



OCT.

15¢ DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

COMBINED WITH FLYNN'S DETECTIVE FICTION

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WILLIAMS
COOKS A GOOSE**
by CARROLL
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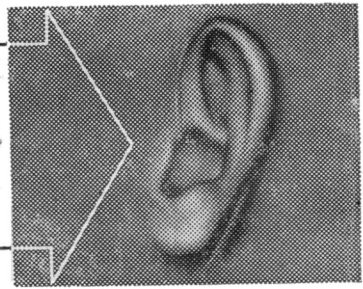
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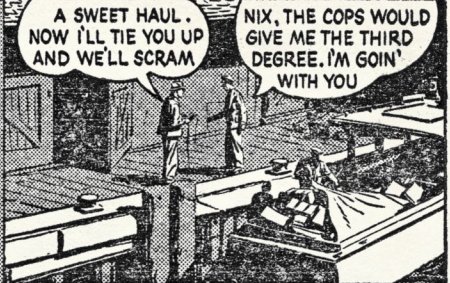
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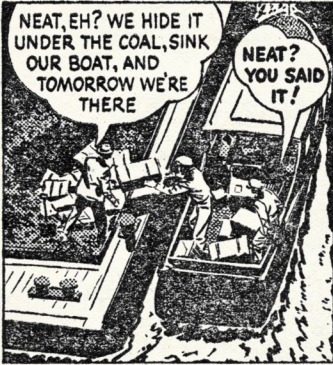
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BERT OUTSMARTS RIVER PIRATES WHEN...

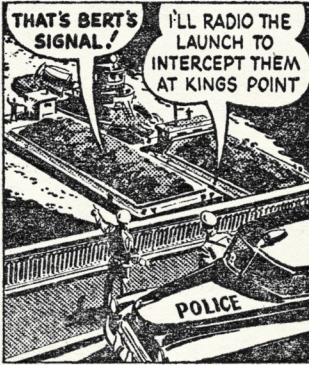


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POLICE



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SO YOU'RE A COPPER!



BIG STUFF, BERT. THE OLD MAN HIMSELF IS ON THE WAY UP

WOW! I'D BETTER GET RID OF MY COAL DUST AND WHISKERS



BLADE? TRY A THIN GILLETTE



SAY, THIS IS THE BLADE I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR! WHAT A SWELL, SMOOTH SHAVE!

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Vol. 61

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Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

Published monthly by Popular Publications, Inc., 1125 E. Valle Ave., Kokomo, Indiana. 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 Kokomo, Indiana, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1949, 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. Printed in the U.S.A.

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A Department

Dear Detective Fans:

More often than not—and much too often—we hear of people being taken in by the same old swindles, dressed up in a slightly new coat. Then we realize that there are certain time-tested and sucker-tested ruses that the petty chiselers like to use and re-use. Unless you readers are aware of these old-hat routines that still pay off to the slick characters, these cheap chiselers will make a dupe out of you.

That's why in these columns we try to expose the many rackets you might come up against and be fooled by. As always, the best safeguard against swindlers is to know—beforehand—what they are up to. And that's how we aim to help you, for by reading this column every month, you will be "Ready For The Rackets."

Also, besides helping you keep your coffers full—we can help you fill them. It's simple. All you have to do is write us when you come up against any rackets that con men might try to pull on you. We'll warn others by printing your experience—and pay you \$5.00 for every letter used. Of course, we'll withhold your name if you wish.

However, no letters will be returned, unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. You'll easily understand that because of the press of mail in the office, we can't enter into correspondence regarding your letters.

Be sure to address all letters to The Rackets Editor, care of DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.

And now, let's see what rackets to beware:

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While in college, I worked part time in a shoe store. It was a small store, and the only other employee besides myself was the manager. Every afternoon the manager would leave me alone in the store for fifteen or twenty minutes while he banked the day's receipts.

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

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POPULAR FILMS

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Ted Palmer Picks:

For Mystery—"The Big Steal" with Robert Mitchum, Jane Greer and William Bendix (RKO).



When a \$300,000 Army payroll is stolen, Lt. Duke Halliday (Robert Mitchum) and Joan Grahame (Jane Greer) start across Mexico by car in pursuit of the thief. They, in turn, are pursued by Captain Vincent Blake (William Bendix) who has accused Duke of taking the money. As the chase progresses, the tension continues to mount until the swift, surprise ending. *The plot of the picture gets jumbled, but the thrill-a-minute pace will hold you in your seat.*

• • •

For Comedy-Romance—"The Lady Takes A Sailor" with Jane Wyman, Dennis Morgan, Eve Arden, Robert Douglas and Alyn Joslyn (Warner Bros.).



The lady (Jane Wyman) is president of a national research institute, impeccable, honest and engaged to a stuffy Harvard lawyer (Alyn Joslyn). People begin to doubt her integrity, however, when she returns from a sailboat trip and says that she has ridden with "Davey Jones" in a strange, underwater craft which was stalled by an octopus. Trying to straighten it out by proving that real-life Bill Craig (Dennis Morgan) was the mysterious "Davey" and that his craft was a new Navy underwater tank, is an hilarious task. *This is a daffy picture that will give you a full evening of laughter.*

• • •

For Drama—"The Great Gatsby" with Alan Ladd, Betty Field, MacDonald Carey, Ruth Hussey, Barry Sullivan, Howard Da Silva and Shelley Winters (Paramount).



Based on F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic about the roaring '20s, this film tells the tragic story of Jay Gatsby (Alan Ladd), who

became a bootlegger because he thought money could buy everything—even a rich man's wife. In the course of the story, Gatsby tries to crash Long Island society but finds it as false in its way of life as he is in his. In the end, awake at last to his empty daydreams, Gatsby is murdered for a crime he didn't commit. *Spottily played, this film claims its chief interest as a portrait of a wild and dizzy by-gone era.*

• • •

For Adventure—"Slattery's Hurricane" with



Richard Widmark, Linda Darnell, Veronica Lake and John Russell (20th Century-Fox).

Ex-Navy pilot, Will Slattery (Richard Widmark), now a chauffeur pilot for an importer, meets his wartime buddy, Felix Hobson (John Russell), who is hunting hurricanes for the Navy. He discovers that his one-time sweetheart, Aggie (Linda Darnell), is now Mrs. Hobson. The importer's secretary, Dolores (Veronica Lake), who is in love with Slattery, realizes that he is still interested in Aggie and disappears. While looking for Dolores and straightening out the situation between Aggie, Hobson and himself, Slattery finds that he is unwittingly involved in the narcotics smuggling ring. He finally makes amends by taking Hobson's place on a dangerous mission to locate a particularly vicious storm. *This is an exciting look into the lives of U. S. Navy hurricane hunters.*

• • •

For A Western—"Calamity Jane and Sam



Bass" with Yvonne De Carlo and Howard Duff (Universal-International). Technicolor.

Sam Bass (Howard Duff) had never fired a gun before he came to Denton, Texas. He learns fast, though, when the town banker has his horse poisoned prior to the big race of the year. Turned outlaw to recover money from the banker which is rightfully his, Bass takes to the hills with the assistance of Calamity Jane (Yvonne De Carlo). Sam's true love, Kathy Egan, convinces Sam that he should give himself up. When it looks like the jury for his trial will be packed against him by the banker, Sam escapes again with Calamity Jane's help. There's a showdown battle and Sam is fatally wounded. When he asks to be taken to Kathy, Calamity Jane realizes that Sam Bass was never for her. *There's enough action, color and different twists to make this a show that Western fans will want to see.*

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*Boiling mad over a lass who was dead,
Race Williams faced her slayer . . .
with a faded photo—and an empty gun.*



RACE WILLIAMS COOKS A GOOSE

By CARROLL JOHN DALY



Marco leaned far over the desk and pointed his gun.

CHAPTER ONE

Photo-Finish Lizzie

THE woman was dead. Someone had put a wire around her neck and twisted it tight. She lay there by the coach, her eyes protruding and her lips swollen. One leg was twisted under

her and the mend in a well-worn stocking showed plainly. Her clothes were awry and her gray hair pulled down over her forehead.

Nothing sensational for the papers. A murder. Yet, somehow to me the most bitter I had ever seen, for the woman had been my client. There was the name on the door of the apartment, as drab as

the three rooms she occupied. Simply—Lizzie Dell.

I looked the place over before calling the police. It didn't look as if the killer wanted anything he could carry away with him. Rather something he could leave behind with the dead woman. Silence.

There was one touch of the personal on the bureau in her bedroom. A worn photograph. Third grade, Public School 0023, 1931. A bunch of kids and the teacher at the desk before them. A woman who might have been Lizzie Dell, or a million other women for that matter. The years had not been kind to the dead woman. I put the picture in my pocket, went into the main hall and down the three flights of stairs to the phone, and called the police.

Sergeant O'Rouke from homicide arrived a few minutes after the squad car. After that, the experts from the department.

"Client eh?" O'Rouke shook his head and ordered another cup of coffee in the little lunchroom down the street. "Didn't look like she could afford your rates. Not holding out, Race?"

"Nothing to hold out," I told him bitterly. "She came to me with a wild story, O'Rouke, and a check I haven't cashed—because I didn't think it would be good. She walked into my office three days ago. Laid a check for a hundred bucks on the desk. Flattered me to the skies about my being afraid of nothing.

"She wanted to be my client so she could tell someone she was my client. She said she wanted to keep this someone in line by threatening to tell me something unless he 'relinquished his evil desire' to do something. I warned her of her danger. She shook her head and said this person never would find her. But he did."

"How did you happen to come to her place tonight?" O'Rouke wanted to know.

I shrugged. "My boy, little Jerry, was in the outer office that afternoon. I gave him the buzz and he tailed her. Tonight I was in the neighborhood and dropped in. A hunch."

"Huh." O'Rouke shook his gray head. "This is Wednesday. She came to see you on Monday. The M.E., Doc Steel says she's been dead for—" he paused and his lips moved as he counted to himself—

"she got it sometime Monday night." With a harsh sort of chuckle, "This guy, whoever he was, didn't scare much when she threatened him with you."

"Don't rub it in. I did everything to get his name from her. But I thought she had a screw loose." I took out my wallet and showed the check to him. "I bet it was good."

"Maybe," O'Rouke agreed. "But it won't be much good to you now she's dead."

"Nor to the lad who killed her. I'm going to get him, O'Rouke. She knew something and had to die."

"It isn't that easy," O'Rouke said. "She knew something—yet wasn't the type to share any great secret. My guess is she saw something by accident, an innocent bystander. She wasn't sure what to do and waited too long. We'll go back over crimes of murder committed in the last couple of weeks and see if she could fit in."

"No," I said. "It was something definite. No accident. She was very earnest, very sure of something."

"You thought she had hallucinations." "The wire around her neck," I told him, "is no hallucination."

"She was a rabbit." O'Rouke shrugged his shoulders. "Too frightened to talk, and too frightened not to talk. The morgue gets them before they can make up their minds." He put a hand on my shoulder. "Don't take it so hard, boy. We'll put a name on her and give you her history by noon tomorrow. . . ."

They didn't put a name on her—except the same one, Lizzie Dell. No one identified her. They tried tracing her back and the trail went cold. Just Lizzie Dell. One of thousands of lonely, unknown women who sewed a little here, scrubbed a little there, and somehow stayed alive in a great heartless city. Unwanted and unknown. I never felt so bad about anything in my life.

HOWEVER, those cops didn't have the one clue I had. The picture. I didn't have much trouble in tracing back Lizzie Dell. She had been Elizabeth Delton—third grade teacher in public school 0023, until she simply faded out of the picture about eleven or twelve years back.

All who remembered Elizabeth Delton had good words for her. A real guide to youth. No one could put a finger on exactly what she had accomplished—simply that she was always helping someone.

I gave O'Rourke the dope on the identification without mentioning the picture, and he gave me a bit of news.

"The Old Man," he said, "has offered to give the woman decent burial."

By the Old Man, O'Rourke meant J. Farrell O'Neil. The man behind about everything on the East Side. Lately he had been getting his name mixed up with rackets which he had never been a part of for at least thirty years. The Old Man hadn't risen to notoriety in the city and then become the power behind things. He had started out behind things and never fully emerged into the open.

He was the last of the old-time political influences. If he copped a few hundred thousand dollars on a city building contract, he gave away about as much to the poor of the city, or added a wing to some hospital. If it was whispered that he had broken more than one man who had questioned his rule, it was openly shouted that he had saved thousands of others. If you got in to see the Old Man with a hard-luck story—it was a hard-luck story no longer. There wasn't a widow or an orphan in his district who ever needed a pair of shoes or went to bed hungry.

O'Rourke explained, "It used to be nothing for the Old Man to do something like that, Race—but lately it's been different with him."

"I know." I had always liked the Old Man. "They say he's been preying on the small business man lately. I hear he's been slowly going to pieces."

"No, no." O'Rourke was thoughtful. "It's been five years now since he took in that cheap killer, Eddie Marco. Sort of wanted to use him to handle the rough element. Now Eddie seems to have control. Some say he's got the Old Man by the ear. Others say the Old Man went hard, and is using Eddie as an excuse. Whatever it is, Eddie Marco is a power today, a real menace."

"Sure." I had heard, but never had anything to do with Eddie Marco. "If you see the Old Man now, it's clear things

through Eddie. Eddie's supposed to be engaged to the Old Man's daughter."

"I've heard that." O'Rourke nodded indifferently. "That's not the point. The point is that the Old Man's daughter, Yola O'Neil, walked into the morgue and took a look at Lizzie Dell."

"Identified her?"

"No, simply took a look at her. Then the Old Man came across with the burial offer. You might try and connect the Old Man up with Elizabeth Delton." Which meant that as a private investigator, it might be better for me than for O'Rourke to step on the Old Man's toes.

That afternoon I made a call on Yola O'Neil. . . .

The Old Man's house had stood for years in a poor section. Then enterprising real estate men discovered it. There was a good view of the river, so they built apartments taller and taller so the tenants could see farther and farther out over the river. But the Old Man hung on to his house. It was remodeled if not entirely rebuilt, and though a bit incongruous among the towering apartments of wealth, not exactly an eyesore.

Yola O'Neil was no eyesore either. She didn't need her Old Man's money, or his influence, to make her stand out. She was fairly tall and not too slim, and her hair was blonde. Her eyes were green, green and blue. I couldn't figure out the changing colors. Just as I thought I had—she went the wrong color on my figuring, and that sort of distracted me from the woman herself.

Beauty and brains. No doubt about that.

She knew who I was and took me into the library, and of all things didn't ask me to have a drink. I was watching her eyes change and came to it rather abruptly.

I asked, "Did you know Elizabeth Delton? The woman was murdered under the name of Lizzie Dell."

She smiled pleasantly and let the blue go to green, and asked me to sit down. Then she said:

"I know you are a detective, Mr. Williams. A very good one too. I presume you are investigating her murder. Tell me about it."

All right. I told her brutally enough to make her squirm a little and chase the

smile off her face. She cleared her throat before she spoke.

"I guess I asked for it," she said, very seriously. "No—I didn't know her."

"You went to the morgue the other day, and recognized her."

"I went to the morgue to see if I would recognize her. You see, a woman giving the name of Lizzie Dell had called me on the phone. But I didn't know her."

"What did she call you about?"

"That, Mr. Williams, was not very clear."

"What exactly did she say?"

"She said she wanted to hear the sound of my voice. Wanted to know if I was happy. Things like that. Very odd. I had an idea she might have known me when I was little. But I'm sure I never saw her before."

"And what did you tell your father?"

"Not what I am telling you." She looked toward the open door. "I didn't want to disturb him. I asked him if he ever knew or heard of Lizzie Dell. I didn't tell him that I had been to the morgue."

"Did you suggest he take care of the burial?"

"I think I did. Anyway, father used to do such things."

"Used to?" She let that ride. "But doesn't now, you mean?"

"I don't exactly mean anything."

I TOOK a shot in the dark, saying, "Did this woman say anything about your intended marriage?"

"What marriage?" She flashed that one and the eyes were definitely green.

"To Eddie Marco?"

"There has been no announcement. How could she possibly have known anything about my intentions in such a matter, when no one knows?"

"She could have known as I know," I said. "She could have read some of the columns."

"Oh, that." Yola seemed relieved. "Yes. She wanted to know if I was happy in my coming marriage."

"Not mentioning Eddie Marco by name?"

"Not mentioning Eddie Marco by name, no."

"Did you tell Eddie Marco about this woman—this telephone call?"

"Perhaps," Yola said. "You'd rather ask Eddie about that?" There was a challenge in her voice.

"If you prefer."

"You wouldn't hesitate to ask him?"

"No."

"You wouldn't be afraid?"

"No. Why?" I said.

"I mean you wouldn't be afraid of Eddie—under any circumstances?"

Now that was an odd way to put it. I gave her a straight answer. "No. I wouldn't be afraid of Eddie Marco under any circumstances. Why?"

"Most people are."

I tried the photograph on her then. "That," I said, "is the murdered Lizzie Dell. You'd hardly recognize her though, for she aged considerably. Are you looking at the woman? Do you know her?"

"No, no," she said. But there was a tremor in her voice and her face was very white.

"You do know her."

"No—no," she said again. "I don't. I swear I don't. I never saw her in my life."

Her fingers seemed to stick to the photograph as I took it away from her. Funny too, I believed her. Believed her, yet couldn't account for her shock. For certainly the photograph had given her a shock, and I had an idea she was looking at the pupils rather than the teacher.

"Well," I said, getting to my feet. "I've got a job to do. I'm going back down town and talk to Eddie Marco."

"Don't go yet." She got up and put a hand on my arm. "I don't want you to talk to Eddie—yet. Sit down a minute. I want to think."

I sat down. Her eyes watched me. They were capable of a direct, unblinking look. After a while she said:

"Mine has been a very strange life, Race Williams. I don't remember my mother. My father has been everything to me—and to a great many people. And sometimes the things he has done have not seemed entirely right. But where he may have done wrong things, he has never done a contemptible thing. I would do anything for him."

I waited a bit and when nothing else came, I said:

"That's a nice feeling for a daughter

to have about her father. I've heard plenty good of him too. Although not so much lately."

"That's Eddie," she said at once. "Eddie has had a strange life too. No one to help him. There have been some terrible stories around about Eddie but they're only stories. Aren't they?"

"If you mean there has never been any evidence that would stand up in a court of law—that's true."

"Do you—" she leaned forward—"believe that he has killed people—shot people down in cold blood?"

"Sure," I said easily. "I believe that all right."

"Can you prove it?"

"No," I said, "I can't."

"Can you— Is Eddie connected in any way with the death of this woman?"

"Not that I know of." I told her the truth. "Listen, Miss O'Neil, I didn't come here to discuss Eddie Marco with you. Just Lizzie Dell. I'm going to find the person who killed her."

"You mean—a sort of conceit with you?"

"I mean—" I stopped. Maybe she was right. "I hope not entirely that," I told her. "But I guess it's partly true. Now have you any reason to believe that Eddie had anything to do with it?"

"No, no." She couldn't get the words out fast enough. "I haven't. Believe me, I haven't." And then both her hands were on my shoulders and she was very close to me. "Race, Race," she said over and over. "Wait. Don't go see Eddie yet. Give me time to think. The telephone calls I've had regarding Eddie since—since that columnist first hinted I was engaged to him. They can't be true. Why do they call me on the phone and say such terrible things about Eddie?"

"Because you have helped people." Which was true enough.

"Wait." She was almost clinging to me now. Yet you couldn't put it down as romance—nor entirely fear. You couldn't put it down as anything. "Don't talk to Eddie yet."

"Why should I wait?" I was unwinding myself uneasily from foreign entanglements.

"Because—if I can find out anything, no matter what it is, I'll tell you."

CHAPTER TWO

Help Yourself to Trouble

FEET upon stairs. Heavy slow feet on hard wood. Feet that slowly crossed the outside hall and came toward us. The Old Man walked into the room. If he had lost his grip, he didn't show it.

He was dressed for the street, and he was a very impressive sight. Not simply tall and heavy, he was huge. Heavy of jowl with a few hanging chins and, of all things, a stiff-winged collar. Gold nose-glasses too. His face was pleasant, but a little too big for his features. His hair was snow white and his eyes bright china blue. But his mouth was too small, and his nose was too small; and his eyes were set too close together. Age—sixty to seventy.

The Old Man showed no surprise at seeing me. He walked slowly across the room, slipping off a spotless yellow glove and tucking his cane up under his arm. Then he extended his hand to me.

"Race Williams," he said. "We are honored, I am sure." There was no sarcasm in his voice and his blue eyes twinkled. That was the Old Man. He could make the most extraordinary statements sound real, even sincere.

"We haven't," he went on after shaking my hand, "come under that private eye of yours?" His chuckle was friendly and pleasant. "Run along, my dear," he said to his daughter. "Race, no doubt, has a word or two he wishes with me." After the girl had left, he said, "Well, Mr. Williams. Lizzie Dell of the morgue, no doubt."

"Did you know her?" I asked.

"Know her? Of course, I knew her—as I know *all* people in the great city. Are you interested in her life or her death?"

"Her death," I told him.

"I have always told myself that if I ever needed the services of a private investigator, it would be you. In what way can I help you? What other information can I give you?"

"You haven't told me what you know about her."

"Know about her?" He seemed undecided then. I knew the Old Man and

how he talked around things. Now he talked on, saying nothing definite, and I reached the conclusion that he wanted to find out things from me, that he suspected something.

I asked him direct questions. I never got a direct answer.

"What can one do for the dead?" he said once, in answer to my question why he paid for her burial. "I thought perhaps she would like it. A resting place of her own. I have often done the same before, for our unknown dead."

"But you didn't know her to speak to."

"Perhaps." He wouldn't even come one way or the other on that. "I meet and talk to everyone. If this Lizzie Dell was part of the city, then I knew her." He seemed to be thinking. "But it does you credit, Race Williams, and belies the stories that you think only of money. You have someone in mind for this murder?"

"No," I said. "I haven't. What made you think that?"

"You're coming here to see, perhaps, if you would step on my toes."

"I don't care whose toes I step on," I told him a bit sharply.

"Good. Good." He really seemed pleased. "The police perhaps spoil me. But this is murder. Ask me anything you wish. You couldn't be thinking of my young friend, Eddie Marco?"

"I could," I said.

"What," he said, "do you think of Eddie Marco?"

"No doubt the greatest scoundrel un-hung."

"A strong man, Eddie." The Old Man nodded. "Capable of making enemies."

"Capable of removing them too."

He put those sharp blue eyes on me. "Ambitious, too. He is going places. I am afraid at times he is selfish. Doesn't think of people." He took my arm and led me to the door. "Call on me again, Race. Any time, for anything. And good luck."

I was out the door and it was closed. Was the Old Man slipping? I had seen him before when he could make snap decisions. A likable old scoundrel. Eddie a deadly menace to the city. What a duo to team together.

Well, they had learned what I thought of Eddie Marco. Eddie and I had never

crossed. But more than once Eddie had let it be known that I had turned down a job offer because it meant tackling him. I couldn't pin that on Eddie. But it hurt my pride.

Anyway, I got one thing out of Yola O'Neil. The classroom photograph had jarred her.

THERE are times when I use more than my brawn and my trigger finger, and do more than talk through the side of my mouth. I went to work on the kids in that photograph. I was interested only in the boys—fourteen of them.

The picture had been taken by a professional photographer. It had been sold to the members of the class at ten cents a copy. But the photographer was no longer in business. The lack of school records was also appalling.

Finally I got two of the boys identified. One was a young doctor in Brooklyn. He remembered the names of some of the kids. One of them built me up a bit.

"Little Eddie Marcolina," he said, and he let me look at the dark-eyed boy through his long-handled, powerful, magnifying glass. "Cute kid. But crooked as a ram's horn. He'd swipe your lunch for no reason at all. Never hungry. Miss—what was her name now?"

I told him.

"Yes—Delton, that was it. She'd buy him lunch and take him home with her. He sure played her for a sucker. She believed nothing but good of him. She was killed, eh? No, I wouldn't have known her from the newspaper picture."

He moved the glass on. "Nellie Braum-wich. On the end in the third row. I used to carry her books and—this one, Mr. Williams—I'll get the name in a minute."

I wasn't interested any more. I couldn't get to O'Rourke fast enough. I wanted to be sure it wasn't the closeness of the two names that made me see the likeness of the boy under the glass to the man. . . .

It didn't take O'Rourke over ten minutes to dig out the truth for me. "Sure." He came back with some records. "He must have dropped the 'lina' part a good many years back. If he ever had it legally changed. It would be the first thing he ever did that was legal. All very interest-

ing, Race—but what does this tie Eddie up with?”

“Have you,” I asked him, “tried to tie Eddie up with the murder of Lizzie Dell, formerly Elizabeth Delton?”

“No, no.” He looked at me. “Why should we?”

“You’d like to, wouldn’t you?”

“I’d like to tie him up with anything that will put him away.” O’Rouke was emphatic. “It seems far-fetched.”

“He was in her class at school. Third grade.”

“She taught school for twenty years.” O’Rouke shook his head. “Thousands must have been in her class at one time or another.” With a grin, he added, “Lots of kids want to kill the teacher. Some even plan it out as a pleasant relaxation—but none of them ever do it.”

“Can you link them up together?”

O’Rouke shook his head. “An old-maid school teacher who went down hill, and a killer who went up. Where would they come together, Race, and how could we link them?”

“You could go back over Eddie’s record.”

“That won’t be hard. It’s long enough. I guess the cops have questioned him for every crime on the calendar. But we never put the finger on him. Now—” O’Rouke shrugged—“he’s hit the big time and getting bigger. I’ll give you a buzz if anything turns up. But don’t hope. Eddie killed women, I guess—but not her kind.”

I went to see another lad who lived in the Bronx and had attended that third grade class of Elizabeth Delton’s with Eddie Marco. I had hopes that someone would have followed his classmates a bit and connect up Eddie and the teacher for me. But this man had less to give than the doctor.

He remembered the dark-haired boy with the dark eyes most unpleasantly, but couldn’t remember his name. He remembered losing a pen and a pencil, and a watch.

“Bad kid.” He shook his head. “Pulled a pen knife on me down in the basement. I was bigger than he was and nearly bashed his head in.” The Bronxite said more about the teacher liking Eddie. Then he wanted to buy the picture—went as high as offering five dollars for it. “I

wasn’t a bad-looking kid,” he said by way of explanation. Looking at him now, I couldn’t blame him for wanting something to recall such an idea.

When I got back, my office boy, little Jerry pointed toward my door marked private and pulled at his nose, so I knew it was the law. I went in, and O’Rouke said:

“You called the turn all right, Race. It goes back to 1937. I wasn’t in homicide or I would have remembered. It was the first time Eddie Marco was dragged in on a major charge.” He consulted his notebook.

“George Wyton was knifed and robbed, and bled to death in an alley. A number of men were pulled in for questioning. Eddie, only a kid then, was one of them. It was no dice. He had an alibi, maybe his first fixed one. Guess who gave it to him?”

“Lizzie Dell,” I said.

“Right. She was still a teacher then, had a good reputation. We really had nothing on Eddie Marco, and didn’t take him seriously after she said he was with her in her apartment. Eddie was sprung, of course. But he could have knifed George Wyton.”

“Then the murder was never solved?”

O’ROUKE admitted, “No, it was never solved. But it simply links up a former pupil visiting his old teacher, who gave her time and her savings to helping kids. That is no reason he should kill her. More reason he shouldn’t.”

“Don’t be a sap, O’Rouke,” I said.

“What’s on your mind, Race? Why did he kill her?”

“Because of that alibi,” I told O’Rouke. “Suppose she was ready to repudiate it? There is no statue of limitations in murder.”

“Why would she repudiate the alibi? And if she was going to, why wait this long? Why give it to him in the first place if it wasn’t true?”

“Because,” I said, “she was crazy about that kid. She couldn’t see any wrong in him. She didn’t believe him guilty. Just a poor kid who was hounded by the police. If she couldn’t believe he’d swipe a pen or a lad’s lunch, she wouldn’t believe he’d knife a man. So she gave him the alibi,

believing his story of police persecution."

"And why the sudden change?"

"Sudden?" I laughed. "That was eleven years ago. She began to doubt. Or she found out about something that Eddie was going to do that she didn't want him to do. That is what she came to see me about. She got in touch with Eddie. Maybe she hadn't seen him in years. But she told him if he does this or that—whatever it was—then she'll repudiate that alibi. There's the reason for his killing her."

"Sure," agreed O'Rourke. "If?"

"If what?"

"If Eddie killed her."

"But she talked to me and told me that—"

"Yeah, I know. You told me. She wanted to make someone do something, or not do something. She didn't mention Eddie Marco by name. With eight million people in the city of New York, and millions outside of it, you pick out Eddie. All right. All right. He was in her class. How many others were in it?" Leaning forward suddenly, O'Rourke said, "What are you holding out on me? Don't tell me all this is head-work."

So I told him about the picture. I didn't tell him I picked it up from the dead woman's bureau. I said she dropped it from her bag in my office.

He didn't believe me, but he didn't argue the point while he looked at the photo.

"It's good work anyway, Race," he said. "She didn't also drop a repudiation of that alibi, did she? I'm not saying you haven't got a good story. But I could spend hours pointing out to you the holes a defense counsel would plug in your case. Why, the D.A. wouldn't touch it with a second-story man—let alone a big shot like Eddie Marco."

"Well," I said. "I know Eddie killed her. And you know Eddie killed her."

"Yes." O'Rourke nodded his head quite seriously. "I'll agree to that. Then you'll agree, too, that there are other killers walking the streets today. I know they killed and who they killed—but I can't do anything about it."

"So you want Eddie to be another. I bring you stuff like this, and you do nothing about it."

"Why don't you do something yourself?" O'Rourke asked.

"What?"

"Spring what you told me on Eddie. If he pulls a gun on you and kills you, we'll know you were right and we'll fry him for killing you. If you must serve the state, that would be a glorious finish."

"And if I should kill him?"

"Then it will be self defense—I hope." O'Rourke grinned. Then he walked out of the office.

He left me with an idea. I would spring it on Eddie Marco and see what he did. O'Rourke was right. I'd never make a good department dick. I didn't have the patience.

CHAPTER THREE

The Moving Curtain

THAT night came the first of my mysterious telephone calls about Lizzie Dell. Where you might like to ignore anonymous calls, in my business you can't. Nine-tenths of them are phony or misleading—but the one-tenth pays off.

"Lizzie Dell," the voice said, and you couldn't tell if it was a man, woman, or a child; so I gathered it was someone talking through a handkerchief. "Lizzie Dell left some writing with me. Keep after Eddie Marco. The time will come when I will put proof in your hands that he murdered Lizzie Dell because of George Wyton."

"I see," I said easily. "Lizzie Dell a friend of yours?"

"Oh, yes. She went to see you. I know all about that. Frighten Eddie into the open. There is writing. I'll make him believe in the writing. But he may try and kill you. Be careful."

The phone clicked. The connection was broken. I went to bed. I'd see Eddie tomorrow all right. I didn't need any voice to egg me on. Still, it was the first time in my life I had butterflies in my stomach. . . .

A few years back, Eddie was a rat running in the gutters of the East Side. Maybe Eddie had had a hard life. But if he made life hard for others, he could always claim that he made death easy for them. Eddie was lucky. He had actually

shot himself into power. Everyone who knew his way around, knew that. No one had ever put the finger on him.

How he ever got so close to the Old Man, no one seemed to know. Eddie had a way about him. He was smooth and slick, and the rough edges had been polished down. Eddie was ambitious. If his best friend stood in his way, then that best friend had to go.

And there was Eddie Marco greeting me now, in his high class offices labeled:

INVESTMENTS INCORPORATED

"You know, Race—" he was shaking my hand—"I've admired you since I was a kid. Fighting it alone; the halfway house between the cops and big business." Eddie always called crime big business. "Come on back, boy, and see my private room. Something special for the élite." I followed him down long halls from the new building into an old one.

He finally let me into a room that might have been a nightmarish idea of how a cross between a big-game hunter, a college librarian, and a guy on the verge of the D.T.'s would have his room fixed up.

