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SEPT.

15¢ DIME  
**DETECTIVE**  
MAGAZINE

WITH FLYNN'S DETECTIVE FICTION



**MAN  
ABOUT  
MURDER**

by **FREDERICK  
C. DAVIS**

**I'LL BET  
YOUR LIFE!**

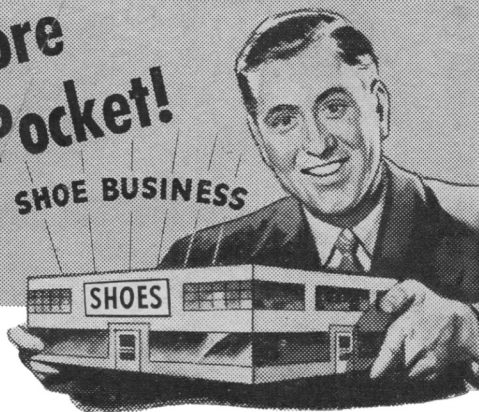
by **T. T. FLYNN**  
**ROBERT MARTIN**  
AND OTHERS

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# 15 DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

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EVERY STORY NEW—NO REPRINTS

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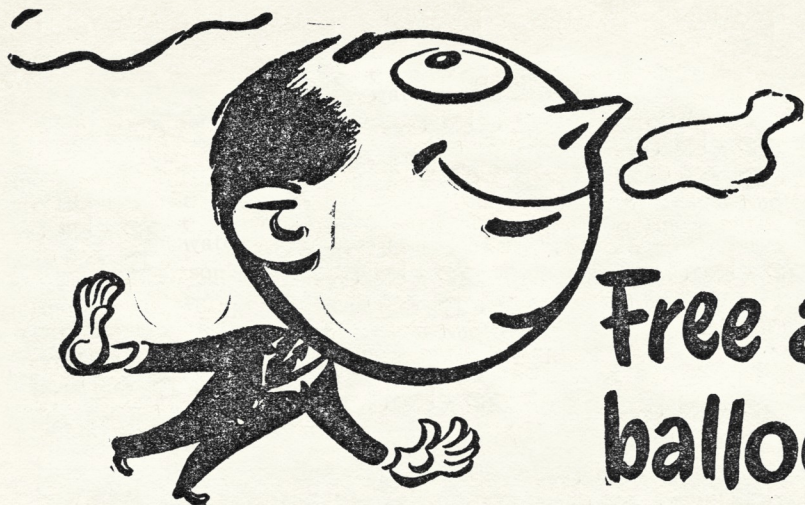
**Cover Painted by Albert Drake.**

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**The October issue will be out September 3rd**

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Published monthly by Popular Publications, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, 16, Illinois. Editorial and Executive Offices, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, 17, N. Y. Henry Steeger, President and Secretary. Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice-President and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter August 24, 1944, at the Post Office, at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1948, by Popular Publications, Inc. This issue is published simultaneously in the Dominion of Canada. Copyright under International Copyright Convention and Pan American Copyright Conventions. All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction, in whole or in part, in any form. Title, Flynn's Detective Fiction, registered in U.S. Patent Office. Single copy, 15 cents. Annual subscription for U.S.A., its possessions and Canada, \$1.80; other countries 50 cents additional. Send subscription to 205 East 42nd Street, New York, 17, N. Y. For advertising rates, address Sam J. Perry, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, 17, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts, enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope for their return, if found unavailable. The publishers will exercise care in the handling of unsolicited manuscripts, but assume no responsibility for their return. Any resemblance between any character, appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional. Printed in the U.S.A.



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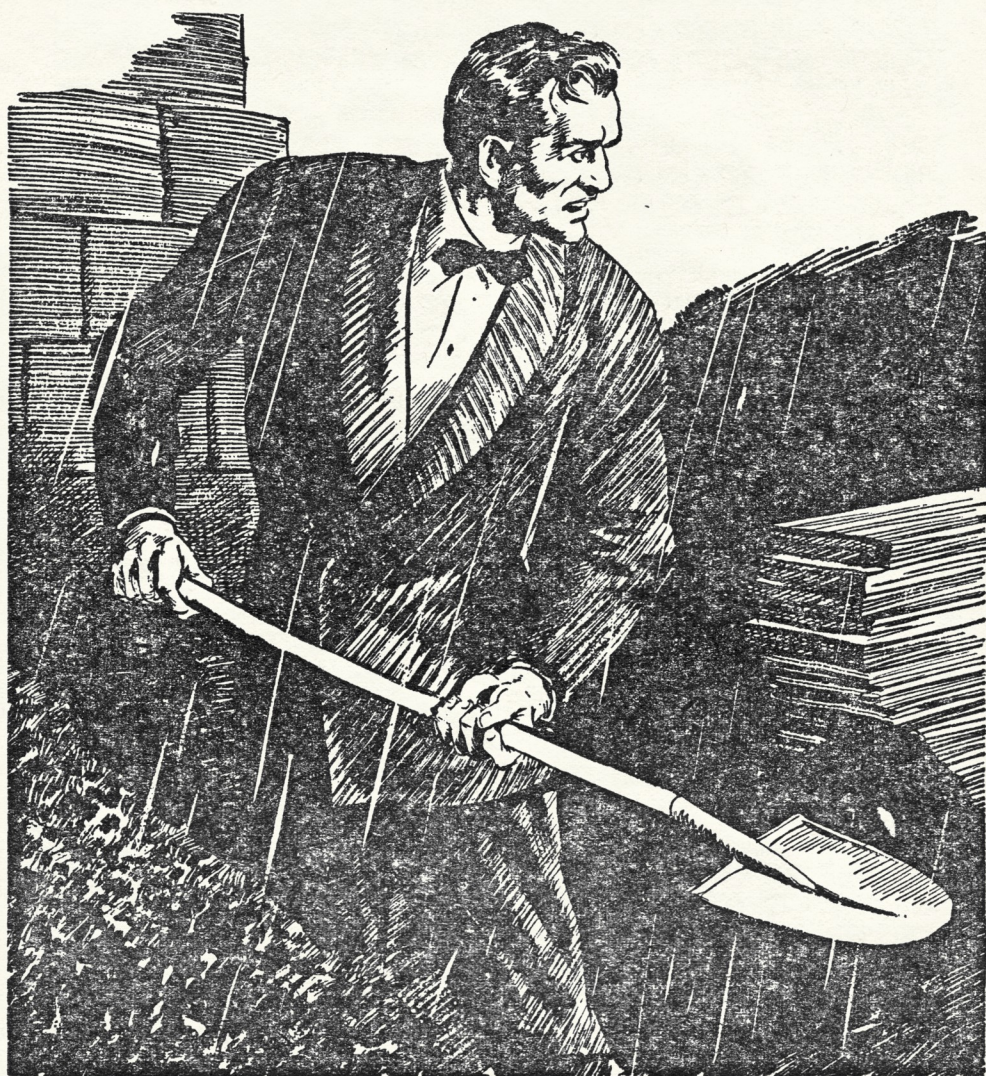
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# MAN ABOUT MURDER

*To crack debonair Burt Chance's slaughter-alibi, the cops worked on the self-made heel's one weakness—using an irresistible Mata Hari as a deadly booby-trap.*



**Startling Action**

**Packed Novel**



**By**

**FREDERICK C.**

**DAVIS**



She had an automatic in her  
wet fist . . . .



**CHAPTER ONE**

**Dig, Killer, Dig**

**H**E WAS on the move and figuring it smart—how to ease in, how to finish fast, then slip back unseen. It was a life or death deal, but it wouldn't take long to play. Fifteen minutes, twenty at the most. The main gamble was the risk of being seen. He had to stay under cover at any cost, even if it meant another kill.

This night was just right for the job—

a night black as death itself, and lonely. Lonely except for the girl he was bringing along, who wasn't being too chummy this trip at that. But on the other hand she wasn't complaining either—wasn't minding the rain a bit.

She was too dead.

Lonely back-streets, just the way he would have ordered them for a little ride in the rain with a lovely corpse. Wet sidewalks deserted. Only a few windows lighted in this crummy neighborhood, bright smears in the downpour. A car or two slashing past. Nobody around to notice. That was the all-important thing—no witnesses.

A witness might mean the difference between staying nicely in the clear—living in the luxury to which he had accustomed himself—and a fast one-way detour to the hot seat.

But, he would be hard for any stray witness to recognize tonight. They wouldn't believe their eyes. Burt Chance driving a truck? Burt Chance, that super-smooth lad, that top-drawer man-about-town—driving a scarred and muddy open truck?

Not Chance. The low visibility must have deceived you, friend. When he happens to need any trucking done, he hires it—without bickering about the cost. After all, what's money to him? And anyway, on a wet evening like this one, Burt Chance is far more likely to be lolling in front of his cozy fireplace with a handful of scotch and an armful of blonde.

He swung the truck to an abrupt stop in front of a structure which might be a small apartment building some day. In its present stage of construction, it was a ribby framework of steel girders. Behind it were piled tons of sand, cement and bricks in a drenched black confusion of waiting materials. This was the spot Burt Chance had picked for his rendezvous with his uninterested companion.

He switched off the ignition and headlamps and dropped down from the cab of the truck, unmindful of his hand-tailored tux and his custom-built patent leather slippers. First he double-checked on a possible tail. No, nobody had followed him. He'd gotten away clean.

He skirted back to the rain-beaten tarpaulin spread over the rear of the truck

floor. He lifted a corner of it and she looked out at him—her face so white, her eyes so wide with frightened wonder at the unexpected experience of dying.

"Last stop, baby," he said softly.

He closed his shiny nailed hand around her small, cold one and pulled her close. He took her into his arms and carried her into deeper darkness.

The night watchman? Halfway down a dark passageway he paused, holding her close, to gaze through the rain at the night watchman's hut sitting forty yards away. He could see into the grimy window, the old guy sipping black coffee and burning wood scraps in a little stove. Burt Chance knew him—a dim-eyed lunkhead past seventy. He would probably skip his regular rounds on this night in favor of keeping his creaky joints dry. From such a worn-out drudger as this—or from thousands of others like him, including those wearing cops' uniforms—Burt Chance had very little to fear.

He hurried on. Even now, he felt an exultant sense that the jackpot would come jingling down. At the moment things were a little tight for him, but after he had dodged out of this one he would be in softer velvet than ever before. And only a few more minutes would do it.

He lowered the dead girl to the puddled ground at the base of a mound of coarse gravel, and murmured, "Too bad for you, baby, but fine for me."

He left her there and when he hurried quietly back—tense, listening alertly through the spattering of the rain, full of urgency to get the job neatly done and be gone—his two hands were gripping a shovel.

Holding the shovel ready, he stood over the dead girl while his ears searched through the little secret noises of the rain.

Still sure that he was unseen and unheard, he drove the blade deep into the wet mound of gravel. In Burt Chance's estimation, shovel-swinging was strictly for fourth-rate bums, but this was laying the cornerstone of a lush future.

He swung the shovel, first dumping the wet gravel rapidly, then helping it to spill down in a dark avalanche. He worked under such pressure to get her hidden and himself gone that he didn't notice when her pale and placid face disappeared under



the wet grit that was piling up all around.

**S**UDDENLY he stopped. He stood still as ice, listening with painful intensity. He had heard a sound that wasn't the rain. Now he caught it off the damp wind again—a furtive noise moving closer. The worst of his fears was materializing out of the dark.

The motion paused then started again. It came even closer while the dead girl lay only partially covered at his feet.

He clinched both fists on the handle of the shovel and swung it overhead. He listened to the noises sneaking nearer in the drenched darkness, and all his muscles drew hard with the murderous power piling up behind his poised weapon.

It had come as close as the nearest shadow. It was just on the other side of the heap of gravel now. It had stopped again. Chance sensed that it was peering toward him, trying to make him out in the blackness. It was becoming a witness to Burt Chance in the act of personally burying his lovely victim.

Then he saw the eyes—two glitters in the gloom. Lower than he had been watching for them. Not man-high, but close to the black ground. Their gaze lifted, glimmering up at Chance's face.

Sidestepping, he saw what it really was—a dog. Just a mutt on the prowl.

Hatred of it boiled up in Chance. Lord, it had thrown a nightmare scare into him! That chilling terror from the commonest sort of cur!

The dog scented the hate in Chance and the death at Chance's feet. It bared its fangs and barked—just once, a single sharp bark changing to a throaty growl.

Chance slashed the shovel downward. He felt its edge slashing hide and breaking bone. He chopped a second time, a third, in a murderous explosion of pent-up power. The very first blow had split the dog's skull, but he wasn't done killing it. Four blows. Five. Six.

When he stopped, he felt cooler. He had a new grip on himself. Killing the dog brought reassurance. Danger was gone again. He almost laughed aloud at the picture of himself scared by a whining hound. He was a little on edge, that was all. But it was over now, and the rest would be very simple to handle.

He simply kicked the loose lump of dog over to the dead girl's side. Now he could turn back to the main job—bury them together, finish it fast and get gone.

Bent to scoop up another spadeful, Chance paused again.

He had heard a creak of hinges. A bar of light had reached across the black yard. Chance turned tensely and saw that the door of the night watchman's shack had been opened. The old man was standing there, a bulky silhouette, looking out. His shaky voice came: "Sport?"

Back bent, Chance eyed him and cursed him. The cur was his, of course—his companion on these long, lonely nights. They shared the job of night-watching. The old man's dull ears had somehow heard that one bark, a warning from the blackness back here.

Chance said under his breath, "Stay there." He straightened slowly, tightly. "Be smart for a change. Stay where you are—and stay alive."

The old man called again from the shack door, "Sport?" Then he stepped out and started along the path. His slow feet trudged closer. "Sport?" Still closer. "Here, Sport."

Chance backed away from the mound of gravel, into deeper darkness. He hadn't tried to drag any more of that heavy stuff down over the inert dog and the dead girl. The chuffing sound of the shovel would have telegraphed trouble to the old watchman. There wasn't time for it, either; and Chance was hoping the lunkhead would stumble off in some other direction. But no, he had trudged to the same path that Chance had followed when coming in.

Chance held himself tense, just out of sight behind a stack of concrete blocks.

The voice, shaky with age, kept calling: "Sport?" It was coming closer. "Sport?" Then, "Ah, there you are, Sport, old boy."

The old man had seen the white patch of dog still exposed against the mud-black ground.

"Sport! What happened to you?"

Chance watched him stooping over the almost dismembered dog. All right, you decrepit crumb. That's as far as you need to go. Take man's best friend into your grieving arms. Weep and carry him tenderly back into your lonely shack where

you spent so many chummy hours together. He just happened to wander under a falling brick, that's all. An accident, of course.

So step on it. There are plenty of other mutts roaming the gutters. Another cur will happen along soon to take this one's place. So just move back out of here, you mush-headed bum, while the moving's still good.

Chance clamped his teeth together, sharply watching the old man straightening. Quickly the night watchman bounced one hand in and out of a ragged coat pocket. The beam of a flashlight leaped out from his shaky hand, catching Chance squarely in the eyes.

Chance snapped himself back behind the concrete, but a little too late. Somehow, by some freakish sort of fluke, the old man had beaten him to the draw. Perhaps his tear-bleared eyes hadn't recognized Chance, but he had seen that somebody was lurking there. Chance could be grimly certain of that because abruptly the night watchman was stumbling back along the path to his shack where there was a telephone.

Chance sprang after him—raced close with his weapon again lifted, heavy and sharp-edged—sped within reach—

## CHAPTER TWO

### Take Your Pick

**L**AST night it wasn't raining. Instead the sky was dusky crystal, the moon chromium-bright above the towers of the town. A balmy spring evening to enjoy and remember. Burt Chance had given the boys at police headquarters a special reason to remember it. That was the evening before his unexpected date with the lovely, dead girl, when he had dropped in unexpectedly on the police.

Stepping inside Headquarters, Chance had first met the startled look of the thick-faced cop at the information desk. Needing no instruction from such meat-heads—knowing, as usual, exactly where he was going, he had strode past without a by-your-leave. Then the whispers had started. Burt Chance could sense them buzzing along the halls, in and out of

doors, upstairs and throughout the place.

"Chance just came in!" "Chance? Here?" "You mean Chance actually has the brass to show himself inside this place just when the chief's turning purple in the face from trying to nail him?" "Chance just breezed in, all right—saw him myself—heading for the chief's office right now!"

Burt Chance took a faint smile into the chief's waiting room. There he surprised a secretary, prettier than a dumb mug like Chief Naylor deserved. Her lips broke apart at sight of him.

"Don't disturb yourself, kitten. After all, your chief is dying to see me," Chance said, and he left her there speechless as he pushed open the door of the chief's inner office.

His unannounced entrance caught a man in frozen motion, a young man sitting behind Chief Naylor's desk. He had just heard the news of Chance's approach over the intercom. He had a brisk look but in Chance's opinion was only middling bright—a Detective Captain named Barney Dixon. Dixon just sat there slowly chewing gum and gazing at his visitor with eyebrows lifted.

"Too bad," he said laconically. "Too bad your entrance isn't quite as dramatic as you planned it, I mean. Chief Naylor is staying home with his ulcer for a few days. Whenever he thinks about you, Mr. Chance, his ulcer seems to get worse. So I'm filling in temporarily. My stomach's stronger."

Chance flicked his gloves and smiled with half his mouth as he went to the acting chief's desk.

"Your attitude toward me is a little unfair, Lieutenant—or is it Sergeant? I've come as a public-spirited citizen who believes in cooperating with the authorities—and just in case you've had any trouble finding me."

Dixon teetered in his chair, unruffled. "What in the world makes you think we have any official interest in you, Mr. Chance?"

"I understand from my very good friend Whitey Yates that you've been asking him a few questions about me."

"We have," Dixon said. "Questions bearing on the death of Paul Bowers last week. You'd heard of the murder of Paul

Bowers, haven't you now, Mr. Chance?"

"Murder?" Chance's one-sided smile grew slightly. "My, my. The papers called it an accident. Bowers got in the way of one of his own bulldozers, they said. It ran away and crushed him up a bit, didn't it? Careless of him. Rather a messy way to die, too."

Dixon sat up and put both hands flat on his chief's desk. "That bulldozer didn't throw out its own clutch and shift itself into gear and steer itself into Bowers. I don't figure I'm giving away any official secrets by telling you that, Mr. Chance. We believe there was a man at the controls—a killer. A mean, ratty kind of killer who did it for the profit in it, Mr. Chance. The type we don't feel much affection for around here, especially since Paul Bowers was much too good a guy to get treated like that."

"But a bulldozer," Chance said, shaking his head. "So crude."

"The man who mashed Bowers to death may have a nice, refined technique with women, Mr. Chance, but he's a little less delicate in his murder methods. He wanted it to look like an accident, one that happened after the construction crew was gone and Bowers was working alone at a few clean-up jobs. He must have caught Bowers by surprise. He used Bowers' own bulldozer to smash him against a solid stone wall. When the wall broke down behind Bowers, the killer ran those steel caterpillar tracks straight over him. Yes, it was a little messy, Mr. Chance. I'm sure the mere sight would have revolted you."

Chewing thoughtfully on his gum, Dixon came around the desk. "You worked on a road-construction gang once, in your lowlier days, when you still had a sort of conscience. But I imagine a man who attains your social graces doesn't bother with bulldozers any more—just babes."

CHANCE smiled with thin charm at the captain. "If this is your reason for suspecting me of murder, it's rather far-fetched, isn't it?"

"There are other reasons, Mr. Chance, but it would only be a waste of your valuable time to mention them. As for Whitey Yates, his story is that you were

with him at the time of the Bowers kill, and he's sticking to it. You have a fine, very useful boy in Whitey, Mr. Chance."

"His word is as good as gold," Chance said, still smiling.

"For you, better, because gold can't buy your way out of a murder rap in this town. You were asking if we wanted to see you, Mr. Chance. Well, considering that Whitey has alibied you so loyally, no, we don't. Not yet. Personally I think the time will come when we will want to see you—fry. And when it does come I want to be there. But—not yet."

Chance flicked his gloves again, permitted himself a quietly derisive chuckle, said, "Just let me know when I can be of service, Sergeant," and turned his back.

He heard the whispers buzzing again as he left headquarters. He turned across town with his jaunty stride, a successful man enjoying the fragrant spring evening without a care in the world. A man to notice. He could feel the glances of passersby drawn magnetically after him as he breezed past.

"That's Burt Chance. Look, there he goes. Sure, that's him—Burt Chance."

He ignored the beefy cop on the corner who momentarily stopped wigwagging at the traffic to stare after him. It was pleasanter to observe the two bobby-soxers, well-built ones, who had turned from a shop window display of New-Look finery to put their heads together.

"Burt Chance—is he handsome!" one might be fluttering to the other. "Mother says he's terrifically debonair, and he's my own dream apple."

As for the two college lads with lettered sweaters and fuzz on their chins, they reacted with a troubled sort of respect, as if admiring him even though he jarred their youthful idealism.

"There goes the smartest operator in town," they might be saying. "In more ways than one, brother, including murder. Sure, everybody knows Burt Chance lost some stiff competition when Paul Bowers got murdered. But he pulled it off the sharp way and the cops are standing around flatfooted, not able to touch him."

He swung along toward El Toreador, feeling only contempt for the chattering monkeys, mugs and yokels; dumb trash, a bunch of crumbs. As for their remarks,

that was a different thing; that he liked. Even including the spreading rumor about the Bowers kill. Naturally he was admitting nothing, but he didn't object to being known in certain circles as a technician whose footwork was so slick that the smartest dicks on the force couldn't reach him. Such a reputation could be valuable as a business asset.

At the gourd-festooned door of El Toreador—one of the richer-paying properties that Burt Chance controlled as backer and silent partner—Whitey Yates was waiting for him. Whitey, his thin hair so ashen it had almost no color at all, had a sly but slightly troubled grin on his lean face and a copy of the *Evening Press* in his waxy fingers.

"Look, Burt," he stage-whispered, putting the folded paper into Chance's hands.

One prominent headline read:

POLICE STILL STYMIED  
IN BOWERS MURDER CASE.

"No kidding," Chance said in mock astonishment. "Why, you could knock me over with a bulldozer."

"Not that one, Burt." Whitey pointed. "*This* one."

SETON SHOWS FAST  
PROGRESS IN LOW-COST  
HOMES FOR VETS.

"But will fall on his face in the home stretch." Chance chuckled. "What're you trying to do to me, Whitey, get me worried?"

"He's right here, Burt. Seton. Inside, at the bar. He's been trying to get ya on the phone for days, so now he's come around in person. He's waiting for ya. So we head for some other ginny, don't we, and leave him take root here?"

"No, no, Whitey," Chance said. "Let's ignore him at closer range."

He stepped inside with an amused smile, Whitey tagging behind like a faithful terrier. As he gave his Homburg and Chesterfield to the redhead at the hatch-check counter a voice behind him said, "Cigarettes?"

One annoyed glance at the cigarette girl was all she rated from Burt Chance.

She looked almost okay in her short flowered skirt and brief bolero—at least her long stems weren't bad in smoky nylons—but she lacked class. Luis had made a mistake in hiring this one, Chance thought. She just stood around blank-panned, parroting that one word over and over, "Cigarettes?" Deploring it with a wag of his head, and touching his bow tie, Chance went on.

Whitey's tip was the straight goods. Steve Seton, the realtor, was standing at the bar, watching him. The tweedy type, Seton, complete with pipe, relaxed, unaffected, genial, a man's kind of man. He was turning to Chance, about to speak. Chance brushed past without a glance for him, leaving him with his mouth open, and went on, catching a signal from Luis Posto.

Luis, ruddy-faced, a man who made an art of selling good dinners for small fortunes, had given his silent partner the eye. Nodding in answer, Chance turned past the bar to the door marked *Private*. It was Luis' office. Luis followed Chance in. Whitey, bringing up the rear, closed the door and stood with his back against it.

"Burt, my friend," Luis said anxiously. "I have news for you. From a certain place, you understand? And not too good."

Luis' wife had a sister whose daughter was married to a probationary patrolman with big ears. Those big ears funneled a lot of locker room talk to Mrs. Luis to Luis to Chance. Useful, Chance had found, especially lately, since Paul Bowers' accidental encounter with the bulldozer.

"THEY'RE really after you, Burt," Luis said, perspiring over it. "Those dicks, they hate your guts, Burt. They won't stop now till they get you. But they know they don't stand a chance playing it the usual way against such a smart boy as you. So they arrange something a little special."

"Nice of them to go out of their way for me," Chance said, smiling. "I didn't know they cared so much."

To Luis it was no subject for banter. His face was becoming beaded. "With you, Burt, they can't get rough. No rub-

ber hoses. Nothing like that, not even for our friend Whitey. So they figure something special for you—to go to work on your weakness, Burt. You understand?”

“I know what my weakness is, Luis,” Chance said, his smile growing. “It isn’t wine and it isn’t song.”

“So you see what I mean, then.” Luis mopped his red face. “It’s true, Burt. They decide to use a woman on you. Understand? A woman to loosen you up, my friend—a woman to coax you. So you will talk yourself into the chair for murder.”

“There couldn’t be a pleasanter way of trying it,” Chance said. “Who is the woman they’re turning loose on me?”

“This part I cannot tell you, Burt. Her name? No. What she look like? I cannot say. All I know is—a woman. Burt, you got to look out now. Between you and a beautiful woman I hate to think what might happen!”

“Hate it, Luis? I take a more cooperative attitude. Let me handle it. My own way. Thanks for the valuable tip. Any other equally fascinating news tonight?”

“That much is more than enough!” Luis protested. “Burt, my friend, you watch yourself. The kind of bait they’re using, they could hook you good.”

Chance kept smiling. Whitey opened the door and they filed out, Chance leading the way. Luis hustled on to fawn at the overcharged customers in the dining room while Whitey stayed ready at Chance’s elbow. Chance shifted to the bar, conscious that Steve Seton was watching him again. This time Chance waited, foot on the rail while the barman unlimbered a pinch-bottle for him, and let Seton come.

“Mr. Chance,” Seton said, looking earnest. “I’ve been trying to connect with you on a business proposition.”

“You’ve connected,” Chance said, “as far as it goes.”

“Yes.” Seton’s bushy eyebrows leveled. “I needn’t tell you how tight the local housing situation is. Hundreds of families, mostly veterans, can’t find homes, can’t buy ground to build their own. Bowers’ development would have been a great help, but now that he’s dead, it must stay tied up until his estate is settled—months.

I’ve started another such development, a smaller one, which will also help, but it will be only a small part of the living space needed. We must have more, much more.”

“As you say,” Chance reminded him, “I already know all this.”

Seton’s eyebrows grew even straighter. “Yes. You also know, that the chief reason why so few desperately needed homes are being built here is that usable lots have been pushed up to staggering prices. You have fixed those prices, Mr. Chance. You hold most of the available ground in the desirable outlying districts under option. You’re demanding all but impossible prices.”

“Buyers don’t have to pay my prices,” Chance pointed out. “They can live in tents. That’s what our boys fought for, wasn’t it—a place in the sun?”

“But not another place in the rain and mud, Mr. Chance. They’ve had that. Not upstairs over somebody’s garage, either.” Steve Seton clenched his jaw a moment. “Here’s my proposition. I’ll buy all the options you hold, at double the price you paid for them.”

“What will you do with them, Mr. Seton?”

“Tear them up.”

“For that money I’d tear them up myself.” Chance shook his head. “I’m not in business for box-tops. And I have news for you. My prices have just gone even higher, as of right now. If you’d like a nice location in Rosedale, for example, it will cost you, say, six thousand an acre. To veterans I’ll be generous—only five.”

Seton spluttered. “A fair price would be well under one thousand! And you hold options on thousands of acres and more thousands of lots!”

“A sizable investment on which I have a right to expect a reasonable return,” Chance said calmly. “Join me in a drink, Mr. Seton?”

Seton choked, glared and moved off.

Even more quickly, Burt Chance forgot him. He was thinking about something tastier—Luis’ tip-off. A woman. A woman sent by the cops especially to go to work on him. An interesting project. Burt Chance liked the idea so well he would even help it along. It had so many delicious possibilities.

He gazed at the several girls perched on stools at the bar, at the laughter in their eyes and the sparkles on their lips, gazed at them and speculated and smiled to himself. One of these, perhaps. And if so, which one. Which of these lovelies was here especially to make a very special play for him—with a murder rap the penalty if he lost?

It hardly mattered which. There were a luscious lot. He would settle for any of them. And Burt Chance reflected in pleasant anticipation, *forewarned was forearmed*.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Dangerous Lure

IT WAS last night, there at the bar in El Toreador, that Burt Chance had played his eyes over the lovely women with a connoisseur's touch. A pleasant occupation, this, with a mellow scotch in his hand, the orchestra in slow lilt, the lights low, and Whitey the worshipful, ever watchful at his elbow. The question tonight was not which luscious lass Chance would choose, but which had already drawn a bead on him for her own supposedly secret purposes. Which of them was delicious bait intended to trap him into the big rap?

That animated redhead sipping the daiquiri? Probably not—a Lieutenant Commander loaded with battle stripes was too busy talking to her and she seemed to like the new climate. Two others Chance had seen on previous evenings and passed them over as too foolishly devoted to their ever-present boy-friends. Down at the end of the bar was a possibility that quickened his blood—that brunette with the lacquered look. Chance's gaze took on a gleam as he met her eyes, hers dark and lonely and a little bitter.

Even in Whitey, standing at his side, Chance felt an electrical tingle as they gazed at that glossy dark girl. Her red lips had a cynical twist. Her long black lashes cast cryptic shadows over her eyes. She was a woman who knew the score had gone against her but was game to play it through. A faint glitter appeared like a star in the shadows of her eyes when she discovered Chance admiring

her; but at once her gaze dropped to her untasted martini.

Chance signaled to Mario the barman, "That dark one, Mario. Is she here alone?"

Bowing close, Mario answered, "She says she's deciding whether to phone her boy-friend to drop in to pay her bill, Mr. Chance."

"We don't encourage unescorted women at the bar, Mario. As a business policy, I mean. But when the time comes to bounce this one out, I'll take care of her myself."

Yes, maybe it was the worldly brunette who was here to take a woman's try at the job the cops couldn't do, and maybe her first planned move was the treat-'em-cold technique. But as for another possibility—

Chance's eyes skipped to another pretty face. Yes, a very pleasant occupation, this, particularly when he remembered the "lowlier days" that that punk Dixon had mentioned back in headquarters. Caked with road dirt and dripping sweat, Chance hadn't rated so much as a glance from a passing lass; but it was in those days that he had learned what chumps "good" people can be. Handle it right, Chance had found, and these suckers would stumble all over themselves to stand in line to be fleeced and slapped down.

Whitey, who had once swung a pick alongside Chance, still couldn't believe that Chance had squeezed up to the top with such quick smoothness—and so little mercy. Chance could look back and shrug. So he'd kicked a few guys over to get where he was. So what? That's life, pal. And he liked it here. Women didn't brush him off these days. Far from it. A babe getting an interested glance from Burt Chance could feel highly flattered.

Like that spicy little blonde just four stools to the south who was giving him the sly eye.

Chance controlled a mocking grin. She was a strutting little chick, mischief in her blue eyes, her lips puckered in a come-on-let's-play pout. Overdoing it a little, Chance thought. Trying a little too hard, being not too bright about it. But forewarned was forearmed, he reminded himself, so she could go right on trying just as hard as her sly little heart desired—and he hoped he could keep from laugh-

ing in that cute, pretty little face of hers.

"Stand by, Whitey," Chance said softly. "Clearing myself out of the Bowers case is going to be really a pleasure."

He noticed in passing that Whitey scarcely heard. Whitey, who could take babes or leave 'em alone, was still gazing spellbound at the lone brunette. Chance could scarcely blame him—but after all, Chance had to keep his mind on business.

Moving toward the blonde, Chance heard a flat voice parroting, "Cigarettes?"

It annoyed him but at the same time it gave him a handy opportunity to show the blonde that he rated head man in this plush bistro. He stopped to say in pained but charming tones, "May I give you a helpful suggestion, darling?"

The dumb little cigarette peddler stood there on her two lovely long stems, just looking at him, not answering—not even seeming to realize who he was.

"Your face is fairly bearable, darling, but blank," he added. "It would look a little better with some kind of an expression on it. Try to seem as if you're alive. For sixty-five cents the customer rates a pack of cigs *and* something resembling a pretty little smile. Don't you think so, darling?"

Apparently she didn't think at all. She just stood there blinking. But she had served his purpose, so now he brushed past to the little blonde, who had heard the whole thing and was giggling over her sidecar.

"You're not happy, honey," he began. "The service here hasn't been what it should be. Let me improve it for you."

She kept giggling. "You could do it. You sure could. Um-hmmm! But not here."

It was an effort for Chance to keep from laughing out loud. Obviously she wasn't that tight. Bolstered a little for the night's assignment, he might say, but not really that high. A little too amateurishly eager, too. But Chance didn't mind letting her think he liked 'em that way.

She said again, "Um-hmmm! But not here!"

"There's no place like home, honey," Chance suggested.

"Why, honest, Mr. Chance, I don't know how to get back where I came from." she said through her playful little

giggles. "I'm lost. I was sitting right here all by myself and wondering, 'Now, Shirley Bell, where in the world can you go?'—until you came along, Mr. Chance."

She had used his name twice. She was working at it, all right.

Still keeping himself from laughing, Chance tried to put on a drooling look as he said, "Well, then, honey, let's go."

She slipped off the stool with starry-eyed eagerness, teetering on her spike heels a little as she curled her arm around his. Shirley Bell was all set. Now that she was well started on her obvious little game, Chance was beginning to enjoy it. He glanced about, to pass a wink to Whitey—and saw that Whitey, who usually followed his every move, was somehow overlooking him at the moment.

Whitey was still gazing raptly at the lone brunette who seemed to need a little sweetening up.

A white-headed woman in a maid's uniform—Millie, the powder room attendant—had put her fingertips on the brunette's shoulder.

"Miss Lyle? Miss Elza Lyle? Phone call for you."

"Yes?" Elza Lyle didn't lift her dark gaze from the chill crystal of her dry martini. "Who is it?"

"A man, Miss Lyle. Said his name is Dixon."

Dixon?

**T**HE overheard name echoed ironically in Chance's mind. The same Dixon, that gum-chewing jerk over there in headquarters, who was going through the motions of being a dick? Chance caught a darkly anxious glance from Elza Lyle as she left the bar and hurried, with a gracefully swinging walk, to the telephone lounge.

Chance saw that Whitey's gaze was hypnotically following Elza Lyle. He scarcely heard Shirley's chirping as she excused herself and tripped off into the powder room. Glad to be free of her—evidently she was just as tight as she seemed after all, and just as dumb—Chance went quietly forward to a spot near her in the telephone lounge.

Elza Lyle couldn't see Chance as she spoke but Chance could hear her. "Yes, Dix. You're home now? No, nothing that

important here, Dix. Okay, I'll call it a night too. Thanks. I always did think you're the nicest copper in town."

His jaw clenched, Chance stayed there. The phone dial was whirring. Elza Lyle was spinning off a number. When she spoke again her voice was lowered, so muted that Chance could scarcely make out her words through the babble of voices and the jingle of the dance music from deeper inside the club. What was she saying now? "Chief? . . ."

Chance tried to repeat it silently after her. "Chief? No dice tonight, I'm afraid. I know, it's still early, but let's not be too anxious, Chief. All right, tomorrow night, then. 'Night, Chief."

In a smoothly unnoticeable move Chance eased away before she left the phone. Keeping his back turned to Elza Lyle, he found himself buying a pack of cigarettes from the little bandit with the million-dollar stems and the two-bit face. He moved on then to disrupt Whitey's reveries with a brisk order.

