

25¢

DIME



FEB.

DETECTIVE MAGAZINE



**WAKE
OF THE
HEEL
HUSBAND**

by **FRANK WARD**

PLUS

**COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL \$2.50 VALUE
MURDER WITH PLEASURE by ROBERT MARTIN**

Earn Big Money

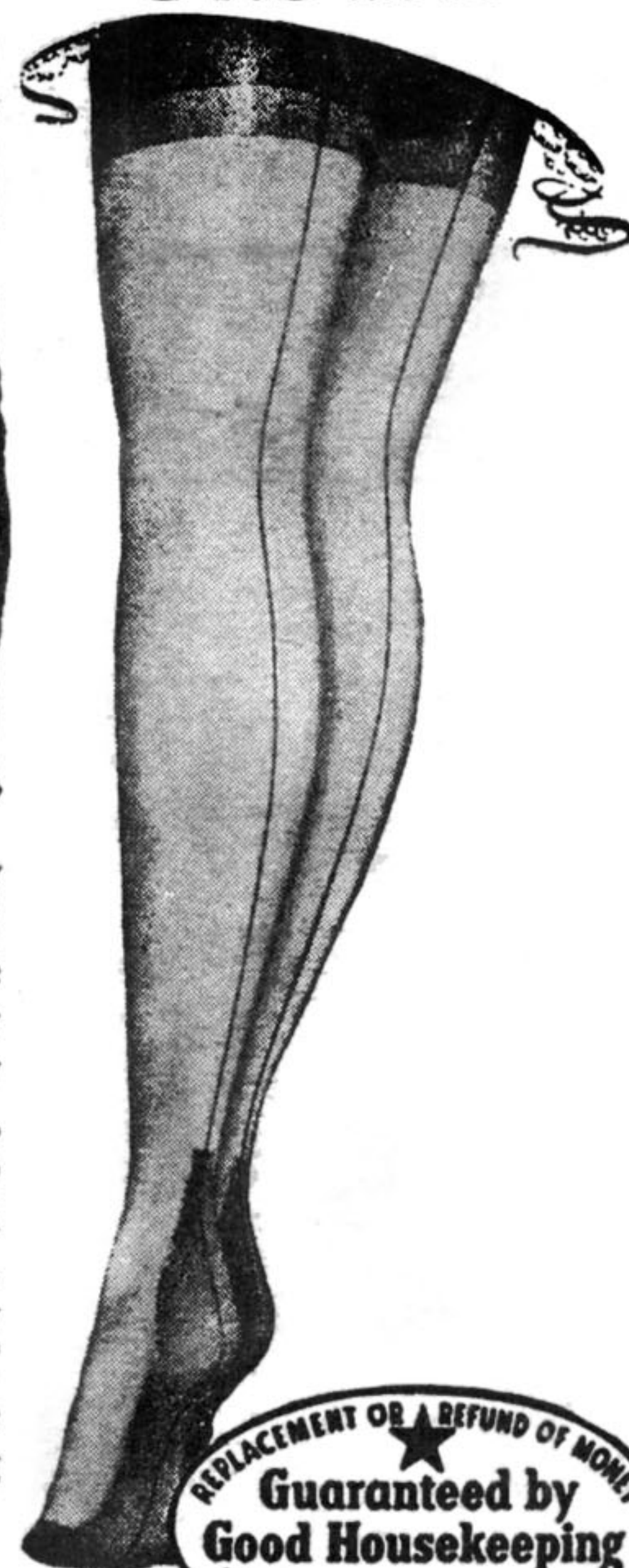
WRITING ORDERS

AMAZING NYLONS

Guaranteed Against
RUNS AND SNAGS

Regardless of Cause!

The world's ONLY complete, nationally advertised nylon hosiery line actually guaranteed against runs, snags or excessive wear, **REGARDLESS OF CAUSE!** It's amazing, but true! No matter what the cause—hard use or deliberate abuse—Kendex nylons are replaced **FREE** if they run, snag or become unfit for wear within entire guarantee period! Every weight from sheerest 15 denier to heavy 70 denier—all gauges up to luxury 60 gauge—all sizes, lengths, popular shades, fancy heels, black seams—full fashioned and seamless. Nothing is missing to make sure every woman is pleased. In spite of the amazing guarantee, retail postage prepaid prices are no higher than comparable quality national brands. Should free replacement be necessary, actual cost is cut in half! How could any woman possibly resist saving money and solving her hosiery problems? **NOT SOLD IN STORES.** Men and women wanted **NOW**, spare or full time, to write orders and earn big money. You can get orders even if you never sold a thing in your life!



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Kendex gives you **FOUR** complete lines, including sensational men's hosiery line actually guaranteed for **ONE YEAR!** Any pair not giving satisfactory wear within 12 months is replaced **FREE** without question. All styles, patterns, colors, yarns (including nylon) at lowest prices that mean steady income for you 52 weeks a year.

LINGERIE HOUSECOATS - ROBES

Full line of lingerie, housecoats and robes. Materials used include nylon crepe, nylon runproof tricot, multi-filament rayon crepe, rayon tricot, rayon satin, etc. Nothing is lacking. Every garment at prices that defy competition and make women eager to order. Kendex values sell themselves.

NATIONALLY ADVERTISED

Kendex has advertised in Life, Look, Collier's, McCall's, Saturday Evening Post, Ladies' Home Journal, Good Housekeeping, etc. Carries the Good Housekeeping Guarantee Seal. Thousands of orders shipped daily. Yearly volume in millions. A dependable responsible national organization.

FREE SAMPLE MATERIALS AND MONEY-MAKING OUTFITS

Man or woman—young or old, **YOU** can easily earn steady income, spare or full time. No money or experience needed. We supply **EVERYTHING** free and set you up in business at **OUR** expense. Nothing to buy or deliver. Write orders, we deliver and collect. Big advance pay plus cash bonus that increases your earnings up to 40%! Your name and address on postcard will bring you sample materials—samples of lingerie, hose, robe materials; self-selling sales books with **FULL COLOR** illustrations; 36-page sales manual showing you easy steps to success; color cards, free "door openers" worth \$1 each but which you give away free; special plan to have others sell for you, etc., etc. You can start making money the minute you receive the complete **FREE** outfits!

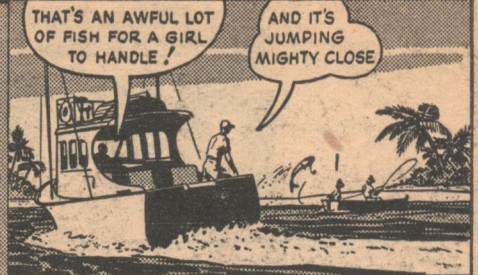


YOUR COST ONE CENT!

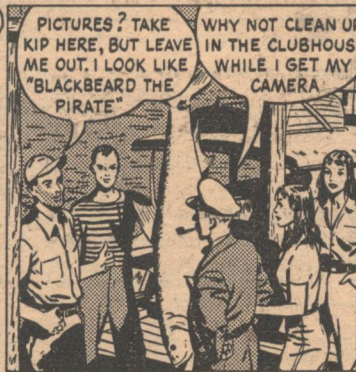
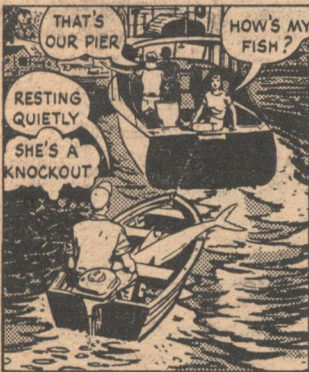
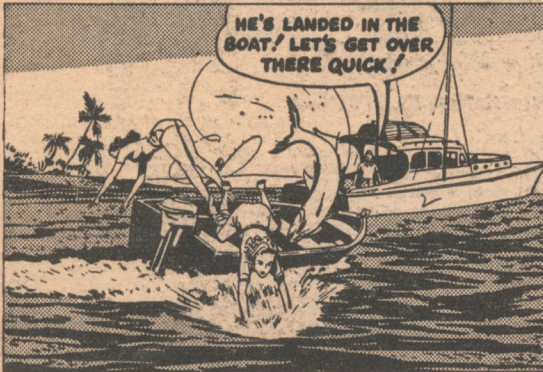
SEND NO MONEY. Pay nothing now or later. No obligation. Not even a promise to return outfits. Simply write your name and address on a penny postcard and mail to us. We'll immediately rush you everything you need **FREE** and postage prepaid. **WRITE TODAY!**

KENDEX CORPORATION • BABYLON 19, N. Y.

LEAPING TARPON STARTS THINGS MOVING



JERRY CANNON AND HIS BROTHER KIP ARE RETURNING TO PORT FROM A LONG DAY OF TROLLING FOR SAILFISH IN THE GULF STREAM, WHEN . . .



NEXT TIME YOU AND HELEN WANT TO GO TARPON FISHING, MY BOAT'S AT YOUR DISPOSAL.

THAT'S A BARGAIN!

H-M-M-TALL, DARK AND HANDSOME!

THIN GILLETTE GIVE THE BEST-LOOKING, MOST COMFORTABLE SHAVES YOU EVER HAD WITH A LOW-PRICE BLADE. UNIFORMLY KEEN AND LONG LASTING, THEY FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR TO A "T" AND PROTECT YOUR FACE FROM IRRITATION. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES IN THE HANDY 10-BLADE PACKAGE WITH USED-BLADE COMPARTMENT.

THIN Gillette 10 BLADES THIN Gillette 10 BLADES 10-25¢ 4-10¢

NEW TEN-BLADE PACKAGE HAS COMPARTMENT FOR USED BLADES

25¢ **DIME
DETECTIVE
MAGAZINE**



Vol, 65

CONTENTS FOR FEBRUARY, 1951

No. 2

1—PUNCH-PACKED MYSTERY NOVEL—1

Deceit and intrigue follow in the—

WAKE OF THE HEEL HUSBAND-----**Frank Ward 16**
 Playing nursemaid could be fun—until it involved murder.

1—EMOTION-FILLED CRIME NOVELETTE—1

Sealed were the lips of a—

BLIND WITNESS-----**Frederick C. Davis 60**
 Inspector Teague forgot the rules when he went after the hoods who had his girl.
Copyright 1940 by Popular Publications, Inc.

3—THRILLING CRIME-ADVENTURE TALES—3

Who wants the billing of—

SCREEN SLAY CREDIT-----**Bryce Walton 35**
 Top scenarist Casey didn't like to see stories—or murders—without endings.

Outside the ropes there was a—

BOXER'S REBELLION-----**Charles Larson 44**
 Glover-boy Costagna wasn't going to take the count for murder.

Death was timed to a—

MURDER BOOGIE-WOOGIE-----**Jonathan Craig 53**
 Doug didn't think that he had to kill to mend a marriage.

3—TIMELY FEATURES—3

READY FOR THE RACKETS-----**A Department 6**
 The slowdown on currently popular swindle schemes. Here's a chance to test your ability as a reporter and win \$5.00 at the same time.

MARCH THRILL DOCKET (Illustrated)-----**59**
 Pictorial preview of Robert Turner's dynamic novel, "Slay Belles."

SANTA'S CLAWS-----**Lauri Wirta 112**
 Befitting the holiday spirit is the tale of a Santa with a dual personality.



Complete Book-Length Novel—\$2.50 Value

Murder With Pleasure

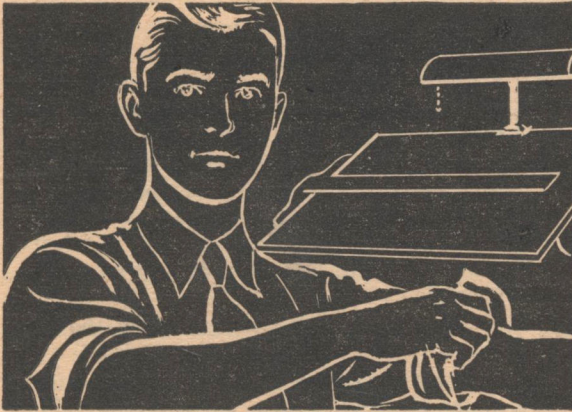
by Robert Martin.....74

Next issue on sale February 2nd

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

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Name _____ Age _____ Home Address _____

City _____ State _____ Working Hours _____ A.M. to _____ P.M.

Present Position _____ Employed by _____

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**WILL YOU BE
1 OUT OF 9 PERSONS**



According to American Medical Association "Journal" one in every nine persons became a hospital patient last year.

HOSPITALIZATION SICKNESS or ACCIDENT

(Age Limit 90 Years)



HOSPITAL



ACCIDENT



SICKNESS



OPERATIONS



MATERNITY

Every speeding ambulance calls attention to sudden accident or sickness. Can you listen to the screech of a siren with a satisfied feeling that you and your family have insurance to help pay Hospital, Surgical and Medical Bills? If not, you should investigate our New Hospital-Surgical Plan that is issued to both Individuals and Family Groups at a very small cost that everyone can afford. We think it is the newest, most modern and up-to-date Hospital Protection Plan on the market today. It covers you in any hospital. It also pays benefits when not hospitalized, for emergency doctor treatments. Write or send a penny postcard. There is no obligation. No salesman will call.

Act Now... Today

BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.

This offer may be withdrawn WITHOUT NOTICE.

Write or send penny post card for Free Information. Advise if you want included information on \$5000 Special Polio Rider.

AMERICAN LIFE & ACCIDENT INSURANCE CO.
231-C American Life Bldg., St. Louis 8, Mo.

Ready for the Rackets

A Department

Dear Detective Fans:

Thieves, chiselers and con men and women of all kind have few, if any, scruples, of course. Consequently, it is more or less natural for them to slyly play upon the sentiment and sympathy that dwells in the hearts of all of us. Some of the letters we are printing this month demonstrate the depths to which some of these inhuman parasites will descend to capitalize on this human weakness. So, take a tip from those who have already been bilked and when some whining stranger tries very hard to play upon your heartstrings, lend a sympathetic ear, of course, because his yarn might be on the level—but before you shell out any of your hard-earned cash, make sure that his sob story isn't just a scheme conjured up to also play upon your purse-strings.

We'd like to also note that another favorite trick of swindlers is to needle that little bit of larceny that seems to be buried under the surface in a lot of people. They seem to know that when they offer something for nothing, or a profit at somebody else's expense, selling something cheap that's been stolen—many people can't resist the temptation to thus make a fast buck by a little "second-hand" cheating themselves. Think twice before you go for such sales-talks. They are invariably calculated to put the bite on you—but good!

One sure way to avoid being taken by many of these slippery schemes is to regularly read this column. And since one good turn deserves another, please help some other reader from being "suckered" by sending us a letter telling of some tricky way in which you might have been "had." We'll pay you \$5.00 for your letter if we use it. If you say so, we'll withhold your name from print. No letters can be returned, though, unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Be sure to address all such letters to The Rackets Editor, care of DIME DETECTIVE, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.

(Please continue on page 8)



BE A SUCCESS AS A RADIO-TELEVISION TECHNICIAN

TWO FREE BOOKS SHOW HOW MAIL COUPON

America's Fast Growing Industry

HURRY VETERANS

G. I. Bill gives you valuable training benefits. But time is running out. Act now to get N. R. I. training under G. I. Bill. Mail Coupon! Hurry!

Offers You All Three

1. EXTRA MONEY IN SPARE TIME

Many students make \$5, \$10 a week extra fixing neighbors' Radios in spare time. The day you enroll I start sending you SPECIAL BOOKLETS to show you how to do this. Tester you build with parts I send helps you service sets. All equipment is yours to keep.

2. GOOD PAY JOB

Your next step is a good job installing and servicing Radio-Television sets or becoming boss of your own Radio-Television sales and service shop or getting a good job in a Broadcasting Station. Today there are over 81,000,000 home and auto Radios. 2700 Broadcasting Stations are on the air. Aviation and Police Radios, Micro-Wave Relay, Two-Way Radio are all expanding fields making more and better opportunities for servicing and communication technicians and FCC licensed operators.

3. BRIGHT FUTURE

And think of the opportunities in Television! In 1949 almost 3,000,000 Television sets were sold. By 1954 authorities estimate 20,000,000 Television sets will be in use. 100 Television Stations are now operating, with experts predicting 1,000. Now is the time to get in line for success and a bright future in America's fast growing industry. Be a Radio-Television Technician.



I TRAINED THESE MEN

CHIEF ENGINEER, POLICE RADIO
"Soon after finishing the N.R.I. course, worked for servicing shop. Now I am Chief Engineer of two-way FM Police Radio Installations."—S. W. DUNWIDDIE, Jacksonville, Illinois.

SHOP SPECIALIZES IN TELEVISION
"Am authorized serviceman for 5 large manufacturers and do servicing for 7 dealers. N.R.I. has enabled me to build an enviable reputation in Television."—PAUL MILLER, Maumee, O.

\$10 WEEK IN SPARE TIME
"Before finishing course, I earned as much as \$10 a week in Radio servicing, at home in spare time. Recommend N.R.I. to everyone interested in Radio."—S. J. PEYRUFF, Miami, Fla.

WORKS FOR TELEVISION DEALERS
"Am tied in with two Television outfits and do warranty work for dealers. Fall back to N.R.I. text book offers for installing Television set."—ROBERT DOHMEN, New Prague, Minnesota.

I Will Train You at Home You Practice Servicing or Communications with MANY RADIO KITS

Keep your job while training at home. Hundreds I've trained are successful RADIO-TELEVISION TECHNICIANS. Most had no previous experience; many no more than grammar school education. Learn Radio-Television principles from illustrated lessons. Get PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE—build valuable multimeter for conducting tests; also practice servicing Radios or operating transmitters—experiment with circuits common to Radio and Television. You keep all equipment. Many students make \$5, \$10 a week extra fixing

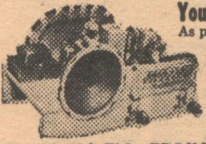
neighbors' Radios in spare time. SPECIAL BOOKLETS start teaching you the day you enroll

Send Now For 2 Books FREE—Mail Coupon Act Now! Send for my FREE DOUBLE OFFER. Coupon entitles you to actual lesson on Servicing; shows how you learn Radio-Television at home. You'll also receive my 64-page book, "How to Be a Success in Radio-Television." You'll read what my graduates are doing, earning; see photos of equipment you practice with at home. Send coupon in envelope or paste on postal. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. IBRI, National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C. Our 37th Year.

Have Your Own Business

Many N.R.I. trained men start their own Radio-Television sales and service business without capital. Let me show you how you, too, can be your own boss, have a good income from your own shop.

The ABC's of SERVICING



You Build This MODERN RADIO

As part of my Servicing Course, you build this complete, powerful Radio Receiver that brings in local and distant stations. N.R.I. gives you ALL the Radio parts... speaker, tubes, chassis, transformer, sockets, loop antenna, etc.

You Build This TRANSMITTER

As part of my Communications Course, I SEND YOU parts to build this low-power broadcasting transmitter. You learn how to put a station "on the air," perform procedures demanded of Broadcast Station operators, make many practical tests.



Good for Both - FREE

MR. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. IBRI National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C.

Mail me Sample Lesson and 64-page Book about How to Win Success in Radio-Television. Both FREE. (No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Name.....Age.....
Address.....
City.....State.....
 Check if Veteran Approved Under G. I. Bill



REVOLUTIONARY NEW DEVICE PAYS YOU UP TO \$700 EACH



29 MILLION PROSPECTS!!!!

Show housewives how to end forever all the mean, nasty, time-wasting work of hand-defrosting. Get a new thrill out of making **BIG MONEY** with this quick profit, patented D-Frost-O-Matic unit. Cash in up to \$21.00 and more an hour. We show you how.

HOUSEWIVES END HAND DEFROSTING FOREVER!

Fastest selling invention "Magically" saves food, saves money, saves time—it defrosts **AUTOMATICALLY** every night! Once you plug it in **HOUSEWIVES WON'T LET YOU TAKE IT OUT!** No more ice-encrusted coils—no more kitchen mess and spoiled food.



DRAMATIC DEMONSTRATION!

When you use tested selling methods, secret selling words and make dramatic demonstrations with the actual D-Frost-O-Matic, you can't help but have orders pour in! A penny post card can get you started in business, so if you are not making over \$200.00 a week send for free selling plan today.

RUSH COUPON NOW!

D-Frost-O-Matic Corp.
6 N. Michigan Avenue, Dept. PG-2
Chicago, Illinois

If you can show me how to make over \$200.00 a week, I'll be your friend for life. Rush me complete details and free selling plan about amazing D-Frost-O-Matics.

Name.....

Address.....

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

Ready for the Rackets

(Continued from page 6)

Gem Gyps

Dear Sir:

That the con men keep up with world events can be shown by a new racket that has operated all too successfully in East Los Angeles recently. In this caper one of the men approaches the victim, usually a middle aged woman, and addresses her in a foreign language. The victim is unable to understand him but her curiosity is aroused. At this moment the other con man "just happens" to come along and offers to act as interpreter. After a brief conversation, the "interpreter" informs the sucker that the foreigner is a refugee from a communist dominated country. Furthermore, he has converted his entire life's earnings into jewelry; now he is desperate for money but is unable to sell his jewels because he smuggled them into the United States and is afraid he will be deported. Naturally, the victim is sympathetic, and when informed that she can purchase them for a small percentage of their real value, due to the circumstances, she is ready to be taken. She is rushed to her home or bank; the sale is made and the men vanish before she can consult her family or get advice from friends. All too soon, she learns that the jewels are as phony as the "foreigner" and she is poorer but wiser. So, beware of strangers who try to play upon your sympathy and especially those who offer you smuggled goods. You just can't win for losing.

Spears Ascherfeld
Pasadena, Calif.

"Fool's Gold" Panned

Sir:

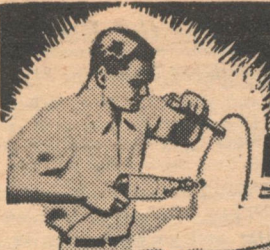
I was greatly excited when I received a telephone call, advising that I had been selected by a company, manufacturing aluminum pots and pans, to receive a gift, and that a dinner would be given at my home, for me and my friends. I was told that a representative of the company would call in a short time to discuss the matter.

Promptly within the hour, a personable young man rang my bell. He showed me three fine, heavy aluminum pans, one of which was to be my gift. All that they wanted of me was to let one of the representatives of this company come in my home, cook a meal, using their pans, and serve it, free of cost, to myself and my guests, who I might invite. The pans would be demonstrated, but no high pressure would be put on the guests to purchase same, although they might buy them if they wish. I would be given my gift at the dinner.

We set a date and made arrangements. As the young man was leaving, he told me, in view of the fact that I was cooperating with him, if I cared to buy duplicates of the three pans he had showed me, he would let me have them at wholesale.

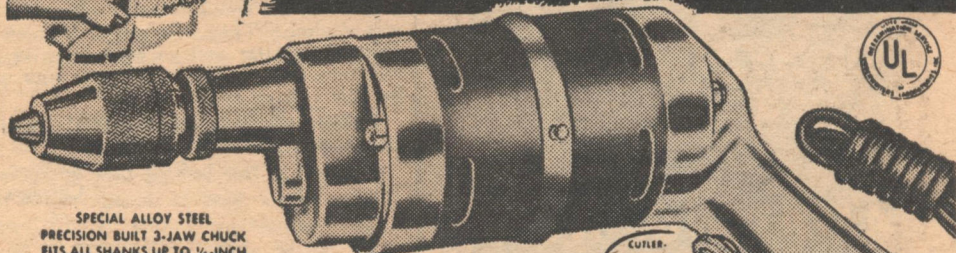
I jumped at the chance. He hurried down to his car and brought back three weighty, nicely boxed packages, and took my money.

(Please continue on page 10)



36-PIECE ELECTRIC WORK KIT

1001 Uses for Home, Workshop, Farm and Factory



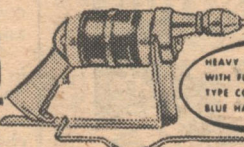
SPECIAL ALLOY STEEL
PRECISION BUILT 3-JAW CHUCK
FITS ALL SHANKS UP TO 1/4-INCH

Never Before—Never Again
a Value Like This.

STEEL BENCH STAND INCLUDED
USE AS BENCH OR HAND TOOL

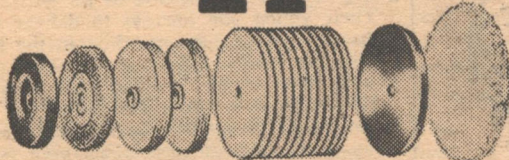
Everything
You Need
for only

\$14.95
COMPLETE



CUTLER-
HAMMER
ON AND OFF
SWITCH

HEAVY GAUGE STEEL CASE
WITH FULL-LENGTH PIANO-
TYPE COVER HINGE—
BLUE HAMMERBLOD FINISH



YOU'LL FIND 1001 WAYS TO USE THESE MANY ACCESSORIES FOR
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Try For 10 Days In Your Own Home
On Our No-Risk Examination Offer!
See for yourself how FAST and EASY
this AMAZING ELECTRIC WORK KIT
enables you to do those tough jobs

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This is the 1st time this 36-piece Electric Work Kit has ever been offered by us for the LOW PRICE of only \$14.95. You must be entirely satisfied and agree it is the great value we represent it to be or you can return the kit within 10 days for full refund.

ILLINOIS MERCHANDISE MART, 1227 Loyola, Chicago 26, Ill.

Here's the opportunity of a lifetime for you to own the kind of Electric Drill Work Kit you've always wanted—at a price many dollars below what you might ordinarily expect to pay for such a quality outfit. You'll be delighted with the way this miracle Electric Work Kit of a 1001 uses performs. You'll be amazed to see how quickly its accessory pieces enable you to automatically complete one job after another—with the greatest of ease and skill. No man can afford to be without this many purpose Electric Drill Kit. Yet even housewives will find it invaluable for polishing, buffing and sharpening hundreds of household items. This marvelous new work-saver is precision built throughout of sturdiest materials—is fully covered with a written guarantee and is Underwriters Laboratories approved. Complete, easy-to-follow instructions are included with every kit.

HURRY! Get Yours While Supply Lasts!

These Kits will go fast on this Bargain Offer so RUSH YOUR ORDER on the Handy Coupon Today!

<p>POLISHES</p> <p>Autos Floors Silverware and other metal & wood surfaces</p>	<p>DRILLS</p> <p>helps up to 1/2 inch in metal, wood and similar surfaces</p>	<p>BRUSHES</p> <p>Removes rust and paint from radiators</p> <p>scour and clean pots & pans</p>
<p>SANDS</p> <p>Table top Autos before painting</p>	<p>MIXES</p> <p>Mix paint in one minute ★ also mix feed</p>	<p>BUFFS</p> <p>Jewelry Silverware Golf Clubs Watches Tools, etc.</p> <p>A HANDY KIT FOR SO MANY USEFUL JOBS</p>

SEND NO MONEY! Mail This "No-Risk" Coupon Today!

ILLINOIS MERCHANDISE MART, Dept. 9829
1227 Loyola Ave., Chicago 26, Illinois

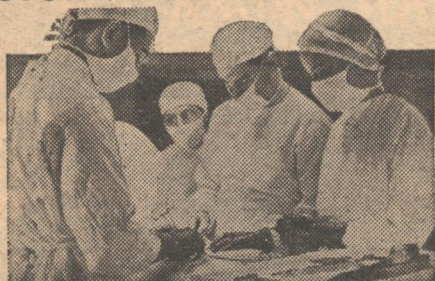
Gentlemen: Send me the 36-Piece Electric Work Kit, complete as shown, C.O.D. at your special LOW PRICE of only \$14.95 plus C.O.D. postage charges. I must be delighted in every way or I can return Kit within 10 days for full refund.

NAME

ADDRESS

TOWN..... STATE.....

BE PROTECTED IN CASE OF SICKNESS or ACCIDENT



**AMAZING, NEW
HOSPITALIZATION
PLAN COSTS ONLY 3¢ A DAY**

**NO TIME LIMIT
ON HOSPITAL
ROOM and BOARD**



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Ready for the Rackets

(Continued from page 8)

I think you can guess the rest. When I opened the boxes I found three miserable iron pans, covered with rust, and fit only to be thrown away.

I called the company with whom I thought I was dealing. They told me they knew nothing about the matter and no representative of theirs had been ordered to get in touch with me, either by phone or at my home.

I think you will agree that the idea was as clever as it was crooked.

S. W.
Chicago, Ill.

Crook's Bologna

Sir:

A friend of mine and her husband have a combination neighborhood grocery, meat market and delicatessen store.

They filled a big order that had been phoned in and for which quick delivery had been asked. The order included imported olive oil, porter-house steaks, a big rib roast and some of their choicest and highest priced delicacies and it took a large carton to take care of it.

Their young son hurried to deliver it to the address given. A man met him in the hall, took the carton, checked over the contents and said several items he had ordered were missing.

He tendered a check and when the boy objected, said, "Bring the other things and if your folks won't take the check, I'll give you cash."

When the boy returned with the articles, needless to say, the customer had disappeared. Neither the janitor or anyone else in the building had ever heard of him.

My friends lost over \$20.00 by the transaction as the check was worthless.

I. L. Kay
Chicago, Ill.

Swindled at the Fair

Sir:

Why don't they have a law against allowing swindlers around the Fair Grounds.

Really, if I could run across one of those heartless money grabbers now, I could beat his brains in.

At the Fair a few years back I had but \$4.00 to spend on entertainment for the day. The grounds were crowded with people from far and near, who were there to see the side-shows, the races, the ball game, and the other exhibits common at a County Fair.

I was about to order a sandwich and coffee when I noticed a small crowd gathered at a stand near by. On noticing my interest, the man called to me: "Hello, fella! A free gift to you for a subscription to a popular magazine!"

After signing my name and getting my gift (a toy camera) he said: "That will be three dollars and fifty cents Mister. Your magazine will come to you by mail."

I never did get the magazine. The man had

(Please continue on page 12)



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P.E.R.

Ready for the Rackets

(Continued from page 10)

three-fifty in his pocket and probably lots more that he had taken from other poor suckers like me.

E. L. McGeorge
 Potosi, Mo.

Gray Deceiver

Sir:

The following money-getting scheme was perpetuated on me and many others.

I answered a knock on my door. A plainly dressed, gray-haired, elderly woman greeted me by name and said she had been asked to call on me by a friend of hers, who was my next door neighbor.

I, of course, invited her in. We started discussing this neighbor, with whom I was friendly, who happened to be an expert needlewoman. Among other things, we spoke admiringly of this ability of hers, of the needle-point chair and crocheted scarves in her living room and of a luncheon set I had also seen, which she was making for the church bazaar. Other topics were touched upon, concerning this neighbor, some rather on the personal side.

After a pleasant 10 minutes, she came to the point. The next day was a tag day and my caller advised she would be stationed at the corner, in front of the drug store. The cause was worthy. She said she was anxious to bring in enough to do some real good for this cause, and my neighbor, who was her friend, had suggested that she contact some of the tenants and get their contribution a little ahead of time, and, perhaps, a little more generously.

She cried a little and told me she had lost a son in World War II, but work of this kind had been a comfort to her and helped her bear up. I was deeply moved and gave her a contribution that was a great deal more than I had planned to put in the slit of the tag box.

The next day I looked for her. I found someone entirely different stationed where she had said she would be. Upon returning home, I got in touch with my neighbor. She advised that a stranger, someone answering the description of the party who had called on me, had knocked on her door, then apologized, saying she guessed she was on the wrong floor. She had lingered a moment and admired my neighbor's needlepoint chair, scarves and other needlework visible in the living room. My neighbor, flattered, had invited her in. They had had quite a chat. In other words, there had been enough conversation to give, when repeated, the illusion of a friendly footing.

It seems that practically everyone in our building had been appealed to. It seems that she would contact one tenant on each floor and use the method of which I have told, altering it a little when necessary, then go to work on the rest of the occupants of the floor. She probably got the names and apartment numbers from those posted in the entrance hall of the building. I imagine

(Please continue on page 14)

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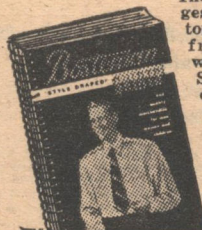
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Ready for the Rackets

(Continued from page 12)

ours was not the only building wherein she used these tactics.

I gave what I could to the real tagger, but I could not afford to give again what I had already given to the unscrupulous, heartless pretender that had fooled me so well by her acting and her lies.

Dora Horowitz
Chicago, Ill.

"Framed"

Sir:

Once, way back in my youth, I saw an advertisement in a reputable—fortunately I forget the name—magazine, stating that if I would send \$1.00 I would be the lucky recipient of a faithful reproduction of an etching of George Washington, framed and mounted.

Being an ardent admirer of George Washington, I sent the dollar, and very shortly thereafter received a one-cent stamp posted on a piece of cardboard, the whole "faithful reproduction" glued to a wooden block. However, the swindlers had certainly stuck to their word—even to the framing and mounting of the "photograph."

I guess you have to lose money to learn how to save it.

Frances H. Whisler
Bozeman, Montana

Tax Spree

Sir:

The only ones who fall for this are those with larceny in their hearts. But its a despicable racket thats costing all of us money because we have to make up the difference. Although few of the perpetrators have been caught, its probably practiced in every community where the income tax "experts" sprout up in barber shops and vacant stores around February and March each year.

You go to one of these "experts" and he tells you that he can get a substantial refund for you—by the simple expedient of adding a few fictitious dependents on your tax return. He assures you there is nothing to worry about, that Uncle Sam rarely checks low-bracket returns except for mathematical accuracy. This, of course, is not necessarily so.

He computes your return so that you can claim a refund, say, of \$75.00 when you aren't really entitled to any. You pay him anywhere from 10% to 50% of this for his "services."

One of these "experts" was caught here recently, and was convicted of making out over 400 such fraudulent returns in one year! The taxpayers weren't convicted, but Uncle Sam may not be so lenient next time. An honest mistake is one thing—conspiring to defraud another.

Ann M. Webster
Nutley, N. J.

That's the pitch on the slicksters, this month, detective fans. We'll be back in the next issue with more highlights on low-down swindlers.

The Editor



Train at Home in Spare Time for **RADIO** and **TELEVISION**

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WAKE OF THE

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Ex-cop Tony Arno didn't mind troubleshooting for his boss's lush of a brother—much. But when the rummo finally mixed himself a crime cocktail of cuties and corpses, who was going to save Tony from a homicide hang-over?

CHAPTER ONE

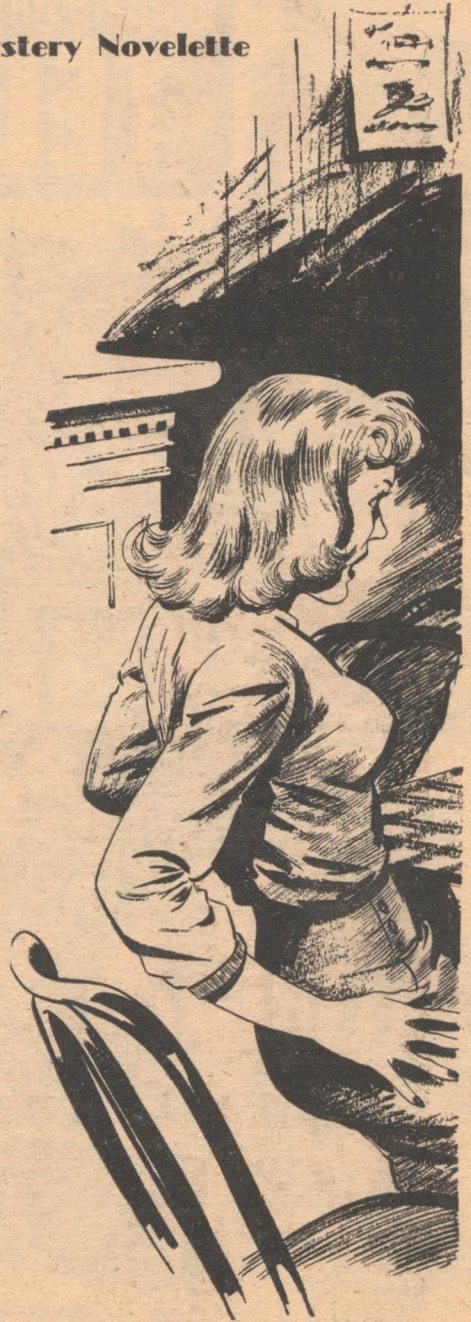
Date in a Deadfall

I GOT out of the car and stood with one hand resting on the wet hood, listening to the night sounds—the wash of water against the pilings under the pier, the distracted agony of a foghorn wailing out in the channel. Down the misty length of pier was the neon sign that said Jack's Place. In the lulls between the channel warnings I could hear a juke-box grinding out a low blues tune, hot and husky against the fog.

I stood there, waiting a full five minutes, then left the car and began walking down the pier. The boards bucked and rumbled under my feet, the echoes hollow against the splash of low-tide water. I paused halfway down the dim stretch to light a cigarette, holding the match high, and promptly threw the cigarette over the side into the water. The flame crawled along the stick and died. It seemed darker then than it had been before.

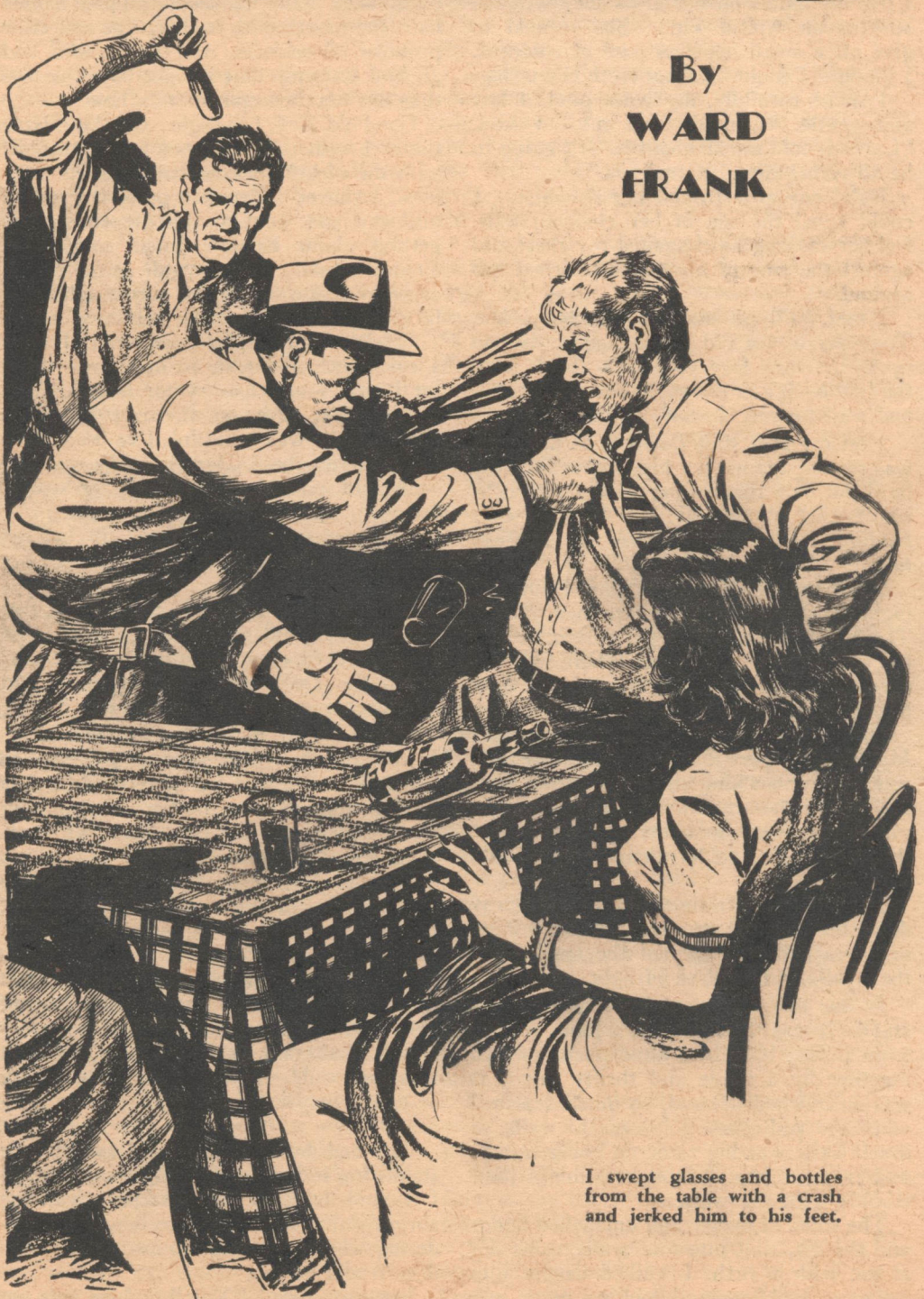
She moved out of the shadows beside Jack's and stood looking at me, her face a blur in the gloom and the fog. I said, "Hello, wabbit," baby-talking it and feeling a little ridiculous, stepping toward her carefully as I spoke.