A moose head, a lion head, and a rhinoceros head crowded over the large fireplace. On the floor, not yet set up, were some pretty odd-looking mounted fish. On the other side of the room were books. Rare editions. Fine bindings. Eddie called them off to me with prices.

At the back of the room, behind a large desk, were tapestries. To top it all off, the carpet upon the floor was thick enough to tickle your ankles. Even then, there were a couple of animal skin rugs tossed over the carpet.

Eddie explained the stuff.

"I'm fitting myself in," he said in all seriousness. "Creating a background. I'm to be married, Race, and I don't mind telling you, it's Yola O'Neil. She went to some swanky schools and knows the right people. We'll buy a place up Westchester way, join the clubs and what not. A big-game hunter gives a lad a bit of standing among the sporting men."

"And the carpets hanging from the walls?" I asked him.

"Carpets," he frowned. "They are rare oriental pieces. They better be or a smart

dealer will wake up some morning with a belly full of lead. Turkey or Persia; or some such place. World traveler. Explorer. Big-game hunter. Books for culture. What are you grinning at?

"Look at Yola. Her old man's a big-time grafter. It didn't set well on the stomach of the high and mighty. So she was a politician's daughter at the first school she went to. Then the Old Man got smart and gave the school a new wing for the girls' gym, and he became a statesman. But look here!"

He walked over in front of the big expensive desk. "*The pièce de résistance.*" He smacked his lips when he pulled that one, and eyed me carefully. He liked the sound of it for he repeated "Yeah—the *pièce de résistance.* Something anyone can sink his teeth in. Look at that."

I looked at the heavy revolver encased in a plush-lined niche built right in the front of the desk. He lifted the gun out and handed it to me.

"Dummy bullets," he explained it's deadly appearance. "That's real, Race. Got it from Chicago. Danny Logan's gun. It's supposed to hold the record for deaths. Killed thirty-seven people with it, Danny did. Men, women, and children and five cops."

I bounced the gun in my hand. It might have been one of my own. Just the sort of a gun I fancied. It was scratched a bit on the nose, and black along the barrel. A nice, heavy, revolver.

"What are you going to tell the élite about this rod?" I asked him.

"The truth, maybe," he nodded. "If I can doctor it up a bit. The story behind it will come in handy if anyone needs a bit of—a bit of a scare. That's right, Race. The D.A. gave it to me in appreciation. The cops took credit for the killing of Danny Logan but: it was me who gunned him out."

I didn't laugh. I remembered Danny Logan, of course. There had always been some doubt as to how he took the dose. What Eddie Marco said might very easily be true.

"All the cops in the country looking for him." Eddie put the gun carefully back in its exposed velvet case. You could see it was his prize possession. "But they couldn't put the finger on Danny."

"And they asked you to get him?"

"No," he scoffed. "I don't do the cops' work. I had a little deal. Danny horned in on it. I went looking for him. We met one night in the Loop. I was coming out of the Greek's place. Logan knew it was him or me. He had the draw, and he had the drop—so I jerked out my gun and tore him apart. Just like that. They hushed it up. I got the slaps on the back, his gun as a souvenir, and they took the credit. That's the truth how Danny died. Guys never cross me but once. Now, Race, what did you want to see me about?"

I TOOK a grin out of that. You've got to admit it was a nice build-up to that final question. I guess I was supposed to shake at the knees and cry that I was collecting for indigent detectives. Instead I said:

"I'm trying to wrap you up for the wire murder of Lizzie Dell."

That could have been his cue to go for his gun. Maybe that would have been the simplest solution all around. I think ten years ago he would have gone for it. Maybe five—maybe even a year or two. Certainly his fingers twitched, and his black eyes grew blacker and a little narrower. But he only laughed. His voice, when he spoke, was steady.

"You know, Race," he said. "You and I have never crossed. When I was younger, you were my hero, but I often thought of pulling a gun on you just to see how fast you were. I wasn't sure then. But now—"

"Now?" I asked.

"Now it would be murder," he said. "You wouldn't get your hand out of your armpit before you were dead. Who is this Lizzie Dell?"

I told him, showing him the picture.

"I was a nice kid." He glanced down at the photography. "I got a picture taken about that time, gave it to Yola. Miss Delton, eh? Sure, I remember her now. She liked me. Fussy old maid. Poor old Pussy—we always called her Pussy."

"She saved your life," I said and watched him. "The stabbing of George Wyton!"

"Wyton." He half-thought aloud. "Was that his name? I was with her

when the old guy croaked off." He laughed. "She thought I'd grow up to be president. I didn't do so bad."

"Not sorry she's dead? She gave you an alibi!"

"Don't be dramatic." He was watching me carefully. "If it wasn't Pussy, it would be another. You're not—not trying to shake me down?"

"No, no," I told him. "She was my client, Eddie. I let her down. I'm going to make it up to her now. I'm going to pin her murder on you!"

He didn't speak for a long time. It was as if he was trying to figure things out.

"Someone hire you to dump me over?" His eyes were shrewd, searching.

"Only Lizzie Dell," I told him. "She was going to deny that alibi, and—" as if I had something—"maybe she did, in writing."

"Baloney." He shook his head from side to side. "She's dead. There would be nothing in it for you there. You say this dame gave me a phony alibi? That's years ago. Suppose it was true. How would that connect me up with Wyton?"

I looked serious and said: "Maybe I got more to go on?"

"Like what?" When I didn't say anything. "You know, Race, I can't make you out. You got nothing. You come and lay a four flush down on the table." He looked at me long and steadily. "I'll think it over and let you know how I'm taking it."

"Better." I nodded at him. "Did it ever strike you, Eddie, that Elizabeth Delton, Lizzie Dell, Pussy—was a dame who liked to keep things in writing."

"She did?" he said. "Well, what have you got in writing? I might pay for some writing. Is that what you mean?"

"Writing that would fry you?"

"Do you know, Race," he said in a clear even voice, "no one in years has talked to me as you are talking now. And no man alive ever talked to me like you have. What do you want?" He leaned forward then. "A belly full of lead?"

"You have a gun," I told him. "I know you killed Lizzie Dell. I just want you to know you're going to die for it, Eddie."

He looked as if he was going to reach and draw. He didn't. I don't think he was afraid. I don't think Eddie Marco

feared anything at any time. He said:

"All right, boy. You're out to get me. You want me to know it. Is that it?"

"That's it," I said to him. "There's a shorter way out of this room, isn't there?"

There was, and he showed it to me. A private door back of one tapestry. I went right down the stairs and out on the side street.

ONE o'clock that morning, Yola O'Neil called me on the phone. Her voice was hoarse and low, and seemed to have panic in it. Would I come and see her at once? I would, and I did.

She saw me in a little room that gave onto a large room, and was closed off by thick curtains. She looked nervous, had been crying. She didn't ask me to sit down. Indeed, she stood before me all the time as she talked, her back to the curtains. She did not give a very good performance. Somehow I got the impression that she did not want to give a good performance.

"Lizzie Dell." She would hardly let

me get a word in sideways. "Have you any idea that he—that Eddie killed her?"

I said: "This is where I came in before, Yola." I looked at my watch. "It's late, unless there is something you really want to tell me."

"What could I tell you?" I half moved to one side, and she was between me and the curtains again. "Have you anything in writing? From Elizabeth Dell, I mean."

"I might have." I didn't whisper. I was watching the curtains over her shoulder. There was no movement to them. Yet, I had the idea we were not alone. Someone was listening, and that someone had a gun in his hand and—

The whole idea came from Yola O'Neil's actions. It was as if she expected a gun to blast and lead come from behind those curtains, and for that lead to bury itself in me. I gave her credit for one thing. She didn't want it to happen . . . at least, not yet.

She didn't like it when I started to play her game. I let her put herself between me and the curtains all right. But I kept backing her closer and closer to them.

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Suddenly I shoved the girl aside. Jerking out my gun with my right hand, I pulled the curtains aside with my left hand. Very dramatic. I looked into a darkened dining room, half crouched, gun up, finger tight against a trigger—and I saw the body and straightened.

There on the floor, on his back, lay Eddie Marco. His right hand was crossed over and up under his left armpit. He was breathing heavily.

I thought he had been shot. That would be the natural thought if one saw Eddie Marco stretched out on his back, and his hand reaching for a gun. But instead, someone had tapped this boy on the back of the head, underneath the right ear. It was a nice clean blow and had felled him like a steer in a stock yard.

Yola O'Neil, behind me, said:

"Eddie said he simply wanted to listen. He had me ask you here. But I was afraid he might harm you. Still—"

"Still you beaned him." I turned and looked at the girl. "Then you don't love him. Do you, Yola?"

"No," she said. "No, I don't love him." She was twisting a handkerchief around in her fingers.

"You were afraid he was going to kill me. So you struck him down."

"No, no." She sure was mixed up. "I didn't think he would; not with me here." Her blue-green eyes looked startled.

"You were afraid he would regain consciousness and take a shot at me. Why did you bring me in here, after you struck him down?"

"After I struck him down—" she repeated my words as if in a daze— "I don't know. He said to bring you here, to ask you certain questions. He wanted to hear the answers. I was afraid for you."

"Sure," I said. "You're a good kid, Yola. Why do you run with that rat?"

"Because I have to. He always wins out. Always. I—I— We mustn't talk here. What will he say when he comes around? He will, won't he? He's not—not going to die?"

"No," I said. With a sudden idea that I rather liked, I asked, "Did he see you hit him?"

"See me hit him? No, no, he didn't. What will he believe?"

"This." I looked down at the unconscious man and led Yola out of the room before I told her. "You tell him you let me in. I came around through the hall behind him, and knocked him cold. The first thing you knew he was out like a light. I was mad and left." She looked at me.

I added, "Then he won't think you did it."

"Oh, no. He won't think I did it." Suddenly brightening up, for she was acting like one doped, she now said, "Thank you, Mr. Williams. Thank you, Race." Both her hands were around my neck now. "You—they told me you were hard and cruel. Why do you do this for me?"

She was close, and she was a nice armful. She had conked the boy friend, Eddie, for me, and I felt pretty good.

I told her when I saw Eddie I'd admit, in fact, I would glory in, having knocked him for a loop. Whatever story she told him would be my story. I wouldn't go into it in detail for Eddie until I heard from her.

"Thank you," she said. "I suppose it's all a waste of time. Eddie has his star. It guides him. For good or evil, it guides him. He can't be beaten. Even father couldn't arrange that—could he?"

"I don't suppose the Old Man wants to," I said.

"No—no." She shook her head. "I don't suppose he does."

I left then. I laughed more than once as I drove home. I was laughing when I went in to little Jerry's bedroom to wake him up for an early snack. Jerry was always ready to eat, and he could put food together real tasty.

Only Jerry was not home. That was funny.

CHAPTER FOUR

Hardware on the House

JERRY missing puzzled me and bothered me, but not too much—until the next day when I was having lunch in a good old chop house. The chair moved across the table from me in the crowded restaurant, and Eddie Marco slid into the seat and faced me.

"Hello, Race." He grinned over at me.

"Still feeling sentimental about that old doll—what was her name, Lizzie Dell?"

"Lizzie Dell is right." I was pleased I had Eddie's goat. "Surprised to find I have a bit of sentiment?"

"Sure, sure," Eddie said. He dismissed the waiter, saying he had eaten. "I like it in you, Race. That pre-shrunk boy of yours, Jerry—attached to him aren't you?"

I wasn't so pleased then. I was jarred. Eddie saw it all right and showed his teeth.

"Smart boy, little Jerry," Eddie went on. "You couldn't fool him. Except he has a bit of sentiment, too. I often heard how you worked out codes together, and put the finger on guys who meant to put it on you. Nothing clever about me, Race. Just an excited voice on the phone saying you'd been shot, was in the hospital—and for Jerry to come at once. You were dying.

"All training went then. Jerry dashed out of the apartment, grabbed the first taxi—the first one—understand? A lad with a gun in it. As easy as that."

"You—you didn't kill him?"

"No. I'm sentimental too. You know, Race, you made your mistake last night when you knocked me out. Should have put a bullet in my head. Guess you thought of it. But—" his hands spread apart—"your sentiment again. Didn't like to do it in front of the girl, Yola, eh?"

I said: "If anything happens to Jerry, I'll kill you, Eddie."

"We wouldn't like that—would we, Race?" Eddie was master of the situation now. "I wouldn't want to be dead, and you wouldn't want to kill me. So we'll make a little deal. Listen. You'll come to my office, say at eleven o'clock tonight. You'll bring all this written stuff you've got. And I'll turn over Jerry to you!" He came to his feet then. "The door on the side street, Race."

He started to turn. I whispered sharply:

"Eddie."

He stopped dead. I said, "Sit down Eddie. I've got a gun on you—under the table. One step and I'll plug you."

He looked at me a long time over his shoulder. Then he shook his head.

"No one has ever called you bluff,

Race. If it wasn't for Jerry, I wouldn't call it now." With a shrug, he added, "but if it wasn't for Jerry, you could shoot and would shoot. Okay—boy—shoot!"

He turned and, with his back to me, strode toward the door. He was right. I knew that the minute he disappeared around the bend near the door to 34th Street. I did have a gun on him under the table. And my finger was pretty tight on the trigger. But it must have been a bluff because I didn't squeeze lead, and he didn't die. Or was I thinking then of the living Jerry and not the dead Lizzie Dell?

Mechanically I finished my chop. The best chops, the best cooking in the city—tasting like leather.

Eddie knew I would come to him that night, but he hadn't mentioned anything about my not coming armed. Why? Because he was willing to face me alone with a gun? No, because Eddie thought I wouldn't plan to come without a gun. At the last minute he'd arrange it so I couldn't see him with a gun—figuring I wouldn't turn back.

He was right. Once on my way, I'd go and see him without a gun if it meant Jerry's life. I hadn't much doubt it did mean Jerry's life. . . .

The next few hours I spent trying to find Eddie Marco in his usual haunts. If I could get him alone, I'd have taken him apart to find out where Jerry was. But I couldn't find him.

I went to my apartment and tried to think it out. I had no writing to bring to Eddie. What good would it do to go unarmed to Eddie, with no chance of making a deal? Then came the flash.

I left my apartment. I wasn't toting two guns now; I was toting three. The odd one sunk deep in my coat pocket. I had scratched it up a bit on the nose, and blackened up the silver of the barrel where it would show. To be sure I wasn't followed, I worked a couple of taxis, crossed in a few subway stations. Then I called Yola O'Neil on the phone. It was twenty minutes of five in the afternoon.

"Yola," I put it to her. "You said you'd do anything for me. Does that go now?"

"Yes," she said over the wire. "Anything up to murder." Up to murder. I

didn't like the stipulation she made there.

I asked her could she get in to Eddie's private office. She could; she had a key and often met him there. I breathed easier. Then I wanted to know if she could meet me some place, and be sure she was not followed. She was expecting Eddie to telephone; so I decided to see her at her home. Her father was busy in his office at the back of the house. If Eddie was going to telephone her, he didn't expect to be there.

SHE saw me in the library, but this time the doors were closed and the curtains drawn over the window. I told her about Jerry and what I wanted her to do. She listened with her hands folded in her lap. She took the gun I gave her from my coat pocket.

Like a child reciting a lesson, she said:

"You want me to go to his den. You want me to take the gun that is in the case cut into the front of his desk. You want me to put this loaded gun of yours in it's place. You want to kill him?"

"I want to save Jerry," I said. "In a way, it may save you too from him. Why are you marrying him, Yola? You don't love him." I tried to keep the doubt out of my voice when I said that.

"No." She shook her head. "This may be fate working things out for me. Still, if you kill him, it will be like—like I killed him."

"It isn't a question of killing him." I objected. "It's a question of saving Jerry."

"You won't kill him."

"Not unless—Yola." I went over and lifted her from the couch and put my arms around her. "You can do it, can't you? And you will do it, won't you?"

"Yes, yes." She hardly breathed the words. "I can do it—and I will do it—if I can."

"But you said you could—"

"I can take myself unseen to his office, put the gun there, and take away the other one. What I mean is—unless something beyond me holds me back, tells me it is wrong." Suddenly raising those now blue eyes to mine, Yola declared, "Yes, Race. I believe that he has killed and killed. I believe that if anything happens to you tonight, my life is no longer worth living.

Yes, yes I'll do it—if I can efface the picture that I am murdering a living human being."

"But you'll do it."

"If the moral courage does not fail me."

"If you want to see me alive again, you'll do it?"

I kissed her then, and I think she liked it. Anyway I did. I kissed her once more and left her with the statement that my life was in her hands. She clung to me too and cried softly, and let her hands run up the back of my head and through my hair. . . .

I didn't return to my apartment. I stayed along the city streets. At eleven o'clock I'd show up at that door on the side street—and I'd have two guns with me.

There was a man lounging against the building when I arrived on the deserted street at exactly eleven. His hands were conspicuously empty. He made sure I noticed that as he swung over to me. I knew him. Cockey Elman, a rough-and-ready lad close to Eddie Marco.

"Hello, Race," he said. "I got a mean job. Don't be sore, fellow. I understand you want to visit someone upstairs. I've got to frisk you first."

I laughed, saying, "You don't think I'd go up there unarmed?"

"I don't think, period." Elman grinned at me. "I'm not to make a point of it. The lad you want to see won't be there unless I take your hardware. Suit yourself. It's no skin off my nose."

"No guts? He's afraid to see me?" I had expected this, but I didn't want to agree too easy.

"Maybe," he said. "I don't know from nothing. I'm to tell you that if you want to see a certain party again alive—I frisk you. Suit yourself."

I let him frisk me. A real courageous act, you think. Just how brave, I didn't know at the time. For I didn't know then that for the last two hours Yola O'Neil was trying frantically to get me on the phone to tell me she couldn't—wouldn't go through with planting the gun.

I let Elman go over me and take the two guns. Also, he hesitated over my pen knife, and finally kept it.

With an ease I did not feel, I said:

"You'll return those to me tomorrow?"

I was clean now, so he spoke right up.

"I'll see that they are buried with you, Race." He thought that was pretty funny and almost split a gut laughing. Then he pointed toward the door. "Go on up," he said, "and good luck."

I didn't pussyfoot up those stairs. I climbed them quickly and easily in the dim light from an overhanging electric bulb. I was showing a confidence I didn't feel. The door to that weird room was open. I saw Eddie under the light as soon as I turned on the landing at the top. He was sitting behind the desk. Both his hands were on the flat surface, one clutching a .45 automatic. He said:

"Come in, Race. You're on time. Close the door after you."

I went in quickly, slamming the door behind me. I crossed right to the chair before the desk and sat down in it quickly. I was facing the gun. Was it mine? I thought it was. I didn't feel so bad.

THEN I looked over by the fireplace and my eyes widened. Little Jerry was there. He was tied in a big, high-backed wooden chair. He wasn't gagged. The kid had found it tough. But he said:

"You shouldn't have come, boss. I could take all this rat could offer."

Eddie Marco said:

"You're a sap, Race. Those telephone calls didn't fool me. Though how you got to my private wire, I don't know. It was kid stuff. That voice saying, 'You have written proof.' But if you had, you'd have sprung it!"

So he had been having telephone calls too.

"Well," I put it to Eddie. "If you didn't believe it, why this elaborate trap, this snatching of Jerry? You went to a lot of trouble for something that wasn't true."

"Did I? You did get the wind up me. But it wasn't Lizzie Dell. It was Yola O'Neil. I could make her believe most anything until you came along." His voice grew hard and cold now. "You crossed me, Race. No guy ever crossed me and lived."

"You think if you kill me, Yola will marry you, that she really could love you."

"She'll serve me," he said brutally, "and she'd marry me. I'm the coming lad, Race. As soon as I marry the Old Man's daughter, I'll wipe out the Old Man. He hates my guts."



"The Red Caps are just out of luck when Elmer gets a Wheaties breakfast on the train."

SOME guys will tackle most anything . . . once they've tucked away a big bowl of Wheaties. Famous training dish with milk and fruit. These 100% whole wheat flakes

provide three B vitamins, also minerals, food energy, proteins. Second-helping good, too. Had your Wheaties today? Wheaties, "Breakfast of Champions!"

"Yeah." I edged my chair closer to the desk and to the gun. I watched Eddie's right hand. "Why does the Old Man stand for you?"

"Because I'm the only living soul who's got anything on him." He held up some papers on the desk. "He killed once, someone else nearly took the dose for it. The Old Man had sentiment like you have. He wrote a confession of that killing in case this other—friend was in danger of taking the rap for it. I got that confession." He waved to the paper with his left hand. "The Old Man had to kill. But that confession would break him."

"That's why the Old Man had a rat like you running things, and why Yola is marrying you."

"One of the reasons she's marrying me, maybe. I'm going to clean things up, boy."

"Why kill the Old Man? Why kill me?"

"The Old Man," he said, "is just that—an old man. He's shrewd, he's smart. He has always been able to arrange things. I don't want him to arrange anything for me."

I came forward on the chair, said, "If you don't believe I have anything, why take this chance on killing me?"

"It's no chance," he said. "There are a dozen gunmen, maybe fifty gunmen who'd like to kill you. The police may think of even more. But the point is, Race—you know I killed Lizzie Dell."

"So you did kill her?"

"Did you doubt it?"

"Never for a moment. But if I can't prove it—why kill me?"

He leaned forward then. His gun raised, and I bent slightly.

"Because you know," he told me. "It's your life, or mine, Race. Maybe you don't know it yourself, but you were going to kill me. I know killers. I saw it in your eyes the other day. You may deny it. But it's a matter of time, as the thing would grow on you. You think you only kill in self-defense; but I know better. It was my life or yours."

I was about to deny it. I had never shot anyone down in cold blood. Yet, at lunch time, how close it had been. But it wasn't true.

Eddie Marco raised his right hand. His eyes were black slits. He said simply: "This is it."

I dove at the front of the desk and the gun that was there. I guess I tossed myself sideways as I shot out of that chair and away from Eddie Marco's vision.

His gun roared. The kid, Jerry, cried out. A stab that was warm seemed to take a chunk out of my shoulders and burn cold across my neck. I missed my grab for the gun. I had reached it all right, but his shot and the jar of it made my fingers bang against it. Then I was flat on my back on the floor.

Something pounded down on my chest. I put up my hand. It was the gun I had knocked loose from the niche in the desk. My hand gripped it, and I could tell from the feel of it that it was my gun. I could tell from the weight that it was loaded. Then Eddie Marco leaned far over the desk and pointed his automatic down at me.

There was a surprised look on his face at first, when he spotted the gun I held. Then he grinned as he saw the empty cavity where his gun with the dummy bullets had been. He said:

"Playing games, Race?" His fingers started to tighten on the trigger.

I raised my right hand; closed my finger once, and blasted lead right into the center of Eddie's smiling boyish face.

The shock blew Eddie right back from his leaning position over the desk. I heard his body hit the desk as it crashed forward again.

I CLIMBED slowly to my feet, gripped the desk and straightened. I couldn't help laughing. Never had I seen such an expression as I saw on little Jerry's face. It was like a rainbow after a storm.

The door was slowly opening. I thought it was Elman come to dispose of my body. But it was the Old Man.

"Ah, Race." The Old Man came slowly into the room and closed the door behind him. He lifted his cane and pointed it at Eddie Marco there on the floor. "Dead?" he asked.

"Quite," I said. "Do you want to make something out of it?"

"Hardly." He shook his head. "You did that." He walked over to the desk

and reached for the phone. Then I saw the paper. His confession. I scooped it up. His sharp little blue eyes watched me. He lifted the phone. "I'm calling the police," he said.

"We'll need them," I agreed. "There was a killing some years back. You wrote it up, I understand."

After a bit he got O'Rouke. Then he put down the phone, turned to me, said:

"Why not burn that confession, Race? I had to kill that man years ago just as you had to kill this one tonight. I'm an old man now. Oh, yes, Eddie Marco killed Elizabeth Delton. She came to see me. I have a statement from her that the alibi she gave Eddie was false. At last she had found out the truth about 'her boy' Eddie. I told her to get in touch with you."

He put his hand in his pocket and laid an envelope on the desk. "Elizabeth Delton's statement for the police," he explained. "Not enough to convict Eddie but Eddie doesn't need convicting now."

"You told Lizzie Dell to get in touch with me?"

"Yes," he said. "And I made those telephone calls to both you and Eddie." I went to work untying Jerry and rubbing at his hands and legs, while the Old Man went on. "Yes, I have been arranging for Eddie's end for some time. Yola was planning to marry him because of me. She didn't think I knew. I couldn't have that. Besides, if Eddie took over, it would be bad for the people." He added, with a wonderful smile, "That confession of my little dereliction so many years back—you'll destroy that."

"I think, Mr. O'Neil," I said slowly, "I've acted outside the law enough for one night."

"Nonsense." He still smiled. "You'll destroy it. Eddie snatched your faithful assistant, the boy there. You came. He shot you. I see that." He was looking high up on my arm where the blood was drying. "You drew and killed him. I think I might even say that I had grown suspicious of Eddie and hired you. At least, I will commend you to the police and press. You'd be dead without me."

"You saved my life?"

The phone rang. It was Yola.

"He's dead, Yola. I had to kill him."

"I'm glad I had nothing to do with it. I've been so worried. I tried to get you for hours. But you know now I couldn't put the gun there. I just couldn't."

"You— Are you saying you didn't put the gun there—here?"

"Of course, I didn't. It wasn't there, was it?"

"No. No," I said. I hung up.

"The gun. You—" I looked at the Old Man—"you put it there."

"Yes. Yola doesn't know. You mustn't trust women, Race. I saved you before."

"The fire tongs, you know. I came up behind Eddie in my stocking feet when he was behind the curtains. He thought it was you. You thought it was Yola. But Yola must have known. Dear child, she never spoke of it even to me."

"But the gun—" I was watching him put back the genuine gun now—"how did you know?"

"Listening." He smiled at me. "I have an intercommunication system hidden in my library. I listened to all you and Yola had to say and—"

"All of it?"

"Yes." His smile now was like a setting sun. "No matter. If you wish to turn that document over to the police, all right. I was nearly resigned to it. . . ."

O'Rouke was pleased when he saw the dead Eddie. He thought I was lucky the Old Man took it so well. I still had the confession in my pocket when I sat down to have a drink and a bite to eat with Yola and the Old Man up at his house. I was thinking what Eddie said about my being a killer. I was wondering if the Old Man had arranged that too, planted that idea in Eddie's head. But I was wondering mostly if it was true. Eddie's bullet hadn't bothered me—much.

The Old Man never said a word about that confession even when he saw me to the door on leaving. It was then I handed it to him, on sudden impulse I guess.

He smiled and thanked me, saying:

"You could go far, Race, with me to arrange things for you. Have you ever thought of it?"

"No, I haven't," I said, and meant it. "And I'm not going to think about it either. Good night."

HE WOKE UP • DYING •



Sue screamed, "Watch out, Bert!"

*An acid bath rubbed the blonde out
and stuck Stanley in another man's clothes—
with a tailor-made frame.*

THE time it takes to get home to dinner from your office. That's all you need. Just the forty minutes you spend every night on the bus, and you're tangled up with murder! There's the guy who strangled his gorgeous girl friend; the salesman who pushed the start-

**By RAYMOND
DRENNEN, Jr.**

er button on his car and got blown apart; the slinky blonde with her throat cut. You read about these, but murder doesn't happen to people like you, you figure. Then, before you know it, it's too late. . . .

You're just an ordinary Joe going home dead tired after a bad day at the office. The cold wind's howling sleet out of a sky as black and low down as your thoughts. You're not in a hurry tonight. The way Ellie's been acting the last couple months, you don't care if you ever get home.

So you don't grab the first bus. You step into the bar for a quick one. Maybe two. There's a guy there next to you about your size, but you don't pay him much attention. Good clothes, a little flashy maybe. You're aware of a sharp, pallid face with thin nose and lips.

He's reading the sport page and finally he shoots a grin and predicts the Dodgers will sell short before the season's half over. You like the Dodgers and you tell him so.

He laughs. "My name's Gil Martin. Didn't mean to rumpel you, fella. I'm a football man myself. What are you drinking?"

"I'll buy, Martin," I said. To hell with Ellie. Let her wait dinner for once. "I'm Tom Stanley."

He bought, I bought. You know how it is. By the fourth or fifth round, I was spilling my woe. It does you good to get it off your chest and this Gil Martin seemed like a straight shot. Maybe he'd had a couple before I got to the bar, I don't know.

But he had some troubles himself and the liquor fogged us into bosom buddies. He shook his head thoughtfully, then looked up with a sudden idea.

"What you need, Stanley, is three or four hundred bucks quick."

"Yeah," I said sarcastically. Suddenly I was feeling sorry for Ellie and like a first-grade drunken heel myself. I looked at my watch. I could catch the 8:05 bus if I hurried. I slid off the bar stool. Martin followed me to the sidewalk and we stood under the marquee buttoning our coats against the snow and sleet while I watched the 8:05 slide away without me.

I cursed my luck, knowing it'd be an hour before the next bus and I couldn't

afford a taxi. Dough, cash money. I was low down and bitter, because that's the only trouble Ellie and I ever had. Just the last couple months she'd started nagging me to ask for a raise so we could save some.

"Which way you going, Stanley?" Martin asked, cupping his hands to light a cigarette.

"Allendale," I muttered, wondering whether to go back in the bar and call Ellie.

"That's where I live," Martin said. "Come on and I'll give you a lift. My car's right around the corner."

The cold air was blowing some of the alcoholic fumes out of my brain and I peered at him narrowly, not quite able to pin down the queezy feeling I had. He grinned a little, then frowned.

"Besides, maybe I can do you a favor, Stanley. You seem like a right guy and maybe I can show you how to pick up a quick buck."

Martin must have caught my quick, instinctive suspicion. He laughed shortly and my face reddened. "Strictly legit. We'll talk about it on the way out to Allendale. If you don't like it, you don't have to buy it. I'm just doing a favor, guy."

He had a new convertible with about a thousand bucks of extras on it. One of them was a silver flask. He held it to his lips for a couple minutes, then handed it to me.

The guy was doing me a favor and I'd practically insulted him. I did need dough and I was shivering from cold. At least, I needed the ride home. I flashed him a grin and took a long pull at the flask. It was good scotch whiskey, better than my taste was accustomed to.

The headlights cut through the black night in front of us. The sleet was peppering against the windshield, the wipers slishing back and forth monotonously. I settled after a few blocks, laid my head on the edge of the seat and blinked my lids down over burning eyeballs. Martin talked in a monotone as we drove. Seems he was a salesman or a contractor, or something. Gradually, the car lifted from the road and floated along gently in the air.

That's all I remember. . . .

IT WAS a shoddy twelve-by-twelve room. That's all you could say for it. The cracked plaster and the sooty window told you it was either a cheap rooming house or a third-rate hotel. I was lying on a lumpy bed that creaked when I tried to move. The dismal light that slanted at the edge of the bed came from an old wrought-iron floor lamp in the corner by the window.

I was flat on my back staring with smarting eyes at the dirty, gloomy ceiling. The nauseating stench of alcohol fumes hung around me like a shroud. My clothes were reeking with whiskey. The bed creaked as I rolled on my side, swung my legs over the edge to the floor.

I don't know how long I sat on the edge of the bed, gazing at the thing sprawled on the floor. Its figure was that of a beautiful girl dressed in a red woolen skirt and white sweater.

The legs were delicately curved and sheathed in sheer nylon. The face, unrecognizable now, was horribly burned and lying sideways on a dirty, threadbare carpet that was eaten away by the acid. It still dripped occasionally from the remaining strands of silken blonde hair.

If the murderer had wanted to make certain the dead girl wouldn't be identified, then the acid bath was a success. But I didn't think about that then. I just sat and stared dumbly, my mind and senses unable to grasp the horror of what I saw. My head was throbbing in great torturing waves and my eyeballs felt like they were fastened in their sockets with rusty wire.

Gradually a dull realization of my predicament seeped into me. Cold sweat bubbled on my face and I clawed at my trouser pocket mechanically for a cigarette. There weren't any there. Then my searching fingers pushed through a hole in the pocket where I knew *there wasn't any hole!*

I forced my eyes away from the corpse, brought them to bear on myself. I'd been wearing a brown tweed suit when I left home this morning. Now I had on a gray worsted suit with a wide pin stripe. I jerked to my feet, stood in front of a cloudy mirror on the closet door. My shirt, my tie, my shoes. But the suit wasn't mine!