"You're taking over that dumb little doll, pal. Name of Shirley Bell. Here she comes."

Whitey shrugged resignedly. "After the dream I saw walking tonight— Okay, I'll dump her home and be right back."

He obediently moved in on Shirley Bell. Ignoring Shirley's disappointed confusion, Chance watched Elza Lyle. She gave him a sense of effervescent surprise. Chief Naylor had really planned it better than Chance had expected. Chance's end of this little game called for more expert handling than Shirley Bell would have needed; and now the stakes were really worth playing for.

Elza Lyle went her weary, sophisticated way to the street door. Chance quietly moved after her. Outside El Toreador, the sky had become a darker glass over a street flowing with a sweet warm breeze and sparkling with new lights. At first Chance couldn't find Elza Lyle—and the moment was empty, lifeless without her.

Then he heard a car's starter grinding and discovered her at the wheel of a convertible that had been waiting for her at the curb with its top booted down. The starter ground again as he went to her.

"Let me try."

Her dark eyes lifted to his and at once,

without a word, she slid across the seat to make room for him. He eased under the wheel, gazing at the oval of her face in the darkness. The motor started without a hitch. He knew she had probably arranged that it would, but he scarcely heard its purr. His own pulse was a faster beat.

She leaned toward him. She kissed his mouth, then slowly drew back.

"Thank you," she said in a husky voice. "I'd often wondered how it would be. Now I know. High voltage."

Burt Chance found himself standing on the curb, his senses swirling in her perfume, a fire flaring up inside him. Almost blinded by the intensity of it, he stared after Elza Lyle as her car whisked her down the night-filled street. He turned back to the door of El Toreador, his clenched fists thrust hard into his coat pockets.

What was wrong with him? Was he a school kid, letting a kiss knock him loopy like this? Why had he scrambled out of that car instead of staying right with her all the way? Was he actually afraid of her—or couldn't he trust himself? He didn't know the answers, couldn't find them. Nothing like this had ever happened to him before. He was a shaken man as he pushed deeper into the night club seeking Luis Posto.

"Luis, there was a girl at the bar," he said tersely. "Her name's Elza Lyle, supposedly. What do you know about her?"

Eyebrows raised, Luis shook his head. "Nothing."

"Then find out for me," Chance ordered him in clipped words. "I'm sure she's the woman who's working with the dicks, but double-check on it. I've got to know all about her, everything—and fast."

"I do my best for you, my friend."

Luis looked startled to see Burt Chance as agitated as this. Chance knew he wasn't quite his usual smooth and confident self at the moment. Somehow the bold dark beauty of Elza Lyle had flashed past his defenses; but now he was finding his old grip on himself and working up half a smile.

He'd have to give those boys down at headquarters more credit. As fishermen wangling for a killer, they knew a little something about selecting the right lure.



## CHAPTER FOUR

## Poison for the Taking

EARLIER tonight—at the gray start of the evening, before the first rain-drops had fallen—Whitey Yates had hustled over to El Toreador alone, a little ahead of Burt Chance. Whitey had decided it might be a smart play to get Luis aside early for a friendly tip.

"Look, Luis, ya better sidestep any arguments with Burt tonight. He's turned sort of touchy, see. On edge. I never knew him to get this jittery before."

"Ah?" Luis said.

"He had a bad night. Kept tossing and punching the pillow, until along about four a.m. he hadda knock hisself out with a coupla husky slugs of scotch."

"Ah," Luis said sympathetically.

"All day he won't eat. Just coffee. Coffee laced with rum. Ya know how it is between Burt and me, Luis—real pals, none closer—but today I been keeping out of his way as much as I could."

Luis wagged his head. "No."

"All day he's pacing around, can't sit still. No bad news, Luis. Business is just as good today for Burt as it was yesterday, maybe better; but still he's all day wearing out the rugs. Ya know Burt, Luis—he always gets what he wants. But this time it's like he just can't wait for something which at the same time he knows he's got to stay clear of for dear life."

"At last Burt is become very scared, perhaps," Luis said.

"G'awn. Burt's top dog in this town and knows it. Nobody scares him."

"Do not be too sure, Whitey. Remember, like you, I am also Burt's very good friend, I do not want to see him get into bad trouble. So I see there is one certain person which he may have very good reason to fear."

"Yeh?" Whitey was skeptical. "Who?"

"Himself." Luis added, "Take your own advice now—watch sharp. Burt is coming in now."

Chance had stepped in from the street, dapper in his custom-built tux, gleaming smoothly from his hand-made patent leather slippers to his specially molded Hom-burg. But his mouth was set and he had

an odd smouldering darkness in his eyes.

"Good evening, Mr. Chance," the red-head chirped behind the hat-check counter. But Chance pushed his hat at her without a glance.

"Cigarettes?"

With an annoyed sound he brushed past the cigarette girl. His eyes gave the place a quick, hungry search. He saw Shirley Bell. The little tramp was back again at the bar, pouting at him in the blue mirror over last night's rebuff. Steve Seton, Chance saw, was also back—tweeds, pipe and all. Chance strode past impatiently, searching deeper into the soft-lighted cranies of the club—then paused.

He had seen her.

She was there.

Elza.

He gazed at Elza Lyle seated at a white-skirted table in a far corner, escorted tonight. The young man seated with her, as far as Chance could judge him in one short hostile glance, was a weak-chinned fancy-pants of the local café society set. Elza, in a gown as glimmering black as her hair, her white shoulders bare, was barely listening to his charming chatter.

Had she been waiting and watching for Chance? She was gazing far across the room at him, her face a lovely oval in the glow of a candle. Chance thought he saw in her eyes more than the reflected flame.

He turned away, with a reluctant effort, to the door marked *Private*. Luis followed him in first and Whitey closed the door behind them. Chance peered at Luis, demanding a quick answer to his unspoken question, and Luis shrugged.

"I have not learned everything about her, my friend. Her address, yes—here it is, written down for you. A little walk-up apartment in a brownstone front. She has been a sort of actress in New York and Hollywood too, I hear, but now she is back home for whatever jobs she can get as a model. The young man she comes here with many times—the one she is with now—is Hugh Shaeffer. Very rich family, as you know, my friend. They say he wants her to marry him."

"What guy wouldn't?" Chance reminded Luis shortly, "Headquarters. What's the news from there about her?"

"Nothing is sure either way, my friend."

They have a woman on the job, yes—that much is known. But—they have been most careful about that little detail. Nobody knows that except Chief Naylor himself and the detective named Dixon.”

“And the guy they’re laying for, named Chance.” The edge on Chance’s voice was sharper. “I know that much well enough. I’ll be a cooked guy if I let her take me.”

“Then keep away from her, Burt.” Luis recommended it earnestly. “If she’s such poison you should keep strictly away from even a little taste of her.”

“Too late for that, Luis,” Chance said with his wry half-smile.

He stepped abruptly from the office, leaving Luis staring gravely after him. Whitey hustled to stay at Chance’s side. Chance ordered him curtly, “Keep Seton and Shirley Bell off my neck. I don’t want either of them annoying me tonight.”

Whitey nodded but these instructions were already fading from his mind when Chance seated himself, at his favorite corner table. Whitey gazed across the room as raptly as Chance at dark Elza Lyle.

**WHITEY**, seeing the yearning look on Chance’s face, stiffened himself. “Look now, Burt. Like Luis said, ya can’t let yourself fall on your face for this babe just the way the cops are figuring you will. When those guys in the death-house pull those straps on you and then spin the wheel that shoots those two thousand volts into the chair—that don’t feel so romantic.”

“Shut up, Whitey!” Chance scowled at him. “So now you’re beginning to think I can’t take care of myself. Since when?”

“Since the first time you glommed that babe over—”

“Never mind, Whitey. You worry too much and talk too much.” Chance’s tone had turned icy. “Have yourself another load of Shirley Bell’s giggling. Go on, Whitey, stop irritating me—get out of my hair.”

Whitey looked hurt and reluctant to move out of sight of Elza Lyle, but he rose and shuffled toward the blonde at the bar. Chance automatically ordered scotch, his gaze remaining magnetically drawn to the dark girl across the softly lighted room.

Burt Chance snorted at himself. He would be smarter to remember that this woman’s purpose was to nail him for murder. He had his many lucrative properties, from El Toreador up to a safe deposit box crammed full of very valuable options, to lose to her—and his life.

How much sweeter it would be at this moment if Paul Bowers hadn’t made the bonehead mistake of getting in Chance’s way! Bowers had happened to own an extensive tract of the most desirably located ground near the city. He could have pocketed a very nice piece of coin simply by optioning it to Chance, as Chance had persuaded dozens of other property owners to do. But instead of grabbing the smart dough, the righteous yokel had decided to build scores of homes there himself under a saintly non-profit plan.

It would have blown up the bonanza that Chance was counting on collecting. When you face that stupid sort of competition, with a couple of hundred grand at stake, you don’t sit back and watch it wreck you. You get rid of it, the faster the better, and no holds barred. Next time, however, Chance would use a different sort of eliminator. Something a little more subtle than a bulldozer but also much more effective.

He would take his cue from the cops and use a luscious woman. A woman like Elza Lyle. So darkly beautiful. An irresistibly fascinating flame.

Chance smiled a one-sided smile at himself. Speaking of housing shortages, he could solve that problem for Elza Lyle with no trouble at all. Even permanently.

“Cigarettes?”

Chance winced as that inescapable parrot’s voice broke the spell; but he said quickly, “Here, wait.” He used his gold pencil to scribble a message on the corner of a menu card. He tore it off, folded it and passed it to the cigarette peddler without glancing at her. “The girl at the table in the opposite corner—take this to her while she’s still alone.”

Elza Lyle’s escort, the pantywaist named Shaeffer, had disappeared through the door labeled *Señors* a moment ago. Chance watched her as the cigarette girl wove between the tables and left the note in her hand.

He forgot to breathe as she read it: *My*

apartment—65 Gotham St.—20 minutes? He watched as she lifted the note to the candle flame. She dropped it burning into an ashtray, and with its light flickering in her eyes she gazed across at him and smiled.

What was the matter with him? His heart bouncing crazily around inside him. Acting like a lovesick kid—about a woman as lethal as cyanide.

Burt Chance pushed himself away from the table. He strode rapidly past the bar, signaling Whitey. Shirley Bell again found herself suddenly lost, with Whitey hustling to catch up to Chance.

Outside El Toreador the night air was cooler. The pavement was spotted by a few raindrops. Chance took deep breaths. "Head for home, Whitey. Go ahead! Wait there."

"Now listen, Burt. If you're figuring on making a long pitch for—"

"You heard me, Whitey!" Chance snapped. "Get back home! Now!"

In bewilderment Whitey started away. Letting Whitey hurry on alone, Chance crossed the street, the rain dripping on him unnoticed. He had left his hat at the checkstand, but no matter. Whitey already out of sight, Chance selected a doorway that was both deep and dark. There he waited. Even the rain seemed to hold its breath while Chance watched the doorway of El Toreador.

Twenty minutes, he had written.

**I**T SEEMED twenty hours before Elza Lyle appeared. Whatever excuse she had given her boy-friend, it must have been a good one. He hadn't even followed her to the door. Elza Lyle herself moved with no hesitation. She knew her destination, Chance's apartment, was less than a block away. Chance watched hungrily her lithe, swinging walk as her high heels ticked and her dark figure moved through the shadows of the street.

Would she make a brief detour to police headquarters? No—nor did she stop at any phone booth along the way. Chance followed behind her, on the opposite side of the street, until she reached 65, the smartly modernized house everybody knew was Burt Chance's.

She rang the bell, and Whitey opened the door for her. Chance glimpsed a joy-

ful sort of consternation on Whitey's thin face. Then she was inside and the door was closed. Now she was waiting for him—there, on the dot, in willing response to his message, waiting for him.

Chance stood still, staring at his own doorway—seeing it as the entrance of a death-house—baited lusciously for him.

He stared also at his windows, at the shadows visible on the drawn venetian blinds. The one with the stooped shoulders and long neck was, of course, Whitey's. The other shadow, Elsa Lyle's, was standing apart, but Chance saw it moving to the other. He felt its nearness to Whitey so galvanically that he broke into an abrupt stride—not toward his door, but swiftly away, to the corner and past.

In the next street Chance paused for a wary glance around, then climbed the stoop of the nondescript tenement building that stood backed up to his own home. When buying this squalid structure Chance had carefully concealed himself behind dummies. The other tenants, mostly laborers, didn't suspect that the vacant ground-floor flat provided Burt Chance with a very private way in and out of his apartment—a great convenience sometimes for overnight guests who preferred not to be seen tripping out at dawn. It was serving Chance well at the moment also, as burningly anxious as he was about the proximity of those two shadows on the blinds.

He eased into the rear of the ground-floor flat to a door that looked entirely ordinary but wasn't. Chance used a special key to unlock it. Stepping into pitch darkness, he closed it behind him. Then opening another door quietly he passed through, emerged from a false-walled pantry into his own kitchen.

He turned quickly to his living room. The sound of his step caused a jerky noise, and he found Whitey staring at him, face blanched, frozen with fright. Elza Lyle, however, quite cool, tapped a cigarette and smiled at him through her lashes.

"Take a walk, Whitey," Chance suggested pungently, standing still. "Cool yourself off. You can use a better grip on yourself."

"Listen, Burt, what's eating ya?" Whitey said breathlessly.

"A couple of minutes are all she needs, Whitey. She can have quite an effect on a man inside a couple of minutes." Chance moved closer. "You're running in luck, Miss Lyle. We've turned out to be push-overs. My old friend Whitey and me both."

Holding her cigarette to her faintly curving lips, she said quietly, "What have I done to deserve so much?"

The cigarette lighter jiggled in Whitey's hand, but a touch of her cool fingertips steadied it for him.

"But this beginning is a break for me, Miss Lyle," Chance went on evenly. "It makes your tactics a little too obvious. I've had a very narrow escape, in fact. You've just saved me from making too huge a chump of myself."

"I can't imagine you being anyone's chump, Mr. Chance—or may I call you Burt?" Elza Lyle's smile was slightly cynical. "Not over me, anyway. After all, you've seen me at the bar in El Toreador many times, but somehow last night was the first time you ever really noticed me. Why did it happen?"

He said acridly, "You're handling it pretty well. Seeming so innocent, I mean. That's part of your act, of course." He took another step toward her while Whitey watched them both, dry-lipped. "What's your name?"

"But I thought you knew—"

"Not the fancy one you've tagged yourself with. Not Elza Lyle. I mean your real name. Could it really be Bowers, perhaps?"

She was beginning to laugh very quietly. "Does it matter?"

"Yes. If your name's Bowers—it matters. After that bulldozer ran into Paul Bowers, accidentally, of course, I happened to read in the papers that he was survived by a younger sister. So that's you."

Her dark head glistened as she shook it. "My real name is Elza Lyle."

"Bowers," he insisted. "Paul Bowers' kid sister. That's why the cops used you as a delicious morsel to put into their trap. They think I killed your big brother and you're trying to help them prove it. Whitey's my alibi for that kill, so you went right to work on him first chance you found—and you were making very good

time, too, when I came in just now."

Her eyes were turning bitter. "Really, Burt—"

"That's it, level. That puts our cards on the table, doesn't it, Miss Bowers?"

She gazed straight into his eyes. "As far as the Bowers thing goes, there's a lot of talk around town. People seem to take it for granted you killed the man. Some of them get pretty indignant about it. To me it doesn't seem to make a great deal of difference." She added quietly. "Maybe that's because I had the very odd experience of falling in love with you. Like a school girl, actually, Burt—at first sight."

HE SET his jaw. "You're here to nail me for murder. I think you would manage to do it too, because—I'll admit it—you hit me where it tells."

She was silent, watching him.

"You hit me so hard I know in advance I'll never be able to take much of this—not without going beserk. So in self-defense I'm calling a halt. Right now. You can go back to headquarters from here and report that the sucker wouldn't swallow the bait."

Eyes still clinging to her, he said shortly, "Your way out is the same way you came in."

With a quick snap of her tapered fingers she flicked her cigarette into the fireplace. "But you're wrong, Burt. I have nothing to do with police work. Cards on the table? All right. I'm not here as a cop, but as a woman who's had the bad luck to fall for a guy she knows is a self-made heel."

He twisted his lips at her. "The lady is such a lovely liar, Whitey. Too bad she's going out of our lives so soon. She's forgotten where the door is, Whitey, so show her."

Whitey hurried. Elza Lyle for a moment did not move. Then, her eyes darker and her red lips pursed, she came closer to Chance.

"Burt—"

"Get out!"

"But, please." Her arms slipped around him. "I swear—"

"Stop this!" Suddenly the fire in him was a wild flare-up. "Get away from me before—"

Her lips were on his. He had fought to

escape them but his own ungovernable longing had trapped him. He made a fevered thrust to force her bare arms loose. Then, in an explosion of resistance to unbearable temptation he struck out, fist clenched, putting all the force of survival behind the driving blow. . . .

He stood there, still, breathing in gulps, blinded.

"Burt!"

He scarcely heard Whitey's hoarse, terrified voice. "Burt!"

He smeared both his hands over his eyes and the room began coming back. Bright blobs of light turned slowly into lamps. A blurred shape became Whitey kneeling on the floor. A long dark blot on the rug became Elza. She lay there, still, as Whitey shook her.

"Burt, look, something's wrong with her. She's bleeding, Burt. . . . Burt!"

His breath still came in gulps and his blood still raced but now he could move. He began telling himself, "*Forget her, forget her now, she isn't a woman any more, not a woman any more. . . .*" Yes, blood in her hair. A hollow of crushed bone behind her delicate ear. Her face so pale—her whole lovely body so still.

"She hit her head on the corner of the coffee table, Burt. That's what musta happened. You hit her so hard—"

Chance stiffened to his feet, his hands clenched on Whitey's arms, and snapped Whitey back to a shaky standing position.

Then his palms flashed right and left, smacking stinging blows across Whitey's face—right, left again. leaving Whitey's lean cheeks quivering with pain and deathly white.

"She's dead."

Whitey stared at him, too numbed to utter the sobs clogging his throat.

"You get it, Whitey? She's dead. But I didn't mean to kill her. It was an accident."

"Yeah," Whitey groaned. "Like Bowers."

Chance's palms smacked across Whitey's face again, swiftly, so viciously that he stumbled backward, bending his head into his arms. When he looked up, a trickle of blood at one corner of his quivering mouth, Chance was still standing over him.

"This *was* an accident, Whitey. But we can't prove it. The cops will never believe it. She was working with them, the damn little she-rat, so they'll jump at the chance to nail me for it. Look what she's done to me—put me in a spot that's plenty hotter than the Bowers kill ever was."

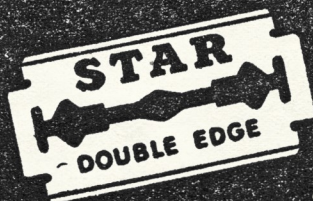
"Y-e-a-h," Whitey breathed. "That's ri-ight. Plenty hotter."

"To get out of it I'm going to need you, Whitey. I've got to depend on you. If I can't depend on you absolutely you'll wind up thinking Bowers died the easy way."

Whitey stiffened. "I'd never rat on you, Burt! Never! You know that, Burt!"

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"I hope I know it now, pal. A few minutes ago I wasn't so sure. Just remember this babe is through baiting us now. You've gone back to stay level with me."

"Sure, Burt! Always. You know good old Whitey, your real pal, Burt!"

"It'll be that way, Whitey—or else. Now stand by. I've got a little figuring to do. I need a way to get clear."

He was finding a new grip on himself now. He made sure the venetian blinds were tight and the door bolted. He paced. Whitey's widened eyes followed him, back and forth. This was a tough one. Too tough for ordinary dimwits; but a sharp worker like Burt Chance could figure it—

He halted, snapped his fingers. "Out the back way, Whitey. Find me a car—anybody's. A parked car with the ignition keys left in the lock, or one you can use a jumper wire on. Bring it around to our private entrance. Don't let anybody see you."

Whitey dodged into the kitchen toward the secret door. Chance stood still, gazing down at the girl at his feet who was so darkly lovely and so dead.

And now doubly dangerous. Now she could be really fatal—as chair-bait.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Taxi to a Tomb

HE WASTED no more time in pacing. It wouldn't be smart to wait here until Whitey sneaked back. He should go out and get himself an alibi. As he had found in the Bowers case, an alibi made-to-order helped plenty to keep him circulating in places more pleasant than the death-house. While Whitey was busy outside, it wouldn't be too hard to whip up a satisfactory alibi for himself elsewhere.

He went out telling himself acridly that one thing was rather certain—the boys down at headquarters would have cause to feel it wasn't such a bright idea after all to send a woman to do a dick's job.

The night in the street had darkened and the pavement was dry. The rain was still holding off, after sprinkling its first few drops around. It was a break for Chance. He could slip back into his luxurious Latin-American bistro with no

wet spots on him to indicate how long he had been abroad.

Hurrying unseen, close along the dark building fronts, Chance felt a gambler's hot hunch that now the good breaks were heading his way. The feeling strengthened when he stepped into El Toreador. Sheer luck had brought him into the lobby at a rare moment when it was entirely deserted—no customers leaving or entering, no cigarette girl standing there like a post, even the redhead gone from behind the hat-check counter. Welcoming the momentary lull, Chance moved in unobserved—except, of course, for the trailing glances of the girls at the tables he passed.

Then another break cropped up for him. His unfinished scotch was still sitting on his favorite corner table exactly where he had left it—and Julio, the head waiter, was just then adding fresh ice cubes to it.

"Thanks, Julio." Chance added smoothly as he returned to his chair, "I was talking on the phone in Luis' office a little longer than I'd expected."

Hot hand on the cold glass, Chance checked the setup here. Now the lull was ending. The redhead was returning to the hat-check stand after mooching a bite in the kitchen. That automaton with the smooth gums and wooden Indian puss was circulating again with her endless, toneless bird-cry, "Cigarettes, cigarettes?" Steve Seton, Chance noted, had left, evidently recognizing the futility of tempting Chance with anything less than big coin. Shirley Bell had remained perched at the bar, still hopeful of a pick-up, and her chances didn't look too bad. The equally lonely young man roosting beside her was an abandoned lad named Shaeffer.

All this added up to give Chance another break. To everyone around him, he must seem to have been an integral part of the scene the whole time.

It was so neat that Chance was only slightly disturbed when he saw the street door opening on Detective Captain Dixon.

Dixon halted in the lobby, thoughtfully chewing his gum. Chance told himself, from a plodder like Dixon he had nothing to fear. Chance was positive that Elza had passed no word to headquarters about her rendezvous at his apartment; he had made sure no cop had tailed her there. Dixon's visit here at this moment could

have nothing whatever to do with the sudden death of Elza Lyle, because Dixon could have no way at all of knowing she was dead.

Still, Chance kept a covert watch on Dixon. This gum-chewing flatfoot hadn't simply blundered in here. He seemed to have something on his stuffy little mind.

Watching, Chance saw him asking a question of Millie the powder room attendant, and Millie shaking her head. Dixon came deeper into the club and paused to speak to Hugh Shaeffer. Shaeffer shrugged and Shirley Bell grasped a chance to get in some of her dizzy chatter. Dixon turned a frown on Chance next, but went on to the door of Luis' office. After a moment Luis came out gesticulating indignantly. He came to Chance's table wringing his hands.

"He's asking about that girl, Burt, my friend. That same girl, the dark one—he wants to see you about her, Burt."

"Why, most certainly, Luis. Why not?" Chance said it easily. "It's a citizen's duty to assist the authorities, isn't it?"

Luis gulped, looking secretly terrified, as Chance rose with his tart half-smile. Chance strolled into Luis' office and found Dixon standing at the desk looking poker-faced—in a bovine way, Chance thought. Chance nodded genially and waited in polite silence until Luis came fluttering in with Shirley Bell and Hugh Shaeffer. They lined up and Dixon eyed them.

"This'll only take a minute," Dixon began. "All I want to know is how-come a girl named Elza Lyle isn't here."

"But Mr. Dixon, please," Luis said pleadingly. "Why is it you keep insisting you should find her in my place?"

"Because this is where she told me she'd be," Dixon said. "Because she never goes anywhere without letting me or my wife know where we can get in touch with her if we have to. This is the first time she's been out of contact with us."

They gazed at him, not certain of his meaning. Chance, asking no questions, kept his wry half-smile on his mouth.

"See, this is the way it's been, about Elza," Dixon explained. "There in that same building where my wife and I live, Elza has a little apartment with her father. The old man's been seriously sick for

years with a bum ticker—the kind that might stall on him any minute. He's the reason Elza gave up a promising career as an actress. There was nobody else to take care of her old man. So whenever she went out, leaving him there alone, she left word with Mrs. Dixon or me where we could find her in a hurry, in case."

Dixon chewed his gum twice, then added, "That's the way it was tonight. She told us she'd be here at El Toreador all evening with her friend Hugh Shaeffer."

The weak-chinned young blue-blood answered querulously, "That's what I thought too. But all of a sudden Elza made some sort of an excuse about having a headache, she was going right home, but wouldn't let me come with her."

"I wish she had. Her father has been dead for half an hour." Again Dixon chewed a few times before adding, "It worries me she went off like this without passing the word to me."

Chance was thinking fast. Her ailing father could be the real reason Dixon had phoned Elza here at El Toreador last night, to report that the old man's condition had worsened, and he could be the true reason she had left early. Was it just barely possible that Chance had been mistaken about Elza and the cops? The thought shook him; and he felt a stiffer jolt when he heard Dixon's next question.

"Are you sure Elza didn't mention where she was going, Shaeff?"

*Shaeff!*

**C**HILLED, staring at Hugh Shaeffer, Chance remembered himself standing behind her in the Telephone lounge when Elza had put through a call last night. He had strained his ears to hear her soft words through the noise. "*Chief?*" She hadn't actually said that! Chance felt coldly certain now that she had said, instead, "*Sheaff,*" as Dixon has said it just now. Actually she had been talking to Hugh Shaeffer, not to Chief Naylor. "*No dice tonight, Shaeff. But all right, then, Shaeff, tomorrow night.*" Simply breaking one date and making another!

A sense of heavy loss swept through Burt Chance, a sickness of heart that was new to him, new and mocking. He could hear Elza Lyle speaking again.

*"I'm not working with the police,*

Burt," and he squirmed inwardly to think that that had been true. "*I'm not here as a cop, but as a woman who's had the bad luck to fall in love with you . . .*" and she had meant it! She had really meant it!

Her name came as a moan into Chance's throat, but he stifled it and kept that grimace of a smile on his lips as he stood there facing Dixon.

"Are you sure Elza didn't mention where she was going, Shaeff?"

"I can guess," Shaeffer said with childish resentment. "There was some other guy. He's the reason I couldn't get to first base with Elza. She must have gone to him—but I don't know who he is or where to find him."

Dizziness was whirling into Chance's mind. He tightened his grip on himself as he heard Shirley Bell piping up.

"Why, I know who that man is!"

They all frowned at her; and Dixon asked, too quietly, "Yeah, who?"

"Why," Shirley Bell said, "Mr. Burt Chance, here."

Chance stood there smiling and hating that squeaking, stupid little doll as their eyes turned on him. He would have enjoyed slapping her vapid little face off; but instead he was forced to remain his usual debonair self. He merely lifted an eyebrow at Shirley Bell as he answered, "You flatter me, honey. This girl you're all talking about—what's her name, Elza Lyle?—is one I've never had the pleasure of meeting."

In silence Dixon frowned at Shirley Bell and Hugh Shaeffer, but neither could deny Chance's statement. Chance had double-checked it in his mind before making it. It was actually a fact that he had never exchanged a single spoken word with Elza Lyle inside this club. Their first brief meeting had occurred in her car, their second in his apartment. Even the truth was serving Chance very well tonight. The breaks were very neatly lining up his way.

"Well, anyhow," Shirley Bell insisted spitefully, "I'm sure Mr. Burt Chance is the man Elza fell for, Mr. Officer. In fact she told me so. Once when she and I were doing a modelling job together we got to talking about attractive men and Elza said of all the men she'd ever seen in her life Mr. Burt Chance was—"

"Really, Miss Bell," Chance interrupted in his smoothest manner, "you must introduce me to Miss Lyle, the sooner the better." He shifted his confident gaze to Dixon. "May I be excused now, Sergeant?"

Dixon thoughtfully chewed his gum. "Elza Lyle must be the only beautiful girl in town you haven't made a pass at, Mr. Chance."

Chance remained smoothly courteous. "I'm really sorry Miss Lyle's rendezvous was not with me—but I've been right here in this club all evening. I suggest you check on that. Ask Julio the head waiter, and the hat-check girl who's been holding my hat for ransom all evening, and Luis here. Then, perhaps everything will be—"

"No doubt you can account for yourself, Mr. Chance; no doubt at all," Dixon said evenly. "Too bad the way the law keeps annoying you. It's only because we don't like crooks very much; but anyway you can go now."

"Thank you."

Smiling his most charming smile, Chance stepped out the door. There he paused a moment, silent laughter on his lips, thinking how very sweetly things were continuing to shape up for him. Dixon could never connect Elza with Chance now, never in this world. Chance already felt entirely safe; but even as he stood there at the closed door another neat break came his way without his even looking for it.

The voices inside were speaking again, Dixon asking, "Now think back carefully, Miss Bell. Did you see a man leaving this place with Elza, or at about the same time?"

"Why, yes, I did," Shirley Bell answered, eager to help. "I did see a man going out just a minute or two after her. He was that nice man named Seton, Steve Seton."

Burt Chance almost burst out in ironical laughter. Steve Seton! Elza Lyle strangely missing, Burt Chance meanwhile remaining inside the club the whole time, but Steve Seton seen hurrying out after her! The neatest break yet! Chance clearing himself so easily, then suspicion shifting to Seton, of all guys! What could be richer?



**B**URT CHANCE strode from El Toreador, leaving Seton to Dixon and swallowing his chortles. Now in the street a light spattering of rain was falling again. Chance hurried through it, across the avenue to No. 65. His key clicked in the lock; he went with a quick step into his living room. Here in the soft lights, so still, Elza Lyle lay where she had dropped.

So lovely. So beautiful in death. Burt Chance set his mouth as he gazed down at her, again feeling the dragging sense of a loss he could never recover.

She had told him she loved him and she had meant it. And now she was gone. She was gone for ever and he had felt her lips so briefly.

He turned his head to listen. A quick footstep in the kitchen. Whitey's. Rain-sprinkled, Whitey hustled in with a feverish shine in his eyes.

"Burt, it's working out fine. I got something better'n a car. I got a truck, Burt, and you'll never guess whose. One of Seton's."

Chance stared, beginning to grin. "Seton's!"

"Yeah. Spotted it down on Front Street. Keys in the lock. Driver inside a bar tanking up on beer, looks like he's gonna be there the rest of the night. It looked safe, taking this truck for a while. You think so, Burt? Is it okay?"

Chance laughed out loud. "Okay! It's a stroke of genius, Whitey, couldn't be better!"

But Whitey had sobered. "What're you gonna do with her, Burt? She was so nice. I'd sorta like to know."

"Leave her to me, Whitey. Your part is to stay here. In case you're questioned later, I've been here with you since leaving the club. Understand, Whitey? I'm not driving a dead girl around in a truck. I'm here, with you, at home, enjoying a cozy rainy evening by the fire."

"That's right, Burt."

"So hold the door for me now, Whitey. I'll get back here as fast as I can make it. Meanwhile just leave all the rest to me. Everything's going smoothly for me now, Whitey, very smoothly."

He lifted her in his arms. He held her gently. She was so lovely, so darkly lovely. And so dead. . . .

Now he was almost finished. A few more quick swings of the shovel and he would be done with this little session of impromptu grave-digging.

Behind him in the night reared the ribby framework of the Seton apartment building in process of construction. The window of the night watchman's empty shack shone through the rain. No cars passed on the street—and in case any came splashing by, its driver would only see a truck sitting there, a truck bearing the name of Seton. It was quiet here now, quiet as a tomb.

The dead girl lay on the cold wet earth almost entirely covered with the heavy gravel that Chance had spilled down on her. The dog lay at her side. It had become a three-way grave now—a bigger job than Chance had planned it to be, with the old man also hidden almost entirely under the gravel.

The continuing rain would wash away the marks on the path, the blood would be thinned and sink into the mud and no signs would be left. And none of this, of course, could be Burt Chance's doing. As loyal Whitey would later testify, Burt Chance at this very moment was lolling in front of his fireplace and enjoying a cheerful blaze.

Chance grinned to himself as he gripped the shovel, making ready to complete the job. How beautifully every break had fallen to him! The cops had no way at all of tying Elza Lyle to him; but far better than that, a conspiracy of incidents had built up a frame for Steve Seton.

Look how neatly it added up, the way Seton had happened to leave El Toreador at Elza Lyle's heels, Seton's own truck used to transport her dead body here to Seton's own property. If it should further happen that Seton was alone at this moment—as was possible, since he was a bachelor who liked his solitude—then, to top it off, he would have no alibi!

Push it one step further than that, Chance thought while he got his breath back from his unaccustomed physical exertion, push it one step further and Seton might even get nailed for the slaying of Elza Lyle—not to mention a night watchman and a dog. In that event this building project of Seton's would necessarily halt and might even be abandoned, and Seton

along with Paul Bowers would be permanently scratched as a competitor of Burt Chance!

Seton a murderer? Hard to believe of a comfortable, tweedy type like Seton. But people would say you never can tell about these quiet guys. Still water sometimes runs very deep. And there would be no competition left.

So neat, all this! Chance chuckled with elation over it as he took a fresh grip on the shovel. Just swing a few more shovel-fuls of gravel, then get back to his apartment. Go in the private way, strip off his soaked clothes, get into his silk lounging robe and morocco slippers. Comb his wet hair sleekly back as if he had just stepped from a shower. And there he would be, basking in Lady Luck's most beaming smile.

Why, certainly, Sergeant Dixon, step right in. It's been a little lonely for Whitey and me tonight. We've been wishing for a little congenial company. Do step in, Sergeant Dixon. . . .

CHANCE raised the shovel—and stopped. His whole body congealed into icy stillness as he heard a voice behind him. A woman's voice with a mocking metallic quality.

It said: "Cigarettes?"

Chance forced himself to turn. He saw her. She was standing there on the black path, her open sandals deep in mud. Her long slender legs in smoky nylons were glistening wet. Her brief bolero surged with her rapid breathing. Her face, beaded with raindrops, was not wooden now. It was pinched into an expression of hatred.

Chance stared at her in stunned, sudden realization. She was the one person on earth who could have known. Hers was the hand that had passed the note to Elza Lyle—hers were the only eyes that could have glimpsed the message: *My apartment—twenty minutes?*

Instantly Chance knew she must have been smelling around Number 65; she must have heard Whitey bringing the truck into the back street. She must have been hiding under the same drenched tarpaulin that he had used to cover the body of Elza Lyle. She had taken a ride

with Chance at the wheel and a corpse lying at her side.

"Cigarettes?" she said with brittle mockery. "Bullets?"

She had an automatic in her wet fist, pointing it steadily at him. She hesitated a minute.

"It was my brother's gun, Mr. Chance," she said harshly. "It was my brother Paul's."

Fury flared up in Chance. This was the final proof that Elza Lyle had had no connection with the cops. They hadn't turned an irresistible glamour girl loose on him after all. No; they had sneaked this one into the club through the employees' entrance—this run-of-the-mill wench. She had been taking his pay while spying on him, watching for her chance to jump him.

Fury broke loose inside Chance. To think that this girl so lacking in class had caught him in a corner like this! It was almost an insult.

