

25¢

DIME



APR.

DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

THE MAN FROM
LIMBO

by JOHN D.
MacDONALD

GAULT
GRAY



Try 20 Vials of World-Famous Perfumes for only \$2⁰⁰

You get the opportunity
to browse at leisure
among
10 fragrances . . .

*Perfume is one of the most
exciting of feminine accessories!
It can delight the senses
enormously . . . be pleasing to
you yourself, and make you appear
lovelier to others. Because your
particular perfume should be
chosen with care, after wearing
it and "living with it,"
this offer has been created
to help you sample ten popular
favorites. Try them one by one.
Then choose as your own the one
that best fits your personality.*

*There are a very limited
number of these packets
available, and you will cer-
tainly want to order for
your personal use, or for
gift giving. Mail coupon now!*

Make him say "YOU'RE LOVELIER
THAN EVER." Don't miss this
chance to make the man of your
dreams lose his heart. Authentic
Perfumes in each glass vial!



As
Advertised
In

**MOST
AMAZING
PERFUME OFFER
EVER MADE**

These are the SAME, GENUINE, ORIGINAL
perfumes that you've seen in Harper's Bazaar,
Vogue, Mademoiselle, Charm, Glamour, Seventeen
and all the other leading fashion magazines
advertised to sell for as much as \$35⁰⁰ a bottle.

You get 2 vials EACH
of every one of
these perfumes

- * BLACK SATIN by ANGELIQUE *
- * FIVE O'CLOCK by GOURIELLI *
- * COEUR-JOIE by *nina Ricci* *
- * COMMAND PERFORMANCE by *helena rubinstein* *
- * MY ALIBI by RENOIR *
- * SORTILEGE by *Cigogne* *
- * SHINING HOUR by *Jacqueline Cochran* *
- * BREATHLESS by *Charbet* *
- * GOLD SATIN by ANGELIQUE *
- * MIDNIGHT by TUSSY *

**Genuine
Perfume**

not colognes...not toilet waters

The manufacturers of these famous per-
fumes want to acquaint you with their prod-
uct. This bargain offer is made so that you can
try each one and then decide which better suits
your personality. Naturally, all these wonderful per-
fumes are available at your local drug or department
store in regular sizes at the nationally advertised prices.

PERFUME IMPORT CO., Dept. 57
318 Market Street, Newark, New Jersey

Please send me the 20-vial perfume packet. I may return perfumes
within 7 days for complete refund.

I enclose \$2.00 cash, check or money order, send postage prepaid.
(I save up to 50c postage.)

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ ZONE _____ STATE _____

Send _____ packets at \$2.00. I enclose \$ _____

ROD TRAPPED THE POACHER AND THEN...



WHEN ROD BROWN, DEPUTY GAME WARDEN AND WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER, RIGGED HIS FLASH CAMERA ON A STATE PRESERVE DEER TRAIL, HE LITTLE EXPECTED A POACHER TO SET IT OFF.



HAND OVER THAT CAMERA!
LOOK OUT-BEHIND YOU!

HIDING NEARBY, ROD SEES THE FLASH AND COMES TO RESET THE CAMERA, BUT THEN...



UGH!
I'LL TAKE THAT GUN!



ALL SET! SHERIFF'S GOT AN EMPTY CELL FOR THIS BIRD. SAYS WE CAN DEVELOP YOUR FILM, TOO
SWELL! LET'S GO!

LATER AT STATE PARK HEADQUARTERS



WHAT A PICTURE! LET'S CALL IN THE REPORTERS
I'M A FINE-LOOKING SIGHT TO BE INTERVIEWED. HAVEN'T SHAVED SINCE FRIDAY
WE CAN FIX YOU UP WITH A RAZOR

THREE HOURS PASS



TRY THESE THIN GILLETTE BLADES
THANKS



SAY! I SURE GO FOR THOSE BLADES! THEY REALLY DO A QUICK, SLICK JOB!
THIN GILLETTES ARE PLENTY KEEN AND EASY SHAVING!



I'LL BET MY SYNDICATE WILL PAY PLENTY FOR THAT PICTURE!
SOUNDS GOOD TO ME!
HE'S CERTAINLY GOOD-LOOKING

FOR FAST, CLEAN, GOOD-LOOKING SHAVES AT A SAVING, TRY THIN GILLETTES. NO OTHER BLADES IN THE LOW-PRICE FIELD ARE SO KEEN AND SO LONG LASTING. BECAUSE THEY'RE MADE TO FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY, THIN GILLETTES PROTECT YOU FROM NICKS AND IRRITATION. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES IN THE CONVENIENT TEN-BLADE PACKAGE

TEN-BLADE PACKAGE HAS COMPARTMENT FOR USED BLADES

25¢ **DIME
DETECTIVE
MAGAZINE**



Combined with
DETECTIVE FICTION MAGAZINE

Vol. 67

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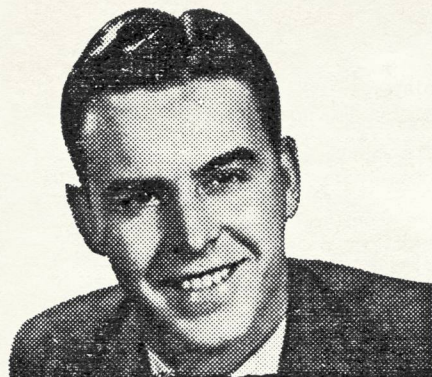
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Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

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This man will get ahead



This one won't . . .

CAN YOU TELL WHY?

They went to the same school, live on the same street, both have bacon and eggs and coffee for breakfast, both twirl a ball at Martin's Bowling Alley Monday nights.

WHAT MAKES THEM DIFFERENT?

One thing—what they're doing about the future. The man who hasn't got any future isn't doing *anything* about it. That's why.

The man who *has* a future is doing something about it right this minute. He's building it with an I. C. S. course that will prepare him for a job he knows he'll be able to fill when it comes.

The dreamy man expects breaks—somehow they never come. The wide-awake man is letting I. C. S. show him how to *manufacture* breaks. They'll be his because he's ready for them.

Which man are YOU going to be like? If you're made for something more than a dead-end job that pays little and holds you back . . . if you feel the urge to climb and grow . . . check off, below, the field you want to get ahead in and send the coupon. Do it while you feel like it—don't let the urge die.

How about it, fellow?

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS



BOX 32-78-G, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me full particulars about the course BEFORE which I have marked X:

Air Conditioning and Plumbing Courses

- Air Conditioning Heating
- Plumbing Refrigeration
- Refrigeration, Domestic
- Refrigeration & Air Conditioning
- Steam Fitting

Aeronautics Courses

- Aeronautical Engineer's, Jr.
- Aircraft Drafting & Design
- Aircraft Mechanic

Automotive Courses

- Automobile Auto Technician
- Auto Electric Technician
- Auto Body Rebuilding & Refinishing

Chemical Courses

- Chemical Engineering
- Chemistry, Analytical
- Chemistry, Industrial
- Food-Plant Sanitation
- Petroleum Refining Plastics
- Pulp and Paper Making

Civil Engineering and Architectural Courses

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- Bridge and Building Foreman

- Building Estimating
- Civil Engineering
- Contracting and Building
- Highway Engineering
- Reading Structural Blueprints
- Sanitary Engineering
- Structural Drafting
- Structural Engineering
- Surveying and Mapping

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- Practical Telephony Radio Operating
- Radio General Radio Servicing Television
- Telegraph Engineering

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- Industrial Metallurgy
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- Mechanical Drafting
- Mechanical Engineering
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- Patternmaking—Wood, Metal
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- Sheet-Metal Worker
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- Tool Designing Toolmaking
- Welding—Gas and Electric

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- Locomotive Engineer
- Locomotive Fireman
- Locomotive Machinist
- Railroad Section Foreman
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- Bookkeeping
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- Business Correspondence
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- Certified Public Accounting
- Commercial Commercial Art
- Cost Accounting
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- Foremanship
- Good English High School
- Higher Mathematics
- Industrial Supervision
- Motor Traffic
- Personnel—Labor Relations
- Postal Civil Service Retailing
- Retail Business Management
- Salesmanship Secretarial
- Sign Lettering Stenography
- Traffic Management

Name _____ Age _____ Home Address _____

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

Present Position _____ Employed by _____

Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces. Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.

READY for the RACKETS

A Department

Dear Detective Fans:

The swindle sheet this time runs the gauntlet from rackets that play upon aching feet to those that capitalize on the grief of the bereaved. There's just no end to the schemes that chiselers can dream up!

If you've been unlucky enough to be a victim, you can forewarn others by writing us your experience. We'll pay \$5 for each letter printed, withholding your name if you request. Address The Rackets Editor, DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N.Y. No letter can be returned unless it is accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Now here's the racket lowdown:

No Yap Coming

Dear Sir:

I bought a wonderful toy for my little girl in town one day—so I thought.

A man was on a corner selling mechanical toy dogs that ran around in circles and barked. They were very much like some selling in the stores for ten cents, but those didn't bark. Thinking it was a different toy, I took one home for a dollar.

When I wound it up, I soon learned that this dog didn't bark either. My little girl had got a ten-cent toy, but my ninety cents was gone.

A few days later the paper stated that a very good voice thrower had been picked up for selling barking toy dogs that did not bark.

Mrs. H. L. Bright
Atlanta, Ga.

Victim's Revenge

Dear Sir:

During the Depression my wife and I were living with my parents in a small town near Toledo. One summer day while we were at dinner, a knock came on the door. My wife answered it, and after some minutes of talking came back to the table with a slip of paper in her hand. It was a receipt for three shirts to be made to my measurement at a cost of \$2.50 each.

As I am quite stout, my wife had been making most of my shirts, and she considered this offer a

lucky break. The samples of material which the man left were of good quality, and the receipt was on the printed slip of a Chicago mail-order shirt company.

I later learned that, using my order as an opening wedge, the salesman took many other orders in the village.

The shirts were due in two weeks. Three weeks passed but no shirts came, so I wrote the shirt company whose heading was on the receipt. Their answer was short and to the point. The company had no salesmen and was exclusively a mail-order concern. It knew nothing of the swindle.

The postlude came two years later, when my wife was caring for an invalid uncle in a town twelve miles south of our home. I went out to get her on her afternoon off, and as I went up onto the porch, the same salesman who had swindled us two years before came out of the house.

My wife hadn't seen him this time, as she was busy in her room. The salesman had talked with my uncle, who told him to call back the next day for an order. This time the man was selling men's trousers, underwear and hose.

I told my wife about identifying the man, and we got in my car and began hunting for him. We finally located him and his partner actively selling in the other end of town, just outside the city limits. I immediately went to a gas station and called the sheriff, with whom I was well acquainted.

The sheriff picked up both salesmen for investigation and questioning. They denied ever being in that vicinity before, but they proved to be much wanted by many authorities, including the Federal Government for using the mail to defraud.

While my wife failed to get her money back, we felt better about having been taken in.

W.C.H.
Toledo, Ohio.

Expensive Windfall

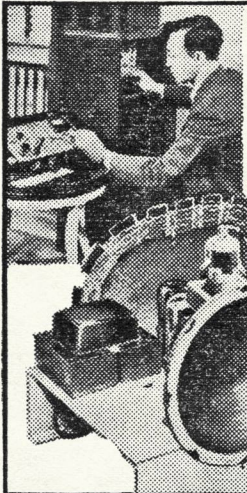
Dear Sir:

Following the tragic death of a close relative in 1935, I received a "Call for Package" notice from our local post office. In the same mail I received a letter explaining that this person (now deceased) had been paying on a gift as a surprise for my next birthday. This gift, the letter said, was a necklace and ear-screw set of "Genuine Mexico Diamonds."

(Continued on page 8)



I Will Show You How to LEARN RADIO-TELEVISION SERVICING OR COMMUNICATIONS by Practicing in Spare Time



YOU PRACTICE RADIO SERVICING

You build the modern Radio shown below as part of my Servicing Course. I send you speaker, tubes, chassis, transformer, loop antenna, everything you see pictured and EVERYTHING you need to build this modern Radio Receiver. Use it to make many tests, get practical experience.



YOU PRACTICE RADIO COMMUNICATIONS

I send you all the parts to build Transmitter shown below as part of my new Communications Course. Conduct actual procedure of Broadcast Operators, practice interesting experiments, learn how to actually put a transmitter on the air.

EXTRA PAY IN ARMY, NAVY, AIR FORCE

Knowing Radio, TV, Electronics can help you get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duty at pay up to several times a private's base pay. You are also prepared for good Radio-TV jobs upon leaving service. Mail coupon TODAY.

NEW

I TRAINED THESE MEN

"After graduating, worked for servicing shop. Now Chief Engineer of three Police Radio Stations."—S. W. DINDWIDDIE, Jacksonville, Illinois.



"While learning, made \$5 to \$10 a week in spare time. Now have a profitable spare time shop."—L. ARNOLD, Pontiac, Mich.



"I accepted a position as Radio and Television Technician... was promoted to manager of Television Service and Installation."—L. HAUGER, San Bruno, California.



"Have my own shop. Am authorized serviceman for five manufacturers and do servicing for 7 dealers."—F. MILLER, Maumee, O.



"Four years ago, a bookkeeper on a hard-to-mouth salary, am now a Radio Engineer, ABC network."—N. H. WARD, Ridgewood, Park, New Jersey.



"When I enrolled, had no idea it would be so easy to learn. Have equipped my shop out of spare time earnings. I am clearing about \$40 to \$50 a month."—J. D. KNIGHT, Denison, Tex.



I Will Train You at Home with MANY KITS OF PARTS I SEND

Do you want good pay, a job with a bright future and security? Would you like a profitable shop of your own? The fast growing, prosperous RADIO-TELEVISION industry is making these opportunities for you. Radio alone is bigger than ever. 90 million home and auto Radios, 3100 Broadcasting Stations, expanding use of Aviation and Police Radio, Micro-Wave Relay, Two-Way Radio for buses, taxis, etc., are making opportunities for Servicing and Communications Technicians and FCC-Licensed Operators.

Many Soon Make \$10 A Week Extra in Spare Time
Keep your job while training at home. Hundreds I've trained are successful RADIO-TELEVISION TECHNICIANS. Learn Radio-Television principles from illustrated lessons. Get PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE experimenting with circuits common to Radio and Television. Many students make \$5, \$10 a week extra fixing neighbors' Radios in spare time. Special Booklets start teaching you the day you enroll.

Television is TODAY's Good Job Maker

In 1946 only 6,000 TV sets sold. In 1950 over 5,000,000. By 1954, 25,000,000 TV sets will be in use, according to estimates. Over 100 TV Stations are operating in 35 states. Authorities predict there will be 1,000 TV Stations. This means new jobs, more jobs, good pay for qualified men.

Send Now for 2 Books FREE—Mail Coupon
Send for my FREE DOUBLE OFFER. Get actual Servicing lesson. Also get my 64-page book, "How to Be a Success in Radio-Television." Read what my graduates are doing, earning. Send coupon in envelope or paste on postal. J. E. SMITH, President, Dnt. 2CR1, National Radio Institute, Washington 9. D. C. OUR 38TH YEAR.

NOW! Advanced Television Practice

New, special TV kits furnished to build high-definition SCOPE... RF OSCILLATOR with flyback power supply... complete TV set... many other units. You see pulse, trapezoidal, saw-tooth wave forms. Get valuable PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE locating and correcting TV troubles. Mail coupon for facts, pictures and price!

A TESTED WAY TO BETTER PAY...MAIL COUPON NOW

Good for Both—FREE

MR. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 2CR1
National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C.
Mail me FREE Lesson and 64-page book.
(No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

The ABC's of SERVICING

How to Be a Success in RADIO-TELEVISION

NAME.....AGE.....
ADDRESS.....
CITY.....ZONE.....STATE.....

(Continued from page 6)

Being young, inexperienced and innocent of such swindling schemes, I went to the post office and paid for the package. It turned out to be a C O D package with some \$26.00 due on it. I did not open the package until I had returned home. The jewelry needed no expert to see at once it was a fake, of the cheapest sort; however I did not turn the evidence and facts over to a lawyer until too late. I have so many times wished I had done something in time for the swindlers to be caught.

Since my experience, I have heard of similar cases; hence this letter, so that other people can learn to detect such schemes.

Mrs. G. S. Sigler
Brownwood, Texas

Sore Feet—Sore Purse

Dear Sir:

A racket that has been worked with success is one that plays upon the pain of aching feet. Many people suffer from weak arches, bunions, callosities, etc. In rural communities especially, they find it impossible in many cases to get shoes that can be worn with anything like comfort. These people are always looking for something that will offer relief and they are ready to pay for it.

A man who had evidently had some experience in the treatment of these ailments came into our neighborhood and started a canvass. At the first house he learned the names of some people whose feet hurt. These were called upon and at each place he would be told about some one else who suffered from bad feet. In calling upon these folks, he represented himself to be an agent of a nationally known foot-remedy company. He had printed forms for orders, receipts and so on, as well as pictures of various appliances such as arch supports, pads and braces. I had used some of this firm's products, and I knew something about the type of arch weakness that made ordinary shoes so painful for me to wear.

The "doctor" made a careful and seemingly expert examination, telling me several things that I knew to be true about my feet. He made an impression of each foot in ink on white paper and showed me illustrations of the support I should have. I gladly gave him an order and paid him \$2.50 down, the balance to be paid when the package was delivered C.O.D.

Nothing in his manner made me at all suspicious. Indeed, he seemed so capable that I was pleased to have had this opportunity to get such able advice. I gave him the names of some friends who were potential customers.

The day after he called at my house, I picked up a magazine and noticed an ad of the firm which said that this company had no agents except established shoe dealers. I immediately set out on a search for our bogus agent, but I was too late. He had cashed his checks at the bank and had taken a bus out of town. Naturally the C.O.D. packages never came, and as the name he used was doubtless as phony as the rest of it, we had no way of tracing him.

Elsie Dungan
Cincinnati, Ohio

Clipping With an Art

Dear Sir:

Two-bits isn't much to be gypped out of, especially in these days of inflated prices. But multiply it many times over and it adds up to the fact that someone is making a good thing out of a nice little racket which, as far as I can see, is operating strictly within the law.

Sometime ago I received a postcard telling me that the sender, obviously the head of a news clipping service, had on file a news item about me which I could have by forwarding 25¢.

Now it so happens that I do a little free-lance writing and my name and address appear in various publications all over the country. Since the postal came from a West Coast city, I leapt to the obvious conclusion that there was an item in a paper out there, and I sent the quarter.

What did I get in return? Merely a clipping of a news item that had appeared in my local small town paper!

Actually, I suppose, I have no legitimate gripe. I got what I bargained for—and a little education to boot. But I'm still seething.

Ruth E. Renkel
Elyria, Ohio

Get a Horse!

Dear Sir:

The following story is how two teen-age boys were swindled.

My buddy and I decided to buy a car and share the expenses. On our day off we were making the rounds of all the used-car lots when we came across a neat-looking car standing by itself in a vacant lot. It had a "for sale" sign that said that the owner would be there from six to eight.

When we arrived that night we found the owner waiting and we asked him about the condition of the car. He said that everything was in working order except the battery. He had brought a battery along, but it was a mobile unit cart. Therefore we were unable to drive the car, just start the motor, which sounded rather well. He then quoted us a price of \$150 which seemed reasonable. The upholstery was in good shape, also the tires, so we decided to buy the car.

The following night we returned with the money and bought the car. When it was towed home, we really found out the car's worth. The transmission was completely shot. Cost to fix: \$150. The electrical wiring was greatly damaged. Cost to fix: \$50. The mechanical brakes hardly worked. Cost to fix: \$100. The complete repair bill came to \$300. The car in its original state was worth about \$35.

We tried to get in touch with the man who had sold it, but he had given us a false name.

My suggestion is—if you are a teen-ager and only know an average amount about cars, don't risk your money. If you can't drive the car for your own personal inspection, the car isn't worth the price, no matter how much of a bargain it may seem to you.

Leo J. Calabrese
Fairlawn, N. J.

\$100⁰⁰ A WEEK in CASH
PAID DIRECT TO YOU

FAMILY HOSPITAL PLAN

SAVE MONEY!

There's a big advantage to buying this policy by mail. This method of selling is less costly for us—and that's another reason why we are able to offer so much protection for so little money.

Policy Pays for a Day, a Week, a Month, a Year—just as long as necessary for you to be hospitalized!

JUST LOOK
The Large Benefit This Low Cost Policy Provides!

The Service Life Family Hospital Plan covers you and your family for about everything—for every accident, and for all common and rare diseases after the policy has been in force 30 days or more. Very serious disease such as cancer, tuberculosis, heart disease, diseases involving female organs, sickness resulting in a surgical operation, hernia, lumbago and sacroiliac conditions originating after the policy is in force six months are all covered . . . Hospitalization caused by attempted suicide, use of intoxicants or narcotics, insanity, and venereal disease is naturally excluded.

The money is all yours—for any purpose you want to use it. There are no hidden meanings or big words in the policy. We urge you and every family and also individuals to send for this policy on our 10 day free trial offer—and be convinced that no other hospital plan offers you so much for your \$1.00 a month!

TWO SPECIAL FEATURES
MATERNITY

Benefits At Small Extra Cost
 Women who will some day have babies will want to take advantage of a special low cost maternity rider. Pays \$50.00 for childbirth confinement either in the hospital or at home, after policy has been in force 10 months. Double the amount on twins.



POLIO

Benefits At No Extra Cost
 In lieu of other regular benefits policy pays these benefits if polio strikes—
 For Hospital Bills, up to . . . \$500.00
 For Doctor's Bills while in the hospital, up to \$500.00
 For Orthopedic Appliances, up to . . . \$500.00
TOTAL OF \$1,500.00



3c A DAY IS ALL YOU PAY
for this outstanding new Family Protection

Wonderful news! This new policy covers everyone from infancy to age 70! When sickness or accident sends you or a member of your family to the hospital—this policy PAYS \$100.00 PER WEEK for a day, a month, even a year . . . or just as long as you stay in the hospital. What a wonderful feeling to know your savings are protected and you won't have to go into debt. The money is paid DIRECT TO YOU to spend as you wish. This remarkable new Family Hospital Protection costs only 3c a day for each adult 18 to 59 years of age, and for age 60 to 70 only 4½c a day. This policy even covers children up to 18 years of age with cash benefits of \$50.00 a week while in the hospital—yet the cost is only 1½c a day for each child! Benefits paid while confined to any recognized hospital, except government hospitals, rest homes and clinics, spas or sanitariums. Pick your own doctor. Naturally this wonderful policy is issued only to individuals and families now in good health; otherwise the cost would be sky high. But once protected, you are covered for about every sickness or accident. Persons covered may return as often as necessary to the hospital within the year.

This is What \$100.00 a Week Can Mean to You When in the Hospital for Sickness or Accident

Money melts away fast when you or a member of your family has to go to the hospital. You have to pay costly hospital board and room . . . doctor's bills and maybe the surgeon's bill too . . . necessary medicines, operating room fees—a thousand and one things you don't count on. What a Godsend this READY CASH BENEFIT WILL BE TO YOU. Here's cash to go a long way toward paying heavy hospital expenses—and the money left over can help pay you for time lost from your job or business. Remember—all cash benefits are paid directly to you.

Examine This Policy Without Cost or Obligation—Read It—Talk It Over—Then Decide

10 DAYS FREE EXAMINATION

You are invited to inspect this new kind of Family Hospital Plan. We will send the actual policy to you for ten days at no cost or obligation. Talk it over with your banker, doctor, lawyer or spiritual adviser. Then make up your mind. This policy backed by the full resources of the nationally known Service Life Insurance Company of Omaha, Nebraska—and with policyholders in every state. SEND NO MONEY—just your name and address! No obligation, of course!

REMEMBER—\$100.00 A WEEK CASH BENEFIT IS ACTUALLY \$14.25 PER DAY!

FREE INSPECTION . . . MAIL COUPON

The Actual Policy Will Come to You at Once Without Cost or Obligation

The Service Life Insurance Company
 Hospital Department R-65, Omaha 2, Nebraska
 Please rush the new Family Hospital Protection Plan Policy to me on 10 days Free Inspection. I understand that I am under no obligation.

Name.....
 Address.....
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SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY

Assets of \$13,188,604.16 as of January 1, 1951
 Hospital Department R-65, Omaha 2, Nebraska



SO SORRY NOW!

◆◆◆ — By HAROLD HELFER — ◆◆◆

A New York State comptroller received \$25 through the mail from an anonymous taxpayer who wrote that his conscience kept him awake at night.

The note added, "If I find I still can't sleep, I will send you another \$25."

* * *

A Portland, Ore., grocer received through the mail two pennies and the following message: "Dear sir: In 1941 or 1942 I stole a two-cent sucker from your store."

* * *

A Hartford, Conn., hotel recently received through the mail a fork a man had stolen from them at class reunion held there—back in 1908.

* * *

A burglar who broke into the home of a Columbus, O., woman in her absence and cooked a chicken, whipped up some potatoes and downed two bottles of beer left this note behind: "Kind people: As I passed by tired and hungry, I found your home open and bade myself 'Welcome.' Blessings be with you. A Disciple."

* * *

A Taylorville, Ill., movie theater manager, received a \$5 bill and this note: "This money is in payment for the time I lied about my age in order to get into the show for half price."

* * *

A New York city official got \$17 in the mail from someone who threw stones at a street light when a boy. "I remember distinctly breaking it and running away from the scene," the letter said. "Now I realize I did wrong and I would like to pay for the damage I did. It could well be that I did break another. In any event I am sending you the amount of three street lights."

* * *

A man in Vancouver, Wash., who robbed

a bank of \$1650, spent \$2, promptly felt remorse and gave himself up with \$1648.

* * *

Three years after a thief lifted a five-pound roast from the auto of a movie actress he had another five-pound roast delivered to her.

* * *

In an Atlantic City hospital after being struck by a hit-and-run driver, a man received this anonymous postcard: "Lord help me for hitting you but I haven't got the strength to give myself up."

* * *

A motorist sent by mail to the Los Angeles court \$15 and a traffic ticket received 12 years before for making a wrong turn.

* * *

To "ease his conscience" a man sent a Springfield, Mass., hospital \$40 to pay his bill—accrued 25 years before.

* * *

Two years after an armed gunman entered the home of a Rochester, N. Y., couple and made off with \$100, he sent them through the mail \$10 and a note saying, "I've changed. You'll get all the money back. This money I earned."

* * *

A railroad received a \$2 bill with this note: "I broke some glass insulators on a railway telegraph pole a few years ago and it has been on my conscience ever since. Please accept the enclosed money to pay for the damage."

* * *

A gunman entered the home of a Chicago woman and ordered her to hand over all the money she had in the house. "You want money from me?" The woman burst into tears. "And I myself need bread. I need bread and he asks me for money."

The bandit gave her a dollar and departed.



6

**MAGIC
WORDS**

**GIVE YOU
DAILY CASH**

**KENDEX
NYLONS
ARE FREE
UNLESS
SATISFACTORY!**

Amazing, but true! The most sensational offer ever made! Can you imagine how much money you could make writing orders for wonderful nylons that actually cost nothing unless satisfactory? Is there any woman who would hesitate to wear beautiful nylons at OUR risk? Nothing like this has ever been heard of in the hosiery industry. Never before was it possible for any man or woman, young or old, to earn a steady income so easily!

The leading Kendex full fashioned, sheer de luxe first quality nylons have just been reduced to only \$.98 a pair INCLUDING your commission, bonus and even postage. This stocking is so finely made—gives so much wear, that KENDEX will refund the full \$.98 purchase price if the hose do not give satisfactory wear within a period of ONE AND A HALF MONTHS! If the hose runs, snags or shows undue wear, the hose will cost the customer nothing!

We don't care if you are 18 or 80—whether you have one hour or 50 hours a week to spare. How can you help make a lot of money? Women buy two million pairs of nylons every day. Just say "Kendex nylons are FREE unless satisfactory" and practically every woman will be eager to give you an order.

There is nothing for you to buy or deliver. You don't risk a dime. Pay nothing now or later. Just mail the coupon, that's all. We'll send you FREE SAMPLE STOCKING and complete money-making outfit postage prepaid. You write orders. We deliver and collect. Advance cash plus huge cash bonus that increases your earnings by 40%. No obligation. If you don't make more money than you thought possible, throw the outfit away! Need we say more?

**KENDEX
CORPORATION
BABYLON 89, N. Y.**

FREE SAMPLE STOCKING

Date.....

**Kendex Corporation
Babylon 89, N. Y.**

Send me, absolutely free and postage prepaid, your complete money-making outfit including free sample stocking. It is understood I am under no obligation and if I am not satisfied with the money I make, I will throw away the whole outfit.

Name

Address

City Zone.... State.....

.....

THRILL DOCKET



What was I doing here—me, Pete O'Mara—prowl- ing my own beach cottage with a gun in my pocket? I didn't really believe it, did I—what the anony- mous caller had said on the phone about my wife?



This is Nancy—who was supposed to be in Frisco —and wasn't. But it didn't matter much, when I found her. She was dead. In the bathtub, with the radio ripped from the wall. Murdered. . . .



I couldn't make the D.A. call it anything but accidental. But I was going to get the killer—even at the risk of getting tabbed myself. And I might be. For a cop saw Laura return my gun. . . .

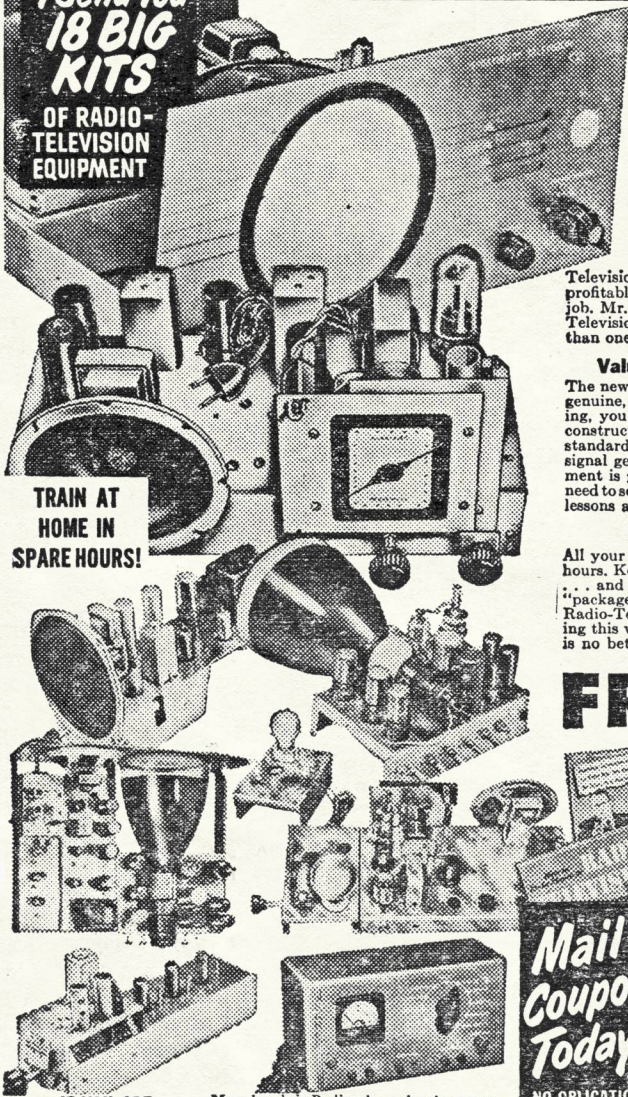


I don't know what I was waiting for in the lonely cottage, but in walked a wild-eyed kid and a gun. . . . Frank Ward will finish the story in "Death in a Punch Bowl," in the next issue, out April 2nd.



NOW-Be Fully Trained, Qualified RADIO TELEVISION TECHNICIAN IN JUST 10 MONTHS OR LESS!

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Please rush to me all information on your 10-MONTH Radio-Television Training Plan. I understand this does not obligate me and that no salesman will call upon me.

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Please Check Below About Your Experience

Are You Experienced? No Experience

**NO OBLIGATION
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THE MAN FROM LIMBO

CHAPTER ONE

Awake to Terror

HE SAT on the hotel bed, lying over so that his forehead was against the back of his right hand, and his right hand clasped his knee. It was warm, but he could not stop shivering. He wanted to fold himself smaller and tighter, shrink down into darkness and nothingness.

"God," he said, "help me." It was prayer. This time it was worse than all the other times. Deeper, blacker. The doctor had said, "Dolph, you've got to do it. You've got to take the job."

Job for a psycho. Fear psychosis, they call it.

Saga of Suspense

By **JOHN D.
MacDONALD**



"I just dealt myself some new cards," she said.

Jekyll and Hyde could learn a thing or two from suave Wally Block—who looked so good in his crusader's shining armor, while he stitched his buddy a shroud!

"You've got too much pride to hide in hospitals the rest of your life, Dolph."

Have I?

The doctor had lined up the job. It sounded so simple. "You just take this sample case and your routing and this literature. You go out on the road and you go to jewelry stores and sell the Russell Line. Compacts, costume jewelry. You have to make yourself do it. Do it for three months, Dolph, and this will never come back again."

"Why did I have to get this way?"

"The war. It brought out . . ."

"But I was all right during the war. All right, I tell you. And for two years afterward I was all right. Now I . . ."

"You can do this. I know you can. Memorize sales talks."

For six weeks Dolph Regan had forced himself to do the job. Sometimes it was a full hour before he could force himself to enter a store. If the owner was too busy to talk, it was like a reprieve. He gave his sales talks woodenly, his body bathed in cool sweat. But he forced himself to do it. He forced himself to believe that it was becoming easier. He made sales—not many. But those he made were precious to him.

And yesterday it had blown up in his face. Here in Brasher, New York, a perfectly normal, grubby, upstate city of fifty thousand. Here in Brasher in a small average jewelry store called Dreifer's.

He was talking to Mr. Dreifer. Dreifer was listening without much interest, fingering one of the compacts. Dolph heard his own voice getting unaccountably louder. He tried to keep it down. A clerk began to stare at him, and two women customers. Dreifer startled, faintly alarmed, stared at him. Eight eyes, looking at him. Familiar roaring in his ears. Eyes pulsing at him, growing enormous, then shrinking to tiny dots, growing enormous again. The store was steadily shrinking. The walls were going to crush him.

He ran stumbling to the door, ran all the way to the hotel, leaving the car by a meter, leaving the sample case with Dreifer; ran with panic at his heels, wanting only to be alone behind a door that was sturdy . . . and locked.

That had been yesterday. Mid-morning. Now it was afternoon. He did not know if he had slept. He had not left the room.

After six weeks this had happened again. He did not know what had set it off, what had triggered it. The doctor would question him closely. The doctor was trying to find a clue, a clue in the past.

There wasn't much that he could tell the doctor. Just that the name of the city had a tantalizing familiarity. Familiarity tinged with faint dread. Nothing much there.

"What are you afraid of?" he whispered.

Nothing. And everything.

Fear of people, with overtones of claustrophobia. Fear of failure.

A sound had been growing in the distance. It intruded on his attention and it took him long moments to identify it. Drums. Parade. He stood up, wavering with weakness, and went cautiously to the window, standing well back as he looked out. The street was three stories below. Sidewalks lined with people.

Now was the time to break out of the room, to go down there. Now he could be certain that they would not be looking at him, would not be wondering about him, nudging each other, smirking behind the concealing hand.

The drums grew louder. Don't wait too long. He fled from the room, went down the two flights at a half run, slowed to go across the lobby. He gave a quick glance from side to side. They did not notice him. He would play the old game, that he was invisible, the game that had put him to sleep during the nights of childhood.

He was tall enough to see over their heads. There was a bank near the hotel. He leaned against the front of it. A fife and drum corps. Tan-legged girl strutting out in front. Brief red skirt and gold halter, and high white shako. Baton with chrome glint in the sunlight, twirling first on one side of her and then the other, miraculously missing the knees that came high in the prancing strut. A girl that was good to look at.

Boom tah da dah, Boom tah dah dah, Boom tah dah dah. Then a blast of whistle and the harsh high skirl of the fifes.

Next a car. A huge convertible. Banners. Block for Mayor. Dolph bit his lip until his eyes watered. He had seen the posters without actually seeing them. He had been uneasy without knowing why.

Block. Sergeant Wally Block. Dolph Regan knuckled his eyes and stared at the

big-shouldered man who sat smiling on the folded top of the convertible, his feet in the rear seat. No one else. Wally Block. Certainly! That was why the name was familiar. "When I get back to Brasher, boy, there's going to be . . ."

Wally Block, with his big, blunt, florid face, tiny blue eyes, neck and shoulders like a bull.

Wally was waving a pale, wide-brimmed felt hat at the crowd, turning from side to side. He looked toward the bank. Dolph instinctively lifted an arm. Wally froze for a long moment, staring over the heads of the crowd at Dolph.

Dolph grinned and clasped his hands high over his head like a fighter. As the car moved slowly along, Dolph ran down to the hotel entrance, pointing meaningfully at the door. He saw Wally's quick nod of comprehension.

The rest of the parade went by. Traffic started up again. The crowds began to drift away. Dolph stood and smiled to himself. He straightened his shoulders and stared boldly into the faces of the people around him. It was gone for this time, cured and gone. Just seeing Wally had been enough to do it.

AT THE door of Dreifer's there was a moment's hesitation, but he walked in, made himself smile at Mr. Dreifer. "Sorry about yesterday. I was sick."

"You didn't do those customers any good, fella. They run out as fast as you did."

"I'm sorry about that."

"You start shouting when you get sick? Funny sickness."

He retrieved his sample case and managed to make a small sale. The car was at the police garage where it had been towed. He paid his fine and the towing charge and drove back to the parking lot behind the hotel. For the first time in over twenty-four hours he realized how hungry he was.

He went to the desk clerk. "I'm Dolph Regan, Room 220. I'm expecting a phone call or a visit from Wallace Block. I'll be down in the grill room for a time. If anything should . . ."

"From Wallace Block? Certainly, Mr. Regan. Pardon me, but are you a friend of his?"

"In the army."

"He's going to do a lot for this town, Mr. Regan. He's waking the people up."

Dolph started to go downstairs, then fingered his stubbled chin. He went up and shaved quickly, showered, changed to a fresh shirt. He found that he could look at his long lean face in the mirror, at the black arch of brows, the firm jaw, and feel with confidence that this was the last time it would happen. The very last time.

And then he remembered that it was always this way. The swing of the pendulum. After the depths there came a brief time of elation. He shrugged it off and went down to order a special steak.

The second cup of coffee had just been served when the girl came and stood by his booth. "Mr. Regan?" she said. Her voice was low.

He got up awkwardly. "My name is Regan."

"I'm Jan Holland, Mr. Regan. Wally described you and the desk clerk told me where to find you."

"Please sit down. A drink?"

"Black coffee, please." She took off her gloves as Dolph signaled the waiter. She met his inquisitive stare with a frank, level-eyed smile. He decided that she was an extraordinarily pretty girl, very nearly a beautiful girl. Her hair was the shade of butter toffee under the pert hat with its tiny veil. The furs slung across the shoulder of the green fall suit appeared to be sable. Her face was broad through the cheekbones, her eyes set wide and gray, her mouth cool and fresh.

"I suppose I should explain, Mr. Regan. Wally sends regrets. He'll try to see you soon, possibly this evening. But with election the day after tomorrow. . . ."