I heard her breath sound unevenly in her throat. She moved, pulling the dark trenchcoat closer about her. I could look over her head toward the hazy glow of



HEEL HUSBAND

By
WARD
FRANK



I swept glasses and bottles
from the table with a crash
and jerked him to his feet.

Jack's without raising my eyes much. When I put my hands on her arms they were as stiff as an Arctic wind. She seemed to give off a small hopeless core of coldness. I thought I could hear her teeth chattering.

I spoke carefully, my voice pitched low and gentle. "Laramie told me," I said. "Laramie told me all about it. It's going to be all right, kitten, it really is."

I slid one arm around her shoulders. I could smell the sea in her chestnut hair, feel her shaking hard against my chest and against the ring of my arm. I turned her around.

I said, "I'll get him for you, baby. Me, Tony Arno, the old grave-digger. Go on up to the car. Buy yourself a drink from the bottle—it's in the glove compartment—and wait for me. I won't be long."

I let my arm slide down until my hand was resting against her hip, and against the hard flat bulk that swung from the trench-coat pocket. I thought: *this time she isn't kidding, this time she's had all she can take.*

Suddenly I felt colder than I had all night. I slid my fingers into her pocket. The small gun made a light splash, hitting the water, and was gone. There was an abrupt ache in my chest so that the next breath hurt.

I said, hoarsely now, "For Pete's sake, Mary," and gave her another shove and watched her walking aimlessly up the pier, half-afraid she wouldn't get as far as the car. There was sweat on my face, colder than the night, colder than sweat should be.

I turned and strode the rest of the way down the pier and into Jack's Place pulling my eyes half-shut against the smoke and the smells and the lack of light.

It was one of those places, you understand. It was the last stop, a joint, strictly from thirst; it had an atmosphere thrown together by a crude and thrifty mind. It was so much driftwood, so much sea-shell and weed and coarse jokes on the walls, so much waiters as big as ocean-going tramps and just as dirty. I thought I might have trouble with the waiters.

The smell of people and unlabelled liquor and the sea, shut into four walls, came out at me with a rush. I walked deeper into the room, looking—and, looking, met a pair of cool blue-grey eyes and recognized the

walled-in, reserved expression, the neat, clean head with its short-cropped blonde hair, the mouth with its long lips and their promise of softness, and knew who had phoned Laramie that his pet boy was battling out another epic in this hole.

Good old Nell, I thought. Good old Nell, the girl with the burnt-out torch, the girl with the nickel for everybody's else's troubles. I shoved a drunken party-boy out of my way and went across the room, forgetting about Freddie Small and about Freddie Small's wife, outside in my car. I came to a stop beside the corner table, my face as stiff as last year's memories.

"Hello, Tony," she murmured. It was a voice, with a chuckle in it, a voice made for laughter and hungry for it and afraid to give away to it, but the overtones were there. If she was beautiful, I've been reading the wrong books, but she had something—she had something for nothing, no strings attached, no husky promises waiting for other promises. I sat down, still looking closely at her, still feeling that pain in my chest.

"Tony Arno," she said thoughtfully, tilting her head and regarding me with those cool, reserved eyes. "The mechanized boy-scout, the *Tribune's* gift to trouble. Out for another merit badge, little man?"

"It was your nickel brought me here," I said tightly. "Did anyone ask you to phone Laramie and tell him Freddie was girding himself for another session with the Bellevue psychos? Or is this just something you do on your time off?"

She laughed then. We were suddenly friends, just for the moment. I felt better. I said, "No point in stalling this off, Nell. Where is the guy?"

She pointed toward another corner and through the haze of smoke and killed-off light and jostling bodies and sneering mouths and crazy eyes I saw him, his head loose and rubbery on his neck, the streak of badger-white hair falling over his forehead.

"Lo and behold," she said softly, "the stabilizing influence of modern-day living." I looked back at her sharply, realizing abruptly that she was alone here and wondering why and seeing the hurt in her eyes deepen and grow.

I got up. I said, "You'll find his wife out in my car, at the end of the pier. She could

use a spare shoulder," and started off across the room, cursing Freddie Small, cursing the man for what he was doing to his wife and to Nell and to me. As I walked the tightness began to go out of my chest and I began to feel better. I began to feel very good indeed.

I came up to his table fast, moving on the balls of my feet, and had him half out of his chair before he knew I was there. I had come here to play this the way I had played all the others—in the other early mornings when the phone had begun its dismal chant on the bedside table and I had known before the consciousness hit me fully just why it was ringing and what I was going to have to do. I had come down to play it soft and suddenly found myself wanting to hurt him, in any way I could.

THE women with him were standard equipment on a Freddie Small expedition. I got between two of them and shoved, hard, and sent them away, and then I was looking down at him through a haze that wasn't all the fault of Jack, or whoever else ran this sty.

I said sharply, "Time for bed, Freddie. Time for bed and bye-bye," and, reaching over, swept the glasses and bottles off the table with a crash and jerked him to his feet.

He came up rubber-legged, his black and white hair flying, his mouth slobbering. He was drunker than I had thought. His tie was half way around under one ear. His shirt was stained red and brown from lipstick and rye. He could have powered an eight-cylinder car by just breathing hard in the right place.

I jerked him around against me, until his face was an inch away, the eyes wild and uncertain, and grinned a cold hard grin at him and slapped him, once, across the mouth. He fell back into the chair, and I spun, feeling the pressure of someone moving toward me, eyes turning my way, and an ominous silence settling over the room. I caught up a beer glass and smashed it hard against the rim of the table and paused there, my back to the wall and the shattered glass in my gloved hand.

The light twinkled merrily on the broken shards and on the sharp points. The big fellow who was almost breathing down my neck came up with an effort that creaked

every bone in his body. He swung there, teetering, his soiled shirt bouncing with the effort of his breathing, one hand still on the billy in his hip-pocket.

I wiggled the glass at him. The silence was complete, a cessation of noise, a halting of breathing. He crouched in front of me, his teeth showing between thick lips, his face ruddy. There was sweat on his greasy skin. I laughed a little, still moving the glass.

I said softly, "A shave, Jack, right down to the bone," and made a forward motion with the glass. He winced and swayed back and I knew I was going out of there in one piece. I reached down and picked Freddie up by the collar and yanked him soggly to his feet. My mouth felt stiff. I said, "Jack, we're going out of here, nice and quiet. I'm taking my little boy home. Any objections?"

His tongue flicked out between his teeth and touched his lips. He looked over his shoulder at the other people in the room, at the man behind the bar, at the waiters. Seeing nothing there, he moved his head ponderously on his thick shoulders. He sighed, the word small and tired in his throat, and began moving away from me.

At the door I stopped, feeling foolish-brave, and looked around and saw that Nell had gone. I was glad of that. I hauled Freddie out onto the dock, slamming the door. I shook him until his teeth banged together and began the long journey back down the pier, half-running him along because I wasn't certain how much farther we'd get before the boys in the back room woke up and came after us. I realized then I was still holding the beer glass.

I threw it away as we reached the car and Freddie half-fell over the hood. I opened the back door and looked in at Mary and saw Nell there, holding her with one arm and talking soft and small and kind.

I said, "I'll take him with me, Nell. I don't think he should be with kitten here, not for awhile."

"All right," she said, "just so long as he isn't in the car with us. You want me to take her home in a cab?"

"You'd never get one here," I said. I went around behind the car, unlocked the trunk, went back and got Freddie and waltzed him back—both of us doing the

splits together, like a tired adagio team. I put him away with the spare tire and slammed the lid on him, half-hoping that he would smother to death on the ride. When I got into the car and started the motor, no one said a word and the bottle in the glove compartment hadn't been touched. I touched it once, briefly, just to get the taste of Jack and Freddie out of my mouth, and went away from there and up through the docks and home.

* * *

You sometimes get so the thought of the sun coming up on you is like a punch in the face. I leaned my arms on the bathroom window and my chin on my arms, looking out at the grayness seeping up beyond the bridge span, gray with a faint hope of orange that would grow in an hour to cover the city. I leaned there, slackly, feeling the weight of six years of doing just this, of watching the sun come up and never seeing it go down, and heard with half an ear the sounds Freddie was making in the cold water of the tub. In the other room the phone rattled its bell, getting ready for the long ring, and had started before I was out of the bathroom and into the living room, reaching out for it.

Even her voice was cool, but with just that ragged edge that bespoke the long night. I thought she would have had a tough time with Mary. Things pile up that way. They pile up, the big ones, until just the lightest breath of trouble breaks the reserves and sends you off the high tower.

She said, "It's all right now, Tony. I've put her to bed. She'll be all right, if she doesn't have to look at that bum for awhile. Is there anything I can do for you now?"

I said yes. I said, "On the way over, stop at Angelo's and pick up a pint of cream. I'll let you make the coffee. If you want, that is."

"What else?" she said in that cool, soft voice, and hung up on me. Within the quarter-hour she was at the door, the bottle of cream in her hand and the slight ironic smile on her full mouth.

I let her in, feeling dirty of a sudden, and, while she made the coffee in the kitchen, went back into the bathroom where Freddie was groaning and moving like a pale, bloated fish, and shaved. When I was

through and rubbing the lotion into my skin, I looked down at him, naked and helpless in the water, with only a push, only the pressure of Cain's hand needed to stop him now, before he killed everyone who gave a damn for him.

I stood there, the towel over my shoulder, the bottle in my hand, looking at him. As I looked he opened one eye painfully and gave me a bleary stare, pulling his head in a little and eying me with that half-stupid, half-majestic dignity some men have when the morning catches them still alive and wishing they weren't.

HE MOANED. Nell's voice called for coffee. I could smell it rich and strong on the dead air in the apartment. I put the bottle of lotion back on the shelf, shutting my mind to Freddie and to what I had been thinking of Freddie, and went out, closing the door.

Nell wrinkled her nose, sitting there, only the paleness of her face showing her weariness. She said, "You always smell good, Tony. That's one thing I'll give you."

"That's oll you ever give me," I said, quietly. I sat down and began pushing my spoon around in my cup.

"That's all I ever give anyone," she said, just as quietly. The subject was closed, the moment gone, if it had ever been there at all.

She looked at me gravely, her eyes softening and drank deeply from the cup and sighed. She asked, "What are you going to do with him, Tony? You can't spend the rest of your life pulling him out of dives and patching him up and sending him home, sweet and clean, for the bright new day. Doesn't Laramie know what kind of a smear his brother is, Tony? Isn't he carrying this big brother thing just a little too far?"

I shrugged. "He has a broad mind. That, and they started on the *Tribune* together, fifteen years ago. Larry has enough sense to know that when Freddie is sober, he can make printer's ink sing a pretty merry tune. I'll give him that much."

I thought of Laramie then, and went into the other room. I picked up the phone and dialed his private number. I waited through the dial signals and through the abrupt clatter of the phone.

I said, "Chief, this is Arno." I held the receiver away from my ear while he cursed himself awake and then went on, "Chief, it's all right, I've got him here, in soak."

"Ha," Laramie said, suddenly clear and wide-awake. "Good. Cost you much, Tony?"

"One dry-cleaning bill and some gas. Too bad you don't pay off for nervous strain."

He chuckled. "If you had any nerves I might, at that. Give Nell my love, kid. It was nice of her to bother to phone me about it. You take care of him, Tony. Get him over to Armand's, steam him up a little. He'll be as good as new. Tough fella, Freddie."

"Tough on everyone," I said, and hung up. I went back into the kitchen and finished the coffee and had another cup. I said, "The old man sends his love, and his thanks to his foremost feature writer. You'll probably get a raise. The old man pays off. I'll say that for him. You might even be able to get a partnership in the Mopping-Up of Freddie Department. It's a growing business."

She made a sad face. "How much is half of nothing, Tony?"

"It would be more than you've got now!" I began to have that old beaten feeling I always got when I sat across a table from Nell Armitage.

How do you climb a wall when you can't reach it? How do you open a barred door when you haven't got a key? Some people talk themselves out of their troubles, others sit tight and hold the trouble inside, where they think it can't be seen, nursing it along.

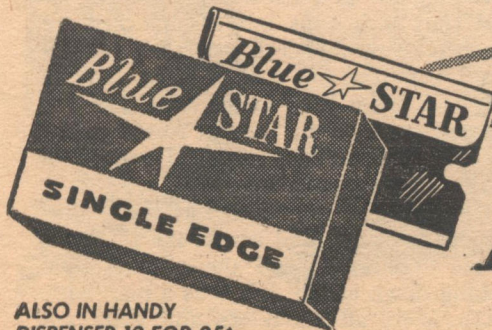
I got up quickly, wanting her there in the kitchen, in the apartment, the sound of her, the touch of her hand. Me, Tony Arno, thirty-three, a guy with no future and too much past and no background to hold onto. Nothing to do but keep people off Laramie Small's neck, and drag Freddie home. I should have stayed with the cops. I should have stayed where I belonged. Me with my big mouth and my hair getting gray, what did I have to offer anyone?

I walked her to the door. I said, "It was nice of you to help. You didn't have to do it. You don't get paid for it. I do."

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But thanks for everything, anyway, Nell.”
 “Sure,” she said, smiling. “Sometime I’ll let you buy me a drink!” She was gone, and for a little while I stood looking at another closed door. I shrugged and stopped feeling sorry for myself and went into the bathroom to hang Freddie on the line to dry.

CHAPTER TWO

A Corpse Comes Calling

THAT night I came into the city room of the *Tribune* and walked across the width of the big room, nodding here and smiling there, down the length of busy desks and saying hello to Jack Roth on police. I went into the small office they’d given me to keep Laramie away from his public. I sat down at my desk without taking my coat off. I sat down, feeling very tired, and lighted a cigarette and took a couple of puffs of sour-tasting smoke.

Then I picked up the phone and dialed Roth’s local and said, “Come in here a minute, will you, Jack?” I took a bottle of bourbon out of the desk and poured two healthy drinks. I was pushing his across the blotter when he opened the door and stepped into the room, a gaunt man with quick black eyes in a dead, unsmiling face. He looked at the bottle and at me and sat down.

I said, “What kind of a man is Gus Gentry?”

“Musical,” he said, indifferently. “He goes for Brahms, Debussy and the sound of a pair of dice rolling on green baize. If they’re his dice. Why?”

“I was in a bar tonight,” I said pushing my glass an inch with a stiff finger, “and I heard some talk. Hard talk. What I heard, Freddie has been playing it high and charging it up when lost, walking out with the booty when he won. Only he doesn’t pay off. He just tells Gentry that the money he dropped pays for no cracks in this week’s column, and so on. Straight blackmail. I heard Gentry didn’t like. What would you know about that?”

“Take a vacation,” he said, leaning forward. His eyes went dull, without life or color. His mouth twitched. “You’ve been running interference for that dope for six

years. Don’t you know when to quit? Don’t you get an idea, from what’s happened, that you can’t stand between Freddie and reality all his life? Get wise to yourself, soldier boy. I know Gentry from back when. He was tough enough then. As I understand, times are now tougher and Gentry isn’t a man who gets any softer with age.”

“All right,” I said. “Send me a bill for the advice.”

He got up, stiffly, a little hurt, and stood looking down at me for a moment. He shook his head, and, turning, walked out of the office. I picked up the phone and dialed a number and spoke with a man who knew where people were when no one else did, and after that I dialed another number and waited.

“I want Gus Gentry,” I said, when the connection had gone through. “Tell him it’s Tony Arno of the *Tribune* calling.” The soft, quiet voice at the other end of the line went away, and after a short time, another soft, quiet voice said, “Gentry speaking.”

I said, “You don’t know me, Mr. Gentry, but I’ve heard of you. I’ve heard all sorts of things about you. Particularly about a man named Freddie Small, who works here. I’d like to go on with that, but not over the phone. Could it be arranged?”

“Anything can be arranged,” Gentry said in his low even voice. “But this is going to be an expensive trip for you lads.”

“Perhaps I’ll write you a check,” I said. “Where and when?”

“The Clover Club, at eight. Ask the head waiter for me. I’ll be there.”

I put the phone down, and wiped the sweat off my face. I had a sudden hunch, a feeling, one of those things you get before your luck runs out. I unlocked the lap drawer of the desk and took out the gun I kept there. I looked at it thoughtfully and put it back in the desk. If I had a gun, Gentry would have at least two and his boys had union cards. I would be batting in the wrong league.

I got up and went into Laramie’s office without knocking and across the thick rug to his desk and stood there for a time, looking down at him. He was a man without a neck, all shoulders and belly and head, the great shock of blue-white hair nodding in time to his breathing. His

features were broad, fuzzy, blurred from a life-time of going into bars and coming out of bars, of a drink here and a drink there, the veins pulsing in his forehead like purple worms under the pallid skin.

I put a hand on him and shook him lightly. He awoke with a grunt and a snort and rocked his head back. I said, "Open the safe, chief. Your prize brother's pulled another one and this time it's going to cost you money."

"Ha," he snarled. He wasn't completely awake, but he was trying hard. He batted one beefy hand across his face and peered up at me. Then he smiled, the smile of a man who has had little reason to smile at anything but is willing to try. "Money?" he said hoarsely. I could smell his breath across the desk. "Freddie?"

"That's it," I said approvingly. "Money and Freddie and a man named Gus Gentry, a low-life who thinks your brother should pay his debts and who objects to being blackmailed by a newspaper because he runs a gaming house when nobody is looking. This time I don't think anybody is kidding. This time I don't think you are going to buy the girl off or replace any fenders and walk away laughing. This time it is going to hurt."

"Not good," he grunted. "Gentry. Heard of him. How much?"

"I don't know. I'm due to see him at the Clover Club in half-an-hour, without portfolio. If you want to dig your brother up, you'll find him in my bed, in my apartment and sober, unless he's found the bottle I have hidden in the dirty-linen basket. Wrap him up carefully and take him somewhere out in the country. Drop him in a quarry, do anything with him but keep him out of my sight and away from Gentry."

I turned and started to walk away from the astonished expression on his face, because people did not talk to Laramie Small like that. When I was half-way to the door I said, feeling at once happy, "I almost forgot to tell you, chief. This is the last time. Positively. Absolutely. I am sorry for the guy. I am sorry for his wife but I am also feeling very sorry for me. First I see Gentry, then I tell you what it costs. Then I quit."

I nodded to him politely, left the room without closing the door and went out

across the city room with a firmer step. I had four hundred dollars in the bank, a car that ran if you coaxed it, and two suits. I went out and found the car, coaxed it and drove through the early evening traffic downtown toward the Clover Club, parked it in the lot and, a good twenty minutes early, descended the steps into the place. I found a table and ordered a drink.

THE Gentry man took up very little space in the atmosphere, but what displacement he had was impressive. He looked like a well-mannered wasp who has found his way into a camel's hair coat and liked the color combination. His hair swept sleekly back, shiny and blue-black, to a point on the nape of his neck, accentuated by a collar as white as the pure driven snow. He had a face that came into the room a long time before the rest of him, and not once during the time he talked to me that night did he take off his chamois gloves.

A tic twitched under one hard flat dull brown eye. The eyes seemed to take up most of his face. They were like blotting paper, a lighter tan against the brown of his skin. He came across the room carefully, without having to be asked for, and pulled out a chair and sat down. I noticed he took care to have his back against the wall.

He said, still scanning the room, "Some guys are late, some are early. I wonder if that means anything?" He looked at me as placidly as a cow would look at a cud, and twitched his mouth in what might have passed for a smile in a colony of clams. "I like you," he went on dreamily. "You have a pleasant, well-fed look about you, Arno. You look as if you had money in your pocket."

"How much money would I need?"

He took out a notebook and eyed it thoughtfully, flipping the pages. He whistled. "Forty grand it says here, Mr. Arno." He absorbed some more of me with his flat, dull gaze. "You wouldn't think one guy could lose that much in three weeks, would you, Mr. Arno?"

"That might depend on whose dice he was using," I said. It was the wrong thing. I don't know how I knew that. His face remained the same and his eyes remained the same and nothing about him changed

except the air. He chuckled, deprecatingly.

"Hard words, he said, "to a professional taker of chances. I may have made a mistake. I think it should be forty-five thousand, in round figures and small bills. Do they let you sign the checks or is this merely a social call?"

"Let's put it this way," I said unhappily. "I am hired, by the week, to keep Freddie's skirts as clean as I can. That's quite a job. Tonight, before I came down here, I quit that job. This is just a last mopping-up operation, if you see what I mean. But I still think you're asking too much. I think this smacks of extortion, shall we say, Mr. Gentry?"

"I don't care," he murmured easily. "It's not me is paying the forty-five grand. Call it anything you like. That was what I called Freddie's deal when he made it with me. Sauce for the goose, you know, Arno. Now I am not threatening Freddie in any way. I don't know just how you worked your way into the dope you got about me, but I'll say this. You, nor anybody else, can live with the guy all the time. Three men with iron bellies and no nerves can't keep up with him on all his trips, to all his bars and to bed, day after day. Sooner or later, Mr. Arno, Freddie has got to settle up. In my book he owes me that much money. In my book he pays or I shut the covers on him, but hard. Just you and me know this, Arno. One of us is going to deny it if you ever waste your time talking about it."

He stood up, a fluid streak of brown and tan and black, very graceful. He leaned over the table. "I know this will take a little time. I understand that. In my business you got to be patient, and I am as patient as the next businessman. Wake me up tomorrow noon, Mr. Arno. You can use the same number you did tonight."

He nodded and went away, softly, quietly, without knocking over any tables or shooting the bartender, but he had me scared. It was the first time in maybe a week I had been scared. The first time in two that I had been scared that bad. I watched him go. When he had gone, I scuttled to the phone and called Laramie, who promptly blew up. Then I called my own number but there was no answer. Either Freddie had found the bottle in the basket, or he had gone to find another.

I sat down again and ate, sparingly, and had one or two drinks. By ten o'clock I was on my way around to my flat, ready for bed and another phone call from Laramie, who would be tearing his hair out strand by strand at the thought of paying out forty-five thousand dollars, even to save his precious brother's neck. I didn't think he would do it.

I was still thinking about that when I put the key in the lock and opened the door and found the light was out. I said, not loudly, "Freddie?" and went on into the darkness, reaching for the light switch. I turned on the light, squinting my eyes. In the sudden glare I saw a small tan and brown man, sitting in a chair. On the floor in front of him, as if it had been casually dropped there, was a Colt .45 automatic with stag grips that looked as if it might belong to me. Beside it, crumpled, lay a green chamois glove—a woman's glove, hand-stitched.

I stopped there, half inside the room, and then closed the door, cautiously. I waited for him to say something. Then slowly it dawned on me that Gus Gentry wasn't saying anything now and would not be saying things until they blew the Last Trump. Maybe not even then.

He had two holes in his throat and very little throat left. There was a great deal of blood lying puddled on his topcoat and down its front and on the one good chair I owned. It didn't seem possible that a man his size could have that much blood. I bent over, still gaping at him, and put out one hand to pick up the gun and the glove. A shoe scraped on the floor behind me. The air behind my head parted with a sighing whistle and the last thing I remembered was the faint nostalgic smell the green glove had as I wrapped my face around it.

* * *

There are better ways of waking up than with a kick in the belly, but no better ways when a man named Patsy Duchaine was doing the kicking.

I groaned, and rolled over on my back on the theory that he wouldn't deliberately step on my chest, and opened my other eye. He stood spread-eagled over me, pyramiding up into infinity, so that he seemed

as tall as the room was high. His hat was cocked on the back of his head. A very wise, knowing look was moving the muscles on his pushed-in, flattened-down face. It was the face of a well worked-over heavy-weight, no tank-town specialist at that, but not good enough for Madison Square Garden of a Friday night. Thick, fat lips that would smile easily in morgues. The eyes peering down at me were small and well hidden behind mounds of scar tissue. He blinked a great deal.

He grinned and nudged me with one heel and said, in a voice that sounded like a truck climbing Mount McKinley in the wrong gear, "Up to some new tricks, Tony boy?" He chuckled. He took his legs away from me and walked across the room and turned around and stared at me.

I moved my head by degrees, because someone had wrapped a molten-lead poultice around the back of my neck. I focused my aching eyes on the small brown and tan man who still sat in my best chair with his blood in his lap. There was a sharp gnawing pain in my back. When I put my hand under me to find out what it was, it touched the cold metal slide of the .45 automatic.

Standing beside the dead man was a fat man who looked just like any other fat man, and who seemed to be sweating for no reason at all. I could feel the chill in the room clear down to my larger intestine. I crouched there, one hand touching the gun, one part of my mind wondering what I was going to do with it, one part of my head listening to the noise Duchaine was making with his mouth.

DUCHAINE was saying, "You make a lousy host, Arno. I'm glad you never invited me up here." He laughed and the fat man laughed, although neither of them seemed to think it very funny.

My head hurt, and the laughter, the harsh rasp of it, hurt more. I was having trouble thinking clearly. I was thinking that it would be best to shoot Duchaine first, because he was the more dangerous of the two, if you could go by appearances. Then gradually it began to seep into my aching head that I hadn't actually killed the brown and tan man, and it would be best if I didn't ruin the evening by killing a couple of cops.

I took out the gun and looked at it and then pointed it carefully at Duchaine's large body and said, in a faint voice, "If either of you moves, I'll have to shoot Patsy."

Duchaine stopped laughing. He looked stupidly at the gun. The fat man sucked in a bellyful of breath and held it until his face began to turn livid, and then let it out in a soft, sighing gush. Nobody said anything.

Still holding the gun carefully in a hand that shook, I got off the floor and stood there weaving. Duchaine said, in a reasonable voice, "Now look, kid, you don't buy yourself anything with that. You don't think we figure you knocked Gus off, do you? You don't honestly think that, kid, do you?" He laughed a dead man's sterile laugh.

I said, shoving the green chamois glove in one pocket, "I don't give a damn what you think. Lie down on the floor and put your arms out straight over your heads. Do it now, or they'll find you that way when they bring the meat-wagon around."

They lay down and I cuffed them both together and hooked the cuffs to a radiator. Duchaine began swearing in a monotone. The fat man said nothing. He merely watched me with soft sad eyes that harbored a small, wicked core of hatred.

I went out of the room, putting the gun away under my cot. I went down the stairs without hurrying and out into the night air, with its soft sounds and muted traffic noises and the scurrying sound of people walking to and fro on cement. I got into my car—knowing that Duchaine wouldn't put up any sort of fuss that might bring people in to find him cuffed on the floor. It would take him perhaps five minutes or more to get the keys out of his pocket and unlock the cuffs. I drove off into the uptown traffic.

I knew where I was going, all right. I knew that there was only one place I could go that night with any assurance that I'd still be able to leave in the morning. But I had reckoned without the hired help Gus Gentry carried around in his hip pocket. I hadn't even thought about that angle, and when at last I had reason to think about it, thought was all I had to go on.

He came up over the back of the seat, one of those cut-down, sandy-haired,

scint-eyed kids you see in the movies, complete with oversize gun and undernourished, tough-guy voice. Why do they all sound as if they have gravel in their throats? He came up over the back of the seat and held the gun where I could see it from the corner of my eye, but out of view of passing traffic. He whispered, tight and hard and confident, "You got freight, Arno. Play it soft and maybe I'll even pay my way."

If there was shock I didn't feel it then. I had worn out my supply for the week. I half-turned my head and looked at his face, which told me nothing I didn't already know. The gun told me all I needed to know right then. I shrugged. "Gentry's property?"

"Once upon a time," he said, squeezing the words through his tight lips. He smelled of stale grease and shaving lotion and something else that might have been marijuana or a number of other equally unpleasant things. "You going to tell me who the dame was, Arno? You going to tell me who left him up there with his eyes open like that?"

I grunted, remembering suddenly the hand-made chamois glove in my pocket. I thought I could still smell its fragrance. The thought brought back other times, other fragrances, but I couldn't be sure. I braked gently for a light and waited, the car out of gear, watching a cop on the far corner. The boy leaned his weight a little nearer. Even his breath against my neck was cool, as if part of him had already died. "No," he said, sibilantly, his eyes on the cop. I didn't move.

The light changed and we pulled away.

"Go out in the country," he directed softly. "Out where it's quiet. I want talk from you. I want the dame's name, Arno."

"What do you care?" I said sourly. "He's dead. You can't change that. Go find yourself another boss, boy. Go out and make some profit. That's all the talk you get out of me, and you don't need the wind and trees for that. I wouldn't tell you if I knew."

He chuckled. "You know, buster. Small one, she was, with soft brown hair, and pretty. You know her. She came outta there maybe half a minute after I heard the gun, before I could be sure it was a gun. She got away, just like that, in the crowds.

You know, and you're going to tell me."

I felt suddenly cold. He had begun cocking and lowering the hammer of the gun, making the cylinder spin wickedly. I began losing weight. "This girl," I said, "what else about her?"

"Now you're being smart," he said dreamily. I was afraid he might go to sleep with the load he was carrying. I was afraid he might doze off suddenly and snap out of it again, pulling that trigger and blowing my head out the window. "I didn't see her good, I guess. Not in that light. I bet I could have some fun with her, a girl like that. You be smart. Tell me about her."

"Sure," I said quickly, and leaned my foot a little harder into the throttle, pushing the car up to forty through the light suburban traffic.

I fell along the seat, jamming the wheel hard around, going down along the seat like a Hawaiian diver going off a high cliff. My head banged the door. The car lurched, tires screaming on the paving. He yelled and fired off his gun, blowing a great hole in the air where my head had been. He was still yelling when the car shot across the sidewalk and through a picket fence and into a tree.

There was a crash, a series of minor noises and then a great shivering silence. Slowly one door fell open and creaked on bent hinges. I lay on the floor of the car with bells ringing in my ears and the taste of blood in my mouth and didn't move.

Then there was the silence, so much of it that I wanted to scream out. Something landed on my chest and bounced. Metal that stank of cordite. His gun. I crawled out and fell on the lawn, on cool, smooth grass that had a rich, dewy, earthly smell. Somewhere a window banged against its frame and a woman began shouting. I got up on my hands and knees, shaking uncontrollably and still hearing the roaring echo of that shot. I pulled myself erect and peered into the back seat.

He lay folded up on the floor like an old discarded car-rug, the side of his head bloody from hitting the door post. I laughed, shrilly. I left him there in the car to do the talking for me, if he was still in a world where words meant anything, and walked away from the wrecked car.

I went around the corner as lights

jumped from window to window in the neighborhood, as doors came open and people spilled out. A man came by, running, his mouth open and his eyes eager. He shouted something about drunken drivers and the law there should be against them. I said something as he passed, and turned another corner.

I was in luck. I was lousy with it. There was a cab at the rank there. Before I got into it, I stopped and pulled out the green glove and stared at it closely under the street-lamp. There were initials on the gauntlet. *M.S. M.S.* for Mary Small. I put the glove back in my pocket and gave the address, and then I leaned my aching skull back against the seat cushions and promptly fell asleep.

CHAPTER THREE

"So I Killed Him!"

IN THE warmth, in the soft quiet of the room I lay still, not moving or trying to think or wanting to think, lapping up the luxury without being quite sure whose luxury it really was, and not being able to place how I had got there or when. I was in great shape.

I sighed and shifted my position and stared at the unfamiliar ceiling, and then moved my glance down the wall and blinked. I was lying in a living room that could be called cosy if you liked old-fashioned furniture. It had one of those dirty, natural fireplaces which litter dust and ashes and friendliness around a room. I liked them. I turned over and put out one hand and knocked a glass off a table onto a thick rug that gave back no sound.

Movement intercepted the hard sharp rays of early morning sunlight coming in through the slats of the blind. There was a soft rustling of silk. She came over and stood beside the couch, still cool-eyed, as if she had been waking me up every day for a month. I thought, for the hundredth time that year: Good old Nell, good sweet Nell, with a heart as big as a Girl Guide's community tent.

She said, casually, "It's about time you hired somebody to look after you, Arno!" She put down a cup of strong black coffee that was laced tight with brandy. I gulped it down eagerly, licked my lips and looked

as if I wanted more. She went away, talking to herself disgustedly. She came back in a short while with two cups and sat down and watched me drink. "Now," she said matter-of-factly, "you can tell all, Tony. How and why and where and what for."

"I'm out of my league," I admitted wearily. "I hurt all over."

She nodded her head and picked a morning edition off the table and unfolded it so that I could see the headlines. "You don't hurt that badly," she said.

I gawked at the headlines and then wondered what I was gawking at and why. I felt instinctively for the glove. She saw the motion and said, bitterly, "We don't roll the guests here, Arno, even when they fall apart on the living room rug. Pull out of it, Rover Boy, you've got troubles to iron out."

I shook the paper apart and read the story under the headlines, a piece signed by Jack Roth. He had written it as if he hated every word. It was about the Gentry kill, but more than that, it was about Mary Small. They had picked her up in a park at three in the morning, walking aimlessly around, talking to herself. She had been drinking. It was a nice sordid little piece about a girl who had gone out to kill her husband and had killed another man by mistake. It was the story of a wife who, so enraged by her husband's philandering, had gone to a friend's apartment where she knew her husband would be. She had found a gun in a drawer, had pulled the trigger before she found out that she was pumping lead into the wrong man.

I put the paper down, wanting to spit. I said, "They're stalling," hearing the weakness of the words. I swung my legs over the edge of the couch and stood up. I said, "They're stalling and I can prove it!" The glove fell out of my pocket and lay green and suddenly hard on the rug. Nell picked it up, her eyes seeking mine. Then she looked at it soberly for a moment. "Where?" she asked harshly.

I grunted. "All right," I said, tiredly. "All right. So maybe they're not stalling as much as I'd like them to be. With the gun. I found him, Nell. I walked right in on it, maybe five minutes after he had died." I told her about the gun-bearer I had left in the car. "He as good as ad-

mitted he saw her there. He was trying to pump me for her address. And now the cops will be pumping him. After what I did to Duchaine and the fat man, they'll squeeze him dry."

"Who hit you?"

I shrugged and wished I hadn't. "Two guesses, and right the first time. The kid. He knew how Gentry looked. He knew what had happened to him without asking me. He got scared when I came in and he hung one on me."

I rubbed my face with stiff fingers. "Look, Nell. Look at this. I'll go talk to them. There are pieces out of this business so big you could drive a train through the holes with everybody leaning out the windows. I'll tell them," I said.

Half an hour later, I looked at Duchaine's grinning face, at the white even rows of his teeth. He displayed them well, pulling his lips back hard against the muscles of his mouth. He walked to the end of the office, paused, and walked back again. He was as friendly as a hungry tiger. There was only the scuff of his big shoes on the linoleum, the pause as he turned, the soft scuffing as he came back down the room. The fat man, whose name was Abercrombie, sat alone and desolate on a straight-backed chair by the window, his haunches hanging out over the edges, the bright core of dislike still hot in the gaze he had on me.

On his tenth trip up and down, he stopped suddenly and leaned his head at me and said, gently, "That's a nice story. I like it. You expect me to turn her loose because she isn't the type of a woman who would kill a man, and because you tell me she wouldn't have the strength to work the action of a .45." He laughed. He laughed hard, and then stopped laughing. "Like hell," he said.

"All right." I used words slowly, trying to keep my temper down where I had parked it. "So she was mad enough to load and cock the gun. So she just pulled the trigger on him, without knowing who he was, thinking maybe that it might even be me. Remember me, Patsy? I live there."

"I remember you," he said bitterly.

"The blood," I went on doggedly. "All in his lap, puddled on his coat, and none of it on the floor, as there would have been if he had been standing up when shot."

"No," he said, shaking his head. "And there was blood on the floor. Not much of it, but as much as would leak out if he fell over backward into the chair, dying. One of those slugs severed the carotid artery."

I opened my mouth and breathed shallowly through it, watching his face intently. After a time his skin darkened and he turned away.

"Nuts," he said. "I know what you're thinking but what the hell should I care what you think, Arno? Why should I care if she's a nice kid married to a louse? She married him, didn't she? She made up her mind, not me. I'm not here to pass judgment on whether or not she had any moral right to bump him off, Arno. All I know is that they fought; they fought all the time. He led her a hell of a life and once or twice she told him she'd kill him. Now it looks as if she wasn't kidding."

I HAD A thought, one that had been twiddling its thumbs while all the other thoughts rushed and tumbled past it. I scuffed a shoe on the floor and said, easily, "I'll go along with that for now, Patsy. But tell me one thing. What was Gentry doing there?"

He turned around, his eyes suddenly harder than they had been. "What?"

"Just that. Who told him? Freddie, who was scared gutless of him and what he might do? Laramie, his brother, the guy who's bailed him out of every scrape he's ever been in? Nell Armitage? Me? Because we four are the only ones who knew that Freddie would be in my apartment, discounting the fact that Freddie wanted a drink badly enough to crawl down the stairs to get it, feeling the way he was. How did Gentry get there, baby? You think Mary phoned him, a man she never even heard of?" I paused.

"Ah," he said, in a whispering voice. He jabbed a button on the edge of his desk and when a cop poked his head around the edge of the door, said, "Get me the kid and Freddie Small in here, Turnessa!" He went back to walking up and down the office again.

The boy came in with his head down, staring at the room out of the tops of his eyes and not liking what he saw. He stood in the middle of the room, muttering to

himself and paying Freddie no heed. Freddie was up to his usual form. The lock of white hair dangled limply over a face that looked as if it had been parked under a dead dog for a week. His eyes were glazed. He gave off a sour, almost-sober smell that was familiar. He saw me and twitched his mouth and looked down at the floor.

"You," Patsy barked suddenly at the kid. "You, punk. I'll tell you what I'm going to do with you, boy. I'm putting you away for a week. Nothing to do but look at the wall and wait for the first hunger to come. You got that straight, kid? No pills. No shots. Nothing but the wall and the food you won't eat. One week, kid, and if you don't speak to me real nice, then another week. I got all the weeks in the world, kid."

The kid thought about it. I could see the sweat working out from under his hair and moving sluggishly on his pale skin. His head jerked a little. After awhile he whispered, hoarsely, "What you want?"

Duchaine smiled. "You were Gentry's gun. We've checked on you and we know you have a permit to carry the gun and we're going to lift somebody's hair for giving it to you, punk. We know you went around to the apartment house last night with Gentry, that you waited outside, that you saw a woman come out and walk away fast, and that you waited for this man—" pointing to me "—and threatened him with violence. We know, too, junior, from some blood and hair on the butt of your gun that you hit Arno over the head with it when he came into the room. Is that the truth?"

The kid licked dry lips and I thought Patsy was going to start in with the week business again, but he merely waited. "Yeah," the boy said. "Yeah."

