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APRIL



DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

WALL
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ROSE FOR
MURDER!**
by **DEAN EVANS**
**FLORA • DEMING
BECKMAN**

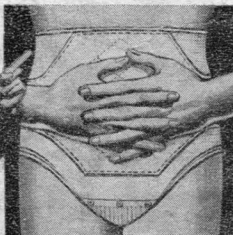


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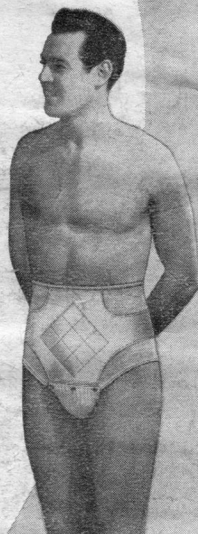
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If answer is no, score 5 points; if possible but doubtful, 10 points; if well able, 15 points. . .
 4. (If married.) Are you supporting your family in comfort?
If wages too low, score 5 points; if barely making ends meet, 10 points; if no money worries, 15 points. . .
 5. Are you able to save regularly?
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 6. Can you look ahead to a better job?
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 7. Are you training yourself for advancement?
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Vol. 68

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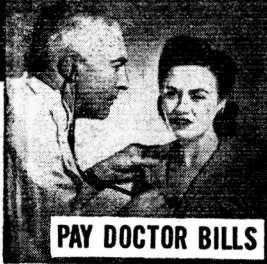
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Name.....
Address.....
City..... State.....
Occupation..... Age.....
Amount you want to borrow \$.....



READY for the RACKETS

A Department

Dear Detective Fans:

There's an old practise that's still a good one to follow—don't sign any contracts until you have read them carefully, especially the fine print. "Look before you leap," is a general rule to remember in all matters involving money.

You know that one way to protect yourself from swindlers and chiselers of all sorts is by reading this column regularly. Here, each month, we print the latest news about current ruses being pulled to put you on guard against the time-worn smoothies that still fleece the gullible.

Not only are you warned against big and little racketeers, but you can collect a cash bonus. We pay \$5 for each of your letters that we consider interesting enough to print. Be sure to address all letters to The Rackets Editor, c/o DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.

Now, let's turn to this month's letters:

Jewelers Beware

Dear Sir:

There's a new racket being worked in small jewelry stores. Recently, a man came into the store where I was employed, stating that he had an old diamond ring and wanted to have the stone put into a new setting. He selected a mounting, I took out my salesbook, and asked him for his name and address.

Then, I asked to see the old ring. He pulled it out of his pocket and laid it on the counter. Before I could examine it, he said that his car was parked in a no-parking zone and he had to hurry. Out of the store he ran.

When the manager came in, I showed him the ring. He found that the diamond was cracked. After looking in the telephone book, he was able to find the customer's phone number and called him up to advise him that before we could undertake the re-setting of a cracked stone, it would be necessary to have the customer's written O.K.

The customer assured the manager that it would be all right to go ahead with the work, that he would O.K. it over the phone. When the manager hesitated, the customer went on to say that he always shopped in our business community and was known by several of the merchants. Unwisely, we went ahead with the job.

Several days later, we sent the customer a card, advising that the work had been completed. Instead of hearing from him, we received a letter from his lawyer, stating that we had cracked the stone, and demanding damages of \$150. Evidently, the customer had reported to the lawyer that the first he knew of the stone being cracked was when we telephoned him.

Jewelers should watch out for rackets like this; and when taking in cracked stones of any kind, be sure to get the customer's signature on a ticket describing such damage upon receipt.

Mrs. R. Schlafman
University City, Mo.

Soft Heart—Flat Purse

Dear Sir:

Some time ago, I had just gotten home from a hard day's work, picked up my evening paper and started reading when my doorbell rang. I opened the door and a well-dressed young man, hardly out of his teens, was there. He told me his name, and said he lived a few blocks down the street and that he and several others were calling on the people in that vicinity to see if they would help the family that had lived in the neighborhood, whose home had burned the night before.

I knew about this fire and knew the family to be in almost desperate circumstances. He seemed so sincere and honest that I didn't think of doubting what he told me, and though I could hardly meet my own obligations, I decided I would contribute \$10.

The next morning I stopped for gas near my home and heard some people discussing the get-a-way of the young man who got my money. The evening paper told of how he had gypped a number of people in that vicinity, then skipped town.

S. E.
Nashville, Tenn.

Up in Smoke

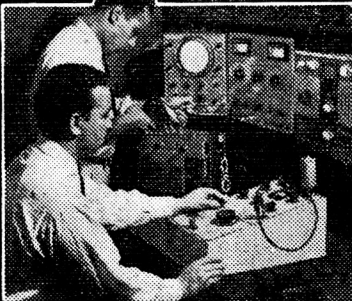
Dear Sir:

A prosperous-looking young man stepped into the grocery store I was running and introduced

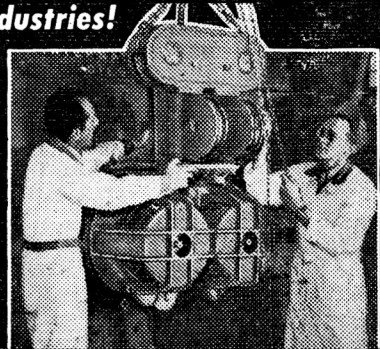
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NAME _____ AGE _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ ZONE _____ STATE _____

VETS! Check here if released from service less than 4 years ago.

(Continued from page 6)

himself. He said he was representing a large, well-established wholesale tobacco concern, and wished to place a cigarette vending machine in my place of business.

The merits of his machine were well told. If a person desiring cigarettes would just place his money in the slot, a package of cigarettes would roll out to him. Many sales could be made while the clerk was waiting on the trade and doing other things. The cost was little considering its value.

I would have just a few dollars to pay each year as a mark of good faith, and that would take care of the interest on the investment also.

The company would make their money on the cigarettes supplied to the machine. I made the down payment, and have never seen that salesman since.

My advice is—if the salesman is a stranger, pass up the deal!

S. Q. Fraser
Houston, Texas

Wallie W. Mattice
Lincoln, Neb.

Wrecking the Wrecker Racket

Dear Sir:

Reading your column helped me to be prepared against a well known racket recently.

On one of those beautiful days after a heavy rain, I pulled the car off to park on the deceptively smooth shoulder of a street on the outskirts of town. The wheels began to slide side-wise in the mud toward a shallow ditch until the car leaned precariously. There was nothing to do but call a wrecker.

I was cautious enough to ask over the telephone how much the charges would be to pull the car out of the mud. A price was quoted that seemed high, but I agreed to pay it.

Remembering your rackets column, I decided to be prepared in case of intended fraud, so before the garage man came I removed all the money from my purse except the amount I had agreed to pay.

Sure enough, when the car was on the road after less than ten minutes of work, I was asked to pay exactly twice the amount quoted over the telephone. I regretfully showed the contents of my purse, and the garage man cheerfully remarked, "Well, I sure can't take what you haven't got."

Opal Y. Palmer
Lincoln, Nebraska

Hurry, Hurry, Hurry!

Dear Sir:

Sometime ago there was an advertisement on television of a book on radio and television troubles and how to diagnose the cause. Their claim was that most troubles were easily remedied if you knew where to look, and that generally a minor adjustment or replacement of a tube would be the answer.

At the time I was taking a course in electronics but had not gotten to the television part, and I thought such a book along with my study could

make my course more interesting and more quickly applicable to everyday practical use.

The charge for the book was only \$1.00. They purportedly had only 1,000 copies on hand and were discontinuing the publication, so there would be no more when the supply on hand was gone.

The price was so low, I was skeptical, but nevertheless I took a chance and put a \$1.00 bill in an envelope, rather than to write a check for so small an amount, and sent for a book immediately.

I have never heard anything further about it.

I imagine the price of only \$1.00 was part of the scheme to get currency instead of checks or money orders. I have often wondered if the ones who sent checks or money orders received their book or if their money was refunded because the publishers were "out of books."

I imagine the rush order pressure was because you would probably never hear the advertisement again.

Don't Talk to Strangers

Dear Sir:

A friend of mine had just arrived from Switzerland and was waiting to be cleared by U. S. Customs. Being somewhat bored by the long trip, and a bit bewildered at the strange surroundings, he was more than eager to carry on a conversation with a stranger who had approached him.

After talking for some time, and gaining the complete confidence of my friend, the stranger asked him over to his apartment for dinner that evening. Such hospitality could hardly be refused, so my friend accepted. Little did he realize that the stage was being set to swindle him out of fifty dollars.

At that moment, as if by prearranged signal, a handsome, well-dressed, middle-aged lady, appearing somewhat distressed, walked up. After being properly introduced as the wife of the stranger, she told her husband that she was unable to obtain a parcel with a collect amount of one-hundred dollars because she only had fifty dollars with her.

Conveniently enough, the husband had forgotten his wallet. He turned, apologetically, to my friend and asked him if he could lend him fifty dollars until dinner that night.

Being greatly impressed by the cunning confidence team, he obliged—only to find later that evening that the address given never existed.

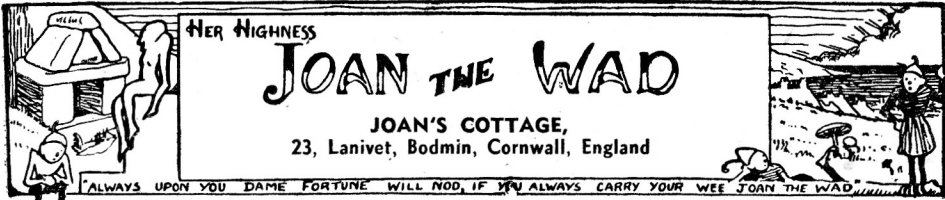
Orval L. Hidde
Waverly, Iowa

Brand Name Watches

Dear Sir:

Beware of any man selling well-known watches for less than half price! This particular fellow was standing outside the neighborhood bank, around Christmas, on a busy afternoon.

(Continued on page 113)



AS HEALER. One Lady writes: "My sister suffered very badly for years, but since I gave her a Joan the Wad to keep near her she is much easier. Do you think this is due to Joan or the water from the Lucky Well?"

AS LUCK BRINGER. Another writes: "Since the war my wife and I have been dogged by persistent ill-luck and we seemed to be sinking lower and lower. One day someone sent us a Joan the Wad. We have never found out who it was, but, coincidence if you like, within a week I got a much better job and my wife had some money left her. Since then we have never looked back and, needless to say, swear by 'Queen Joan'."

AS MATCHMAKER. A young girl wrote and informed me that she had had scores of boy friends, but it was not until she had visited Cornwall and taken Joan back with her that she met the boy of her dreams, and as they got better acquainted she discovered he also has "Joan the Wad."

AS PRIZEWINNER. A young man wrote us only last week: "For two years I entered competitions without luck, but since getting Joan the Wad I have frequently been successful although I have not won a big prize. But I know that . . . who won \$5,600 in a competition has one because I gave it to him. When he won his \$5,600 he gave me \$280 for myself, so you see I have cause to bless 'Queen Joan'."

DO YOU BELIEVE IN LUCK ?

HURRY

Mrs. WILSON, of Fal-mouth, says, 1951:
Since receiving Joan the Wad . . . my husband's health has improved 100%.

Mr. JONES of Cheltenham, says, 1951:
Send me J. O'Lantern. Since receiving Joan the Wad have won two 1st prizes in Cross-words . . . *John Bull* and *Sunday Chronicle*.

SEND NOW

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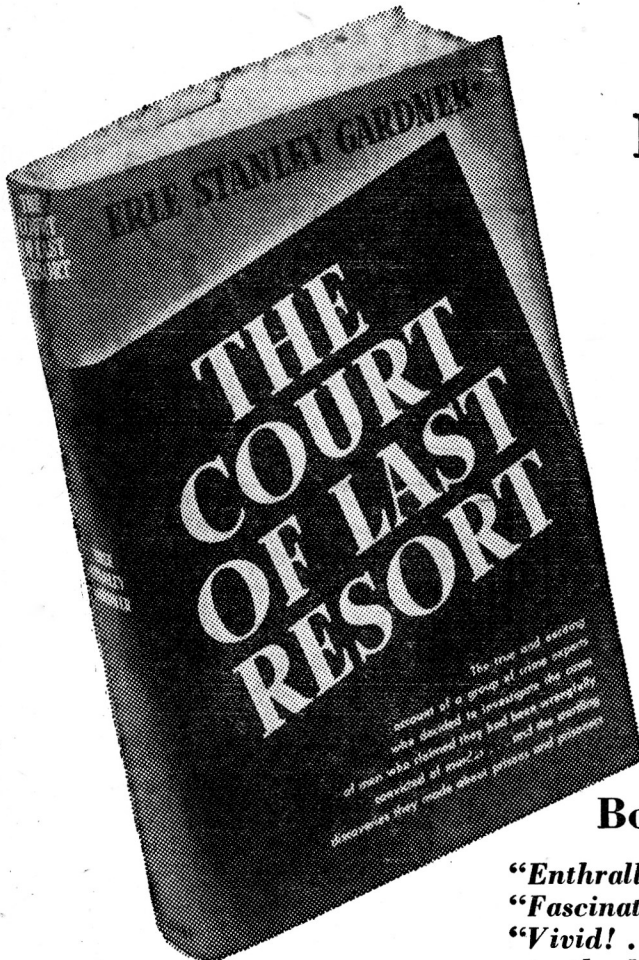


AS SPECULATOR. A man writes: "I had some shares that for several years I couldn't give away. They were 14 cent shares and all of a sudden they went up in the market to \$1.10. I happened to be staring at Joan the Wad. Pure imagination, you may say, but I thought I saw her wink approvingly. I sold out, reinvested the money at greater profit and have prospered ever since."

Just send Two Dollar notes or an International Money Order and a large self-addressed envelope to:
JOAN'S COTTAGE, 23, LANIVET, BODMIN, CORNWALL, ENG.
and I will send you both History and Mascot.



The Court of



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"Wise, fast and big-city!" he snarled.

There was no reason why I should make like a private eye, excepting that I felt sorry for the poor little ex-con. But I needed someone to feel sorry for me, when my sympathy led me straight down the one-way, crimson path to murder!

REMEMBER

ROSE

FOR

MURDER!

By

DEAN EVANS



UNTIL TEN o'clock on the morning of the sixteenth of March, I hadn't a thing in the world to do except sit in my office, where too many cigarettes had been smoked and butted, and stare the calendar down off the wall, and think of the shine on the seat of my pants and death and taxes—next year's

taxes. This year's were ancient history.

But at ten, the one door in my office opened and a thin man poked his head in rather timidly, and he gave me a tentative smile.

I smiled back—fainter than his, for he caught me in the middle of a yawn. He didn't say anything, which was a novelty. When the sign in your window says *Income Tax Service*, you hear a few beauts, some even legitimate.

He closed the door and came across the linoleum. He stood for an instant on the other side of the desk, brought back his smile, and said on the tail end of it, "A man named Sam mentioned your name. He said you might not be busy today."

I couldn't argue that. "I just went into a coma yesterday at midnight," I said pleasantly. "It happens like this every year."

He didn't smile. At first, he didn't. And then, as though he thought perhaps I expected it, he put one on and took a long breath and waited. He was thin. He had a frame that could have tucked away thirty more pounds without a double-breasted suit. His hair was grayish, but lacking the luster of true gray hair. His eyes were an uninspired sort of blue. His hands were long-fingered, with not much skin, but a lot of raised, blue veins. His lips looked like they were used to being sunburned and windburned.

When he didn't say anything else, I asked, "Tax problem? You're a little late. Your return should have been in a few hours back."

"It isn't that. Sam mentioned you. Sam down at the Sunset Grille—the barman."

"Oh," I said, "that Sam."

"He said he knew you. He said you drop in there now and then. He said you were a pretty nice guy, and probably you wouldn't be too busy."

"Sam gets three cherries," I said, modestly. "But his beer is bad."

"This hasn't anything to do with income

taxes, Mr. Marcus. I—" He hesitated. I waited, thinking and playing back the husky sound of his voice in the ears of my mind. Not that I'd heard it before—I hadn't. But there was something about the way he spoke that didn't sound quite normal. Some oddness of tone, perhaps.

He must have noted the frown on my face. "Sam also said he thought you were pretty clever. That's what I need, somebody clever."

I let that one go by. "Have a chair."

"I can stand." He leaned over the desk, and smiled again. "You're all right, I think. I think Sam was right, now that I've got a look at you."

I shrugged. On the sixteenth of March I've got all the time in the world. I speared myself with a cigarette.

"I was in a little trouble," he said.

"What was it?" I asked.

"Murder."

The cigarette fell out of my mouth.

He shook his head. "Second degree only, you understand. The last things I remember about the outside were funny little things: Ben Bernie's music; Chicago's Century of Progress, and a fancy marble bar they had there; the empty downtown streets very late at night, 'Canyons of Loneliness,' I think it was Winchell used to call them in New York."

I leaned over, got the cigarette and checked it for dust. It looked pretty bad. I tossed it at a full wastebasket, and took out another. "You know, he's still going strong, that boy," I said.

"He always will. Men like him don't happen very often, they have to last a long time."

Maybe it was the weather. Maybe he was a poet. Or maybe he was just funny.

I rolled the cigarette between my forefinger and thumb, and tried it under my lip. It fit, so I snapped a match at it, blew smoke into the air, and stared at him across the desk. He said—and very huskily this

time, "I did eighteen years. At that I was lucky. There I was standing over him, and the gun still smoking in my hand. I took second degree without an argument."

I blew more smoke.

"Except—" he added.

"Oh," I said.

"Except that I didn't do it, of course. The woman did it. I took it for her. At the time, I knew she didn't deserve the break, but I took it anyway."

He *was* funny. "Eighteen years!" I said.

He nodded. "She had a baby, you see. That's what made the difference to me. A mother should be with her baby, I figured. So I took it for her."

That one I didn't comment on at all.

He said simply, "She was my wife. The baby was my own baby."

HE SUDDENLY WASN'T funny anymore. I blinked at him, then looked at him steadily. It was about as much my business as it would have been Sam's business taking orders for caskets with one hand, while he drew bad beer with the other. Less, if you considered the beer seriously.

I said at last, "But she didn't deserve the break?"

"Yes. That's the way it looked to me then. But eighteen years can be a long time. You can get a little mellow in eighteen years. Looking back on it, I think I can understand how she felt at the time."

"How did she feel?" I said.

He took a deep breath. "There was this man," he said, almost gently. "I didn't know it, of course. I thought I was a happily married husband. But there was this man anyhow, no matter what I thought. He had the looks, he had the money, and he had the time. In the end, there was just one thing she found wrong with him—he didn't have much staying power. And one day he said, "Goodbye kiddo, it's been swell

and all that, but . . . like she must have realized all along he would sooner or later. He meant it, and she finally knew in her heart that he meant it. She didn't like that, so she let him win first prize."

"And now you're mellow?" I shook my head, wonderingly.

He smiled sadly. "That isn't too important. The time, I mean. But here is why I've come to you. I don't know where she is anymore. I want you to find her for me."

"Huh?" I gawked. "Didn't she ever visit you, after all you did?"

"Yes."

"Well, then?"

"Once. About seventeen years ago. She wanted to go to Reno. I signed a waiver."

I sat back. I shook my head, and sighed.

"You see, I'll never get over loving her, Marcus."

I swallowed.

"Her name is Rose. I've got a picture here that looks just like her. And about money, don't worry. Here's two sawbucks for a starter."

"You know, you'd spoil a good man for sure," I grunted.

"Oh, there'll be more, don't worry."

I stared at him again. I suddenly realized that he wasn't funny, nothing he had said since he came in had been funny, no matter how you looked at it. He was just a thin, little man with something terribly wrong inside him, and he had come to me for the cure. The cure was a commodity that a tax man usually doesn't have in his briefcase.

"I'm not the police, old boy," I said gently. "I'd like to help if I could, but I sure can't. What you want to do, is lay this in the lap of Missing Persons down at Police Headquarters. This is strictly their stuff."

"I know," he said, nodding. "I realized that right away. But then, I also realized how very disinterested they would be in an old con's troubles—or in a con's old trou-

bles, I mean. That's why I came here."

I shrugged. "If not them, how about a private agency? There must be a few in a city this size?"

"There are. Private detectives thrive in a town like this."

"Well, then," I said.

"They want money—at least the ones who could do me any good. Two sawbucks to them is just nothing at all. And the others, the ones who'd take it on for peanuts. . . . Well, a lot of water has gone under the bridge since I knew the world last, but not this—you still get what you pay for."

I spread my palms, and tried to smile. "But me? Laddie, I'm a tax man; and when I'm not a tax man, I'm an accountant."

"I know," he said. "I got to thinking when I was in the Sunset. And I thought to myself: Now if I could just get hold of a good accountant, I'm sure he'd be willing to help me out for old times' sake, if not for anything else. So I asked Sam, and he mentioned your name."

"For old times. . . . That one I don't get, brother."

He nodded, smiled, nodded again. "Maybe I'm sentimental. But when I was out, I knew all the boys. The boys are good fellows, they stick together. They'd do favors for one another. I was one of the boys myself, back then."

"Huh?"

"I was a C.P.A., and a darned good one."

"Oh," I said. "Oh. Well, yeah. Like I said before, and I meant it, I'd be glad to give you a hand if I could. But look, this thing is out of my line—out of *any* accountant's line—to find a missing person, somebody who maybe moved to China or Tibet fifteen or so years ago?"

"Won't you please, Marcus?" he pleaded. He leaned down over the desk, got his eyes on mine and held them like that, let-

ting me wilt under his gaze. "Please? I'm not asking much. Just to nose around a little for me! I don't have anyone else I can turn to."

I sighed. His name was Albert J. Geberloend. I took him to lunch, and he talked about it the whole time. I began to realize that in eighteen years, a city like this can change so much that a man wouldn't know his right name any more. Primarily, I supposed, that was why he felt he needed help. He was a gentle, gutless, little man. His hands shook badly every so often; to cover it he'd clench them tightly together when the spells came because he thought I might notice the trembling.

The thing that amazed me most, was the apparent philosophy of patience which seemed to have been holding him together in comparative sanity for all those years.

When he finally left me, I was in possession of two, badly crumpled ten-dollar bills; an address on Inaldo Street; and a picture of a brunette whose black, lacquered hair, attractive face and full lips would never in a million years be able to hide the predatory eyes, already on the prowl from the first day she opened them to the hard, white light of the world.