She gave a pretty shrug, very expressive.

"It certainly was a surprise to me to see him sitting on that car, Miss Holland."

"No surprise to us, Mr. Regan. We've worked for a long time to find a man strong enough to knock over the local applecart. I'm a campaign worker and sort of secretary to Wally. He wants to know why you are in town."

"Working. I'm on the road, selling."

She tilted her head on one side. "He seemed to remember that you were an architect, Mr. Regan."

"I was. I guess, in a manner of speaking, I still am. This is a—sideline."

"I see," she said in a tone that meant she did not see at all.

"Does he have a good chance of winning?"

"We think so. We hope so. If you lived here, would you vote for him?"

"What an odd thing to say! Of course I would. My platoon sergeant? I was a replacement officer, green as grass. Most replacement officers in combat had a life expectancy of about three days. Wally taught me the tricks. He said he was tired of breaking in new lieutenants."

She bit her lip. "Sorry if I seem a little puzzled, Mr. Regan. Could there have been any bad feeling between you two, at the end?"

"What are you driving at?"

Wally got me aside and gave me that grin of his and told me to come down here and find out if you were for him or against him. So I wondered . . ."

"He must have been joking, Miss Holland."

She made a face. "Maybe he's getting super-sensitive. It's been a rough, dirty campaign. One little group has controlled Brasher for so long that until a week or so ago they still thought the Good Government League was a joke. We had a newspaper poll that woke them up. I've worked so hard I feel unreal, like I could be a million miles away. I've rung so many doorbells my thumb aches. They're calling us a 'bunch of amateurs'. But we're getting results."

"Maybe I could help in some way," he said. He knew at once that it wasn't from any desire for good government for Brasher, but from an urge to become better acquainted with this girl.

"Would you, Dolph?" she said eagerly. She blushed. "Wally called you that and I . . ."

"I was wondering how I was going to start calling you Jan," he said quickly.

"Anyway, I was thinking that maybe at the banquet and rally tomorrow night you could sit at the speaker's table and say something about him, a sort of introduction or . . . Are you ill?"

He knew his smile was closer to a grimace. "No."

"You looked so odd for a moment."

"I don't think I'd better try to make a speech, Jan. I'm—no good at that sort of

thing any more. I might do more harm than good."

She frowned in thought. "How about a statement? You could write it out. Lieutenant's commendation for his platoon sergeant or something. We could get it in tomorrow's paper and maybe have it read over the air."

"I'd be glad to do that, Jan."

She glanced at her watch. "Could you come over to headquarters right now? There'll be somebody there who can take dictation. And Wally ought to be going back to headquarters a bit later."

"Glad to." They walked side by side in the gray dusk. She had a nice long-legged stride and seemed to know every third person they met.

HHEADQUARTERS was a vacant store into which desks and chairs had been moved. Banners hung spotlighted across the front of the building. Workers were turning in reports, and over in one corner, under a sign which said Auto Pool, a group of men were arguing over a routine chart. Some of them stopped to wave at Jan.

A tall thin blond man in his thirties came over, smiling. "New recruit, Jan?"

"Bill, this is Dolph Regan. Dolph was Wally's lieutenant in the war. He's willing to give us a statement we can use."

"Glad to have you aboard, Regan. Eager beaver left out my last name. Holmes. Nice of you to help, but I don't want to overdo the war stuff. It's sort of old hat."

"I wasn't thinking—of any valor and clenched teeth sort of thing. Mr. Holmes. Just how you get to know a guy by sharing a hole in the real estate with him."

"That ought to be just what we need, then. Jan, go take Betty off that Martinson speech and have her take this down. I'll check it later. Glad to meet you, Regan."

He hurried away. Betty was a little girl who looked remarkably like an owl. Chairs were scarce, so Dolph sat beside Jan on a desk top while Betty sat with the notebook braced against her knee.

Jan made alert suggestions and between them they got it into shape. Betty read it to Bill Holmes from her notes, and he liked it. Betty was almost through typing it when the atmosphere of the crowded room changed. Dolph looked toward the door and saw Wally coming in, looking, as always, a

bit larger than life size. Wally seemed confident, happy. His big voice filled the room.

"Amateurs, are we? I think we're going to show 'em."

He spotted Dolph and came over, without haste. His small eyes twinkled. "The Lieutenant! Damn your eyes, Dolph! I nearly fell out of the car when I saw you standing there in front of the bank."

Dolph pumped his hand. "Happy to meet you, Mayor Block."

Wally put a familiar arm around Jan's shoulders. She smiled up at him. "Dolph is helping. He's making a statement."

Wally still smiled, but Dolph had the odd impression that the big man had suddenly become wary. "What kind of a statement?"

"The usual thing. How Sergeant Block and Lieutenant Regan won the war."

"Good. Give it a lot of distribution, Jan. Come on into the back room, Dolph. Be with you in a few minutes, people."

Wally closed the door of the back room, closed out the noise of the workers, the ringing of the phones, the rattle of the typewriters. He opened a low cupboard, took out a bottle. There were two glasses on the table. He splashed a generous drink into each glass, handed one to Dolph. He was no longer smiling. He looked tired.

"Here's looking up your address, Lieutenant."

"Here's to the next mayor."

Wally sat down heavily in a frail chair which creaked under his weight.

"What are you after, Regan?"

Dolph frowned. "Should I be after something?"

Wally grinned mirthlessly. "Aren't we all, boy? Only you better understand something. Every dime I've got is in this campaign. I've got to get in. And once I'm in, boy, I can't move very fast. Slow and easy will do it. I've got a lot of do-gooders to dump over the side before I can start producing."

Dolph perched on the table. "Maybe I'm stupider than I look."

"No, Lieutenant. There's nothing at all stupid about you. That's what worries me. Here I am, all set to move into the driver's seat, and you have to show up."

"I don't want to stop you."

"That's what I was afraid of. Understand what I said, I've got to move slow.

The best I can give you is an appointment. Investigation deal. All it pays is per diem, but maybe I can wangle twenty bucks a day."

"Are you offering me a job, Wally? I don't know anything about city government."

"I suppose you think I do? All I know is how to get onto a gravy train. Shenck froze me out from one direction, so I'm going to be such a nuisance he's going to have to play ball. What are you doing in town?"

"Salesman on the road."

"A hell of a likely story, Lieutenant. You're the coolest one I've seen in a long time." Wally stood up. "Well, you're on the team. But I'm warning you. Don't ever get too greedy. There's enough for all."

HE WENT out before Dolph could emerge from his confusion. It almost seemed as though Wally were mixing him up with some other person. And this gravy-train talk didn't sound exactly like Good Government.

By the time he walked out of the back room he saw Wally Block going through the front door out onto the sidewalk.

Jan came running to him excitedly. "Dolph! He told me! I think it's wonderful. It just never occurred to me that you'd be willing to step in and take a job. Most of our good people have businesses and professions they can't leave. When we start cleaning house we're going to have a terrible shortage of competent men to take over."

"Jan, I don't think I can take any . . ."

"Now you hush. I can see that you need convincing. And I'm going to talk you into it. You can't go back on Wally now."

"I want to talk to you, Jan."

"I've got scads of work to do here, Dolph. Why don't you go back to the hotel? I'll phone you just as soon as I get through."

"How late will you be?"

"Midnight, I guess. Maybe later."

It was only a bit after seven, and a relief to get out onto the dark sidewalk away from the clamor and congestion of the party headquarters. He walked back to the hotel, went restlessly down to the bar. The bar was in the lull between cocktail time and the evening drinkers.

When the bartender brought his bourbon, Dolph said casually, "Is a man named Shenck prominent around here?"

"Dilbert Shenck. Dilly to his pals. You could call it prominent, mister."

"What does he do?"

The bartender grinned humorlessly. "Well, not much of anything. I guess you could kind of say he runs this town. When the mayor wants to spit, he phones Dilly and asks if it's okay. If one of the neighborhood books starts to hold out bets, Dilly calls the Chief and the book goes out of business for a while. Dilly says what streets are going to be repaved and who is going to do it."

"Where does he live?"

"Hell, he's a country gentleman, Dilly is. Big place out Pike Avenue, couple of miles beyond the city limits. Fluorescent lights in the cow barns they say."

"Suppose a man wanted to go see him."

"Sometimes that's tough to do, mister. If I was you, I'd go out South Warren Street to the tracks and look for a big joint on the left a mile beyond the tracks. Some people say Dilly spends his evenings there. It's called Red-Top's."

Dolph finished his drink. The man at the parking lot told him how to get onto South Warren.

He had imagined a garish barn of a place, glittering with neon. Red-Top's turned out to be a long, low, ranch-type place on a knoll, with a long drive that led up to it. The sign on the highway was discreet—black cut-out letters against a pink ground-glass screen.

There were only a half a dozen cars in the lot. He parked and went through the nearest door. It opened into a cocktail lounge. A woman with hair like flame came lithely off a bar stool. She looked to be about thirty. She was ripely and beautifully built, and she wore a dress that seemed unable to decide whether it should be chaste or daring. The woman was at least an inch over six feet tall, and the stilt heels of gold sandals added close to another four inches. The flame hair was piled high in an ornate crest.

Dolph stared up into her face with something close to awe.

"Sort of takes your breath, doesn't it?" she said in a husky baritone.

"Imposing, in a way."

"Do you know what you get, Shorty?"

"What do I get?"

"A free drink for not asking me how the air is up here. Grab a stool, Shorty. You have arrived a bit before our traditional festivities. Johnny, give the man his pleasure. I'm Red-Top."

Seated side by side, her eyes were on a level below his. Most of that height, he saw, was in her legs, particularly from knee to hip.

"And I'm Dolph Regan, stranger in town."

"You have come to the right place, Regan. Bourbon, did you say? Fill mine too, Johnny."

Two couples came in and Red-Top gave them her booming welcome. When she turned around, Dolph said, as casually as he could, "Do I have any chance of catching Mr. Shenck here tonight?"

She studied him. "Internal Revenue?"

"Nothing so ominous. A friend of a friend."

"That, Shorty, is not what we call enough."

He took his copy of the statement Betty had tucked out of his pocket and unfolded it and handed it to her, under the edge of the bar. Her lips moved as she read it. She folded it and handed it back to him.

"You call that a friend of a friend?"

"In a manner of speaking."

"Come on," she said.

SHE led the way out of the lounge, back along one side of the almost deserted diningroom to a door at the back. Beyond the door was a hallway, an office at the end. She clicked on the office lights, pushed the door shut as soon as he was in.

She kicked off her shoes and it brought her down so that she stood eye to eye with him. Her manner had changed. "Window dressing for the sucker trade," she said. "Have a seat."

She sat behind the desk, chin on her fists, and stared at him.

"This needs figuring, Regan. This isn't on the schedule. What do you want to see Shenck about?"

"Where do you stand? What's your place in the picture?"

"I'm a friend of a friend." Her eyes were a gray so pale that they looked like rain water on a window pane. Her mouth

had a ripe squareness. Her exuberance and friendliness of the bar was gone, utterly.

He stood up. "Don't bother about it. I can find him."

"What are you selling?"

"Am I selling something?"

She grinned. "All right, Regan. We'll call this a draw." She pulled open a desk drawer, took out an automatic and pointed it at his middle. Her hand was not dainty and neither was the weapon. The combination had a deadly efficiency.

"I just dealt myself some new cards," she said, coming around the desk. "Turn around and brace your hands against the door."

As he was lifting his arms, his back to her, consciousness slid into fragments. There was no feeling of being hit. It was as though he saw, within his mind, one of those newsreel shots where a cliff is dynamited. It lifts, almost intact, and then slides into dust and rubble. . . .

Dolph awakened in a blackness so intense that there was no way to orient himself, nor even any assurance that he had not been blinded. He had a shattering headache, a pins and needles feeling in his bound hands and feet. His hands were tied in front of him and he lay on his side with his knees and forehead against a hard surface, hips and heels against another. As he straightened his legs, thrusting against a third surface, the top of his head slid up until it hit the fourth. The feeling was inescapable that he was enclosed in some sort of a box. The air was not good. He breathed rapidly, shallowly.

A coffin could be just like this.

Five feet of packed earth above him. . . .

He sucked in the stale air and screamed. The scream had no place to go. It filled the box like shards of broken glass. The sides of the box were compressing against him, smothering him. He screamed again.

The top lifted. Light slanting in shocked him into silence. It was Red-Top and she had lifted some sort of a lid. He stared up at her as she peered in at him, one hand supporting the lid. Her lips were pursed.

"Hush-a-bye baby," she said.

Wally appeared behind her, towering high and solid over the box. He stared down at Dolph with disapproval. From Dolph's angle of vision they were distorted, out of proportion, leaning as though

they would momentarily fall in upon him.

"You disappoint me, Lieutenant," Wally said. The box caught the rumble of his voice, resonated it oddly.

"Wally, please get me out of here," he begged. "Please!"

Wally put a heavy arm around Red-Top's waist, swayed her back and forth with rough affection. "It was just bad luck, Lieutenant. You made contact with my gal here. We would have both been real upset if you'd gotten to Dilly, wouldn't we, honey?"

"It would have been a shame," she said.

"Wally, I don't understand all this."

"Then why were you trying to see Dilly?"

"Because of what Jan told me. She said a reform group was trying to get you elected. Then you talked about a gravy train. I wanted to see what sort of a person he was."

"And then go disillusion the Holland wench? Don't try to kid me, Lieutenant!"

"Don't leave me in here! What do you want of me?"

Red-Top answered for him. "Why, Wally just wants his old pal to be his house guest. He's sent a man after your baggage and by now you should be all checked out. You're in Wally's place right now, Regan. I got you out the back way. You're a heavy little rascal."

She released the lid and it slammed shut with a sound that deafened Dolph, that left him once more in the frightful darkness.

CHAPTER TWO

The Most Wanted Man in Town

EACH time he would try to think, try to plan, the waves of panic would come washing over him, weakening him, leaving him gasping and shuddering. During one coherent interval, he managed to cock his head so that he could lay his left ear against the side of the box. He could hear muffled voices and could identify them as belonging to Red-Top, Wally and a third person, a man. He could not make out the words, and from time to time he heard them laugh. It was a small comfort to know that they were there, that he had not been left alone.

And then, as he listened, he heard the voices become more faint, heard the distant slam of a door and then silence. The next spasm of fear was so intense that he knew he must either find an escape or go mad.

The very dimensions of the box defeated him. It was so narrow that he could not bring his knees high enough to be able to exert the strength of his back. He could not sit up, even by bracing himself with his bound hands, because his head struck the inside of the lid too soon.

The only thing left to do was to get over onto his face. This involved getting his knees much straighter than they were. He pushed his head as far up into one corner as he could, and, with an effort that took skin from the angle of his jaw, managed to get his knees under him, his bound hands under his chest.

In that position he was able to get into a kneeling position, his shoulders against the lid. He cautiously pushed upward. The lid did not move. Then, with an effort that rolled his lips back from his teeth and dizzied him, he exerted all his strength against the lid. It came free, suddenly, with the sound of tearing wood. The force slammed it up and he struggled to his feet.

Turning, he saw that he was in a small living room. A small-boned swarthy man sat and stared at him with intense surprise. As he came quickly out of the chair, Dolph lost his balance and toppled over the side of the box onto the rug, unable to break the fall. He landed on his right shoulder and his head thudded against the carpet. Animal shrewdness advised him to pretend to be unconscious.

He lay with his eyes shut, heard the footsteps, heard the soft curse. Hands reached under his armpits and he was tugged up into a sitting position. The man cursed again and began to heave Dolph, a few inches at a time, back toward the box. Dolph, chin on chest, head lolling, waited. Now he was near enough. The small man had to lift him up and in.

The arms slid further through his armpits, and through slitted eyes Dolph saw the lean fingers almost touching. The man grunted and locked his fingers together. As he started to lift, Dolph clamped down with his arms with all his strength, and in the same moment flung his head back as

hard as he could. Through the pain of the blow he sensed the sickening impact. With the arms still clamped, he struck again and again. Resistance was over with the second blow. Dolph rolled free. The man lay still, his face a wreck.

The immediate problem was his wrists. They were tied with heavy wrapping cord. At any moment the small man might regain consciousness. Dolph saw that the box was actually a sort of couch with a quilted top. He used it to worm his way to his feet. With care he could hop along.

The kitchen, he saw, was down a short hallway. Twice he almost fell. He found the knife drawer, took a knife out, put the handle inside the drawer and pushed it shut with his hip. He sawed the cord delicately against the exposed blade. As soon as his hands were free, he took the knife clumsily in numbed fingers and cut the ankle cord.

The small man had rolled over onto his back. He was holding one hand over his nose and mouth, moaning weakly. Dolph forced himself to strike the man again. He bound his wrists and ankles and tumbled him into the box, dropped the lid. Then, remembering the airlessness, he propped the lid up with a small table lighter.

He found his sample case and suitcase in the bedroom. He gasped at their weight as he picked them up. He opened the suitcase. In with his fresh clothes he found five common red bricks.

The implication was frighteningly clear. He flipped the bricks out, strapped up the bag again, took two bricks out of the much smaller, heavier sample case. The kitchen clock said ten minutes past one. He pulled Venetian blinds out from the side of the window. A silent street lay one story below.

Wally Block might be returning soon. And Wally had become incomprehensible. It was as though there were two Wally Blocks. One was Sergeant Block, shrewd, dependable, unexcitable. And this new one. Mayor-elect. Man with crazy suspicions, impossible motivations. Yet the man did not seem . . . mad. He seemed merely to possess information which he believed that Dolph shared.

Only one person could make sense of this. Jan Holland. By now she would

have given him up, gone to her home. He realized he had no address for her.

Suddenly he realized the ridiculousness of burdening himself with the suitcase and sample case. He dropped them, let himself out into a narrow hall near the head of a straight flight of stairs. One dim bulb burned in the upper hall, one in the lower hallway. He looked down, saw nothing but a front door, the upper half of it glass. He went down quickly, as silently as he could. He looked through the grayish mesh curtain that covered the glass. The porch was dark.

As he touched the door knob, a car pulled up in front. He moved to the side, still watching. Wally Block got out of the car. The car seemed packed. There were loud voices, laughter. He thought he recognized one laugh as being Jan's. The car drove away and Wally stood there for a time. A street lamp made his shadow grotesquely long.

Wally lifted his arm, made a beckoning motion. A figure came quickly out of the shadows on the far side of the street, trotted toward Wally. Wally turned and walked heavily toward the porch.

DOLPH realized that he should have been hunting for a place to hide rather than standing there watching. He ran down the hall, beyond the stairs. A closet was set underneath the stairs. It opened with a rasp of hinges. He went in and pulled the door shut, stood there in a reek of rubber, a smell of rust and dust.

The front door opened and closed. Feet were heavy on the stairs. Wally said softly, "The car's in the back. I'll help you."

"Tracks bother me," another male voice said.

"If you're worried, use planks from that pile by the barn. Line it up with the biggest willow on the other bank. Deeper than hell, there . . ."

The rest of the words were lost. Dolph stood in the darkness and the closet walls were enfolding him, pushing in on him. He put the back of his fist between his teeth and bit hard, holding his breath against the scream that surged within him.

And then he could wait no longer. He slammed the closet door back against the wall as he plunged for the front door. At the first attempt his wet hand slid off the

knob. He wrested the door open, plunged down the porch steps. He ran down the dark sidewalk, shoe soles slapping so hard that his feet stung, his mouth open, sucking air, his eyes bulging and blinded with the strain.

Once he heard a shout. He ran on until he could run no more, and with the last bit of his strength he vaulted a low hedge by a dark house, fell on the damp grass, rolled into the deeper shadows of the shrubbery close to the house.

Nearby a dog barked. Car tires made a silky noise on the asphalt. Wind rustled the leaves that were turning dry with autumn. A couple went by. Dolph saw them under the street light. Arm in arm. Girl's face, flower-like, upturned to his. Laughter warm and low in her throat.

After a long time he got up. His bones felt leaden. He shuffled across the grass, pushed his way through a narrow gap in the hedge. He had no idea how far he had run, or in what direction. He went to the nearest corner and looked in all directions. Far down the street to his left he saw a cluster of lights, neon so far away that he could not make out the sign.

After three blocks the neon was readable. *Grill*.

A neighborhood spot. Smears window. Light shone through the window onto a pole outside, a pole on which a placard was tied—heavy smiling face—Block for Mayor.

He knew they would stare at him, but he went in. The bartender gave him five nickels. It was a wall phone. Numbers were scrawled on the plaster wall around the phone.

"Information."

"Have you got a number for the headquarters of the Good Government League?"

"Do you know the address, sir?"

"No. Look, it's Wally Block's campaign headquarters."

"Just a moment, sir." From behind him the clink of glass on glass, low conversation, chatter of the pinball. "That number is 33134, sir."

"Thanks."

33 1 3 4. There. Duzzzz duzzzz duzzzz duzzzz. "Yeah?"

"Is Miss Holland still there?"

"Don't see her."

"Can you give me her number?"

"It's in the book, isn't it?"

"There are seven Hollands in the book."

"Try under John J., friend."

"Thanks."

Holland. John J. 26765. 18 Walker Circle.

2 67 6 5. There. Duzzz duzzz duzz.

"Hello?"

"Jan?"

"This is Jan speaking."

"Jan, this is Dolph. I . . ."

"I guess we better skip it until tomorrow, Dolph. I'm dead."

He was conscious of the listeners behind him. "Jan, I must see you. It's very important."

"Very isn't enough. It better be crucial. Earth-shaking."

"It is."

"You sound . . . almost frightened. Want me to take a run down to the hotel?"

"I'm not there. I better come to your house. I have the address out of the book."

"Do you know how to get here?"

"I'll get a cab."

IT WAS a big stone house, impressive but not cold. The window lights looked warm, comfortable. He paid the cab and went up the walk. She opened the door before he could press the bell. She wore a long dark blue robe, the belt knotted at her waist.

"I wanted to catch you before you started those darn chimes going and woke up the house," she said in a half whisper. "Come on in."

There was one floor lamp on in the big long living room. Embers glowed on the hearth. She turned her back to the embers, her hands in the pockets of the robe.

"You look sort of rumped, Dolph. And you've scraped your face. Been sampling our night life?"

He sat down on the couch that faced the fire. He spoke slowly, distinctly. He started with the episode in the back room at headquarters. He gave her no time for questions. When he started she was standing, facing him. When he finished she was sitting beside him, her eyes wide.

"It can't be!" she said softly.

"But it is. He said it. He told me that he couldn't get in with Shenck any other way."

"He's a thoroughly honest man, Dolph. Don't you think we've checked him a thousand ways?"

He held out his hands. The red grooves in his wrists had faded, but they were still visible. She touched the mark on his left wrist with her fingertips. "This . . . is more than I can . . . absorb in one sitting." She smiled wryly.

"They planned to kill me. Put me in my car and run it off into the water someplace near a barn with a board pile and a willow tree on the opposite bank. He was talking to a man with a high voice."

She stood up suddenly and walked two steps to stand on the hearth, her back to him. "I—I believe you, Dolph. And I'm darned if I know why. I've got to think. If all this is true, we've got to stop him. Better a devil you know than a devil you don't."

"He acts like I knew something about him, Jan."

"And you don't?"

"Only what happened tonight. Now I do know too much."

"When did you see him the last time? I mean when you were both in the army?"

"The war was over and we were waiting to be sent home as a unit. They gave us odd jobs to do. Running convoys of stuff back to Paris. I guess I had too much to drink in Paris. Got a knock on the head. Bad concussion. Woke up in a general hospital near Paris three weeks later. The unit had gone home. So, let me see. The last time I saw Wally was during that truck ride."

She turned and studied him for a moment. "Maybe something happened the night you were hurt. And Wally thinks you remember."

"I don't remember anything. That was years ago, you know. If I was going to remember, I would have before this."

"I suppose so," she said softly.

The door chimes began to sound, and in the middle of the melody somebody clattered the brass door knocker.

"Darn!" Jan Holland said softly.

Dolph moved instinctively to the far corner of the room. She stared at him curiously. He licked his lips. "I better not be here, Jan."

"Go through that door then and wait. The hall leads back to the kitchen."

She went to the front door. He listened.

"Miss Holland?"

"Yes."

"Police, Miss Holland."

"I can see that."

"Sorry to bother you. There's been trouble. Mr. Block got hold of us. A friend of his, stranger in town, went off his rocker and killed a guy in Block's apartment. Then he ran. Fella named Regan. Dolph Regan."

Dolph held his breath.

Jan said, "Why come to me?"

"Mr. Block said you were with him earlier today. Mr. Block said he might come here. Have you seen him?"

"No, I haven't."

"Well, we got his car where he left it behind Mr. Block's apartment, and we got his luggage. Thanks. If he shows up, Miss Holland, don't let him in. Try to stall him and phone us."

A heavy voice said, sleepily, "Who is that, Jan?"

"Nothing important, Dad. Go back to bed."

"Thanks, Miss Holland. We're getting in touch with Regan's firm in the morning. We're watching the bus station and the railroad. Unless he hitches a ride, I don't think he'll get out of town."

"Thank you for warning me."

"That's okay."

Dolph heard the door shut softly, heard her footsteps coming across the rug toward him.

She looked at him. She held the back of her hand to her forehead. "You get tired enough and everything gets unreal, Dolph."

"I've got to leave. They'll find the cab driver. He'll say he brought me here."

"I keep wondering why I said I hadn't seen you."

"I could start talking about a big frame-up. I could try to tell you that Wally got so sore at the guy I tricked he hit him too hard."

"Come back and sit down by the fire. No one can see in."

"I'll sit down by the fire, Jan. There's something I have to tell you."

SHE sat beside him. He put his head back and closed his eyes. "You said when you get tired, Jan, things seem un-

real. How unreal can they get when you can't trust the evidences of your own senses? I'm trying to say this. I'm trying to say that maybe it all didn't happen. Maybe Wally didn't say what I thought he said."

She was biting her lip. "Dolph!"

"They'll check back, all right. They'll find out that a doctor pressured the company into hiring me. It's a kind of occupational therapy. For the last couple of years I've been in and out of hospitals. It started one day in the firm. I was trying to sell a big builder and his partners on a design for a low-cost home. And then their eyes went as big as saucers and the walls started folding in on me and I screamed and ran out of there."

She touched his arm. "Don't, Dolph. Not that way. Not so bitter."

"It comes like fright. It squashes me. It turns me into a crazy animal trying to get out of a trap."

"Have you ever imagined things that didn't happen?"

"This can be the first time, Jan."

"You've done a good job of imagining. You've imagined a lump behind your ear and welts on your wrists and a scrape on your face, Dolph."

"Don't get sucked in. Don't go maternal. Tell me to get out, Jan. That's your best play."

"Never tell a woman to be logical," she said.

He looked down at his fists. "What can we do? What can I do?"

"I've got friends, Dolph. All traces of what happened can't be removed. We can find enough to back up your story. Maybe you ought to turn yourself in and let me put someone to work on it. Let me get Dad in on it, too. He's publisher of the *Brasher Courant*, and the paper owns BRCX. We're not helpless."

"Tomorrow—I mean today—is the day before election, isn't it?"

A stocky gray-haired man in a terry-cloth robe came into the room. His hair was mussed. "Jan, who is this?"

They stood up. "Dad, this is Dolph Regan."

The man's eyes widened. "What's going on here? I just caught a late news flash on the bedside radio. This man is a murderer, Jan!"

"Listen to what he has to say, Dad."

"I'm not a judge. I'm not a booking sergeant. They can listen to what he has to say."

He began to move warily toward the phone.

"Dad," she begged, "Dolph can tell you that Wally is going to turn crooked the minute he's in office."

Mr. Holland glared. "Nonsense! When I put the weight of the paper and the station behind a man, you can be assured that he's sound."

"Are you afraid to listen to him, Dad? Are you afraid of what you might hear?"

Holland stopped his cautious drifting toward the phone. "Of course not. Speak up, Regan. What's your story?"

A boy of about eighteen had appeared in the doorway, unnoticed. Dolph guessed that he was Jan's brother. Dolph swallowed hard.

"It was like this. I had forgotten that this was Wally's home town. He was my platoon sergeant and . . ."

He swallowed again. All three of them were watching him. He felt the familiar roaring sound in his ears. Vision went off at a tangent. Holland's face swelled to the size of a bushel basket, seemed to press closer to him. The three of them stood at an odd angle, and the floor tilted up to where they stood. Eyes pulsing—expanding, then shrinking. The walls of the room were shifting, moving in.

He began to back away from them, shoulders hunched, arms hugging his belly. This was terror. Blindness. Holland had gone gray. Jan stood with her fingers at her throat. He could not break through to her, tell her what had happened.

Then the door handle was under his fingers and he did not remember how he had gotten out into the hallway. Running, running. Street lights marching by in orderly precision. Curb-stumble. Ankle-pain, slowly receding. Whip-slap of shoe leather and cool night air streaming against his sweating face.

Run for your life. Run from terror.

And the car was moving along, keeping pace with him. He began to run faster, looking wildly for a place to hide.

"Dolph!" she called. "Dolph, stop!"

Pain was a huge fist that tightened slowly on his left side, from waist to armpit.

"Dolph!"

He stopped suddenly, weak, sweating, panting, undone.

Jan was at the wheel of a pale convertible, the top down. He stood numbly and stared at the car, his chest heaving.

"Get in, Dolph." She leaned over and released the door. He got in humbly and pulled the door shut. She started up. "We're going back, Dolph, and we're going to get to the bottom of this."

There was strength in her, a strength he wanted to lean on. She still wore the robe. She held her chin high, looking over the long hood of the car. Her hair whipped in the night wind.

His breathing began to slow down. Suddenly she jammed on the brakes so hard that he had to brace himself against the dash. She shifted into reverse, backed into a driveway. He looked down the street and saw the sedan, red light on top, parked in front of her house. She roared the car off in the opposite direction.

"Take me to the station, Jan."

"Don't be a fool! I saw what happened to you. Do you want a padded cell for the next thirty years?"

He had to speak loudly above the whine of the wind. "Maybe that's what I need, Jan."

"Shut up, please."

She wrenched the car around many corners, then straightened it out on a highway where, for the first time, there was a certain amount of traffic. They passed all-night drive-ins.

"Where are we going?"

"To a place I know," she said. A light caught them and she pressed the button that put the top up, shut out the night wind.

"They can make trouble for you, Jan."

"Don't be such a miserable rabbit," she said.

It cut sharply and deeply. He clamped his jaw shut. Okay, baby. Take your own risks.

HE GUESSED that they were twenty miles from town before she turned north off the highway. The dash clock said three. The night air had grown perceptibly colder.

After ten miles on the secondary road, she turned off into a lane between the

trees. The car lurched over ruts. She pulled off into the brush and turned off the motor and lights.

"Now watch the path and try to follow me, Dolph."

It was not a long walk, but it was down a steep hill where roots laced the path. Ahead of him he heard her step up onto a wooden porch.

They were out of the trees and there was some starlight. Enough to see her as a moving shadow. He saw her stretch high, run her fingers along a porch beam, heard her sigh of satisfaction.

He could hear the lap of water, the creak of a dock. The lock grated and the door opened onto a greater darkness.

"Wait here," she said. She went in. He heard a sound he could not identify, a sort of pumping sound, and then saw the match flame. The flame grew into a blinding whiteness and he knew that she had pumped pressure into a gasoline lantern.

The blue-white light made harsh shadows, a cruel illumination on the wide boards of the floor, board and batten walls, huge stone fireplace.

"There's the woodbox and you can find some papers around. Make yourself useful and I'll be back in a few minutes," she said.

He laid a fire of newspaper, kindling, large birch logs. He opened the draft and lit the paper. The fire caught at once and began to roar as flames fingered up between the logs.

She came back into the room. She had changed to faded jeans, a plaid wool shirt. "Mumm. Nice fire."

"Will they look here?"

"No chance. There are only two cabins on the lake. The other is on the far side, empty now. I'm a moody guy sometimes, Dolph. I bought this myself, with money an aunt left me. Nobody knows where it is. It's my cave, sort of. I crawl into it and growl at the world."

With her hands in the pockets of the jeans, she moved over, kicked a log into better position. With her back to him, she said, "I'm your friend."

"I know that, Jan. But—"

"Even so, I'm going to lock the door and put the key in my pocket. You're not going to be able to run. And you're going to keep remembering that I'm your friend."

"What are you going to do?"

She turned out the lantern, carefully locked the door. The room was alive with flame light. "Lie down on the couch there, Dolph."

"Amateur psychoanalysis?" he said acidly.

"See how you fight against it. Go on, stretch out. Try to relax."

He shrugged. She came over and sat beside him. He moved over a bit to give her room. She bent and kissed his lips lightly. As he reached for her, she pulled back.

"That was just to let you know I'm on your side, Dolph."

"This sort of thing has been done before."

"Not by me. Not by Jan. Not by a girl you want."

"What makes you think I want you?"

"See how you try to squirm out of it—by trying to make me mad? You can't make me angry, Dolph. Shut your eyes. Think of a small enclosed place, a place you can't get out of."

"Life is a place you can't get out of."

"Skip the corny sophisms. Do as I tell you."

He closed his eyes. A small place. An enclosed place. Cold.

He felt the contraction of his muscles, the tautening of his throat.

"Say what you think of. Say the words."

"Cold," he said in a voice that rasped. "Cold, dampness. Naked. Dark. Wet stone. Cold and hurt. My head hurts."

He sat up, gasping for air. She pushed him back gently. Close your eyes again, Dolph. Think. Remember."

"I . . . I can't."

"Think, Dolph."

His mind drifted back through blackness. "Truck," he said in a whisper. "Running, and there was a truck. I didn't know what they said. They put me in the truck with . . . all the others. Packed like cattle. Swaying. Sweat and stink. Packed so tight I couldn't breath. All of them watching me."

"Better, Dolph. Oh, much better, You were running from the dark place and they put you in a truck. Were you still naked?"

He frowned, his eyes still shut. "No. I got clothes from some place. Let me think. Clothes. Wait! There was a stone

window, a narrow window, level with a dark alley. I wiggled through it and I hurt my chest. I knew that I had to have clothes. And I waited. There was a man. He tried to run. I knocked him down and I took his clothes because I knew I had to get away."

"Do you know how you were dressed when they took you into the hospital?"

"They told me that. My uniform was gone. I wore ragged clothes. A QM truck company officer brought me in and said he'd found me with a bunch of DPs."

"Could he have taken you off the truck, do you think? Maybe you called to him from the truck. They'd picked you up not knowing you were American, thinking you were another Pole or whatever nationality they were taking out of Paris in the trucks."

"Just vague—very vague—I have the memory of calling, of all of them in the truck, pressed close to me, watching me, laughing when I called."

"We've got that much. You escaped from a dark place through a stone window. You were naked. You stole clothes and were put in a truck with DPs. Now we have to go the other way. Back toward the beginning of it."

"No," he said.

"Dolph, we *must!*"

"I can't remember."

"Start with the trucks. Start with entering Paris."

"There was a check point. We had tank trucks. Thirty of them. Thousands of gallons of gasoline, hauling it back west when it had been so much trouble to get it east, for the tanks."

"Gas was valuable, wasn't it?"

"On the black market a dollar a gallon. But don't you see, Jan? When I woke up in the hospital, the only thing I could remember was driving away from the check point, sitting beside the driver in the lead truck. I had the convoy trip ticket in my hand. It had just been stamped. And after that . . . blackness."

"Why did you assume that you'd gone on a drunk?"

"That was what I planned to do. I thought I had, and had gotten into a brawl."

"Let's rest for a time and try it again, Dolph." Without self-consciousness she

swung her feet up, stretched out beside him. He slid his arm under her shoulders, ran his lips along the smooth clear line of her cheek. "No, Dolph, please," she said sleepily. "Just keep trying to remember. Every minute. Keep trying."

CHAPTER THREE

Death for Two

HE SLEPT. There was a door. He knew, as he dreamed, that it was a door. A door for giants. The latch was a dozen feet over his head. There was a piece of timber. With it he was trying to trip the latch. It was too heavy. It kept falling. And then she was beside him, smiling, helping. Another try. Up, up. The latch clicked loudly and the door swung open. Wally Block stood there, filling the doorway, smiling down. Dolph took Jan's hand and tried to run from Wally. But the big foot lifted, blotting out the stars, ready to stamp down, smash them . . .

Dolph awoke with a gasp. The room was chill. The hearth was gray ashes. The windows were gray oblongs. His right arm was asleep. She had turned toward him, her cheek on his arm, her knees pulled up so that they dug into his thigh. Her face was calm and lovely.

With care he moved an inch at a time, pressed his lips against hers. They moved under his with a wordless exclamation and she came awake.

She pushed at his chest and sat up. She combed her hair back hard with her fingers, then buried her face in her hands.

"Compromised, hey?" she said, her voice muffled.

"Both of us so bushed. We couldn't help it."

She turned and smiled at him, slid off the couch and stood up. "How did your subconscious do while you were asleep? Did we jog it enough?"

"I dreamed that together we got a door open. Wally Block was on the other side of it. And then, as I woke up, I remembered it, Jan. In the moment of awakening, I knew what happened. I know now."

All the lethargy, the warm languidness of awakening, left her. "Tell me!" she said tensely.

"Wally was in the second truck. They pulled by me and cut me off by the curb. Wally came back to talk. It was dusk. He climbed in so that there were three of us in the cab, me in the middle. The convoy was halted. He said he'd done some missionary work and he had a buyer for the whole convoy. I told him not to be a damn fool and told my driver to get going. He laughed at me. Wally stuck a .45 in my ribs and told me to be good. He gave the route. We took the lead again. Then it was night and we were still rumbling through those narrow streets.

"We drove down an alley and through an arch into a courtyard with warehouses all around it. Men met us. The other trucks didn't know where they were going. Some of the men were AWOLS that had gone into the Paris underground, into the black market. They had weapons. Three of the drivers tried to get away. The archway was blocked. They were shot down. Just like that.

"Wally was some sort of a ringleader. He told me not to be a damn fool. He said if I cooperated I could have a thousand dollars, and information on a sure-fire way of getting it to this country. I tried to make a break for it. He ran along behind me, yelling to the others not to shoot. I turned just in time to see him swinging the flat of the .45 toward my head. When I came to I was underground, in a narrow place. There was a tiny barred door at the end. It was like a coffin with a door at the end, all made of wet stone. I'd been stripped. Wally came and told me he was sorry, but they had a use for my uniform and identification for a few hours.

"He went away. They'd even taken my dog tags. I pried one stone loose from the wall, a stone the size of a brick. I pounded on the hinges until I broke first one and then the other. I got out. I found the high narrow window and got out of it into the alley. I jumped on a man who came running down the alley. I think he had maybe escaped from the truck load. I think the others in the DP truck stared at me that way because they knew, and the French guards didn't, that I wasn't the man who had escaped, even though I wore his clothes."

She took his hand in both of hers. "Look, my darling," she said. "All this fear you've

had. This blind irrational fear. See what it was due to? The trauma of that experience. And now you understand it. It won't come back any more."

"Say the darling part again."

Even in the pale gray light he saw her flush. "Don't be a fool, Dolph. Now you see how it fits. Wally had no way of knowing you'd forgotten. He thought you were here to blackmail him. He told you that all he could do was to give you a small job. Then you went to see Shenck, the man he mentioned. That woman, Red-Top, turned out to be on Wally's side. He probably told her about you. Wally thought you were going to sell Shenck the story of that gas convoy. It would be invaluable the day before election. The answer would be to have you disappear completely. Then you couldn't sell information or blackmail Wally."