"Huh," Duchaine grunted. "Now," he said sharply, "look at this other man. Ever see him before?"

The kid turned and blinked his pale milky eyes at Freddie and nodded.

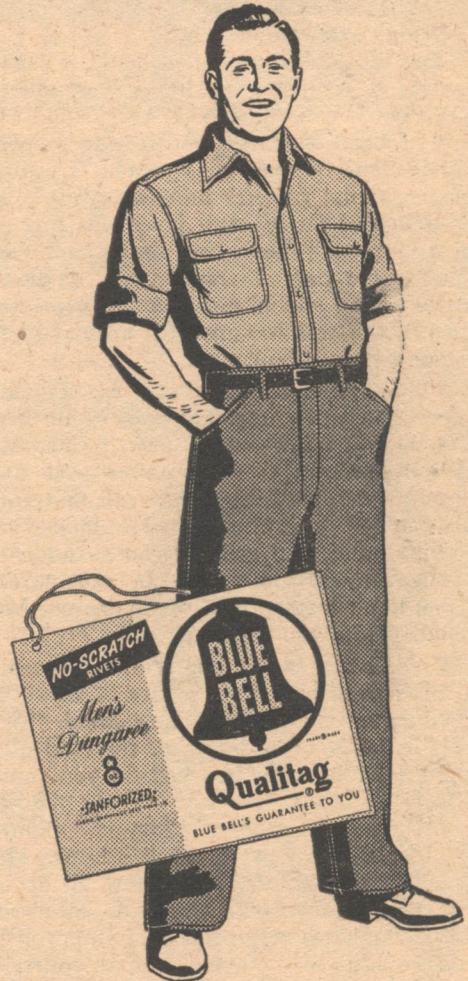
"Where?"

"At the club. He used to like the dice a lot. He ain't been around in a week."

"And he owed Gentry money?"

The boy's lips curled. "Sure," he said, almost derisively. "I wonder why they always make the welshers big and soft and easy-lookin'?" Freddie's eyes widened and

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he took a half-step forward and stopped.

Patsy's grin broadened. "Making time," he said happily. "Okay. So you went with Gentry around to this apartment house. Why?"

"What d'you mean, why?"

"Don't stall me, kitten."

The kid looked at him sullenly, a nerve twitching regularly in his sallow cheek. "We got a call. That is, Gentry did. He said we had business, and I was to wait outside, and he went in. I waited. I waited maybe ten, fifteen minutes—this was around nine-thirty—and I see this girl go in and then I hear two shots, and Gus don't come out. I waited, see. I didn't know what I should do. The girl came out then, but it was too crowded around there to do anything about that. . . ."

"That's enough," Patsy said. He sounded tired. He yelled for Turnessa again and had the kid taken away. Then he glanced at me sombrely. "A call," he said disgustedly. "A lousy telephone call that anybody could have made." He looked at Freddie and his voice became suddenly gentle, almost purring. He murmured, "You don't look so well this morning, Mr. Small. How you feeling?"

Freddie ran his tongue around the taste in his mouth and made a face. "How the devil do you think I feel," he snarled. "My wife in jail for murder, after the kind of a night I had. How the hell do you think I feel?"

"We're getting there," Patsy said, politely. "That was what I asked. Look, Mr. Small," he went on, "we know all about the rows you had with your wife, all about the fact that she threatened to stop you if you wouldn't stop playing around, yourself, and we've got statements from the people who heard you. They'll be used as evidence if we have to use them. How do you feel about that?"

Freddie shoved the lock of white hair back with a shaking hand. "Hell," he muttered, "I feel awful. Look, officer, she wouldn't do a thing like that, not to me, not to her own husband. You've got it wrong somewhere along the line. People are always saying things they don't mean. Ask anyone. They'll tell you they all say things like that, sorehead things. It doesn't mean anything. Look," he said in a high voice, "let her go. She didn't do it."

"You know that, eh?" Patsy said grimly. He walked over and leaned forward, studying Freddie's face. "How you know that?"

Freddie looked up at him. His skin was a ghastly yellow color in the sunlight coming in the window. He moistened his lips and looked at me and said, in an almost inaudible voice, "Because I killed him myself."

Duchaine rocked on his heels, the sarcastic grin still around his thick mouth. "Oh," he said mincingly. "You just walked in, as drunk as four tadpoles in a barrel of rum, and picked up the .32 and shot him. Is that right?"

It was so obvious I groaned. But Freddie stepped up to the bait like a man. He said, "Yeah, I did. He had it coming if anyone ever did. I owed him money. I couldn't pay it off. I called him and told him to come over. When he came in, I shot him and he fell half against the bed. I didn't touch him. I just put the gun on the floor and ran out."

"And Gentry's boy didn't see you?"

He shook his head. "I was smart enough for that," he said, mumbling. "I went out the back way and down the alley."

"Uh-huh," Patsy said thoughtfully. "Well, now, that's very noble. I appreciate the gesture." He looked over at me. "Tell him what's wrong, kiddo. I couldn't bear to do it."

I looked at Freddie hard, liking him just a little bit. I said, "It was a .45, kid, and he didn't fall against the bed."

Freddie sagged back in his chair, put one hand up over his eyes. He didn't say anything. Patsy said, "This has gone far enough, Arno. I owe you one for that cuff job and for pulling a gun on me, but we'll tack that up against a later date. Get your pal out of here, take him home, pour him around a drink. He needs it."

CHAPTER FOUR

Rogue's End

I GOT UP and took Freddie out of the office and through the ante-room, where Laramie Small sat crouched on a bench, with his great ruddy face flushed and his eyes dangerous. Nell was sitting quietly in one corner of the room, staring

hard at her hands. I shook my head at her and she winced and wouldn't look at me again. Freddie was mumbling something to himself, over and over again. I leaned closer and heard him groan, in a voice that was almost a cry, "if only she hadn't done it. If only she hadn't left that glove! Why in hell did she have to do a stupid thing like that?"

I hit him a light punch on the arm, enough to jostle him, snarled, "Keep on talking like that and you'll get a free ticket to the execution, pinhead. Keep your mouth shut in here."

He looked at me blankly. His eyes were wetter and sloppier looking than usual. I said to Laramie, "That's all there is to it. I've tried my best. Take your precious brother home, buy him a bottle, and keep him out of my life."

Laramie looked at me soberly and shook his head. His heavy voice sounded loud in the room, but it lacked assurance and the old Laramie Small ring. "Fair enough, I guess, Tony. Look, kid, I want you to drop around at the office. Any time will do. You've got a lot of back pay coming to you."

"I'm up to date," I said stiffly, "I don't need any bonuses." I walked away from him, feeling mad at myself for behaving like a kid, and thinking at the same time that Laramie was just trying to be nice for a change. He didn't seem to have much luck at it.

The turnkey on the cell block just shook his head when I asked to see Mary, and kept on shaking it through the ensuing argument. He was still shaking it, but more slowly, when I tramped out the front door and stood on the broad clean steps looking down at the stretch of civic lawn and at the cannons gleaming sharp and bright against the green. My head hurt still, a dull gnawing sort of pain that throbbed against the back of my neck. I was standing there letting it throb when Nell walked out and started down the steps.

She paused then, squinting in the sun, and said, "I'll buy it if you'll drink it, Tony. Coffee, that is. Or are you getting tired of looking at me across tables?"

"No," I said, vaguely. "And no. In that order." I took her arm and walked her as far as the sidewalk. I said, "Listen, Nell, this is none of my business, but it

might help. The night I picked Freddie up at Jack's Place. A dive like that suits Freddie but it doesn't suit you. How come?"

"How come I was there, you mean?"

I nodded.

She shrugged. "You should know Freddie by now, Tony. Every time he gets a load on he decides he needs more company. He called me up, very drunk, and told me where he was and asked me to come down and have one or six."

"And you called Laramie and told him about it, and Laramie called me. You went down just to make sure nothing happened to the poor dear boy while I was getting there?"

"Something like that," she said. A small frown bridged her forehead. "Why?"

"Damned if I know," I said. "I keep getting a weird idea and it won't stay fixed long enough for me to get a good look at it. Something that was said this morning."

I walked a few steps, thinking hard. "Angel, where would Mary get a gun? At two in the morning? I took one off her, down at the pier, and tossed it in the water. Where would she get a thing like that?"

"Look, mister!" She was, suddenly very serious. "Talk like that could kill that girl."

"Oh, stop it," I growled.

She made a gesture with one hand and fell silent. I went on, "Here's the key to my place. Be a good kid and run over there. Turn on the hot water in the tub and get me some dry clothes. I'll be back in about half an hour, with luck." I left her gaping after me, got into a cab at the corner and told the man to drive me down to the pier where Jack's place was, unless somebody had torn it down since the last time I had been there.

* * *

I came up for the third time, gasping and spitting out dirty water and combed the muck out of my hair. I clung desperately to a piling, dragging the air deep into my aching lungs. Small waves from a tender in midstream lapped against the soggy wood and bounced my legs against the supports. I tossed my head back and stared along the rim of the pier and judged the distance again and made allowances for

a pound of metal hitting the bottom, and where it should be. I went down again, feeling like a porpoise on the verge of retirement.

I was an hour finding it, all told. It came slick and slimy from the silt along the bottom, into my hand and I clung to it like a barnacle, making awkward fanning motions with one hand and kicking my feet until I reached the ladder that led up to the pier. There was a small crowd waiting for me at the top, standing around the pile of clothing I'd left there. The taxi-driver I'd told to wait had gone off on his own, probably figuring there was no money in suicides. I stood shivering in the cool breeze and sneering at the audience. I collected my clothes and walked off down the pier, struggling into my shirt and getting my pants on. I stooped to put on the shoes and heard the wail of the siren, a few blocks away, caught another cab at the corner and went home. I was sneezing when I arrived.

Nell opened the door for me, took one short look, groaned in despair and went back into the kitchen, leaving the door open. I slammed it, stood looking at the chair where Gus Gentry had died the night before, and wondered if I was going to have trouble living in this place. When I came out of the bathroom in my pajamas and bath-robe, she had a hot breakfast waiting. I sat down, just like any husband who has got beyond the burnt-toast stage, and dumped the slimy gun on the table cloth and said, proudly, "There it is, kitten," and sneezed.

"Drink your coffee," she said coldly.

"I can do better than that," I told her. I got a bottle of whiskey out of the cupboard and poured a long, tall strong one. Then I cleaned the gun off with a dish-towel, broke it open and dumped the shells on the table.

For a little while I sat looking at them, the grin getting stiffer on my face. "Some people," I said slowly, "just can't win, no matter where they place their bets." I pushed one of the little brass cylinders with the tip of my finger.

"Blanks," Nell said softly.

"Than which there are no blankers." I drank my coffee in one draught. "Blanks for a girl who is determined to give her husband just one last chance. With his

own gun, at that." I got up and got dressed. "You take that Freddie," I said, "and you got a boy who is smarter than he looks." I came into the kitchen, knotting my tie, and sneezed again and began to feel sorry for myself because I wasn't getting paid for this deal. This one was on the house.

I went back into the living room, wondering why I had gone into the kitchen in the first place, unless it was to look at Nell, and picked up the phone. I was beginning to feel fine. I dialed a number and talked to a police sergeant and finally was put through to Duchaine, who sounded mean and tough and not at all as I wanted him to sound.

I sneezed loudly and said, "Patsy, Tony Arno here. I want you to do me a favor."

"Look," he said meanly, "I've been thinking about last night, Arno. The more I think about it, the madder I get. Albeit you used to be a cop, Arno—"

"That's a nice word, albeit," I cut in, chuckling. "How about you and me making up like two nice girls and talking sense, Patsy?—I can prevent you from sticking your neck in a hoop, not because I'm any smarter than you are, but just because I happen to have had a little more luck. In other words, boy, I can prove that Mary Small didn't kill Gus Gentry, and in a few well-chosen words."

THERE WAS a short silence. He said, calmly, "If you can, then I'll owe you a favor." He hesitated again. "I been talking to her and, y' know, I sort of like the kid. She's had a rough time."

"You use the word loosely. Come on over here and Nell will make you some coffee and we can hold hands and talk."

I was putting the phone down when the door behind me opened and Laramie Small, with Freddie in tow, came into the room. In the morning light Laramie's face was ugly and splotchy, and almost too white to be human. Freddie was his old self. I could smell the rye on him at twenty paces.

I flushed. I said, tightly, "You have the wrong address, Laramie. Even if you had the right one, you should knock."

He waved one heavy hand. "Never mind that, Arno." He looked around the apartment and grunted. He moved farther into the room, lighting a cigar, and blew the smoke out in a spreading fan. Through

it, he said: "Kid, you've worked for me for six years. That's a long time. I don't like to see you go like this, all of a sudden, over nothing. If you're worried about Mary, forget it. The worst she'll get is a stretch in some asylum."

"Just a few years in a sanitorium." I considered it thoughtfully. "Just carve some time out of her life because your brother isn't fit to live with human beings, and let's call it square. Is that it?"

"Now look, boy!" His tone was heavy.

I started to tell him what he could do and remembered that Nell was still in the kitchen and said instead, "Take that sodden hulk out of here, Laramie. You're lousing up my atmosphere."

He looked at my face and I looked at his. Finally he shrugged. He said, "I'll make it rough on you, boy, real rough," and went out the door. I could hear him going down the stairs. Freddie sighed a dismal sigh and looked at the chair that had held the remains of Gentry, and turned to go.

He had his hand on the doorknob, pulling it closed behind him, when I said, softly, "You want your wife's glove, Freddie?"

His head jerked around. His eyes were small and inflamed and ugly. He had trouble focusing them. He mumbled, "What?"

I found the glove, under the pile of wet clothing I had dumped on the edge of the bed, and held it loosely in one hand. "The glove," I said. "You remember it. The glove that was with the gun when the cops found Gentry. You want it back?"

"Oh!" He began walking into the room, one hand outstretched. At the last moment I dropped it, and as he bent to pick it up, I brought my knee up into his face with a force that had me limping for three days. He fell sideways, his head striking the floor.

Nell came out of the kitchen, holding the gun I had taken from Mary loosely in one hand. She stopped when she saw Freddie.

I looked up at her and grinned. I was still grinning and holding her hand for some reason I couldn't remember, when Patsy Duchaine came into the room. He had Laramie Small with him. Small looked at his brother lying on the floor, then at me. His mouth thinned down. He made a chopping motion with one hand. He said,



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too quietly, "That does it, Arno. I'll have your neck for this."

"He fell," I said innocently. "I dropped something and he was going to pick it up but he slipped. He slipped a long way. He slipped far enough to overdo his act down at headquarters, his moaning, sobbing I-done it, take-me-away act. He was good, he almost had me thinking he was sorry for somebody else in this world but himself. And then he had to go and ruin the whole thing by muttering that his wife was a damn fool to have left her glove in this room after she killed Gentry."

I said down on the edge of the bed, still holding Nell's hand. "Now that is a very nice thought." I lit a cigarette. "Except that I picked up that glove myself, last night, Patsy. No one ever knew it had been here. Except the guy who left it, when he shot Gentry to wipe out that gambling debt and to frame his wife for the job. Just Freddie and I knew about it, and I'm coy. I didn't tell anybody."

Duchaine's face turned cool and smooth and hard. He glanced at Laramie.

I said, plaintively, "Freddie admitted it all, at the office. He fooled us all by telling the absolute truth. He did phone Gentry and tell him to come around here and they'd make a deal. He told him that because Laramie would go a long way for his precious brother, but forty-five grand was too long a haul, even for brotherly love. He had Gentry sit down in the chair and went out, probably on the pretext of making him a drink. When he came back he mixed Gus a gunpowder special. He killed him sitting down.

"It was that easy. Gus was dead and the debt was wiped out. The only thing to be paid for now was the actual killing. Freddie had somebody all lined up for that bill, as usual. He had his wife's glove. He'd fought with her often enough to give the neighbors an impression that would stick long enough for an investigation to reach it. To top it off, he'd phoned Mary to come around and see him, so maybe they could patch it up. That much is guess-work, because your boys wouldn't let me talk to her. If it wasn't that, then she was coming to see me, and picked the wrong time. Freddie, as he admitted, went out the back way in search of a bar."

I picked the gun up off the bed and held it on the palm of my hand. "I was coy the other night, too. When I went down to get Freddie at a dive called Jack's Place, I ran into Mary waiting outside. Again on call, I'll bet, and carrying a gun. This gun. I took it away from her and tossed it in the drink. This morning I went back to get it. If it's registered at all, it will be in Freddie's name, because Freddie, in his happy, hazy way, figured it would be good window-dressing to have Mary take a crack at him down there. He put blanks in the gun just in case her aim was better than he thought. He called Nell, too, not knowing Nell would phone Laramie here, and that Laramie would call me."

I stopped talking and looked wistfully at the bottle on the kitchen table, and licked my lips. Duchaine hadn't said a word. Laramie moved now, opening his mouth and not finding the right words, shut it.

"Go ahead," I said encouragingly, "have a stroke. You started this ten years ago, when you got Freddie out of his first scrape. You knocked every ounce of guts out of him, if he had more than one. Later, when he was in real trouble and couldn't get you to bat for him, he thought this one up. All by himself. Which is just the way they hang him, I hope."

They did, on a cold bleak morning in March. Jack Roth, who had been there to see it, told me about it over a highball in Angelo's, a day or two after it happened. He told it in short, hard, small words that seemed to hurt him inside.

"It wasn't that I liked the guy," he said bitterly. "I hated his guts. After all I had seen of him, I would have done the job myself. But it isn't nice to see them crawl. And it was a long drop."

"It wouldn't have been any shorter for his wife," I said, bleakly, and finished my drink. We went outside. It was snowing lightly, and crisp.

"Well," he said, "I guess I'd better get home to the wife." He looked up at the snow again. "Don't imagine it's very cold where Freddie is, eh, Tony?"

We both laughed, but not hard and not for long. It wasn't much of a joke. He nodded to me and walked off into the snow. After a time I got into the car, feeling hungry and wondering if Nell had cooked.

SCREEN SLAY CREDIT

By **BRYCE WALTON**

He half tripped over Casey's feet, then went down on one knee.



CASEY stood in the darkness on the porch of the big Laurel Canyon house. The place was fresh, paint-smelly and new. He looked down at the distant, far down lights of Hollywood. His thin hands gripped the red-wood railing. His face was pale and studded with sweat as he wondered why the many lights in the faint mist of rain should resemble the eyes of a million crying children.

"No sad songs for me, kiddies!" He turned and looked at the darkened panels of glass. He took the .25 automatic out of

Top scenarist Casey had to name the killer to finish a real-life murder epic.

his coat pocket and the damp cold feel of it sent a chill down his neck.

Dark, the house that we built, he thought. That Marge and I built and which we'll never live in. Not together, or at all. Dark as a bright day suddenly clouded over. They had worked together on the house a year—a year of planning and over-seeing and changing, of dreaming. But Marge had

gotten fed up. She had said Casey was turning the house into a nightmare with his gadgets, his eccentric ideas, his wire-records everywhere, and secret panels and screwy mechanical devices.

Casey was in bad shape by now. He knew how he felt, incredible as the situation was, he knew. He'd been given a delayed-action drug that would see him dead by noon, Sunday, unless he killed his wife tonight.

His face grew pinched and tense as he stared at the dark panes of glass. The place was so dark and already lifeless. Would he kill Marge whom he somehow both loved and hated, to save his own neck? He'd been asking himself this for a week, and he was here.

One of those situations like he had cooked up in one of his own screen treatments. Only in real life who would believe it, except the guy it was happening to? And the other guy—the hidden one who wanted it to happen.

But unless he killed her, the promised antidote wouldn't be given to him.

There was a quotation from Shakespeare, something about dying only once. But he couldn't remember it. He couldn't remember anything, anymore. The poison had killed his brain, what there was of it.

The note from the unknown murderer with the macabre sense of humor had said Martin and Marge would be here—not playing solitaire. Casey had a key. He used it and went in, switched on the lamp by the fireplace. Didn't seem to be anyone around. Nothing but ghosts and skeletons and shadows of memories and dreams and hopes and plans. That was all.

Then he saw Martin. Sprawled on the green rug, a knife in his throat, a stream of blood soaking into the green rug like a splash of red wine.

Sweat trickled like tears in two separate streams and gathered in Casey's beard stubble. He managed to make it to the bathroom where he lost whatever he had drank last. He went from room to room, then, calling Marge's name. No Marge. Marge had a helluva temper. She could have killed Martin. If not, who had? The cops would think it was Casey. An obvious jealousy motive. He'd stopped at a filling station on the way up, one down at the bottom of the hill. They would remember. If the cops said, "Casey, where were you at eight-

thirty or thereabouts on the night of—?" Casey wouldn't have anything to say that would do him any good.

He ran out of there. He had to see someone. Wes would listen and help him . . .

Wes was on the studio couch with cigar butts all around him and a half-emptied bottle of Kijafa, a wild cherry wine only extreme eccentrics could tolerate in quantity. An ex-actor's agent, Wes had taken to drink and an off-shoot of Yogism to pad his downfall. He'd been a friend of Casey's for some time. Once he had handled Marge who had since risen much higher as an actress. Casey had moved in with Wes after Marge had given him the boot.

His belly stuck out and fell down over wrinkled slacks. He had a few strands of blond hair, a pink face with white beard stubble. His lower lip drooped and he wore colored glasses all the time to conceal the pink glow of his albino eyes. He was tired of the world.

Words rushed out of Casey as though Wes was a psychiatrist. He told him everything. The note he'd received last week stating that Casey had been given a delayed-action drug, that he would die by Sunday if he didn't kill Marge Saturday night. A rare South American poison from a herb root. No name. He told Wes about Martin.

Casey dropped into a chair and rubbed his throat. "What can a guy do?"

"You're sure about the poison, Johnny?"

"Yes! It's been working on me. I get dizzy. My brain's dead. I went to a Doctor yesterday because I finally got to believing it. The doc couldn't find anything. But he said it could be something like an allergy, operating that way. Takes time to find out. I couldn't tell him what had really happened!"

"Interesting," Wes said sleepily. "Someone's doing it the hard but dramatic way. Someone wants Marge dead and for you to carry the burden of guilt."

"I couldn't kill her, but I don't want to die either, Wes!"

"You don't *think* you could kill her, but you don't know. A frustrated screen writer could do anything. I think you might be able to kill her—maybe."

Casey jumped up, grabbed Wes' sport shirt and heaved him onto the floor. Wes sat up and leaned back against the couch. He didn't say anything, just yawned. Casey

poured himself a drink, went over and looked out into the gray drizzling rain that made the palm fronds shine and shiver softly.

Wes was right. He'd been mixed up. He'd always wanted to do something good, a novel. He had grown sick of subjecting good novels to the scalpel. He could hear his option dropping with a dull thud. The marital split-up didn't help either. He might do anything. He didn't feel exactly sane anymore.

"Johnny, who would want to really get you this way?"

"Enemies? A few. Guys like Mike Gaston. I was drunk one night and told a reporter what I thought of a picture Gaston had just written. I said only a fish could speak the dialogue with the proper accent. Other things, too. Gaston said he would get me. And Harold Browning. I was working on a book, an expose of Hollywood. I was going to reveal some of Browning's shyster lawyer tactics around town. I'm not working on the book any more but Browning doesn't know it. He knew what I was doing, though, and he said he would kill me.

"Then there's Dan Pearson. When I freed myself from a long-term contract with him a year ago, I described in no uncertain terms the odor of his studios. I was more important two years ago. Maybe that was the first step in Pearson's financial collapse. He's down and out now. I sent him some money a while back, anonymously of course, because I've been sorry for what I told. But he's said he would get even. I used to think it was brave to expose every one but myself."

"You know how to make real good enemies," Wes said. "And Marge?"

Casey whispered. "Not Marge—how could she—?"

WES climbed to his feet like a dyspeptic Buddha, waddled to the room's center. "I wouldn't notify the police yet, about Martin. There's one other thing you can do. Find out who sent the note and poisoned you. I'll help. I'll check on Pearson, Browning, and Gaston. You lay low, stay at Ruthie's place so I can get in touch with you."

"You're a real friend," Casey said.

Wes laughed. "Friend? I'm just interested in a fantastic situation. I'll help you all I can, but remember—in my philosophy, what happens to men in any earthly sense is of no importance. We are mere transitory shadow shapes that come and go, Johnny. What does it matter?"

He lifted a bottle of Petri wine from a tray. "Here, Johnny, have a drink on it."

"No, no more of that stuff. I'm about knocked out now."

Wes insisted. Casey refused. "If I'm going to die, why die a wino?"

Wes was still insisting when Casey rushed out the door.

Casey stood on the corner under a palm looking through the rain at the black-fronted Club 19. So much had happened in that bar that brought back pleasant memories. The neighborhood bar with the nostalgia. The times when he and Marge had been so much together, their laughter in the same key. Mostly good things had happened in the Club 19.

She couldn't stand his eccentricity, his obsession about getting realistic dialogue by recording every one's voice and turning every room of their new house into a secret ear. She didn't like trap-doors and secret

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passageways and gadgets that practically took her house away from her and ran it by themselves.

So she had gotten out. That was all. All the arguments had gone before. The ending had been simple. All good endings were simple, Casey knew. Any good writer knew that much.

Where was Marge? He couldn't think. He was nervous and crawling and sweating and afraid. He walked toward his car through the clean, soft-smelling rain. He could feel his watch ticking, the sound climbing up his arm and thundering in his ear. His knees were weak and the dizziness hit him harder. His stomach kept knotting and he felt constantly like retching. Sometimes his feet seemed to float off the ground.

He managed to get to Ruthie's apartment and onto the studio couch. Ruthie wasn't home, but she always left the key outside above the door. Her apartment was a meeting place for bull-sessions and trouble-airings of various sorts. Casey sat there, staring at the rug. It was green too, like the rug he'd seen Martin's body lying on. Green like a jungle seen from an airplane. Like—

A jungle! Casey straightened, and a surge of something like thought slogged through his fogged brain. He grabbed up the telephone and called Wes and told him about how Pearson, when he had been a young producer-director, had gone to South America on location to do a semi-documentary on aborigines. He's the only one, Casey said, who could have picked up that rare drug.

"Well, he could sure be your boy then," Wes said. "I did a little phoning myself. I think Gaston and Browning are out. Browning went to New York three weeks ago. Gaston's not bitter these days. He just signed a three-thousand-a-week contract with Universal."

Casey said he was going to see Pearson immediately.

Pearson lived in an ancient rooming-house where the wall-paper was peeling. His wife had left him when he went on the slide, and some harpy reluctantly let Casey into the two-room hole where Pearson lay on a davenport. He lay among dirty sheets, clad only in a pair of shorts, varicose veins bulging in his thin white legs, his bearded cheeks sucked in between the teeth of his gaping mouth. He was snoring painfully

and drunken spittle dribbled from the corner of his lips.

The haggard, frightened and half-drunk-en harpy stood between Casey and Pearson. She was thin, hair in curlers, a housecoat draped carelessly around a figure upon which a carelessly draped housecoat was a thorough waste. Her face was pinched and harrowed and whiny.

She whined over and over at Casey. "What you want? What you want?"

Casey stared at Pearson. His sickness dropped into a vast vacancy of terror. He felt like a man who wakes up in the bottom of a deep dark well in the middle of nowhere. Anyone looking at Pearson would know he had been out cold for hours. Much too long to have been up in Laurel Canyon killing Martin. He didn't look as though he had been in any condition to have planned anything like this either. He was a long way from reality. Escape seemed a lifetime job for Pearson now.

The room blurred. Casey had to get out of there. He ran into the harpy and realized then that she was screeching. She was over against the wall, her face stretched in a thin mask of terror.

He got into the hall and saw the pajama clad and night-shirted figures like ghosts expectantly haunting the hall, summoned by the harpy's shrieks. Then he saw the blue uniforms spilling over the top of the stairs. He also saw the window at the end of the hall, the white curtains drifting in toward him like beckoning white arms.

He ran toward the window. The cops were yelling at him to stop or they would shoot. They were using his name. They'd gotten up here pretty fast out of a rainy night. Casey was out the window, hanging suspended, glad that the hall had been crowded with people too scared to try to stop whom they probably thought was a burglar, a murderer, or worse. And too dumb to get out of the way so the cops could shoot.

He fell into a poinciana bush. He freed himself. The voice was right above him, the uniform silhouetted against the light. "Stop—or we'll stop you!"

Something like that. Casey didn't stop. He kept running faster and faster, precariously faster, down the wet walks, fast enough to get beyond the brightness of the street light. Fear pushed him on as the

shots roared, dulled by the wet air. Bullets spanged against the concrete. He heard the roar of the squad car and the siren whining over it. There was the bursting flare of a spot light.

SOMETHING happened to Casey as he kept on running, for what seemed hours. He ran and breathed more deeply, and finally he got away. He got away from the police and he got out of the fog. He kept on running, inhaling deep draughts of clean, wet, cool night air. Finally, when he quit, he stood still, breathing deeply behind a sign board on a vacant lot. He thought: "It's funny, but how can a guy who's got to die at noon tomorrow start feeling so good all at once tonight?"

Confidence filled his expanding chest. He thought of that line from Shakespeare which he hadn't been able to remember earlier. "*By my troth, I care not: a man can die but once; we owe God a death . . . and let it go which way it will, he that dies this year is quit for the next.*"

His thoughts rapidly clarified, but he didn't know why, unless it was the long bursting effort, the panic of flight from death. The straining and running and the clean air and the intense prolonged physical effort.

Things started fitting together. The cops, the wine, the motive, other things. Things he hadn't been able to fit together because his mind had been doped.

He flagged a cab and directed it to the Club 19. Maybe he could trust himself now. But he didn't know that, not for certain.

SHE was there, at the back, at their old table. The light had the same dim, reddish caste. The juke box was playing the same tunes. They always sounded the same. They made all the bars seem the same.

She didn't see him. He looked at her profile as she sat there alone. He remembered a lot of things, most of them good. Her beauty of course, that had always been good. The corn-silk hair and the turned-up nose, the blue eyes. There wasn't much of the white dress she was wearing tonight, but there seldom was. Under the fine hair, her eyes would be grown-up a little more fully. The mouth would have a slightly greater hardness and a finality perhaps, he thought. Stubborn. Very gay and bubbly

some times. Sometimes moody and depressed, with shadows on her face. There weren't many like Marge, Casey thought. No one like her. His eyes closed for a moment. He rubbed his hand across his forehead.

He went over there and slid into the half-moon, leatherette seat beside her. The warmth and the familiar smell of her hair reached out to him. She looked up slowly from her Martini, started to register surprise, then looked angry, and tried to keep back some tears. None of this worked at all.

"I've been here all evening," she said softly. "Not that I expected you to show up, Johnny."

"What have you been doing here then?"

"Thinking. You look bad, Johnny."

"Unrequited love," Casey said.

"Uh-huh. I've been here so long," she said. "I've been drinking too much. And thinking too much. Now I'm leaving—leaving . . ."

She didn't seem to know what had happened up on the hill. She was a good actress, though, Casey knew. She always had been good at acting. Maybe he should have been an actor instead of a writer. "Wait a minute." He took hold of her arm. It was like touching a high tension wire. "We're too smart to end it this way. You're coming with me and we're going back up to the house that Johnny and Marge built. We're going to see if there aren't some sparks around somewhere we've missed. I'll drop by Wes' and pick up a bottle of his Kijafa. We'll put a fire in the fireplace and sit there and see what happens."

She stared into his face for a long time. Her black eyes were wet. "I've been thinking, Johnny. Trying to figure—which is the most trouble—living *with* you, or without you."

"An old question," Casey said. His hand shook as he lit a cigarette. "Kahlil Gibran says to do both. 'Let there be spaces in your togetherness.'"

She slid out of the booth. "All right, Johnny. If you're in the poetry-quoting mood tonight, anything can happen. Let's go. But remember—what I said and what I've done still goes. This is just an interlude, no matter what happens—just an interlude."

Marge waited outside. She didn't like Wes. No one did except a few who admired the fact that he was mad. Casey had long since grown used to mad characters and that was also part of his eccentricity. Maybe he was one of them, but he had always considered himself a by-stander. It was his study of deviants, nonconformists, that had given him rich characterizations for his writing.

Wes was squatting in the middle of the floor. His round fat face turned slowly. "Hello, Johnny. What's been happening?"

"I've found Marge, at the Club 19. I should've known she would be there."

"So what happens now, Johnny?"

Casey whispered. "What I have to do happens now. I've figured things out. It'll be easy for me now. I didn't think I could do it, but now I can."

He was scratchy inside. Every sound outside lifted screaming hackles all over him. Maybe he could think now, clearly, for the first time in days, but his nerves were crawling.

Wes said. "There are always a number of alternatives, Johnny. Be sure you don't get stuck so that you can see only one door out."

"This door's the only one I can take," Casey said. "I'll give her the romantic pitch, Wes, and take her up to our place in Laurel Canyon."

Wes' face showed strain. "Listen, Johnny—my philosophy can carry me so far. But you're a friend. One of the few friends I have in the world. I don't want this to happen but I don't know what to say. I don't know how to help you. This—this is murder, Johnny. I'm beginning to feel queazy about it."

"You're out of it, Wes. You're lucky. It'll be a nice story for you, seeing the whole thing from the beginning. Maybe you can sell it to MGM for a couple of thousand. A five page outline."

"I guess I've sounded like I was kidding. But I guess I've never really believed this was happening, not at all. It's seemed like a gag. You live in this town for a while and you begin to see everything as a publicity stunt, cardboard stuff, phony. You know?"

"I know," Casey said. "Can I have a bottle of your Kijafa to take with me? Marge likes Kijafa. It'll be nice there in

front of the fire with her favorite drink."

"Sure—"

"Don't get up, Wes, I'll get it."

Casey went into the kitchen and took the Kijafa out of stock. He went on into the bedroom and slid open the bureau drawer. He'd seen Wes' gun in there before, a .38 automatic. Wes had a permit to keep it because of making the long drives at night into the valley where his Agency Office had been. Casey slipped it into his inside coat pocket. He knew where Wes kept his duplicate keys, and he took the key to Wes' car.

He cradled the wine in his arm and stood at the front door looking down at Wes. "I probably won't be back here to see you. Shall we say *au revoir*?"

"Why not?" Wes said harshly. Sweat stood on his forehead. "*Au revoir!*"

MARGE sat on the long, heavily-cushioned couch by the fireplace. Through the wall of glass the lights of Hollywood glittered like fireflies above a dark sea. Casey lit a lamp that cast a greenish subdued glow. He went to the radio and got soft music. He poured the wine and they sat there, sipping the Kijafa while the flames went higher, then died to a comfortable mellow flickering.

His throat was dry and there was a painful tension in his chest. A trickle of sweat slid past his eye and outlined his cheek.

Marge sat in deep shadow, only the bright ear-rings, red and trembling as they caught the firelight, revealing her there. Now and then something was said. A fragment of memory caught with inadequate words. A figment of thought drifting through shadows. None of it meant much of anything. Not now, not to Casey.

He got up, backed toward the radio. He took Wes' .38 out of his pocket and raised it slowly. He raised his voice and it seemed loud and erratic and headed for complete loss of control. He had figured things right, he thought now. And he had waited. It was time.

"Marge—I've got something for you. A little present."

"Yes?" she turned and in the lamp-light he could see the incredulous fear come slowly into her face like dye and change to terror. "Me—" she whispered, the sound fading slowly.

He told her all about it, about the note, the drug, the fact that he had to kill her tonight or he would be dead himself tomorrow noon.

"I don't—I can't believe it," she said hoarsely. She moaned and her hands slid jerkily along the top of the couch.

Casey said. "Someone had it set up. I don't know exactly what the idea was. Maybe to make it look like a jealousy slaying, justifiable in some cases. So that if I was caught, I'd have a way out. I don't know. But the way I've planned it, I'm not going to be in it at all."

"Johnny, you couldn't mean it! You couldn't—"

"The coward does it with a kiss, the brave man with a sword . . ."

"You can't do it, Johnny. They'll get you. No matter what you've planned!"

"Maybe. I hope not. See—this is Wes' gun, not mine. You've told me how much you hated Wes, how much he's hated you. How he's threatened you—or did once. You've told me all about it. You've told me you couldn't understand how I could be friendly with Wes when he was such a gyp-artist and a crook, and a psycho-neurotic. When you told me about his threatening to murder you, I thought it was some more of your melodramatics. Maybe it was. But you've told others about it no doubt. That will make it look credible enough. There'll be other clues around for them to find. The Kijafa."

Casey took out the pack of cigarettes, took out a few butts and dropped them into an ash-tray. "Wes' brand, butts that he left at the apartment. If you wondered why I brought Wes' car up here instead of mine, now you know. After this job's done, I'm going to puncture a tire half way back down Cresthill Road and leave the car there.

Maybe Wes can explain his way out of it, but I doubt it.

"If he does, and I end up in it, I'll still have a chance. I'll still have killed you and I'll get the antidote tomorrow. I'll still have a motive. Common law. I found you and Martin in sordid circumstances and popped off in a socially acceptable way. Then, no matter what happens, I can always say I did everything I could to keep from dying tomorrow. No one wants to die."

"I—I don't want to—die, Johnny—"

"You killed me when you left and took what was worth anything in me, with you. What's the difference, killing a guy that way, or with a bullet in his head?"

A thin grin stretched Casey's mouth to a pale bloodless line. He stepped back and switched off the music. The silence was suddenly heavy.

Marge sighed and staggered up and away from the couch. Her slim body crouched, animal-like, in its tenseness and terror. "No!" she kept whimpering.

He followed the gun toward her. "No," he said, "take it, Marge. All you've got coming. . ."

He heard the door into the bedroom slam, the sudden ferocious stomping and rushing. Casey didn't want to fire. He spun quickly, threw himself headlong, rolled. Wes' body half-tripped over Casey's feet, then went down on one knee.

Casey moved slowly, but not too slowly, not so it was noticeable. Wes, moving with the quick, snapping, unexpected speed that fat men display, hopped and heaved himself forward, his face straining, his glasses shining crazily. He hit Casey as Casey raised the gun. They grappled and tore at each other, clawed and slammed with fists and fingers.

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Wes' arms were slippery and wet and soft as he encircled Casey's neck with one and slipped the other up Casey's arm for the gun. His breath burst hot and desperate from his lips. Casey kicked and choked. He felt the gun slip out of his hand. Wes' weight lifted. Wes stood there, his fat round body bent down and forward like a hairless ape's.

Casey crawled backward, got shakily to his feet. Even now, Wes still wore the colored glasses to conceal his eyes. He held his .38 on Casey.

Casey said. "Wes—what—what are you doing here?"

"I came here to see that everything went right. It wasn't going right. When I went to get my gun, it was gone. When I went out to get my car, that was gone. I started to get suspicious before I got up here. So I hid in the bedroom and listened. I'm glad I did. I wouldn't want to be guilty of murdering someone."

"Wes, I don't get it. What did you mean—you came here to see that everything went right?"

Wes laughed, a low funny sound like a chipmunk's laughter. "I'm the villain, Johnny. You would have guessed, maybe, if I hadn't kept you doped with that Petri wine. I had dope in it that kept your brain foggy, that increased your suggestibility. I can tell you now. Neither one of you will ever tell anyone else. I'm going to make sure of that."

Casey leaned forward and stared. "Wes—not you! You mean you—the poison, the note, all of it?"

"Sure! I killed Martin too. I had to do that. I wasn't intending to kill anyone at all. You were going to kill Marge, but it'll be all right, I guess, if it just looks that way and I go ahead and do it. This way, I know it'll be done. I arranged for Martin to be up here, and for Marge to meet him. I had a key made, a duplicate from yours, and gave that to Martin in case Marge wasn't there. I was sure you'd be up there to kill Marge about the time Martin was there. I was here to see that things went right, concealed of course. But Marge didn't show up, and you didn't either. Finally, I decided things weren't going right. I killed Martin, then went back to my apartment. I figured you'd be back there, and you were."