CHAPTER TWO

The Trouble Begins

THIRTY-TWO forty-five Inaldo Street was a frame house covered with a thin veneer of unpainted stucco, cracked and broken off in patches that showed rusty chicken wire underneath. In front of the house, on a totally grassless square plot, was the trunk of a twisted eucalyptus. It had been sawed through at about hip-height, and growing out of the cross-wound were tender, sprouting shoots looking like fountains of green water.

It was a small house, one of several on the block just as badly neglected. Across the street, and suffering from supermarket

poisoning, was a small grocery with a tattered awning that nobody bothered about rolling up anymore. In the window, was a peeling decalomania of the N.R.A. emblem—which probably dated the last big hope the owner had had. I shook my head at that, and went up three worn, wooden steps. I punched a button and somewhere inside the house a buzzer sounded loudly. The door opened.

“Eh?”

“My name is Daniel Marcus,” I said. “I’m looking for a Mrs. Rose-Geberloend. I was told she lived here several years back.”

“Eh?”

“A brunette,” I said, “not too tall, attractive face, nice figure.”

“Eh?”

He needed a shave on the point of his weak chin. He had needed the same shave the day before yesterday. His sunken eyes were grave and bloodshot, and had as much expression as two melon seeds on a yellow platter.

“Eh?” he said again, and sucked air delicately through a decayed tooth.

“She probably hasn’t been around for a number of years,” I said. “But I thought I’d check up on the off chance. Here is what she looked like back then.” I took the print out of my pocket and held it out so he could see it.

That time he didn’t say “eh?” For a long instant, he didn’t say anything. When he did at last, he wasn’t sucking air through the bad tooth anymore, he was staring with a rapt expression at the picture.

“She . . . ah . . . is very attractive, yes. A—a—nice figure, you said?”

“That was then,” I said. “She’d be about forty now. Probably wrinkles.”

“Oh.” His eyes dulled and he stopped looking at the snapshot.

I put the photo away. “Well,” I said. “I really didn’t hope for anything. Would you know of an old resident here on the block?

Someone who might remember back about twenty years?”

That made him smile faintly. “Next door, possibly. The Jackson woman. But you won’t like her.”

“No?” I said. “Why not?”

“Drinks,” he said nastily, and banged the door in my face.

I went down the three wooden steps and crossed over the plot of bare earth to the house next door. I punched the same kind of button, and inside the house the same raw buzzer bracked sharply in the same naked way.

She was a big woman, even in her youth she must have been big. When the door swung open, her square chin preceded her flying, red hair—and her flying, red hair came whipping out fast.

“Somebody bang on my door, Willy?” she barked.

I backed away about a foot. “Are you Mrs. Jackson?”

“That’s me!”

“My name is Marcus,” I said, “Daniel Marcus. I was told you’d been living in this neighborhood for a long time.”

“You been told true, Willy! Girl, woman, and hag, I been here for years and years. Mamie Jackson, bride of Captain Horseshoe Jackson, last of the old time hoss-soldiers. I’m living on his pension now, and I ain’t ashamed to admit it. Anybody put up with Horseshoe Jackson like I did deserves a pension!”

“Swell,” I said. “You’re just who I’m looking for.”

“That so?” She studied me. Her chin came down and her eyes came out as she stared at me for a long moment. “Hey!” she rapped. “Who told you?”

“Man next door,” I said, indicating with my thumb.

She leered. “Oh, *him*.” And then her eyes went into tight slits. “What’s your opinion of that bird, Willy?” she demanded.

"I think maybe he collects pictures of pretty girls," I said.

"Har, har, har! *Yow!*" She slapped a huge paw on my shoulder, and let out a whoop that went over my head and shook the ragged awning on the grocery across the street. "Come on in, that deserves a snort!"

SHE GRABBED my right arm and yanked. Suddenly there was a living room I wasn't prepared to see, considering the run-down exterior of the place and the run-down neighborhood. The walls were a dawn pink and clean. On the floor was an oriental rug with a pad under it, and the two combined would have made a mattress on anybody's bed. Against one wall a long divan—new and not cheap—faced a television console that must have cost five hundred dollars if it cost a cent. There were occasional chairs scattered around. I didn't count them. There wasn't a jarring note in the room.

"Set, Willy. Be right back." She waded, thick-ankled, through an archway in the opposite wall and disappeared. Somewhere in the rear of the house, a closet door opened and slammed shut. And then she was back, with two water tumblers in one hand and a fifth of what could have been gin in the other.

"This ain't what you're thinking," she rasped. "Ain't gin. Kümmel. Old Horse-shoe used to say, anybody could down enough kümmel to get drunk sure deserved a better fate all the way around. Say when."

"Kümmel?" I said. "Holy Moses! One finger. One little finger."

"My gawd!"

I took the glass. She half-filled hers, set the bottle down on the rug and gracefully—for her size—folded her bulk on the divan beside me. She winked as she hoisted her glass. "Aaah, there's a warm, good-natured drink for a body's stomach! Well, then.

What's all this about the fellow next door?"

"Nothing," I said. "Nothing about him, I mean. He just happens to live where a Mrs. Rose Geberloend used to live a long time ago."

"Huh?" One tangled skein of her red hair dropped over her left eye and hung there.

"Mrs. Rose Geberloend," I repeated. "Her husband's name was Albert J. Geberloend, a little man who used to be a certified public accountant."

"Yeah? That so?" She reached up slowly and pushed back the fallen hair and then stared, blinking, at her glass. "Cops?" she asked in a very low tone.

I laughed. "Heck no! I'm an accountant myself. Just doing old Al a favor, sort of."

Her eyes came up from her glass. "Old Al, huh?"

"Yes," I said.

"Friend?"

"Yes."

She nodded. "Old Al out now? He copped a plea as I recall."

I nodded back. "Yes, he's out—and lost. You know how it is when you've been under wraps that long, you don't know your way around anymore. He asked me to help him locate his wife. It seems she didn't keep in touch with him any too well."

"Old Al, huh? Well, well, well."

I nodded once more.

She raised her tremendous bulk on a deep breath, and pouted with her thick lips. Then she looked over at my glass and grinned slyly. "Hell, Willy, I knew that little dab wasn't enough. Look, it's done evaporated already. Gimme your glass, I'll fancy it up." She reached out, grabbing.

"Just another little one, though," I said. "I'm not used to this sweet stuff."

"Aw, go on! She leaned over for the bottle, got the cork out with her teeth and went to pour. Then she said with a frown, "What the hell, there's lint or something in your glass. My gawd, what a housekeeper

I am. I'll go rinse your glass out for you."

"Oh, now," I protested.

"Won't take a sec." She dropped the bottle, heaved herself to her feet, and walked heavily out of the room. A faucet splashed water somewhere for a moment, then a bang of the pipes as she turned it off. The closet door opened once more, slammed hard once more. In a minute she was back. "Got another glass. Noticed the other had a crack in it too. Seems like everything's gone to hell since old Horseshoe passed on. How much this time? Another little finger? Har, har, har!"

"Easy," I said. "Go easy, Mrs. Jackson."

"Aw!" She swooped up the bottle, poured and shook it around in the glass. "Look," she grunted, "for babies, this stuff is." Then she handed it out. She plumped down, gave herself some more, touched it to her lips.

I drank mine. "Certainly goes down like whipped cream," I said. "How long since you last heard from Mrs. Geberloend?"

"Oh." She screwed up her little eyes, "a long time, I guess. She moved away right after, you know. I did have her address once but hell, we never was very snug, Rose and I wasn't. You know how it is in a big city, you could live next door to a body for ten years and never know for sure if they had a bathtub. But that's life, I guess. I . . . Is there something wrong, Willy?"

I knew what she meant by that. I knew it before she did. The room suddenly was drawing in on me, as though someone behind the four walls was pushing them slowly toward the center. Something behind my eyes started to throb, and at the same instant, I wanted to throw up on the beautiful Oriental rug at my feet.

"You look sorta faint," she said, smirking.

"I . . . I . . ."

"Something you et, huh?"

I TRIED TO make it to my feet. The throbbing behind my eyeballs was hard, hot, incessant. I lifted with all the strength I possessed and put my hand out—about an inch and a half. And then something hit the floor hard, and my shoulder felt like a china cup shattering on concrete four flights down.

"Old Al, huh?" I heard a voice sneer dimly. "Them as knew him at all, Willy, used to call him Junior. Too bad you didn't know about that."

Knockout drops.

I closed my eyes so I wouldn't have to watch as the fast freight roared down upon me. . . .

When I came to, there were two things I noted almost simultaneously. The first was an open window, with the curtain blowing in and out and gathering dust on its bottom doing it. The second was an odor as heavy as the scent of sachet left behind by a dowager sweeping through a drawing room. This wasn't perfume. It was a sharp, sour odor that corkscrewed up my nostrils.

I raised my head from the Oriental, and took a breath. I took another breath, got up on my elbow, and then waited while the surf rode high inside. When it subsided, I went to my feet fast and clutched the arm of the divan, took three stumbling steps, landed pawing on the television console. From there to the wall was easier. I half fell through the archway and into a dim room and out to the kitchen.

Through the window above a white porcelain sink cabinet, I could just see the late afternoon sun drooping listlessly out over the Pacific and ready to drop from sheer fatigue. In another minute, the subtropical night would come blanketing down. I yanked on the faucet and then reached up to the china closet and yanked on the door.

I found a glass. I also found a small, purple-colored, prescription bottle with the label torn off and something inside of it I had the best reason in the world to swear

wouldn't be aspirin. I shoved the bottle in my pocket, got down a glass, and took a drink. After that, I slammed off the faucet making the pipes bang violently, and found my way out of the kitchen, out of the living room, out of the house and away. The sharp smell which I couldn't identify lingered on behind.

As for the widow of the late Horseshoe Jackson, she was not to be found anywhere. I wondered if she was bored with TV and had wandered down to the drugstore for a good magazine.

CHAPTER THREE

The Police Join In

THE LETTERING on the pebbled-glass door said *Missing Persons*. Below that, and in very small letters, *Sergeant Xavier Augustus Rittenhouse*. I went in.

He was an old, half-bald, half-gray-headed man with puffed eyelids and a look of sore feet. He was behind the desk and he had the office all to himself. From the two fangs on the left side of his mouth hung a briar pipe quite possibly the same age as he was. When the door snicked shut behind me he raised his eyelids briefly, indicated a chair with a gray-stubbled chin, and then slowly picked up a pencil and got it set.

"Girl friend or wife?" he asked cynically.

I smiled and shook my head. Then I sat down and dragged the chair closer. I told him who I was and about what had happened up on Inaldo Street, not omitting the kummel and the bad sleep I'd had on Mamié Jackson's Oriental. The only thing I didn't tell him, was the not-guilty story Albert Geberloend had told me. I didn't know why I left that out, it was just that it seemed simpler without it.

When I finished, he tossed the pencil away from him and picked up the purple, drugstore bottle I had taken from my pocket. He uncapped it. He stuck his nose

down, sniffed at it and looked very wise.

"Very likely." He recapped the bottle and shoved it to one side. A little time went by during which he took the dead pipe from his mouth, frowned at it, dropped it in the center drawer of his desk, and from the same drawer took a cigar that didn't have any cellophane around it. He sniffed appreciatively at that and then put it down.

"One detail you seemed to overlook," he said slowly. "What you're doing—have in fact, already done—happens to lie in the realm of police work, mister."

I nodded. "I know. When he first asked me to help him, I advised him to come here. Missing Persons, I told him."

He nodded. "Not that it would do much good—but—hell, yes!" A pause, then, "How does he look? I remember that guy. He was a little guy with a name almost as funny as mine. Albert J. Geberloend. Yeah. Back in those days I was what's known as a 'comer.' I was on homicide detail for awhile."

"He's all right, I guess," I said. "Thin, and looks sick, as who wouldn't? And what do you mean it wouldn't do much good?"

"Well . . ." He tilted his head to one side and gave me a look out of angled eyes. "Maybe you took me wrong. But eighteen years, that's a long time, mister. She probably got married again. And if she kept her nose clean, what chance would we have now—I mean her under a new married name, and all?"

"He put it differently," I said cautiously. "How much interest would the police have in an ex-con's old troubles." Understand, these are his words—not mine."

That one put a sour look on his face. He didn't answer. Instead, he picked up the cigar once more, bit the end of it, spit at a wastebasket under his desk. He poked it back in his mouth, struck a kitchen match on the seat of his chair, and sucked slowly.

A little blue smoke filtered my way . . .

then a little more. And suddenly I knew what the sharp, elusive odor was in the widow Jackson's living room. "Cigar smoke, I'll be damned," I said.

His left eyebrow went up. I said it again, "Cigar smoke. That's what the smell was . . . but fainter."

He puffed. "Wasn't there when you first went in?"

"No."

He looked thoughtful. "Likely the old girl needed a stogey to soothe her nerves after you threw up on her brand new carpet. Don't mind me, I get horsey now and then. This dinkey, little office bores me stiff. Seriously, maybe she called in the neighbor and he was smoking at the time. After she put you to sleep, maybe she didn't know what to do and called him over."

"Not that boy," I said, shaking my head. "A scented and tipped cigarette, maybe, but not a cigar."

"Oh, yeah." He focused his eyes up on the wall. The cigar hung from his lips. Some little time went slowly by and he seemed to be thinking.

At last—"Lots of funny angles to that case. I never quite believed it happened the way he confessed it. Of course, at the time, old F. T. Baker was simply delighted to get the second degree deal like that without a fight. Baker was then D.A., and running for mayor at the next election. He was in the middle of a nice campaign to glorify F. T. Baker, as I recall. But like I say, I always figured it a little too pat. Hell, let's quit kidding ourselves, it was just too damned phoney for words."

I COCKED AN eye politely and kept my face without any expression on it.

"These ain't department secrets I'm telling you, mister. It was all in the papers at the time. This Geberloend was in the garage out back washing his car, see? He comes in the house. Not tiptoeing, not making like a little mouse. He surprises

this romantic scene in the living room, just like that. So he sees red, and while the guy and Geberloend's wife just stand there politely waiting for him, he goes in the next room, gets his gun, comes back, and shoots the guy dead. Now I ask you?"

I averted my eyes and shrugged. "I wasn't living here at the time, so I wouldn't remember."

"Who was?" he growled. "California's nothing but a state full of foreigners these days."

I looked back and grinned. "You may have something there. Who was the man Geberloend shot? He didn't tell me."

"No?" His eyes popped suddenly. "By God, what do you know about that. And you just tossing cookies on the widow's rug."

"What?"

"Yeah. John Joseph Jackson was the victim. 'Horseshoe,' they used to call him. Because he was so lucky, I suppose."

"I'm damned!" I said.

"Love thy neighbor. Horseshoe tried to take it literal."

I closed my mouth and tried to think about it. Behind the desk, Rittenhouse just sat, puffed slowly at his cigar, and stared at the wall, smiling musingly. I tried to think about it for a long while.

He said finally, "Well, I don't suppose we've been much help. But I'll get on it. If Geberloend's wife is still around, we'll find her probably. In the meantime, you can go back to your accounting and enjoy life again."

"I had a different idea," I said. "Being a fairly representative specimen of red-blooded American boy, I figured on going back to Inaldo Street and kicking in the teeth of old Horseshoe's widow-lady."

"Uh uhh." He shook a warning finger. "You ain't got a leg, mister. In the first place, you couldn't prove beans. Maybe even *I* don't believe your yarn, and frankly I do, but you ain't got nothing. Whose

bottle is this, hers? Prove it! Did somebody see her slip you the sleep? Prove it! Did she have a motive for doing it? Prove it!"

"Holy Smokes!" I complained. "Don't forget my swan dive on her Oriental. That was me did that."

"Yeah? You couldn't even prove that."

I left him staring morosely at me, and I went home. My stomach felt like a troupe of circus elephants were walking inside it with their shoes on. I took a shower and pulled down the bed. Just then, the telephone rang.

It was Geberloend. "See me tomorrow," I said. "I'm just headed for bed."

"Oh?" He sounded disappointed. "All right, Mr. Marcus. I . . . uh . . . I was wondering though, if you had time to do any thing?"

"I had had," I said sourly. "That's what I'll tell you in the morning."

"Oh?" His voice went up, and then down. "Oh."

"Goodnight," I growled. I hung up. I put the phone down, and took a breath. I was just turning away from it when it rang once more. Warily, I picked it up for the second time.

"This Marcus, the tax man?" The voice sounded gruff, with lots of underlying gravel—not the voice of Albert J. Geberloend.

"Yes."

"Yeah. Meet me in fifteen minutes on the corner of Pico and Vermont!"

He sounded like one of my clients whose tax return—made out by me—might have just drawn an answer from the Bureau of Internal Revenue. But tonight just wasn't the time.

"Tomorrow," I said, "at the office. Sorry." I dropped the phone. I got in bed and pulled the covers up. That made the phone ring. I let it. It kept on ringing. I put both pillows over my head and fell asleep that way.

IN THE MORNING my stomach felt a little better but *just* a little. I stayed in bed until nine. Then I had a poached egg, and called it breakfast, and went down to the office. I had expected to see Albert J. Geberloend, but certainly *not* the man who needed a shave on the end of his chin.

He was waiting for me, and since my hole in the wall wasn't open yet, he was standing two doors down staring in the window of a tots and teens shop—probably his idea of not being conspicuous. When he saw me park the car and get out, he turned away slowly, started slowly to come down. He timed it nicely. I had the door open and was behind my desk already when he wandered in.

"Ah . . . I . . . ah, good morning," he said with a small downward jerk of his chin.

"Eh?" I gave him.

"You . . . ah . . . wouldn't be remembering me, I don't suppose?" he smirked.

"Eh?" I gave him again.

It didn't seem to do anything to him. He adjusted his neck in his collar so that each would have enough room without crowding. "Thirty-two forty-five Inaldo Street—last night . . . remember?"

"Eh?" I said and then gave it up; I couldn't do it like he did. "Tax troubles, huh?" I said, this time in my own voice.

"Ah . . . no. I would have rather thought . . ." He left the rest unfinished, sat down, and crossed his legs. "No. I have no tax troubles. I can't work. My heart, you know."

"Oh," I said. I stared at him and then raised my eyes over his left shoulder and stared at the calendar on the wall behind him.

"This morning I had a little idea, you see," he said. "I admit I didn't realize you were a tax man, though. I would have sworn . . ." Again he didn't finish it.

I kept staring at the calendar.

He began again. "I would have sworn

you were interested in a missing woman.”

My nose twitched, but I didn't move my eyes from the calendar. I nodded, slightly.

“I had thought that perhaps . . . I mean to say, something rather odd happened last evening, I think. I . . . uh . . . just happened to notice you go next door after you left my place.”

I still stared. “Just like you told me,” I said. “She drinks.”

“Ah . . . yes. Well, I meant to say, not being able to work and all . . . a lot of time on my hands, as it were.” My eyes on the calendar were bothering him bad. I still stared. He watched me, fascinated, as long as he could. Then, without another word, he swiveled his head around and looked to where I was looking.

I switched my eyes to him. When he saw the girl pictured on the calendar he looked like the cat about to swallow the canary.

“You were saying?” I said abruptly.

He swiveled back. Two, little, pink spots were high in his cheeks, just under his eyes. He blinked rapidly, uncrossed his legs, crossed them the other way, and took a breath.

“I don't work,” he said. “My heart. Naturally a man in my position has a hard time making ends meet. That is to say . . .”

“You're talking to an accountant and a tax man,” I reminded him. “I work in money . . . but when it comes to spending my own, I'm afraid that's a different matter. And now that we've got that straightened out, was there something about last evening you still figure you'd like to tell me?”

APPARENTLY he had been thinking enough of it to risk it. He plunged quickly, “Last night, a little while after you went in there, *she* had another visitor—a rough looking man, a man who was smoking a cigar. Then a little later, they both came out, went across the street, and stood in the doorway of the grocery far back un-

der the awning. And they stayed there. They looked frightened. I thought perhaps . . .” He stopped. His eyes hung on to mine—hoping.

“Pshaw! I laughed and pushed my hand at him. “I knew that. Mamie Jackson and her boy friend, Harry. They got in my hair.”

“Eh?” His jaw dropped.

“Sure,” I went on. “She didn't know anything about the woman I was looking for, but she heard me mention I was a tax man. By an odd coincidence, I was just the kind of guy she wanted. She was having some trouble about a tax form and hadn't sent in her return yet, and she welcomed me like a rich uncle. A little late, to be sure, but that's life. And then, in came the boy friend. I just plain told them I couldn't work with all that noise and drinking and such going on, and if she wanted my help she'd have to tone it down. Well, Harry—nice, considerate chap, by the way—he suggested they should step outside and wait while I did my figuring. It was a nice warm evening. . . .” I waved with my hand and laughed again. “Just what was it you were thinking?”

He didn't appreciate it. Disappointment followed disappointment in waves that washed over his grave eyes. “But I thought . . . I mean to say, you came out and went away after a while and I thought . . . that is, they didn't go back in right away. It wasn't until eleven o'clock that I happened to notice lights go on next door and I . . .”

“A warm night,” I said, “young love . . .”

“Young? Her?” He got up and stood in front of the desk. He looked sour, as sour as green peaches. “*She drinks!*” he uttered.

I nodded. “Slander is a little disgusting, too,” I said softly.

He surprised me by leaving. He closed the door without slamming it. He was used to sneaking, and couldn't get out of the habit.

CHAPTER FOUR

Deeper and Deeper

BUT HE LEFT me with vague worries. I'm an accountant and a tax man, but I have eyes. I know there is a seamy side to life if you look in the right places and dig deep enough. For that matter, there probably isn't a house in ten that doesn't have its own private skeleton in a closet, something it is more desirable not to air out on the clothes line.

Even I . . . There have been times when I've worn the same pair of socks three days in a row. But I had an uneasy feeling that the man who goes in a house and unlocks that closet door and drags that skeleton out—bone by bone—gets more out of it than in a briefing on human anatomy.

I was in that mood when Albert J. Geberloend came in. He smiled wanly, dropped in the chair, and waited politely for me to tell him what I had to tell him.

"First off," I said. "You had better know that last evening I turned your problem over to a Sergeant Rittenhouse down at police headquarters. If there's anything for you here in this city, I have no doubt his department could find it quicker than I—about fifty years quicker." I stopped. I stopped deliberately and stared at him.

His eyes flickered, and he bit his lips. His thin, veined hands intertwined and held each other tightly. But he didn't speak.

