moran's voice was surprisingly mild. I had expected something in the nature of a bellow.

"You tell her her cousin was comin'?"

"I thought you'd prefer to do that yourself."

"Good. You can run along now, Mamie. I'll call you when we're through."

"Take it easy then, Colonel. She's not well yet." Nurse Moran shook a large red head. "Not by a hell of a sight," she said, in her well-modulated voice. She pushed past us, flattening Tancred and me against the wall.

I DON'T know exactly what I had expected to find in that room. Certainly not what I found, which was a pair of eyes. They were neither unusually large, nor sinister, nor mystical. Their dominance of the room seemed to spring from the simple fact that they were a child's eyes, as gentle and candid and as utterly free from guile as those of a three-year-old.

And the body was scarcely larger than a child's—a frail body, shapeless in a simple dress, a dress as plain as the bob of the straight black hair. She could not, I saw on second glance, have been over forty, and her thin face was as pleasantly undistinguished as the face of a poor relation.

Boriska Sibilger rose from a rocking chair under a bridge lamp, laying aside a book. As I said before, it was the eyes that stood out. They were without fear, and it was impossible to imagine them sharp with anger or narrowed in any unworthy passion.

This, then, was the woman whom Hitler had hated and feared as he must now hate and fear Stalin, who was thought worthy of the attention of Heinrich Himmler himself, who had endured three full years of Dachau.

I noted now that her left arm stood out at an unnatural angle from her body. I began to wonder what had happened to Boriska Sibilger in Dachau, and my hands started to sweat and tremble.

Instinctively I glanced at General Tancred's face, hoping I would see mirrored my own reaction to Boriska Sibilger. I saw more than that. All the way from Toller Cassatt's apartment, on the stairs, in the hall, I had been conscious that Tancred was steeling himself as you might prepare yourself against being sold a bill of goods. Now this feeling was gone. Tancred's hard-angled face was curiously relaxed, as though some of the simplicity of this colorless little woman had passed into him.

I thought, by some bizarre connection, of Toller Cassatt, a gangster whom even death could not ennoble in the slightest degree—Cassatt, who lay in the welter of his own brains now because he had not slain this woman.

I looked at Boriska Sibilger's lips—thin, pale, wholly without allure for man—and tried to realize that those lips, moving in prophecy, had affected, and might yet affect, more lives than the lips and body and limbs of Helen of Troy. But I could not.

Yet those lips had predicted, in 1940, that America would enter the war in 1942. Earlier they had predicted the death of King George V and told the month he would die. Also that his successor would "renounce the throne" in a period "not exceeding twelve months." Those lips had foretold, with a hideous accuracy, the Spanish Civil War, both the beginning and the end. And in 1938, months before Munich, they had spoken again: "No general war before the month of September, 1939."

Nostradamus had foretold more and covered a vastly wider field. Yet Nostradamus must needs be interpreted, and you can allow yourself great latitude in your interpretations, just as a piece of cloth may be cut to fit almost any figure.

Yet Boriska Sibilger, in 1941, when the armies of the Reich were triumphant wherever they had struck, when England was virtually on its back and Hitler was still many weeks away from his insane leap upon Russia, had forecast the inevitable fall of Germany, and had been hustled away to Dachau before the prophecy could spread.

And it was in 1941 that she had predicted the death of Adolf Hitler, and thus sent that pathological gentleman into what trustworthy sources described later as the most cyclonic of his great nervous storms.

She had been wrong about Hitler. She had set the date as 1942. I racked my brain as I stood there watching her. It was in 1942 that three known attempts were made on Hitler's life. At least one of his several doubles had been the sacrifice. Perhaps only the slightest wavering of an assassin's hand had robbed Boriska Sibilger of infallibility. . .

COLONEL KASPIR advanced across the room. I saw Boriska Sibilger's pale lips spread in a smile of welcome that labeled him as an old and trusted friend.

Kaspir said in French: "I hope you are well. I have taken the liberty of bringing two friends to meet you. This is General Tancred"—Tancred inclined his head in a very courtly little bow—"and this is Captain Michael Kettle, of my bureau."

I bowed, too, suddenly flustered as the eyes turned on me.

"I am so very pleased," said Boriska Sibilger in a low voice that seemed to have no quality other than an even gentleness.

"General Tancred," said Colonel Kaspir, "does not entirely believe in you, Mademoiselle."

Tancred's mouth set itself to an angry protest, but before he could speak Boriska Sibilger laughed.

"I do not," she said, "entirely believe in myself, General. Please do not apologize."

Let me say, parenthetically, that the conversation from here on was all in French, which Kaspir speaks fluently.

"Why did they keep you alive in Dachau?" said Kaspir, for Tancred's benefit.

At the word "Dachau" a very human shade passed across Boriska Sibilger's brow. Her hands came together at the base of her throat, as though she were suffering from an unexpected shortness of breath.

"Because," she said quietly, "they wished me to say that Germany would, in the end, win." She thought, biting her lip. "You see, General, I speak of the future only when the thoughts well up, unbidden, in my mind. I find I cannot twist these thoughts to make people happy. Always I must speak what is inside me, and no more. Yet at Dachau. . ." She bowed her head, shook it slowly.

General Tancred said quickly, in surprisingly good French: "Mademoiselle, do not pain yourself by speaking of Dachau. I—"

She looked up, a new resolution in her small, plain face. The eyes were dominant again. Tancred and Kaspir were watching her with a curious intentness.

"At Dachau," she said, raising her voice, "they persuaded me. I thought then that I could not stand that life much longer. I am a very normal woman. I cannot bear pain long. I feared, above all, losing my mind. So I weakened. My freedom, they said, would follow a simple prediction that Germany will win. You must understand, General, that those men, for all their brutality, seem as simply superstitious as the most ignorant African native. So they took me to Berlin and gave me an audience with a highly-placed man—not Hitler himself, but one close to him."

Mademoiselle Sibilger shut her eyes a moment, recalling the scene.

Kaspir said softly: "Rosenberg?"

She nodded. "And when I was before him, no words would come. I tried hard to speak

what they wanted me to say. I cannot explain it, other than to say that it was as though a hand had been laid across my mouth. I could talk of other things. I tried very hard to say those few words. But no. Understand me again—I do not claim a divine check. It was simply something in me, some part of me, that forbade me to speak. They thought I was merely stubborn. They returned me to Dachau. There they. . ." Her right hand began to rub her left arm.

I was having trouble with my own throat at this time. Beside me I could hear Tancred's breathing quicken. Kaspir lit a cigarette, the match-flame quivering.

"It happened once again," said Boriska Sibilger. "Again they took me to Berlin. And once more the same thing happened. So they returned me to Dachau, and this time I resigned myself to die. I was very much afraid. There is not much actual killing in Dachau. They wish you to suffer the limit before your body gives up. Then one night a guard came and led me out to a rear gate, and talked with another guard, and I thought. . ."

From the side of his mouth Kaspir, in what he thought was a whisper, rumbled: "That part set us back ten grand, Tancred."

Boriska Sibilger did not seem to hear. ". . . thought: 'Here is my end.' By then I was glad. I hoped only that they would be quick. But they put me in a car, and we drove a long while. I do not think I was quite sane during this. Twice we stopped overnight at small places, and the driver of the car was changed twice. Then there was a plane, and another plane, and one day we landed in sunshine and this gentleman whom I know as Colonel Kaspir brought me here." She turned to Kaspir, her eyes luminous. She straightened her narrow shoulders. "I am ready to go to Istanbul. Or wherever you wish, Colonel. My life is yours for as long as you wish."

GENERAL TANCRED stared at the floor. The almost biblical simplicity of her words had a peculiar emotional impact.

I heard my own voice say: "Are you Jewish, Mademoiselle?" For some reason my thoughts had flown to the Old Testament.

"My mother's father was Jewish," said Boriska Sibilger. "Then we have some gypsy blood. In Hungary, Captain, that is not an unusual combination."

Colonel Kaspir said abruptly: "Can you

A WORD TO THE WISE

Waste paper is still an important war material—it's essential for packing ammunition. So in order to make sure there's enough left over to go 'round for your favorite publication, don't forget to save all waste paper and turn it in for scrap.

travel inside of three days, Mademoiselle?"

It was plain that the suddenness of this alarmed her, but she did not hesitate. "Whenever you desire, Colonel."

"You will have a companion," said Colonel Kaspir slyly.

"Nurse Moran?" She looked pleased.

"In all the world—speak honestly now, Mademoiselle—whom would you like to see most?" said Colonel Kaspir. He was leaning forward and smiling. I felt an upsurge of apprehension as I watched Boriska Sibilger's face.

She smiled a fleeting smile, made a rueful mouth. "I would not like to hurt your feelings. But I would like most to see— My parents are dead, Colonel, and my one brother. . ."

I held my breath.

"I have a cousin in the little town of Kecsekemet. She is stronger than I, and most loving in her care of me. We lived together. Her name is—"

"Sarana Ferencisz?" Kaspir could not wait.

"Yes." The word was an outpouring of breath, incredulous, with a smothered sob behind it. "Yes."

"Suppose I tell you that she will be here within an hour," said Colonel Kaspir.

I felt an absurd desire to jump up and shout for joy. I saw Boriska Sibilger grow a size larger in that moment, as though Kaspir's words had been a transfusion of strong blood into her bloodless frame. She rose, her eyes riveted on Kaspir's face.

"Then you are the prophet, Colonel, and a magician to boot."

Kaspir leaped to her side, caught her shoulders as she was about to fall. He eased her into the chair. Tancred was on his feet the same instant.

Kaspir eased her into the chair. She murmured feebly: "Do not trouble yourselves. It is just that the pleasure inside me is almost too great to be borne. Let me just rest a minute." Her head went back against the chair. "It has been my hope for three years to see Sarana once more, just once more. . ."

She seemed to go into a reverie, her eyes open as though picturing Sarana and her home in Kecsekemet that she had thought never to see again. My senses must have been unnaturally acute in that moment, for there was a change in the room. It was more than the absolute stillness that held us for a dozen seconds. Even Kaspir was affected. When he spoke, I had a feeling that it was more to break the quiet than anything else. Over Boriska Sibilger's motionless dark head he said, as though she were not there: "How about it, General?"

General Tancred said: "We will cooperate in any way possible, Kaspir. If you need any

help with arrangements here, or in Istanbul. . ." His eyes were very deep, as though he were engaged in some inner struggle. He nodded toward the still figure in the chair. "What do you think of it all, Kaspir?" His voice was somewhere in his throat, scarcely louder than a whisper, but the question somehow had the force of an emotional explosion.

Colonel Kaspir passed his hand across his eyes. It is seldom that he stops acting, or speaks otherwise than for effect. This was one of those rare occasions.

"God knows," he said at length, a little helplessly. They were speaking English now. "But if it's an act, it's the best one of its kind. I'm going to play this thing through to the end, for all it's worth. After all—"

I said: "Shhh!" They turned.

I WAS watching Boriska Sibilger. I knew now whence had come that change in the room.