WES bent his knees slightly. "I was sure I'd pegged you right psychologically. I was sure you would kill Marge if I worked it right, doped you up enough, gave you the suggestions in the right way. When you got back to my place after being here, I was uncertain. I got more uncertain all the time. I was worried. What if Marge came back up here and found Martin and blew the lid off everything before you got in it right? So I took a quick run up here after you called me from Ruthie's and told me you were going to see Pearson. I moved Martin's body into the bedroom and under the bed."

"What are you going to do now?" Casey didn't look at Marge. He couldn't hear her breathing. There was just Wes.

"Kill you with Marge's gun. Kill Marge with your gun. That's how they'll find things here. With Martin's body hanging around for a motive. You have your gun on you. I felt it a minute ago. Does that sound all right, Johnny?"

"It sounds just right," Casey said. "Except if I'm going to die anyway, from the poison—what does it matter? It's bad for Marge, but for me—"

"Poison," Wes chuckled again. "No poison. Just the drug to make you feel lousy, the suggestibility which made you accept the note's statements. But not strong enough."

Casey said. "Thanks for the statement, Wes. It was complete. Now go ahead and shoot. After that you can wait for the gas chamber."

Wes looked around, his head jerking like a bird's. His lips quivered. "What?"

"I guess you forgot about my realistic dialogue, Wes. That's why Marge left me. There are mikes all over the place. Everything you've said has been recorded on wire and tape and discs. Marge used to go crazy because I'd invite all kinds of people up here just to record dialogue."

Casey smiled. "When I switched the music off before your big speech, Wes, I turned on the recording equipment. It's all hooked up to the cabinet there. You've confessed everything. Now, no matter what you do, the cops will find the evidence. There's not a damn thing you can do about it."

Wes' mouth opened slowly. He licked his lips and sweat was on his face like drops

of glycerine. "Yeah," he whispered. "I forgot about that obsession of yours for getting realistic dialogue. Wait a minute—Johnny—is this a trap? I mean did you know that I—?"

"Sure, I knew, Wes. At least, it was a strong suspicion. When I went to see Pearson, the cops turned up at the right minute. Only you and Ruthie knew I was going there. You tried to force the wine on me and you were too persistent. I remembered what Marge said about her experiences with you when you were ten-percent-ing her. How you loved her and went to pieces after she pulled out. After not getting the doped wine tonight, and running away from Pearson's, I felt too good to think I could die tomorrow. I figured even the poison gag was a fake."

"That's a helluva way to treat a friend," Wes yelled suddenly. "Damn you, Johnny! I figured Marge would be able to see me after she left you. I came up here and she laughed at me! You ever hear a woman laugh at you like that, Johnny? You'll want to kill, too, if it ever happens to you! You'll want to, Johnny. You'll have to! You won't be able to stand it otherwise."

Wes moved forward. "But I'll get both of you anyway. I'll die for killing Martin. I might as well finish it up. There's always the chance of destroying the recorded stuff. Sure, now you've told me, I'll get the stuff and wipe it off."

"No, you won't, Wes. The recording stuff is all over the place. Some of it's buried in the walls. You'd never find all of it. But you can try."

"Sure, I'll find it all. I'll get rid of both of you. That'll give me plenty of time. I'll burn the place down—"

"And destroy all the planted evidence against me?" Casey laughed. He felt completely free.

Wes started shaking his head like a big fat mechanical doll. "I'm going to do it now," he yelled wildly.

Just then, the lamp crashed and Marge screamed. Shadows flickered deep as the lamp went out and Wes' shots sounded futilely after each other as Casey became part of the shadows.

He crawled noiselessly through deeper shadow and then he heard Wes' frantic, rodent-like scurrying toward the door.

Casey came up from the floor and kept running. In the familiar place, darkness didn't matter. He plunged his weight unerringly across the room, felt his shoulder dig into Wes' fat back. He ploughed him into the door. His breath went out and Wes sighed and choked, as he slid down and lay there in the darkness without moving.

Just to make sure, Casey felt out the vicinity of Wes' head with the barrel of his gun. Then he got the lights on and Marge was still over there by the shattered lamp.

Casey tried to keep his emotions down. He said very simply. "I'm glad you thought about the lamp."

She didn't say anything. She came toward him slowly, her face as white as a splash of milk. She almost got to him, then swayed and he caught her as she started to fall. He brushed the hair out of her eyes, carried her to the couch. She opened her eyes and looked up at him.

Her hands found his hand and pressed it tightly between them. She smiled thinly. "Johnny—I believed you there for a while. You're a good actor. You shouldn't write. You ought to be an actor."

He kissed her. "Everything's going to be okay now, Marge. That confession of Wes' is all over the place. I even had one planted inside a wall. He could never have gotten rid of all the stuff. He'd have had to use dynamite."

She nodded. "I know. Remember, Johnny, how you would invite people over and secretly record everything they said? Some of them would get mad and destroy the wire and discs or something. But I got madder at you than anyone."

"So I hid the recording equipment everywhere so they wouldn't find it," Casey grinned. "You mad at me now?"

"Darling!" she said. "Your antics and gadgets keep a girl so mixed up and confused she doesn't really know whether she's mad or not. No—no, Johnny, I don't think I'm mad at you anymore. I don't think I could ever get that mad again. Not now, dear."

He leaned down and kissed her again. Her lips parted slightly and her hands came up and tightened on the back of his neck. Things were going to be fine for them now, he knew.

BOXER'S REBELLION



KOSTER said: "All right. What the hell is **this**?" He closed the door behind him, stood stiffly in front of it. He was a short man, balding, with the loose-skinned, gray look of a badly wrapped mummy.

Dominic Castagna got to his feet. "I come to talk to you a little bit, Mr. Koster." He tried to keep his voice steady, but

it was difficult. Very, very difficult in fact.

"Yeah?" Koster let his eyes flicker past Dominic to the sleepy-looking blond man leaning against the bookcase. "You certainly got your guts, Prentiss," he said, "dragging me in here for this."

The blond man took a pipe out of his pocket, regarded it idly. "Sure," he said. "That's what I'm made of. Publicity re-

By
CHARLES LARSON

They said Marta's glover-boy was on his heels, through with the ring. But when he had to take a murder rap on the chin, he was—winner and still chump.



Dominic rammed his fist against the cop's jaw.

leaves and guts. With maybe a touch of consideration thrown in for the poor devils you try to brush off."

Koster watched him for a long moment. Then, softly, he said: "Aren't you a little out of line, my friend? Suppose you just stick to your part of the business and leave the rest to me."

In the silence that followed, Dominic cleared his throat. "Mr. Koster . . ."

"And as for you, Castagna," Koster said, "if you got anything to say, say it at my office. I'm sick of you broken-down pugs butting in on me at home whenever the mood takes you. This is a private party.

When I want you in here, I'll invite you."

Dominic felt the anger beginning in him. He moved his shoulder muscles restlessly, pressed his hands against him. Marta, he remembered, had warned him not to lose his temper. "Speak easily, my ugly big one," she'd whispered to him in her soft Southern Italian, "easily, always easily, my darling. Without violence . . ." But how, Dominic wondered, could a man who had lived by violence become suddenly like a small kitten? He would, however, have to try.

He swallowed carefully. "I have already gone to your office, Mr. Koster. But each

time they told me you were busy . . . not there . . . something. I—”

Al Koster leaned forward slightly. “Will you beat it, or do I have to get somebody to throw you out?”

“Just a minute,” Prentiss put in. He pushed himself away from the bookcase. “Let’s calm down, Al. Shall we?” His tone was mild, but his eyes were dark and cold. “Castagna didn’t ‘butt in’, as you so delicately put it. He didn’t want to come in at all. I found him outside, and I brought him in. Nobody saw us—not even Mildred—so it won’t besmirch your excellent reputation as a host.”

“Now listen, Prentiss—”

“You listen. You’re the biggest match-maker in this part of the country, aren’t you? You’ve made a lot of money out of it. And I’ve helped you make your money. But the men who’ve fought on your cards—men like Castagna—have helped you make a whole lot more. It won’t cost you a damn dime to listen to him for five minutes.”

Koster snorted, turned on his heel, and opened the door.

Outside, in the hallway, his wife, Mildred, stopped. “Oh, there you are, Albert. Everybody’s been asking what happened to you.”

Dominic, hidden behind the door, could see her in the mirror. She was in her middle thirties, slender, rather tall, dark. A woman, Dominic thought, of superb beauty.

“Hurry up. They want me to get started.” She smiled and continued on.

“Yeah,” Koster said. “I—”

“Al,” Prentiss murmured.

After a moment, Koster swung around again.

“You know—” Prentiss struck a match, lit his pipe—“it might look kind of crummy if the papers were to print a story about the great Koster throwing one of the old-timers out of his house.”

Koster dropped his hand from the door knob slowly. “Tell me something,” he said. “Just what the hell is your stake in this thing?”

Prentiss chuckled. “Always looking for the stake, aren’t you, Al? There isn’t any. Maybe I like the guy.”

“Sure,” Koster said. He continued to stare at Prentiss for a while longer. Then, glancing toward Dominic Castagna, he

said: “Okay, John L. Sullivan. Sit down. But make it quick.”

Prentiss threw his dead match into the fireplace, and started for the door himself. “I had a hunch you’d see it our way,” he said pleasantly. “So long, gentlemen.”

He waved his pipe at them, opened the door. The sound of violin music from the front of the house tickled Dominic’s ears. He always had had a taste for music. Marta herself could do rather well on the cello. Dominic had felt sick when they’d been forced to sell the cello, although Marta had told him that it didn’t matter a bit.

He looked at his hands uneasily, remembering all the things they’d had to sell. And again the anger rose in him.

WHEN the door had closed behind Prentiss, Koster perched on the corner of a desk. “Well, let’s get this noble pow-wow over with. What’s on your mind?”

“I need a fight,” Dominic said. He kept his eyes on his big hands. “I haven’t had a fight for three, four months. I got no money, no job. My wife had baby. Cost something. And then an operation.” It occurred to him that he was explaining badly. But words in English had never come easily to him.

“Well, ain’t that tough,” Koster said. “I should put on fights for your benefit? You’d be laughed out of the house, Castagna, after that last one.”

Dominic pursed his lips. The last one had been bad. But how could he say that he hadn’t trained well on an empty stomach? That he had been worried half crazy about Marta in the hospital?

“You waltzed around in there like Father Time himself. How old are you, anyhow? Forty? Forty-two? Can’t you get it through your thick skull that you’re washed up?”

Again Dominic moved his shoulder muscles. His arms tingled the way they did when he was mad in the ring. The red haze was moving behind his eyes.

With an effort, he controlled his voice. “Then at least you give me the fifty dollars from the last fight.”

Koster smiled slightly. “What fifty dollars?” he murmured finally.

Dominic looked up, puzzled. “The fifty you—”

“You’ve already been paid.”

“What?”

"You heard me."

Dominic frowned. He knew, of course, that he hadn't been paid. But why would Koster . . . ?

Koster was looking at his watch. "Haven't you been here about long enough, Castagna? It's—"

"When I get my fifty," Dominic said, "I go. Yes."

"You go now," Koster said. "Yes." He got off the desk.

Dominic stood up. "My fifty?"

"Listen, you punchy—"

Again Dominic frowned. The red haze rose. "You not give it to me?"

"Right, Buster. I not—"

In the first place, Dominic had never meant to hit him so hard. He even tried to catch himself, recalling the words of Marta like a cry in his mind, but he could not hold his arms. The blow rocked low and straight into Koster's gray face, and the narrow eyes were filled for a single second with pain and fear, and then with a blankness like the deepest death.

Koster fell without a sound, lay crumpled beside the desk. Dominic rubbed his smarting fist. He stood above Koster for a time. Then he leaned down, reached inside the expensive coat, and withdrew a wallet. He removed fifty dollars, put the wallet back.

Quietly, still rubbing his fist, Dominic left the room.

As he passed through the hallway to the rear door, he could hear the sounds of the party at the other end of the house. He paused momentarily. He recognized one of the guests as the new Eastern heavyweight, Kid Lusetti. Inexperienced, but rising rapidly. A guest of Koster's for diplomatic reasons, probably.

Lusetti turned, a drink in his hand, and glanced in Dominic's direction. At once Dominic moved into the shadows. Lusetti walked on, and Dominic saw Prentiss wander past with Mildred Koster. A beautiful woman, Dominic thought. But not so lovely as Marta. He blew on his knuckles. Marta would not like what he had done. He continued out the door. Perhaps he had better not tell Marta. . . .

As it happened, there was no need for Dominic to tell her. The next morning's newspaper did that much better than he ever could have. The newspaper, and the two cops who came to his door like uniformed fate.

Dominic had had a poor night. Once, many years before, when he had been a young fighter in Italy, he had killed a man. The battle had been a fair one, and the ring officials had neither blamed nor held him, but the death had been at his hands nevertheless.

Since then, he had never felt entirely at ease during his bouts. He had been unable to bring all the power he possessed into play. It had kept him, perhaps, from becoming a champion. Only twice in his life had he hit a man as hard as he could. Once, when he'd killed the boy in Italy. And again when he'd struck Koster.

All night the face of Koster swam in his brain. He remembered the glaze on Koster's eyes, the blankness. He decided that he would make inquiries the next morning.

But he had no chance.

IN THE morning, over her coffee, Marta read the black headlines, and Dominic knew by her face that it had happened again. Incredulously, Marta put her coffee cup aside.

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Her lips seemed to move of their own volition. "*Boxing Impresario Robbed, Murdered. The body of Albert Koster, well known local match-maker, was discovered late last night. . .*"

She raised her head slowly, her eyes sick.

Wordlessly Dominic walked to the telephone.

In Italian, Marta said: "Dominic. What is this that I am reading? What is this horror?"

Dominic dialed the operator. And when she answered, he said: "The police. Please."

Marta rose, walked to him, and put her finger on the hook. "Talk to me, Dominic. Not to the police." She took his head between her hands, turned his face toward her. "Dominic."

"I am not a robber," Dominic said. "The fifty dollars was promised to me. How could I rob my own money?"

"And are you a murderer?"

"I tried not to hit him," Dominic said. "I tried."

In the other room the baby laughed happily and the sound ached in Dominic's heart. Marta's face was dull with pain. The pain, in one form or another, had been there too often, Dominic thought. And always it had been caused by him. He had intended to do so many things for his beautiful wife.

He had wanted her loveliness dressed in pretty clothes; he had wanted to buy high-heeled shoes for her small feet; fiery red polish for her fingernails, which were growing long again; foolish hats to sit upon the back of her head. He had wanted her to look sleek and satisfied, like Mildred Koster, and instead he had brought her worry and pain.

He reached again for the phone.

"No," Marta pulled him away. "We will not call the police. If you were taken away, how could I stand it?" She put her cheek against him. "Without you, where is my life? No, Dominic."

It was then that they heard the steps outside their apartment. Marta raised her head. Unhurriedly, someone knocked.

Dominic sighed.

"Wait," Marta whispered.

The knocking recommenced.

Marta straightened. "Who's there?"

"Police. Open up."

Calmly Marta said: "Yes. Just a mo-

ment, please." She took Dominic's hand, started to draw him toward the back room, where there was a fire escape.

Dominic pulled his hand gently away. "And is this the answer, Marta?"

"Dominic."

Turning, Dominic walked to the door, opened it.

The two policemen stared stolidly at him. "You Dominic Castagna?" one of them asked.

"Si."

"Warrant for your arrest. Suspicion of the murder of Albert Koster."

"Yes."

Emotionlessly, the policemen stepped in. One of them patted Dominic's clothes, while the other started toward the bedroom.

"You can save us a lot of time, Buddy," the one beside Dominic said, "if you tell us what you did with the gun."

Dominic wrinkled his forehead. "Gun?"

The sound of drawers being opened came from the bedroom.

In rapid Italian, Marta said: "What is this of the gun? You told me nothing about—"

"A mistake," Dominic replied. "There was no gun." He glanced at the policeman. "Why you look for a gun?"

"Because Koster was shot."

"Shot."

"Comes as a shock, don't it? Never owned a gun in your life, did you? Relax, Buddy. You're screwed up."

The first policeman re-entered the room carrying Dominic's gym shoes. "These the shoes you wore yesterday, Castagna?"

"Yes, but—"

Rubbing his fingers on the sole of one of the shoes, the first policeman said: "Checks with the resin in the room. Better take 'em along?"

"Right."

"Okay, Castagna. Let's go."

"Listen," Dominic said, "wait. I—" He raised his fingers to his temples, rubbed them in perplexity. "You mean that Mr. Koster did not die because I hit him? You mean—"

"That's the general idea, Buddy. All you did was knock him out. That's why you're going to get a first-degree charge slapped on you. The bullet did the job. No manslaughter there. Now let's **start moving.**"

"Then I did not kill him, Marta," Dominic said in Italian. His voice was exultant.

"And who is there to believe you," Marta breathed, "but yourself and me? Dominic, think about the shoes they have found. You wore them to the gym, but you did not have them on when you went to see Mr. Koster. How could they have found resin from them in that room? Unless perhaps, someone who dislikes you put it there for them to find."

Dominic watched her carefully.

"Do you imagine," Marta went on softly, "that they will listen to you . . . that your trial will be a fair one?"

The two policemen looked puzzled and uneasy. "Okay," one of them said, "say your goodbyes in English." He took Dominic by the arm. The other lifted his gun from its holster.

Savagely Dominic spun, knocked the restraining hand from his arm. At the same moment, Marta leaped like a small whirlwind upon the policeman with the gun. While Marta clawed and spat at her particular foe, Dominic rammed his fist without science into the man beside him.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the other policeman shove Marta away, although she still clung to his gun hand, and Dominic turned, smashed a straight left into Marta's policeman's face. He ducked instinctively, and caught the second policeman going by with a right jab and a left cross to the heart.

Very far away, he could hear Marta screaming: "Run, Dominic. Run!"

HE DROVE two pumping blows into the meaty face confronting him, and stumbled toward the bedroom. He plunged through the door, slammed it behind him. The window was open to the summer heat, but a screen on it balked him temporarily. He raised his foot, drove it through the screen, and scrambled out onto the fire escape.

In the flats and apartments around him, windows were being raised, heads were popping out, excited voices were calling. Dominic clattered down the iron ladder, jumped to the alley below. He bent over, ran rapidly along the alley, toward the street. There was a shriek from Marta, and then the sound of a shot, together with the

zing of a bullet ricocheting somewhere behind him.

By the time he reached the street, his lungs were sore, and his heart had begun to pound as though it wished to break loose in his chest. He was indeed getting old, Dominic thought. In former days such exercise would only have invigorated him.

He was forced to waste precious minutes by walking slowly for a time. But at the next alleyway, he again began to run. He entered a back yard, dodged his way through the maze of clotheslines, and slipped between two ancient tenements. Faintly the sound of a police whistle came to his ears. He emerged on an avenue of second-hand shops, lounging, shirt-sleeved men, vegetable hawkers.

Again he forced himself to slow down. He rounded a corner, stood undecided. A taxi, cruising idly, swung in toward him, and on an impulse, Dominic motioned toward it.

The cab stopped, and he climbed inside. The driver turned down his radio. "Where to, Mac?"

Dominic leaned forward. On the seat beside the driver lay a newspaper. He stared down at a picture of Koster, and one of himself.

Impatiently the driver half turned his head. "Well?"

Dominic slid back in the seat. "Ninetyeth and Claypoole," he said. That was far enough out. The distance would give him time to think. He moved carefully out of the range of the rear-view mirror. "Your paper," he said easily. "Can I see it?"

"Sure thing." The driver tossed it over. He reached toward his radio. "Anything you want to hear?"

"No, no." Dominic opened the paper, folded the front page so that the pictures were hidden, and pretended to read. As he stared at a story about the latest divorce of a Hollywood starlet, he considered the words of Marta.

It was true about the shoes. He had not worn them to Koster's. But even more important was the question of how the police had known that it was he who had struck Koster in the first place.

No one had known that he had visited Koster—except Prentiss. No one had seen him in the room—except Prentiss.

Prentiss, however, liked him. Prentiss

had his interests at heart at all times.

Of course, if no one else had realized that he was there—

But why, Dominic wondered, would Prentiss wish to get him in such trouble? Unless—which seemed ridiculous—he had found Koster after Dominic had left, and had murdered the match-maker himself. Which, in turn, brought Dominic back to the original *why?*

His head throbbed, but at least he knew what his next move should be. Find Prentiss, talk to him.

He leaned forward. "Take me to the Crestwell Apartments. Fifteenth Street."

Baffled, the driver said: "I thought you—"

"Please."

With a shrug, the driver swung his cab around. . . .

The Crestwell Apartments on Fifteenth Street were covered with ivy and dignity and age. Dominic got out, held the folded newspaper close to him. Inside the cab, the radio had switched from music to a news broadcast.

"That's a buck-twenty," the driver said.

Dominic paid from the money he had taken from Koster. The lowest denomination of bill he had was a ten. The driver sighed, reached into his pocket.

"On the local news front," the radio blared, "*the alleged murderer of boxing promoter Albert Koster was at liberty in the city today following an escape from officers who attempted his arrest. Dominic Castagna, 42 . . .*"

"You're gonna have to take silver," the cab driver said.

"Yes. All right."

"... when last seen, Castagna was wearing brown trousers, tan sport shirt. He had no coat . . ."

"You guys with your big bills," the cab driver laughed. He began to count half dollars and quarters into Dominic's hand.

"... repeating: 42 years old, about five feet eleven, one hundred and eighty pounds, scar over right eye . . ."

"Six dollars. Six and a half. Seven. Eight . . ."

"Police warn that this man is dangerous. He may be armed. A reward of . . ."

"And ten," the cab driver concluded. He glanced up. "Okay?"

"Okay," Dominic said. He gave the

driver fifty cents, began moving leisurely toward the apartment house entrance.

He heard the slam of a door behind him. Inside the apartment entrance, he stopped, looked back. The driver was looking through the cab for his newspaper. Dominic waited motionlessly. At last the driver got into the front seat, drove away. Dominic released his breath, closed his eyes for a moment.

Presently he turned, started toward Prentiss's apartment.

On the second floor, at the end of a carpeted hallway, he halted, knocked. There was no answer. Dominic waited, knocked again. After a moment's hesitation, he tried the doorknob.

The door was unlocked.

Thoughtfully he contemplated the brass knob. Then he pushed the door open.

PRENTISS' apartment was empty and still. It was a small place, but compact. Two doors led off the living room. A kitchen, Dominic guessed, and a bedroom. The main item in the living room was a large desk next to the sofa.

He closed the door behind him, and approached the desk.

It contained the usual paraphernalia. A check book, envelopes, receipts, a few newspaper columns, pictures.

Dominic rearranged the things he'd disturbed, and started to turn away. But as he did so, one of the yellowed newspaper clippings caught his eye. He turned back slowly, picked it up. It was a faded photo of Mildred Koster. An accompanying story announced the wedding of Miss Mildred Morley to Mr. Albert Koster on the fourth of June, 1941. The clipping had been crushed, as though in anger, and then straightened carefully again.

Frowning a little, Dominic put the picture aside. He drew up a chair, began going more thoroughly through the desk.

And then—far back, hidden within one of the compartments—he found the answer to all his questions, the reason why Prentiss, mild-mannered as he was, would conceivably commit a murder.

He had found a scrapbook. It was thick with news items, notes, pictures, and it concerned itself exclusively with Mildred Koster. There were photographs of Mrs. Koster entertaining at her home, Mrs.

Koster in costume for a country club masquerade, Mrs. Koster at this musical gathering or that literary tea. Every scrap of news relating to Mildred Koster had been clipped and preserved by Prentiss.

And Dominic knew that he was intruding on a most secret and lonely love. The knowledge of it left him guilty and shamed.

It had been common gossip for years that Koster and his wife had not gotten along together. Their interests were widely divergent, their tastes not at all alike. It was not difficult to imagine Koster mistreating his beautiful wife, and Prentiss hearing of it, and brooding over it, and eventually avenging it.

The man who could live so silently with a love like this could commit murder. He could pick his opportunity so that suspicion fell elsewhere, and he could hope in his heart that he might then have his love to himself.

Dominic closed the desk. He rose, stood undecided. He must find Prentiss, but at the same time it was obviously impractical to go out in search of him. If, however, he waited in the apartment, stayed out of sight.

Quietly he walked to the bedroom door, opened it, and stepped inside.

And there, curled on the bed, lay Frank Prentiss. He had been shot through the left temple.

Dominic closed his eyes, tried to keep the weakness in his stomach under control. He felt as though every prop had been knocked from under him.

After a long moment, he opened his eyes and walked very slowly to the bed.

Prentiss was on his back. One hand hung over the edge of the bed. The other still clasped a blue black .38. The entire top of his head had been shattered by the bullet. The body, when Dominic touched it, was still warm. The dead eyes were staring toward a framed picture of Mildred Koster which sat on a small table nearby. Serenely the beautiful, remote face of the girl in the picture smiled back. The hands, with their manicured, close-clipped fingernails, were folded about a white Persian cat.

Dominic drew his gaze away from the picture at last, and forced himself to look at the body of Prentiss. Keeping his glance carefully off the blood-soaked head, he

went through the dead man's coat pockets. He found nothing of importance except a press release and a wire photo from the East of the fighter, Kid Lusetti.

Dominic sat back, stared at the press release. Koster must have been planning to use Lusetti in future bouts. It was normal that Prentiss, who had handled Koster's publicity, would have such material on his person. But the thing that attracted Dominic's attention was the picture of Lusetti.

It showed him dancing in a corner of a ring, moving his feet in the resin box.

Slowly Dominic let the picture fall. Resin. Perhaps no one had planted the resin in Koster's den, as Marta had suggested, after all. Perhaps the appearance of the resin there had been wholly natural . . . unavoidably left behind by the murderer.

Quietly Dominic lifted the gun from Prentiss's limp fingers. He opened the chamber, closed it. Then, thoughtfully, he replaced everything as he had found it.

Presently he rose, moved into the living room once more. Prentiss's phone was on the large desk. Dominic picked it up, dialed Marta.

When she answered, he said: "Marta, listen to me. I am all right, but a terrible thing has happened. I am at Frank Prentiss's apartment. The Crestwell. Now, I want—"

"Dominic!" Marta screamed. "No—" "I know what I am doing, Marta . . . I know who killed Koster."

With a click the line went dead. Dominic stared at the phone for a long while before hanging up the receiver.

Then he put his head in his hands, appalled by his knowledge, and waited.

A minute went by. Five. Ten.

And behind him the door to Prentiss' bedroom slowly opened.

DOMINIC heard the creak of it, and lifted his eyes. In the mirror across the room he could see the door swing back, see the blue black muzzle of the .38, see the hand holding the gun.

He stood up.

"Don't move," a voice murmured.

Dominic stopped.

"So you know the murderer, Dominic?"

"Yes." Dominic turned.

Mildred Koster pushed the door all the way open, leaned against the jamb. The gun was steady on Dominic's stomach. Her face was tired, lusterless.

"Should I ask how you knew, Dominic?"

Dominic said: "The police tell me. But at first I could not understand. I knew when I find Mr. Prentiss. And see so many pictures of you."

"That doesn't make much sense, does it? The police told you?"

"When they said there was resin in Mr. Koster's room. And when I see in your pictures that your fingernails were always cut short. In a lady of such great fashion, why short fingernails?" Dominic shrugged. "I remember when Marta, my wife, had to cut her fingernails. It has only been since we have had to sell Marta's cello that her nails have grown long again. They could not be long when she played. Nor could yours. At Mr. Koster's, I heard violin music. It was you?"

"Yes."

"Yes. And on the strings and bow of a violin—as on a cello—there must be resin. I remember when Marta used to knock something by accident with her bow, and how the powdered resin would drop from it."

Mildred Koster nodded. "I hated him, Dominic," she murmured, "I loathed him. And when I found him helpless."

"But Mr. Prentiss. Why you kill him?"

"He was in love with me, Dominic. But he was a strange man. He didn't know that I'd killed Albert. . . until today. When I told him, there was no love left. He threatened to report me. There was nothing else to do."

Mildred Koster's voice drifted away. She looked at Dominic. "Which, of course, applies to you, too, doesn't it?"

Dominic was silent. His head was turned slightly away, toward the front door.

"You're a smart man, Dominic, but not smarter than this gun. I'm sorry, Dominic."

Her finger pressed quickly against the trigger.

Dominic reached into his pocket. As the gun clicked again and again in Mrs. Koster's frantic hand, Dominic opened his palm, let her see the blunt nosed slugs. "I took them from the gun, Mrs. Koster, when I saw that Mr. Prentiss did not commit suicide. He was not lefthanded. How could he shoot himself in the left temple? I had been in front of the apartment long time, and no one had left. Mr. Prentiss' body was warm. The blood was fresh. He had not been dead very long. I knew you must still be here. And I am sorry, too."

Over his shoulder he called: "You come in now?"

The door opened. Quietly the policemen entered. Two of them went to Mrs. Koster.

"You heard all right?" Dominic asked.

One of the cops who had fought with him in the morning nodded. "We got it."

"I am sorry to scare Marta so when I called," Dominic said. "But I knew you would tap her wire, and would come after me. I wanted you to hear."

The policeman approached Dominic. His face was swollen. "You got a real left."

"Believe me, I am also sorry about that. But I—"

The cop broke into a grin. "Yeah." He rubbed his nose with one hand. "I—was talking with your wife. She said you been having a tough time." He stared at the floor, and then looked up abruptly. "You ever hear of a fighter named Lusetti?"

"I have heard of him."

"He's . . . got a lot to learn. But . . . well, I know a guy that knows him. And he needs a trainer. Now, I was just thinking . . . if you'd like to take a crack at it."

Dominic rubbed his own nose. "A trainer?"

"He's a comer, that kid."

"Yes. But his feet. Not so good yet. And his left—" Dominic grinned widely. "Maybe," he murmured, "I could teach him a thing or two."

Murder Boogie-Woogie



The girl twisted around in the seat, a gun in her hand.

By
**JONATHAN
CRAIG**

Carol's current husband brought her back for a visit to ex-hubby Doug Ramey—so that they could kill-and-make-up.

HE HAD the biggest hands and the longest fingers in the music business. When he spread his left hand out over the bass notes, it spanned an octave and a half. It was a good, solid left hand, made for boogie, and boogie was what he was playing now.

Sitting there at the piano in his *Inferno Club*, Doug Ramey gave the customers what they had come to hear. The piano rocked with the rhythm of his big left hand and every face in the small, smoke-filled

room was turned toward him. There was no dancing and no table hopping. It was not that kind of place. It was what Doug Ramey had dreamed about for twelve years—twelve years of one night stands with fifth rate bands and name bands, and everything in between.

He'd played with them all—and hated them all. All he'd ever wanted was a place just like the *Inferno*. A place where he could play *his* kind of piano, where other musicians could come when they felt like

jamming a few more hours after they got off their regular jobs. Doug Ramey was a *musician's* musician. The Inferno was a musician's club.

Ramey did a fast four-bar modulation and went into *Cheatin' Mama Boogie*, putting everything he had into it, building improvisation upon improvisation. The number called for everything in his bag of tricks and he brought them all out for the gang to hear. For six long minutes there was no sound in the club except the mounting roar of the piano and the quickened breathing of the listeners. When he was through and walked from the piano toward the bar, the applause shook the room.

He leaned against the bar, a tall, loosely-knit man with dark, lonely eyes.

The bartender set a bottle before him, smiling. "Wonderful, boss!" he said. "You were really with it." He poured a gill of bourbon into a glass and slid it toward Ramey. He lowered his voice. "Couple girls at the other end of the bar want to meet you. Okay?"

Ramey downed his drink, shook his head. "No. But tell them to stick around. This place has only begun to jump."

"Going home, boss?"

Ramey nodded. "For a while. Take over, Toby." He left the bar and pushed through the crowd toward the door.

Outside, the narrow, neon-bordered street was almost empty. Even here, in the heart of the city, down in the long canyon between the sheer cliffs of skyscrapers, the smell of Spring was everywhere. Ramey sucked deep draughts of the night air into his lungs. It was a nice night for walking. He turned in the direction of his apartment house.

The shiny dark sedan made no sound. The first Doug Ramey was aware of it was the whisper of its tires as it slid to a stop at the curb beside him.

A girl's voice, soft and urgent, said, "Doug!"

He turned, smiling. Then the smile left his face and his jaw sagged. He stared at the beautiful brown-eyed face framed in the car window. All the hurt and the bitterness of twelve years ago flooded back into him. He said, "Carol!"

Diamonds flashed on the girl's hand as she motioned to him. "Get in, Doug. Hurry!"

Ramey pushed his big hands deep into the pockets of his slacks. The spring warmth was gone from the street now; he felt a little chilled. "Why?" he asked. "Give me one good reason."

A man's face, dark under a wide-brimmed hat, appeared just behind the girl's. Light glinted dully on something in his hand. "Here's your reason." He jerked his head toward the back seat. "Inside, jazz-man. This thing I'm holding ain't no flute."

Ramey felt his shoulders slump under his sport coat. He opened the door and got inside. "This is beginning to put a little strain in an old-time love, Carol," he said tightly. "What's the hell's the idea?"

The girl twisted around in the seat to face him as the car purred away from the curb. She held the gun now, resting it on the back of the seat. The light from the passing neon signs caught in the short yellow curls above the white oval of her face. Her wide-set dark eyes, under finely winged brows, searched Ramey's. She said, "You haven't changed much, Doug."

"Let's cut the small talk, Carol," he said. "What gives?"

She sighed, glanced at her companion. "He's going to be difficult, Lew. Doug always was difficult, even when we were kids together."

"He'll see the light," Lew said. "Just keep that gun on him, baby."

Carol's lips peeled away from small, sharp white teeth. "This is Lew Dycer, Doug," she said. "We're in a jam. We need your help."

"Why throw a gun on me?" Doug cut her off. "Why come to me in the first place. You were always the brainy one." He laughed bitterly. "And don't pull that stuff about my being glad to help you just because you're my ex-wife. I—"

"Shut up!" Carol said sharply. "You're going to help us, whether you like it or not. Get used to the idea."

"That's interesting," Ramey said. "Let's hear more about what I'm going to do."

CAROL ran the tip of a pointed tongue across her lips. When she spoke again, her voice was taunting. "I hate to use such a nasty word in your presence, Doug, but blackmail *does* pay off. It keeps paying off. While you were jumping around from one tank town to another, playing

for cakes and coffee, Lew and I've been raking it in like crazy."

Lew Dycer made an impatient sound from back in his throat. "What are you trying to do?" he demanded. "Make a production out of this? We ain't got all night!"

Carol shifted the gun. She said evenly, "Lew and I had to kill a man today, Doug. We need a place to hide out. That's where you come in. We're going to use your apartment."

Doug Ramey said nothing. He sat there, rigid against the cushions, watching the lights blur past. He had always known that some day Carol would show up again. He remembered how she had always depended on him for everything, even before they'd been married, back when they were kids together.

He remembered watching her mature into blonde, full-blown beauty, and his concern over the changes in her. Right after they were married, he began to find out about little things—like expensive gifts from men with daughters her own age. Other things followed—worse things. Lots of them. Finally there was that morning, twelve years ago, when he first discovered that Carol was getting money through blackmail. She had come in, very drunk, and dropped her bag and the roll of big bills had spilled out on the floor.

He slapped the truth out of her that morning, the tears streaming down his face. She called him every name she could think of. The next morning, when he got home from work, she was gone.

The car swerved around a corner, jerked Ramey to the side of the seat, jarred him back to the present.

"Outside of that gun, why should I want to help you?"

"Because," Carol said, "the dead man's name is Wally Kane—the same man you had a fight with last week. Remember that?"

"It wasn't a fight," Ramey said woodenly. "He was drunk. I had to put him out of my club. That's all."

"Try and make the cops swallow that," she said. "And there's something even more interesting about him. He was killed with *your* gun, Doug, the one I took with me the morning I walked out on you, years ago. It's still registered in your name, friend. The cops can tie it to you so fast

it'll make your head swim. Now try *that* frame on for size."

"You're crazy, Carol!" Ramey said. Cold sweat began to crawl along his ribs. His tongue seemed to fill his mouth.

Carol said, "Listen to that, Lew. Here's a dummo that never did anything in his life but pound on a piano, and still he's got the gall to call somebody else crazy."

"Yeah," Lew Dycer said. "I'm laughing." He pulled the big car to the curb. "End of the line," he said. "I just stole this crate for the occasion. This is a good place to leave it. We'll walk the rest."

Carol said, "Listen, Doug. The frame's on you so tight you couldn't pry it off with a crowbar. I know you were home at the time we killed Wally Kane because I called your number and you answered. You get a lot of sleep. You sleep all day. When you answered the phone your voice sounded like you had a mouth full of marbles. I asked if you were alone and you said, 'yeah, what did you want.' Then I hung up. Remember that call, Doug?"

Doug Ramey remembered. His stomach seemed leaden.



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He said, "Damn it, Carol. You'll never—"

"Sure we will," Carol laughed. "You see, Doug, *you're* going to be our alibi. You're going to swear that we were with you in your apartment at the time our business friend was killed. We'll all work together, Doug. You have to go along, because *you* don't have any alibi yourself. A man asleep in his own bed at the time of a murder doesn't have any alibi at all. You can see that, can't you, Doug?"

"I'll see you in hell first!"

Carol laughed softly, opened the car door. "What a way for a man to talk to his beloved ex-wife!" She handed the gun to Lew. "Your turn, chum."

Lew took the gun, tucked it under his arm beneath his corduroy jacket. His flat, pale eyes stayed on Doug Ramey. "I'd hate to blast you with your own gun, jazz-boy," he said softly. "It's still warm from the last knock-off. Don't make me heat it up again." He slid from the seat, walked quickly around the car and opened the rear door. His hand remained inside his jacket. "Get out and start walking. Slow."

They walked along the dark, deserted street, the three of them, with Ramey in the middle and Lew Dycer tagging a step behind.

Doug Ramey dragged along, putting one foot after the other, feeling the pound of blood in his temples. It was a pleasant night for a walk, but not *this* kind of walk.

"Turn here," Carol said. "We're going in the back way."

"And get this," Lew put in. "If we meet anybody, Carol is going to start acting drunk. Tell them that you and me had her out in the fresh air to sober her. You were a little sheepish about bringing her in the front way. We'll fix up the rest of the story after we get in your apartment. You got that?"

"Sure," Ramey said. "It makes as much sense as the rest of it."

They went in the tradesmen's entrance, walked along past the furnace room to the service elevator. "Inside," Lew grunted.

THEY rode up in silence. At his floor, Ramey thought desperately of lunging against the double row of control buttons. It might jam the elevator, throw Lew off balance long enough to make a try for his gun. He glanced from the buttons to Lew's

pale eyes. The man's thick lips were spread in a grin that reached across his beard-stubbed, heavy-jowled face. "Quit thinking out loud," he said. "I could hear you clear over here."

Beside him, Carol's cold laugh filled the elevator. "He's a real thinker, that one!" she said.

The door slid open. "Take a look," Carol said to Lew.

Dycer looked up and down the corridor. "Okay," he said. "Let's get going. Carol, take this guy's keys."

Ramey handed his keys to Carol, followed her down the corridor to his apartment, with Lew Dycer just behind him. He waited while she worked the key, feeling Lew's breath hot against the back of his neck.

The door opened, and Lew shoved him roughly inside. "I hope you got something to drink, jazz-boy," he said. "We've got a reunion to celebrate. You and Carol might even want to kiss and make up."

Carol laughed again, moved past them toward the kitchen. "You got some liquor out here, Doug?" she called over her shoulder.