Gripping tighter on the shovel, Chance swung it high. He had already killed twice with it tonight. A third kill would be easy. A single slashing blow would be enough to get this sneaking little trash out of his way for keeps. Just one blow would be enough to—

Her automatic cracked out at him. A numbing force swiped at his right wrist. Not hard; it didn't even hurt. But it brought a peculiar powerlessness with it. Chance's fingers loosened on the shovel. Suddenly, he had to let it fall. He turned squarely on the girl bare-handed, a promise of death in his eyes.

In her brassy, cigarette-selling voice she said, "More bullets perhaps, Mr. Chance?"

The gun cracked again. The same paralyzing force nudged his right shoulder. His whole right arm became suddenly a cumbersome weight. There was no feeling left in it.

As he stood poised in a turmoil of rage on the black path, the girl named Bowers said, "I've been practicing, Mr. Chance. Using Paul's gun. Plugging away at tin cans in the basement. Getting ready for this. Because I knew that when the time came I wouldn't want to miss. I'd want to call my shots. Like this. Your left shoulder now."

That sharply cracking flame again!

Chance's left shoulder suddenly shaken and left utterly numb. And now the pain from the first wounds was beginning to burn.

"Better get set to take the works, Mr. Chance. I'm all alone here, but you haven't got a way out now. No more of a way out than you gave my big brother Paul. But I'm not going to let you die as fast as you killed him, Mr. Chance. I want to see you take it the way the law does it—the hard, slow way. The harder and slower the better."

She paused.

He snarled out a sound of challenge. Her answer was another flicker of appallingly accurate flame. He felt his left leg go suddenly weak under him. He tried to throw himself toward her, but that leg was a dead mass dragging him helplessly down.

"More bullets, Mr. Chance?" She parroted it and added, "I want to call Dix from that phone in the watchman's shack, that's all. I want Dix to find you still here when he comes. And still alive. I want them to make you well again so you'll be in the best of health when they strap you into the electric chair. So if you'll just wait here a moment, Mr. Chance—Don't worry. I'll be right back to see you."

He snarled at her again and made a wild, scrambling attempt to reach her. The lightning of her gun struck out again. The power of the bullet smashing into his hip sent him reeling backward. She followed him, her little feet oozing in black mud, her gorgeous legs glistening in their

wetness, her gun relentlessly on him. It cracked again as he fell backward in an awkward sprawl at the base of the mound of gravel.

"It's funny, Mr. Chance," he heard her saying through the rain. "I guess you'll never face trial for murdering my brother. But we will get you for killing Elza Lyle, at least. We'll just have to be satisfied and settle for that. And the poor old watch-under the gravel."

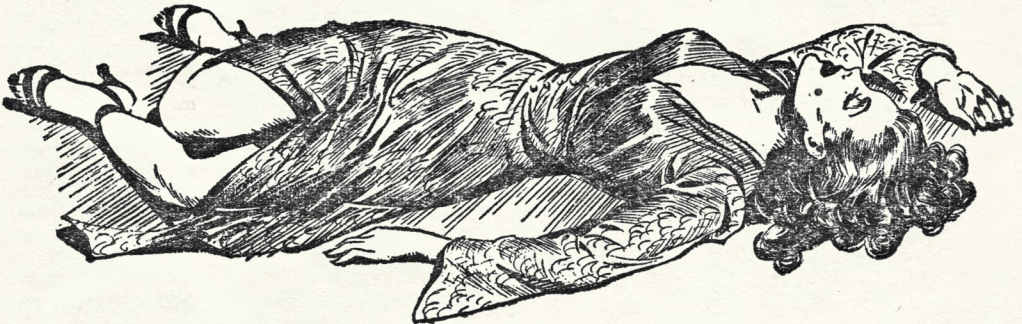
Her gun cracked again—again—again. The bullets pinned him down, pierced both his legs and both his arms and bound him inescapably with pain. In his futile attempts to escape he dislodged the piled gravel and it began spilling down again, sliding down over him until its weight held him immovable, pinned down helplessly under the gravel.

The girl with the gun was gone now. She had run into the shack to call the cops. Chance lay helplessly still—and found in his numb despair that his fingers had closed on something smooth and tapering and cool. Under the wet gravel he had found the lovely dead hand of Elza Lyle, the hand that he would have wanted to hold forever.

He held it—gripped it with a deep yearning for the life that had been in it but was in it no more. He held it desperately, knowing that time would be short now. He wouldn't be permitted to keep Elza's hand in his own cold one for very long. No, not for very long. The time was almost up.

Too soon they would be lying many graves apart.

THE END



*When Doc Pierce, king of con men, takes a gander at the daffy dame, his brains grind out dollar signs—and a caper to turn . . .*

# CUPID FOR CASH



Her staff comes down across Gilmore's skull....

**T**HE waiter has a big ear tuned in our direction, so we are not talking much. Suddenly the Doc chuckles. "Observe that dilly, Pony Boy," he says. "I diagnose a case of smallpox. She is playing the hinge constantly."

I take a gander at this blonde parked at the bar across the room. Of course the Doc does not mean he expects her to pop out in red lumps. When you say a party has smallpox, you mean John Law is on the prowl for that party.

This kind of smallpox is also catching.

If you happen to be in the vicinity of such a party when John Law arrives, he is liable to figure you are worthy of closer inspection.

This blonde is indeed playing the old hinge. She keeps taking peeks at the door behind her like her neck is on a swivel.

By **RICHARD  
DERMODY**

In between peeks she works on her martini. It is not her first.

I watch her and at the same time I am thinking about this waiter and his big ear.

The reason this waiter tunes in is because Cough-Drop Kelly is over there behind the bar. Cough-Drop Kelly knows the Doc and me from way back, and he also knows the Doc is one of the smartest operators in the country. It is a cinch Cough-Drop tells this waiter to listen carefully and maybe pick up a few angles.

I do not like waiters with large ears. In most cases, I will kick this waiter in the shins and tell him to go out on the beach and listen to a sea-shell. But Cough-Drop Kelly will not approve if I kick his waiter in the shins. I am always careful not to annoy parties like Cough-Drop Kelly.

Cough-Drop gets his handle from a Special he mixes up for customers who annoy him. A customer takes one swallow of this Special, and in about a minute he gives a big cough and drops flat on the floor. This is not good for business, but I notice that when Cough-Drop Kelly is annoyed with a customer he does not seem to care about business.

The Doc and me have just arrived at the Vista Del Dinero Hotel, and this is our first visit to the bar. We hear the chumps are heavy with shekels this season in California, and when we find Cough-Drop Kelly manning the pumps we figure this rumor is correct. Cough-Drop is always around places where the chumps are sagging with shekels.

So here we are, sitting at a table in the corner and watching this martini-guzzling blonde. She pushes her glass across the bar for a refill, and a bright ray of light hits me in the eyes. For a second I think she turns a spotlight on me. The Doc sits up and pokes me in the ribs.

"A sparkling Simple Simon," he says. "I detect the odor of fresh, crisp lettuce."

By this time I also realize this ray of light comes from a diamond on the blonde's finger, but I do not understand how the Doc smells money in this situation. I see many a blonde with a diamond or two, but I always figure it is a score for the blonde and not an opportunity for operators like the Doc and me.

This blonde is not such a bad little dilly,

at that. She is younger than me, maybe twenty-two, and she has big blue eyes and pink cheeks.

She is dressed in a very odd manner for such a tomato. She is wearing a velvet bonnet tied with a blue ribbon under her chin, and a fluffy white dress that fans out on all sides. A long stick with a crook in the end is leaning against the bar beside her. This stick has a blue bow tied around it. I just barely notice this stick right then. Later I pay plenty of attention to it.

Cough-Drop pours another helping of grog in the blonde's glass and she takes another quick peek behind her. Just as she turns back to the bar, a slab of sunlight falls across the floor. The door swings open and I sit up straight in my chair. I see many strange things in bars, but I never see a sight like this.

A pair of pint-size woolly lambs are trotting across the floor. They are saying *m-a-a-a*, and they have blue ribbons tied around their necks. They run to the blonde and stand there at her feet looking up and saying *m-a-a-a*. The blonde speaks to them and pats them on the head. The Doc gives me another poke in the ribs.

"On your way, Pony Boy," he says. "Throw a rope on Bo-Peep. We must get into this play immediately."

I stare at him. His big red face is tightened up and I can see he means business. I know better than to argue with him, but I don't like this. I play many a game with blondes in my time, but this is the first time I encounter a situation like this.

However, I move across the room and slide onto a stool next to her.

"The name is Horner," I tell her. "My friends call me Jack." I point my thumb at the Doc. "Old King Cole is letting me out of the corner for a few minutes."

The blonde turns and gives me a stern look.

"Go away," she says. "You must not sit here. A friend of mine named Miss Muffet had a frightening experience with a stranger who sat down beside her."

**W**ELL, I have no quick come-back for this one. I glance at Cough-Drop. He tips me a wink and speaks to the blonde.

"The character who frightens Miss Muffet is a nasty old spider," Cough-Drop tells her. "Mr. Jack Horner is a clean-cut young American lad. He will not harm you."

The blonde takes a long swig of grog and thinks it over. Finally she smiles at me and looks across the room at the Doc.

"Ask Old King Cole to join us," she says. "Tell him to bring his Fiddlers Three. I like music."

This sounds like a good idea to me. I turn and flag the Doc. He gets to his feet, settles his swayback coat on his big shoulders and pulls down his white vest. He picks up his black skimmer, arranges a smile on his face and starts across the room.

Just then the door opens again and a tall party comes into the bar. He looks around and heads for the blonde. I begin to feel better when I see this party. He is the Doc's age, maybe fifty, with a long chin and sharp eyes, and he looks like ready money on the hoof. His voice is sharp.

"You are a bad girl, Mirabel," he says to the blonde. "I have been looking everywhere for you. Your mother is worried."

Mirabel swings around on the stool. Her blue eyes are cold and her lips are a thin line. She reaches for this long stick leaning beside her. Before I can move she ups with this stick and whaps the tall party on the side of the skull.

The tall party lets out a yip and staggers sideways. The blonde winds up for another whap and I grab the stick. But I forget about the livestock. In no time at all I am rolling on the floor.

Well, it is a lively scene for a minute or so. Mirabel takes the fall, too, and she is squealing and kicking in all directions. The woollies are stepping in my face and saying *m-a-a-a*. Finally I get untangled and put the arm on Mirabel. I get her on her feet and boot the woollies away. She lets out a couple of sobs and buries her nose in my shoulder.

The Doc is among us by this time. His face is sober but I can tell he is pleased with this performance for some reason. The tall party is holding his skull where Mirabel whaps him, so the Doc leads him to the bar and tells Cough-Drop to pour him a quick brandy. The tall party downs

it and feels better. He bows at the Doc.

"I must apologize for this unfortunate episode," he says. He looks at the blonde. "Poor Mirabel is not herself. I fear she has been indulging in alcoholic drinks." He gives the Doc another bow. "My name is Ellicott Smurr."

The Doc bows back at him. "I am Doctor Pierce, of New York. This other gentleman is a colleague, Doctor Allan." He pulls out his cheaters with the black ribbon and places them on his nose, then takes a long gander at Mirabel who is still snuffing unhappily on my willing shoulder.

"Not an unusual case," the Doc says. "I have encountered many similar phobias in my practice. I would diagnose arrested adolescence with a tendency to adhere to childhood in the form of Mother Goose characters."

Well, this is quite a spell, even for the Doc. I hold down a snicker. The only practice the Doc ever encounters is when he peddles snake-oil around the carnivals in his young days. I take a look at Ellicott Smurr and I don't feel like snickering.

Ellicott Smurr is not having any. He gives the Doc a cold look and walks over to the blonde. He starts to pry her arms loose from my neck. The blonde puts a tighter grip on me, and for a minute I am nearly strangled. Finally I break her hold and Ellicott Smurr puts the arm on her.

She looks up at him, lets out a sigh, closes her eyes—and bang, she is down on the carpet again.

The Doc pushes Ellicott Smurr to one side. He leans over Mirabel and puts his fingers on her wrist. He looks up and shakes his head.

"We must get her home and in bed," he says. "Her condition is not dangerous, but she must have rest and quiet." He jerks his head at me. "You'd better carry her."

I pick her up. She is strictly a sack this time. I take a look at Ellicott Smurr and start for the door. The Doc herds him along behind me and the two woolly lambs bring up the rear. I look back once, and Cough-Drop Kelly and the waiter are watching this procession with their eyes bugged out.

A LONG black limousine is parked outside. I load Mirabel in the rear seat. But before I get in myself, I have to fight off this pair of woollies. The woollies figure on riding with us and they are not pleased when I give them the boot.

The Doc and Ellicott climb in the front seat and Ellicott starts the motor. As we pull away, the woollies take up the high gallop and start after us. We lose them at the first turn. That is the last I see of these woollies for a couple of days.

Ellicott is not friendly but the Doc gives him a fair pumping out as we ride along. He finds out that Mirabel is the only daughter of the late J. Twombly Thripps. It seems that Mirabel is a little unpredictable, especially when it comes to prog, so J. Twombly Thripps is careful and sets up a nice tight will.

Under this will, Mirabel's mother, Mrs. Cleota Thripps, gets about one million iron men. Mirabel is left two million, but she cannot handle this money until she reaches the age of twenty-five or marries. She must have her mother's consent to marry, and in the meantime Ellicott Smurr is handling Mirabel's money.

Mirabel comes up with this Bo-Peep routine a month or so back and her mother immediately moves her from New York out to this house they own in California. Ellicott Smurr comes along for the ride, so far as the Doc can find out.

Well, this is a pretty clear picture, but it is not the sort of company the Doc and me train with. I don't like it, but I know it will take an earthquake or a deputy sheriff to move the Doc away from the vicinity of all these shekels.

The Thripps residence is maybe a quarter of a mile down the beach from the hotel. It is about the size of a public library and has long windows looking in all directions. We pull up in front and I get out and unload Mirabel. The front door opens, and a young party about my age comes galloping down the steps.

He is tall and beefy with long eyelashes, and I notice he combs his hair all the way around to the back of his head. He is done up in a striped jacket and a pair of little white pants. The minute I lay eyes on him he is a wrong gee in my book. He rushes over and stares at Mirabel,

then quickly turns back to Ellicott Smurr. "What's wrong, Dad? Was there an accident?"

Ellicott shakes his head. "My son, Gilmore," he says. He moves a hand at the Doc. "This is Doctor Pierce; the gentleman holding Mirabel is Doctor Allan. Mirabel had a slight dizzy spell in the hotel bar."

"Oh-oh," Gilmore says. "Plastered again, huh?"

The front door busts open again, and a hefty dame about forty years of age trots down the steps. She is not a bad-looking bag and she is packing a couple of grand in rags and rocks on her frame. She comes to a halt in front of me and puffs a few times, then lets out a holler.

"My baby," she yells. "Is she dead?"

Ellicott Smurr speaks sharply:

"Nonsense, Cleota," he says. "Your infernal daughter got a skinful and struck me with that staff she uses to herd those silly lambs." He rubs his skull. "She might have injured me seriously."

The Doc steps forward and bows.

"Doctor Pierce, at your service," he says. He gives Mrs. Cleota Thripps a big smile. "Doctor Allan and I happened to be present when your daughter collapsed. I suggest that you show Doctor Allan the way to her room. She must sleep for an hour or so. Later I will have a little talk with Mirabel and suggest a course of treatment."

Mrs. Cleota Thripps looks up at the Doc, and I see this look come on her face that I see on the faces of a hundred bags since I join up with him. The Doc is always preaching about not mixing dames and business, but I have never known him to bump a bag out of the way if she is holding a bankroll.

EL LICOTT SMURR is not happy. He horns in at this point and makes a pitch about how he and Gilmore can handle it from here on. I can tell Ellicott he is wasting his breath. Once the Doc smells money and moves in, he stays in. I start up the steps with Mirabel.

It is getting dark by the time Ellicott Smurr finally shoos the Doc away from Mrs. Cleota Thripps and out of the house. On the way up the beach to the hotel, the Doc tells me about this interview he has

with Mirabel after she sleeps off this load of grog.

It seems Mirabel is fairly sensible except about this Mother Goose routine. She keeps calling the Doc Old King Cole and insists he produce the Fiddlers Three.

Well, this is all very interesting, but I am in favor of forgetting we ever run into this crew. The Doc is annoyed when I say this. He says he has already agreed to start giving this psycho-something treatment to Mirabel and he cannot run out on his patient.

We argue all the way into the bar. Then the Doc ditches me while he has a big confab with Cough-Drop Kelly. I am so nervous by the time we put on the feed-bag that I can hardly bite my steak.

After dinner we retire to our bungalow. The Doc shucks his coat and vest and sits staring at the ocean and smiling to himself. He pays no attention when I drag out the keisters and start packing.

I am still packing when there is a loud rap at the door. The Doc chuckles. "Come in," he says in a loud voice.

Ellicott Smurr walks into the room. Gilmore is with him and they are both scowling. Ellicott looks at me.

"I trust you are leaving town, Doctor Allan, or whatever your name is," he says. He turns to the Doc. "Your little game is finished. I telephoned New York, and the Medical Society has no record of a psychiatrist named Pierce."

The Doc smiles. "A wise precaution. I suspected that you would investigate. In fact I counted on it." He waves his mitt at a chair. "Please be seated, gentlemen. This discussion may be prolonged."

"Discussion?" Ellicott turns red. "We have nothing to discuss with you two charlatans."

The Doc leans forward. "We will not call names," he says in a hard voice. "Sit down. I assure you that you will regret any hasty decision or action."

Ellicott and Gilmore look at each other and I can see they are worried. Finally they park in a couple of chairs.

"Start discussing," Ellicott says.

The Doc smiles. "Let us begin with the fact that you are responsible for two million dollars left by Mr. Twombly Thripps to his daughter Mirabel. I have reason to believe that a strict accounting of those

funds would be most awkward for you."

Ellicott's face whitens. "Go on," he says in a low voice.

The Doc smiles again. "Mrs. Cleota Thripps informed me that your son wishes to marry Mirabel. The girl is not averse to this union, but Mrs. Cleota Thripps is undecided. Her consent is necessary. I believe I can obtain that consent."

Ellicott turns and looks at Gilmore. I can see they are both getting a good hold on the hook. The Doc gives it another yank.

"I might say that the alternative to my proposal will be an immediate examination of your accounts, Mr. Smurr."

Ellicott looks tough for a second, then shrugs.

"What do you propose?"

The Doc glances at Gilmore. "Are you willing to carry out this matrimonial project?"

Gilmore grins. "Sure," he says. "Mirabel is a goof but she's a pretty cute little number. I can handle Mirabel if you pull the old lady into line. Mirabel calls me Little Boy Blue."

I take a quick look at the Doc, and I can see he will also enjoy wringing Gilmore's neck. I am beginning to catch up with the Doc at this point and I am feeling much better. In fact, the more I examine Ellicott and Gilmore, the more I like this caper.

Ellicott is thinking. "How soon do you think you can arrange the marriage?"

"At once," the Doc says. "I will spend the day at the Thripps residence tomorrow. I will subject Mirabel to a long examination, then I will advise Mrs. Cleota Thripps to allow the wedding to take place. I am sure I can convince her that the stabilizing effect of marital bliss will restore Mirabel to normal, healthy womanhood."

Gilmore snickers. "I'll stabilize her," he says. "I've got the license. I arranged it last week."

Ellicott scowls at him and gets to his feet. He crosses to the Doc and holds out his mitt.

"It's a deal," he says. "When Gilmore is safely married to Mirabel, I can consolidate my hold on the Thripps fortune. I will see that you gentlemen are handsomely rewarded."



The Doc grips Ellicott's mitt, although I can see he will rather take him by the throat.

"Good," he says. "You will find pen and ink in that desk over there. We will accept a small retainer to show good faith, say one thousand dollars. Make it out to cash. I am certain the hotel will honor your signature."

Ellicott opens and shuts his mouth a couple of times, and for a minute I figure he is going to stick his toes in. Finally he snorts and walks to the desk.

**T**HE Doc is up bright and early the next morning. After he stokes his haybilly with a big platter of ham and eggs, he takes off for the Thripps residence. I spend the day paddling in the Pacific and baking my hide on the beach. The Doc returns around five o'clock and we head into the bar. The Doc goes into another big huddle with Cough-Drop Kelly and then sits down at the table in the corner.

"The wedding will take place at high noon tomorrow," he says. "Mrs. Cleota Thripps was grateful for my advice. I have been most helpful to that charming lady. I have arranged all details for the happy event, even to securing the services of a man of the cloth."

"Okay," I tell him. "So you are a one-man matrimonial mill, complete with preacher." I have been doing some thinking. "Look, Doc," I go on: "I don't like this caper. It is not our style and there will be no further payoff. We have made expenses out of Ellicott Smurr. Once Gilmore crosses the wire, his old man will cross us up. Ellicott Smurr is nothing

but a plain crook—and you know it."

The Doc grins at me. "I have a little plan, Pony Boy," he says. "I want you to pay close attention to my instructions. The success of this little plan will depend on your efforts." He lets out a chuckle. "Of course you will receive assistance, principally from a pair of uninvited guests at the ceremony."

Well, I still can't make sense out of this setup. Even after the Doc outlines my duties, I fail to see a chance of a score. The Doc always figures I do better in a caper if I don't know too many details.

We show up at the Thripps residence around eleven-thirty. A flunky bows us into a big room with flowers banked around the walls. I notice a table across the room with a row of bottles and glasses. This table is next to a pair of sliding doors to the next room.

The Doc has dusted his swayback coat, and he is wearing a fresh white vest and his best striped pants. He trots around the room monkeying with the flowers and moving the furniture until I tell him he looks like an undertaker getting set for a fresh customer. He gives me a growl, and I realize that for once he is as nervous about a payoff as I am.

Ellicott and Gilmore come in and it is plain to see they are also nervous. We stand around for a while, and finally the flunky comes in with a skinny party in a black suit and turn-around collar. This party has a long neck and big ears, and he is the Reverend Thaddeus Jigger.

In a couple of minutes we hear soft music and Mrs. Cleota Thripps and Mirabel walk through the door. Mrs. Cleota Thripps is wearing a long gown and a

# HEADACHE

UPSET  
STOMACH

JUMPY  
NERVES



# RELIEF!

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couple pounds of jewelry. Mirabel is in the Bo-Peep outfit she wears in the hotel bar, and she is clutching this long stick with the crook in the end and the blue ribbon tied around it.

The Reverend Thaddeus Jigger is standing by the table in the corner with the bottles on it. I figure he is reading the labels. He comes forward and everybody howdy-do's around and then we line up for the ceremony.

This ceremony is so short it scares you. In fact I am just getting my feet planted when I realize that the Reverend Thaddeus has buckled the harness and Gilmore and Mirabel are in double hitch. While they go into a quick clinch, I back across the room to the table in the corner.

The Doc's big voice booms out: "Now we will have a toast to the bride and groom." He starts herding the gathering toward me. "Doctor Allan will pour the libations."

Gilmore and Mirabel stand a few feet away with their arms hooked together. The rest of the crew line up in front of me. I pour a sherry for Mrs. Cleota Thripps and another one for the Reverend Thaddeus Jigger. Then I look at Ellicott Smurr.

"Scotch," he tells me.

I ladle his drink and then pick up a bottle of bourbon and pour a pair of doses for the Doc and me. We lift the glasses to Mirabel and Gilmore and dump it down. I notice the Reverend Thaddeus Jigger has moved over by the sliding doors. He reaches out and opens them.

Mirabel gives a squeal and the two woolly lambs I last see outside the hotel bar come in at a high gallop. They rush up to Mirabel and say *m-a-a-a*.

Well, this is quite a surprise to most of the people in the room. Nobody is paying any attention to me, so I move over to Gilmore and give him a quick shove. Mirabel is leaning over the woollies and patting them on their heads.

Just then Ellicott Smurr gives a loud moan. He grabs his middle and coughs. The next second he is on the carpet rolling around and making faces.

I am all set now.

Gilmore is in line, so I chuck him under the chin with a hard right cross. Gilmore grunts and goes forward on his face. My

timing is perfect, and he lands smack on top of the pair of woolly lambs. They let out loud squawks and start moving.

Gilmore has a good grip on both woollies by this time, so I let out a yell you can hear ten blocks away.

"Stop abusing those poor little sheep, Gilmore," I holler. I take another breath and yell the same thing again.

Mirabel looks down and sees Gilmore flopping around with the woollies under him. Her staff comes down across Gilmore's skull. I let her keep up this healthy exercise until Gilmore quits kicking. Then I move in and grab the stick away from Mirabel.

The woollies get loose and run back through the sliding doors. Mirabel takes off after them, and I get my breath and look around. Everything is in good shape.

Ellicott and Gilmore are stretched out flat, and the Doc and the Reverend Thaddeus Jigger are holding Mrs. Cleota Thripps by the arms to keep her from joining them. It is coming pretty fast for Mrs. Cleota Thripps. Her face is sagging and she is letting out little whimpers. The Doc leads her to a chair and loads a big helping of bourbon into her.

"You must relax, dear lady," he says. "Everything came out exactly as I planned it."

Mrs. Cleota Thripps looks up at him and I can see she is now among us again.

"You planned this—this awful scene?"

The Doc nods. The Reverend Thaddeus Jigger walks over to the pair of bodies on the floor. He looks at the Doc.

"You want me to drag these two muggs outside?" he asks. "They won't come out of this for a while, especially the old duck."

The Doc grins at him. "That is an excellent suggestion, Joe," he says. "Kindly remove the culprits while I explain this procedure to Mrs. Thripps."

Mrs. Cleota Thripps sits and stares as Ellicott and Gilmore bump along the carpet and out the door. She shakes her head and looks up at the Doc.

"What does it all mean? Who is that man?"

"Joe?" The Doc looks surprised. "I thought everyone knew him. He is the waiter at the hotel bar."

Mrs. Cleota Thripps shakes her head

again. "Then—my little girl is not really married?"

"That's right," the Doc says. He gives her a chance to think it over and then goes on: "It was the only way I could bring this situation to a head, the only way I could expose Ellicott Smurr."

Mrs. Cleota Thripps frowned. "Expose Ellicott? Why should you expose him?"

**T**HE Doc speaks slowly: "Last night Ellicott and Gilmore came to the hotel. Ellicott told me that he has misused funds from Mirabel's estate. He said the only way he could be saved from ruin was by a marriage between Gilmore and Mirabel. Then he offered me a huge sum of money if I would advise you to allow the marriage to take place. I agreed, and then arranged with the waiter to impersonate a minister of the gospel."

Mrs. Cleota Thripps thinks it over. "But why didn't you just warn me?"

The Doc smiles. "Because I feared you might not believe me. I wanted to show you the full extent of his wickedness. I also suspected that the excitement of the wedding would bring on an attack. You see, Ellicott Smurr is not well mentally."

Mrs. Cleota Thripps opens her eyes wide. "You mean he is insane?"

"I'm afraid so," the Doc says. "I noticed the symptoms when I first met him. They are apparent to the trained eye."

Mrs. Cleota Thripps thinks it over for a long time. Then she gives a shudder and looks up at the Doc. "How can I ever repay you," she says. She shudders again. "You have saved my little girl from a horrible fate. When I saw that boy Gilmore abusing those poor little lambs, I felt like striking him myself."

The Doc nods and lets out a sigh. "Yes," he says. "Poor Gilmore has inherited his father's weakness. Any excitement may lead him to violent action. He should be placed in confinement."

Mrs. Cleota Thripps gives another shudder. "You must stay with us, Doctor," she says. "We will need your help to get this terrible confusion straightened out."

The Doc shakes his head. "That is impossible, dear lady," he says. "Doctor Allan and I have just accepted the leadership of a fund-raising drive for a mental

clinic in Chicago. We must leave tonight."

I am watching Mrs. Cleota Thripps carefully. I see this smile come over her face and I relax. She gets to her feet.

"You must allow me to become the first contributor," she says. "It will be a slight repayment for all you have done."

The Doc frowns. "Very well," he says. "But I will not accept one penny over ten thousand."

We are again sitting at the corner table in the hotel bar. Cough-Drop Kelly and Joe, the waiter, grin at us. Cough-Drop is riffling a stack of lettuce the Doc just hands him. He splits it into two piles and passes one stack to Joe.

"I am sorry I miss this wedding," he says. "From what Joe tells me it is a lively shindig."

Joe laughs. "You should see me tie that old knot. I am a red-hot preacher for a few minutes." He laughs again. "The Special works like a charm on that Smurr geezer. He takes the prettiest flop I ever see."

Cough-Drop nods his head. "The Special never fails," he says. "It is a good thing you find out this Ellicott Smurr is strictly a scotch man and the old lady never hoists anything but sherry."

The Doc chuckles. "A neat operation all around," he says. "Those two rascals deserve everything they are going to get. I think both Ellicott and Gilmore will have a difficult time from now on. Mrs. Cleota Thripps is convinced they are both candidates for padded cells."

He turns to me.

"You performed beautifully, Pony Boy," he says. "That right hand you placed on Gilmore's chin was a lovely gesture."

I grin at him. "Little Boy Blue. After Mirabel and me and the woollies get through with him, he is Little Boy Black and Blue." I have been doing some thinking. "What about Mirabel?" I ask the Doc. "Is she really daffy or is this Bo-Peep act a racket?"

The Doc shoots me a quick look and chuckles. "Mirabel was just plain swacked," he says. He shakes his head. "Besides, Mirabel is a blonde. I doubt if she is any daffier than a great many blonde dillies I have encountered."

# I'LL BET

Mr. Maddox Detective Novel

By T. T. FLYNN

## CHAPTER ONE

Four-Grand Sucker

**T**HE girl at Bowie Racetrack surprised Mr. Maddox. Then she made him suspicious. The danger she had in store for him he did not suspect until later.

Bowie was between Washington and Baltimore. It lay off the main highways, with green pine woods lifting in the background. This cool and sunny autumn afternoon, the grandstand and clubhouse were crowded with race fans from Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania.

Mr. Maddox was strolling slowly in front of the grandstand, a large and genial man, his gray hat brim snapped low in front and his topcoat comfortably open over a distinguished mid-section.



# YOUR LIFE!

*It was a neck-and-neck race down the homicide stretch—when that genial bookie, Mr. Maddox, made a four-G bet . . . with a lady who was too dead to collect.*



*Tony Rager lunged in, shooting. . . .*

He was scanning the program when a breezy voice spoke at his elbow.

"Joe, can you handle six on Tassello, to win?"

Distaste came on Mr. Maddox's broad face.

"'Lonzo Keeler!' he said. It was not a greeting, not a welcome. It was a flat statement of unpleasant fact. In past years Alonzo Keeler had been a specialist in feather-brained ladies with more money than judgment. He had done well at it.

"Still the same name," said Keeler airily. His smile, under a close-clipped mustache, was easy, confident. He looked lean and fit in casual tweeds. His face was well-browned; his hat had the same old hint of jaunty angle.

Mr. Maddox said without warmth, "'Lonzo, you haven't been around in years. How much time did you draw?"

"Been traveling, Joe. South America." The fingers of Alonzo's right hand came together in a Latin gesture. His eyes lifted expressively. "Ah, the Argentine, Joe! Buenos Aires! What a town! What women!"

"What were you lamming from all that time?" Mr. Maddox inquired.

"It was business, Joe. How about six on the nose, in the fifth?"

Bugle notes soared from the loud-speaker horns. The horses were leaving the paddock for the fourth race. Mr. Maddox regarded the man coldly. "Six pennies?"

"Six grand, Joe. The betting is light today. That much dinero would murder the tote odds."

"Keep to your English; this is Bowie, U. S. A. And I wouldn't lay you six cents against an Argentine jackrabbit to run last," Mr. Maddox said curtly. "Beat it!"

'Lonzo Keeler had never allowed emotion to interfere with business. He ignored Mr. Maddox' manner.

"It's not my money, Joe. I'm speaking for a friend."

"The same to all your friends."

"Six G's in your hand, cash, before the race starts. You never handled a cleaner bet. I give you my word, Joe."

"I'd rather have you stab me," Mr. Maddox stated flatly. "'Lonzo you and your rackets always gaged me."

'Lonzo smiled. "Kid me all you like, Joe, I don't mind." The man's eyes had a strange, cold glint even while he laughed. "Cash before the race."

"The horse must he hopped. The jockey evidently is riding with batteries," Mr. Maddox decided. "'Lonzo, if I ever smelled a fix, it's now."

'Lonzo shrugged the idea aside. "Joe, do you know who owns Tassello?"

Breeding lines, horse form, and the names of most owners and trainers were all filed in Mr. Maddox' remarkable memory.

"A Miss Pat Carnes is the owner," he answered without hesitation. "The horse is trained in Nick Lang's public stable. Nick shoots square. None of his horses deserve any interest from you or your crooked pals."

"Do you know Pat Carnes?"

"Not interested."

"She wants to make the bet. Her horse, her money, Joe. There she is over there. Talk to her."

Mr. Maddox looked and whistled softly. A moment later he was smiling as 'Lonzo Keeler introduced him to the girl.

He'd noticed her earlier in the afternoon, in the clubhouse. So had other men. From smart black suede shoes to honey hair under a small off-the-face hat, she was the kind of girl men noticed.

"Nick Lang pointed you out at Belmont this summer," Pat Carnes told him. "What did Nick say?" Mr. Maddox chuckled.

She had a nice laugh. "Let's see—something about Joe Maddox, who takes the biggest bets and owns the worst race horses in the country."

'Lonzo broke in, "He won't take your bet, Pat."

"I've changed my mind," Mr. Maddox decided.

**A**LONZO KEELER'S relief was visible, which was something to ponder later on. Keeler said to his companion, "I told Joe it would be cash before the race."

Pat Carnes nodded. She opened a leather purse.

"No money here at the track," Mr. Maddox said quickly. He added gallantly, "Your credit is good, Miss Carnes."

She closed the purse, but not before he noted a wad of money inside. A five-hundred-dollar bill was on top. More of the same was evidently under it.

"Six thousand to win on your Tassello in the next race," Mr. Maddox quoted.

"That's correct," Pat Carnes agreed.

She wore a diamond on her engagement finger. 'Lonzo Keeler's manner had a certain swaggering possessiveness. Pat Carnes looked level-headed. But what man could chart a woman's emotions? Not Joe Maddox.

As he left them, Mr. Maddox thought rather grimly that she'd probably know 'Lonzo better before long. Women learned about Alonzo Keeler the hard way.

Mr. Maddox walked back under the grandstand. He halted again as a sarcastic voice addressed him. "Who were your friends, Joe?"

"Cassidy!" Mr. Maddox exclaimed. He started to chuckle. "I thought you fell out of a window in Brooklyn and broke a leg."

Cassidy was a big man with solid feet and burly shoulders. He looked like a cop and he was a cop. The Masterton International Agency rated Cassidy tops among their men who watched the large race tracks for crooks, touts and shady racing.

Masterton men also were alerted to prevent bookmaking at any track. All money bet outside the mutuel windows was lost revenue. For years, from coast-to-coast, Cassidy had watched Joe Maddox—and had never been able to arrest him.

The failure galled Cassidy. He was given to brooding about it. But with all that, they were friends in a wary sort of way.

Cassidy grunted sourly, "You kill me with your gags. What horse were you taking a bet on out there near the fence?"

"Snooping again, eh?" Mr. Maddox said. He bit the end off a fat black cigar and carefully lighted the rich Cuban tobacco.

Cassidy plucked one of the cigars from Mr. Maddox' front coat pocket. He bit the end off with a wrench of strong teeth.

"That smoke," Mr. Maddox reminded, "cost me a dollar and a half, you larcenous flatfoot."

"Sucker for paying it," said Cassidy,

unimpressed. "What gives with you and the gorgeous tomato and her friend, with your heads together like pals from the same cell block?"

"Why ask?" Mr. Maddox countered.