"He must have been afraid all these years that one day I'd show up."

"We've got to plan, Dolph."

"How do you plan your way out of a killing?"

"Do you think you killed that man?"

"How can I know? I didn't think so. I hurt him, I know."

"Block would be angry with him for letting you get away. Dolph, I saw him lose his temper once. It frightened me."

"Who can you trust, Jan, really trust, in the Brasher police?"

"The Chief is named Tom Rider. He's a dear old fuddy-duddy. Absolutely harmless and absolutely honest. He's one of Dad's friends. Shenck controls the police through the Commissioner, not through Tom. But you know how things are. All the ones who want to stay on the job are mending their fences, hoping that Wally won't have them thrown out if he wins."

Dolph stretched mightily and scrubbed the stubble on his jaw with his knuckles. She watched him.

"You look better, Dolph. Your eyes look better, as if you weren't seeing ghosts any longer in the back of your mind."

"That's easy to say. How do I know I still won't go to pieces when the circumstances are lined up against me?"

She went over and hooked one elbow on the mantel, scuffing her heel against the hearth. "We can't go into town in the daylight, Dolph. They'll pick you up at once.

I could go alone. I could try to see Shenck."

"What would you say to him?"

"That if he wants to help us, we can ruin Wally's chances."

"How?"

"Bollinger is the mayor. He's running against Wally. If Bollinger could use all this about Wally in his last speech . . ."

"Wouldn't it sound just like another political smear?"

"You should give the speech," she said, smiling.

"Not me."

She stiffened. "Now wait a minute. Maybe that isn't such a silly idea. Wally has radio time today for a canned speech. I could get us into the station. I could keep them from taking it off the air. You could just tell the story of that gas convoy, Dolph."

He found the two remaining cigarettes in a pack, lit them both, handed one to her. He thought hard. "And that might clear me of the other thing, by showing Wally's motive for framing me."

"It's worth a try, Dolph. I was just kidding when I first mentioned it."

"Where do we go from here?"

"Roger Parry runs the station. If I told him to jump out a window, I think he would. If we can just get to him . . ."

ON THE outskirts of town Dolph waited in the car while Jan made a phone call from a small grocery store. When she came out she was pale and upset. Dolph was behind the wheel. She got in quickly.

"Dolph, I didn't know they were going to get so upset. Dad has called out everything but the Marines. Roger wanted to be stubborn, and let Dad know that I was okay. I guess you are supposed to have murdered me or something. We're going to have one awful job trying to get into Roger's office without anyone finding out."

"We're . . . a bit conspicuous, lady."

"Let's give it a try."

As he started up, he saw out of the corner of his eye the car that had come up beside him, the black sedan with fishpoles fore and aft, decal on the side, two uniformed men in the seat. He stared straight at them and saw, aimed at his face, the round dark eye at the end of the muzzle.

He had gone a hundred feet beyond the

store. He turned in too abruptly and the left front wheel bounded over the curb. The cruiser nosed in, blocking them.

One cop came up to his window, wary, revolver ready, and the other went around to Jan's side and opened the door.

"You all right, Miss Holland?"

"Of course I'm all right!" she said indignantly.

It was a neighborhood of overgrown lots, stained billboards. Early morning traffic was heading for the city. Dolph noticed that the man by his window stood so that the gun was shielded from passing cars.

"Regan, don't try to make any trouble."

"He isn't going to make any trouble," Jan said hotly. "He's innocent, and I'm going on the air to tell how and why Wally Block framed him."

"You're upset, Miss Holland."

"I demand to be taken to my home, officer."

One cop said to the other, "Six precinct, Al?"

"No. Can't trust Taylor."

"What's going on?" Jan asked.

They ignored her. They seemed obscurely troubled. The one by Dolph's window said, "How about the farm?"

"That's better. Keep them quiet while I make a phone call."

The man strode away from Jan's window. The other one looked glum.

"What's this about a farm?" Dolph asked.

"We got the word, Regan. A certain party doesn't want you picked up officially until tomorrow. Anybody taking you in might get to be unpopular. Having the girl with you makes things kind of complicated. Just take it easy for a while."

Traffic snarled by and pallid sunlight began to come through the morning mist. The other cop came back. "The farm it is. Both of them. The car stays right here."

During a few moments when there was no traffic, Jan and Dolph were herded into the cruiser. The man driving took a U turn, a series of back streets, then headed south into the country.

The farm was nondescript. The cruiser went down the drive, swung to a stop between house and barn. A heavy sedan was parked near the barn and Wally Block stood leaning against it, smiling faintly.

DOLPH looked beyond the barn, saw the curve of a small river, a group of willows on the far bank. A young man came out of the house. He had a soft, handsome face and a look of great evil.

Wally walked over. "Welcome to the Block homestead, folks. And thanks, boys."

"There could be a lot of trouble from this," one of the cops said.

Wally stared at him. "Don't you worry about that. There could be a lot more trouble if you'd taken him in. You know that."

"Sure, sure," the cop said hastily. "Only you never saw us."

"And neither did they," Wally said. "Come on, folks. Get out."

They got out. The cruiser swung hard and raced down the drive as though the men were eager to wash their hands of the whole thing.

"Lieutenant, you've been giving me a lot of trouble."

"That's nothing compared to the trouble you're going to have," Jan said grimly.

Wally smiled, almost sadly. "Jan, honey, you just don't understand. I can't have people rocking the apple cart when I'm this close. I haven't gotten to too many of the cops. It was just luck that a couple of my boys picked you up. Otherwise you two might have been making statements."

"What makes you think I won't make statements when you let me go?" Jan demanded.

"I can think of a lot of ways of stopping you, honey. Want to hear a few? I could have that kid brother of yours worked over. Or I could arrange some nice glossy prints of you that you wouldn't want shown around. Or I could promise to have somebody frame that noble old man of yours. Want some more?"

Dolph took a step forward and said, "Block, if you hurt her in any way. . . ."

Wally threw his head back and laughed. "So it's like that! That makes it nice. That makes it easier all around, Lieutenant. You talk and she has a bad time. She talks and you have a bad time. Perfect, Lieutenant!"

"I think you're insane," Jan said in a low voice.

"Crazy like foxes, honey. Come on in and make yourself at home. Don't be wise because my friend Bobby has orders about you. Right, Bobby?"

The young man said, in a thin voice,

"Oh, how right! I know just what to do."

"He was going to roll my car into that river with me in it?" Dolph asked.

"It would have been dreadfully interesting," Bobby said with a smirk.

"You disappointed the boy," Wally said.

It was the typical kitchen of an unimproved farm. A pump was set into the wooden drainboard beside the sink.

As they went through the kitchen, Red-Top came out of one of the bedrooms. The red hair was tousled and her face was puffy. She wore aqua pajamas with a gold belt. She stared at them and through them.

"Don't mind Claire," Wally said. "She isn't civil until noon."

"Up with the chickens yet," Claire grumbled.

"Where will they be happy?" Bobby asked.

"Tie her and give him the run of the house. That ought to make it simple."

Bobby clapped his hands. "Of course!"

Claire was bending over the sink, cupping up cold water. Wally went up behind her and slapped her smartly.

"Watch it!" she snapped.

"Get your clothes on. We're leaving for town. I'll drop you."

"Nuts. I'm going to get some more sleep. I'll come in later, with Bruce, when and if he gets here."

"Suit yourself," Wally said. He went out. Dolph heard the car motor start, caught a glimpse of the sedan with Wally at the wheel as it went by the windows.

Dolph tried to move close to Bobby without being conspicuous about it. Bobby smiled and pulled his hand out of his pocket. He touched the button and the six-inch blade of the switch knife flicked out, locking in position.

"Naughty, naughty," Bobby said gently.

Jan looked shrunken, withdrawn. She was listless as Dolph, following Bobby's orders, tied her wrists to the arms of a heavy chair with lengths of clothesline. Bobby checked the knots, pulled them a shade tighter. He took a nearby chair, a pile of magazines in his lap.

He said, "Now if you don't answer when I call you, Mr. Regan, or if you try anything coy, I'll make Miss Holland very unhappy."

Claire stood in the doorway. "Dirty little animal, isn't he?"

She padded back into a bedroom. Dolph heard her heavy sigh, the creak of springs. He wandered around, looking out windows. He could see no other dwelling. Just fields and patches of woods and a road with no traffic.

Thinking vaguely of some sort of a weapon, he wandered out into the woodshed.

"Still around, Mr. Regan?" Bobby called.

"Yes," he answered dutifully. There was nothing out there that would serve. No axe. No tools. No knives in the kitchen drawers.

THE long slow hours passed. It was noon by his watch when he had the glimmerings of an idea. The pump handle was bolted to a rigid support on one end. The nut and bolt were rusty. They bruised his fingers. He used a torn towel and managed to free the nut. He turned it until it came off and only the bolt held it. The piston arm, fastened to the middle of the handle was far easier. He knew that in a matter of seconds he could free the handle, provide himself with a cast iron club over two feet long.

Claire woke up and came yawning out of the bedroom. "Bruce been here?" she asked Bobby.

"I haven't noticed," he said sweetly.

Claire gave him a long look of contempt. She went back in to dress. Dolph knew that the time in which he could make a move was growing short. He dreaded the consequence of failure. Yet logic said that if Block were truly mad, his simplest answer would be the death of both Jan and Dolph.

Dolph walked casually into the kitchen again, freed the pump handle, lifted it off without a sound. He held it close to his leg. Claire was fixing her hair behind the half-open door. He glanced through the crack and saw that her back was turned. He revised his plan at once, slid through the opening of the door, and as she turned, eyes wide, he rapped her across the skull with the handle.

He had been afraid of hitting too hard, but the red hair muffled the blow. Her eyes glazed and she swayed, making no sound, reaching out to the bed post to steady herself. He took a shallow breath and struck again, stepping forward quickly to grab her around the waist as she sagged. He levered her over onto the bed.

He went into the hallway and grasped the pump handle in both hands, near the end. He rehearsed his exact moves mentally. Then he swung the handle high over his head and in the same motion sprang into the room. As Bobby came up out of the chair, his hand flicking toward his pocket, Dolph threw the handle with all his strength. It made one half turn in the air. Bobby tried to duck away from it, but the blunt end caught him flush in the hollow of his throat.

Jan screamed once and then she was still. Dolph was glad that Bobby had managed to pull the knife free of his pocket in the instant that he died. He did not think he could have forced himself to go through the pockets.

He cut Jan free. Her eyes were weak and sick.

"That . . . woman?" she said.

"She's all right. Come on."

Her fingers hardened on his wrist as they heard the car come into the drive. When it stopped behind the house they went out the front door as quickly and quietly as they could. They did not stop running until they had reached a patch of woods on the far side of a neighboring field. Jan collapsed on the ground, gagging and coughing, and Dolph clung to a tree trunk and watched the house. After a very few minutes he saw a heavy man hurry out to the car, saw Claire running unsteadily after him. The car left as though it were being pursued.

Jan had herself under control again.

"Where do we go now?" she said.

"There's only one answer to that. We go to Shenck. This is no time to be touchy about who helps us."

IT WAS the Good Government League's final rally and banquet, and it was held in the large ballroom of the Brasher Hotel. In the dark corridor behind the curtains, Dolph could hear the enthusiasm. Shenck's people had smuggled him into the hotel. Shenck had been incredulous for a long time, but at last he had believed.

He knew that Shenck had planned this with all the care of a fleet admiral setting up the order of battle. Shenck was not a wholesome person to do business with. But he was able to produce twenty men who would follow orders.

Dolph smiled grimly as he heard portions of Wally's final speech, the speech that was being broadcast.

"Even though this should be a time of celebration, I know we are all saddened by wondering what might have happened to one of our most loyal workers, Janet Holland. I sincerely hope that she is unharmed, that the man now the object of a state-wide search will be apprehended soon."

He went on to specific campaign issues. Dolph had to admit that Block was a convincing speaker. Devilishly convincing. His aura of forthrightness and honesty was thick enough to cut with a knife. Small wonder that he had hypnotized so many voters.

They stood up and cheered and applauded when he was through. Dolph turned quickly as the man came up behind him. "Okay, Regan. It's all set. You're on."

Dolph's mouth was dry. He straightened his shoulders and pushed through the curtain. Two men followed him closely. He came out onto the stage that held the speaker's table. The master of ceremonies turned from the microphone and stared blankly at

the trio. Wally gave a grunt of dismay and lunged for the mike. The nearest of Shenck's men rammed a gun into Wally's middle and forced him back to his chair.

The ballroom was in uproar. Chairs overturned and people started to scurry for the exits.

"Please keep your seats," Dolph said into the mike, trying to keep his voice calm. "Please keep your seats. The doors are guarded. The men have orders to let no one out. Return to your seats, you people by the doors."

The people from the radio station were being guarded, ordered to keep the connection open. With any break at all, Jan could keep the station from taking the program off the air.

Slowly order returned to the room. Block sat still, his face pasty, sullen, his eyes hooded.

A faint roaring began in Dolph's ears. His vision began to go off. The ballroom began that familiar shrinking.

Not now, he begged silently. Not with so much depending on this! He thought of Jan, of what she had said. He shut his

I was the square at the square dance!

I CAN'T GET A GAL UNLESS I ROPE ONE!

SMARTEN UP, SON! GALS WOULD STAMPEDE YOU IF YOU'D GET GOOD-LOOKING WORK PANTS AND SHIRTS MADE OF PEPPERELL FABRICS!

AT THE NEXT DANCE

CHANGE PARTNERS? NOT ME. I COULD DANCE WITH YOU FOR LIFE!

AM I GLAD I GOT ME THESE NEAT DUDS OF PEPPERELL FABRIC!

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When you buy work clothes, look for this fabrics label.

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eyes and fought against it, fought with the sweat rolling down his cheeks. And slowly, steadily, the room returned to normal.

Dolph straightened his shoulders. "My name is Dolph Regan. In order to get a chance to speak to you and to the radio audience, I have had to use force. I regret that. You are fair people. I know that. All I want is a chance to tell my story, calmly, truthfully. And then you shall judge my case. And judge Wallace Block in the light of your new knowledge."

The trembling left his voice. His knees steadied. "I first met Sergeant Wallace Block when I was assigned as a replacement infantry officer in eastern France. . . ."

As he went on he could feel the focus of attention. The room was very still. He told of the convoy, of coming to Brasher and seeing Wally Block in the parade, of talking to him at headquarters, of going to Red-Top's. He explained the mental block which kept him from remembering the Paris episode.

At the end he said, "And now I am prepared to give myself up to the police, confident that on the basis of a thorough and unbiased investigation, I will be cleared."

In the awed silence he stepped back.

Wally Block stood up and brushed by the gun and went to the mike.

"My friends, you have just heard the most fantastic set of lies that you will ever hear." He paused, smiling. There was no sound in the room.

"Will you believe him? Instead of me?"

There was still no sound.

Wally Block sucked at his underlip. His face darkened. There was no mistaking the unfriendliness of that silence.

With the breath-taking animal quickness some large men have, Block spun and slammed the guard to the floor. Before the man could pick himself up, Block had already disappeared through the curtained doorway.

It was more effective than ten thousand words of confession. . . .

After four hours of courteous, searching questions, Dolph was released. Flash bulbs blinded him on the dark courthouse steps.

"Have they got Block yet?"

"Twenty minutes ago, I believe. They're bringing him here. Him and the redheaded woman."

"Any statement at all, Mr. Regan?"

"Yes," Dolph said. "I cleared myself with the help of Shenck. But unless this city gets rid of men like Shenck and Block, the next man in a spot like I was in may not be so lucky."

"Some gratitude!"

Dolph smiled. "Take it or leave it, boys. Shenck helped me for his own purposes, so he could keep his hold on the town. I'm not grateful and he knows it."

"How about you and Jan Holland?"

He saw her then, coming up the walk toward him, her head high, her smile for him alone.

"They tell me I'm going to have to make an honest woman of her," Dolph said.

She took his arm and turned to the reporters. "And that's off the record," she said.

The bulbs popped again. They fled down the walk to her car. He shut the door and ran around, slid behind the wheel.

"Honest woman!" she said. "I like that!"

"Many a poor guy forms a terrific emotional attachment for his psychiatrist," he said, slowing for the light at the corner.

"Save your strength, Regan. You've got a tough evening ahead of you."

"Daddy?"

"Complete with shotgun."

He pulled over into a shadowed place and turned off the light and motor. He put his arms around her. She lifted her face.

"Just one question, darling," he said.

"I'll answer anything."

"Tell me, darling, how are you going to vote tomorrow?"

He smothered her indignation in a thoroughly successful way.

THE END

CHECK-MATE!

A deputy sheriff in Waukegan, Ill., who has established a reputation for running down bad check artists, has been taking a renewed interest in his work. Somebody has been cashing checks in his name.

TAILSPIN CUTIE



*Chip thought the people you
don't meet can't hurt you—until
he mixed bourbon and Sherri.*



*She was as beautiful
and friendly as a girl can get. . .*

ON THE last leg of the run to Beirut, Chip Colton was still pleasantly befuddled by the memory of his last night in New York.

He looked down at his belt buckle, a gold-plated job set in rhinestones that spelled "Chip". If it weren't for that belt, Chip would have been willing to put down that night in New York as a crazy dream and

**By RUFUS
BAKALOR**

let it go at that. But there was the belt, and it was real.

He nodded the plane over to his co-pilot, and went astern to try and puzzle out that night with Sherri. . . .

Chip remembered himself nursing along his fifth bourbon in his favorite 52nd Street joint, when the redhead had come in.

She strode to the barstool next to his and carried on like it was old home week. "Chip! Chip Colton, the old short snorter! Still partial to bourbon, I see—and red-heads, I hope."

Chip remembered with a little tingle that her voice was as delightfully low as her neckline. "I've missed you an awful lot since you were in town last, Chip."

"And I've missed you, too," Chip managed to say with a neutral smile. He was desperately searching his memory for an image of her, but he was sure that he'd never met her. Never. "What're you drinking?"

The redhead pouted. "You've forgotten! Don't you remember, sherry for Sherri? We had a lot of laughs about it last time."

"Oh, yes, I remember," said Chip. "Sherri. A very cute name."

Chip ordered a sherry for her and a sixth bourbon for himself. Then Sherri took over the conversation. She knew a lot about him; his hometown, his family, his airline, the routes he flew. And little things, too, like his wanting his steaks done medium rare. She even knew about his tattoo. It was enough to make a guy wonder if he'd had amnesia. But Chip was convinced that the set-up was as phony as a paddlefoot wearing a fifty mission cap.

Anyway, Sherri was beautiful and as friendly as a girl can get, so Chip decided to play along with the game. And when, after they'd finished their drinks, Sherri suggested that they go up to her place, he was glad that he was in the lineup.

While Sherri was mixing his drink, Chip took a look around her apartment. His photograph, inscribed *To Sherri, All my love, Chip Colton*, stood on the mantel-piece. It was a photograph he'd had taken, all right. And the handwriting looked like his. He was beginning to wonder; maybe it was.

Sherri came in with the drinks. "By the way, Chip, when you leave, how about taking all your stuff with you, huh? Last time

you forgot your belt and cigarette lighter. I'll see if I can hunt them up."

The cigarette lighter had his initials engraved in it. And the belt, well, that was the item with the gold-plated buckle.

"All that's got to happen now," thought Chip, "is for this mysterious doll to excuse herself while she slips into something more comfortable, and I'll know that all this is just a figment of some detective writer's imagination."

Sherri rose and smiled. "Excuse me for a minute, Chip. I'll just slip into something more comfortable."

AFTER he'd put the plane down at Khalde Airport in Beirut, Chip telephoned Artie Blunt at the Embassy.

He had a few ideas now. He told Artie about Sherri—not in unnecessary detail, of course, because Artie was an old friend of his and stuck away in Beirut.

When Chip had finished, Artie whistled. "This may be it, Chip," he said. "Look, stick around Khalde and I'll call you back in half an hour. Stay right where you are; don't go wandering around."

Artie sounded a little on the momentous side when he called back. "I've talked to the Old Man and he's made all the arrangements. I guess this is kind of important. You're in for a little adventure, Chip."

"Hot diggety—the Rover Boys in Beirut! Brief me, Artie; what's it going to be, a chase on camels?"

"Take an airline car into town and get off at Parliament Square. Stand around for a couple minutes and then take a stroll toward Sharia Ibrahim. Leave the rest to us."

"Some adventure. But I've got a feeling you aren't giving me all the poop."

"I'm giving you all I can. Just walk along, stupid like a tourist. Gawk, only don't look behind you."

"Don't look behind me, eh? What if some Druse takes a notion to conk me on the head?"

Artie laughed shortly. "Good luck, Chip," he said, and he hung up. . . .

A short while later, Chip was coming to in an Embassy office. Artie handed him a bourbon.

"Adventure over, friend Artie?"

"Yup."

(Continued on page 113)

SHE WOULDN'T STAY DEAD!

By JOHN BENDER



No wonder he found it hard to laugh. For it was the kind of joke only his dear, dead Diane could play. . . .

IT WAS always worst at morning. At night there were the liquor and the tablets to drop the curtain of sleep in front of me, swiftly, completely. But in the morning the waking was a long, drawn-

She was moving toward me. . . .

out struggle against the fearful nightmare. I could see her face, white almost, the lips parted from the teeth in the small grimace of pain and shock that looked for

all the world a smile. If she had hated me, it wouldn't have been such torture. But there was no hatred in Diane's face, just the incredible trust that she had always shown. Through the bluish cloud of the water, she was still looking to me for help.

She wanted me to come to her.

The horror of that thought swirled into my consciousness while I struggled with the bed covers, fighting for the sanity of daylight and the cool air that rippled the curtains beside the bed.

The bed was a raft, bobbing on the angry sea, tossing me deeper into nausea. My hands slipped off the pillows, clutching for the solid mattress. I was certain that if I opened my eyes I would still see the water, blue and slick and strangely oily, with just the faintest trace of lightness to mark where my wife's body had gone down.

I was awake now, fully, the gray-green fiber rug staring back at me. I was free of the dream; there was no water below me. The raft had stopped moving.

I sat up. The breeze tingled on the dampness of my skin; the salt tang of the air quivered my nostrils. I shivered. I did not like the sea smell. I would never be able to welcome the smell of the sea again.

IT WAS not morning, I saw; it was well into the afternoon. The pills had really kept me asleep for some time. The sun had burned its path across the rippling dunes of the island to the west side of Diane's house. . . . My house, I corrected the thought quickly. My house, my money, now.

I rang for Mrs. Hallon, the housekeeper, and was putting on my bathrobe when I felt the dampness against my left leg. In the pocket of the robe I touched something slick and wet wadded there.

It was a clump of seaweed.

Despite the effort at control I made, my voice shook when I called, "Mrs. Hallon!"

There was no answer. I flung open the door and yelled for the housekeeper again. She was an ancient crone whom Diane had kept on for years, and who had treated me with silent disrespect in the four weeks I had spent here with my bride—before the "accident." Mrs. Hallon was typical of these island people—shrewish, indrawn, intolerant of outsiders like myself. Like the others, she suspected that I had married Diane for her fortune. Perhaps she suspected more.

I snorted. There was little she could do about it. There was precious little any of them could do now. The body had not been found—what could they do? Turner, the hick detective from the local force over on the mainland; or Barreford, the young artist who had a cabin of sorts farther down the beach. Hugh Barreford and Diane had been childhood sweethearts, the story went: it was understood by the local yokels that the pair of them would marry one day. But her parents' death in an auto crash, and a war in Korea, had intervened. Barreford had been recalled to service and was only recently back—discharged because of an injury of some sort—and it was quite a surprise to him to learn that his childhood companion, broken up over her parents' passing, had turned to me, a penniless boat designer, ten years her senior, for solace and affection.

"Mrs. Hallon!" Where was that old crone?

My bare foot touched the piece of seaweed and I jumped. My nerves hadn't been good these past few days and I was angry at the mocking silence. Almost unconsciously I picked up the bottle on the night table. I remembered having promised myself to stop drinking so much.

But that damned seaweed! How had it got into my pocket?

I tilted the bottle against my mouth, drinking quickly, hungrily.

Then my throat was on fire and I was choking, sneezing and coughing together. I was on the raft again, fighting down the nausea. . . . Somehow I managed to get to the bathroom. I held my head under the tap, swabbing my mouth with fresh water, gulping for air. The coughing fit subsided. But I was weak and red-eyed when I staggered back into the bedroom to examine the liquor.

I had some thought that it might have been poisoned. Anyway, I checked the label, sniffed carefully. No whisky aroma rose to my nostrils. The liquor obviously had been poured out; in its place had been substituted . . . sea water.

IDON'T know how long I sat in the silent bedroom, staring dully out the window at nothing. A search of the house had produced a note from Mrs. Hallon, propped on the kitchen table, that she had gone over to

the mainland to her sister's for a visit. Instinctively I knew that it was not she who had put the sea water in the liquor bottle. It wouldn't have been like her. I went back to the bedroom and watched the long magenta clouds stringing before the sun, graying the brightness everywhere.

I felt that if I could have seen the ocean at this moment it would be as I remembered it, in fact and in nightmare, on the day that Diane and I had last gone out. I could not bring my mind back to the room then, and I wondered if this was to be the way of all future days: the dream by night becoming also a nightmare by day.

The clouds were racing toward me, bringing the storm closer, as they had that other day:

"Isn't it going to blow up, Larry?" Diane had said. *"We don't want to get too far out."*

"Darling, I built this boat myself. Don't worry. I know how much weather it can take."

The first long lash of lightning had struck then, lighting the excitement in her eyes. She had been such a trusting little thing. All alone out there with me, too far from shore for anyone to see when I threw her over.

She was an excellent swimmer, but her strength was limited; against that furious water she was helpless. It had taken all my skill to bring the boat back safely in. But the risk had paid off.

A noise snapped me alert in the semi-darkened room.

"Who's there?" I asked.

A long, whining noise, rising thinly from some depth of the darkened house suddenly took on definition—the record player, downstairs, the needle scratching meaninglessly until the turntable speed permitted organized sound to shape the music creeping up to me. A song . . .

Diane!

In growing dread I listened as the music swelled. Then it cut off, not quite abruptly, but with a garbled slowness, fading into nothing.

Like a woman sinking beneath the surface of the sea.

Downstairs, in the living room, I snapped on the lights and examined the radio phonograph. There was no record on the turntable!

SLOW down, my mind said. Don't let this thing run away with you. You've been hitting the bottle the last few days, missing meals. That was probably it—I needed food. Something solid in my stomach to settle these fits of imagination.

The music? A trick of my ears, nothing more. It had to be imagination. I'd been thinking too much of Diane, these last few days. I had to get off that subject, forget her. Staying here, in this house to which she had brought me, was not easy, but I had thought it wiser to stay, at least for a little while after the "accident," in order to preserve appearances. Now I wasn't sure.

In the kitchen I found some cold meat and had a sandwich. It was a pasty lump, it didn't help a bit. Before I'd half finished it, I was craving a drink as badly as I'd ever wanted one in my life. I went back to the living room, opened the liquor cabinet. The bottles were all there, lined up as I had left them—and they were all of them empty!

I threw out my arm and swept them all to the floor. Almost as if the crash were a signal, the lights in the house went out.

I stood there, swearing, feeling first the anger then the fear rising like a foul taste in my throat. Out on the horizon, where the storm rumbled, a flash of lightning split the night. By the time it died, I had made my decision. To hell with the island! I was done with it!

I dressed and hurriedly packed a bag and went down to the garage below the house. I was trembling more than ever; a film of perspiration beaded my upper lip as I tore open the car door and threw the suitcase into the back seat.

The headlights were a sudden, blinding brilliance against the whitewashed wall, but they were lights and a comforting reassurance nonetheless.

I turned the key and punched the starter. Nothing happened.

"No!" I sobbed. Defeat and annoyance raged when the motor failed to respond. I began to beat the wheel with my fist in desperation, then I slumped back on the cushions. My hand dropped to the seat beside me, touching something there. My fingers coiled, withdrawing quickly. Recognition struck me like a hammer blow.

On the seat with me was Diane's bathing suit. Freshly wet, puddled in a dark mass.

the suit she had worn when she had drowned!

There was a block of white paper lying on the sodden suit. It was a note:

Darling—

The water is fine. You must come. I'll pick you up in five minutes.

Diane

The name was boldly sprawled—there was no mistaking the signature. I had seen it too often to be wrong about it now.

In five minutes . . .

Fear sat beside me in the car, urging me to break this spell of immobility. I could be well away from here in five minutes. I could run. I could get to the road, at least, and there might be a car going by. . . .

It was the only thing to do. I had to get out of here. There was no question of that now. I had to get away from this cursed house before Diane found me!

I leaped from the car and bolted for the door of the garage.

And I stopped, as abruptly as I had started.

Diane!

I saw her, then. Standing there, not fifty yards away, her long, slim arms upraised, held toward me. The blonde hair glowing, halo-like, damp against her head; the strapless bathing suit tightly wet against her slim, straight body.

"No!" I screamed. "No!"

The dark sooty points in the face were her eyes, fixed straight upon my own. The half smile—the trusting look that spoke her shock and pain at my deserting her, my refusal to reach out and help her—it was the same, unyielding stare that had haunted my dreams.

She was moving toward me now! Coming closer, closer, the effervescent glow of the sea bathing her in a pale gray light. She did not walk; she glided. Closer . . .

I screamed again. "You're dead! You're dead! I killed you!"

But she came on, relentlessly, and then I saw nothing but the flower of flame that seemed to burst within my brain, consuming me. I felt the nausea. My legs gave way. I had no feeling of hitting the ground.

I WAS on the raft. It was moving slowly, swaying from side to side, but there was no sickness in me now, just a vast empti-

ness. A murmur of voices brushed against my ears; my eyes fluttered.

There were three men in the car with me. Barreford, Diane's former fiancé, was one of them. The man driving turned around once, then grunted something to Turner, the detective, who sat beside me in the rear seat.

"Man, did you see his face when he saw his wife!" Turner chuckled. "Barreford, I got to hand it to you. Never thought it would work, myself. The seaweed . . . that note of Diane's you'd saved all these years. And the record."

"It had always been a favorite—hers and mine," Barreford said softly. "I'm sentimental. . . . Hell, we all knew Diane too well to swallow that accident story."

"Well, he told us once. He'll tell us again."

"He was mumbling something about it in his sleep, too. I heard him when I was planting the seaweed. I could have killed him then." He glanced my way. "Maybe I should have."

"Man, we got him, didn't we? Though I must say I didn't think he was that far gone he'd fall for the color-slide gag. Mighty slick deal you rigged with the projector. Throwing her picture on a screen."

Turner reached over to feel my pulse. "Quite a shock. But he'll come out of it. This kind always does." His hand moved to my face and roughly lifted my eyelid.

I did my best not to flinch. Instinct warned me not to let them know I was conscious. My brain was whirling. I had to think this through. Make no mistakes now.

They'd done this to me; they'd contrived to make me think Diane was coming back. But Diane *was* dead. I had killed her and she was dead.

Maybe, I thought, I can prolong this ruse of shock; maybe I can work it out still. Pretend that I don't remember—that I'm insane. The shock had been too much for me.

I jerked up straight as the flame burst before my eyes.

"Come off it," Turner said curtly. "Just a match. See." He had lighted it with his thumbnail close to my face—and I had flinched, normally.

"He's coming around," Barreford said.

Turner laughed. "Man, he's going to wish he never came around—when they throw that switch."

FELONY FOLLIES

by Jakobsson and Waggener

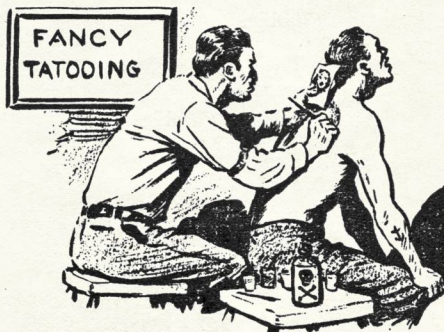
The way to a man's heart, said little Emma Walters' mother, is through his stomach. Useful advice—for Emma was a bride at fourteen. Except, it wasn't a husband's heart that Emma wanted to reach, but his wallet. She twisted the advice a bit, seasoned the potato soup with arsenic, and was a well-fixed widow at the age of fifteen! Learn young, practice often, was Emma's motto . . . and she was widowed five times more by the time she reached middle age, still making potato soup. It was then she ran into a step-daughter who didn't like her cooking—who chose to run away from home, in fact, rather than take a meal there. This interested authorities, who took a deeper look into Emma's past. Now Emma lives in a Missouri prison, for life, where she is NOT employed in the prison kitchen.



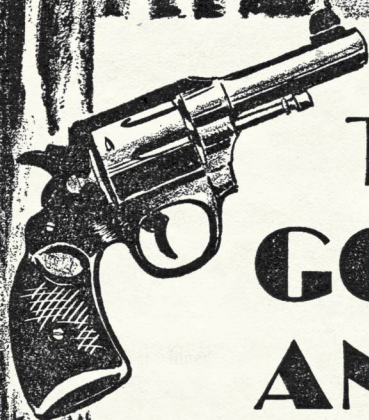
The evil that men do lives after them. Shakespeare said it, but he might have been thinking of an angry lady who lived and died and murdered three centuries after his time. Madame Eulalie de Verneuil, even as she lay on her deathbed, planned earthly revenge upon her estranged husband. She left elaborate instructions for her funeral and interment, and passed away. Her embalmed body was shipped in its coffin to her husband's family home in France, taken down to the old medieval family vault in the bowels of the chateau. Just as Eulalie had expected, her Pierre was unable to resist one last look at the beautiful, bad-tempered woman from whom he was free at last—and as he opened the coffin, a mechanism in the lock released a dozen tiny poisoned needles into his hand. As Bertillon, the detective, reconstructed the case, de Verneuil must have died within minutes—victim of a killer who was already beyond justice!

Pierre Gonzar, tattoo artist of the Spanish port of Puerto Santa Maria, was used to the long talk of sailors. Always, when they came in to be decorated, they had stories to tell him, and always, he listened and worked in silence. One day, a handsome young seaman brought him a lady's photo, asked to have it duplicated on his back by Gonzar's needle. As Gonzar worked, the sailor confided that the lady was unhappily married to some old fool in the neighborhood, and that she would be running away with him that night. Silently, Gonzar dipped his needle—into prussic acid. Silently, he made the slightest mark in the younger man's back . . . and the sailor dropped forward, dead. For the lady in the photo was Gonzar's wife.

A Spanish jury shrugged. What else, after all, could Gonzar have possibly done?



The most time-saving murder-tool ever devised, and one which is now happily in the hands of an antique dealer, is the McCoy fiddle, for use at square dances to which Hatfields were invited, in the days of the famous feud. The fiddle contains an old-fashioned .44, with the barrel built into the fiddle's neck and the trigger in reach of anyone whose fingers are on the strings. McCoy musicians, in the old hill wars, were required to shoot on sight, if necessary, when an enemy showed his face—without missing a note in the dance tune!



THERE'S GOTTA BE AN ANGLE

Punch-Packed Detective Novelette

By

WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT

CHAPTER ONE

The Long Count

THE morgue was cool, the sound of traffic on the street above just a vibration. The deputy said, "I never saw him fight. I wish I had, now. Very few men that can crowd a slab."

He pulled back the sheet and I looked down at the face of Ramsay Tate. I'd seen him fight. He wasn't quite as clumsy as most of those giant freaks; he had a fair left hand and his right was a guillotine.

His head was even with the upper edge of the slab; his feet dangled off into space at the other end. His shoulders



*If Tate was just a slob on a slab
to his curvaceous widow—why
was I getting paid to kayo his
killer?*

She said, "What the hell business of yours is my love life?"

pushed over the sides of the slab. "Slob on a slab," the deputy said. "A lot of meat."

Nobody had liked him, hardly anybody. I said, "Three hundred and forty pounds of it. Worse men are still living."

The deputy shrugged. "Not in my neighborhood. Never got to the title, did he?"

I shook my head. There was a hole above Ramsay Tate's nose. The face was otherwise unmarked. It was a big face, and without distinction, beyond a certain soft sadness. The eyes were brown and no more dead than they'd always been.

"A .32?" I asked.

"Steel-jacketed, I think. Didn't find the slug. Expert job, though. Not close enough to make powder burns, but exactly where it would stop *anybody* of *any* size. Entered from an angle, down to up, which is the way it would have to be unless the killer used a ladder. You a reporter, Mr. Puma?"

I shook my head. "Private operative."

"Lordy, one of those." His voice had lost interest. "Looking for a clue, or something." His smile was superior.

I looked at him. "If I'm taking up too much of your time, complain to the sheriff. But try to remember I'm also a citizen. And a taxpayer."

He laughed and shook his head. "Sure. Sure, okay."

We left the morgue behind, after a while, and I went down the dusty, quiet hall to the sheriff's office.

Sheriff Knowles was dictating when I came in. I went over to his water cooler for a drink.

He finished and got up to stretch. "Well, Joe?"

"It's a hot day," I said.

"Sure is. Who's paying you, Joe?"

"The widow."

He looked at me fondly. He said, "Your job I wouldn't want."

I knew him well. He'd watched me grow up. I'd known him since before I was in high school. I said, "The force is too dull, and I just had to be a cop."

"Why?"

"Because I've always admired you. You are my idol, sir."

"From the time you were nine," he said dryly, "you never admired anything but a buck." He rubbed the back of his neck. "What do you know about this Tate, Joe?"

"He beat some good men and lost to some ordinary ones. Made more in the grunt and groan, after he quit the ring. His widow's a lot of mama, tall and impressive."

"And rich, no doubt, now," Knowles said. "Tell me something I don't know."

"I can't. You want to tell me something I don't know?"

"His real name was Jacobsen. He was half Swede and half Russian, born in Minnesota, dumb as an ox and as strong. Fought for Sam Gimbel, most of his career."

I asked, "Have you talked to Sam Gimbel?"

He shook his head. "Didn't even know he was out here. He didn't handle Tate as a wrestler, too, did he?"

"No. I think he's been trying to, though. Claims Tate owed him some money, and he's been hanging around for that."

The sheriff nodded. "We'll check that." He rubbed the back of his neck, again. "I wish this wasn't a county kill. I wish it had happened in the city limits. I'm not much good on homicide."

"You've got me working right along with you," I consoled him. "I'll keep in touch."

"And out of my deputies' hair."

"I'll try. And if the trail leads to town, you can disown me, as usual. Take care of your liver."

I WENT out into the hot day. Jed Petrie was still sitting in my car. He's an elegant gent, tall and slim and the kind who does right by imported flannels.

He'd handled Ramsay Tate's wrestling promotion, and that must have been a step down from his usual public relations accounts.

"Well?" he said.

"Just a small hole, over the nose. You could have stomached it."

"I can't even watch a fly die. The sheriff have anything?"

"Nothing important. I'm going out to see Sam Gimbel. Any place I can drop you?"

"Why drop me? Ramsay was the biggest account I had left, and I'd like to look at the man who stopped him."

"You're optimistic," I said. "Very few murders are solved by private eyes. In round figures, close to none."

"I haven't anything better to do," he said.

Sam was staying at a motel in the valley. I turned the Merc that way, thinking about Ramsay Tate, fighter, wrestler, lover. Sam had tried to bring him along carefully, avoiding the two-handed hitters, favoring the Fancy Dans.