"Yeah," Doug said. "Over the sink. There's something *under* the sink for a chaser. Rat poison."

"Is that nice?" Lew Dycer said. "Set down, comic, before I tap you on your little pointed head with a gun butt."

Doug Ramey sank onto the couch, his big hands balled into fists. It had taken a little time for the helpless anger inside him to boil over, to make him feel like killing Dycer. But he felt that way now.

Somehow it was different, here in his own apartment. This was part of the life he had built for himself, saved and worked for all these years since Carol had left. It was like his piano and his club. It was part of the pattern of his life, the life Carol and her boy friend were going to blast right out of existence. He felt the muscles ridging along his shoulders, the hard throb of the pulses in his wrists.

But . . . there was the gun under Lew Dycer's arm . . .

Carol came back from the kitchen carrying a tray with three glasses, a bottle and a bowl of ice. She set the tray on the cocktail table in front of the couch. Her eyes smiled at Doug Ramey as she lifted one of the glasses and sipped from it slow-

ly. "To your continued good health, lover," she said.

Ramey glared at her, said nothing.

She stood there for seconds, smiling down at him, a brown-eyed blonde with a face like an angel's. She pushed an errant gold curl away from her smooth forehead, her full red lips pouting mockingly.

"Really, Doug," she said. "You're not being very hospitable." She turned from him, crossed the floor to the radio cabinet. She flicked the switch, humming to herself. Music came on, a clarinet wailing high and free above a background of muted brass. Carol tapped one four-inch heel in time with the slow, primitive beat of the music.

"Remember that number, Doug?" she said. "I was just a little girl in pigtails when it first came out." She put her glass down on the cabinet, began to dance down the room.

Doug Ramey watched her, dumbfounded. A thing like this couldn't happen. A girl didn't take part in murder, then dance around a room to radio music like a teenager. He was filled with a nightmarish feeling of unreality. This was fantastic; he'd wake up in a moment and—

"Look, Doug!" Carol's voice broke in. "Remember this step we used to do together?" She whirled around the room, faster and faster, her full skirt swirling almost straight out from flashing nylon-clad legs. Her fingers snapped in time with the savage screaming of the high-riding clarinet.

"Stop it," Ramey shouted. "Stop it! Do you hear?"

Lew Dycer laughed nervously. "Yeah, Carol," he said. "This ain't exactly the time for hoofing."

Carol shrugged, walked back to the radio cabinet, picked up her drink.

Nausea, sudden and overwhelming, crawled in Doug Ramey's stomach. He'd taken too many things too fast; his nervous system was rebelling. He swallowed hard, got to his feet and started for the bathroom.

Lew Dycer's pale eyes narrowed. His hand snaked beneath his jacket, came out with the gun. "Where you going?"

"Bathroom," Ramey said thinly. "I—I feel sick to my stomach. Seeing Carol dance that way—knowing she'd helped kill a man it's . . . I—"

"Too much for your weak little tummy, huh," Carol purred. "Well, hurry back and join the party."

"Not so fast," Lew said. He moved ahead of Ramey, jerked on the light in the bathroom. He was fast and thorough. He came out shrugging his bulky shoulders. "Nothing in there to help him," he said to Carol. "Not even a window for him to jump out of."

He stooped to pour himself a drink from the bottle on the cocktail table. "Don't try to lock yourself in there," he called to Ramey, "or I'll just bust that door down and work you over, just for being cute."

INSIDE the bathroom, Doug Ramey closed the door behind him. The nausea left him but he ran cold water into the bowl, sloshed it against his face, anyhow. As he groped for a towel, his hand touched the light fixture beside the shaving mirror.

He stood there, water dripping from his craggy face, wondering. Ten minutes ago he wouldn't even have considered what he had in mind. But ten minutes ago he hadn't been this angry, so filled with hate and vindictiveness. There were things that happened to a man that wiped away the surface veneer of civilization and left only a cornered, snarling jungle beast. It was that way now with Doug Ramey.

Very quietly he opened the medicine cabinet and took out the big bottle of mouthwash from the bottom shelf. He set the bottle on the edge of the wash basin, where it would be ready. Then he unscrewed the light bulb from the fixture beside the mirror and placed it gently in the wastebasket.

He grasped the mouthwash bottle in his right hand, while with his left he scooped water into a drinking glass.

He took a deep breath, brought the bottle up, then slammed it down hard against the rim of the basin. Glass splintered, the bottom burst from the bottle and Ramey had the jagged, razor-sharp weapon he had gambled on.

Heavy feet pounded toward the door. He heard Carol cry out. He flung the glass of water into the empty light socket. There was a sizzling, spitting sound. The fuse blew out, and Ramey was in utter darkness.

He turned, hit the door with his shoul-

der and plunged into the equal darkness of the other room—straight into the figure of Lew Dycer.

In desperate self defense, Ramey brought the weapon he had made upward in an arc toward Dycer's neck. Dycer screamed. His big body went limp, fell away. There was the heavy sound of it hitting the floor, the muffled thud of the gun on the carpet.

Doug Ramey threw the weapon from him, went down on hands and knees, groping for Dycer's gun.

From somewhere out of the darkness another form tore into him, snarling, clawing. Fingernails raked his face, a hard knee ground into his ribs.

Carol was strong for a girl. Twice Ramey's big hands closed around her wrists. Twice she broke away from him. She fought like a tigress. Her teeth sank into his hand and he yelled, flung her away.

Then he heard her laughter—the most blood-chilling sound he had ever heard. It filled the darkness, penetrated the very marrow of his bones. Her voice was ragged with her rapid breathing. "I've got the gun! Stay where you are!"

The blackness pressed around him. He felt as if he was going to be sick again. He got his feet beneath him, tensed the long muscles of his thighs. He sprang toward the sound of her voice, sprawled forward on his face.

The gun roared. Orange flame burst less than a yard from his face. The slug picked at his coat. Ramey swore, lunged toward her again. His hand caught in the folds of her skirt and he yanked at it with all his strength. She came sprawling down upon him, her tiny fists beating hard at his face.

He threw his whole weight upon her, locking her arms behind her back. There

in the darkness he felt her struggles weakening, heard the click of her teeth as she tried to bite him. He tightened his grip and held on. The sound of the shot would bring the police. It would just be a matter of sweating it out until they came . . .

After what seemed like hours, he heard the sound of many feet pounding along the corridor. There was a loud rapping on the door and a voice with an Irish burr in it yelled to open up.

Ramey yelled back for them to break in. Light spilled in from the corridor. The room filled with blue uniforms. Rough hands jerked Ramey from the girl, dragged him to his feet. This was what he had expected, knowing how it would look to them.

He saw one of the cops bend down toward Carol. Pure hatred contorted her white face as she slithered away from him. Her hand stabbed toward the gun. Faster almost than Ramey's horrified eyes could follow, the cop's fingers grabbed at the gun, stopped her from using it on herself. He was glad of that, glad she was being denied the easy way out.

It took the police department less than twenty-four hours to wrap up the case. They kept Lew Dycer alive long enough to tell the whole story. He'd known he was going to die, wanted to clean the slate. The police moved rapidly and efficiently and when Doug Ramey walked out onto the darkened street the next night, he was as free as any man.

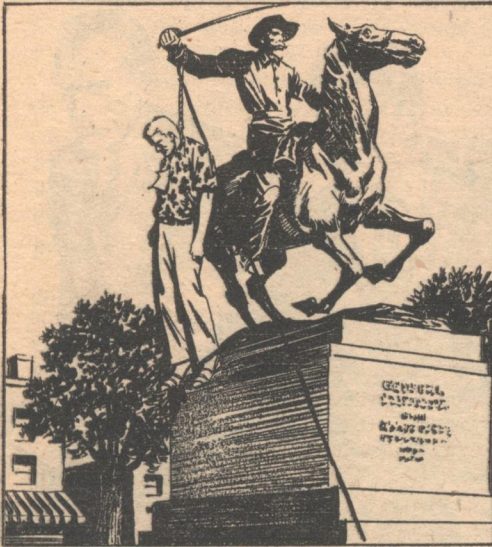
He stood on the curb a moment, breathing deeply and then he hailed a cab and gave the address of his *Inferno*. There was a big grand piano waiting for him there. A man could sit at a piano and hammer the keys until he had beaten some of the bitterness and hurt and trouble out of his heart. A piano was a wonderful kind of purgative at a time like this.

JUSTICE SHINES

It was the old business of the horse not being quite as good as the machine, the cavalry being outmoded by mechanized movement, that cost an army deserter his freedom in West Virginia. The serviceman was on horseback when officers spotted him. They flagged a passing switch engine and pursued the horse for a mile up the tracks. They finally nabbed him.

Charleston, S. C., police were pretty sure that 150 racing pigeons in the possession of three men were stolen, but couldn't prove it because the leg bands were missing. So the officers liberated the birds. They promptly flew to the loft of their rightful owner—and the three men winged their way to jail.

—H. H.



A strange and ghastly sight greeted early-bird farmers who came to Southfield on the opening day of the tobacco market. Someone with a macabre sense of humor had dangled a cadaver from the upraised arm of the statue of the town's war hero.



When the murder blasted the sleepy town wide-awake, Sissie Willmette, who couldn't successfully hide her redheaded lusciousness behind glasses and tailored clothing, became desperate enough to try trickery to save her family's home-sweet-homicide.



And then there were three—killings that is—with pugnacious, grotesque young Wynne Willmette being the Third Man on a Hearse. Yet everybody in this wild and whacky household seemed to take the trio of slayings in stride, calmly, almost eagerly . . .



Even pigtailed Naomi—the accused—seemed to think more of kisses than killings when Detective Coyne found himself riding this mad murder-go-round called "Slay Belles"—a dynamic novel by Robert Turner—in the March issue, published February 2nd.

BLIND WITNESS

Smashing Crime

Novelette



By FREDERICK C. DAVIS

Eileen was held hostage by the worst of the tough town's hoodlums — and only Detective Jimmy Teague could spring her from the trap . . . by using himself as bait.

She tried to twist away from the hands holding her with such terrifying strength.



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CHAPTER ONE

Homicide House

A FIRST-GRADE patrolman stepped into his chief's office, and when he emerged a few minutes later he was Detective James Teague.

His promotion, coming just when he had hoped it would, filled Jimmy Teague with a glow of achievement. Five years of tough routing in the field, of constant grinding

over exams, and here he was, suddenly, actually a plainclothes man. It bowed what a man could do when he had the drive of a dream in him. One more step—and all his prayers would come true.

Grabbing up the nearest telephone and spinning the dial, he said impressively, "Colonel Landis this is Detective James Teague calling. May I speak to that best girl of mine?"

An old man's cackling burst of laughter came over the wire. "You made it, did you, Jimmy? I knew you would, my boy. Congratulations! Eileen isn't here now. She just went out to the grocery but I'll tell her the minute she gets back."

"I'll be over right after dinner," Teague said breathlessly. "There's something important I want to ask her."

"Well, young fellow," the colonel said, "she might hesitate a little, you know, talk a lot of nonsense about not wanting to be a burden to you. But you keep right on asking her."

"I'll certainly do it, Colonel," Jimmy Teague declared. "Tell Eileen I'll be over early."

Still grinning, Teague tried to realize what a really tremendous day it was. Not only a more responsible job, not only the prestige of plain clothes, but a big raise in pay! It meant an end to Eileen's having to skimp along on her grandfather's pension. His savings, plus four thousand a year was enough for them all—an apartment with plenty of room for the colonel to wheel himself around in, a girl to help Eileen with the work, new furniture, all the trimmings—everything. And a ring.

A ring was the very first thing. He'd have to buy it on an easy payment plan, of course, but it must be a fine one, even though its sparkle would be lost to Eileen's eyes.

Jimmy Teague strode swiftly from Headquarters, dazed with delight, scarcely aware it was snowing. . . .

The snow rapidly thickened, covering the city with a down that a girl—across the width of the town—was fully aware of. Flakes flew gently into Eileen Landis's lovely face until she reached Mill Street, where the river wind caught her. She had to lean against it as she turned the corner. The snow was slippery, and the loaded

market basket on her arm was difficult to balance. She moved close to the long row of stoops, each exactly like the others, her free hand swinging from one brownstone post to the next. Several times she was forced to turn her back to the stinging gusts.

Midway in the block she hesitated, a bit confused, but she turned again, and climbed the few steps to an unlocked door. Closing it behind her she paused again, listening to an unexpected voice in a room beyond.

"I don't want your money," it was saying in a cantankerous tone. "I'm a respectable man. I won't have anybody but respectable people living in my houses. The sooner you move out, the better it'll be."

Eileen recognized the voice as that of Daniel Tuthill. Mr. Tuthill owned a series of these houses in the old Mill Row, as it was often called. Originally, the row was occupied by workers in a foundry that no longer existed, and the houses had been modernized as the street took on an aspect of modest quality.

Eileen and the colonel had leased one of them from Mr. Tuthill years ago. He lived in another, all alone—a crusty, unneighborly widower. Promptly on the last day of the month he always made the rounds to collect his rent, but today, Eileen remembered, was only the twenty-seventh. What was wrong? He was a hard man to get along with, but surely he wasn't speaking to Eileen's grandfather so irascibly.

A second man spoke in a low, throaty voice—one that Eileen had never heard before.

"O.K., Pop, we'll clear out. No hard feelings. But we've got to have a little more time. Here, Pop, take this money and in ten days or two weeks you can have the place."

DANIEL TUTHILL answered obdurately, "Keep your money! I don't like the looks of this. Five men, no families and no business connections. It's queer, I say. You act mighty suspicious, to my mind. I've watched you. Every time you step outside you stop and look up and down the street, like you're afraid of somebody seeing you. Respectable men don't behave the way you do. Who are you, anyhow? Never should've let you have the house. You can clear out, hear?"

Disturbed, Eileen felt for the knob of the street door. She realized now that she had made a mistake. She was in the wrong house. They were exactly alike, the fourteen of them standing side by side, their fronts continuous. With the snow treacherous under foot, and with the wind nudging her at every step, she had lost count of the posts. If the entrance had been locked she would have realized her error at once, but it had yielded, as she had expected her own door to yield. Now she was finding herself in a strange house—one that felt peculiarly cold and full of an ominous tension.

The low voice said, "Come on, Pop, give us a little more time. A week, ten days. . . ."

"No, sir!" Daniel Tuthill snapped. "And I'll tell you why. I wrote to the names you gave me as references. Good answers came back from Cleveland, too. But this morning in the newspaper I read about the parties who sent 'em. Arrested, both of 'em! For selling stolen goods! That's the kind of people you associate with, is it? Trying to pull the wool over my eyes, are you? Well, I won't have you on my property another day. No, sir! Clear out, all of you, right now! Before night, hear me?"

The front living-room was quiet for a few seconds. It must be closed off from the hallway, for no one seemed to know Eileen had happened in. She would slip out unnoticed and, she hoped, find her own home without much further trouble. It was probably the one next door, or perhaps two doors away at most. She was anxious to reach it, anxious to get out of this chill, unfriendly place. But the street door was shut now, tightly shut. A spring bolt had entered its socket. Eileen's sensitive fingers searched for it as the guttural voice spoke again.

"We can't leave so soon as all that, Pop. We've got to stay a few days longer. Business reasons. You're taking our money, understand, and we're not leaving quite yet."

Daniel Tuthill's answer was shrill with defiance. "Get out! You men get out of my house! Look through that window. You see that policeman over there on the corner? Well, you hurry up and get out of my house at once or I'll have him put you out!"

"You don't mean that, Pop," the low voice said menacingly.

"I'll show you whether I mean it!" Daniel Tuthill squeaked indignantly.

Eileen heard Mr. Tuthill's quick foot-

First-

**FIRST AID for
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ALL DRUG STORES U.S. and CANADA

steps in the closed room. They stopped abruptly, as if his move had been blocked. She was twisting the knob, trying to open the entrance.

"Wait a minute, Pop," said the man with the deep voice. "You're not calling any cop."

"Let go of me!"

The noises that followed were swift and violent. In the hallway, near Eileen, a door slammed open. Feet scuffled. A cracking blow was answered by a groan and the thump of something hitting the floor. Then the only sound was that of fast, strained breathing. Consternation, a new chill in the air, held Eileen still.

The growing voice said, "Who's this girl? How'd she get in here?"

Eileen braced herself against the door. "Mr. Tuthill!" she called. "Mr. Tuthill!"

There was no answer, no sound but the sibilance of hot, rapid breath.

She pushed at the balky bolt. Shoes scraped toward her. The market basket was snatched off her arm. Big hands seized her. She felt a man's breath, smelling of liquor, rushing against her cheek. She tried to twist away from the hands, but they held her with terrifying strength, pinioning her arms to her sides.

A NEW voice spoke, higher pitched, quavering a little. "You shouldn't 've hit him like that, Blacky. You hit him too hard."

Blacky was the deep-voiced man who had been arguing with Daniel Tuthill. His powerful grip held Eileen motionless.

"Who's this girl?" he demanded again. "How'd she get in here?"

"He must've left the door partly open when he come in—the landlord, Tuthill," the second man answered. "She lives in this block. I've seen her goin' past. I dunno how come—"

Eileen said quickly. "I didn't realize I was at the wrong house. Please, you're hurting me!"

Blacky turned her, the pressure of his hands never relenting. She could feel him staring into her face.

"What's the matter with her?" he said. "She's not looking at me, or you either. She's not looking at anything."

"She can't see, Blacky," the other man answered. "She used to have one of those

Seein' Eye dogs. When I was at the grocery store the other day somebody was talkin' about how the dog got hit by a car—a car what skidded, and the dog was pullin' her away from it. She's got to wait a couple of weeks before she can get another one."

"Even if she's blind, she's not deaf," Blacky said. "She heard plenty a minute ago, Slug."

His hands clamped even harder on Eileen's arms, so hard she winced with pain. He was still staring at her.

"Gee, Blacky," Slug said, his tone shaking again, "You oughtn't've hit him like that. You don't know your own strength. What're we gonna do?"

"Upstairs with them," Blacky said. "Both of them. Upstairs."

A push sent Eileen into the hall. Again she tried to tear herself away, and Blacky closed one thick arm around her waist. He was behind her, lifting her. She cried out, "Mr. Tuthill!" Instantly Blacky's hand pressed over her lips. It smelled of tobacco and sweat. He raised her off her feet, forcing her up a flight of stairs.

Below, in the hallway, there was the sound of something being dragged.

"You shouldn't've socked him so hard, Blacky," Slug's voice came up. "Gee, look at the side of his head where he hit the corner of the table. What're we gonna do?"

Blacky's arm was almost crushing the breath from Eileen's lungs.

"We couldn't let him put us out," he said. "Not after the way we been waiting and planning this long. We need this place, need it more right now than before. We couldn't let him call in a cop. Not when the break's due any minute. We're following through on this job. No crazy landlord—and no blind girl, either—is going to stop us."

He brought Eileen to the landing, still hugging her against his big body so closely she could not move. Beyond the heavy rushing of his breath, she heard Slug dragging something up the stairs. It made little bumping noises. Slug pulled past Eileen with it, uttering grunts of effort.

"In there," Blacky said.

A door opened, and after a moment the sliding sounds ceased. Returning, Slug came close.

"Listen, Blacky," he said through a dry

throat. "There's something else I gotta tell you. A couple times lately, when this girl went past, I seen her with a cop. Judgin' from the way he held her arm and steered her along, he's sweet on her. I seen somethin' about him in the way he nailed a couple of heisters. He's a cop name of Teague, Jimmy Teague."

Eileen felt Blacky's nerves grow taut.

"Glad you told me that, Slug. That's enough to know. Maybe she can't see what we look like, but blind people've got sharp ears, and she could recognize our voices. Well, we're not taking any chances, not at this stage of the game. She's not going to be telling anything to a cop named Teague. But I guess we'll save her a while, until we got more time."

Blacky's arm loosened and a thrust sent Eileen forward. She felt a sill under her feet. A muffled quality in the air told her she was entering a small space. Something tripped her. She stumbled to her knees and her hands struck a wall. Behind her, hinges squeaked and a key clattered.

"Yell your head off if you feel like it, sister," Blacky's voice came through the locked door. "Nobody'll hear you."

The air was stagnant. Eileen could almost feel that there was no light within these four close walls. She was imprisoned in a closet.

A bell began ringing somewhere below, a succession of short peals. A telephone. Holding herself still, Eileen heard the two men running down the stairs. Blacky's voice rumbled through the floor.

Over Eileen as she remained on her knees, stunned and striving to orient herself, came a strange sensation that she was not alone in this cramped space. She reached out, slowly. Her fingers poised upon fabric, coarse and wrinkled. A sleeve. She drew her fingers along it and found a hand. It was resting inertly on the floor, and it was wet, sticky.

Eileen jerked away, stifling a scream, staring unseeingly at the man who was lying huddled beside her—the man who was dead.

Blacky was moving again and speaking decisively in the room below.

"That was the Squire. This is what we've been waiting for. Get going, Slug. The ambulance just arrived at the Wellcord place."

CHAPTER TWO

Ambulance Hi-jackers

SYCAMORE DRIVE was the most fashionable street in Queen City, and the finest residence on the Drive was the huge Georgian house of the Wellcords. Frequently its long semi-circular driveway was lined with cars. The Wellcords entertained lavishly and their parties highlighted the season. This evening, however, there was no gaiety in the house. The lone automobile standing at the portico was a snow-whitened ambulance bearing the name of the Surgeons Hospital.

Two white-coated interns came out the great door, bearing a litter between them. On it lay a boy of nine. As blond as a young Viking, his cheeks were wan and his eyes were closed. As he was carefully lifted into the ambulance he did not stir. He did not feel the snowflakes flicking upon his hot forehead. One of the interns closed the door while the other watched over the patient, then hurried to the wheel. The ambulance turned out of the driveway, its gong clanging, traveling as fast as the slippery pavement permitted.

As it passed the first intersection a sedan swung from the curb, leaving behind it an oblong of clear pavement. It had stopped here hours ago, before the first flurries had fallen. Its motor had been kept hot by its driver, a man of dignified bearing and conservative dress known to the police of New York and Philadelphia as the Squire. He trailed the ambulance.

A chauffeured limousine was coming rapidly from the opposite direction. Passing the ambulance and Squire's sedan, it swung into the grounds of the Wellcord residence. Immediately it stopped, Wallace Wellcord alighted. Heavy-set and pale with anxiety, he ran up the broad steps.

The entrance opened as he neared it. The man who came out was brisk-mannered, and he was carrying a medical case. Wallace Wellcord paused, was silent a moment, dreading to ask the physician the question that must be asked.

"How is Bert, Dr. Brooks? I came as soon as my wife phoned me."

The doctor pursed his lips. "Mr. Wellcord, I must be frank with you. It's a serious case. The most difficult diagnosis

I ever made. Verification came from the bacteriological laboratory just a few minutes ago. I called the hospital immediately. Your son has a fighting chance, an even chance."

"Yes?"

"Tularemia," the doctor went on quietly. "A virulent fever, I suspected it when I learned from Mrs. Wellcord that Bert made a hobby of raising rabbits. Unquestionably some of the rabbits are diseased. I've ordered them to be destroyed. Bert mentioned having been bitten by ticks while in the pens. In that way the germs entered his bloodstream. The point of entry happened to be one of the most dangerous—the soft flesh of the lip."

"What can be done, Doctor?"

"There's only one effective treatment—a transfusion of blood from a person who has recovered from a less serious case of tularemia. I've already found such a donor—a young waitress who happens to be out of a job. She's waiting at my office now. I'll examine her and give the transfusion as soon as possible. You and Mrs. Wellcord had better join me at the hospital within half an hour. Time is the most important element now. Fortunately, we're getting the case early enough."

"Bert's such a fine lad," Wellcord said. "None finer than Bert. . . . I can't believe anything like this could happen to him."

He watched as the doctor drove off through the swirling snowfall. It was a shocking thing—Bert's being brought so close to death by his apparently harmless hobby. Strange and terrifying. Wallace Wellcord, chairman of the board of the American National Bank, director in a dozen corporations, president of the Chamber of Commerce, one of the wealthiest men in the state, was finding his station and his money of little importance now. The one hope of recovery for his only son depended utterly on the blood of a nameless young woman—an unemployed waitress. . . .

THE ambulance turned into a street leading directly to the hospital, situated on the bank of the river on the opposite side of the city. Its rear wheels spun in the tire-tracked snow, but the white-jacketed intern in the driver's seat sent it ahead skilfully. Its gong beat out a steady note and crawling cars pulled aside to let it pass.

Behind it, the Squire's sedan followed closely.

When the ambulance was still six blocks from the hospital, an old coupe swung suddenly from the curb and veered into its path. The driver shouted and twisted the wheel. With its brakes clamped, the ambulance slid on. The coupe was skidding crazily, directly ahead. Its rear half took the impact. The bumper of the ambulance crushed into it and sent it careening. It was still in the twisting course of the ambulance. A second rending collision brought the ambulance to a violent stop. The intern clung to the steering wheel. Thrown sideward, his head had hit the closed window, and he was stunned.

A man sprang from the coupe and ran. He was fat-faced and scared. He'd taken a very dangerous part in the scheme. His name was "Slug" Graves.

The Squire's sedan was fifty yards behind the scene of the accident, and on the opposite side of the intersection. It turned, then braked. As Slug scrambled in, it accelerated, turned again, began losing itself in the white confusion of the storm.

The front of the ambulance was rammed into the coupe which Slug had abandoned. The ambulance's rear doors swung open. At the same time the driver climbed down dizzily.

"The boy's all right," said the intern who had been watching over Bert Wellcord. "But look at those front wheels. We can't move. I'll phone in and get another wagon here."

"Listen!" the other intern said. "There's one coming now."

Another ambulance was rolling toward the wreck from the direction of the river. It bore the name of the Samaritan Hospital, an institution located in City Park. Neither intern recognized the two uniformed men who dropped out of it as it stopped, but that in itself meant nothing.

"Take this boy to Surgeons, will you?" one of them asked quickly. "Emergency transfusion. Make it fast. I'll call in."

"Sure thing."

They slid the litter from the wrecked ambulance and lifted it into the other. The second vehicle clanged and cleared a path through the gathering crowd, aided by a patrolman. Once away from the scene of the accident its speed quickened. Immedi-

ately it doubled back while the two unrecognized men peered from the cab.

It turned into a snow-quieted street that was almost deserted, then swung into a small public garage. In one of the grimy windows of the building was a *For Sale* sign. The broad doors remained closed for five minutes. When they opened again, a light truck rolled out. The legend on its side read: *Excelsior Laundry*.

"We're takin' it easy now, Prince," said the man who was driving.

"Easy does it, Dutch," said the man at his side.

Their load was a single canvas laundry basket covered with a sheet. Inside the basket, strengthless and still, burning with fever, his head pillowed on two white coats rolled up, young Bert Wellcord lay.

In the closet the air was heavy, almost unbreathable, as if the body huddled on the floor were exuding the scent of death.

Eileen Landis pressed herself into a corner, her hands closed hard, listening. It seemed an immeasurably long time since she had heard the quick footfalls in the lower hallway and the clicking of the spring bolt as the front door shut. The house was still now, but she did not know whether both men had left, or whether one of them had remained. Perhaps one was waiting in a room downstairs. Eileen seemed to sense that the house was not deserted, but perhaps it was a closer presence she felt. The dead man on the floor at her feet. . . .

Her hands gripped the knob and twisted it. The door was stoutly locked.

SUDDENLY Eileen remembered. Mr. Tuthill calling on the dot to collect the rent, making an officious entrance, fussing with his fountain pen and his receipt book, fishing into his pockets in a way that rattled his keys. His keys! He carried a score of them, one for each of his houses, and others besides—perhaps many old ones for which he really had no further use. This closet—it must be fitted with an ordinary inside lock—one that almost any commonplace key might open. One of those on Mr. Tuthill's chain. . . .

Eileen reached out slowly. Her fingers met the rough texture of Mr. Tuthill's coat and paused, trembling. She forced her hand across a series of buttons and found the frayed flap of a pocket. An inert arm

was pressed against it, but she pushed her hand in. Metal clinked. She clutched the keys to prevent jingling, and drew them out.

Standing against the door, she listened and sorted the keys. These flat ones would not work. This old-fashioned kind—each one was a possibility. Taking care to make as little noise as possible, she inserted the first into the keyhole. It turned half-way, and stuck. She twisted it backward, her fingers throbbing with the effort, and it squeaked loose. Checking her breath, she tried to hear some slight noise in the rooms below.

The second key turned. The door gave almost imperceptibly. Eileen twisted the knob again, and it yielded. Her pulse sped. Cooler air poured in through the crack—air she could take into her lungs without sickening. Cautiously she sidled from the closet.

Her hand followed the wall to the landing of the stairs, and she found the rail. She knew the way now. All the houses in the row were exactly like her own. The stairs, thirty-two steps in the flight, four paces to the vestibule, four more across it—the street door. . . .

Eileen froze.

A car had stopped in front of the house and now it was humming off again. Feet were shuffling up the stoop. Louder footfalls sounded in a room below, beating quickly into the hall.

Someone had been in the house all the while!

Eileen retreated as the entrance door opened. She heard men's voices speaking tensely. A stair-step snapped. They were coming up. They would have to pass the closet. Eileen backed into it and drew the door shut. As before, the hinges whined. Had they heard?

The men moved within a few feet of her. They were shuffling, carrying something heavy, something that creaked.

Sounds came from a bed in the room across the hall.

"The kid never even opened his eyes," a new voice said. "He don't know what's happening to him. He won't make us no trouble."

Eileen recognized next the nasal tones of the man called Slug. "What about the girl, Blacky?"

"She won't be giving us any trouble either," Blacky said. "Hell, they won't even find her until we're a good thousand miles from this place with plenty of kale oiling the wheels."

CHAPTER THREE

Rats' Rendezvous

DETECTIVE JIMMY TEAGUE was suddenly learning what it meant to bear the responsibilities of a plain-clothes man. Scarcely had he been relieved of duty for the day and he was summoned back. He hadn't even time to take off his uniform. Stepping out of Petersen's, the jeweler's, on State Street, after having trudged eagerly from one store to another, he had been signaled by a cruising radio car. Orders to report to Inspector Brannan at Headquarters immediately, Special detail. With the ring in his pocket—the blue-white solitarie for Eileen.

He followed eight other detectives into the Inspector's office. All were veterans. They had slapped Teague's back and wrung his hand and welcomed him to the bureau. Their faces were soberly set. The grapevine had already hinted to them that something serious had happened. Teague, besides wanting to be away as soon as possible, felt a twinge of stage-fright, standing there with Inspector Brannan's dark eyes boring at him.

"Glad to have you assigned to me, Jimmy," the Inspector said. "Your first job's turning out to be the damndest, most important one any of us have had in many a year." His sharp gaze swept over the others. "You men probably read in the papers a few days ago about young Bert Wellcord, Wallace Wellcord's son. Somebody else also saw that news. The boy was on his way to the Surgeons Hospital for a transfusion. His life depends on it. And he's been snatched."

Absorbing every word, Teague frowned and noticed the faces of his brother detectives became even more set.

"The crooks staged an accident on Bridge Street, just this side of Hickory. Forced the ambulance to run into a coupe that was bought second-hand last week for thirty-five dollars, registered under a false

name at a fake address. Driver got away. Mr. and Mrs. Wellcord, and Dr. Brooks, and a girl who was going to give the boy some of her blood—they were at the Surgeons, and they kept waiting.

"This is no ordinary snatch. The boy's got to have that transfusion or he'll die. Maybe the crooks don't know it, but they do know he's dangerously sick. Every hour that passes brings him closer to death. If he's missing much longer it will be too late even for the transfusion. We've got to find him."

The detectives shifted their feet, and Jimmy Teague closed his hand hard over the ring in his pocket.

"We're co-operating with Mr. Wellcord all the way," Inspector Brannan continued dourly. "The crooks didn't lose any time about demanding a ransom. Phoned Mr. Wellcord. The usual amount and the usual stipulations—fifty thousand, small, old bills, unmarked and unlisted. To be passed tonight. Mr. Wellcord has appealed to his friends and he's managed to raise the cash. He's going to follow instructions to the letter. Under the circumstances, we're not making a single move without his O.K. By far the most important thing is to get that boy back, get him to the hospital as soon as possible."

Teague pinched his lips together, and he thought, too, with disappointment, that he'd have to wait a little while before he could see Eileen.

"At this very minute Mr. Wellcord is about to leave his home with the money done up in a bundle. He's been told to drive into the central business district of the city, and to keep cruising around. Another car will pull alongside. Mr. Wellcord will toss the money into it. But this won't happen unless the crooks are absolutely sure the coast is clear. Mr. Wellcord must be alone, so I can't send a man with him. We can't trail him, because that would scare the snatchers off. But we've decided on a plan. It's already in operation—risky, but still the safest move we can make. If it works, there's a chance of getting the boy to the hospital in time. If it doesn't—"

Inspector Brannan handed a scrawled memorandum across his desk.

"Each of you men take a car and park at the position designated on this list. When you're in place, I'll have a man at

every important intersection in the retail district. Sit in the back seat and keep out of sight, but watch every vehicle of every description that goes by. Mr. Wellcord will be driving a black Cadillac limousine, license number X-12.

"As long as he still has the money with him, he'll drive with his left elbow sticking out the window. Once he's passed the ransom he'll draw in his arm. He'll keep that position for just one block, then the window will be closed. That will mean the crooks' car is probably right ahead or right behind him. Spot every one in sight. You'll have to work fast to get their marker number, and anything peculiar about them. But whatever you see, let it go. Understand? Let it go! We'll have to give the crooks a chance to communicate with Mr. Wellcord, tell him where to find the boy. Once young Bert Wellcord is safe, we'll close in, but not before. That clear?"

Jimmy Teague bobbed his head as the other detectives grimly nodded.

"I hope none of you men make a mistake," the Inspector said quietly, squaring his shoulders. "Imagine how you'd feel if it was your kid. I hope none of you will be so unlucky as to have Bert Wellcord's death on your soul."

His gesture dismissed them. In the outer office they silently consulted the memo. Teague's position was noted as the southwest corner of Locust, at Blockhouse Street. He was the first to hurry from Headquarters and turn in the direction of the official garage. Always, when a special assignment filled him with eagerness to acquit himself, he was the first to get under way. As the others filed out the revolving door after him, the telephone on Inspector Brannan's desk began to ring.

"Who's that?" the Inspector grated over the wire. "Colonel who? Colonel Landis? You want to speak to Detective Teague? Yes, they told you right—Teague's assigned to me—but he just left the building. He's acting under urgent orders. No, man, no! I can't call him back."

The Inspector broke the connection.

THE cabriolet in which Jimmy Teague waited was Inspector Brannan's personal property. Locust Street was one way, and he parked about fifty feet back from Blockhouse, on the left side, so he

could have the best possible view of the cars stopping at the traffic light. This was the fringe of the downtown section, gloomy and comparatively unfrequented at this hour. The snow, still falling heavily, made observation difficult. Mr. Wellcord's limousine must even now be cruising about somewhere near-by, but since he had come to his post, Jimmy Teague had not glimpsed it.

The evening was wearing on. He had told Colonel Landis he'd be over early, to see Eileen. He was worrying about being late, and he was unceasingly conscious of the little box in his pocket.

So far he hadn't had a chance to plan just how he would ask Eileen to marry him. At first, he was sure, she would answer no, but he wasn't going to stop there. It would be a hard thing to say, but she must realize the colonel wouldn't be with her much longer. She'd need somebody, all the more. Besides, Dr. Bessey, the eye specialist, had said her failing sight was the result of the emotional shock she had suffered when her father and mother had been killed in a railroad wreck years ago. With the proper treatment she might, in time see again. Jimmy meant to do everything he could to help her, but he wouldn't wait for that. No matter how she argued, he was going to slip that ring on her finger. Tonight.

It was late. The corner was quieter now, for the storm was driving traffic off the streets. The lights of a drugstore shone on Jimmy's car. Just inside the frosted panes there were several telephone booths. He could keep on watching while putting a call through. It wasn't right to leave his post, but it would only take a minute. A minute probably wouldn't make any difference.

Jimmy Teague hurried into the drugstore and sidled into the front booth. Except to dial the number he didn't take his eyes off the corner.

"Hello, Colonel," he said quickly. "I've got special orders and I'm sorry I can't—"

"Jimmy!" the old man broke in, his voice strained. "I've been trying to reach you. Eileen isn't here. She hasn't come back."

Teague stiffened. "You said she only went to the—"

"I phoned the grocery store, Jimmy.

She left here a long time ago. I don't know what's happened to her. When I couldn't get hold of you, I phoned the hospitals, but they haven't any record. I even called the morgue." The colonel's voice was breaking. "Damn this wheelchair of mine! I'd have been out looking for her hours ago if I were able. I'm going crazy with worry, Jimmy. What's happened to Eileen? Why hasn't she—"

"Colonel!" Jimmy blurted. "Phone Inspector Brannan. Ask him to call me off duty. I'll have to ring you back."

Through the whitened window he was staring at a car that was stopping for the red light. A big black limousine. He could see the license plate—X-12.

His shoulders hunched, Teague left the booth and crossed the sidewalk. He checked himself, warned himself he must show no interest in the big car. His mind was stormy with wonder about Eileen, but he had to remember his orders. "Imagine how you'd feel if it was your kid," the Inspector had said. Wanting to tear himself away, to rush to the colonel, he ducked into the cabriolet.

The limousine was still motionless, and Wallace Wellcord was at the wheel. Mr. Wellcord's elbow was not thrust out the window. He was turning the crank, raising the pane. Agitated as he was, Teague was struck numb by the signal. The ransom had been passed, passed within the length of this very block.

Jimmy sat still, his scalp prickling. The beacon was green now. Mr. Wellcord was driving on. There was no other car ahead. The crooks' machine, then, must be behind Mr. Wellcord's. Risking a glance, Jimmy saw two cars in the block. One was far behind, the other close. Two men were in the front peering around. The other man was bending forward as if examining something lying at his feet. Though he could not see that object, Jimmy knew it was the bundle, the money, the price demanded for the return of a dying boy.

HE USED his eyes. The car was a light sedan, neither brand new nor very old—like thousands of others in the city. It was plastered with snow and its color was uncertain. Even its number plates were obscured by sticky white. It was turning right at the corner, and Jimmy couldn't

make out a single numeral. In the gloom he had seen the two men merely as dim forms with few details. The sedan was moving away, increasing its speed.

Most of Teague's mind was choked with anxiety for Eileen and the rest of it was focused on that vanishing car. He was suddenly finding himself the vital element in Inspector Brannan's strategy. What could he report? Nothing that would help. A worthless description. Not the remotest hint of the identity of the snatchers, not a single word by which the sedan could be traced. It was almost out of sight now. Once it was gone, it would be lost forever.

"Whatever you see," Inspector Brannan had ordered, "let it go."

The Inspector could not have divined that he was issuing instructions which would, in all probability, doom the case to the Unsolved File. "The damnedest, most important one any of us have had in many a year."

Jimmy Teague switched on the ignition. The traffic light was red again, but he shot past it and turned as the sedan had once. It was a block away now, and turning again. When he reached the next corner, he glimpsed the sedan's snow-dimmed tail-light disappearing into Bridge Street. Swinging right at Bridge, he sat up stiff and straight. His quarry had melted into thin air. The sedan was nowhere within sight.

Jimmy went along that block slowly. He braked. On his left stood a small public garage, its windows boarded, one of which bore a sooty sign: *For Sale*. Nobody would normally be driving into a place like that, but there were tire tracks curving to the closed doors. Two pairs of old tracks which the snow had all but filled, and another, cleanly impressed and so new that the first flakes were setting into them now. Ten to one the sedan had ducked into this deserted building.