"Reasons," said Cassidy. "I'm giving you a break by asking." Cassidy rolled the cigar across his mouth. "Give, Joe."

"Sounds bad."

"Maybe it is," Cassidy said. "Level with me, Joe, and I'll do the same with you."

Mr. Maddox looked as if he almost believed the statement. His bland face became shadowed with worry. "I wouldn't want this to go any further. It could be serious."

"It's just between us, Joe." Cassidy promised. "Word of honor."

Mr. Maddox moved closer. He drew a worried breath and looked around to make sure no one was close. Cassidy's nostrils twitched with anticipation.

"We decided that skirts won't go lower after all," Mr. Maddox confided huskily.

Cassidy swallowed hard. His face began to turn red. "Funny, aren't you, Joe?"

Mr. Maddox slapped Cassidy's shoulder. The blow would have felled a lesser man.

"My pal!" Mr. Maddox said.

He was still chuckling as he walked away. But out of Cassidy's sight he sobered. Cassidy had a one-track mind. His interest in 'Lonzo Keeler and the girl could hardly be casual. Not when you knew Keeler's unsavory past.

The fourth race had started. The announcer's booming voice in the loud-speaker horns chanted calls to the head of the stretch, and tumult grew in the tiered seats of the grandstand overhead.

Mr. Maddox ignored all that. He was thinking of Keeler and the girl, and the six-thousand-dollar bet. Something was wrong there. He'd felt it from the moment Keeler spoke.

There was nothing specific. A girl owned a horse. She wanted to bet it would win. Cassidy had seen them talking and had showed curiosity. Not a thing out of line in any of that. But the feeling persisted.

In the lull between races, Mr. Maddox walked to the paddock, where saddling was in progress for the fifth race.

Tassello was a six-year-old bay horse. Good conformation, rather leggy, suggesting a turn of speed. Trained to an edge, too. The horse was nervous and glistening with sweat as a groom held his head and Nick Lang, the trainer, adjusted the saddle.

Freddy Beyers, a veteran jockey, and one of the best, came to the stall. Nick Lang gave a last inspection of saddle and stirrup and spoke earnestly to the jockey for some moments, evidently giving riding instructions.

It was just another race, another bet—save for Alonzo Keeler's presence in the picture. Like a worm in a fine ripe apple, Mr. Maddox thought wryly.

**K**EELER was not at the paddock. Miss Pat Carnes did not seem interested enough to appear at the paddock either. And that was queer.

Take a girl—any girl—eager enough to bet six thousand her horse would win. She should be excited enough over the race to visit the paddock where her horse was being saddled and sent to the post.

Most girls her age would have used their owner's badge to enter the paddock and stand in the stall with Nick Lang and Freddy Beyers. It was human nature. But Pat Carnes had not appeared when the jockies were up.

The nine horses slowly circled the paddock and headed toward the track. The pulse-stirring bugle notes announced their coming, and still she did not appear.

It stayed in Mr. Maddox' mind as he went out in front of the grandstand to watch the race, which was a route affair, at a mile and a sixteenth, full allowances, for horses four years and older.

The start was good in front of the grandstand. Tassello broke slowly, taking dust from half a dozen other horses to the clubhouse turn.

Mr. Maddox whistled softly. This he hadn't expected. Not after the big win bet. Freddy Beyers should have brought the horse out smartly and made his bid for the rail to save ground around the clubhouse turn.

Tassello was sixth into the backstretch, running heavily, without excuses. Freddy Beyers could have done better with most cheap platers.

Ordinarily it wouldn't have meant much one way or another. But the six-thousand-dollar win bet overhung every move now.

Mr. Maddox had seen all kinds of crookedness around a track. There was the fix to win, and the fix to lose, which could be made even more profitable. But here was a puzzler.

Joe Maddox would be the only winner if Tassello ran less than first under the wire.

He was aware that owners and trainers were often too enthusiastic about their own horses. The Carnes girl could have made that mistake. But Lonzo Keeler's touch in the matter aroused his suspicion.

Mr. Maddox smiled ruefully. Here he was worrying about Tassello losing—and losing was the only way Joe Maddox stood to win.

Cassidy drifted through the crowd and stopped beside him. "What horse you like in this race, Joe?"

"Tassello."

"He ain't winning," said Cassidy.

"They can't all win."

"Sometimes," said Cassidy, "they win when they shouldn't." He waited a moment, watching Mr. Maddox' face. "Then again," said Cassidy. "they don't win when they should."

Cassidy had to lift his voice. The leaders were entering the stretch. The crowd was beginning to root the horses to the finish wire.

Mr. Maddox stood without replying. The horses rushing toward them in the stretch were suddenly more important than Cassidy. Excitement charged the announcer's voice that came booming out of the loudspeaker horns.

"Tassello is being taken outside . . . . Tassello is fifth—no, fourth . . . . Tassello is coming up fast. . . ."

Mr. Maddox had stood thousand of times in tense crowds like this, watching exciting finishes on all the big tracks of the country. But he never had become jaded and he never would. Even Cassidy was not immune. Cassidy was looking, too.

Far up the stretch two horses were locked together along the inside rail, jockies crouched low, using whips. A third horse, half a length back, was tiring and already out of the stretch battle.

Tassello was running so far out on the



track he was hidden by spectators massed along the fence. Mr. Maddox glimpsed the bobbing scarlet-and-yellow colors on Freddy's visored cap. He saw Freddy's whip rise and fall. That was all he could see.

High up in the stands, thousands had come to their feet. The familiar crowd roar clamored out as the race swept into the final furlong. Three leaders flashed past the spot where Mr. Maddox stood. Perspective changed as the race passed on. It was anyone's guess as to what happened in the final yards.

The crowd noise subsided. Mr. Maddox spoke to Cassidy: "Freddy Beyers took a chance in going so far out from the rail."

"Beyers knew what he was doing," Cassidy retorted.

The winning number flashed on the board. Number 6—Tassello. Joe Maddox had lost, at five-to-two.

"So they put that one over on you," Cassidy remarked. He watched the quick, wary surprise on Mr. Maddox' face. Cassidy's grin was satisfied.

"Who put what over?" Mr. Maddox asked.

Cassidy slapped Mr. Maddox' shoulder with bone-bending force. "I have to laugh. Sucker!" Cassidy walked away, chortling.

**M**R. MADDOX scowled thoughtfully after him. Then, outwardly smiling and genial, he walked through the crowd in search of the Carnes girl and Alonzo Keeler.

Friends greeted him. In the clubhouse a gray-maned congressman shook hands. A little old lady in almost shabby black asked his advice about the next race. She

could have bought Bowie track and most of the horses.

For thirty-odd years Joe Maddox, big and smiling, had been moving around the country making friends like this. They were everywhere. But this afternoon he finally had to admit that Alonzo Keeler and the girl had vanished.

Mr. Maddox headed for the stable area. The grandstand tumult fell back to a distant murmur. Along the rows of straw-filled stalls, the smell of liniment, straw, leather, manure and horses hung in the air. It combined into a nostalgic fragrance a horse fan never forgot.

Mr. Maddox smiled as Kopper King, the big bay route horse he had owned for years, thrust a sleek neck over the door-strap and nickered greeting. The sound brought Pop Harvey, the trainer, out of the next stall.

"I knowed he seen you," Pop greeted. He spat brown tobacco juice and gazed reproachfully through his lop-sided spectacles. "I been expecting you fer days, Joe. Old Sam Larkhanger made him a auto trip from Kentucky with some of that sweet hill-juice that keeps my cough down. I talked Sam outa a few fruit jars full on the cuff."

"I was afraid so," Mr. Maddox said with resignation. He gave Pop a hundred from a thick billfold. "Where is Nick Lang stabling?"

"Second shed over. I hear Nick got the fifth by a hair."

Mr. Maddox nodded. "Freddy Beyers just made it under the wire. Know anything about Tassello?"

Pop said, "He won. Ain't that enough?" He rubbed a calloused palm



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over graying beard stubble. "Kinda surprised me at that. Last night Jake Swizler said this Tassello wouldn't win today."

"That rum-pot!"

"Jake's poorly," Pop defended. "Wasn't for Nick Lang givin' him work, I dunno what Jake'd do. But Jake knows hosses."

"He knows a bottle better." Mr. Maddox snapped his fingers sharply. "That Kentucky dew! You and Jake were guzzling it last night."

Pop looked virtuous. "Jake had him a cough. I give him a snort." Pop cleared his throat. "Then when I heered Tassello won, I remembered Jake said Hot Handle in the fifth was a sharp bet today. He touted me away from his stable's hoss when it was in to win. An' drinkin' my likker while he done it."

"A man will do anything after drinking old Larkhanger's poison," Mr. Maddox remarked as he walked on.

Nick Lang trained and raced some twenty horses in his large public stable. Owners who had only a horse or two were able to show their silks at all the big tracks by using an experienced public trainer like Nick, who had been a jockey until weight set him down.

Mr. Maddox found Nick watching a swipe work on Tassello. Nick lifted a hand in greeting. He was comfortably flushed and wearing a gaudy sports jacket.

"I thought Tassello was going to miss it," Mr. Maddox remarked.

Nick said briefly, "He didn't," and turned to the swipe. "Get him under the belly."

The swipe pushed the rub-rag gingerly underneath the horse. A hind leg kicked viciously forward. The swipe jumped back.

"Gimme!" Nick took the rag impatiently, stepped to a front leg and reached under. Tassello became a whinnying fury, plunging on the hackamore rope. Nick dodged, swore under his breath and tossed the rag back.

"Where can I find this Miss Carnes, Nick?"

"It's a long trip," said Nick. "She died."

Mr. Maddox gave Nick a disgusted look. "I'm serious."

"I ain't clowning," said Nick. "Miss Pat Carnes is dead."

## CHAPTER TWO

### All This and Murder Too

NICK shrugged at Mr. Maddox's startled disbelief. "Her lawyer told me to keep training the horse until the estate is settled. She only owned this one."

"Dead!" Mr. Maddox said. Nick regarded him curiously. Mr. Maddox stared back. "Nick, did you make any remarks about me to a woman at Belmont this summer?"

"How do I know what I said to anyone at Belmont?"

"How old was Miss Carnes? What did she look like?"

"She was forty-five, I guess. Had a face like a hatchet." Nick thought a moment. "But her eyes," he added, "were like a kid's eyes. You know—full of interest. I kind of liked the old gal. She was nuts about this horse and about racing." Nick grinned. "I think she bet plenty. She'd never say."

"Who's her lawyer?"

"Can't remember his name," Nick said, frowning.

Mr. Maddox regarded him blandly. "Wonderful loss of memory, Nick. What happens when you have to turn this win money over to the estate?"

"Now you got to make cracks!" Nick said, getting angry. "The hell with it, I'm busy!" Nick walked toward the tack room.

"Thanks," Mr. Maddox called after him.

Oscar was at one of the telephones when Mr. Maddox stalked into the parlor of their comfortable hotel suite in Washington.

"We only checked in here last night. No business yet . . . Yeah, if I hear." Oscar hung up. "You're back early, Joe."

Mr. Maddox tossed topcoat and hat on a chair and went to a table which held scotch, seltzer, glasses. He poured a stiff three fingers. "Who was that?"

Oscar, small, wizened and shrewd, had come through life the hard way. It was marked in Oscar's seamed face. It made

him eternally suspicious. He handled the telephones and betting sheets, and was good at it.

But Oscar had greater value. His loyalty to Joe Maddox was a legend from coast to coast.

Oscar said, "That was Louie Haggett, in Jersey City. Louie took six G's on a horse named Hot Handle in the Fifth at Bowie."

Mr. Maddox reached for the seltzer. "Hot Handle lost. Louie keeps that one. Is he bragging?"

"The woman who bet it lives here in Washington," said Oscar. "Name of Carnes."

Mr. Maddox turned from the table, seltzer bottle forgotten in his big hand. "What about her?"

"She bet long distance with Louie. On credit. He laid four thousand of her bet off. Then an hour ago Louie is talking to Philly. He hears the Carnes woman bet eight G's there by telephone on the same race at Bowie."

"On Hot Handle?"

"On Big B to win. In the same race."

"This," said Mr. Maddox, "gets better and better!"

Oscar said, "Louie started telephoning around. He found she bet five grand in New York on Bastwick. That's *three* in the same race."

"All on credit?"

"Louie says so. He's still telephoning, trying to find how much more dough she's spread around."

"Call Louie back. Ask him what he knows about her."

"Louie told me," said Oscar. "She's got dough. Been betting for several years. Paid off when she lost. But she never bet this much. Her spreading it around on different horses in the same race is making Louie think."

"The four thousand Louie laid off is making Louie sweat," Mr. Maddox guessed. "Louie has to pay that, whether he gets it from the woman or not."

Oscar grinned. "It'll kill Louie."

Mr. Maddox put the seltzer bottle down. He drank the scotch straight from the tall glass.

"Louie," he said, "is not the only one."

Oscar snapped his fingers. "I forgot. A dame telephoned. Asked if you were back

from the track. Guess she had a bet."

"Did you get her name?"

"I tried. She screamed at me an' hung up."

Mr. Maddox poured another drink. He swallowed it straight. Say that last again."

Sulkily Oscar said, "I told you. I asked her name. Sounded like she screamed. Then bang—she hung up on me."

"I've got to believe it," said Mr. Maddox. "All of it. I've got to believe 'Lonzo Keeler. I've got to believe Cassidy, Pop Harvey, Nick Lang." Mr. Maddox's voice was rising. "I've got to believe Louie Haggett—and now you, about this telephone call!"

"You don't have to believe anything!" Oscar snapped. "What's it to you anyway?"

"The Carnes woman went six thousand with me on Tassello, to with the same fifth race today. Her fourth bet on the same race. And she made this one at five-to-two," said Mr. Maddox. "I owe her sixteen thousand, two hundred dollars!"

OSCAR whistled. Then he shrugged. "Don't take it out on me." An acid edge entered Oscar's voice. "How-come you took her on the cuff for that much when you don't seem to know her?"

Mr. Maddox almost looked sheepish. "I thought she was all right. There's only one thing wrong. She died last week."

Oscar froze. "She died last week—but she won her bet in the fifth at Bowie today?" he said carefully. "Okay, Joe. I aint saying anything."

"Don't," said Mr. Maddox. "Especially if Cassidy comes around and tries to pump you."

"Oscar's reply was edged with feeling. "I should be pumped into a padded cell if I talk about a woman who died last week and won a horse bet today!"

Mr. Maddox walked to his hat and coat.

Nervously Oscar demanded, "Where you going?"

"Out," Mr. Maddox looked back from the door. "I'm going to find that Carnes woman."

A telephone directory in the lobby listed a Miss Pat Carnes, across the Potomac River, in Virginia. Mr. Maddox drove his big blue convertible. Twilight

was deepening as he crossed the river at Georgetown.

He turned right beyond the bridge. The big car swept up rising grade through the Virginia suburbs of Washington. He stopped twice at filling stations for directions, turned off the highway onto blacktop, and then onto smoothly graded gravel. After that he had little trouble in finding the name Forest Hill, Miss Pat Carnes, on a roadside mail box.

A driveway curved back through tall trees. The last light was fading as the trees ended at a broad sweep of lawn, three or four acres in extent. There were boxwood hedges, shrub clumps, flower beds, and a long, low, shingle-covered house at the far side. The house showed no lights and looked lonely in the heavy dusk.

There were no signs of life as the car stopped in a graveled circle at the front. Mr. Maddox stepped out and stood still, listening. A low, uneasy murmur filled the dusk, like wind in distant foliage.

The high trees beyond the broad lawns stood motionless against darkening sky. There was no wind. The uneasy murmur went on.

Mr. Maddox skirted the house on thick turf. A fifty-yard belt of grass sloped gradually from an open stone terrace and ended in space. He looked far down to rapids of the Potomac, frothed with white water among big rocks.

He had hoped to question close neighbors. There were none. He turned to the house, which seemed more lonely by the minute. A door looking on the terrace had been closed when he first walked back here. He had looked at it and was certain it had been closed. Now that same door had opened a little.

Mr. Maddox watched it. The opening widened a little. Not much. Nothing else happened.

"Hello!"

His voice boomed in the quiet. The door stayed motionless. Mr. Maddox swore softly and walked toward it. Antiqued strap iron hinges moved soundlessly as he pushed the door open.

He looked into a comfortable living room clotted with deep shadows. He could make out chairs, divans and lowbeamed ceiling. He called again and stepped in

side—and then the ceiling fell on him.

That was Mr. Maddox' first thought some time later. He was stretched flat on the floor in darkness. His head felt balloon size. A bump throbbed painfully, but the scalp was not broken.

He could barely recall fast movement when he stepped inside the door. A man had been crouched there against the wall.

Mr. Maddox groped for his pigskin billfold. It was there inside his coat, lean now, emptied of the thousands of dollars of bankroll money it had carried.

HE STOOD up and weaved a little as he struck a match. He was in the same living room. He located the light switch. Soft glow filled the room from fluorescent tubes concealed around the ceiling.

There was a telephone on a table against the front wall. Its cord had been cut. Mr. Maddox tried to think, no small effort with a throbbing head. Joe Maddox had been taken for a chump. But the facts wouldn't sort out.

One thing was certain. This was Miss Pat Carnes' home. The mailbox at the road confirmed it.

A small address holder beside the telephone caught his eye. He went through it, and checked one listing, Bartlett, Bartlett and Henway, in the directory. They were a firm of lawyers. Mr. Maddox grunted with satisfaction and examined the room.

A rosewood secretary held a blotter, desk pen, and some fine linen stationery engraved with the initials PC. All personal papers had been removed. A leather-framed photograph had been tossed face down in one drawer. Mr. Maddox turned it over, and then snatched it out of the drawer.

The handsome features of 'Lonzo Keeler smirked back at him. 'Lonzo had a flower in coat lapel and wore a fine Panama at a sporty angle. It was 'Lonzo at his best—'Lonzo Keeler, who specialized in feather-brained ladies with too much money.

The photo was inscribed in bold strokes: *To Pat, the loveliest señorita in Mexico—Alonzo.*

The inscription struck a false note. Nick Lang's hatchet-faced Miss Pat Carnes

could never be twisted into the loveliest señorita in Mexico.

Nick must have lied. This was the lady's house. This was 'Lonzo's gift to her. And 'Lonzo's words could only fit the gorgeous girl who had bet on her own horse—and other horses in the same race.

But why should Nick Lang have lied?

Mr. Maddox put it out of his throbbing head for the moment. Before tossing the picture back in the drawer, he gave the handsome smirk a heart-felt promise.

"'Lonzo, if you're the one who slugged me—Lord help you!"

A sudden thought sent Mr. Maddox to the front door. There had been no other car in sight when he drove up. He looked out—and there was no car at all in sight now. He had been cleaned of his money and his automobile. He couldn't even call a taxi over the dead telephone.

Mr. Maddox' comments were sulphurous for a moment

There might be an extension telephone or a drink somewhere about the house. He needed both. He went into the dining room that adjoined the living room—and halted suddenly, eyeing a dark blotch on the rug

The spot looked fresh. He wrapped a handkerchief around a forefinger and stooped and touched the spot. A fresh crimson stain came off on the white linen.

Mr. Maddox spoke aloud. "So it's murder too!"

If there had been a struggle, the room had been put back into order. The blotch on the rug seemed to have been wiped with a wet cloth.

Mr Maddox hastily searched other rooms. There was no body. It could be

anywhere on the property. It could be hidden in the surrounding woods, or dropped over the cliff, far down into the tangled brush beside the river.

But as he searched, he suspected where the body was. It was probably in Joe Maddox' big blue convertible.

Mr. Maddox began to perspire a little. He owed Miss Carnes sixteen thousand dollars. She'd evidently been telephoning about the money when Oscar spoke to her at the hotel. Joe Maddox had driven here to her house, like the chump he was. He'd even asked directions at two filling stations. His fingerprints were all over the place. If her body were found in his car.

Mr. Maddox' head throbbed harder. Men had been strapped in the chair for less evidence.


He jerked a towel off a rack in the kitchen, found a bottle of ammonia on a shelf and slopped the pungent liquid on the cloth. Retracing steps, he scrubbed each spot he could recall touching. But a good fingerprint man would probably find at least one overlooked print.

He was thinking of 'Lonze Keeler's smirk as he cut off the last lights and started the long way to the highway.

**T**WO cars passed him on the blacktop road. Mr. Maddox hoped the drivers would forget the big striding figure which did not look around. He was near the highway when an automobile came up fast behind him. Its horn blared warning. Mr. Maddox leaped off the road. The car slid tires and stopped.

"Ride?" the driver called, opening the door.

The shock had started Mr. Maddox'



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headache again. He bit back a caustic retort and got into the car. "Thanks."

"It's worth a ride to see you hopping off the road like a fat kangaroo," the driver remarked.

Mr. Maddox stiffened. "Cassidy!"

"Big-hearted me," said Cassidy. "What's the idea of roaming around at night on foot, away out here, Joe?"

"Walking for my health."

Cassidy's comment was sarcastic. "Doctor's orders, I suppose! Look, Joe, those satchel feet ain't pounding any road for fun. The Carnes woman wasn't home, was she?" Cassidy waited a moment.

"Joe, it's time we got together. I'm leveling with you now."

"I'm listening."

Cassidy turned the car toward Washington. "Let's forget the big dough you book on horses. I'm on a Masterton case that could blow me off the job if it ain't cracked. McCarty, the head of our Baltimore office, tossed it to me."

"McCarty will learn," Mr. Maddox murmured.

"Lay off the cracks, Nothing personal now, Joe—but how much business did you do with Nick Lang on that fifth race today?"

"None."

Cassidy snorted. "I got eyes! You hurried over to the stables and got together with Nick right after the race!"

"Just a big flatfoot at heart," Mr. Maddox remarked blandly. "Did it occur to you I might be interested in buying Tassello?"

"No!" said Cassidy. "Because you ain't! That horse is a dog. The race he won today is the first this year."

"He brushed them off today."

"And we're giving him the mouse test and every other test to see what Nick Lang used to wake him up. We know where Nick and Freddy Beyers bet over ten grand on that race! How much more did they lay out?"

Mr. Maddox whistled softly. "So Nick and Freddy knew that race was in the bag!"

"They put it in the bag!" Cassidy snapped. "When Freddy Beyers and a hard-boot like Nick lay it on a race, they know. I was rushed to Bowie to look into it. And Joe, you cinched a hunch I got

when I seen you with that good-looking tomato and her friend. During the race you had Tassello on your mind. He was running sixth. He was a dog that shouldn't have been on any smart guy's mind. But he was your horse. And after the race you went straight to Nick Lang."

Mr. Maddox was reproachful. "Would I lie to you?"

"Yes!" said Cassidy. "I get the Carnes woman's address from the racing secretary and drove out tonight to see what she knew about shenanigans with her horse—and I find *you* wandering around in the country out here."

"For my health," said Mr. Maddox. "What did Nick Lang say about Miss Carnes?"

"When I get the facts, I'll talk to Nick." Cassidy grew almost plaintive. "If they bet with you, Joe, you lost. Why cover for them? All I want is the facts. You ain't under suspicion."

"Thanks," said Mr. Maddox, "for nothing. I didn't even know Nick and Freddy had bet on the race. And I did ask Nick about buying Tassello. Which," reminded Mr. Maddox cheerfully, "explains why I walked out to the lady's house. To see if she'd sell. Get it?"

"Okay," said Cassidy. "I believe you." Cassidy lapsed into thought. They rolled across the Key Bridge into Georgetown. "Where do you want to get out, Joe?"

"Fourteenth and Pennsylvania Avenue," Mr. Maddox said absently. "I'm at the Clareford again." And then without thinking, he blurted, "*That's* my car parked there at the curb!"

Cassidy almost slid the tires. Brakes squealed on an automobile behind them. Cassidy ignored its angry horn and looked for a place to park.

Mr. Maddox explained hastily, "I meant it's a model like mine. Go on."

"Why didn't you say so?" grumbled Cassidy. He shifted gears. "I almost made that guy slam into me!"

Mr. Maddox got out on the wide, brightly lighted sweep of Pennsylvania Avenue below the treasury. "Thanks for the ride. If I hear anything, I'll let you know."

"I'll look for it, Joe," Cassidy said cordially.

Mr. Maddox crossed the street and hur-

ried to his hotel. He cashed a check quickly and went out the side entrance where taxicabs were waiting.

"Georgetown," Mr. Maddox said briskly to the taxi driver who pulled up.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### *Jinx-Horse for Sale*

**T**HE gleaming convertible was still parked at the curb in Georgetown. Mr. Maddox paid off the taxi a block away. He might have been a big, prosperous-looking gentleman out for a leisurely evening stroll as he came to the car.

The New York license plate was his. He glanced through a window. The keys were there as he'd carelessly left them. Passing pedestrians ignored him as he opened the door. And then a genial voice spoke behind him:

"Now ain't this funny, us both coming back here?"

Mr. Maddox jumped and turned. Cassidy was grinning at him.

"I got to thinking you must have a swell car," Cassidy said. "So I drove back here to look at this one, Joe. And who comes ozzing along but you?"

Mr. Maddox regained composure. He beamed at Cassidy. "I must have parked here and forgotten it. Bad memory."

Cassidy said bluntly, "It stinks. You left your keys inside too. Anything been stolen?" Cassidy opened the rear door and was flashing a pen-type flashlight around inside before Mr. Maddox could protest. Cassidy reached over the front seat for the keys and backed out.

"Let's have them," Mr. Maddox said with annoyance.

"In a minute." Cassidy stepped to the back and opened the luggage compartment. A light went on inside. The space was empty.

Mr. Maddox, jeering past Cassidy's shoulder, exhaled a long soft breath. "Care to check the tires?"

Cassidy shut the compartment and returned the keys. He poked a thick forefinger hard against Mr. Maddox's chest. "Joe, you better be clean right down the line. I'm warning you. Think it over to-night." Cassidy stalked away.

The dash compartment held a flashlight. Mr. Maddox searched the back seat as Cassidy had done. There was a dark stain on the floor carpet. He pushed the same handkerchief against the spot and held it in front of the flashlight. Now the handkerchief showed two rusty stains.

When Mr. Maddox returned to the hotel suite, Oscar came hastily out of a chair, half-empty glass in hand. "Find anything, Joe?"

"Everything but the woman I'm trying to pay sixteen thousand dollars to," Mr. Maddox said morosely. "I found blood in my car and lost a body. I was mugged, rolled, and my car snatched."

Oscar said blankly, "Whose body?"

"How do I know? I didn't see it." Mr. Maddox had poured a stiff drink. He took it neat.

"She screamed," Oscar reminded him. "Could be she was killed."

"That's what I'm afraid of." Mr. Maddox glowered at the empty glass. His head was throbbing again. "But I'd lay forty to one no woman with sixteen thousand spending money coming would let herself get killed."

Oscar asked uneasily, "Did you report it?"

"With blood in my car? My fingerprints in her house? And me owing her sixteen thousand?" Mr. Maddox asked witheringly. "Any B-grade D. A. could prove I bent my own head, stole my own money, and killed her to keep from paying off."

Oscar was getting more jittery as facts sank in. "Is there blood in the car now?"

"On the back floor carpet. I bought two ounces of battery acid and poured over it. In the morning I'll have new carpet put down. And hope for the best," Mr. Maddox finished gloomily.

Oscar remembered, "A man named Keeler telephoned. Said he'd call back."

"So 'Lonzo's taking the ball now." Mr. Maddox' smiled lacked any of his usual jovial humor. "I'll wait up for him to call," he said. "For 'Lonzo Keeler, I'd wait all night now!"

By midnight 'Lonzo Keeler had not called back. Oscar had telephoned a score of hotels, without finding a trace of the man. Mr. Maddox went to bed.

Morning brought another perfect day.

Mr. Maddox met it without pleasure. In the hotel coffee shop Maggie, his favorite waitress, said brightly, "It's a beautiful morning."

"I had nightmares," said Mr. Maddox morosely, opening the paper.

Maggie clucked sympathetically. "Your usual? Four eggs, triple bacon, a quart of orange juice, a pot of coffee. . . ."

"Only three eggs, Maggie. No appetite."

MAGGIE looked concerned. "You should feel good," she admonished. "Suppose you were that man they found last night beside the highway, over in Virginia? Shot right through the heart. He really had trouble."

"What man?"

"Page six. I read it coming to work. Betcha he picked up a hitch-hiker." Maggie hurried toward the kitchen.

#### HITCH-HIKE SLAYING SUSPECTED

Mr. Maddox raced through the account. A local resident with a flashlight, walking home beside the highway, had discovered the body. All identification had been removed. Age about forty, slender build, black hair. . . .

"Alonzo Keeler!" Mr. Maddox thought aloud.

A moment later Maggie brought a pitcher of iced orange juice. Mr. Maddox drank a scant ounce of orange juice and put a five-dollar bill on the table. "I'll eat breakfast tomorrow, Maggie."

"Gee, thanks! But—but—"

Mr. Maddox was already gone, taking the newspaper and thinking of tire marks where a car had pulled off to leave the body. Cassidy was the man to wonder if tire prints like that might match the tires on Joe Maddox' blue convertible.

An attendant brought the convertible down the long ramp at the garage and got out with a warning, "Your battery must be leaking, mister. Smells strong."

"Thanks," Mr. Maddox said gratefully, and gave the man half a dollar.

In an upholstery shop out on Fourteenth Street, the acid-damaged carpet was replaced in a few minutes. Mr. Maddox drove on several blocks. He bought four new tires at a cut-rate store and had them loaded on the back seat.

He pulled in at a filling station halfway across the city, which displayed a rack of second-hand tires.

"I've bought some white sidewalls," he explained genially to the young man who came to the window. "There's a bargain in my old ones if you can change them in a hurry."

But when he finally drove back across the Georgetown bridge into Virginia, Mr. Maddox had the uneasy feeling he'd overlooked something and would regret it.

A gas pump man along the highway said the dead stranger had been taken to the Daley Funeral Home at Falls Church. "I got held up here one night about three months ago myself," the man said. "It's rough these days, brother."

"It's getting rougher," Mr. Maddox assured him.

Falls Church was a small and pleasant suburban town. The undertaker occupied a neat brick building. A few people stood on the sidewalk in front, talking. Mr. Maddox followed two women in and heard them tell a somberly polite young man, "We'd like to see the body they found last night."

"Straight back in the corridor, ma'am. Room two."

Mr. Maddox asked, "Has he been identified?"

"No luck so far, sir."

The women were looking in an open coffin when he entered the small quiet room. "Like my cousin Henry, who died last year," one was saying. "Real natural, ain't he?"

Mr. Maddox joined them beside the coffin, and the bump on his head almost throbbed again.

The dead man, thin and hard-faced, was not 'Lonzo Keeler. But he jogged memory. He brought back the shadow-clotted living room and the blur of movement to the left of the doorway.

This was the man who'd slugged Maddox. But who had killed him?

"I don't believe it!" Mr. Maddox muttered, and then stood still as a voice behind him asked, "Friend of yours, Joe?"

Mr. Maddox waited a moment before he looked around. His reply was blandly amused. "I laid odds your embalmed brain would come snooping out here."

Cassidy walked outside with him. The



tall, grizzled Masterton man was almost as cheerful as Maggie, the waitress. "I been waiting," said Cassidy. "Guess why I've been waiting, Joe?"

"Do I have to guess?"

A man across the street had stepped behind a parked automobile when they came out. Newspaper man? Detective? Something about that short pudgy figure was familiar.

Cassidy said, "I had a hunch you'd drive out here. They took pictures and moulage of tire marks where they found the guy. All they need now is the right auto to check."

"Very clever reasoning," Mr. Maddox said absently. He was trying to place that man he'd glimpsed across the street.

CASSIDY plucked a cigar from Mr. Maddox' front coat pocket. He lighted it, grinning. When they reached the blue convertible, Cassidy opened the back door. "Guess what I seen in here last night, Joe."

"What?"

"On the floor."

Mr. Maddox looked in. He bent down and rubbed a finger over dark smears on the floor carpet. His fingertip came away scarlet. He sniffed it.

"Lipstick," he said, chuckling. "The ladies will get careless, won't they?"

"Lemme see those spots!" Cassidy exclaimed. His own fingertip came away scarlet. He sniffed hard, and his face began to redden. He snatched a glossy photograph of a tire mark from inside his coat and made a hasty circuit of the car, comparing tire treads.

Mr. Maddox slid in behind the wheel. Suddenly he realized that the pudgy figure across the street must be Louie Haggett of Jersey City, who had laid off four thousand of Miss Carnes' money yesterday.

When Louie dropped everything and traveled this far so quickly, he meant business. Louie Haggett had beaten two murder raps that Mr. Maddox knew of.

Cassidy looked through the open window. "Maybe I was mistaken, Joe." Even saying it seemed to choke Cassidy a little.

Mr. Maddox pushed the starter button. "Were you ever right?" he asked blandly. Then he forgot Cassidy as he went past the parked automobile where the pudgy

figure of Haggett had been standing.

The car carried a District of Columbia license, and held several men who stared as Mr. Maddox drove by.

The rear-view mirror showed the D. C. car pulling out and spewing bluish vapor as it went fast to the next corner, where it slowed for a U-turn.

Mr. Maddox drove slowly until he saw the gray car following, to trail him out of town. He parked on the short stretch of street. The gray car turned in also.

Mr. Maddox got out and walked back to it. Two well-dressed, unobtrusive men were already standing on the sidewalk when he got there. Mr. Maddox sized them up. Wise characters. Mob men. If they didn't carry guns, Joe Maddox had never taken a horse bet.

He was big and smiling as he stepped off the curb to the open window where the pudgy figure sat beside the driver. "Hello, Louie. Still looking for six grand?"

"Maybe I've found it," said Louie coldly. "Get in the back, Joe. I want to talk."

"Some other time," Mr. Maddox refused genially. "Tell those two hoods on the sidewalk not to get ideas about pushing me in. What's on your mind?"

Louie fitted a cigarette into a black holder. His hands were small and nimble. "Let's start with that dead guy you looked at. He's Danny Rager. His brother Tony is standing there on the walk."

Mr. Maddox looked a little quicker than he wanted to. His nerves had tightened. The brother was thin-faced and hard also. Younger, too, and more reckless looking than the dead man. He was staring without expression.

Louie Hackett had the ghost of a smile when Mr. Maddox looked back without comment. Louie said:

"I telephoned Danny Rager in Washington yesterday afternoon and told him to find this Carnes woman and see about that six grand quick. Plus thirteen thousand more she owed other books on the race. I promised to collect."

"For a cut," Mr. Maddox guessed.

"Sure. Do I look like charity?"

"Anything but charity," Mr. Maddox said. "Your best friends wouldn't accuse you of charity, Louie."

"I don't go for cracks like that," said Louie. "But never mind. Danny took a quick taxi out to her house, found her there and sent the hacker away so he could talk business alone."

"So if she screamed, there wouldn't be a witness," Mr. Maddox guessed.

Louie shrugged.

"She swore she wouldn't have any money until she saw you, Joe. Danny called me long distance from her house and asked what I thought. I said she was a liar. You hadn't booked any bets in Washington. Your stooge Oscar told me." Louie Hackett flicked ashes out the window. They struck Mr. Maddox's coat. "That was the last of Danny."

Mr. Maddox brushed the ashes off with a sweep of his big hand. "Do you know where Miss Carnes is?"

"I don't care where she is," Louie replied coldly. "I know where you are, Joe. You know what I think? I think you helped put over a fast one on the out-of-town books."

Mr. Maddox nodded. "You would think so. Louie, you think like a hood. And you act like a hood, sending a roughneck to get tough with a woman and shake her down before you were sure what happened."

"Did you owe her sixteen grand?"