Do not mistake me. She was not in a trance. Her eyes, wide open, were as reasonable as an earnest child's. There was none of the dramatic rigidity of attitude affected by charlatans or peculiar to the hysterical seers.

"What is it, Mademoiselle?" This from Tancred, in a tone that would have drawn confidences from a marble statue.

"I am afraid," said Boriska Sibilger, "that I shall not see Sarana."

Kaspir opened his mouth, shut it again. The color had drained from his face. Again it was General Tancred who spoke.

"What do you mean?"

"It is not over," said Boriska Sibilger faintly. "I had thought it was. But it is not." She looked from Tancred to Kaspir. "Danger," she said, in answer to the question in our eyes. "Pain. Violence."

There was a silence, through which, quite clearly, I could hear the ticking of our watches, thin and cricket-like against the stronger tick of a small clock on the mantel. Then I lost these sounds, drowned in the thumping of my own pulse in my ears.

"Who?" said Kaspir softly.

"I do not know." She was looking at the wall now. She seemed to be waiting for something. "Men," she said. "A man." She shut her eyes, opened them again. "Yes, a man."

"A man with dark skin, with slanting eyes?" said Kaspir, leaning forward. "A man named Ruiz?"

Another, and longer silence.

"I cannot see his face. There is nothing there. Just an emptiness where the face should be." There was no emotion in her voice, no sound of strain. "Do you suppose," she said, "that he—they will ever let me alone? Will they always be after me, wanting me to say things I cannot say?"

Tancred's hands were fists. "This man, Mademoiselle—try to see him. You must."

"I cannot." She sketched a circle in the air with her forefinger. For the first time her face became taut with the effort of vision. Once again I heard the watches ticking. "It is no use," she said, her flat chest heaving suddenly. "He is nobody." She controlled herself, tried to smile. "Perhaps I am only nervous. It is all because I am agitated with joy over Sarana—I shall see her. . ." But there was no conviction in her voice. Then, so suddenly that we started, she was on her feet, her right hand clutching Kaspir's thick wrist, her eyes almost wild as she looked into his face. "You must take care! You will be very careful? This man—this—this nobody!"

For the second time, Kaspir caught her as she drooped. This time he did not ease her into the chair. Instead, he swung her up in his powerful arms and stepped to the bed. I did not need a command. I ran to the door, flung it open. "Nurse!" I called. "Nurse!"

Nurse Moran swept down on me out of nowhere, nearly bowling me over as she wheeled into the room.

Kaspir straightened up beside the bed.

"Over-excited," he said. "Take over, Mamie. Lemme know the minute she comes around."

"You can wait," said Nurse Moran angrily. She stood like a lighthouse, glared us out of the room. Kaspir shut the door gently behind him.

CHAPTER THREE

Danger on Delivery

THERE were footfalls on the stairs. Kaspir hurried down the hall, General Tancred and I trailing him like chastened schoolboys.

Maude appeared at the head of the stairs. Behind her was a woman in dark clothing. Maude's fur jacket was open. She was breathing hard and her violet eyes were wide and excited.

"Go along up to my office," said Kaspir.

"But—"

"Go along!" repeated Kaspir. "All of you."

He seemed possessed with the desire for action of some sort. The woman behind Maude stared at him.

Kaspir pushed past her, ran halfway down the stairs. "Joe," he bellowed. "Joe!"

"Yes, Colonel."

Maude made a small sound of disgust and disappointment. She took her companion by the arm. "Come with me," she said, in French, and started with her up the stairs to the third floor, where the offices are. Once more Tancred and I formed a rear guard, meekly, like

sheep. My legs seemed very tired as I climbed the steep stairs. Something resembling a lump of lead had settled in my chest just under the breastbone.

From the flight below, Kaspir was yelling some order at Joe. Then, as I reached the third floor, I heard him bounding upstairs behind us. By the time we had reached the outer office at the end of the hall he was treading on my heels and panting like a walrus.

Maude and the woman in dark clothing went on into Kaspir's office, we three men shuffling behind them. In the office there was a momentary silence while we threw off the effect of the episode on the stairs, got our breath and collected our thoughts.

Sarana Ferencisz was the first to speak.

"Where is my cousin Boriska?" She fired the words at Kaspir like bullets from a gun.

"She cannot see anyone for a while," retorted Kaspir, and. . ."

"Why?" There was both alarm and apprehension in the word.

"Because—" Kaspir checked himself, suddenly aware that his manner was, under the circumstances, more than a little cavalier.

"Let's sit down and get our breath," said Maude drily. Her French, I thought resentfully, is better than mine. Maude took off the offending fur jacket, threw it onto an old sofa in the corner. She went to Sarana Ferencisz, who was standing in the center of the room, her face stubborn and suspicious, and made a move to help the woman off with her coat. Sarana Ferencisz submitted with an air of unwillingness, never taking her eyes off Kaspir for a moment.

"You must not be upset," counseled Maude smoothly. "Colonel Kaspir is not himself." She removed the coat deftly, threw it over her own. "He seldom is," she murmured. "Here, Mademoiselle, sit down." She propelled Sarana Ferencisz firmly to a chair, virtually forced her into it. Then she surveyed us men with a cool eye. "Who," she said, "has the cigarettes?"

General Tancred was quick with a battered pack. Even Sarana Ferencisz, at Maude's urging, accepted one, albeit as though it might explode. Kaspir and I fished in our pockets. He and Tancred and I lit matches simultaneously. With the first plumes of smoke the atmosphere cleared magically.

Maude, in complete command of the situation, introduced us formally to Sarana Ferencisz. I got my first good look at the woman from the plane. If there was a family resemblance to Boriska Sibilger, I could not find it. This woman had strength and drive in her face. Her black brows made a straight line over her eyes. She was shorter than Maude, but her figure had none of the heavy shapelessness of the peasant, and even the plain

black shoes and dull stockings could not kill the good lines of her legs.

KASPIR flung himself into his old swivel chair, jerked out a desk drawer, cocked his feet on it. Chin sunk on his chest, he looked down his nose at Sarana Ferencisz.

"My apologies, Mademoiselle, for my manners. I was excited. But you are not to be. Mademoiselle Boriska is all right. It was merely the excitement of the news that you were coming. In half an hour you will be able to see her."

Sarana Ferencisz exhaled. "Ah!" She included us all in her look of apology. "It has been so long," she said. "I was afraid." Her eyes swung back to Kaspir. "To you," she said, "we owe everything."

Colonel Kaspir muttered something, and began to play with his cigarette. He is not pretty when embarrassed.

Maude came to the rescue. "I can hardly wait myself to meet your cousin, Mademoiselle. Colonel Kaspir has guarded her so carefully that even Captain Kettle was not allowed to see her until this afternoon." The glint in her eye was meant for Kaspir alone.

"Perhaps," said Sarana Ferencisz, "you may understand better, Colonel, when I tell you that in Cairo, on our way here, there was a rumor among certain of my countrypeople that Boriska was dead. The Gestapo had been boasting that although she had been delivered from Dachau, she had been shot by Gestapo agents here in Washington, right under the noses of your authorities."

Colonel Kaspir nodded without comment.

"Not unnaturally," continued Mademoiselle Ferencisz, "I was—"

"When my man from Istanbul found you," interrupted Kaspir, as though he had not been listening, "you were in Budapest?"

"Yes." She looked surprised.

"Did you have any trouble getting out of Buda?" Kaspir had forgotten his manners again. The question was put in the tone of a cross-examination.

Sarana Ferencisz frowned. "No. My papers were in order. I had expected them to ask why I wished to go to Istanbul, but they did not."

Kaspir scratched his head, then shook it. "Too easy," he said. He was speaking to Tancred. He sounded depressed. Suddenly I knew why. The Budapest authorities must have been quite aware of the relationship between Sarana Ferencisz and Boriska Sibilger. That meant the Germans were, too. And they had put no difficulties in the way of Mademoiselle Ferencisz when she left for Istanbul.

General Tancred picked up the thread of my own thoughts by saying: "I doubt, Mademoiselle, if you can say whether or not you

were followed, or under observation, in Istanbul or Cairo."

"I cannot." Mademoiselle Ferencisz paled.

"I can."

Every eye turned on Kaspir.

Kaspir grimaced. "What the hell!" he said cryptically, in English. Then, reverting to French: "Torano, the man who brought you my message and escorted you from Buda, Mademoiselle, reported that you were under close observation as far as Istanbul. About Cairo he was not sure. There is no use shutting our eyes to the truth. They must suspect that Boriska is alive. It is not a difficult deduction—not after the death of Toller Cassatt."

"Toller Cassatt?" Mademoiselle Ferencisz looked puzzled again.

"A Nazi agent. He shot a woman here several weeks ago in the belief that she was your cousin. He has been found dead himself. Executed according to their custom. We believe that it was punishment for error."

Sarana Ferencisz exclaimed—a word I did not understand. The strength was no longer so evident in her face. She looked frightened now. She murmured: "I had thought, Colonel, that in this great, safe country of yours. . ."

Colonel Kaspir swore. The next instant he was on his feet, head cocked as though listening. A second later there was no need for this pose. We could all hear the banging in the hall. Instinctively I reached for my hip and suffered a moment of panic when I realized that I was not carrying a gun.

Maude chuckled, a low, delighted chuckle.

"It's your desk arriving, Steve," she said. She opened the door. Sure enough, a pair of huskies were wrangling a large and shiny desk from the hall into the outer office.

COLONEL KASPIR swore again, a full-bodied oath born of relief and lacerated vanity. Maude's mocking eyes were on me. "Don't shoot, Mike," she said. My hand fell away from my hip. I felt my cheeks getting hot.

Even Tancred, up now and standing behind his chair, looked abashed. Sarana Ferencisz had not risen. Indeed, I doubt if she had the strength to rise. Kaspir's catlike leap, coming when it did, was enough to unnerve anyone.

The deliverymen negotiated the outer door, set the desk down, and one of them lit a cigarette. The other called: "Where's it go?"

"In here," barked Kaspir. He swung his foot against the old desk in a valedictory kick of pure ill-temper. He rammed his hands deep in the pockets of his sagging tweed trousers and his big face was that of an overgrown, sullen infant. "Hurry up," he snarled, as the pair stretched out their rest period.

The man with the cigarette dropped it on

the floor and ground it under his shoe. "Com-ing, chum," he said, matching Kaspir's tone. They bent, heaved.

Kaspir picked up the telephone from the old desk. Then he raised a leg like a tree-trunk, set his heel against the old desk, and shot it across the room by straightening his leg. It jarred the walls.

He nodded to the spot where it had been. "Put it there," he directed.

"O.K., chum." They scraped through the doorway with the new piece and made a great to-do about placing it exactly where Kaspir had told them. One of them took the telephone from Kaspir and stood with it in his hand while giving directions to the other. They seemed humorously determined to inconvenience Kaspir as much as possible. Kaspir ignored them, turned away, began to talk to Tancred in a loud voice. I joined Maude and Sarana Ferencisz and tried to make polite conversation with Mademoiselle Ferencisz about her journey, but she answered absently. I could see that her mind was on her cousin, and that there would be no peace for her until she was in that room on the second floor and holding Boriska in her arms.