My watch told me it was eleven-thirty. Three and a half hours since I'd left the bar with Gil Martin. Frantically I stooped and felt the bare shoulders of the corpse. I couldn't tell how long she'd been dead, but her flesh was still warm!

Suddenly I felt trapped and dizzy. I think I'd have fainted if the window hadn't been open a few inches. A chilling gust of air whipped in and struck my face like a cold towel. I stepped to the window, threw it wide open and stuck my head out. It had stopped snowing and sleeting, but it was still cold and the wind was blowing in gusts. It lashed my face, whipping my numbed senses back to life.

There was a rickety iron fire-escape under the window. It led down to a dark alley three stories below. A half block away at the end of the alley, I could make out a dim street lamp. I pulled my head back in and looked around.

A small, maple writing desk with blotter pad on top sat by the floor lamp. There was pen, ink and cheap writing paper in the drawer. Nothing else. A battered wicker basket under the desk was empty.

I was about to straighten up when I spotted a wad of paper behind the basket, concealed by the desk leg. It was a sheet like that in the desk. I smoothed it out on the blotter pad, saw the name *Louise Mathews* written fifteen or twenty times, once right after the other.

You know how you doodle when you're killing time, or trying to bring your thoughts together? Maybe you'll practice writing your own name, or a friend's, or a movie star's. I'm not a detective any more than you are, but I folded the paper and shoved it in my pocket.

A scarred chest against the other wall had a cheesy scarf on top. The drawers were littered with cosmetics, lingerie and dead whiskey bottles. I kept thinking about that name. By then, it sounded familiar.

What was I getting, making like a detective? Nothing maybe, but a little time to get hold of myself. My flesh had stopped crawling, my heart wasn't thumping in my throat like it had been, and my hands weren't shaking.

I was swinging open the closet door when I heard the noises in the hall. Heavy

footsteps and excited voices that were getting louder as they approached.

Suddenly I was panic stricken. Suppose I was caught here? *Framed*, I thought for the first time. Maybe that's the way the killer had planned it. *Gil Martin!* The guy who'd doped me and brought me here. Was *he* the murderer?

The steps were drawing closer now. My eyes darted desperately around the tiny room as cold sweat budded on my skin. I didn't know whether the door to the hall was locked. I hadn't tried it. If the footsteps stopped at the door, I had to pray it was locked. That would give me time to get out the window and part way down the fire-escape.

A man's hat and coat—not mine—were thrown over the foot of the bed. Even as I thought about it, I was slipping them on and running toward the window. I had one foot on the fire-escape when a heavy knock came on the door. I didn't wait to see whether it was locked. I slammed the window shut after me and slid down the clanking iron steps. If the snow hadn't muffled the noise, I'd have sounded like a fire engine.

My heart was pounding like a jack hammer when I reached the alley. You ever been scared, brother? Have you ever had a hysterical feeling that you were being caught for murder? That's how I felt when I hit the alley and glanced up at the window.

Then I raced like a frightened rabbit up the alley toward the street. It was so dark,

I didn't have to worry much about keeping in the shadows, but I stayed near the buildings anyway in case any neighbors were alley-gazing.

I walked a half-dozen blocks before I got my bearings. It was northwest Washington, in a district of old rooming houses and cheap hotels. The wind had died down some but it was cold and I was grateful for the overcoat and hat. They fit me like they were mine, but you know how you are after you get a shock like that. I was still too dazed to attach any significance to it. The blanket of snow on the street deadened the sounds of occasional cars and pedestrians.

The only thought I had was to get the hell out of here. Catch a bus or taxi on out to Allendale as soon as possible. Ellie would be worried sick, but I wasn't thinking about that then. In the year we'd been married, I hadn't stayed out at night without letting her know.

On the next corner, I turned into a tavern, a joint that was anything but fancy. It was crowded with stale smoke and beer and a few drunks trying to sing sentimental songs. I pushed toward a telephone booth to call Ellie, feeling in my pocket mechanically for change. Then I stopped dead.

LIKE a sudden dose of smelling salts, I realized I didn't have on my own clothes. My hand in my trouser pocket was folding around a large wad of bills. It wasn't my money. When I'd left the

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bar with Gil Martin, I'd had maybe a couple of bucks in change. No green money.

With a sinking feeling in my stomach, I edged into the telephone booth, pulled the roll out and counted it. It came to four hundred and sixty-five bucks, mostly tens and twenties!

I didn't call Ellie. I was mixed with murder and I couldn't run out on it. I shoved the roll back in my pocket and made for the bar. My nerves were screaming like sirens keeping time with shaking hands. A couple double ryes quieted me down some and I went through the rest of my pockets to see what else I'd find.

The overcoat held a room key with a fiber tag that said 401, Gladstone Hotel, Washington, D. C. That was about four blocks from the rooming house where I'd awakened with the blonde corpse. There wasn't anything else in the pockets. Not even a book of matches.

Time you started using your head, Stanley, I told myself. It wasn't an accident that I'd been in that rooming house, with whiskey poured all over me to smell like I'd been on a lost vacation. It wasn't an accident that I had on somebody else's clothes—or that I had over four hundred smacks in my pocket.

Gil Martin had offered to put me next to some quick money. It was quick, all right. As I thought back, things seemed to clear up a little.

I remembered how I'd come into the bar, moved up to the stool beside Martin. He'd been reading the paper and I shot him a look. About my size. Hell! As I thought about it, he looked a damn lot like me. Maybe these were his clothes I had on.

Maybe he was waiting in the bar for a fall guy to turn up. And I was the sucker. I remembered taking a long swig from his flask in the car. He'd held the flask to his lips, too—but you can hold your tongue over the spout and not swallow any. Maybe he'd planned the whole thing. If he had, then Ellie's husband Tom Stanley was right in the middle of a murder frame!

The only thing in my favor was my hunch that I'd regained consciousness before I was supposed to. If the whole thing was a carefully planned murder frame, then the police were supposed to break

into that room and find me passed out dead drunk on the bed after having killed my blonde girl friend!

Whoever had changed my clothes for me, knew who I was. I'd had plenty of identification. Suddenly, I knew there would be other bits of evidence, all planted carefully to lead the police right to me! If I could stay ahead of them and gather up the evidence, I thought vaguely. . . . That was a laugh. But it was worth a try.

I left the tavern, and ten minutes later walked into the dreary moth-eaten lobby of the Hotel Gladstone. A bald-pated clerk was dozing in a leather chair in the corner. That was a break.

Tiptoeing past him, I skipped the ancient elevator and took the stairway to the fourth floor. Room 401 was at the rear and my key fit. I edged the door open and enough light filtered in from the hall to show me the room was empty. I found the switch by the door and stepped in.

It was unruffled, looked like the maid had just made the room up. A double bed, desk, radio and several current magazines. Dresser with a couple shirts, socks, change of underwear—all my size. Three suits were hanging in the closet. One of them was my own brown tweed suit. My overcoat and hat hung on a nail at the back of the closet, over a row of empty whiskey bottles.

It took me thirty seconds to change clothes. This time, I didn't hear the footsteps in the hall.

The only warning I had was a key sliding into the lock. I dived into the closet as the door swung in. For a minute that pushed eternity, there was no sound. Not even cautious footsteps coming on into the room. Just my own tortured breathing, the frantic pounding of my heart as I shrank back into a dark corner of the closet.

Then they walked into the room. Through the closet door, I could hear them talking.

"Told you I'd have seen him if he came in." That would be the bald-pated clerk, I guessed. "What'd ye say his real name was?"

"Thomas Stanley is Martin's real moniker. Can you identify him, pop?"

"Well, now—"

A third voice cut in: "You wait up here for him, Mack. I'll go back down in the lobby with Pop and stake out there. Pop can point him out to me when he comes in and I'll call you on the phone. Better to brace him up here."

I breathed easier as the clerk and one of the cops left. They were cops, I knew. They talked like cops. Then I heard footsteps walk to the window, raise it, then close it. They came back and I braced myself for what was coming. My groping hands in the dark closed around the neck of an empty whiskey bottle.

I was crouched low, my heels tense against the wall, when the closet door opened and the detective stood framed. He didn't even get a chance to focus his eyes on me in the darkness.

You can get a lot of steam up when you're scared. Your brain and muscles are stimulated to split second decisions that are impossible under normal circumstances. These dicks had me nailed as a murderer. How they got my name and tied me up with Gil Martin, I didn't know.

All I knew was, with half an excuse, they'd as soon shoot me as look at me. In their book, I was an off-balance killer. If I was to stand a chance of clearing myself, I had to get loose and find Martin. If I couldn't find him before they caught me, they'd never believe there was such a guy.

I shot out of the corner of the closet like a rocket. My head was lowered and my neck folded up like an accordion as I ploughed into his belly. He whooshed air out and caved backward as though he'd been hit with a battering ram. I followed him up, swinging the bottle. He never got a good look at me. The bottle bounced on his head, his eyes rolled and he just collapsed.

I DIDN'T waste any time. On the second floor, I found a fire exit that dropped me into the alley. Back at the dingy tavern, I fortified my skittering nerves with a couple of shots of rye, then went to the telephone booth and called Ellie. When she answered, I could tell she'd been crying.

"Tom! Where are you?" she choked. "I've been so worried. Are you all right?"

"Listen carefully, honey. I'm all right

and don't worry. Has anyone called for me?" If the police had my name, I knew it wouldn't take them long to track down my apartment in Allendale.

"No, no one's called, but . . . Tom!" She broke off in sudden alarm. "Somebody's at the door."

"I'll call you back, Ellie," I snapped. "Don't believe anything anyone tells you."

In ten minutes, I drank three ryes. It was the longest ten minutes I ever lived. Then I called her back. Instantly I noticed a forced calmness concealing panic and terror in her voice. You know those things.

"Are you alone, Ellie?"

"Y-yes." She was too long in answering. I knew she was lying. Someone was with her, beside her at the phone, listening to me and telling her what to say.

"Are the police with you, Ellie?"

"N-no one is with me, Tom." Pause. "Where are you?"

I ignored her question. The thing that was most important was that she not lose faith in me. "Ellie, honey, I don't know when I'll be home. But don't believe what anyone tells you about me."

"Tom! Where are you?" she screeched hysterically. "You've got to come home immediately! Do you hear?"

I hung up. My hand felt cold and clammy as I put the receiver back on the hook. A new note of terror had suddenly swept over me.

Suppose it wasn't the police with Ellie? Suppose my regaining consciousness so soon had thrown Gil Martin's murder plan off center? Suppose he was there with Ellie now, threatening and torturing her, waiting for me to come home! Maybe that was why Ellie had sounded so hysterical in screaming at me to come immediately. If Gil Martin wasn't the murderer, who was? Suppose the murderer was with Ellie now. . . .

I stood on the sidewalk in front of the tavern watching a sedan swing into the curb across the street. Two couples, obviously drunk, piled out and I got a break. As they ran past me into the tavern, I headed for the car. All kinds of hell were churning inside me. If I went out to Allendale in a bus or taxi, I knew I'd probably get caught. But I *had* to know if

Ellie was all right. If the drunks hadn't left the key in their car, I'd have to take a taxi.

The key was there. It was a black sedan, with plenty of gas—and a radio. I turned it on as I drove to Allendale, hoping I'd catch the one a. m. newscast. When I got it, I didn't feel any better:

"Here's more on the acid murder of Sue Conover that we reported a few minutes ago. A bulletin just in from police headquarters says the murderer is believed to be Thomas E. Stanley, a government employee in Agriculture. The FBI is now checking fingerprints found in the rooming house where the body was found. So far there has been no further identification of Miss Conover. From labels in her clothes, she is believed to have come to Washington from Chicago. Her landlady says that Stanley, alias Gilbert Martin, visited the girl frequently. From a letter the police found in the dead girl's room which she had apparently written to Stanley just before he killed her, he was traced to the Gladstone Hotel where he maintained a room under the name of Martin. More news at two o'clock."

Letter? Maybe I was driving too fast. But I was thinking what kind of crazy letter Sue Conover could have written me. I was swinging the sedan into Cameron Street, a block up from our apartment, when I heard the siren behind me. I couldn't risk stopping and bluffing it through. I knew several of the Allendale cops and the way my luck was running, there'd be two of them in the squad car.

I poured on the gas, took the next corner by the grace of the Lord, and headed for Highway No. 1 leading out of town. There wasn't much traffic at that time of night and I knew if I could make the highway, I could distance them.

I had a couple narrow squeaks, but the siren on the old squad car faded fast when we passed the outskirts of Allendale. I stayed on No. 1 for ten or fifteen miles, then cut off on a side road and ploughed into a clump of trees for the night. The effects of the dope and liquor had left me incredibly tired and light-headed.

I went right to sleep—if you can call it sleep. I was convinced it was the police who had been with Ellie when I called, and not the murderer. I was convinced . . . but, when it's someone you love, just being convinced doesn't help much.

Then, there was the letter. The one Sue

Conover had addressed to me. *Me!* I'd never seen her before. It was fantastic. Ellie was the only girl I'd dated in the last three years and I'd married her a year ago. Poker with the boys every Friday night was my recreation . . . not girls.

THE weather in Washington, like its presidents, is unpredictable. When I came awake a little after seven, it was bright and clear. By noon, the sun would have melted all the snow. I drove the sedan to the nearest bus line, then dropped it like a rattlesnake. It was stolen and the police would be on the lookout for it.

I played like a commuter and caught a bus into Washington. The morning newspaper carried the full story and I read it while stowing breakfast at a small diner.

On the second page was a reproduction of the alleged letter that Sue Conover, the murdered girl, had written to me. The police had found it in an envelope under the blotter pad on the desk. I kicked myself for not looking there. It was the only clue to me they found. The envelope was addressed to Gil Martin at the Gladstone, but the letter went:

Dear Tom:

I'm sick and tired of calling you Gil Martin. You're plain Tom Stanley to me, dearest, and you always will be. When can we get rid of that mousy little wife of yours? Why do you keep putting me off? Let's just forget Ellie and you and I go away together. Forgive me for nagging, as you call it—but if you'll please just come back to me, we'll go on as we were. I really didn't mean it, dearest Tom, when I threatened over the phone today to call Ellie and spill the whole thing. You know I didn't. Please forgive me, honey, and come back. I'll be good . . . forever.

Sue.

I stared at it incredulously. It was crazy. It just couldn't be. On the third cup of java. I started thinking again, and realized that since I was framed for murder, this was part of the frame! Of course, it was crazy. But the police would never believe it. And neither would Ellie.

I read the damn thing over again, trying to pin down the vague feeling I'd seen it before. Then I got it. I hadn't seen the letter, but I'd seen the handwriting. That crumpled paper, with the name *Louise Mathews* written repeatedly. I took it out of my pocket and compared

the writing, letter by letter, on both.

There were evidences of similarity. The shape of the *s*'s, the small *e*'s. As I studied it, I got the idea that whoever had written the name *Louise Mathews* was trying to copy something. A signature, perhaps? Maybe I had something.

I choked on my coffee, paid my tab and dived for a telephone booth. But my chin dropped down to here. There were several *Mathews* listed in the directory, but only three started with *L* and none of them *Louise*.

I walked up Pennsylvania Avenue toward the White House, thinking. That letter was in feminine handwriting—no mistake. It was written for the plain purpose of framing me for the murder.

Obviously, Sue Conover wouldn't help frame me for her own murder. Therefore, if Gil Martin was the guy doing the framing, there was another girl helping him. Martin and this girl X had murdered Sue Conover and stuck me with it. Why?

Why would they go to such elaborate lengths? If they just wanted to kill her, they were smart enough to just run out and leave the cops with an unsolved slay. And why the acid to disfigure her face? Then I got it. Nutz, it was staring me right in the eye, but I had to go through all that rigamaroll before I could see it.

Unless the police got an immediate solution, they would do a lot of investigation. Martin and this girl X didn't want that—because they didn't want the murdered girl, Sue Conover, investigated. They didn't want her identified, except as a transient girl in a cheap rooming house.

Why would they kill her in the first

place? To show you how my mind runs in a rut, all I could think of was money. That's what Ellie and I needed. So, I figured if Martin could get any money by killing Sue Conover, then she wasn't just a tramp. At that point, I started thinking that maybe her name was Louise Mathews and she had a bank account. Otherwise, why would this girl X try copying her signature?

When the banks opened at nine o'clock, I started calling them.

"This is the credit manager at Hollywood Credit Jewelry," I spied. "A woman by the name of Louise Mathews has just given us a check for some merchandise and I want to verify her account."

The fourth bank I called asked me how much the check was for. My heart jumped up into my throat because that was the first nibble I'd gotten. I took a deep plunge and said, "Fifty-five hundred."

They told me the check was good. They said it with a kind of snicker that made me think it was chicken feed. But they wouldn't give me her address. They would verify it, they told me, if I would give it to them. I swallowed, asked them to hang on, and hung up.

Could I go to the police now? Give them what I knew? I walked back down Pennsylvania wondering just what the hell I did know. I knew there was someone by the name of Louise Mathews who had a large bank account. Maybe she was a congresswoman from Wyoming—or just somebody's widow, and had never even heard of Gil Martin or Sue Conover.

Then lightning struck on my lame brain and a miracle happened. I ducked into a

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cigar-store phone booth, dialed information and asked for the number of Louise Mathews. A sweet girl with a southern voice gave it to me. I asked her why it wasn't listed and she told me it was a new number.

Lordy, I'm dumb. Louise Mathews, a new number! The name was starting to click. When I first saw it, I thought I'd seen it before. Now I was sure of it. I went to the library and started turning through back issues of the newspapers. A couple hours later, I had it.

On the society page, two months back—a picture of a beautiful blonde. Louise Mathews, only daughter of the Texas oil millionaire, Bayard Mathews. He'd died several months earlier, leaving her alone in the world with four million bucks. Then, two months ago, she'd moved to Washington. When she was interviewed by the paper, she was looking for an apartment.

WHEN I left the library, my feet were walking six inches above the pavement. I was scared. I was sure that the dead girl was Louise Mathews. It was a big deal and I was pictured right in the middle. If I was right, my life wasn't worth a whisper against four million tickets. If I went to the police with what I knew, they would check Louise Mathews . . . and if I was wrong, it would be a quick trial and I would ride to glory in the electric chair. I was sick and I needed someone to talk to. I called Ellie.

It wasn't a very good connection and her voice sounded like she'd been crying all night.

"Where are you?" she asked listlessly.

"Honey, don't talk like that. Don't believe any of it. I didn't do anything," I pleaded.

"How can you say that, Tom?" she cried. "You must have known her or she wouldn't have written you that letter."

There was a clicking on the phone that made it hard for me to hear. Ellie's voice was choked anyway.

"Are you alone?" I asked.

"Yes, I'm alone, Tom," she said, tired. "Where are you? Why don't you give yourself up?"

Then I got mad. "Ellie!" I snapped. "Do you believe in me or not?"

She didn't reply for a moment. When she did, there was sudden alarm in her voice. "Tom! You've got to hang up. Quick!"

I didn't get it. I was too mixed up at that point to understand what the distant screech of the siren meant.

Ellie cried "You've got to hang up right away, Tom. This phone is tapped and they'll trace the call and catch you."

The siren was coming louder then, and I understood. I was calling from a little one-man cigar store on Seventh Street. I dropped the receiver and raced out of the booth. At the door, I saw I couldn't make it. The radio car was only half block away and the siren was dying.

I turned back into the store and looked at the guy behind the counter, a little fellow about my size. There wasn't anything to do. I shoved my hand in my pocket, walked behind the counter and told him to turn around. His eyes bugged out, but he turned. Then I let him have it on the back of the head with a copper ash tray from the counter.

They say in crisis you can think straight and stay calm. Anyway, that's the way I had found it when I was pushing a fighter around over Berlin. And that's the way I felt when this guy slid to the floor. In another couple of seconds, the police radio car would be rolling up to the door.

I caught the clerk by the collar, crammed him into the supply closet and threw my coat and hat in over him. When the cops ran in, I was standing behind the counter with my sleeves rolled up.

"Did a man just make a call from here?" one of them barked. There were four of them and they had their guns out.

"Yeah," I said. "He ran out just before you came up."

They turned back to the door and I took an extra breath.

"Which way did he go?"

"Dunno. Think he went up Seventh," I said, trying to get interested. "What's up?"

One of the cops gave me a long look and a dirty one. Then they went on out and got in the car. I walked to the door and watched them. Then I got my hat and coat and kept on walking.

When I used to get back from those Berlin missions, I'd either get drunk or

get the screaming meemies. I walked straight and even until I got to a bar on New York Avenue. Then I faded into a booth and started shaking, with cold sweat running down all over me. If I'd run out of that cigar store, they'd have shot me down on the street.

It took about eight ounces of rye to steady my nerves and dry my sweat. Then I started thinking that Ellie had warned me. When the chips were down, she hadn't wanted me to be caught. I felt better.

I couldn't keep it up forever, though. Louise Mathews was the key. If I couldn't clear this thing up, solve the murder myself, I was a dead cinch to get caught before very long. If I was going to get any place, I had to find out whether Louise Mathews was alive or dead. I took her number out of my pocket and went to the phone booth to call her.

However, I knew that wasn't so smart, because if she were dead and anyone at all answered, it would be this girl X. Or Gil Martin. That would warn them away.

That meant I had to go over there. The business office of the telephone company gave me her address, an apartment on Connecticut Avenue. I caught a cab and leaned back in the cushions. I was about as relaxed as a row of piano strings. Have you ever wished for anyone to be dead?

When your emotions and stomach are turning over like mine were, then I guess you're not responsible for crazy thoughts. But I was wishing like hell for Louise Mathews to be dead. If she was, I had the thing solved. If she met me at the door, hale and hearty, then I might as well give up. I was that wrong!

The Coronada Apartment is one of those class places that guys like me read about in the paper and walk on the sidewalk. When I got out of the cab, a doorman held the door for me. Maybe I looked like I belonged, because a snooty clerk behind the desk in the lobby didn't try to glare me down.

"What apartment does Miss Mathews have?" I asked him. Then I added, "She's expecting me."

He nodded. "She's in apartment eight-ten. Shall I announce you?"

I shook my head and walked to the elevator. The uniformed operator let me

off on the eighth floor and I stood watching the indicator slide all the way back to the lobby before I could move toward apartment eight-ten. I pushed the buzzer and waited. I didn't wait long. The peephole opened and I caught a quick glimpse of an eye. It shut that fast and the door swung open. I was staring into the grinning, half-amused face of Gil Martin—and the very black automatic that he was pointing at my stomach.

HE STEPPED back, motioning for me to come in. "I don't know how you figured it out, Stanley," he growled. "Maybe you shouldn't have."

He motioned me ahead of him, into a luxuriously furnished corner living room, with picture windows for walls. A girl, a golden-haired beauty in a simple black dress that took your breath away, was lounging on a white sofa, a highball in her hand. Her dark eyes were narrowed in a kind of mingled fear and anger.

"So, you're Miss X," I said. This was it, I knew. I'd figured it right. "Sue Conover, or whatever your name is."

"How did you figure that?" she snapped, frowning.

I laughed, but it wasn't from mirth. Martin was behind me and I could feel his gun prodding my kidneys. I'd figured it out and I had them backed into a corner. So far—that they were going to kill me.

"Simple," I said. "Louise Mathews was new in Washington and not very many people knew her. You look enough like her that you could double for her, so you and Martin decide to kill her. Then you can take her place."

Martin stepped from behind me and turned, holding his gun on me so I was facing them. His lip was curled at one corner but there wasn't any blood in it.

"Go on, Stanley," he sneered.

"When you killed her, you had to be sure she wouldn't be identified. That's why you used the acid on her face. You figured that if her picture was published across the country, then some of her old friends in Texas might see it and recognize her. You figure, if you give the cops a fall guy, they won't go any further."

"You're dead right there, Stanley," Martin snarled. The knuckles on his hand

were showing white. Sue Conover leaned forward on the sofa.

"So, you plan it very carefully. You're pretty smooth with the women, Martin, and you manage to get a sample of Louise Mathews' signature and give it to Sue to practice on. Then, when you're ready, you go down to the bar looking for a fall guy."

"How did you get on to it, Stanley?" Martin demanded sarcastically.

I grinned, because I was getting an idea. It was a feeble grin, but so was the idea. I started swaying a little and put my hand to my head.

"Sue was nervous, with my laying there on her bed drunk, while she was waiting for you to bring Louise. She writes the letter you had cooked up—all you needed was the turkey and his name—then she practices Louise Mathews' signature some more, and throws the paper in the basket."

I swayed some more, rubbed my hand over my forehead like I was faint. "Let me have—" I nodded toward Sue's glass—"some of that."

Martin sneered. "Okay, smart guy. So I cleaned out the basket. How come?"

I reached for the drink. "Sue missed the basket," I said, straightening up. Then I threw the drink in Martin's face and ducked at the same time.

He swore, staggering back, his free hand going to his eyes. It happened fast from then on. Sue screamed, "Watch out, Bert. He's grabbing the table."

I had hold of the cocktail table and she flung herself on the other end. Martin fired, flame shooting over my shoulder. I wrenched the table free and came up swinging it. As it crashed against Martin's head, he fired again and I felt hot lead sear my left arm.

Crouching, I moved toward him, my right fist cocked back. I brought it from Baltimore and it went clear through to his spine. He doubled forward, growling air through his tonsils and I straightened up, brought another long right up to his jaw. I felt bone give against my fist and he dropped in a heap.

Sue Conover was screaming, clawing at my back. I turned, trying to shake her off, then hunkered down quickly and she lost her grip.

At that point, I didn't know much what I was doing, or maybe I wouldn't have hit her. I guess I didn't have to, but I did. My left arm was useless and burning like sin, so I brought my right up against Sue's carefully carved chin. I guess it was hard enough. It put her right to sleep.

I don't know how long I stood there, gazing down blankly at Gil Martin and this girl X. Sue Conover was what they called her. I must have called the police, but I don't remember doing it. They took me down to the hospital and dressed my arm. The bullet had gone clear through the arm and ricocheted off a rug.

Then they took me to the police station. Ellie was there, talking to Detective McElroy when I walked in. She gave me a cold look, then continued talking to McElroy.

"What about Louise Mathews then?" Ellie was asking.

"Oh, she'll get off," McElroy said. "She was just a victim of circumstances and a little blackmail. When she got to Washington, she was lonely and ripe for someone like Martin. So she married him. He was already married to Sue, but they were separated. When Sue found out about it, she started blackmailing both of them. Martin decided to kill her, but he had to destroy her identity so we couldn't trace him through her."

My head was going round and round, but I kept on listening. They had it all wrong and I'd tell them about it as soon as I could get a word in edgewise.

"So Martin picked up your husband at the bar," McElroy went on to Ellie, "and took him up to Sue's room. Then he forced Louise to write that letter and sign Sue's name to it. He figured that would be the end of it. Louise practiced with the pen by writing her name." McElroy gave me a dark look. "Of course, if your husband hadn't stolen the evidence, we'd have—"

"Hell!" I snorted. "Come on, Ellie. This guy's nuts."

In the taxi going out to Allendale, Ellie forgave me for burning money up drinking at a bar and told me why she'd been nagging me to save some.

"I was keeping it a surprise, darling," she purred. "Shall we call him Junior?"

KILLING'S TOO EASY

"Oh, Dave, no! You're
not a killer!"



By
PRESTON GRADY

WHEN I saw the announcement in the newspaper, I guess I went crazy—again. They'd kept me in a mental hospital a year before they left me out of the army. I'd been sane since then. The state went to a lot of trouble to prove that I'd been sane—and that I'd done a murder. Well, I agreed with the

● *Chain-gang fugitive Kennet was after his double-crosser—
and this time, nobody was going to do his chilling for him!* ●

state about my sanity, if not about the murder. But I was going to commit one now.

"What's the matter with you, Red?" the guard said.

It was his newspaper I'd been glancing over while my truck was being loaded. Tobacco bulged his cheek. In the crook of his arm was a buckshot-loaded double-barrel.

I folded the newspaper and handed it back to him through the cab window. My hands were shaking. I knew I must have been livid. "Just the heat, I guess. Thanks for letting me see the paper."

The power shovel dumped a last scoop of earth into the truck behind me. I got in gear and rolled off slowly, up the slope to the crest of the road.

The gang was scattered along the hillside for about fifty yards, wielding picks and shovels. Half of them wore leg chains. It had taken me nearly a year to earn my way out of chains.

I drove a hundred yards to the area we were filling, backed in and dumped. There were several other trusties here, one on a bulldozer, scattering and leveling the soil.

When I drove up to the road, empty and ready for speed, instead of turning back toward the convict gang for another load as I had done a hundred times, I turned in the other direction. I stepped on the gas.

It was as simple as that. I could have done it any one of those other hundred trips. Fifty-odd convicts scattered along a highway and three underpaid guards with shotguns to watch them. None of the guards even bothered to shoot at my vanishing tires. I was out of their range. One of them, I knew, would be running for his car to chase me.

The truck roared. I got it up close to sixty-five. That was all it would make, except downhill. I prayed. All I wanted was five miles to the double-track main line of the railroad. It crossed a ridge, along which the highway ran at that point. From either direction a heavily loaded freight train was likely to be straining from the grade it had climbed, slow enough for me to swing aboard.

If I wasn't lucky enough to catch one my pursuer, or pursuers, might be in

doubt as to whether I had, or did, if a freight came by. They might expect me to take either a northbound or a southbound, just to get away.

But I wasn't running just to be running. I would take only a southbound, for the sixteen miles into Palmetto, the county seat. Beyond killing Sam Carthage, I had no plans.

At the junction with a county road, where a general store sat in the fork, I slowed down to forty to pass. The truck had *Palmetto County—Department of Public Works* printed on its cab doors and there was a telephone in the store.

The guard who undoubtedly was chasing me might stop here to use the phone or return when I abandoned the truck. The two guards left with the gang couldn't do anything; they had to stick with the rest of the convicts.

A couple of hounds sleeping in the shade of the chinaberry tree in front of the store didn't even raise their heads. There were three cars parked but no person was in sight.

I got the truck back up to sixty-two and -three. Ahead of me I heard a steam whistle blow for the crossing. It sounded as if it was northbound. That was too bad. I wanted a southbound. If it was a long freight and pulling up the grade, it would be slow enough for me to have caught. And it probably was a freight, I told myself; most of the passenger trains on this line now were hauled by Diesels.

Slowing the truck off the road into a field at the crossing, I jumped out and ran south through the waist-high broomsedge. The whistle sounded again. The train came into view from the south. My heart sank. It was a passenger train, a short one, and traveling entirely too fast for me to swing on, even if I'd wanted to.

I dropped to hands and knees and began to crawl through the high brown sedge. Finally I tumbled behind an old terrace. I lay there panting. The train rushed by, shattering the stillness of the countryside. It was hardly out of sight before the sedan squealed to a stop at the crossing.

THE big pot-bellied guard got out and stood looking down the track toward the vanished train and then at the county

truck. I could see his lips move, probably swearing. He couldn't be sure how fast the train had been moving. He walked over to the truck. I parted the sedge stems before my face to watch him.

He looked over the truck carefully. I couldn't imagine what he was looking for. He lifted the hood and leaned in, over the motor. He propped his shotgun against the fender. He did some tinkering. I guessed he was removing part of the distributor so the truck wouldn't run.

He must have figured I'd caught the train which passed just before he arrived but in case I hadn't and was hiding nearby, he'd take the truck out of the play. He put the part in his pocket, picked up the shotgun, stood looking down the track toward where the train had run, then returned to his sedan, got in and turned it around, and drove back the way he had come—probably heading for the store to make his phone call.

He'd probably call the next railroad stop to the north, for the train to be searched for David "Red" Kennet, lifer, murderer. That was dandy.

I'd almost made up my mind to start walking along the railroad, toward Palmetto, and run the risk of being spotted, when I heard a southbound train. In a minute or two I knew it was a freight, the way it took the grade. When it came by I swung on easily, about the middle of the long string, and didn't even bother to locate an empty; just braced myself between two cars for the short ride.