Jimmy got out of the Inspector's car, thinking he'd better be sure, even if he was alone, even if the uniform under his benny might telegraph his purpose to anyone who might be watching. There wasn't a call box in sight. If he left the street in order to ring in, his move would give the snatchers a chance to slip away. Besides, he was disobeying orders and, knowing how Inspector Brannan could crack down

on a miscreant, he'd better be sure of what he was doing.

He walked slowly toward the garage and put his service gun in his outside pocket. He pushed at the big doors and found them barred. A small door was cut into one of them. He lifted its latch. It yielded, and Jimmy Teague stopped breathing. Gun in hand, he pushed the door open wider.

Blackness filled the garage. He could see nothing inside. He stood still a moment, then cautiously poked his head through. Nothing happened. He stepped into the silent blackness.

Wondering if the electricity was still connected, and if he could find a switch, he groped overhead. He paused, because his out-thrust gun was touching something. Snow. Something with snow on it. A car. Jimmy stepped around it and found the front window. Reaching in, he fumbled for the headlamp button. The lights glared.

The blow swished from behind, catching Jimmy just above the right ear. . . .

He found himself flat on his stomach, with grit on his lips and the stench of rancid grease in his lungs. His brain spun as he picked himself up. Through a big, open square in the wall he could see the street and Inspector Brannan's cabriolet sitting at the opposite curb. They had left the doors open in their haste to decamp, and the snow-cruised sedan was gone. . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

Duty or Death?

STANDING at attention in front of the Inspector's desk, Jimmy Teague was trying to keep himself from shuddering. He wasn't cold, but somehow his body was reacting as if it were chilled to the bone. There was a cut on his right cheek, a lump above his ear, and the bridge of his nose was blackly bruised. He'd rung in to the Inspector from the box nearest the garage, then rushed to Headquarters. Now he was getting it.

Perhaps, he was thinking bitterly, it was just as well he hadn't had a chance to take off his uniform. He hardly dared consider himself a detective any longer. Doggedly, he was holding onto all his plans, but in the back of his mind he was wondering how he'd ever be able to pay for the ring.

"It was the only thing I could do," he said. "That car would have slipped us if I hadn't—"

"I heard you the first, second and third times, Teague," Inspector Brannan said. He leaned forward, clasping his hands on the blotter, his lids drooping. "Mr. Wellcord hasn't had any further word. He's waiting now at home. It's getting late—almost too late—but he hasn't been told yet where to find his boy."

Jimmy tried to swallow.

"I'm glad I'm not the man who did it," the Inspector said. "I like to sleep nights."

Teague had already pled every line of argument he could marshal.

"Well," Inspector Brannan resumed, in his grating tone, "we've got the dragnet out. Railroad station, bus depots, the bridges and all the roads being watched. Not that it'll accomplish anything. The stolen ambulance is in that garage, Teague, but it doesn't mean much. We're going over it for prints. Using a fine comb on the whole building. I'm afraid you won't be much help, but go back and see what you can do."

Leaning on the desk, Teague asked, "You had a call from Colonel Landis, didn't you, Inspector? About his granddaughter, Eileen? Is there any news?"

Inspector Brannan shook his grizzled head. "Your girl?"

"Couldn't you let me try to find out what's happened to her?"

"I've got two men on the job, Teague. Collins and Deverage. You know them. They're good cops. They're tracing her."

"I know the neighborhood so well—and I've got a special reason—"

"What could you do that Collins and Deverage aren't doing?"

"I don't know, sir, but it means so much."

"The Wellcord boy has been snatched. He's desperately sick, dying. A few more hours and there'll be no hope for him, no hope at all. That case means a great deal, too, Teague. It's not going so well as we might have expected. Had you forgotten?"

Jimmy Teague stood straight.

"When one of my men becomes personally involved in a case I never assign him to it. A surgeon never operates on his own wife or his own children. He's too likely to be overanxious and his judgment

won't be the best. Strong emotions get in the way of his thinking. It's the same way here. You're going back to the garage. This time don't try to improve on your orders."

VOICES were mingling nearby—the guttural voice of Blacky, the nasal tones of Slug, the grave utterances of someone called Squire. And there were two others—Dutch and Prince. Several of them had gone out and come back. The entrance door had banged again and again. Now all of them were gathered in one of the rooms across the hall. Their vocal expressions were tense but exultant. They seemed to be counting money, dividing it among them.

"Ten grand each!" Slug exclaimed jubilantly. "I hand it to you, Blacky. You know how to map out a job. Why, we've left the cops running around in circles. Now we clear out, don't we?"

"Easy," Blacky said. "There's no rush. Besides, the job isn't finished yet. Not quite."

Eileen could almost feel him peering at the door of the closet that still imprisoned her.

She was standing just inside the door, her one hand closed over the keys she had taken from the pocket of the dead man still huddled at her feet. All this interminable while she had found no new opportunity to slip out. Constantly, one or more of the conspirators had remained in the room across the hall. To open the closet would mean immediate detection. Eileen forced herself to wait, to listen.

Now the men had ceased talking. The only voice in the room was that of a small radio. Eileen heard fragments of a news-cast: *Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Wellcord . . . their son, Bert . . . abducted . . . a fever called tularemia, invariably fatal in its late stages . . . the final coma certainly approaching . . . some small hope remained, provided the transfusion could be given at once . . . now the ransom had been paid, but the promise to return the boy had not been kept . . . a desperate appeal from the distressed parents . . . the next few hours must mean certain death for their only son unless . . .*

"Blacky!"

The radio went silent. The sober tones of the man called Squire, came from the front of the house.

"There's a car outside, Blacky. Might be one of the special jobs the cops use. Two men were just standing beside it and talking. Now one of them is going down the block and the other's coming this way. They look like dicks."

Eileen heard Blacky moving quickly into the front room. A long silence followed. It was punctuated by the rasp of a buzzer.

Blacky said in a throaty whisper, "You're the man to answer the door, Squire."

Her ears straining, Eileen listened to the Squire's rapid descent of the stairs. The buzzer sounded again and he called, "Just a minute, please!" He hurried into the kitchen, then returned to the vestibule. The bolt clicked back.

"Evening," the Squire said easily, in his drawling, respectable tones.

His coat was off and his sleeves rolled up. He had a dinner plate in one hand. He kept rubbing it with a dish towel as he smiled with simulated sheepishness at the man on the stoop.

"Evening," the caller answered. "Lieutenant Collins from police headquarters. Do you know a Miss Landis—lives a couple of doors from here?"

Eileen took the inside knob of the closet door in both her hands.

The Squire answered, "Don't believe I do. We moved in here just a month ago. Haven't gotten acquainted with any of the neighbors. Anything wrong?"

"Might be," Collins said. "Were you home earlier this evening?"

Eileen twisted the latch from its socket, holding herself tense, poising.

"Lieutenant," The Squire" answered, "has your wife ever had a baby? Well, mine did last week, and it's no joke. I'm supposed to be selling leather goods, wholesale, but what've I been doing instead? Running back and forth from the hospital, cooking my own meals, keeping house, doing errands, washing the dishes. I just came in for a bite, and I've got to go right out again. Got to keep my wife company in the evenings. Still, it's worth it, I guess. Beautiful little girl. Weighed eight pounds two ounces and—"

Eileen flung the door open. She pushed herself from the closet, a cry on her lips. The breath was jarred from her lungs. At her first step she had collided with a man

standing in the upper hall. Instantly she thrust away, but an arm hooked around her neck, a hand slapped over her mouth. She fought to escape but he held her in a crushing, gorilla hug.

At the door Lieutenant Collins asked, "What was that noise?"

"Guess it must be the dog. Always jumping around, that pup, looking for something to eat." The Squire shouted, "Prince! Lie down!" And he chuckled in appreciation of a grim jest which escaped Collins. "Something happened to some girl, you say? Well, I wouldn't know anything about it."

Collins said. "We're checking the whole block, that's all. I know what you're up against. Got two kids of my own. Good night."

Eileen was striving hopelessly to escape the crushing arms of Blacky.

Collins paused on the stoop, looking back as the Squire closed the door.

"Couldn't get any answer at the house at the end of the row," he said. "Understand a man named Tuthill lives there. Happen to know where he is?"

"Wouldn't know about tonight, Lieutenant," the Squire said. "But he'll be here bright and early on the morning of the first, to collect the rent."

Chuckling, the Squire closed the door. Blacky held Eileen immovable, and they listened to the squeak of the snow under

Collins' heels as he departed. In the hall below, the Squire emitted a sound of relief. Slug, close beside Eileen, sighed, "Geez! That was a close one! Look, Blacky. What's she got in her hand? Keys!"

"Take 'em away from her. I'll fix her so she'll stay put this time!"

A strong hand pried Eileen's fingers apart. The keys were torn from them. Blacky released her. She stood swaying a little, lost in blackness. She was unprepared for the vicious, open-handed slap that caught the whole side of her face. It knocked her sprawling. Something struck her side as she fell. Lying, stunned, with her head pressed against the base of a wall, she heard a door slam.

"Better get used to it in there, sister," Blacky said. "It's as far as you're ever going."

FLASHLIGHTS were shining inside the grimy garage on Bridge Street. Two plain-clothes men were painstakingly brushing aluminum powder over the doors and the steering wheel of the stolen Samaritan ambulance, searching for fingerprints. They were finding nothing but useless smudges. Two more men were systematically ransacking the office partitioned off in one corner. No significant clue had come to light. Apparently the crooks had bro-

(Please continue on page 104)

GET THEE BEHIND ME . . . by John D. MacDonald

In January he was George Cooper, doing a quiet job in a quiet way, thankful for those quiet years after the bad years—the very bad years. And then in March his name was Allan Farat, a tall black-haired hood who killed for profit. . . .

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MURDER

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MARTIN**



Two men had already fallen for the luscious widow—one from a ladder—one into a murder rap. And insurance investigator Regent was following merrily along in their fatal footsteps.

74

CHAPTER ONE

Widow, Weep for Me

LATE on a bleak November afternoon Regent parked his coupe before a smoke-blackened apartment building in the heart of the factory district and checked the address in his note book. It

WITH PLEASURE



Elaine Shannon was racing past him.

was the right place—545 Carbon Road. He got out of the coupe, crossed the cracked and broken sidewalk, and entered a small foyer containing a row of mail boxes. He scanned the boxes until he came to the name he wanted—Mr. and Mrs. George Shannon, Apt. 26. The first two words, *Mr. and*, had been crossed out with

a pencil. Regent climbed two flights of stairs carpeted with a threadbare rug and knocked on the door of 26.

A tiny blonde girl opened the door and stared at him solemnly. Regent guessed her to be between four and five years old. He smiled down at her. "Is your mommy home?"

"No," she said seriously. "My mommy has gone away for a long time. So has my daddy. But Elaine is here. And Uncle Vernon. He's nice. He calls me Blondie. Sometimes he takes Elaine and me for a ride."

"Good for Uncle Vernon," Regent said. He peered into the apartment. It was clean and attractively furnished. From an inner room he heard voices, and a woman called, "Who is it, Jan?"

"A man," the little girl said, her big eyes on Regent.

Regent took off his hat and waited. He was a tall man, with a lean, bony face and deep-set brown eyes. His tan gabardine topcoat hung loosely from his wide shoulders.

A woman came through an archway and stared at him curiously. Her eyes were blue and her hair was black. She was wearing a thin, pale gray sweater, dark blue slacks, and soft white leather moccasins. Her skin was clear and milky, her nose short, her mouth soft and red. The sweater fitted her snugly, and Regent noted her slim figure with quick approval. He said politely, "Mrs. Shannon?"

She nodded. "Yes." Her voice was soft and clear.

"My name is Regent. I'm the district agent for the Industrial Welfare Commission. I'd like to ask you a few questions in connection with your husband's death."

Her blue eyes clouded, and she said quietly, "Please come in."

Regent stepped inside and closed the door. The little girl gazed up at him with curious eyes. "Is he a nice man, Elaine?" she asked.

The woman smiled faintly. "Of course, dear." She motioned Regent to a chair.

Regent was about to sit down, when a tall pleasant-faced man entered the room through the archway. He was wearing a blue flannel suit and a silk necktie the color of dark port wine. Over his arm he carried a gray tweed topcoat, and in one hand was a gray felt hat. He glanced at Regent, nodded briefly, and said to the woman, "I'll see you later."

"Perhaps you'd better stay," she said. "This gentleman is from the state Welfare Commission—about George's death." She turned to Regent. "Mr. Regent, this is Mr. Dorr. He is the personnel manager for the

Ferris Abrasive Company—where my husband worked."

Regent shook hands with Dorr and said, "I've seen your signature on your company's accident reports."

Dorr smiled. "We have our share of injuries—the same as any other plant. But George Shannon was our first fatality in five years." He shook his head. "Too bad about George. He was one of our best workers." He paused, gazed at Regent curiously. "I've heard of you, but aren't you new in this territory? Lew Kingston had this case. He made the investigation after the accident."

"Lew was transferred," Regent said. "I took over his territory a month ago. He did a good job. I'm just picking up the loose ends, winding it up."

Dorr nodded. "Lew is a good man, very thorough." He nodded to the woman, patted the little girl on the head, and said to Regent, "If I can be of any help, let me know."

"Thanks," Regent said.

Dorr went out.

The little girl said, "Uncle Vernon is nice, isn't he, Elaine?"

The woman flushed faintly. "Why don't you go color a picture for me? Your crayons are on the floor beside your bed."

The little girl wandered into the adjoining room. The woman said to Regent, "Mr. Dorr has been very kind to us since my husband was—was killed." She hesitated. Her lips trembled a little. "It's been rather difficult for Jan and me."

Regent nodded gravely. "You have my sympathy, Mrs. Shannon. The ten thousand dollar death benefit will be paid you shortly. I am here to get your signature on a release form. It seems certain that the state will allow the claim, but before it can be paid I must have proof that you were Mr. Shannon's legal wife. Could I see your marriage certificate?"

"Of course." She left the room, and returned almost immediately with an embossed paper. Regent took it, and noted that Elaine Margaret Kovac and George Allen Shannon had been married in a town in Kentucky eight months previously. As he handed the paper back to her, he said, "The little girl—she is your husband's daughter by a former marriage?"

She nodded. "Yes. Jan—her name is

really Janice—is my step-daughter. My husband's first wife died two years ago."

"I see," Regent said. "On the day of your husband's death, had he complained of feeling ill?"

"No. He went to work that morning in good spirits. It was Jan's birthday, and he had promised to take us out to dinner that evening. He—" Her voice broke, and she turned away. Her slim shoulders trembled.

Almost involuntarily Regent stepped forward and touched her arm. Her skin felt soft and warm beneath the thin sweater. He said gently, "I'm sorry."

SHE turned slowly to face him, and Regent dropped his hand to his side. "We'd been married only a short time," she said. "It was quite a shock. When Mr. Dorr came and told me—"

"Of course," Regent said, and he thought grimly of all the widows of victims of industrial accidents he had talked to in the years that he had been an investigator for the state Welfare Commission. "There's just one thing more—you have the option of drawing the ten thousand dollars death award in monthly installments, or in a lump sum. Which way do you prefer it?"

"What does it matter?" she said in a choked voice. "It won't bring my husband back."

"If you have no preference," Regent said, "it is the policy of the Commission to pay the award in monthly installments. In that way, we feel that the worker's dependents will receive the maximum benefit over a longer period of time. You will have a regular income over a period of years."

"No," she said, and there was a sudden harshness in her voice. "I want it now—all of it. I don't want checks arriving every month, reminding me that George—" She turned away.

"Very well," Regent said. "I will recommend that it be paid in a lump sum." From his brief case he took a form, laid it on a table, and handed her his fountain pen. She signed quickly, hardly glancing at the form, and returned the pen. He replaced the paper in his case, picked up his hat, and moved to the door.

She said, "Thank you, Mr. Regent."

He smiled at her. "All part of my job. You should receive the money within a week or ten days." He hesitated, looking

at her. She smiled at him, and he said abruptly, "Goodbye." He went out and closed the door.

At the bottom of the stairs, opposite the mail boxes, was a door labeled *Superintendent*. Regent pressed a bell button, and a gray-haired woman with bright black eyes, opened the door. Regent smiled, removed his hat.

The woman said, "I like that, son—taking off your hat. You been raised up right. What can I do for you?"

Regent said, "I'm with the state Industrial Welfare Commission. I've just seen Mrs. Shannon in regard to her husband's accidental death. Could I ask you a few questions?"

"You sure can, son. I'm Mrs. Ryan. Come on in."

Regent shook his head. "It'll only take a minute. How long have the Shannons lived here?"

"Oh, about six months. Ever since they got married."

"Good tenants, would you say?"

"Very good. Quiet, never had any loud parties, not many visitors. Always paid their rent on time. I feel sorry for Mrs. Shannon—and the little girl."

"I understand she is Mr. Shannon's daughter by a former marriage."

The woman nodded. "That's right, son. But her own mother couldn't have cared for her any better than her step-mother."

"You would say they were a happily married couple?"

"I sure would. It's a shame he had to be taken. Reminds me of my own man, Herman. Killed on the railroad in thirty-nine. Only we didn't have any kids. Herman was an engineer, Chicago to Cincinnati. I took his insurance and made a down payment on this place. Get it paid for, too, if I live long enough. Kind of a tough neighborhood, but the people are good working folks. I like it—because I understand 'em. They pay their rent—except when the shops are laying off, or on short time. Then I carry 'em. I don't get stuck too often. How about a bottle of beer, son? You look kind of peaked."

Regent smiled. "No, thanks. I appreciate what you have told me." He moved to the door.

"I hope Mrs. Shannon gets that state insurance money," the woman said. "She

can use it, with the little girl, and all."

"I imagine she can." He went out to the street. In his car he removed from his brief case a printed form with the heading, *Investigator's Report of Death*. Under a section headed *Conclusion and Comments* he wrote in ink: *Witnessed proof of marriage. Checked apartment superintendent, and verified fact that beneficiary, Mrs. Elaine Shannon, deceased's wife, was living with him at the time of his death. Marital relations apparently good. Employer certifies death as arising from deceased's employment. Recommend that maximum death award be paid beneficiary in a lump sum.*

He replaced the sheet in his brief case, and sat for a moment with his hands on the wheel. He had other calls to make in this area, but it was after five o'clock, and he decided to return to his hotel. He couldn't return to his office in the state capital until the end of the week. Another day in this city wouldn't affect his schedule. He drove slowly away, thinking of Elaine Shannon, and wondering what kind of a man her husband had been.

As he got his room key, the clerk handed him a letter. Regent noted that it had been forwarded from the main office, and was marked, *Personal*. It was a cheap white envelope, and the address was pencilled in sprawling letters.

He opened the letter in his room.

Dear Sir: George Shannon didn't have no accident. I saw what happened. I don't want to get mixed up in it, and I can't tell you no more. But I'm telling you true. Geo. Shannon was murdered.

One of Geo.'s Fellow Workers

Regent read it twice, a puzzled frown on his face. Then he placed the letter in his case, and moved thoughtfully into the bath room. He shaved, changed his shirt, and went down to the hotel bar. Al Purdy, his assistant, was sitting on a stool drinking a bottle of beer. Purdy was a short, heavy man with a ready grin and keen little gray eyes. He said to Regent, "I wondered if you'd show up. Have a drink?"

"Sure." Regent slid onto a stool beside him. "Is this on your expense account?"

"Aw, you know better than that. Drinks

never appear on an expense sheet to the Commission. I always add the drinks to the cost of my dinner, or hotel room, or something."

"Cheating the state," Regent said. "I'll have a dry martini—on your expense account."

Purdy laughed, motioned to the bartender, and said to Regent, "Hard day?"

"Not too bad. How did you make out with Lame Back Flanagan?"

Purdy grinned, and took a swallow of beer. "The Claims Board will blow its top. Lame Back has been drawing his thirty-five a week regular for—let's see—twenty-two weeks. Total disability. Claimed he couldn't even push a button on a punch press. Well, I followed him around today. He's working for a brewing company. I snapped a string of pictures of him heaving beer cases around. That ought to convince the Board that he's faking that back injury."

"Yeah," Regent said. "That case smelled to me from the start, but we couldn't prove that his back *didn't* hurt him, and neither could the doctors. We'll shut off Lame Back's compensation, and sue him for the money already paid him." He sipped at his drink, and added, "What about that Jim Reardon case?"

Purdy shook his head. "Jim's in a bad way. Flat on his back. I checked his doctor. Silicosis, advanced. Jim's wife wants to work, but she can't afford to pay anybody to take care of the kids. I wish you'd recommend that they put him on permanent total disability until he recovers, plus medical expense."

Regent made a note on the back of an envelope. "Right," he said. "You'll file a report on it?"

"I'll turn it in tomorrow."

Regent sighed. "This is a thankless job we've got. But when you can help a man like Jim Reardon, I guess it's worthwhile."

"And it does me good to show up a fake like Lame Back Flanagan," Purdy said. "Another drink?"

"One more," Regent said, "and then we'll eat."

TEN minutes later they left the bar together and entered the lobby. A slim dark girl in a loose tweed coat came toward them with a long-legged stride. Regent

saw that it was Elaine Shannon. He said softly to Purdy, "Wait, Al."

She came straight up to them, and said to Regent, "I hoped I would find you here. Can I talk to you—alone?"

Purdy moved away. "See you later," he said to Regent.

Regent glanced around the crowded lobby, and his gaze returned to Elaine Shannon. "The bar?" he suggested.

"Isn't that rather public?"

"Rather," Regent agreed. "My room?" He felt a faint excitement in the presence of this grave-eyed woman. He had felt it when he had first talked to her.

"That would be better," she said. "If—if you don't mind."

Regent said, "Not at all." They walked side by side to the elevators.

In his room Regent switched on a floor lamp, closed the door, and motioned her to a chair. She sat down stiffly, her body erect, her hands clasped in her lap. Regent offered her a cigarette, but she shook her head quickly. He stood looking down at her, a question in his eyes.

"There's something I've got to tell you," she said quietly. "I should have told you before, when you came this afternoon. But I—" She lowered her eyes, and Regent waited.

"It's about George, my husband," she went on. "Yesterday I received a letter saying that he had not died accidentally, that he had been murdered. The letter was signed, 'A Fellow Worker'—that's all. I didn't know what to think, and I—I didn't tell you about it because I was afraid I wouldn't get the insurance money—if what the letter says is true. It's just Jan and me now. We need the money. But after I talked to you this afternoon, I decided to tell you about it. No matter how George died, it won't bring him back to me, and I I want to do what is right."

"Of course," Regent said. "I'm glad you told me. Do you have the letter with you?"

She shook her head. "No. I locked it in a drawer at home."

"I'll stop and pick it up in the morning. It's probably just the work of some crank, but I'd like to see it . . . How did you know where to find me?"

She looked up at him. "I just called hotels until I found the one where you were

registered. Do you forgive me—for not telling you about the letter?"

Regent grinned at her. "Sure."

She stood up, and smiled at him almost shyly. "I feel better now—even if it means that I won't get the money."

Looking at her, Regent thought that she was one of the prettiest women he'd ever seen. Pretty and soft-looking, yet there was a firmness about her manner; a cool steadiness that he admired. The nature of his work forced a loneliness upon him. He was not married, had never had time for marriage. He had driven himself to the position of top agent for the state in the investigation of industrial accidents. He was thirty two years old, and had been with the Commission ever since he'd left college. He had been an all-state halfback, had stood high in his class, and had the usual romances with various blondes, red-heads, and brunettes. He was attractive to women, but he was not aware of it. He had buried himself in his work.

On a sudden impulse, he said to her, "Have you had dinner?"

She looked a little startled. "No," she said.

"How about having it with me?"

She hesitated, and a faint flush colored her cheeks.

He smiled. "Strictly business. I can probably think of a few more questions to ask you."

Suddenly she smiled. "I'd love to. It's been so long since I've been anywhere. But are you sure it'll be—all right?"

"Why not?"

"I'll have to call Mrs. Ryan," she said. "I left Jan with her."

Regent motioned to the telephone. She picked it up and spoke briefly. Then they left his room and moved down the hall to the elevator.

Al Purdy was leaving the hotel dining room as they entered. He gave Elaine Shannon an appraising glance, winked at Regent, and moved on out to the lobby. Regent guided the girl to a table.

At first she was reserved, faintly embarrassed, but as the meal progressed she relaxed and responded to Regent's smooth flow of conversation. He learned that she had been born in a small hill town in West Virginia. Her father had been killed in a coal mine, and after the death of her

mother two years previously she had moved north and found work on the inspection line in the plant of the Ferris Abrasive Company. There she met George Shannon, the father of little Jan, whose mother had died two years before. After her marriage to Shannon, she quit her job and stayed in the apartment on Carbon Road to take care of Jan.

As they were having coffee, she said thoughtfully, "I can't get that letter out of my mind. Do you think there is any truth in it?"

Regent shrugged his wide shoulders. "I wouldn't be too concerned. Some queer people in this world. Your husband's accidental death while on the job has been verified by his employers. All the evidence at hand points to it. I have already recommended—"

"Don't you want to know the truth?" she broke in.

"Of course," Regent said easily. "I'll check the possibilities before I leave town."

"Will you let me know—if you find out anything?"

"Sure," Regent said. "But don't worry about it."

She stood up, and smiled at him. "This has been nice, Mr. Regent. Thank you very much."

He got out of his chair. "Can I drive you home?"

She shook her head. "No, thank you. I have the car outside. It was George's pride and joy. Every Sunday he used to wash and polish it." She turned abruptly and moved across the lobby toward the door. Regent followed her outside, and she turned to face him. "I'll see you in the morning?" she asked.

He nodded. "Around ten. Okay?"

"That'll be fine." She walked swiftly away. For a few minutes Regent stood staring after her. It was cold. A light November snow had begun to fall. Presently he turned, entered the hotel, and walked slowly across the lobby and into the bar.

As he had expected, he found Al Purdy drinking a bottle of beer. Purdy grinned as Regent sat down beside him. "Nice babe," Purdy said.

"Business," Regent said.

"Nice business. Have a beer?"

Regent shook his head. The bartender moved up, and Regent said, "Bourbon and

water." He turned to Purdy. "You tied up tomorrow morning?"

Purdy sighed. "Well, I'll tell you. O'Connor wants me to tail a blonde who is drawing temporary partial disability for weak eyes due to spot welding. He wants me to make sure that she's wearing dark glasses all of the time. He thinks she's got bloodshot eyes from drinking too much rye. You know O'Connor—the suspicious type."

"Yeah, I know," Regent said. Austin O'Connor was chief of the special investigation division of the state Industrial Welfare Commission, and his immediate superior. Although Al Purdy was Regent's official assistant, O'Connor had the authority to order him to any special duty which he, O'Connor, deemed necessary.

Regent wondered wryly how O'Connor would regard the developments in the George Shannon case. He made a mental note to withhold a full report until he'd checked all angles.

He said to Purdy, "Forget O'Connor's blonde. I might need you in the morning."

"What's up?"

CHAPTER TWO

"Slugger, Come Back to Me!"

REGENT told him quickly about the case of George Shannon, and about the anonymous letters. When he had finished, Purdy said, "We get a hundred screwball letters like that every day. You know that."

"I know," Regent sighed. "But a quick check won't cost the state much."

"You're the boss," Purdy grunted. "I'll be on deck."

An hour later Regent sat in his room reading the file on George Shannon.

REPORT OF EMPLOYER: Deceased was a lathe operator in the main Finishing Department. He was regularly engaged in cutting unfinished abrasive grinding wheels down to exact tolerances with a diamond cutting tool. At 10:05 A.M. on the day of his fatal accident, a maintenance repair man, Frederick Riggio, hoisted a twenty foot ladder to the skylight near Shannon's lathe for the purpose of replacing a broken skylight pane. Riggio was carrying tools. He asked Shannon if he would follow him

up the ladder and hand him the new window pane. Shannon agreed, and, carrying the pane of glass, followed Riggio to the top of the ladder. He was standing beneath Riggio, when suddenly the ladder slipped. Shannon fell to the floor, hitting his head on the cement, fracturing his skull (See medical report). Fellow employees immediately carried him to the plant first aid room. A doctor was called, and Shannon was rushed to the hospital, where he died an hour later without regaining consciousness.

Regent turned the page, and read the testimony of the two witnesses to the accident, Frederick Riggio and Vernon Dorr. He was a little surprised to note that Dorr had been a witness, but he read Riggio's statement first. It was similar to the employer's report, and ended: . . . *I was standing on the ladder, two rungs above Shannon, removing broken glass from the skylight. Suddenly I felt the ladder slip out from under me. I grabbed a beam beneath the skylight and hung on, and I managed to pull myself to the roof. I heard the ladder fall to the floor, and when I looked down I saw Shannon lying on his back below me.*

Vernon Dorr's testimony followed:

I was walking through the Finishing Department when I saw Riggio and Shannon go up the ladder. I stopped beside the ladder and looked up at them. My attention was diverted, and I gazed off across the department. In that instant the ladder slipped, and I tried to steady it, but it fell to the floor. George Shannon fell, and I immediately directed that he be carried to the first aid room

Regent lit a cigarette and turned on through the thick sheaf of papers. He came to the autopsy report. It was signed by a well-known pathologist employed by the state. Regent quickly scanned the typewritten pages.

Regent stopped reading the medical report. It was an old, old story to him. George Shannon had died of a fractured skull. That was obvious. He flipped the pages to a final question asking if the employer certified that the accident occurred on the employer's premises, and in the course of the employee's regular duties. The an-

swer to this was, *Yes*, followed by, *The Ferris Abrasive Company, V. H. Dorr, Personnel Manager.*

The telephone on the table beside Regent began to ring shrilly. He picked it up, and a breathless voice said in his ear, "Mr. Regent?"

"Yes."

"This is Elaine Shannon. Could I see you for a few minutes?"

"What's the matter?"

"I'd rather not tell you over the phone. I can't leave Jan—could you come out here?"

He glanced at his wrist watch. Eight minutes after ten o'clock. "Sure," he said.

"Oh, thank you. But please hurry. I—I'm a little frightened."

"Ten minutes," Regent said, and hung up.

He was wrong on his time calculation. It took him almost fifteen minutes to get his car from the hotel garage and drive to the apartment building at 545 Carbon Road. He knocked gently on Elaine Shannon's door, and from inside a low voice said, "Who is it?"

"Regent."

The door opened, and he stepped inside. Elaine Shannon closed the door quietly, and turned to face him. She seemed pale, Regent thought. Her eyes were big and dark. He looked around for the little girl, but he didn't see her.

"Jan's in bed," she said. She held a cigarette between her fingers. The room was softly lighted by a shaded lamp on a table in a corner.

"What's wrong?" He felt a faint stirring of excitement at the sight of her.

She laughed a little shakily, and placed the cigarette between her red lips. She inhaled deeply, and said, "Maybe I shouldn't have bothered you, but I thought you should know about what happened. When I drove home from downtown, I suspected that a car was following me. By the time I got out here I was sure of it. I was afraid to put the car away. The garage is in the rear of the building, so I parked on the street. The car stopped behind me, and I ran to the building entrance. A man got out of the car, and ran after me. But I got inside, and went into Mrs. Ryan's. I told her about it, and she went outside to look, but the man was gone. The car, too.

Mrs. Ryan is quite brave. She carries a small pistol in her purse all of the time. She came up here with Jan and me, and stayed a while. I finally told her that we'd be all right, and she left. Then I called you." She paused, took a deep breath, and added, "I know it was rather silly of me . . ."

"Not at all," Regent said. "Did you, or Mrs. Ryan, notify the police?"

She shook her head. "Mrs. Ryan wanted to, but I didn't see what good it would do. The man was gone . . . But then, something else happened. After Mrs. Ryan left, my telephone rang. A man said, 'Burn that letter about George, and stay away from that guy, Regent—if you don't want any trouble.' Then he hung up.

Regent said, "Did you get a look at the man who followed you?"

"I glanced back once. He was beneath the street light. A small man in a dark overcoat. No hat. His hair was either white or light blond."

"Would you know him again if you saw him?"

"I—I think so."

Regent said, "Maybe you'd better give me that letter now." He smiled, and added, "That is, if you're not afraid to."

"Of course not," she said quietly. "But what's going on? Why did that man follow me. Why did he call me and say what he did?"

"I don't know. It's queer."

She gazed at him with level eyes. "I don't want any trouble," she said gravely. "I—I just want to make a home for Jan." She turned away abruptly. "I'll get the letter." She left the room.

Regent sat down and lit a cigarette. She returned and handed him an envelope. It bore the same pencilled handwriting as the letter he had received. He took out the single sheet of paper and read:

Dear Mrs. Shannon: This has been worrying me for two months and I got to tell it. You're husband didn't have no accident. I don't want to get mixed up in it, and I can't tell you no more, but I thought you ought to know that he was killed on purpose. I have also told Mr. Regent, of the state Industrial Welfare Commission . . . One of George's Fellow Workers.

Regent placed the letter in his pocket, and said, "Either a crackpot is trying to stir something up, or there's something to it. I'll find out." He moved to the door.

"Must you go?"

"Scared?"

"A—a little."

Regent hesitated. He didn't want to leave, and yet he could think of no reason for staying.

She said, almost shyly, "Would you care for a drink?"

"I'd like a drink—if it's all right."

"Why wouldn't it be all right? George would want me to have friends. It—it's been pretty lonesome, just Jan and me." She laughed uncertainly. "I have some bourbon, been in the cupboard for ages. But there's no soda. Would water be all right?"

"Water's fine," Regent said, and he removed his topcoat. He watched her slender form as she moved toward the kitchen. "Can I help?" he said.

"If you like." She smiled at him over her shoulder.

He followed her into the kitchen and broke out ice cubes while she got the whiskey and glasses.

THEY had their drinks in the small but pleasant living room, and they talked of many things. She told him of the week she and her husband and the little girl, Jan, had spent at a cabin in the Michigan woods. "It was wonderful," she said, her eyes shining in remembrance. "Warm sunny days, cool nights, and we had a fire in the fireplace." She looked at him suddenly with a faint smile. "I've been wondering—are you married?"

Regent was a little surprised. He laughed, said, "Not yet."

"I knew it," she said.

"How?" Regent asked curiously.

She said seriously, "Because I don't think you would have stayed to have a drink with me—if you were married."

"Is that a compliment?" Regent asked, smiling.

"Of course." She added hastily, "Not that there is anything wrong with our having a drink together. It—it's been fun.

Across the room the telephone jangled. Elaine Shannon gazed at Regent with big startled eyes. He said, "Shall I answer it?"

She nodded silently, and he moved to the phone. "Hello."

A man's guarded voice said, "Who is this?"

"Guess," Regent said. He winked at the silent girl.

The voice said harshly, "I want to talk to Mrs. Shannon."

"You can talk to me," Regent said.

There was a sharp click in his ear, and Regent slowly replaced the phone. He said to Elaine Shannon, "Your boy friend again, I guess. He wanted to talk to you. If the phone rings again tonight, don't answer it."

"I won't. But what does it mean? Who do you suppose—?"

Regent shrugged. "Hard to tell. But if he bothers you again, maybe we'd better tell the police."

"All right," she said quietly. "If you think it best."

He moved over to her. "I'd better go now."

She gazed up at him, and her chin lifted a little. "All right. I'm not afraid."

He had a sudden desire to kiss her. Several hours before he had admitted to himself that this girl, this widow, attracted him strongly, more than any girl had for a long time. But he didn't want to push his luck. He would see her again. The case of George Shannon, deceased, and the state, was not finished yet.

He turned away, and as he did so he saw the look in her eyes, and knew that he should have kissed her. She had wanted him to, had expected it. But it was too late now. The moment was past. He picked up his hat and coat and moved to the door.

She gazed at him thoughtfully. "Will I see you again?"

"Sure. Tomorrow, maybe. I'll call you." She nodded.

"Look," he said. "I'll ask Mrs. Ryan to come up and stay with you tonight."

She shook her head. "I'll be all right."

"Lock your door."

She nodded again.

"Good night," he said softly and went out and closed the door.

There was a light shining beneath Mrs. Ryan's door, and Regent knocked gently. She opened it immediately, and her broad pleasant face broke into a smile. "Oh, it's you again."

He said, "Mrs. Shannon called me about

that man who followed her. I understand she came in with you a while, and that you went outside to look for him. You didn't see him?"

She shook her head. "Nope. By the time I went out, he had scooted, car and all. That poor girl was scared stiff."

"Whoever it was," Regent said, "called her a couple of times since. She's a little nervous. Would you kind of keep your ears open tonight?"

Mrs. Ryan smiled. "Don't worry, son. I will. Mrs. Shannon is a mighty pretty girl, and now that her husband is gone she'll have to expect men to notice her. That man—when I was a girl we would have called him a masher. But I'll keep an eye on things. There ain't much going on in this building day or night that I don't know about. And I keep a pistol handy. Long barreled .22 target job. Used to belong to Herman. He was a crack shot on the railroad pistol team. He taught me how to shoot, but I don't get much chance any more—except at the rats in the basement." She paused, and looked at him with crinkles of humor around her eyes. "Ain't it kind of late to be seeing a widow on business, son?"

Regent grinned. "Maybe," he said.

"I don't blame you," she chuckled. "Mrs. Shannon is a fine girl. Her husband ain't been dead very long, but you can't blame her for getting lonesome."

"I was seeing her on business," Regent said.

"Oh, sure."

Regent tipped his hat. "Good night, Mrs. Ryan." He went out to the street. His car was parked a half block away beyond a dark alley entrance. He crossed the alley, thinking of Elaine Shannon. He heard a slight sound behind him, and started to turn. A powerful arm hooked beneath his chin, jerking him backward. He struggled, but the arm was like a steel band on his throat. A voice grunted in his ear, "This is to remind you to lay off the Shannon case."

Regent kicked his feet, and tried to twist free. He gulped for breath. Something exploded against his head, and it seemed to him that he was soaring away into an enormous ringing blackness. . . .

When Regent opened his eyes again, he blinked into the bright glare of a flashlight.

His head ached, and his neck felt stiff. He knew that he was lying on the rough bricks of the alley, and slowly he remembered what had happened. He lifted a hand to shield his eyes from the light.

Above him in the darkness a voice said, "Drunk, huh?"

"No!" Regent started to push himself to his feet. A hand grasped his arm and helped him. He stood dizzily, leaning against the wall of the building. The light shifted away from his eyes, and he saw the broad form of a uniformed policeman. The policeman picked up Regent's hat and handed it to him.

"Thanks," Regent said. He put on his hat, felt of his head gingerly. There was a swelling on the right side, just above his ear. "Somebody slugged me," he said.

The policeman held the flash under his arm and hauled out a leather book. "Robbery?"

"No." Regent felt for his wallet. It was gone. He sighed, and said, "Yes. My wallet's gone."

"Much money in it?"

"Fifty or sixty dollars."

"Come out here," the policeman said, and Regent followed him a little unsteadily to the sidewalk. It was lighter here, and he saw that the policeman was young, with a broad friendly face. He peered at Regent closely, said, "Nope. I guess you're not drunk. What happened?"

Regent told him. When he had finished, the policeman said, "I was walking my beat, and I saw your feet sticking out from the alley. Did you get a look at him before he attacked you?"

Regent shook his head. "No. He grabbed me from behind. Damn near strangled me as he did."

The policeman wrote in his book, and then asked for Regent's name, address, and occupation. Regent told him, and the policeman grinned at him. "State Commission, huh? We're kind of in the same business. Down here on a case?"

Regent nodded. "I was seeing the widow of a man who was killed out at Ferris Abrasives."

"Would that be George Shannon's wife?"

"That's right."

"Know her well," the policeman said. "Knew George, too. Nice couple. Too bad

he got killed. Cute little girl, too. I know pretty near everybody on this beat." He snapped his book shut. "You want to see a doctor?"