When the Fancy Dan was arm-weary from pitching leather, about the seventh or eighth round, Ramsay would drop that guillotine right. And that would be another one.

It was even hotter in the valley. It always is. I turned left onto Ventura, heading for Van Nuys.

I thought again of the widow. Ever since I'd seen her, in my office, I'd thought of her. Like a Viking goddess, she was, blonde and long-limbed and beautiful.

It was a Spanish-style motel, the El Dubarro. Sam Gimbel was on the ground level front porch in front of his apartment, his feet on the rail in front of him, his chair tilted back. He was reading a racing form.

He was standard; short and fat and dark with a fringe of dark hair circling his bald dome. Complete with sport shirt and no tie, and a bold, diagonal-weave sport coat and fawn slacks.

He looked up as we came along the porch, and the chair came to rest on all four legs. His eyes went to Jed and back to me, the form drooping in one hand.

"Do I know you?" he asked.

"I think you've met me, Sam," Petrie answered for me. "I was handling Ramsay Tate's public relations and publicity."

"Oh, yeah—Petrie, Jed Petrie."

"And this," Jed said, "is Joe Puma. He's a private operative, investigating Ramsay's death."

"Oh," Sam said, and tilted back in his chair again. His eyes crawled around my face. "What did you learn, Hawkshaw?"

"I learned you figured Tate owed you some money."

"That I did. About fifty-eight thousand, a third of his wrestling earnings. His wife can keep it, now. I want no part of her, even in a law suit."

He was staring out at the highway, his face sagging. I asked, "Did Ramsay promise you a part of his wrestling earnings?"

"No. We never had any written agreements and very few oral ones. I always got my third. After she married him, I didn't get anything but an occasional 'hello.' You tell her, if she wants she can give the money

to CARE, or the Red Cross. Or buy herself a new girdle. She gives it to CARE, I'll personally send her a letter of clearance."

Jed said mildly, "I take it you don't like Mrs. Tate?"

"That's right. I'm more concerned, now, with the murder. I'd like to know who did it, too. Before she came along, Ramsay and I were very, very good friends."

I said, "Was his name really Jacobsen?"

"That's right. This Ramsay Tate was his idea. He'd read it, somewhere. I never caught him reading, but when he does, he comes up with a name like that. Isn't it a lulu?"

"Half Swede, I hear, and half Russian."

"All Russian, I'd say, though it doesn't make sense with a name like Jacobsen. Big and dumb and sentimental. Russian as the Volga." Sam's voice was soft, his eyes still directed toward the highway.

I asked, "Any ideas on what happened, Sam?"

"Ideas? In that—that burlesque of a sport called wrestling? Maybe he didn't show up for rehearsal. Maybe he wanted to play one on the up and up. Who can tell anything, in that racket?"

"Well," said, "if you hear anything that would help, I'd be obliged if you passed it along."

"If I hear anything," he said, "I'll buy me a twelve-gauge shotgun and take care of it myself."

We went back to the Merc. Jed said, "You'd think they were brothers. He's really broken up, isn't he?"

"Seems to be." We walked around Sam's block-long Caddy and climbed into the Merc.

Jed's eyes were on the Caddy. "Get that out of Tate?"

"Could be. Though Sam's had some other good boys in his time."

"Other? You rate Ramsay high as a fighter?"

"The N.B.A. rated him third. Their word's good enough for me."

"We learn every day," Petrie said. "I took him on because he was a name. It was just his size I promoted."

It was getting cooler, but it wouldn't really be cool for another three hours. I headed the Merc toward San Marino—and Mrs. Ramsay Tate.

SHE was in the rear patio of the gargantuan Tate home, reclining on a wheeled chaise longue, reading a fan magazine. She smiled at both of us. "Squat, gents."

At the pool on the rear of the lot there was another blonde, just as shapely, but a smaller edition. She was sitting on the diving board.

Mrs. Tate saw my glance and said, "My sister, Jean. She's out here for the funeral." Her voice was composed. "You made identification? I simply couldn't go down there and look."

"I made identification," I told her. "You and Jed should develop stronger stomachs."

I sat down in the matching chaise longue and tried to keep my eyes from the long, tanned legs. She was wearing a white halter and white shorts. She put down the fan magazine, and pulled a cigarette from a case.

She didn't look at me. "Anything new?"

"Nothing. I stopped off to see Sam Gimbel."

"*Him!*" she said.

"He says he'll be happy if you'll give the money to CARE or the Red Cross."

"Oh, brother! What is this?"

"Sam's got a reasonable code. He made Tate. Tate would have never got beyond the rear end of the plough if Sam hadn't picked him up. He made him famous."

"He handled Ramsay as a fighter, not as a wrestler. When he didn't manage him, he stopped getting paid. That's simple enough, isn't it?"

"It's not quite that simple. A manager spends his own money on a boy for years, if he brings him along right. And Ramsay was brought along right."

"What'd he do, buy you?" She looked at me cynically.

"He didn't even try. Besides, I'm tied up."

"Tied up," she said. "That reminds me. You're not tied up for dinner, are you?"

"No." I stared at her, puzzled.

"It's Jean," she explained. "I want to take her out to dinner, but she might feel naked without a man along. Jed's willing to make it four, aren't you, handsome?"

"Gladly," he said.

I said, "I'd have to go home, first, and—"

"Nonsense," she interrupted. "All you need's a shave. You can use Ramsay's razor."

I must have flinched.

She said, "Don't expect me to mourn. I may be a lot of wrong things, but I'm no phony. And I haven't loved the freak for three years."

"Helen, for heaven's sake—" Jed said.

She waved him to silence, and looked at me. "And if Jean isn't enough reward for you, you can put the dinner on the expense account."

I said, "If you didn't love Ramsay Tate, why spend money on me?"

"Because I have it. And I want to know. Maybe the same person is an enemy of mine. Or maybe I just want a man around who isn't a wrestler, for a change." Her laugh was short. "What do you care, as long as you get paid?"

I didn't answer her. Jed went over to mix a drink.

Her sister came along the flagstone path that led from the pool. Her figure, I saw, was even better than Mrs. Tate's. Mrs. Tate was about five-ten, this girl about five-six. Her features were finer, and there was more warmth in her dark blue eyes.

I stood up.

Mrs. Tate said, "Jean, this is Joe Puma. Jean Hovde. Joe's consented to take us to dinner—for a price."

"I'm a poor man," I explained.

Jean's smile was brief and young. "I can understand that. I'm poor, too."

"Not for long, baby," Mrs. Tate said. "This town's full of rich suckers."

Jean glanced at me, as though in apology.

We had a drink and sat under the shade of the awning. Jean told us how cold it had been in Chicago. Mrs. Tate told us about her troubles in getting the new Jaguar serviced. I sat only half listening, thinking of the body on the slab. Nobody, it seemed, was mourning Ramsay Tate.

CHAPTER TWO

The Swendsen Trademark

WE ATE at the Hamilton Farms, an unpretentious if expensive place and had a few drinks there. Then I said, "Why don't we go over to Pacific Park?"

Mrs. Tate looked at me quickly. "Why?"

"I'd like to talk to Muggsy Retzer." Muggsy ran the wrestling at Pacific Park Coliseum.

Jean said, "I've never seen much wrestling, except college matches. Is it fun?"

"It's not fun," Helen said. "If you want to see Muggsy, we'll wait in the car. And why tonight?"

"Because he's not there during the day. And I don't want to wait until tomorrow night."

They waited in the car while I went along the aisle that went past the ring. In the ring, Count Basin was being fumigated by his valet.

In his corner, the Count's opponent of the evening, Delectable Dan the Golden Man was having his painted skin buffed with a huge sheep's-wool buffer. Third-grade vaudeville, and television had resurrected it.

In a room near the south exit, a room with chipped plaster walls and an uncarpeted wood floor, Muggsy Retzer was sitting behind a battered steel desk.

He looked like a water-logged spaniel, with curly, long brown hair and sorrowful brown eyes. He was staring at the desk top, his head in his hands, when I walked in.

"Puma," he said, looking up. "Joe Puma. A private op, ain't you?"

"Right," I said. "You were expecting me?"

"Right," he mimicked me. "It's my kind of luck to run into cops."

"Just one question," I said. "That match Ramsay had the other night, the one right before his death. Was he supposed to win that?"

"He won it, didn't he? Damned near killed the Turk, didn't he?"

"I didn't ask you that. Was he supposed to win it?"

"I don't decide those things. I'm not the wrestling boss in this town."

"I think you are, but if you aren't, who is?"

"Somebody you wouldn't want to bother with, shamus. Some guy you'd never go up against."

"Let me decide that."

"Okay." He looked at me evenly. "Joe Swendsen. Ever hear of him?"

But definitely. A rough, rough lad. A slob and a butcher, rotten and rich.

"Muggsy," I said, "you're leveling? With his dough, he needs your nickels, too?"

"Need? It isn't what he needs, it's what he wants. If you don't believe me, you could ask him."

"Thanks," I said.

I went out and down along the aisle where the fans were shrieking at the furious battle in the ring. Above, the huge television cameras were carrying it all into the town's better homes.

I went out, and there was Sam Gimbel's Caddy, and Sam climbing out of it. "On the trail?" I asked him.

"In my own dumb way. Give my regards to the widow." He went past me, and I turned to see him going down the long aisle.

As I climbed into the car, Helen said, "Well?"

"Yup," I said. "Where now?"

"Listen, Hawkshaw," she said belligerently, "I asked a civil question and I'm paying—"

It was Jed who came to my rescue. Jed said, "You aren't paying me, muscles. Why don't you shut your big loud mouth?"

"Why, Jed," she said. "Why, of all—" And then she was silent.

Next to me, in the front seat, Jean was smiling.

We went to Cliffside. I danced with Jean and with Helen, and came back to Jean for the rest of the evening. She wasn't very talkative, and I mentioned it.

She said, "I was thinking of Ramsay. I stayed with them, you know, when they lived in Chicago. He was fine. He was gentle and not at all like the papers tried to picture him."

"You read the wrong papers," I said. "How about Sam Gimbel? Did Ramsay ever talk about him?"

"Not—often. Helen and Sam never hit it off, you know. I got the impression Ramsay thought an awful lot of Sam Gimbel, though."

"And Sam of Ramsay," I added. "Any enemies Ramsay may have had, any you know of?"

"I don't see how anybody—" She shook her head. "Who could hate him?"

"One gent I know," I said. "A man who uses hate in his business, a man named Joe Swendsen. He could hate anybody."

AT TWO, I was driving back on Ventura again, and the Caddy with the Jersey plates was in the court at the El Dubarro.

At two-forty-five, I was asleep.

The heat had broken during the night. There'd been an inch of rain, and I woke to a dismal, cold day.

I was frying some eggs when the doorbell rang.

It was Sheriff Knowles. "Thought I'd drop by on the way to the courthouse," he said. "Anything?"

"Mrs. Tate has a pretty sister. Coffee, Sheriff?"

He shook his head. "How about Sam Gimbel? You talk to him?"

"Mmmm. Sam will go gunning, if he gets a lead. He's all wound up."

"What you're saying is that you didn't learn anything solid."

"More or less. Heard that Joe Swendsen runs the wrestling in this town. Maybe it was his work."

"With a .32? That's no professional's gun. Don't go taking a tale like that to Evertson."

Evertson was the head of City Homicide. I smiled and asked, "Why do you always fret about Evertson? Tell him next time you find a corpse, you're going to dump him at the city hall. Why worry about Evertson? He's only one vote."

"He's so damned—efficient. And you're impertinent. Let me know if you get something reasonably important." He went out, slamming the door.

He'd have been a good sheriff back in the days sheriffs rode Palominos for something besides parades. It wasn't his fault that times had changed. The voters hadn't changed, though. We have so many parades, and he looked so good on a horse.

The eggs were too hard, the coffee black and bitter. I'd spent yesterday without much success, but maybe the widow wasn't looking for success.

I went out into the chill day and headed for Wilshire.

Jed Pietrie's office was a narrow and elegant rectangle of walnut furniture and gray carpeting. The uncapitalized letters on the door read: *jed pietrie—public relations*.

Jed was sitting in the inner office, reading a trade paper.

"Anything new?" he asked.

I shook my head. "Mugsy Retzer told me last night that Joe Swendsen was running the wrestling racket out here. Is that right?"

"As far as I know. Why?"

"I got the impression Ramsay was supposed to lose that last match. And he won it. I can't see it. I can't see it two ways. I can't figure a wrestler turning honest and Joe Swendsen dabbling in a peanut sport like wrestling."

"Wrestling is not for peanuts, not these days, Joe. And I hope you aren't thinking of running up against Joe Swendsen. Not for day wages."

"It's a pretty good wage," I said. "Want to go along?"

"No, thanks. Drop by on the way back. I'll buy you a drink." He was shaking his head as I left.

A winding road and tall trees and fine, expensive homes set back on beautiful lawns. Early American and authentic farmhouse reproductions (for sixty-five thousand) and latter-day Frank Lloyd Wright and what are called cottages. With four baths. Novelists and oil men, stars and directors—and Joe Swendsen.

Restricted, the realtors claim. But not against Joe Swendsen.

The drive was gravel, cutting between a flowered hedge that surrounded the two acres of lawn. The house was Colonial, with two-story pillars and floor-length windows and louvre shutters.

The man who came to the door was big and had a flat, sunburned face and almost-white hair. He was no bigger than Joe Puma, but I'd bet he was tougher. Joe Swendsen.

"Well?" he said, looking me up and down.

"My name is Joe Puma," I said. "I'm a private investigator."

"Termite or credit?"

"I'm investigating the death of Ramsay Tate. I thought you might be able to help."

He frowned, studying me. "No kidding. Another guy told me that last night. Fat little—" He didn't finish the last word, but it hung there, nevertheless, foul and ugly and vicious as the man who'd started to voice it.

"Sam Gimbel?" I asked.

"Sam Gimbel," he said. "We gave him a light work-out. Aren't you pressing *your* luck, Puma?"

"Could be." I gave him stare for stare and hoped he was as nervous as I was. Which he wasn't, of course.

Finally he smiled. "Come in, snoop. We're looking for laughs."

I WENT through an entrance hall and into a living room of polished mahogany and mable-topped tables. Two men sat together on a down-filled brocaded davenport. Neither of them looked like they belonged there.

They looked up as we entered. One I knew—Harry Johns. The other was just Mr. X.

"A private eye, gents," Swendsen said. "He's on our trail."

Harry Johns smiled. Mr. X. looked at me and went back to the paper he was reading.

"The Ramsay Tate business again," Swendsen went on, "and after what happened to Gimbel. He send you, snoop?"

I shook my head.

Swendsen's light blue eyes were cold. He was in a pique, it seemed, spoiling for trouble. I was nervous, my hands moist.

Johns said, "I always thought private eyes came into a room by kicking the door open. I thought they always had a gun in their hands."

"Me, too," Swendsen said. His smile was tight. "Got a gun on you, Sherlock?"

I nodded.

"Let's see it."

I shook my head.

Malice grew in the room. Three pairs of eyes were on me, now. Joe Swendsen repeated quietly, "Let's see it."

I reached in and pulled out my .38. I aimed it at the belly of Joe Swendsen. "It's standard," I told him. "You pull the trigger and it makes a noise and a hole." I tried to make my voice casual, but I must have sounded like a high school valedictorian.

My hand was steady enough, though, to get by.

They stared at me in complete silence, and then Joe Swendsen laughed. "Okay, okay, just a little fun. You're all right, Puma. Now, what can I do for you?"

I fell for it. I put the gun back in its holster and said, "Whatever you feel free to tell me about the death of Ramsay Tate, I'd like to hear. You know the wrestling—"

Harry Johns' hand moved some twelve inches, and now there was a gun in his hand. An automatic, pointed my way.

I looked at that—and Swendsen's right

hand caught me below the ear. It was a professional right hand. I went down on all fours, and his foot crashed my side. I tried to roll and the impact at the base of my skull must have put an end to that. . . .

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Jean and I were running, but from what? Helen watched us from above, smiling. She was wearing a long, non-shadow-proof robe. Jean went over the edge of the cliff, and I watched her fall. Then the rock came down from above, and hit me at the base of my neck.

That's where the biggest pain was, at the base of my neck. I sat behind the wheel of the Merc, still alive, though not relishing it. The biggest pain hammered, the others throbbed and I moved my neck gingerly, rubbing the base of my skull.

The inside of my mouth was cut and there was blood all over my chin. They'd moved the car, I saw, a couple blocks down. Traffic went by, not a glance coming my way.

No teeth were loose. I looked in the rear view mirror and saw the swollen right eye.

After a few minutes, I started the motor and moved into the traffic stream. I drove carefully, licking the dried blood off my lips, exploring my mouth with my tongue.

In the washroom of a filling station I bathed my lumpy face with cold water, while they filled the tank and checked the oil. When I came out, again, the attendant said, "He must have been awful big."

"There were three of them," I said.

I went up into the Valley again, heading for the widow. I was going past the El Dubarro when I saw the department car behind the Caddy, and the stretcher next to the Caddy.

I swung the Merc into the court and was out of it and heading for the group when I saw Captain Evertson on the porch. And he saw me.

I'd worked for him for two years, but he had no love for private ops. He was a broad man with a pock-marked face and gray hair.

He said, "The smell of blood bring you? Or is this some of your delicate work?" He was looking at my battered face with interest.

"What's happened?" I asked. "Is it Sam Gimbel?"

"It's Sam, and he's dead. Beaten to death. His heart wouldn't take it."

"Joe Swendsen," I told him. "He just put his trade mark on me, too. I was investigating the death of Ramsay Tate. And so was Sam, last night. Swendsen told me he beat up Sam. If my name was Gimbel, I'd probably be dead, too."

"What the hell do you mean by that?"

"You figure it out," I said. "Swendsen didn't know Sam was dead, though. If you don't tell him, maybe you can trick him. If you can't, I'm your witness."

"Don't tell me my business," Evertson said evenly. "I'm not your uncle. You working for him on this?"

"If you mean Sheriff Knowles, he's not my uncle—sir. And I'm not working for him. I'm working for Ramsay Tate's widow."

He said, "Wait," and went over to watch them bring the body of Sam Gimbel from the Caddy. I didn't look at it.

When Evertson came back to me, there was a uniformed man with him.

Evertson said, "If we pick up Swendsen, we'll want a case. We've picked him up before, you know. But witnesses get—scared."

"You'll have a case. They must have beat him up in Swendsen's house, or wherever Sam met them, and then driven him here. You should have some prints, or witnesses, somewhere along the line. And they admitted it to me. The papers haven't got this yet, have they?"

"Not so we can't stop it. Okay, you keep in touch with me, Puma. You figure Swendsen bumped Tate, too?"

I shrugged. "I can't see a .32, with him. Though we don't know. We haven't got the slug."

"Naturally," Evertson said. "You wouldn't have. Give my love to your uncle's horse."

CHAPTER THREE

The Widow Weeps

IN THE east, the sun was trying to break through. I swung my car to the right, toward the Tate home.

The two of them were having breakfast in the patio. The sun was about halfway through the smog. Jean was in pastel green linen, Helen in a black lounging suit.

Helen said, "Fresh coffee. Fresh rolls. Fresh girls." She stared at me, suddenly. "What happened to your face?"

"I forgot to duck. I'll have some coffee." I sat down.

She started to pour the coffee, and I said, "Sam Gimbel's dead. He was beaten to death."

Her hand trembled, and some coffee missed the cup. "Damn you," she said. "Don't throw a line like that at me. This coffee's hot. Try not to be a ham."

Her voice had been shaky. She sounded scared, wondering.

Jean stared at my face. Helen looked at the table cloth. Then, finally, Helen looked at me. "Who did it?"

I lied with a shrug.

She glared at me. "Am I paying for information, or not?"

I didn't say anything.

She said, "I hired you to find out who killed my husband. Don't let last night's slumming give you the idea you're anything but hired help around here."

"Helen!" Jean's voice was shocked.

I stood up. "Okay, I won't even bill you. Don't go too near the fire." I started for the walk that led around the house.

"Come back here, damn you," she called. "I'm sorry."

She looked penitent as I came back. She said humbly, "I can be a so-and-so, can't I?"

"You do it well," I agreed, and sat down again. "I don't think you hired me to find out who killed your husband. I think you hired me to find out who didn't."

Both of them stared at me. Helen said, "Now, what the hell kind of statement is that?"

"Just a hunch. I got this face from Joe Swendsen, along with some lumps in less visible places. Know Joe?"

"I've heard of him." She was buttering a roll.

I watched her face. "It was Joe who killed Sam Gimbel."

Relief in her face. She looked at me. "Why?"

"Because Sam went to see him—with questions. Because Joe grew annoyed, and being the foul animal he is, he and the boys worked Sam over a little. Sam's heart couldn't take it."

"But—why would Swendsen kill Ramsay?"

"I didn't say he did. But if he did, it could be because Ramsay won his match, the one with the Turk. Now, the only reason I could see for Ramsay changing the script would be some important emotional upheaval. Maybe he was angry about something. Have you ever seen him angry?"

"Never. Am I paying you to work or to give out with these theories?"

Jean said quietly, "You're not paying him to get beaten up."

Helen's eyebrows lifted. She winked at me.

I looked at Jean. "At U.C.L.A. I got more lumps for less money. But I'm glad you're interested. In the Pacific, I saw more danger, again for less money."

She said gravely, "There may have been some principle involved in the Pacific, don't you think?"

"If you've any regard for Ramsay Tate," I told her, "and I think we share a regard for him, there's a principle involved here. And aside from that, there's a principle involved in all murder. It's nothing to encourage."

Now Jean looked at Helen, and then she looked at me. "You're not stupid," she said, "but you're certainly being stupid in this."

"Well!" Helen said.

"He's an honest man, and you're mixing him in a dishonest business," Jean said evenly. She stood up, suddenly, and walked into the house.

Helen shook her head and picked up her cup of coffee. Her hand was shaking again. "What could have got into her?"

"She's a lady," I said. "It's so refreshing to meet a lady these days." I stood up. "If you want me to, I'll quit. You're not leveling with me."

"You're the detective," she said. "Pretend it was somebody else who hired you. You want me to reveal all my maidenly secrets, just to solve a murder that probably has no connection with them?"

"You hope there's no connection," I said. "Love, love, love. I'll see you again."

She smiled blankly. "Of course. I can hardly wait."

FROM a drugstore, I phoned the sheriff. He said, "What's this business about Joe Swendsen? Evertson phoned me and wants to know what I've got on Joe."

"That's what I want to know," I said, "You check his time on the Tate kill?"

"First man I thought of. He's clear, and so are his principal stooges. He manhandle you, as Evertson claims?"

"He sure did. Go easy on him, though, Sheriff. He's nailed, now."

"I'll run this end, Joe. We've got a lot of steps he could fall down. But you be careful. He's got friends."

"I'll be careful," I said. "What did you hear about that match with the Turk? Did you hear Tate was supposed to lose it, too?"

"That was the smart money, what there was of it. Most big operators won't bet on wrestling matches."

"And most smart wrestlers won't go against the script."

"So?"

"So Ramsay must have been perturbed about something. What was it?"

"You tell me."

"Don't tell me you're too old to remember. Give it some thought."

I ate at the Farmer's Market, and went to the office. I relaxed on the worn leather couch, hoping my headache would go away. I took a stiff shot, after a while, and washed it down with water, lots of water.

Helen Tate wasn't leveling, and not leveling, now, meant that she wanted to protect somebody. Three years, three years, three years . . . It went around and around in my head.

Too simple, but the hard ones are always too simple. There was no use making an involved case out of a simple one.

I had another drink and more water and phoned the Tate home at four. Jean answered.

"I thought you might have something to tell me," I guessed.

"No," she said. "She's—still my sister, Joe."

"All right," I said. "You're a sweet kid."

"Thanks," she said. "You're kind of all right, too. Be careful, won't you?"

I promised I would, and hung up.

No slug, and yet it hadn't been given any publicity in the papers, the fact the slug was missing. Even Evertson hadn't known it, until I told him.

Maybe the killer didn't know the slug was missing. Maybe it was still around, somewhere. Down, to up, the deputy had said. Three years, three years, three years. . . .

Down to up, maybe in the ceiling, though a hole in the plaster would be noticeable. No, three hundred and forty pounds would be a lot of man to move. Ramsay Tate had probably been killed where he'd been found.

Unless the killer had help. Why was Swendsen so annoyed about it?

And who'd want to kill Ramsay Tate?

I took the chance. It was an easy place to get into, through the back door, and there it was, in the moulding around the top of the wall. In the fine, grained moulding and scarcely noticeable from the floor. Not at all noticeable unless you were looking for it.

A steel-jacketed .32 slug, like the sheriff had guessed. Makes a small hole going in and a small hole going out, and it had to be steel-jacketed for that.

I put it in my pocket, and headed for the Tate place again.

At eight o'clock, the Jaguar came out the driveway and headed east. Helen was alone in it.

It was an easy car to follow.

Cahuenga, through the pass and east again on Franklin. It stopped in front of a triplex, and I parked a few blocks down. That would be about it, the address I'd looked up in the phone book.

I GAVE them an hour, and then drove up and climbed out. It was the front apartment, and there was only a dim light on.

There was no *jed petrie*—public relations to mark this door, but he answered my ring.

Tall, slim, elegant. Smiling, cool. "Well, Joe. Surprise."

"I'm looking for Mrs. Tate," I said.

"Of course. Come in."

The furniture was bleached, the rug gray. Helen Tate was sitting on an oversized low davenport, a drink in her hand.

"Love," I said.

She said nothing, watching me.

"Drink?" Petrie asked me, and I nodded, still looking at Helen Tate.

"Any particular kind?" His voice was annoyed.

"Any kind."

He brought me a Scotch and water. I nodded my thanks, and sat down on the big davenport, away from Mrs. Tate.

"Three years," I said, and both of them were looking at me.

"You told me, Mrs. Tate, that you hadn't loved Ramsay for three years. That was just about the time Jed came into your life, wasn't it? That's when he took over Ramsay's publicity."

"That's right," she said. "But that

doesn't prove murder, and what the hell business of yours is my love life?"

"None. Only have you thought about Jed being sort of broke? And needing a rich wife if he wants to maintain his standard of living?"

"I love him," she said. "You don't think those things about someone you love."

Jed said, "Isn't this kind of ridiculous, Puma?"

I ignored him. I looked fully at her. "The hell you don't think them. You even hire a detective to find out if there's any truth to what you might be thinking. Ramsay found out about you two, didn't he?"

Her eyes widened. "I don't know. He didn't say what he'd found out. He was furious, that night, and stormed out. He hit me. I've still the bruise on my shoulder."

"He was furious enough to forget his script," I said, "and damn near kill the poor Turk. Then he went over to Jed's office for a showdown. And Jed shot him."

She looked at Jed, her eyes wondering, pleading, almost.

"It's a lie," he said. "I didn't see him that night. It's all guessing, Helen. Can't you see he's guessing?"

"A .32 is an amateur's gun," I said. "Jed's an amateur."

He expelled his breath. "Oh, for heaven's sakes."

"But one thing I noticed," I went on. "Ramsay was found in his car. I woke up in mine. Sam Gimbel was found in his. The Swendsen trade mark. One of Swendsen's stooges was sent by the boss to help you haul that 340 pounds away, right?"

Petrie nodded. "Sure. We used a bulldozer."

"Swendsen was crossed, and he doesn't mind getting his trade mark around for a kill he didn't handle. Not if he's clear. It helps to keep the rest of the boys in line. But the kill was Jed's." I stood up. "I've just fished the slug out of his woodwork, at the office. Better come along with me, Jed."

Now there was no doubt in Helen's eyes. Now she was staring at Jed with horror in those eyes and her mouth was open, like a gasping fish. I had my gun in my hand as I turned to face him.

And he had a gun in his hand, pulled from the pocket of his dressing robe. It was

a .32. The simple jerk hadn't even got rid of the gun.

I didn't know if his trigger finger was tightening or not. It looked like it might be. I put a slug into his belly, just to be on the safe side.

He crumpled, and Helen screamed, and I told her, "You'd better get the hell out. I've got to phone the law."

* * *

Evartson said, "You took a hell of a lot for granted. Why didn't you bring the slug to us?"

"Just ego. Sorry, Captain. Any of Swendsen's boys likely to break down and admit they're accomplices?"

"I don't know. Your uncle's got Swendsen over at his place. The Chief, here, doesn't hold with some of those old-fashioned ideas. You really think you're something, don't you, Puma?"

"A private operative has to think a lot of himself," I said quietly. "Nobody else in the world thinks he's worth a damn, so his ego is bound to get bruised if he doesn't practice some self delusion. I do the best I can, and work with the law all the way. I make a living in a competitive field and shouldn't have to take any man's contempt."

I turned and started to walk away.

"Just a minute, Puma." His voice was sharp.

I turned, and then he studied the lumps on my face. "All right," he said finally, "you've had a busy day. That one I'll allow you."

"Thank you, Captain," I said.

He was all right. Bad disposition, because he had to deal with the public, but a pretty good all-around man.

At the Tate house, there was a dim light in the living room. Helen was in there, a half-empty bottle of Scotch in front of her. She looked at me bleakly.

She said, "Jean's out in back, looking at the stars. Better take her coat out to her. She's not used to our nights."

"I'll keep her warm," I said. "This world is full of guys, Helen."

What I didn't say was that the best one she'd ever had was dead, killed by her precious Jed.

I went out to see about the stars.

MUSIC FROM HELL



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By **JOHN LAWRENCE**

I KNEW it was coming—knew something was. For three days a tight, tormenting uneasiness had been growing in me.

I tried to keep Carl Georges in the “ballroom” of my little log hotel after supper. I poked up the blaze of pine logs in the oversize stone fireplace till the waxed floor glittered and the white bearskin glowed on the wall.

“A nasty night out on the water,” I said. “A good night to lounge around in front of a fire.”

Carl’s coal-black eyes revealed amusement. “Pops, you’re blowing sour again.”

He was a handsome devil—blond hair with just enough silver in it to make it more romantic. Being an actor, he wore it long. He had the finely cut features of his profession, a cleft chin, and a little waxed

Had the playboy’s love song gone slightly off-key . . . and turned into his death-chant?

mustache so perfect that it might have been manufactured. He was slender-hipped, graceful, with long, dark hands.

He lit a cigarette, loafed against the door jamb. "I came here for a vacation, Pops, not a revival meeting. Remember?" He flipped the match out onto the veranda. "Or are you going to flash that tin badge of yours and lock me up so you can keep an eye on me?"

He had started this line the day he arrived, as soon as he found that I was the local constable of a crimeless community.

"No," I told him. "I won't lock you up. But listen to me, Carl. Rosemary O'Hara's father has a devil in him. You're askin' for trouble."

He laughed and slid his slender hands in the slash pockets of his black corduroy jacket. "Hell, Pops, I've debated the issue with tougher guys than him. Don't worry, it's just a little innocent romance. What's life without romance?" He hesitated in the open door. "I may take a canoe from the boathouse, Pops. Don't get excited if one's gone."

He wandered on out, whistling softly.

I shook my head, filled my pipe slowly and reached automatically for a book. I didn't open it. Instead, I sat worrying.

For all his personality, Carl was a type I didn't like—the perpetual playboy. He spent most of his time off on canoe trips, but I wished he'd chosen some other spot to "get back to nature" rather than my little twenty-room log outpost in the wilderness.

He'd turned a bright eye on Rosemary O'Hara the first night he was here, when I had her in to wait on table. I never asked her in again, but the damage had been done. She'd never seen anything like Carl Georges in seventeen years up at Oliver O'Hara's brat-filled farmhouse.

Not that the O'Haras were farmers. They kept a few cows, in order to sell milk, and an acre or two of truck. Mostly, O'Hara was the local carpenter and builder. Ma O'Hara churned butter and did washing for some of the summer people. But I'd seen Oliver O'Hara, with a drink or two in him, revert to savage shanty Irish. If he once worked himself up over Carl Georges and Rosemary. . . .

The wind was rattling the big windows of the long, slender ballroom, and the fire

was very inviting. But somehow I couldn't concentrate on my book.

I heard the screen door in the kitchen open, and I started to get up, thinking the wind had blown it in. Half up out of my chair I hesitated. Oliver O'Hara came slowly to the mouth of the hall.

One look at the flush in his gray cheeks and I knew he'd been drinking. He was tall, rawboned, with the map of Ireland on his face. He had heavy, hairy brows, and a wild black forelock fell down over his short forehead.

He wet his already moist lips. "Where's that musician at?" he asked huskily. His gray eyes were dull and heavy.

Because Georges, like most actors, could strum superficially on my old piano, he was a musician to Oliver.

"You mean Carl?" I stalled, trying to think of something pacifying to say. "He went out somewhere."

"Where's Rosemary? She over here?"

"No." What was there to say? "Listen, Oliver. . . ."

He had turned and was gone, with his padding, sidwinding Indian's walk. Before I could move, the kitchen door banged behind him.

I looked at the ship's clock on the mantel. It showed ten minutes to eight. . . .

It showed well after nine when I finally gave up trying to make sense of the book. I got up and prowled restlessly, put the little hotel to rights. Even then it was too early to turn in. I wandered outside to the veranda and stood looking out over the black restless water, the wind in my face.

That was when I got the odd sensation. There was no other word for it but sensation. I found myself instantly leaning forward, straining some inner sense to catch—what? Vaguely, it gave me the experience of music, or a sweet relaxation. And it came from the island called *Campment d'Ours*.

Take a generous handful of silver and spread it on the floor. Set a pencil pointing roughly onto their center. The coins would be the assorted islands of pine land around the junction of Lake Superior and St. Mary's River. The pencil would be the finger of mainland known as Buckingham Point, up at the head of the thirty thousand islands. It would also be the Buckingham Point Hotel, for my ballroom was built to

completely cover the narrow finger of rock out onto the water.

If one of your coins were oval-shaped, and directly facing the pencil point across a space representing two miles of water, that island would be Campment d'Ours. And it was from there that the weird sensation was coming to me.

I STRAINED to see through the rolling darkness, but I saw nothing, heard nothing above the wind and murmuring water.

My nerves hummed, and it dawned on me that perhaps a certain subconscious trick was being played on me, nudging my attention toward the island. It had a little history connected with it—modern, and pretty uninspiring—but history.

A youth named Hedleigh Noyes owned Campment d'Ours. You've heard of him. Up until the war, he was cutting a wide swath through his father's Chicago packing million. He was one of the ten or twelve families who had establishments scattered over twenty square miles of the vicinity. The Canadian Railroad, years back, had vainly tried to promote this district as summer playground—and incidentally built the tiny, twenty-room log hotel which, on my retirement as investigator for the line, they practically forced on me.

Noyes had shown us a new high in prodigality, having imported special workmen from as far as Chicago to build his place, flinging money around as though its possession pained him. And he had hired Jim Bristol as caretaker.

That, perhaps, was why I was drawn toward Campment d'Ours tonight. Because what was happening between Carl Georges and the O'Hara girl was a deadly parallel to what had happened two years ago between Hedleigh Noyes and Jim Bristol's stepdaughter, Anne.

Not an exact parallel—but uneasily close. Anne Bristol had come in to do some work in young Noyes' household. She was a pale, pretty ash blonde thing—the English type of beauty, just as her stepfather's immense, powerful figure and blazing red face was Cockney from way back. The good-looking, improvident playboy had been taken with her.

And in a more literal sense, she had been taken with him. Young Noyes had acquired the habit of walking over the island

with her. One day he gave her a ring. He tossed it off so casually that she took it as a trinket. It was not till her stepfather got a look at it that she learned that it was a fabulously valuable star sapphire.

Jim Bristol beat her within an inch of her life. The next morning she was gone, and so was Hedleigh Noyes. Evidently the young playboy lacked the courage to stand up to Jim Bristol's terrible rage. To be truthful, it was something to frighten any man, when Jim went berserk. He could crush a man's skull between his hands. And Noyes' wealth and position was no help to him this far from civilization, so to speak. At any rate, when the girl ran crying to him, Noyes had simply up and left in his cabin cruiser, carrying her along. He had not been back since.

And that was the last we ever heard of her. Jim Bristol refused to have her name mentioned in his presence. A rumor drifted back to us that Noyes had turned her loose, not very long thereafter, in Chicago. There was no reason to doubt that; she was a numb-headed little animal, for all her prettiness, and would soon bore a man like Noyes. And as a clincher, someone had, very recently, brought in a Chicago newspaper, revealing that young Noyes was now about to marry a Chicago blueblood. Obviously Anne had passed out of his life. But we did not expect her back here—not with Jim Bristol waiting.

The queer part of it was that Jim still continued to operate as caretaker of the island. A lawyer in the Soo administered the place and paid expenses.

So definite, however, was my weird feeling of the moment that I could not quite believe it was only a mental mirage. I thought of calling Jim Bristol and asking if there were anybody or anything on the island. He would know. His island, Garnet, was directly behind Campment d'Ours, about the same distance from it as I was but, because of the terrain, in such position that he could see the buildings on the place from his front door.

I debated—and then suddenly realized that Jim had gone to the Soo a fortnight ago on one of his "monkey business" trips. That's what he called them. Certain Toronto people, for months, had been trying to convince Jim that Garnet was loaded with copper and platinum, if not bauxite,

now soaring in price. They wanted to drill for it. According to Jim, who knew every foot of Garnet like his own hand, they got hold of a faulty electrolytic survey, probably of some other island. He was foxy enough to stand off their offers of a share in the profits and was, he told us, holding out for a fabulous flat cash offer.

Even as I considered what to do, my phone rang inside the hotel—three long, two short. When I went in and answered, Jim's heavy, Cockney voice came through our normally ear-splitting static: "'Allo!'"

He wanted to tell me to advise Oliver O'Hara that he had just come back, and to kindly recommence deliveries of milk. I said I would tell him, and then blurted: "Wait a minute, Jim. Is there anybody over at the Noyes place? I thought I heard a noise or something."

"Noise? In this wind. You must be off your 'ead. Well, wait a minute, I'll 'ave a look." I held on for a moment or two. He came back to say: "I don't see anything, Fred. You been readin' another of them ghost books?"

I hung up, but I could not beat down a fidgety uneasiness. I went back out to the porch, disgusted with myself. A flash of light winked from the island, down at water level. It was like a very brilliant red spark.

And then the sharp crack reached me.

I STOOD there, struck numb. There was nothing at all in my mind except the sinking certainty that Oliver O'Hara had finally caught Rosemary and Carl Georges.

I had utterly forgotten that I was the Law in these parts. It was seconds before I recovered sufficiently to remember.

I turned and stumbled inside to grab my windbreaker and, after only a second's hesitation, my cartridge belt and heavy holstered pistol. I hurried back along the veranda to the stairs leading to my boat-house.

Rosemary O'Hara ran up the steps into the light and stopped, panting. Her deep, long-lashed blue eyes were scared in her thin, delicate white face. "Mr. Banks, did you hear—?"

"I heard it," I said. "I thought you—Where's Carl?"

"I don't know! I waited for him for over an hour—down by the cove—but he

didn't come. Oh, I know something's happened! I knew it would. I tried to make him tell me the last time what he was doing, but he just laughed. And tonight Pa's out. I went home and Ma told me Pa'd took out after us. . . ."

"Yeah, I saw him." I stopped suddenly, peered at her. "What did you say about the last time? You mean Carl's kept you waiting—not showed up at dates with you before?"