I nodded and said, "Second; when I agreed to help you yesterday, I did so in good faith, Geberloend. I listened to your yarn and felt pretty bad about it. Since I wasn't busy and you didn't know the town too well anymore, it seemed like the only thing to do—especially in light of the fact you were an accountant yourself once."

"What happened?" His voice came out huskily.

"I got nothing at the old Inaldo Street address. I went next door and met a Mamie Jackson, widow of the late Horseshoe Jack-

son. Mamie Jackson fed me some dope in a glass of kummel. When I came to, the house was empty and I was sick. I am still sick. I'm also a little sick because you stood where you are now sitting and didn't tell me what could be termed a lie by omission—that the widow Jackson's husband was the man your wife killed."

His hands went white at that and he got a little ashen around the corners of his eyes. But he didn't try to deny it; he even nodded slightly. "I'm sorry about that, Mr. Marcus. Believe me, I had no idea she would be living there after all these years; the omission was one of negligence only. As a matter of fact, I truthfully don't recall whether I did or did not mention his name."

"You did not. The way you described him, I pictured the dead man as suave, rich, and blase, among other things. I didn't picture him as an old horse cavalry man."

That one made him bite his lips some more, but he nodded again. "Perhaps—yes, I see your point. Again, I'm very sorry."

"Sergeant Rittenhouse told me about your case. It seems he used to be a homicide man. He remembers it. You were in the garage washing your car, he said. That close by—and yet a love tryst was going on in the living room. Sergeant Rittenhouse thought it a little odd at the time and still does. I do too."

"I . . ." He unfolded his hands and at once they started to shake. He looked down at them, turned red, clenched them together once more. "Not a tryst, exactly," he explained. "As I told you, he was telling her goodbye."

"Goodbye forever," I sneered. "Yup. But he lived right next door. And so do I. Goodbye, Geberloend. Here's your twenty back. I didn't earn it, and never should have tried."

"But—" his washed-away eyes clouded. "Sergeant Rittenhouse," I said, "will

look into it. His office is on the eighteenth floor."

He swallowed that as though it hurt him. He got to his feet slowly, looked down at the money, picked it up. He sighed. I felt a little sorry for him. He looked sick—sicker than I was—and lonely, friendless, and eighteen years behind the fog of pained remembrance, like Doctor Manette in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

"I'm afraid I shall have to apologize once more then, Mr. Marcus," he said softly. "Not knowing how things went with you last night, I inserted an ad in the personal column of today's *Times-Chronicle*. I gave this as the mailing address; so, of course, you might be hearing from it. Will you please hold any communications for me?"

Gentle, husky and yet soft-spoken, a small, thin man as gutless as a dime-store violin. I wondered if eighteen years in the hoosegow did that to everybody. I doubted it. "Okay," I growled.

A little later on, I got a call on the phone from a young man and his wife who wanted me to open a set of books. The man was a disabled vet, just out from the policing in Korea. His wife was nineteen and they had two kids. They were going into a citrus business, which meant that every day one of them would drive a tank truck down through the rows, while the other walked behind dragging a hose and spraying diesel oil on the ground under orange trees and a blazing sun.

Their names were José and Maria Avila, and they met me at their three-room shack with a quart of homemade wine which wasn't anywhere near a quart by the time I had the books set up.

When I got back to the office, it was time to close up and go home.

THE AD that was in the *Times-Chronicle* today was small and direct. *Anyone remembering Rose Geberloend, communi-*

cate with Daniel Marcus. Except for my office address, that was the whole of it. I was thinking of it when I walked into my apartment. I smelled cigar smoke, which wasn't right because I don't smoke cigars myself.

The cigar angled out of his mouth like a flagpole on the side of a building. To keep the curling smoke from bothering him, his left eye was squeezed shut, but the right eye was open wide. Wide enough to see where to aim the gun he was holding on his crossed knee. He wasn't my size, and I probably could have taken him if it wasn't for that gun.

"You look like you eat regular, Marcus." His voice had gravel in it. "You don't look like the kind of guy who ducks his head in garbage cans seeing if he can find a little nourishment."

I didn't answer that, because I felt he wouldn't be expecting any. I was right. He went on.

"Had us a little-fooled for a while. We didn't exactly believe that yarn you spun, Mamie and me didn't. But today I checked up on you, even saw Geberloend go in your office. So I guess maybe you was only trying to help him all along. Huh?"

This time he did expect something. I looked at the gun in his hand. It didn't seem to me he really meant it, but then I wasn't used to looking at the wrong end of guns either. I said, "That's all I was trying to do. Help him find his wife."

"Hah!" Then the look in his right eye changed as he got to his feet—still pointing with the gun. "Mugs like you just ain't got a brain in your head, I guess, Marcus. Ever occur to you, a guy could get dead awful easy just by sticking his damn nose where it ain't wanted?"

"It does now," I said, agreeing with him.

"Yeah. Nice you see it, even if it is a little late. Now here's where I give you a tip, see? Lay off. Lay off the Geberloend thing. Geberloend was nobody you never knew. You just dreamed it up one night

after you'd et oysters and ice cream and pickles."

"And washed it down with kmmel," I said bravely.

I never got a chance to see whether he really appreciated that. He moved toward me fast. His right arm came up in the same motion, and in the same motion came down hard. I tried to take a backward step, but by then it was a little late. The front of his gun raked my forehead, and as I went down on one knee the apartment walls shook. Illogically, I noticed, going down, that the ash on his cigar hadn't been disturbed.

"That's just to help you forget," he rasped. "More where it came from if a second dose seems advisable, as the medicos say."

The door banged shut behind him. I got up shakily and felt my forehead. It wasn't cut, but the skin would have to stretch to get over the bump coming up. I cursed low, long and vivid and was ready to play it back when the phone rang.

It was Sergeant Rittenhouse. "Got a little startling news for you, Marcus," he said.

"And I for you," I said.

"Yeah? Listen to this, and then grab something. Just because I'm a good cop through and through, I sent your bottle of sleeping powders down to the lab for a checkup. Only it wasn't sleeping powders."

"What?"

"Arsenic. Or, as they call it in the trade, Lead Arsenate. You say you threw up?"

"And how I did."

"Well, you can be thankful. Otherwise you'd be deader than yesterday's fan mail."

"What?"

"Overdose," he said laconically, "Arsenic is funny that way; you take too much and you don't die, you just wish you could. Thought you'd like to know. You might drop around tomorrow and give a statement to the desk sergeant. We always like to

get statements from the would-be's when they don't quite make the grade."

"What?"

"Folks down here sometimes get the idea that other folks—meaning you—try to knock themselves off now and then."

"Oh for God's sake!" I said disgustedly.

"Yeah. By the way, no news yet for your friend Geberloend: It's a little early. Now, what was the news you had for me?"

"Oh nothing! I grunted, and leaned wearily against the wall. "Not a darned thing, you can just forget it."

"Yeah? Oke, then. 'Night."

I DROPPED the phone. I glanced at my reflection in the wall mirror, stared at the angry-colored area on my forehead. I ran my tongue under my teeth and made a face at myself. Skeletons in people's closets. . . . Form Ten-forty was never like this!

But it seems the skeletons were not quite through with me for the evening. I had gone to the kitchen to put a pot of coffee on, and was just sitting down to the first cup when the doorbell rang. I sat there for a moment and listened to it. As I gnashed my teeth, it continued to ring. At last I got up, went to the bedroom, and got an iron out of my golf bag. I took that to the door. It wasn't much, but it was the best I had. I intended to make it double in blackjacks.

He was waiting politely as I opened the door. His eyes took in the club clutched in my right hand, didn't seem too amazed at the sight of it, and then raised slowly to my own, held there and waited. All this time, the door was still opening—slowly, inch by inch. His hair, what I could see of it under a Homburg that looked hand-crafted, was steel gray in color and smoothed back obediently around the ears. His eyes were nearly a match in shade, and his teeth, through slightly parted lips, looked as white as you can buy teeth anywhere. He wore a gray topcoat that was meant for him purposely, and gray gloves.

His voice was gray also. "Daniel Marcus? I am Arnold Wentworth. When your advertisement was called to my attention, it was already beyond office hours. I therefore took the liberty of looking you up at your home address."

I didn't say anything. I liked the sound of his voice. I had heard softer voices on old time circuit-riders, but the rocks sounded as though they were carefully buried beneath Harvard and perhaps even Berkely as well.

He waited. "Come on in," I said and tossed the golf club at the davenport. "Have a seat, and excuse me a moment. I've got coffee getting cold in the kitchen."

When I came back again, he was seated in the easy chair. His ankles were crossed and his hands were folded quietly in his lap, gloves beside them. His hat was off and also in his lap. As far as I was concerned that labeled him, for I would have tossed my hat on the floor at my feet. I

sipped coffee and sat on the edge of the davenport across the room.

"The ad you inserted?" he reminded politely.

"It wasn't me," I said abruptly. "I'm sorry you came up here for nothing. The ad was put in by a man named Albert J. Geberloend. For lack of any headquarters of his own, he used my address. I am slightly acquainted with him and that's all."

"I see." His tone held faint traces of disappointment. He thought for a moment, his gray eyes politely resting on mine but not pawing, not probing. And then, "You know nothing about this, then?"

"A little," I admitted. "I tried to do him a favor, but that turned out to be a mistake and I'm through with it. If you like, you could come to the office tomorrow and wait. He might show up, and he might not. As for contacting him right now, I can't help there either, because I don't even know where he's staying."



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"I see." He reached up a finger and touched at where a mustache would be, if he had a mustache. "But you do know something of this yourself? Forgive my persistence, it is very important to me."

I smiled. "Compared to what I'm used to lately," I admitted, "your persistence is refreshingly mild. I'm sorry, but I'm out of it. You'll have to see him."

HE TOOK a long, tired-sounding breath. I thought for an instant he was going to get to his feet, put on his gloves and hat, and politely thank me and bid me goodbye. But I was mistaken. Instead he smiled faintly and nodded his gray head.

"Perhaps I can understand your reluctance, and perhaps I can't. It doesn't seem relevant somehow. If I mentioned Rose Geberloend had a child, and that many years ago I legally adopted her child and cared for her ever since . . . would this entitle me to a little of your consideration?"

No rocks showing—just velvet, soft and very polite. I sighed, put down my coffee and looked at him. "He was just paroled," I said. "He's here now and a bit lost. He had the idea that a brother accountant, which is what I am, might be willing and good-hearted enough to help him out a little. He was anxious to pay for that help.

I went to his old address and got no leads there, because the man had never heard of Rose Geberloend. Next door, though, was a woman named Mamie Jackson who lived in the neighborhood for twenty years. When I mentioned Rose Geberloend, she fed me arsenic in a drink. Luckily, it was an overdose or I wouldn't be here now telling about it."

I took a breath. He didn't utter a sound, so I went on. "When I came to, the house was deserted and smelling of cigar smoke. I went directly to Missing Persons and dumped the whole thing, which is what I should have done in the beginning. I have since found out that Mamie Jackson

is the widow of the man Geberloend is supposed to have shot and killed."

"Supposed?" His voice went up softly.

"Geberloend says he didn't actually do the shooting. He says that his wife killed Jackson and he walked in a moment afterward, sized it up and, feeling that a mother should not be separated from her child, made a sacrifice and took the consequences himself. This latter," I added, "seemed a little phony to the naked, official eye, but it was glossed over and so he went to prison. If, that is, Geberloend was telling me the truth."

"Which . . ." It was a prompted whisper from across the room.

"Which," I said, "I believe to be the truth, as far as it goes."

He nodded and dropped his eyes. "This is something new," he muttered softly. "It would explain a great deal, I think." He looked up. "And that is all?"

"Not quite. Tonight, in fact a few minutes ago, a man who likes to smoke cigars, threatened me if I continued to poke my nose in the Geberloend business. To show he really meant it, he hit me once on the forehead with his gun. That explains the purple spot which you're now staring at."

If I had expected him to be surprised at that, I was fooled. He merely nodded.

"This seems normal?" I said.

"That part of it, yes. The man with the cigar is a fringe case who seems capable over the years of just barely averting disaster constantly brought on by himself. As for the woman, Mamie Jackson, she is of a similar kind."

"She lives on a pension," I tossed out casually.

"Quite. And other resources as well, I believe." He smiled a little sadly, got his gloves in one hand and his hat in the other and stood as gracefully as if he'd been practicing the action for years. "You have been disillusioned, I fear," he said. "When a man undertakes to help his fellow man out

of the simple goodness of his heart, he should not be treated so shabbily for it. I would deem it a favor to mail you a small check to cover your inconveniences, Mr. Marcus."

"That is absolutely out," I said quickly. "Amnesia is the only thing I want!"

"Still"

I shook my head. He jerked a little farewell nod at me and went to the door.

I took my cup back to the kitchen. My stomach had begun to ache again in sympathy with the throbbing within my forehead. I felt like hell's Hallowe'en. I put a compress of epsom salts on the lump and went to bed.

CHAPTER FIVE

Bruised, Bothered, and Bewildered

THE NEXT DAY business was slow. Nobody came in, nobody called on the phone. I hadn't a thing to do but sit there and smoke cigarettes and think about the Geberloend mess. I thought about it for a long time. I thought about it all morning. At noon I went out to eat, and then walked a few blocks over to police headquarters and made my report to the sergeant in charge at the desk.

He asked me why I had wanted to take my own life. I denied it. He looked patient and asked me all over again, his pencil poised, waiting for my safe and sane answer. I sighed and gave up. "Who wouldn't?" I said sadly. "What with the Oakland Oaks dropping two in a row to the Hollywood Stars?"

That he could understand. "Oh, yeah. Funny, wasn't it? You betting on the Oaks for the pennant?"

"Why not?" I said. "Somebody has to."

I was just walking away from the desk, when an elevator door opened down the hall. Sergeant Xavier Augustus Rittenhouse got out of it and started down my way. When he saw me, he hastened his

tired feet, took my arm and said in a hoarse whisper, "You through there at the desk?"

I nodded. He led me over to a corner and got out his old briar pipe, jammed it in his mouth and said sternly, "Seen the papers yet?"

I shook my head.

"Your friend stopped something last night. The funny guy over at Thirty-two forty-five Inaldo Street."

My mouth dropped.

"Yeah. The guy who you figured liked pretty girls. Seems he was a real photography fan, he had arty pictures all over the house. A kid passing by last night about nine o'clock heard the shot. He told his mother and his mother mentioned it to his father and his father told us." His eyebrow jerked down hard. "We found it, in the bathroom. Somebody shot him through the neck."

I gawked at him.

"Yeah. Of course, when I say 'we' I mean homicide, not me. I just heard about it this morning myself. Now here's what I was thinking. You're not even remotely in it—nobody outside myself and the sergeant over there ever heard of you. But you could be in it, maybe. Maybe you could be in it real nice and deep. Anything else you know about that bird that you ain't told me?"

Other people's skeletons again. I was sick of them, sick unto the death. "Sorry to disappoint," I lied. "I know how you'd like to rate yourself out of that Missing Persons office. I don't know a thing. I just saw him that one time when I rang his doorbell."

"Yeah? Hell!" He sounded disgusted. "I figured, but you can't blame a boy for trying, even at my age. Who do you figure would do a thing like that to a guy like that, Marcus?"

"Search me," I said. "Maybe he wrote mash notes too. I've heard of cases where a woman's boy friend got a little jealous

over mash notes and such things like that.”

“Yeah,” he said morosely and yanked his pipe out of his mouth and scratched his chin with the stem. “Me too. That’s life, I guess. Where you headed for now?”

“Back to the office,” I said. “I haven’t made a dime all day.”

I PICKED UP a paper, spread it out on my desk, and went through it to the final page of the second section. I didn’t find it; it was too early. I thought about it for a little while. Then I made up my mind, grabbed up the phone book, and looked for a number and dialed it.

I had to give my own name to a switchboard operator and three secretaries—two male and one female—before I got up the ladder to where I wanted to be.

“This is Daniel Marcus, Mr. Wentworth,” I said. “I’ve got something to tell you, if you have the time to listen.”

“If I have the . . .” Something in my tone caught and held him. “I see. Yes, Mr. Marcus, I do have the time. You may speak freely, if you will.”

“Good,” I said. “It isn’t in the papers yet, but I thought you’d like to know. The man, who lived at Thirty-two forty-five Inaldo was shot to death last night in his bathroom. I don’t know what it means, if anything, and I most certainly don’t know why I should be bothering with it. I just thought it would be nice if you knew.”

There was a long pause. I could hear the familiar vague clickings and buzzings that always come over a phone when neither party is speaking on a closed circuit.

And then he said, “I do appreciate it, Mr. Marcus. I didn’t know the party, and, like you, I don’t know if there is a significance. But thank you. Incidentally, you said it had not appeared yet in the newspapers?”

I knew what he was driving at by that. “I just left police headquarters, where I gave them a statement on why I tried to

do away with myself night before last with Lead Arsenate. They requested it. While I was there, Sergeant Rittenhouse from Missing Persons told me about the other.”

“Ah, I see. You are not involved personally?”

“I am definitely not,” I assured him warmly. “And *definitely not* is the way I’m going to stay from here on out.”

“Quite so.” An amused tone filtered in between the words. “And I shouldn’t think you will be bothered, Mr. Marcus. I’ve been a little busy this morning. If my money, of which I seem to have a great deal, can buy anything at all these days, then I am sure you won’t be. Goodbye and thank you for calling.”

“Not at all,” I said. I hung up, and blew out a comfortable breath. In the phone book, in the dignified white section and not the yellow classified, Arnold Wentworth was an investment broker. I thought about his three secretaries, and wondered if he ever had any trouble making out his income tax forms. Probably not.

After that, nothing happened except a warm wind came in off the desert, bringing with it the scent of blossoms from the naval orange trees along the way. It smelled sweet and fresh and stirred longings inside me, such as going out on the course with my clubs and smacking a small, white ball all over God’s new, green earth.

At five o’clock, I went home and had supper.

At six, I got out my clubs and the silver polish and some wax; brightened up the shafts and gave the heads a simonize job.

AT SEVEN, my doorbell rang and half-absorbed in the polishing, I walked to the door. I threw it open wide and stared at a black eye, lips that were puffed but sneering menacingly, and a mad-looking gun held in the right hand of the man who smoked cigars.

“Wise, fast and big-city!” he snarled,

and backed me in with the gun. His shoulder slammed the door shut. He continued on. "I gave you warning, but that wasn't good enough huh, business boy? You had-da go send a little, private muscle my way, huh? Look at me. Look at me real good—and then say your prayers quick!"

I looked. Somehow he didn't seem hard anymore, I knew it was insane. He held a gun. If I guessed right, he had used that same gun on the man in Inaldo Street.

He came on. I backed up. I turned, backed slightly at a right angle to the door. He turned, came on toward me. I turned again. He turned again. That put my back to the door and his back to the davenport, where the clubs were scattered about. I stopped. I wet my lips. I don't claim to be braver than Dick Tracy. I stopped. I let him come on toward me two more feet until he was standing in the middle of a small throw rug.

I hit him then. I wound up, gave an Indian yell, and hit him hard enough to smash a ripe tomato almost flat.

It was a good thing that the runner was under his feet. His gun went out sideways as he lost his balance, with the runner slipping from under him. He clawed air wildly with his left hand and tried at the same time to complete the arc with the gun, so that it would include me once more. He never made it. He went down backwards, the edge of the cushion getting him behind the knees; his back and his side and his head, in fact all one hundred and fifty pounds or so of him, smacking down hard on my scattered golf clubs.

I reached for his gun and got it. Under my fingers, it felt about as handy as a calculating machine would have felt to him. I slammed it into the corner, and then dove down to meet him halfway, as he came up at me cursing.

That was when the door behind me opened, but I was a little too busy to turn. I thought: *Marcus, if ever you had a two*

hundred yard drive in your system, now is the time to show it off to the world. I wound up a haymaker and steered it straight for his swollen, black eye. And he went down. I had never in my life hit anything so hard and I hope to never again.

"It would seem I am a little late," somebody said. "It would also seem I wasn't needed in the first place."

Only then did I turn around. "Mr. Wentworth," I said, panting. "God alone knew about that last crack of yours, I surely didn't."

He almost smiled. "He was followed from the Jackson place, of course. I got here as soon as I could. I knew he meant trouble, but not like this. Not ever like this."

I looked down at my shaking hands. "Guess I'm scared," I croaked hoarsely.

"That is only natural. Anyone would be. What are you going to do with him? Let him go?"

"This guy?" I grunted. "This killer? Let him go, did you say?"

"But you don't know he's a killer—not for a certainty."

I LOOKED suspiciously at him. I stared into his gray eyes. They seemed very sad, very much alone. I stared for a long time. There was a silence between us broken only by my panting breath.

At last, I said, "Not for sure, no. But the guy next door to the Jackson place was killed last night. Who else? Knowing him like I did, I figure he didn't leave well enough alone after he talked to me. He didn't believe the tax story I told him, probably. So probably he went next door and probably forced the Jackson woman with his hand out for a little easy blackmail. Probably that was the end for him."

He nodded. "I notice a great many repetitions of the word *probably*."

"All right," I growled. "What, then? Just let him go and forget about it?"

"Isn't that what you said you wanted? Amnesia?"

He could be gentle. He could bring the concrete out from under Harvard and perhaps even Berkeley; he could show it to me and it would still look like velvet; except that I knew it was concrete all the time.

"If you are correct," he continued quietly, "then never fear. The police will get to him. For now, though, perhaps it would be wiser to let him go."

I stared. That was like staring at a wall. The man on the davenport groaned and made a retching noise. I took a breath and went over in the corner to pick up his gun. I broke it open like I'd seen them do in the movies. I got out the bullets in the cylinder and put them in my pocket. Then I took the gun over to the fallen man and shoved it in his own pocket.

We waited. He slid to his knees and looked up at us, and there was a blessing in his eyes you wouldn't want to forget.

"Out," I snarled. "Five seconds to get out of the apartment, get out of the neighborhood, and get lost. I start counting now."

Watching me, he used the davenport for support and got to his feet. He made it to the door. The door opened, then closed. I heard the elevator hum a moment later.

"You play a good deal of golf, Mr. Marcus?" Wentworth's eyes were on the clubs as though he had never seen a set before.

"A little," I said. "I'd like to play more."

"We all would, I imagine. Where, the Victoria Park Club?"

"With Queen Elizabeth," I said. "But when I really play, it's at the public links. The Victoria is a little beyond my budget, I'm not a member."

"Oh. Forgive me."

"There's nothing to forgive," I said. I began to wipe off the clubs once more and put them in the bag one by one. He said nothing. I said nothing. My hands were

calmer now, but my stomach began to feel like it would enjoy acting up again.