"As a matter of fact, I did. She bet the winner with me in that fifth race yesterday. Six thousand, on credit, too. Oscar didn't know about that when you talked to him."

"I'll take the sixteen."

"Bring her to me and I'll pay her."

LOUIE said, "There's no one at her house. I didn't even know what she looks like. All her bets were telephoned."

"Then wait until she collects from me."

"I ain't good at waiting, Joe. And what about Danny Rager?"

"I didn't send him looking for trouble." Mr. Maddox bit the end off one of the heavy cigars. "I don't know what you're thinking, Louie. But take a tip from me and don't. The Masterton Agency is prying into all angles of that fifth race yesterday. Are you clean enough everywhere to risk throwing your weight around this far from Jersey?"

Louie thought it over. His grin was not

pleasant. "I'll let you know later, Joe. . . ."

Mr. John Henway, of Bartlett, Bartlett and Henway, was a solid man with a dawning bald spot and a bold blue-striped collar. His greeting was cordial. He was attentive when the large and impressive visitor in the chair beside his desk said amiably, "I'm trying to locate Miss Pat Carnes."

Henway said regretfully, "Miss Carnes was killed in an automobile accident about two weeks ago. I am executor, if you have business with the estate."

"She owned a horse named Tassello."

Henway cleared his throat. "A very fine animal."

Mr. Maddox smiled. "A dog, you mean, even if he did win yesterday."

Henway laughed. "I see you know horses. But this morning I was offered five thousand for Tassello. He can't be too bad."

"Two thousand would be high." Mr. Maddox made a guess, watching the lawyer: "Nick Lang must like the horse."

Henway could not have been too good at poker. His look admitted that Nick Lang had made the offer. Mr. Maddox thought back over the angles which centered around Nick and the horse. He had come here for information. Now on an impulse he made a quick gamble, not that Joe Maddox wasn't being a bigger chump than ever.

"I'll make you an offer, good for exactly two minutes," Mr. Maddox said abruptly. "Eight thousand for Tassello. I have the cash with me." He thought of something else. "I'll also want your promise that the sale won't be announced for ten days, or until I mention it. Not a hint to anyone."

Henway's guess was logical. "Not a hint to Nick Lang, you mean."

"Including Nick," Mr. Maddox said blandly.

Henway considered. "It's unusual. Two minutes, you say?"

"A little less now," Mr. Maddox said, glancing at his wrist watch. He chuckled. "Not enough time to get on the phone and start a bidding duel."

Henway's faint smile admitted his thoughts were running that way. "Sold. It's my duty to take the best offer." He rang for a secretary and the papers.

While they waited for the secretary's return, Mr. Maddox asked, "How old was Miss Carnes?"

"Forty-seven," Henway told him. "She was rather remarkable; did what she pleased and said what she thought. I handled Miss Carnes' legal affairs for years and admired her greatly."

"Did she have a youngster sister, a cousin, or someone of the same name?"

"There were no heirs. The estate goes to charity."

"I seem to recall a Miss Carnes who visited Mexico City."

"This Miss Carnes was never in Mexico," Henway added, "She had planned to spend this winter touring Mexico and Guatemala, and seeing the races at the *Hipodromo de las Americas* in Mexico City. Her secretary had even flown down and taken up reservations and was waiting. I had to call her back with the death message."

Mr. Maddox sat digesting that. "So she had a secretary," he muttered thoughtfully.

"A sort of secretary-companion," Henway assented. "Delorah Morgan took over a great many small details Miss Carnes didn't care to bother with. Since the funeral, she's been a great help in getting the house closed, listing personal effects, and all that. Quite an efficient young lady."

"Evidently," Mr. Maddox agreed. "I'd like to speak with Miss Morgan."

"I think she's still temporarily at the Colton Arms, an apartment hotel out on Sixteenth Street. Call her from here if you like."

"I'll stop by the place," Mr. Maddox decided. . . .

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Money-Mad Señorita

THE precise little man at the desk and switchboard of the Colton Arms said, "I'll ring Miss Morgan's apartment. Who is calling?"

"Nick Lang," said Mr. Maddox cheerfully. When he left the elevator and knocked on the door of 609, he was whistling softly. The door opened immediately.

"Surprise," Mr. Maddox said jovially. "Santa Claus has money for the lucky winner."

She stared wordlessly, color going from her face. Then, reluctantly, she admitted him. Her voice was strained as she closed the door and turned. "Why did you give Nick Lang's name downstairs?"

Mr. Maddox had glanced quickly around the small living room. They seemed to be alone. He beamed at her. "Merely a surprise, Miss Carnes."

It took a moment for her to sort that out. "You didn't find this apartment by asking for Miss Carnes?"

"What's in a name?" said Mr. Maddox cheerfully, reaching inside his coat. "Miss Carnes yesterday—Miss Morgan today—and I still owe the money, don't I?" He began to pluck thousand-dollar bills out of the well-stuffed billfold.

Delorah Morgan regarded the money with fascination. The diamond ring was still on her third finger. She wore a skirt and hand-printed blouse; the honey hair was caught up in a loose knot behind, and she looked as attractive as she had yesterday at the racetrack. But she was tense now as he thumbed out thousand-dollar bills.

"Sixteen thousand, two hundred. Right?"

Delorah Morgan moistened her lips. "Yes."

Mr. Maddox gave her the money. She took it—and his big hand clamped on her wrist.

"Going to take it from me twice, sister?"

"What do you mean?"

"Your money was gone from my billfold when I got up off Miss Carnes' floor," Mr. Maddox said calmly. "And sister, it wasn't in Danny Rager's pocket when they found his body beside the highway. Have you guessed who finally got it?"

Her pallor was almost alarming; she tried to speak and then shook her head.

Mr. Maddox released her wrist. He towered, big and stern, studying her face. "The loveliest señorita in Mexico wouldn't forget. Perhaps Alonzo Keeler can help tell."

"You found that picture!" Her hand trembled as she returned the money.

"Where is it?" she begged unsteadily.

"In the drawer where you left it," said Mr. Maddox calmly. He put the billfold back in his coat pocket. "Was Keeler in that house last night?"

She shook her head.

"It's still murder," Mr. Maddox reminded.

That brought her quick, unsteady protest. "It was an accident!"

"Murder usually is—or so they often claim."

"This was!" Delorah Morgan spoke with a rush, as if the words had been bottled up, waiting for a listener. "The man tied me and gagged me when he saw an automobile coming to the house. But he was in too much of a hurry. I got free and I was trying to run out of the house when he caught me again. He—he had a gun. I snatched at it. I was too frightened by then to think. The gun went off and he fell down!" She shivered. "He was dead."

"So then you had to steal my car?" Mr. Maddox suggested.

"All I could think of was getting away."

"You got away," Mr. Maddox conceded. "Was Keeler behind the horse bets yesterday?"

"You seem to know everything!"

"My big ears," Mr. Maddox said. "How about 'Lonzo'?"

"He doesn't know anything. He'll break our engagement when he hears. You must know what kind of a man Alonzo is."

"Slightly," Mr. Maddox agreed dryly. "Engaged, eh?" Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Is 'Lonzo engaged to Miss Carnes or Miss Morgan?"

Delorah flushed. "It's isn't funny to me now. I was in Mexico City, in rooms reserved for Miss Carnes. When the manager got the idea I was Miss Carnes, I let them think so. It seemed a joke then, which would amuse Miss Carnes herself when she arrived. The manager introduced me to Alonzo as Miss Carnes—and I didn't think it mattered. Alonzo was only in town for a few days on business."

"What kind of business?"

"It had something to do with the gold mines Alonzo owns north of Guadalajara.

He has so many different interests."

"'Lonzo keeps busy," Mr. Maddox commented blandly. "Let's see. The manager got 'Lonzo and the wealthy Miss Carnes together—and then what happened?"

"Miss Carnes died in an automobile wreck. I had to leave immediately. And then yesterday morning Alonzo got off the plane from Mexico City and asked me to marry him. He'd even brought the ring. We—we went to the races and—and I put off telling him who I really was."

"To think 'Lonzo should be deceived," Mr. Maddox murmured sadly. "But the horse bets, sister. The four big bets in the same race, using Miss Carnes' credit."

She gulped. "You know about all the other bets?"

"My big ears again."

DELORAH walked over to the window and looked out. She began talking before she turned, and she sounded bitter.

"I thought I'd be remembered in her will. I wasn't. I hadn't saved much money, and suddenly I didn't have a job. I had made bets over the telephone for her. I'd learned a great deal about horses. It occurred to me that if I could bet enough on the two or three possible winners in a race, one of them would win, and pay enough to leave me a good profit."

"Get rich quick—just like that," Mr. Maddox remarked. He shook his head sadly. "Barnum was right. I'll guess the rest. You layed out eighteen thousand of Miss Carnes' credit to different books and then you got a tip at the track that Tassello was going to win. You had to get more money down fast. Much more money than the mutuels would take and pay anything. And then 'Lonzo spotted me."

Delorah nodded miserably. "Nick Lang passed me in the clubhouse and whispered that Tassello was going to win. I hadn't even suspected it. Tassello never did win."

"The horse players' nightmare," said Mr. Maddox, dryly. "Now then, sister, if you were so broke, where'd you get the roll you flashed at the track?"

Delorah's resentment came at him in her look, but she replied meekly, "I

checked out my savings so I could look prosperous. When I told Alonzo that Tassello should win the race, he let me borrow almost four thousand dollars he happened to have with him."

Mr. Maddox whistled softly. "'Lonzo must have been scratching gold south of the border, in one way or another." Mr. Maddox reached absently for one of the fat dark cigars without taking his eyes off her. "Did Nick Lang have anything to do with your other bets?"

"No."

Mr. Maddox bit the end off the cigar. "Where'd you go after you bet with me?"

"I was too nervous to stay and watch the race. We drove back to Washington."

"Can't blame you," Mr. Maddox admitted. He poised a thumbnail against the match head while he watched the run of expression on Delorah's face. "You live in this apartment. What were you doing out at Miss Carnes' house?"

Delorah was getting sulky. "Alonzo would expect me to be living in Miss Carnes' house. I—I'd described the place. I had a key. He thought he was taking me home. We had a date last night. I met him in town, and afterwards I told him I was staying here with a girl friend last night."

Mr. Maddox mused, "You had Alonzo's picture at Miss Carnes' house to impress him. You accepted 'Lonzo's ring. Do you love him?"

"That," said Delorah sulkily, "is my business."

"Sister, it's all your business," Mr. Maddox agreed. "Where's the money you took off that hoodlum last night?"

Delorah walked into the next room and returned with her purse. "There was a little over sixteen thousand dollars."

Mr. Maddox nodded. "I had your money and a couple of hundred extra." He riffled through the money she handed him. "Now get your savings."

She was rebellious. "Why?"

Mr. Maddox regarded her coldly. "You will then have about eighteen thousand dollars. You will go downtown to a bank and buy Washington exchange, and mail it registered to the books you bet with."

"I won't have anything left!"

"You'll have Alonzo," said Mr. Maddox coldly. . . .

In the taxicab that carried them downtown, Mr. Maddox broke the silence with one question. "Did you really talk to Nick Lang at Belmont?"

"No," Delorah admitted. "Alonzo told me about your horses. He said you were always at the Belmont meets."

"I wondered," said Mr. Maddox briefly.

He was at her elbow in the post office when she mailed the letters. They walked outside. Delorah said almost spitefully, "I hope you're satisfied. Are you going to tell this to Alonzo? Or—or the police?"

"I'm not a detective. Horses are my business, sister. When cupid puts on racing plates, I'll meddle with love. True love," Mr. Maddox added with some irony, and he left her on the post office steps.

Later, out at Bowie track, Maddox parked in the stable area and walked to Pop Harvey's back room. Pop was not around. On the floor beside Pop's battered old tack trunk was a stack of racing papers. Lighting a cigar, Mr. Maddox began to trace past races of Tassello by the indexed chart numbers in the papers. He looked up when Pop Harvey walked in.

"Who's got some old chart books, Pop Harvey's back room. Pop was not before the Carnes woman bought him."

Pop spat expressively out the doorway. "Old man Buck Taylor owned him before the Masterton men got the old hellion barred from racing."

Mr. Maddox whistled softly. "I remember. Cassidy did that. It all fits in now! Didn't Freddy Beyers ride some for Buck Taylor?"

"Seems so," said Pop. "Jake Swizzler says Nick Lang has entered Tassello in the second race tomorrow. Nick said he'll unwind Tassello tomorrow an' take him off training. Not a chance of a win." Pop spat out the doorway again. "I think Nick's lyin'."

"So do I," agreed Mr. Maddox. He thought a moment and slipped a thousand-dollar bill from his billfold. "Bet this around for me, Pop, so it gets known. On Tassello, to win tomorrow. If Jake Swizzler hears about it and tells Nick Lang, it won't hurt."

Pop peered over his lop-sided spectacles. "I dunno what's cookin'. But somethin' tells me Nick Lang won't like what's

gonna happen to him come tomorrow."

Mr. Maddox stood up to leave. He was smiling. "We'll know tomorrow," he told Pop.

But despite all that, Mr. Maddox was vaguely uneasy as he drove back to Washington. A girl with a pretty face and an itch for easy money had set off a chain of trouble beyond her understanding.

Joe Maddox knew the chiselers and fixers, the hoods, the guns, the sure-thing gamblers, the wise guys and mobs who operated behind the fix, as she never could know them.

The hoodlum, Danny Rager, had tried to strong-arm a girl. Her fright had turned his own gun against him. A good enough end for him, as far as Joe Maddox was concerned.

The law at times could be shrugged off. The law demanded proof. But the mobs acted on suspicion. Louie Haggett was suspicious.

**A** LAST long hill on the Annapolis highway dropped down to the heavy traffic of the Washington-Baltimore Boulevard. After another half mile or so, Mr. Maddox halted with other traffic for a red light. The right door opened suddenly and the trouble he'd been thinking about was suddenly with him. Danny Rager's younger brother slid in.

Mr. Maddox drove on when the light changed. "Hitch-hiking?" he queried calmly.

"I'll do the talking! Take the next turn at the District Line."

Mr. Maddox made the turn. In the rearview mirror he saw a small black sedan turn after them. "Is Louie back there?"

"Shut up. I'm thinking about Danny."

It would have made Cassidy laugh. It made Mr. Maddox more thoughtful. This had Louie Haggett's fine touch. But Louie was not a man for a quick killing where money was involved. The cash, always the cash, came first with Louie—or did it?

Following curt directions, Mr. Maddox headed back out in suburban Maryland, over a network of secondary roads. Finally he swung the convertible up a steeply sloping drive which led to a large frame farmhouse and barn. He parked behind

the house on order. The black sedan pulled in to a stop beside him. Louie Haggett sat with the driver. A third man was in the rear seat.

It was probably as good a spot as any around Washington for a nice quiet mob killing, Mr. Maddox thought wryly as he stepped out, with a gun prodding his back.

"Getting rough, aren't you, Louie?" was all he said. More would have been a waste of breath. These men were not amateurs.

Louie did not bother to smile. "Business, Joe. You know how it is. No hard feelings. Let's go in the house."

Mr. Maddox noticed that the raw-boned driver of the black sedan had to unlock the back door of the house. They were alone here.

"Friend of mine rents the dump," Louie said, opening a kitchen cupboard and taking out a rye quart and thick tumblers. "How much dough you carrying, Joe?"

"Less than a thousand."

"Frisk him, Tony."

Billfold, coins, handkerchief, memo book, cigars, papers were tossed on a kitchen table. Mr. Maddox thought of the papers with sudden uneasiness.

Louie Haggett checked the billfold in silence. He thrust one of the cigars in the corner of his mouth and flipped through the memo book.

Mr. Maddox said calmly, "I paid the Carnes woman. She has mailed checks for what she lost on that race."

Louie took the papers out of the envelope. "I ain't calling you a liar, Joe, but—" Louie bit hard on the cigar. In a moment, not lifting his voice, he said, "I knew you were in it. So you own the damn horse!"

It was the way Louie said it. Mr. Maddox silently damned the impulsive purchase of Tasselto. "Look at the date, Louie. I bought the horse this morning."

Louie tossed the papers on the table. "Tony, give me that rod." And when Louie had the automatic, produced from a shoulder holster, he spoke to the raw-boned driver and the third man, who had the look of a fourth-rate wrestler.

"Hold his arms, boys. Tony, you can work him over a little. For Danny,"

Louie added, grinning at Mr. Maddox a little, humorlessly.

Something like this had been in the cards, but Mr. Maddox had a quick cornered feeling of helplessness. Anger topped it as his big arm knocked the lanky driver back a step. The other man, chunky powerful, dived in low against his legs. Mr. Maddox staggered and caught a glimpse of Tony Rager slipping behind him, hefting a blackjack. He tried to swing around. The blackjack knocked him groggy.

The rest was as bad as he'd thought it would be. A man hung on each of his arms. Tony Rager used his fists, standing close, flat-footed, smashing him in the face.

"That's enough," Louie said finally. "Joe, do you pay off?"

Mr. Maddox spat blood from a split lip. "The lady mailed it."

Louie had lighted the cigar. He blew a smoke ring. "Okay, So tomorrow it's in Jersey—maybe. Then we work out something for Tony losing his brother and you trying a fast one with that Tassello."

Mr. Maddox was big and battered and bitterly blunt. "I pay off when I owe, Louie. When I don't, I don't."

"That's reasonable," Louie said. "The boys will keep you company tonight."

It was all very reasonable. They locked Mr. Maddox in a sizeable basement room which held an old leather-covered couch and a dingy electric blub. Empty storage shelves lined the walls, and the concrete walls and floor were only slightly damp. There were not many spiders, and the clammy silence should have been restful.

Mr. Maddox brooded. His head ached. He thought of what a girl with a little greed and larceny in her heart could do, and he swore under his breath.

Late in the evening Tony Rager brought a pitcher of water, a glass and three hamburgers in a sack. The other two men waited at the doorway. Tony Rager's young, thin face was expressionless. "I can't hardly wait," he said, and walked out.

The hamburgers were cold. Mr. Maddox ate them bleakly and stretched on a lumpy couch under two clammy blankets and went to sleep.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Payoff for Maddox

IT WAS nine in the morning by his wrist watch when the telephone rang upstairs. Two men clattered down the cellar steps. Tony Rager unlocked the door. "Louie wants you on the phone," he said tersely.

Mr. Maddox walked upstairs stiffly. He was unshaven. His suit was wrinkled. The smell of bacon, eggs and coffee in the kitchen made his nostrils twitch.

Louie Haggett's voice was friendly. "You all right, Joe?"

"Perfect," said Mr. Maddox grimly. "Has that check reached Jersey?"

"Maybe the mail is slow. I see you're after another win today with that Tassello, Joe. A good bet, huh?"

"No."

"You wouldn't advise it?"

"No. When do I get out of here?"

Louie was feeling good. "I got some tips this morning, Joe. Nick Lang, who's been training Tassello, and old man Harvey, your regular trainer, are both socking dough on Tassello. What does that mean to me?"

"A fast buck for a smart guy," Louie answered himself. "I ride with the dope on that race, Joe. I'll lay off everything my book gets on Tassello. And I'll sock a bundle on him to win." Louie was chortling. "While you talk it over with Tony Rager today. How does it sound?"

Mr. Maddox slammed up the receiver. The three men were watching him. "I'm hungry," Mr. Maddox said.

"Cook it yourself, you fat slob," Tony Rager told him.

They sat and watched him eat half a dozen eggs sided with bacon. Mr. Maddox finished his third and last cup of coffee, lit his last cigar, and began to chuckle as he studied their faces.

"What's so funny?" Tony Rager demanded.

"All of you," Mr. Maddox said with amusement. "You sit around watching me for peanut money. The big roll that Louie is betting on my horse today is for Louie's private pocket. Want odds on it?"

The raw-boned driver leaned forward.

"Who said Louie was betting on your horse?"

"Ask him, sucker. The profit always is for Louie. But it's worth two thousand if I get out of here by noon."

Tony Rager jumped up, his thin face dark with anger. "This guy stays here until Louie's through with him! Then I get him!" He drew the automatic from the shoulder holster. "Get back in the cellar!"

Later in the morning, Mr. Maddox heard heated voices upstairs. He sat hopefully on the old couch and studied the bill-of-sale for Tassello. The hope began to dwindle when the faint sound of a departing automobile seeped into the cellar.

Steps began to walk back and forth overhead. One man seemed to be angrily pacing up there. The time was a little after eleven-thirty when the cellar door was flung open and someone came down almost at a run. One man.

Suddenly Mr Maddox knew what was going to happen. He came off the couch swiftly.

He had looked carefully for some kind of weapon. There was none in the bare little room. Mr. Maddox snatched the blankets off the couch. He snapped the light off and spun the hot bulb out of the socket with his bare hand as the steps reached the door.

"I'm coming for you, Maddox!" Tony Rager shouted outside the door. "I'll give you what Danny got!"

Mr. Maddox stopped beside the door in pitch blackness. He was not angry; this was too grim for anger. This was the end of Joe Maddox unless luck helped mightily.

The door jerked open. Mr. Maddox slammed the hot bulb back toward the couch. It shattered on the damp concrete floor like a gunshot. Tony Rager lunged in, shooting at the sound. Light followed him from a second bulb at the bottom of the cellar steps.

The blankets swooped over his head. Mr. Maddox slapped a big hand to the crashing automatic. His left arm jerked tight around the blanket-shrouded neck. His plunging weight drove the young hoodlum hard against the concrete wall.

They were in semi-gloom. Tony Rager muttered oaths under the blanket folds.

The hoodlum struggled with lithe fury.

Joe Maddox was a big man who looked fat. It was deceiving. His bulk was mostly muscle. In silence he wrenched the other back. His big right hand twisted the gun hand until agony screamed out inside the smothering blanket and the gun clattered to the concrete.

Mr. Maddox yanked the blankets off and hit the contorted face that looked wildly toward him. Tony Rager bounced against the concrete wall. Mr. Maddox caught him, cuffed him with a big palm, each slap pistol-like, paralyzing.

MR. MADDUX slapped him across the dim-lit prison room and knocked him back on the lumpy couch. Tony Rager tried to get up. Mr. Maddox slapped him flat, and he stayed there, sniveling.

Mr. Maddox stood over him, breathing hard. "Son," he said, "punks like you don't rate. Keep out of my way after this."

Mr. Maddox picked up the automatic as he went out. He locked the door and took the key. Mr Maddox hurled the key and the automatic toward the barn and walked to the road. He let one polished new automobile driven by a woman go by, and hailed a shabby farm truck. It stopped and picked him up.

The first race at Bowie was going to the post when a taxi driver, richer by a five-dollar tip for speed, let Mr. Maddox out at the clubhouse entrance.

Mr. Maddox' lip was slightly swollen and sore. His broad face was a little lumpy in spots. But he had reached the hotel and bathed, shaved and changed. To any casual eye he was the same Joe Maddox as usual, big and smiling, a friend to everyone.

It must have seemed so to Alonzo Keeler when they sighted each other in the clubhouse. Alonzo darted over. His handshake was hearty. "The wife says you paid off, Joe."

"The wife, 'Lonzo?"

From snapbrim hat to casual tweeds and smart English brogues, 'Lonzo was sartorially perfect, dashing and handsome. "We eloped," 'Lonzo said. He poked Mr. Maddox in the ribs. "I'm not as young as I was. Time to fall in love and settle down."



"With Miss Carnes?"

"Who else? One slight correction, Joe. Her real name was Miss Morgan. A niece of Miss Carnes' who, I understand, died suddenly a short time ago. My sweet, it seems, inherits the estate!"

"Lonzo, I had a hunch you two would be married, and quickly," Mr. Maddox said. "So you finally bagged a good-looking heiress?"

Lonzo touched his close-cropped mustache. "I'd feel the same way about her, old boy, if she didn't have a dollar."

"And when she finds you don't have a dollar?"

"We're married," said Lonzo smugly. "I had about four thousand left after I gave her a real rock in her engagement ring. When the second race is over, I'll have ten or better." Lonzo smirked. "When that's gone, we'll tap my sweet's estate."

"Ten back from a horse bet, Lonzo?"

"The same horse," said Lonzo. "Tassello. The wife got in touch with the trainer this morning. He said it was sure again. I wired the bankroll to a book in Jersey City that the wife knew of."

"Let me guess, Lonzo. Was it Louie Haggett's office?"

"Right."

Mr. Maddox shook Lonzo Keeler's hand again. "Congratulations. I'll be thinking of you both. Two true love birds." Mr. Maddox hurried on, too overcome to say more.

Cliff Walters, the racing secretary, was cordial when Mr. Maddox entered his office.

"Cliff, I've bought Tassello, who's starting in the second race," Mr. Maddox

said. "Here are the papers. As the new owner, I want a change in equipment posted."

Cliff Walters nodded. "Are you changing jockies?"

"Freddy Beyers suits me. And so there's no last minute argument with Nick Lang, you'd better contact that law firm in Washington and check my ownership."

Cliff reached for the telephone. Mr. Maddox walked out and had a cup of coffee. He rented a pair of binoculars and caught a glimpse of Nick Lang hurrying toward Cliff Walters' office. Mr. Maddox hummed softly as he walked to the fifty-dollar window and bought a win ticket on Tassello.

It was another beautiful afternoon. Mr. Maddox drank a second cup of coffee and kept away from the paddock. He was standing in front of the grandstand when horses and jockies paraded to the post for the second race.

Tassello was number four. Freddy Beyers looked glum in the saddle. The distance was a mile and a sixteenth, and the start again was in front of the grandstand. The watching crowd quieted as the horses filed slowly to the gate.

In that tense lull, a heavy hand gripped Mr. Maddox' arm.

"I've been looking for you since that equipment change was posted and the secretary's office said you bought Tassello," Cassidy said brusquely. "You're throwing this race, Joe."

Mr. Maddox silently produced the fifty-dollar win ticket. Cassidy waved it aside.

"Penny ante stuff. So is that money Pop Harvey let everyone know he was betting for you. It was a good smoke



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screen until you crawled out in the open as owner."

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Did the master brain find something wrong with Tassello's last race? How about the dead man?"

"He ain't my business. Every test we could make puts Nick Lang in the clear on that last race," Cassidy admitted reluctantly.

"Don't tell me you've found a law against buying a horse."

**C**ASSIDY was losing his temper. "When a bookie buys a horse and throws the next race, there's plenty of law that will make sense to the racing commission! You've evidently booked plenty of money on this race, Joe. You mean to cash in by taking the whip away from the jockey."

Cassidy's grizzled face was hard with certainty. "That was the tip-off. That last minute equipment change. No whip, no win."

The starting bell rang sharply. Ten horses broke in a charging line from the gate and drove furiously past the grandstand.

Tassello was running with the leaders. Freddy Beyers was taking him skillfully over toward the rail for the first turn.

Mr. Maddox lifted his voice as the loud-speakers began to blare. "There's an easy thousand waiting if you can turn up a dollar I've booked on this race."

"I should waste time. It's enough you made Beyers ride without a whip as soon as you bought the horse."

"I'm soft-hearted."

"I ain't soft-headed!" snapped Cassidy.

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "That's never been settled. Miss Carnes raced Tassello two years. She never let her jockey carry a whip. Look in the chart books. Why shouldn't I do the same when I buy her horse?"

Cassidy's befy face was getting red. "The jockey carried a whip day before yesterday!"

"Nick Lang ordered it. Miss Carnes was dead. Or has anyone whispered you were hunting a dead woman like a stumblebum cop?" Mr. Maddox trained the binoculars on the backstretch. Tassello was running fourth.

He heard Cassidy sourly admit, "I

found out she was dead. Cut the stalling about the whip, Joe."

"It's my big tender heart," said Mr. Maddox blandly, lowering the glasses.

"What heart?" Cassidy snapped. "Joe, there's a wad of money bet on that horse! The Masterton Agency has been checking. Nick Lang has bet plenty. And wise money is riding. We know of one Jersey bookie named Haggett who unloaded every bet his book got on Tassello. And then Haggett bet thousands of his own money with other books on the horse. Tassello was a sure winner to everyone in the know until you turned up as owner and ordered no whip."

"So what?" said Mr. Maddox, looking through the binoculars again. Tassello was running third at the far turn.

"What?" Cassidy repeated loudly. "I'll tell you what, Joe! You lose this race, and I'll have you before the racing commission so fast your shoes smoke. I'll have you barred off every track! I'll—"

"You'll have a stroke next," Mr. Maddox warned with a critical look. "Do you remember old Buck Taylor?"

"I had him barred from racing! Worst case I ever ran across."

"Why?"

"He trained his horses by whipping them in the stalls under the belly, until they went half crazy with fear when a jockey cracked down underneath with his whip," Cassidy said harshly. "I personally caught the old devil at it and took the whip to him until he yelled on his knees. Sweetest music I ever heard, that old devil bawling for mercy."

Mr. Maddox lifted the binoculars again. The horses were swinging into the head of the stretch, Tassello still a good third. The powerful glasses showed Freddy Beyers leaning far forward and shouting at his mount as the other jockeys went to their whips for the stretch run.

"Miss Carnes bought Tassello at the sale of old man Taylor's stable," Mr. Maddox said calmly. "She was soft-hearted, Cassidy. She never allowed a whip to be laid on Tassello again. She had to die before Nick Lang dared to try it. Nick got his win all right—and after the race Tassello was like a wild horse when the swipec tried to use a rub-rag."

(Please continue on page 97)

# DREAMS GET BLASTED, TOO

By DEAN EVANS



Young Tommy said: "Katie was my girl  
and you had to louse it up."

*When the pale young man plagued  
him about the discarded blonde, ele-  
gant LaRaye moved out of his tinsel  
world to spring a trigger-trap.*

**O**NE of the rewards, Curt LaRaye thought, of having a successful club like the *Purple Rose*, was this. He looked around his plush office and felt satisfied with himself. Even the bulky figure of Joe, his mechanic, standing

over against the wall peering huskily through the peep hole out into the gaming room, failed to disturb his peace of mind.

He snickered. Joe must do all his breathing with his adenoids in high gear, Curt LaRaye thought. He was making enough noise to be heard above the slot machines outside.

"Hey, boss!"

Joe's voice disturbed Curt LaRaye. He frowned. "Quiet, Joe," he murmured.

Joe didn't notice. "C'mon over here, boss," he yelled. "That young jerk's out at the bar again." Joe turned from the peep hole and rubbed big fat palms together. "Whatcha say, boss? Give him the heave-ho again?"

Joe's voice itched at Curt's sensibilities. It was like a sniff of soap powder, it made him want to sneeze. He lowered his head and inhaled the fragrance of a purple rose that was pinned to his lapel. This was better. This was the sweetness of life. This was the opposite of the necessary evil of Joe.

"That ex-boy friend of Katherine's?" he asked mildly.

"Yeah, boss. Dollars to doughnuts he's wantin' to see you again. Makes the fourth time this week."

Curt thought for a moment. Suddenly he decided something. "No," he said. "No, don't throw him out. Have him come up here to see me. I'll find out what he wants. And you can wait in the closet over there. If anything happens, you can come out."

Joe's eyes lit up greedily. "Oke," he said. "But you should oughta let me toss him out on his fanny. He's nuthin' but a bum." Joe padded across the office on catlike feet, stuck his thumb to his nose at a vase of purple roses on a table by the door, went on out.

A few minutes later the office door opened and Joe came back. He was not alone this time. He had his arm through the arm of another, a thin young man. A man in a light gray topcoat that looked rather thin for this time of year. A young man who wore no hat, and whose eyes seemed to burn with an inner light of some sort. A missionary-looking young man, Curt LaRaye thought.

LaRaye smiled briefly. "Good evening. You've been wanting to see me, I believe.

Be seated." He walked over to his desk.

The young man came on into the room. He paid no attention to Joe, who faded into the closet built into a wall. He walked across to LaRaye's desk, laid both palms on the felt covering, leaned over and looked straight down at LaRaye.

"I'm not sitting down," he said. "What I've got to say can be said standing up. What you going to do about Katie?"

LaRaye's fingers spread on the desk, then curled a little, taking small pleasant exercises. LaRaye smiled. "Katie?" he asked.

"Yeah. Katie Winters. What are you going to do about her?"

A slight twisting of the lips was LaRaye's only outward emotion. "Who are you?" he asked, amused.

The young man's face wasn't over two feet from LaRaye. His breath came across the space in waves that smelled of cheap whiskey. LaRaye wondered if that were *his* whiskey.

"Katie was my girl once," he said. "Die laughing, why don't you? All I want to know is what you're going to do about her now?"

"Why?" It popped out. LaRaye didn't really give a damn. He didn't know why he had asked that. Idle curiosity perhaps. He turned his head slightly to avoid the whiskey breath.

"Because Katie needs you right now, that's why. And I know it. What you going to do for her?"

LaRaye's eyelashes dropped over his eyes in a deft fanning motion. This silly young man! What was it Joe had called him? Oh yes, a jerk. He sniffed at the rose on his lapel. He looked up at the young man. "Katherine would like some purple roses?" he asked mockingly. "We can arrange that, perhaps. Yes, I think we can arrange that."

"Roses?" the young man yelled. "Roses? You call that something? When a kid needs affection and tenderness you send roses? You think roses are any damned good *now*?"

The young man was hysterical. Or drunk. Or both. LaRaye lifted a long forefinger, held it within six inches of the young man's nose, wagged it a little.

"Roses," he said softly, "are the flowers of love. Or wouldn't you know about

that?" He turned away from the man.

"What Katie needs," the young man said quietly, "is not symbols but the real thing. A long long love. A lasting love. Especially now."

LaRaye was suddenly bored with this poor, this deluded missionary young man. He felt like signaling to Joe in the closet. "Get out," he said.

The young man did not. The young man, rather, came around the desk toward LaRaye. He brought down his hands—thin hands—and contracted them into fists which gripped LaRaye's lapels suddenly. The young man shook with a fury that was transmitted through those hands.

"Katie was my girl!" the young man breathed. "My girl, understand? And you had to louse it up! And by heaven you're not going to ditch her now. Not now, you dirty heel! Not if I have to kill you!"

There was a small, snicking sound over by the closet. The door swung open and Joe the mechanic shoved through, took big steps across the room. "Drop them mitts, kid," he husked. "Drop 'em before I drop you."

Slowly the young man's hands fell to his sides. "I'm not drunk," he said. It was a funny thing to say. Illogical, ridiculous. He nodded just a little. "Yeah, tough guy, yeah. I don't argue with a rod. Not now I don't."

"Who's got a rod?" Joe guffawed. "I don't need no rod, not with you, sonny." His ham-like right hand pawed the air in a short arc and struck the young man across the side of the head. Joe guffawed again. "Who needs a rod?" he repeated.

He vised the hand into the young man's coat collar at the rear, shoved with the other hand. The young man shot across the room and through the door with Joe behind him.

A few moments later Joe returned. He closed the door. "You're gonna have trouble with that bum," he mentioned.

But LaRaye wasn't listening. His head was bowed a little, twisted a little to the left, his eyes looking down at his left lapel. The purple rose which had been pinned there was a mashed pulpy thing now, a thing of soiled ugliness now. There was a dark stain on LaRaye's cream-colored lapel, where one of the rose petals

had smeared in dying. He stared at it.

"You're gonna have trouble with that bum," Joe said again. "Why'ncha let me do a job on him, huh?"

LaRaye's nostrils were pumping in and out nervously. He went over to the desk, opened the center drawer, lifted a .38 revolver, looked at it.

Joe's eyes balled. "Cripes, boss, you gonna bump the kid? Why'ncha just let me rough him a little?"

LaRaye looked up. For the first time he seemed to notice the other. "I'm not going to kill him," he muttered. "But the scare he's going to get will make him wish I had."