"Oh, yes. He always comes late. But that doesn't matter now—"

"Come on, then." I took her arm.

She burst into terrified sobbing as we hurried down. "Oh, my God, if Pa—"

I said grimly, "Whatever's happened, has happened. Pull yourself together now. Jump in."

I cast off, heaved my little outboard-motored skiff out into the water. We tossed for a minute, till I could turn the engine over, and then we sped swiftly toward the island. I laid my flashlight, alight, on the bottom of the boat.

The motor made too much noise for conversation. Rosemary knelt in the bow, her back to me, her eyes straining into the watery blackness ahead. We were three-quarters of the way across when she suddenly whipped her head around to the side.

Then she was suddenly up on her feet, yelling at me, her eyes wide and white-ringed as she pointed out into the darkness. I couldn't hear what she was yelling, but her shaking finger moved steadily and she was almost upsetting the boat. I cut the motor hastily, and then I could hear her cry frenziedly:

"Look, there's somebody. . . ."

I flung the beam of the flashlight hastily around to where she pointed.

Oliver O'Hara was sitting, his oars drifting, in his dinghy. He was cowering. There was no other word for it.

I bent the tiller, sent the skiff bounding around till I whirled up behind him. I cut the motor and drifted. "You—Oliver! What are you doing here?"

He licked his lips. The drink had died out of him now and his eyes were reddened. He croaked, "I—I heard a shot."

"Heard it! Did you fire it?"

"No, no—not me!" He gulped, and his turkey neck bobbed frantically. "An hour or so back I was up the shore, lookin' fer

her. I seen lights out on the island, up in the gues' house. I run over there, around to the back, thinkin' they were there. When I get there, they was nobody; the place was locked up again. I clumb back in the boat, and when I'm just clear, I heard that shot."

I set my jaw. "Throw me your painter. Hurry up! I'm the constable talkin' to you now, Oliver!"

With him in tow, I kicked the motor alive again, and we bobbed and pounded for the spot in the blackness where I knew Noyes' dock was.

ROSEMARY saw the body first. I had slowed down the outboard and was hauling in the slack of Oliver's painter to heave him in ahead, when she screamed.

I whipped my flashlight around.

Carl Georges was lying on his chest, sprawled limply on the dock. There was no mistaking his black corduroy jacket. Rosemary threw herself, sobbing, onto the dock.

When I got up, I had to move her aside almost bodily by the shoulder, so I could kneel down. I tugged the body farther back from the edge of the dock and turned him over.

His skin was the color of wet sand. One coal-black eye stared frantically. Where the other should have been was a bloody hole, and blood, partly watered away, stained his cheek.

I stood up just as the girl flung herself frantically on her father, screaming, clawing like a wildcat. "You killed him! You killed him! You drunken old—"

I grabbed her, pulled her away as he stumbled backwards, his eyes frightened "No, no, Rose," he croaked desperately.

The girl collapsed, sobbing, in my arms. I held her thin body, vaguely soothing her. I snapped at Oliver: "All right. We'll go up to the guest house where you say you saw these lights." I hesitated. "Have you got a gun on you, Oliver?"

"No," he cried huskily. "I swear I never done this!"

The sobbing girl tried to writhe and squirm free. "He did! He did it and then threw his gun in the water!"

"Now take it easy, Rosemary. We'll find out what happened, never fear. Come on."

The island was humped like a razor-back. A path wound up from the dock over the ridge and to the little plateau beyond. I flung a shaft of light to the left where the main house, elaborate, towering, gray-shingled, sat silent and shuttered. I swung the beam around as we turned off to the right. The guest house was a low, shingled cabin with a long, overhanging roof.

Something white fluttered and I swung the flash beam along the pine needles that lay thickly everywhere. A scrap of paper was caught in fallen branches beyond the path. It looked fresh. I stepped swiftly over and retrieved it. It had been crumpled and then thrown away. It was in soft pencil, and I recognized the scribbling of the dead man, Carl Georges. It read:

*Pierpont Hotel 8-3-41 — 8-19-41 4:23 C. N.
W R R. Car 132 — Seat 4.*

I stared, uncomprehending, trying to make sure it had no bearing on the murder.

Oliver's hot breath came on my neck. I turned and backhanded him away. "Stand over there!" I snapped, and stuffed the paper in my pocket as I stepped onto the ground-level porch.

The front door was locked by a rusted padlock. I knew there was no back door. I hesitated only a moment, then located a heavy stick, ran it through the hasp of the padlock and bore down. The hasp squealed out and I palmed the doorknob, threw away the stick and pushed the door inwards, spraying light over the interior. I reached in for the light switch I knew to be inside the door, clicked it.

Nothing happened.

Oliver gasped frightenedly. "But there was lights! Somebody was up here! I could see them moving around even from the shore."

"Was there?" I said grimly. "Look at that room."

In the beam of my powerful torch, we saw bare wicker furniture in the room before us, and an ancient upright piano. The piano lid was closed, and on top of it lay an old guitar. There was a rusty electric fan on a flimsy table just inside the door. Over everything was a fine, thick coating of dust, as heavy as to make every object in the room look gray.

I turned to Oliver. "Walk inside."

He gulped, moved hesitantly a few steps

in and looked at me over his shoulder.

"Look down," I said. "See your footprints? Where are the marks made by the people you claim you saw? A squirrel couldn't walk in that dust without marking it. Rosemary, do you know where the main switch is in the Delco shack?"

"Yes, but—"

"Go over there and throw it. And hurry back here."

She ran off, still sobbing. A moment later, the paper-shaded globe in the ceiling came alive.

I said, "So you saw lights and somebody moving. That's a stupid story, Oliver." I walked over and lifted the dust-covered guitar, noting the deep encrustation where it had lain. When I looked at him, his eyes were trapped, stunned.

He whispered: "You—ain't going to put it on me, Fred! You ain't—"

My coat sleeve brushed the rusty guitar strings as I went to replace it. It gave off a vague singing sound. Weirdly, it jerked me back to the sensation I had had on the hotel porch. I got hold of the thing, dug in my memory for a chord and played it, but the vague nostalgia wasn't there when it was struck fairly. I finally set the thing back and went over to wait, perched grimly on the arm of a wicker chair.

As the girl ran up to the door again, I said grimly:

"You've got just one hairline chance, Oliver. Jim Bristol will be here any minute when he sees the lights on here. I happened to be talking to him just before I heard that report. I think he told me there was nobody up here tonight. If I misunderstood him, maybe you won't hang. Maybe."

SURE enough, the sound of Jim Bristol's speedy little launch was already audible, spluttering across the two miles of water from his island. We sat silent, listening to it. Plainly, he was putting on speed.

He burst into the little guest cabin exactly ten minutes later, panting, red-faced. He was a huge man, as powerful as a gorilla. The little spiked blonde mustache on his beefy red face looked silly. His steely, water-colored eyes gaped at us in astonishment. "What, are you fellers breaking in?"

I told him, "Carl Georges—that actor who's been stayin' with me—is lying on the dock, shot."

His jaw sagged. "You don't mean it!"

I said. "I mean it, all right." For a second I lost the thread of what I was saying, as a sudden startling series of thoughts swirled in my head. "We just caught Oliver here making a quick getaway from the island. He claims there was somebody up here tonight with the lights on."

The big, red-faced Cockney blinked stupidly. "Here?" he exclaimed. "Tonight? Why, he's crazy. I been workin' around outside my place. I would have seen them. Like I told you Fred, there wasn't nothing."

"No lights?"

"Lights? Hell, no." A sudden, dawning horror came queerly over his face. He jerked around to look, thunderstruck, at Oliver. "Why, you done it—killed that bloke yourself and made up the story. . . . Hey, Fred, he done it! I heard about Rosemary and this actor. By Jerusalem, that's it!" He gulped, strangling with excitement.

I scarcely heard him. I was crumpling the slip of paper in my pocket, my brain suddenly whirling in a startling, terrible conclusion.

"No," I said.

"No?"

"You heard me. You haven't got it exactly right, Jim. Not exactly."

I hesitated. Even yet, chills were playing up and down my spine and I was incredulous. "Some of it's right. Oliver here did get a brainstorm over those two. Rosemary has been seeing Georges—was supposed to see him tonight, matter of fact. Only he didn't show up. Instead, he seems to have come here."

Their eyes were like weights on me. "I guess he's been everywhere else in the vicinity in these last couple of weeks. Anyway, he came here tonight—to find something. I'm suddenly realizing that he's been prowling around looking for it ever since he got here. Tarnation! He wasn't on any holiday in the first place. He was on a snooping expedition! He found what he was looking for here in this house tonight. And then he was set. Once he had it, he wanted to attract attention—a certain party's attention—and knowing that that

party would instantly come rushing, he turned the lights on and made himself at home."

Jim Bristol's water-colored eyes glinted impatiently. "What sort o' nonsense is that?" he asked. "Didn't I tell you—"

"That's right, you did," I said quickly. "But say, just for fun, that he did come here and did turn on the lights. Of course it's pretty far-fetched, seeing that he didn't leave any footsteps on the floor—him, or whoever else was here."

Jim Bristol scowled uncomprehendingly, then a sort of worried concern popped his eyes. He said, "Hey, now, Fred, you ain't been readin' one o' them ghost books?"

"It might be appropriate, at that, Jim. What's happened here is kind of like the ghost of what happened three years ago. Rosemary taking up with this Georges—well, it's something like your stepdaughter, Anne, taking up with young Noyes."

Bristol's red face was splotched and angry, and his teeth clenched. "Fred Banks, I told you before not to mention—"

I hooked a thumb in my leather holster. "I mentioned him because I chose to, Jim. I'm the law, remember."

I looked over at Rosemary. Her face was trembling, her eyes bloodshot. "Rose, I know it's tough for you kids up here, burning with all sorts of romantic notions and not much outlet for it. But take my word, you're pretty well rid of this Georges."

I looked over at the shrunken Oliver. "Let's say you did see lights here tonight—that folks were, as I say, in here tonight. In that case, somebody's certainly gone to plenty pains to make it look like it wasn't so. Now why would they do that?"

I answered myself: "Well, maybe to make it look bad for you, Oliver, although they could hardly know you'd stumble into this like the fool you are. There must have been some other reason, as well. There must be some other reason why, say, a person would be desperate to make it look like this shack hadn't been entered in years. Maybe they'd even go so far as to take a bucket of dust from outside and, say, turn on that electric fan, to coat the whole room over."

"Sounds kind of silly, doesn't it? That is, unless you figure that maybe that person—now, mind, I'm just going hog-wild on all this theory—this person met Carl

Georges here, lying around with his feet up, maybe strumming on that piano or the guitar. And maybe the party he met here ended up losing his head and, for some reason, killing him—then lugging him down there to the dock and setting about to fix the place so it looked like I said. Why would a person do that? Can you think of any reason?"

"Well, I think of one. Just one, matter of fact. Maybe the party that did it didn't want any attention focussed on this guest-house, no matter what. Maybe he was scared crazy that people would start poking around here, looking for clues or fingerprints or something. Of course this is all crazy theory."

"Crazy?" Jim Bristol said harshly. "I'll say it is!"

"But just for argument, let's go along with it. Let's say there's something around this house that a certain party is terrified will be stumbled on. Now, it'd have to be something pretty important, wouldn't it? Something pretty horrible, perhaps, eh Jim?"

His eyes were haggard.

"You ought to be able to make at least a guess what it could be, Jim," I urged. "You been caretaker here all along. Kind of funny at that, too, seeing as how the rich young waster that owns the place ran off with your stepdaughter. But at any rate, you ought to be able to make a guess."

"I don't know what you're talking about! You're off your head, Fred!"

I SAID, "No. I'm not, Jim. I'm awfully sharp, right at this moment, Jim. Not that it takes much sharpness, now that everything's fallen into line. Now that I see the original mistake that we all made."

"What?"

"Why, in thinking that Anne would be able to get along in the city by herself, after Noyes was through with her. She hadn't any brains to speak of; she was mostly a little native. Natives live by instinct—and once she was tossed out, her instinct would be to run home, no matter what had happened. Dumb, sure, but Anne was a dumb girl. Anyway, it's got to be that way. She couldn't stand up to the city; maybe she lost what money Noyes gave her and was desperate. But Anne must have decided to come crawling

back home, within a month or two of when she ran off. Then that makes everything that Carl Georges did logical."

"D-did Carl—?" the girl stammered.

"Yes. He must have met young Noyes in Chicago, probably with Anne. Carl wasn't a nice fellow, Rosemary. He was a pretty sneaky, unscrupulous dollar-hunter. The set-up between Anne and young Noyes would delight his soul. Especially when young Noyes went and got himself engaged to a ritzy Chicago girl.

"A clever shyster could make the story sound terrible—the rich young waster and the innocent girl. Anyway, Carl Georges saw the possibilities for a shakedown that would keep him in luxury the rest of his life. All he had to do was locate Anne.

"Here." I showed them the slip of paper. "Here's the record of the key point in his tracing of her. He found that she'd taken the 4:23 Chicago, Northwestern train out of Chicago on the 19th of August, two years ago, which was just about eight weeks after she left here. That train runs to the Soo, about thirty miles from here."

I expected a break then, but it didn't come. I finished grimly, "So imagine his surprise when he got to the Soo and found that the trail died. She got to the Soo but she never reached here—according to Jim's story.

"But Carl Georges was neither slow-witted nor clean-minded. He smelt something sour, and he quickly stuck his nose further into it. His original plan of lining up a squeeze on young Noyes had fizzled out, dead, finished, but the chase didn't leave him empty-handed. He suddenly realized that he'd wound up with something else, something entirely different. But it had possibilities even greater than his first scheme. He couldn't blackmail young Noyes under the circumstances, but—once he'd come down here and poked around, found confirmation of what he'd suspected—then, by the Lord Harry, he knew he could blackmail Jim here."

"Blackmail me?" Jim Bristol raged. "What would he get? My garden truck?"

"I'm beginning to suspect that you've been fudging us on this deal the Toronto men have offered you, Jim. Maybe your island isn't so damned bare of metal as you've insisted. Maybe it's really worth

important money—and maybe Carl Georges, while he was in the Soo, found that out, too. And maybe he figured out what must have happened when Anne tried to come home to a vicious-tempered gorilla like you."

Bristol's eyes were flaming and feverish. "What do you mean, Fred?"

"I mean I'm going to tear this shack to pieces, Jim. Maybe under this dust we'll find evidence that George had the floorboards up—that he found where Anne had got to in the end."

He sobbed, flung himself at me like a madman, his face twitching. I jumped aside hastily, whacked him alongside the forehead.

Blood ran down his face. He whirled like a wounded bear, hysterical sobs coming from his deep chest. He lunged at me and got me in his terrible big arms.

I gasped, "Leggo, Jim. I'll have to let you have—" and he squeezed the breath out of me in a moan.

I pulled the trigger of my gun against his stomach. The light blew out of his eyes. He fell away from me, both his shirt and mine burning from the explosion. He crashed down like a mountain log and lay there, while I beat out the fire on my shirt.

Rosemary screamed, ran and hid her face in her father's chest.

"He wasn't so dumb at that," I panted. "Fixing an alibi for himself on the phone with me. He probably put a little blasting powder floated on a board with a fuse, so it'd dump itself when it went off—to make it seem Georges was shot after Jim had got back home. . . ."

Oliver stared at me with haunted eyes. "But how did you guess all that? About Anne?"

"It wasn't guessing once I got started—once I realized somebody had been in this shack tonight."

"But it was my word against his! How'd you know somebody had been here?"

"Why, that's simple enough, Oliver. That guitar is in tune. Guitars don't stay in tune three days, let alone three years. Carl Georges must have been playing with it while he waited here. Come to think of it, maybe the wind carried a little touch of the sound across to the hotel, earlier, in a vague sort of way."

That was the way they were found—one twin dead and one unconscious. . . .



The murderer had to strike twice to silence both lovely twins!



● ●
Gripping

Murder

Mystery

By FREDERICK C.

DAVIS
● ●

THE DEADLY DOUBLE

CHAPTER ONE

The Lost Twin

WE KNEW so much, yet so little. We knew, for example, that if this girl was Sally, she was safe; but if she was Susan, her life was in danger. That is, her name was either Sally Chester or Susan Chester—but which? One of these two twin sisters was dead, a killer's victim, while the other twin sister remained alive, though in bad shape; and the all-important question was whether or not the living sister was the one who could identify the murderer.

It had me stopped in a homicide investigation that was getting wierder by the hour. That was why I was glad to see Thatcher turn up, even though nobody'd asked him to come.

It was late evening when decisive knuckles rapped on the door of this rambling house that sat amid rolling sand dunes, a hundred yards back from its private, crescent-shaped beach, on Cape Gale.

Charley Price was pacing about the vestibule when the knock sounded. A lanky,

sandy-haired guy with shrewd gray eyes, Price covered police for the *Courier*. So far I'd allowed him to print only the barest details concerning the murder. But he was impatient to splash the whole sensational thing all over the front page, and he'd been haunting the Chester place during the past twenty-four hours.

"I'm Professor Timothy Thatcher," I heard a voice at the door say when Price opened it. "May I see the officer in charge of the case?"

I was in the living room with Townsend Chester, the Chester twins' uncle. He was our superintendent of schools, and a progressive and efficient executive. Usually he was a jolly sort—but not tonight. Looking tragically stricken, he was up to his triple chin in trouble—and the murder was only part of it.

The knock on the door had interrupted the man talking earnestly with Mr. Chester—David Weldon, his lawyer. Weldon was thick-set, with dark, bushy eyebrows and a quietly dogged manner. He'd been discussing the delicate problem that lay at the root of the murder—blackmail. Mr. Chester was too distressed and preoccupied to answer the door when the knock came so David Weldon rose to go.

Hearing the voice at the door, Mr. Chester, grasping at a new hope, said quickly, "I know Timothy Thatcher, Lieutenant. Perhaps he'll be able to help. He's known the twins for years, and he's an associate professor of psychology."

As Weldon left I brought Timothy Thatcher in and shut the connecting door so Charley Price couldn't eavesdrop. I introduced myself—Carl Crocker, detective lieutenant in charge of the Homicide Squad. Thatcher explained that after having read the brief news stories he'd immediately left Northampton, Mass., with the thought that he might be of some aid.

He didn't look anything like a professor. He was young, tall and straight, and handsome as hell. When he turned his clear blue eyes on me I felt their force. While he talked with Townsend Chester, I decided he might be some help after all. It turned out he'd made a special study of the surviving sister's present peculiar affliction, amnesia.

"Tim," Mr. Chester said, "I'm completely at a loss. Tonight one of those two

lovely girls is lying in an undertaker's chapel with a murderer's bullet in her heart. The other is lying in a bed here, injured only a little physically, but mentally torn from the past. Try as I may, I can't tell—I don't know—"

"You don't know which of the sisters it is who's still alive?" Thatcher asked. "You don't know if it's Sally or Susan?"

Mr. Chester passed a trembling hand across his drawn face. "You see, Tim, death has caused slight changes in the face of the one, and severe shock has also slightly changed the face of the other. To save my soul, I can't decide which sister it is who's in that bedroom now. And she can't tell us that, either—not while her mind remains blacked out. But you, Tim—you must know of ways—"

As Mr. Chester broke off, I said, "Before we explain just what happened, you might try to get through the fog in her mind."

I started leading him to the bedroom but within two seconds he was leading me. At the door I stopped him.

"Professor, were you ever able—"

"Nobody except my students ever calls me professor. I'll probably be here for a while, so how about calling me Tim?"

"Okay, Tim. Were you ever able to tell one of those Chester sisters from the other?"

He shook his head. "Not without their help," he said. "Usually, of course, there are small differences between twins, but Sally and Susan were absolutely identical in every particular—looks, actions and thoughts. Their closest friends couldn't tell them apart until they began wearing their little gold pins, one with Sally's name engraved on it, the other with Susan's."

"Those pins are no help at all now," I said. "They weren't wearing them when this happened. Damn it, Tim! I must say this thing burns me up. I can't stand college girls. They're spoiled, headstrong and flighty. Instead of making themselves useful, they dash around to cocktail dances and hairdressers and football games and dinner dances and hat shops and supper dances. They think the world is their special playground."

TIM THATCHER'S wise eyes were saying silently, You're a young man, Lieutenant. It's surprising you feel like

that. Did one of them, at some time, hurt you?

Well, last year there was this girl named Neila, from Vassar, who spent the summer in town. She was the most exciting girl I'd ever seen. Every time I was with her, her high spirits, her friendly independence, hit me like a strong drink. Besides, she was class. Me, I've never had much schooling and I came up the hard way; but, intoxicated as I was, I made marvelous, dreamy plans. I had a diamond ring in my vest pocket the night an Army Air Corps pilot breezed into town. She knew him from 'way back. Waiting for him to get a furlough, she'd just been having herself an amusing time. She'd taken me for a summer-long ride.

Ah, well, this was none of Tim Thatcher's business and I had a right to feel pretty sour.

"They're too smart for their own good," I added, "too selfish to think of anything more important than their lacquered toenails, and they won't mind their own business."

"I don't share your opinion, Lieutenant," Tim answered. "In particular I've always considered the Chester twins to be pretty intelligent and level-headed."

"Is that so!" I came back indignantly. "Look at what happened here. One of them poked her pretty nose into a criminal matter which she should have left strictly alone. It cost one of them her life—which one we don't know yet—and it also knocked her sister's mind off its pins . . . or her own mind, as the case may be. Thanks to her, I've got the damndest, most ticklish murderer I've ever tackled. College girls! Lord save me from any more of 'em! They're too scatter-brained, too—"

The bedroom door opened. The man who appeared from inside was Dr. Thomas Enroot, Mr. Chester's physician. Dignified and solemn, he wore an impressive gray-brown Vandyke. He wagged his beard to signify he'd made no progress with his patient, shook hands with Timothy Thatcher when I introduced him, then hurried along to report to Townsend Chester.

"Well, try your best, Tim," I sighed. "So damned much depends on finding out which sister it is in there! The whole case depends on it—and perhaps her own life."

"Her own life?"

"The man who killed her sister is a blackmailer. He's desperate to keep himself covered. That girl in there may be the only one on earth who knows who he is. She *may* be. We know one of the twins found out, but we don't know whether or not it's the one in there. If she *is* the one—if she's Susan and not Sally—then the killer may make another attempt to shut her up. That's what I'm watching out for. I've got men guarding the house right now."

Tim Thatcher quietly opened the bedroom door.

The girl lay propped up on pillows. I had to admit she was lovely, even if she was a spoiled brat of a college girl. She was pressing her hands to the bandage wrapped over her honey-colored hair, as if trying hard to remember, and there was a faraway light in her brownish-green eyes even after she looked up at Professor Tim Thatcher.

He sat quietly beside her and said, "Hello. You remember me, don't you?"

She thought a minute. "No-o."

"Psychology class."

She shook her head.

"I taught it, and both you and your sister were students."

After thinking hard again, she came up with nothing but a perplexed smile.

Then he said a strange thing. "If you're Sally, there's a very special reason why you should remember me." Gently he closed his hand over hers. "Don't try to use your mind now. Let it go. Just *feel*." He was smiling. "Isn't there something you feel inside you?"

Another moment passed, an awkward one. Finally she murmured, "I'm sorry. I just feel—lost."

He sighed, then smiled reassuringly. "Don't worry about it. I'll help you to bring it all back. But don't try any more now. Just rest—sleep—and I'll see you again in the morning."

We left the room, having accomplished exactly nothing. The whole crazy mess looked hopeless. If it had been anybody except a twitter-pated college girl, I might have cracked the case by now. But as it was, we still didn't know whether or not this girl could identify the killer—or whether or not this same unknown killer would try to silence her exactly as he'd

already silenced her beautiful twin sister.

CHAPTER TWO

"He Has to Kill"

IN THE living room, Timothy Thatcher sat with Townsend Chester and me. The house was hushed. Charley Price, the police reporter, had left, saying he needed to get some sleep. And Dr. Enroot had gone. The cops I'd stationed around the house would be on guard all night. It was quiet and we could talk.

"Lieutenant Crocker," Mr. Chester said, "you may tell Tim the whole story. I'm sure he'll respect our confidence."

I began, "First you've got to understand that the two Chester twins didn't live here. Their home's in California. They came here from college in Northampton to visit their Uncle Townsend at the start of their summer vacation, before going back to the coast—their first visit here in twelve years. They'd only been here a few days and hadn't gone into town at all. That's important. Remember, practically nobody around here knew that Mr. Chester had twin nieces—or if they did know, they'd forgotten it. At any rate, the blackmailer was unaware of it."

"What about this blackmailer?" Tim asked.

"This is the part you've got to keep strictly under your haircut, Tim," I said. "Out in the southwest, many years ago, Townsend Chester served a prison term for larceny. He was young then. It was a reckless mistake. He served his term and never broke the law again. He came east, worked his way through college, studied hard and became a teacher. He advanced to being principal of the high school here and finally was appointed superintendent of schools. He's done a fine job.

"Even so, you can understand what would happen if the Board of Education should learn that he has a criminal record. An ex-convict can't be permitted to head a school system dedicated to the training of our young. He'd get kicked out. All this grand life he's built up over so many years would be wrecked. Well, all this will never become known if I can help it—but somebody found out. How, I don't know—but that was the basis on which

Mr. Chester has been bled for hush-money for years."

Tim gazed sympathetically at Townsend Chester. "Certainly I'll never repeat a word of this. You don't know who the blackmailer is?"

"He made his demands by phone, disguising his voice. He instructed Mr. Chester to wrap the money in newspaper, go to a certain corner in town at a certain very late hour of the night and drop the package in a trash receptacle. He always warned Mr. Chester never to wait around with the idea of spotting him in the act of picking up the money. Mr. Chester obeyed instructions. This went on for years, without Mr. Chester's ever having a sound suspicion as to who was bleeding him. And, living in fear, he said nothing to anybody about it."

Tim Thatcher's blue eyes were turning angry.

"It preyed on Mr. Chester's mind. Demands began to come more often. He was being bled unmercifully. Finally he couldn't stand it any longer—his secret dread, his secret impoverishment. The next time the blackmailer phoned, Mr. Chester had the guts to talk back. The blackmailer repeated his threats to expose him. It was a crisis, a showdown. And Susan Chester overheard Mr. Chester's end of that argument over the phone."

"You're sure, then, it was Susan who overheard, and not Sally?" asked the professor.

"We reconstruct it this way, Tim. When the blackmailer's call came, late at night, one of the twins had gone to bed and was asleep. The other sat up, reading a book. Half a minute after Mr. Chester left the house, to drive into town and leave the money, this second sister slipped out after him. Mr. Chester was gone, and she was just backing her own car out of the garage, when Mrs. Hodson, the cook, drove in. It was Mrs. Hodson's night off and she'd just come back from town. Seeing the twin in the car, she said, 'Why, where are you going, Sally—or is it Susan?' The girl answered, 'I'm Susan. Don't worry, I'll be right back.' Then she sped off."

"It must have been Susan who overheard the heated telephone conversation," Tim agreed, "and who went rushing off after Mr. Chester."

"Nobody but a willful, spoiled college girl would have stuck her nose into her uncle's personal affairs like that, but I give her a little credit. Since arriving with her sister two days before, she'd noticed how worried and worn he was. She felt sorry for him. If her Uncle Townsend couldn't save himself from the blackmailer, she thought, then she'd try her best to do it for him. Her intentions were good, you see, but what a stupid thing to do, rushing in like that! A smarty-pants college kid sticking out her pretty neck, just asking for murder!

"Mr. Chester drove into town, to the appointed corner, at the appointed time. He dropped the package of money into the trash basket and immediately turned back toward home. But not this bright little college girl! Oh, no! She had to play detective.

"Without knowing exactly what she did next, we can make a very good guess," I went on. "She probably parked her car out of sight around the corner. She slipped into a nearby doorway, a dark store. She watched that basket. The better part

of an hour must have passed, but she stuck. If the blackmailer took any precautions before approaching, he failed to see her until he was right there at the basket, taking the money out. Then— who knows exactly? Something drew his attention to her; he saw her. Right then and there murder was born—thanks to a college kid's dabbling in a deadly serious crime as if it were a lark!"

"I find her courage rather commendable, Lieutenant," Tim said quietly.

I snorted. "Maybe the blackmailer made a grab for her on the spot; we don't know. We do know she ran back to her car, plenty scared. He chased her—not knowing who she was, understand—just that she could put the finger on him as a blackmailer. She rushed right back here to his house."

This was the part that griped me the most.

"She hurried in here, still scared. Her uncle was asleep. So was her sister. Late as it was, and frightened as she was, she didn't say anything to anybody. Probably she intended to tell her uncle first thing in the morning. Seems to me her impulse

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was like a child's—to duck under the bed-covers and hide. Anyway, she pulled off her clothes and put on a nightgown.

"Now, up to this point I've been telling you what Susan did. From here on, we don't know which sister did what. All we know is what happened to them."

I PAUSED, then went on: "There must have been a noise at one of the windows. That was the blackmailer getting into the house. He was still after the girl he'd seen, still determined to shut her up to save his own skin. Well, one of the girls upstairs heard him. Which one, we don't know. Maybe it was Susan, still awake. Or maybe the noise aroused Sally. Whichever it was, she came to the head of the stairs and snapped on the light. The crook was at the base of the stairs. That was the end of his hunt—or so he thought then. He lifted his rifle—"

"His rifle?"

"A twenty-two automatic," I said. "An awkward weapon to use at close range, I know. On the other hand, you don't need a license for a rifle. Carrying an unloaded rifle around in your car is not illegal. The commonest civilian weapon on earth is a twenty-two rifle. Use it to commit a crime—and if you lose it, or have to abandon it, it'll be hard as hell to trace. Anyway, the blackmailer fired his rifle just once and the bullet got the girl at the top of the stairs—got her squarely in the heart."

Tim sat forward, listening intently.

"She came spilling down the stairs, already dead. The murderer thought to himself his job was done—she couldn't put the finger on him now. He unlatched the front door and stepped out on the porch, beginning to scam. Just then he got the jolt of his life. The gunshot had brought the second twin in a hurry to the top of the stairs. The murderer looked in and saw her staring down. Picture it, Tim!"

"He'd just shot a girl who was now lying at the bottom of the stairs, dead," Tim said quietly, "and yet she was suddenly back at the top of the stairs again—and alive!"

"Imagine his feelings!" I said. "He must have felt he'd gone crazy. Then the realization of the truth must have hit him—these two girls must be twins. That didn't help much. He'd killed one of them,

yes, but was the dead girl the one who'd spotted him? The girl he'd murdered might be the witness who could identify him—or, on the other hand, she might not be. How could he tell? He couldn't. He was panicky—and now there was only one way he could make sure. That was to shoot the second girl too.

"So he fired again. Remember, he was standing outside, on the porch steps. The second empty shell we found out there proves that. He could see her, but she couldn't see him. The bullet drilled at her out of the dark.

"It grazed the head of the second girl now standing at the top of the stairs. She fell, bumping her head on the steps as she stumbled. One violent physical shock added to another. She spilled to a stop right beside her dead sister. The murderer must've thought he'd killed her too. Anyway, both Mr. Chester and Mrs. Hodson were out of their beds now, calling to the twins, wanting to know what had happened. Then the killer did scam—without leaving a single trace to indicate his identity.

"That's the way the two girls were found, Tim. One twin dead and one twin unconscious, both lying at the base of the stairs, both wearing identical nightgowns. Since then the surviving sister hasn't been able to remember anything at all. She can't tell us whether her own name is Susan or Sally. We don't know, so far, whether the killer actually succeeded in silencing the witness who was able to identify him, or whether he killed the wrong girl. But one thing I'm sure of, above everything else—he still wants to find out which is true."

"Sooner or later," Tim said, "the surviving sister's memory will come back to her—and then, if it's Susan who's still alive, she'll be able to identify him."

"That's it. If it's Sally who's still alive, she won't know from nothing. But, Tim—this killer can't take chances. He knows it's a fifty-fifty toss-up that he'll be sunk the minute the girl in that bedroom regains her memory. It's too big a risk to run. His own life's at stake now. He's looking for another opening, another chance to kill. That's why I've got this house guarded, because if he finds his chance—"

The interruption electrified us. It was a scream—a shriek of terror in the room

where the blank-minded girl lay alone—followed by a glassy crash.

CHAPTER THREE

Sniper's Paradise

AS I ran along the hall to the twin's room, Tim Thatcher passed me and pushed in. The room was black. Somewhere in the darkness the girl sobbed.

Tim snapped the wall-switch and we found her on the floor beside the bed, tangled up in a sheet, her eyes full of fear. A table lamp lay beside her, smashed. Across the room a window stood open, its blinds flapping in the warm sea-breeze.

While Townsend Chester helped Tim to get the girl back into bed, I stuck my head out the window and yelled at the guards. Two of them were skirting about the lawn, looking startled and confused, their revolvers drawn. Obviously they hadn't even seen the prowler who'd sneaked in through the night. I roared, "Find that guy!" and they loped off aimlessly. Two other cops, who'd been stationed at other points on the property, also scurried into the general search.

"She's not hurt." Tim came to me with the details. "She heard a noise at the window. It was already halfway open, and she saw a man's head and shoulders. He had a handkerchief tied over his face. She screamed, slammed the lamp over and dove out of bed in the dark."

"Can't she give me a better picture than that of him?" I snapped. "The dizzy college kid! Keep an eye on her."

I ran outside and prodded the guards into a deeper search. A fine chance we stood! The whole shore was blacker than hell's cellar. The nearest houses on both sides stood half a mile away. In between lay rolling dunes overgrown in patches with rank grass and rushes. The men's flashlights beaming off across the hummocks created baffling shadows that lured them into one wild goose chase after another. We could hunt around out there all night, with ten times as many men, and still find nothing but grass, sand, and a steady inshore wind.

Finally I posted two men right outside the girl's window, and the others close around the house, and went in. After mak-

ing sure that she couldn't tell us anything more, we got her to swallow a sleeping tablet. When her eyelids drooped we left her. She seemed reasonably safe now, but it still burned me up to think the killer had managed to sneak in on her and then dodge away untouched.

"He'll try again," I said, feeling a chill in my bones. "He's desperate and I'm damned sure he'll try it again. Isn't she able to remember anything yet?"

Tim Thatcher frowned. "Not yet—and she still doesn't *feel* anything toward me, either. There was a reason why I tried to get that sort of response from her, Lieutenant. You see—though Susan was still fancy free—Sally and I were engaged."

I stared at him. Then I said hesitantly, "That girl in there's not wearing a ring. If you—"

"I hadn't given her one yet, Lieutenant," Tim cut in. "It was coming soon." His voice broke. "It's a hellish sort of uncertainty—not knowing whether it's my fiancée lying in there with her memory gone—or whether it's my fiancée who's lying dead in the undertaker's chapel in town!"

* * *

Late next evening we still didn't know. Tim Thatcher had spent most of the day probing into the darkness of the girl's mind without finding a single revealing gleam. Dr. Enroot had come and gone. Now, not being physically disabled, the girl was out of bed and moving about her room.

Charley Price, the reporter, disgusted after waiting another whole day without news, had left for town to find himself a late dinner.

While Mr. Chester talked with his niece, I said to Tim, "It's got to be somebody in town or nearby, somebody who's familiar with the situation here, in some way, because otherwise he wouldn't have known which window to go to last night. Who could have found out about Mr. Chester? Well, for example, take a newspaper reporter, like Charley Price, who knows how to dig for facts. He might have stumbled on it in the news files—and reporters don't make much money."

In an obscure way, Tim's mind was busy. "Or take Dr. Enroot, even. Mr. Chester had to have an operation about a year ago. His medical history goes way back of

course, and overlaps the period when he was a convict. In checking his previous medical history, Dr. Enroot might have come across that hidden chapter. Then too, people under the influence of ether sometimes blurt out things they'd never mention otherwise. Dr. Enroot has a good practise, but any man's capable of craving a lot more money than he's already making, particularly if he can get it just by asking."

"In the same way," Tim said, "an attorney like David Weldon often has to search through old court records and judicial decisions."

"It might be one of those three," I agreed. "Or it might be anybody else. There's just one thing I'm sure of about this murderer, and I can't forget it for a minute—he's desperate enough to kill again. I wish to heaven that girl would screw a new fuse into her mind! Our only chance is the fifty-fifty possibility that she'll turn out to be Susan. If she's Sally—well, I hope she is for your sake, Tim. But, damn it all, that would mean we're practically licked!"

JUST then Mr. Chester appeared with the girl on his arm. She'd put on a bright cardigan, a short plaid skirt, saddle oxfords and bobby socks. Though I still disliked her, I had to admit she looked as cute as a bunny, even with the bandages still wrapped around her head and that seeking, faraway look in her eyes.

"It'll be all right if I take my niece for a short walk, won't it, Lieutenant?" Mr. Chester asked. "She feels that the fresh air and a little mild exercise might help to clear her mind."

"Go out there? Good Lord, Mr. Chester, you must realize—"

"It's very dark and we'll be well guarded. I'm sure we'll be safe enough. Since my niece suggested it, I feel—"

Against my better judgment, but on the off chance that it might help, I said, "All right, but I'm going with you."

First I circled out, warning the guards to keep an extra sharp eye out. Tim came along as we moved toward the beach, my hand on my gun in my pocket. I knew in my bones I shouldn't allow this—something was too damned likely to happen—but we picked our way down to the smooth wave-washed sand, the girl clinging to her uncle's

arm. He had a flashlight which he blinked on for only a second or two at a time.

"That's right," I said uneasily. "Don't use that light too much."

My nerves snapped tight when the girl stumbled. She stayed on her feet though, and Mr. Chester touched the flashlight button again in order to see what her toes had hit. It was one of a couple of logs left on the beach by the receding tide. Tim helped her around it.

"Please put that light out!" I snapped. "You're making yourself a target."

Then it came.

It was a single, spitting report—the crack of a rifle. From somewhere among the rolling dunes, or from somewhere along the smooth stretch of beach, it spoke. I didn't see the flash. Suddenly Mr. Chester pitched forward and the girl sprawled beside him.

Tim blurted, "Stay down!"

I didn't know which one was hit until Mr. Chester moaned.

Not even waiting to see whether he was dying, I sprinted toward the house. While my legs pumped, I yelled at the guards. "Scatter out! Find that guy with the rifle! Head him back from the road! Get the guy with the rifle—find him!"

Inside the house, I grabbed up the telephone. In twenty seconds I had the telegraph bureau at headquarters.

"Flash the prowls cars stationed in Cape Road! Order 'em to stop all cars leaving the vicinity of the Chester home. Search every car and everybody, and to hell with their constitutional rights! They're also to grab everybody on foot. There's a killer on the cape and if he's trying to sneak out I want him stopped cold. Tell 'em to look for a rifle, a weapon of murder!"

Ducking out again, I found my guards scouting around the dunes with their flashlights slashing through the night. The way they scattered, helter-skelter, told me they hadn't actually seen the rifle flash either. The gun might have been fired from either side of the house, from any direction. This stretch of beach was a mile long and the dunes behind it were more than half a mile deep. There were patches of reeds, countless hummocks, innumerable hollows, and the darkness was baffling.

On the beach a flashlight gleamed steadily, lying where it had fallen. Mr. Chester

was back on his feet. I heard him gasping, "I can make it alone, Tim. Take care of her."