I finally looked up. "I hope I'm not exactly a fool, Mr. Wentworth," I said slowly. "I have a feeling you know I'm not. It would be an insult to your own intelligence, were I to pretend I was."

He nodded gravely.

I said, "Taking it backwards, which is perhaps as good as the right way around, I figure it like this. Mrs. Rose Geberloend, after she got her divorce a long time ago, probably married some rich man who didn't know her background. Mrs. Mamie Jackson, destined to live on a small pension, either had an idea herself or was prompted into it by the man who just left. The idea was that Mrs. Geberloend—or whatever her name was now—would gladly pay serialized blackmail money to keep that background well in the background, rather than have it come to the attention of her new husband.

"I figure she would choose this course because, although not having chosen it the first time she was blackmailed and getting away with it, she had no more Albert J. Geberloends around who would take the consequences for her. I believe Mrs. Mamie Jackson realized this and has been living comfortably ever since."

I STOPPED and raised my eyes. He was staring at the putter which was still in my hands.

I said, "I just mentioned about this being the second time she was blackmailed. I have a reason for this. Geberloend thinks she killed Horseshoe Jackson in a fit of rage because he was throwing her over. I don't think any such thing myself, and I haven't thought it—not since I saw a picture of the woman."

I put the club down, went over to my desk and got Geberloend's print. I took it over and dropped it in Wentworth's lap. I went back to the davenport.

"A woman like that," I said. "You don't need two eyes nor even two, long looks with one eye. There isn't the man living who would throw that woman over. Especially not a broken-down, old ex-horse cavalry man, which was what Horseshoe Jackson was. Is there anything you would care to correct me on?"

"I thought not," I said. "Well, then. The only other thing comes to my mind is that Jackson attempted to blackmail her—and that brings up why. Why, indeed? Having a nasty mind would be a big help right about here. Having a nasty mind, would naturally suggest the obvious thing; that Mrs. Geberloend's baby girl was not Mr. Geberloend's baby girl, even though Mr. Geberloend might to this very day think so. Following that to its end, indicates that somebody else was the father."

I hesitated, and then I shrugged. He wasn't sitting opposite me just because he liked my place better than his own estate. I threw it quickly, "You say you adopted Mrs. Geberloend's child yourself, Mr. Wentworth."

He nodded. "I did. You are a very discerning young man, Marcus. What you have just said could have been read almost word for word from the diary of my memory. I am afraid you judge me too lightly, however. I am seventy-five years old. At the time the child was born, I was fifty-six and married, the father of a grown son."

"Oh," I said.

"Nevertheless, you have hit close to home. My son was a little wild, I fear. This was not the only trouble he got into. I sometimes think it was a blessing of sorts when he was killed in an automobile crash many years ago. That isn't a nice thing for a father to have to admit, is it?"

"No," I said. "No, that isn't nice, and I'm sorry for you. And after her divorce, did Mrs. Geberloend come to you about the child?"

"I went to her. I knew, of course. She

was quite willing. She married a wealthy man from Texas and still lives in Houston. I have known all along that she was being systematically blackmailed, and by whom, but I did nothing. I told myself she deserved at least that much. Perhaps that was merely the bitterness of an old and disappointed man."

"But the child?"

"She graduates from college this semester. Her name is Helen Wentworth; she has known no other."

A little time went by. "This is rough on Albert Geberloend," I said suddenly.

"It is," he agreed. "However, he chose the course of his own free will; in the final analysis, a terrible thing to have brought upon himself. And now, if he ever becomes successful in his search, I fear he is due for more heartaches. For his sake, I sincerely hope he never does."

"I'll hop that flyer myself," I said. "Wish I had never met him."

"You will forget in time."

THREE DAYS LATER, Albert J. Geberland wandered into the office to see whether there had been any answers to his ad. I told him no. He seemed a little crushed. I asked him what he intended doing, whether he would like to go back into the accounting game. If so, I said, I thought maybe I could work out a niche for him in the office.

He declined. He already had a job. He'd been steered to it by the parole officer where he went to report. In an office, it was. In an investment broker's office. I didn't ask him which one.

I never saw him again. I never heard of the man who smoked cigars, nor of the big, redheaded Mamie Jackson.

A week or so later, I got an envelope in the mail. In it was a paid-up, life membership for me in the Victoria Park Golf Club. That I liked. The greens are pure velvet.

THE FRAME AND THE DAME



Brand brought a right
uppercut from below
his knees.

A "Manny Moon" Mystery

By RICHARD DEMING

*Only Mr. Moon, dizzy murder specialist,
would dust off the hot squat for his pal,
Mouldy—then try it on, himself, for
size!*

UNDoubtedly, there is at least one man in the world dumber than Mouldy Greene, but it has never been my bad luck to meet him. Marmaduke Greene, who derived his nickname from his sallow complexion, was the sad sack of my army outfit. In civilian life, I still had the

impulse to kick him every time he bent over, yet his talent for irritating me was tempered by a kind of exasperated fondness I had for the guy.

I had not realized how deep either the exasperation or the fondness was until Mouldy got tagged for a murder rap.

I learned about it at nine o'clock in the morning, which increased my exasperation, for my usual rising hour is noon. I awakened to a gentle shaking, opened one eye, and was confronted by a pleasing hunk of feminine anatomy.

In astonishment, I popped open the other eye and immediately understood why I was being offered a reverse view. I sleep raw, and in the early morning summer heat, I had kicked off the sheet almost completely. With her back to me, the woman was reaching behind herself and shaking my bare shoulder.

With one hand I brushed her fingers from my shoulder and with the other pulled the truant sheet to my chin.

"All right," I said. "You can turn around now."

I already knew that my caller was Fausta Moreni, for I had recognized both her figure and her natural, platinum blonde hair, but I pretended surprise when she swung around.

I said, "Who let you in?"

"Manny, your phone is out of order."

Her tone made it an accusation, and though I was unable to generate any feeling of guilt, I explained that it must be the phone company's fault, because I had paid the last bill.

"I will wait in the front room," she announced, and marched out, closing the door behind her.

It takes me a little longer to dress than most people, because I have to strap a mechanical apparatus of cork and aluminum to the stump below my right knee. Nevertheless, I made it in fifteen minutes, including a shower and shave.

Fausta was standing by the mantel when

I entered the front room. Ordinarily, we play a little game for our mutual amusement—she burlesques jealous infatuation, and I go along by simulating frightened resistance. Today, however, she bypassed her usual greeting technique, which was to fling her arms about my neck, plant an impassioned kiss on my chin, then step back and lightly slap me, just as though I had been the aggressor.

Instead, she announced simply, "Mouldy's in jail, Manny."

I cocked an eyebrow. "I told you the eight-ball shouldn't have a driver's license, Fausta. It was only a question of time."

"Not for a traffic violation," she interrupted. "He's been charged with murder."

I let my jaw hang. Then I said irritably, "You know it's three hours before I usually get up. Make me some coffee before you tell me about it."

She surprised me again by not responding as usual. Fausta is an extremely independent woman, as she can well afford to be, since as sole owner of the fabulously successful El Patio Club she possesses not only beauty, but riches. But, instead of telling me to make my own coffee and then dunk my head in it, she obediently headed for the kitchen.

Obviously, she was upset.

WHEN SHE TOLD me the story over coffee, I was not surprised at her mental state, for like myself Fausta regarded Mouldy Greene with somewhat exasperated fondness. Mouldy was El Patio Club's official customer greeter and Fausta's pet employee.

Evenings, he stood just inside the club's great double doors with a hideous smile on his flat face and his rhinoceros-sized body uncomfortably encased in a dinner jacket. With earthy informality he greeted each customer by name, usually the wrong one, pumped celebrities by the hand, and pounded the bare backs of dowagers. Once

the customers got over the initial shock, they loved it, and in cafe society Mouldy was accepted as an institution.

The tale of Mouldy's trouble was simple enough, at least on the surface. Apparently, what had happened was that a woman customer of El Patio had made a play for Mouldy. Mouldy had returned the play, and the previous evening had been enjoying a cozy time at her apartment when the husband walked in. Mouldy was accused of shooting the husband to death during the ensuing unpleasantness.

However, two factors made the tale a little incredible. Fausta and I agreed that no woman attractive enough to possess a jealous husband would make a pass at Mouldy; and unless the husband had been a professional strong man, it would never have occurred to Mouldy to use a gun on him. A guy who can lift one end of a grand piano with one hand doesn't need a gun to defend himself.

After my second cup of coffee I said, "Let's take a run down to headquarters."

We found Inspector Warren Day bent over reports in his office. When we entered, he bowed his skinny, bald head to peer over his glasses at us, scowled at me, then turned the scowl into a simper when he looked at Fausta. In theory, Warren Day is a woman hater, but bare female shoulders have an odd effect on him. The yellow halter which went with Fausta's shorts left her shapely, tanned shoulders exceedingly bare. Behind their thick-lenses the homicide chief's eyes bulged noticeably.

"Miss Moreni," he said with choked affability, "sit down." Then he looked at me and the bulge left his eyes. "What do you want, Moon?" he asked sourly.

The greeting was routine. For years, Day and I have maintained a cooperative agreement: I get in his hair, and he gets in mine. Yet, beneath the surface, I respect his ability as a cop, and I think he likes me—admissions neither of us would make to the other even under torture.

I said, "You've got a friend of ours down here on some asinine charge of murder."

The inspector scowled at me. "Greene, eh? I been half expecting you, since I knew he worked for Miss Moreni." He paused to simper at Fausta, then sat back in his chair and clasped hands over his lean stomach.

"We got him cold," he said abruptly. "It's his gun, and the shooting was witnessed. There isn't a thing you can do for him."

"Mind giving details?" I asked.

The inspector did not mind. The woman, he told us, was Mrs. Minerva Talcott, and her husband, Henry Talcott, was the corpse. The facts in the case were essentially what Fausta had told me, with the additional information that the shooting had occurred at approximately two thirty a.m.

"Mrs. Talcott is the witness you mentioned?" I asked.

Warren Day nodded. "And Greene admits the gun was his." He frowned suddenly, and rumbled the fuzz over one ear. "Why he was carrying a gun on a date, I don't know. When we asked him, all we got was a blank look and a stupid answer. He said, 'I should leave it home and maybe have somebody steal it?'"

For the first time that morning, Fausta grinned. "He has a permit for the gun, you know, Inspector. One of his duties at El Patio is to act as house officer."

"Greene admit he shot this Talcott?" I asked.

The inspector gave me an irritated look. "Naturally not. What killer does, aside from those who bump off their spouses or lovers?"

"Mind if we see him for a few minutes?"

He glowered at me, obviously preparing to refuse, then glanced at Fausta's shoulders and emitted a preoccupied grunt of permission, which seemed to surprise him. Once out, he decided to stand by it though, modifying his decision only to the extent of limiting our visit to five minutes.

Mouldy was flat on his back on a canvas drop-down bunk when the turnkey led us to his cell. When he saw us, he swung to his feet, arranged his misshapen face in a smile of pure pleasure, and thrust a hairy forearm as big around as my neck through the bars. I took his hand cautiously, gave it a quick squeeze, and dropped it before his enthusiastic friendliness could break any fingers.

"Sarge," he said happily, "I figured you and Fausta would be down to spring me." The "Sarge" was a holdover from army days, and I had given up trying to break him of the habit.

"Spring you?" I repeated.

"Yeah." He looked at the turnkey. "Well, what you waiting for? Open the door!"

I said, "You're a little ahead of yourself, Mouldy. This is just a five-minute visit. Talk fast, and give me the whole story."

BUT TALKING fast was not one of Mouldy's talents. He was willing enough to tell his story, but somewhere between Mouldy's brain and his vocal chords was a maze in which ideas frequently got lost before he could express them. By virtue of dogged questioning and the kind-heartedness of the turnkey, who risked the inspector's wrath by letting us stay ten minutes instead of five, I finally managed to piece together Mouldy's version of what had happened. But the ordeal left me almost exasperated enough to let him take the rap.

The "Talcott dame," as Mouldy referred to her, had dined at El Patio three nights in a row, and each night stopped a few minutes to chat with Mouldy.

"She acted kind of lonesome," he said. "Though why a dandy-looking babe like her should be lonesome, I couldn't figure. She said she liked me because I reminded her of a polio athletic man."

"A what?" I asked.

"Polio athletic." She said that was some kind of cave man."

"Paleolithic," I said. "Go on."

"Well, one thing led to another, and first thing I know she invites me to drop over some time. I tell her I work till one a.m., and she says make it one thirty some morning. I ask, what morning? The one coming up, she says. This was about nine last night, see. So when we close at one, I shed my tux, put on another suit, and drive over to her apartment."

Mouldy said the apartment was in the Grand Towers, probably the most expensive apartment house in town. After feeding him several drinks, his hostess left him alone and entered the bedroom, with the routine remark about getting into something more comfortable. They had been drinking in a small card room between the front room and the bedroom, and while Mouldy waited for his lady love to return, he heard a key open the front door and someone enter the front room.

Since Minerva Talcott had neglected to inform him she had a husband, Mouldy was mildly interested in the new arrival, but not in the least alarmed. He simply sat and continued to sip his drink, until a shot boomed in the front room. Then he sat a moment longer, thoughtfully considering the meaning of the explosion, finally set down his drink and ambled into the front room to investigate.

He found a thin, middle-aged man with gray hair lying on his stomach in a pool of blood.

I interrupted to remark, "Warren Day says your gun killed him."

"Yeah, Sarge. You could've knocked me over with a feather."

"Where was your gun when you found the body?"

"In my holster."

I looked at him for a moment, finally had a bright idea, and asked, "Where was the holster?"

"Attached to the harness."

"You silly moron!" I yelled. "Stop playing games!" Then, I brought myself under

control and pursued him further in a subdued tone, "Where was the harness?"

It developed the harness was hanging from a chair in the front room, where Mouldy had left it along with his coat when things started to get cozy. Apparently, the first drink had been served in the front room, and the move to the card room was a later development.

The gun was still in its holster when Mouldy discovered the body, but he managed to get it into his hand before Mrs. Talcott entered the room attired in a fetching negligee, took one look at the body, another at Mouldy's gun, and fainted.

"I figured with shooting going on, maybe I better have a rod in my hand," he explained brightly.

He was still wandering around the apartment carrying it when the police arrived.

When we got outside, Fausta said, "What do you think, Manny?"

"He was suckered," I said. "A frame, pure and simple. Go on home. I got a date with another woman!"

"Minerva Talcott?" she asked. "Can't I go too?"

"She probably wouldn't offer to change into something more comfortable if you were there," I said.

Fausta screwed up her nose at me. "She won't anyway. Even a woman who would chase Mouldy must draw the line somewhere. No woman but me would want a man of such ugliness."

Apparently, my expression of belief in Mouldy's innocence had begun to restore Fausta's spirit.

A card beneath a mail slot at the Grand Towers informed me that Mr. and Mrs. Henry Talcott occupied apartment one hundred and eleven, which proved to be a rear apartment on the first floor. The woman who answered my ring fitted Mouldy's description perfectly. She *was* a dandy-looking babe.

She was not more than five feet three, and her legs, arms and waist were slim, yet

she must have weighed at least a hundred and twenty-five pounds. The excess weight was in the right places, and the negligible sun dress she wore indicated that she was proud of every pound of it.

Sultry eyes beneath square cut, coal black bangs appraised me silently.

"I'm Manville Moon," I said, and showed her my license as a private investigator.

WHEN SHE HAD examined it and returned it without comment, I said, "Mr. Marmaduke Greene has retained me to dig up evidence in his defense. May I come in?"

"I've already talked to the police," she said distantly. "And losing my husband has been an awful shock, of course."

Since, according to her own story, her husband had died because he discovered her with another man, I withheld any expression of sympathy, merely waiting for her either to invite me in or slam the door. She waited too, and when the silence finally became absurd, petulantly stepped aside and asked me in.

Cleaning service at the Grand Towers must have been excellent, for there was no mark whatever on the rich, gray rug of the apartment's front room, not even a light spot to indicate where blood had been scrubbed away.

Mrs. Talcott had two other visitors; a chunkily-built man with smooth, blond hair and a lean, gray-faced character with rubbery eyes and absolutely no expression. The moment I glanced at the latter, I felt the short hair along the back of my neck rise like a dog's hackles. It's a sensation I almost always experience when I encounter a hood, a sort of sixth sense which fingers a professional killer for me the moment I see one.

The chunky, blond man she introduced as Gerald Brand, and identified him as her deceased husband's partner. Gerald gave me a hearty handshake and the bluff sort of greeting you usually get only from fellow

lodge members. The gray-faced man was identified simply as Mr. Fen, but was addressed by Gerald Brand as Deuce. He gave me a distant nod, and kept his hands by his sides.

It did not require any particular brilliance to deduce that Mr. Fen was Gerald Brand's bodyguard, which set me to wondering what sort of business he and his deceased partner had been in together.

Not being a subtle person, I bluntly asked for an explanation.

"My husband and Gerald operated a news publishing and distribution business," Minerva Talcott said.

I hiked an eyebrow. "What paper?"

"No paper," Brand said easily. "Turf news."

I understood the bodyguard then. Horse-racing dope sheet distribution was big business, and while legitimate in itself, its customers were largely illegal bookshops. It was more or less common knowledge that the national gambling syndicate was trying to monopolize the field by crowding out independent publishers and distributors. The mortality rate among independents across the nation had grown to the point where only a distributor with either a syndicate tie-in or a suicide complex would appear in public without a bodyguard.

I asked Mrs. Talcott, "Mind if I look over the apartment's layout, so I can get a picture of just what happened last night?"

Her dubious expression suggested that she did mind but, nevertheless, she showed me around. There were five rooms in the shape of an L. If you walked straight ahead after entering the front room from the outside hall, you passed through a dining room and then into a kitchen. If, instead of going straight ahead, you turned right, you found yourself in the card room Mouldy had mentioned. Beyond that was the single bedroom and bath.

In the bedroom, I glanced out the window and noted that there was a drop of not more than six feet to the ground. Since

the apartment faced rear, the window looked out over a neat back yard and a row of garages, beyond which was an alley.

When we returned to the front room, I thanked my hostess for her courtesy, seated myself, and asked if she minded cigar smoke. She shook her head, but at the same time frowned and glanced sidewise at Brand, as though mutely inquiring why I did not leave.

Gerald Brand, who sat in an overstuffed chair directly opposite me, smiled reassuringly at her and gave a slight shrug. The gray-faced Deuce Fen was not seated, but leaned idly against a bookcase at one side of the room.

When my cigar was burning satisfactorily, I said, "Mrs. Talcott, I understand from what you told the police, you think Greene actually shot your husband."

She looked surprised. "But of course he did. How could there be any question about it?"

"Just exactly what happened?"

She frowned again. "I have already told the police, Mr. Moon."

"I'd appreciate it if you'd tell me also."

"Just a moment," Gerald Brand interrupted pleasantly. "This whole thing has upset Minerva terribly, and I see no reason to make her hash it over and over. If there were any possible doubt as to what happened . . ."

He let his voice trail off; I waited politely for a moment, then repeated, "Just exactly what happened, Mrs. Talcott?"

"See here!" Brand said, reddening slightly.

The whole thing began to bore me, so I stopped trying to be subtle. I'm not very good at it anyway.

"Suppose I tell *you* what happened, Mrs. Talcott?"

SHE LOOKED at me wide-eyed. "What do you mean?"

"I mean this was the rawest kind of a frame. Greene not only didn't shoot your

husband, but you know he didn't. You deliberately set him up as a patsy."

Gerald Brand rose out of his seat and advanced toward me threateningly. Laying my cigar on an ash stand, I stood up too, and looked down at him from a three-inch height advantage. He stopped far enough away to study my shoulders, glanced at Deuce Fen for reassurance, then stuck out his jaw at me. The bodyguard seemed indifferent to the whole thing, but I noted his rubbery eyes never wavered from my face.

Brand said, "Suppose you explain that remark, Mr. Moon!"

"Sure," I said. "Minerva picked Mouldy Greene because he was the dumbest guy she could find. She gave him a play and got him over here with the deliberate intention of framing him. Her husband walking in was no surprise. She *knew* he was coming home, and just about when he'd arrive. And she very adroitly arranged that when he *did* arrive, Greene's gun and holster would be hanging from a chair in the front room, Greene would be in the card room and she would be in her bedroom, ostensibly getting into something comfortable.

"Only she *wasn't* in the bedroom and she *didn't* change into something more comfortable until after her husband was dead. She climbed out the bedroom window, walked around to the apartment's front entrance and waited for her husband. What explanation she gave for waiting for him outside at two thirty a.m., I don't know. Maybe she made a practice of it every morning. At any rate, they came in together. Minerva walked over to where Greene's gun was hanging, borrowed it, and shot her husband. Then she put it back in its holster and walked out the front door again. While Greene was discovering the body, Minerva was climbing back in the bedroom window, stripping off her clothes, and getting into a seductive negligee."

Minerva Talcott's face had turned dead white. Gerald Brand's was scarlet. He took one step toward me and brought a right

uppercut from below his knees to my chin.

I moved my head back two inches to let the uppercut whistle past. Then I stepped in with a left hook which set him to trotting backward a half dozen steps. He would have trotted farther, but his knees caught the edge of the overstuffed chair he had left a few moments before and he abruptly sat down.

The moment my fist connected, Deuce Fen moved, or at least part of him moved. His right hand flashed under his armpit. Mine moved too, a bare micro-second faster.

I let him look at the muzzle of my P-38, until he decided to drop his half-drawn gun back into its holster. When his hand returned to his side, I put away the P-38 and grinned at him.

I said cheerfully, "I want to talk to Mrs. Talcott alone. You gentlemen wouldn't mind calling another time, would you?"

Gerald looked at Deuce, Deuce continued to look at me and his fingers began to caress the edge of his coat.

"You can try it again," I said, "but this time I'm going to pull the trigger."

Gerald looked amazed. Rising from his chair, he looked from Deuce to me and then back again, as though not quite willing to believe his bodyguard was refusing to tangle with me.

When the door closed behind them, I picked up my cigar, walked over and seated myself in the chair Gerald Brand had occupied, which left me facing the door, instead of with my back to it. Minerva Talcott watched me with pale fascination.

In a breathless voice she said, "It isn't true—any of it."

Before I could make any comment in reply, there was a sharp rap on the door. I again set down my cigar, and waited with my right hand under my coat while Minerva went to answer it.

Warren Day strode in, with a curt greeting for Minerva and a suspicious scowl for me.