The wheels sang, *Kill Sam Carthage, kill Sam Carthage, kill Sam Carthage.*

I wasn't in stripes. Stripes were no longer used. The county could buy more

serviceable army surplus shirts and pants cheaper. I'd need a change before calling on Sam. I figured I could make it all right to Mary Venable's cottage, where my things were stored—including a .45 automatic.

Mary would be a problem but she wouldn't rat on me. She was the one person who never had lost faith in me, who believed me innocent.

The afternoon shadows were lengthening when I dropped off the freight in a patch of pines on the outskirts of town. I walked through the pines, found a path past old shacks and so came to Mary's back door.

The wooden door was open for air and the screen door wasn't latched. I walked in. She was in the living room, at a desk, making some kind of sketch. She dropped her pencil and rose swiftly to face me, one hand on the back of the chair in which she'd been sitting.

She was never lovelier, her hair so black it had purple highlights, her ivory skin flushed with pink and her lips red as hibiscus. But I scarcely saw her through the flame of rage which enveloped me. "Dave! What are you doing—"

"Where are my things?"

After the trial, she'd taken my meager possessions from my room at Carthage's place where I worked, to store for me here in her home.

"I'll show you," she said as she led the way to a small storeroom at the back of the house. "But how could you come here? Did they send you to town on an errand?" The camp boss had done that a couple of times. "I thought you were forbidden to make a personal visit," she said.

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"I am forbidden," I said. I opened my trunk and felt under clothes. "I wasn't sent on an errand. I just came. They'll be after me. But they won't catch me before I do what I've got to do." The cold metal of the heavy automatic was in my fingers and I brought it out.

"What, Dave? You're not yourself! You're—" Her eyes focussed slowly on the gun.

"I'm going to kill Sam Carthage," I said.

This much I'll say for her. She didn't have hysterics. Many a woman in her place would have. She loved me. She'd shown it, even flaunted it, to the town, the judge and jury and her school board. She'd fought for my freedom—but it hadn't been enough.

"Oh, Dave, no! Please! Please! You're not a killer! Believing that is the one thing I've held to. . . . But why, after three years—"

"Did you see the announcement in the paper?" I asked, checking the gun and making sure it was loaded. "Sam's running for sheriff. The only candidate. Election assured. A rotten, grafting crook."

"It's not your responsibility! You can't kill a man just because—"

"Listen, Mary. You know I'm not a flag-waver. But I almost lost my life and I did lose my mind, for a year, fighting to stop people like Sam Carthage thousands of miles away from—"

"But don't you see you're proving them right? That if you do this thing you *are* a killer? Only four years more and you'd be eligible for parole and we'd—" Tears were rolling down her cheeks and she knuckled them away.

"Only four more years, Mary? Seven in all before the Parole Board will even review the record of a lifer. The best years of your life and mine. No. They said I was a killer. All right. I'll go along with that. I'll prove it this time even to myself."

"But, Dave—"

"Get out of here while I change my clothes."

I pushed her out and slammed the door. I changed to sport shirt and slacks. I found a snapbrim hat to cover my red thatch. The gun I put in my left-hand pants pocket and kept my hand there on

it, to conceal its bulk until I needed it.

STARTING out through the living room, I stopped abruptly. A tall, well-dressed man, middle-aged, with thin gray hair, was being admitted by Mary. I'd never seen him before.

"John," she said, "this is our new minister, the Rev. Dr. Grace. . . . Dr. Grace, my nephew John Venable, from Charleston." She was a fast thinker. She had no nephew named John in Charleston or anywhere else.

It was lucky it was my left hand in the pocket on the gun. I took his extended right and said, "Hello, Doctor. How long have you been in Palmetto?"

"Just a few days," he said, "It's beautiful. And I've hardly had time to get acquainted before being put on the committee with Miss Venable for the new playground. That's what I dropped by to talk over. But on the way I had my automobile radio on and heard an alarming piece of news."

"Yes, Dr. Grace?" said Mary. Her eyes were still a little swollen but a comparative stranger might not notice.

"A murderer has escaped from one of our county convict gangs, working on a road," he said. "Name's Kennet. Serving life for killing a state constable here a few years ago. You must have been here then, Miss Venable. Do you remember the case?"

"Yes," she said, "I—"

But he was too eager to tell us the news. He sat down. "The announcer recalled that this Kennet had been working as a mechanic for Sam Carthage. At Carthage's big auto repair and used-car auction lot. Kennet was acting as receiver for a stolen car gang and slipping the stolen cars into the auctions. Sergeant Pitts of the state constabulary had evidence and was about to arrest him. Kennet shot the investigator."

"So Carthage testified," Mary said hopelessly, with a glance at me.

The gun bulked under my left hand in my pocket. I still had my hat on, which must seem odd. But the slacks were thin cotton and if I took my hand out of the pocket the shape of the big .45 would show. I sat on the end of a divan, my left leg against its arm, and slipped the gun out

of my pocket, shoving it between the cushion and the arm.

The preacher had no reason to suspect I was anything other than a visiting nephew from Charleston. I had to stall, though my insides were twisting with impotent fury at the delay.

"Well," said the minister, "he escaped. Caught a northbound train, they think. I suppose the county is rid of him."

"Yes, Dr. Grace," said Mary sweetly. "Now about the playground equipment. I have a manufacturer's catalog which I received today. I left it in my car. John, do you mind stepping out and getting it for me?"

There was a high hedge in front of the cottage and I wasn't likely to be noticed. I went out to where her coupe was parked in the driveway and looked for a playground equipment catalog—on the seat and in the dash compartment. No catalog. Could she have been giving me a chance to leave? But that would seem odd to the preacher and besides, my gun was hidden in the divan.

After thinking it over a few minutes and making sure there was no catalog in the car, I returned to the living room. Mary was rummaging in a big purse.

"Oh, I'm sorry, John," she said. "I got the catalog in this afternoon's mail at the post office and thought I'd left it in the car, but I remember I stuffed it into my bag. Here it is," she exclaimed, producing a thin folder.

I sat down where I'd been before and got the gun back into my pocket. I said, "If you'll excuse me while you talk over your business, I'd like to run downtown for a few minutes. May I use your car, Mary?"

She stared at me, unable to conceal her frustration, but she said, "Of course." She gave me a key folder. Her eyes said, "*Don't, Dave! Please don't!*"

I told the preacher I was glad to have met him and got the hell out of there. I still had the hat on and believed I could drive to Carthage's without being picked up. He'd be there at this time of day, probably alone. He was always the last to leave, hanging around until time for dinner. He usually had dinner at a tourist camp and restaurant he owned a mile down U. S. 17 from the automobile shop.

If Mary had been counting on the delay to evaporate my determined anger—she was wrong. I was never so sure of anything in my life as of what I was going to do. It had been building up in me for three years on a chain gang. Carthage stepping in as the chief law-enforcement officer of the county was the final blow which stripped me of pretense and left nothing but the implacable desire to kill.



Driving through back streets and keeping my hatbrim turned down, I reached Carthage's big garage and used-car lot, where I had lived and worked. It was a long, quonset-type structure. A few weeks after I'd drifted into town and gone to work here, I had caught on that Sam Carthage was running in a few stolen cars in his auctions, to which dealers came from all over the Southeast. But the work on the cars, including the altering of motor numbers, was done elsewhere. I figured it was none of my business.

I parked at a corner of the lot farthest from the long garage and office building. Looking for Mary's catalog, I'd noticed a folded paper sack in the dash compartment and now I had an idea. I got out the sack, put the gun in it, my hand over its butt. It looked as if I might be carrying a bottle or something of the sort.

Carefully I approached and went the building, glancing in the big windows. No one was in sight. I approached the door to Sam's office. Through his window, I saw him at his desk, the light on against the gathering dusk.

I opened the door, stepped in and closed the door behind me in one smooth motion. I held the sack firmly.

"Hello, Sam," I said.

HIS big-knuckled hands were on the desk, his kegl-like belly against the partly opened middle drawer. His heavy black brows came together and his thick wide lips whitened on the cigar in his beefy face.

He said nothing. His eyes were like marbles, as black as his lying heart. I had minded my own business, said nothing of my suspicions to Sam or anybody else, certainly not to Sergeant Pitts, had done my work and kept my nose clean—and then Carthage had made me the fall guy, had almost sworn me into the electric chair. His testimony would have sent me there if it hadn't been for my war record.

He'd come into my room at the end of the garage farthest from his office that night and woke me out of a sound sleep. He'd stuck a gun in my hand.

"There's a burglar in my office," he had said. "I came by and happened to see him go in. He's got the shades down and he's going through the files. Go out around the building and keep that door covered while I get the police."

If I hadn't been half asleep I would have known this was fishy. How could Sam know the burglar was going through the files if the shades were down? But Sam Carthage was my employer, I'd had a hard day and was only half awake. I'd obeyed instructions, gone to cover the office door.

The next thing I knew cops were turning flashlights on me, telling me to drop the gun. I did so. They herded me into the office and there was Sergeant Pitts' corpse, shot with the gun I had held.

Now the hate which had been simmering in me for three hard years came to a boil as I walked around beside Carthage's desk where I could see all of him. The sack hung in my hand beside my thigh. He seemed not to notice it. He half turned in his swivel chair to face me. He rose to his feet.

His black-haired hand darted into the desk drawer and started out with a revolver. In that instant I was sure I could have killed him. The .45 was in the sack in my hand and all I needed to do, I told myself, was raise it and fire and that would be the end of Sam Carthage. A .45 tears a hell of a big hole in a man.

Further, it would have been plainly a

matter of self defense. He was going to kill me, even though he had no idea about the sack.

But killing him would be too easy for him, too quick and painless. I knew in that instant, too, that killing him would do me no good, would not satisfy the rage in me.

Instead of shooting him, I kicked the revolver out of his hand. The gun went skidding across the floor to a corner of the room. I dropped the sack off my .45 and covered him.

"Keep your hands up," I said.

He said, "What do you want, Kennet? Money for a getaway? There's between five and six thousand dollars cash in the safe. I'll get it for you."

I didn't answer him. Sweat began to pop out on his thick face. The cigar fell out of his mouth, unnoticed. His gaze was frozen on the muzzle of the .45 in my hand.

I went over to the corner and picked up his revolver. Crossing to the low window, I lifted a foot and jammed a big hole in the screen. I threw both guns through the hole out into the yard.

Carthage was a powerful, barrel-chested giant, outweighing me at least fifty pounds, but agile. He scrambled to the top of his desk and dived at me. My left fist hooked into his face and he crashed against my shoulder.

We went down. His hands got a grip on my throat and I jerked my knee into him. His hands loosened. I smashed left and right against his mouth. Blood spurted over me. His right came up against my chin and my head snapped back.

He got on his feet and his heavy shoe exploded against my jaw. I went spinning on my backside across the floor and he came over to kick me again. I grabbed his foot, jerked it and he sat down like a ton of bricks, shaking the walls.

I jumped, both my heels striking his chest, and fell beyond him. Carthage scrambled up, grabbed a straight-back chair and swung it over his head at me. I ducked. The chair splintered partly across my back and partly on the desk behind me. I ran, butting into him. His fingers caught my head and gouged into my eyes. I tore his hands loose, raised up and slugged his jaw. Both of us were

breathing in hoarse rasps and streaked with blood.

After that, I don't remember much of the details. It must have gone on five or ten minutes. Time ceased to exist. The office was a shambles. We were ragged savages. Half my teeth were knocked out. I remember spitting them in his face. The next thing I remember clearly is sitting astride him, pummeling his jaw with leaden fists I could hardly swing.

When I stopped, fighting for oxygen in my lungs, arms propped against him, he gasped:

"What—do you want, Kennet?" his breath coming in gulps.

I managed to grate words through the ruin of my mouth: "Who—who killed Pitts?" I wanted to hear him say it although I knew the answer, had always known the answer.

"I did," he said.

"You framed me?"

"Sure. You knew it all along. But—who'd believe you, against me?" Carthage choked out.

"You were—pushing the stolen—cars, weren't you?"

"Sure."

"Damn you," I said. "You're going to tell—the police—that."

I got off him, staggering, reeling, hardly able to hold myself up, and tried to grasp his necktie, pull him up.

The door opened and the Rev. Dr. Grace stood there, guns in both hands, Carthage's revolver trained on the big man who raised himself on an elbow and then stumbled to a crouch beside me.

"It won't be necessary for him to tell

the police," the preacher said. Mary was beside him.

"We've been waiting outside the window for several minutes and heard his confession."

Mary came to me where I leaned against a wall, still gulping air into my tortured lungs, and she drew my arm across her shoulder. Her soft fingers explored the bleeding wreck of my face with tender, gentle skill.

"Dave, forgive me!" she cried. "After I'd done it, I could have cut my heart out."

"Done what?"

"When I sent you out of the house to my car, I got your gun from the divan, under cover of my big purse, excused myself for a minute, went in the kitchen and unloaded your gun. Then I returned it to the divan, still hiding it behind my purse, before you came back in and got it."

"So—I came here to kill Carthage with an empty gun?"

"Yes, Dave! But I didn't realize I was risking your life! All I could think of was that you hadn't been a killer and I didn't want you to start being one. Then when you'd gone, I realized what you might walk into. I was crazy with worry and told the preacher everything and we followed you."

Tears were streaming down her lovely face. I didn't have to lean on the wall any more. I got both arms around her as she sobbed on my chest.

"Don't cry, honey," I said. "You were right after all. I just didn't have it in me to be a killer. Everything's going to be all right now."



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TARGET FOR TONIGHT

*Only a gal with a stake in Winton Hull
would swear that someone else shot an arrow
into Hull's never-loving wife—
and left him holding the bag.*

He poised on top of the
wall.



By **JOHN D.
MacDONALD**



**Startling
Suspense Novelette**

CHAPTER ONE

Bull's-Eye!

ALL through the night she lay in the garden. At dusk she had been there just over an hour. At dusk the garden was sweet with the drift smoke of burning leaves from other yards, sweet with the dead ripeness of fall flowers.

She lay with her shoulders flat against a gray flagstone in the walk that curved

around the plot where the concrete bird-bath stood, her slender legs extending away from the birdbath toward the squat sundial.

In the hour of dusk when there were sleepy birdsongs in the woods just beyond the fieldstone wall, when there were the distant shrill cries of children at play—that was when she was most beautiful, fallen in dancer's pose, prematurely silver-gray hair crisp-curled, tight to her head, like a gay helmet, blue eyes half closed, unseeing. Her dress was gray, with blue tones in the gray.

The night was clear and cool and the high star patterns shifted through the sky, turning like a great slow wheel. A little after ten the phone in the house was a distant shrilling. Eleven rings, and then the silence again.

Not complete silence. Far down the street a radio was turned loud, and only the bass beat could be heard in the garden. A wind crackled the dry leaves of the elm and some drifted crisply down. One leaf rested across her mouth for a time until another breeze whirled it off to catch in the barberry.

Before dawn the milkman came down the path beside the house, bottles clinking in the partitioned metal basket. He whistled softly between his teeth, opened the little door of the milk box, put in the usual two quarts.

The dew was heavy just before dawn. The dress was soggy then, more clearly limning her body. The dew had taken the curl from the gray-silver hair, showing the delicate lines of the skull.

The wall at first blocked the sun which, as it rose higher, at last touched the gay feathered end of the fletched arrow. Feathers of black and red, crisp in the aluminum shaft, delicately beaded with dew as were her eyelashes.

Half the length of the arrow was visible. It was at a slanted angle, disappearing into the soft hollow at the base of her throat. There was very little blood. It had formed in a small pool around the shaft and had dried there.

At a quarter to eight the garbage truck stopped in front of the house. The man came down the walk to the kitchen steps, tilted up the cast iron rim of the sunken can, reached down and lifted out the inner

container. As he turned to walk back to the truck, he glanced down toward the garden. He had been on this route for over two years, and always he looked at the garden. It made him feel good to look at the garden.

He made a small sound as though he had been hit in the pit of the stomach. The handle of the container slipped out of his hand and the can fell, spilling orange rinds and coffee grounds.

He walked, absurdly on tiptoe, down to within ten feet of her. He swallowed hard, turned and ran back the way he had come, beginning to shout when he was forty feet from the truck.

All down the street the people tensed at the breakfast table as they heard the sirens on this street which had so seldom known that loneliest sound on earth. Coffee cooled in the cups and eggs simmered long overtime as they went down and stood as close as possible to the gray fieldstone house at the end of the street, the house nearest to the woods.

But the policemen blocked the driveway and the walk, saying, "Nothing to see. A little accident. Better go home, folks. Move along there."

One boy of twelve circled the house and climbed the wall. He poised on top, then dropped back to the crisp leaves outside the wall. He retraced his steps to the street. Somehow the neighbors knew that he knew. The boy was ill and wanted to go home. He wanted to go home and go to bed. But suddenly he was an important person.

"It's Mrs. Hull. Yeah, she was there on her back with a shiny arrow sticking out of her throat. Yeah, she's dead. I don't know how I know, but she's dead. Half of that arrow is in her."

Memory was strong and the boy gagged. The crowd parted for him. He walked slowly home, scuffing his heels, his mouth and throat acid-tart.

* * *

Milya Grant listened, frowned, said, "Just a moment. I'll see if he's left the office." She put the phone down, went through the open door into the inner office. Winton Hull stood by his desk, hat and topcoat on, selecting papers and in-

serting them neatly into his tan briefcase.

"There's a call for you, Win."

He glanced impatiently at his watch. "Tell 'em I've left, Milya. I've only got twenty minutes to get to the terminal and buy my ticket."

"I think you'd better take it, Win."

"What makes you sound so funny?"

"It's the police. They're calling from Coopersville."

"Police?"

He stared at her, then picked up the phone on his desk and said, "Hull, speaking. . . . No, I didn't phone this morning. She sleeps la— what's wrong? . . . What! . . . Yes, of course. I'll be right out."

He hung up the phone. Milya saw his hand tremble.

"What is it?" she asked.

Win sat down, his eyes narrowed, his lips compressed. His strong hands rested on the desk top with a peculiar helplessness. "It's Lorraine. She's dead. I don't know how or where. He said she was— killed."

Without another word, he stood up and walked blindly out of the office. The outer door shut softly.

Milya stood and was shamed by the exultation that filled her. She stood by the window and looked down twenty stories into the morning traffic of 41st Street. She was a tall girl, not beautiful because of the wideness of her face through the cheekbones, the slight heaviness of her lips. But her gray eyes were lovely and her brown hair had a rare copper glint. She wore her office uniform of black skirt and white blouse. She had a delicately inarticulated awkwardness of youth about her that belied her efficiency.

She turned quickly away from the window and placed a call to Detroit, told the branch office that they could not expect Mr. Hull on the noon plane, that he would advise them as soon as possible when he'd be able to make the trip.

It was better to be busy. She took the dictation discs from the machine by Win's desk, carried them out to her own desk and fitted the first one into the transcription unit, adjusted the speaker to her ear.

The electric typewriter spoke crisply and the neat lines of the first letter quickly filled the page.

When the letter was finished, there was a pause. Then in a voice far different than his dictation voice, she heard Win say, "Have I remembered to tell you today how much I love you?"

She turned off the machine, lowered her forehead to the cool metal of the typewriter and began, very softly, to weep.

THE Coopersville police headquarters was in the back of the town hall, constricted by the assessor's office, the town clerk's office and the branch office of the county supervisor. The building had been constructed of a pleasing tan stone, but fourteen years of residence by units of the town government had left the interior with the smell of antiseptic devices in the lavatories, the reek of cheap cigars, a faint odor of stale beer and laundry.

The Police Chief, Arthur Lanik, headed a force composed of two lieutenants, one of whom was his younger brother, three patrolmen and one detective. In contrast to Arthur Lanik, who was bald, heavy and florid, the detective, Lan Pankerd was

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a small, gray and wordless, observant man.

Reporters from the metropolitan dailies had clustered in the wide hall outside police headquarters, while inside the chief's office, Win Hull sat at a chair pulled up to the chief's oak desk, flanked by Lan Panker, Mayor Lewis, Robert Lanik—the chief's brother—and Dr. Bogart Lyman, the young coroner.

On the desk lay the aluminum arrow, the hunting point gleaming.

Arthur Lanik said, "I realize how rugged this is for you, Mr. Hull, but this is a clean case of criminal carelessness. We want to round up the cottonhead who fired this damn thing into the air. It will help if we can narrow down the time of death. Now, you say you saw your wife at about six?"

"That's right. I drove out from the city and arrived home a little after four. I had a drink and then packed my bag. At about five-thirty I phoned a cab to take me down to the station. I was going on a business trip and I usually left the car for Lorraine while I was gone. The cab was late and I barely made the six-ten back to the city. I didn't have time to get a ticket. I had to buy it from the conductor. Figuring about ten minutes from the station to the house, I must have left just a minute or so before six. Lorraine was in the garden at that time."

"Didn't she come out to see you off?"

"I take a lot of trips. It wasn't that important."

"If you weren't leaving until this morning, why did you go back to town last night?"

"There's some trouble in our Detroit office. I wanted to make transcripts of some of the personnel records. It was more convenient to work late at the office and spend the night at a hotel in town."

"What was she wearing when you left?"

"I . . . I don't know, really. She usually wears pale blue or gray or pale green. Those colors suited her best."

Arthur Lanik slid a glossy print across the desk. "Since you identified the body, this shouldn't bother you too much. Was that the dress?"

Win Hull shut his teeth hard. "I'd say it was. Why is that important?"

"If it was a different dress, we'd have to

set the time of death back a little bit. As it is, Doc Lyman can only approximate it. Right, Doc?"

"Yes. Death wasn't instantaneous. The arrow missed the heart, tore lung tissue and paralyzed her by clipping the spinal cord. She fell immediately, but I couldn't say how long it would take the torn lung to fill. Of course, if the arrow had hit exactly dead center, it would have killed her immediately by severing the jugular vein."

"Thanks, Doc. Now yesterday was the third day of deer season and though the woods have been full of damn fools with guns there haven't been too many of them hunting with arrows." He picked up the phone. "Harry, send that Harbisher fellow in."

Harbisher was young and tall, with thick wrists and an Indian cast to his features.

"Sit down," Lanik said. "Mr. Harbisher, gentlemen, is a recognized authority on this bow and arrow stuff. He's hunted game in Africa with a bow. He's agreed to give his services, providing we pay transportation. I was lucky to get hold of him so quickly. Harbisher, here're the pictures of the woman. She was in her garden. This happened to her last night and we found her this morning."

Harbisher took a long look at the pictures. He said softly, "Tough deal. The angle is right. There're damn fools in every sport."

"How far away could the arrow shooter be?"

"That would depend on the pull of the bow the archer was using. If it was a hunting bow, which I assume it was, with a fifty-five to seventy-pound pull, he could have been five hundred yards away, maybe six."

"Didn't that arrow go too far in?"

"Good grief, no! On a direct shot an arrow like that one on the desk there, shot by an expert, would pass completely through a buck and stick half its length in the ground on the other side. Is that the arrow?"

"Yes, you can handle it. We couldn't raise a print off it. Just some blurs. We wonder if you could tell us how to trace it."

Harbisher picked up the arrow and ex-

amined it very carefully. Then he said:

"It's new. The hunting tip still has the factory polish. It hasn't been re-ground. It isn't numbered. I number all of mine to keep track of which ones fly true. It was made by the Gardner Archers' Service Company in Racine. There are at least eighteen retail outlets for their equipment in New York City alone. Probably more. I personally don't like their arrows. I find the shaft too light in relation to the trip. The fletching is a factory job and . . . hmmm!"

"What is it?" Lanik asked.

"Look here. See the relationship of the notch to the feathers? The arrow tip rests to the left of the bow. If the arrow is notched on the bowstring improperly, one feather is in a position to brush the wood of the bow. This bruises the feather and hurts accuracy. Whereas, if the arrow is revolved one half turn, no feathers brush the wood of the bow. This feather here is bruised. That means it was improperly shot.

"A MAN in a hurry to shoot at game might yank the arrow from the quiver and notch it without looking. But this arrow was shot into the air. Thus the archer was an amateur. That may make it tougher to trace him. He won't belong, probably, to the archery clubs. He may have been hunting without a license. With the death spread all over the papers, he won't be likely to come rushing in and give himself up."

"Could it have been kids?"

"Rich kids, maybe. These arrows cost a dollar and a half apiece. Even a rich kid would hardly shoot it away for the fun of seeing it sail."

"Maybe he was shooting at a bird."

Harbisher shrugged. "Could be. I don't think I can be of any more help."

"You've helped a lot."

"At least the woman didn't suffer."

"I'm afraid she did," Doctor Lyman said. "She lived for a time."

Harbisher snorted. "Utterly impossible! I know a little anatomy and I know the shocking power of a hunting arrow. That woman was dead when she hit the ground."

"I would like to believe that," Win Hull said.

Dr. Lyman said coolly, "May I remind you, Mr. Harbisher, that I have an entirely adequate medical background for performing a simple autopsy and for ascertaining the time of death. Mrs. Hull did not die until anywhere between fifteen and forty minutes after she fell. I grant that she may have been unconscious, but she was living and prompt medical attention could have saved her."

Harbisher flushed. He picked up the arrow. He balanced it on the palm of his hand and said, "Few people know it, but the shocking power of a hunting tip is greater than that of most calibers of hunting bullets. Look at the tip. It is better than an inch across the barbs. And it weighs as much as a thirty-caliber slug. An arrow is designed so that it spins in the air, like a spiral football pass. The spin, as with a bullet, makes it fly truer than if it were dead in the air. The fletching helps the spin.

"I've seen slow-motion pictures and stroboscopic pictures of arrows in flight. They spin fast, gentlemen. If you ever hear one close to your head you'll hear two sounds—the hum of the spinning tip and the whiss of the feathers. And now you're trying to tell me that the shock of a spinning blade driven down through a woman's chest cavity wouldn't kill her outright. Nonsense!"

Dr. Lyman had an odd look on his face. He said, "Does the spin stop at the moment of impact?"

"No. That's been proven with tests on gelatine blocks."

"Are there defective arrows that don't spin?"

"Yes. But this one isn't defective."

Dr. Lyman said, "Chief, this is going to make your case more interesting. That wide flat tip made a perfectly straight channel. That's why there was so little blood. I had little difficulty removing the arrow. The barbs slipped right back through the gash they'd cut. Thus the arrow wasn't spinning. Thus, it wasn't fired from a bow. It looks like Mrs. Hull was stabbed with the arrow."

There was a tension in the office like a deep hum below the range of audibility.

In the silence. Win Hull said, "Two years ago I bought a hunting bow and arrows like that one, a dozen of them.

My doctor advised that I was on the edge of a breakdown and he told me to take up some hobby. I bought the set and never used it. I remember that the arrows were that color."

"And where are those arrows now Mr. Hull?" the chief asked mildly.

"At my home. In the game-room closet, I think."

"Wouldn't it have been a good idea to mention them before?"

"I . . . I didn't think of the connection."

"You claim that your wife remained in the garden when you went out the front of the house and took the cab."

"She was."

"And the cab driver didn't see her?"

"He couldn't have seen her. I told you that she stayed in the garden. It can't be seen from the road."

"What hotel did you stay at last night, Mr. Hull?"

"Well . . . as a matter of fact, I didn't stay at a hotel."

"But you already told us you did? Isn't that a little peculiar?"

"I think I said that I had planned to stay at a hotel."

"But you didn't. Where did you stay?"

"I don't think I can tell you that, Mr. Lanik."

"What was the time of death, Doc?" Lan Pankerd asked in his soft voice.

"Anywhere from six-thirty to seven-thirty."

"Then," Lan said, "Mr. Hull could have stabbed his wife a few minutes before six?"

"It's possible," Dr. Lyman said un-
easily.

Chief Lanik said, "Hull, this is a small town. It's pretty common knowledge that you and Mrs. Hull weren't exactly billing and cooing. I'd suggest you call your lawyer."

Win Hull's voice was taut. "Are you charging me with murder?"

"I haven't made up my mind. Just say that we're holding you until we get further information."

"You are dead wrong. If it was an accident, I wasn't going to be vindictive about it. But if someone stabbed her, I want to know who did it. It won't help locate him by holding me."

"We'll be the judge of that, Hull."

CHAPTER TWO

The Lady's Warbonnet

STEVE ROYAL, Win Hull's attorney, was let into the small basement room shortly after twelve. The door swung shut with a decisive click. The light was harsh from the overhead bulb, but the room was comfortably furnished with bed, easy chair, bureau and night table.

Steve, in contrast to Win's tallness, his long almost dour face, was small and plump, with an open expression, sandy hair, a surprisingly deep voice. They had been in school together. Steve grinned and said:

"The bridal suite, I see." He sobered quickly, shook Win's hand. "Win, this is a damn shame. These country clucks are off the beam."

Win smiled wryly. "They don't talk like rustics, Steve. They aren't sucking on straws and talking about the harvest moon. Look, I want you to get me out of this."

"I'm a corporation lawyer, bub. Suppose it goes to trial? You don't want me stammering up there."

"You've got to handle it. I can trust you."

Steve sat down on the bed. His eyes were narrowed. "Win, boy, did you kill her?"

"No, I didn't."

"Good. All the way out here I was afraid you had. Heaven knows you had reason enough. The fates have given me the privilege of knowing quite a few stinkers. Lorraine was right at the top of my list."

"How much do you know?"

"I had a chat with the boys upstairs. Win, they're real upset about where you were last night. They smell a motive. They want to know. And, as you didn't kill her, you're going to have to tell them."

"Not a chance."

"Don't be a fool! You're protecting some rattle-headed babe."

"I'll tell you, Steve. But not them. And you have to respect anything I tell you in privacy. You know Milya Grant."

"Grant. Miss Grant." Steve snapped his fingers. "Oho! The dish in your

office. Miss Efficiency. Don't tell me!"

"Not the way you think. I've been in love with her and she with me for over a year. Lorraine knew it for the last six months. I told her when I asked for a divorce."

"That must have been like banging your head on a boulder."

"It was."

Steve Royal said softly, "And you spent the night—"

"Not what you think, Steve. Milya has some strong ideas about what is sordid and what isn't. She helped me finish the work at the office last night. Then I took her out to dinner."

"Where?"

"A chop house on 48th. They know me there. After we ate we took a taxi into the park, then walked for hours. We sat on a bench and tried to talk the whole thing out. I told her that I had been wrong in saying that Lorraine would never give me grounds for divorce and that she'd contest any action I brought. We talked and watched the stars. Then, when it was beginning to turn gray in the east, she decided that we'd never watched a dawn before and that we ought to see one. Like a couple of high-school kids. We had breakfast together at one of the cafeterias on Eighth Avenue and then we went directly to the office. There's a bath adjoining my office. I keep fresh shirts there and shaving equipment. I freshened up. I was getting ready to leave for the Airlines Terminal when the call came from the police here."

"Why not tell them?"

"Would they believe it? And think of what the tabloids would do to her. I can

write the heads myself. No, Steve. I won't let them bring her into this."

"You're being a fool. She's already in. They know you at the chop house. Your picture will be in the afternoon papers. The first place they'll check is your office. Do you think Milya is the type to lie to them to save herself? Nuts, boy! She'll be right beside you, swinging a big club."

Win sighed. "I guess you're right. But look. See Milya and tell her how it was a better percentage play for me to tell them than for them to find it out, will you?"

"Of course. Now let's get down to cases. How was Lorraine when you came home to pack for the trip?"


Win flushed. "We had one of our typical little scenes. It's a good thing the nearest house is two hundred feet away. I told her where I was going and she asked if I was taking my 'sweetie' with me. That's been her name for Milya ever since I told her I wanted a divorce. I told her that it was a fine suggestion and I'd consider it the next time I had to make a trip. She tried to hit me but I caught her wrist and pushed her away."

"She went out into the garden. I called good-bye to her but she didn't even turn around. It really surprised me that I'd been able to make her angry, because the night before she'd mentioned that she might reconsider that divorce idea. That had been my good news for Milya, even if I was suspicious of it. That's why we were . . . pretty happy last night."