He stuck the revolver into his pocket, went over to the closet, put on an overcoat, gloves and hat. Joe watched him leave the office. Joe chuckled a little. He said "Har har" a couple of times.

**V**IRGINIA STREET was a dim funnel of night toward the south of Carson City. To the north, the neons of the big gaming clubs clawed at the black sky, dropped back, clawed again. The night air was cold.

The young man made it to his coupe, got in, started it. He pulled slowly out into Mill Street, turned left at the corner of Center, went around the block. At Virginia he waited for the red light. Traffic was balling down Virginia past First in a steady stream. A few cars spit out a white frost of steam from their tail pipes. It was getting colder.

The traffic signal bell up on the corner post went off like a giant alarm clock and the signal sprayed a cold veneer of green over the hood of his coupe. He started up slowly, turned right into traffic.

At Second the light was with him. He moved down toward Commercial Row with its big illuminated arch across the street.

At the intersection a big black sedan ignored the boulevard stop sign and plowed around into Virginia. The young man jammed on the brakes, swept the wheel over to the left hard. The big black sedan missed his coupe by inches. There was a loud noise, a bang, like a backfire.

The young man yanked the wheel around again, straightened out in the right lane. That was close.

He drove slowly down Virginia. Across Fourth, across Fifth. At Sixth, lights from a car behind drew up and prowled through his coupe, found the mirror, jabbed into his eyes. He jerked his head away from the blinding glare.

The lights gave off prowling, went back out the rear window again and disappeared. The car behind was beginning to pass. There was the rich slap of fat tires on the asphalt and the low chromium grille of a Lincoln Continental nibbled along close to the ground parallel to the coupe.

The young man pulled over a little toward the curb.

The chromium grille swept onward followed by a long black hood. The hood came abreast of the hood on the coupe, paused there momentarily. The young man risked a sideward glance.

His ears split with the crash of it. The window on his side shattered crazily. Glass tinkled on the steering wheel, on his hands. A metallic thud followed that and then the contented surge from a powerful motor. The Lincoln stopped nibbling. It went away fast.

The young man fought his coupe but he wasn't quick enough. It went up the curb, jarred with a crash against a poplar tree and came to rest.

That was no backfire. Not that time. He stared, hypnotized at the bright splinters of glass on his hands. A gleaming spot on the metal window casing attracted him. He looked at it, then reached down and felt the floor below it. His fingers touched something. Something still hot.

A slug.

He was still sitting there, struggling against the hysterical giggle that tried to force past his lips, when a passing Reno prowl car got curious and stopped. A cop got out and came over to him.

\* \* \*

Detective Lieutenant Arnold sat at his desk in his office. He looked up at the old regulator on the wall, sighed. He should have been home long ago. Since his wife had died and his daughter Marie had married, the old home was a lonesome place though. There wasn't anything to do at home. Better here at Headquarters.

At least here something was usually happening. His dark skin looked old and worn in the glaring light from the overhead fixture.

His eyes dropped to the desk and rested on a picture of a young girl. It was an old picture. Old frame. The girl in the picture had been dressed in the style of ten or fifteen years back. A full length shot. In her hands was a long-stemmed rose. It showed up quite plainly in the picture. Quick sharp pain lines flirted with the corners of Arnold's eyes. He reached up, passed a stroking hand across them.

And then the door opened. Arnold looked up. It was Elkin, from the prowl squad, and he had a young man with him. The young man wore a light gray topcoat. He had a queer look about him, thought the Lieutenant, like an evangelist, sort of.

"Found this guy in a daze up on North Virginia," Elkin said. "Somebody took a shot at him and he banged his car into a tree. Been drinking, but he ain't drunk."

Arnold looked at the young man. No. He wasn't drunk. Anybody could see that. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Thomas Dowell." The young man got it out evenly, no nervousness.

Elkin came over to the desk, dropped a slug down in front of Arnold. Arnold looked at it.

"How did it happen?" he asked.

The young man wasn't too clear on that. "A car," he said. "A big car began to pass me. Then it happened. I lost control for a second and my coupe hit a tree."

"And you were just driving along North Virginia when this car approached and you were shot at?"

Dowell nodded.

"Don't know why anybody'd shoot at you?"

"No."

Lieutenant Arnold fingered the slug. "You acquainted with any tough guys in town? Guys that carry guns?"

The young man shook his head. "Nobody. Only. . ."

"Ah." The lieutenant's fingertips on both hands met in a small arch. "Tell me," he said.

The young man wasn't going to give it all. Some of it maybe, but not all. "To-

night I went to see a man," he said. "A man named LaRaye at the *Purple Rose Club*. He didn't like what I had to say."

"You threatened him? This LaRaye?"

"Not exactly. There was something I was going to see that he did. I went there to tell him to do it."

Lieutenant Arnold raised his dark eyes toward Elkin over by the door.

Elkin snickered a little. "You told him to do something?" he asked. "You told LaRaye? You didn't just ask—you told him? *Him?*" He snickered again.

Lieutenant Arnold held up a roughened hand. Elkin left off snickering, turned around and went out. Arnold brought his eyes back to the young man. The young man nodded.

Rough fingers came down on the desk slowly, began a small tapping rhythm there. Soft, like the stroking movements of a cat's paw.

The words formed slowly on Arnold's lips, went out on the air and floated there lightly, caressingly almost. He could be a human guy, this Arnold.

"A girl?" he asked. "There was a girl in it somewhere?" He leaned back in his chair, watching the young man. "Your sister?" he asked.

His eyes never left those of the young man. The office was warm, quiet. The old eight-day regulator on the wall knocked back and forth, and a leaky valve in the radiator over in the corner hissed a little.

The young man dropped his eyes. "My girl," he admitted finally. "I mean she used to be my girl."

Arnold sighed. "You're a brave man. Perhaps you'd better tell me." He waited a moment. Then, "This woman?"

"I couldn't play ball in her league; I'm a sandlot guy. She started to go with LaRaye. Then he dropped her." The young man snapped his thin fingers. "Like that."

Arnold's eyebrow was raised a little. It stayed that way. He said nothing, only stared.

Dowell cleared his throat. "But it was too late for dropping, you see," he added. "Too late and I went and told him so. He had me thrown out."

Arnold fingered the slug. "Why was it too late?" he asked.

"Because she—" The young man stopped. A deep red tinged his face up near the cheekbones. "You're married aren't you?" he asked.

Arnold's eyes batted. "I was once," he said softly.

"Well, you see what I mean," said the young man.

"I see." Arnold studied the slug carefully. "You think this LaRaye was the one who took a shot at you?"

"I don't know. I don't know anything. All I know is he's gotta marry Katie. He's not going to get away with it, Lord, he's not." The young man was tensed, as though he were about to spring.

Arnold dropped the slug into a small envelope. He got up, walked around the desk, went over to the young man.

"We'll look into it," he said. "But there's one thing, you see. This LaRaye, this gambler. That's bad business, but we'll look into it. And take a little advice. Stay away from LaRaye. Stay away and out of trouble." He smiled a friendly smile. "After all," he said slowly, "she's not your girl any longer."

Arnold went over to the window and watched the young man leave the building. Then he looked up in the sky where the yellow glow of the big arch across Virginia Street splashed against the clouds. "*The Biggest Little City In The World*," it said. He frowned and left the window.

THE south wind tumbling down from Carson had a bitter edge. Thomas Dowell braced himself sideways against it as he left Police Headquarters and walked up Center Street toward First. His coupe was parked down street half a block. One front fender was matted down and the bumper U-shaped on the right end, he noticed. Glass was gone out of one headlight on that side, too. Well, it could have been worse.

He got in, started up slowly and wound around the block and then headed north and west over to the Whitaker Park section. He pulled up in front of the Olive-wood Apartments.

The wind banging against the coupe made it squeak on rusty springs. He braced himself against it and walked over to the entrance of the Olivewood. He punched the bell over the mail box of

Katherine Winters and waited a minute.

The door clicked a little. He pushed on in, walked down the heavy carpeted corridor and up three small steps. This led into another corridor that went at right angles to the first floor. He counted doors, paused at 8C, knuckled the wooden paneling of the door.

A cascade of soft blonde hair billowed out at him as the door opened. It brushed his cheek. He didn't move away from it. "Hello, Katie," he said.

"Tommy." Her dark brown eyes were staring at him, couched like off-color rubies in the satin jewelry box of her white skin. A skin that looked like it had never felt the scorch of sun or the whip of wind. A flower petal skin almost

"This is a surprise, Tommy," she said. Her voice was soft like her skin. Soft and easy on the ears. The young man almost smiled, listening to the melody of it.

"Yeah, Katie, yeah." He seemed embarrassed. "Can I come in, Katie? Just for a minute, I mean?"

She looked at him. Finally she nodded, a little puzzled. "Of course, Tommy," she said. "For a minute, of course."

He closed the door behind him, went on into the living room. It was warm in here, he noticed. Cozy warm. And there was the elusive scent of Katie's perfume in the air.

"How's it going, Katie?" he asked. His voice was a little tight now, a little forced.

Katherine Winters went to the sofa, sat down. Her eyes didn't look at him. "It's going all right, Tommy. How have you been?"

Dowell pushed out a little grin at her, took a chair across from the sofa. He felt he was in the boss's office being interviewed for a job. Katie always did make him feel that way. Funny, he'd never gotten over that

"Katie," he began. A pause. A hesitation. "Katie somebody took a shot at me tonight. LaRaye I think."

She jerked from the surprise of it. "Curt? Curt took a shot at you? For heaven's sake, why?"

"I'd gone over to the club to see him. I roughed him up a little."

The girl shook her head at him slowly.

"Oh Tommy," she said. "Oh Tommy."

He grinned again "Yeah," he said. "Makes headlines, don't it? Him missing me, I mean." He shuffled his feet on the rug, looked down at them. "You can sort of guess why I went to see him, can't you Katie?"

There was a stillness in the room. Only a lisp over in the fireplace scratched at the silence. And now and then a bright flame from the burning logs stroked across the rug fleetingly like the sudden prow of headlights on a speeding car.

Dowell's eyes were lifting now, looking at the woman. He caught the lovely, white throat that showed through the V of her dressing gown. His face reddened.

Katherine Winters leaned back against the sofa, took a deep breath. "I see, Tommy," she whispered. "What did he say to that?"

He frowned a little, then turned the frown to a smile. This had to be good, he knew. This had to be said at just the right moment.

"You know what he said," he answered quickly. "That's why I'm here. Katie, will you marry me? Seriously, will you?"

The girl got to her feet all in a floating motion as though she were belled upward, like warm air rising. She walked over to the fireplace and stared down into the flames. Her back was to him now. A back that showed nothing but the sheen of a quilted white dressing gown and the fuzzy heels of wooly bedroom slippers sticking out beneath.

"Light me a cigarette, will you Tommy?" she asked.

He got out a cigarette from a crumpled pack. It was a little bent so he straightened it. Then he held a big kitchen match to it, took a couple of puffs. He got up, took it over to her.

The white mass of Katherine's hair moved slowly from side to side. "Thanks, Tommy," she said. "I guess I don't want it after all. Thanks, though."

Dowell took a deep drag on the cigarette, blew a mouthful of smoke downward, watched the draught from the fireplace suck it inward and up. He tossed the cigarette on top of the flames.

"Don't want the cigarette, you mean? Is that it, Katie?"

She turned then and faced him. She



got a grip on his eyes, held them imprisoned with her own. "Sometimes," she whispered, "sometimes there're many things you don't want—without knowing why exactly. So many, many things. Do I make sense at all, Tommy?"

Dowell stared at her. He ran a tongue over dry lips. His head was moving a little sideways, but that might have been nothing.

"Thanks, though," the girl said. "How can I tell you? But thanks."

Dowell turned, walked across the room. At the door he paused. "Well, you know where I am, Katie. If I can help." He opened the door, stepped on through, closed it behind him.

A sudden gust of wind coming down from the south hit the apartment. The building shook a little with a trembling movement, like a very small child turning in its sleep. There were tears in the woman's eyes.

**D**OWELL stopped his coupe several doors down from the *Purple Rose* and started to walk back. A silver-colored sedan pulled into the only remaining parking spot behind his coupe. "P.D. Reno" was painted on its side in blue. Its lights went out, its motor stopped. Thomas Dowell didn't give it a glance.

The big chromium-framed glass doors of the club swung inward before he touched them. Electrically controlled. Nice. Only the best for Curt LaRaye.

The place was busy. To the left were the long rows of machines against one wall, crowded now with the indigent section of the upper classes. The rest of the club was divided into glassed partitions that held the tables where the real gambling took place. The partitions were made of heavy, sand-blasted glass. Nice. Only the best for Curt LaRaye.

Inside the first partition was a glittering roulette wheel not quite as large as a circus tent. And standing to one side, hair a little grayish and looking like the president of a bank, was the croupier. He saw all. Upon occasion he saw nothing.

The croupier's eyes flicked a little. He had caught a discrepancy here. The young man in the thin gray topcoat definitely didn't belong.

The croupier snapped his wrist. The

wheel moved on tiptoes. He gave it an instant, tossed a white ball in the opposite direction into the wheel. The little clicks it made were a pleasant sound, light, airy. The ball stopped clicking. The wheel slowed, came to a silent stop.

The croupier smiled his trained professional smile and let his eyes flick briefly to each of the three well dressed women who had played his table. His gracefully moving wrist plied the little rake across the table, gathering chips.

The three women looked slightly askance at the young man in the gray topcoat. There was a whisper, not loud, then all three moved from the cubicle. They strolled over to the next partition some distance away.

The croupier frowned and bit at his mustache. That shouldn't have happened. The frown deepened.

"Make your bets," he intoned. It sounded as though he wished the young man would drop dead—not at his table, of course.

The young man came closer. The young man's right hand was in the deep pocket of his topcoat. It didn't come out. The young man moved closer yet. The croupier's mustache twitched.

"Push me a stack of blues—a big stack," said the young man. His hand was jabbing now through the coat. He was offering no money in return for the chips, obviously.

The croupier's face cracked in three or four places. His graceful wrist shook a little as he reached over the wheel toward the stacks of chips. Little beads of sweat bubbled on his brow, ran down into the cracks. He carefully pushed a stack of blues across the green felt table top in the direction of the young man. At the same time, a nervous foot beneath the table hunted wildly for a button. Found it.

The door to Curt LaRaye's office banged open and Joe the mechanic barged in. He had a very scared-looking young man firmly by the arm. Joe's other hand held a small .25 caliber pistol which he waved in the air.

"What'd I tell you?" he growled at Curt LaRaye. "I said you'd have trouble with this bum. You should of let me handle him."

LaRaye looked up from his desk, sur-

prised. "Where'd you get him?" he asked.

"Outside, tryin' to put the snatch on the number one roulette wheel. The croupier won't be no good for the rest of the night now. He's scared silly."

"Where did that gun come from?" asked LaRaye.

"Where wouldja think? He had it. He was usin' it on the croupier."

LaRaye looked up at the young man. He studied him silently. Then: "Why?" he asked softly. "Just why?"

The young man still had some defiance left. "If I just came in here and tried to see you how much luck would I have? I scared the guy out at the table because I knew that would get me in here to you again."

"Har har," Joe chortled. "Har har."

"I saw Katie," the young man said. "I offered to marry her. But she wouldn't. She's ashamed to, I guess, so that lets me out. I just came back here to tell you that. And now you know. What you going to do about her?"

Curt LaRaye smirked. "So you had to come back?" he asked. It sounded like fenders rubbing together.

"Yeah. Just to tell you. You going to let Katie down all the way?"

LaRaye moved forward. His right hand was hanging at his side. He brought it up in a flipping motion, cracked it sharply against Dowell's face. Dowell reeled.

LaRaye's nostrils trembled. "You impudent pig," he breathed.

Joe moved in, pinned the young man's arms behind him. "Go on, boss," he said cheerfully. "Let's see you muss him a little."

LaRaye's hand cracked again, and again. Then he had a better idea. He reached inside his coat, brought out his .38.

He swung it in a half circle, butt foremost. The gun stopped mushily against the young man's forehead. The young man slumped in Joe's arms.

Joe chortled again. "Har har," he said. "Har har."

He was still chuckling when the knock came at the door. It sounded like somebody outside was hitting it with a milk bottle. LaRaye jerked.

THE door swung inward. Framed against the backdrop of the brilliant club lights outside stood a small, middle-aged man. He wore a service revolver in his right hand. "Busy?" asked Lieutenant Arnold.

Curt LaRaye was quick on the recovery. He tossed his head back, followed it with a flip of his hand in his hair, a smoothing motion. "Stick-up, Arnold. You got here just in time."

"Stick-up?" The lieutenant's voice sounded surprised.

"Tried to knock off table number one," explained Curt LaRaye.

"Oh. What was he using to knock off table number one?"

Joe let go of the young man. The young man slid forward. Joe regained his grip, jerked his chin toward his coat pocket. "Guy's gun," he husked. "I took it away from him. In my pocket."

Lieutenant Arnold tried the pocket, brought out a small pistol. He looked at it. Then he nodded to Joe. Joe dragged the young man over to a chair, let him slide into it.

Lieutenant Arnold went to the desk, and picked up the phone, dialed a number. He spoke a few words. You could have heard the flowers growing on the wallpaper, the room was that quiet.

"This is Arnold," he said. "Contact Elkin. I want him over at the *Purple Rose*." He hung up, eyed Curt LaRaye curiously. "What were you doing with the .38?" he asked.

LaRaye was a little embarrassed. He dropped his .38 on the desk, stepped away from it. "Protection," he muttered. "This punk had a gun."

"Yeah," said Arnold. They waited. There weren't any words spoken for a while. Once LaRaye began to speak, but Arnold held up a hand. "Save it," he said.

In eight minutes Elkin got there. Arnold helped him get Thomas Dowell to his feet.

"Back way out of here?" he asked.

Joe got the nod from LaRaye, led the way out of the club through a door that opened on the alley alongside the building.

"Take him to the tank," said Arnold. "Have a doctor take care of his forehead. I'll look in when I get back." He watched

the prowler car move off and then walked slowly back into the club. Joe had disappeared. He went alone to LaRaye's office.

Curt LaRaye was over in the corner mixing drinks. His face was twisted in a cheery smile. His thin nose looked steady now and his eyes twinkled.

"That's service," he said grinning. "That's service. No sooner does a stick-up happen than the old boy himself pops up. Calls for a drink."

Arnold waved it off. "Not service—coincidence," he said. He went over to the desk where the .38 still lay. He looked down at it, shrugged his shoulders.

Curt tried a sip of the drink. "H'mm, good. Better have one. Cold night out."

"No, thanks." Lieutenant Arnold waited while LaRaye tossed off the drink. "Coincidence," he said. "I was on my way up to see you about a charity case. Thought you maybe would like to help out."

Curt LaRaye put the glass down. "Of course," he said smoothly. "You know me, pop, anytime." He reached in a hip pocket, dug out an embossed leather billfold, took out a bill. "Ten be enough?" He tossed it over on the desk. "Anytime."

Arnold eyed the bill. "Maybe you'd like to hear a story," he said softly. "Maybe it happened, maybe it didn't but a story." He waited, looked at LaRaye.

Curt LaRaye quirked his face a little. He reached over, filled his glass again, lifted it. "Shoot," he said.

"Not a funny story," said Arnold. "Or perhaps it is. Funny in one way anyhow. Funny it happens so often, I mean. There was a girl. A good girl. And like it sometimes happens this woman started grabbing at zephyrs thinking she was getting something. But the zephyrs fluffed away in her hands."

Curt LaRaye sipped. He winked with his right eye. "You should be writing that stuff," he said pleasantly.

Arnold thought about that. "No," he said. "You see, this girl's in a little trouble. And no money, no nothing but the strings of memory from the zephyr. Kind of thin, wouldn't you say?"

LaRaye sipped.

"This girl," Arnold went on, "had too much pride to pick up again with another boy who still loved her. Or maybe she

didn't want to saddle him with the headache. Who knows? Anyway she thought there would be another easier way out." He reached in a pocket, let a revolver slug roll out of a small yellow envelope. He laid the slug on the desk.

"They dug this out of her over at the Washoe Hospital," he said. He waited, watching the dull gleam of the slug on the desk.

The glass in Curt LaRaye's hand began to sweat. The moisture seeped down, spread over his fingers. He stared at the bullet on the desk.

"Oh, she'll live," Arnold said wearily. "I thought you'd like to hear the story, that's all. Deserving case. Charity, of course, but deserving."

Curt LaRaye remained motionless. His lips were pressing a little back against his teeth. He didn't raise his eyes from the slug.

"Around a thousand would be a nice gesture, I thought," mentioned Arnold.

LaRaye's head snapped back. "*A thousand!*"

"Yeah."

"Are you insane?" he snorted.

"One thousand," said Arnold.

LaRaye's forehead was beading. He raised a hand and wiped at it. "Look," he muttered. "I'm laughing, it's so funny. You said this dame shot herself. Get it, you said that, not me."

Arnold shrugged again, picked up the slug, laid it alongside the .38 revolver. "What'll you bet it fits?" he asked. He stared hard at LaRaye. "What'll you bet I can prove it fits?"

LA RAYE'S voice came out like leaves whispering away from a tree in late fall. The words shook a little, trembled a little. "That's blackmail," he said. "Plain and simple blackmail—and by a cop." He tried to stare back at Arnold. He tried that for a long while. "This whole story about the girl shooting herself is something you made up."

Suddenly Arnold laughed. "Sure," he admitted. "I said it was a story, didn't I? And don't say blackmail. I don't like the word." The laugh turned into a pleasant grin. He picked up the slug, tossed it in the air once or twice. "Let's see can you make up a better one," he said. "Let's

see. I'll listen now and you can tell me how this slug happened to come from your revolver."

No sound from the tables outside, from the machines against the wall penetrated here. The only movement in the room, the only sound at all, was the little plopping up and down of the slug in Arnold's hand.

Curt LaRaye's eyes jerked away. He walked stiffly over to a wallsafe. He opened it. He counted out ten bills, came back to the desk, dropped them in front of Arnold. "Blood money," he breathed.

Arnold put the bills away, placed the slug back next to the .38 and walked over to the door. He looked at the vase of roses on the table by the door. He took one. "How's your wife?" he asked. "How's Marie? Tell her to drop over and see her old dad sometimes."

\* \* \*

The wind from the south was still slamming down Virginia Street. The big neons groaned uneasily above the *Purple Rose*. Arnold walked a few doors down to his sedan, got in, drove away.

Sergeant Williams was at the desk. "The kid's all right," he told Arnold. "Wasn't hit hard enough to do much damage. Got him in an overnight cell. You want to see him?"

Arnold went down the long block of cages. At the end he stopped, motioned to Williams. The doors clanged back and he went in.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

Thomas Dowell grinned sourly. "Okay, I guess. What hit me?"

"A gun butt. The doctor says you're not hurt. Where did you get that .25?"

"I had it," said the young man. He sounded worried. "It wasn't loaded though. I just used it to get to see La-Raye again. I was afraid he wouldn't want to see me."

Arnold chuckled. "No?" he asked. He reached down, helped the young man to his feet. "You'd better get on home."

Dowell stared, unbelieving.

"And here's something," Arnold brought out the ten bills, handed them to Dowell. "Be careful of it. There's a thousand there. You can either take it to the girl or mail it. I don't give a damn which. It might help out a little."

Dowell's mouth opened ridiculously. He stared at the ten bills.

"From Curt LaRaye," Arnold said. "He wants to help the girl out. It's the best he can do. And don't expect anything else. Ever. The guy's already married, you see. Already married for ten years now." Arnold's eyes blinked. "You maybe didn't know that, though. Let's say that's the reason he gave you the brush off. Get it?"

Arnold watched the big oak door close behind the young man. He sighed, went back to his office, looked at the regulator on the wall. Ten to two. He should have been home in bed long ago.

Steam was still escaping from the leaky valve over on the radiator. It sounded dismal somehow. Arnold curled his lips at it. He reached in his pocket and brought out a purple rose that had somehow managed to escape becoming crushed. He held it to his nose, smelled it twice. Then he went over to his desk and sat down. He laid the rose against the picture of a girl in an old looking frame. Then he folded his rough hands across his chest and closed his eyes.

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## Kiss-Proof - By Law

If you happen to have a mustache and are traveling through Indianapolis and meet a pretty girl—a not too far-fetched series of coincidences—pick her up by all means. Buy her dinner, take her to a show, have yourself a time. But if you kiss her good night, you're more than a cad—you're a crook. They have a law against it.

If you have a mustache you can't kiss *anybody* in Indianapolis!

# COFFIN FOR A BATHING BEAUTY

By EJLER JAKOBSSON

"I HAVE come back, my dear," Mr. Williams probably said, "to turn back the clock." Perhaps he smiled affectionately down at her brimming eyes, wondering what the effect would have been if he had told her, *I've come back to kill you!* For Mr. Williams had a sense of humor.

Perhaps his wife nuzzled his lapel—nobody knows exactly, for there are sacred moments in every woman's life and you're a cad if you insist on all the details. Perhaps she only said, "I've missed you, Henry."

Henry, unfortunately, hadn't missed *her* for the two years he had been away from home. He hadn't missed anything about her—except her comfortable cash income and her bank balance.

He had come home silk-hatted, soft-spoken, looking reasonably prosperous, as a man of forty should. He fully intended, as he had given her to understand, to make the rest of her days happy ones. But it would not, he had already decided, be a long, hard pull.

He proceeded to give her all the comforts of home. A house on High Street, Herne Bay—this was England. He made out a will in her favor. She, of course, reciprocated. He insisted she have a medical check-up and even took the doctor aside and told him what he said she would be too embarrassed to mention—Beatrice was subject to periodic fits or seizures. He bought her a bathtub. . . .

For this, only a few days later, he was bitterly blaming himself, right out loud. Stiff and cold in the bathtub, lay his beloved wife, who had evidently been taken with one of her seizures just as she was reaching for the soap—a nice little human touch, that.

Mr. Williams went to Southsea to recuperate. He changed back to his real

name, George Joseph Smith, to be anonymously alone with his sorrow—although not too alone. There was a pretty little nurse, who also happened to be an heiress.

Alice Burnham was her name. Just a few months after his first wife's death, Mr. Smith decided to bestow his spare name upon her, after prevailing upon her to insure herself for a few thousand in his favor.

Alice wrote to papa, a retired merchant, who sent his blessings—plus enough money for Alice to draw up a respectable will in George's favor, as he had done in hers. By this time the couple were wed—and forty-eight hours later Alice lay dead in her bathtub, evidently the victim of a periodic ailment, whose presence Mr. Smith had previously confided to a local doctor.

Just to prove that some things come in threes, a year later found George Joseph Smith wedded once more, this time to one Margaret Elizabeth Lofty, in London, who commanded a slightly higher insurance value than had her predecessors—and was just as bad a risk. She, too, proved highly susceptible to death by drowning in a bathtub. . . .

Mr. Smith probably would have continued his homicidal hobby indefinitely if it hadn't been for a Mr. Crossley in Blackpool. This gentleman noted the two accounts of the demises of Mr. Smith's wives in the newspaper obituary columns and sent both clippings to Scotland Yard, with marginal notations pointing out certain parallelisms.

They strung up Mr. Smith on an unlucky day, August 13, 1915. He reacted to the rope just like any other mortal, though his record as a bathtub murderer has never been equaled.

As far as anybody knows, nobody has successfully gotten rid of even a single wife via the bathtub ever since.

# A CORPSE HAD COLD FEET

By RUSSELL  
BRANCH



He snapped a shot in my direction.

*I thought I'd kissed my trouble goodbye when I stepped into the suicide's shoes—until I discovered I'd acquired his sweetheart, his past . . . and his foreshortened future.*

**O** H, I was dead all right. There was no doubt about it. It said so right on the front page of the Times, our most conservative and reliable newspaper:

Sanford H. Miles, 34, prominent local

builder, was listed as a suicide after police early today found his abandoned car and other personal possessions in the middle of the Bay Bridge. . . .

*That was me.*

Contents of a final note addressed to Miles' estranged wife, Mrs. Rhoda Miles, were not revealed, but Mrs. Miles told police her husband had been despondent over financial and other difficulties which had led to their recent separation. . . .

*And that was my wife.*

Police hold little hope for recovery of the body, although a search is being made. Of the 103 persons known to have leaped to their death from the Bay span since its completion in 1939, only 28 have been subsequently recovered. . . .

*And that concerned some other guy. The guy whose car I was sitting in and whose topcoat and hat I was wearing—the man who really belonged to the wallet and suicide note burning holes in my pocket. . . .*

As a matter of fact, I *had* been thinking about suicide when I started across that bridge the night before. I guess a lot of unhappy people who cross the Bay Bridge think about it, one way or another.

Dizzy high, that bridge, one of the highest in the world. Swirling water so far below it seems remote and unreal. Death in space—a sure, clean death. As sure as falling 300 feet to concrete, but you wouldn't think about that until you were already on the way down.

It occurred to me, sure. But I wasn't the kind of a guy who jumped off bridges. It'd taken this other guy—some poor sucker with more troubles and less guts or more guts or whatever it was.

The car had first caught my eye. A coupe stalled by the side with its door hanging open. It'd been late, after midnight, and even with the bridge empty of traffic, the toll stations on the city side were out of sight. I slowed down, thinking maybe I could help.

Then I'd spotted the man already half over the rail, and there was no mistaking his intention. I slammed on my brakes, tumbled out as fast as I could, and ran

back toward the spot where the man stood.

Maybe I heard a scream, a far-off splash—and maybe it was just my imagination. Actually there was nothing there but a lonely wisp of fog drifting past the amber bridge light and the pathetic little heap of stuff lying by the empty rail.

A topcoat, a hat, a wallet, an envelope—all the usual junk a man carries around with him. Don't ask me why a guy committing suicide should bother to empty his pockets and take off his wristwatch and spectacles.

I don't know either why I stood there inventorying the stuff—unless it was because the notion had already been in my own mind. Now it really started adding up.

Suicide by proxy! An easy way out of my own troubles, and who would get hurt by it? Certainly not the poor duck already going out to sea on the whispering tide below, and certainly not Rhoda. Least of all, Rhoda.

Tall, cool, sinuous Rhoda. Rhoda of the gracious manner and the ungrateful soul—an alley-cat in mink clothing. My wife. I'd given her the mink, given her everything that blind, hard work and cutting corners could get her.

I knew now how blind. I'd found out when the chips were down. When the banks tightened up and lumber and wages kept going up and up and up—when I needed courage and support and a hundred thousand by tomorrow. That's when lovely Rhoda had pulled out—with the partner I'd been counting on. Pulled out together, and had taken all my guts with them in their suitcase to Las Vegas. . . .

Those were the thoughts going through my mind in the time it took me to glance at the wallet and the hotel key, and make my decision.

My insurance would take care of my creditors, and Bill could take of my Rhoda forever and ever, and I'd go somewhere with a new name and start all over again with a pick and shovel.

I was already shedding my own coat, dumping my pockets. Putting on a dead stranger's coat and hat, filling my pockets with his possessions. It's strange how much a part of us those familiar things are. The cut of the coat, the shape of the hat—even the feel of his wallet in my **h**

pocket, and his glasses in my breast pocket.

The last thing I did was tear a page from my pocket notebook and pick up my fountain pen again from the concrete. I told Rhoda—but then the newspaper had been decent enough to withhold what I told her in that note, and there's no good reason why I should tell you here.

I LEFT my car sitting there with the driver's door open just as his had been, and I started his coupe just as if I'd been doing it every day. Panic came for a moment as I approached the toll station, but then I laughed at myself.

*Sanford H. Miles is dead, chum; he'd died back there where his car stands empty. You're another guy in another car. But what's your name? What was the name in that wallet? Dunlap . . . Duncan. . . . That's it! Peter Duncan. You're Peter Duncan, pal, and don't you forget it.*

Not that it mattered here. The drowsy guard handed me my change as if he'd been doing it all his life in his sleep, started to close the door of his little glass cage without a word.

His indifference annoyed me. After all, I'd just committed suicide.

"There's a car stuck back there on the bridge," I yelled at him.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah," I said. "Maybe somebody in trouble. Thought you might want to look into it."

He grumbled something but picked up his phone, and I chuckled to myself as I pulled away. *You're doing all right, Peter Duncan*, I told myself. *For a corpse, you're doing all right.*

I wasn't chuckling now. Not after a night spent in an all-night movie and time to think. That and the early newspaper I'd bought on my way back to the coupe had really brought it home to me. I'd burned my bridge behind me—or perhaps jumped off it would be the more appropriate expression.

Sanford H. Miles was dead, all right. No home, no friends, no business card to flash at hotel managers—none of the things that a "prominent builder" gets to take for granted. Most of all, no money beyond what was in my pocket. No more than it was going to take to get me a safe

distance away from this town where I was already a ghost.

I needed a shower, a shave, some rest. I also needed, for the sake of my self respect, to give Mr. Peter Duncan a decent burial in return for the favor he'd done me.

I took out my new belongings and looked at them again. The envelope was still sealed and it was going to stay that way, but I couldn't help reading and wondering about the name on the outside:

Miss Judy Tyler  
c/o The Sultana Club  
Los Angeles, Calif.

The hotel key tempted me. It would give me a chance to clean up, first of all, and also a safe, simple way of disposing of the death on my hands. I'd leave the note on his dresser, his car in the hotel garage, and walk out.

That'd leave us both properly dead, then. Even if the police did eventually recover his body, there'd be no connection beyond the apparent fact that we'd both ended up in the bay.

The wallet convinced me, or rather the driver's license and an old ID card in it. *Age: 36. Weight: 177. Height: 5-11. Hair: brown. Complexion: fair.* Peter Duncan—and a million other guys. Me, for instance, allowing for a few pounds here and a couple of years there.

With the help of the topcoat, hat and glasses, I should easily get past the desk clerk in a busy, commercial hotel like the Sherwood.

I didn't. The man behind the counter pegged me as I went past toward the elevators.

"Oh, Mr. Duncan there!"

Nothing to do but stop. My disguise, at least, was a success—unless my heart was showing in my throat.

The clerk wasn't too comfortable himself. "Mr. Duncan, I'm really terribly sorry about this, but—well, we found it necessary to transfer you to another room."

I shrugged. "As long as it's just as good and no more expensive."

"Oh, yes sir! In fact, it's a better room. We've already taken the liberty of moving your belongings, and if you'll just let me have your old key. . . ."

He handed me another key. stammer-



ing something about a mixup in reservations, but for some reason I didn't believe him. On the elevator I glanced back and he was still looking at me. Or perhaps it was just my strange spectacles.

I couldn't see anything wrong with the room, even with the glasses off. An ordinary hotel room, a bit larger than the usual single perhaps, but Peter Duncan's possessions looked right at home. A Gladstone bag, and another case which obviously held a musical instrument of some sort.

I opened the Gladstone, feeling like a ghoul but still determined to make the most of it. My friend Duncan had been very considerate. He had left an electric shaver of the same make I use myself.

He had also left a revolver, a brand-new dull blue .38 with a short barrel.

I was looking at that when the door opened behind me, and it was still in my hand as I wheeled.

**T**HE door led to the adjoining room. The gent who had opened it looked like a butcher in his Sunday suit. He had a well-fed paunch, a light crop of dark hair, and a square, honest face. The eyes were something else. They shifted sideways around the room, and came back to a point somewhere behind me.

"Duncan?"

I nodded. What else could I do?

He came on in then, moving on his feet with surprising lightness and offered me a fleeting glimpse of something round pinned inside a wallet. "My name's Strobel. Sergeant Strobel of the police."

I gulped but it didn't do any good.

He went on, still studying me with those cagey eyes. "The captain thought we oughta keep an eye on you while you're here. There's been a leak somewhere."

"A leak?" I stammered stupidly.