Without preamble, he announced, "The

guard reported your conversation with Greene, Moon, and you're on to something I missed. What is it?"

This sort of thing was what made me respect Warren Day as a cop. He had an airtight case against Mouldy, but the moment he discovered it contained a false note, his mind was wide open. And when he suspected he might have made a mistake, he followed up personally, instead of sitting in his office and sending out a subordinate.

"I've got an alternate theory, Inspector," I said mildly. Then I outlined the case against Minerva.

I said, "Now tell your version again, Mrs. Talcott. Only this time, include a good reason for getting Greene over here."

HER HANDS were fumbling nervously and she made two attempts to speak before words came. In a toneless voice, she said, "Your accusation is only partly true. I admit that I got Marmaduke over here deliberately, and I knew my husband would arrive at two thirty. But I only meant for him to get beaten up. It never even occurred to me that Marmaduke might kill him."

Day said, "You'd better elaborate a little."

"Henry and I haven't lived together for two months," she said wearily. "I wanted a divorce, but he wouldn't give me one. He was insanely jealous and he made my life hell by creating scenes over my seeing other men. He still had a key to the apartment, and a week ago he unexpectedly walked in and found me with a male friend. He beat the man unmercifully.

"This incident was the last straw. Twice before he beat men friends of mine, but never so seriously. I decided to teach him a lesson. I picked Marmaduke Greene, not because he is dumb, as you suggested, but because he is the strongest man I ever knew. I knew Henry would attempt to beat up any man he found with me, and this time I wanted *Henry* to end up in a hospital. In a roundabout way, I managed to let Henry learn that he could surprise

me with a man if he dropped in about two thirty a.m. Believe me, my faint was genuine when I discovered Marmaduke had killed him, instead of merely beating him up."

Something about the tone of her voice, possibly its resigned weariness, led me to believe the woman was telling the truth. The inspector's expression indicated he was believing nothing Minerva said, however, now that she had changed her original story.

Before he could speak, I said, "Just what was the roundabout way you mentioned you let your husband learn he could surprise you?"

"I told his and Gerald's private secretary," she said dully. "A woman named Nancy Stark. We've always been friendly, but ordinarily I wouldn't tell her anything I didn't want known, because she's the worst gossip in town. I knew she'd lose no time in relaying the news to my husband and anyone else who would listen."

"Where's your husband's office?" I asked.

"In the Rand Building. The Standard Racing News Service."

I glanced at my watch and saw it was only eleven thirty. "Inspector, if we hurry we can catch this secretary before she goes to lunch."

Day looked at me like he thought I was crazy. "I've got a lot more questions to ask this woman," he growled, "and I'm going to ask them at headquarters."

"Well, I won't wait then. See you around."

"Hey!" he bawled as I started for the door.

When I stopped, he examined me uncertainly. "You're on to something else I don't know," he accused.

I shrugged and pulled open the door. After a moment's hesitation, the inspector scurried after me.

In the doorway, he turned and snarled at Minerva, "You leave town and I'll send

after you with a warrant for your arrest!"

The office of the Standard Racing News Service was on the fourth floor of the Rand Building. Just as Warren Day reached for the knob of the glass-topped door, it opened from inside. Gerald Brand, a friendly arm draped across his visitor's shoulder, was ushering out a thick-bodied, beetle-browed man with a flat nose and practically no forehead.

Momentarily, Day gaped at the man in surprise, then his lips drew back in a delighted snarl and he centered his forefinger in the man's chest.

"Hello, Rocco," he said with gentle ferocity.

Rocco blinked at him uneasily. "Just visiting, Inspector," he explained hurriedly. "My plane leaves at eight tonight."

"Check if there's an earlier one," Day advised, "and take it, or you may miss the one at eight."

"Sure, Inspector." The big man sidled past, and was gone without even bidding Gerald Brand goodbye.

"Rocco Polito," Day informed me in an aside to my unasked question. "Syndicate contact man." Then he blared at Gerald Brand, "What's your business with that hood?"

"No business, Inspector," Brand said with a hurriedness as great as Rocco's. "I knew him in New York, and he just dropped in."

"Want to talk to your secretary," Day growled.

NANCY STARK proved to be a middle-aged blonde who dressed and acted like a college girl. She was thrilled to death to be questioned in a murder investigation, and she gushed out everything she knew.

"I knew she was having that man over last night," she confided, "of course, I would never have mentioned it to Mr. Talcott, if I had thought he would be mad enough to go over there. As a matter of

fact, from what he said I assumed he had no intention of going himself."

"What did he say?" I asked.

"He said he was fed up with Minerva's cheating, and thought he'd use her date as grounds for divorce. I assumed he meant he'd have a private detective or someone break in and take pictures."

I looked over at Gerald Brand, who was hovering to one side and listening uneasily.

"Where's Deuce?" I asked.

Gerald's lip curled. "I fired him."

I grinned at the inspector. "Need any more?"

Day looked at me blankly. . . .

"Henry Talcott got tired of beating up his wife's lovers," I explained. "He decided he wanted a divorce. He didn't want to pay alimony, so he needed her cheating. Unsupported testimony of a husband isn't accepted in court, so naturally he took along a witness. The witness probably hadn't planned to murder Henry right at that moment, but when he ran into a perfect setup, he took advantage of it. The motive? This is only a guess, but suppose Henry was fighting a tie-in with the syndicate, and the syndicate offered his partner a good deal if Henry was put away?"

"What are you getting at?" Gerald Brand asked tightly.

"At you," I informed him. "If Rocco Polito being in your office isn't evidence enough of a syndicate tie-in, your firing Deuce before you hired another bodyguard is. The only people in your business who don't need bodyguards are members of the syndicate."

Warren Day rubbed his palms together. "This time, Moon," he said, "I think you've got a tenable theory. Now step aside, and let an expert take over!"

An hour later the door of Mouldy Greene's cell opened — Gerald Brand walked in as Mouldy walked out.

Fausta treated me to dinner that night. ● ● ●

YOU'LL MURDER 'EM TONIGHT!

By V. E. THIESSEN

Quiet and businesslike,
Ronnie reached for his
gun.



Boe and Joe were a great comic team—with lots of sparkle, lots of laughs . . . but the applause rang loudest the night that Death crowded into the act!

I REMEMBER the night Joe died. I can remember the hot, angry words I shot at him just before we left the dressing room to go on stage. I can still feel the hate that gnawed at me, like a rat eating its way out of my brain, until I saw him lying dead under the staring eyes of the television cameras. He was the greatest comic that ever lived, and the

greatest heel. He was the best partner I ever had, and the worst friend. He stole my money, my girl, and my fans; and when he died, he left the house rocking with laughter. I don't know whether I hate him now; I can't explain exactly how I feel, but I remember the night.

I'm Boe Boswell. We were a comic team. "Boe and Joe." We came up the hard way; learning hundreds of routines, picking up a script and gag writer named Ronnie Thedford somewhere along the line, and it took us ten years to become an overnight sensation at a swank night club.

Bacchus Inn, that was the name of the night club, Larry Larrimore's Bacchus Inn, and the night was just like any other night, except for the television. They were televising us for the first time.

And I remember Ardyce's dress that night—a frosty, lime green thing that made you forget whether or not she could sing, and made you sit there with the hurt in your throat that something too beautiful gives you. She had finished her song and Joe and I were on stage.

We'd been on about five minutes, and had run through eight bits, quick one-liners that were old twenty years ago. But Joe gave them a pace and a class that was new to the penguin crowd, which was the name he always used in referring to the tuxedo trade at Bacchus Inn.

Joe went into a solo then, and I watched him, wondering how you could hate anyone with a genius like that. He had a new act; he played an old broken-down vaudeville actor who had just been fired. Broken-hearted, the old ham had gone out and gotten drunk, and now was trying to think up a new routine.

He began to work out a diving act with a plastic pool and the lowest rung of a stepladder. He found fault with this as being too easy, and progressed up the ladder as he made the pool smaller. Eventually, he reached the top and the diving pool was a tumbler of water. His final re-

vision was to substitute a bottle of beer for the water. There was some drunken worry about how to dive through the neck of a bottle, then the problem was dismissed as a mere detail, and he staggered up the ladder for a practice leap. The ladder toppled with him and fell. He banged his head, and he came up groggy.

You could see his confusion, wondering who he was and where he was, and what all the noise and laughter was that rolled in from behind the footlights. And then he discovered the beer. There were no words for his joy when he found the beer and drank it. By the time he had swallowed it, there wasn't a silent spectator in the house. He made it quite a routine. And tonight, after he finished the beer, he added a new touch. He passed out cold, dead drunk, but with a happiness wreathed on his face that was the reflection of paradise for all the little guys in the world.

They ran the curtain up and down five times, and he took the curtain calls with the bottle in his hands and his face wreathed in an oblivious, drunken sleep that brought new howls each time the curtain came up.

But he didn't move, and finally they left the curtain down and went out on stage. He was dead. . . .

THE WORDS *murder*, and *poison*, and *Cyanide of Potassium* weren't mentioned until after the doctor came.

I've done a few comic cop routines, and I figured I ought to know how a detective ought to look, but the lieutenant who took charge wasn't like that. He wasn't Philo Vance, elegant and learned, and he wasn't a hard-boiled, rubber hose-wielding tough from the movies. He was just a middle-sized man with a crew haircut and a business suit, but he looked at you from eyes that seemed about two generations old.

When he spoke it sounded like just conversation, but the technical boys and the uniformed cops jumped when he spoke,

and no fooling about it. I got the idea that there must be a mighty hard core down under that ordinary surface. There was a hint of bulldog in his jaw, and a tenacity in his mild voice. He moved like a guy that had played football once, and I figured that if he ever went after you, he'd go all the way and would be harder to shake than a finance company. His name was Freeling, Lieutenant Dan Freeling.

He was nice when he talked to me the first time; just asked routine questions about the timing of the act and where we got the props. He asked me to stick around, like he did everyone else who went through the preliminary questioning.

Then he came out of the dressing room that he was using for interrogation and said, "I'd like to see you again, Mr. Boswell."

I went in. The stenographer was ready with his notebook open and one of the uniformed cops lounged there. It was quiet, too quiet, and neither the steno nor the cop would look at me.

Lieutenant Freeling went after me. "All right, Boswell, why—just tell us why."

"Why what?"

Freeling wasn't answering questions. He was asking them. "Where did you get the poison?"

"Poison," I said. "You're crazy!" I laughed. The laugh sort of thinned out and died in that quiet room.

Freeling said, "You want to give us a confession?"

"Confession! Damn it, I didn't kill him! Maybe I've wanted to now and then, but I didn't."

Freeling sighed, "So we do it the hard way. Okay, Boswell. You quarreled with him before you went on stage. Half a dozen people heard you. What was that all about?"

"I had a solo bit while we were on stage together, just a pantomime with a comment now and then. For a couple of weeks, people have been laughing at the wrong

places. I slaved over that bit, trying to figure it out, trying to make it right. Then today Ronnie Thedford, our script writer, told me it was Joe. He was catching flies."

"Catching flies?"

"Yeah, a theater term. He was clowning behind my back, mugging, ruining my bit. I told him off, plenty. But I wouldn't kill him about something like that."

Freeling took a couple of quick steps, up and down the room. His face didn't tell me a thing. He said sharply, "What about the girl singer, Ardyce Parker? What were your relations with her?"

"Just friends."

"But you'd been sweethearts once?"

"Yes, once. For about a week. It didn't last long."

"You got tired of her?"

I looked at my hands. "No. I didn't get tired of her."

"What were her relations with Joe?"

I said carefully, "They went together."

"There was more to it than that, wasn't there? He took her away from you. And you didn't think he was treating her right. You quarreled about that too."

I said, "Damn it, he's dead and he was a great comic. Don't make me talk about him!"

"He's dead because you were jealous, because you hated him for what he did to you."

"No. I hated him for what he was doing to her, but I didn't kill him."

"What do you mean?"

I said, "He was one of those men who ruined women. I'm talking about more than just an illicit affair, though that was the starting point. He stripped a woman of her character, of everything decent. He could make a guttersnipe out of an angel. I didn't want him doing that with Ardyce."

FREELING looked at me. His eyes were shining. "Whoever killed him did a service to humanity, to all the pure, young women in the world. Is that it?"

"Something like that," I told him, my voice as cold as his own. "But I didn't kill him."

He switched the subject, whiplike. "You and your partner carried insurance?"

"Yes. Fifty thousand on each other. It's not an unusual business arrangement."

"But you'll get fifty thousand out of his death?"

"He was worth more alive."

"Was he? And what about Larry Larri-more's offering him a solo contract, a contract that left you out in the cold?"

I gaped at him.

He said, "You're a good actor, Boswell, but then, that's your profession, isn't it? You can go now, but remember this, we'll be tracing the poison. And don't leave town."

I went to the door, and he called after me, "Pleasant dreams! We'll get you pretty soon!"

When I got home, I felt like I'd been through a dozen shows instead of one. I got under a hot shower, trying to wash out the tension inside of me. I was under the shower when the telephone rang. I grabbed a towel and went to answer it, dripping on the rug, and not caring much, the way I was feeling.

It was Ardyce on the telephone. She'd been crying, I could tell, and fright made her voice sound like a little girl's. She said, "Joe, I'm in trouble. I need you bad. Could you come over here?"

I said, "I'll be there in thirty minutes."

It's normally a twenty minute drive to Ardyce's apartment; I made it in fourteen. As I walked into the foyer and rang her bell, I wondered if Lieutenant Freeling would have been happy if the cops had pinched me for speeding.

Ardyce opened the door. It was late now, going on two o'clock in the morning, but she still had on the lime green gown from the program. It was crumpled, as if she had fallen on the sofa in it, and didn't care how much she wrinkled it. Her eyes were

red, and she had a handkerchief in her hands that she kept crumpling nervously.

Her lips were trembling.

But she was still an eyeful for anyone; and if crying had ruined her face, it couldn't do anything to that figure.

She said, "It came in the mail, Boe, and I don't know what to do. I'm scared, Boe."

"What came in the mail?"

She led me, without explaining, to a table in the corner of the room. There was an opened package, about the size of a shoe box, on it. There had been excelsior inside, and some of it was scattered on the table. Inside the box was a wide-mouthed bottle.

I had seen a bottle like that before; I frowned at it, trying to remember. Then I had it. When I was in college, the biology class used to use bottles like that to kill bugs and butterflies for mounting.

The inch or so of white substance in the bottom of the bottle was cyanide.

I said, "Well, we'd better call Lieutenant Freeling," and reached for the telephone.

She stopped me, and her hand had a tight grip on my arm. "No, Boe. Not that."

"Why not? You've got the wrappings, and the cancelled stamps are on them. They'll never blame this on you."

She looked at me with near panic in her eyes. "No, but they'll wonder why it was sent to me. They'll wonder why someone would want to frame me. They'll dig deeper into why I might have wanted to kill him. I don't want that."

I stared at her. "And why would you have wanted to kill him?"

"Because he wouldn't marry me. Even when I told him he had a reason, he wouldn't marry me."

"You mean you're—you're going to—" I stopped, anger and jealousy roaring inside me like a furnace.

Ardyce said, "I don't want to talk about it, Boe, and I don't want the police dig-

ging into it. I don't want them coming here."

HER EYES were hard and bright. I swore softly. "The rat! The dirty rat! I'm glad someone put cyanide in his beer!"

I began to understand why this had upset her and why the bottle of cyanide had thrust her into such panic. I said, "I'll take it with me, honey, and drop it in the river. Just forget it, and I'll take care of things."

She smiled at me, and let me kiss her goodnight. It was like old times, except somehow it wasn't quite the same. . . .

I put the cyanide into my coat pocket and went out into the street toward my car. As I came out of the apartment building, a shadow detached itself from the larger shadow of the building and came up to me. It was the policeman who had been with Lieutenant Freeling.

He said, "What are you up to now?"

Panic ran through me. The cyanide bottle in my pocket was as big as a barrel. I couldn't be caught with it on me. Not when they were already sure I was the murderer.

I played the fool. I tripped him and ran for my car, while he lay on the sidewalk. I got into the car and kicked it to life. The motor roared, and I might have made it except for one thing . . . Lieutenant Freeling was waiting by the car.

They searched me and found the cyanide. I could see Freeling's eyes shining in the light of the single street lamp. He had me now, he figured.

The words tumbled out of me, swift tongued, frightened. I told them about the package, about the box and wrapper upstairs.

Freeling said, "Hold him here while I check." He went upstairs to check with Ardyce. The cop looked at me and said softly, "Try it again, just try it again."

I didn't think that would be smart. He outweighed me twenty pounds, and he was

ready this time. But I didn't worry. It didn't occur to me that Ardyce might lie.

After a few moments Freeling came out. He called quietly across to the other man, "Let's put this damn liar in the squad car and wrap things up."

Then I knew things were wrong, and inside me the fear reflexes sprang to life. In the instant that my captor was unguarded and listening to Freeling, I lifted a right hook that had all my fear behind it. He fell, and I leaped into the car. The motor was still running, and I gunned it and put it in gear. There was a moment when I thought I had killed it, the way it jerked as I let the clutch in too fast. Then it was chugging and gathering speed around the corner.

They'd be looking for my car. I knew that, so I took one more turn, spotted a taxi and pulled up to the curb. I ran across to where the cab was parked and climbed in. The driver was behind the wheel, and I told him, "Ten twenty, Forest Drive, and make it snappy."

He turned toward me. He was a big man with cauliflower ears. He looked like an ex-fighter turned taxi jockey, and he talked like one.

He said, "I saw you get out of that car, bud. Maybe you swiped it, maybe not. But I got a hunch the police will be here in a couple minutes, and you ain't going nowhere in this cab."

I jumped out and ran for the end of the block. I got around the corner and there wasn't another cab in sight, just the entrance to an apartment building. There ought to be another cab any minute, but I just couldn't stand there.

I had to take some kind of chance. I ducked into the lobby of that apartment building, shrugged out of my coat, hat and tie, in something less than ten seconds, and was back out on the street. There in the dusk, I was just a guy out on a hot night in a white shirt; not the man in a suit and hat that they were looking for.

If it was dark enough, I might get away with it.

It turned out I had wasted the effort. A taxi rolled up just as I came out, ahead of the police, and it wasn't my cauliflowered friend. I told the cabbie, "Ten twenty, Forest Drive," and we rolled through the night.

That was Larry Larrimore's address, just behind the Bacchus Inn.

AS I RODE toward Larry's apartment, I was doing some heavy thinking. I figured Ardyce had been scared, and probably burned the wrappings in her fireplace the minute I got out the door. Then, when Lieutenant Freeling caught her by surprise, she couldn't produce them. Maybe she had even denied all knowledge of the cyanide. If that was it, and she stuck to that story then. . . .

Just thinking of that gave me the chills.

We rolled up at our destination and I reached for my wallet to pay the driver. I fumbled for it, but it was gone.

And then I remembered. It was in the coat that I shucked when I had tried my unnecessary disguise. I was getting in deeper and deeper. I told the cabbie, "Wait for me. I may be a half hour or so."

He said, "The meter keeps running, buster. Can you stand it?"

"Sure," I lied. He looked at me skeptically, and I wondered if he'd seen me fumbling for my wallet.

And then another thought hit me. I'd given the other cab driver this address. If the police questioned him, they'd be right behind me in the next few minutes. But I had to see Larrimore. I had to get things worked out before they put me in jail, or I was gone for sure.

I told the cabbie, "Pull up to the end of the block and wait, will you? I don't want anyone to know I'm here."

He shrugged his shoulders. "You're the boss."

He didn't fool me. My money was the

boss, and if he figured I didn't have any, I was cooked, and well done too.

I went up the walk and woke Larry Larrimore by leaning on the bell. After a while he let me come in.

He was a big man, dressed in a silk brocade lounging robe. His hair was rumpled and his eyes were sleepy, so that I knew he'd been in bed. It was a time to be sleeping, all right. It was three o'clock in the morning.

I said, "I want some conversation, Larry, and it can't wait till morning."

He used his poker playing voice, "So?" he asked.

"And if the cops come here, I want you to say you haven't seen me."

"And why should I do that?"

I said, "Look, Larry. Joe and I have made you plenty of bucks in the past—that's one reason; another is that I can rattle a few skeletons in your closet if you make me do it. I haven't worked around your setup this long without getting a few ideas. If you get in trouble lying about me, you can always say I held a gun on you while I was hidden here."

He gave me a long, hard look. "What do you really want?"

"I want some answers," I said. "I want to know if you offered Joe a contract without me."

He gestured toward a chair. He seemed embarrassed. He lit a cigarette while he studied a reply. "Yeah, Boe, I did that."

"How come?"

"He was a great artist, the greatest on the stage. You aren't up to him, Boe. You know that."

"And you were dumping me because you figured I was slipping."

"No! I dumped you because he asked me to."

That should have surprised me, but it didn't. I knew Joe had been starting to hate me, the way I did him. This was like him, to break up the partnership behind my back and leave me out in the cold.

I said, "And why did you have to go along with him? Did he have something on you so that you couldn't refuse?"

Larrimore's eyes flickered at that.

"Was it a kind of blackmail? And did you kill him to keep him from getting more than a lousy contract?"

Larrimore's face flashed, then he smiled suddenly. "Guess that shouldn't make me mad, considering what I was doing to you. Yes, Joe had something on me, and no one will know about it now that he's dead. I'm glad he's dead, but I didn't kill him!"

His personality was so tremendous that I almost believed him. And then I thought. It could all be true, but the very last part. Larrimore could be the one. As we stared at each other the doorbell rang. He said, "That'll be the cops you mentioned, and I've talked all I'm going to. Take the back way out."

"Will that do any good?"

He smiled again. "I'll stall a few minutes, if that's what you mean. I'll give you that much."

I DIDN'T wait to discuss it. Outside, I went up the alley and ducked out onto the street and up to where the cab was waiting. The cabby looked at me, and I could tell he was beginning to wonder if I were trying to pull a fast one and beat him out of his fare.

But if I didn't pay him, he'd holler coper, and I couldn't stand that. I had some money at home in my other clothes, enough for this cab fare at least.

And then I realized I couldn't go home. They'd be waiting for me to show there. Freeling would have a man waiting just in case.

I said, "Take me over to the East side and fourteenth street. I don't know the exact address, but I'll recognize the house."

Ronnie Thedford, the script writer, lived there in a little bachelor duplex. I figured he'd let me come in.

He was hard to wake, as Larrimore had

been, but after a few minutes of ringing, he let me come in. I walked in, and if I had taken the time to think I would have noticed his attitude. He was definitely unfriendly.