"No. I'll be all right." Regent nodded at his car parked at the curb. "That's my car. I'll drive on down to the hotel."

"Make it all right?"

"Sure."

The policeman said, "I'll report it, but I don't suppose it'll do any good—since you didn't get a look at him. But I'll keep my eye peeled."

"Thanks." Regent got into his car and drove away.

Al Purdy was sitting in the hotel lobby. He got up as Regent entered, and said, "You look kind of pale around the gills."

"I feel pale." Regent told him what had happened.

Purdy whistled softly, and then grinned. "Maybe you'll get a Purple Heart from the Commission."

"The way I feel now," Regent said, "I should file an application for temporary total disability. Me for bed." He moved toward the elevator, said over his shoulder, "Meet me at nine. We'll run out to Ferris Abrasives and snoop around a little and see if there's anything we should know."

"Right," Purdy said.

Sometime during the night Regent's telephone rang. He groped for it sleepily, grunted, "Yeah?"

A man's voice said, "Your wallet's outside your door. Thanks for the sixty bucks. And lay off the Shannon deal. Just let it ride as it is. If you don't, I won't be so gentle the next time. Goodbye, pal." The man laughed, and the receiver clicked in Regent's ear.

Regent crossed the room, opened the door. His wallet was lying there. He picked it up, opened it. His papers and identification cards were intact, but the money was gone. He picked up the phone once more and called the desk. A sleepy clerk answered, and Regent said, "Did you notice a man in the hotel a while ago—maybe a little man in a dark overcoat? No hat, white or light-colored hair?"

"No, sir. People keep coming and going all night. Is anything wrong? Can I help you in any way?"

"Everything's fine. Never mind." Regent went back to bed.

CHAPTER THREE

Rogue Scholar

THE plant of The Ferris Abrasive Company was in the center of the city's industrial section. It was a sprawling collection of huge brick and steel buildings surrounded by a high wire fence. The boiler stack loomed high and black against the November sky, and black smoke from the mouths of a dozen kilns rolled away in the wind over the gleaming roofs. At the main gate a uniformed guard telephoned to Vernon Dorr, and presently Regent and Al Purdy stood in Dorr's outer office. From beyond the paneled walls they could hear the high metallic whine of the finishing lathes as the cutters bit into the whirling, rough abrasive wheels.

Dorr's office was complete with indirect lighting, a thick tan rug, and a snub-nosed red-headed secretary. She motioned Regent and Purdy to deep leather chairs and spoke softly into a telephone. "Mr. Regent and Mr. Purdy, of the Industrial Welfare Commission." She replaced the phone, and gave them a dazzling smile. "Mr. Dorr will see you in a few moments."

"Thanks, honey," Purdy said. "How's every little thing?"

"Just fine," she said, and turned to her typewriter.

Purdy winked at Regent, and picked up a magazine from a stand. From beyond the door to the inner office they could hear muffled voices. A man's, and a woman's. Presently the door opened, and Vernon Dorr came out. His big form was draped in a double-breasted brown gabardine suit. A dark green knit tie was knotted neatly into the slot of a crisp white shirt. His black hair was combed smoothly back from his high white forehead, and his smile of greeting showed strong white teeth. He shook hands with Regent and Purdy, and said, "Come in, gentlemen."

Purdy glanced at the red-head, and said to Regent, "Go ahead. I'll wait here."

Dorr smiled, and stepped aside as Regent entered his office. Dorr closed the door. A girl was sitting opposite a big mahogany desk. She gazed coolly at Regent. He smiled at her, and she quickly averted her gaze and stared out of a window. She was young, in her middle twenties, Regent

guessed. She was dressed simply in a plain gray suit with a white starched collar showing at her throat. She wore no hat, and her glossy brown hair was combed severely back over small flat ears and knotted at the nape of her neck.

Her clear white skin was devoid of cosmetics, and she wore no lipstick. She wore eyeglasses with heavy, brown, mottled frames. Her legs were crossed, and her gray skirt was pulled primly down over her knees. She wore low-heeled black shoes. But her nylon-clad ankles were slim, Regent noted, and the fullness of her tall slender body was subtly suggested beneath the severe gray suit.

Vernon Dorr said to Regent, "This is Miss Shannon, Mr. Regent. She is the sister of George Shannon, and we have been discussing the details of the award to be paid in connection with her brother's death."

The girl turned her cool gaze upon Regent and nodded briefly. Dorr sat down behind his desk, motioned Regent to a chair, and said, "Miss Shannon has some questions she would like to ask about the payment of the award. I have already given her my views on the subject." He turned to the girl. "Mr. Regent is the man I told you about. He is with the Welfare Commission, in charge of the investigation of your brother's death."

Regent took out a package of cigarettes and offered one to the girl. She shook her head. Regent lit a cigarette, and waited.

Dorr cleared his throat, and said to the girl. "Perhaps you would like to explain to Mr. Regent how you feel in this matter?"

She said crisply to Regent, "I understand that the state is about to pay ten thousand dollars to my brother's wife. Is that correct?"

"It was correct," Regent said quietly.

"Was?" she repeated sharply.

Regent nodded. He had decided that he may as well come out in the open with the circumstances surrounding George Shannon's death. Sinister anonymous letters had been written, phone calls had been made. Elaine Shannon had been followed, and he had been slugged. Where there was smoke, there was fire. He intended to separate the smoke from the fire before any money was paid to the widow of George Shannon. It was his duty as an agent of the Commission

to establish, or not to establish, that George Shannon had died from causes arising from his employment with The Ferris Abrasive Company. He said carefully, "Yesterday I was about to close this case, and recommend that the full award be paid to the widow of George Shannon. But—"

"How did she want it paid?" Miss Shannon broke in.

"In a lump sum," Regent said.

"I thought so," she said bitterly. "Thinking of herself. She'll squander it. Nothing will be left for my niece, Jan. I feel that the money should be paid to some responsible person, Mr. Regent. My brother's wife is not a responsible person. I want that money to be paid to me, as the sister of George, and the aunt of Jan. I want the Commission to appoint me administrator of the money."

Regent shook his head. "I'm afraid that is not possible, Miss Shannon. The workmen's compensation laws provide that benefits be paid to the claimant himself, or to his or her dependents."

"I'll get a lawyer," she snapped. "I'll fight it."

Regent said quietly, "Miss Shannon, I am afraid that no one will receive the money until the cause of Mr. Shannon's death is established definitely."

"He was accidentally killed in this plant," Vernon Dorr said.

"That remains to be proven," Regent said.

Dorr gazed at Regent with an incredulous expression. Miss Shannon's eyes grew big behind her glasses. "What do you mean?" Dorr asked harshly.

Regent sighed, and said, "You may as well know it—you, and Miss Shannon. Mrs. Shannon is already aware of this possibility; her husband may have been murdered."

There was a shocked silence in the office for maybe two seconds. Then Vernon Dorr spoke. "What are you talking about, Regent? George Shannon fell from a ladder to a cement floor and died of a fractured skull. The autopsy showed that. This company, through me, has officially certified that he died as the result of an accident in the course of his employment. What more proof does the state want?"

Regent said in a level voice, "It is my duty as an agent of the Commission to

thoroughly investigate the circumstances surrounding every fatal industrial accident in my territory, regardless of the employer's statement. I feel that further investigation in this case is justified. The payment of the death benefit depends upon what I decide is the true cause of his death."

Miss Shannon said crisply, "And if you find that he did not die accidentally, Mr. Regent?"

"Then no award will be paid to his widow."

"I am not concerned about his widow," Miss Shannon said in her cool voice. "I am concerned about his daughter, Jan. It's not fair to her."

Regent shrugged. "I hope I am wrong. But it is my duty to determine the truth."

Vernon Dorr said, "Can you give us any particular reason for your attitude?"

"Not at this time," Regent said. "I'd like to inspect the area where George Shannon worked, and interview the employees who were near him at the time he fell."

"Lew Kingston made a thorough investigation," Dorr said impatiently. "I told you that."

"And I told you that Lew had been transferred," Regent said. "This is my territory now."

Dorr shrugged. "Very well. Do you want to go back into the plant now?"

"Yes."

DORR picked up his telephone, said, "Miss Crandall, please have one of the guards come in here right away." He hung up, and looked at Regent. "I hope you know what you're doing." His eyes were bleak.

Regent grinned at him. "So do I."

Dorr said, "I hope you will make your investigation as quickly as possible, and not disrupt production any more than necessary."

"I'll do my best."

The door opened, and a middle-aged man in a tan uniform appeared. "You want me, Mr. Dorr?"

"Yes. This is Mr. Regent. Please take him to the Finishing Department. He wants to interview some of the workers, and to inspect the area where George Shannon worked."

"He the feller who was killed a couple of months ago?"

Dorr nodded, and the guard turned to Regent, "Ready, sir?"

Regent stood up, and said to Dorr, "My assistant, Mr. Purdy, will accompany me. I'll see you again before I leave."

Dorr nodded silently, and Regent looked at Miss Shannon. She said, "I think we shall meet again, Mr. Regent."

He smiled. "Good." He went out.

Al Purdy was leaning over the red-head's desk. She was laughing, but when Regent entered she turned quickly to her typewriter. Purdy grinned at Regent, and followed him out behind the guard. "Got me a date for Saturday night," Purdy said. "Cute babe, huh?"

"You always did like red-heads," Regent said. "Now, listen, Al. I'm going to talk to some of the boys back here. I want you to kind of hang around and watch. Somebody who worked near Shannon wrote me that letter. He's the man I want to pick out. Keep your eyes on all of them—for signs of nervousness, anything unusual."

"Right," Purdy said.

The guard opened a steel door, and they entered a huge long room filled with hydraulic presses. Men were working at the presses, and the hiss of many pistons filled the air. They entered another area, and the guard pointed to a triple row of lathes. A high metallic whine hit their ears. The guard said in a loud voice, "Finishing room." He pointed to a big orange-painted machine in the middle of one line. "George Shannon worked there, on that big automatic. He was boring holes in the wheels. Nice fella, George. Too bad he got killed."

Regent nodded, and looked upward. A skylight was almost directly over the big machine.

"Want me to wait?" the guard asked.

Regent shook his head. The guard moved away, waving to the men on the machines. Regent started down the middle line beneath the skylight, and Al Purdy leaned against a steel post. Regent asked the same questions of each man: *Did you know George Shannon? Were you here the day he fell? Did you see him fall?*

The first two men said they hadn't been working at Ferris Abrasives at the time of the accident. The third had seen Shannon after he'd fallen to the floor, and had helped to carry him to the first aid room. "He

didn't say nothing. He just lay like he was dead."

The worker on the fourth machine was a burly blond kid with yellow fuzz on his cheeks. "Sure," he said, "I saw it all. It was just after rest period. George had drunk a bottle of pop, and put the bottle back on the floor by his machine. Just then Fred Riggio comes up, dragging a ladder and sets it up beneath the skylight. It's a twenty foot ladder, and George helps him. Then Fred hands George a pane of glass and points up to the skylight, and Fred climbs the ladder. George follows him up with the glass. His machine is going all the time, you understand? It's an automatic, and George just has to watch it until the hole is bored to tolerance. The next thing I know the ladder hits the floor, and George is laying beside it. Fred, he's hanging by his fingernails to the rafters. He almost got what George got. All the guys rushed over to George, and a couple of 'em carry him to first aid, but I guess he was a goner before they picked him up. Fred, he managed to hoist himself to the roof."

"Was Mr. Dorr around here?"

"Dorr? Oh, yeah. He was standing by the ladder when it slipped. Some of the guys saw him, but I didn't. They say he grabbed for the ladder, but he couldn't hold it."

"Thanks," Regent said. He moved down the line to the next man. His story was the same as the blond kid's, even to the pop Shannon had drunk. The sixth man was tall and cadaverous looking, with sunken cheeks and a long nose. He shut off his lathe to talk to Regent. His account of the incident was the same as the rest. "I always liked George," he said. "He was a good man—turned out a good day's production, and minded his own business. I saw him go up the ladder, and when I looked around again he was on the floor and all the guys was running toward him. I'm telling you true, that's all I saw." He turned back to his lathe, and pressed a button to start it again.

Regent moved on down the line. The stories were all the same. George Shannon had a soft drink. He had climbed the ladder behind Fred Riggio, carrying the pane of glass. The ladder had collapsed. Shannon had fallen. Just an accident. A mishap in a factory. Another statistic for the in-

dustrial accident reports. George Shannon, **l**athe hand, killed on the job. Another claim for the Welfare Commission to pay, another widow, another kid without a father.

Regent didn't take any notes. He felt that he could recite the story of George Shannon's death in his sleep. When he had finished talking to every man in the department, he walked back to where Al Purdy waited.

"Notice anything?" Regent asked.

"Nothing special," Purdy said. "Every man out there has been watching you out of the corner of his eyes. But that's what they do in a shop when they see a white collar, or a stranger. You know that."

"Yeah, I know," Regent said. "Come on."

Purdy followed him back through the plant to the office of Vernon Dorr. The red-head looked up at them brightly. Vernon Dorr stood beside her desk with a sheaf of papers in his hand.

Dorr gave Regent an amused smile. "Did you find the murderer?"

Regent frowned. "I'll discuss the matter with you privately."

Dorr grinned. "Oh, come now. We can trust Miss Crandall. She's secret agent number X-77."

"Very funny," Regent said. "I want to talk to that man, Riggio."

"All right," Dorr said. "But isn't this all a little fantastic? After all, it's just a simple shop accident."

"A man is dead," Regent said. "Death is never simple. Try it sometime. Where can I talk to Riggio?"

Dorr stopped grinning. "I'll have him come to my office." He stepped through the door, and Regent followed him.

Al Purdy said, "I'll wait out here."

DORR picked up his telephone. "Call Maintenance," he said. "Have Fred Riggio come to my office." He replaced the phone, and said to Regent, "This is the damndest thing I've ever heard of. Murder! If Elaine—Mrs. Shannon—doesn't get that money, it'll be a dirty shame." He glared at Regent with hot eyes. "This case was all sewed up, until you stuck your nose in."

Regent said curiously, "Why are you so steamed up? What do you care?"

"Damn it," Dorr flared, "when a man

gets killed in this shop, I feel responsible for his family. It's company policy. We're paying damn high premium rates to protect our employees. I can't see why you are stirring this up. It doesn't matter to Mrs. Shannon whether her husband was murdered or died accidentally. He's still dead. She's still got a little girl to support. I think this whole silly business of snooping around here like the FBI, and these dark hints about murder, are silly. You're supposed to be the top agent in the state, Regent, but still a man who is willing to give a working man a break. Why are you fooling around with something like this? Don't you have enough to keep you busy, or what?"

"This case won't be cleared until I say so," Regent said stubbornly. "You—"

The door opened, and the red-head peeked in. "Mr. Riggio," she said.

"Send him in," Dorr snapped.

The red-head went away, and a big man in gray overalls stepped into the office. He had a broad, dark-skinned face and short curly black hair. White teeth flashed in a grin as he looked at Dorr. "They said I should come to your office," he said. "That's bad. Am I fired?"

"Hell, no, Fred," Dorr said. "We wouldn't fire a good man like you. This is Mr. Regent. He wants to talk to you about George Shannon."

Regent stood up and held out his hand. Riggio hesitated, and rubbed his hands over the front of his overalls. "My hands are dirty, Mister. I been packing the fifteen hundred ton press."

"That's all right, Fred," Regent said, smiling. They shook hands, and Regent added, "I'm with the Industrial Welfare Commission. Do you know what that commission is?"

Riggio nodded vigorously. "Sure. It's the state insurance. They pay me two years ago when I smash my foot in the steel mill at Youngstown." He spoke with the barest suggestion of an accent.

"Fred," Regent said, "tell me what happened when George Shannon fell from the ladder."

Riggio looked bewildered. "But I already tell Mr. Dorr. He put it all on the paper."

"I know. But tell it again. Just how it happened."

Riggio looked at Dorr. "Go ahead, Fred," Dorr said.

Riggio raised liquid brown eyes to the ceiling, frowning in an effort to concentrate. "Well, it was like this. I have instructions to replace the window pane in the skylight over the finishing room. I carry a ladder and the glass to the proper spot. George Shannon, he is working near, and he helps me put up the ladder. Then I ask him to carry the glass up behind me—because I have putty and tools to carry. We think the ladder is secure. I reach the skylight, and I break out the broken glass, and I ask George to hand me the new glass. Then I feel the ladder slip, and I start to fall. I grab a beam, and hang on. I look down, and I see George on the floor. I am sweating. I am shaking. A close call for me, but poor George—he died." Riggio shook his head. "A bad thing. I feel like it is my fault."

"It was nobody's fault," Dorr said. "It was just an accident." He looked at Regent with a mocking smile. "Well, are you satisfied. Does everything check?"

"So far," Regent said.

"Then if you don't mind, I'll let Fred get back on the job. He gets two dollars and a quarter an hour."

The sarcasm in Dorr's voice was not lost upon Regent. He looked at his wrist watch, and said, "He's been away from his work about ten minutes. You can send a bill to the state for his time."

Dorr's heavy handsome face flushed. "If the state's got so damn much money," he blurted, "why can't they pay a measly death award to a poor widow without quibbling about it and dreaming up silly blood-and-thunder nonsense about murder? I'm surprised at you, Regent. I think I'll tell O'Connor about your attitude in this case. If you haven't got enough to do, and must kill time on this kind of a farce, maybe O'Connor can fix that, too. I'm serious, Regent. He'll hear from me."

Ignoring Dorr, Regent said to Riggio, "Thanks, Fred, for coming in here."

Riggio grinned, and his white teeth glinted in his dark handsome face. He was young, Regent noted, with a big brawny body. Riggio put on his cap, and went out quickly.

"Damn it," Dorr said angrily, "there'll be a dozen wild rumors about George Shannon all over the shop before noon."

"There wouldn't have been," Regent said, "if you hadn't blown up in front of Riggio. If you wanted to give me hell, you should have waited until Riggio left."

"You don't need to tell me how to do my job," Dorr said harshly. "Are you all finished here?"

"For the present."

"What about this Shannon case? Will the state pay off?"

"I don't know. It depends."

"Upon what?" Dorr snapped.

"Upon a lot of things—and maybe upon nothing. I'll make my final report within a few days. Then it's up to them." He turned to the door, and added, "I presume your secretary can give me the address of one of the men in the finishing department?"

Dorr's eyes narrowed. "What man?"

"The one on number ten lathe. Tall, skinny guy, with a long nose."

Dorr thought a minute. "That's Eddie Fleet." Then he asked suspiciously, "What do you want with him?"

"It'll be in my report," Regent said. "I'll send you a copy." He went out and closed the door.

AL PURDY was again leaning over the red-head's desk. She wasn't typing, but thoughtfully tapping the space bar, and listening with averted eyes to Al's low-voiced conversation. Purdy stood up straight as Regent entered. The red-head began to type briskly.

Purdy grinned at Regent, and said, "That didn't take long, boss."

Regent moved over to the girl. "Can you give me the home address of Eddie Fleet, in the finishing department?"

"Certainly." She stood up, moved to a big steel file, pulled out a drawer. "He lives at 616 Clinton Street," she said.

"May I see his record?"

Silently she handed him a large manila envelope bearing typed information on both sides. Inside the envelope, Regent found various personal data pertaining to Eddie Fleet and his job as well as his photo, social security information, income tax exemptions, his absence record (Fleet was a steady worker, he noted), his hospital, surgical and life insurance coverage in a company sponsored program, and a number of other records pertaining to his employment.

Regent copied some of the data on a sheet of paper, and returned the envelope to the red-head. "Thank you," he said. "What time does Eddie Fleet usually quit work?"

"Four o'clock."

Regent jerked his head at Al Purdy, and the two of them went out into the late morning sun and walked to the plant entrance. A girl was standing by the guard house, and Regent saw that it was Miss Shannon, the prim sister of the deceased George Shannon. She stood with her hands in the pockets of a loose black coat. The November wind had loosened a strand of her dark brown hair. Here in the sunlight she looked young and fresh, even without powder and lipstick. She came up to them, and said to Regent, "I've been waiting for you. Can I speak with you privately?"

Al Purdy said under his breath, "Here I go again." He moved away, and said loudly, "I better go see if Lame Back Flanagan is lugging any beer cases today. I'll get a bus downtown." He waved to Regent. "See you at the hotel."

"Okay, Al," Regent called, grinning. He returned his gaze to the girl.

She started to speak, but in that instant a whistle blew shrilly, drowning out her words. She tried again, but Regent smiled and held up his hand. Presently the whistle stopped. The vast parking lot was suddenly filled with moving cars, jockeying and pushing for a place in line on the street leading away from the plant.

"They get out quickly," she said.

"They're hungry," Regent said. "They have been working since seven this morning. What time did you have breakfast?"

She laughed, and it changed all her features. White teeth, crinkles at the corners of her eyes. "Late," she said. "At least nine o'clock." Suddenly her expression was once more severe and withdrawn. "Can we talk here?" she asked crisply.

On a sudden impulse, Regent said, "You're not teaching the third grade now, Miss Shannon. Of course we can't talk here. We can talk while we're having lunch."

She appeared startled. For an instant her eyes wavered. Then she said, "Does—does it show?"

"A little," Regent said, smiling. "But what's wrong with that?"

Her rounded chin came up. "Nothing. It's a fine profession."

"Okay. Does it allow you to have a couple of martinis, and lunch, at the Poinsetta Room?"

"I was there once," she said. "Years ago."

"It's time you went again."

She gazed at him thoughtfully through her glasses. Suddenly she smiled. "Yes. I'd love it."

"Good," Regent led her toward his car. Before he drove away he saw a new maroon coupe with Vernon Dorr at the wheel, speed around from behind the factory buildings and head up the street. For no reason, Regent noted that the license number was X-566.

CHAPTER FOUR

Country Cutie's Claws

THE Poinsetta Room was softly lighted, and a stringed orchestra played Strauss waltzes. Over martinis Regent learned that Miss Shannon's first name was Gloria. She had been engaged to an airline pilot who had been killed in a crash in Florida three years previously. After that, he gathered, she had more or less withdrawn from the world and had buried herself in teaching. She didn't mention her dead brother, George Shannon, or her sister-in-law, Elaine, until they were having coffee. Then she said, "This has been pleasant, Mr. Regent, but, as the walrus said, the time has come to talk of many things."

"Of ships and toys and ceiling wax?" Regent smiled.

She gazed about at the velvet drapes, the chrome and leather, the soft lighting. "I feel like Alice in Wonderland," she said. "It seems that I've been buried in the country for too long. Mr. and Mrs. Stockmaster—they're the people on the farm—go to bed at nine o'clock. It—it's really rather grim, now that I think of it."

"I can imagine," Regent said.

"No, you can't. I'm up at six in the morning, in school all day, home at four in the afternoon. Maybe a bath—if I feel up to heating water and filling a tub. Then dinner at five. After that, I correct papers, or read, or just sit on the front porch until

the mosquitoes get too bad. Then I go to bed."

"You're wasting your life," Regent said.

"I know it," she said soberly. "But when I think of Mike—burned to death in that plane—" She averted her gaze. Regent saw the glint of tears. She removed her glasses, brushed the back of her hand over her eyes. She tried to smile. "I sound like a candidate for the lonely hearts club, don't I? I almost forgot what I wanted to talk to you about."

"Must you remember?" Regent said.

She replaced her glasses. Suddenly she was cold and brisk once more. "I meant what I said in Mr. Dorr's office," she said. "Since then I have talked to an attorney. He tells me that if I can prove that my brother's wife is not competent to handle the money, the court will appoint someone who is."

"Meaning you?"

"Preferably," she said coldly. "That isn't important. It's just that I can't sit by and let Elaine throw away that money. In her hands it will never do Jan any good, and she is the one to be considered. After all, she is my brother's daughter, and Elaine is merely her step-mother."

"Why don't you like Mrs. Shannon?"

She lifted her shoulders. "I don't know. I've never liked her, since the day George first brought her to meet me. I think she is shallow, insincere. I don't trust her. I've got a feeling that once she gets that money from the state, she'll disappear—she and Jan—and I won't see Jan any more. And I—I love Jan very much. George and I were pretty much alone in the world, and Jan is all I have left of my family. After Helen died—my brother's first wife—he and Jan stayed with me, and I—I feel like a mother to the child. I should have something to say about her care, and her future."

Regent said, "Mrs. Shannon impressed me very favorably. She seems devoted to Jan, and concerned about her future. I'm sure she will do everything possible for her."

Gloria Shannon's eyes narrowed. "I don't think so," she snapped. "In the first place, my brother had no time to really know her before he married her. She rushed him into it. He—he was infatuated by her. I'll admit she's attractive, and she

has a pleasing personality—when she wants to have. But I've seen the cold look in her eyes. I know that she has no real love for Jan. After all, Jan is nothing to her. But I am Jan's aunt—her father's sister."

Regent said bluntly, "I think you're just jealous."

"Don't be ridiculous, Mr. Regent. Why would I be jealous?"

Regent was a little irritated, and it showed in his voice. "Can you give me one good reason for your attitude?"

"If you mean have I caught Elaine mistreating Jan, no. But I've got a kind of a fear for Jan—now that George is gone. I can't explain it. If I could, you wouldn't understand. I had hoped you would."

"Even if I did," Regent said, "there is nothing I can do. What you propose is a matter for the courts. Mrs. Shannon is the widow of George Shannon. As his widow she is entitled to the death payment from the state. There is no way to get around that."

She said quietly, "You mentioned the possibility that George may have been—murdered. It sounds fantastic, but if it were true, how would that affect the payment to Elaine?"

"I told you this morning," Regent said. "She wouldn't get a dime. Murder is not classed as an occupational hazard. Not in this state."

Suddenly she smiled at him. "Shall we change the subject?"

He said, "What are you doing tomorrow night?"

She flushed faintly. "That's a quick change, Mr. Regent. I plan to attend a lecture."

"Look," Regent said earnestly, "I've got two tickets for the road show of a hit New York play. I'll pick you up around six. Cocktails, dinner, the play, highballs and dancing, hamburgers and coffee at dawn. How does that sound?"

"Very attractive," she said, "but I promised my girl friend I'd—"

"Bring her along," Regent thought of Al Purdy. "I'll have an escort for her."

"I think not, Mr. Regent," she said crisply. She picked up her purse. "Thank you for the lunch." She stood up, added, "So I can't count on your cooperation in the matter of the insurance?"

Regent got to his feet, and shook his head. "I'm afraid not. It doesn't concern me, or my work. My job is to establish the facts. Then it's up to the Claims Board." He smiled at her. "I'm sure you would enjoy the play more than a dry lecture."

She shook her head.

"Some other time?"

She hesitated. Her eyes wavered. "I think it best that we keep our relationship on a business basis."

"Why?"

She looked away from him, and her lips trembled.

"Mike?" he said gently.

She turned abruptly, and walked away. He followed her out to the street. They stood on the sidewalk, with people hurrying past them. The November wind was cold on their faces. Regent said, "Call me at the hotel if you change your mind about tomorrow night."

"I won't," she said.

HE GAZED at her for a long moment, and she looked away. She had long thick lashes, and her skin looked smooth and clear in the cold sunshine.

"Goodby," she said, without looking at him, and she walked swiftly away.

Regent stared after her tall slender figure, walking jauntily in the loose black coat. He smiled wryly to himself. Ten minutes later he was driving down Carbon Road. A new maroon coupe was parked before Elaine Shannon's apartment building. The coupe's license number was X-566.

Regent parked beyond the coupe and waited. He smoked two cigarettes before Vernon Dorr came out and walked swiftly to the coupe. Regent got out to the sidewalk, and called, "Dorr."

Dorr turned. When he saw Regent, his handsome face took on a stubborn look. Regent moved up to him. "Hi," he said, smiling. "Is it my turn now?" He saw that there was a smudge of lipstick on Dorr's cheek.

"Your turn for what?"

"To see Mrs. Shannon."

Dorr flushed. "I don't like your manner, Regent."

"What manner?" Regent asked smoothly.

"I was seeing Mrs. Shannon about her

husband's death," Dorr snapped. "It was all settled until you poked your nose into it. I'm going to fight it, Regent. As a representative of George Shannon's employer, I feel it my duty to do all I can to see that his widow receives the benefits to which she is entitled by law."

"Then you *were* seeing Mrs. Shannon on business?"

"Of course."

"All right—Uncle Vernon," Regent said.

Dorr's face grew darker. A hot light flared in his eyes. He started to speak, then checked himself, and glared at Regent.

Regent said, "You have been seeing Mrs. Shannon often. The little girl calls you 'Uncle Vernon.' Mrs. Shannon forgets herself and calls you by your first name. You're in love with her. That is why you are so anxious for her to collect the ten thousand death payment from the state, why you object so strenuously to my stirring up anything which might prove that George Shannon was not killed accidentally and thus deprive her of the money."

"That sort of talk is utter nonsense," Dorr said coldly. "My interest in Mrs. Shannon is entirely impersonal. It is my job to see that an employee, or an employee's dependents, receive the benefits to which they are entitled. It is merely one aspect of my work in connection with the company's personnel."

"You'd better wipe the lipstick off your cheek," Regent said.

Dorr's hand went involuntarily to his face. He turned away. He jerked open the door of the maroon coupe, got in, and drove furiously away. Regent stood on the curb and watched the car move swiftly up the street. It turned a corner with a screech of tires, and disappeared. Regent moved on to the apartment house, and up to Elaine Shannon's door. He knocked softly.

She opened the door, and smiled at him. "Hello. Come in."

He stepped inside. She was wearing a thin, pale green dress with short sleeves, no stockings, and low-heeled sandals. Her glossy black hair was pulled tightly away from her ears and knotted on top of her head. It gave her face a pert little-girl look. For the first time Regent saw that there was a small dusting of freckles over her short nose.

She motioned him to a chair, but he shook his head. "I can't stay." Before her level gaze he was suddenly embarrassed. He looked around the neat pleasant room. "Where's Jan?"

"She's spending the day with her aunt—my husband's sister. I took her out to the farm where she stays, this morning."

"Gloria Shannon?" Regent asked.

Her eyes widened. "You know her?"

"I met her in Mr. Dorr's office this morning."

A small frown marred her smooth forehead. "I see," she said quietly. "Vernon—Mr. Dorr told me that she had seen him. I have tried to be friends with her ever since George and I were married. But she seemed to—resent me. I don't know why. But she's very fond of Jan." Her eyes clouded, and she went on: "I love Jan, too. No one can take her away from me."

"Of course not," Regent said. He paused, and then added, "I met Vernon Dorr downstairs."

A faint flush colored her cheeks.

Regent took a deep breath. "He's in love with you," he said. "He kissed you." He felt like a fool, like a jealous high school freshman, but he couldn't help it.

She saw the look in his eyes, and smiled. It was the knowing smile of a woman who realizes that she is attractive and desirable to a man. Regent recognized the smile, and he didn't care. He was glad. If this was the way it was to be between he and Elaine Shannon, then it may as well come out in the open. To hell with Vernon Dorr, and Gloria Shannon and her possessive jealousy. He said, "Are you in love with Vernon Dorr?"

She stopped smiling. "No," she said soberly. "He has been wonderful to Jan and me since my husband was killed. I like him, but I don't love him. He—he thinks he loves me. I—I let him kiss me today. But he knows how I feel. I wake up in the night thinking that George is still with me. I loved my husband. I still love him."

Regent smiled bleakly. "I see," he said.

"Why did you come here?" she asked.

He took a step toward her, and the faint clean fragrance of her was all around him. "Never mind," he said, harshly.

"Why?" The knowing smile was once more on her lips.

"You know why," he said. "You know damn well why. I came here because I want to see you, be with you. I came here to ask you to go to dinner with me tomorrow night, and to a play. The usual bait a man offers a woman—so that he can be with her."

"I'll go," she said. "I'd like to go—with you."

He placed his hands on her bare arms. Her skin was smooth and warm. She stood very still and suddenly he pulled her to him. She raised her mouth to his and he kissed her. Her lips were cool and soft, but faintly reserved. He felt that restrained warmth and he didn't want to let her go.

Presently she pushed him gently away, and he took a deep breath. "Me and Vernon Dorr," he said.

She shook her head, and her eyes were big and solemn. "Please forget Vernon Dorr."

He reached for her again, but she smiled, and shook her head. "What time tomorrow night?" she asked.

"About six?"

"I'll be ready."

"Fine." He touched her arm.

She shook her head again. "Not now." She paused, and a faint troubled look came into her eyes. "Do you think it—it's all right for me to go? I mean, my husband—"

"George wouldn't care," Regent said gently. "He would want you to be happy."

"I guess he would," she said. "It's just that I haven't got used to being without him."

He said, "I'm sorry—now—that this murder business came up. If it's true, you won't receive the money from the state."

"I don't blame you," she said. "You're only doing what you have to do. I admire you for that. I had counted on the money for Jan's sake, but I don't want it if it's against the law. But I still can't believe that—that he was murdered. Who—"

"I don't know," Regent said. "I don't even know if it's true, but I'm still checking . . . Did your husband have any life insurance of his own?"

"Just a thousand dollars. The company has already paid me that."

"That doesn't help much. What'll you do?"

"Find someone to care for Jan, and get a job, I guess."

Regent thought of Gloria Shannon, and of her desire to care for her brother's daughter, but he didn't mention her again. He turned to the door, opened it. "Tomorrow night?"

She smiled. "Yes."

He went out quickly, and closed the door. As he drove through the streets toward his hotel, he thought: *Let it ride, Regent. Don't stir it up. George Shannon is dead. It doesn't matter how he died. Turn in your report. Accidental death on the job. Let her have the ten thousand. She deserves it. Why worry about some crackpot writing sinister notes and making telephone calls? How could George Shannon have been murdered? And why? Vernon Dorr is right. It's silly. I'm just messing things up for Elaine Shannon. . . .*

Then he thought of the clout he'd taken on the head, of the wallet which had been returned to him, of the man who had followed Elaine Shannon. He thought about the whole affair, and when he entered his hotel he knew that, right or wrong, he had to follow the trail to the bitter end. He had been an agent of the Commission too long to leave a loophole in a case. He had been wrong to let himself become attracted to Elaine Shannon. And then he remembered the cool softness of her lips, and he cursed under his breath.

CHAPTER FIVE

"Here's Blood in Your Eye!"

AL PURDY'S thick form was sprawled in a lobby chair. He grinned up at Regent. "Hi, boss. How do you rate all these nice babes wanting to get you alone? Last night it was a cute brunette number. Today it's a brown-eyed knockout with glasses."

Regent laughed. "The knockout with glasses is Miss Gloria Shannon. She's a school marm, the sister-in-law of George Shannon's widow. She has sort of a family interest in the case."

"And in the insurance pay-off, no doubt."

"You're sharp, Al. Miss Shannon also wants custody of her brother's little girl."

"Miss Shannon?" Purdy said. "Do you mean to tell me that a gal who is stacked like she is, ain't married?"

"That's right."

Purdy sighed, and shook his head. "I won't ever understand those things."

Regent looked at the big clock in the lobby. Three-thirty in the afternoon. He said to Purdy, "At four o'clock I want you to run out to the home of a man named Eddie Fleet. He lives at 616 Clinton Drive. He is one of the men who was working nearby when Shannon was killed. Question him and see if you can get anything out of him. I'll wait for you here."

Purdy wrote the address on the back of an envelope, and stood up. "Okay. But there was fifty guys working around there. Why pick on this Eddie Fleet?"

"Just a hunch," Regent said. "The person who wrote the note to me used a certain phrase, a little unusual. He wrote, *I'm telling you true*. Fleet used the same expression when I talked to him this morning. I figure that maybe Fleet wrote those notes. Talk to him, and tell him that you know he wrote the notes. Ask him why he said that George Shannon was murdered. Find out if he's just a screwball trying to stir something up, or if he's really got something. I'll take it from there. Got it?"

"Maybe we'd better tell the cops," Purdy said. "After all, this ain't like tailing Lame Back Flanagan."

"Plenty of time for the cops," Regent snapped. "We'll see what Eddie Fleet has to say, first. Get going."

"Okay," Purdy said in a hurt voice. "Don't getumpy."

"My head hurts," Regent said. "I'll wait for you in my room."

At six o'clock Al Purdy came back. He flopped into a chair and mopped his broad face. "Wow," he said. "The beer I've drunk! That Eddie Fleet! He must have hollow legs. I went to his house, like you said, but he wasn't home yet. His wife said I'd probably find him in a beer joint down the street. I did. He was drinking beer by himself at the end of the bar. He remembered seeing me with you in the shop this morning, and he was cagey. I poured beer into him for an hour and a half, but he didn't tell me a damn thing. But I know this—he's scared as hell. It sticks out all over him. All he would say was, 'Look, Mister, I don't know nothing.' But he kept drinking the beer I was buying. Can I put it on my expense account?"

"Sure." Regent got off the bed, and put



Dorr said, "Go on."

on his coat. "Was he still in the joint when you left him?"

"Yep. He'll probably be there for a week—just coasting on my beer."

Regent put on his hat and topcoat. "What's the name of the place?"

"The Red Bird Tavern. Next block from Fleet's house, on the same side of the street."

"I'll be back," Regent said. "Go eat your dinner."

"Goodbye," Purdy said. "I drank my dinner."

Regent found The Red Bird Tavern without any trouble. The wide front windows were shuttered with Venetian blinds. A neon beer advertisement glowed over the door. Inside, was a long narrow room with

a bar along one side and a row of tables on the other. Several card games were in progress, and a few men sat drinking. A thin-faced man in a dirty white jacket stood behind the bar eating a sandwich. Regent went up to him. "Eddie Fleet around?" he asked.

The man chewed on his sandwich and jerked a thumb toward the rear. "He just went to see a man," he mumbled.

"I'll wait," Regent said. "Give me a bourbon and water."

He finished the drink, ordered another. Ten minutes elapsed. He said to the bartender, "Many guys from Ferris Abrasives hang around here?"

"Hell, yes. Most of 'em. All home for supper now."

Regent slid off the stool and walked back to the rear. Behind the bar there was a dimly-lit passageway with the wash room door at the end. He opened this door, and stepped inside. Eddie Fleet lay on the cement floor beneath the wash bowl. His head was turned toward the wall. Regent saw the blood and the matted hair. He knelt down quickly and turned the man over. His eyes were open. Blood had dripped down over his face. Eddie Fleet was dead.

REGENT called the police from the Tavern. They came, followed by the photographers, fingerprint men, the coroner, and finally, two bored reporters. Eddie Fleet's body was moved to the morgue. A suspicious sergeant of detectives named Navarre, questioned Regent carefully. Regent identified himself, and told Navarre about the case of George Shannon, all of it. He told him the whole story, ending with the death of Eddie Fleet.

Navarre snapped. "Why didn't you tell us sooner? Murder is police business, not the state Industrial Welfare Commission's."

Regent shrugged. "We get a lot of crackpot letters. I wanted to check a little before I stirred it up."

Navarre said darkly, "This Fleet knew something. The killer of Shannon saw Fleet talking to your man, and he figured Fleet was squealing. So he killed Fleet, to keep Fleet from exposing him. Does that add up?"

Regent smiled faintly. "It's obvious."

"We'll take it from here," Navarre barked. "Don't leave town, Regent."

Later, Regent sat in Vernon Dorr's paneled office. The vibrating hum of the night shift drifted through the walls. After locating Dorr at the bar of a local lodge, Regent had arranged to meet him here. He told Dorr about the death of Eddie Fleet. Dorr sat behind his desk, his white manicured hands folded before him. He looked tired. A faint growth of black beard showed beneath the skin of his cheeks. When Regent finished, Dorr sighed heavily, and said, "Why would anybody kill Eddie Fleet?"