"Those boys don't let any grass grow under their feet, I'll tell you. They knew you were here before we did." He nodded casually toward the gun in my hand. "That's a good idea, too. You got a permit?"

"I—well, you see. . . ."

He shrugged apologetically and took the gun from my limp hand. "We'll fix you up when we go down to headquarters.

Meantime, brother, you're stuck with me."

"Fine," I said.

The sergeant plumped himself comfortably down in the only easy chair. "Hope you don't mind changing rooms, Duncan, but it's a lot more convenient this way. You had me worried when they said your bed hadn't been used last night."

There was a question in his voice that couldn't be ignored. I managed a weak grin. "Maybe I found a better one, sergeant. I was just going to shave."

"With *this*?" He waved the revolver and smirked at me. "Go right ahead, pal. We got nothing better to do for a couple hours—not unless you'd go for some coffee, too. They got me up at six this morning."

I pulled the shaver out of the bag. "You said there'd been a leak?"

"Don't worry, pal. I'm here now and I'm gonna stay here." He grinned companionably. "Yeah, they got another one last night. One of the swipes. Full of lead, but he lasted long enough to sing. Funny how long a punk can live sometimes when he ain't got nothing to live for—ain't it?"

I said "Yeah," without much enthusiasm and went into the bathroom with the shaver. I didn't want to shave or do anything else now except get the hell out of Peter Duncan's past—whatever it was. Whatever it was, it'd caught up with me.

When I came out again my stocky friend was still sitting in the easy chair, sucking on a pungent, pot-bellied pipe. He looked like he hadn't moved an inch, but I had a feeling he'd been through the pockets of Peter Duncan's topcoat on the bed.

"Look better," he said amiably. "You got the list, eh?"

List? What list? But I didn't say it. I just nodded noncommittally.

"In a safe place?" he persisted. "We don't want it to get out of our hands."

I nodded, knowing he was going to ask me to produce it.

But the bell saved me. The bell of the telephone sitting on the table right by his chair. I stared at it until he took the pipe out of his mouth.

"Telephone, pal. It must be for you."

Telephone—or booby trap? I picked it up gingerly, murmured an indistinct,

"Hello?" The voice came out breathlessly.

"Dunc, this is Judy."

It was a feminine voice, an eager, lilt-ing voice. The sort of a voice I'd like to get acquainted with, under any other circumstances.

While I hesitated, she said uncertainly, "Is this Mr. Peter Duncan?"

I wanted to scream "No!" and hang up the phone, but Strobel was looking at me, both ears open.

"Yes," I said.

"Dunc!" she exclaimed anxiously. "What's the matter? You sound so strange. Is something wrong?"

"Must be a bad connection," I said, trying desperately to recall the name on that envelope. "Did you say Judy? Judy Tyler?"

"Dunc, you clown!" She chuckled. "How many other Judys are there in your life? I'm here, darling. At the airport. I got worried about you and everything, so I came up. . . ."

She paused. "Dunc, listen. I got thinking after you left yesterday, so I phoned the authorities up there and then caught the next plane myself. I thought—well, I just don't want anything to happen to you, darling."

Another pause, while I tried to think of some answer to all this double-talk.

"You're not angry?" she asked anxiously. "I just couldn't sit there, doing nothing to help, not *knowing*."

"You're at the airport? You mean here?"

"We just got in," she told me. "There's a limousine leaving right away. It'll take me right to the hotel."

"Swell, darling," I said, and hung up with her voice still murmuring sweet nothings in my burning ears.

STROBEL was making a great show of lighting his pipe again, and I knew he had heard every word of it. "Trouble?" he asked.

"Not exactly. Just the girl friend. She's out at the airport. Said she got worried about me."

"Women!" Strobel grinned and got to his feet with that surprising lightness of his. "What d'ya say we eat first, pal? It'll take half an hour from the airport, anyway."

"Suits me fine," I told him.

I didn't tell him, though, just how fine it suited me. Anything to get out of this hotel room, surrounded by four walls and a detective and an arriving sweetheart. At the first corner, I promised myself, I was going to leave that detective and George Duncan behind.

But Strobel was right at my elbow as we went down the hall. He had his hand on my elbow as we came out into the lobby, and he steered me into the hotel coffee shop without giving me a chance to even say anything about it.

Then, when we were already seated at a table, and I was considering throwing it at him, he suddenly got up again.

"Order me some wheat cakes, eh, Duncan? I just remembered I gotta make a phone call myself. Be right back."

His square back went through the archway toward the lobby again, and the thought struck me that he was pretty casual about leaving me after all his talk. But I didn't stop to worry about it then.

I just got onto my feet as quickly as possible and let those feet carry me out through the street entrance as fast as they could.

Two blocks away I slowed down to a fast walk and wondered where I was headed in such a hurry. The railroad station was in the opposite direction—but was that a wise move now?

Strobel had undoubtedly already found me missing and had phoned in—and wouldn't the station be one of the first places the cops would check? Besides, you just didn't walk up to a ticket window these days and get a reservation on a moment's notice.

I paused automatically to light a cigarette, shielding it from the brisk breeze blowing up from the bay.

"Pardon me, sir. Could I borrow a light?"

I looked up into the round jovial face of somebody's salesman and automatically held out my lighter to the unlit cigarette in his lips.

The cigarette glowed, and then the fat, dapper gentleman was crowding me toward the curb, and the lips were saying quietly, "One funny move, Duncan, and we'll let you have it right here."

I backed away, half turning, and a

strong hand closed around my wrist from behind. Then the wrist was being forced up behind my back, and something hard was against the small of my back.

I got it then, and I started to do something about it. My efforts landed me in the rear of a sedan which had pulled up at the curb. Although my arm was free now, that hard object was still in my side. It was hidden under the coat of the man who had shoved me—a tall, thin mugg with a face worn to the bone and eyes as blank as frosted glass.

I went after him then, but the fat little fellow was already in, and the car began to roll. The lanky one twisted to get away from the hammerlock I had thrown around his head, his fists beating into my kidneys.

Then something harder than fists crashed against the back of my own head, and as I tried to move away from it I saw the jovial, still-smiling face of the fat man leaning over his cohort. The sap in his hand came down again, and a second crash of pain shook me loose of all feeling and all thought.

**T**HE hard floor under me vibrated like a pneumatic hammer against my splitting skull. I lifted my head, trying to clear my swimming vision and the nausea that floated in my belly.

I was on the floor of the sedan, I decided, with two pairs of feet planted firmly on my middle. A moon face beamed down on me amiably.

"Feeling better, Duncan?"

"I'm not Duncan," I groaned and tried to raise myself to a sitting position.

The lean man moved his left foot and my head hit the floor again. The car droned on, and the fat man continued smiling.

"You're making a big mistake," I insisted. "I'm not George Duncan!"

"Yeah?" said Spareribs cynically.

"So we noticed," smirked Butterball, patting the pocket of his Chesterfield.

I realized then that they had searched me and my possessions were gone. *My possessions? Peter Duncan's possessions.*

"Peter Duncan is dead," I yapped. "Just because I happened to have his wallet, that doesn't mean you've got the right guy."

"You'll do until the real thing comes

along," Butterball answered cheerfully.

"Shut up," said his flat-sided sidekick.

I started to laugh. Maybe those cracks on the head had joggled a brain loose, but I couldn't help myself. It struck me funny: Some strange guy named Peter Duncan had thought enough of his troubles to prefer the bridge, and here I was in his shoes, and it had been my own bright idea.

Funny? Funny like a funeral. *My funeral.*

I tried to get up again, and the thin man shifted his foot again. This time I went down and stayed down. . . .

They took me to see the Boss, just like they always do, but any similarity to Hollywood ended there. It wasn't a swank office furnished in chrome and bleached blondes; it was just an ordinary, drab little house in a row of drab little houses on the east side of the bay.

And the Boss was an ordinary, middle-aged citizen with tired feet and tired lines in his dark face. He was the guy next door, or the man who runs the corner grocery store, and he wasn't particularly happy to see me.

"Why'd you bring him here? You had your orders."

The smile had faded from Fatso's face. He said anxiously, "The list's not on him, Ben. Another thing, he claims he's not Duncan."

"I'm *not* Duncan!" I snapped, wishing that ringing would leave my head. "I tell you I'm not Duncan. I don't know anything about Duncan, except that I saw him jump off the Bay Bridge last night."

The man named Ben frowned at me with dark, inscrutable eyes. He said, out of the corner of his mouth: "You guys gave him a good shakedown?"

Fatso handed him the wallet and the letter. "This is all we found. Carl took care of the room, and he knows his business."

Ben sat down on the lumpy sofa and went through the wallet carefully. His eyes went from me to the driver's license and then back again. Then he read the note addressed to one Judy Tyler, and when he had finished he tossed it aside and looked at me with some doubt in his mind.

I started to make the most of that doubt. "Those were left behind by Peter

Duncan when he committed suicide. I happened to be around and I picked them up for my own reasons. I never heard of him before and I don't care if I never hear of him again. Any beef you had with him is none of my business."

"It is now," Ben said evenly. "Besides—" he pointed to the letter, "—that could be a stall."

Three pairs of hard eyes stared at me in dead silence, while I tried my best to look like three other guys beside Peter Duncan.

Then the Boss rose to his feet in abrupt decision. "Stall or not, we'll be able to make good use of that letter. But the list is still the main thing."

"I don't know anything about any damned list!" I exploded. "If you stupid buzzards would—"

"Shut up," interrupted the lean one and slapped me across my face with the flat of his automatic. I went after him then, gun or not, but between the beating I'd already taken and the help he had, I didn't last long.

They dragged me away up a flight of stairs, and the last thing I remembered was Ben's business-like voice saying, "We'll know soon enough. The girl's in town now."

Then I didn't remember anything for a while.

**I** WAS on a bed, but that's as far as my comfort went. I was hog-tied and gagged, and my body cried with pain and the gag was slowly strangling me to death.

There were voices and footsteps on the floor below, there were sunshine and freedom outside the window a few feet away, but I was helpless as a Christmas turkey. I couldn't even move enough to ease the cramps.

I lay and thought and waited. I thought of how sweet and desirable life seemed now, and I wondered whether they'd kill me even when they'd satisfied themselves I wasn't their man. I answered the question myself, and the answer did nothing to raise my spirits.

I think I floated off again, or perhaps I just got completely numb. Then the door was opening. A girl stumbled into the room, followed by the man who had

shoved her. It was my good friend Ben. For a second she stared at me. I got an impression of bloneness, of pertness trying hard to be courage—and of something weighing and calculating behind the fright in the wide blue eyes.

Then she had thrown herself down by the bed, her hands tender on my battered face. "Dunc! Oh, you poor darling. They've hurt you—they've hurt you!"

She began to sob helplessly, while I cursed women and the gag that held me defenseless.

Ben pulled her off, passing her to the lean man who clamped his arms around her as if he enjoyed his work. Then the gag was out of my mouth, and I was trying to get my jaw and tongue back in their proper places.

Ben said quietly, "That's all we wanted to know, Duncan. Now tell us where the list is or we'll have to get really rough. Not only with you, but the girl too. You wouldn't like that, would you?"

I looked at him and I looked at the girl's white face, and I knew they'd never believe me now. Never. But a little more time, even half an hour—what was there to lose?

"It's—back at the hotel." Perhaps the police would be there, would pick them up, follow them here. "I hid it—in my room."

"Where in your room?" Ben asked patiently.

"Under the wash basin—jammed in the pipes underneath."

Ben straightened up, turned. "He may be stalling again," he told the thin man. "Keep them *here* and keep them quiet."

He went on out, with Fatso tagging along like a faithful shadow, and the door closed behind them.

The girl tried, I'll say that for her. She scratched and kicked and bit, while I swore helplessly. But she ended up on the floor, moaning. The thin man rubbed his twisted face where a fingernail had left a raw track, and raised his gun deliberately.

"I'll keep you quiet, you little hellcat!"

I strained against my bonds, but they wouldn't give an inch. The gun came down in a vicious arc and landed with a dull thud, and I went as limp as if it had hit me.

A moment later, she was trussed up just as I was. Spareribs gave me a leer and went on out, locking the door behind him.

It took me two minutes of concentrated effort to roll over to the edge of the bed. The girl was lying on her side, her back toward me, and I could see the knot that tied her legs and arms behind her. I could also see her legs, but it was the knot which interested me most at the moment. I studied it a long time, and then, because there wasn't anything better to do, I rolled on off the bed.

I grazed her small, limp figure, but she didn't stir. Then I began to edge my way along the floor, and every inch was a mile.

Five minutes later, or perhaps five hours, the knot was in my teeth, and I was learning how stubborn clothesline could be.

I was still working when she began to stir.

"Oh . . . oh, my head. . . ."

"Don't move," I said softly. "And don't make any noise."

I thought she had passed out again. Then she said wonderingly, "Who are you?"

I grunted, and it was a bitter grunt.

"How did you get into this, anyway?"

"Shh!" I cautioned her. "They thought I was a guy named Duncan. Now they're sure of it, thanks to you."

"I *had* to make them think so," she whispered earnestly. "I just had to."

I gave my aching jaws a rest. "Why?"

She remained silent.

"As long as I'm going to hang," I told her bitterly, "I'd like to know what I'm hanging for."

She hesitated again, but I guess I had convinced her. She whispered while I worked, and I egged her on mainly because a woman never goes into hysterics when she's got somebody to listen to her.

**P**PETER DUNCAN was a musician, a trumpet player. One of the best, she added proudly. Maybe I had heard of him—Dunc Duncan.

I had. I had just about every platter he'd ever made, and I'd often wondered what had happened to him. But I didn't tell her that. I merely grunted again, my

mouth full of rope. She went on quickly.

The rest of the story came in pieces, reluctant pieces. Liquor and reefers, that's what had happened to Dunc Duncan. He'd slipped, slipped until he'd lost his band and his name and was peddling the weed to other musicians for enough to keep himself flying.

I gathered she was in love with him, although she didn't say it. She just said modestly, "I'm a singer of sorts and—well, he was really on rock bottom when I met him. I staked him to a spell in a sanitarium, got him back on his feet. We worked together. He was beginning to get that old touch back and—"

She paused and went on grimly. "Well, it wasn't that easy. Dunc had been in pretty deep, and you just don't walk out on a racket like that. We got a booking in New Orleans, and a gunman turned up in Dunc's hotel room there. Fortunately the hotel detective had spotted him and arrested him before Dunc got back, and it was called 'attempted robbery.'

"But we knew different. Later Dunc found something the man had ditched under the bed when they nabbed him—a little address book with some names and telephone numbers. They were only first names, but Dunc recognized one of the names and the number that went with it. It was the name of the mob's bag man—the collector—that Dunc had worked for when he was peddling the stuff.

"I wanted Dunc to turn it over to the police then, but he was afraid of being dragged into it and perhaps going to jail for his own past. So I let him talk me out of it."

"You mean this mess here is connected with the same dope gang?" I murmured incredulously.

"It's organized so you wouldn't believe it," she sighed. "It's big business. A national syndicate. There were several other times. . . . Well, to make it short, Dunc still couldn't call his soul his own. And finally, when we read in the paper about the arrests here, and that the federal narcotics men were moving in and hoped to break up the racket on a national scale—I put it up to Dunc then.

"I told him I was through with him unless he'd go to the police with his information and that address book, since it

would obviously be invaluable to them in convicting the whole rotten gang."

"So he came out here," I said, "and you followed because you got worried about him?"

"We weren't too sure about the local police," she explained. "Dunc had learned some things about the situation there when he was working for the gang. Anyway, after he left I began to worry. I phoned the narcotics chief here, a nice man by the name of Sills, and he promised that they'd keep an eye out for Dunc and see that he got in the right hands with his evidence."

She paused again, and then said defensively, "That's why I had to make them believe you were Peter Duncan. You see, by this time Dunc has probably given his information to the police, and as long as you were in it already. . . ."

I gave a last tug and the knot came loose. She pulled her hands apart absent-mindedly, rubbing her wrists.

"But you told them where the list is!" Her voice was puzzled and accusing.

"It was just a stall," I snapped. "I don't know anything about any list. We can figure the rest of it out when and if we get out of here."

She shut up and got busy. First she untied the end of the rope still around her legs, and then finally mine. I couldn't move a muscle when the ropes first came free. Then the blood began running back like a million needles in my veins.

She helped by rubbing my arms, and I got my first good look at her. There was nothing wrong with my eyes, even if the rest of me was momentarily incapacitated.

She came up to about the point where I begin shaving, and she had natural taffy-blond hair and a figure as cute as a kitten's ear. Her face wasn't beautiful—not in the sense Rhoda's was—but it had vitality and strength and a pair of generous lips. . . .

I stopped my daydreaming and tested my legs. She was quiet while I thought it over, and that was another thing I found myself liking about her. She was just as scared as I was, but she knew how and when to keep quiet.

"Our friend with the gun is downstairs," I said finally, "and he may have

company. But we won't have a chance once the others get back."

She nodded gamely, her eyes steady. I glanced out the window and quickly gave that up. It was twenty feet down to the concrete driveway, and even if one of us made it. . . .

I turned back. "We'll have to take a chance. You lie down just as you were."

She obeyed without question. I wound the ropes again loosely around her slender body and legs. Then I picked up the light chair in the room and smashed the window.

"Scream!" I told her as I ducked back against the inside wall.

She screamed, all right. The crash of the window had already brought footsteps pounding up the stairs, but she screamed and kept on screaming even as the door was unlocked and opened with a curse.

In fact, she did even better than that. She moved her leg and neatly tripped up the thin man as he rushed past her, his eyes on the gaping window. The chair in my hand did the rest of the job, and then I had an automatic to call my own.

I whirled in time to see a familiar, round face at the doorway. He snapped a shot in my direction, but if it hit me I didn't know it then. I ploughed after him. He turned again to look over his shoulder near the bottom of the staircase, and that was when I pressed the trigger, aiming carefully.

Once was enough. The slug did a permanent job of wiping that face clean of all expression. He went on down the stairs like a sack of potatoes, and he didn't move when he hit the bottom.

I ran back into the bedroom, but there was no need for it. Judy had been busy—and she had done a good job of it. She had used both ropes, and the lanky mug on the floor looked as if a whole troop of boy scouts had been turned loose to work on him.

She gave me a game, shaky little smile. "Is there a phone in the house?"

"Phone, hell!" I said, grabbing her hand. "We're getting out of here!"

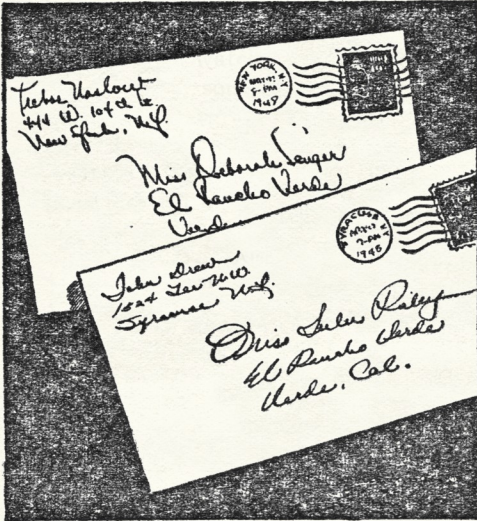
She shook her head stubbornly. "Every minute counts. And I'm going to wait right here for the police to come, even if you don't."

*(Please continue on page 96)*

# THRILL

DIME  
DETECTIVE  
MAGAZINE  
COMBINED WITH FLYNN'S DETECTIVE FICTION

# DOCKET



Cash Wale and Sailor Duffy, still hiding out from the Sing-Sing consequences of the Cash Wale Massacre, sought haven on an arty dude ranch—and found themselves deep in a bizarre and lethal romance racket. Two mysterious letters had arrived at the rancho—addressed to two babes who didn't exist. . . .

Penny Green, owner of El Rancho Verde, was one large 'n luscious gal. She had her hands full with her eccentric, pseudo-artistic guests—especially when Cash discovered some canny cutie was using the ranch for an undercover matrimonial bureau . . . and luring romance-hungry old men to their death.



An eerie, wailing howl sent the ranch guests running out into the night. It was Drew 42, aristocratic collie, uncovering the first of many corpses—that of his master's missing father. That made it murder—and brought down a swarm of what Cash most desperately wanted to avoid—eagle-eyed lawmen.



It was exposure and the chair for Cash unless he caught the murderer. He set a snare and waited, crouching in the dark. . . . Suddenly, the trap was sprung—in a burst of red-hot flame. . . . Peter Paige will tell the complete story of "Cash Wale's Lethal Lulu" in the October issue—out September 3rd.

# READY FOR THE RACKETS

## A Department

*Racketeers and scoundrels of all sorts are lying in wait for you, eager to rob or cheat you of your hard-earned cash. All you need to thwart them, guard against them, is a fore-knowledge of their schemes and methods of operation. Write in, telling us your own personal experiences with chisellers and con men of various sorts. It is our intention to publicize—withholding your name if you wish—the information you have passed on, paying \$5.00 for every letter used. No letters will be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope, nor can we enter into correspondence regarding same. Address all letters to The Rackets Editor—DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, 205 E. 42nd St., N. Y. 17, N. Y.*

### Not So Dumb

Dear Sir:

"I've been hooked!" was my first coherent thought when I realized that the footsteps retreating down the hall were carrying away twenty-five cents of my hard-earned cash.

I had been alone in the office just a few minutes before when I heard a knock at the door.

"Come in," I called, and a clean-looking young man opened the door and entered.

"Can I help you?" I asked, but he did not answer. He walked to my desk and handed me a card which bore pictures of hands in all manners of contortions and each letter of the alphabet. The printed message on the card was "I am a deaf-mute. Give whatever you like. Thank you."

I fished in my purse and found a quarter, which I gave the young man. He grinned, saluted, and walked out.

It was only after he left that I realized that he had entered the office upon my call, "Come in." I've been robbed!

Olive Marie Cook  
Fredericktown, Mo.

### Snug as a Bug

Dear Sir:

A friend of mine, a salesman, told me this story of an incident which happened recently in a better-class cafe in Reno, Nevada.

He was eating his breakfast near another man who had been served a stack of hot cakes. He noticed that the man did not start eating his breakfast. When the waiter came up again, the man asked to talk to the manager. When the manager arrived, he lifted up one of the cakes and whispered: "What will you give me for this plate?"

The manager was obviously upset and offered to get the customer another plate, but the customer said: "Listen, mister, if you want me to walk out with this stuff and show it to the health officer, I will. But if you want to buy it, say so quick."

The manager hurriedly got the owner, and the man was given a twenty-dollar bill along with sincere apologies.

Later, the waiter told me the man had found a large centipede in his breakfast. Then, after the manager had fired almost everyone in the

place, one of the cooks discovered that the insect had been planted in the food. There were marks in the hot cake where the man had pushed the centipede in with his fork, to make it appear that it had been prepared that way.

They had the police out looking for the man, but he had made his getaway.

R. M. Edwards  
Socorro, N. M.

### The Ad Men Cash In

Dear Sir:

A daring racket is now being peeled off at the expense of suckers. Fly-by-night publishers, without authority on your part, pick up from legitimate magazines classified advertisements you might have subscribed to in conducting a mail-order business, publish them in a one-shot, circulationless sheet, then bill you for same at outrageous rates!

I recently received just such a bill for \$10.80 along with a letter telling me, "Here are checking copies of the advertisement you instructed us to run; we've circled them in red in accordance with your previous instructions."

I glanced at the one-shot sheet. It carried a title I'd never heard of before. I glanced at the ad. It was a classified ad concerning maple sugar I'd run several months previous while living in Vermont. Months after I'd moved from Vermont, this fly-by-night racketeering concern ran the ad and had the gall to bill me for payment on an ad I had not authorized them to run!

No doubt many receiving such a 'tear sheet' plus a bill plus a reminder that 'your instructions have been carried out' will pay such bills. Don't. Ask your postmaster for the name of the postal inspector in your territory and turn all papers over to authorities. That's the solution for wiping out such rackets.

Eulalia Turner  
Santa Maria, Calif.

### Grocery Store Blackmail

Dear Sir:

Many women have been victimized recently by a racket that is worked by department and grocery store managers.

The manager approaches a woman shopper and accuses her of shoplifting. Usually the accused one is innocent, but sometimes she



is guilty of pilfering a small item. The policy of honest stores in the latter event is to ask the woman to pay for the item. If she refuses, then they call the police.

Some unscrupulous managers, however, use the situation to their own advantage. They take the woman into the office and threaten her with a lawsuit and disgrace unless she produces or promises to secure a certain sum of money, often as much as one hundred or two hundred dollars.

In a surprising number of instances, the woman falls for the ruse and gets the money demanded. She is motivated by the human desire to avoid scandal.

One big city super-market reportedly took thousands of dollars from his victims before being reported and dealt with. A prompt police report is the best method of dealing with this type of extortioner.

Jack Eicholz  
Cleveland, Ohio

#### Paging Mr. Webster

Dear Sir:

A little con game was worked on me some months ago in Chicago.

I was passing through Chi and had a couple of hours to wait for a train, so I went into a pool room to watch them play. I hadn't been there long before I noticed one player who kept wiping his face with his handkerchief and saying, "My, my, it's terrible to transpire so easily."

Well, I got tired of hearing him say it so often so I stepped over and said, "Excuse me, buddy, but you mean *perspire*. not *transpire*."

He looked at me as if he thought I was crazy. "I mean just what I said—*transpire*."

I said, "All right, smarty, I'll bet you twenty dollars you mean *perspire*."

He covered my bet, then took a dictionary from his inside pocket, found the word 'transpire.' One of the two or three definitions said: "To emit from the body as a vapor, to sweat."

He thanked me, took my money and went out, leaving me a sadder but wiser man.

E Neniger  
Indianapolis, Ind.

#### Helping Hand

Dear Sir:

A well-known charity organization was holding a dance in a large hall. It was attended by several hundred people. One young man was very helpful and cooperative. No one seemed to know him, not even the sponsors of the affair, but everyone assumed he was a member of the organization or there in the capacity of attendant. He was helping out everywhere. One minute he sold at the flower booth, the next he was regulating traffic calmly and courteously.

When the dance was well under way, the helpful young man approached a committee member in charge of one of the booths and explained he was going to close that particular booth and use the adjoining one for receiving customers and tallying. He requested five thousand dollars in five, ten and twenty-dollar bills for this purpose.

The young man was given the money without demur. When, a little later, the busy committee member attempted to locate him, he discovered the charming young man and the \$5000 had vanished simultaneously.

Clark O. Bomia  
Monroe, Mich.

#### Let the Seller Beware!

Dear Sir:

I am still boiling over from a little lesson that cost me \$1000.

One day a man came into the office of my handkerchief factory, gave me his business card, and told me he wanted to buy a large order of handkerchiefs. Naturally I was delighted. While I engaged my prospective customer in small talk, my secretary quietly looked up his firm in a book that gave the credit rating of various businesses. When she reported that the firm's credit was good, I went to work on the buyer.

Everything I showed him was just what he wanted, with no complaint about the price. I wound up selling him a little over one thousand dollars worth of merchandise. I was very happy and so was my customer. We sat around and talked until about five in the afternoon. When the customer looked at his watch, he was surprised to see that it was too late to call up his firm and report.

However, he said he knew they would like what he had done, particularly since they had so much faith in him that they had already advertised a big sale on handkerchiefs for the next morning. He asked if there was any way I could get them over to their warehouse by nine o'clock in the morning. I wanted to please them, so I had the merchandise packed that night and shipped early the next morning. Then I sat back to wait for the check.

I was not alarmed when it was a week overdue, as this was not unusual with big firms, but as I was in the city on other business, I thought I'd go around and get acquainted with my new customer and pick up the check. When I went to their warehouse, I got a surprise.

First, an old man working on a dilapidated elevator asked me if I was looking for anyone in particular. I told him I was and showed him the card. The old fellow started to laugh and called me a sucker. When I asked him what he meant, he said that a hundred people had been there looking for a bunch of crooks. He told me that as soon as my truck delivered the merchandise, another truck picked it up.

By this time I was seeing things, so I went around to the credit-rating company to learn more about my customer. The firm was legitimate. When I went to see them, I found them as hot under the collar as I was, for they had received a number of calls such as I was making.

The racketeers had gotten hold of one of the legitimate firm's business cards, printed a number of them, and sent buyers out to catch suckers like me. The amount of merchandise they got amounted to over \$800,000.

R. J. Tatham  
Bound Brook, N. J.

(Please continue on page 98)

# DOCTOR OF DOOM

Dramatic Crime-Adventure Novelette

## CHAPTER ONE

### Grave Case

**D**R. CLINTON COLBY ran a hand through his short black hair and looked up at Celia Brooks. "Any more?" he asked wearily. It was now approaching six o'clock in the afternoon, and he had some house calls to



make before he was due back in his office at seven.

"Two," Celia Brooks said. She was Colby's combination nurse and secretary. She had an erect young body and strong straight legs, deep blue eyes, and a milky skin dusted with freckles over her short nose. "A man and a woman, together.

*Dr. Colby got curious when curvaceous Marjorie tried to prevent an autopsy on her late, lamented husband—and more curious when the corpse took wing and flew.*



Waterman said: "It's your show, Doctor."

● ●  
By **ROBERT**  
**MARTIN**

They wouldn't tell me what they wanted to see you about. They both look healthy."

"Send them in," Colby said.

The white uniformed girl nodded, and left the office with a slight swaying of her neat hips.

Colby walked to the window and looked out at the tree-lined street. He was a tall young man with a lean dark face, a strong chin and gray eyes. He was wearing a white, short-sleeved jacket buttoned tightly at the neck. The door opened behind him, and he turned.

A girl stood hesitantly in the doorway. Colby appraised her in one quick glance. About thirty, blonde, five foot four or five, around one-twenty, with a full, well-proportioned figure, a mobile red mouth.

She was wearing a gray flannel suit, a thin black sweater, close-fitting at the neck, and black, high-heeled shoes. Her legs were good, and her hair was brushed straight across her forehead, parted on one side. It fell in loose folds around her shoulders. A nice-looking, healthy girl, Colby thought, and he smiled at her.

Behind her stood a man. He was about Colby's age—somewhere in the middle thirties—and he had a tanned, smooth face. He was small, almost the same height as the girl. A closely clipped brown mustache and checked sport jacket gave him a horsey, race-track appearance.

"I'm Mrs. Walter Tolbert," the girl said. She had a soft clear voice. She nodded at the man behind her. "This is Dr. Jarrett."

Colby shook hands with the short man, and motioned them both to chairs opposite his desk. He sat down across from them and lit a cigarette.

The girl spoke first. "You are the coroner of this county, Dr. Colby?"

Colby nodded silently.

She leaned forward a little. "I want you to stop an autopsy which is to be performed on my husband tomorrow afternoon."

Colby said: "Yes?"

She looked down at her red-painted fingernails. "He's been dead for six months," she said in her quiet voice. "I—I don't want them to touch him. It won't serve any good purpose, and I can't allow. . . ." She paused.

A flicker of interest broke through the professional mask of Colby's face. He crushed out his cigarette in a bronze ash tray and hunched his big shoulders forward. "Who is doing the post mortem, and why?" he asked.

She looked up at him. "The State Employee Insurance Commission. You see, my husband was a chemist. He worked for a company in Toledo. Two years ago he was injured in an explosion in the company's laboratory—a gas explosion. It affected his lungs, and he was no longer able to work. Because it was an industrial accident, he drew employee's compensation from the State Insurance Commission until—until he died."

Colby nodded. "And his death was the result of his injury—of the gas explosion?"

She shook her head, and the yellow hair rippled over her shoulders. "No, Doctor, it wasn't. He died suddenly of a heart attack—coronary thrombosis. It had nothing to do with his injury."

"How old was your husband, Mrs. Tolbert?"

"Forty-two. We—we had been married four years."

"I see," Colby said. "Why does the State want to do the autopsy now?"

She leaned toward him. "Apparently they question the cause of his death. He had been drawing disability compensation because of his lungs—but he died of a heart attack. They explained to me that if his death was caused by his injury, and not by a heart attack, I would be entitled to the widow's death benefits.

"Walter carried quite a large personal life insurance policy, and I don't care about the money from the state—not enough to let them do . . . do that to poor Walter. Yesterday a state investigator came to see me. He . . . he was very persuasive and insistent that I permit the autopsy, and I finally signed the authorization permitting them to go ahead. But I was sorry afterwards, and I telephoned him to destroy the authorization. He refused. You are the county coroner, and I want you to stop it."

Colby shook his head slowly from side to side. "I'm afraid I can't do anything about it, Mrs. Tolbert—since you signed the post mortem authorization. Who cer-

tified your husband's death certificate?"

THE man spoke for the first time. "I did, Doctor," he said. He had a pleasant, deep voice. "You see, I've been the Tolberts' physician for several years, and I was with Walter when he died. We were having cocktails on the lawn at their summer cottage on Lake Erie. Walter just slumped forward out of his chair, without warning.

"Mr. Wilbur Hollis, the funeral director up at Beechtree, was there too. It was coronary thrombosis, all right, pure and simple—you know the symptoms, Doctor. Clear-cut. I had examined Walter's lungs only a week previously, and they seemed to be gradually clearing up. Of course, I knew he had this heart irregularity, but I didn't think it would hit him so suddenly. . . .

"I wish you could do something about this ridiculous autopsy—it's upset Mrs. Tolbert considerably." He paused and glanced at the girl. "She neglected to tell you this, but I think it has a bearing on the case. The state investigator who talked her into signing the autopsy authorization is a former suitor of hers—George Waterman is his name—and he has been very bitter toward her since she married Walter. Unrequited love, you know?" He laughed lightly, and the girl flushed.

"I know George Waterman," Colby said. "I've found him to be very efficient. Maybe he's being too efficient in this case." He spoke to the girl, "Where is your husband buried?"

"In Beechtree Cemetery. My husband maintained burial space there for years—it's near his boyhood home. Mr. Hollis, of the Beechtree Funeral Home, is letting them use his facilities for the autopsy." She paused then and lowered her head, and her round shoulders trembled a little.

Dr. Jarrett reached out and put a hand on her arm. He glanced at Colby, and shook his head in a sympathetic manner.

Colby stood up. "I wouldn't worry about it, Mrs. Tolbert. There's nothing I can do about it now, and it really isn't as bad as it sounds. The men who will perform the examination will be very considerate."

"It's desecration," she whispered.

"Walter wouldn't want them. . . . Why don't they let him rest in peace?"

Dr. Jarrett took the girl gently by the arm and led her to the door. He turned and said to Colby: "Thank you, Doctor. I told her not to worry about it, but she wanted to see you. . . ."

Colby nodded, and they went out.

The next day was Wednesday, Colby's day off. He made a few calls in the morning, and spent the remaining time until lunch oiling and inspecting his extensive gun collection. After lunch he refused a golf invitation, and on a sudden impulse drove up to Beechtree. It was a small, sleepy country village with big houses and wide shaded streets. The Hollis Funeral Home was a big white frame house set back from the square with an expanse of green lawn shaded by hundred-year-old beech trees.

Colby found Wilbur Hollis in a chair on the porch reading a copy of *The Mortician's Review*. He was a tall, spare man with thin red hair and a bulging forehead. He looked older than he was, and local gossip called him "a woman chaser." But he was the only undertaker in town, and people did say that he had a "sympathetic manner," especially toward young and pretty widows whose husbands Wilbur's glossy hearse took for their last ride.

He was a bachelor, and he had inherited the business from his father. He was dressed in sober black, with a high white starched collar and a neat black tie.

Colby sat down on the steps and grinned up at him. "Waiting for business, Wilbur?"

The undertaker had a high shrill voice. "Dammit, Clint, what you got against us fellows? You kill 'em, you bury 'em. What's wrong with that?"

Colby lit a cigarette. "Take it easy, Wilbur. I hear the big-town boys are doing a P.M. at your place today."