But then, it was an unfriendly hour. I said, "Look here, Ronnie, I'm in a jam. I need twenty bucks and I can't go home for it."

He was edging over, moving between



Joe could remember the quarrel, the foolish, drunken dancing, the bitter accusations. . . . But nothing could fill in the horrible blank space between then and this moment, as he stared, unbelieving, at Lyra's body, at the crimson gash in her throat. . . .

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me and the couch. He wasn't listening, just moving around.

"Damn it, listen to me!" I cried.

And then I saw what he'd been trying to hide. It wasn't much, just a purse that lay on the divan in the living room. But it made the room whirl and spin, and suddenly turn right again. I was scared, when I saw the look in Ronnie's eyes, as scared as I've ever been in my life.

I had seen that purse a couple of hours ago, at two o'clock in the morning, in Ardyce's apartment. It was hers.

I took a step toward the hallway that led to his bedroom. He tried to stop me, but I shook him off and called, "Come on out of there, Ardyce, I've got to talk to you."

After a couple of minutes she came out. She had on a robe, and she was as beautiful as ever. Without her usual makeup there were hard lines about her face, and the hardness in her eyes that I'd seen earlier was fixed there. I knew I was seeing her for the first time as she really was. It hurt enough that I almost forgot to be scared.

I said, "You didn't show Freeling the wrapping paper that the cyanide was mailed in."

"No, I was scared and I thought you'd get rid of the bottle. I turned the wrappings the moment you left."

"Because you'd faked them in the first place! That package had never been through the post office. You knew that fake wouldn't stand the police tests. You had the poison all along, and you planted it on me."

Ardyce said softly, "Now, why would I do that?"

I said, "All this story about Joe and your affair with him. That was just hokey, just bait. Ronnie here is your boy friend, and you're in this together."

Ronnie Thedford said, "You talk too damned much, Boe."

I shot right back at him at once with,

"And that line is almost as lousy as the rest of the scripts you write. I just remembered something else. Joe and I each had insurance on each other, but I named Ardyce as alternate beneficiary. I'll bet he did the same. And with him dead, and me hung, that would be one hundred thousand bucks."

I'd been so worked up that I'd forgotten my fear. It came back now with a rush. Ronnie took a gun out of the pocket of his dressing gown. He was quiet about it, and businesslike, too businesslike. He said, "Suicide is as good as hanging, Boe. Too bad it has to be this way. Now let's go outside and get in my car."

"No!" I told him. "It might as well be here as a spot where you can get away with it easier."

I lunged for the door, jerking at the knob with frenzied hands. I heard the gun go off, but he'd fired too fast, and I got the door open. Then he shot again, and I felt a searing burn and the impact of a bullet in the muscles of my shoulder. The shock threw me down, and I fell across the threshold. The third shot sounded, and I knew I was dead. . . .

But I didn't feel that third shot. I heard Ardyce gasp, and then I saw Lieutenant Freeling stepping over me with a gun in his hand, and I realized that he'd fired the third shot.

I guess I passed out. And when I woke in the hospital, it was another night.

But I remember the night Joe died, since that was the night I almost died as well. I'd been suspected of murder, and my girl turned out bad, all bad. I'd even been suspected of beating a cabby out of a fare. That's why the police had come. The cabby finally got suspicious of the way I'd made him wait, and called the police. He'd saved my life. As I recall, it was quite a night.

I looked the cabby up later, after I got out of the hospital, and paid my fare. I figured it was worth it. ● ● ●

FELONY FOLLIES

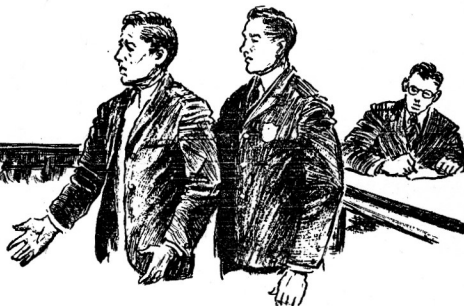
by Jakobsson and Waggener



Ernest Mattice, convicted by a Denver jury of atrocious assault, had only one way of relieving the life sentence imposed on him by Judge Dunklee—and that was to reveal the name of his confederate. Mattice would not do so, and was therefore given two life sentences instead of one, which lengthened by thirty years the time that must elapse before he would be eligible for parole.

Later evidence threw light on Mattice's stubbornness.

He couldn't have named a confederate. He hadn't had one. He happened to be entirely innocent.



But if the evidence hadn't turned up, he would still be waiting for a 1976 Parole Board to review his case . . . whereas a guilty man might have been eligible for parole this year. It makes you think.



Two British magistrates were given summonses, on the same day, for driving in excess of the speed limit. When they arrived in court, the presiding judge had not yet appeared, and so they agreed to hear each other's cases at once—which is legal.

The first speeder took the bench, the second, the stand. No. 1 pleaded guilty, and No. 2 fined him five shillings. They reversed places. No. 2, grinning a little at the travesty, pleaded guilty.

"These speed cases," said his upright and treacherous honor, Judge No. 2, "are becoming much too common. This is the second this morning. Thirty shillings fine."

Which proves that if there's no honor among thieves, there isn't too much among justices, either.



New York plainclothesmen carry some strange anecdotes under their fedoras. The phoniest yarn of all—sorry, it just came out that way—concerns a bond buyer who had stashed his queer-looking negotiables in the safe of the hotel where he was staying. So odd, in fact, were the bonds, that the hotel management called police to have a look at them. They proved to be counterfeit. The startled owner swore he hadn't printed 'em himself, that he had bought 'em from a man whose name he didn't remember.

This alibi was substantiated, much to the surprise of the law, but the suspect was not released. Seems he had shrewdly paid for the queer bonds with fifty thousand dollars in counterfeit money!



Henry Chancey, railway mail clerk, was shocked to discover that he had an enemy, and a venomous one. Chancey's company had just sustained a thirty thousand dollar loss through theft, and now Henry was being accused of it. Who could have named him to the police? He sat in the station, protesting his innocence—but even greater than his fear of the law was the ugly realization that some unknown hated him—hated him as much as this.

He fell into a sleep of exhaustion, still talking of the robbery—but this time, differently. He admitted taking the money. He led police to the spot where he had cached it, still in his sleep.

Psychiatrists said he had committed the theft in his sleep, that the waking Henry was innocent. But when the waking Henry Chancey at last learned the identity of his venomous enemy—it couldn't have been pleasant knowledge.





COLLECT IN CHI !

A Murder Novelette

By **DOROTHY DUNN**

There was something about Chris Keller's eyes that wasn't good to look at. It bothered his girl friends, his partners . . . and most of all, it bothered his victims. . . .

HE WAS MORE than a little cocky as he emptied his pockets and spread his belongings on the scarred dresser top.

He kept saying to himself: *Sure they could. They could slap me right into the gas chamber this time! But I won't worry. They have to catch me first!*

He didn't have much; keys, comb, wallet, knife, and the .38; sixty-two dollars in the wallet and a full load in the gun.

He had the clothes on his back; a neat brown suit, a white shirt, new brown shoes, a yellow and brown tie, a brown hat. Brown—that's all the flustered witnesses were going to

remember—something brown, a gun, and a lot of crazy shooting.

"Give us a description of the guy, please, lady. What did he look like Bud?"

"He was dressed in brown, stocky build, medium height."

"Hair?"

They wouldn't be sure.

"Brown, maybe." Everything else had been brown.

"Eyes?"

They hadn't been close enough. *"All that shooting."* They hadn't noticed. *"Probably brown, most likely brown eyes."*

Great descriptions the cops were going to get from the three people who had stood on the fringes of the gun battle! Medium build, dressed in brown. . . . That told them a lot, that did!

He was in a hotel, just a notch above the flophouses. He didn't have any luggage. He didn't even have a pocket handkerchief. He had used that to stanch the bleeding of his left wrist, and had thrown it away amid the rubble of empty, half-pint wine bottles that littered the sidewalk around the Mug Cafe. It had been just a cheap handkerchief that he'd bought the day before in Chicago. A drug store handkerchief. They couldn't trace him by that.

Nor would the clothes he wore prove anything about who he really was. A brand name suit . . . a brand name hat. You could buy duplicates in any store.

He smiled, remembering some sappy radio commercial where a girl sings: "I love a man who wears an Eden Hat!"

Maybe that's what he needed all along. An Eden hat. He was almost thirty and, so far, he'd never had any real luck at being loved. He'd done some loving, but he'd always felt sure that he hadn't been loved in return. That's no good. That's just like nothing. Somewhere, in his plans for the life he wanted, this one desire to be loved by somebody was pin-pointed, either at the beginning of things or at the end.

The money . . . the fine car . . . the clothes

—everything anybody else had. All that was important. He could clench his large hands, knot his tremendous shoulder muscles, and twist the money out of a society that wouldn't be able to protest his strength. Nerve, brains, and strength. You can write your own ticket. You can beat money out of any dark night, if you want to. He wasn't worried about being able to get the money.

But you can't fight the same way for the rest of it. There hadn't been a girl yet who didn't end up being frightened of him, or of what he was, or of something.

Chris Keller was twenty-eight. He had large gray eyes, black hair that sprang into curls, a long, rangy build, hard muscles, and good features. Handsome? Sure. All the women went for what he had—at first—but it didn't last long.

He shrugged as he walked down the hall to the public bath. Why was he worrying about love at a time like this? As soon as he got to Chicago, there would be twenty thousand dollars waiting for him. He could take a vacation from Pete Mangone and find all the girls he wanted.

HE STRIPPED to his underwear and washed the dried blood off his hand and wrist. The wound wasn't too bad, although the slug had passed right through. But the cold water washed away the slight crust and started the bleeding all over again.

The swirling pink water in the sink nauseated Chris. His arm hadn't hurt before, but it began to throb as he inspected the wound, as he watched the trickle of fresh blood coming out.

The cop's face had spurted blood, too—a lot of it, all at once. He hadn't meant to shoot him in the face, but the slug through his wrist had jerked his hand up. He wasn't sure about the other cop, the one who had winged him—dead, very likely. He hadn't waited to see. And the three people who had been standing there

on the sidewalk had been too stunned to follow him.

A good get-away, but he'd gotten shot doing it. Pete Mangone wasn't going to like that. Pete was getting a little touchy these days—hard to do business with.

He took his arm out of the water and held his thumb over the pressure point. The wound ought to be fairly clean now. He wiped off the blood, freshened his face, and straightened his clothing.

Then he went back to the room and put the keys, the wallet, the comb, and the gun into his pockets.

He wiped his wrist and hand once more before he threw the stained towel across the iron railing of the bed he hadn't even lain down on.

His bill had been paid in advance to a bored cagemaster, who was no more surprised at a well-dressed customer than he was at the ragged degenerates who lurched in for a night. Chris wasn't worried about walking out of the place.

He'd meet Pete Mangone at the Mug Cafe, they'd catch the bus for Chicago, and that would be that.

Twenty thousand dollars . . . a vacation . . . a girl. . . .

Pete's eyes were puffy little slits of disapproval, and his mouth made a thin, straight line across his fat face. He had a paper which he kept rolling nervously with his hands. His voice was a husky, scared whisper.

"My God, Chris! Two of them, right on the sidewalk in front of the Acme! Did you have to do it that way?"

"Quiet down and come inside, Pete. I want a cup of coffee."

"You won't have time."

"What do you mean I won't have time? That bus doesn't leave for another hour."

Pete was pulling him away from the entrance, pulling him toward Broadway.

"I got you a ticket on an earlier bus. I fixed a set-up for you, scouted down a seat mate—pretty, but dumb. You won't

attract so much attention with her along."

Chris stopped and jerked his arm away.

"You mean you're not riding back with me? You went ahead and changed plans without asking me? You think you're taking over, Pete?"

"Not taking over. Just pulling out. I want my cut on this, quick, then I'm making a new connection. You're tough, that's your own business. You want to get the gas chamber, that's your own business. How about the dough, Chris? Now."

Chris grinned. Suddenly, Pete Mangone had that look in his eyes that the dames all got sooner or later . . . scared . . . backing off.

"Sorry, Pete. You have to go to Chicago with me to collect it. I was banking on our original plan."

Pete came to a halt on the sidewalk, both hands clenched around the rolled newspaper.

"You idiot!" he whispered. "You mean you didn't get to the suitcase you checked at Union Station? You mean I picked that up and took it to the bus station for nothing?"

"That's what I mean," said Chris. "And since you're pulling out, I'll tell you that I never did plan to get the money out that way. Giving you the key to that locker would have been just like giving you the money, the frame of mind you're in. See what I mean?"

PETE'S face set rigidly into fat folds. "You double-crossing killer!"

"Save it, Pete. I just beat you to the cross, just protected myself. You'll collect in Chi, but you'll damn well have to come up there and get it!"

"You haven't got it on you?" Pete's eyes were checking Chris' suit, looking for a bulge.

"Don't be stupid. You know where I carry my life insurance!"

"Have you seen the paper?" asked Pete.

"No."

"You ought to take a look, then. That thing in your pocket has turned into death insurance. They're looking, they're concentrating on that, and they're plenty mad."

They entered the bus station and Pete handed over a check for the suitcase.

"I'm just an ordinary guy," said Chris. "I look like a dozen other guys. I'm riding the bus because it's cheaper. Who's going to search?"

Pete shrugged. "You take silly chances. Okay. That's up to you. You pull that fool mail stunt again?"

"It's a smarter stunt than you know. Worked the last time, didn't it?"

"Break of the century. I held my breath."

"Then hold it again," said Chris. "And if you want your cut, be at the Edgewater Beach at three tomorrow afternoon."

"You taking a room?"

"A suite, chum. I need a rest. You riding this bus, or not?"

"Not. I'm flying. I don't want to be around when they catch you. But I did all I could to help."

"Meaning what?"

"The seat mate, the dummy. A guy with a doll, it's not so noticeable."

"What makes you think I couldn't have got my own doll?"

"Not one like this. She just dropped out of the blue. Made to order. Long on looks and short on brains and cash. But family back home in some junction. Good girl, you know what I mean? Hasn't been around. I picked her up in Union Station when I picked up the suitcase."

"And you think she's a good girl? When she lets you pick her up?" Chris laughed.

"I was just being neighborly, as far as she was concerned. She couldn't afford the train fare home. I was behind her when she was turned away from the ticket window."

"So now she's going to Chicago instead of home?"

"Sure. I offered her a job up there. She fell for it. She'll be on your bus. I even

bought her a ticket and she said I should take it out of her first week's salary. What a dummy! You might toss her a ten if you make it all the way to Chi. She'll need eating money when she finds that the Craig Ellington Manufacturing Company is an address that hits the middle of the Chicago River!"

"The kid was going home, so you send her up to Chicago for nothing, for a gag. You're quite a guy, Pete. I'm glad you're running out."

"I did it for you, Chris, not for a gag. She came along. She'll be a good front for you. Give her something. Pay her anything you want, if you feel that way."

"I'll do that. Your share of the loot, maybe!"

Chris started to walk toward the check desk for the bag, but Pete grabbed his arm. The fat fooled you. Pete Mangone had plenty of strength in his hands. The pressure hurt.

"I want what's coming to me, Chris! I cased the job, sold out my own cousin so you could pick up that payroll. I did my share!"

"I'll remember that," said Chris, "if I get picked up!"

"Now, Chris . . ."

"Never mind. Just be at the Edgewater Beach tomorrow afternoon at three, if you're not too scared to come. And, I'd like to have that newspaper you're crushing."

"Sure, Chris, sure. You'll like the girl, she's a natural blonde with big eyes in a hungry-looking face. Good luck, boy. . . ."

"Yeah, Pete. You, too. You need it as bad as I do."

CHAPTER TWO

Pretty Little Decoy

CHRIS KELLER walked to claim his bag at the check stand, and Pete Mangone left the bus station.

There was another suit in the bag, a flashy one, glen plaid in gray. There was a maroon knit tie and a pair of suede shoes. Not an outfit for a dresser who would wear all brown—just a guy, like any other good-looking guy.

He had twenty minutes before the bus pulled in. He went down to the rest room to change his suit. The cuff of his white shirt was stained from rubbing against the wrist wound, so he changed his shirt for a soft blue one with french cuffs. The bleeding had stopped again and if he didn't knock it against anything, he wouldn't need a bandage. A bandage was more conspicuous than a small crust of dried blood. He had to be careful.

He packed the brown suit in the bag, and then stood twirling the brown hat in his hand. He thought about the girl and put the hat on, pulling the brim down smartly. "I love a man who wears an Eden hat!" He was due for a little luck in that direction. Maybe the hat would help, like the ad said.

When the rest room was empty, he slipped the .38 into the suitcase, right on top, then closed the lid.

Now he was anybody—anybody on the way to Chicago, via the bus. He went up to the waiting room, found a seat, and opened the newspaper that was still damp from the scared hands of Pete Mangone.

Front page stuff . . . pictures of the two cops. One fifty years old with two grandchildren; the other one, the one who got it through the face, had been a good-looking guy—thirty, not married, but engaged. It was too bad. It was too bad about both of them.

The news account kept referring to him as "the robber," the crazed gunman who took the Acme Shoe Factory's payroll of thirty thousand dollars.

The witnesses gave varying descriptions, as he'd known they would.

Two of them said he was carrying a small bag, like a doctor's bag. One of them

said his hair was brown and crew cut, that his tie had been orange. Things they didn't see, but thought they saw. The only thing that all the witnesses agreed upon was that he had been dressed in brown, that he had brown eyes and hair.

They were searching for a man in a brown suit, for a small bag that contained thirty thousand dollars in spendable money.

The "bag" had been a plain manilla envelope, stamped ahead of time, and addressed to Charles Garson, General Delivery, Chicago.

Second class mail. There was a label on the front, inviting the postal department to "Open for Inspection."

Ordinary second class mail. He didn't have to worry. He'd done it before. There was no such person as Charles Garson, but when he called for the package at General Delivery in Chicago, the clerk wouldn't know that. Suppose your name is Charles Garson. You just go up to the window and say: "Anything for Charles Garson?" If there is, they hand it to you.

Second class mail. Maybe your brother is sending you some pocket books he's finished reading. Maybe it's just advertising. The man doesn't care. The invitation is there, plain as can be, *Open for Inspection*. But the postal employees don't have time to open everything, they're not even curious. They know about what's in a package you don't even bother to send first class or register—advertising . . . magazines . . . junk.

Twenty thousand dollars? Cash? Spendable cash? They'd never guess it! For anything over a dollar, the money order is a sacred cow to the postal department.

No dope would send cash by second class. They don't guarantee delivery. They don't stand behind the deal.

So what? The magazines arrive at their destination. The advertising gets through, come sleet, come storm.

Pete Mangone thought the mail deal was risky. but it was much safer than carrying

it with you in your pocket or suitcase.

It wasn't a sure thing, but, knowing the post office, it was a pretty safe bet.

Chris threw the newspaper in the trash bin and went over to stand in the loading zone for the Chicago bus.

He recognized the girl immediately from Pete Mangone's description.

Natural blonde and big eyes in a hungry face. There was something wistful about her, something that would make you think of her as a kid sister. She was little, about five feet. But Pete had been right about something else. She had looks. You couldn't tell exactly what it was, but if you were looking for a nice dame you'd know at a glance that this was it.

She took a seat near the middle of the bus and Chris went down the aisle, hefting his suitcase by slapping his knees against it.

"You mind?" he asked, stopping beside her.

She moved her purse and a magazine off the seat.

"No, of course not."

He leaned over her, stowing the suitcase on the overhead rack.

Then he sat down, and he looked out the window as the bus started. She hadn't given him the first glance that most women gave him . . . especially, the women in the know.

"Going all the way to Chi?" he asked.

She looked at him then—a level, friendly look.

"Yes, I am."

"Good!" He settled back against the seat, as though he felt pleased to be with her, but didn't intend to talk any more right now.

"You going to Chicago, too?" she asked finally.

"Right-o. I'll buy you coffee at the stops. It's a long trip."

HE SLUMPED back further in the seat, ending all conversation. But the friendly basis had been established. He pulled

the brown hat down over his eyes, pretending to sleep.

The bus lurched through the traffic to the bridge across the Mississippi River. He was on his way out of the state and, maybe out of danger.

It was too bad about those cops. He didn't like thinking about it, because deep within him was the wish that he'd never had to do anything bad like that. But there was a deep resentment, too, because of the poverty he had been born into. He was convinced that he'd never had the chance to live a normal life, that things at home should never have been the way they were. No matter how black his crimes were now, he could always dredge up a bit of white paint from the bucket of his childhood.

By the time the bus reached the first coffee stop, his conscience was coated again and he stopped thinking about the men he had killed.

He straightened up in the seat, and put his hand on the girl's arm as he stretched.

"First stop, kid. Come on and get the kinks out of your legs."

She followed him obediently. He ordered coffee and doughnuts at the counter.

"Lousy sandwiches here," he said. "There's a good place for that about the third stop."

She laughed. "You planning to eat all night?"

"And sleep. Best way to ride this bus. This your first trip on it?"

"Yes. I've never been to Chicago before."

"No kidding! It's a swell town. Incidentally, what's your name?"

"Judy. Judy Larkin."

"Well, hi. I'm Chris Keller. Want a cigarette, Judy?"

"No, thanks."

The smile she gave him was pretty. Her teeth were very white, and she didn't have on too much lipstick. He liked the way her short, blonde hair curved toward her cheek. He liked the clear, clean look of her skin. She was little and dainty.

Chris looked at his own large hand as he crushed out his cigarette.

I could break her in two, he thought. She's just a handful. I'd have to be careful, be gentle.

By the time they got back on the bus, he was feeling very mellow toward Pete Mangone. Judy's eyes were so clear and so friendly that he was sure she wouldn't ever be afraid of him, as the others had been. She was different, completely different from the others. She wasn't constantly running her eyes over his muscles, looking at him with her mouth half open. She would have to know him and like him first.

He thought about the twenty thousand dollars and the suite at the Edgewater Beach.

At the third bus stop, they ordered the big, thick hamburgers.

"Where are you going to stay in Chicago, Judy?"

"I don't know yet. I'll want to hunt for a room near the office where I'll be working." She showed him the card that Pete Mangone had given her. It was one of the many dummy cards that Pete carried around to impress stray dolls who might ignore his looks if they thought he was legitimate business. "You think I might find anything near this company?"

"Nothing too close to that neighborhood, but I could help you find something decent. I know the city pretty well." He pretended to study the card. "Funny, I never heard of this Ellington Company."