The banging and scraping of the desk stopped. It was in place. The man with the telephone set it down on the shiny surface. He said: "What about the old one, chum? The boss didn't tell us—"

Kaspir wheeled, his frayed patience giving way.

"Take it away," he bayed. "Burn it! Eat it! Only get the damn thing out of here!"

"Sure." They went over to the wall. Once again they bent and strained. The thing seemed to drag on interminably. Getting it through the first doorway seemed an incredibly complex operation, but they finally achieved it. They were halfway through the outer office when I saw Kaspir frowning at the surface of the new desk with a disturbing intensity.

Then it came to me that he was looking at the telephone.

"Hey!" he bellowed. "Wait a minute."

With great deliberation they set the old desk down in the outer office, and the larger man returned to the doorway. He had a beefy face, with a flat nose and a mouth like a skate.

"Whatsa matter now, chum?" he said wearily, and began to feel in his pockets as though for a cigarette.

"Didn't you used to work at the Lafayette-Rouen bakery?" said Colonel Kaspir. He wasn't bellowing now. His voice was low and flat and hard. "About two years ago."

I heard General Tancred inhale sharply.

"The what?" said the large man.

"You heard me." Kaspir moved a step nearer the door.

The other man had moved up and was looking over his companion's shoulder.

Something made me glance at the telephone. I had a chilly, hollow sensation. Across my mind flashed Boriska Sibilger's last words to Kaspir: "You must take care. . . This man—this nobody. . ."

The larger man shook his head slowly. "You got me mixed up with somebody else." His hands were still in his pockets. The man behind him appeared to have his arms folded across his chest.

"Who told you where to find this office?" demanded Kaspir.

The larger man raised his eyebrows. "The colored fellow downstairs. He said: 'Go right on up. Third floor, back, right.' Just what—"

"He didn't come up with you?"

"No. He—"

"The hell you say!" Kaspir drew breath. "Joe," he yelled. We could hear his call echoing down through the lower halls. "Joe!"

"Shut up!" said the larger man, without raising his voice.

It was Sarana Ferencisz who screamed. Then I saw the gun in the larger man's hand.

Kaspir's head seemed to sink down between his bull shoulders.

"Don't make me do it," said the larger man. His voice was up a key or two.

I glanced around. I was proud of Maude in that moment. As casually as though she were reaching for a handkerchief, her hand went out to where her bag lay on the couch. In that bag she carries a small automatic.

General Tancred moved around in front of his chair. The larger man moved inches to his left. His companion joined him in the doorway. He had a gun, too. His eyes swept the room.

"Put that bag down, sister," he said.

Maude, her fingers on the clasp, became feminine and fluttered. "Why, I. . ."

"Put it down."

THE glance of the larger man wavered in her direction. Colonel Kaspir can move very quickly, for all his towering bulk. He shot across the eight or ten feet to the doorway as though thrown by a giant hand.

Had the distance been three feet less, he would have got his hands on them, and the story might have been different. Kaspir can crack thick-shelled walnuts between his thumb and forefinger.

This part is still confused in my mind. I remember stepping forward in Kaspir's wake, and General Tancred bouncing in ahead of me like a small, enraged terrier.

There was thunder in my ears as one of the guns went off. Tancred seemed to be tugging Kaspir out of the way. Then, very suddenly, I found myself face to face with the

larger man. I learned later that after Kaspir had gone down, a single clubbing blow of the man's fist had flung Tancred aside.

My hands went out eagerly to the larger man's throat. I might have made it, except for the second man. The pain that came when he brought his gun-barrel down on my right wrist clouded my eyes. But I can recall very distinctly the grunt that the larger man gave as he hammered my head with the butt of his weapon.

At this point I went over Niagara Falls in a barrel and everything turned dark.

Maude says that my first words, delivered from a reclining position on the floor, were: "It's no use, General."

That was when Tancred picked up the phone. I have no recollection of uttering the warning. But I was right. The wire had been cut. That was what Kaspir had noticed.

My first conscious thought was for my assailants. They were gone. I became aware that someone was shaking me and shouting in my ear. The words didn't make sense. That was because they were in French. It was Sarana Ferencisz, and her eyes were insane. I tried to shake her off but she clung to me. "Where is Boriska's room?" she was shouting.

I struggled to my feet. Mademoiselle Ferencisz loosed me. Her hands dropped to her sides. Her features, once so vigorously outlined, were now slack with dread. It was as though she were paralyzed by some picture in her mind.

I looked numbly toward the desk. Kaspir was there, in his swivel chair. Maude was there too, and Tancred. I was wondering angrily why someone was not doing something constructive when I saw that Kaspir was leaning far back, his face to the ceiling, and that Maude was unbuttoning his shirt. There was, amazingly, a cigarette between Kaspir's lips, the smoke ascending in a wavering line. He made no sound.

General Tancred was holding the telephone in both hands and cursing it in a low, spiritless tone. Suddenly he hurled it to the floor and, after a single glance at Kaspir, hurried out of the room. I found myself staggering after him, and heard Sarana Ferencisz behind me. Then the fear of what we might find came upon me, and only a mounting anger sustained me as I clattered, weak-legged and shaking, down the stairs to the second floor.

The walls buffeted me from one to the other as I plunged down the hallway to Boriska Sibilger's room. As I turned in at the door I stumbled over Tancred's foot. He was kneeling on the floor beside the large, white, limp mass that was Nurse Moran.

Boriska Sibilger was not in the room.

Tancred looked up. "Better have a look downstairs," he said.

From the doorway, Sarana Ferencisz cried: "Where is my cousin?"

I waited for Tancred's answer. "They've taken her, I think." He almost said: "I hope." It dawned on me why. If outright murder was their intention, why had it not been done in this room, once Nurse Moran was out of the way?

"Better go downstairs," said Tancred again.

I stepped over his foot this time. One thing—Nurse Moran was not dead. There was blood on her forehead and face, but her ample bosom rose and fell as I looked.

Sarana Ferencisz had come into the room. She cried, in a high, hysterical voice: "Why in the name of God are you not going after her?"

"Be quiet," said General Tancred, without looking up.

"But she—" The hysteria broke, as it sometimes does, in the middle of a thought. As I passed out of earshot she was saying, quite calmly: "Forgive me. Let me assist you with that unfortunate woman. . ."

CHAPTER FOUR

Sanctuary House

JOE was in the hall on the first floor, just behind the stairway. They must have struck him down from behind as soon as he admitted them. A single blow it was, across the base of the skull. Even so, one of his hands had got to a gun, for it was thrust Napoleon-wise under the flap of his white jacket. Of course he had been unable to draw. The action must have been pure reflex as he went forward on his face.

I dragged him into the dusty parlor that we never use and lifted him to a couch. I didn't like the way he was breathing—heavily, stertorously. I hoped the concussion was not as bad as it seemed.

I went, with no very clear idea of why I was going, into the street. It was dark now. People were passing on their way home from work. I walked a dozen yards or so, trying to collect my thoughts for action. Under a street lamp an urchin stood solemnly manipulating a yo-yo. He had an all-day sucker jammed into his jaw, and he regarded me without interest for a moment. Then he goggled. I put a hand to my head, above the right ear. It came away sticky.

"I fell downstairs," I said, before the child could pop the question. "Did you see a truck leave here, a big truck, the kind they use for furniture?"

"Uh-huh."

"How many men were on it?"

"Three or four. They brung some things out."

Things! Boriska Sibilger, bundled up in one of those padded affairs, must have made a small burden over a big man's shoulder.

I realized for the first time that we had not seen the kidnapers. The pair with the desk was both the decoy and the strong-arm squad, sent upstairs to keep things quiet while the actual abduction was taking place on the floor below.

"Which way did the truck go?"

"That way."

"Thanks." I felt in my pockets for change, found none. "Thanks," I said again, and headed for the corner drugstore. I managed to get to the rear without attracting undue attention. The druggist is a friend of mine and let me use the phone on the prescription desk, withdrawing tactfully to the front of the store as I began fumbling with his phone book.

My head ached abominably and my damaged wrist sent up a steady stream of distress signals. I could not seem to think. Or rather, I could not clear my mind of the thought of Boriska Sibilger. And of Sarana Ferencisz' words: ". . . this great, safe country of yours." Boriska, so suddenly yanked back into a branch office of the hell from which Kaspir had liberated her. . .

First I called two doctors. They said they would hurry. Then I called—yes, the furniture company. My guarded questions elicited the information that they had taken on a new truck driver and helper only the day before. I got the license number of the truck. Next I called the telephone company. Kaspir's number is a blind one. I knew that in Washington you get swifter repair service on blind numbers. Finally I called the private number of General Tancred's headquarters, where someone in authority is always on duty.

The man I got must have been very much in Tancred's confidence, for he cut into my first narrative paragraph with an eager suggestion about hitting the Lafayette-Rouen bakery. It was here that I made shameless use of Tancred's name. The bakery, I quoted Tancred, was positively out-of-bounds for raid action before the next day at five P. M. But I gave him the truck number, and said that Tancred had wished the search for it to be kept quiet and not reported to the civilian police.

Then I washed my head and face at a basin, combed my hair as well as I could with my fingers, and strolled back to headquarters wondering if my legs would last me to the third floor. I stood a moment on the little front stoop of the old building. The normal night sounds of southwest Washington seemed subdued and somehow sinister. Somewhere in the city was Boriska Sibilger—Boriska, worth "twelve divisions and ten million words of propaganda." But I thought of her, at that

particular time, more as a small, sick, frightened woman. It made me a little sick myself.

NURSE MORAN was in a hospital. So was Joe. Colonel Kaspir, hit twice by bullets from the big man's gun, was not. His refusal to go was uttered with a violence that silenced all further discussion on that topic. Even Maude, who can bulldoze him into most things, forebore pressing the matter.

The doctor—the other one had accompanied Joe and Nurse Moran to a hospital—finished cobbling Kaspir's two smashed ribs as best he could, plugged the hole below them (that bullet was still in) and, after a final warning about going to a hospital at the earliest possible moment, shook his head two or three times and departed. Tancred was gone, too, to supervise the search from his own headquarters. But Kaspir, before Tancred left, extracted from him a repetition of his promise to leave the *Boulangerie Lafayette-Rouen* alone until the agreed hour the next day.

Now Kaspir stood up, a cigarette dangling from his cupid's-bow mouth. Maude, who had previously finished patching the lump on my skull, took one final turn with adhesive tape about my swollen wrist.

Maude said: "Listen, Steve. . ." Her voice was unusually temperate.

"Huh?"

"Whatever you want done, Mike and I will do. You stay here."

He shook his head. I have seen Colonel Kaspir low in his mind but never like this.

"I started this thing. I got to finish it." Behind these simple words lay a confession of failure and mulishness and fear and indecision that shook me clear to my boots. Kaspir's normal self-rising confidence is an irritating thing. But I had never realized before how sustaining it is. Now that it was no longer in operation I missed it as a diabetic feels the lack of insulin.

Kaspir stuck his hands into his pockets. The move wrung a groan from him that he tried hard to turn into a cryptic grunt.