Steve leaned back on the bed and said, "Isn't it odd the way this has come out? Remember when we had our bachelor apartment and all those ideas about staying single and getting to be pretty big

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wagons' around town before thinking of marriage? And then Lorraine moved in across the hall. I introduced you to her."

"Not because you wanted to. I maneuvered you into it."

"Hell, I never saw anyone as lovely, and as sophisticated. But she had to like you better. What an act she put on!"

"And it took me a good six months to find out that dear, dear Lorraine loved herself better than anyone in the world. Hollow to the core. Vain. I found out that she was thirty-four rather than the twenty-six she'd claimed and I found out that it had been two previous husbands instead of one. And then I began to see that her hobby was making people squirm. She got a sense of power out of finding the weak spots in people."

"Win, you'd better not let anyone but me hear you talking like that."

"I hated her, Steve. I'll admit it. She married me because she saw that I would never walk out on her, no matter how badly she acted. She married me so she could have a nice soft berth."

Steve frowned. "We can't let that out, boy. It will strengthen your motives too much. She sure roped us in, didn't she?"

"Not us. Just me. By the way, how's June?"

"Sweet and lovely. Look, I'll go upstairs and give them the pitch on your actions last night and see if I can get you out of here. I'll lawyer 'em a little."

"In a way," Win said softly, "I feel sorry for Lorraine. She had everything she wanted for five years."

Steve said harshly, "I'm not a damn bit sorry for her."

"PLEASE call me Steve, Milya," he said. Steve was sitting by her desk, and now he lit a cigarette.

"Thank you, Steve. Please, are they going to let him out?"

"Not right away."

"That's so stupid! He couldn't have done it. He couldn't have been like he was last night if he had that on his conscience. He couldn't commit a murder."

He said, "There's another angle, Milya. They lived in the town but they weren't a part of it. They didn't join the clubs. Naturally the officials out there will be rougher on him than they would be on

somebody who hadn't held himself so apart from the community that it gave the impression that he felt he was too good for them. If you and Win had lived out there. . . ."

"Even dead she can still hurt him." Milya said, tears hidden behind the calm tone. "Did you see the horrible newspapers? Is it legal for them to write as though they had already found him guilty?"

"All suspects seem to get their first trial in the newspapers. They weren't easy on you, Milya."

"I don't count. Let them make their innuendoes. Win is the important one."

"Do you know that you're a very nice guy, Milya?"

"Not nice really. Just in love, Steve. Now don't lie to me. Just how serious is it?"

He leaned toward her and gently touched her arm. "You can take it. They have motive, opportunity and ownership of the murder weapon. There were only eleven arrows left in the playroom closet. The one they took out of her is a mate to the others. If no other leads are opened up, Milya, they could . . . convict him."

Fright was naked on her face. "No, Steve! No!"

Her desk phone rang. She answered it, hung up, said, "Please wait a moment, Steve. Mr. Brandon wants to see me. I'll be right back."

When she returned ten minutes later, she was walking slowly and she had an odd expression on her face.

"The arm of Lorraine is indeed long. A nice check for a month's pay in advance and a fatherly pat on the shoulder and some words about the reputation of the firm, plus a weasel-worded letter of recommendation."

She sat down and her eyes slowly filled with tears.

Steve said quickly, "Look, honey. June and I are sharing her ancestral mansion in Gracey Square. It's an enormous old barn. Pack your stuff and come stay with us, will you? Until we get Win off the hook."

"But wouldn't June—"

"She'd flay me if she found out I hadn't asked you. She's the heiress and also the boss. I know she'd want you. When will

I tell her you'll check in?" Steve insisted.

"Some time tonight. But I shouldn't . . ."

"Nonsense! Maybe by tonight we'll be laughing over the whole affair, with Win joining us later for drinks. . . ."

Milya Grant moved into Steve's house on Wednesday night. On Friday the Coroner's Jury returned a verdict of death by the hand of person or persons unknown.

At the request of the County Attorney, Winton Hull was charged with the murder, escorted, handcuffed, to the funeral of his dead wife, and was moved to one of the cells under the Court House to await trial. The uncrowded calendar permitted that a date be set three weeks in advance.

June Royal was a small girl with a square plain face, a dumpy figure, heavy horn glasses and almost no neck. But her weak eyes behind the glasses were warm and friendly.

After Milya's second visit to Win in his cell, she went to her room and wept. June came in, sat quietly beside her. At last Milya said:

"June, he's so quiet. He's begun to think that they are really going to electrocute him. If he dies, June, I'll die too."

June said, with surprising strength and firmness, "Sitting and wringing your hands is one thing. Trying to do something for him is another."

"But what could I do?"

"Evidently Lorraine didn't go around making dear friends. I detested her even though I only met her twice once at our wedding a year ago. Someone must have had a good reason to kill her. Maybe the motive is in the past. Maybe if someone dug around a little . . ."

"I don't know anything about that sort of work, June."

"You're a woman and she was a woman. And it's your man they want to kill."

"That sort of thing takes money."

"You have a bank account. I'll transfer into it all the funds you need."

"I can't let you do that. You've been too good to me already, June."

June stood up. She didn't smile and her eyes were hard. "This is something I want done, Milya. Please don't be stupid about it." She turned and left the room. . . .

THE chairs were stacked on the tables and a pimply young man was sighing to himself as he swept between the tables. A bald man behind the bar was measuring the level of liquor in the bottles with a celluloid ruler and making notations on an open ledger on the bar top.

Milya said clearly, "I have an appointment with Mr. Ring."

They both stopped working and looked at her. The bald man jerked his thumb toward a door half hidden by fake cloth-of-gold draperies. "Up the stairs."

She heard the music as she opened the door. She followed it to its source, a long room that was neither office, nor bedroom, nor music room—but a bit of all three.

"Are you Mr. Ring?"

The music stopped. He swung around on the bench, his fingers still on the keys. He was blond, middle-aged, with features so weak as to seem almost formless. But his eyes were chips from the bottom of a green bottle.

"There, I almost have it. I'm about to take it into a diminished seventh like a Gershwin opus. Then you got to come in and say, 'Are you Mr. Ring?'"

His tone made her blush. She said, "I'm very sorry."

He seemed to notice her for the first time. He said softly, "But I can use taller ones. Take off the coat, sugar girl, and turn real slow. If I like the way—"

"I didn't come about a job."

"You're the Grant girl, aren't you? You phoned me and I thought . . ."

She sat down. "I had to see you. It's about Mrs. Hull. Lorraine."

His eyes hardened. "The police have checked me, honey. I'm clean. This place doesn't give a guy time to go running off into the brush sticking arrows in ex-wives. And for the press, no comment."

"I'm not from the press."

"Who are you then?"

"I . . . I was going to marry Mr. Hull as soon as the divorce was granted."

He pursed his lips. "Did old Lorraine say she'd cut loose of the guy?"

"She half-way promised to."

"Don't worry. He had dough—so she wouldn't have given him up. You want to see if the police missed their chance of hanging it on me, eh? Move along, Grant. Stairs to your right."

"Please, Mr. Ring. That's not my idea. I don't think Win Hull killed her."

"Of course he killed her. She finally drove him crazy."

"No, he didn't," she said firmly. "I know he didn't. I think it was someone from the past, but not you. You were married to her. Who hated her?"

Ring walked slowly over to a table, took a cigarette from a silver box. "Who hated Lorraine? Grant, that's quite an assignment. That's a diamond-studded dilly. Let me check the dates now. I married her nine years ago. I had a little club in the Village then. She came up to see me just like you did. Only she wanted a job. Her husband had died. Too bad I didn't check on that before I married her.

"The poor guy, I found out later, had shot himself. She looked about twenty then. I found out later that she was thirty. She gave me the sob act and I felt sorry for her. She couldn't dance, but she did have a sugary little singing voice. I was writing my arrangements for the band and I put a few sugar numbers in her key and she sang in the joint. She didn't stink the place up too bad and so I let her stay on.

"For some silly reason I fell crazy in love with her. We got married and we didn't live happily ever after. As soon as the ceremony was over she told me she was through singing. I didn't mind that. I was so silly about her I didn't want her up in front of the cash customers in those tight evening gowns."

"Did she stay around the club?"

"Did she stay? She wore the same gowns and hung around the bar. She never drank much. She was just picking up the dirt. Dirt that columnists even wouldn't touch. Soon I find out that she has a large happy knack for alienating people and losing customers for me. But I was still in love with her and I couldn't make her stay out of the place. Finally business began to really drop off. I mean really bad.

"We couldn't keep any regulars and we had to depend on the drifters, but we were making out. I got curious about it and I checked. Well, she was bribing the rest-room attendants to listen for dirt and she pried it out of drunks at the bar. She loved to use it at the right time."

"How did you get rid of her?"

"I tried for a year and a half. She laughed in my face. And she was so cute, I couldn't frame her. Then I got my idea. I'm proud of that idea. I started keeping two sets of books. One for me and the tax boys and one set just for her. I began to lose money. Then I hired an actor friend of mine to play bigshot. He came in to take over the place. You should have seen Lorraine's face when she heard I was cleaned. Two weeks after the divorce was final, without alimony even, I bought in here. I guess she drifted for a year or so before she nailed Hull."

"Can you remember anyone that might have saved their hate all these years and then went out and killed her? Someone whose life she had smashed up?"

Ring scratched his chin. "She busted up a lot of people's dreams. I don't know. I couldn't say. For a while there I was almost willing to push her off a bridge myself. Wait a minute. I know a guy might now. When I was faking going broke she had to take Chimp Brown off her payroll. He came a little high.

"I don't know where's the place to look for him, but I know he's still around town. I saw him couple months back. Sort of an investigator. She used him to follow up leads when she didn't have enough to go on."

"Did Lorraine ever try to make money out of . . . out of . . ."

"Selling the dirt? No, she didn't. I thought she did for a while but I found out no. Just call it a little something wrong in her head. She had to make people squirm. I used to say that it was because she knew, deep down, that she was pure trash and she had to have some way of feeling like she was on top of the heap. Amateur psychology, that's me."

"I don't know how to thank you."

He waved a hand carelessly. "Leave the door open the way you found it." As she went down the hall he called after her, "Hope it wasn't that guy of yours."

HE WAS a big man with a flabby face and a dirty shirt. He lived alone in a cellar apartment a half block off Second Avenue. She was waiting when he came back in the late afternoon.

The furniture in the small room looked as though it had been stolen from a fourth-

rate hotel. He had a habit of exhaling cigarette smoke and drawing it up his nostrils. They were rimmed with yellow stain.

He spun a chair around and spraddled it, a heavy arm resting on the back. Miyle sat on the edge of the couch.

"You're paying to talk," he said. His eyes were pouched and filmy but she had the feeling that he saw everything there was to see.

"If I hired you, how much would it cost?"

"Twenty-five a day and expenses. Maybe twenty. Depends on how we get along and what there is to do."

"Suppose it were a . . . a type of work that certain firms wouldn't want to touch?"

"I'm not too awful particular, honey. What's your name?"

"I'll tell you that when I'm ready. I was thinking of the same sort of work that you did for Lorraine Hull."

He moved with remarkable speed. She tried to put her purse out of his reach, but he tore it out of her hand, backed away, poked through it with blunt fingers. He tossed it onto the couch beside her and went back to his chair.

He said calmly, "I would have had it sooner if that had been a better picture of you in the paper. What do you want?"

"When was the last you worked for Lorraine?"

He stood up. "Out," he said.

She remained seated. "Aren't you being a little particular? You said you weren't. How do you know I won't hire you?"

"Because nobody but Lorraine could hire me for the sort of stuff I did for her.

One jump ahead of losing my license and even doing a stretch. No, Miss Grant. No more of that. She's dead and so one little chapter is closed."

"That means she had something on you, too."

"It doesn't mean anything except please go away."

She stood up. "I can go away. I can go directly to the police and say that I have reason to believe that you are withholding information about her. I can say that they should find out how recently you worked for her. Maybe you killed her. How do I know you didn't? All I know is that Win Hull didn't kill her. I'll go right now if you ask me again, Mr. Brown."

He sighed. "Sit down, honey. And you better call me Chimp. Everybody does. We'll deal off the top of the deck. I didn't kill her. I've been in business long enough to know that killing people is a bad percentage play. But there are boys at headquarters who don't exactly love me. I'll answer anything you want to know. In return, you keep me out of it."

"I'm not promising anything, Mr. Brown."

"Your deal. Shuffle the cards."

"What sort of work did you do for her?"

"Sometimes a little tailing. Not much. What you'd expect if a person was lining up a blackmail pitch? Out of curiosity I checked back a few times. She wasn't after dough. I don't know what she wanted. But mostly documentary evidence. She was nuts about that. Letters, notes. Real warm letters. That's what she went for. I stole the papers she wanted. She usually knew just where

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they'd be. A real smart gal that Lorraine honey was," he said.

"Do you think she destroyed them after she'd used them?"

"Not that cold-hearted dish. She'd keep those papers even after the poor fish died. She got exactly what was coming to her, that one. Damn glad she's dead."

"When did you last work for her?"

"Let me see. She wasn't so active lately. Maybe a year ago. I can't check it exactly because I never kept notes on what she wanted me to do."

"Do you remember what the job was?" Milya Grant asked.

"I'll never forget it. I'll tell you because I don't think you could ever prove it on me. It took me four days to set it up. I had to get letters away from a girl who lived in one of those hotels for women. No men allowed on the floors. I had to bribe a gal elevator operator to do it for me."

"Did Lorraine come here and get the letters?"

"Yeah. A lot of them weren't the right ones. Letters from the girl's folks. I didn't read them. Lorraine found the ones she wanted and then she said, 'Now I can fix that smug so and so.' She put the two letters she wanted in her purse and I burned the rest of them."

"What did she pay you?"

"Nothing important. Fifty I think, and that's what it cost me for the elevator girl."

"What was the girl's name and where did she live?"

"Her name was Holcomb. Louise Holcomb and she lived at The Driad's House on Thirty-seventh. Are you going to the cops?"

"No. If nothing comes of it, I'm going to have to ask Mr. Hull's lawyer to use it at the trial. He may call you as a witness. I hope I won't have to do that."

He grinned tightly. "I'll deny that I ever heard of the woman."

"And that will mean that it will take a bit longer to connect the two of you. There will be a way to do that. I'm sure." Milya went to the door.

He picked stained teeth with a short heavy thumbnail. He laughed softly. "Sister, you've got the makings of a real rough girl."

CHAPTER THREE

Give the Devil His Due

THE lines bracketing Win Hull's mouth had deepened and his eyes seemed to have settled deeper into the sockets.

"I've only got a few minutes, darling," she said after they had kissed. "I've got to ask questions and I haven't time to tell you why. Suppose Lorraine had something which was very valuable to her. Where would she hide it?"

He frowned. "She was always secretive. Somewhere close by her, I'd guess."

"Did she have a safety deposit box?"

"If she did, I didn't know it. I doubt it. It would have been a little too practical. Lorraine was . . . more feline. My guess would be somewhere in the house."

"The police made a complete search, Win."

"What are you trying to find?"

"Some letters, maybe some other papers. They were stolen. The person they were stolen from has gone out West someplace. I can't locate her. She got her hands on the letters about a year ago."

"Not much to go on, eh?"

"It has to be enough, Win. Don't you see how important it could be?"

He nodded and said slowly, "If it will pin a motive on somebody else, it could turn out to be . . . very important."

"She was foul, Win! Lorraine was completely foul!"

"I'll hardly accept that as news, Milya. I'm worried about you. Suppose you should happen to stumble onto the trail? Whoever killed her isn't going to hold up his or her hands and say, 'I give up. You got me.' Please be careful. If June is financing you, why don't you hire a detective or a bodyguard?"

"I'm doing all right by myself."

"Time, lady," the guard said.

Win took her hands. He said, "If I ever get out of here and if we can ever be alone together, I'm going to hire a man to come in and say, 'Time, lady.' Then I can throw him out into the hall. . . ."

Detective Lan Pankerd said, "Sure, we got the keys. And it would take a court order for you to get in that house."

She moved closer to him. "Oh, please,

Mr. Pankerd. You come with me. I won't harm anything. Honestly. This means so very much to me."

"You're too nice a girl to be mixed up with that wife-killer."

She forced a smile. "Then let me find out it's a wild goose chase, Mr. Pankerd."

"The name is Lan. Short for Lancelot, but don't tell anybody."

"Please help me, Lan."

"I don't know as I should, Miss Grant."

"Just suppose, Lan, that we found something that was overlooked before. Wouldn't that make them sit up?"

"Sit up and hit me on the head. Well, let's go."

"You're a darling."

The detective had a surprisingly deep blush. He said, "Had a daughter once that would have been about your age by now."

"I'm so sorry."

"One of those things. This your car? Some wagon!"

"I borrowed it. . . ."

Pankerd unlocked the front door. The hall was dark and dust had settled on the top of the hall table. The place had the smell of emptiness about it. Milya had been treasuring a certain confidence that she would know where to look. Now, faced with the fact of the house itself, she was suddenly depressed with the thin and bitter edge of her chances.

"Now what?" Pankerd asked.

"How carefully was the house searched, Lan?"

"Oh, they didn't slash the upholstery or take the backs off the pictures. Just drawers and closets and stuff like that."

"In your experience, Lan, where do women hide things they don't want anyone to find?"

"Depends. Has to be a place where a cleaning woman won't look. And women are thief-conscious. Has to be a place no sneak thief would look. What sort of a thing are we looking for?"

"Letters. Personal letters."

He gave her a quick look. "Letters where somebody wrote down too much?"

"Exactly."

"Sort of figured her that way myself. That kind of a woman. Got any proof?"

"I know she had them, but I can't prove it."

"Letters, eh? Wouldn't take up much room. All the usual places have been covered. Women all have a little pack-rat in them. We'll have to check for loose boards, loose chimney stones. That sort of thing."

"Let's split up. It may go faster."

"Take the upstairs, Milya. I'll poke around down here."

She found that she was walking through the rooms on tiptoe. In Lorraine's bedroom she opened the closet door. The woman-scent on the racked clothes was sweet and strong and completely horrible.

On the top shelf of Milya's closet she found a small box tucked well back. For a moment she was excited. She broke the cord and opened the box. Nothing but a pair of new fragile evening slippers, barely worn.

Win's room was sadness. A pipe rack. Golf shoes in the closet. Smell of tweed.

IT SEEMED hours before she heard Lan's distant call. Her hands were grubby from searching in dark corners. She went quickly down the stairs, her breath shallow in her throat, her heart pounding.

"Down in the cellar," Lan called.

She found the cellar door open. She hurried down.

The detective stood in the game room. "I don't know if this means anything," he said. "Take a look. But don't touch, please."

There was a large closet in one wall. Built into the side of the closet was a chest of drawers. One drawer had been taken out.

Lan said, "I saw a lot of junk on the closet floor and didn't think anything about it. Then when I checked the drawers, I found one of them empty. That one. On a hunch I took it all the way out. See the bottom of it? Something was taped to it. Those are fresh marks where the tape was ripped off. Still gummy. Whoever took the stuff off that spot was in too big a hurry to fill the drawer again.

"Now come here. Take a look in the fireplace. One little pile of ashes from burned paper. That in itself wouldn't mean anything, but somebody took the trouble to mash up the ashes. You can see a shred of ash stuck to the tip of that

poker. Except for that little pile, the fireplace has been cleaned out some time ago. Milya, you begin to make a little sense."

She sat down in a leather chair. Her voice was hopeless as she said, "I'm making sense, but we're too late, Lan. Too late."

He shrugged. "Couldn't a defense attorney make something of this, Milya? With photographs, he could be pretty convincing. He could tell the jury that when Hull came home there was a person in the house. That person hid downstairs here. The arrows were in that same closet. The prosecution has taken them in evidence, you know."

"Maybe by dumb luck the person hiding found the letters. Or maybe they threatened Lorraine and she told where the letters were and then they killed her. Then they came down here, collected them and burned them. You better tell Royal to get a court order and get over here with a photographer. He can call me as a witness and I can testify that nobody has been in here since the killing and everything is just the way I found it. No chance of planting evidence."

"Oh, Lan, do you think it would help?"

"Sure it would help. Reasonable doubt, you know. The lab in New York can tell what kind of paper the letters were written on, even the color of the ink. I didn't handle the drawer knobs. Don't touch them. Those plastic knots hold a print nice. Better than an aluminum arrow."

"Wouldn't the police have spoiled the prints?"

"Oh, we didn't look in the drawers here. That's why I came down, because we didn't do much searching in the cellar. The arrows were in plain sight."

"I'll tell Steve right away."

"I'll put a man on the house until he gets his pictures."

The night was cool and a fire had been laid in the library. June sat with her face in shadow. Milya sat on the floor in front of the fire, hugging her knees.

Steve paced slowly back and forth. "Milya, you've done wonders!" he said. "When Win goes free, it will be largely because of you. I've had people working, of course, but they haven't come up with anything to touch this."

"Maybe my motivation was stronger," Milya said happily.

"Tomorrow morning we'll grab those pictures. And it certainly won't be any trick to put pressure on Chimp Brown to testify if we have to use him. If we can set Lorraine up in the minds of the jury as a woman eager to meddle in the affairs of others, eager to store up little documents that incriminate others, I can convince them of reasonable doubts as to Win's guilt. Hell, we won't even have to find out who did it. Our job is to get Win off the hook."

"And after you get the pictures, Lan said that he'll see if any prints can be raised off the drawer knob. He thinks he can see good prints."

June yawned. "I seem to be more than bushed, people. 'Night, all."

"I'll be up in a little while, honey," Steve said.

With the release of some of the tension and doubt and fear, Milya slept so heavily that it was like a little death.

In the morning she rode out with Steve. They picked up the photographer and headed for Coopersville. When they arrived, Lan Pankerd was pacing up and down in front of the house.

He hurried over to the car. His smile was grim and wry. "Too late, folks."

"What do you mean!" Milya gasped.

"The man I posted here is in the hospital with concussion. A basement window was smashed. No ashes left in the fireplace, and the drawer knobs are wiped nice and clean. Somebody worried about leaving too much evidence around. I think the prints worried 'em most. Anyway, the damage is done."

Steve said slowly, "But this is better than what we had before. This is a perfect indication that it wasn't Win. I can go to town on this."

Lan said, "Getting Hull off is one thing. Nailing the killer is something else. The first job is yours and the second is mine."

"Good luck on your end," Steve said, his eyes merry, his smile wide and exultant.

When they returned to the city, June did not seem as interested in the development as Milya had hoped she would be. Her expression was pasty and she moved with lethargy.

At lunch Milya said suddenly, "It's almost too good."

"What's too good?" June asked.

"That the murderer should choose last night to break in. The coincidence smells. I'm wondering who Lan told about it. Lan would know and so would the man posted. Either of them could have talked to the wrong person. Of course we three knew, but that hardly counts. Somehow I trust Lan. I'm going to ask him to make a close check. If he dropped a careless word, somebody might have become very very worried."

"Why fret about the murderer, Milya?"

Steve asked. "Our job, like I said before, is to clear Win. And now I think we can do it."

"But you can't be sure, Steve. It's still a gamble. Don't you see? Juries do funny things, I've heard. If we could find the person who did it, it wouldn't be a gamble any more. Win would be free immediately."

He grinned. "Anxious, eh? You two have waited a long time. You can wait a little longer."

DETECTIVE PANKERD acted odd. He wouldn't meet Milya's glance. He said, "Glad you came out again, Miss Grant. Saved me a trip in. Buy you a soda?"

He held the drugstore door open. There were no customers. He led the way back to the last booth in the back of the store.

Milya looked at him curiously. "Maybe my ideas can wait."

"I guess they can. Couple sodas please. Lemon in yours?"

After the drinks were brought, Lan

looked at her steadily. His gray face held a tired look. "I took sort of a fancy to you, Miss Grant."

"Thank you. We weren't as formal yesterday, Lan."

"I get to wondering about people: Wondered some about you. When I searched the house the day Mrs. Hull died, I found out about that drawer. And I saw the burned papers. Seemed to me you were pretty anxious to get in that house. I smoked and waited in the cellar while you hunted around upstairs."

"I . . . I don't understand."

"With the new turnpike, a car can come out here one of two ways. One way is almost as fast as the other. Hull always came through town. Habit, I guess. He drove home that day. A girl could have left the office the same time and parked on the turnoff the other side of the woods. A short walk. Wouldn't take strength to jam a sharp item like that arrow down into a woman's chest."

"What are you trying to say?"

"I'm trying to say that you fit fine. Just fine, Miss Grant. I checked with the office. You left right after Mr. Hull did."

"But he told me to go home and rest. He said we'd have to work that night, fixing the reports for him to take on the trip."

"That made it handy," Lan said sourly. She lifted her chin. "Mr. Pankerd, I find it difficult to understand all this."

"Who had a better reason to want her dead? What do I know about you? Maybe she had something on you and she could expose you to your sweetie and then he wouldn't want a divorce from Mrs. Hull. Maybe you two are kidding about her

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saying she'd consider a divorce. You could have hung around on the other side of that garden wall until he left for the train. Yes, I think I could set up a pretty good case."

"You're insane!"

"After you killed her you could report back to town, all sweet and pretty after dropping Mrs. Hull in her tracks."

"You can't be just making this all up. You must have something to go on. Something wrong."

"Then you got worried about the prints on that knob. And about the ashes. A woman could have slugged Tommy last night. I lied to you. We'd already found that we couldn't lift a print off those knobs. Just smudges. And I already took a sample of the ashes to the lab in the city. Dime store stationery, they said. I didn't think Hull did it. I told Lanik to keep Hull in the can in order to sort of quiet the nerves of whoever did jab that arrow in her."

"I'm beginning to feel like I'm dreaming this, Mr. Pankerd."

"Then I'll get to the facts. The ground is soft over at the cutoff from the turnpike. Used to be a popular trysting spot. Hunters park in there sometimes. I made a nice mould of the tracks we found there the day Mrs. Hull was killed. Front right tire had a big gouge out of it in the center of the tread. Last night that same car was parked in there again. Mean anything to you?"

"Not a thing."

"That car you drove out here yesterday and again today has a big gouge out of the front right tire. I had a chance to match it up yesterday. It matches perfect. I told Tommy to gather you in when you showed up in the night. But you outfoxed him. Now start sweating, Miss Grant."

She held her knuckles tight against her lips, her eyes wide. In a gasping, muffled tone she said, "Steve!"

"And just what the hell does that mean?" Lan said.

"I can prove that I never saw or touched that car until after Mrs. Hull was dead. It belongs to June Royal, Steve's wife. Steve drives it. Wait a minute! Suppose, Lan, that when Lorraine moved across the hall from Steve's and Win's apartment, years ago, Steve was really

gone on her. Or her on him. And she preferred the security that Win could offer.

"But she couldn't help operating in her usual way. She may have dug up something on Steve. She may have been holding it over him. Something that could get him disbarred, maybe. And maybe Steve got tired of jumping through hoops held by a scheming woman. Yes, that might be it."

"You're still not dealt out of it, Milya."

"At the time Mrs. Hull is supposed to have died, I was in an art gallery at a private showing. Win told me to go home and rest, but I couldn't. The show was by a friend. I went there. Dozens of people saw me and will remember me."

After a long moment Lan reached across the table and clumsily patted her hand. "I had to try, you know. Sorry. I believe you without checking, Milya. But of course I'll have to check it. I'm a cop."

"I don't care," she said. "You are trying to help Win. Even if it meant confessing that I'd done it, if I thought that in that way I could save him . . ."

"Don't make martyr talk, Milya. I'll buy Steve Royal. Let's figure out something. Could you get out here in an hour or so?"

"I'm sure of it."

* * *

They arrived in the sedan. He had brought June with him. Milya's heart sank as she saw June get out of the car, come walking toward the doorway in the expensive clothes that never did anything except make her look a shade more grotesque.

Milya had forgotten what this might do to June.

Lan said affably, "Sure hope you folks won't mind coming inside for a little police routine. Something has turned up that's pretty odd, and I got to bother you folks. Yes, you come on in too, Mrs. Royal, please."

Lan led the way into the deserted office of Chief Arthur Lanik. The late afternoon sun made patterns on the tan wall.

"Sit down, folks."

Lan Pankerd went over to a table in the corner and picked up a fingerprint card.

Milya sensed that Lan was acting the part of a befuddled and not very bright man. He said:

"Guess we sorta got our wires crossed. There I was real proud of finding those prints on the drawer knobs and all the time Art had found 'em a week ago and the lab boys lifted two beauties off them knobs. I didn't even notice the dust from the brush work. Now I'm not right handy at this, but the manual says that when you got prints to go on, you've got to print everybody connected with the case. You first, Mr. Royal."

"Don't be a damn fool!" Steve said harshly. "I'm his lawyer, not a suspect. I'm not connected with the case."

"The way I look at it, Mr. Royal," Lan said amiably, "connection is connection. And if you're his lawyer, then you're connected with the case, darn it. Now if you'll just ink your fingers on his pad and sort of roll them in these little squares right here."

"This is a farce!" Steve said.

"Oh, I've printed Miss Grant and I'll take you're wife's prints too, Mister Royal, just to show that I'm not singling you out for special attention."

"I ABSOLUTELY refuse," Steve said. Milya saw the quick gleam in Lan's eyes, and she inadvertantly moved her chair back a few inches away from the man she had considered her friend and Win's friend.

"I absolutely refuse," Steve repeated.

Lan cocked his head on one side. "Now, Mr. Royal, you know you're beginning to make me think that maybe it is your prints we took off that drawer. You're making me suspect something fishy. Why should an important man like you refuse to do a little thing like this? You knew Lorraine Hull, I guess, before she and Win Hull were married. Maybe you are mixed up in this."

Steve stiffened and then forced a laugh. He put his hand out. "Okay, go ahead."

Milya saw the shadow of disappointment on Lan's face. She slowly relaxed.

Lan said, "Just to show you we're fair out here, we'll print Mrs. Royal too. She knew Mrs. Hull."

June Royal said, in a voice that was so hoarse as to be almost unrecognizable, "I

knew it would come out this way. I knew when I saw her that it would come out."

Steve said softly, "What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about you sneaking off to come out here and see her every time Win was out of town. I'm talking about following you and knowing how long you were in that house alone with that woman after you walked through the woods. I'm talking about waiting for you, Steve, and wondering."

"But I didn't—"

"Oh, I know you didn't. I thought you did for a while. I knew I was too lucky to have you as a husband, Steve. But she told me, laughing, that she made you come out to see her—because if you didn't, she'd send something to me."

"When was all this?" Lan asked in a remote voice.

"I decided I had to face her with it. I had to fight for Steve. I came out and I drove the roadster and parked it and then I heard Win's voice. I didn't know he'd be home. I waited. When I heard the cab drive away, I came through the garden gate. Lorraine looked at me and said in a funny way that it was nice to see me.

"And then before I could tell her to keep away from Steve, she told me that she wanted to show me something. She took me down into the cellar and emptied the drawer and turned it over and stripped the letters, the two letters off the back of the drawer and handed them to me. How could you write those letters, Steve, and tell me that you loved me?"

Steve clenched his fists. His face was white. "I wrote them to the Holcomb girl. I was in love with her when I married you. I wrote silly things. I told her that you looked like an overgrown dwarf, but that you had the money I needed for a front. I don't know why I wrote those things. Lorraine got the letters somehow. I fell in love with you after we were married. And Lorraine made me come out to see her so that she could tell me how, whenever she wanted to, she could smash my marriage. But I love you, June."

"I loved you until I read those letters. Now I don't love you, Steve. I never will again. She laughed and I snatched up an arrow and stabbed her. She fell down.

(Please continue on page 95)

My CRIME— Your PUNISHMENT

By CHARLES LARSON



"We quarreled. . . . I hit her with a golf club."

Ding dong bell

Laura's in the well.

No one knows who pushed her in—

but Banning'll pay for the sin.

64

ON A Thursday night they came for me a little past nine o'clock, while I was listening to a rather slow middle-weight bout over the radio. Constance, I remember, was in the kitchen, working with a few narcissus bulbs she'd picked up in an attempt to find some-

thing that would grow well and without fuss in our three-room apartment.