Might as well start her thinking, prepare her for the fact that the Chicago River was no place to work in.

"I understand it's a big company," she said proudly. "I'm to be a receptionist."

"Then you can count me in at the reception! Will you give me a date, so I can show you around Chicago?"

That's the way you talked to girls like this. You asked them for a "date."

"That would be nice, Chris."

He let his arm slide across the back of

her seat. "It'll be fun having a girl to take around. I haven't had much time for girls, been too busy."

"What kind of work do you do?" she asked.

He always hated that question, always gave a different answer.

"I'm a salesman, honey, for a shoe factory. Business was pretty good in Saint Louis."

HE MADE UP stories to tell her about the big accounts he had landed, and she chatted away about her folks and how she was grateful for this chance at a good job in Chicago.

By the time the bus neared the outskirts of the city, she was napping on his shoulder and he had taken off the Eden hat so he could rest his head against hers.

At the terminal, he spotted the man in the gray suit who was watching the passengers come off the bus. The man had a long chin and bushy eyebrows, and the way he stood there, watching, you knew he was good at his job.

Chris carried Judy's bag and his own, and he tried to turn his head away from the alert eyes. But he felt he hadn't turned soon enough. He was sure of it, when the man followed them out of the bus station.

Chris decided that he'd have to get his gun out of the suitcase before he went to the post office to pick up his second-class mail.

Evidently, Pete Mangone was taking no chances. He knew where the money was, but he didn't know under what name it had been sent.

The first thing to do was check in at the Edgewater Beach. But he didn't have time to give Judy the proper build-up for that, and he didn't want to lose her now. She had suddenly become very important in his scheme for the enjoyment of the twenty thousand dollars.

There was just one angle he could try. People from small towns are neighborly,

like to be helpful. He hoped it would work. The man was tailing them closely, and he wanted to get his gun in his pocket as quickly as possible.

"Judy, there's a guy who spotted me getting off that bus. He's following us now. I don't have time to explain, but he means trouble." Chris tried to put a note of fear into his voice, a note of panic—panic that he didn't feel. He wasn't worried about any cheap hood that Pete Mangone might hire. He just wanted Judy to share that suite at the Edgewater.

"What kind of trouble, Chris?"

She moved closer to him, put her hand over his wrist and walked that way, as if she were pledging her friendship.

Good, thought Chris—strong maternal instinct, the protective gesture. Lots of sympathy in her soul and he could play on that. She wouldn't let anybody down if she thought she were needed.

"I haven't got time to explain now, Judy, but it's serious trouble. I haven't any right to ask, I know. But you could help me. . . ."

Her voice was almost a whisper. "Have you done anything wrong, Chris?"

He turned and met her clear eyes. She liked him already. He could read it in her expression.

"Do I look like a wrong guy, honey?" He smiled down at her, and she melted.

"No, you don't. And I'm always a pretty good judge of people's character. I thought right off to myself when I met you that you were strong like a man should be, but you were gentle, too."

That put her right in the palm of his hand, but her naive character analysis gave Chris a strange, empty feeling. Usually, it just amused him when a doll thought he was a right guy, and he had never cared when they found out differently. Well, what the hell? Why change now? After a few days with Judy, he'd probably be as ready as ever to move on.

"You trust me enough to help me, Judy? I want to throw this guy off my tail, but

I want to get you and these bags into a safe spot first."

"How can I help?" she asked. Soft question, willingness indicated, ask me anything.

"Just check into a hotel with me as my wife. We'll get a suite, Judy. You can trust me."

They were nearing the line of cabs outside the terminal.

"But Chris! How would that help? I don't understand. . . ."

"It's just an idea, honey. Maybe a crazy one. You don't have to do it if you don't want to. But you've been spotted with me, and I guess I just want to get you into a safe place until I can take care of that cheap hood that's following us. I'd feel terrible if any harm came to you because of me. I don't want you to be hurt."

"What does he want Chris? Why is he following you? Can't you tell me?"

He put the bags down in front of the cab door, and put his hand on Judy's arm. Then he looked into her clear, blue eyes and made himself sound as sincere as she was.

"I'll tell you when we get checked in. Can't you trust yourself to make a quick decision, honey? After all, it's morning. We'd have all day to read the want-ads and find you a room for tonight, after I take care of goofus back there." He opened the cab door and gave her a brotherly smile. "Coming?"

She got into the cab, her brow just faintly puckered.

"That's right," she said. "It is broad daylight, after all. Are you in any real danger, Chris?" she asked, as the cab lurched out to buck the Chicago traffic.

"Everybody's in danger, kid, every minute—when you cross the street . . . ride in a cab . . . step on the soap in the shower—no more danger than that."

SHE GAVE HIM a searching glance, and the soft look in her eyes started an ache in him. If she had been another type

of dame, he'd have started working on her right then, right in the cab. Take what you want, when you want it. He'd always done that. But Judy was different, and loving her was going to be different. He told himself it was worth waiting for. He took off the hat and put it over his knee, caressing the brim.

"Are you sure you're not just trying to keep me from worrying?" she asked.

"You mean you'd worry about me?" he asked, humbly.

"Of course." She lowered her eyes, and he reached for her hand and held it lightly.

"Judy . . . I know we just met last night, but . . ." He increased the pressure on her fingers, and she returned it. He sighed. "You know what I mean, don't you, honey? I'm not very good at words."

"Fate's a funny thing," she said, relaxing happily. "You know, I thought maybe I was crazy to come up here to Chicago just on the spur of the moment, instead of going home the way I had planned. But I'm glad I did."

"I'm glad, too, Judy. And when I write Mr. and Mrs. Chris Keller on that register, I'm going to feel pretty proud, even if it isn't true. . . ."

She gave him that little flash of her eyes that women use when they want to put you in your place and lead you on at the same time—the battling look . . . the come-on look . . . the silly look that's supposed to keep you guessing . . . the woman-to-a-man look.

Everything was going to be fine. He'd kill that long-chinned monkey if he had to. He'd collect the loot from the post office, then he'd buy a diamond ring and present it to Judy before the sun went down.

He'd tell her they could get married right away to make the lie on the register the truth . . . he'd have champagne sent up to the room . . . he'd start enjoying himself.

The Saint Louis job hadn't been an easy one . . . he needed a rest . . . he needed a girl . . . he needed Judy.

CHAPTER THREE

Cupid Hounds a Killer

THE CLERK at the General Delivery window asked for identification and Chris showed him a driver's license for "Charles Garson." He, like Pete Mangone, had been in business long enough to have procured the necessary props.

Then, the package was there on the counter being shoved toward him. The manila envelope was more crumpled than it had been, but it was all intact. Chris scarcely glanced at it.

"This all there is?" he asked the clerk.

"That's all, sir."

"Oh, well, thanks. It's just that I was expecting a letter."

"Second-class mail. Who likes it?" Chris was grinning as he walked out of the post office.

He held the package tightly now under his left arm. He had his right hand in his coat pocket, curled around the gun.

It was exactly noon.

He walked right up to the long-chinned man who had been following him. "Okay, buster," he said, "what do you want?"

The man had a nasty smile. "I was just about to tell you. Pete Mangone wanted me to deliver a message to you just at this time. He needs money badly—that's the message. He doesn't want anything to go wrong."

Chris also had a nasty smile when he wanted to use it. "You tell Pete he knows where to come and what time. He'll get a little stake from me, just the way I promised. Tell him that, and meanwhile, keep off my neck. I'm tired of having you around, buster."

"I got orders to stay around. Personally, with that gal up there, I don't think you'd be leaving town suddenly. But I got orders."

"You'd better check with Pete and get your orders changed, sonny. You can live

or die, for all I care. -You'd better check."

Chris wasn't conscious of putting the look in his eyes, but it must have been there. The big man raised his bushy eyebrows and seemed to take on a more wary stance. The bluster was gone, replaced by caution. Watch this kid, he might mean it. He might kill you as soon as talk about it.

"You really intend to pay Pete off?" he asked.

"If he comes for it the way I told him . . . if he quits horsing around trying to be a big shot . . . if he doesn't get me mad. He's looking for a new connection, buster. But I'd steer clear if I were you, you'd get fed up. He's as nervous as your grandmother one minute and as low-bellied as a snake the next. Don't let me see you around."

Chris walked away, wondering why he had bothered to say as much as that. But it annoyed him that Pete was clearing out. He hoped Pete would starve. The little, fat guy had been good at lining up the payrolls, but he'd never find another boy who could pick them all up without getting caught.

Well, so what? He should worry about Pete, or anybody else—except himself—and you don't worry about yourself when you're carrying a big bundle of money.

Chris stopped at a tavern, ordered a beer, took a few sips, and then went back to the men's room. He put ten of the one hundred-dollar bills in his wallet and left the rest in the manila envelope.

He knew better than to pay too much for the ring. He figured a pawn shop deal for about five hundred ought to be right for Judy, something cut simply and not too flashy. He didn't want her to know right away that he could buy or steal anything she wanted. She'd find out eventually, but he hoped to have her really loving him by that time. He hoped desperately that she would be different when the moment came, that she wouldn't be afraid like the others had been.

By one-thirty, he was back at the hotel

with the ring in his pocket near the gun.

She was sitting there, marking the want-ads with a pencil, but her face lit up when he walked in.

"Chris! I was beginning to worry! It seemed that you'd been gone such a long time. Are you all right? Did you get rid of the man?"

That was something, Chris thought—really something that she should have been worried about him. Imagine anybody caring whether you ever came back or not, or wanting to know how it went while you were gone!

He sat down on the floor at her feet and held the ring box out to her with both hands. He hoped he could sound sincere. "Judy, I know it's awfully sudden, but I found myself buying this. I shouldn't expect you to be as sure about us as I am, but honey. . . ."

He flipped up the lid of the box.

Her eyes were shining. She leaned forward, covering his hands with hers. "Chris!" she whispered. "You too? I felt it almost at once, that fate had brought us together, that we belonged together."

He couldn't believe it. She wasn't reacting right. He had expected some resistance, but it was going to be a pushover . . . a cinch. Charming, these small town girls—good neighbor policy.

He leaned across her knees and put the ring on her finger. Instead of holding her hand to the light to check the size of the rock, she put her arm around his neck and drew his head close.

She's hungry, he thought, plain starved. You never know. You expect a slap in the face and go to a lot of trouble to set the thing up right. Then you find out that the babe in the woods must have been there once or twice before.

It was a relief.

Chris moved his lips across her neck and up to her ear, gathering her toward him with his hands. "Judy! You feel it, don't you, Judy?"

"Oh, Chris!"

He covered her mouth and it was trembling and eager. Her sighs made him feel wanted and needed. For once, he felt that he was giving, not taking, for somebody else.

"Chris, darling!"

"Yeah, honey. Me too."

BY TWO-THIRTY, he was lying on the divan, his head in her lap. Usually he wanted a highball about then, because the dolls suddenly looked like cheap dolls and filled him with disgust—self-disgust mostly. To think that he'd been dumb enough to want more than he ever found.

But it was different with Judy. He didn't want a drink . . . he didn't feel disgusted . . . he just felt relaxed and complete, as though the moment had answered the crying need of his whole childhood.

He was caressing her hand, turning the ring around idly, lazily. "I never belonged to anybody before, Judy," he said. "Not really, not like this."

She traced his hard jaw with the tip of a finger. "You don't have to say things like that, Chris. After all, I could have. . ."

He drew her fingers across his closed lips and her other hand dropped possessively to his chest and rested against him.

"I'm not just saying things, Judy. I'm being honest for the first time. The ring started out as a gag, I'll admit that. I wanted you, it was as simple as that, and a diamond doesn't mean any more to me than a couple of dollars means to most men. I'm loaded, honey. See that envelope on the end table?"

"The big brown one?"

"Yes. It's stuffed with money, big money. I'm a wrong guy, Judy. I've been wrong all my life. But I've always wanted something, I don't know what. You're the closest I've ever come to finding it, so the ring isn't a gag any more—it's the realest thing in the world. I could change if I had you, I could change!"

Chris didn't know whether he meant it or not. He just knew that the words were coming without thought, without calculation as to their effect.

She patted his chest, comfortingly now, like a mother. "Don't talk that way, Chris, please. It sounds weak, and I like you strong. What time is it?" She turned his wrist over and looked at his watch. "Ten to three. Don't you think I'd better be going?"

He grinned up at her. "Going where? Don't be silly."

Suddenly, he noticed that she didn't seem like a country girl any more. Even her facial expression was more mature, as though love had deepened her understanding of life. No longer the kid, no longer naive, but completely self-possessed.

"I'm not being silly, Chris, but I think I'd better leave. I could meet you someplace for dinner."

"Don't leave now, Judy. Not ever, if you want to give me a chance to prove that I love you."

"Love, Chris? You mean *love*?"

His laugh was bitter, although he hadn't intended it to be. "Sure. That's a laugh. A bigger one than you know, but it's true, whether you want to believe it or not."

He rolled off the divan and got to his feet, tucking his shirt in and adjusting his belt. He stood there, looking down at her, hating the moment but knowing he had to rush into it, had to get it over with.

If the look of fear came into her eyes, he'd kill her. If she laughed at him, he'd kill her. Pete Mangone was due here any minute and there wasn't much time.

"I'm no good, Judy. I told you that, but I didn't tell you everything. I want to now. You've got to know. I'm a killer . . . for money . . . more than once . . . not just to be killing, but to get away clean. But, Judy, help me, I don't want to keep on! I want something—I don't know what—only don't be afraid. . ."

His voice began to break, and he was

ashamed. He wasn't telling her the way he had told the others. He was shaking inside, and all at once the words were horrible in his own ears.

He dropped to his knees and hid his face in her lap. "Judy, I don't want things to have been the way they were—it's that—just that I never had anything any good—until you—please. . . ."

It was awful. He couldn't stop the heaving that was going on inside of his body. He couldn't make himself look up to see whether or not the fear was in her eyes.

Then he felt her fingers pulling his hair, forcing his head upward.

"My God, Chris; stop it! Pete Mangone is due here at three o'clock. Pull yourself together, and listen to me for a minute. I've got a proposition. . . ."

He lurched to his feet, staring at her, his fists clenched, his thoughts crowding in on top of each other across his surprised brain.

Three o'clock . . . Pete Mangone. A bus ticket in Saint Louis. A guy with a doll is not so noticeable . . . a dummy with looks. . . . a sweet little country kid . . . for you, Chris . . . a seatmate on the bus. I set it up for you, boy . . . good luck. I'm checking out, but I want my share. You want to shoot your way into the gas chamber that's your business.

Insurance . . . Pete Mangone covering himself all the way—a gal on the bus, and a long-chinned vulture to cover the post office.

Chris went dead inside. He looked into her eyes and they weren't afraid. Her eyes seemed to be glistening, but his own vision was blurred.

IT DIDN'T matter. It was no good. She'd been working for Pete Mangone. Nothing was any good . . . nothing would ever be any good. And she'd made a fool out of him. She must have had plenty of laughs on the trip . . . and one big belly laugh over the diamond ring.

"You're strong, but gentle. I'm a good

judge of character. Fate meant us to be together."

Her trembling lips, her hunger. Her gentleness too. What an actress!

His voice came out as a cold whisper. "You're not afraid of anything, are you, baby? Not even a killer!"

Her eyes didn't flinch. "Chris, I didn't know how it would turn out. . . ."

He slapped her as hard as he could. She went over like a doll that has a lead base and bounces back. Her eyes still didn't show the fear, the backing off, the horror.

"What strip joint on Skid Row did Pete find you in, baby? Or in what third rate show? You put on a good act!"

She picked a cigarette out of his package and lit it with a match that was jumping in her nervous fingers.

"It doesn't matter," she said.

There was a soft knock on the door and Chris walked, stiff-legged, into the bedroom and got his gun out of his coat pocket.

Then he picked up the brown hat.

I love a man who wears an Eden hat!

The chill in his body turned to a hot, fiery pulsing of blood as he walked toward Judy, swinging the hat in one hand and the gun in the other.

She still didn't back away. She wasn't afraid of him. He had cried in her lap and now she thought he was weak. He'd show her! He'd let her see!

Chris Keller—the shoot-'em-up, get-away-clean boy. The boy with a yard of jobs and not a single arrest. The boy that took what he wanted and scared them all.

He sat down on the divan beside her. "Go open the door for your fat friend, baby."

"Listen, Chris. . . ."

"Do what I say!"

The look must have been there in his eyes, because she moved. She crossed the room, opened the door, and Pete Mangone walked into the room, cheerful and expectant.

"Good boy, Chris! You did it again!

Slim tells me you've got a little stake for me. I pulled him off like you said. No hard feelings, boy? All's fair in business. Right?"

Chris grinned, holding the hat over the gun. "Right! No hard feelings. I want you to meet Judy, Pete, Judy Larkin. I rode up on the bus with her."

Pete turned toward the girl and smiled his lecherous smile.

Chris pulled the trigger and got Pete right in the face—right where he'd got the cop, only this time he did it on purpose.

The hat muffled the sound of the shot and Pete pitched forward, his bulk rattling the lamps when he hit the floor.

I love a man who wears an Eden hat!

Chris put the gun down on the divan and stuck his finger through the brown felt, twirling it.

"I sure shot a hole in that commercial," he said.

He looked up at Judy then, anticipating, and wanting, the look of fear. He'd always dreaded it. Now he wanted it. He wanted it more than anything in the world.

But he found himself looking at a gun, a small automatic. And just as he saw it, it went off.

The pain seared his chest and he looked

down. The blood was coming out over his heart, right where her hand had rested.

He held on, not caring whether he moved or not, but knowing that a move would be fatal. He sat very still.

He watched her wipe the gun butt and place it in Pete's hand. He watched her cross the room and pick up the manila envelope.

He watched her and he tried to speak, but he couldn't.

She stopped for a moment in front of him, and put a cool hand on his cheek.

"You're the one who loused it up, Chris. I'm sorry. Pete was giving me a thousand. I wouldn't have crossed him, until you convinced me that you weren't just giving me a line. But then you went crazy . . . all that talk about going straight. It's too bad, Chris, but thanks. Thanks for the compliment."

Chris let go then and sank back, slumped on the divan. It felt comfortable, peaceful and lazy, just the way it had felt with his head in Judy's lap.

He thought that he could still feel her gentle hand on his chest, but he knew that couldn't be.

He'd heard the door close some time ago as she'd left. ● ● ●

THE GREATEST MAIL-TRAIN ROBBERY

HOLDING UP railway trains is a custom of the American underworld which dates back almost to the beginnings of rail transportation in America. There was even a certain amount of public sympathy for the daring robbers who pulled off these raids—the Daltons, the Jameses, the Youngers. A robbery that today still stands out as a masterpiece of planned strategy took place on the 13th of June, 1924, at Rondout, Ill. Working on an inside tip, a band of desperadoes stopped a mail train on the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad and made off with a cool \$3 million in cash, jewelry and securities. In your March issue of RAILROAD MAGAZINE, there'll be a fascinating portrait gallery of the characters involved in this sensational holdup, along with a dramatic account of just how the scheme was pulled off. On sale February 4, or send 35c to

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WRONG KIND OF KILLING

By JOE BRENNAN



Pam made a lightning motion for my holster.

Lovely little Pam Ming had a voice that would break your heart. And that same, wonderful voice would break my neck, if I believed one word she said!

BRISTER AND I stood in the fore-castle of his tuna boat, the *Cissy Lou*, my voice kicking out at him, hard and slapping. "Yes," I said, "I'll tell you why I'm back again. Young Joe Kublitch died from the gunshot wound, thirty minutes ago!"

The squatty, little man, who was a boat owner and a gambler, made a noise like the opening of a can of vacuum-packed coffee. He suddenly looked balder, yellower.

"Okay, copper," he finally squeaked, "so somebody croaked 'im. What's it to me?"

"It's this to you," I said. "He was shot

on your boat. Old man Kublitch has a bucketful of dough, and he'll spend every last Russian ruble of it to send Joe's killer to the deathhouse."

It made him back up, and swallow. "Look, Marvin," he said. "I wasn't at the game; I wasn't even aboard."

"Okay, then," I said. "What I want to know is, who *was* aboard during the shooting?"

"How do I know!" he screamed. "My *Cissy Lou's* been docked here with no crew, no nothin'. Danny Ryan wanted to throw a little poker party somewhere in the harbor, where no plainclothes schlemmiel like you would nose in. So, what? So, I let him use the boat."

"Four played, Brister, judging from the seating arrangement we found. Young Kublitch and Danny Ryan, for sure. Danny's fingerprints were on the chips. Suppose you slip me the names of the others." I waited for him to spill his guts.

It was no dominoes, so I went on. "By the time we were tipped off and arrived, there was only Joe Kublitch here. He was leaking like a sieve from a shot in the head." Frankly, I had no feeling of friendliness for the deceased, for he was just a rotten, spoiled son of the big cannery tycoon. But the investigation had been dumped into my lap—and I was it.

"Didn't Joe Kublitch tell you nothin'?" croaked Brister.

"With a brain injury like his, you don't do any talking," I said. "But the cards they played with . . . do you have them?"

He wet his lips and gave me his weasel's smile. "When I got back, my forecastle was cleaner'n a sea trout. You wise-guy coppers prob'ly took even the drinks home!"

I yanked a playing card from my pocket. "Come clean, Brister. Here's the only card I found—the joker from a standard brand. Was it a marked deck?"

He threw one of his legs across the end of the table. That nasty look again, too.

"Marvin, when I sit in on a game, I see that it's a new deck with no seal broken. I ain't no tinhorn gambler." He suddenly tossed me a knowing smile. "Smells to me like San Pedro'll be kickin' a certain gumshoe off the payroll, if the Kublitch family don't see somebody croak for killin' their only heir."

I SHUFFLED over to the red stain on the deck's planking. I nodded at it. "You or your flunkies didn't even make a good job of cleaning up the gore."

It didn't faze him, and it was getting plainer that he'd give me no square answers. He stuck a cheroot in his face, lighted it up. "Marvin, I got an old score to settle with you. Remember?"

I said, "Smuggling narcotics in from Mexico on your boat was a federal offense. The FBI should've boiled you in oil."

He hissed, "I can forget the Feds confiscatin' my other boat, but I can't forget you tippin' 'em off!"

"It was my job as a copper," I said. "After all, I've got to sleep with myself."

He threw his head back with a loud cackling. "An' after all your Boy Scout work, they broke you and sent you back to poundin' pavements!"