"Why ain't we heard anythin' from Arthur?" he burst out. His face darkened. "Unless Tancred's gone ahead and—" He shook his head again. "I don't think he will. But he thinks Ruiz has pulled this thing. And nothin' I'll ever be able to tell him will convince him that Ruiz ain't got the brains—no, nor the guts—for a job like this unless he had orders from up top." The cigarette bobbed up and down between his lips as he spoke. He took it out, gazed fixedly at the ash. "Up top," he said. "Old Man X, damn his soul. Old Mr. Nobody, with a zero for a face. I'll—"

He was improving. Even the suggestion of an empty threat was better than the self-reproach of his previous words.

"One thing," I said, "if they were going to kill her, why—"

"I know," he said. "I'm clingin' to that with my front teeth. Either it's a last-minute change in their plans or . . . But if it is, it's—what did Tancred call it?—'sheer insultin' arrogance.'"

"Arrogance?" Maude paused on her way to the clothes-closet where Kaspir keeps a heterogeneous collection of odd garments for emergencies.

"Arrogance—insolence—swagger, whatever you damn well want to call it. Sure. Old Man X has got his vanity up. He's been made a fool of once, over the Murphy business." Kaspir's eyes were alive now as the idea grew and flowered. Behind it I could see the desperate effort to convince himself. He eased himself into his chair, fiddled with the newly-repaired telephone. "Sure. He's goin' to show his bosses in Berlin he can pull one as good or better'n we can. Shootin's good, but not good enough. Suppose he delivers her right back to Dachau—alive!"

"Oh, Steve!" Maude's hand was at her throat.

I knew exactly how she felt. It would have enraged me beyond measure to have found Boriska Sibilger murdered. But that, at least, would have been a crime to be mourned and avenged. But the thought of that child of a woman on her way back to Dachau, and what must inevitably await her there. . .

I had distinct premonitory symptoms of nausea. But through them came another and stronger feeling, at once elemental and salutary. I wanted to hit somebody. Preferably Old Man X, if such an individual existed (I was still unconvinced in this regard), but more immediately the gentlemen who had turned Section Five into a small shambles.

Kaspir's next words, pessimistic as they were, served only to sharpen my acute craving for physical violence of some sort.

"And he wouldn't be figurin' on that," he said, head back, eyes shut, "unless he's got a way to do it. A pretty damn good way." The chair squealed as he righted himself, and Maude, at the closet door, dropped a clean white shirt she had found.

KASPIR seized the phone, dialed a familiar number, spoke briefly and urgently to two persons before he got the man he wanted. Then he stated his request.

I wondered if the man on the other end had the same reaction to that request as I did. It was plain from Kaspir's words that he was meeting with objections. But he overrode them. When he hung up he smiled a crooked smile.

"That's one leak stopped," he said grimly. "They won't take her out that way."

They wouldn't either. No dead would move out of Washington in the next eighteen hours, at least, not until the coffins had been inspected by efficient young men who would assure themselves that the corpse had no pulse. The FBI is a remarkable organization.

I could see my own desire for action mirrored in Kaspir's face now. Maude helped him into the clean shirt, tied his tie for him when she saw that raising his arms made the sweat stand out on his gray brow.

The telephone shrilled. Maude reached it before Kaspir could. She said "Hello," then listened. Kaspir fidgeted, scraping his feet noisily on the floor. Then she said, after half a minute: "Thank you, General," and hung up.

"Well—" began Kaspir petulantly.

She fetched his suit coat and overcoat from the couch before answering, and his impatience forced some color into his cheeks.

"They've located the truck," she said, easing him into his suit coat. "General Tancred says he knows you want to take over, so he'll wait until he hears from you before he makes any further move."

Kaspir did not speak until he was halfway into his overcoat. Then he said through his teeth: "Where?"

"In a side street called Wing Alley. It's only seven or eight blocks from here."

"Let's go," said Colonel Kaspir. We were almost out of the office when the telephone rang a second time.

I hurried back.

A low voice said: "Who dat?" In the background I could hear a clanking of some machine in operation.

I said: "That you, Arthur?" and felt a tremor of excitement creeping down from my neck along my arms and into my wrists. Arthur, porter at the Lafayette-Rouen, is a cousin of Joe, and, like Joe, a Columbia graduate. His specialty before the war was industrial psychology. Therefore the "Who dat?" meant that he was having to talk in character, presumably from the Lafayette-Rouen bakery itself. The clanking machine was probably a bread-mixer.

"It's me, honey," said Arthur. Then another voice penetrated the background of sound. I could not hear what it said, but Arthur said hurriedly: "'Scuse me a minute, honey." I heard him say: "I'll be th'ough in a moment, Mistah Gaudette. Jes' talkin' to my gal." The other man said something sharp. Then his voice died.

Arthur said: "I'm gittin' off a little early tonight, and wondered would you like to catch that late show at the Palace?"

"What time?" I said. "Where shall we meet?"

"In front de store. About ten o'clock,

honey. So long. I got work to do now. You be there, huh?"

I said I would and hung up. Kaspir was back in the room now. So was Maude. The tension in my voice had communicated itself to them.

"Arthur," I said. "He's got something, I think. We'll pick him up at ten."

"Where?" This from Kaspir, frowning.

"In front of the store," he said.

Kaspir said: "He'd never have said that if he figured on going back to work there tomorrow—or ever." Then he said, "Hmmm," and turned away. There was finality in his tone and manner. Maude made a little grimace of excitement at me. We went downstairs. The building seemed strangely empty without Joe. You could feel his absence. An uncomfortable feeling.

Colonel Kaspir halted a passing taxi with an ear-splitting whistle. He climbed in with an injudicious vigor that left him panting and swearing.

"Wing Alley," said Maude to the driver. "I'll tell you how to get there."

THE young man in the gray suit, waiting in the shadow of the abandoned truck, stepped out and said: "Colonel Kaspir?"

Wing Alley was a cobblestone lane between the blank backs of stores, and the single light at the entrance did not quite reach us. The night air was humidly cold, and I felt Maude, who had taken my arm, shiver a little.

"Yep. It's me. Anything in it?"

"Not a thing, sir," said Tancred's man. "That is, nothing significant. Just a few desks and chairs and such. But I'd suggest, sir, that this would be an ideal place to transfer the—er—victim to another truck. Or a car."

"Yep." Kaspir leaned against the side of the truck, his cigarette-end scarlet in the half-light.

The man in the gray suit hesitated. "I did find one thing, up the alley a little way," he said diffidently. "I don't know whether it means anything, but I thought I'd better. . ."

"Let's see it."

Tancred's man took a small, paper-wrapped package from his pocket. I had a feeling that he was flushing as he unwrapped it.

"This," he said, handing it to Kaspir.

"Hey!" said Colonel Kaspir.

It was a French roll, of the sort known as *petit pain*.

Colonel Kaspir broke it open. For a second I thought he was going to eat it. Then he took it away from his nose and threw it down. "Today's bakin'," he said. "Is there a bakery near here?"

"Next block, to your left," said Tancred's man. "Perhaps some child dropped it out of a bag. On the other hand—"

"Yeah," said Kaspir. There was a lengthy silence, during which the night mist seemed to be settling in my bones.

"Nope," said Kaspir, to no one in particular. "Anyhow. . ."

We waited some more.

"It's the Lafayette-Rouen for you, Maude," said Kaspir suddenly. "They didn't take her there. But I can't be sure. . . Anyhow—"

"Wait a minute," I protested. "You can't send Maude into—"

"I'm not sendin' her *in* there, you ninny," exploded Kaspir. "Maude, get along and keep an eye on the place. I can't even tell you what to look for, because I don't know. But hang around. And pick Arthur up at ten, if you don't spot anything before that. Get back to headquarters then. If Mike and I ain't there, wait for us." His eye fell upon Tancred's gray-suited subordinate. "You go with her," he said.

"Yes, sir," said Tancred's man with the first animation he had shown.

Maude's high heels clicked away down the alley. Tancred's man had a hand at her elbow, lest she stumble. An unnecessary precaution, I thought, jealously.

Colonel Kaspir, without another word, started in the other direction. We emerged from Wing Alley into a block of small stores. It was after seven o'clock now, and all save a delicatessen and a drugstore were closed, including a small bakery next to the drugstore. Kaspir evinced no interest whatever in the bakery, which rather surprised me. In fact, I raised the question.

HE stopped dead in the middle of the sidewalk and I thought I was in for another outburst.

To my surprise, he said meekly: "Mike, I got a confession. I'm scared to check on this hunk o' bread. I'm scared I'll find out it didn't drop off a Lafayette-Rouen truck. I'm scared I'll stop believin' in Old Man X—and I got to believe in him. Maybe he's more than one guy. But all I got to go on is my original belief. He's high up somewhere, he's got friends high up, otherwise how'd he click on that troop-train business? And he's just the opposite o' everything an agent's supposed to look like. If I had time, maybe I could sit down and grind out a better theory. But we ain't got time. He's got Sibilger—sure, he used the Lafayette-Rouen crowd for the rough work, but he ain't takin' any chances like keepin' her at the bakery. Not after that double-bluff Zelli's been playin' with me—at X's orders. Believe me, Mike, he's capable o' torturin' Sibilger right here in Washington, if he saw any point to it. And I'll tell you the one other thing that's hauntin' me. It ain't only a question of findin' X. We got to hit

him quick and hard when we do. Otherwise, if he finds us pussyfootin' around, he'll kill her outright. But not until he's forced to do it. You dig me?"

He tried to smile, but his mouth wouldn't stretch far enough to make it convincing. We started walking again, aimlessly. We passed beyond the block of stores and rambled through a residential section of old houses, big houses. Kaspir's head was bowed. My spirits felt as though someone had drawn a hot, wet blanket over them and left it there. The inspiring desire to have a crack at somebody had unaccountably died in me.

Out of Kaspir's turned-up coat collar came a very faint voice that might have belonged to anyone but him. "Mike, I'm not feelin' so hot." He had slowed down. Suddenly he staggered.

I looked wildly around for a cab. There was, of course, none in sight. I grabbed Kaspir's arm and steered him, tottering, over to the nearest support in sight, one of the gateposts of a big old house set deep in a broad lawn among trees—a rare sight in this part of Washington.

Kaspir's weight bore on me. He leaned his cheek against a brass plate on the post as though hoping its cool surface might be soothing. Then he toppled forward in a half-faint, and over his shoulder, as I caught him under the arms, I caught a glimpse of the legend inscribed on the brass: *Sanctuary House*. It didn't register at the moment, for Kaspir's collapse had alarmed and addled my not-too-steady nerves.

Footfalls on the sidewalk. I called out: "Lend me a hand, will you?"

The Samaritan stopped. He was a tall man. Without a word he added his support to mine. Between us we were just able to keep Kaspir—he is well above six feet and admits to two hundred and seventy-five pounds—from going forward in a face-smashing fall on the concrete.

The tall stranger peered into Kaspir's face. Then, in a surprised voice, slightly accented: "By all that's holy! Are you not Steve Kaspir?"