Neither of us had been expecting callers. It had been one of those incredibly wet and dreary days that farmers seem always to be praying for; the rain had been dripping out of sodden gray skies for hours on end, sadly and softly and constantly, like tears at a funeral.

When the doorbell rang, we didn't quite know how to react. Constance uttered a small and startled: "Oh, damn," and peered out at me, her hands covered with peat moss.

I looked at her inquiringly.

"Don't answer it," she whispered. "Let 'em go hang."

But the radio had been blasting much too loud, and we were trapped. Again the doorbell rang. At last I went to see who could possibly have the ill grace to drop in on such a night.

Two men were standing in the hallway, indistinct beneath the dusty, dim light. They were both big, both dressed in white-belted raincoats and slouch hats.

"Mr. Banning?" the taller one said.

"Yes."

Constance had come into the living room and was hovering curiously behind me, staring into the hall.

"MacMahon," the taller man said. "Detective Bureau." He held out his hand, allowing the light to catch his bronze badge. "Sorry to bother you so late like this."

"Detective Bureau!" Constance said. She glanced at me, wide-eyed. I dipped hurriedly back into my drab and pleasant past, wondering what on earth I could have done now. Beyond beating a few red traffic lights, I was certainly as clean as the next citizen. Maybe cleaner.

"Are you sure," I said, "that you've got the right party?"

"You're Paul Banning? The writer?"

"I am, yes, but—"

"Then we got the right party."

"Better get your hat and coat, Mr. Banning," the shorter man said.

"Now wait a minute," Constance put in. She was frowning angrily at the two of them. "I know it's asking a great deal, but would you mind awfully telling us what he's supposed to be guilty of?" Ever since she'd gotten a ticket for driving too

slowly, she'd been at war with the law. The taller detective pushed his hat back on his head, and gazed at her for a long time.

"Well?" Constance snapped.

"Well," the detective said, "since you ask me so sweetly—he's wanted for questioning. Unless you got some objections."

"Questioning," Constance said, "in regard to what?"

"A little matter," the detective replied, "of murder."

As a writer, I've had characters react in the damndest ways to that unhappy word. I've had them blanch, and stammer, and carry on like all get-out. But never have I permitted them to stand there as I did—empty-minded as a stunned ox, totally unable to assimilate the word's simple, savage implication.

Constance, I must say, did a good deal better, dramatically. She sat down on the arm of the sofa as though an invisible hand had pushed her, and whispered: "Murder," in a manner that would have made any actress look to her laurels.

"Ready, Mr. Banning?" the short detective asked.

"Certainly," I said. "Of course. Yes." I wandered toward the back of the house, picked up my hat and coat, and returned, hardly aware that I had moved at all. Almost as an afterthought, I said: "Excuse me."

"Yeah?"

"Perhaps I'd better call my lawyer."

"You don't have to. He's at the station now."

"Who," I asked, "was murdered?"

"A woman named Laura Anderson."

"I think," Constance said slowly and distinctly, "that I am going to be sick."

I knew exactly how she felt. I knew, too, why my lawyer had already been called in. Because my lawyer was named Bert Anderson—and the name of my lawyer's wife, a lady who had disappeared from her home and husband some seven months ago, was Laura.

THE office of Captain F. O. Grigg—Homicide—was large and old and chilly, resembling nothing so much as the back of a pool hall without tables. A balding, squarely built man in crumpled tweeds glanced up from the desk, irritated,

as Constance and I were led before him.

"Mr. and Mrs. Banning, Captain," the tall detective said.

"Um." The balding man thrust his thumb toward two unoccupied chairs and turned back to his desk immediately.

There were perhaps a dozen people in that room. From a chair beside the desk, Bert Anderson looked at us through tired, numb eyes, and nodded in recognition. He was a small man, compact, with a brilliant lawyer's mind, and a quick, Scottish temper. We had known each other since college, had roomed together, as a matter of fact. Beside him sat his secretary, an efficient, distant girl named Mary Price.

I turned toward Constance as I felt a discreet tap on my knee. Wordlessly, Constance nodded in the direction of the door. I swung my head slightly and saw—out of the corner of my eye—the thin face of the person who had just entered. Tucker Linskog, his name was, and he was Laura's brother.

We'd never liked each other. Tucker was a boneless, malignant character who lived on gossip and thrived on hate. For insurance—when Laura had first disappeared, word had gotten to Bert, who was half out of his mind with worry, that I knew much more about his wife's disappearance than I was telling.

Bert had actually come to me, and intimated that someone had hinted at too close a friendship between Laura and myself. I was not married then, although Constance and I were engaged, and it had taken a good deal of talking on my part to nail the whole silly thing as a lie. Bert had refused to divulge the name of his informant. I gathered later, however, that it had been Tucker.

A nice fellow. A very, very nice fellow. . . .

"Banning!" somebody barked, and I jerked my head around so hard I nearly popped a vertebrae.

One of the detectives was motioning me toward the desk. I rose, and walked over to Grigg, the tweedy Captain.

Abruptly Grigg glanced at me. "You Paul Banning?"

"That's right."

He didn't waste any time. "Know Laura Anderson long?"

"About—five years."

I watched him note my answer on a piece of paper. Mary Price leaned over and whispered something to Bert, who nodded irritably and continued to stare at the floor. Outside, the rain kept up its sad crying on the window. Somewhere a clock ticked, ticked, ticked.

I cleared my throat tentatively, and Grigg peered up at me.

"Well?"

"I'd like to ask a couple of questions myself," I said.

Grigg leaned back in his chair, cupping his strong hands over the ends of his chair-arms. "All right. Go ahead."

Carefully, I said: "Would someone kindly tell me just exactly why I'm here? I understand that Laura's been killed. But no one has told me why, or where, or how."

"She was hit over the head with a blunt instrument," Grigg said.

"Damn you, Grigg!" Bert had got to his feet, his face white. "If you think I'm going to let you railroad this kid—"

Grigg turned sharply, the swivel chair creaking. "Now, listen, Anderson. Either you keep your mouth shut, or you get out of here. Is that clear?"

Bert was trembling with anger. Just as he started to reply, however, his secretary, Mary Price, put a restraining hand on his arm, and shook her head silently. For a long moment Bert stood there, the vein in his forehead pounding. Then, with a snort, he sat down again.

"Now, then," Grigg said coldly. He picked up a notebook, began thumbing through it. "I understand, Banning, that you're a writer."

"I am."

"And that you've just recently finished a novel."

I nodded.

"Where do you work?"

"Why—at home, mostly."

"Anywhere else?"

"As a matter of fact," I said, "I've done quite a lot of work at Mr. Anderson's place. It's quiet, far enough away from—"

"That's his cabin you're talking about? On Lost Lake?"

"Yes."

"When were you there last?"

I frowned, thinking. "About seven

months ago. I did some writing up there.”

“Alone?”

“Of course.”

Grigg snapped the notebook shut, and raised his eyes. “Seven months ago,” he said. “That was just about when Laura Anderson disappeared, wasn’t it?”

“I—believe it was.”

Thoughtfully, Grigg swung around in his chair to face the window. “Tell me, Banning,” he said, “where’d you get your water when you were up there?”

“From a stream near the cabin.”

“Isn’t there a well on the property, too?”

“There is. But it’s dry. Hasn’t been used for years.”

“Boarded up?”

“It is now.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I mean, naturally, that I boarded it up. It was open, and it was dangerous to me. I didn’t want anyone falling in on some dark night. Including myself.”

Bert groaned, and over the groan I could hear Grigg’s quiet chuckle. Lazily the captain turned to face me again, his hands clasped behind his bald head. “All right, Banning,” he said, “I’ll tell you what we’ll do. A while back you asked me where and how and why Laura Anderson was killed. I’m going to tell you. I’m going to pretend that you don’t know a thing about it. We’ll have a lot of fun, won’t we?”

He chuckled again, and held up one finger. “First we come to the where. That’s a cinch. She was killed at Lost Lake, seven months ago, in the cabin that you were occupying—alone. She’d been tossed into the well, where her husband found her yesterday when he reopened it.

“The how is a little harder, but not impossible. She was beaten to death with our old friend, the blunt instrument. And why? Well, that’s the hardest of all. We may have to work to find that out. But we can make a couple of guesses in the meantime. Suppose, for example, that you and Laura Anderson had been—oh, let’s say friendly. Suppose that the friendship, on your side at least, was growing cold. You’d met another girl—your present wife. You wanted to break away from Laura. She objected. You

quarreled—and, then, you killed her.”

It was funny. I felt as though I should be laughing in his cocky face, but I couldn’t seem to dredge up a snicker. It wasn’t too hard to figure out how he’d been able to fasten on to that insane motive. The fine hand of Tucker Linskog was all over it.

“Riley!” Grigg shouted, and one of the detectives standing against the wall came forward.

“Yes, sir?”

“Bring me that stuff on the Anderson case.”

The detective nodded, and disappeared into an adjoining room.

Complacently, Grigg smiled up at me. “You act a little quiet, Banning,” he said.

“I’m trying to figure out your angle. I don’t know whether you’re crazy, or I’m dreaming. I sure as hell know you can’t be serious.”

“Can’t I?” Grigg said. He laughed softly, and began clearing off the top of his desk as the detective, Riley, returned. Riley was carrying a wooden box, a foot or so deep and a couple of feet long, which he placed on the captain’s desk. It contained, so far as I could see, several items of groceries . . . and an enlarged glossy photograph. Tucker Linskog had come up beside me, and was staring silently into the crate.

GRIGG picked up the photograph, handed it to me. “Take a look at this,” he said.

It was a police picture of the well near Bert Anderson’s cabin. The boards which I’d used to cover it had been ripped away, and the camera had been aimed straight downward. The interior of the well had been clearly lighted by the camera’s flash bulb. And at the bottom lay something that might once have been Laura Anderson.

Grigg answered my unspoken question. “It’s her,” he said. “We got her dentist’s identification. Not much after seven months, is there?”

When my reluctant eyes were able to take in the rest of the picture’s details, I could see where they’d gotten the crate full of groceries. She’d apparently been walking home from the one store in the lake district, intending, possibly, to stock

the cabin, and had stumbled into the well in the dark.

"It must have been an accident," I said. "How can you possibly put a date on the time of her death?" My fingers had begun to tremble, and I lay the photograph down.

"You know," Grigg said softly, "every time you open your mouth, Banning, you pull the noose a little tighter around your neck." He gazed at me for a time, unblinking, his hairless head glistening in the harsh light. Finally he sighed.

"Okay. We'll go over it real slow for you. The last time anybody saw Laura Anderson was on the third of September, last year. She got into the car, told her husband's secretary that she was going to attend a fashion show . . . and vanished. On the tenth of September, you asked Bert Anderson for permission to use his cabin at Lost Lake. You told him you wanted to work on your novel. On the twentieth of October, you returned to your own apartment in town.

"Now—sometime between those two dates you boarded up the well. That means that Laura Anderson must have been killed and thrown in the well before the twentieth, at least. No earlier than the third of September; no later than the twentieth of October."

"Suppose," I said, "that Laura went to the cabin on the third, fell in the well accidentally, and was dead when I got there? Is that entirely out of reason?"

"How far," Grigg murmured, "is the well from the cabin, where you were working?"

"About . . . six feet."

"Six feet," Grigg repeated. "I hate like hell to be crude, Banning, but are you trying to suggest that you could have been sitting six feet away from a dead body for a month and a half without realizing it?"

He had a point there. I licked my lips, and stared at the articles of groceries strewn across his desk. Several rusted tins of salmon, a moulded gunny sack containing potatoes, two boxes of powdered sugar, a broken jar of cream cheese.

"But, if I killed her," I said, "why should I have tossed these things in after her?"

"To make it look like an accident."

"You've just said that the accident theory doesn't hold water."

"So," Grigg said, "you were stupid. All murderers are stupid. That's why they murder. They're never smart enough to think of another way out."

"All right," Bert Anderson said suddenly, "I've had enough." Again Mary Price put a warning hand on his arm, but Bert paid no attention.

"It just so happens that I've got a bigger stake in this whole thing than you or anyone else, Grigg. She was my wife. But if you're looking for a quick conviction, you're barking up the wrong tree. Maybe Laura was murdered. I don't know. I doubt it. But if she was, Banning didn't do it. I've known him for fifteen years. I've been his lawyer for ten. And until he dismisses me, I'm still his lawyer."

Grigg's face was growing red. "Look here, Anderson."

"You look. For the last twenty minutes you've been talking awfully damned big. Got it all figured out, haven't you? Now suppose you just put up or shut up. Are you holding him?"

Sputtering, Grigg said: "Why, of all the—"

"I asked if you were holding him!"

Worried, Mary Price leaned over. "Bert."

Without turning, Bert shook her off. "Give me an answer, Grigg!"

But before Grigg could explode into speech, a familiar, rasping voice broke in from behind me. "If you don't hold him, Captain," Tucker Linskog said, "I'll see to it that there's an investigation into this office, so help me."

Bert whirled, staring up into his brother-in-law's flat face.

"I mean it," Tucker grated. "Laura may have been Bert's wife, but she was also my sister. I intend to see that her murderer pays for his crime. I intend to do everything in my power, and I expect you to do everything in yours."

Slowly Bert got to his feet, his knuckles white on the desk. For a long time he was silent, watching Tucker. Then, over his shoulder, he said softly:

"All right, Grigg. It's a clear-cut choice. If you don't hold Banning, my brother-in-law's going to be mad enough

to spit. And if you do hold him, I'll have him out of here on a habeas-corpus writ in half an hour. I've got a couple of angles on this case myself, and believe me, you'll regret it as long as you live if you try to stick to those fat-headed theories of yours."

Tightly Grigg said: "Are you withholding information, Anderson?"

"Me—withhold information from the Great Grigg, who investigates everything so impartially? Use your head, Captain."

"I might suggest the same thing," Tucker said. "Use your head. If you let this man go—"

"Shut up!" Grigg shouted. "Everybody! I'm in charge here, and by Peter, I'll make whatever decisions are supposed to be made!"

I could see a quick smile flit over Bert's face. Tucker stepped back, mumbling something about incompetence. In a way, I suppose that's what helped us most of all. Because Grigg heard him.

Bert was grinning as Grigg began to lash out at Tucker. I stood patiently, listening, until Grigg caught a glimpse of me.

"Well?" Grigg snapped. "What the hell are you waiting for?"

"Nothing," I said. "Not a thing. I was just going."

Bert and Mary Price were already at the door. As Constance and I joined them, and all four of us slipped into the hall, we could still hear Grigg's stentorian voice blasting about the evils of interfering in the correct course of the law.

THE rain had settled down to a fine, pin-pointed drizzle when we left the station. Swollen streams hissed along the gutters, and stood in ankle-deep puddles on the ancient, broken sidewalk. Constance and I, of course, had been driven to the station by the two detectives, and were without a car. We accepted gratefully when Bert offered to take us home.

He was quiet and thoughtful as we pulled away from the curb. Constance and Mary Price were in the back seat, speaking to each other in low voices. Away from the tension of Grigg's office, I felt suddenly beaten, old, completely rudderless.

I got out a cigarette, lit it. Through the plume of smoke, I said: "Thanks, Bert."

"Forget it. He couldn't have held you. And we're not out of the woods yet."

"Sweet brother-in-law you got." I murmured.

Bert watched the street silently for a time. Then, very softly, he said: "Paul."

"Yes?"

"There's something I want to tell you. Grigg doesn't know it yet, but he'll find out."

I waited.

"Don't get me wrong," Bert said. "I think Laura stumbled into that well. The police are putting a lot of faith in—the condition of her skull. But she could have hit her head going down. On the other hand, they may be right. Maybe she *was* murdered. We've got to look at every angle."

He stopped for a red light, got out a cigarette of his own. Then, quietly, he said: "Maybe I'm as far off the beam as Grigg is. And yet, the more I think about it. . . ."

He took a deep breath, and turned his head to me. "I was going through Laura's private papers today. And I found her will. She had a lot of money in her own right, you know, as well as twenty or twenty-five thousand dollars in insurance. Every last cent of it was left to—Tucker."

I stared back at him wordlessly.

"I knew about the insurance," he went on, "but she'd never told me about the will. It doesn't make any difference to me. I've got more money now than I know what to do with. But Tucker was damn near broke. It'll be quite a windfall for him. And people have murdered for a whole lot less, Paul."

Very slowly I ground my cigarette out in the dashboard ashtray. "Yes," I murmured. "They have."

The traffic light turned green. As we continued on toward home, both of us were silent, thinking.

Now, there is a part of me that doesn't at all want to tell you what happened next. It was a move so abysmally stupid that I hate to confess it. I can only say that—at the time—it seemed quite logical and harmless. I had no idea that it

would lead to such horrible events.

It happened the following day, although I had probably been planning it subconsciously ever since Bert had told me about the will.

At breakfast Constance was much more silent than usual. We had been married less than six months. She knew very little about my previous life, and it was clear that Grigg's fictional story about my friendship with Laura had bothered her. She wanted to trust me, and to believe me, but I could tell she was worried, and that she would continue to worry until the whole terrible case was cleared up.

When we were through eating, I mentioned that I wanted to get out of the house for a while. I promised that I would be home for dinner, but I wanted her not to expect me much sooner.

And then, so help me heaven, I headed straight out of the city, toward Lost Lake, and Bert's cabin.

I had no particular plan in mind. I suppose, in some vague way, that I intended to look for clues. For one thing, the groceries in the well with Laura continued to bother me. I felt that there was something wrong about them, and that I *might* be able to find out what it was by going to Lost Lake.

Tucker had seemed too insistent about my guilt. What if he and Laura had gone to the cabin together on the third. What if I could find something proving he'd been there. . . .

I got to the cabin shortly after noon. The rain, which had finally cleared up over the city, had swept east to the mountains, and was falling in torrents over Lost Lake. Going up the sea of mud that served as a road to the cabin, I thought several times that I saw automobile-tire tracks, but it was impossible to be sure.

There were, at least, no cars in sight when I pulled to a stop opposite the cabin door. Lightning flickered and jumped across the gray sky as I got out of my coupe, and seconds later the thunder came, crashing as though the very earth itself had split apart. I sloshed quickly through the mud to the protection of the porch, and stood there dripping, trying to decide what to do next. Bert had given me a key when I had come up be-

fore to write, but like a fool I had left it at home.

As it turned out, I wouldn't have needed it anyway. I had just taken hold of the knob in the off-chance that the police might have left the cabin open, when the wind sucked the door inward without my help. I paused, startled, while the door banged loosely against the wall. The dark day made the interior of the cabin a study in black. There was no sound except the endless rattle of rain on the wooden roof.

Still I might have been all right. I might have turned, and gone back to my car, and driven home to sanity and safety.

Instead of which I entered the cabin.

It was like being enveloped in dry ink. The windows had been shuttered, and I had no idea where the kerosene lamps had been left. Across the room, I thought I could distinguish the misty-white spear of a candle. I went ahead slowly, my arms stretched out before me.

Then I stepped on the body.

I don't know. Sometimes I think that the human mind is too weak a thing to hold all of the terror it may be called upon to absorb. Yet, I suppose that nature knew what it was about when it fashioned such weakness. My own reaction to that yielding something beneath my foot probably saved my life.

Because, instead of soberly and sensibly lighting a match to see what I had stumbled into, I leaned down idiotically, still in complete darkness, and searched about for it with my hand.

My fingers slid over a face, and came away slick with blood.

IT SEEMED to me that the most important thing in the world was to keep from being sick. I let my head hang down, fighting against the nausea that pierced my stomach. Far away I could hear the kettle-drum dramatics of another thunder-crash.

Rubbing my fingers together, I tried to catch my breath. The whole room appeared to be grotesquely out of shape. The white spear which I had taken for a candle, for instance, seemed actually to be coming toward me.

I really can't remember how long it took for me to realize that I wasn't crazy

—that the white spear was indeed moving—and that it was not a candle . . . but the dull silver handle of a poker.

Crouched in the darkness, I tried to get hold of myself. I had walked in on a murder, and the murderer was no more than four feet away, searching for me.

My position, of course, could have been worse. The darkness was on my side. If the person with the poker had been absolutely sure of my location, he would never have come so slowly.

On the other hand, the slightest move would betray me. I had my choice of remaining still until the poker found me, or of jumping upward to meet it.

Outside, the thunder rolled again. In the midst of its rumble, I leaped.

We came together in mid-air, and I could feel the sudden, aching pain of the poker as it slashed across my shoulder. I twisted away, trying to get my hands on the other's throat. I stepped backward, and stumbled again over the body behind me. Twice the poker thudded into the floor. I fought to roll away from it, but I couldn't have been lucky forever. The world surged upward suddenly, and the side of my head seemed to erupt as the poker caught me just above the right ear. Then there was no more wondering, nor fear, nor confusion. The blackness billowed over me like a cloud . . .

I awoke in the rain.

I was lying on my back, beside the open well, and my head was pounding, pounding, pounding like the sound a sea-shell makes when you hold it to your ear. or an eternity, I lay still wondering how I could possibly be alive. A weight in my hand caused me to look down finally, and I saw why the murderer had chosen not to kill me.

My fingers had been wrapped firmly around the poker.

Groaning, I raised myself to a sitting position, waited for my whirling head to come back to my shoulders and somehow got to my feet.

I hardly had to glance into the well. I knew that the body I'd stumbled over would be there . . . a pretty picture for the police to find.

The curious thing was that I could not see who had been murdered. The well was too deep; the day was too dark.

Awkwardly tripping over my own feet, stumbling and lurching in the mud, I made it at last to my car. I must have started the motor automatically, because I woke up on the road back to the city without having the least notion of how I'd got there. Nor do I remember any part of the main drive home.

Then I was in Constance's arms, and she was crying helplessly, her pale face swimming before me in a most remarkable way.

"It's all right," I said. "Don't cry, darling."

"But you're hurt! I'll call a doctor."

"No." I made my way to the bedroom.

"You've got to have attention!"

"He'd ask questions. Don't call a doctor. Promise me." I fell onto the bed. It was a dreamy, delightful bed that drifted in pleasant circles, around and around and around. "Promise me," I said, and my voice was miles away. So far off. And the bed continued to spin . . . and to spin. . . .

Coming back to consciousness was a struggle of such magnitude that it hardly seemed worth the bother. I was lying on my stomach, with my head pressed into the pillow. For a moment, I could not remember why my body ached so persistently, and then, as pieces of the past afternoon fell into place, I turned over, groaning.

It was dark outside. The clock on the dresser indicated eight-thirty. Slowly I swung my legs over the side of the bed.

"Constance?"

I could hear someone coming from the other room. I rested my head in my hands, staring between my knees at the floor. More than anything else, I wanted a drink.

Sighing, I got to my feet. As I started toward the kitchen, the bedroom door opened, and Bert Anderson peered in. "Hey, there," he said. "you shouldn't be up."

I stared at him stupidly. "Bert?"

"How you feeling, Paul?"

"Then it wasn't you. In the well."

"I don't know what you're talking about, fella."

"Somebody's dead. Up at your cabin."

Worried, Bert said: "I don't think you ought to be walking around like this.

Constance just left. She called me, and then went out to get a doctor. Be back in a minute. Maybe you—"

"I'm all right," I said. "All I need is a drink."

MY HANDS, though, were like butter. When I reached into the cupboard where we kept our liquor, I brushed against one of Constance's pet narcissus plants, and before I could catch it, the damned pot crashed to the floor. I tried to pick up the broken pieces, remembering that she kept the plants in the dark cupboard in order to make them grow more quickly.

But all of a sudden I couldn't move. I found my eyes riveted on the tiny, broken flower pot, and on the dead white shoot of the narcissus. "Bert," I said slowly, "look at this."

"Sure, kid. Later. Right now."

"No, look." Excited, I reached back and pulled him toward me. "Don't you see how it's grown? In the dark."

"I don't know what in the hell you're talking about."

I stood up, trembling. "The potatoes. You remember. There were potatoes in that well with Laura, and there wasn't a thing wrong with 'em!"

"Why should there be?"

"Because she was supposed to have fallen in there seven months ago! She couldn't have! The well was boarded up! The potatoes would have put out a million roots! She *was* murdered, Bert. She was killed somewhere else, and brought to Lost Lake only a couple of days ago. They wanted to make it look like an accident—that's why they threw all that stuff in after her.

"But they forgot that I'd been up there, and that I would be the one suspected. Why, the real murderer would probably even want to defend me . . . to get back to his accident theory. He'd—" I stopped, letting my words trail away.

"I wanted you to get back to bed, Paul!" Bert murmured.

Then it was so clear that I wondered how I could ever have missed it. "You were the one at the cabin," I whispered. "You were the one with the poker."

"I followed Tucker up. I think he sus-

pected those damned potatoes, too. He accused me. There was nothing else I could do."

"But . . . why? Why?"

For a long time Bert gazed at me. Then, softly, he said: "All right, kid. I suppose I might as well tell you. It was because I wanted to get married again. Isn't that funny? Laura found out—about Mary and me. We'd never gotten along. We quarreled. I didn't mean to kill her. But I hit her with a golf club—and she was gone. Last September.

"I buried her in the cellar. Then Mary and I decided to get married. But we couldn't—as long as Laura was missing. I had to produce her body . . . prove that she was dead. I tried to make it look like an accident. I took her body to Lost Lake and put it in the well, and pretended that I had just found it. But you were right. I'd forgotten that you'd been at the cabin . . . that they'd suspect you." His voice was remote, sad in the semi-darkness.

I watched him silently, still holding on to the broken flower pot.

"I'm sorry," Bert murmured, "that I had to hit you at the cabin. I'm sorry I have to kill you now."

He began to walk toward me leisurely.

I could feel myself going. Quickly before the blackness came, I took the one chance that was left to me. With all my strength, I threw the broken flower pot straight at his face.

The jagged crockery and the dirt sprayed into his eyes. It was enough to stop him for an instant . . . and I jumped. Swearing, Bert lunged sideways, clawing at his eyes. Together we crashed into the stove.

I couldn't have lasted long. I was too weak. Helplessly I sprawled on top of him, wondering why he didn't throw me off, finish me. But he didn't move.

My one leap had been enough. He'd hit his head on the stove.

Eternities away, I could hear the front door open. That would be Constance, and the doctor. Now I could sleep again.

But I hoped they'd let me do one more thing on my own. I hoped they'd let me call Grigg.

It would break his heart right in two to find out that I wasn't the murderer.

THRILL

DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

COMBINED WITH FLYNN'S DETECTIVE FICTION

DOCKET



Jim Bennett's old flame Marcia Delaney phoned, insisted he drive to her tycoon-husband's place immediately. The private eye did—and got konked from behind.



Luscious Marcia revived Bennett, denied having phoned him. She was backed up by redheaded Helena. . . . Later, Bennett found the gatekeeper dead.



Delaney was right behind him—with a gun. Bennett knocked him out, ran to phone the sheriff. He returned, discovered Delaney dead . . . and the widow relieved.



Helena was waiting in Bennett's apartment. . . . The novel—"Slayers Go Solo"—by Robert Martin will appear in the November issue . . . published October 5th.



He was sent to the most formidable jail. . . .

IN MISCOLKZ, HUNGARY, a few years before the war, was a small food shop. When you went in, you were served as a peasant is served by royalty. If you were insulted, you went away and they did not miss you—neither the proprietor nor the customers. But if you had that unusual talent for understanding which is reserved for children and specially gifted adults, you would realize that you were at a way station on that rainbow trail to the pot of gold which most of us never take. You would discover that you suddenly believed in a concept only slightly less fantastic than the fourth dimension—namely, that you only live twice!

The chances are that you tossed away the dishonest dreams of youth long ago and settled down to living just once. If you did, you were lucky. Living your two lives to the full takes it out of a man—

DOUBLE

• • •
One life wasn't enough for this irrepressible schemer—he had to try several.
• • •

Ignatz Strassnoff, the proprietor of the little food shop, could have told you that. Of humble origin, he made a swindler's reality of make-believe, became the consort of princes and bishops, and even applied himself once, briefly, to tampering with the course of history.

It all began, appropriately enough, on the stage, some time before the turn of the century. Stassnoff, a young actor then, played the part of an Imperial Hussar in a forgotten play. The resplendent uniform clothed more than his body, it clothed his thoughts and his brain. It *made* him a Hussar of noble birth, and he knew, long before the play wound to its tedious, artificial end, that no stage would ever hold him.

So, when the silly drama was over, it was only natural that he shouldn't remove his costume. He had needed no make-up for his part, so he did not pause to remove it. He simply walked out of the stage door and into the night, to stroll for a moment under the moon and gradually witness, within himself, the metamorphosis of a dream into reality.

The next day, make-believe soldier Stassnoff walked into the ornate offices of the supplier of uniforms for the Imperial Hussars. Presenting the compliments of his commanding officer, a high army dignitary, he demanded an immediate estimate on a large order of new dress uniforms the cavalry needed before an impending review by the Emperor himself.

Hussar Strassnoff was haughty and courtly and cynical of mien, a most realistic job. In a very short while he proved himself corruptibly human. He took the bedazzled military tailor aside and confessed he had been authorized to pay

LIFE OF A PHONEY

By **EJLER JAKOBSSON**

8,000 kronen in excess of the cited value of the uniforms—a sum he was willing to split equally with the firm supplying the goods, provided he could have his share in cash immediately. Pressing financial obligations, this military facsimile confessed with a noble wink—and shortly walked out of the place with a wallet bulging comfortably with the crown's money.

A thing that wasn't so—sired by why-not out of might-have-been—this will o' the wisp in cavalry pants made his rounds, feeding on things that shouldn't have been. Patriotically he arranged for fodder for cavalry horses and new, fine equipment for the men of war, removing fantastic sums of graft from circulation.

Then Ignatz Strassnoff woke up—in irons. Nor did he dream again for nearly two years, not until he finally got out of jail.

Then he found himself working on a progressive newspaper, whose publisher, Zoltan Karlitz, was a practical idealist believing in political reform and striving to reach his goal by getting himself elected to the parliament. For some time Ignatz Strassnoff, who walked the rainbow trail as easily as he trod the pavements of Budapest, watched his employer's newspaper campaign with detached interest. No group idealist himself, he decided Karlitz' aims were solid. He knew, too, that Karlitz stood not a chance of being elected, with the local moneyed interests forming a solid front against him.

Great numbers of voters were being given no time to get to the polls by their employers. The situation was made to order for the whimsical talents of Strassnoff.

HE WAITED until the night of the election. Then he casually picked up the nearest telephone and quietly called Budapest's leading firms. It was the Minister of Commerce speaking. The government was grateful for the support given its candidates, whom the day's voting had assured of re-election. It would be a handsome gesture if the residue of the population were allowed to go to the polls now that it could do no harm. . . .

Budapest awoke the following morning to a hilarious practical joke—Karlitz had been elected by a slim but decisive margin!

The irrepressible Strassnoff went along to parliament as his confidential secretary, and continued to reach for the pot o' gold. With characteristic facility he ceased being Strassnoff and became Karlitz—especially when it came to signing checks. The disillusioned Karlitz had him sent to the most formidable jail in Hungary, where for three years Strassnoff enjoyed complete national obscurity. He came out of this prison a profoundly reformed character.

Along with a female companion of some of his earlier peccadilloes, he became a regular churchgoer—and soon knew the most intimate details of the private lives of the important members of the religious hierarchy.

Going over his many notes, it seemed to him that, as soon as continue to be Ignatz Strassnoff, he might as well—at least occasionally—be the eminent Councillor von Zahranyi.