Hollis removed his feet from the porch railing and looked at Colby. "How did you know about that?"

"I'm coroner of this county, aren't I?" Colby asked him. "Tolbert's widow told me."

Hollis said: "Who, Marjorie?"

"You seem to know her pretty well. Is that her first name?"

The undertaker picked up his magazine and began to leaf through it. "Sure. Nice girl. I was there when her husband died. Very sad. I had the funeral."

Colby said: "Did the boys from Columbus get here yet?"

Hollis lowered his magazine. "Sure, they got here. This morning. But they are not going to cut open Walter Tolbert in my place—not in the condition he'll be in. When they opened his grave this morning, they found that the cement vault had cracked. Grave full of water. Casket, corpse, everything. I buried Walter, but I'm not responsible for the vault they bought. I won't let those state boys bring a body in that condition into my place. It's bad for business."

"What are they going to do?" Colby asked.

Hollis shrugged his thin shoulders. "I don't know, and I don't give a damn. Those cocky state examiners give me a pain anyhow."

Colby stood up and flung his cigarette out over the green lawn.

Wilbur Hollis said: "Don't rush off, Clint. How about a cold beer?"

"No, thanks, Wilbur. Be seeing you." Colby walked across the lawn to his car.

**B**EECHTREE CEMETERY had been officially named right after the Civil War, but there were gravestones bearing dates of 1840 and earlier. Colby wheeled his coupe slowly along the winding drive until he came to a grassy knoll at the far side. A convertible roadster was in the drive, and a little group of men were standing beside an open grave.

He parked his coupe behind the roadster and walked over the grass toward the open grave. He recognized two of the men—old Doc Conners of Beechtree, and George Waterman, the State Insurance Commission investigator. They were talking to two men beside the grave. A casket lay on the grass beside them.

Doc Conners was chewing tobacco, and his yellow-stained walrus mustache was bobbing up and down. He saw Colby, and waved a hand.

"Hello, Clint. What the hell you doing up this way?"

"Just snooping around, Doc. Thought I might like to watch this."

Doc Conners turned to the three men. "Gentlemen, this here is Doc Clint Colby. He's the county coroner, so I guess he has a right to watch."

Colby shook hands with the three men. One of them, a heavy, red-faced man, was Dr. Ludwig Von Haupt, a pathologist whom Colby had heard of. The second man was young and serious-looking, with horn-rimmed glasses. He was Dr. Harrigan, Dr. Von Haupt's assistant. The third man was tall, dark, well dressed, with a smooth hard face. He was George Waterman, special investigator for the State Employee's Insurance Commission. Colby knew him fairly well.

Waterman said to Colby: "You know about this case, Doctor?"

Colby nodded, grinning at him. "A little. Mrs. Tolbert tried to get me to stop these—er—proceedings."

Waterman grinned a little ruefully. "Maybe I'm sticking my neck out, but when we pay a man compensation for two years for a lung impairment, and he finally dies of a heart attack—well, we kind of like to know why."

Colby nodded in agreement. "And then if the widow tries to sue the state later on, you've got the facts."

"That's right," Waterman said. "If he died of a heart attack, we forget about it. If the condition of his lungs caused his death, we pay the widow seven thousand dollars, less the compensation he has received. But I had a hell of a time getting Mrs. Tolbert to sign the autopsy authorization. I can't understand why—she's got nothing to lose."

Colby said: "I understand that you and Mrs. Tolbert used to be pretty friendly—before she married Walter Tolbert?"

Waterman flushed, and then he laughed shortly. "That was a long time ago, Doctor."

Old Doc Conners' shrill voice said: "You fellows better get going. Those grave diggers will be back in an hour to plant him again."

Colby said to Waterman: "Where are you going to do it?"

The investigator smiled a little grimly. "Right here, I guess, under the trees. That damned Hollis backed out on us." He moved over to the casket. "Ready, Doctor?" he asked Von Haupt.

The big, red-faced man nodded shortly. Colby helped them open the water-soaked casket and lift out the body of Walter Tolbert. He was in pretty fair shape, Colby thought, considering the water and the lapse of six months.

They lifted the body out of the soggy casket and laid it on a wide plank resting on two wooden platforms. A warm breeze blew across the quiet cemetery, stirring the leaves of the mammoth oaks above them. The sun filtered through the leaves and covered the group of men and the still white body with moving patches of light. Colby thought grimly: *A scene like this should have darkness and rain and the distant rumble of thunder.*

The slight man, Dr. Harrigan, removed the water-soaked clothing of the corpse—coat, trousers, neatly tied necktie, shirt. The pallid, emaciated body of Walter Tolbert lay exposed to the air of the world once more.

Von Haupt moved over to the body. He stared a second, and then his guttural voice said sharply: "Mr. Waterman! Someone has already opened this man!"

They all crowded close, Colby among them. It was true. The stitches were very plain. They extended from the lower part of the corpse's abdomen to the chest. A long, deep gash, clumsily sewed up.

George Waterman's face was expressionless. "So I see. Please proceed, Doctor."

Von Haupt took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves. He pulled on a pair of rubber gloves. Dr. Harrigan opened a black leather case and handed Von Haupt a thin, strong scalpel with a razor edge. Von Haupt grasped the instrument in a strong chubby hand and went to work.

"It's the lungs we want," Waterman said. "And the heart."

Von Haupt grunted, working swiftly.

Colby turned to look out over the cemetery. A shining black ambulance was coming up the drive. It was coming fast. Colby's eyes narrowed with interest as the ambulance slid to a dust-raising stop opposite the open grave.

A figure jumped out and moved swiftly across the grass, over the flowers, heedless of the dead beneath its feet. Over the figure's head was a burlap bag, with holes cut into it for eyes. Beneath the

hood were brown nondescript overalls. The figure looked like a Ku Kluxer, or like a visitor from Mars.

The rest became aware of the intruder, and they all turned—Von Haupt, Harrigan, Waterman, Doc Conners. The hooded figure stood silently, a big black automatic in its fist.

Waterman said in a tight voice: "What in hell do you call this?"

## CHAPTER TWO

### Mortician's Reward

THE figure advanced three steps and laid a piece of paper on the grass. Waterman moved forward, picked up the paper, and looked at it. Then he turned to the group behind him and read aloud:

"Carry the body of Walter Tolbert to the ambulance. Don't try anything, and nobody will get hurt."

Waterman looked at the silent hooded figure. "My Lord," he said. "A body snatcher, complete with mask!"

Von Haupt began to curse in his guttural voice.

Old Doc Conners said: "Well, I'll be damned."

Colby stood still, his eyes on the gun in the hooded figure's hand. Even from where he stood, he could see that it was a Colt .45. The person beneath the hood and overalls was not large, maybe five foot four or five in height.

It was very quiet in the cemetery. Then, suddenly, the quiet, serious-looking Dr. Harrigan shouted, "To hell with you!" and ran toward the hooded figure.

The big Colt barked once, and Harrigan pitched forward to the grass. Von Haupt, still cursing, ran to the form of Harrigan and turned the young doctor over. Colby saw that blood was already oozing through his trousers over his left knee. Von Haupt began to shout wildly at the figure with the gun.

Waterman looked at Colby, and Colby shrugged his shoulders helplessly. The Colt barked again, and grass and dirt spurted at Waterman's feet. The investigator's face paled a little.

Colby said: "He's got the gun—we'd better do it."

Waterman nodded grimly. He and Colby picked up the corpse of Walter Tolbert and carried it to the ambulance. The hooded figure watched them as they deposited the body in the rear of the vehicle. They stepped aside, and the figure motioned them back with the gun. Then it jumped behind the wheel of the ambulance, swung the car in a wide arc over the graves, and roared down the drive for the cemetery entrance.

Colby ran for his coupe, Waterman beside him. As he headed the car down the drive, he saw the ambulance stop for a moment at the open gate to the cemetery before it swerved out onto the county highway. Colby feed gas to the coupe, but as he passed through the gate he heard a couple of muffled explosions, and the coupe began to roll and pitch wildly.

He slammed on the brakes and got out. Two tires were flat, and Colby saw the reason. The driveway by the cemetery gate was littered with sharp inch-long tacks.

Waterman said: "Could you make out a license number?"

Colby shook his head, watching the black ambulance disappear over a hill to the east. "It was covered with grease and dust."

"That looked like Wilbur Hollis's ambulance," Waterman said. He got out of Colby's coupe and began to kick at the tacks on the drive.

"Booby trap," Colby said, remembering the months he had spent in the Medical Corps in the South Pacific. "He stopped long enough to scatter those tacks. Is there a telephone near?"

Waterman shook his head. "Not under a mile."

"Is this the only entrance to the cemetery?"

Waterman nodded silently, kicking at the tacks.

"He's long gone now," Colby said, and he turned to look back up the drive. The two doctors—Von Haupt and Conners—stood silently by the open grave looking down toward the cemetery gate. Dr. Harrigan was lying on the grass at their feet.

Waterman waved to the two men with a hopeless gesture, turned, and began to kick at the tacks again. Colby helped him. . . .

A half hour later Colby sat on a box

beneath a stunted apple tree in front of a garage in the village of Beechtree and waited for a kid in greasy overalls to bring his car in from the cemetery. George Waterman had brought them into town in his roadster.

Young Dr. Harrigan was in the local hospital. Von Haupt and Conners were drinking beer in a tavern two doors down the street from the garage. George Waterman was scurrying around the county with the local constable and the sheriff. An alert had been sent out to the state police, and by this time all the roads leading out of the county were supposed to have been blocked.

Colby leaned back against the brick wall and lit a cigarette. Suddenly he stood up and walked briskly across the square to the Hollis Funeral Home.

*The Mortician's Review* was lying on a chair by the porch railing, but Wilbur Hollis was not in sight.

Colby crossed the porch to the wide screen doors which opened into a dusky carpeted interior. A cool musty smell came out to him. He pressed a bell button, and from somewhere in the big silent house chimes sounded melodiously and discreetly. Colby waited maybe a minute before he pressed the bell button again. The chimes sounded plaintively, reproachfully, but still no one came to answer their melancholy summons.

Colby tried one of the screen doors. It was not hooked, and he stepped inside to the thick soft carpet. He stood in a wide hall lined with mirrors and straight chairs. A big room opened to his left, and another to his right; both silent and dusky, with the drapes pulled against the afternoon sun. Colby moved silently into the room to his left and stood still, looking around.

There were a couple of dozen rows of empty chairs, with a small movable pulpit sitting at one side. Colby smelled the sickly sweet odor of many flowers, and he saw basket upon basket of bright blooms banked around an ebony casket with silver handles along its sides. In the deep shadows of the corner he saw the dark outline of a body reposing in the casket's white satin nest.

Colby grimaced in distaste. To him, public funerals, with mountains of flowers and the morbidly curious mob staring and



whispering at a defenseless dead man, were barbaric, a carry-over from the jungle, a superstitious tribal rite from the Congo or Haiti. Colby thought that a man had a right to be buried decently and privately, with maybe his family and his real friends around him, but no outsiders or professional funeral-goers.

A woman coughed politely, discreetly, behind him. He turned. She was young, maybe twenty-five, with a neat, short figure, clad in sober black with white lace at her throat. Her hair was the color of Lake Erie sand, and it was pulled back tightly from her face. Her features were plain, without make-up, but her figure, even in the somber black, was rounded and full in the right places.

She said in a half whisper, a professional expression of pity on her face: "Are you a relative of the deceased?"

"No, ma'am," Colby said, and he was irritated to realize that he, too, spoke in a hoarse whisper. "I'm looking for Wilbur—Mr. Hollis."

"I'm Miss Anders, Mr. Hollis' assistant," the girl said. "He's probably in his work room in the basement, cleaning up. I didn't know that he had finished with poor Mr. Murdock." She moved on tip-toe toward the casket, her hands clasped in front of her. "Mr. Hollis does such beautiful work," she said softly, and she leaned over the casket.

Colby stirred restlessly, and then suddenly he stiffened, his spine crawling.

**M**ISS ANDERS was screaming in a very indiscreet manner. The shrill vibrations of her voice rocked through the silent house. She was biting the back of one hand, and her eyes looked like ping-pong balls. She began to sway. Colby caught her as she fell.

Cursing under his breath, he carried her to a divan in the room on the other side of the hall. He laid her down, and his swift, skillful fingers found the pulse in her wrist. It was strong, and he let her lie. He went back into the room where the casket lay. He looked down at the still body, and his lips tightened a little.

Wilbur Hollis, mortician, stared up at him with unseeing, glazed eyes. His mouth was open a little, and the edges of his teeth showed through, like the teeth

of a dog trying to make up its mind to snarl. The bright steel handle of a scalpel protruded from his chest. There wasn't much blood.

Colby placed the back of one hand against the undertaker's cheek. The flesh was cool, but not cold. Colby decided that he hadn't been dead very long—maybe less than an hour.

He turned and crossed the hall to the girl on the divan. She was stirring a little and making small whimpering sounds.

Colby shook her by the shoulder, and she opened her eyes. She looked up at him, and he could see the beginning of another scream behind her eyes. He shook her again. "Listen," he said. "Did you see or hear anything?"

A little intelligence came into her eyes, and she moved her head slowly from side to side. "No. I—I was down at the drug store. I—I just came back. . . ."

"Was Wilbur here when you left?"

"Yes. Downstairs, fixing Mr. Murdock. I heard him down there, and I called to him when I left—told him where I was going. . . ."

Colby pointed out at the hall. "Basement that way?"

She nodded silently, watching him with big eyes.

"Stay here," Colby told her. "Don't move."

He went to the end of the hall, opened a heavy metal door and descended wide, shallow cement steps. He knew from the equipment in the big white-painted room that this was where Wilbur Hollis had done his embalming. On a white-enamelled table there was the naked corpse of a thin, angular man. Mr. Murdock, Colby thought grimly.

He looked slowly around the room. There was a scraping sound, like a foot on cement, and a man appeared in the shadows of an alcove beyond the corpse. For half a second, Colby's body went cold.

George Waterman said: "Did you have the same idea I did, Doctor?"

"About what?" Colby said.

The state investigator came forward, around the body on the table, and his bright black eyes looked quickly around the room. "About Hollis," he said. "He embalmed Tolbert, and he must have done that crude post mortem job. I got to won-

dering why he would bother, and I came here to look around a little. I heard you coming down the steps, and ducked until I knew who it was."

Colby nodded, his eyes on Waterman. "Yes, I wondered, too, when I saw the incision in Tolbert. I was going to ask Wilbur about it—but I got here a little too late."

Waterman said: "Late? Did Wilbur go away?"

"He's gone," Colby said. "Forever." He jerked his head at the dead man on the white table. "I found Wilbur upstairs—in the casket intended for this man. Stabbed to death."

Waterman ran a hand over his face. "Say that again," he said.

Colby told him again, and started up the steps. "Come on," he said.

Waterman followed him silently.

Miss Anders was talking to someone in the hall. Colby saw that it was a tall, skinny woman in a print dress and black straw hat decorated with birds and cherries. The woman was trying to peer over Miss Anders' shoulder at the casket in the room beyond.

The girl was saying in a desperate voice: "I'm sorry, Mrs. Gideon, but Mr. Murdock isn't quite ready yet. Maybe if you come back this evening. . . ."

The skinny woman sniffed loudly. "Nonsense. Homer Murdock is laid out right there, and I can see him. I came to town on purpose to pay my respects to Homer's remains, and I'm not leaving until I see him. Why, I even sent flowers—that big basket of yellow roses mixed with daisies at the head of the coffin. I guess I got a right to look at poor Homer. I—"

Miss Anders was wringing her hands and moving quickly from side to side to keep Mrs. Gideon from entering the room. Colby stepped up quickly and took the woman by the arm.

"I'm sorry, Madam," he said firmly, leading her toward the door, "but we have just learned that Mr. Murdock died of leprosy."

Mrs. Gideon gasped, gave him a look of horror, and darted for the door. The screen door slammed behind her, and Colby saw her walking swiftly down the walk toward the square.

Miss Anders leaned against the wall. George Waterman walked over to the casket. Colby found the telephone, and called the sheriff's office. He told the deputy who answered to call the sheriff in from the chase for the renegade ambulance and send him over to the Hollis Funeral Home in Beechtree. The deputy said he would try, but the sheriff was the-hell-and-gone all over the country.

"You better find him," Colby said. "Wilbur Hollis has been murdered." The deputy began to sputter, and Colby hung up.

He said to Miss Anders: "Are you all right now?"

She nodded. "I—I guess so."

"Good. Lock all the doors, and don't let anyone in. The sheriff will be here shortly. Tell him I'll be back."

"You mean I'm to wait—in *here*?"

"Sure. You're an undertaker's assistant. A little thing like a dead man shouldn't bother you."

"But it's *Wilbur*!"

"All right," Colby said. "Wait on the porch." He jerked his head at George Waterman, who had been standing silently by. "Come on."

Waterman didn't move. "Where to?" he asked.

"I'll tell you on the way."

Waterman shrugged, and followed Colby out to the square and across to the garage. Colby's coupe was ready. Waterman got in beside him, and he drove around the square and headed north, toward the lake. They passed the Hollis Funeral Home and Miss Anders waved a hand a little uncertainly at them from her lonely chair on the porch.

Waterman said: "I think we should have stayed there—at least until the law showed up."

"Relax," Colby told him. "We're doing the law's work now. I get these spells every once in a while—gives me a change from catching babies and peddling pills. Do you have a gun?"

Waterman looked startled. "Yes. Why?"

Colby sighed. "We might need one." They cleared the village limits, and Colby held the coupe at sixty miles an hour. "Mrs. Tolbert is a good-looking woman," he said.

"Yes," Waterman said shortly. "Very." "Young," Colby said. "And married to a man with a lung ailment."

Waterman said carelessly: "I meet a lot of good-looking widows in my business."

"Are you married?" Colby asked him.

Waterman shook his head and laughed shortly. "Where in hell are we going?" he asked.

"To Mrs. Tolbert's summer cottage, on the lake," Colby said. "Where her husband died."

George Waterman hunched down in the seat and didn't say anything.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Doc Turns Dick

TWENTY minutes later, Colby stopped by a mail box at the end of the lane leading to the lake. Black letters on the mailbox read: *W. H. Tolbert*. Colby wheeled the coupe down a stone-covered lane through stunted pine woods and came to a stop in a clearing on a bluff overlooking the lake.

In the middle of the clearing was a white one story cottage with screened porches on two sides. The lake slapped lazily on the beach fifty yards away. When Colby turned off the motor, he heard the drone of crickets in the afternoon stillness of the woods. George Waterman sat up in the seat and looked around.

"Nice spot for a murder," he said.

Colby looked quickly toward him. "Murder?"

Waterman nodded grimly. "That's why I've been pushing this autopsy. I may as well tell you this: Wilbur Hollis was sweet on Mrs. Tolbert—I don't know if she encouraged him or not—and Tolbert carried a personal insurance policy worth forty-thousand dollars to his wife when he died. I also happen to know that Hollis' funeral home, his hearse and his ambulance were mortgaged to the hilt."

Colby nodded slowly. "And so Hollis put poison in Tolbert's cocktail, got the job of burying him, as he knew he would, and then removed the stomach and intestines in case they dug him up later and checked for poison. Is that it?"

Waterman lit a cigarette and looked out

over the lake. "That's the way I figure it. And when Hollis knew we were going to do the autopsy, he cooked up a flimsy excuse for not doing it in his place—and then hired somebody to swipe the body so that we wouldn't discover that he had already opened Tolbert up."

Colby shook his head. "It doesn't jell. Where does Jarrett fit in? He's the one who signed Tolbert's death certificate. Heart attack, he said."

Waterman said softly: "Money—or the promise of money—can do a lot. Hollis probably bought him off."

"Jarrett is a doctor," Colby said. Remembering his medical school days, he added: "*I swear by Apollo, Physician by Asclepius, by Health, by Panacea, and by all the gods and goddesses . . . that I will carry out, according to my ability and judgment, this oath. . . .*"

He paused and turned to Waterman. "Do you know what that is?"

Waterman said bitterly: "Sure, I know what it is. I once studied medicine myself, but I flunked in anatomy. It's the beginning of the Oath of Hippocrates, the first real doctor of medicine. But Jarrett probably needed money, like all of us, and if he said a man died of a heart attack, that's what he died of. He had no reason to question it, and what could he lose?"

A small, cold feeling started at the base of Colby's neck and tingled along his jaws. He said carefully: "Mrs. Tolbert is the beneficiary of Tolbert's insurance?"

"Yes," Waterman said. His face was expressionless.

"And Wilbur Hollis is dead," Colby said. He paused, and then he added: "Did you notice the small stature of the masked person who shanghied Tolbert's body?"

Waterman's bright black eyes looked steadily at Colby. "Let's leave Mrs. Tolbert's name out of this, shall we, Doctor?" he said quietly.

Colby didn't answer him. Abruptly he opened the door of his coupe and got out. Waterman followed him silently. They walked over the well-kept lawn and around the cottage until they had a clear view of the lake and the rocky beach below them.

In the middle of the grassy slope, half-way to the beach, were two people. They

were sitting side by side in canvas chairs. On the grass between them the sun glinted on the moisture-beaded surface of a silver cocktail shaker. A man and a girl, with glasses in their hands.

Colby and Waterman stopped and looked. Waterman's thin dark face was grim, his eyes without expression—flat and cold. He looked at the laughing couple, and suddenly flicked his cigarette viciously across the grass.

Colby said loudly: "Hello, there."

The couple turned their heads suddenly, and the man got to his feet. Colby walked toward them, aware of Waterman following behind him. He stopped by the canvas chairs.

Dr. Alvin Jarrett nodded and smiled: "Hello, Doctor."

Marjorie Tolbert made a pretty picture in the afternoon sunlight. She was wearing a thin white sweater and brief white shorts. Her long yellow hair had a sparkling glint to it, and her long slender legs looked pale gold in the sun. She looked up at Colby, smiled and drained her drink, setting down her glass. "How nice," she said. "Dr. Colby—and Mr. Waterman."

Jarrett was wearing a pale blue, open-necked shirt and gray flannel slacks. His mustache glinted red in the sun as he smiled at Colby. "We meet again, Doctor. Apparently Wednesday is your day off, too."

Colby nodded. He had a tight feeling in his throat, and it annoyed him. *After all*, he thought, *what the hell business is this of mine?* George Waterman stood woodenly beside him.

Dr. Jarrett laughed a little uncertainly. He stooped down and picked up the cocktail shaker. "Well," he said jovially, "let's all have a drink. I feel like celebrating. Marjorie—Mrs. Tolbert—has just consented to be my wife."

He grinned down at the girl and rattled the ice in the shaker.

"Congratulations," Colby said.

George Waterman laughed shortly and turned to look out over the lake.

Marjorie Tolbert flushed a little and looked down at the empty glass on the tray. Jarrett filled her glass, and she sipped at it silently.

Jarrett, still smiling, leaned down and patted her shoulder. He looked up at Col-

by. "I suppose the—ah—autopsy is finished?"

Colby shook his head. "No. We had a little trouble. Somebody came along and ran off with Mr. Tolbert's body."

Dr. Jarrett's tanned face was suddenly serious. "No kidding? Who in hell? Did you have the body in Wilbur Hollis' place?"

Marjorie Tolbert sat very still. She gripped her glass tightly in both hands.

Colby said: "Hollis changed his mind. He wouldn't let them bring the body into his place." He paused and stepped clear of the three of them—Jarrett, Marjorie Tolbert, George Waterman. Then he said: "Wilbur Hollis is dead. Somebody murdered him and put his body in one of his own caskets."

Nothing very dramatic happened. George Waterman just stood silently, a faint sneer on his face. Marjorie Tolbert sat stiffly, her cheeks like paper. Only Dr. Alvin Jarrett moved. He ran a hand through his hair and smiled grimly.

"No use pretending I'm sorry," Jarrett said. "I never liked the pious so-and-so. Did some woman's husband finally get wise and put a bullet into him?"

The crickets droned in the trees around them, and the lake pounded gently on the beach below. Colby looked at them.

"I DON'T know," he said in a quiet voice, "but I think that Walter Tolbert was murdered. Poisoned, with arsenic, probably, or cyanide—something which acts fast. Somebody put it in his cocktail on the day he died. You, Doctor Jarrett, put it down as a heart attack. Maybe you had no reason to think otherwise."

"Anyhow, Walter Tolbert died. Six months later the slow cogs of the State Insurance Commission revolved to the case—lung disability, but death due to coronary thrombosis. It didn't jibe. It wasn't clear-cut like the State likes it. So they arranged an autopsy. All routine, apparently, under the circumstances."

"Upon exhuming Walter Tolbert's body, it was found that a crude post mortem examination had already been made upon him, presumably by Wilbur Hollis, at the time he embalmed Tolbert. And then a masked person took the body

## Doctor of Doom

away at the point of a gun, and Wilbur Hollis was found murdered in a casket. The body of Walter Tolbert is still missing."

Colby stopped talking and lit a cigarette. "Anybody got any suggestions?" he asked.

George Waterman spoke first. "I think we're wasting time, Doctor. I—"

Doctor Jarrett broke in. "What is this?" he said plaintively. "I treated Walter Tolbert for years. I know what he died of. And as for Wilbur Hollis, I admit I didn't like him, but I wouldn't stab him to death." He reached down again and patted Marjorie's shoulder. "I'm sorry you have to listen to this, darling," he said.

She didn't answer him. Her eyes were veiled, and it seemed to Colby that her slender body was trembling a little.

Colby made up his mind, and turned suddenly to George Waterman. "Give me your gun," he said.

Waterman stood very still and looked at Colby. "Why?"

All three of them were watching Colby silently, and he felt more lonely than ever. If he was wrong. . . .

And then Waterman took a little flat automatic from an inside coat pocket and handed it to Colby. "It's your show, Doctor," he said.

Colby took a deep breath and tried to keep his hand from shaking as he clicked open the breech of the gun and saw that it was loaded. He held the gun at his side and said to Waterman, "Go into the cottage and call the sheriff. Tell him that we have the murderer of Walter Tolbert and Wilbur Hollis. Tell him where we are—and tell him to hurry."

Waterman didn't move. He said in a ragged voice: "How do you figure that, Doctor?"

"Damn it," Colby said harshly. "You heard what Jarrett said. How would he know that Hollis had been stabbed to death—if he hadn't stabbed Hollis himself?"

"Jarrett's in love with Mrs. Tolbert—and with the money she got when her husband died. He put the poison in Tolbert's drink, and then signed the death certificate as a heart attack. He was Tol-

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## Robert Martin

bert's regular physician, and he knew that his statement of the cause of death would be accepted. But Wilbur Hollis, who also had his eye on Mrs. Tolbert, was suspicious, and so he did an autopsy on Tolbert and found evidence of poison. Then he blackmailed Jarrett to keep it quiet.

"But when the State wanted an autopsy, Hollis knew that they would discover that he had already examined Tolbert, and so he told Jarrett that he was going to tell the police about what he had found—to protect himself. Jarrett couldn't have that, and so he killed Hollis with one of Hollis' own scalpels and laid him out in a casket ready for a funeral to delay discovery for a while. Then he took Hollis' ambulance, went to the cemetery and kidnapped Tolbert's body to keep the State from finding out that Tolbert had been poisoned. . . . Where did you hide the ambulance, Jarrett?"

"Doctor Jarrett," Jarrett snapped. "Doctor, hell," Colby said grimly. "Doctor of death, maybe. You're a disgrace to the profession." He jerked his head at Waterman. "Call the sheriff. Step on it."

Waterman moved swiftly across the lawn toward the cottage. Marjorie Tolbert covered her face with her hands. Colby put a hand on her shoulder.

"I'm sorry," he said.

Suddenly Jarrett moved. He jumped for Colby, and his fist found the doctor's jaw. Colby's head rocked and sang with the impact of the blow. He reeled backward and fell sprawling on the grass. He heard Marjorie Tolbert scream, and he caught a glimpse of her slender body leaping from the chair. And then Jarrett was upon him.

Fists thudded into his face. Waterman's gun flew from his hand and skidded across the grass. He saw Jarrett leap for the gun, his hand reaching for it like a claw, and in the same blurred instant he saw the girl leap upon Jarrett, saw her fists beating on the back of his head.

Jarrett stumbled, and Colby rolled across the grass. As his fingers closed over the gun, he heard a sharp slapping sound and saw Jarrett's fist strike the girl's face. She sank to the ground, and Jarrett bolted toward the beach, headed

## Doctor of Doom

for any protecting out-cropping of rock. Colby rolled over on his stomach and steadied the gun. He took a deep breath and held it, then squeezed the trigger slowly and carefully. Jarrett pitched forward and rolled over and over down the slope, like a jack-rabbit full of buckshot.

Colby got to his feet, rubbed a hand over his aching jaw, and moved over to Marjorie Tolbert. He picked her up and carried her to the canvas chair. Her lip was cut, and blood was running down over her chin. Colby dabbed at the cut with a handkerchief. She opened her eyes and looked up at him.

"Doctor Jarrett was so kind," she said in a faint voice. "And he said he loved me. After Walter died, I was lonesome. . . I—I really didn't object to the autopsy—nothing can hurt Walter any more—but when I told Alvin, he advised against it and persuaded me to see you. . ."

"Sure," Colby said. "Sure."

George Waterman came running out of the cottage. He stopped by the girl's chair and looked down at her. Then his glance swung from the girl, to Colby, to the form of Jarrett on the beach, and back to the girl again.

Colby said: "She helped me when I needed help. Stay with her while I look at Jarrett."

The hard lines in Waterman's dark face softened a little. He spoke to Colby, but his eyes were still on the girl. "A pleasure," he said.

Colby got his bag from his coupe and moved down the beach to Jarrett. The wounded man glared up at him with hate and pain in his eyes.

Colby's jaw still ached where Jarrett's fist had struck him. He fingered his jaw carefully and said to Jarrett: "I asked you before—where did you hide the ambulance with Tolbert's body?"

Jarrett spoke from between his teeth. "In the woods, behind the cottage. Damn you, get to work on my hip!"

Colby sighed, opened his bag, and knelt down beside him. Gently he began to loosen the blood-soaked clothing. As he worked he was aware of the hate in Jarrett's eyes, and he thought grimly:

*I swear by Apollo. . .*

**THE END**

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## Russell Branch

(Continued from page 78)

And what can you do with a woman like that?

We found the telephone on a table next to the couch in the living room. But there was also a letter from a guy named Peter Duncan lying on that couch, and she spotted it there while I was using the phone.

I finished my call and then I listened to a kid yelling out on the street, and a clock ticking away somewhere in the hall, and a faucet dripping heavily in the kitchen. . . .

When she finally turned around her face was filled with weariness, but her eyes were dry and the chin was high.

"He couldn't take it," she said in a flat, emotionless voice. "He saw one of the old gang on the street. He knew they were still after him, he was still afraid of the police . . . and he quit."

She paused and looked at the letter again in her trembling hand. "There's some jive talk here that I think means the list is hidden in his trumpet, but that doesn't matter now. What matters is, he couldn't go through with it himself."

She looked at me. "Did you ever love anyone?"

"Once," I said carefully.

I don't believe she heard me. Her eyes were far away in the past. "I fell in love once, too. With a nice boy and a silver horn. But not with this." She shook the letter clenched tightly in her fist. "Not with this."

The tears came then, and I put my arms around her just because I understood how she felt. We were still standing there, like two lost kids in the middle of a strange, death-filled house, when the sirens moaned to a stop outside.

"I've got troubles too, Judy," I told her softly. "More troubles than you know, and it's going to take time to work them out. But there's always tomorrow, isn't there?"

She nodded and smiled at me through tear-stained eyes. "I—it's funny, but I don't even know your name."

"Miles," I said firmly. "Sanford H. Miles." Then I went to the door to greet the police.

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## Pll Bet Your Life!

(Continued from page 58)

Cassidy stood staring, without a ready reply. Mr. Maddox was not smiling as he said:

"Nick Lang was evidently sure he could win the same way today. Maybe he can win. But not with a whip, Cassidy. No one will ever put a whip on that horse again."

Cassidy stood in silence. Mr. Maddox' chuckle spread, shaking his vast middle. "You were the one who caught old Buck Taylor at it. It was under your nose all the time. And you ran around yelling crook like a dumb cop when it was only soft-hearted Joe Maddox."

The crowd roar was rising about them. Cassidy looked at the track as horses flashed by in a driving finish. Tassello was running well, a stout fifth, and losing ground.

Mr. Maddox tore up the fifty-dollar win ticket and let the pieces fall. Cassidy's glance followed them down. Slowly Cassidy took two fifty-dollar win tickets from his coat pocket and tore them also and let them drop.

"I thought it was a sure thing, with the wise money riding and even you betting," Cassidy admitted painfully.

Mr. Maddox put a comforting hand to Cassidy's arm. "Peanut money, pal: Think of the real dough Nick Lang and Louie Haggett lost. They were big suckers. You were only a little sucker."

"Okay, Joe, rub it in." Cassidy's face grew redder as Mr. Maddox stood shaking with rising enjoyment. "Do you have to laugh like a fat hyena?" Cassidy demanded.

"I'm thinking of the loveliest señorita in Mexico, and phony gold mines, and four thousand dollars minus four thousand dollars which two ever-loving hearts will use for their honeymoon."

"You're crazy!"

"I know two love birds who will be crazy when the truth hits them," Mr. Maddox said, shaking at the thought.

"I don't get it, Joe."

"Why should you?" said Mr. Maddox. He pointed to the torn tickets Cassidy had dropped. "You've already got yours—Sucker."

THE END



## THE WESTERNER 'TIE HOLDER

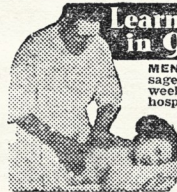
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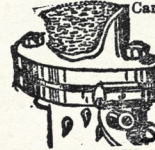
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**Ready for the Rackets**

(Continued from page 81)

**The Farmer Takes the Rent**

Dear Sir:

The jolly, tanned old farmer came to Lincoln to purchase an apartment house. He had sale papers showing that he had recently sold his large cattle farm and said he wanted to move to town and retire. He looked like a farmer, and he talked like a farmer.

In a few days he found a suitable brick structure and bought it. Because his farm-sale money hadn't had time to clear the banks yet, he paid for the property with a post-dated check.

Then he leased all the apartments to housing-shortage victims who were so desperate for a place to live that they were willing to pay several months in advance.

You guessed it! The check bounced. But by that time the bird had flown—and with many citizens' rent money.

The slick swindler was caught in Iowa, but whether or not our renters can get their money back is a question.

So take warning! Beware of strangers. Remember the old saying: "All strangers are not crooks, but most crooks are strangers."

James D. Callahan,  
Lincoln, Nebraska

**Sentimental Swindle**

Dear Sir:

This is a variation of the photographic swindle practiced on ex-GIs now growing sentimental over past days of glory and action. For sums ranging from two to four dollars (send no money, just pay the postman four bucks and a few cents postage, or send money and we pre-pay all postage), you are offered a photograph showing your outfit or ship in action.

A friend of mine asked for a picture of the transport on which he rode across. In a couple of months he received a badly made enlargement of a ship at dock. The only point of similarity between it and the original transport was the ship's name printed in white ink across the bow. It was not even a photograph of the same class of ship.

H. A.  
Bartlesville, Okla.

**Clipped by Curiosity**

Dear Sir:

I received a letter from California telling me there was an item in the newspaper about me, and if I would mail one dollar, this party would send me the clipping. I was very curious as to what could be in the newspaper there about me, so I mailed the money.

In a few days the clipping came. It was taken out of our own local newspaper here in Omaha.

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She was Rouge, the English noblewoman turned buccaneer—Rouge of the sea-green eyes and

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