The voice, the face, and the name-plate on the post added up in my mind. Sanctuary House! What a break! And the Samaritan—I could see his features now—was the Reverend Frederick Francis Null! All Washington, particularly official Washington, knows Null. I had met him and his beautiful wife once at a reception.

"Here," said Null briskly. "Get him inside."

I became merely a helper as we half-carried, half-guided Kaspir between the gateposts and up a flagstoned walk. We were near the house when Kaspir snapped out of it a little—

enough to turn his head and say, in a tone of relief that did not help my vanity: "That you, Frank? I'm sorry as hell. . ."

"Forget it, Steve," said Null. He was a powerful man, which was fortunate, for I was weak from apprehension for Kaspir and the battering I had taken earlier. Null took over as we reached the steps and somehow got Kaspir onto a broad porch and up to a lofty door. He freed one hand, opened the door. "Miriam," he called. "Miriam!"

Upstairs there was a buzzing of many children's voices.

"Ah," said Colonel Kaspir faintly, and went out cold.

Miriam Null came running down the vaulted hall. Hers were the eyes that might have belonged to Boriska Sibilger, large, shining, passionate.

CHAPTER FIVE

Morte d'Arthur

"SHALL I get you a surgeon, Steve?" asked Null anxiously.

We were in a parlor, a parlor scarred by the shoes and games of children, and Kaspir's face, looking up from the couch, was as pale as a winter moon.

Miriam Null swept in. "Bouillon," she said. "Here, Colonel."

Kaspir took the cup in a shaky hand and absorbed its contents at a single swallow.

He shook his head. "No docs," he said, and grinned apologetically. He sat up, waving away Null's hand. "I'm gettin' to be an old woman," he said. "Who's got a cigarette?"

"You are hurt, Steve?" said Null, hovering near, his round, pleasant face solicitous.

I opened my mouth to explain, but Kaspir—he abhors a fuss and sympathy—said quickly: "Somethin' I ate, no doubt." The grin returned. "Anyhow," he said, "my luck's in, pickin' your doorstep to faint on, Frank."

He was more serious than he sounded. I knew what he meant. With our entry into Sanctuary House, a raw spot on my nerves had healed. This place was so completely removed, I thought, so exactly opposite to the dirty business of murder and kidnapping and treachery that had led us into the neighborhood. Here was courage and hope and unselfishness.

Perhaps you have forgotten the Reverend Frederick Francis Null and his wife. They figured briefly in the newspapers immediately after the fall of Austria to Hitler. Null—he always referred to himself as a social worker rather than a minister, and I think he had given up his ministry years before in favor of nonsectarian charity work—had had an agency for the care of underprivileged chil-

dren in Vienna. He was a Viennese himself. The first thing he did after the *Anschluss* was to have Miriam Null smuggled out of the city. Once she was safe, in Lisbon, I think, he raised his voice. He raised it high and he raised it hard, and his words were very plain. He was beaten. But still, the moment they freed him, he resumed his attacks on the Third Reich. That he ever got out of Vienna alive was due to his friends, who knew that the next time he was in custody he would be shot, not beaten. They virtually forced him to leave, convincing him finally that his death would avail him or them nothing. He turned up in Lisbon, and in the two days before he left by Clipper there were two reported attempts on his life—attempts which the German propaganda machine gravely disavowed. Once in Washington, he immediately threw himself into the business of establishing a home for refugee children. He had friends in Washington, and he was not backward about going to them for money. When they saw what he was accomplishing at Sanctuary House, they formed The Friends of Sanctuary House, Inc. so that Sanctuary House might operate free from financial worries. Kaspir was a director once, I believe, his name small among the dignitaries listed with him.

A river of children had passed through Sanctuary House. Once the unfortunate child was healed, mentally and physically, and fed to strength and vigor, the Nulls saw that he got a good home with a family of his own countryfolk. They did not believe in keeping children in an institution, even their own, longer than necessary. Besides, they could serve more that way.

The public forgot Null quickly once he dropped from the headlines. That suited Null. He wanted only to be allowed to do the work he had chosen. And he was doing it. The very atmosphere of the room in which we sat, the very look in the eyes of Miriam Null as she anguished over Kaspir, attested to it.

I watched Miriam Null with real interest. That she worshipped her husband was evident. But behind her eyes was an inextinguishable fear, born, I suppose, during those months of waiting in Lisbon. She was a beautiful woman, apparently of a pure Jewish strain, and there was soul and mysticism in her eyes. I recalled their one tragedy—that they were childless. A curious union it was, Null vigorous, matter-of-fact, a fighter, and this woman with a different sort of strength.

The children, I imagined as I sat there, benefited, for Miriam Null took out all her frustrated maternal love in giving each waif a real home at Sanctuary House.

She said now: "Colonel Kaspir, are you sure you would not like me to call a doctor?"

Kaspir shook his head. He had stopped smiling. I saw that his mind had returned to our business in hand, and that he was anxious to get away as soon as he felt strong enough. I wondered if he was bleeding internally, and cast about for some moral lever with which to force him into a hospital.

"May I ask, Steve, what good fortune put you in our hands?" said Null.

I saw Kaspir meditating an evasive reply, then spotted the sudden decision in his eyes as he gazed at Miriam Null.

"You remember hearing about Boriska Sibilger?" he said.

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DETECTIVE TALES

Null looked at his wife, frowning.

Miriam Null said: "The little prophetess of Budapest?"

"Yes."

"The one"—Null's face darkened—"who went to Dachau?"

"Yes."

"I remember her. She prophesied that Germany would—"

"Uh-huh. Well, she's in Washington. I brought her here. Tonight the Gestapo got her."

I HEARD the quick intake of breath by the Nulls. Something like horror sprang into the eyes of Miriam Null. Null made a sound that was more like a growl.

"We're tryin' to get her back. I'm tellin' you this because you never can tell. If you folks hear anything, anything at all, get in touch with me. God only knows what you'd hear. But I'm clutchin' for anything now." The words were as hollow as though they had come from a death-mask, and Kaspir realized it. He rallied what spirits he could to an attempt at diversion. "Maybe something'll come to you, Miriam," he said, with heavy humor. "She's of your race of prophets and prophetesses."

"Come to me?" Miriam Null was puzzled.

"Sure. Wasn't Miriam a prophetess in the Old Testament. I seem to recall somethin' about 'Miriam, sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand. . .'"

Miriam Null smiled. The strain in the room lessened.

Null put in, in his scholarly way: "Don't forget Deborah, Steve, the wife of Lapidoh. And Huldah, wife of Shallum. And Noadiah—they were all prophetesses." He glanced at his wife. "My Miriam, Steve, prophesies nothing more esoteric than a big waistline for me if I do not give up starches."

It was I who interrupted this pleasant but irrelevant talk. I did not like Kaspir's color. Also, when Kaspir goes in for such trivialities, it usually means that he is covering something. In this case, I could see now, it was pain. Severe pain. That argued a dangerous condition. I had no choice. "May I use your telephone?" I said to Null.

It was significant that Kaspir did not demand to know why or, guessing my purpose, raise objections. He was about washed out.

"But certainly. Miriam, will you show Captain Kettle to my office?"

She led me up a broad stairway, saying: "Frank prefers to have his office on the floor where the children sleep. He works late at night sometimes, and he likes to be near if a child has a nightmare." Her voice dropped. "Our children," she said, "have many nightmares."

I noted, as we walked down a long, high-ceilinged hall, that Sanctuary House kept early hours. It was only a little after eight, but through the closed doors of what I took to be sleeping rooms there was only an occasional murmur.

Miriam Null showed me into a very businesslike office at the rear of the house. I telephoned the doctor who had done the preliminary work on Kaspir's wounds. He was expected home momentarily. His night nurse would call me—I gave her the Sanctuary number—the instant he arrived. I thought about a cab, then decided against it. Something warned me that a medical opinion was desirable before Kaspir was moved.

Miriam Null said: "While you are waiting, would you like to see some of the playrooms? Frank has worked wonders with this house. We shall be able to hear the telephone—the staircase is right outside." She looked terribly weary yet somehow alert, as though listening for the slightest sound of fear or pain from the dormitories.

We went up a short flight to the third floor. A heavy-set, calm-faced woman sat outside one door, under a light, reading a book. She looked up, smiled.

"They are all right, Anna?" said Mrs. Null, concern in her voice.

"Marie is awake, but her temperature is not high. Francine is asleep."

"Our infirmary," Miriam Null said. Then, on impulse: "Would you care to see it. It is one of Frank's pet projects." To Anna: "We shall be careful not to wake your sleeper, Anna."

I tiptoed in after her. It was a lovely room, at once sterile and homelike. A shaded light burned in one corner. Two of the four beds were occupied. A merry-looking, flushed eight- or nine-year-old sat up. She had dimples. She said something to Miriam Null in a language I guessed was Polish, and Miriam Null answered affectionately in the same tone.

The other occupant, a blond-haired child, was asleep, and did not awake. Back in the hall again Miriam Null told me something of the history of the dimpled Pole, and added that she would be going to Martinique—it seemed that they had discovered a cousin of hers living there—as soon as her cold and touch of fever made traveling safe. The blond sleeper—here Miriam Null shook her head—had lost all her people in Southern France. She was staying on a while longer. She was recovering from pneumonia.

We had viewed just one of the playrooms when the telephone below rang. We hurried back down. I told Dr. Evans of Kaspir's partial collapse. He sounded alarmed and said he would be right over.

IT WAS just as well that he made good time. Two minutes before he got there, Kaspir, in a patent effort to prove to himself that he was better than he felt, stood up and walked over to the mantelpiece to inspect a Murano vase. He collapsed on the hearth before Null and I could reach him, and when we laid him back on the couch there was a trickle of red from the corner of his mouth.

A tinkling clock was striking nine as Dr. Evans blew in. Dr. Evans gets things done. Ten minutes later we were on our way, by ambulance, to St. George's Hospital. Twenty minutes after that Colonel Kaspir and I were closeted with an attendant in an elevator on the way to the operating room. Kaspir, a bulky ghost, nearly covered the rolling table on which he lay sheeted and drowsy from a shot in the arm. Evans had warned him against trying to talk, but from time to time, as we ascended, and when I walked beside him to the big and frightening glazed doors behind which the glaring lights burned, I saw his clouded glance on me and knew that he was fighting desperately to think, to keep his mind clear to the last.

The attendant pushed open the door, with a look at me which told me that here was where I got off. It was here that Kaspir made one final, valiant effort, a mere raising of one hand, that obviously took all his strength and courage to make, and which gave me a tightness in the throat that I still remember.

His lips moved. I bent over, conscious that the attendant was looking at me with marked disapproval.

"Your party now, Mike," said Colonel Kaspir, lips bloodless. His try at a grin was a ghastly thing. Then, with a feeble forefinger, he traced a ragged circle in the air for emphasis, and was borne off to the ether.

I flopped to a bench apparently put there for people to flop on. A passing nurse took one look at me, hurried on, and, without a word, returned and thrust a jigger-glass of ammonia-and-water at my mouth. I drank it, coughed, and thanked her with my eyes. She made a thumbs-up gesture and went away.