He was trudging up the slope panting hard. A quick look told me the bullet had smacked into his shoulder, and he was hugging his useless right arm. The bullet hadn't been meant for him, of course, but for Miss Chester. I thanked heaven it was no worse than that—but what had happened to the girl?

Tim was carrying her in his arms. She was limp all over—unconscious.

"Hurt bad?"

Hurrying her along, Tim answered, "No."

So, I thought, she'd fainted. That would be just like a college girl too big for her panties—who could ask for plenty of trouble but, when it came, couldn't take it.

"She struck her head on a log when Mr. Chester pulled her down," Tim explained, trudging hard. "It knocked her out."

"Oh," I said grimly.

Tim hustled her into the house and got her into one bed while I steered Mr. Chester into another. Then I phoned Dr. Enroot's home. He wasn't there, I was told—he'd gone out on an emergency case, but they'd try to reach him. Not there? While I worked to stop the bleeding of Mr. Chester's wound, and while Tim fussed over the unconscious girl, that news kept buzzing in my mind.

WHILE we were still waiting for Dr. Enroot, a commotion sent me hustling to the front door. I found one of my guards, a cop named Egers, doggedly holding onto the collar of David Weldon, Mr. Chester's attorney. Mr. Weldon was red-faced and indignant.

"This guy was drivin' in over the private road, big as life," Egers puffed, "and when I started to search him he begun talkin' big about warrants."

Weldon, I reflected, must have been in between the two prowler cars when they received my radio flash.

Without being asked, he began explaining. He'd been to see the district attorney, and he'd come to tell Mr. Chester that they'd agreed on some legal maneuver or other which would permit them to prosecute the killer without revealing Mr. Chester's private affairs to the public. That was

fine, I decided—provided the killer ever got nabbed.

"Any rifle?" I asked Egers.

"No rifle."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Weldon, but if you want to see Mr. Chester you'll have to wait. . . . Get the hell back on the job, Egers."

Five minutes later I was again brought to the front door by loud voices. This time it was one of the prowler patrolmen, who had a handcuff around one of Charley Price's wrists. The reporter muttered curses under his breath while the patrolman explained that they'd spotted Price prowling along Cape Road on foot.

"Prowling, hell," Price retorted. "I was simply walking in. On the way back from dinner I ran out of gas about a mile from here. I showed this dumb cluck my car and proved to him the tank's dry. What the hell is this all about? Call him off, will you?"

"Any rifle?" I asked the patrolman.

"No rifle."

"Let him go. You can come in, Charley, but the lid's clamped on this case tighter than ever now, understand?"

The third to arrive was Dr. Enroot, with a prowler-car escort. His ruffled look meant he'd also been searched. I didn't need to ask whether a rifle had been found. Obviously the answer was no. When I sent the prowler car back, Dr. Enroot was already busily attending Mr. Chester.

I heard whispers buzzing in the next room. The girl had recovered consciousness and Tim Thatcher was doing most of the whispering.

"Well?" I asked hopefully, going in. "Has her memory improved any?"

Tim shook his head.

My nerves at a tight pitch, I trudged outside. The girl's continued amnesia was galling enough, but the way the killer had twice slipped past my men was even more unnerving.

This setup really made it impossible. Though he'd managed to dodge my guards, unseen on the night-covered dunes, the scope of his maneuvers was limited. Cape Road ran parallel to the shore, half a mile inland, and on the other side of it, stretching along for miles, were salt marshes—a broad morass of water, jungle-thick grass and quicksand that nobody could cross. As for the beach itself, in both directions the

sand ended at high, craggy cliffs which were definitely not climbable, particularly in pitch darkness.

The escaping killer simply *had* to retreat to the road, where I'd had two prowler cars posted at strategic points. He certainly couldn't remain trapped between the road and the sea, and yet there was no way he could get out undetected.

Except possibly one.

That one possibility must be the answer. The killer had been stopped and searched; then he'd been allowed to pass simply because he didn't possess an incriminating rifle. If this was true, then the rifle itself must be hidden somewhere in the black expanse of sand.

Hidden at some spot where—if the chance came again—he could get hold of it once more!

CHAPTER FOUR

Challenge to a Killer

IT WAS evening again when, finally worn out and overloaded with disgust, I had to call off the search. All day I'd had my men—every man I could possibly assign to the job—probing into the beach. Somewhere in that stretch of sand the murderer's rifle must be buried—but where? That was the question buzzing in my mind hour after hour, like a gadfly. Where?

There was more than a square mile of smooth beach topped by undulating dunes. In the first place it was useless to look for any disturbances on the surface. My guards had been tramping around there all night, fruitlessly, leaving countless footprints. The steady inshore wind caused the sand to drift into smooth new hummocks, erasing the footprints and any other mark that might have been there before.

If the rifle had been buried on the beach itself, the surge of the tide and the constant washing of the waves had made that spot flat and indistinguishable from a million others. The only thing in the world we could do, lacking a steam shovel or some tricky magnetic device, was to poke and dig, poke and dig. An army couldn't have covered that beach more thoroughly, except by screening the whole beach and carrying it away by the truckload. When I finished,

worn out, I was still morally sure the rifle was there somewhere—but we hadn't found it.

This uncanny certainty that the desperate killer hadn't finished trying rankled in my mind, but even worse was the baffling frustration I felt because the girl was still answering my questions with, "I can't remember."

When darkness fell, my nerves drew tighter. The place was again under guard. The road was again posted. But in spite of all my precautions I felt more and more that something terrible was going to happen. My anxiety wasn't helped by hearing Tim Thatcher in the girl's room, their whispers buzzing and buzzing. When, finally, he came out, I cornered him.

"Still nothing, Tim?"

He was silent.

"Is she really trying? Doesn't she realize the spot she's in? If she's Sally, then we'll broadcast the news and the killer will know he got the right girl the first time. It'll leave my case hanging in mid-air—I'll probably never solve it then, Lord help me—but at least she'll be safe."

"She's aware of that, of course, but—"

"Well, it can't go on like this. We've got to get her out of here—take her to a place where nobody'll have a chance of getting at her."

"I've a still better idea, Lieutenant," Tim answered, "but first I've got to get Dr. Enroot's okay."

I listened while he called the physician on the phone.

"I'm confident I can solve this problem, Doctor," he said, "by taking Miss Chester back to a familiar point in time *prior* to the murder of her sister and gradually rebuilding her memory from there, step by step. That is, she came to Cape Gale from college, so I'll take her back to Northampton. I'll show her her old classrooms, her own dormitory, everything she's known best.

"We'll repeat her preparations for leaving for the summer; we'll drive back exactly the way she drove before, and so on. In this way, by re-enacting every incident leading up to the night of the shooting here, I'm certain we'll gradually get at the hidden truth. The first question is, do you feel she's well enough to travel?"

"I think she is," I heard Dr. Enroot answer. "It strikes me as an excellent course

of treatment. When do you expect to leave?"

"Tonight," Tim said, "at ten o'clock."

As soon as he hung up I asserted, "I'm going with you."

"Sorry, Lieutenant. My whole purpose is to re-create a normal, familiar picture of her old self in her mind. A police officer was never a part of it. You'd spoil the effect. Don't worry about it, though. The murderer won't dare trail us. His very absence from these parts would give him away."

I wasn't too sure. I kept mulling it over while Tim told Mr. Chester of his plans. Mr. Chester lay in bed, his shoulder encased in a plaster cast. David Weldon was there again, and they'd been discussing matters. Both of them approved of Tim's plan. Tim wound up by saying, "We're all set, then. We'll leave here at ten-thirty."

Before I could ask him why he'd changed the time of their departure, he was out of the room and bumping into Charley Price, who was still hanging around hoping to get permission to print the whole story. Tim explained to him patiently that this new move couldn't be published either. It was far too important, Tim said, but he might have the big break for Price when he came back, after maybe two or three days. Meanwhile, please excuse him, because he had to get ready to leave in the girl's car at eleven o'clock.

Wondering why Tim kept changing his mind about when they'd go, I paced around downstairs while he and the girl packed. I didn't like this one damned bit. It was too risky. I felt things building up to the bursting point.

AFTER Price left, and Weldon too, the house grew still and my feeling of imminent disaster grew stronger. I was responsible for this dizzy college girl's safety, and if she should happen to get herself killed, there'd be hell to pay. My nerves were jumping when, finally, Tim and the girl came into the vestibule with their bags.

It was a few minutes before ten. He'd changed his mind again. He looked grimly eager, but the girl was pale and tense, scared. It was just like her, I thought, to be afraid of what she might remember.

"I'll bring your car," Tim said quickly.

"You stay right here, Miss Chester," I

said, "until you can hop right into it. I'm not taking any chances. I'm going to see you off safely if it's the last thing I ever do."

She waited while Tim hurried out. Presently a motor hummed up and Tim stopped the girl's car at the walk leading to the porch steps. To me the distance from here to there looked dangerously far. The porch was wide, there were twenty steps, then about fifty feet of walk. She'd be out in the open plenty long enough for a marksman hidden in the darkness to draw a murderous bead on her. Tim had her bags and was about to lead her out when I snapped, "Hold it!"

Going out first, I called three men over. We gathered in a group on the porch. When the girl emerged we formed a ring around her. Our bodies gave her some protection but not enough to reassure me. I held my breath. With every step I expected to hear the crack of a rifle, to feel a bullet whizz between us, to see the girl fall.

That porch seemed as wide as the board walk at Atlantic City. The steps went down and down endlessly. The walk stretched off to an interminable length. Finally we reached the car. The girl slipped in, Tim took the wheel, and snapped on the dimmed headlights. I drew a deep breath of relief.

"All right, Miss Chester, now you stay 'way down in that seat," I ordered. Then I gazed at Tim. "You're all set. Well, why don't you get going?"

He was gazing with uncertain concern at Miss Chester.

"I—I really don't feel very well," she murmured. "Could I—well, just rest a little while first?"

"Of course," Tim said. "We'll wait until you're all right."

Good Lord! After having gotten her safely out here, she had to go back! We had to run that risk all over again because this delicate, tender-skinned, spoiled brat didn't feel exactly tip-top. I gritted my teeth and took it.

Back we went—along the walk, up the steps, across the porch to the door—and at every step I died a separate death myself. But I got her into the house again and she was still alive.

She lay down and after a short while she reappeared, saying she guessed she could make it now. It was then that a sus-

picion began crawling around in my mind like a mouse inside a cage. She was all set again, and now it was just ten-thirty. I thought I knew what that meant, and the mere idea of it froze my blood.

Still, I didn't say anything. At whatever time this girl might step outside that door she'd run a deadly risk, but the sooner she got away from here the better I'd like it. So, I clenched my jaw and we started again—that unending, unnerving traverse to the car.

I held myself in while we crossed the porch, the girl again surrounded by the five of us men. I hardly dared breathe while we descended those steps. The whole length of the walk I felt like I was treading on live coals. But finally, again, we got her into the car without having heard the murderous crack of a rifle. Tim slid under the wheel again, switched on the headlights again, and again I drew an easier breath.

"Tim," the girl said suddenly, her hand slipping to his arm, "I—I want to back out. I don't want to go. At least, not to-night. It frightens me, all this blackness all around us. Couldn't we wait at least until daylight?"

Tim said sympathetically, "I don't want to upset you. That would be the worst thing. If you prefer to go in the morning instead, we'll wait."

I ground my teeth together. We'd needed to venture into the open only once, but already we'd done it three times and now the fourth trip was coming up! I had plenty of supercharged opinions to voice on the subject of a college brat's whims, and it took all my will-power to keep myself from bursting my buttons. After all, I thought, daylight would be safer.

This time, though, I didn't allow her to dawdle. I grabbed her arm and hustled her back—along the walk, up the steps, across the porch and into the house—as fast as her little feet could catch up with themselves. Then I slammed the door and glowered at Tim.

"All right! That's all for tonight. Get a good night's rest, Miss Chester!"

SHE went into her room and Tim sat silent. I watched him intently, knowing in my heart exactly what was up. My worst suspicions were confirmed when, quietly, Miss Chester appeared in the doorway still

dressed. It was just half an hour later—a minute or two before eleven o'clock.

"It was perfectly silly of me to be scared of the dark, Tim," she said. "I'm all over it now. We don't need to wait any longer, really. Let's go."

"No you don't," I said, and I got up. "No, you don't! I know what you're up to—and you're crazy, both of you. I'm damned if I'll let you try it again!"

"Why," the girl said, "whatever do you mean?"

"Tim," I said, ignoring her, "you've let everyone connected with this place know you're confident that when you bring this girl back her memory will be restored. In other words, tonight is the last chance the killer will have to silence her. You told Dr. Enroot you'd leave at ten, and that was part of a plan you'd cooked up. Then you told Mr. Weldon you'd leave at ten-thirty. You next told Charley Price you'd leave at eleven. They're our three chief suspects, and you've deliberately made a living target of this girl!"

I gave Tim no chance to talk back.

"You went out first at ten, and if a shot had been fired at her then you'd have automatically known Dr. Enroot had fired it. Next you went out at ten-thirty, and if a shot had been fired at her then you'd have been sure it was David Weldon. Now you think you're going out again at a time when, if a shot should be fired at her, you'll know it's Charley Price. If no shot is fired at her this time either, you'll know it's none of those three, but somebody else. Well, no shot's going to be fired. I'm responsible for this young woman's safety while she's here, and you're not going out again tonight!"

"Lieutenant," Tim said gravely, "I'd advise you not to interfere. At this moment Miss Chester's mind is very finely balanced between an abnormal state and a normal one. Any small upset, any minor shock, might cause a very serious relapse. The normal condition is trying now to return, and if it's frustrated, turned back on itself—well, if I were in your place, I wouldn't want to shoulder that responsibility. Your ill-advised attitude may cause your case to remain unsolved forever, and, what's much worse, it might cause Miss Chester's amnesia to become permanent."

"Besides," the girl added willfully, "nobody else is responsible for me—neither

you nor Tim. I'm responsible for myself, and I'm *going*."

It was a stern, professional shake of Tim's head that really put the damper on me. I could arrest this girl as a material witness and hold her, but I decided against it. Not understanding these special points of psychology, I didn't dare to run the chance. I had to take his word for it. Besides, being so full of confusion, I was no longer sure that my accusation was well-founded. In the last analysis, the most important thing was to get this girl to a safer place and bring her memory back.

"Let's go," I said, "and this time you *do* go."

I called the three cops back.

The blood pounded in my ears as we crossed the porch. I growled to Tim and the three cops to stick close to the girl as we went down the steps. It was impossible to cover her completely, but we gave her barely enough room to move her feet while we went along that walk. I kept thinking, "The very last time!"

These tactics of mine weren't, of course, fool-proof. One shot could drop a cop and, before anyone else could do much about it, a second quick shot could reach the girl.

Now we were close to the car. Tim hurried around to the opposite side, slid in and snapped on the headlights. The rest of us shifted a little around the girl.

AT-FIRST I wasn't sure I'd heard it. I'd been expecting it so intensely, I might have imagined it. Then, staring over the girl's head, I couldn't doubt it. There'd been a thin, vicious cracking sound somewhere in the night, then a sharp smack directly in front of me—and there, in the car's top, just above the door and not an inch from the girl's head, was a bullet hole!

"Price!" I yelled. "It's Price!"

I dove down, carrying the girl with me. The cops skirmished out. Up again, my gun in my hand, I ran at a crouch. A glance backward told me the girl was out of sight. Ahead spread the dunes, an utterly black desert. From scattered points inshore flashlights appeared. Their beams cut the darkness, criss-crossing. Then, from an unpredictable direction, came another dart of flame.

The rifle had spat again. The man with the rifle was trying to dodge out. Four service guns barked a challenge. Several of my men had managed to place the killer between themselves and the headlight glare of the girl's car. We were closing in. Two more rifle shots brought another fusillade from my men's guns—and that was the end of the shooting.

Hemming him in, we found Charley Price squirming in a deep hollow between several hummocks, still gripping the rifle, bleeding from both legs.

I went trudging back in a cold fury. The bullet-marked car still stood at the head of the walk, empty. Tim had hustled the girl inside. Slamming in, I found them in the living room. The girl was sobbing. She had her arms around Tim's neck, and she was babbling out sounds that didn't make words. Scared silly, I saw. But she wasn't half as scared as I was mad.

"I was right! That *was* your plan! You laid a trap for the killer with this girl as bait!"

Tim looked up, grinning. "It worked," he said. "But I can't take credit for it, Lieutenant. It was Sally's idea."

"Sally's!" I stared at the girl. "You mean her memory's come back?"

"It came back last night, after she fell and hit her head on the log," Tim explained. "Her mind has been perfectly clear ever since then. She insisted on this thing, Lieutenant, so I had to see it through with her."

"Sally!" I repeated, still staring at the girl, who was smiling now through her tears. "Sally, the twin who *didn't* know! The killer got the right girl the first time! All you had to do was say so, and you'd have been perfectly safe! The killer would never have needed to make another move. But no! You had to keep your mouth shut. You deliberately and unnecessarily egged a murderer into taking a crack at you. You've solved my case for me, but great grief! Nobody but a spoiled, willful, dizzy college girl would have pulled off a stunt like that!"

I slumped into a chair, overwhelmed.

"Nobody but a spoiled, willful, dizzy college girl," I repeated—"with a head on her shoulders and plenty of courage. Lord, Tim, you're a lucky guy!"

THE END



By **CORETTA
SLAVSKA**

"I—just found my wife in the bathtub. . . ."

RELAX AND REGRET

Millie couldn't begin to compete with delectable Doris.

For Millie couldn't even stay alive. . . .

FROM where he stood in the darkened living room, he could hear the steady drip, drip of the water from the bathtub. He had turned the faucet off tightly, but the overflow from the tub, now going slowly down the drain, was still dripping on the tile floor.

He found himself counting the drops; they fell with monotonous precision like

minutes ticked away on a clock. He turned hastily and switched on a lamp, and reached for the telephone on the end table.

He would call the cops now. Millie was lying dead on the bathroom floor, her limp body next to the book he had hastily picked up from the bookcase and thrown beside her. That would be the book she had been reading while in the tub. It would be a

good touch, to prove that Millie was reading. Not that it was necessary. He had everything worked out perfectly.

But his fingers shook as he dialed the number of the local police station.

"Hello—hello! This is Dan Black at Fresh Meadow Road. I—just found my wife in the bathtub. She's—dead! Drowned! I'm phoning our doctor now, but. . . . You'll be right over? Thanks—thanks!"

He hung up, then dialed Dr. McCune. This time was a little easier. His voice hadn't been exactly steady, but that was all right, considering the shock he was supposed to have received.

He wiped the sweat from his forehead. This part was harder than he had anticipated—this phoning, this talking about Millie.

The other part had gone according to plan. He had come in from the shack after painting there all day and evening, except for a light supper with Millie. He had found her in the tub, as he expected, submerged in the warm water, only her gray, curly hair showing. She had left the hot water faucet on, as she usually did, so there was a slight flow in the tub while she bathed.

He was somehow glad she had the warmth of the water as she lay there. It wasn't easy to think of Millie being dead. Middle-aged though she was, she had unusually bright eyes and a soft mouth that suggested warmth. It was almost too bad he'd had to kill her.

There hadn't been any other way out. She was such a stickler for doing the right thing, so intolerant of other people's weakness. She stood for all the things he had rebelled against all his life. He had been orphaned at three, and since his teens had bummed around the country doing odd jobs, going where he pleased, taking orders from nobody. Then one day he found his way to New York State—to the village of Upton, and to Millie's house.

It looked like a soft spot, this isolated red-brick house at the corner of a dead-end street, and the woman who answered the door bell looked soft, too. Small, gray-haired, friendly, she was obviously very lonely.

He was selling cook books, and she said she would buy one. Then, not liking to see him stand out in the rain that was

starting up, she asked him to come inside.

She was a widow, she told him, as they sat down at the kitchen table and she poured him a cup of coffee.

"I'm alone in the world, too," he said, and grinned.

But she had been serious about it. "It's not good to be alone," she sighed.

She was easy to talk to, childishly eager for friendship. He felt a bell ring in his head. This was it; this was what he had been waiting for. A rich widow, someone who wanted a man around the house again. They all did, of course, but this lady looked like she wouldn't be ashamed to admit it.

Funny thing, his beginning and end with Millie was over coffee. The last time he saw her alive was when they were having coffee tonight at supper.

The thought brought him up sharp, and he nervously eased out of the living room onto the front porch, to wait for the police. But he really had nothing to worry about. . . .

HE HAD been married to Millie for a year. First she had taken him on as a hired man and he'd lived in the shack behind the house. Then one night she let it drop that folks in the neighborhood were talking about his staying there, with her being a widow. He leaped at the hint, but hid his eagerness from her. He let her worry over his reaction for a week. And then one night he kissed her. A week later they were married.

He still spent much time in the shack, whenever he could get away from Millie. The days passed by quietly, and he found himself getting restless. He'd always liked to draw, and now he decided, mostly out of desperation, to take up painting. He bought a few pamphlets and books on art, and a paint set. Millie sniffed at his hobby. Sometimes they even quarreled about it.

Then he found another hobby—a much more intriguing one. Doris, a waitress at the village tearoom.

Doris liked him too. Once she ran her slim fingers through his soft, black hair and said, "You're too good-looking to be tied to an old lady."

He had told Doris nothing of his plans. But that very night he decided he had to get rid of Millie.

It was ridiculously easy. Everyone in

town knew Millie had a weak heart. Dr. McCune had often warned her against taking long, hot baths at night, fearing she might fall asleep in the tub. But of course Millie paid no attention. She liked to lie in a steaming tub and relax.

So it was really the doctor and Millie herself who'd provided the idea.

He thought again of how Millie had looked when he'd found her in the tub. He had picked her out of it easily enough and laid her on the tiled floor. He flung her wet arm over the book he put next to her. Then he fled the room, sweating with fear.

He was still sweating! He leaned against the wall, feeling weak.

Doris! Her slim body came before him as he stood on the porch, and he almost smelled the perfume she used. To kiss her, to hold her in his arms . . .

Suddenly he hated her. Damn her! She had gotten into his blood like a virus, destroying his ability to think calmly and sensibly. He wanted Doris as he'd never wanted anything before. And the only answer was—marriage.

Doris was determined to become Mrs. Dan Black—and she wasn't above doing a bit of teasing. The teasing had messed up his life. Here he was at thirty-eight, married to a rich widow, and he had to fall for a dame who spelled trouble!

The hitch was, he had to have Millie's money. Without it, Doris was an unobtainable dream. Even worse, Millie had become suspicious. She hadn't said much, but Dan knew he had to watch his step.

Well, it was over now: the waiting, the hopeless longing for Doris. It was over because Millie was dead now, lying in a pool of water on the bathroom floor.

Dan relaxed a little, then, and when the police car pulled up in the driveway, he lit a cigarette and saw that his hand was steady.

A detective stepped out of the car. "I'm Berger," he said. "What's wrong here?"

Dan cleared his throat. "In the bathroom—my wife. I found her drowned in the bathtub. I'd been painting in the shack—the one behind the house—and . . ."

"Yeah, I know the shack."

Berger followed him into the house. Once in the living room, Dan felt his fear returning. "She's in there," he said, point-

ing to the bathroom. "Excuse me—I need a drink!"

"Go ahead," said Berger. "You look done in." He closed the bathroom door behind him.

DAN waited, his heart pounding. What could Berger be doing in there so long? The seconds dragged, and then he heard Berger come out.

"Sure got herself drowned," Berger said slowly. "Too bad; she was a nice woman. We all were happy about her marriage with you. She needed a man around the house. And you two never seemed to quarrel. Or did you?"

Dan had expected that one. "No," he said. "Oh, we had our little arguments, like every couple. Nothing serious—mostly about my painting, in fact. She thought it a childish hobby."

Berger nodded. Dan wished he could read behind the detective's calm expression. "Yeah, lots of people take up painting. But Millie—of course Millie never would."

"Not on your life! She even disliked anything connected with art—crayons, paints, books—anything. Otherwise, we got along fine. I knew of her bad heart. I did almost everything around here for her, so she wouldn't have to strain her heart."

The front door opened. Dr. McCune came in, his kindly face wreathed in a frown. He had liked Millie.

He put his hand on Dan's shoulder. "Terrible thing, Dan. I still can't believe it!"

Berger pointed to the bathroom. "Looks like her lungs are full of water," he said. "Dan picked her out of the tub and laid her on the floor."

Dan backed against the buffet, watching Dr. McCune and Berger go into the bathroom. Everything is going to be okay, he told himself, and he poured another glass of whiskey. It didn't help much.

He waited some more. Then he walked slowly to the bathroom. He had to know, had to see what was going on in there.

He opened the door. Dr. McCune was drying his hands on a towel.

"We'll be wanting to talk to you, Dan," said the doctor. "You'd better go back to the living room."

Dan walked slowly into the living room and sank into a chair.

The doctor stepped in front of him. His kindly eyes looked very stern.

"I want to say something to you," he said softly. "I'm an old friend of Millie's—and one of the things she feared most was having an autopsy done on her body. Don't make us do it to her now."

Dan got up. He felt dazed, sick. They couldn't really suspect him!

"What are you talking about?" he asked shakily. "I don't understand."

"Yes, you do, Dan. You gave her something to make her fall asleep in the tub. What was it?"

"Nothing—nothing!" Dan swallowed hard. "She just fell asleep, like you always warned. . . ."

Dr. McCune shook his head, smiling grimly. "Did you feel that water, Dan? It's still plenty hot, even now. And contrary to popular belief, a steaming hot bath isn't relaxing! It's stimulating, in fact—makes the heart action rise and dilates the blood vessels near the skin. I didn't approve of long hot baths for Millie, but I never really worried about her falling asleep!"

Dan felt sick. He tried desperately to get control of himself, to think of something to say. But Berger had had enough of the doctor's gentle methods. He seized Dan's arm and propelled him toward the bathroom.

"If that doesn't make you confess," he said, "maybe the book in here will. You mean to say it was the one Millie was reading?"

Dan's steps slowed in confusion. Desperately, he tried to think back. He had only glanced at the book when he put it beside Millie. But he was sure he hadn't—oh, he *couldn't* have given her a book on art!

Then Berger picked up the book—and Dan saw with tremendous relief that it was a detective story.

But his relief was short-lived. Berger was thrusting the book in front of his eyes. "That it, Dan? That the book? Come on, speak up!"

"Y-yes," Dan stammered. "Is anything wrong?"

A glint came into Berger's eyes. "Nothing at all—except the book's hardly wet.

If your wife was reading it in the tub, *why didn't it fall in the water?*"

It was suddenly very quiet in the room. Dan looked at the floor, trying to avoid the terrible, accusing eyes. His gaze met Millie's body, and a sob shook him.

"There's always an autopsy, Dan. . . ."

"No—no, don't cut her up!" Dan let out a long, quivering sigh. "I guess I owe her that much anyway." His voice fell to a whisper. "I dropped a dozen phenobarbital pills in her coffee. . . ."



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◆ *It was his red-letter day—blood-red, that is—when the golden girl's husband that he began protecting at nightfall . . . became a corpse at dawn!* ◆

SHORTER!



A girl's excited voice demanded: "Where's Lee Manassas? Where is he?"

CHAPTER ONE

She's a Widow Now!

THE MAN who opened the office door and hesitated there looked frightened. A heavy U-shaped crease of worry and/or dissipation ran from the corner of one eye down his cheek, under his mouth and back up to his other eye. He

glanced over each shoulder, up and down the outside corridor, as if he feared someone was following him.

He was well-dressed in a dark blue pin-stripe suit, conservative in cut. He carried a slender yellow cane and limped on his

right leg. His hair was sprinkled with gray at the temples. He was somewhere in his early forties, and in a mature and wordly way, he was handsome.

Lee Manassas had met the man once before and was expecting him. He said almost gruffly, "Well, come in."

The man looked about the office. He fiddled with his cane. Then he stood it in a corner by the door.

"Sit down, Mr. Goforth." That was the height of politeness for Manassas. Among the people he usually contacted courtesy was a wasted commodity. Lee Manassas wasn't the kind of person who went at people with a mouthful of teeth, like a dentrifice ad.

Mr. Goforth limped to the only other chair, the one across the desk from Manassas. He sat down on the edge and glanced again about the office. The place was grubby, untidy. Some old fishing clothes were piled in one corner. The open-faced pine bookcase leaned heavily to leeward. The few books in it stood in shocking disarrangement, one lying open, face down. A head-high stack of old newspapers was piled in another corner, while in the other sagged a sad-looking old golf-bag.

Manassas grinned wryly as Goforth frowned at the untidy bookcase.

"I read 'em," he said. "Lots of people keep their books all perfectly erect, shoulders back and dressed to the right—and never turn a page." He gestured toward the old newspapers. "My private filing system. Never could find a thing if they were straightened up."

"You're alone?" Goforth conquered his nervousness with an effort.

"My secretary is in the wash-room, briefing her face to go out."

"That's why I wanted to come at this time, Manassas. I thought we'd be alone."

"We shall be, Mr. Goforth. . . . Oh, Jill! Take a powder, honey."

Jill Guinn mumbled something and presently stood in the rear door. She was a trim, pert little sprig of Irish in a tailored suit that made the most of curves that didn't need too much help. She had a small round face, as hard and bright as an apple, but made gentle by her generous red mouth and her eyes which were deep blue and wide apart. Her very black hair hung in a careless bob to her shoulders; and on the back of her head was a little hat with a green

something on it that stuck up in front like an exclamation point.

Lee Manassas' slow easy grin was brazenly caressing. It was always like that with them. When there was someone else present, he exuded love and affection. When they were alone, you'd have thought she was encased in barbed wire.

Manassas said, "I bet you get a lot of wolf calls in that outfit."

"From all but the right one. He isn't human."

Manassas pursed his lips and gave her a low, wondrous whistle. "Now get the hell out, will you? We want to be alone."

Jill tossed her head and tripped across the office and out the door. The slight smile lingered on Manassas' lips as he listened to her high heels tapping along the corridor outside.

Probably Mr. Goforth disapproved of this flippant by-play. He sat primly erect, his face a strict mask.

"Don't look so depressed," Manassas said turning back to him. "Last night at the Sylvan Dell Club, you didn't act like this."

"That was different. I was relaxing. This is business. And it's serious. Last night at the Sylvan Dell when you met me—"

"When you met me," Manassas said.

Which wasn't strictly true. It was Jill who'd brought them together. Jill, when she'd had a couple of Martinis, didn't know a stranger. Goforth and his wife were there, sitting at the table next to Jill and Manassas. Next thing Manassas knew their tables were together, Jill was sitting across from Goforth, who didn't dance, and Manassas was dancing with Mrs. Goforth.

She was a tall handsome woman of about thirty, a blonde with a rosy complexion. She wore a well-cut evening gown, a modest amount of very good jewelry. She'd had enough drinks to be sort of uninhibited in a nice way, and she hadn't given Manassas a bad time.

By the end of his second dance with Mrs. Goforth, Jill had confided to Goforth that Mr. Manassas was the "eminent private detective." Later, in the men's room, Goforth told Manassas he needed the services of a competent and trustworthy private detective, and made the appointment for this afternoon.

But last night he hadn't appeared nearly so urgent about it as he did now.

"Well, we're alone," Manassas said impatiently.

Goforth leaned forward. "I'm desperately afraid."

"Maybe it's indigestion. Bad liquor—"

Goforth frowned. "A man is trying to kill me."

LEE MANASSAS lifted an eyebrow high. His wasn't a handsome face. It was too long, too angular, with too much sharp jaw. Now, with that one eyebrow cocked, it looked satanic.

Goforth went on. "First of all, I need protection. And second, I want to impart to you a secret—to be used in case something does happen to me."

Manassas got up and went to the window, and stood with his back to Goforth, looking down on the side street below. In a doorway on the opposite sidewalk, a man leaned against the brick casement. He had on a brown hat, which hid his face from this angle, a shabby, unpressed brown suit. He was lighting a cigarette from the stub of another. He appeared entirely too casual, too indifferent.

Manassas lowered the shade and turned back to Goforth.

"You want me as a sort of bodyguard, is that it?"

Goforth wet his lips. "I need protection, yes. But that's only part of it. I expect to put in your hands information that will convict the culprit—in case something does happen to me."

Manassas took a deep breath. So many phonies came to him, so many guys with a neat little double-cross up their sleeves. When they asked for protection it often meant they wanted to hire him, Manassas, to be shot at in place of themselves.

"It involves a certain amount of risk for you," Goforth admitted. "Of course—"

"Of course you'll pay for that," Manassas finished for him. "It'll be two hundred dollars retainer and fifty dollars a day, plus expenses."

Goforth took off one gray glove. He brought out his wallet and extracted fifteen twenty-dollar bills and laid them on the desk.

"The retainer and two days advance."

Manassas picked up the bills. He liked

Vincent Goforth better. He scribbled Goforth a receipt, then squared around to face his client. For the first time he showed a decent degree of courtesy.

"Let's have your story."

"You're acquainted with my business?"

"No. I understand that you're a fairly successful business man and that you are in the trucking business."

"Motor freight, it's called now. The South and West Motor Freight Company. We operate a fleet of trucks. We're not the biggest, but it's a good solid enterprise. We're rated at two hundred thousand dollars—and it's worth more than that. I built that business, almost alone, from one second-hand 1933 International truck, Manassas."

"Okay," Manassas said impatiently. "You've got a lot of trucks. Go on."

"Most of my employees have been with me over the years. They own small nominal stock in the business, which they've worked out. They share to some extent in the profits."

"Just one big family, eh?"

"Something like that," Goforth admitted.

"Which one wants to kill you now?"

"My secretary-treasurer, Louis Browder, is short about twenty thousand dollars in his accounts. No one knows it but me. I have given him two weeks from last Tuesday to make restitution. Otherwise I'm going to turn him over to the police. He'd have to sell his home, sacrifice everything he has accumulated. He's not going to do it. He's going to kill me, instead."

"How would that help him?"

"He would take charge of the business, cover up his shortage, and operate it as the company's head."

"What about your wife?"

"She only inherits an income and my share of stock. She knows nothing about the business."

"And what makes you think Browder will try to kill you?"

"He's tried it. That is, I'm sure it was Browder. Last Wednesday evening I went to the office alone, to work on the accounts. I often do that at night. Browder came by to see me. Told me he was putting his house on the market to make good his shortage. . . . Remember the cold spell last week? I had lit the gas stove to warm up

my private office—it's just a little cubby-hole. I stepped out and across the street for a cigar. When I got back Browder had left. When I opened the door of my office raw gas hit me in the face. I jumped back and closed the door. If I had walked into that room I'd have been overcome—dead in a few minutes."

"You've accused Browder?"

"No. It could possibly have been an accident. But the windows were closed; there was no draft to blow out the blaze. A simple twist of the wrist by Browder to kill the fire, another to turn the gas back on. If I'd been killed it would have been perfect—accidental death with perhaps some suspicion of suicide."

Manassas spread his long fingers on the desk top, studied them critically. He said suddenly, "Why come to me? Why not go to the police?"

GOFORTH squirmed a little in his seat. "You don't understand. I feel a great sense of responsibility to all my employees—most of all to Louis Browder. He's been with me sixteen years. He worked beside me day and night. He never quit when it looked like a sinking ship. If he hadn't got to speculating in cotton and lost all that money, he would be just as staunch and trustworthy as he ever was. . . . I don't want to sacrifice Louis Browder; I want to salvage him. But I do want to live."

"Understandable. Now this danger. When are the times and points of danger?"

"I'm sure he won't try anything in public or in broad daylight. When I'm home, or alone at the office at night, are the times I'm most in danger. I suggest that you come to my house, say by eight o'clock tonight, and keep the place under surveillance. Follow me if I go out. Keep watch on me at the office tomorrow."

"What does Browder look like? He wouldn't be a thick-set, chunky-chested hombre in a sloppy brown suit and brown hat—a guy who eats cigarettes, would he?"

Goforth's eyes widened, and he licked his lips. "No. . . . I brought a picture of him."

He handed Manassas a three-by-five photo. It was of a plump, blondish man in a neat suit, who looked as though he had just finished making a speech at the Rotary Club. Manassas studied it a moment and

then gave the picture back to Goforth.

"All right, Mr. Goforth. I'll take your case—with the understanding that if I have to I can go to the police. But I can make you a suggestion that will give you more protection than all the snooping and tailing I can do."

"What's that?"

"Write everything out. Go home and do it tonight. *Write everything*. Why Browder tried to kill you, and his attempt with the gas stove. Bring it to me first thing in the morning. My secretary is a notary public, and I'll witness it. It will be put in my safe to be used only in case of your death. As soon as you leave here I'll call Browder and tell him that I have the sworn facts in black and white, ready to hand to the police in case anything happens to you. He'll be checkmated."

Goforth frowned a moment, then his face lit with relief. "Maybe that's it! Maybe that will do it! Now, why didn't I think of that?"

"I wonder," Manassas returned cryptically. "Okay. Go home now and get busy on that statement. I'll have your place under the eye by eight o'clock. I'll get in touch with Browder and scotch him. I may also look over his house before I get to your place. Does he have a family?"

"Yes, but he's living alone just now. He sent his wife and two children up in Ohio to visit her mother."

Goforth walked to the door and turned, standing there. His face was almost beaming. He made a gesture with his hands. "I'm glad I came to you, Mr. Manassas. A great burden of fear has been lifted from me."

"Don't mention it," Manassas said drily.

After the man was gone, Lee Manassas stared with slitted eyes at the closed door. He crossed presently to the window, raised the shade and peered out. As he watched Goforth got in his car and drove away. Manassas shaded his eyes against the sun-glare and read the license number. BR-8616. Manassas scribbled it on the window sill.

The man in the brown suit had moved from the doorway. He stood farther along the side street, leaning against a steel awning post. He was lighting another cigarette, and he still showed no interest in what went on along the street.

Manassas sat down at his desk and called Hub Douglas, a good eye who had worked some for him in the past. He told Hub where to relieve him, and that there was ten dollars in it.

He dug under a pile of papers and unearthed the telephone directory. He thumbed through the Br's, ran a finger down the page and found Louis Browder's residence and telephone number.

He dialed and got the busy signal, frowned and racked the receiver. He looked out the window again and saw the man in brown. He put on his hat, hard-heeled it along the corridor, down the stairs and out into the street. He swung rapidly around the corner.

The man in the brown suit was gone. Manassas covered the side street for a block, up one side and back along the other. He didn't see the man.

His scowl deepened as he went back to his office. He lifted the phone and dialed Louis Browder's number again. It wasn't busy this time, but no one answered. He let it ring for five full minutes, then hung up.

He didn't like it. Something was wrong, and he couldn't put a finger on it. Had Goforth put a tail on him, while he was putting the eye on Goforth? If Goforth was scared, why wasn't he scared right now, instead of waiting until eight o'clock to be scared?

Manassas took a driver out of the neglected bag of clubs, took a couple of practice swings, then went back to the telephone.

He called Ham Berkstein; Ham practically lived in his store. He sold office equipment, and was enough of a big shot to subscribe to the Credit Guide. Manassas told him what he wanted.

"I'll have to look it up, Lee."

Ham came back on the wire in a moment. "South and West Motor Freight. Vincent J. Goforth, president and general manager. Louis Browder, secretary-treasurer. Established 1935. General motor freight under licensed permit. . . . Medium prompt. One hundred thousand."

"Thanks, Ham. Somebody lied."