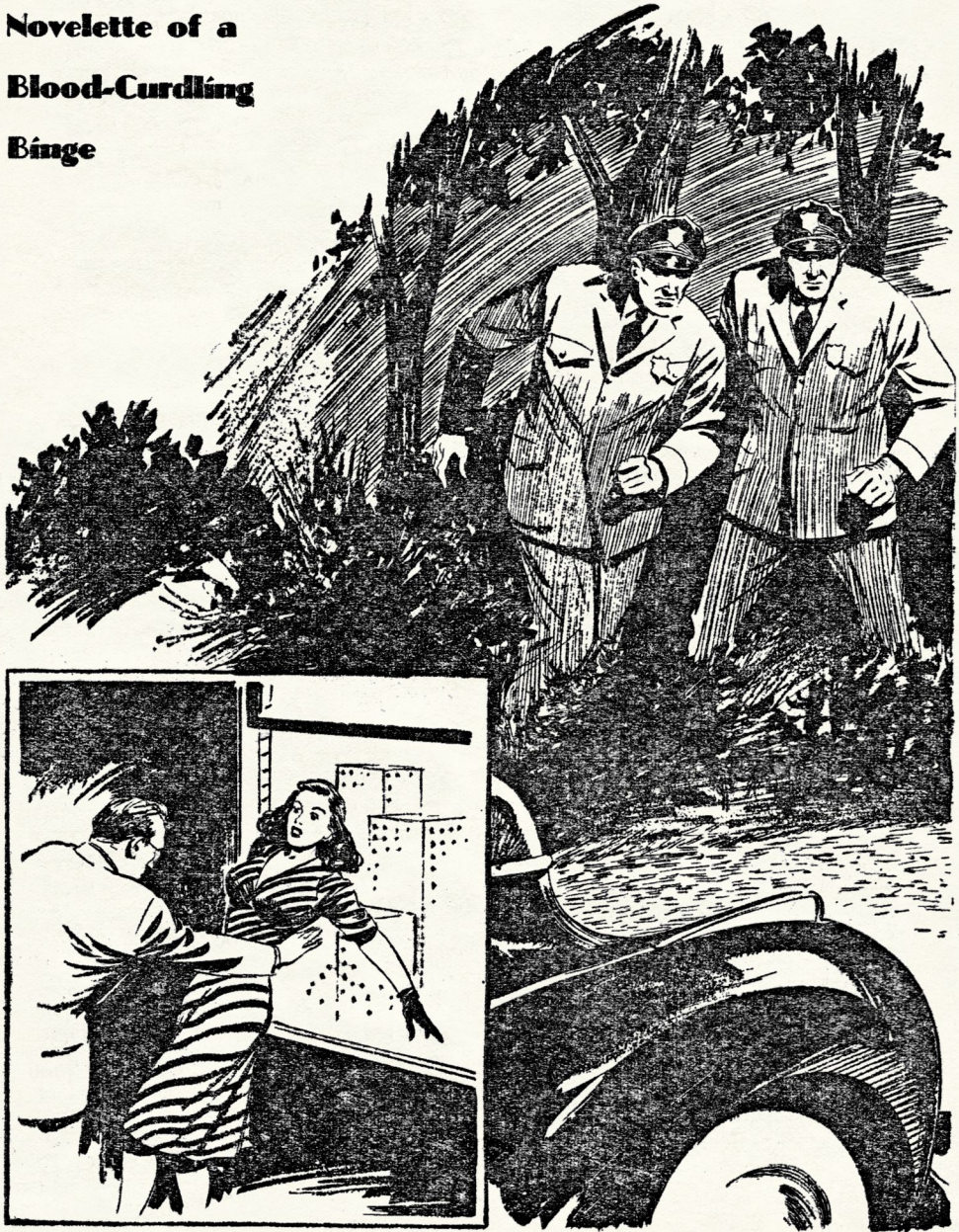
Arraying himself in the proper regalia, Strassnoff called upon the aged Bishop of Neutra, the real Zahranyi's uncle.

(Please continue on page 98)

HUNT HER

By **WILLIAM P. MCGIVERN**

**Novelette of a
Blood-Curdling
Binge**



IN HELL

*Even though Jim had seen the shapely dancer's body on a morgue slab,
he was going to take the stranger's dare
to bring her back alive!*

CHAPTER ONE

Never Say Good-by

AFTER enough liquor, the blackness began to lift from his mind, leaving him with a miraculous feeling of release and freedom. The blackness didn't go away completely, but retreated to the edge of his consciousness

Jim's shoulder crashed into
the backs of his legs. . . .



and hovered there, waiting to return. The thing then was to keep drinking. Keep the blackness away.

Before him appeared a patch of whiteness topped by a red balloon. The balloon wavered crazily and words sounded. He laughed at that and was further amused by the sound of his laughter.

The words became more insistent.

"Sure, Mr. Daily, you've had plenty for tonight. You're needin' a good sleep now."

Jim Daily realized that the balloon belonged to the bartender. It was really Mike's face, he thought.

"Drink," he said, trying to focus his eyes.

Mike's face was sympathetic as he took a bottle from the rack behind him and carefully filled Jim Daily's glass. "Now that's the last," he said. "You can't keep this up much longer, Mr. Daily."

"Doesn't matter," Jim said.

Mike put his freckled hands on the bar and leaned forward, a comically earnest expression on his honest red face. "She wouldn't like the way you're behavin'. You know she'd hate to see you drinking this way, neglecting your work with the paper."

Jim smiled. The shadow on the rim of his thoughts had almost disappeared. His mind was free and he could smile.

"Don't use the past tense about Terry, Mike," he said, speaking very slowly so the words didn't slur together. "Bad habit of yours. Always talking about Terry as if she's dead." He leaned forward, staring earnestly into Mike's eyes. "Terry's not dead, Mike. You know that, don't you? She's not dead."

Mike nodded miserably. "Sure, Mr. Daily, sure." He moved away shaking his head.

Jim was sitting in a smoky little hang-out on the lower level of Chicago's Wacker Drive. It was a gathering place for newspaper men who wanted liquor without a noisy juke box or the distraction of television. A warm and mellow place, it had brown wooden booths along one wall, a bar free from pop-corn bowls and trick ashtrays.

Jim Daily put his elbows on the bar and concentrated his gaze on the clusters of bubbles on the shiny surface of his whiskey. He tried to imagine what it

would be like to sit inside one of them, sit inside the glassy curve of its walls, and float, warm and free from the world.

A hand touched his shoulder. He turned with the impressive deliberation that some drunken people acquire in the attempt to control reflexes made uncertain by alcohol. There was a man on the stool beside his, a thin man with a narrow head. The man wore rimless glasses and they caught the light evenly and made a gleaming bar across his narrow head.

"You said your wife was alive," he said quietly. "You say that frequently. Why do you think she's alive?"

Jim shook his head nervously. The blackness on the rim of his thoughts had gathered itself to spring. He looked into the man's face unable to think of anything except the dread of that blackness.

"I—" He stopped, wet dry lips. He turned desperately, searched for Mike. But Mike had gone.

"I was merely curious." The man's words fell slowly, inevitably, like black drops of water on black stone. "I heard she'd committed suicide some time ago. I heard that you identified the body. That was right, wasn't it? You did identify the body, didn't you?"

Jim reached for his glass, spilled the liquor over the bar. He looked again for Mike and then he put both hands to his face as memories returned, as the blackness swept over his mind. . . .

TERRY was impulsive, scatter-brained, laughing and gay. Long legged, slim waisted, with red hair that didn't come from a bottle, and changeable blue-green eyes. She was a dancer, in the line at the *Golden Slipper*, one of Chicago's fancy clip joints.

They met when Jim covered the night-club beat, filling in for the amusement editor who was down with the flu. Their romance had the cynics along Randolph Street beaming tenderly.

For two months he sent her flowers three times a day, they went to the zoo, they went swimming, they walked in the park, and they went on picnics—and Terry, the night-club hoofer, made the lunch herself.

Then Terry quit her job, Jim found an apartment, and they were married. For six

months they lived a life that was all brightness and love.

Then. . .

She wasn't in the apartment one evening when he came home. The salad had been made, the vegetables cleaned, and there were lamb chops in the icebox. Everything was ready. But Terry wasn't there.

The couple downstairs, the Wrights, told him she'd gone out around four o'clock. That was all he could find out.

At seven-thirty his phone rang. The coroner's office. Was he James Daily, husband of Terry Daily? Well, in that case he'd better come down to the morgue. His wife's body was there. She had jumped from the thirty-ninth floor of the Advertiser's Building.

He'd made the identification, from clothes, jewelry, the contents of her purse. That was all he could be sure about. Then with the frantic urgency of a pain-blinded animal he had gone from bar to bar, from bottle to bottle, trying to numb his mind and senses against the black knowledge that she was dead.

* * *

A hand shook his shoulder, a familiar voice said huskily, "Now, Mr. Daily, lift your head, please. That's a good boy."

Jim saw Mike watching him anxiously. He was sober now and the feeling of pain and loss that only liquor could deaden was with him, agonizingly intense. Underneath that was leaden anger against the man who had talked to him about Terry, who had blasted his moment of numb peace.

"Where is he?" he said thickly to Mike.

"Who, Mr. Daily?"

Jim looked around, saw that the stool beside his was empty. Turning, he focused his eyes on the men along the bar, in the brown wooden booths, at the tables. He was looking for a man with rimless glasses and a narrow face. But there was no such man in the room.

"You were all alone," Mike said insistently.

Jim rubbed his forehead slowly. Was he that far gone? Was he starting to imagine things?

"I'll help you to a cab," Mike said.

The next morning was worse than usual. His tongue was thickly coated with a substance that tasted like rotting wool, and hammers were exploding against the insides of his skull. He lit a cigarette, but after one drag that sickened him he crushed it out.

Gray dawn was filtering through the cracked green shade of his furnished room, the place he'd moved to after Terry's death. He still had a lease on the apartment but he couldn't go back there yet. For although it seemed like centuries, Terry had been dead just seventeen long days.

He sat up, fighting rolling waves of nausea. When he was able to stand he made his way to the bathroom and was violently sick. Feeling somewhat better, he returned to the bedroom, but the sight of his dirty clothes piled in the corner, and the whiskey bottles on the bureau, almost sickened him again.

He investigated the bottles but found them all empty. He'd have to wait a while for the neighborhood bar to open. He forced himself to lie down again, an arm thrown over his throbbing eyes.

"Terry!" His voice was a ragged whisper. "Why, honey? Why?"

That question had no answer. There would never be an answer. But that didn't help. He asked himself the question a thousand times a day. If he knew the answer then he might be able to get himself in hand, go on living.

His thoughts drifted to the night before, to the man with the rimless glasses. He would love to have that narrow head within range of his fists. What was the reason behind the man's cold discussion of Terry's death?

Another question without a possible answer.

For a few minutes Jim lay thinking. There might be an answer to that question. It wouldn't help anything, but any bit of information that related to Terry's death was worth investigating. Why was the man interested in Terry's death?

He sat up and rubbed the stubbled beard on his face thoughtfully. He was thinking. For seventeen days he had lived in a blurred nightmare of alcohol and despair.

Now he made himself think. . . .

IT WAS almost noon when Jim entered Mike's bar. He had shaved and stood under a driving cold shower for half an hour and now, after several glasses of tomato juice liberally spiked with Worcestershire sauce, his head was clear and his nerves steady.

Mike put a shot glass on the bar with a disapproving expression but Jim waved it away and ordered ginger ale.

"Now," he said, "think hard, Mike. Some guy sat down next to me last night, opened up about Terry. You got to help me figure out who he was."

"I was down at the back booths for a while," Mike said apologetically. "But I'd swear you were alone. And I can't recall any guy like you're telling me about."

"Possibly he wasn't alone," Jim said. "He might have been with a group of people, or with a girl. Think hard, Mike."

"Let me think a bit," Mike said, frowning. Finally he came around the bar and stood in the middle of the room, glancing over the booths and tables.

"Now," he said, "Frank Ryan from the weekly was sitting there with Bill Wade from the *Express*." He tapped the top of a scarred table with a blunt forefinger. "Next to them, at this table were the two girls from the picture service." Moving down the tables he stopped at the last one, frowning.

"There was a couple here, I think. They must have been new or I'd remember them. But I do remember something about the girl," he said, turning to Jim with a triumphant smile.

"She wore a fancy wrist watch, one of them hideous-looking things that look like a snake. You know, the band was made of gold with scales on it, and the watch sticks up about half an inch like the head of a snake."

"What about the man she was with?" Jim said.

Mike shrugged helplessly. "I got a blank in me head where he should be."

Jim slid off the bar stool. A girl with a fancy watch that looked like a coiled snake. Not much to go on, but it was all he had. It was a start.

Mike came with him to the door. "It's nice to see you sober again, boy. Now, why don't you get back on the job at the

paper, and forget about this man who spoke to you last night? It'll just keep you stirred up, thinking thoughts that are better forgotten."

Jim let out a tired breath. "I can't work until I know why—why she did it, Mike. This man who talked to me last night is the first thing in the whole business that makes a little sense."

"What sense is there in a man who talks to you about your poor wife? There's no reason at all to it."

"And that's why it makes sense," Jim said. "There's got to be a reason, don't you see, Mike? . . ."

It was a lot to go on. A girl with a snake watch. How many girls in Chicago wore flashy watches? How many had two legs and two arms? It was about the same thing, Jim thought.

But he had one hunch. That kind of watch would be worn by a certain type of girl. Not a stenographer, or a college girl, or housewife. It would be worn by a girl who would match a cheap, flashy time piece. A model maybe, but not likely. Better, a burlesque hooper or a dice girl.

That afternoon Jim headed for the few blocks where were ninety per cent of the city's burlesque houses, pawn shops, penny arcades, and shooting galleries, and where lived and worked hard-faced, humorless men in pin-stripe suits and white fedoras, and women who ranged from sullen young kids to bleary hennaed creatures who wandered the street in broken, high-heeled shoes and tight silk dresses.

From practically every doorway music blared from small jazz combos. In these smokey, dimly lit bars were hostesses who provided unenthusiastic company and uninspired conversation at the rate of a dollar a drink. Their attention came high, for they could put away twenty shots in an hour, since their drinks were normally a concoction of weak tea diluted with about two drops of whiskey to provide an authentic aroma.

Jim turned into the first one he came to, the *Kicking Horse*. It was about three in the afternoon then, and the bar was empty. In the back, three of four girls sat around a table. One of them wandered up front as he took a seat at the bar. She was young, a brunette, with fine skin.

Climbing onto the stool beside him, she said, "Hi, there," in a brassy voice. She turned so that her knees bumped his legs, and asked him if he'd like to talk to her a while. She was lonely, she said. She got so lonely here in Chicago, she said. She was really from California where she missed a chance to be in pictures by a real tough break.

Jim bought her a drink. She wasn't wearing a wrist watch.

AFTER three drinks, which the bartender set before her the instant she drained her glass, she told him she liked tall men in tweeds with lean faces. Jim was tall and his features were lean and he was wearing a brown tweed suit. He wondered if this were a coincidence. He decided not.

Then he brought the conversation to watches. He was buying one for his sister, he explained, and didn't know the kind to get.

"Well, what's this sister of yours like?" the girl asked without interest.

Jim had no idea of what the girl he was looking for looked like. But if his hunch was correct, if she was a burlesque hooper or a dice girl, then she would probably fit into a certain pattern.

"She's got a good figure," he said. "Gets along with men pretty well, knows her way around, if you get me."

The girl laughed. "What's all that got to do with the kind of watch you get her?"

Jim shrugged. "I thought one of your friends might have something unusual in the way of watches. What I meant was that my sister was sharp, good-looking, of the same type some of your friends might be."

She frowned with the effort of concentration. "Well, lemme see," she said. "I'm trying to think of what kinds of watches my friends wear."

Jim felt a curious tension building inside him. He knew his excitement was idiotic. This girl—what if he did find her? She might not have been with the man who had talked to him at Mike's bar about Terry. And if she did—if he actually found the man, himself—what would he have? Nothing at all.

But his hand was tight on his glass as

he watched her hard face and waited.

She said, "I don't think I'm any help. Most of my friends just wear ordinary watches. But some of them have diamond chips on the face," she added hopefully.

He got nothing else from her. And he got nothing from the next five places he visited, and by that time he was convinced he was wasting his time. It was seven thirty by then and the bars were filling up. The girls were busier now and it was harder to get them talking. Talking slowed down drinking. They preferred not to talk at all, but to giggle, to push the customers for more drinks, and then coyly demand if they were getting fresh. This chatter took little time and was an incentive to even faster drinking.

And then he stumbled onto what he was looking for. The girl was young and she'd been drinking more than tea. She was half-tight and her voice was fuzzy.

"Watch for your sister, eh?" she said. "Good idea. Always can pawn a watch. Tell you something. My room mate, Trixie, has a beaut. It's made like a snake. It coils around your wrist and there's little scales on the band, honest to Pete there is."

"Sounds like what I've been looking for," Jim said, casually. "Where's Trixie now?"

"She was off last night. She comes in tonight about eleven I think." She looked at him sullenly. "What'cha so interested in her for?"

"I'm not," Jim said. "I'm interested in you."

"That's a little better."

"I'd like to see you tonight. Could I pick you up where you live?"

The girl wasn't that drunk. "What's the matter with here?" she said.

"Nothing," Jim said. "Nothing at all. But there's no place for a man to relax. I'm a homebody at heart." He took a ten-dollar bill from his pocket and slid it across the bar. "I don't get to town often, but when I do—I want fun and I pay for it, honey. Now, what's the address of your place?"

She closed her thin fingers over the bill and gave him the address. . . .

The address was on the near North side in a neighborhood of cheap rooming houses. Jim paid off his cab and went up

the wooden steps two at a time. The landlady answered his knock, and peered suspiciously at him from a poorly lit vestibule.

"Well?"

"I'm a friend of Trixie's," he said. "She alone?"

"Don't worry, he's gone," she said. She laughed and it wasn't a pretty sound. "It's okay; he left almost ten minutes ago. She's on the second floor, back room."

Jim felt the woman's bright eyes on his back as he went up the uncarpeted steps to the second floor. The place exuded a mixture of smells that were impossible to separate and identify. But the approximate effect, Jim thought, could have been achieved by pouring strong cheap perfume over a heap of sun-baked garbage.

Trixie's door was closed. Jim knocked twice and waited. There was no sound from inside, no stir of life. He tried the knob, felt it turn under his hand. The room was dark, silent, and the air had a moist, sickly-sweet smell. He fumbled for the light switch, snapped it on.

From a naked bulb hanging by a cord from the ceiling, strong white light poured onto the cheap sagging bed, the clutter of feminine clothes that were strewn about on chairs, on the bureau, on the window sill.

And the light fell on the girl who had been known as Trixie. She lay on the floor, one long leg doubled under her body, staring upward at the light with reddened eyes. She didn't blink, she didn't move. Trixie was past caring about light in her eyes. She was past caring about everything.

Jim swallowed the sudden dryness in his throat. Here was the start of the trail. And the end. For she couldn't tell him what he wanted to know. Ever.

He turned and went quickly down the steps. The landlady was waiting in the vestibule. She said, "You weren't long."

"You've got a dead body upstairs," he said. "Get to the phone, call Homicide."

She stared at him blankly for an instant, then tried to push past him, swearing incoherently under her breath. He shoved her back and told her again to get to the phone. This time the effect of his words was like a sharp slap across her face. She backed away, paling, and then

she waddled off down the corridor, suddenly frightened and timid. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

No Help From a Bull

LEUTENANT Bill Devlin of Homicide listened to Jim's story without any particular expression on his hard, regular features. He was a stocky man, with bushy black hair and calm eyes. They were sitting in the anteroom of the coroner's office. It was eleven o'clock. Outside, Chicago was ablaze with night-time brilliance.

"Well, you got something," he said in a quiet voice, "but I'll be damned if I know just what."

"Let me run through it again," Jim said. "Last night a man at the bar developed a curious interest about—about Terry. He took the trouble to pin me down to find out what was behind my ramblings. He was with a girl. A girl with a flashy snake watch. That much Mike is sure of."

"Now hold on," Devlin said. "Mike *thinks* this fellow may have been with that girl."

"All right, all right," Jim said. "But I find this girl Trixie. And someone has strangled her. Doesn't that add up to something?"

"Maybe, maybe not," Devlin said. "First of all we have no way knowing if this Trixie is the girl who was in Mike's bar last night. Hell, Jim, a watch is damn poor identification. There may be a thousand babes in town with watches like that."

"But only one of them got killed," Jim said. "The one I was after."

"Okay," Devlin said. "Let's assume this girl Trixie was the girl who was in Mike's bar. And let's assume she was with the guy who spoke to you. What does that add up to?"

Jim stood up, paced the floor with his hands rammed into his pockets. "Look at it this way," he said. "Supposing you saw a poor miserable drunk at a bar babbling about his wife, pretending she wasn't dead at all. Would you step up to him, tap him on the shoulder, and ask him about it, reminding him that he had iden-

tified her broken body, and that said body was now six feet under?"

Jim stopped and his face was pale. There were beads of sweat standing out on his face. "Would you?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Hell, no," Devlin said.

"Nobody would," Jim said. "Unless he had some reason for doing that and Trixie's death makes me think it was an important reason."

"What do you want us to do?" Devlin said, after a pause.

"Check Trixie's movements last night. Find out who she was with and keep your eye out for a thin guy with rimless glasses among her friends."

"We'd have done that anyway," Devlin said. "But I'll check it myself."

"I'll call you in the morning," Jim said. "I've got some work to do myself tonight."

Devlin opened his mouth, then closed it and shrugged.

Jim walked out. . . .

His neighbors, the Wrights, lived in the apartment a floor below the one which he and Terry had shared. Jim rang their bell at eleven-thirty that night. He gave his name to the speaking tube and the buzzer clicked immediately. Jim went up the stairs quickly, trying not to recall the silly ritual he and Terry had of kissing on each landing.

Wright met him at the door in a bathrobe. They shook hands, and Wright said, "Come in, Jim. Jane and I were hoping you'd stop by and visit with us some time."

Jim sat down in the comfortably furnished living room and then stood up as Jane Wright came in wearing a robe and slippers. She had been ready for bed and her hair was in pin curlers. She smiled at him a little uncertainly.

"It's nice to see you," she said. Then, with forced brightness, "How about some coffee?"

Jim said, no thanks. When they were sitting down, he explained why he had come.

"I've been in such a fog for the past couple of weeks that I never checked the details of—" he stopped and said the words for the first time—"Terry's death." He wet his lips, went on firmly, "I know

she stopped here on her way out that day, Jane. Would you mind telling me about it, please? Everything."

"Of course I will," Jane Wright said. She glanced with uneasy helplessness at her husband, then began to speak. "Terry knocked on the door about a quarter to four. She wanted me to know she was going out, so that if she was late I could tell you. But she didn't really expect to be late. That—that's about all. She was in a hurry, I think, and she seemed—well, she seemed kind of happy about something."

"Wasn't there anything else?" Jim said, desperately. "Any little thing, a word or something, that you've forgotten?"

Jane put her fingers to her forehead in a childish gesture of concentration. "Well, she said her dinner was all ready, and I think she said something about the weather. And—" She took her fingers from her forehead suddenly. "Oh, yes, she said something I didn't understand at all. She said, 'we'll see who's a romantic little shopgirl now'."

"What's that?" Jim said blankly, looking at Jane.

"Just that. As she was leaving she said that."

"But didn't you have any idea what she meant? Didn't it refer to something you were talking about?"

Jane shook her head firmly. "I'm sure it didn't. You know how she laughed and talked at the same time, so you'd get to laughing with her and you wouldn't really care about what she was saying."

"Jane," her husband said gently.

"Oh—oh, I am sorry," she said, looking at Jim.

"Please go on," he said. He locked his hands together to stop their trembling. "I'm all right."

"Well, that's really all."

That was all she remembered. It wasn't any help. Jim had no idea what she might have meant, or if it really meant anything at all.

He got up to leave and Jane said, "We can put you up on the couch here, Jim. Why don't you stay?"

"No, I'll go on upstairs," he said. That surprised him. He hadn't thought about it, until the words came out. He forced a smile and said good night.

UPSTAIRS in their apartment, he turned on one light and sank into his big chair. Terry was everywhere in the room; it echoed silently with her laughter, and seemed to be waiting for her to come in.

He tried to discover some significance in what Jane Wright remembered. The one thing was the crack about the romantic shopgirl, simply because it wasn't Terry's style. It was more like the kind of thing he'd say to her, teasingly, while kidding her about her starry-eyed rapture over puppies or babies.

Yes, it was his line. Then with a rush of memory, he recalled the time he'd said those words to her, the very words. It had been at night. Right here in this room.

He pushed his fingertips tightly into his skull, as if by sheer pressure he could force out the information he wanted.

It was night, they were in this room. He had that much. What night? And then he remembered.

It was the night before her death.

That was it! But why had he said those particular words to her, and why had she repeated them to Jane Wright the next afternoon?

He got to his feet and began pacing. It was coming to him, piece by piece, the whole scene.

They had been talking about his work. He had been complaining about an assignment, grumbling half in earnest about the deadly dullness of newspaper work.

Terry had been lying on the floor, leafing through a magazine. He even recalled that she was wearing a white silk shirt with shorts because the night was warm.

"I think your job is exciting," she'd said, in answer to his tirade.

"Yeah? Well, look at this assignment. Every year we do an expose on Chicago's unsolved murders, probably because the publisher's wife got a parking ticket once and has it in for the police force. I got stuck with the job this time. The first story I've got to do is on a cheap hood named Riga, who was shot in the lobby of the Regent Hotel about sixteen years ago. The police had a suspect, but he was released for lack of evidence. Isn't that a sizzling story to work on?"

Terry had swung around to a sitting

position with her elbows resting on her bare knees. "Well, darling, why don't you go out and find who did kill this man Riga?"

"It's too old. It's dead. And Riga probably deserved what he got anyway."

"I'll bet I could help you." She had grinned with excitement.

"How?"

"Well, I met a lot of people when I danced at the *Golden Slipper*. You know, characters from the underworld, I never had anything to do with them, but I might use them now to get you a lead."

He had reached over and mussed her shining hair. "Darling, I love you, but you have all the fuzzy sentimentality of a romantic shopgirl."

Jim stood up slowly and fumbled mechanically for a cigarette. He was numbed by the implications he'd uncovered.

One. Terry had wanted to help him solve Riga's murder.

Two. She'd gone out the next afternoon and it was obvious from the comment to Jane Wright that she was intending to do just that.

Three. She hadn't come back. She had died.

Then it came to him with sickening force. She hadn't committed suicide. She had been murdered. She had found something—something had made her dangerous to someone. And that someone had killed her.

Suddenly as he stood in the dimly lit room with Terry's presence about him, he felt a leaden despair sweep over him. What did it matter how she died? She was gone from him.

But then he thought of her murderer. The murderer was alive, free, safe. That wouldn't do. Not at all. Jim's mind was cold and sharp again. He'd sleep here tonight. Tomorrow morning he'd see Devlin. That was the starting place. . . .

"YOU'VE got something," Devlin said, nodding slowly as Jim finished his story. "Now you've got a lead."

They were drinking coffee from thick mugs in a restaurant adjoining central station. Jim hadn't slept well. His face was drawn.

"How about the girl, Trixie?" he asked.

"A blank so far," Devlin said. "We

found no sign of a guy with rimless glasses in her life. There was a guy at her rooming house before you got there, but the landlady's description is too vague to mean much."

"Okay. But this other thing. Terry went to the thirty-ninth floor of the Advertiser's Building the afternoon she was killed. She went there to get information on who killed a punk named Riga. Devlin, someone on that floor knows something. That's where we got to start."

"There're two hundred offices on that floor," Devlin said. "It'll take time."

"I've got time," Jim said quietly.

"So have the police. But first, let's run over the files on the Riga murder. . . ."

The file room was hot and close. Jim and Devlin stood at one of the high tables and quickly went through the records on the Riga murder.

The date was December 3rd, 1932. Guiseppe Riga, the deceased, had been an immigrant Italian who operated a small grocery store on the west side. This was a front. His main job was driving beer for O'Bannion. On the night of the murder Riga was sitting in the lobby of the Regent Hotel reading a newspaper. A man came up to him, fired three shots into his head, turned around and walked out. There were two witnesses. Mrs. Catherine Green, housewife, and Jeremiah Spicer, a bookkeeper who lived in the hotel.

Police picked up one Ted Delahunty, a practising gunman, and Mrs. Green identified him positively, along with the bookkeeper Spicer.

Mrs. Green was killed by a hit-run driver before the trial opened, and police felt sure it was done by Delahunty's gang. Spicer changed his story at the last minute of the trial and testified that he could not make a positive identification of Ted Delahunty as the murderer he'd seen in the hotel lobby. The State's case against Delahunty blew higher than a kite.

Jim looked over the dusty report at Devlin. "Looks like Delahunty beat a rap all right. And I wonder where this guy Spicer is today."

"We'll check 'em both," Devlin said, nodding slowly. "I'd bet right now that Mrs. Green was rubbed out and that Spicer was paid off."

They went out into the bright sunlight to wait for a cab. Devlin said, "I'd advise you to be a little careful from now on, Jim."

"Why me?"

Devlin gave him an odd look. "You're generally brighter. Look. Somebody was on your tail. You look for the girl who was with the guy. The girl gets killed. Now you've got another lead, a hotter one. Watch out you don't killed."

Jim shrugged. "That wouldn't matter very much."

"Okay, don't worry," Devlin said with a touch of anger. "But I want to straighten this thing out, and I can't do it if you go barging around, advertising what's up. You go back to the paper and take it easy. Maybe we can convince this guy that it's all blown over. Meanwhile I'll check everybody on the thirty-ninth floor of the Advertiser's Building. Okay?"

"Okay," Jim said. . . .

Jim checked into the office of the *Express* that afternoon. Rayburn, the city editor, was glad to see him but told him he could stay out another week or so if he felt like it. Jim said he was okay and ready to go to work. He took an assignment to cover the Grand Jury for the next few days and left the office.

That routine went on for a week. He heard nothing from Devlin, from anyone. Then on a Monday morning Devlin called him, asked him to come down to Central.

"We found Spicer," Devlin said without preamble when Jim entered his office. "He left Chicago after the trial, went out to California. Now he's living in Fort Wayne, been there four or five years."

"Have you talked to him?"

"No. He's not there now. He left a week ago on a motor trip for Washington."

"Then you haven't really found him yet," Jim said, tired. He sat down, crossed his legs and lit a cigarette. "Spicer own his own home in Fort Wayne?"

"We checked all that," Devlin said. "He lives comfortably, but not suspiciously so. We'll have to wait until we find him to check his bank account."

"Well, how about the Advertiser's Building?"

Devlin glanced down at a stack of papers on his desk. There was something

curious about his attitude that Jim didn't understand. Devlin acted nervous, almost apologetic, as he shuffled the papers around before glancing up again at Jim.

"I found one lead there that looked promising," he said. "Man by the name of Stone, a whiskey importer. He was mixed up in marijuana in Mexico, did some rum running from Cuba, and so on. Lovely character. But he's not Delahanty."

"Are you sure?" Jim demanded. "He seems to fit the pattern."

"What pattern?" Devlin said unexpectedly.

"I mean, that's the kind of activity you could expect to find Delahanty mixed up in. He was a hood, knew his way around pretty well, so you wouldn't look for him running a kindergarden."

"That's just a guess," Devlin said. He got to his feet and perched on the edge of his desk. "We've nothing solid to go on, Jim. Theories, guesses, a snatch of conversation from your wife, a man in a bar, a girl with a snake watch. It adds up to nothing."

"The girl from the bar was murdered," Jim said. "And Terry started out with the idea of finding out something about the Riga murder. Where the hell is she today? You can't call two murders just a bunch of theories and guesses, Devlin. The murders happened. The girls stopped breathing."

"Neither one is conclusive," Devlin said with a shake of his head. "The police are checking out of this thing, Jim. Those are the orders."

"That's just great," Jim said, getting to his feet. His jaw was set in hard, tight lines. "You can't get it on a silver platter so you quit. You're great at handing out parking tickets, but with two murders staring you in the face you start mumbling about no evidence and back out."

"There's nothing to get sore about," Devlin said quietly.

"Oh, no, nothing at all," Jim said bitterly. "Just the fact that my wife was murdered and the police sit around with their finger up their nose and refuse to do a damn thing about it. Well, I'm not quitting. And before I'm through I'll bring in more than theories. I'll bring in the murderer."

He slammed Devlin's door as he left and went toward the elevator with long determined strides. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

Reunion in Purgatory

IT WAS eleven o'clock that night when Jim walked into the *Golden Slipper*. He stopped in the elegantly decorated vestibule and nodded to the headwaiter who stood at the entrance to the dining room.