I dropped my head to my knees. A violent trembling took charge of my limbs. It was more nerves, I think, than physical infirmity. I think the whole weight and realization of my responsibility struck me at once. Kaspir was gone. Would he ever come out of that operating room? Alive, that is.

Someone shook me gently. I had not heard them approach. It was Maude and General Tancred. Between her concern for me and her fears for Kaspir, Maude was little, if any, better off than I. Tancred needed a shave. On his face, as he mentioned Kaspir's name, was an expression I had never seen before. I had always assumed that he had respected Kaspir rather than liked him. Now I knew differently.

I pulled myself together as best I could—Maude's presence is always a tonic, and I hate to appear weak or incompetent before her—and told them what little I knew of Kaspir's condition. I asked them how they had happened to find out about Kaspir so quickly. It seemed that Maude had called headquarters, and, getting no answer, had called Tancred. At a venture Tancred had called the hospitals, getting St. George's a minute or two after Kaspir had been admitted.

Suddenly I remembered that Maude—my watch said nine forty-eight—was supposed to be casing the Lafayette-Rouen with Tancred's young man. I remembered also that, in Kaspir's absence, I was in charge.

I asked her about Arthur. She glanced at Tancred, who nodded dourly. I don't know why, but at once I felt as though my ribs and backbone had been painlessly removed, that my whole torso had jellied with dismay.

"Arthur is dead," Maude said.

ON THE way back to our headquarters I heard the details. They were horribly simple.

Maude and Tancred's man, standing in a doorway across the street from the Lafayette-Rouen, had been astonished to see a police car pull up in front of the bakery. Half a dozen policemen had piled out.

Tancred's man had interrogated the driver of the police car. It was not a raid. They had been called there by Ruiz, the owner. There had been an accident in the service alley leading to the rear entrance.

Maude and her companion had circled the building and approached the little knot of excited men from the service alley.

It was Arthur, all right.

Ruiz and Gaudette and Zelli were all present, excitedly telling a police lieutenant about the "accident." Zelli had been turning a light delivery truck around in the little court by the loading platform when Arthur, who had

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been cleaning up the court, unaccountably got in the way. The truck had backed over him.

There was one thing more. This I heard when we had settled ourselves in Kaspir's office as comfortably as our frame of mind would permit.

Tancred's man, at Maude's suggestion, had got one of the policemen aside and shown him his credentials. At his request, the officer, while Ruiz and Gaudette and Zelli were still haranguing the lieutenant, had gone into the bakery and had a look at the downstairs phone, the one from which Arthur had called headquarters when he talked with me.

"It was an extension, Mike," Maude said. Her lips were tight, her eyes deep and angry. "The other phone was in Ruiz' office."

So Arthur's act had gone for naught. Someone in Ruiz' office, listening in, had heard my male voice replying to Arthur's purported remarks to a female. So Arthur had been disposed of.

I thought of Colonel Kaspir, of Joe and Nurse Moran. I thought of Boriska Sibilger. And now Arthur. . .

Maude took a piece of paper from her handbag, some sort of printed form, about four by six inches.

"The policeman brought us this," she said. "There was a pad of them, and a pencil, beside the basement telephone. Of course, there's no way of knowing whether Arthur did this."

She handed it over. It was a standard order blank, topped by the name and address of the *Boulangerie Lafayette-Rouen*.

There was nothing written on it. Just a circle. A large circle, done in pencil. That was all.

I gave up. My head had begun to ache again. I realized that I would need some rest if I wished to avoid a complete collapse. And a collapse was something I could not afford at this point. Although, I asked myself, what good was I on my feet?

I asked Tancred about Sarana Ferencisz. He had taken her with him when he left us after the affray and had made himself responsible for her safety. He replied grimly that she was at his home in Chevy Chase, and that there were enough of his men on the premises to stand off X (I noted that General Tancred referred to X as though he had never had any doubt that the man, or men, existed) and his whole gang and a squad of paratroopers to boot. With that, Tancred took his leave, promising to call us if anything turned up. He did not sound very optimistic, although he tried.

Maude went downstairs to take a nap in one of the second-floor bedrooms, not, however, the one lately occupied by Boriska Sibilger. I took the couch because I wanted to be near the phone. Under the warmth of

two blankets I was asleep, I believe, in less than a minute.

CHAPTER SIX

The Man Who Was Nobody

THE story broke in the early afternoon papers next day. Not the story of Boriska Sibilger. This was another, and, in its way, a grimmer tale.

I woke with a start at a sound in the office. The sound came from Maude. She was setting a tray on Kaspir's desk, and I caught the heartening odor of coffee. Then she raised a shade. Bright sunlight slanted into the room.

I glanced at my watch. Then I took another look. Maude saw the amazement in my face.

She said: "That's right. It's after one."

I had slept more than fourteen hours!

I demanded to know why she had not awakened me earlier. She shrugged her shoulders. She looked as though she had slept badly. But her blond hair—it looked almost red in the sunlight, for it is a deep cornsilk shade—was perfectly coiffed, as usual, and her skirt and blouse were fresh and unwrinkled.

"What for?" she said morosely. "Tancred hasn't heard anything. I called him. I called the hospital. Nothing definite on Steve. The bullet's out. He's on the critical list." The life seemed to have left her voice.

"Look at this," she said dully. "I picked this up at the drugstore when I went for the coffee."

She gave me a newspaper.

They had played it up big, and, as an old newspaperman myself, I could hardly blame them. Curiously enough, I felt no emotion as I read, although the thing was staggering.

The streamer read:

REFUGEE CHILD KIDNAPPED, WIFE OF MINISTER TORTURED, BURNED.

It seemed that, just before dawn, the Reverend Frederick Francis Null had been awakened by screams. Mr. Null and his wife slept in adjoining rooms on the first floor of Sanctuary House.

He had looked immediately into his wife's room. She was not there. The screams seemed to come from the cellar. He had found her there, near the furnace, tied to a cellar stanchion. Her mouth and hands were horribly burned.

At her feet lay a coal, still red, from the furnace.

From her burned mouth he had been able to gather that, hearing a noise in the cellar and not wishing to awaken him, she had fearlessly gone down herself to investigate. Then

three men had seized her. One of them had, wrapped in a blanket, one of the refugee children. The child was gagged.

They seized Mrs. Null and tied her to the stanchion.

And that was where the story of Mrs. Null ended. She had gone completely to pieces with pain and shock after telling her husband this much. Why she had been tortured, what the torturers wished to learn, Mr. Null and the police could not say. She had been removed to a private sanitarium operated by a neurologist friend of the family, and there were grave fears that her reason had been permanently impaired by her experience.

Mr. Null, once he had made his wife as comfortable as possible and called a doctor, had rushed upstairs.

One child was missing. She had been taken very quietly from the little infirmary on the third floor—so quietly that the nurse, Anna Brule, sleeping in the next room, had not been awakened.

The missing child was—I had a vision of curly dark hair, flushed cheeks, dimples—Marie Lebowski, nine, a Polish orphan, who, within the next day or two, was to have left by plane on the journey that would eventually bring her to Martinique and a home awaiting her there with a cousin.

The other child in the infirmary, Francine Demeresque, thirteen, was convalescing from pneumonia, and had also, under the influence of a mild sedative, slept through the kidnapping.

The story wound up with the usual stuff—police on the trail, no news at press time on the missing Marie, the old history of Null and his wife rehashed, plus the obvious dark and vague hints that the incredibly brutal business was the work of Nazi agents.

Maude said: "What about it, Mike? Tanced's all at sea."

I LAY back on the couch. I tried to visualize Miriam Null with that full-lipped, red mouth and those sensitive hands burned raw. But before I could concentrate on this, a question Null had asked Kaspir popped into my mind, out of nowhere, the way those things do.

"Mike. . ."

I shut my eyes, shook my head fiercely. An idea was budding somewhere in the dark corners of my mind, an idea so unbelievable and so tenuous that I was afraid it would dry up and disappear before I could throw more light on it and examine it from all angles.

Maude's lighter clicked as she prepared to light a cigarette. She told me later that I flung a very rude word at her, but I have no recollection of speaking.

I rose like a sleepwalker, and like a sleepwalker I went into the outer office. Maude fol-

lowed. In our recapitulation that night she confessed to a fear that my reason had cracked under the strain. And what I did next strengthened this impression.

I am not a devoutly religious person. Hence Maude's astonishment when, from a little shelf of reference books beside her typewriter, I took a regrettably dusty Bible that Colonel Kaspir had once brought to the office to settle one of the arguments in which he and Maude and I are forever engaging.

Luckily the Bible had a cyclopedic Concordance. Otherwise I might have lost hours in a maddening search. As it was, even with the Concordance for guidance it took minutes, because the phrase I was after—one of those things that stick in your mind from childhood—was not easy to find.

I read aloud, while Maude gaped: "*Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar:*

"And he laid it upon my mouth"—I heard Maude gasp, but I read on, my voice rising as the welter of thoughts in my mind took shape—"and said, *Lo this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.*"

I put the book down and looked at Maude.

I knew now that Miriam Null's hands had not been tied when her hands and mouth were burned.

It developed automatically. I knew where I could find Boriska Sibiliger.

And I knew, or rather, I was afraid I knew, where I would find that dimpled Marie Lebowski, aged nine.

I said: "When we got into Sanctuary House last night, Null asked Kaspir if he could get him 'a surgeon.'" That was the question that had popped into my mind and erased my picture of Miriam Null.

"Are you sure you—" Maude began. Then: "Why didn't he say 'doctor'?"

"That's what I was wondering," I said. But I wasn't wondering. Null had known Kaspir was wounded. How had he known?

"Let's go," I said. Maude, without a word, fetched her jacket and my coat and topcoat and tie and hat and got me into them as I stood rooted in the middle of the office.

We were nearly at the street door when I remembered that I had not brought along a gun. I borrowed Maude's little "scent-sprinkler" (a favorite jibe of Kaspir's). She asked no questions. We found a cab. I gave the driver the address of Sanctuary House. It was not until I was ringing the bell that I began to be actively afraid. That was because my first job was to look for Marie Lebowski.

Frederick Francis Null himself answered the door. His round face was ravaged by strain and emotion.



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I said: "I won't waste words offering you sympathy, Mr. Null. I couldn't say anything that would do any good. But my office is interested in this affair. Will you show me down to the cellar where—where this awful thing happened?"

He nodded. Then, as we went back through the hall, he became curiously talkative. He expressed the greatest concern over Kaspir. He informed me that the children had been sent on a tour of the Smithsonian to get them out of the way for the afternoon. He pressed me for news of Marie Lebowski. His speech was fuzzy, the speech of a man whose nervous system is so close to the cracking point that he must pour out words in an effort to maintain mental equilibrium.

We descended a narrow flight of stairs into a spacious cellar of several rooms. Mr. Null was still talking. Maude listened politely.

He pointed out the post. He said that the fragments of rope had been removed by the police.

I wandered around the cellar. So fixed had my conclusions become by now that I was not really searching. I was merely trying to stiffen myself against the task in hand.