"Well, that's an old report. July, last year. A lot can happen these days in sixteen months. I can call for a special report with later information if you want me to. Probably could give it to you tomorrow."

"Do that, Ham, and call me. First time you catch me down at the Pirate's Den, I'll buy a drink."

Manassas called Browder's number again. Nobody answered. He took off his coat, took his shoulder holster and gun from the desk drawer and strapped it on, then slipped again into his coat.

He left the building and went to a little restaurant two doors down. He ate a Mexican dinner. It took him half an hour, and it was dark outside when he finished.

He sought the telephone booth, waited for a fat woman in a big red hat to finish a long and panting conversation, then tried Browder's number again.

No answer.

MANASSAS' car was in an open parking lot three blocks away. He got it out, drove along Jackson street to Preston and turned left. Seven minutes later he was driving along Dillon, a modest residential street. He parked in 2900 block and walked two more blocks.

He found Browder's number by peering hard through the darkness. It was a six- or seven-room tan brick, hugged closely by clipped hedges. The house was dark.

He hurriedly scanned the surroundings, then walked to the front door. He pressed the button and heard the chimes tolling far back in the house. There was no response.

Manassas' nerves began to tingle. He returned to his car. His face, staring back at him from the rear-view mirror, was forlorn.

He tooted the car along Dillon, and swung right into Greenville. At Henderson he clipped the red light close and turned right again. He cruised Lindell street for four blocks.

Goforth's house was even less pretentious than Browder's. Dark red brick, probably six rooms. Short lawn, clipped hedge. A light burned in one of the rear rooms.

Manassas parked and circled the place on foot. Blinds were drawn. A two-car garage faced the side street, nearly flush with the sidewalk. Manassas managed to pry open the swinging doors a crack and aimed his miniature flashlight into the stalls. One was empty. The Goforth Buick was parked in the other.

He breathed easier. He walked across Lindell street and found a place where he

could watch three sides of the Goforth place at once. It was a dull vigil. It got cooler and he wished he had brought an overcoat.

An hour passed and nothing happened. The light remained on in the rear room. Nobody came, nobody left. He didn't like it.

He crossed the street and rang the doorbell.

Footsteps came from the rear and along the hall. Lights came on, and Mrs. Goforth answered the door. Tall, stately, now in a blue quilted robe. A little on the Venus side. Blonde. Thirty or so. A spot of color in each cheek.

"Mr. Manassas!" She remembered him from last night at the Sylvan Dell. Probably her feet still hurt. "Won't you come in?"

"No, thanks. I dropped by to see Mr. Goforth. Is he in?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. He left about seven o'clock. Is it important?"

"Not especially. He was going to fix up some papers for me. Did he say when he'd be back?"

"No, I was in the back of the house. He just called out and said he was leaving for a while with Mr. Browder."

Manassas caught his breath and stared at the woman. She seemed oblivious to the fact that her husband's leaving alone with Louis Browder meant anything. Brother, he thought, the guy sure keeps his wife in ignorance.

He didn't tell her. He wasn't in the mood to cope with hysterics. He backed away from there and hiked for his car.

He drove by Browder's. It was still dark, still deserted looking.

From there he went across town. The South and West Motor Freight Company building was a rough concrete affair. Garage on the first floor, warehouse and offices on the second. There was no light anywhere about the place.

Manassas parked and got out. Instantly a flashlight winked on down in front of the garage entrance. The night-watchman came stumping toward him.

"Is Mr. Goforth here?" Manassas called.

The man held Manassas speared by his light beam and stalked forward to face him.

"Who wants to know?"

"Lee Manassas. Private Investigator. It's important."

"He ain't here. Nobody here but me. Mr. Goforth ain't been here since the office closed at five o'clock."

Manassas went home, feeling futile. It was a lost night, even though he was getting paid for it. He got a bottle of beer from the refrigerator, uncapped it, and carried it to the telephone. He called Mrs. Goforth. She said Mr. Goforth should have returned home or called her by now, but hadn't. She was beginning to be alarmed.

"Don't worry. Have him call me at my home soon as he comes in."

He hung up and rang Hub Douglas. The Scotchman was getting ready to leave for his assignment.

"I won't be there, Hub. But you get out there and put the eye on the place until at least eight in the morning. Ring me if anybody arrives or leaves, no matter what time—anybody at all. I think we're watching an empty nest, but that's what we hired to do, so do it anyway."

Manassas finished the bottle of beer and then went to bed. It was a long hour before he could get to sleep, and it seemed only minutes before the phone awoke him. It was 4:40 by the wall clock.

He answered, half-asleep.

Hub Douglas was sputtering, "Lee, you'd better get out here pronto! The place is loused up with cops thicker'n flies in a syrup barrel. Dick Renfro is here spouting like a whale. He wants to talk to you *at once*. They brought Goforth's body by here for her to identify it, and found me sittin' on the place like a hen on a nest."

"His *body*? Goforth's dead?"

"If he ain't now he'll never be. A train run over him and cut his head off even with his shoulders!"

CHAPTER TWO

The Car That Ran Away

CHIEF OF DETECTIVES Richard E. Renfro paced the living room of the Goforth house. He was a huge man, red of face, eternally flustered, elephantine in his lumbering movements, and loud of mouth. He took off his hat and put it on again at the rate of about five times to the minute.

Reporters were about. Cops were on the front porch and in the hallway. Dick Ren-

fro never moved without an army. Hub Douglas sat meekly in a corner, wishing he was any place except where he damned well was.

Renfro caught sight of Manassas as he came through the front door. His big round eyes glared at Manassas like the headlights of an automobile.

"Time you're getting here!" Renfro yelled. "Come on in here!"

Renfro aimed a finger like a big red banana at Hub Douglas. "That working for you?"

Manassas said, "Yep."

"You working for Goforth?"

"I was."

"What the hell you two shamuses doing watching Goforth's house?"

"Goforth hired me to. I hired Hub to help me."

Renfro got redder. "You come here and ask Mrs. Goforth about Goforth. You go to the motor freight warehouse and ask the night man about Goforth. You leave this piece of left-over dog-food here eyeing Goforth's house. Goforth gets bumped off, the most thoroughly bumped off I've ever seen a man. And in his wallet we find your receipt for three hundred dollars, dated yesterday. Start talking, Brother Manassas—and it better be good!"

Manassas grinned. He liked to needle Renfro. "Why get so excited, Dick? If it was an accident—"

"Accident, hell! If a man fell in front of a train, he wouldn't fall with his neck precisely across the rail. Not once in a hundred times. And what would he be doing on the tracks? He had a car, and he was lame. Either he laid his neck on the rail—or somebody else laid it there while he couldn't help himself. Start talking, Manassas."

"It'll take some telling, Dick. Besides it's confidential, and you've got too many reporters standing around. And first, I want to ask a question or two."

"You—!"

"Have you located Louis Browder?"

"No. He's gone. His car's gone. Mrs. Goforth is prostrated—"

"While you're out of breath, I'll ask another question. Where did you find Goforth's body?"

"Five miles south of town. Along that level stretch of R. and O. main track near

the river. It must have been the Night-Lark Limited that hit him. The engineer probably never knew about it. His body was laid outside the rails. Look here, Manassas—"

"Who found him?"

"Two kids who'd been down on the river gigging frogs. They got somebody to phone Headquarters. We got to the scene at two o'clock. If you—"

"Are you sure it's Goforth?"

"Sure? Of course I'm sure. He had papers on him. Driver's license. Wallet. He had that receipt of yours. The body has that three-quarter inch shortening of the right leg that made Goforth limp. His wife identified the body. Of course it's Goforth!"

"Okay. Okay! How was he dressed?"

"Dark blue pin-stripe suit."

"Gray gloves?"

"Gray gloves. Gray hat quarter-mile down the track, bloody and battered all to hell."

"Was his body battered up?"

"Hardly bruised. But his head—ugh!—was destroyed."

Manassas said, "Let's go where it's a little more private."

"I'll fix that." Renfro shooed a couple of reporters out and closed the door. "Now—talk, brother."

Manassas sank back into his easy chair, and lit a cigarette. He liked Dick Renfro, and the two got along, in spite of Renfro's blustering.

"Goforth hired me to protect him—to try to keep him from being killed. Looks like I wasn't fast enough, or smart enough."

Renfro swore heavily. "A man has Death that close on his heels, and he won't come to the police!"

Manassas told him then, the whole story. He gave Renfro all the information that Goforth had given him. He held back nothing, except the fact that Goforth had exaggerated his financial rating.

"So it's Browder," Renfro said soberly. "I knew it was murder. And now Browder has disappeared. We'll drag the country for him."

"Have you got a picture of him?"

"Goforth had a picture in his coat pocket. The night-watchman at the warehouse identified it as Browder."

Manassas nodded. "Goforth showed me that picture this afternoon."

"I'll have copies struck off," Renfro said grimly. "We'll put him on the teletype. We'll get him."

"Of course you'll get him."

RENFRO eyed Manassas suspiciously. He was not sure whether he was still being needled. Also he was beginning to think over Manassas' story with a little ice-cold logic. "Your story stinks, shamus. It had sure better stand up."

"It will, Dick, because it's the truth. I'm ready to make a sworn statement any time."

"You'll do that all right. I don't think you killed Goforth, but something's fishy. I just don't trust you."

"How you go on! . . . How's Mrs. Goforth taking it?"

"It was a hell of a shock to her. She stood it pretty good till she looked at the body. Then she went off the beam and we had to have Doc Minard give her a knock-out. She's in her room sleeping now. . . . Did Goforth get a chance to write out that sworn statement?"

"Well, at least he didn't give me any part of it. We might search the house. He might have worked on it."

Renfro gave Manassas a pitying glance. "You think we have neglected that? We found his typewriter back in his den. It had sheets and carbon in it, but only the date and heading had been typed in. We'll ask Mrs. Goforth about it, when she's able to talk."

"She wouldn't know. She didn't even know Goforth was in danger. He seemed to keep everything secret from her."

Renfro frowned. "Funny thing we haven't been able to find any pictures of Goforth. Not one in the house, not even a snapshot. And the boys going over his office have reported the same thing. No pictures."

Manassas' brows knitted. "He struck me as being a little on the vain side, the kind of guy who'd have his pictures all over."

"Maybe Mrs. G. can dig up some. We searched Browder's house. We found pictures of *him* all right."

Manassas slid deeper into his chair. He eyed Renfro and his long face was thoughtful.

"Let's put the thing together, Dick, and see if it ticks. Say Louis Browder

killed him. He did it hoping to cover up his shortage and take over the business. Say he came here at seven o'clock and Goforth answered the door. Browder jabs a gun in his boss' ribs, tells him to call back that he's leaving for a little while. He drives out along the railroad, conks Goforth, then lays his head across the rail so it will look like suicide. Then why does he take it on the lam? Why didn't he come back, sit at home, and face the police? Why did he abandon the purpose of the murder—to take over the business and cover up his embezzlement?"

"I dunno. Killers are funny. Professional killers will work along a rational plan and face things out and bluff. But first-timers—they lose their nerve at lot of times, and scam right out of an air-tight plan. And maybe you weren't the only one who knew about Browder."

"I was the only one," Manassas said flatly. "We were alone. Jill Guinn, my secretary, left the office before Goforth told me a thing."

"Yeah? Maybe Browder had Goforth tailed. It's a cinch that if Browder learned that Goforth came to your office, he'd damn well know what the man came for."

A picture leaped up before Manassas' eyes. A hefty guy loitering in a doorway, chain-smoking cigarettes. But he shrugged and said nothing about him to Renfro.

The police finished their work at the Goforth place, left a cop on guard, and departed.

Manassas drove to his office, where he lay down on the moth-eaten divan to try to retrieve some of the sleep he'd lost. He was lying there, his hat over his face, the toes of his sock-feet aimed at the ceiling, when Jill came in at eight-thirty.

She woke him up. She said, "If I ever had any romantic ideas toward you, they're all gone with that last snore."

He rubbed his eyes and managed a lean, crooked grin. "Honey, I had a hell of a night."

He snatched the folded paper from her and opened it up, running his eye over the first page. But beyond mention of the discovery of the body, the Goforth case had broken too late to catch the first morning edition. The headline said, *Train Victim Found Decapitated Beside Tracks*. The body, the item read, had been identified by

the police as that of Vincent J. Goforth, who was a local business man, president and general manager of the South and West Motor Freight Lines.

He passed the paper to Jill.

Jill said, "No! Oh, my gosh!" and her eyes widened incredulously as she read the piece.

Manassas said, "How did you like him, Jill?"

"Goforth? Oh, he seemed nice enough. Seemed preoccupied night before last at the Sylvan Dell Club. I thought he kept watching you and his wife awfully close while you were dancing. What did he come to see you about, Lee?"

"About getting killed—or rather about not getting killed. He paid me three hundred dollars to protect him. And I let him get bumped off before the night was over!"

"Then it was murder?"

"It was murder."

"But—who did it?"

"All suspicion points to a guy named Browder, the company secretary. And Browder seems to have taken a powder. A sorry rhyme, huh?"

MANASSAS went into the washroom and scrubbed up and shaved. He looked distastefully at his soiled and wrinkled shirt, but put it back on.

He told Jill, "If I get any calls, I'll be over at Dick Renfro's office."

He walked the seven blocks to Headquarters. Renfro was there. He bellowed, "Come in here, Manassas." He was harassed, and he hadn't got any sleep.

"I never have a minute home with my family," he fumed, as if Manassas were personally the cause of it all.

"You shouldn't have any family. You belong to The City. To the ever-loving public. . . ."

Renfro growled, "I'll get a steno and you make out that statement and sign it. I just hope you swear to one little-bitsy lie. I don't believe that phoney story of yours, and I'm betting I can shoot it full of holes." His tone changed to one that was almost wheedling. "You wouldn't be holding out on me would you, Manassas?"

"My hand on it, Dick."

"To hell with your hand!"

"Okay. Be like that, and make people hate you. You don't mind if I look over the

pictures you made, do you? And I'd like to go down to the morgue to view the remains."

"Why? You think we slipped up on something, Brightness? Four or five of Goforth's workers have seen the body, and they all say it's him."

"Still it won't hurt anything."

In the photography room, Bedac, the picture man, showed Manassas the dozen photos taken at the scene of the crime.

Bedac, a thin, wistful man, slightly cross-eyed, was proud of his gruesome pix. "This one's a beauty," he sighed, as he exhibited the glossy print of Goforth's headless body lying spread-eagled on the slight embankment of the railroad tracks.

The print was clear and sharp in detail, and Lee Manassas studied it, though he gulped as he peered at the bloody pulp of the severed neck. He saw the familiar pin-stripe suit which Goforth had worn when he came to Manassas' office, and even the gray gloves. The slender yellow walking stick lay near the right hand of the body.

There were other pictures. The victim taken from other angles. Closeups of various items: Goforth's wallet and keys, and papers taken from his body.

Bedac was also running off prints of the picture of Louis Browder. He showed Manassas a copy, still damp from the developing wash.

Clipped to the picture was a mimeographed slip with a description of Browder and also of his car that had disappeared with him. Into his little notebook Manassas copied the data: 1949 Chrysler New Yorker, dark maroon, License BT-9303.

From the photography room Manassas went down to the morgue in the basement. He viewed Goforth's remains, but the view told him nothing, and he came up feeling a little sick.

Dick Renfro caught him and pushed him into a chair. Manassas dictated his statement to a thin, hatchet-faced woman, who typed it expertly and then took his oath on it. He signed the statement and got out of there.

He got his car from the parking station and drove across the river to Highway 277. He drove south until he judged he was about five miles from town. He stopped the car and parked on the shoulder of the road, then started east across a brown field of

oat-stubble, heading toward the railroad.

A sandy lane ran along the east edge of the field. Manassas crossed this and crawled through a wire fence, and then was on the railroad right-of-way. From here south the rail-bed was a straight level stretch for several miles. A quarter-mile east the level land fell away to a thick line of trees which banked the river bed.

Manassas walked the ties. The shining rails glittered in the morning sun. A V-formation of crows left the river bed and went cawing out across the field. Two buzzards circled high over the tracks half a mile ahead, and Manassas shuddered.

He came to the scene of Goforth's death, marked by its great dark bloody splotch. The blood was dry and blackened where it had seeped into the cinders. The grass about the right-of-way had been trampled by the police and reporters, and a dozen cigarette stubs were scattered about.

Manassas ranged back and forth, peering at the ground. He didn't know what he expected to find. He found nothing.

He began circling the spot where Goforth had been killed, still searching the ground, and gradually widening his field of search. For nearly an hour he kept this up, and still he discovered nothing new.

By this time his circle was nearing the trees that thickened along the river bank. He narrowed his search now to the vicinity of the trees. Twice he knelt on the ground, and suddenly he became excited. The earth was dry and hard, and he found no prints, but there was faint evidence here that the weeds and grass had been crushed or pressed down. There was a barely discernible furrow in the thick, short vegetation, a kind of trail.

MANASSAS felt a twinge of exhilaration. Something, perhaps a body, had been dragged over the dead weeds here. The trail pointed toward the first little clump of trees. But Manassas did not rush toward them. Instead he pressed close to the ground, on hands and knees, going meticulously over that obscure trail.

He was rewarded. On one scraggly bunch of grass he found a stain. A tiny stain, and a dark one, now almost black. But certainly a bloodstain. He stood up. Some fifty feet away stood the first trees, a small island of shade, half a dozen scrubby young oaks

bunched together, brilliantly scarlet and purple in their autumn foliage.

He moved ahead and searched under the trees. Near one he found where the undergrowth had been trampled and disturbed. And here he found another stain, a spot of congealed blood little larger than a silver dollar.

This suggested, but did not prove, that Vincent Goforth had been injured or killed here under the trees, his body dragged across to the tracks and his head laid across the rail.

Manassas again began his circling search, widening it toward the river. The river was low and drawn back from its bank into the mid-channel, a narrow, sluggish flow of dark water that meandered southward. Manassas pushed aside bushes and reeds, peering among them. Beyond these the ground was soft under foot.

He ran his eyes over the flat width of silt between the bank and the water, and was about to turn away when a tiny object caught his eye. Something small glittered on the wet sand some twenty feet from the bank.

Curiosity more than expectancy prodded him toward it. He sank to his shoe-tops in the soggy sand before he had taken half-a-dozen steps, and he waded half-way to his knees before he reached it. He bent and picked it up, an empty brass cartridge case, partly embedded in the wet sand.

It was a .32 caliber shell. It could have been ejected from an automatic, if the pistol had been fired on the bank. More likely it had come from a revolver, and the user had attempted to throw the shell into the river.

Manassas waded out of the mud, staring at the gleaming bit of brass in his hand. It pointed to several things. Goforth had been shot here under the trees. Shot in the head, for there was no bullet wound in his body. He'd then been dragged to the railroad track, so that the train would decapitate him. Why? A shot in the head was pretty certain to be fatal.

It looked like the killer had wanted to conceal the identity of the murdered man. If so, why hadn't the identifying papers and articles been removed from the body?

Right now, only one conjecture made sense. The dead man was not Vincent Goforth. He was some other luckless person, lamed like Goforth, who had been selected

and lured into being the victim of an ugly plot. That meant that Vincent Goforth wished to be declared dead. Why? To collect insurance through collusion with his wife, or Louis Browder?

Yet none of this explained why Louis Browder had disappeared.

Manassas' long face was knitted in a frown as he hesitated, standing on the river bank looking about. How had the murderer brought his victim to this spot?

He remembered the lane that ran through the stubble field. There were many tire tracks on it, of course, because police and reporters' cars had come over it last night and left by it this morning. But . . .

Leaving the bank in a determined stalk, he angled south and to his right. He came to the tracks perhaps half-a-mile south of where the train had struck Goforth's body. He crawled between the wires of the fence and paced along the lane parallel to the tracks. There were the prints of at least one set of tires here, but they could have been made by a police car that probed this far south of the death scene.

Within a couple of hundred yards these tracks played out. Manassas could see where the car had backed into the hard oat-stubble to turn about.

He continued southward. Along here the lane was bare of tracks, weed-grown in the center.

But within another two hundred yards Manassas suddenly halted, peering at the ground. A slow look of pleasure came into his homely face. Tire tracks marked the shallow dry ruts of the lane, a new set of tires, different from those he had quitted a short way back. They angled into the lane from the stubble, and ran south.

Manassas looked back along the lane, and grinned maliciously. He said aloud, "You're a smart cop, Renfro, and you've got a hand-picked army of smart lugs working for you. They came along the lane looking for clues, and they turned back just before they hit the jackpot."

Manassas could vision Dick Renfro's red and outraged face as he told him this, and it filled him with a vast pleasure.

Manassas knew something about tires and tire tracks. He knew the tread patterns of the popular makes and could judge fairly accurately the dimensions of a tire by the mark it left on the ground. And this is

what he read in the sand: The two rear tires and the right front were Goodyear Pathfinders, size 700 by 16, and probably worn until the tread was no longer sharp. The left front was a Goodrich Silvertown Cord, same size, nearly new and with a sharp tread.

His deductions sent a sharp thrill through him. Manhunting was in his blood. Most of his cases were too routine, too sordid and devoid of any such thrills. He felt a degree of happiness in this one. Even without the three hundred he had got from Goforth, he would not have missed this case. . . .

He still kept his eyes on the ground, and he had gone probably a mile, following the tire marks, when suddenly they quitted the lane and cut northward across the pasture.

From here he could detect only the general direction the car had taken—a faint line of grass pressed down in twin rows, an occasional glimpse of a tire mark in the hard ground. These led him toward the river, and to the trees.

He found, at the edge of the trees, the spot where the car had stopped and started again; deeper ruts cut by the tires. And from here he stood in sight of the clump of trees near where he had found the cartridge shell. Directly west of that was the spot on the tracks where Goforth's body had been found.

But where had the car gone from here? There were no tire marks turning about or leading back across the pasture. And in any other direction there were only trees, heavy underbrush, and the river.

For an hour he skirted along the edge of the woods, hunting for a spot where the car might have come out. He ended up dog-tired, hungry and footsore, but certain of one thing. The car had not come out of the woods.

So he pushed directly into the maze of the woods, clawing through toward the river.

The spot was only a hundred feet or so from the sluggish brown water. The brush was over head-high and the half-naked trees were thick and towering, shedding their brilliant leaves like confetti. The automobile was stopped between the trunks of two oaks, almost hidden from view from any angle.

It was a dark-maroon Chrysler New

Yorker Sedan. The license plate number, BT-9303.

CHAPTER THREE

The Thirteenth Ball

DICK RENFRO glared at Manassas. "Get out!" he bawled. "This is a respectable office. If you're drunk—"

Manassas looked tired and bedraggled, but his face was smug. He sank into a chair facing Renfro, took a cigarette from Renfro's pack on the desk, and lit it. Thistles had caught in his socks and were pricking his ankles. Red dirt crusted his shoes and pants-legs, and he brushed a yellow leaf from his coat lapel.

"There's nothing," he said, "to compare with a walk in the country. . . . Goforth didn't commit suicide. His murderer took him in a car out Highway 277, drove across a field to a lane that runs south to cross the railroad tracks, and from there to a spot just back from the river bank. He walked Goforth to a clump of trees, where he shot him in the head, then dragged him to the tracks, deposited him so that the Night-Lark Limited would neatly cut off his head—and destroy it. Then the murderer went back to his car, drove it through the densest thicket of underbrush still to be found in this civilized county, and hid it in a spot where nobody—especially the police—would be likely to find it for a month. From there the murderer either escaped on foot, or committed suicide by jumping into the river."

Manassas took a deep draw from the cigarette and exhaled it.

Renfro's big round eyes glared at Manassas, and his heavy brows made a bushy V over his prominent nose.

"You didn't get that way from smoking my cigarettes," he growled. "That story is crazier than the one you swore to this morning. What's the name and present address of the murderer?"

"The car," Manassas answered, "is—or was—Louis Browder's. The murderer is either at the bottom of the river, or he's far, far away."

He laid the shiny cartridge shell on the desk. And he laid beside it something else, a piece of brown wrapping paper, of the type used in butcher shops. It had been

creased in accordion pleats until it was only about two inches wide. One end was smoothly cut. The other was roughly torn. The whole piece was about eighteen inches long.

Then Manassas went over, item by item, his morning's excursion. By the time he had finished, the big chief of detectives was scratching his head and registering plenty of respect for Lee Manassas, private detective.

"And this," Renfro asked, eyeing the folded piece of paper as though it was a snake, "what does it mean?"

"I don't know," Manassas returned frankly. "Something or nothing. I found it on floor of the car."

"Why would Browder commit suicide—if he did?"

"Because, either before or after he was shot, Goforth told him about me, and said that I had all the incriminating evidence to convict Browder. . . . I suggest that you both drag the river and intensify the search for Browder."

"We'll do both—and *thoroughly*," Renfro growled.

Manassas laughed and watched Renfro flush.

"I don't understand it," Renfro grumbled. "I got a good bunch of cops—a smart bunch. They covered that area thoroughly. Stayed out there from two last night till after nine this morning."

Manassas stood up languidly. His twisted grin was wicked and superior.

"The difference," he said, "is that your boys get paid for going through the motions. Me—I can only collect when I get results."

The indignation that puffed Renfro's ruddy face gave Manassas his full measure of satisfaction. . . .

MANASSAS opened the door of his office a foot and sailed in his hat. When it did not come sailing back, he boldly opened the door and entered.

Jill Guinn gave him one horrified look. She ordered, "Go out and come in the back door. Scarecrows' entrance is at the rear."

Manassas was still grinning from his memory of Renfro's face.

"I've been having fun."

Jill said, "I've been trying to get you everywhere. Mr. Berkstein called. Mrs. Goforth wants you to come to her house—"

she's upset and says she's been robbed."

"Not by me," Manassas said stoutly. "I've been out of town."

"Something very valuable to the case has been stolen. She sounded frightened."

"I didn't scare her either."

"Shut up! And you had a visitor."

"Who?"

"He wouldn't leave his name. He left this."

She handed him a slip of paper. On it was scrawled in an awkward, almost unintelligible hand: *Call Y-2-0080 before five tonight and ask for Joey.*

"What kind of a guy?"

"Definitely not nice. He smelled like cheap gin. He had thick shoulders, a beefy scarred-up face with blue whiskey-veins, cauliflower ears, and a voice like tearing a rag. He wore—"

"Don't tell me. A brown suit that needed pressing."

"Yes—worse than yours does. What's more, he'd been watching our office for two hours. I saw him across the street, from the window."

Jill was standing up facing Manassas as she talked. He looked down at her, conscious only of her bright eyes and animated face, hardly thinking of what she was saying. Jill was so smart, so sharp, so very enticing in that trim little suit He reached out and gathered her to him and kissed her.

The way she stopped trying to talk, the way she lost her breath and returned that kiss, the way she went all to pieces in his arms—it surprised and kind of shocked him. It left him weak and alarmed. . . .

When he released her, she sat down suddenly in his chair at the desk. She shook her head as if shaking a mist from her eyes. She fussed with her hair, and with some papers on his desk.

"What a business!" she said shakily. "Going on in a decent respectable office!"

Manassas stood at the window with his back to her. "I've been wanting to do that for a long time. . . . The man in the brown suit isn't out there now."

It was the first time he'd tried to kiss Jill, though she had worked for him for eight months, and he had taken her out about once a week, usually to the Sylvan Dell Club.

He heard her leave and go into her own

little office. He turned back and picked up the telephone.

Jill stuck her head in the door. "You go home and clean up, Lee Manassas. And—don't you ever kiss me again in such dirty clothes!"

He laughed. But it wasn't a confident laugh. There was something between them now. And he wasn't sure he wanted it that way. He was a very cagey bachelor. He looked on matrimony as an axe hanging over a man's head. . . .

He called Y-2-0080, and no one answered. He picked up his hat and got out of there.

At home he took a hot shower, shaved, and put on a clean suit. He called Mrs. Goforth and her deep, husky voice answered.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Manassas. Could you come by the house? I'm frightened. I—I don't like to go to the police, and since you and Mr. Goforth were—"

"What is it, Mrs. Goforth?"

"I—I'd rather not talk about is over the phone. Could you come by the house—say within an hour?"

"Certainly. Six o'clock?"

"Please. I'll be expecting you."

He broke the connection and dialed Y-2-0080. A woman's flat, disillusioned voice answered.

"What place?" Manassas asked.

"What place d'yuh want?"

"Joey—I want Joey."

"Joey? Joey who? Oh—I know." The receiver clattered on a table top and her voice went shouting down a corridor. Then he heard shuffling footsteps, and a ragged, suspicious voice, a man's voice, came on the wire.

"Who's there?" The voice was a rasp.

"I want to talk to Joey."

"This Manassas?"

"That's right."

"Okay. This is Joey, what left you the note."

"What do you want?"

"You by yourself?"

"Yes."

"Where yuh at?"

"At home. What's eating you? Go ahead—talk."

"Don't rush me. Listen now—and don't try double-crossing me. The cops want a picture of this guy Goforth. Nevermind how I know. Newspapers, maybe. Well,

I sorta collect things like that. How much would it be worth to *you* to get a picture of Goforth?"

"I'm not a cop—and I don't care a hoot about a picture of Goforth. Why don't you take it to the police?"

Joey laughed derisively. "Me? Mister, I don't go close to cops. Might catch something—like stir-bugs. But for twenty-five bucks I'll sell *you* a picture of Goforth—of him and his wife. And I don't care if you sell it to the cops for a hunnert bucks."

MANASSAS started to refuse. He knew what Vincent Goforth looked like and he did not covet a picture of the man. But this Joey obviously had some connection with the case. And Renfro needed a picture for their records and had not been able to locate one. Renfro probably would be glad to pay whatever Manassas would be out in getting a picture of Goforth.

Manassas said, "I'll give you fifteen dollars."

Joey seemed about to cry. "I commit break-and-enter for a damn lousy picture, and you wanna give me a damn lousy fifteen bucks!"

But he accepted it. "Tonight, say nine o'clock, come into Camellia Club pool-hall, on Benley Street, four doors down from Trinity Street. I'll be there, and I'll know you."

"Camellia on Benley."

"That's right. And say—"

"Yeah?"

"Be alone, see? Don't try ringing in the cops."

"I'll be there, Joey." *And I'll know you, too, Brown Suit.*

Luckily Manassas' ring found Dick Renfro still in his office.

Manassas asked, "What about that folded paper? Any fingerprints on it?"

Renfro chose to be coy. "Wouldn't you like to know?" he asked.

"Okay, Dick. If that's the way you want to play. I laid every thing I had on your desk, and now you freeze up and sneer at me. Only I thought you wanted a picture of Vincent Goforth, and I Just forget it."

"What? Whazzat?"

"Nothing, Dick."

"Look, Manassas! You holding out a picture of Goforth on me? Look, Manassas,

you know that I was only kidding you—"

"Fine, Dick. I like to kid. What about it? Were there any fingerprints on that paper?"

"No fingerprints," Renfro roared disgustedly. "You know the old gag-line. The criminal wore gloves. Everybody wears gloves. Goforth wore gloves, you wear gloves, I wear gloves. Even the little babes in their cribs wear gloves. Sweet, ain't it? The new Congress is gonna abolish fingerprint departments because everybody wears gloves. Now—what was that about a picture of Goforth?"

"Oh, forget it, Dick. I haven't got any picture. It's just that when I thought of a picture of Goforth, I thought of you. G'bye, old man."

Manassas hung up, with Renfro fuming over the wire.

Ham Berkstein said, when Manassas got him on the wire a few minutes later, "South and West Motor Freight was rated two years ago at two hundred thousand. But something seems to have gone *p-f-f-ft* since then. Now his equipment's worn out, and he hasn't been able to replace it. The last regular report—the one I gave you yesterday, rated the outfit at one hundred thousand. The business has gone down badly since then, and now it's questionable if it's barely solvent. That help, Lee?"

"I dunno, Ham. Maybe so. Thanks anyway."

"Might be the reason he laid his head on the rail, huh?"

"Maybe so, Ham."

Manassas laughed hollowly and clicked the receiver.

So Goforth was going to hell financially. It put a little different face on the matter. It dirtied up the water. Maybe Browder wasn't the only who was speculating and losing dough. Maybe he wasn't the only one short in his accounts. Maybe Goforth was short too, and maybe he was a hell of a lot more short than twenty-thousand. And maybe this had been a suicide pact, another one of those things that senseless little people dream up to torment the police and private dicks, who strangely enough still believe that people ought to have rational motives. . . .

Manassas scowled as he left his apartment. He felt like a juggler who had had eleven balls going smoothly in the air, with

the twelfth poised on his nose, when from nowhere a thirteenth ball came into play and brought them all crashing down about his head.

CHAPTER FOUR

What's in a Picture?

MILLICENT GOFORTH answered Manassas' ring. One of Renfro's cops was sitting on the front porch, but he grudgingly said that Mrs. Goforth had requested that Manassas be admitted.

In the light of the living room Manassas was shocked at the change in her. The woman he had danced with a couple of nights ago had been handsome, carefree. She had seemed a little shallow, and certainly unworried. Now she looked years older. She trembled, and there were dark hollows under her eyes.

Her face is a mask, he thought. A mask that talks, that says things she's expected to say, that even smiles. But behind that mask is shock and blank horror.

He sat facing her. She shredded a flimsy wad of handkerchief in her fingers.

"If one could just quit," she said. "Could just say it's all over, and lie down and forget. I wonder if any woman ever had to look on her dead husband as I did?"

"Now, now, Mrs. Goforth. You have to go on. You know that."

That mask of face managed a smile.

After a moment she said, "This may be important. It may not. I want to help every way I can. I *know* my husband never—never took his own life. Louis Browder killed him. And I want Louis Browder caught and punished."

"Yes, Mrs. Goforth."

"Chief Renfro has asked me for a picture of Vincent. There was almost no picture of him. He'd never pose for one—thought it vain. But last winter while we were down at Miami on a little vacation there was a picture made of both of us, together. A hotel photographer snapped us, posing on a pier. It was published in a little magazine put out by the hotel where we stayed—one of those little society gossip things just circulated among the guests of the hotel. I prized that picture and saved a copy of the little magazine."

"You have it now?"

"No. That's why I called you. I told Mr. Renfro I had the picture, and was going to give it to him. But the picture's gone now. It's been stolen."

"Stolen? Why should anyone want to steal the picture?"

"I don't know. But I know exactly where I kept it. In a little treasure-box with the few pieces of jewelry I own. The jewelry is still there and the picture's gone!"

"When was the last time you saw the picture?"

"I don't know—that is I don't remember. Maybe a week, maybe ten days ago. The little magazine always laid on the bottom of the box. Now the lock's broken on the box and the magazine is gone."

"How could anyone get in to steal it?"

"I found a place where it looks as though a window was pried open."

She showed him the treasure-box, then, with the broken lock. It contained her few pieces of jewelry, nothing fabulous. A solitaire engagement ring, a clasp or two, a fairly good diamond dinner ring, and a string of pearls, maybe cultured, maybe synthetic.

She showed him about the house and he examined the window, which certainly had been jimmied. It was marred up by a prize-bar and the screen had been cut.

Manassas said, "I think I'll have your picture back by morning, Mrs. Goforth."

Her face lighted up with relief, and for a moment did not seem so like a mask. "But how? How can you know about it so soon?"

"I have a deal on it. Maybe I'll get the picture back tonight."

She said, "I'll be grateful, Mr. Manassas."

He left there, feeling not at all satisfied with the matter of the stolen picture. Joey, of course, had stolen it. But why hadn't he also taken the jewelry? And there were other things Manassas didn't like. That jimmied window, for one thing....

THE Camellia Club pool hall wasn't a nice joint. It was a one-flight-up affair. The narrow, alley-like room reeked with the smell of cheap gin and sweat.

Manassas stood near the entrance. A big man sitting against the wall near the rear got up and shambled toward him. A big man with thick shoulders, a beefy face, dull

opaque eyes. He wore a shabby brown suit and a shabby brown hat.

As he brushed past Lee Manassas, he rasped from the corner of his mouth, without removing the cigarette pasted to his lower lip, "Come wit' me."

Manassas fell in step. He didn't let the man get behind him, and Joey was equally wary. Side by side, they went down the narrow stairway and out onto the sidewalk.

"It's four-five blocks," Joey said. "You got a car?"

Manassas said he had, and it was parked around the corner. When they reached it, Manassas got in under the wheel, and Joey crawled in beside him and directed him how to drive.

They parked on another side street, a ratty, run-down one. Manassas, on guard, kept his right hand free and near the butt of his gun for reassurance. They walked along in darkness to an open stairway flush with the sidewalk. A scrabrous sign lettered on the third and fourth risers proclaimed, *K. C. Hotel, Rooms*.

Inside, Joey unlocked the door to his room and they both entered. The room had one chair, a sagging iron bed, a washstand with a bowl and pitcher.

Joey said, "Sit down, Mr. Manassas," and squatted on the bed. He fished out a fresh cigarette, lit it from the butt he'd finished, then owl-eyed Manassas through the smoke.

Manassas said, "You've been on my tail for two days. Who you working for?"

"I ain't working for nobody. I ain't been on your tail. An' I ain't answering no questions."

He exhaled smoke from his nostrils. He sat hunched like an evil idol, and looked unblinkingly at Manassas with slate-like, opaque eyes. "You interested in this here picture?"

"I want to see it. And you're gonna answer one question anyway. You took that picture from a little box in the Goforth house, jimmying a window to get in. You left behind maybe a thousand dollars worth of jewelry. Why didn't you take the jewelry?"

"What makes dicks so damn nosey?" Joey whined. "An' so dumb? Where, in this burg, hot as I am, would I get rid of them rocks? I'd a been hunted down and jugged for the murder of Goforth. I took

the picture because I knew the police wanted it, and I figured I could turn a few dollars. But I didn't know you was such a cheap-skate. Fifteen lousy bucks!"

"When did you break into the Goforth place?"

"Look, mister—you want that picture or not?"

Manassas eyed the unpleasant man narrowly. He had no doubt Joey was working, or had been working, for someone. Whom? Goforth? Browder?

"I might be willing to pay more for information. Especially information about Browder."

Joey snarled, "I tell you I don't even know d' guy Browder. An' you shut up askin' questions or d' whole deal's off!"

Manassas paid him the fifteen dollars. Then Joey dragged a battered suitcase from under the bed, dug into its soiled and meager contents, and brought forth a small pamphlet-like magazine printed on glazed paper.

"An' if—" Joey said, "you aimin' to come back here wit' d' cops, it won't do no good. I need them fifteen bucks to get outta town on—an' I'm already packed."

Manassas examined the little magazine. It was elaborately titled, *The Sun-Worshippers*, and was dated the past January. It was mostly photographic, showing glossy camera shots of the guests of the hotel. There were perhaps a couple of dozen pages, and a page near the middle was devoted to Mr. and Mrs. Vincent J. Goforth.

Goforth in the picture looked much as the man had looked when he had come to Manassas' office. Beside him sat Millicent Goforth, and she looked much as she had looked the other night at the Sylvan Dell Club, except that instead of evening dress, she wore very smart sport clothes.

Mrs. Goforth, the blurb stated, had come to the Sea Spray Hotel for the past three summers, but this was the first time Mr. Goforth had enjoyed that wonderful privilege. Mrs. Goforth had been a guest for the past ten days, taking part in the social activities along the beach, but Mr. Goforth, held back by heavy business duties, had been able to join her only for this last week of her stay.