Jim had spent the day digging into the background of one Ellis Stone. Stone was the man Devlin had mentioned, the one man on the thirty-ninth floor of the Advertiser's Building who had a shady background. Ellis Stone, Jim had learned, had money, was not married and headed a whiskey importing corporation which looked on the level. Also, Stone was known as a heavy spender, a fast man with women, and an habitu  of the *Golden Slipper*.

Devlin had said that Stone wasn't Delahanty, but that didn't mean he couldn't be connected in some way with the Riga murder—and, therefore, with Terry. Terry had gone to see someone on the thirty-ninth floor of the Advertiser's Building. That was definite. The elevator operator had remembered the floor she'd gotten off on. And that was the floor from which she'd jumped several hours later. Stone was on that floor. Stone, the big dealer, the marijuana peddler.

Jim said hello to the hat-check girl, a wise little woman, who was respected by everyone because she was a good businessman and she didn't talk. Her name was Marie and Jim had known her for years. But he hadn't seen her since Terry's death.

She took one of his hands in both of hers and said, "It was awful tough about Terry, Jim. I knew her when she worked here, you know. I'm sorry as hell."

"I know," he said. "But do you want to help me find out about her death?" He put his cards down face up, knowing no other approach would work with Marie. "I don't think she committed suicide, Marie. I think she was murdered."

Marie's expression didn't change, but

her eyes narrowed slightly. "Sure, I'll help, Jim," she said quietly. "What goes?"

"I'm shooting a little in the dark. Tell me about this guy Stone who hangs out here?"

"You don't mean—"

"I don't know," Jim said. "I need some information."

"Well, Stone is a guy with a lot of money and all that goes with it. He likes women and always the same type. You know, long-stemmed, custom-built jobs with a yen for a mink-lined apartment. Stone came here during the war, from the coast, I think. His last girl was Baby Nelson, a model. She blew town a couple of weeks ago and Stone hasn't made any other connection yet. Baby liked him a lot, but he must have paid her off and told her to clear out." Marie frowned and sighed. "That's about all I know, Jim."

"Is he here now?" Jim asked.

"Yeah. Want to take a look at him?"

Jim nodded and Marie led him to the entrance of the dining room. She pointed out a table where three men and two girls were drinking champagne.

"Stone is the big guy," she said.

Stone was wide shouldered, with thick blond hair and strong regular features. He reeked of success, from his beautifully tailored clothes down to his shoes which, although Jim couldn't see them, he felt sure were imported from England in lots of twelve. Jim studied him for a moment, then turned and walked back to the vestibule, with Marie at his side.

"Could you take a message to him?" he said.

"From you?"

"No. From a postal telegraph messenger."

"You're not in the act yet, eh?"

"That's right. Will you take a note in to him, tell him a messenger brought it in?"

"All right," Marie said, without hesitation.

Jim took out a notebook and pencil, quickly scribbled a note. He wrote:

*See me outside right away. Important.
Spicer*

If Stone were Delahunty, that should

bring him out running, Jim thought grimly. Spicer was the man who had refused to identify Delahunty in the long-forgotten Riga murder. Now if Stone-Delahunty thought Spicer was in trouble. . . .

Marie folded the note without reading it and sauntered into the dining room, swinging her slender hips as if she was walking to dance music. Jim took a seat in the corner on a round, upholstered stool and waited.

It wasn't a long wait. But it was long enough for him to start sweating.

Marie returned alone. Jim got to his feet quickly.

"Well?"

"He read the note, then tore it up," she said. "He said he didn't know any Spicers and if it was a gag, it wasn't a good one."

"How did he act?" Jim asked.

Marie shrugged. "Unconcerned. A little puzzled, maybe, but that was all."

Jim felt a hope go glimmering. He had played a high card in the hope of bluffing Stone into some commitment. But it hadn't worked. The card wasn't high enough, or Stone was on the level. Either way, he had lost.

HE TRIED to smile, but it didn't come off. He patted Marie on the shoulder, thanked her and walked out of the club. There was no cab in sight, so he stood for a second on the curb talking with the doorman. The doorman had a son in high school who played football and Jim had covered several of the games as a favor to Nick. They talked about Nick's boy for a while. Then Nick unslung his whistle and told Jim he'd go down to the corner to snare a cab.

Jim put a cigarette in his mouth and stood on the curb staring without interest at the people drifting by on the opposite side of the street.

He had played and lost. Maybe Devlin was right. Maybe this was all a waste of time, chasing vague, ambiguous leads that twisted off into insignificant conclusions. But there was enough to go on, he thought angrily. He went quickly over the things he'd discovered, desperately trying to reassure himself, to bolster his own lagging confidence.

He was preoccupied with this when the black limousine drew up in front of the club. The rear door opened and a voice said, "Daily?"

Jim started slightly, then bent forward to see the man in the rear seat who had called his name. He saw a thin man with rimless glasses dividing his face. The man wore black and in his hand there was a nickel-plated revolver.

"Get in, Daily," the man said. "Or you get it right where you stand. Move fast!"

Jim had no intention of not getting in. He felt a sudden exultant rush of conviction. This was the man who had talked to him at the bar. And that was all he needed to tell him he hadn't been wasting his time.

"Sure, I'll get in," he said, and climbed in beside the man in the rear of the car. The man shoved him back against the seat with his forearm, reached past him and jerked the door shut. The uniformed chauffeur let out the clutch and the car roared away from the curb, and swung left.

"You're a nuisance," the man said to Jim in a mild voice.

Without changing expression he raised the gun, brought the barrel down across Jim's forehead with savage force. Jim raised one arm protectingly, but was too late. The second blow struck him behind his ear and he pitched forward to the floor of the car, fighting the blackness, nausea and pain. He didn't win. . . .

A hand shook his shoulder, then slapped him stingingly across the face. The blackness went away as he opened his eyes. There was sunlight on his face and a creamily plastered ceiling met his gaze.

He turned his head when he became aware of the man standing beside his bed. He saw the man with the rimless glasses looking down at him with a bored expression. This was the first real look he'd gotten of him, and he saw that the man was about forty, with narrow shoulders, sparse dark hair, and cold eyes.

"You had a long nap," he said. "It's morning and the whole world is up and around."

"What goes?" Jim said. His tongue felt like a length of corrugated rubber. "Or do you hit people for the fun of it?"

"It's strictly business," the man said,

as the door behind him pulled open.

Jim craned his neck slightly and saw Stone coming across the rug to the side of the bed. Stone at close range looked even more successful and impressive than he had from a distance. Now he was wearing a crimson dressing gown over silken pajamas, and he had a fresh shave and smelled of an expensive cologne. His short blond hair was brushed back, and his features were bland and impassive.

"I was right," Jim said. He nodded at Stone. "You're Delahunty, aren't you?"

"I used to be called that," Stone said. "But I got tired of the name. I like Stone better."

Jim worked himself up to one elbow. He saw that he was in a large, comfortably furnished bedroom. Outside the window, trees were growing and the air smelled fresh and clean. From somewhere he heard the faint sounds of water.

"So I was right." He was too weak to feel anger. "You killed my wife, Stone."

"You were wrong about everything but who I was," Stone said. "I didn't kill your wife. Your wife is alive, Daily."

Jim tried to sit up but the man with the glasses pushed him back on the bed. Jim tried to speak, but no words came. Terry alive!

"You've been a problem," Stone said. "You're still a problem."

"Who was the girl?" Jim said.

"You don't know her. Her name was Baby Nelson, a model." Stone sat down in a chair beside the bed and put a cigarette in his mouth. The man with the glasses supplied a light. Stone said:

"The whole thing was a mess all along. I once bought your wife a drink at the *Golden Slipper*. Nice of me, wasn't it? At the table was a drunk, a guy who'd known me all my life. The talk drifted around to a recent murder, and this punk grinned at me and said, 'Like Riga, eh?'"

Stone shook his head and grinned bitterly. "Not much of a break, really. I killed Riga sixteen years ago, and nobody even remembers his name now. But your wife did, Daily. She walked into my office the other afternoon and said you were working on the Riga murder for the *Express*. She reminded me of what my drunken friend had said that time at the table, and she wanted to know the whole

story. I was scared, Daily, but bad. If she talked to you and you started digging into me, a lot of stuff might come out.

"She saw that I was scared. She knew she'd hit a bull's-eye. She wanted to leave then, but that wasn't possible. I couldn't let her go. But I didn't want to kill her, you see, because I knew she'd be a lever on you if you got anything on me. So I had to shut her up, but keep her alive. Kidnapping was out. There'd be too much stink. So," he spread his hands in a helpless gesture, "there wasn't anything to do but make it look like she'd committed suicide."

"So you rigged it that way," Jim said. "With Baby Nelson, your girl."

"SHE WAS getting to be a nuisance anyway," Stone said evenly. "And it had to be her because she was a red-head like your wife and built along the same lines. I called Baby after we put your wife to sleep with a little drink full of sleeping dope. I told Baby to check out of her hotel with all her bags and come down to the office. She did like she was told all right, and then I had her get into your wife's things, jewelry and all."

Jim realized he'd been holding his breath. He let it out, said, "Go on."

"Clive then took Baby down to the end of the corridor where the window is. This is Clive, by the way," he said, nodding at the man with the rimless glasses. "We told Baby that we were pulling a very important little job and that she could help by impersonating another woman."

"Baby was kind of dumb," Clive said with a grin.

"Fortunately, yes," Stone said. "Clive waited until the corridor was deserted, and then—" He shrugged and put another cigarette into his mouth.

Clive held a light and said, "It wasn't hard. She was looking out at the lake, and she was saying how pretty it was when she—er—fell out."

"After that we got rid of Baby's grips and brought your wife here, to my home in Glencoe. It's right on the lake, you know, and she's been comfortable."

"If she hasn't," Jim said, "you'll wish to heaven you'd never seen me, Stone."

"Don't be a bore," Stone said. He drew reflectively on his cigarette. "You started

messing things up by banging around from one bar to another insisting your wife was still alive. Everybody else knew she was dead, and we didn't know whether you were just talking out of a whiskey bottle, or whether you guessed something was wrong. I let Clive contact you, to see what the pitch was. Clive picked up a silly kid to make it look natural. A guy alone in a bar is always remembered. But a guy with a girl just fades into the wallpaper.

"Anyway, you started nosing around the next day, looking for this babe who'd been with Clive. She would have led you to him, and he would have led you to me. So we had to break that link in the chain. Clive got Trixie, if that was her name, out of the way just in time."

"Very logical," Jim said. "In the traditional phrase, do you think you'll get away with this?"

"I really don't know," Stone said frankly. "But I'm going to try like hell, and my guess is I'll make it. You see, I know the police aren't as crazy as you are. I know they've stopped working on the case. That leaves just you and your wife. Your wife is already legally dead, and you—" He stopped and shrugged. "I'm not trying to scare you. It seems inevitable though. When you sent that note with Spicer's name on it in to me at the club tonight, I knew you were going to be too troublesome to let live. I called Clive immediately at the garage, told him to find you. Fortunately he got there before you left."

"How did you know it was I who sent in the note?" Jim asked.

"I knew you'd come into the club, and I knew you wrote a note and gave it to Marie. The headwaiter is a better friend of mine than Marie. I've been watching you for the past week, wondering what you'd find out, what you'd do next. Now I know. You won't do anything."

He stood abruptly, nodded to Clive. "Take him down to his wife's room, and lock him in. Then meet me downstairs." Without looking at Jim again, he turned and walked out of the room.

"Get up," Clive said.

Clive led him up a carpeted flight of stairs to a landing on which one door opened. "Go on in," Clive said.

Jim twisted the knob and opened the door. The blinds were drawn and the room was in shadow. He couldn't see clearly for a moment, but then he saw a slim figure lying on a cot against the wall. A weak voice said:

"Who's that?"

"Terry!" Jim whispered. He didn't trust himself to say anymore. He strode across the room and pulled her close to him, burying his face in her throat. She repeated his name over and over, her thin arms desperately tight about his neck.

Clive slammed the door. The lock turned with a sound of dry finality. . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

No Kicks Coming

THEY sat close together on the cot and talked to each other for what seemed like hours. ". . . I was a little fool," Terry said for the tenth time. "A romantic little shopgirl, in your words," she said.

They had checked their stories and filled each other in on everything that had happened. Terry had told him of going to Stone's office; Jim had sketched in everything that led to his finding her.

"But I knew you would," Terry said. "I—I knew you wouldn't believe I'd killed myself."

He tightened his arm around her shoulder. "It's okay now, honey."

"You don't have to kid me, Jim. He won't let us go now. But I don't mind so much, now that you're here."

"We're not dead yet," Jim said.

He got up and made a careful inspection of the room, but the results were not encouraging. The door was of solid oak, locked tightly. There was one small window, but it was protected by iron grill work that would resist anything but an acetylene torch. They were caught in an air-tight trap, with nothing to do but wait helplessly.

He sat down and pulled her red head against his shoulder. "Let's talk about that farm we're going to buy."

She smiled. Her voice was steady, as she said, "Sure thing. Would you rather raise prize chickens or prize cows?"

"Cows, of course," Jim said. "A cattle

breeder has a leather vest, tanned face, steady eyes—obviously a man to trust and respect."

"It's probably because cows don't hop around so much," Terry said, smiling. "Cows are good for a man's character. You know, there's something steady about a cow."

"That's it," Jim said. His throat was tight, but he tried to smile. "A cow looks like he'll be on hand tomorrow. But a chicken lives on borrowed time."

He felt her body tense against his. He held her tighter. They didn't talk anymore.

The sun was slanting through the one small window, criss-crossing the floor in a checkerboard pattern, when the door opened and Stone and Clive entered.

"Get up," Stone said. He tossed a loop of rope he was carrying across to Jim. "Tie her up," he said. "And do a good job, elbows and knees."

"You're looking more heroic every minute," Jim said.

"Don't argue," Stone said. "Clive is driving us to my boat. The rest of us will be in the rear seat. I can't watch both of you, but if she's helpless you'll watch her. And I can watch you. Get busy."

Jim looped the cord about Terry's elbows twice and tied the knots firmly. Bending, he bound her legs below the knees. Stone said, "Do a good job, or I'll have Clive take over. He'll be rough."

Jim finished the job efficiently.

"Now pick her up," Stone said. "We're going down to the car. The servants are gone, and everything is set. Don't try to spoil my plans. I won't like it."

There was nothing for Jim to do but obey. With Terry in his arms he was as helpless as she. Clive led the way and Jim followed down three flights of stairs to a spacious foyer. Stone came behind them, a gun in his hand.

"First we have a telephone call to make," Stone said. He pointed to a couch against the wall. "Put her down there and come with me, Daily."

Jim did as he was told and followed Stone into a library. Stone dialed a number on a cradle phone, then handed it to Jim. "I called your paper," he said quietly. "When the operator answers, get Rayburn, your city editor. Tell him this:

That you're going to the coast because you can't stand the city any longer now that your wife is dead. Tell him to forward your mail and salary to General Delivery in Los Angeles."

When Rayburn answered, Jim told him what Stone had told him to say. He couldn't take a chance on anything else, because Stone had his ear along the receiver and could hear Rayburn's voice . . . and the gun was in his back.

Rayburn was surprised but understanding. *Too damn understanding*, Jim thought bitterly. *Why in hell couldn't he get suspicious?* But no! Rayburn wished him all the luck in the world, told him he understood just how he felt, and even added that if Jim didn't write he'd understand perfectly. When Jim hung up, Stone was grinning.

"There will be no squawk when you disappear," he said. "Now get going."

Jim walked back to the vestibule and lifted Terry into his arms again. Then he went out the door and into the black limousine. Stone got in beside him and Clive hopped into the front seat.

It was about five in the evening, Jim guessed. The car started smoothly and Clive fed it gas as they wound along the gravelled driveway that led to the rear. There were twin stone posts that marked the entrance to the house. As they roared toward these, Jim felt his last hope fade. Once on the highway nothing was likely to stop them until they reached Stone's boat. And Jim knew what that boat ride would mean.

Then, fifty feet from the posts, Clive slammed down on the brakes with a startled oath.

ANOTHER car, a convertible with the top down, was turning off the road into the driveway. The driver had misjudged the width of the opening and his own speed. His brakes shrieked in protest, but too late. The hood of his car crashed into one of the posts, bringing the car to a shuddering stop.

The driver was a young dark-haired man wearing an open-necked sport shirt and a white sport jacket. He climbed out of his car and looked ruefully at the damage.

Stone said, tightly, "Get rid of him,

Clive," and leaned forward to watch.

The young man looked around as Clive stepped out of the car. "Quite a mess, isn't it," he said cheerfully. "And this isn't the Glendenning place after all."

"No, it isn't," Jim heard Clive say. "Now back up and clear out."

"Well," the young man said, "it was an accident, after all. This isn't my idea of fun."

"Get that car out of here," Clive snapped.

Stone said, under his breath, "The fool." He raised his voice. "Clive, that's hardly the way to talk to a young man who's made a slight mistake in judgment." He pushed the gun into Jim's back. "Get out of the car after me, stick beside me. And don't make any mistakes. Your wife will suffer if you do."

He opened the door on his side of the car, stepped out and held it open for Jim. Together they walked toward the young man in the sport jacket. Stone was smiling good-naturedly.

"My name is Ellis Stone. You have made a little mistake. The Glendenning place is about a mile down the road."

"My first time here," the young man explained. "Sorry to be such a nuisance but they said it was the first turn off Pike Road."

Jim said suddenly, "It's not easy to find. Tell you what, I'll go along with you if you like. Supposing I show you the way?"

The young man smiled gratefully. "Would you do that?" he said. "I'd appreciate it terribly. Funny thing, I flew a plane all over Europe and never got lost, but these suburban by-paths get me all snafued."

Stone looked at Jim, his eyes cold. "Remember our appointment Daily. I'm afraid you won't have the time to act as navigator for our friend."

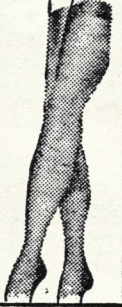
"It wouldn't take more than five minutes," Jim said. He knew this desperate gag wouldn't work. But he hoped to plant a suspicion in the young man's mind, something he might remember and talk about later.

"I don't think we have the time," Stone said again.

"Oh, I can find it all right," the young man said. "I don't want to bother you

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any more than I already have, mister." Cheerful, brainless fool, Jim thought bitterly. He hadn't seen the look that Stone gave him; he couldn't see the apparent strangeness of this situation. Probably had nothing on his mind but a tennis date the next day.

"Well, I'm sorry about your gate," the young man said. "I'll stop by tomorrow and straighten out the damages. Okay?"

"That won't be necessary," Stone said, with a touch of impatience in his voice.

"That's awfully good of you," the young man said, and with a smile that included them all, hopped into his car. He waved at them and tramped on the starter. The motor turned over powerfully but didn't catch.

Stone swore under his breath.

The young man grinned apologetically and continued tramping the starter.

Stone looked at his watch. He said shortly. "Take a look at it, Clive."

Clive walked over and looked inside the car. The two men had their heads together an instant, then Clive opened the door and got inside. He bent over the dashboard.

"What's wrong?" Stone said sharply.

"Ignition wire pulled loose," Clive answered. "She's stuck here. We'll have to push it out of the way."

Jim saw the beads of sweat starting on Stone's forehead. He gestured at Jim with an almost imperceptible movement of the gun in his pocket.

"Give them a hand," he said.

It was getting dark fast, and Jim wondered as he walked to the front of the convertible, if he could make a break for it now. But he knew that wouldn't help Terry. And Stone was still watching him.

Stone said sharply, "Clive, get out and help push."

Clive didn't answer.

Another voice spoke. "Get your hands up Stone. Make a move and you get it right in the back."

The voice came from behind Stone's car. There was a man standing there, the gun in his hands pointing at Stone. There was a sudden movement from the trees, and shadows began to converge on Stone in a semi-circle. Shadows wearing blue uniforms on which gold buttons glittered.

STONE turned and his face was working with fear. For an instant he stared at the man who stood behind his car, and then his eyes flicked to the policemen moving in on him. Then he went for the gun in his pocket.

Jim was already moving for him by that time, driving low. His shoulder crashed into the backs of Stone's legs before Stone got the gun clear. Stone's arms flailed the air desperately as he crashed forward, and when he struck the gravelled driveway the air left his lungs.

A hand caught Jim's shoulder, helped him to his feet.

The hand belonged to Devlin. He said, "In the good old nick of time, eh?"

Jim didn't have time to be surprised at Devlin's presence. He said, "There's one more in the convertible."

He turned to start for the car but stopped. Clive was getting out. Behind him, the young man in the sports coat was prodding him with a police special.

"He was one of your guys," Jim said to Devlin, in a weak voice.

"Yeah. Jim Neddleton, a Princeton

boy. We thought he could look natural in a sport coat."

"But why in hell did you do it this way?" Jim exploded.

"Look at it," Devlin said. "We knew he had you and your wife. First move we made, he'd get rid of you. We couldn't take a chance of rushing him. We had to do it like a B Western."

Terry called from the back of Stone's car. "Damn it, I'm not Houdini. Get these ropes off me." She was trying to laugh, but she was almost crying.

Jim swore and jumped toward the car.

The road was a white ribbon that unwound under the lights of the police car. The police chauffeur had the speedometer needle at sixty. These were his orders.

Jim sat in the rear with Terry snuggled under his arm. Devlin was on her other side, smoking a cigarette.

"You see," he said, "I found out about Baby Nelson before you did, Jim. I found out she'd disappeared pretty suddenly, and I knew she looked a lot like Terry and had red hair. Once, I got that much, I got scared. You see, if Stone had Terry



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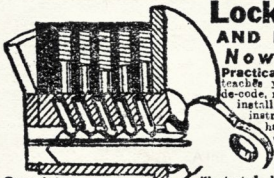
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William P. McGivern

alive, he'd get rid of her the minute he suspected the police were interested."

Jim said, "I'm sorry about popping off to you. I thought you'd quit cold."

"I wanted you mad at me. I gave you Stone's name, hoping you could stir him into making the break. But it was touchy.

"We'd have never got him once he got rid of your wife. And he was going to keep her alive just as long as you were dangerous. She was his last protection against anything you might uncover. But you see, that wouldn't work with cops.

"So we had to convince him we weren't interested. He wasn't too worried about you, because he thought he had a way to make you play ball. And then he stood little risk in getting rid of both of you."

Devlin lit another cigarette. "From the time you left my office the other day to work on your own, you've been tailed by three of my men, working in relays. And three more were on Stone's trail. Last night we followed you from the *Golden Slipper* out to Stone's home.

"We knew he wouldn't get rid of you there, so we put a bug on his wire and sat tight. We picked up his call to the dock, telling his captain there to get the boat ready. Then we cooked up this little scheme, to get him in the clear so we could take him without putting your wife in danger."

They were silent until they reached the outskirts of Chicago. Jim realized that Terry had fallen asleep. He shifted his arm to a more comfortable position and the movement awakened her.

She sat up and pushed a strand of hair from her forehead. Then she turned to Jim smiling. "Didn't I tell you you had an exciting job?" she said. "What's the next unsolved murder you go to work on?"

Jim caught her shoulders with both hands and said sternly, "The first thing I'm going to do is to ask Rayburn to put me on ship's news."

"Really, is that the very first thing you're going to do?" Terry said, lowering her eyes modestly.

"Well," Jim said, and coughed.

He pulled her closer to him and Devlin began to feel quite unnecessary.

THE END

Target for Tonight

(Continued from page 63)

There was no blood on the floor. Her eyes were open and horrible and she was breathing but she couldn't speak. I carried her out into the garden. I don't know how. I thought it would look like a hunting accident. Then I went back down and put the drawer back and burned the letters and left."

"And last night?" Lan asked.

"I put some of my sleeping pills in the coffee. Milya and Steve drank it. I didn't drink any. I poured mine down the sink. I didn't want to die for killing that woman. I hit your man with a tire iron. I walked very quietly."

"June," Milya said, "why did you lend me the money to help Win?"

"I didn't want to die for it and yet I didn't want Win to die. You two have what I . . . thought I had for a little while. I wanted you to find out that I had done it and yet when I thought that you were going to, I—I was frightened. That was silly. Not wanting to die.

"Now I know that I've wanted to die ever since I stood there and read those letters while she stood and laughed at me."

* * *

Win said softly, "This seems to be the same bench, darling. Where were we when we were so rudely interrupted?"

They sat side by side. The night was cool and the moon rode high. He had his arm around her.

She shuddered. "I keep thinking of June."

"Don't, darling. It will be all right with her. Steve will fight for her. And he'll be waiting when she gets out. That will be the proof she needs so badly."

"She tried to kill herself."

"I don't think she'll try again."

They were silent for a long time. Milya nestled closer to him.

His hand found hers and he said, "Don't tell me, darling, that we're going to watch another sunrise."

"Uh huh."

His arm tightened. "Aren't you being a bit of a honey, Miss Grant?"

"Only for you, Win. Always and forever—only for you."

THE END

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Ready for the Rackets

(Continued from page 6)

"I represent the So-and-So Advertising Company," he said, "we're putting on an advertising campaign locally. I wonder if you would let me take a picture of the interior of your store. There's absolutely no obligation. We're just gathering material and getting ideas."

Being of a naturally suspicious nature, I hesitated. But the fellow's persistence and my own inexperience in such things combined to wear me down. Soon he was helping me tidy the place up a bit for the picture.

"Just stand over here," he said when all was ready, "just to lend a little life to the picture." He posed me to his liking, took the picture, and quickly departed. I said nothing about the incident to the manager.

A few days later the same young man came jauntily in, again during the manager's absence.

"Well, here are your pictures," he began, taking three large photos out of an envelope. "That will be seven-fifty, if you just want the three."

I may have been inexperienced, but I wasn't that gullible. I refused to buy the pictures. A heated argument ensued, only to be interrupted by the manager's return.

Hearing the argument, the manager naturally wanted to know what the trouble was. We both presented our case. The manager asked the photographer what the actual cost of making the pictures had been. The reply was, "One dollar."

The manager gave the fellow a dollar, along with an order never to come back in the store again. The photographer, not to be outdone, gave the manager one of the pictures.

I still have that picture, given me by my former boss, as a reminder to beware of things "absolutely free and with no obligations."

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Some Cooperation!

Dear Sir:

The swindlers in this racket first scare you to death and then collect the money you're glad to pay because you're grateful to be still alive.

I was standing on a downtown corner waiting to cross the street. The five o'clock rush was over and the streets were practically deserted.

I'd just taken three or four steps off the curb, when suddenly a car I'd noticed parked on the corner down from me swung into gear and roared straight at me. I felt paralyzed. My legs refused to function.

Just as I thought I was doomed, I felt myself being jerked to safety. Somebody had grabbed my arm and fallen to the street with me. The car zoomed by.

Still shaking with fright at my narrow escape, I turned to thank the poorly-dressed man who continued clutching my arm.

"Well, mister," he said, "if you feel maybe I saved you a little grief, maybe you wouldn't mind helping me get my coat fixed up. I tore it when I fell."

I readily agreed and gave him a five-dollar bill. Then seeing how shabby he was and feel-

Ready for the Rackets

ing deeply obligated to him, I gave him another five-dollar bill. He thanked me and left.

Imagine my surprise at reading in the newspaper a few nights later that the man driving the car and the man doing the saving worked as a team and had been arrested. They had made the mistake of pulling that stunt on a quick-thinking policeman who had just come off-duty and was in civilian clothes.

K. S. C. A.
Suffolk County, N. Y.

Guff From a Gaff

Dear Sir:

I have handled the stick for some of the biggest crap games in the country, and in my youth I worked the carnivals. With a background like that, you'd think I'd have built up some measure of immunity to most swindles. However, but for a bit of luck and a cold day, I would have gone for a bundle.

The swindle had its inception when a stranger knocked at my door and tried to promote me into roofing my house. He could do a good job cheaply, he said, though he didn't mention a price. I told him I wasn't interested. He became insistent. In fact, he became quite obnoxious, going so far as to maneuver himself past me into the house.

These tactics built up a deep resentment in me. By the time I'd got rid of him, I wouldn't have bought a ten-dollar bill for a nickel from him. I was to learn later that he was depending on that. My resentment was working for him.

It was bitterly cold when I returned from work a few days later. The roofing salesman was walking down the street when I got off the bus. He came over and seemed in a more jovial mood than the previous time. But I stiffened just the same. I didn't relish another session with him. And it was cold.

He smiled and shook his head. He explained that he wasn't selling roofing that day, but was collecting for charity. He mentioned a worthy one. Fifty cents would do.

I felt relieved, peeled off a glove, dug down and came up with a half dollar. I put the glove back on and turned to go.

"Wait a second," he said. "Put your name on the book. You might as well get credit." He smiled as he brought the book out.

"Too cold," I said as I walked away. "You put it down."

A few of my friends, I learned later, signed his book—and went for plenty for an almost worthless roof job. In the book was the salesman's gaff—a well-concealed, blank roofing contract.

Name Withheld

Remember, the gimmick that costs you your money in most cases occurs when you pay before you see what you are paying for. Look before you ladle out your hard-earned dough, detective fans. And be sure to keep us posted on the slick deals you've come up against.

The Editor.

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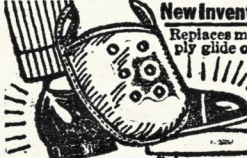
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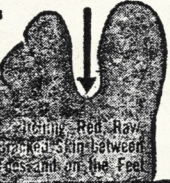
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Double Life of a Phoney

(Continued from page 75)

When the old man failed to recognize him as a nephew, Strassnoff blandly convinced the bishop that His Eminence's mind was failing and sadly revealed that it was his duty to report the true state of affairs at Budapest—unless, of course, the bishop were willing to come across with a sizable portion of his cash assets.

The bishop promptly recognized him as a kinsman and paid him!

Encouraged, Strassnoff investigated further and discovered that the high clerics of Central Europe were as amenable to paying graft to save their jobs as had been the more mundane office-holders. One haul, involving the Bishop of Steina-manger, netted him fifty thousand of the best—and led to his downfall.

Arrested, Strassnoff attempted to make a clean breast of things by confessing to his earlier mulcting of His Eminence of Neutra—and was amazed to find that that dignitary held steadfast to the story that the real von Zahrayi had visited him and that any financial transactions between uncle and nephew were nobody's business. Strassnoff's confession reacted against him at the trial. It was considered to be an effort to blacken the Church's name unnecessarily.

His conviction put an end to his triumphs. When he came out again, he had little heart left for more.

Strassnoff retired to the dingy little shop in Miskolcz. It might have been the pot of gold Strassnoff spent a lifetime searching for. He got it for nothing—it was subscribed and presented to him by well-wishers who had enjoyed his tripping of the pompous. He had his honest friends, this swindler who trod his rainbows, and who inadvertently did as much as any single man to strip the middle Europe of the Hapsburgs of its shame and hypocrisies.

But he couldn't settle down. The shop went to ruin while the old man tried vainly to capitalize on his previous audacities by putting them on the stage. You walk the same rainbow only once—and when he finally died in poverty in the early thirties, almost the only possession he left behind was an old actor's uniform of the Hussars.

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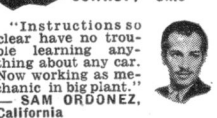
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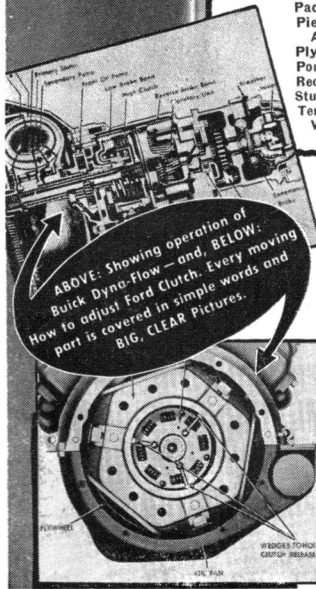
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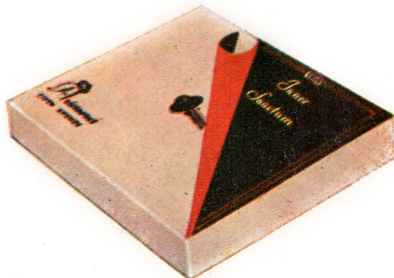
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