The coal pile—there must have been a dozen tons—was in a boarded enclosure a few feet from the big furnace. The surface of the big black hill looked oddly regular, almost as though it had been smoothed over with the long-handled shovel leaning against the boards.

Null fell silent as I seized the shovel and began to dig.

I could feel Maude behind me. Also I could feel, emanating from her as though in waves, the surging horror that my actions were creating in her.

I dug without haste, wondering meanwhile why I was not excited, angry, horrified like Maude.

The shovel edge struck something soft.

I uncovered a small, blackened foot and leg, a knee, the edge of a smudged, once-white nightdress.

"Boriska!" breathed Maude.

That word was nearly our undoing. I had been so positive that the body would be that of Marie Lebowski that for a moment I was unnerved.

I heard the feet of Frederick Null grating on the concrete floor behind us, but so violent was the shock of Maude's suggestion that I paid no attention. All I could think of was settling this unexpected problem that Maude had posed. I dropped to my knees, began clawing at the coal with my hands.

Maude cried: "Mike, he's—"

I heard Null's footfalls as he sprang up the cellar stairs. But I had to know.

It was Marie Lebowski. She had been

Who Owns Boriska?

strangled. I left her pitiful body on the coal and ran over to the stairs.

The anger had come now.

THE first floor was silent. But in a room directly overhead there were sounds as though someone were moving furniture.

I ran up the back stairs. The landing brought me out opposite the open door of Null's office. He was moving around in there, and there was a familiar odor. Then I saw the wisp of smoke.

Maude joined me. I glanced up. I had a flash of the square face of the maid Anna peering palely over the rail from the third floor.

I made an abortive move toward the fire-hose coiled on the rack across the hall from Null's office, then decided against it and stepped to the door of the office. Null was working very quickly and efficiently. Already a fire was blazing on a rug in the center of the office, and he was ripping out the contents of filing cases to feed it. It had begun to crackle.

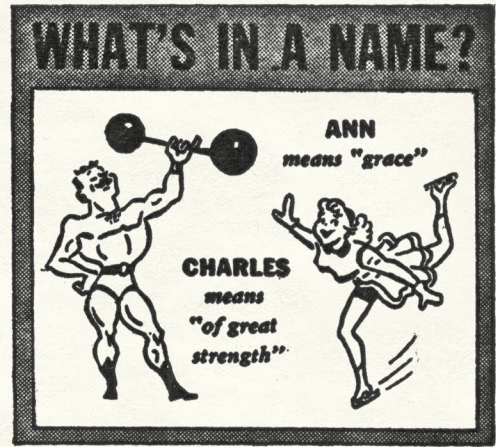
I roared inanely: "Here, wait a minute. . ."

Null straightened up, looked me in the eye. Then he charged. As I have said, he was a powerful man, and his rush carried me out into the hall as a good blocking back takes out his opponent. I think I pounded him feebly about the ribs once or twice as I gave ground. Then I brought up with a jarring crash against the far wall, inches from where Maude was trying to unwind the firehose.

Why I did not use my gun I shall never know. Perhaps it was that I enjoyed, to the exclusion of more important things, the luxury of getting my hands on Null. I did. Again he drove me back, using one arm. The other hand was clawing at his hip, and as he closed with me against the wall the glimpse of a gun in his hand put some frantic and badly-needed strength into my arms.

The next instant I was cursing the firehose and the regulation that insists on large fire-hoses in institutions, for Null and I and the hose had become entangled in a thrashing mass. It would have been ludicrous—a far-fetched burlesque of the Laocoön group—save for that gun in Null's hands. The quarters were too close for him to shoot, but he was trying to free his arms to use the barrel against my head. I gripped his arms, and we spun around, thrashing our way against the wall. So confused were my mental processes at this point that when my hands touched cold metal I thought I had hold of Null's gun. I wrenched viciously. There was no resistance.

I discovered I had the brass nozzle of the hose in my hands. Only a reflex action born



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of the instinct of self-preservation made me turn it into a weapon, for Null had freed his gun-hand and the muzzle of the heavy automatic was coming up. I chopped down. There was an explosion, a burning sensation near my right knee. I thought, "My God!" and chopped again. This time I got his head, and the sound sickened me, for I could feel through the brass the skull giving way.

I discovered that Maude was doing something with the control wheel.

I stepped aside as Null went down like a tree in the forest, the gun still clasped in his dead, or dying hand. He was quite dead a few minutes later.

A curl of the hose still hung over my shoulder. Maude said: "Watch out, Mike!"

The nozzle jerked in my hands. The jet of water struck the ceiling, washed down over the pair of us. It was here that I remembered the fire. I stepped to the door of Null's office. It took only seconds to blast away that blaze of papers and turn the rug into a smoking, sodden mess.

It was footsteps on the third floor that reminded me of the last stop on this pilgrimage of mine.

I helped Maude shut off the water. "Come on," I said.

We reached the infirmary just as the woman Anna was bundling a limp, little form with blond hair into a closet. She turned as I ran in, swore savagely at me in German.

My only excuse for what I said and did is that I was over-fatigued. I did not go to Anna. Instead, I took out Maude's "scent-sprinkler."

I said in German: "If you do not put the little *fräulein* on her bed immediately, I shall shoot you through the head."

I think she must have had some dim idea of making a fight for it, for she wavered—just long enough to ascertain that I meant exactly what I said.

Maude pushed past me, seized the night-gowned form from Anna's arms, stood with it in her own arms. She looked at me, her lower lip trembling, her eyes filled with tears.

"I take it, Mike," she said shakily, "that this is Boriska Sibilger." She passed a hand, a very gentle hand, over the lately-dyed hair. "It is," I said.

THE moment of victory is sweet. It is the moment after victory where weakness catches you unawares.

"Get out," said Maude sharply to the woman Anna. "We will come for you later."

It was thoughtful of her to spare me embarrassment, for a second later I sat down heavily on one of the beds and put my face into my hands.

Who Owns Boriska?

I heard Maude lay Boriska Sibilger on the next bed. Boriska Sibilger stirred faintly.

"When you get time," I said feebly, "will you call Tancred and ask him to take over? I'm about through."

I was not wrong. I was about through. It was an hour and several stimulants later—Maude found some rum in the kitchen—before I was able to go below, leave Tancred, and go with Maude to the hospital to see Kaspir.

I saw Dr. Evans first. He said, looking closely at me; "If it's bad news you can't see him."

"I can see him," I said. "And don't be surprised if he jumps out of bed and does a Highland Fling." But I was not quite as joyful as I sounded, because I could not, nor shall I ever, entirely forget Marie Lebowski, aged nine, whose only crime in this world, as I see it, was being born.

Such is vanity, though, that even the thought of Marie Lebowski could not keep me from preening myself just a trifle as a nurse ushered Maude and me into Kaspir's room.

Kaspir was propped up. He looked not so bad, considering what he had been through.

"We've got her," I said. "And him," I added. He knew what I meant.

"It was Null, wasn't it?" he said, before I could speak.

"Who told you?" I cried, stung.

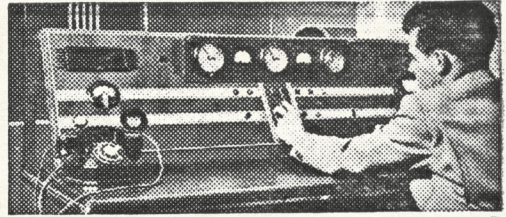
"Nobody." There was a trace of his old bumptiousness in Kaspir's voice and manner. But he said: "I got to hand it to you, Mike. I didn't get it until about three minutes ago. I got to pondering around, and then it drifted across my weak mind that *null* means 'zero' or 'cipher' or 'nobody' in German. Not that that was conclusive. But I began to get a vague idea of what a sucker I been all along. But this business"—he waved a plump hand toward a folded newspaper on a side table—"about Miriam and the burns, I don't get."

"Perhaps," said Maude, a trifle acidly, "if you'd save that valuable breath and listen, Steve, Mike might condescend to explain."

It isn't often that I get a chance like this at Kaspir. And he had to listen. There were things he was dying to know.

So I told him, and I am sure that I will, in view of certain indignities I have suffered at Kaspir's hands in the past, be forgiven if I confess that I talked down to him the least little bit. When I think how, in the past, he has pirouetted after the successful conclusion of a case. . .

IT WAS not until I came to the part about Miriam Null and the burns, and the explanation of Marie Lebowski's death that I came off my high horse. There are some things too sacred for vanity—even mine.



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"Miriam Null didn't know," I said. For some reason I found it hard to go on.

"I was wonderin' about that," said Kaspir softly. "She loved him, I suppose."

"I guess so. I doubt if she ever had an inkling, even when he was putting on that big act in Vienna being built up for his job over here. No, he must have been a hero to her right to the last—that is, until she got suspicious about Boriska."

"You think she knew about that?"

"I think she suspected something," I said. "I think that, after what you said about Boriska in the parlor last night, she had a tiny suspicion. I think that's why she took me to the infirmary. She wondered if I would recognize the little blond girl—Anna and Null had dyed Boriska's hair, by the way; Tancerd's men found traces of dye on the pillow—who had appeared so mysteriously in the house. I take it Null must have given Miriam a fairly offhand explanation of where the 'child' came from."

Kaspir started to speak, but I didn't give him a chance. I wanted to get the thing off my chest while it still hung together in my mind.

"As I see it," I said hurriedly, "Null had been giving the orders—the Friends of Sanctuary House, Inc. office was in the next block to the Lafayette-Rouen; also, the Lafayette-Rouen delivered bread to Sanctuary House—but keeping well out of any active participation that might give him away. His job was policy and big things and picking up information like the dope on that troop-train."

"But the Boriska matter was big enough for him. So after they got her from headquarters and transferred her to a Lafayette-Rouen truck waiting in Wing Alley—that's where the roll fell out—he was all set. He and Anna dyed her hair and shot her full of dope and meant to keep her that way."

"I think it was your words to Miriam about prophetesses that got Miriam's blood and racial feeling and emotion at fever-heat. But she couldn't be sure that he was what she was suddenly afraid he was."

"Null's plan was good. He had papers all ready for Marie Lebowski to go to her cousin's in Martinique. By getting rid of Marie and doing a little forgery, he'd have had papers for Francine Demeresque, otherwise Boriska Sibilger."

"My guess is that last night Miriam Null was unable to sleep. And she heard Null when he got up during the night. She followed him, saw him carry Marie Lebowski into the cellar, and saw what he did to her there. In that moment her mind cracked wide open. Imagine it! To find that the husband she adored was a murderer and worse than a murderer. And then came the feeling of guilt, the feeling that

Who Owns Boriska?

she had, without knowing it, helped him and been a party to his crimes against her people, and innocent children and the whole world. She was afflicted with an insanely strong urge somehow to purge herself of that guilt. She remembered that passage from *Isaiah*, about the live coal on the lips. . . 'Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.' The furnace was there, glowing. So she opened the furnace door and took out a coal and pressed it to her mouth—"

I broke off, and made a difficult business of lighting a cigarette. Kaspir's expression had not changed since I started talking. His eyes were the proverbial holes burned in a blanket.