Regent said patiently, "Can't you see? Eddie Fleet knew how George Shannon died. But Eddie died before we could get

the story out of him . . . Can you show me a sample of Fleet's handwriting?"

Dorr's black brows came together in a puzzled frown. "Yes, but—"

"Get it," Regent said.

Dorr got up silently, entered the outer office, and came back with several yellow ruled sheets and handed them to Regent. The sheets were covered with a penciled record of work turned out on a given day. They were signed, *Edward Fleet*. Regent compared the writing on the sheets to the writing on the notes received by himself and Elaine Shannon. It was the same, down to the method of crossing the t's. Regent said, "Eddie wrote the notes, all right. He knew something about the death of George Shannon. That's why he's dead now." He looked up at Dorr. "You were in the finishing department when Shannon was killed. Didn't you notice anything at all? Think back."

Dorr shook his head. "What *could* have happened? I was standing right by the ladder, looking across the department. Suddenly I became aware that the ladder was moving, and I tried to grab it. But I was too late. The ladder went down, and George Shannon fell to the floor. It was just an accident, damn it, and I don't think Eddie Fleet's death has anything to do with it. Maybe it appears that he wrote those notes, but that doesn't prove anything." There was sweat on Dorr's face.

Regent said softly, "The cops are on it now, Dorr. They'll be seeing you—probably on their way now. They'll look at it this way: there were two men near Shannon when he fell. You, at the bottom of the ladder, and Fred Riggio at the top. Riggio had to hang on the rafters to save himself. You were safe on the floor."

Dorr said in a strained voice, "What are you getting at?"

"I'm just trying to assemble my facts," Regent said. "You are in love with Elaine Shannon—"

Dorr rose half out of his chair. "Damn you!"

"Sit down," Regent snapped. "Why deny it to me? You've been in love with her a long time. But she had a husband. With her husband dead, you would have clear sailing with her. If he died accidentally while on the job she would also receive ten thousand dollars from the state.

I didn't tell the police about your affair with Elaine Shannon. I wanted to talk to you first. But if they knew what I know, they would damn soon figure out that you kicked that ladder out from under George Shannon and killed him." He paused, watching Dorr.

Dorr's face was white. He said from between clenched teeth, "Go on."

Regent said, "You're the only person in this deal who had a reason to kill Shannon. Did Eddie Fleet happen to look up from his machine and see you kick the ladder?"

"Go on," Dorr said, again. His voice was like a rasp on steel.

"When I asked you this morning for Fleet's address, you became suspicious. You were afraid that maybe Fleet had talked about what he'd seen. So you followed him when he left work today. You saw Al Purdy talk to him at the Red Bird Tavern. You figured that we were getting too hot. So when Purdy left, you sneaked in the back door of the tavern and waited in the dark passageway for Fleet to come back to the men's room. When he did, you followed him in and killed him—to keep him from testifying. What did you hit him with—a sledge hammer?"

Dorr leaped from his chair, and swung wildly. Regent ducked, and slammed his right fist into Dorr's face. Dorr reeled against the wall, whirled around. There was blood on his lips. His long black hair hung over his face. "Damn it!" he panted. "What kind of a dirty double-crossing deal you trying to hand me?"

"I'm sorry," Regent said. "But you aren't the first man to kill for a woman."

Dorr uttered an unintelligible cry and lunged forward.

"Stop it," Regent snapped.

Dorr swung his fist, and Regent sidestepped, but he was too late. Dorr's knuckles raked along his jaw. Regent stumbled to one knee. Dorr crowded him, hammering wild blows on his head and shoulders. Regent straightened up, and struck out with his right fist. It caught Dorr in the throat. Dorr gasped loudly, and slumped against the wall, fighting for breath. Regent stood still, his fist cocked, his eyes on Dorr.

Lights flashed across the windows, and a car door slammed. A door opened. Then rapid footsteps, and the figure of Detective

Sergeant Navarre stood in the office doorway. A gray-uniformed plant guard, his eyes bugged out, stood beside him. Navarre's gaze flicked to Dorr, and then to Regent. "Having a ruckus, huh??" His thumb jerked toward Dorr. "Is he Vernon Dorr?"

"Yes," Regent said.

Navarre smiled thinly. "Beat me to him, didn't you? Why didn't you tell me that he was nuts about Mrs. Shannon?"

"How do you know?" Regent asked.

"Some dame called me just now. Said Dorr killed George Shannon because he was in love with Shannon's wife. Said he also killed Eddie Fleet because Fleet was wise and was tipping off your man at the Red Bird. Does that make sense to you?"

"Yes," Regent said wearily. "Who called you?"

"Don't know. We traced it to a pay booth in a drug store on Carbon Road, but that's all. It's enough for me to run Dorr in on suspicion." He called over his shoulder. "Come on, boys. Take him away."

Regent shouldered his way past Navarre, the plant guard, and the two uniformed policemen trying to get in the door. He didn't look back at Dorr. As he left the outer office, he heard Dorr shouting at Navarre.

AL PURDY was snoring in a chair in Regent's hotel room. Regent shook him, and said, "Party's over. Go to bed."

Purdy yawned, rubbed his eyes, and gazed up at Regent with bleary eyes. "Where you been?"

Regent told him quickly about the death of Eddie Fleet, and the arrest of Vernon Dorr for the murder of Fleet and George Shannon.

Purdy yawned again, said, "I'll be damned." He moved to the door. "Tell me about it tomorrow." At the door he turned. "By the way, some babe called for you a while ago. Wants you to call her back. The number's by the phone." He went out, still yawning.

Regent called the number Purdy had written on a slip of paper. Gloria Shannon said breathlessly, "Hello. I just wanted to tell you that I—I've changed my mind about tomorrow night. I'd love to see the play—if you still want me to."

Regent hesitated, thinking of his date

with Elaine Shannon. Then he said, "I'm sorry. I've made other plans."

"Oh."

"Where are you?" Regent asked.

"In a drug store on Carbon Road. I've been with Jan. Elaine brought her out to the farm this morning. I left her long enough to come in and talk to Mr. Dorr, and—"

"To have lunch with me," Regent broke in.

"Yes. Jan and I had a wonderful time this afternoon. I just took her home. I—I'm afraid I misjudged Elaine. She's a nice person, really. I suppose it was just selfish jealousy on my part. Elaine has an offer of a marvelous job in Los Angeles, and she has to leave tomorrow. She has agreed to let me keep Jan—at least, for a while. I'm to pick her up in the morning. Isn't that wonderful?"

Regent's fingers tightened on the telephone. "Yes," he said carefully. He paused, then added, "You may be interested in knowing that Elaine will not get the insurance payment from the state. Nobody will get it. So you can stop worrying about that."

"W-what happened? Tell me."

"Not now. Can you meet me here at the hotel in half an hour?"

The wire was dead for maybe three seconds. Then Gloria Shannon said in a faint voice. "All right." She hung up.

For the fourth time in two days Regent parked his car near the apartment house on Carbon Road and walked up the stairs to Elaine Shannon's apartment. She seemed surprised to see him, then she smiled and placed a finger to her lips. "Jan's asleep." She stepped aside for Regent to enter.

He moved inside, and she closed the door softly behind him. "This is a pleasant surprise," she said.

Regent said bluntly, "I hear you're leaving for Los Angeles tomorrow."

"That's right," she said quietly.

"We have a date for tomorrow night. Remember?"

She looked away from him. "I—I'm sorry. Really, I am. But I have friends out there. They wired me this afternoon about a job I can have. A good job, in an aircraft plant. Much higher pay than I get around here. I feel that I should take it, but I must go out there right away. I tried

to call you this afternoon, but you were out. I intended to call in the morning, before I left. How did you know?"

"Gloria Shannon told me."

"I see," she said. "Gloria is going to take care of Jan until I can send for her."

"I thought—" He stopped.

"So did I," she said softly. "But this is an opportunity I can't afford to miss. After all, I must think of Jan . . . Maybe—maybe you might come to California, some time."

"Maybe, hell," he said harshly. "I'm tied to a job in this state. I may as well tell you now that you won't get any money for the death of your husband. I couldn't help it. I had to do it." He told her quickly about the death of Eddie Fleet, and about Vernon Dorr.

She stared at him with big eyes in a suddenly pale face. "Vernon—killed George?"

"Yes," he said harshly. "Because he was crazy about you."

She turned away, and began to sob brokenly.

The little blonde girl, Jan, wandered into the room. She was wearing pink pajamas, and rubbing her eyes. "I waked up," she said plaintively.

Somebody knocked softly on the outer door. Elaine Shannon stopped sobbing. Her body stiffened. She stared at the door, and Regent saw her face in profile. There was fear in her eyes, and a swift furtiveness.

The little girl said, "I'm sleepy, but I waked up. I had fun with Aunt Gloria."

Regent said softly, "Go back to bed, honey. Please."

Still rubbing her eyes, she turned obediently and moved into the bedroom. There was a dim light inside the room, and Regent saw two leather traveling bags just inside the door. The little girl climbed into bed, and Regent closed the door softly.

The knocking on the door grew louder, and the knob rattled. Regent suddenly realized that the door locked automatically when it was closed. He was glad of that. Elaine Shannon stood stiffly, staring dumbly at the door. From nowhere the words of Detective Sergeant Navarre came back to Regent: *Some dame called me . . .*

And in that instant Elaine Shannon moved swiftly, but Regent was ahead of

her. He reached the door first and clamped a hand over her mouth, whispered against her ear, "You called the police tonight, didn't you? You told them that Vernon Dorr had killed your husband, and Eddie Fleet. You're the woman who called, because you're the only one who knows that Vernon Dorr is in love with you. Quick—why?"

She tried to twist away from him, but he held her tightly. Her eyes rolled up at him in a mute expression of mingled fear and hate. Six inches from Regent's ear a fist pounded on the door. He pulled Elaine Shannon away, dragged her to the telephone. He picked up the instrument, said, "Western Union."

WHEN a man answered, he said, "Did you have a telegram this afternoon from Los Angeles for Mrs. George Shannon, at 545 Carbon Road?"

"One moment."

Elaine Shannon struggled. Her teeth dug into his fingers, but Regent held on grimly. The pounding on the door grew fiercely insistent.

A voice in his ear said, "No, sir. We

The man lay on the floor.



had no telegram on record for that party."

As he replaced the phone, Elaine Shannon struggled violently in his grasp. Suddenly she twisted free and darted to the door. Regent sprang after her. Elaine Shannon screamed at the door, "Run! Run!"

Regent grasped her, flung her away, jerked open the door, and stumbled headlong into the hall. A man was running for the stairs. Regent raced after him, but he knew that he could never catch him. He left his feet in the longest diving tackle he'd made since his football days. One hand grasped the man's ankle, and Regent's fingernails tore against cloth. The man stumbled, then plunged forward and clattered down the stairs. Regent scrambled to his feet, knowing that he was too far behind.

The single sharp bark of a gun echoed up the stairs. Then a heavy thudding sound. Then silence.

Regent heard swift running steps behind him, and he swung around. Elaine Shannon was racing past him, hugging the wall, headed for the stairs. He reached for her, and felt tearing silk in his hand. He snatched again. His fingers closed over her arm. She struggled wildly, but he held her, fighting her clawing fingers. He dragged her along the hall and flung her into the apartment. She sprang at him, her face contorted, her fingers digging for his eyes. He tried to hold her off, but she was like a mad woman.

He hit her then and he felt a deep, forlorn sadness as her body crumpled before him. He caught her in his arms before she slumped to the floor, and laid her gently on a divan. Then he returned to the hall, moved swiftly to the stairs, and peered down.

A man lay on the floor of the hall below, and his groans came up to Regent. Mrs. Ryan stood by the open door of her apartment. She held a long-barreled target pistol in her hand. She peered up at Regent, brushed a strand of gray hair back from her motherly features. "I winged him, son," she called. "Want me to get the cops?"

Regent went down the stairs and stood beside her. He gazed down at the man lying face down on the floor.

Mrs. Ryan said, "I hate to pump lead into a man, but he was coming down them

steps too all-fired fast to be up to any good. I waved to him to stop, but he kept coming. So I plugged him." She pointed the muzzle of the gun at the man on the floor. "What devilment was he up to, son? Who is he?"

Regent knelt down and turned the man's body until he could see his face. Bright dark eyes beneath black curly hair glared up at him, and a mouth worked in pain.

Fred Riggio gasped, "Get a doctor!"

Regent stood up. He knew now. He knew it all. He said to Mrs. Ryan, "Call a doctor—and Police Sergeant Navarre."

She entered her apartment, and Regent stared silently down at the maintenance man from Ferris Abrasives. The man who had climbed the ladder ahead of George Shannon. He lay on his side, his face to the wall. He had stopped groaning. Presently Regent said, "You killed George Shannon."

From between clenched teeth Riggio said, "I kill nobody. My leg—"

Mrs. Ryan came out into the hall. "Doc Morris is coming. His office is just around the corner. The cops are coming, too." She gazed down at Riggio, and pointed a finger. "See where I winged him, son? Smack above the knee."

"Nice shooting!" Regent moved to the outside door. "I'll be back." He went out to the street. A black sedan was parked at the curb, its motor running. He turned off the motor, and peered into the back seat. A leather bag and a metal tool box were on the floor. Regent turned on the dome light. The name, *F. Riggio*, was painted on the lid of the tool box. Regent lifted the lid of the box. It was filled with various tools—screw drivers, pliers, wrenches, two hammers. One of the hammers was a big one, blunt and heavy. Regent peered closer. On the head of the hammer was a dried dark smear, and Regent thought grimly, *Eddie Fleet's blood. George Shannon's, too, even though it has been worn off by now.* He dropped a handkerchief over the handle of the hammer, and carefully carried it into the apartment house.

Mrs. Ryan stood over Riggio, the gun in her firm hand. "Son," she said, "maybe when you get time you'll tell me what the heck is going on."

Regent laid the hammer on the floor.

(Please continue on page 102)

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(Continued from page 100)

"Sure," he said. He pointed to the hammer. "Watch that." He climbed the stairs with heavy feet.

Elaine Shannon was stirring feebly on the divan. She lay with her back toward him, and with a deep sadness he gazed at the slender lines of her figure, at the glossy sheen of her tumbled black hair. He moved over to her, and touched her shoulder. She turned her body slightly, and gazed up at him with wide frightened eyes.

Regent said gently, "You and Riggio were in this together, weren't you?"

Her lips trembled. "Fred. . . ? Where is he?"

"He's all right," Regent said. "Now, listen." He began to speak swiftly, wanting to get it over with. "You married George Shannon—and then you fell for Fred Riggio. Together you decided to get rid of George and collect ten thousand dollars in the bargain. Riggio got George to go up that ladder, then hit him with a hammer and kicked the ladder down—to make it look like an accident. The state would pay you ten thousand dollars, and you and Riggio could be happy ever after.

"But when I came snooping around—after the case was all sewed up—you got scared, especially after you received the anonymous note saying that George had been murdered. You were forced to tell me about the note you received, because your note stated that the writer was also writing to me. So, to throw suspicion off Riggio, your lover, you invented the story about the small, light-haired man following you, and the phone calls. You called me, and in the meantime you called Riggio. The telephone call I took here was from him. He is the one who slugged me in the alley and took my wallet. But it all tied in with your fake description of a 'small light-haired man', which is the exact opposite of Riggio, who is big and dark. But I fell for it.

"So Riggio watched us—Al Purdy and me—and he became suspicious when I called him into Vernon Dorr's office for questioning. Riggio didn't know that Eddie Fleet had glanced up and seen him hit George Shannon with a hammer, but he guessed something of the sort when he saw Al Purdy talking to Fleet in the Red Bird Tavern. So, when Purdy left, he sneaked into the tavern, waited for Fleet in the

wash room, and killed him with a hammer."

ELAINE SHANNON stared at him dumbly. Regent took a deep breath, and went on: "After Riggio killed Fleet, he decided it was time to scam. He called you, told you to get packed. Then you told Gloria Shannon that you were going to Los Angeles, and asked her to look after Jan. You called the police and in an attempt to further throw suspicion off Riggio, you told them that Vernon Dorr had killed your husband. But when I showed up here, it upset your getaway schedule. You knew I was wise to something, and when Riggio came for you, you tried to warn him." Regent paused, and then said wearily, "Isn't that about it?"

She turned her body on the divan, and buried her face in one crooked arm. She didn't say anything.

"I suspected Vernon Dorr," Regent said. "It all pointed to him. But I was wrong. Dorr loved you, but he didn't kill to get you. Her merely wanted you to have the money, because he loved you. Because he didn't doubt for a second that your husband had been killed accidentally."

She moved, and sat up slowly. There was a red mark on her jaw where Regent had struck her. Her black hair hung over one side of her face in loose strands. Looking at her, Regent felt a tightness in his throat and chest, and a sad remembrance of the warmth of her lips.

She said in a dead voice, "I want you to know this—I had nothing to do with it—at first." She paused, her full lips twisted bitterly. "It's the old story. I knew Fred Riggio, and loved him, before I met George. But Fred didn't want to get married. George did. I was tired of standing at a machine all day, of working my life away. I wanted some security, and a place of my own. And so I pushed Fred out of my mind and married George. For a while I was happy. I thought I had what I wanted. And then I began to see Fred again. He was gay, and exciting. After being with Fred, I—I couldn't stand to be with George. He bored me. But I was married to him.

"I talked to Fred about divorcing George, but Fred said to wait—that he knew a better way. When George died, I

Murder with Pleasure

knew that Fred had killed him. He didn't tell me for a long time—until one night when he was drunk. There was nothing I could do about it then. I loved Fred, still love him. I—P . . .” She turned away, buried her face in her hands. Sobs shook her slender figure.

To Regent, it seemed that a cold, dank wind was blowing through the room.

Elaine Shannon sobbed, “What will they do to me?”

“I don't know.” Regent stood up abruptly, went outside and down the stairs.

He met Detective Sergeant Navarre coming up. Regent said, “We were wrong about Vernon Dorr. Let him go. That man on the floor killed George Shannon and Eddie Fleet. I've got the hammer he used on Fleet. You can check it for prints. Mrs. Shannon gave me her story. See what she tells you.”

Navarre smiled thinly. “All tied up in a pretty bow, huh? Maybe you ought to get a job on the force.”

“Like hell,” Regent said. “I'll stick to simple accidents.” He turned abruptly, went back up the stairs, and entered Elaine Shannon's apartment once more. She was sitting on the divan with her face in her hands. He moved past her into the bedroom.

The little girl was sleeping quietly. Regent wrapped a blanket around her, and picked her up. She mumbled something, opened her eyes wide to see who held her. “Nice man,” she said sleepily, and clasped her arms around his neck.

Elaine Shannon looked up as he carried the child out. “Goodbye, Jan,” she said.

“Bye, Elaine,” she murmured, and clasped her arms more tightly around Regent's neck.

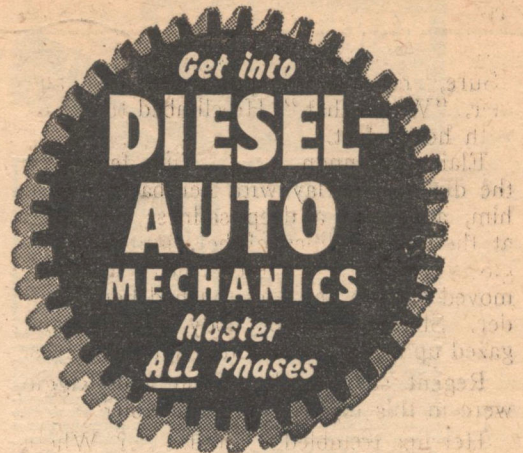
Detective Sergeant Navarre stood in the doorway. “I'll see you,” Regent said as he moved past him.

“You're damn right,” Navarre said.

At the bottom of the stairs Mrs. Ryan looked at Regent with bright eyes. “These cops won't tell me nothing,” she said plaintively. “What's going on, son?”

“I'll tell you later,” Regent said, grinning at her. “I've got a girl here who has to get to bed. But first we have a date with her Aunt Gloria.”

THE END



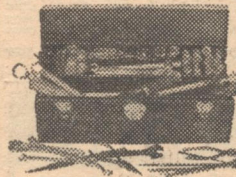
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Frederick C. Davis

(Continued from page 73)

ken into the building and used it without the knowledge of its owner. Other detectives were prowling in the corners, completing a hopeless hunt. One of these was a heartsick Jimmy Teague, following orders.

In spite of all his earnest endeavor, his attention wouldn't stick to the job. Eileen claimed all his thinking. Ten times, as his search led him near the street door, he had had to force himself to stay inside. Pausing now, he drew a cold breath into his throat and gazed at the other men who were performing their appointed tasks so persistently and fruitlessly.

He was worried about young Bert Wellcord, of course, but he was far more worried about Eileen. He knew, minutes before he made the move, that he was going to risk his promotion again.

There came a moment when he was standing alone, with none of the other men looking in his direction. Abruptly he was on the sidewalk, tracking rapidly through the snow.

Opening the green box a block away, he rang in and asked for Inspector Brannan. "Teague calling," he said quickly. "We're not getting anywhere at the garage, Inspector. Has there been any word from Mr. Wellcord?"

"None."
"He hasn't heard—about where he can find his kid?"

"Nothing?"
"What about Collins and Deverage, Inspector?"

"They've reported no headway. Maybe in the morning—"
"In the morning? Inspector—"

Jimmy hung to the telephone, hoping to hear the few words that would release him from the special detail and allow him to do all he could for Eileen, but Inspector Brannan's answer was silence.

"Any further orders, Inspector?"
"Stay on the job until you're relieved. The chief wants to talk to you when you come in."

"The chief? I see. That's all, Inspector?"
"That's all."

The receiver hummed in Jimmy's ear. He replaced it slowly and locked the box.

Blind Witness

What the chief would say to him wasn't as important as it would have been hours ago. The inspector's orders weren't important any more, either. Jimmy was bitterly sorry about Bert Wellcord, but the boy was just a name to him now, someone he'd never seen. Eileen was warm and real and like life itself.

Almost before he was aware of it, Teague was again striding rapidly, his back turned to the garage.

The old Mill Row was a long series of windows, some black, some glowing but dimmed by the steady snowfall. Jimmy scanned the street, looking for Collins and Deverage. He wanted to ask them the questions burning in his mind, and then he might hurry back to his post before his absence was noticed. But he didn't see them. None of the few cars in the block could be theirs. They'd gone back to Headquarters, having learned nothing about what might have happened to Eileen. Their footprints on the stoop of Eileen's home were being blotted away.

A window rattled up. Colonel Landis brushed the curtains aside and called in his brittle, old voice, "Jimmy! Come in here, Jimmy!"

Teague hastened into the vestibule and found the colonel wheeling himself from the window at which he had been keeping a long vigil. His thin white hair was rumpled, his faded blue eyes glimmering with bewilderment and anxiety.

"Jimmy, they haven't come back to tell me. I don't know what's happened to Eileen."

His veined fists beat the arms of his chair. He made a futile effort to rise. "Damn those old bones of mine!"

"Easy, Colonel," Jimmy said. "She must be all right. She's got to be."

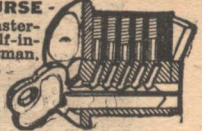
"But she just went around the corner to the grocery, Jimmy—to Repman's. She should have come back in just a few minutes, but it's hours now, hours! Nobody can tell me what's become of her—the hospitals—nobody. I've phoned all of them twice. It's such a short distance, Jimmy. She didn't even have to cross the street. What could have happened to her?"

"If she wasn't even leaving the block, Colonel—" Jimmy said quickly. "Did you tell that to the detectives?"

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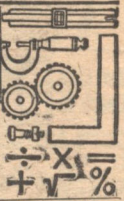


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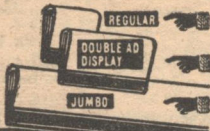
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Frederick C. Davis

"Yes, but they're new in this neighborhood. It's just a routine case to them. All they can do is go around asking questions and that hasn't helped, Jimmy. Such a short distance, between this house and the grocery—"

"Listen, Colonel," Jimmy said. "You know most of the people who live in the row. Are there any strangers, any new people who might—do something to Eileen?"

"All I can do, Jimmy, is look out the window, you know that. I can't see very far along this side of the street. But something happened to Eileen between the grocery and—"

"Maybe Mr. Tuthill can tell me something. I'll take a good look around. If Eileen is somewhere near here, I'll find her. I won't stop looking until I do."

The old man was wheeling himself back to the window when Jimmy Teague hurried out.

CHAPTER FIVE

Hell-Trap

JIMMY strode to the far corner, rounded it and stopped. There was Reppman's grocery, closed now, dark. Leaving it, Eileen must have walked to the corner and turned left into Mill Street. Jimmy followed the path she must have taken. She must have passed the cigar store on the corner, then come to the first home in the row—Daniel Tuthill's.

Jimmy gazed at the stoop of the Tuthill house. A pair of foot-prints went up to the threshold, then down again. Collins or Deverage had made them. Jimmy went up and rang the bell three times, wondering why there were no lights inside. Strange that Mr. Tuthill wasn't here tonight. He always spent his evenings at home, reading the newspaper. Jimmy tried the door, decided he would come back later. This time, instead of retracing the way Eileen must have gone, he crossed the street and stood in front of the fire house and looked at the whole long row.

He had so often come to see Eileen at her home that it almost seemed he lived in the row himself. He knew some of the neighbors. The Randalls had the house on the

Blind Witness

left of Mr. Tuthill's. The third place was vacant, and the fourth was the Applegates'.

Jimmy's gaze went along the row to the farther end—the Blakes, then Eileen's, the Riskins and the Haufers. These families were old friends of Eileen and the colonel. Certainly they could not be connected in any way with her disappearance. Then Jimmy looked back, and he began to wonder about the house on the right of the Blakes—Number 20.

Jimmy seemed to remember that until about a month ago Number 20 had been for rent, but it was occupied now. He didn't know who it was that had moved in. The windows were heavily curtained. Those on the ground floor were bright, while those upstairs were dim, as if light were shining into the front bedroom from the hall. As he stood there, studying them, Jimmy saw a man come to one of the second floor windows and look out. The man remained only a moment, then withdrew.

But as he stood there, between the street lights illuminating the front of the fire station, Jimmy Teague somehow felt that eyes were fixed upon him. . . .

Eileen's hands closed upon something smooth and rounded and curved. It was the rim of a bathtub. Leaning on it, she brought herself to her feet, still stunned by Blackie's blow. She found the door. Of course it was locked. This time she could not possibly find any way of opening it.

The men were in the next room.

"Look at this kid, Blacky," Slug's high-pitched voice said. "He ain't moved since we brought him in here. The kid's sick as hell and gettin' worse all the time. Blacky, he's dying!"

"Never mind that kid. Things are quieting down now. It's about time we lammed out of here."

Eileen turned from the door, trailing her fingers along the wall. There was no window. As in her own house, the bathroom was installed in the center of the second floor. Everything was the same—the wash-bowl, the medicine cabinet with the light above it, the towel rack, the old-fashioned gas-burner and copper coils in the corner, for heating water as it was needed.

Though the room was larger than the closet, Eileen was as closely confined as before. Even if she cried out at the top

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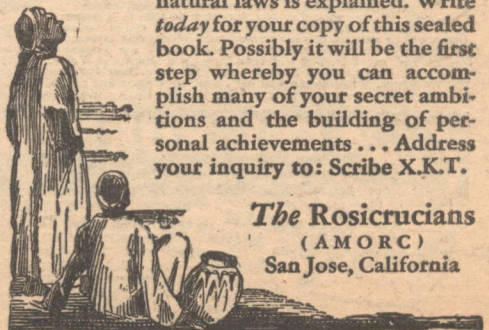
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Frederick C. Davis

of her lungs, her voice couldn't possibly carry through these walls and to the street. She was trembling and cold, and she felt inexorably trapped; but she must think.

In the next room, Slug said, "Blacky, this kid looks like he's dyin'. I don't like it, leavin' him go like this."

"So you don't like it," Blacky growled. "You'd like it still less in the hot seat, Slug. We're not taking any chances, no matter what happens to the kid. Get busy, all of you. Take those rags and those bottles of lemon oil out of the kitchen and start polishing everything in the place—all the woodwork, and the furniture, and the doorknobs. One thing we're not leaving behind is prints."

Eileen heard again the dignified voice of the Squire.

"A guy just stopped in front of the fire house on the other side of the street, and he's looking around, Blacky. A cop."

"Yeah? You keep watching him. Make sure he don't see you. The rest of you get busy with that polish."

"Blacky," Slug said, "what about that kid?"

"Listen, you damned whining old woman!" Blacky snarled. "I got a letter in my pocket, all written. I'll drop it in a mailbox on our way into town. It'll be delivered to Wellcord in the morning, and then he'll know where to find his kid. That'll give us plenty of time to make distance."

"But the kid—it'll be too late then."

"All right, you're feeling sorry for the kid, but that's the way it's going to be. Quit talking."

"What about the girl, Blacky?"

"They'll find her the same time they find him. She won't be doing any more talking than he will. I got all this figured out, Slug, the best way."

EILEEN heard the Squire return to the front room, to watch the cop across the street, while the other men scattered through the house. Her heart quickening, she turned to the medicine cabinet. It was almost empty. Her fingers found a shaving brush, a crushed tube of cream, a safety razor. With the razor in her hand, Eileen braced herself against the wall.

In the upper front room, the Squire said, "That cop's sizing up this place."

Blind Witness

Slug's voice lifted. "Geez, Blacky you know who that cop is? He's the one I told you about, the one I seen his picture in the paper, what's sweet on the girl. Teague, his name is."

"Teague, is it?" Blacky said. "Alone?"

"Yeah, alone."

"That's good. If he starts coming this way, just let me know—and let him come."

"The girl might yell."

"That'll make him come all the faster. That'll be fine."

Eileen pressed her knuckles to her lips. Her pulse was hot and fast. Sightless eyes widened, she bent over the bathtub. Pushing the plug into the drain, she opened both faucets. Cold water streamed. She held her palm in it, deflecting it against the end of the tub so that it would make as little noise as possible. While the Squire watched the cop in the street, the other men shifted about. Their movements were quick and noisy. They weren't noticing the faint sound in the bathroom. The water poured on Eileen's hand and it's level rose.

The Squire said, "That cop looks like he'll be coming over any minute now."

"The sooner the better," Blacky said.

"The sooner he comes, the sooner we'll light out."

The water was pouring rapidly and quietly into the tub. The men downstairs kept moving about. Eileen tried to visualize their positions. The Squire was still in the front room upstairs—the room next the bath. The Wellcord boy, she judged, was in the rear room, farther away. The water in the tub was deepening.

"He's starting to cross the street, Blacky," the Squire reported. "He's moving slow and looking pretty careful."

"When he comes to the door," Blacky said, "be polite and invite him in."

"He's right outside now," the Squire said. Eileen turned from the tub, letting the water spill noisily. She found the light fixture above the medicine cabinet and pulled its cord. She saw no gleam, but the growing warmth of the bulb told her it was burning. Rapidly she unscrewed it. Snatching a towel off the rack, she covered her hand with it and held the safety razor by its head. She thrust the metal handle into the live socket. The immediate result was a hissing sputter.

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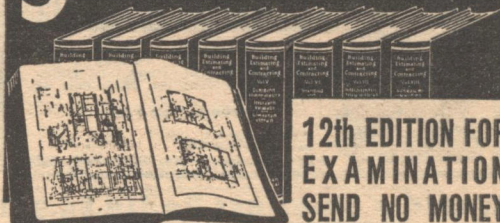
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Frederick C. Davis

Downstairs Slug blurted, "The lights! Who turned 'em off?"

"Nobody," Blacky answered. "A fuse blew."

"They're all out except the lights in the kitchen and in the upstairs hall."

"Stop shooting off your mouth and do something about it," Blacky snapped. "The switch is in the kitchen."

Breathing slowly in order to hear as clearly as possible, Eileen held the handle of the razor in the light socket.

The Squire said, "The cop's standing right in front of the steps. He must be wondering why all the lights went out. He'll be coming up in a second."

"You at the front door, Prince?" Blacky asked.

"I'm waiting for him."

"Dutch, what's that you got?"

"Poker from the fireplace. All set to give that cop a special welcome, Blacky."

"That's good. Let him come."

EILEEN groped to the water-heater in the corner. She turned the gas on full. Dipping a towel into the running water, she pressed it over her mouth and nose. Quickly the sweetish smell of the gas swelled into the air. She lowered herself to her knees to escape the strongest flow of it. She heard Slug hastening forward from the kitchen.

"There's a short in the wirin' somewhere," he said. "The fuse blow out as fast as I screw 'em in. There's only one left."

"Somebody's playin' hell with those lights," Prince declared. "That girl!"

"Listen." Blacky's voice was a chesty growl. "Water running in the bathroom. It's that girl, all right. I'll take care of her." He started up the stairs. . . .

Eileen crouched beside the tub, covering her face with the wet towel. In spite of it she could not help drawing some of the gas into her lungs. The fumes were thickening. Her pulse was drumming in her ears. She felt faint.

Blacky was at the head of the stairs.

The Squire whispered, "The cops coming to the door."

The buzzer rasped as Teague, on the stoop, pressed the button.

"Just a minute," Blacky said, "till I get at this girl."

He was inserting a key in the lock.

Blind Witness

Eileen crawled over the rim of the tub. Chill water came up around her. She lowered herself until only her face remained above the surface. The doorknob was turning. Catching her breath, she lowered her head and—went under.

Opening the door, Blacky struck a match!

There was a puffy, booming noise. Lightning flashed from Blacky's match and burst throughout the small room. Terrific pressure bore down through the water, but Eileen felt it for only an instant. The thunderclap was swiftly followed by the splintering of wood. The whole house rocked.

Eileen tried to lift herself. For a moment there was no sound except the spatter of falling fragments, and the rumbling echoes of the explosion. Then Teague's voice was shouting raggedly, "Eileen!"

"She's resting easily now. No burns, fortunately. Shock mostly. She'll be good as new in just a little while."

"Thanks, doctor. Inspector, have you heard anything from the hospital?"

"Just a few minutes ago, Jimmy. Bert Wellcord's had his transfusion. His fever seems to be dropping. They think he's going to be all right."

"I'm glad of that!"

"Mr. Wellcord's going to come over here as soon as he can, Colonel. Blacky Coyle and Squire Bowers went out of the picture fast. Slug Graves will be a long time mending, then he'll take a trip to the chair along with Prince Ringo and Dutch Müller. We can't be too technical with Jimmy in a case like this. He certainly picked a good one." Inspector Brannan chuckled. "I don't think the chief will be too unpleasant about it, Jimmy."

"Thank you, sir!"

Eileen heard these voices and felt herself covered by a crisp, cool sheet. She was very tired and glad of a chance to rest. There was a new sensation on her left hand—the third finger. She lifted her hand and saw, as if through a fog, a bright bluish sparkle.

Jimmy Teague's fingers gently closed over it.

"It's all right, honey," she heard him saying. "It's all over. You're home now."

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SANTA'S CLAWS

By LAURI WIRTA

Yes, there *was* a Santa Claus. Was—because nobody lives forever, not even Old Nick. And he gave gifts to all—even the lost and the damned.

Nobody knows for sure what goes on up around the North Pole. Whatever it is, it only goes on once a year. And you've got to be good to get in on it. This Charlie Appel had a beer stube and dance joint hard by the tired old Cook County Jail, south Chicago way. This old clink was tired when Frankie shot Johnny, weary when things went the other way and Johnny was left to mourn. Charlie Appel figured maybe to do something about it.

So he became Santa Claus. Not just once a year, but when needed. Slaygals heralded his coming; slayboys knew him well. And when they mounted the last thirteen steps to Chicago's old gallows, they always had one of Charlie's best dinners tucked away under their belts. Maybe the first good thing many of them ever had had inside them. Free, gratis, for nothing. They got to the death house and there was Charlie. Their wish was his law. He did what they wanted, got what they needed and topped it off with the kind of meal they never had had before.

Then, one day in the early twenties, the Kris Kringle of Cook County Death House vanished. And those who knew the story never told it and so the legend grew.

Dion O'Banion lived then. The O'Banion of the fabulous evil strength. O'Banion was born in Little Hell and sprouted on Death Corner—both Chicago landmarks. O'Banion loved flowers and funerals and killed something under thirty men and furnished their graves with beauty.

For years Dion O'Banion raided and looted. He carried the votes of Chicago's North side in the place where he carried his gun. In all his life, Dion O'Banion never spent more than six months in jail, and that was when he was young. But though he made more than a million a year,

Santa's Claws

he never gave up his flower shop. It was a thing he cherished.

O'Banion fought for Al Capone. He grew and put cops on his payroll and tended his flowers. Finally, he knew he was bigger than his bosses.

Not even Fate, though, finally, was bigger than Dion O'Banion. When one of his henchmen went horseback riding and the indignant horse bucked off this human vermin and trampled it to death, O'Banion drew his gun on destiny. He and his gang took the horse for a ride and ritualistically murdered it.

So big was O'Banion at last, that he fought with Capone and another boss. When they would have held back, he inflicted such an insult upon them as they could not ignore, by causing them to fall briefly into the hands of Federal authorities, over whom they had no control.

He was cutting chrysanthemums in his flower shop when three men entered, gravely shook his gun hand and shot him to death.

The funeral of Dion O'Banion was the largest ever seen. His solid silver casket cost ten thousand dollars and drew nearly fifty thousand mourners. Three bands and a police escort led him to his grave. Twenty-five trucks carried his flowers and the cortege covered a long mile. His murder was never solved.

Bigger than a legend was Dion O'Banion! Yet somewhere along the way he touched a legend, briefly. Touched it and killed it. Not until a few years ago, when there was talk of putting up a memorial to Charles Appel, who gave last life to those who had forfeited all right to it, did the truth come to light.

It seems Appel had met Dion O'Banion and conspired with him to rob and embezzle friends of goods amounting to something under a quarter of a million—and had died quietly, a fugitive from justice, some twelve years after his disappearance. His friends had soft-pedaled his crime, while aiding authorities in their hunt for him. He had been dying when they caught up with him. So nothing was ever made of the case. Until that business of the monument—to the Santa who finally showed his claws.

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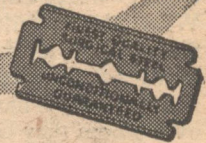
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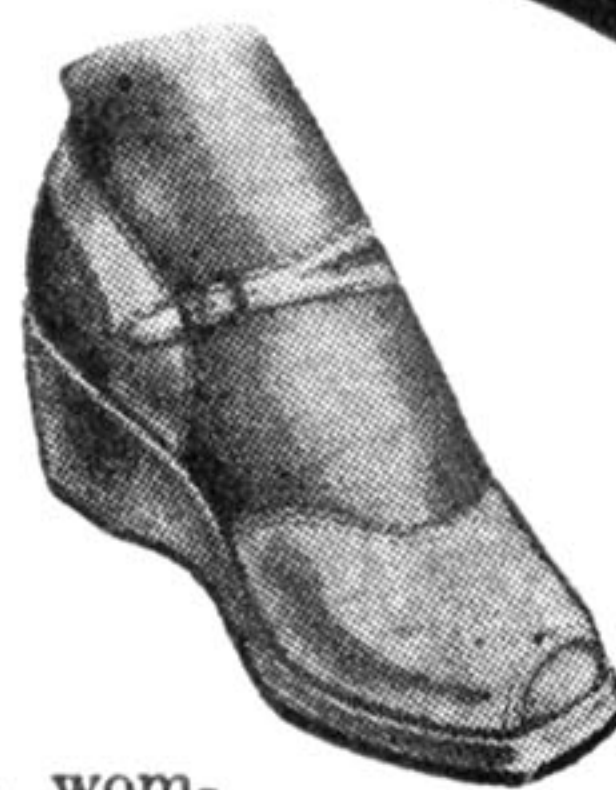
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