Manassas folded the magazine and rammed it into his coat pocket. He looked up to stare into the barrel of a snub-nosed

gun, held in Joey's big fist and backed by Joey's ugly and humorless grin.

Manassas said, "If this is a stick-up—"

"It ain't. I just aim to see you to d' street and away, pal. I just want you outta my life, thassall."

THEY walked along the bare corridor to the stairs and Joey stood at the landing and watched Manassas to the street door. Manassas looked back and the man had disappeared.

He stepped out on the walk and peered up the dark, deserted street. He was disgusted. Joey might be a key-piece in this thing. He'd have liked nothing better than to go back with a cop and put the hand on Joey. But by the time he could locate a cop or get to a telephone, he knew Joey would have skipped. A penny-ante thug, Joey. But for whom was he working?

He dismissed the mugg from his mind and walked to his car. He looked back. The street wasn't deserted after all. Another car was parked about a block behind his—the only other car on the street.

He started up and drove to the corner. The other car came on, moving slowly.

Manassas looked up and down the cross-street, saw that it was, like this one, nearly deserted and nearly dark, lit only by a single street lamp at the next corner. He slipped gears into second, and rammed down on the foot-feed. The car sputtered out like something from a bazooka and his tires screamed as he whipped it to the left.

He was half a block away before the other car came to the turn. He stamped on the brakes, cut to the curb and turned off his lights as the second car came careening into the cross-street.

He was ready. He had his gun out and his hand on the door-latch, poised to leap out.

But the other car did not stop. It slowed, then picked up, to sweep on past him.

Manassas switched on his lights and went after it. With no stop lights to worry them, the other car, a Plymouth, put on the speed. Manassas kept his foot on the accelerator. At this rate, patrol cars would soon spot them and joint the chase.

They did. Within five minutes Manassas heard the sirens. He didn't slow. The car ahead turned and whipped into Murray Street, and he whipped in behind it.

There was some traffic on Murray, and traffic lights. The other car went through a red light, barely missed the front end of an old jalopy, and Manassas, swerving to the left, barely missed its rear. But the car gained on him, and the police car was pulling alongside.

The patrol car crowded him to the curb.

Manassas got out, furious. Both cops got out of the patrol car, also furious.

Manassas knew the driver. "Damn it, Sweeney! Couldn't you see I was trying to catch the Plymouth? That guy's the key to the Goforth case!"

The Plymouth was five blocks out Murray Street now, and getting away fast.

"Sorry, Manassas. We're traffic cops and we grab speeders when we can. Get in, we'll see if we can catch him."

But it was too late. The Plymouth had disappeared, turning off Murray, and they could not pick up its trail again. Finally they drove back to Manassas' car.

"Thanks, Sweeney, for the big help," Manassas said caustically, as he parted with them.

At home, he found a note-pad and wrote down the number of the Plymouth, while it was still in his head. He carefully placed the magazine with Goforth's picture in the bottom of a bureau drawer, under a pile of underwear. He took off his coat, laid it across the foot of the bed, got a bottle of beer from the refrigerator, kicked off his shoes, turned off the light, and sat in the darkness, trying to concentrate.

Why had that car followed him tonight? Were they after the picture of Goforth? If so, why? Joey was undoubtedly working for somebody. Had he double-crossed them to get a measly fifteen dollars, or was this, too, all a part of the master plan?

It wasn't all here, he told himself. The Goforth case, as things stood now, could be just plain suicide, or faked suicide plus murder.

He paced impatiently to the window and stared out. Trees bordering the sidewalk threw the opposite side of the street into deep shadow. In this deepest darkness, a cigarette tip glowed.

He could make out no figure, but presently there was an action so familiar it sent Manassas' nerves tingling like electric wires. The person across in the darkness was lighting one cigarette from the tip of another.

THAT was enough for Manassas. His feet found his shoes in the darkness. He ran down the carpeted stairs on the balls of his feet. He eased himself out the front door and slid along the sheltering darkness of the building. He crouched behind the low box hedge to the edge of the scant yard. He still wore his shoulder holster, and his hand was ready for the butt of his gun.

Then he broke from the hedge, aiming diagonally across the street for that cigarette tip. He could make out the man now, vague, a blur among blurs in the shadow. But before Manassas reached the farther curb, the man whirled and ran straight down the sidewalk.

Manassas called, "Stop, Joey, or I'll shoot!"

Joey didn't stop.

Manassas didn't shoot. He had no doubt he could outrun Joey, and also that he could manage Joey with his hands when he caught him. But he was ready with his gun if Joey got trigger-happy.

They sprinted straight down the street, Manassas along the curb and Joey down the middle of the sidewalk. Within the second block Manassas overtook him.

He made a plunging tackle for Joey's knees and sent him to the ground.

But Joey was a long way from quitting. He kicked with both feet, wallowed and scabbled on the grass. One of his heels caught Manassas on the shoulder and jarred his collar-bone; the other raked the skin from his jaw. And Joey kicked free, leaping up and darting away.

Manassas went after him again, tackling him again. He rammed the big man to the ground. He got his arms about Joey now and lifted him up, swung him around and slammed him against the hard turf of the curb. Breath left Joey. He squirmed on the ground, gasping for air, his great loose mouth flapping open.

Manassas raised his gun and hit Joey on the side of the head. And Joey quivered like soft mush, and lay supine on the ground.

Manassas had been too busy. That was why he did not see the third figure who joined the fight. That was why he didn't know the figure was over him, raising a stubby automatic for a blow.

He knew when he was hit, however. There came a tremendous clap of thunder

which started in his head and rolled away into vast cosmic spaces. A wondrous pinwheel of sparks roared over the whole city and yet strangely seemed confined within his own head. His mouth was open and he couldn't close it. He was vainly trying to push himself up with his elbows. He was looking at the dead grass on the dark ground from a distance of not much more than four inches. . . .

He never did pass completely out. He hung suspended in a fuzzy limbo, helpless, half-knowing, half-unconscious. He might as well have been out, because he couldn't move an inch.

He knew that Joey was gone. He knew that the man who had wielded the gun was gone. He knew that he was horribly sick, with a taste in his mouth that was something strictly from an old swill pail.

He heard the distant *clap-clap* of the milkman's horse, and somewhere still farther away garbage cans were being slammed around. He managed finally to get to his feet. He found his gun near him on the ground.

Manassas made it to his own apartment. He climbed the stairs by pulling himself up along the rail. He weaved across the hall to his own door.

It was ajar. The lock had been broken. Manassas muttered an oath.

He stepped into his living room. A tornado had struck it. Somebody had turned it wrong side out. His bedroom was worse. Drawers open, clothes hanging out, suitcase open on the bed. His coat lay wrong side out on the floor.

He swore again and made it across to the bureau and hurriedly dug to the bottom of the bottom drawer. The magazine with the picture of Goforth was gone.

At least they hadn't taken the fifth of bourbon he kept in the pantry. He uncorked the bottle and poured a tumbler nearly full. He remembered with irony the oft-repeated instruction in First Aid, which he had received back in his recruit days. "In treatment of shock, keep the patient still and quiet. Cover with blanket. *Do not administer stimulants.*"

Bourbon wasn't really classed as a stimulant, was it?"

He drank the tumbler of whiskey, stumbled to his bed, fell across it—and passed out.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Yellow Cane

His telephone awoke him at 10:30 the next morning. A roundhouse full of locomotives occupied the inside of his head, shunting miles of box cars. But he managed by great effort to make it to the telephone and lift the receiver.

Dick Renfro was raving. "What's the matter—you dead or drunk? I been ringing you for thirty minutes."

"Half-dead," Manassas croaked. "I had a bad night. Since when do I have to report to you every morning?"

"Since today. What kind of shenanigans are you working with that picture of Goforth?"

"I wish I knew. Why?"

"Mrs. Goforth reported to me last night that a picture she owned had been stolen. That you said you could get it back last night for her. Now this morning she says she hasn't heard from you."

"And she's right. I got my hands on the picture. Bought it from a chiseler for fifteen bucks. Somebody then stole it from me right here in my apartment, while I was chasing said chiseler down the wide beautiful boulevard that runs in front of my house. Look, Dick—I was getting the picture for you. This guy was hot and there wasn't a chance the cops could have got to him. I had to play it the way I did—"

"Hell!"

"And something else. Last night somebody followed my car, evidently to get the picture back. I managed to get behind him and give chase. One of the city's Bright Boys curbed me and let him get away."

"Which one?"

"I'm not telling that. But I want your office to check by wire on a tan Plymouth Two-door, California license. Wait a minute." He fumbled around until he found the slip and read the license number off to Renfro. "Do that right now, please, Dick. It's important."

"So now you're begging me!"

"You bet I am. It's the biggest lead we've had, Dick."

"Okay. Okay!"

"Did your boys drag anything out of the river?"

"No bodies. An old rubber boot. Enough

old parts to build a Ford. A thirty-pound concrete block that hadn't been in the water long."

"I'd like to see the collection."

Jill was in her own cubby-hole when he entered his office at twelve. She was clicking away at the typewriter, and called out snappishly, without looking up, "A fine time of the evening to be coming to work. If you wouldn't carouse around all night—"

Manassas sank into his chair with a groan. She came to the door, stared at him, then rushed over to drop on her knees and put her arms about him. "Oh, Lee—I'm sorry. I didn't know!"

There was tape on his head where the flat side of the gun-barrel had connected; there was tape on his jaw where Joey's heel had scraped off skin and flesh. There was the look of a gaffed fish in his eyes.

"Now look, honey," he said, warding her off. "I'm okay. Just not feeling virile . . . Take a telegram, will you? To Sea Spray Hotel Company, Miami. Attention, Advertising Manager. Tell them to airmail us by return mail a copy of the January issue of their *Sun Worshipers* magazine, or else a print or negative of the photo of Mr. and Mrs. Vincent J. Goforth which appeared on page thirteen. Tell them we're acting under direction of Mrs. Goforth. And that it's very important."

"If you'd only take care of yourself!"

"I do my best. Did you get that telegram?"

"Of course I got it. You need somebody to look after you."

"No decent person would be caught dead in the situations I get myself into."

Jill sighed. She said, "You've had a caller. A Mr. Gentry. He waited a long time, and said he would come back."

Mr. Gentry did. In fact Jill was still phoning the telegram to Western Union when he hove into the office. His eyes widened as he looked at Manassas' face, but he withheld comment. He was a big man, well dressed, with a heavy-jowled face, barbered pink.

He gave Manassas a card which announced that he was an operative of the Mid-American Detective Agency, and showed credentials to prove it. He sat down, crossed his massive legs and lit a cigar.

"Car wreck?" he inquired politely.

"I backed into a door. What is it you want, Gentry?"

"We might make a deal. You were working for Goforth. You know something about the case?"

"I seem to know less and less. What's your angle?"

"Goforth had a policy with the Granville Life Insurance Company. Granville is a client of ours."

"How much?"

"Twenty thousand. He had two other policies, with two other companies. Both for the same amount. Those companies also have retained us, in this case. One of the policies is less than a year old, and won't pay off on suicide. What do you make of the case?"

MANASSAS indicated the knot on his head, grimacing. "So far I've made this. How do your companies stand if Goforth was murdered by Louis Browder?"

"They stand to pay off all around. If Goforth killed himself the Spencerian Life doesn't have to pay. But if the body is *not* Goforth's, of course nobody pays—it's fraud."

"Well, the body's been identified to the satisfaction of the police. What more do you want?"

"What does an insurance company usually suspect when a dead man's face is disfigured—or entirely gone, as in this case?"

"I know. But—"

"Positive identification is nearly impossible."

"There's his fingerprints."

"Yes, but so far they haven't found any official fingerprints of Goforth's on record. . . . Besides, Goforth's business is in bad shape. Two years ago it was worth two hundred thousand, a year ago half that. And now it's barely solvent. It's when a man's business is extra good or extra bad that he loads up on insurance. That's the way it was with Goforth. And it's when a man's business goes rotten that he begins to think of cashing in on his insurance."

Manassas eyed his visitor with calculation. He said, "Beginning today I haven't got a client. Goforth paid me for two days, then got killed. Mrs. Goforth hasn't indicated that she wants to continue my services. And, in light of the 'protection' I gave her husband, I don't expect her to."

"You intend to drop the case then?"

"Not while I've got this knot on my head. . . . Besides, I'm in pretty deep."

"You know the case. I have *carte blanche* on the investigation for the three companies. We'll give you twenty-five a day to carry on. Of course, if you break the case, and we can prove there's fraud or collusion—the insurance companies would be generous."

"I'll take it," Manassas said. "But I'll make no reports until or unless I break the case."

When Gentry was gone Manassas proudly waved five twenty-dollar bills at Jill. "Look, honey—a man just came in and paid me twenty-five dollars a day to do something I was going to do anyway!"

Over at Headquarters Dick Renfro indulged in undue chortling at Manassas's disfigured face.

Manassas said sourly, "It's very funny."

Renfro continued ill-concealed chuckles as he went into the laboratory and showed Manassas the soggy things that had been dragged out of the river. The only item Manassas was interested in was the concrete building block. The others showed plainly they had been in the water long before Vincent Goforth had died.

It was a large block of the hollow-tile type. Through an end-space had been tied a heavy piece of fishing cord. Knotted in the cord was soggy wisp of brown paper.

Manassas gave his attention to the paper. "Look, Dick," he cried, "where's that folded brown paper I brought in from Browder's car?"

Renfro called one of his men and the other piece of paper was brought in. It was the same kind as the wet piece tied to the concrete block.

Manassas rolled his eyes at Renfro and cocked an eyebrow. "What do you make of that?"

Renfro ran his hand through his hair. He groped around for his hat, but since it was out in his office, he had to do his thinking without it. And he came up with something pretty good.

"A guy wants to commit suicide, but he doesn't want his body discovered for several days. He makes a noose around his neck of heavy paper, folded and twisted, and tied to the block with fishing cord. He takes the block in his hands and walks to the

middle of the river—and lets go. His body is anchored for maybe a day, until the water dissolves the paper. As the body bloats it would rise some and wash down stream. Browder's body may be forty miles south of here by now."

Manassas grinned. "Not bad, Dick. So?"

"I'll have lookouts spread along the banks of the river from here to the Gulf."

"Nothing if not thorough, eh? But there's another angle. Suppose a guy just wanted it to look like he'd committed suicide. Suppose the length of brown paper wasn't left in his car accidentally—he expected his car would soon be found. He expected you'd probably drag the river and find the block. Put all that together. Now what?"

"Browder would be getting farther and farther away while we looked for him in the drink. But don't think we're overlooking that bet. We've had the dragnet out for Browder ever since yesterday morning."

They walked back to Renfro's office. Renfro asked, "Did Mid-American's man Gentry see you?"

"He did. I'm their man now."

"Well, they're wasting their money. They think the body wasn't Goforth. That's a closed matter far as I'm concerned. The dead man's fingerprints match latents that were picked up all over Goforth's home and office. Also we located the doctor who set his ankle that was crushed twenty-five years ago. We brought the doc in and he positively identified an X-ray of that ankle. He says it's Goforth . . . We're gonna let him be buried tomorrow."

Manassas sighed. "There goes my bonus. But at least I collect twenty-five a day as the insurance companies harbor a doubt. . . . Dick, how well did your men go over Goforth's house the night he was killed?"

"From stem to stern. That's one part of our job we really know. Why?"

"Oh, I just wondered if your boys needed pepping up a little," Manassas said lightly, making for the door.

"Hey, come back here!" Renfro shouted. "What do you mean by that?"

"I wondered if they reported a screen cut and a window jimmed."

The blank look on Renfro's red face told Manassas no such report had been made. But Manassas waved airily and moved out the door as Renfro lunged up from his chair. . . .

MANASSAS gloated to himself the next morning as he applied new tape and gauze to his skinned jaw and studied the effect in his shaving mirror.

"I like my new client," he told himself. "Another day, another twenty-five dollars—and no new contusions or lacerations."

But things were humming by time he walked into his office.

Jill said, "Chief Renfro called. Said to call him soon as you came in."

"Thanks. Want to be kissed this morning?"

"Not during business hours. You never know when a girl's in the mood."

Manassas chuckled. He called Dick Renfro.

"We work while *you* sleep," Renfro said sourly.

"Give."

"Not until you loosen up. What about the guy in the Plymouth? How does he figure?"

Manassas gripped the receiver hard. "He's our key man. He's the guy who stole the picture of Goforth. Also he's the guy who conked me. What have you found out?"

"That Plymouth was registered four months ago in Los Angeles. In the name of Bernie Valentine. Bernie Valentine's present whereabouts are unknown. He's a played-out playboy. Ex-actor, co-respondent in a couple of divorce cases, confidence man, swindler. The women swoon over him and he's always well kept. California would like to lay hands on him."

"I hope I lay hands on him first," Manassas muttered, rubbing the sore spot on his head.

"His car was serviced this morning at a little garage on Pembroke Street—a place called Pete's Garage. So you see my boys do get about."

Manassas looked up the address in the phone book, and thirty minutes later was talking to Pete. Pete's Garage was one of those little alley shops that have sprung up like mushrooms since the war.

Pete, a grimy young grease-monkey, was busy tightening the tappets on an old Chevrolet.

"You get paid by the hour or by the job?" Manassas asked conversationally.

"By the hour right now."

"How about a beer or two on the cus-

tomers' time? I got a couple of cold bottles in my car—and I'd like to talk."

He showed Pete his credentials. Pete wiped his greasy hands. "Must be about that tan Plymouth. Cops have already been asking about him. I'll drink a beer. But you're wasting it. I don't know nothing about him. I fixed his car and he paid me. He's gone and I don't know where he lives."

Manassas brought in the two cold bottles and uncapped them. "What was wrong with the car?"

"No brakes. Master cylinder of the hydraulic system shot to hell." Pete leaned against his cluttered work bench and tilted his bottle.

"How long did it take to fix it?"

"About three hours. I had to go to the parts supply house and get a new cylinder and plunger kit."

"Did he wait around here all the time?"

"No, he left. I called him when the car was ready and he came for it in a taxi."

"You called him? Then he left a number?"

Pete, who was taking another swig, lowered his bottle and his eyes widened over it. "That's right. I'd forgotten about that. But I wrote the number down somewheres."

The battered garage desk was beside a grimy window. There among the greasestains, among another hundred phone numbers, he picked out one.

"This is it. Mr. Valentine."

"Did he answer the phone himself?"

Pete scratched his head. "No. An operator answered, and then got this Valentine guy on the phone."

That appeared to be all the information the garage man could give concerning Bernie Valentine. "What's the guy done?" he wanted to know.

Manassas showed the lump on his head. "He gave me this while I wasn't looking."

BACK in his office, Manassas dug out his tattered copy of the Confidential Cross-Indexed Telephone Directory, for which he had paid twenty dollars. It took him about a minute and a half to learn that number L-2-6182 was the Wagon Wheel Tourist Courts, located on Highway 83.

He had seen the Wagon Wheel Courts a few times in passing. On the hunt again, he drove across the river and out Highway 83, and when he came to the big wagon

wheel outlined in neon, he turned into the wide graveled driveway of the "corral."

He stopped his car and glanced around.

The driveway made a big horseshoe swing which was lined on each side with rough brick cottages, each joined to the other by a carshed. The court office stood between the prongs of the horseshoe.

A bell rang as he entered the office. The place was empty, but presently in shuffled a fat and baldheaded old man in shirtsleeves, green suspenders and red felt house slippers. He looked at Manassas truculently.

"Now don't tell me you haven't got a room," Manassas said.

"I'm tellin' you I got one vacancy left," the fat man admitted grudgingly. "Five dollars a night. Take it or leave it."

Manassas took it. He signed the register and paid over the five. His eyes ran along the page of the register, but he did not see the name of Bernie Valentine.

"Show you to your cottage," the old man grunted.

"Do."

It was the usual tourist cabin, a little better than most. Bedroom and kitchenette. Bath attached.

Manassas sat down on the bed and smoked a cigarette. Then he went outside, opened the turtle-back of his car, and pretended to be arranging its tools and other contents. He could see around the whole U-shaped court.

He almost let the turtle-back drop down on his head. Across at the rear corner of the court, a tan Plymouth was parked under the shed of Cabin 19.

It was the tan Plymouth with the California license.

He let down the turtle-back and went hastily into his cabin. He made sure of his pistol harness, and the slip of his gun from its holster. He stepped out of his door then, took a glance about, and walked directly across to the door of Cabin 19.

He knocked. There was no answer. The shades of the front windows were down. He looked back. No one seemed to be about in the whole area of the court, so he moved cautiously around the corner to a side window. Here the shades were not drawn quite to the bottom. He peered in long enough to assure himself no one was in the cabin, and then hurried back to his own cottage.

He drew a chair up to his front window,

propped his heels on the sill. Here he could look out and get a view of the whole area-way and the approach to Cabin 19.

All afternoon he sat there, and nothing happened. Nobody came to Nineteen. At five he went to the court office, put a coin in the phone and called his own office.

Jill said, "Chief Renfro is about to explode. He has news and he's been trying to find you. Better call him."

Manassas did. Renfro said, "Ha! I should tell you *this* over the phone. Why don't you stick around where somebody can find you?"

"I'm watching a rat-hole," Manassas told him. "Send somebody out to relieve me. Have 'em pick up *anybody* who enters Cabin 19, here at the Wagon Wheel Courts. I'll swear out a warrant of assault, or you can book him on suspicion of murder."

THIRTY minutes later he was in his office. Dick Renfro waited for him there. It was one of the few times the chief of detectives had condescended to enter Manassas' shabby sanctorum. He looked disdainfully about as he relaxed in a tilted chair.

Jill wigwagged from her door, but at the moment Manassas could not brush Renfro off. He signaled with his eyebrows for her to shut her door and wait.

"Well, Dick?"

Renfro played coy. "You come clean with me and I'll come clean with you."

"You wouldn't know how," Manassas objected. He knew Renfro could hardly contain his news. "But—what do you want to know?"

"Who's the guy you're shagging out at Wagon Wheel Courts?"

"I don't know. I think he goes under the name of Bernie Valentine. He drives a tan Plymouth with a California license. He clouts private dicks on the head with guns. He burgles apartments for pictures of a man and his wife. I don't like him."

"Damn you, Manassas," Renfro snarled. "If you knew where he was, why have you had me sending my men out all day on this hunt for him?"

"Your boys had the same chance to find him that I did. Next time try sending 'em out with a handout of cold beer."

Renfro grunted. "I know you're holding out. I know you've got that picture of Go-

forth. Come on, now—admit that you do."

Manassas rolled his eyes devoutly and crossed his heart.

Renfro could hold his own information no longer. "We found the other body. Fished it out of the river about three miles south of Wyatttsville. It was floating on the surface."

Manassas wheeled on him. "Who was it?"

"He was fully clothed," Renfro went on, enjoying Manassas' suspense. "Had been in the water some forty-eight hours or more. Had a contusion on the side of his head—not enough to cause death. Apparently he died from drowning."

"Dick—" Manassas knotted his fists ominously. "Who is he?"

Renfro stood up and put on his hat. He looked down at Manassas tantalizingly. "I haven't seen the body yet. They're bringing it in from Wyatttsville now." He took off his hat, then put it back on, deliberately. "He had papers on him belonging to Louis Browder. Nobody who knows Browder has seen the body yet. So I can't say he's been positively identified."

Manassas watched Renfro's thick legs and wide heels as the big man swaggered out the door. He pulled his lower lip and frowned.

Those legs, walking out the door, brought back something—a vivid memory of another man walking out that door. Of a man standing in a doorway and gesturing with his hands. . . .

An alert nerve tingled in his brain. *This is it. This is it!* It was like an electric spark. But still he could not fill in the picture. He needed something else. Something was missing.

He didn't hear Jill rustling about getting ready to leave. *Something right here in his own office. Something in a corner. . . .*

His eyes flew about, probing each corner. Old hipboots. Fishing tackle. The dilapidated golf bag and clubs. His army raincoat dropped from its hook and half-standing, because of its stiffness, in a corner near the door. Nothing there. His eyes stared at every familiar item, hunting, hunting for the tantalizing, elusive fact which he knew was crying out to him.

He got up and stalked about, kicking at things, lifting them, shaking them. He did not see Jill staring at him from her door.

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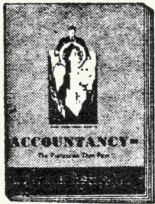
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He didn't hear her pitying comment, "You poor dear! It must be that clout on your head!"

He lifted the raincoat to hang it back on its hook. Something under it clattered on the floor. Manassas stood and stared down at the thing. A slender yellow walking cane.

He didn't touch it. He just stared. He walked around it and sank into his chair. Instantly the pieces in the puzzle began falling together. They fitted. They made a sordid and very ugly picture. A picture that even he, Lee Manassas, calloused and shabby private dick, was ashamed to put together and hold up and look at....

But he felt his thrill, his elation. He looked up and saw Jill standing in the door. He got out of his chair like a sleepwalker and walked to her. He pinched both her cheeks and kissed her full on her red lips.

"Honey, I've got it. It's in the bag!"

Jill just stood, staring into his face, her lips parted. She said, "I've been trying to tell you the airmail package from Miami came in. I thought maybe you didn't want Renfro to know." She said it absently—maybe she was still thinking about the kiss.

"You're smart. You're tops. Remind me tomorrow to raise your pay.... But on the contrary I'm anxious for that picture to get into Renfro's hands at once."

Jill brought in the big manila envelope. He tore it open, rifled through the little magazine and studied page 13 a moment.

"This is perfect," he cried. "I feel like dancing."

He slipped the magazine back into its cover, scribbled a few words on the envelope and handed it to her.

"Will you take this by Headquarters on your way home? See that it is placed in Dick Renfro's own big red ham-like hands."

He was busy again, writing on a note pad on the desk. He tore off the slip and gave it to her.

"Tuck this in your purse. I have an idea people may be looking for me before this night's over. If I'm not at home—this is where I can be found."

"Lee Manassas—the way you treat a poor working girl! I don't know how I put up with you!"

He patted her shoulder. "Someday I'll

(Continued on page 106)

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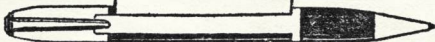
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(Continued from page 104)

make it all up to you. Get the hell gone, now!"

A few minutes later he locked his office. He carried the yellow cane. Any other time he would have blushed with shame. He wasn't the type to carry a cane.

But tonight he walked jauntily out into the street. He swung the cane. He whistled, *It All Comes Back to Me Now.*

CHAPTER SIX

Cornered

THE house on Lindell Street was dark. Manassas drove twice around the block, then parked half a block away. He stalked back and stood across the side street, staring at the two-car garage. One stall yawned open and empty.

This suited Manassas. But it meant a wait. He made tracks back to his car. He sat behind the wheel—and sat and sat.

An hour passed, and still he sat. He said aloud, "I'm watching an empty rat-hole. While I sit here—" But he shook his head. "No. This is the way it is. This is the way it's got to be."

He started to light another cigarette, but he lowered the lighter without spinning the flint. A car came slowly down Lindell. It rolled under a street light and he recognized it—a familiar Buick. It slowed in front of the house, pulled into the garage.

The garage doors squeaked as they were closed. Minutes passed. Two, three, maybe five. A light came on in the back of the house.

Now Manassas lit his cigarette. He smoked slowly and with relish, drawing on it until it was an inch-long stub. Then he crushed it out. He got out of the car and closed the door with careful silence.

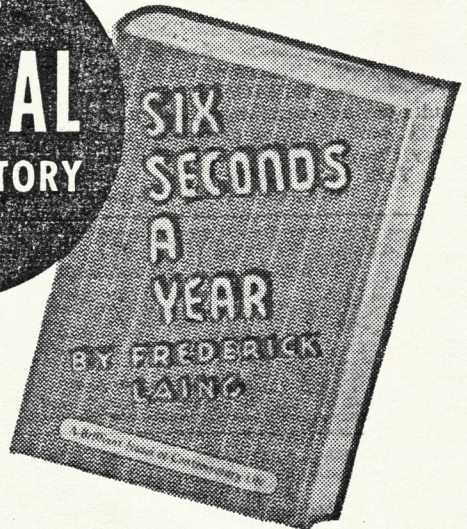
He carried the cane. He walked along the sidewalk, swinging it. Brisk, sure steps took him into the yard and across the porch and stopped at the door as he pressed the button.

Other steps came from the back of the house. Not brisk steps, not sure steps. Hesitant and dragging steps, rather.

He thought, *How does a murderer feel? Does he have premonition that the finger*

(Continued on page 108)

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Westmoreland Gray

(Continued from page 106)

is on him? Does the bottom fall out of his stomach at the unexpected ring of his door-bell?

The hall light came on. Mrs. Goforth opened the door. He said, "Lee Manassas, Mrs. Goforth. May I come in?"

She turned and led him into the living room. She had changed into a housecoat. He hooked the cane over the corner of the table. She stared at it with a quick intake of breath, started to say something—and didn't.

He studied her face. It was still a mask. But now it was a mask she was used to wearing. The mask stayed on without so much effort.

"I'm returning the cane, Mrs. Goforth. I thought you might wish it as a keepsake. Your husband left it in my office last Friday."

"I—I don't understand." Her voice was a croak in her throat. "My husband never walked without a cane."

Manassas smiled. His smile was satanic.

He said, "I came also to put you at ease about that picture which was stolen, Mrs. Goforth. I have recovered it."

"You—you recovered it! But that's impossible! You couldn't!"

"Oh, it's not the same picture. Just another copy of the little magazine—*The Sun Worshipers*."

She wavered. She sank into a chair. She stared at him.

"You—have the picture now? You brought it with you?"

She was trembling. Her breath shivered through her teeth. Lee Manassas leaned toward her, his dark, sunken eyes boring into hers.

"No, I didn't bring it. I knew you wanted it for Chief Renfro. So I sent it directly to him!"

THERE was no mask in front of her face now. The mask was gone and you saw the stark horror beneath.

"Go ahead and scream, Mrs. Goforth. I don't mind if it will make you feel any better."

He stood up and towered over her. She wilted and covered her face with her hands.

Her voice sobbed in her throat. "You—you came to me. You want money."

One Head Shorter!

"No. It's too late to offer me money. It's been too late for that since about midnight Friday night. . . . You've just come from the Wagon Wheel Tourist Court, haven't you, Mrs. Goforth? Did he tell you about the cane being left in my office?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

The door chimes rang then, and broke for a moment the spell of horror which had come into the room. The woman recoiled as if she had been struck.

"They've come!" Frenzy, hysteria edged her voice. Utter panic was in her face.

"No, they haven't had time. Will you answer the door, Mrs. Goforth—or shall I?"

She managed to pull herself together. "I'll go," she whispered jerkily.

"To the door—and no where else, Mrs. Goforth."

She stood up and faltered, and then walked into the hall. Manassas slipped his gun from its hideout clip, and held it in his fist. He stood in the archway, watching her back as she walked to the door. *A cornered woman is as tricky as a cornered man. . . .*

But this time Manassas was the one who gasped. The woman opened the door a foot, and then backed slowly into the hall, raising her hands.

A girl's shrill excited voice demanded, "Where's Lee Manassas? Where is he?"

Jill Guinn backed Mrs. Goforth farther into the hall, her little pearl-handled gun pressing into the woman's ribs.

Manassas let out a squawk of laughter, then stepped forward to put his hand on Jill's arm.

"Relax, honey. I'm all right. I'm on guard tonight—see?" He waved his own weapon.

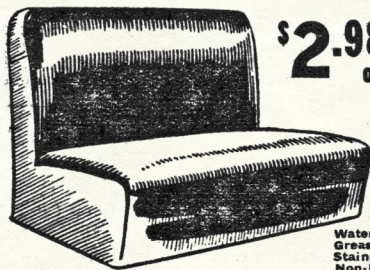
Jill lowered the little gun and stood straight facing him. "You don't know how to take care of yourself, Lee Manassas. Just because I don't mean anything to you is no sign that you don't mean anything to me. Soon as I read that address on the note I guessed what was up. . . . People who will lay a helpless man on a railroad track—they'll do as bad to you!" Her voice broke on a sob.

"You little brat! I told you to stay home where Dick Renfro could call you."

"I did, Lee. He called. They picked up

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Westmoreland Gray

the man at the tourist court. Said for you to stay here; they'd bring him here."

They sat in the living room. Mrs. Goforth sat staring blankly before her, a stiffly erect ghost. But Manassas and Jill did not look at her. They looked at each other.

They heard the cars stop out front. Mrs. Goforth let out a shivering sigh.

The three in the living room stood in the archway now. Two husky policemen came down the hall, pushing along a man between them, a gentleman with a handsome, dissipated face. A handsome man whom Manassas had seen but twice in his life.

Mrs. Goforth gave a low moan and fainted.

Jill Guinn stared. "*Mr. Goforth!*"

"No, honey. That's just the rub," Manassas said. "It's not Mr. Goforth. It's Mr. Bernie Valentine."

Dick Renfro roared from behind the trio. "And I want to know what you think you been pulling! You knew all along—"

"You give me credit for being smarter than I am, Dick." He bent over Mrs. Goforth. "Lend me a hand with her, Dick. I think she'll probably sign a statement when she comes to."

LATER, when a doctor had been called for Mrs. Goforth and had given her a hypodermic, and policemen had taken her and Valentine away, Dick Renfro said, "I can't believe it. It's too fantastic!"

Manassas said, "I don't know whether she hated her husband or it was just the money. Then she was undoubtedly infatuated with Valentine too. She'd been two-timing Goforth. I don't know how long. She'd had plenty of chances, going alone on vacations to resorts. When she hooked up with Valentine down in Florida, they registered as Mr. and Mrs. Goforth, because she had been there before and was known. The hotel photographer took their picture. That wasn't too risky because the little magazine was circulated only among the hotel guests and was never likely to meet Goforth's eye."

Jill sat deep in an armchair looking devotedly up at Manassas, who sat on the arm of it, grinning back at her.

"Go on—g'wan!" Renfro growled.

"Bernie Valentine probably hatched the plot and worked out the details. He's a

One Head Shorter!

swindler and con man with a devious mind. They wanted to get rid of Goforth and collect his insurance. Murder would get them fifteen thousand more than suicide, because one policy wouldn't pay off on suicide.

"That's where Valentine's devious mind came in. Hog-greedy, he and the dame wanted the dough from all the insurance policies. They plotted to kill Goforth and throw the blame on Browder. By killing Browder and having him disappear, they'd have the police practically certain Browder had done the murder. So here Valentine really had a brainstorm. He'd build up the case against Browder before Goforth was killed.

"I don't know why they picked on me. They couldn't go to the police, of course, so they selected a private detective who would be about the last person on earth to know Vincent Goforth personally. They knew that Jill and I went fairly regularly to the Sylvan Dell Club—"

"How could they know that?" Renfro asked gruffly.

"They had this mugg Joey on my trail.

"So Valentine and Goforth's wife manage to meet us at the Sylvan Dell. When I swallow the hoax and accept him as her husband, they know they're safe. I don't know the real Goforth. So the next day Valentine, posing as Goforth, comes to my office, hires me, and gives the big snow job about Browder going to kill Goforth. He acted the part very well, too. Of course Mrs. Goforth had coached him and furnished the props—pin-stripe suit, cane, gray hat and gloves.

"He was in character when he came in, but out of character when he went out. He forgot to limp, and he forgot the cane. But these things didn't hit me at the time.

"I think my suggestion that he make a written and sworn statement jarred Valentine. He didn't want to sign Goforth's name.

"After that he had to hurry the plot. He drove to Browder's house, stuck him up and knocked him out. In Browder's car he drove to Goforth's and also poked his gun in Goforth's stomach. He drove out on the highway near the railroad tracks, shot Goforth down close to the river, and then placed him just so on the tracks. After that he drove the car into the river-bank brush, drowned the unconscious Browder by tying

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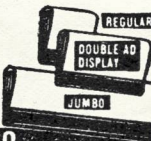


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Westmoreland Gray

the block to his neck with heavy brown paper. You know about that."

"Yeah, I know about that," Renfro mimicked sourly.

"The first thing that didn't ring true to me was when Mrs. Goforth told me her husband had called to her that he was leaving with Louis Browder. If it had really been Browder holding the gun in Goforth's belly, he would have never allowed Goforth to mention his name."

"Yeah? Well, go on."

"Evidently Valentine and the dame wanted to be sure I didn't get any notion that the Goforth I knew was a phoney. They had that picture which had been made in Florida, and they wanted me to see it. Just me and nobody else. So they hatched up the bull about it being stolen. Right then was when I spotted that Mrs. Goforth was in the plot. She told me she didn't know when the picture was stolen. Yet she wore her jewelry Thursday night to the Sylvan Dell—and certainly in putting it away she'd have noticed whether the lock on the jewelry-box was broken. It meant that Mrs. G. had faked the robbery, cut screen, scratched window sash and all—and had given the picture to Joey to peddle to me.

"But they wanted me alone to see the picture. They had to get it back before I could show it around. That's why my car was followed and I was knocked out."

Manassas paused to light a cigarette.

"Everything began to tie together when I remembered that Valentine had not limped when he left my office. I'm really indebted to your big thick legs, Dick, for jogging my memory on that. Then when I rediscovered the cane, under my old raincoat—the whole thing hit me like a ton of bricks."

Manassas finished and smacked his lips and looked across at Dick Renfro. Renfro did not look at all happy.

Manassas knew what was bothering him. He said magnanimously, "You give the story to the papers, Dick, in your own inimitable way. Me—I'll keep my mouth shut. I just want to get in touch with Gentry and see just how generous those insurance companies want to be. And by the way, have one of the boys drive my car down town for me, will you? I'm going out with Jill in her car tonight . . ."

THE END

Tailspin Cutie

(Continued from page 36)

"Tell me if I'm a hero. Wha' hopen?"

"You got conked on the head. Between two quaint buildings on Sharia Ibrahim. Two guys were tailing you, and the secret police were tailing them. When they were about to make off with your belt, the police closed in."

"Aha! It was the belt!"

"A very unusual belt, Chip. More valuable a thing than you needed to keep your pants up. When we cut it apart, lo and behold, there was a microfilm with all the dope on the new ram-jet rocket."

"Hot stuff, eh?"

"Too hot for the diplomatic pouch. Sorry we had to use your head the way we did; but it was the only way we could pick up the espionage contact men here in Beirut."

"I suppose this means Sherri will be grounded."

"Yup. Drink your drink and then give me all the dope on her you can so we can cable the F.B.I. to pick her up."

"Too bad."

"Real bad, especially after all the trouble she went to setting you up for a courier. What was it that made you suspect a frame, Chip?"

"The belt. She had me pretty well sold on everything else, but the belt didn't jibe. I've always been a suspender man, myself."

"Well, Chip, this whole affair couldn't have happened to a nicer guy. But, after this, be careful about your drinks. Never mix Sherri with bourbon."



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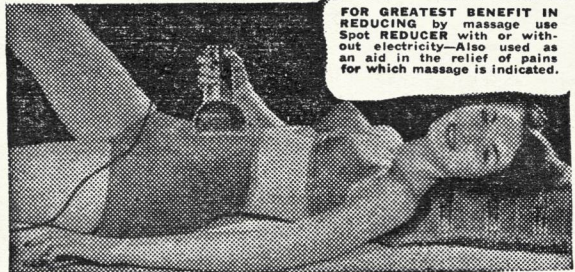


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