"Perhaps," I said, "that's when Null first knew she was in, or anywhere near, the cellar—when he heard the furnace door and saw what she was doing. It must have been tough, having a thing like that happen just when you thought you were all set. But he had a mind, and he was hard as granite, and he saw that he could not only cover up her action, but actually turn it to his advantage. So he cut up some rope and concocted that yarn about the three men. Or maybe he had something like that already cooked up to explain the disappearance of Marie Lebowski. And you notice that Miriam Null was taken to a private sanitarium. . ."

"We'll pay a little call on the doc that runs that place," murmured Kaspir thoughtfully.

He knew about Arthur already, I found, so there was no use going into that again. Our best guess about the zero Arthur left on the order blank beside the phone was that Arthur had overheard some talk in the Lafayette-Rouen. Or perhaps, as Maude suggested later, the Lafayette-Rouen crowd used that as a code word in referring to Null. It sounds reasonable. I suppose we shall never know. Tancred gathered the whole gang up. They wouldn't talk. They are dead now. Shot.

Kaspir and Joe got out of the hospital about the same time. Nurse Moran is still improving. And there appears to be some hope that Miriam Null—now in a legitimate sanitarium—may regain her reason.

Of Boriska Sibilger—

She is in Istanbul now, with Sarana Ferencisz. Kaspir is there, too, preparing the ground so that when the news of Boriska's presence and latest prophecies on the outcome of the war are released to the Balkan press it will be done in style. Kaspir has a touch about that sort of thing.

The prophecies? You will be reading them any day now. I myself have no idea what she will say. I can only state confidently that they will be sincere.

THE END

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Dime Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 50)

realize she couldn't have been killed in the wreck? Maybe he saw all three of us looking at her body, and realized her blood was on Oscar's overcoat. If there was a slight chance of me yelling murder and a check was made of the passengers, and the fellow didn't show glass cuts, wouldn't he want to get hold of Oscar's overcoat? The blood on it might be analyzed and proven not to have come from him, even if he cut himself later deliberately. So he had the other husband, already in Miami, get the coat from the valet."

"Joe," said Cassidy, "you should have been a detective. You've missed only one thing."

"I doubt it," said Mr. Maddox. "The next step would be to shut my mouth, and then Oscar's, if necessary. By then they knew who I was. It was easy to start me coming to this rented house, and wait for a chance to make sure I'd never talk about the wreck."

"For a million bucks or so I'd almost take a chance on murder myself," said Cassidy reflectively. "I'd knock you off, Joe, for free, maybe." Cassidy grinned. "Anyway, we've got one niece and her husband. I'll drive over to Miami Beach and get the other couple."

"They're driving over here to save you the trouble," Mr. Maddox said. "Watch that mugg on the floor. He'll be ready for a gag in a minute. I want to get my billfold. She took it off me and it's full of dough."

"Bringing a payoff, weren't you?" Cassidy guessed.

Mr. Maddox looked bland and amused. "I came here to collect charity money. Didn't you hear me at the door?"

"Charity?" Cassidy snorted as he dragged the wobbly prisoner to his feet. "What kind of charity, Joe?"

"Mother Gillfilly's home for Aged Children," Mr. Maddox chuckled. "I got five hundred bucks from them, and it's not half enough—considering the risk it took to collect."

THE END

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The Doctor Deals

(Continued from page 33)

up to take a pull at his beard. It is the hand with the gun in it. I let the clasp knife go. It clips him square between the lamps and his head slaps against the wall.

I give him two in the middle before I nail him on the whiskers.

The Doc picks up the gun while I take the bandanas off Doris. I hop across and put the bandanas on Derryberry while he is quiet. I look over at the Guardians. They are both awake now so I slip them a couple of taps with the pick handle.

The Doc pats me on the shoulder. "That was a neat job, pony boy."

"That was a neat spiel," I tell him. I go over to the Goat and twist the head around. It takes both of us to shake it out on the floor. The Doc goes through the papers while I count the cabbage. It comes to a hundred and thirty-six grand, mostly big bills.

Derryberry is shaking his head now. He glares at us. "You will regret this," he says.

The Doc grins. "You were about to commit a grave error," he says. "We saved you from yourself." His red face sobers. "As I said a few minutes ago, we are businessmen. We are ready to make a deal with you." He parts the pile of cash in the middle and drops half of it back into the Goat. He shoves a couple of the papers in his pocket.

"This is the deal. We are splitting the take with you so far as the cash received to date is concerned. We are also taking with us the power of attorney you extracted from poor old Mrs. Bates. I note that you have been unable to cash any of her property as yet. Of course Doris and her mother will leave with us, but I do not think they will talk about this incident to anyone."

Derryberry stares at him. "But the rest of these people—all this other property—"

The Doc chuckles. "I have been trimming suckers all my life," he says. "The cry of the skinned sucker is music in my ears. You may complete your pitch with no further interference from us."

We have a little trouble getting Old Lady Bates over the hill. Derryberry roars like a bull when we tie him into the same bundle with his Guardians, and the old lady is plenty upset at the way we treat the Sage.

She quiets down after we get in the car and Doris leans over and speaks to the Doc. "What shall I do with her after we get home?"

The Doc shakes his head. "I might suggest a few quiet months in a sanatorium."

"Well," I tell Doris, "if you will take my advice you will get her a job on a section gang. After this pick-and-shovel workout Derryberry gives her, it will be a breeze."

THE END

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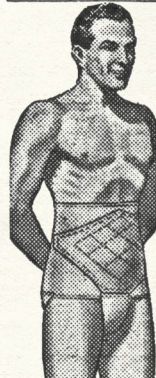
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WITH the accent on making old clothes do in wartime, watch out for this gyp artist with his slick "clothes rejuvenation" scheme.

The Racket Editor
DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE
Dear Sir:

One day last spring, a smiling, convincing-looking young man called at my door and told me he was representing a line of men's tailoring. I happened to be familiar with the line and needed a new suit badly, so I let the salesman into the house. He immediately went about showing me many sample fabrics and talking them up like an old veteran in the field. His enthusiasm and pleasant manner soon warmed me to him.

But suddenly he began talking about a company in Chicago that had discovered a new process, yet a carefully kept trade secret, that positively could restore old tweeds, serges and woolens to almost new condition. He showed me a lot of descriptive matter authentically explaining the advantages of the entire process.

It guaranteed complete rejuvenation of old garments. The nap would rise, the tell-tale shine would vanish, the original softness of texture would return. Even the color and pattern would resume its brightness and freshness once more. And to emphasize further plausibility, the young salesman proffered a business card bearing the name of a local man's clothing store which, he told me, would vouch for his authorization as a representative.

Although the price was relatively high, \$15, I figured I would be saving \$20 to \$25 on the price of a brand new suit for another year, at least. I dug my last year's suit out of the mothballs, gave it to the salesman along with a deposit of \$5. He wrote me out a receipt, told me he would see me in a week or so, and walked away. He returned after eight days, but my suit hadn't been completely "reprocessed" as yet. He promised to bring it to me just as soon as it was done, however. Smiling politely, he asked me if I could pay \$5 more on account. I paid him another \$5, for which he gave me credit. Thanking me, he promised to return my suit the following week, and left.

(Continued on page 82)

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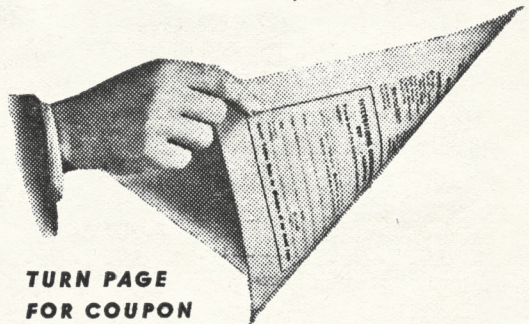
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(Continued from page 80)

That was the last I saw of him, my suit and the \$10. I went to the men's clothing store mentioned on the card, told them of the predicament I was in, but they were at a loss to help me. No individual answering the salesman's description was known to them. They didn't know how he had come in possession of their business cards, and the name of the Chicago firm was also unknown to them. Besides, they told me I was not the only person to be hoodwinked on the crooked scheme. At least a dozen others had fallen suckers to the bogus salesman's racket within a month. To what extent the clever fellow had gone with his nefarious game, I never learned. But I do hope when John Law catches up with him, he will be properly punished.

G. H. M.,
Newburyport, Mass.

HERE'S a new squeeze aimed at servicemen, the most unscrupulous racket we've heard about in a long time.

The Racket Editor
DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE
Dear Sir:

This is a racket which I know about that happened to a buddy of mine.

He was home on furlough and the hometown paper had put his picture in one night along with a few others. After my pal had returned to camp, he received a letter from a girl from right near his home telling him that she would like to write to him. The reason she gave was that her only brother was killed in action and she was lonesome for someone to write to. So my buddy played along, writing to her quite often. She was getting quite friendly, even sending all her letters air mail special delivery. This went on until about three days before Christmas when my buddy received a telegram saying, "Honey, please wire \$30. Am waiting in Greyhound Bus Terminal. Coming down to see you." Fortunately, my buddy didn't send the money because he had begun to suspect it was some kind of a racket. It is my opinion that this girl is not a girl at all, but a man, who is probably writing to hundreds of soldiers pulling the same gag.

S/Sgt. Wilbert Springstubb,
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MATCHED SHIRTS AND PANTS
WHIPCORDS • DUNGAREES
COWBOY PANTS
INDUSTRIAL UNIFORMS



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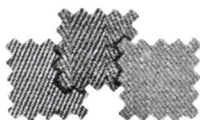


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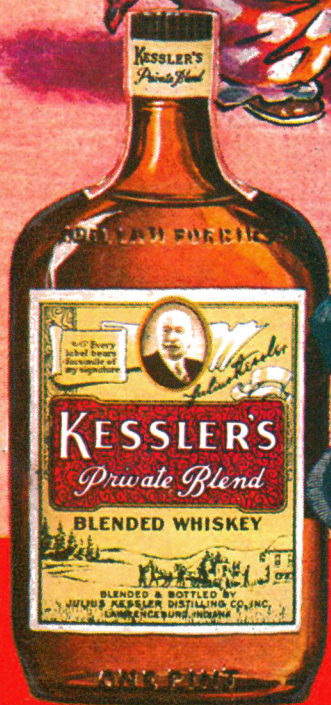
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"Gossip is dangerous at this stage!" says HI to HATT

Remember-war has reached a stage
where guys must talk discreet

There's traitors set to act upon
each rumor we repeat!

Chaplingo



**SMOOTH
AS SILK
but not "High Hat"**

DON'T GIVE THE AXIS A LEAD!

We gotta mind our P's an' Q's
to beat the foes we're fightin'—
Don't hand 'em any secret news,
in speakin' or in writin'...
They're sittin' in the audience,
with ears as big as platters,
So let's all act with common sense,
an' shush on wartime matters!

(Signed) MR. HI and MR. HATT

KESSLER'S
BLENDED WHISKEY