He had me dead to rights, and was needling like he knew how to needle. Headquarters had busted me like a crock from a high shelf. I'd been quite a time working back. "The department allows no fumbling," I said. "That's why I won't fumble this time." Secretly, I was wondering if I wasn't already bungling this new case.

He went on hitting out at me. "Fogg was your pigeon that time; I was only his stooge, but I did five years for it. If you hadn't fumbled, you'd've fixed Fogg up for twenty, maybe thirty years."

Brister's words had me squirming, and he knew it. "Where's Danny Ryan's hide-out?" I asked.

Brister went right on sticking it in and breaking it off. He pointed one of his claw-

like fingers at me. "Hah! Your lettin' Lonnie De Lara take you the way she did. Why, she an' her boy friend, Fogg, framed the whole thing. They're still laughin' at you!"

I stepped close, clapped my hand on his mushy bicep. "I asked you where Danny Ryan has run to! Let's have it, or I'll get a search warrant and ransack your boat like a pirate."

He got up, his stogie looking like a bazooka. "The Waterfront Hotel."

"That's more like it!"

I went out through the companionway, hearing the last of his sputtering: "I hope headquarters grabs your badge once an' for all."

The clerk at the Waterfront Hotel was quick to give me a passkey to Ryan's room. I'd seen Ryan around enough to know the blond guy on sight. Nice guy he was, a square character with a smiling hello, but packed with a gambling itch that would give him no rest.

I went over his room slowly; careful as a man with a bag of bombs. There was evidence that he didn't intend to return there for awhile. I'm a slob of a Hawkshaw; yet, by working harder and longer than the others, I sometimes bob up with a thing or two that proves a good lead. When your talent is thin, you've got to sweat more for results.

I checked for playing cards; found none that tallied as mates for the joker I had in my pocket. I searched his room with a fine-toothed comb. No soap. Disgusted, I sat down and turned on his portable phonograph. It had a song recording on it by some nightingale who could really warble.

But the little portable spelled nothing for me till I spotted a small record under the cover. It was the kind on which people record their own voices in penny arcades. I gave it a whirl. There was a lot of talk on it by a girl with a husky, whispering sort of voice—the kind I like. However, except for the nice quality of the voice, the context

gave me an earache—dull stuff. She was saying something about having a good time in San Francisco, wishing Danny could be with her, she'd be back in San Pedro soon—and other chatter.

Suddenly, it came to me that this was the same voice that I'd just heard on the other recording. Quickly, I checked the first one, found the canary's name to be Pam Meng. Somehow, it rang a bell within me. Somewhere, at some night club I had run into that name, heard that voice. I high-tailed it out of there and started checking the local cabarets.

THE FOURTH ONE I hit, Toni's Place, had a Pam Meng listed as an entertainer. I got there at dinner time, and found that the entertainment was already under way. A pretty, little auburn-haired trick by the name of Pam Meng was dancing a Spanish fandango sort of thing that quickened a guy's pulse. She had an incredible body that floated around the floor like a yard of silk in the breeze.

For an encore, she rendered a little song. A soft, quaking bit of a thing that sounded like broken hearts. She didn't exactly sing the lyrics—sort of talked them. It was her voice that got into you—low and throaty. She seemed to end her words on unfinished notes, and with a queer little huskiness that was sad and choking.

At the end of her number, I went to the master of ceremonies. I said, "I want to talk with that entertainer, Pam Meng."

"See Miss Toni first," he came back. "She's in the back, and plenty touchy about competitors stealing her talent."

I gave him a gander at my tin can. "A little routine investigation," I explained. "Where's Miss Meng's dressing room?"

"I repeat," he insisted, "that you see Miss Toni first. She's the major-domo around here."

Well, I wasn't going to go around banging promiscuously on dressing room doors, so I went to the rear, asked for Toni.

"She ain't here right now," said the gangling doorkeeper. "She won't be back till mebbe midnight."

"Then let me have a word with Miss Meng," I went on. I realized I was getting the run-around. He took a look at the badge I flashed, then reluctantly showed me to the entertainer's dressing room.

At my knock, Pam Meng opened the door, took her breath, and stepped back. She was still in her red dancing costume. Her wide, grey eyes were something to see—big and luminous.

"Officer Ray Marvin," I said.

"How do you do?" she said, and she had that hunted look on her.

"I'm trying to find your brother, Danny Ryan," I said, taking a chance on the similarity of voices and facial expressions. How I hoped I was right. . . .

Her dainty hand darted out to my arm, touched it lightly. "Please, Mr. Marvin, give him a break."

My guess had been right. I tried pushing my luck a little farther. "You can be of real help to all of us by taking me to him."

She nodded her wealth of shiny hair, wiped at her eyes. "I wish I could help you. I'm afraid I can't."

I tried to be tough—the copper again. "Look, the homicide bureau has to know where Danny is hiding. Where do you live?"

Her teeth were dug into her full lower lip: "The Harbor View Apartments."

"By yourself?"

She nodded again. She seemed so tiny, so defenseless, and ready to break up like a pretty dish. I felt like a stinking elephant in that minute. Still, there was a job to do. The plug-ugly recollection of how Lonnie DeLara had taken me crept through my brain. *Be tough!* I thought. *Keep your heart out of this.* . . .

"Well," I said, "you can see that I've got to go out there."

Her eyes swam. "I—I'll go, too," she blurted. She turned away, her hand on the

door knob. "Will you wait till I change?"

What could I do? I could see through the doorway that there was no telephone in her room, so she couldn't phone a warning to the apartment. Looking at the back of her slim, young neck and seeing her quake with a deep, lurching sob, I said, "Okay, but hurry." She closed the door.

In ten minutes, I was knocking on that door again. With no answer, I figured she might have done something to herself. I put my shoulder to the door, gave it my one hundred and ninety pounds. I found myself standing in the dinky room, with a wide-open window laughing at me. It was high and it was small, and only a little girl like herself could have slipped through it. A slow burn hit me. I turned, ran for my car, realizing bitterly that, for the second time, a slip of a girl had tied a can onto this dumb ox of a copper.

A TAXICAB pulled away from the Harbor View Apartments, as I drove up. Except for the driver, it was empty, and it was a lead-pipe cinch that the girl had outfoxed me. I pounded up the stairs to the foyer, got her apartment number from the mailbox, and took the staircase to the second floor. Slamming into 201, I found her breathing hard and embarrassed.

"Wasn't nice of you, Pam," I said. "Wasn't cricket at all. I took you at your word."

Throatily, she said, "You don't know what it is, Mr. Marvin, to be a girl fighting alone."

I took a look-see to find what I could turn up. Her bedroom was neat and trim like herself. I gave it only a light once-over. I went into the bathroom, gave it a closer look. Then, I returned to the living room, checked some more. In ten minutes, I walked to where she was staring out the window into the night. She had a haunted look in her wide eyes.

"Plenty of evidence that you don't live alone," I said. "You missed ditching a few

things—or do you smoke cigars?” I showed her the cigar band I’d found on top of the evening paper. “Also, the receptacle for discarded razor blades in the bathroom is jammed with recently-used blades. No rust on them.”

She dropped her gaze to the carpet, stifled a sob.

“Do you play poker?” I asked.

She shook her head *no*.

“It isn’t likely then that you’d be reading this,” I said, picking up a magazine that was opened to an article on the intricacies of scientific poker playing. It began with involved facts about the variable law of probabilities.

She looked hopeless and tiny. The peaches-and-cream color had drained from her face. “C-can’t—can’t you leave him alone?” she said on a downbeat. “I—I want to help him from getting hurt. I love him—even though he’s weak. . . .”

“You can help him most,” I said, “by letting me talk to him.” She thanked me with her eyes. Thinking back on the Lonnie DeLara deal, I wondered why I was being so damned nice. It wasn’t arithmetic. Why should I let a doll hoodwink me again? I became the copper once more. “Get him to give himself up. He’ll get hurt if we have to shoot him out of his hideaway.”

She stood close, looked like she was going to play it straight. If ever I saw quality in a girl, I figured I was looking at it right now. Something fine and brave, and a lady to her finger tips.

“Oh, I do want to help!” she cried. “I want to be fair with you, Mr. Marvin, but Danny needs me so. He has no one else to turn to.”

“Which of you is lugging the square moniker?” I asked. “You or your brother?”

“He is,” she said. “*Meng* is just my professional name.”

“I’m glad the name *Pam*, at least, belongs to you.”

“Why?” she asked, her lips parted.

“Because, I like it,” was my answer. And I thought, *Cripes, I must have rocks in my head!*

“Thank you so much,” came her words, soft and low. She sagged wearily onto a chair. “Danny was here when you were outside my dressing room at the nightclub. We have no apartment phone, so I ran out on you and took a taxi here to warn him.”

I scratched my thick noggin. “Yeah, so I see. And, if headquarters hears how I let you give me the slip, they’ll junk my badge. They’ve got new, young rookie cops—collegiates—who can do better.”

“What is your charge against Danny?” she asked.

“He was part of the card game in which young Joe Kublitch was killed. And I happen to know of the fist fight he had with Kublitch some months ago.”

She leaned forward, her face anxious with hope. “Please, Mr. Marvin, believe me, Danny is straight. He’s just a fisherman, with a terrible love for gambling at cards. And the fist fight was over improper advances that Kublitch made to me.”

“I didn’t know the facts,” I admitted.

She went on with, “Danny realizes everything points to him as the murderer, so he’s out trying to bring in the real murderer.”

“I believe you, Pam,” I broke in, “but tracking down killers is the job of the law, and that’s me. Suppose you stay here, in case he returns. You’ll do him a favor if you sell him on the idea of surrendering.” I started out of the apartment, figuring that the probabilities of a shoot-out would still scare the girl into giving me the wanted information.

“Wait!” she whimpered, following me to the door and putting her hand to my sleeve. “He went back to the *Cissy Lou*—to shake the truth out of Brister. I want to come along with you, Ray.” Her use of my first name, sort of made me buzz inside with a warm feeling. “No one will get hurt this way. Danny will listen to me.”

I HELPED HER on with her coat, and we went out together. After all, maybe I could take Danny Ryan into custody without a fuss. Nothing like an easy pinch.

Quietly, we walked down the gangplank to the *Cissy Lou's* deck.

"Let me take the lead," she whispered as we approached the companionway to the forecastle.

But, there I drew the line. I hadn't yet tagged along back of a woman on any kind of an assignment. And I sure wasn't going to begin it this night. I tried to be the tough copper again. "You can do some backseat driving, Pam," I said. "But that's all."

Slipping along, as quiet as light through a transom, we moved into the forecastle. The man with his back to me turned, looked into the barrel of my .45 and raised his hands. "Keep them there, Danny!" I ordered. No gun was in his hand.

On the other side of him was Brister, spread out on the deck, a bullet-hole in the middle of his forehead. To Danny I said, "All right, whistle the patter."

"You could fool me, Marvin," he said. "I just this minute got here myself. I came to pay Brister his half of my last night's winnings." He turned and gazed sorrowfully at his sister, then as an aside to me: "Also, to get some facts from the guy."

Carefully, I shook Danny down. No gun, no sap, no anything—and I wasn't surprised. Fact is, I'd known him as a busy tuna man with a flair for cards in his spare time. Then, I saw a .38 Police Positive on the deck between Brister's feet.

"Your gat?" I asked Danny, nodding at the shooting iron, and waving him away from the body.

"I don't carry one," he said, shuffling backward to the far side of the forecastle. Then, pleading his case like a little Daniel Webster, added, "I know this'll sound like the old story, but I had nothing to do with the killing of either Kublitch or Brister. But I know who *did* rub out Joe Kublitch. It's the same murderer who just did away

with Brister. If you'll let me go till morning, I'll get him for you."

Again, I was thinking of how I had once let Lonnie sell me a bill. I looked from Danny to Pam and back again. "Give me the dope on both killings, Danny," I said. "It's my risk, not yours."

Pam had stepped close to Brister's body. "Oh," she gulped, "it's Mr. Brister." She swung around to her brother. "Danny—Danny, you didn't do it! Really?"

I turned to Pam. "How did you know Brister?"

"I used to work for him when he owned Toni's Place."

Danny interrupted with, "Marvin, everything points to me as the killer in both murders. All of us know it. And, unless I trap the gunman myself, I'm lost. Please?" He had the same soft look of supplication on him that I'd seen on Pam. "The Kublitch family with their millions will crucify me! Will you give me a couple of hours?"

"No dice," I told Danny again. "You give me the correct pitch on the killings, and I'll get the man. I'll do it neat." I looked over at Pam. "I have to do it neat, in order to square away the mess I made of my last big case." Seemed everyone knew.

Pam was bending over Brister's body. "Careful, Pam," I said. "Keep your hands off everything; fingerprints, you know."

Without touching the murder gun, she inspected it at close range. "It's a Colt, Danny," she said. "Blue steel—and with D. R. engraved on the pearl handle."

Danny's eyes bugged. "It's mine," he said thinly. "Stolen from my hotel room a few hours after Kublitch was shot. Now I'm positive who killed Brister."

"You know where to find him?" she asked.

"Right, Sis."

"Then, give Officer Marvin the murderer's name and address," she said. She was looking at her brother in a way I hadn't seen before. They seemed to have a silent language of their own. "Go on, Danny."

DANNY FALTERED with, "Okay, Marvin, will you take this down?"

I holstered my revolver, reached for my pad and pencil. Pam made a lightning motion. There was a blur of something sailing through the air from her to Danny. I grabbed for my holster, but it was too late. Danny had caught the gun which she had tossed. I was gawking into the mouth of it, crazy-mad over my having been suckered into an old play. I was tempted to grab for my .45 and chance it, but I saw the .38's hammer ear back. It froze my move.

"Get his gun, Sis," Danny told her, holding the .38 straight at my face.

Two quick steps, and she lifted my gun, throwing it to him.

"You have my word, Marvin," Danny said. "I'll surrender to you at dawn at Pam's apartment—if I'm not a corpse by that time."

All I could think of, was how Lonnie had murdered me with lying smiles, and now Pam had done it with a gun-toss. I knew I'd never live it down.

"You'll need a good start, Danny," Pam said. "The handcuffs. . . ."

"That's right," Danny agreed. "Your keys, too, Marvin. Give them to her."

Danny's words cracked out again to hurry me. "I said give them to her, Marvin!" His trigger finger looked anxious as it tightened.

The desperation in his voice prodded me into handing the bracelets and keys to Pam. Danny was at that point where he was more dangerous than a professional gunman. Quickly, deftly, Pam hooked the cuffs onto my wrists. At the same time, Danny disappeared like money in a slot machine.

Pam backed away, putting the keys in her pocket. "Ray, I feel rotten about this," she said, tears tumbling down the curve of her cheeks. "A shabby thing to do to a man who trusted me, b-but Danny has to get a head-start."

She knew I wasn't going to rush out into the night, wearing my own handcuffs, pro-

claiming myself as the prize boob of the department. She also knew I wasn't going to maul her for the keys, either.

"You win," I said leadenly.

Pam leaned back against the bulkhead, brushed at her wet cheeks. "If Danny doesn't return, Ray—lock me up. I'll deserve it."

I studied her small, young frame with its wonderfully modeled legs, realized how easily I could batter her into helplessness with my manacled fists. And the idea was unthinkable—like hatcheting a golden pheasant. "Pam," I said, you've made a tramp out of me tonight."

"Please," she cried, "please, don't hate me this way! I'll make it all up to you. Danny will come back, if he can walk or crawl. I know him. He's honest."

She walked over to me, unlocked the handcuffs. "It's enough start for him," she said brokenly. "Maybe he'll have luck this time."

I FELT pretty inept and useless. As far as the department was concerned, I was just a stumbling block in the way of good men; a worn-out workhorse—not even worth turning out to pasture. The thought of the pension due in two years made me all hollow inside. Instead, I'd be getting the tramp's toss.

We went out onto the deck, hiked up the gangplank together. Words would have been absurd. The dull thudding of our feet on the wharf pounded the realization into my brain that I had nothing to sell—absolutely nothing. I could see Lonnie DeLara throwing back her head of raven hair and laughing at me, and I could see her in the arms of Fogg, who had finally glaucmed it all.

"I've got to go back to Toni's Place," Pam said. "Got to finish out my night there—unless you intend to lock me up for interfering with an arrest. . . ."

She sounded tired and worn. I took a sidelong glance at her. Some of the April

had gone out of her face. Here I was, feeling sorry for her having to go back to that brazen nightclub to dance her heart out. And I wasn't going to arrest her. It shamed me to think of the kind of a report I'd have to make.

"Why don't you call it a night?" I said in a dead voice. "It's been a rough go for your dough."

"Got to play the game," she countered.

I looked at the blackness ahead, thinking of the characters she would meet between the waterfront and the club. "I'll walk you back to your work," I said.

It sounds loony now, but she threw a sad little smile at me, locked her arm under mine—and made me wish I had a sister like her.

All the way back to the club, our silence was a wall between us—solid and heavy—until we got to the front of the place.

"Will you come in, Ray," she said, "and watch my last number? Then we'll go to meet Danny at my place."

I mumbled something about, "What have I got to lose that I haven't already lost?" Then too, it was still a few hours away from the time Danny had promised to surrender. I wondered whether I was a missionary or a sucker.

"Evenin', Marvin," came a greeting from in back of us.

I turned to see Patrolman Travis working his beat.

"Hello, Jim," I said. "Any miseries tonight?"

"Little quiet," he answered. "I'm goin' off duty now." Three sailors stepped up to him, apparently wanting information. He pulled out his pocket manual, consulted it.

Pam and I went in, started twisting our way through the mob. Several tables away I saw the back and legs of a girl that spelled something to me. Even the way she carried her head started something clanging deep in the recesses of my memory. She turned her head, and I saw violet eyes under long lashes. I stood like a cigar store Indian.

Pam had halted, too, and was looking up at me. "See a ghost?" she ribbed.

I nodded my pumpkin head up and down, grunted, "Uh-huh."

Pam followed my line of vision. "That's Toni you're admiring," she explained. "She's seldom on the floor."

"I don't wonder," I breathed raggedly. "She's also Lonnie DeLara made up to look like someone she isn't."

In that instant, Lonnie saw me, too. You could see her suck in air and bat her flashing eyes. She wheeled and hurried up the stairs toward a door on the mezzanine. As she reached that point, I heard two quick, muffled shots come from back of that same door.

I rushed for the nightclub's front door, got outside, and found Jim Travis still jawing with the sailors. "Travis," I said, "give me your gun." He handed it over quickly.

AS I ROARED back through the milling customers, Pam caught up with me. I answered the question in her eyes with, "Stay here, Pam!"

I took the stairway on the run, slammed through the locked door on the mezzanine as if were made of cotton candy. Lonnie piled out as I piled in. I didn't want her; not right then, anyhow. There was bigger game to trade punches with. An open door across the office was my dish. I was just in time for the blasting that was smoking up that room.

Fogg was back of the half-opened safe door, and broadside to me. He was taking snap-shots with an automatic at Danny who was behind a steel filing cabinet. Fogg's jaws clacked open as he saw I had him covered. He let his gun slip to the floor, raised his hands shoulder-high. Jim Travis came panting up back of me.

"Danny!" I yelled. "Toss your gun to the patrolman."

"I've got a score to settle with this rat!" Danny moaned. "Let us shoot it out."

"Toss it!" I repeated.

Reluctantly, he heaved it, and Travis caught it.

I turned to Fogg. "This's a pleasure," I said. "I've waited a long time."

He snarled, "Watch out I don't make a sucker out of you again!"

"It's a double murder rap this time," I said. And I was praying that my calculations coincided with Danny's.

Travis slapped the handcuffs on Fogg. Danny busied himself at the medicine chest, tending a gunshot wound on the back of his hand where one of Fogg's bullets had creased him. Meantime, I ransacked the desk. The gods smiled down on me as I found a broken deck of cards, minus a joker; a deck matching the single card I'd been carrying. As nearly as I could make out, however, they weren't marked in any way.

Danny came over, took me by the arm, and walked me to the big vault. "Look, Marvin," he said, pointing at a case of playing cards with standard backs. "He's a counterfeiter of cards; marked decks that'd fool a sharper. In his games, an unbroken seal on a deck doesn't mean a thing. Brister was his partner in the printing of them. It was Brister who put me wise to it."

"Why?" I asked. I had to verify my convictions. "Why did Brister tip you off to the markings?" And the sight of cases of narcotics in that vault was making me realize that I'd hit the jackpot, this night.

"Why?" Danny parroted. "Revenge, that's why. Fogg and Toni were partners with Brister long ago in the dope-running racket. When closed in on, they hung the whole rap on Brister—then cheated him out of this night club while he was in stir."

Danny looked past me, and I heard that low, throaty voice behind me. "Hurt, Danny?"

HE CHUCKLED inwardly as he looked at his cut hand. "Not nearly like Fogg is going to be hurt. Guess I'm a revengeful guy, too. He's going to be hurt for keeps—the gas house." He turned back to me.

"Lacking the old moxie, Brister arranged the poker game for me, staked me, then stayed off his own boat. Half the winnings were to be his. He knew I'd already lost a pack of dough to Fogg and his fixed decks. This was my chance to get it back—and more. We made it look good by inviting Joe Kublitch who just loved to chuck bales of dollars away. Fogg liked that kind of dough, and thought he'd make a killing."

"He made them, all right," I said. "But of the wrong kind. By the way, Danny, how much did you rake in at the game?"

"Ten thousand cocoanuts!" he laughed. "Mostly from Fogg, because the other guy was a Fogg henchman playing Fogg's own money."

Pam had hold of my sleeve and was leaning closely against me. But she was speaking to her brother. "Why, oh, why, Danny," she asked, "did there have to be those two awful shootings?"

He came to her, put an arm around her. "You see, Sis, when Fogg realized I was reading the backs of his own crooked cards, he pulled a gun and tried to get his money back. Being unarmed, I kicked over the lamp to keep from getting shot, then ran out of the fore-castle and got off the boat. Fogg let Joe Kublitch have it in the dark, thinking it was me. With everybody knowing of the bad blood between Kublitch and myself, I had to get Fogg to clear myself."

Well, it was clear to me why Fogg had scooped up the phony cards and scrambled. It was also clear that Fogg had realized that no one other than Brister could have tipped off Danny to the marked cards.

But it wasn't clear to me why Pam hung on to my arm as though I were Don Juan or Casanova. No sir, that wasn't clear at all.

It still isn't clear to me—even though she's been hanging on that way ever since the trial. And now that both Lonnie DeLara and Fogg are getting their come-uppance, just imagine how Pam'll hang on when she learns of my promotion. ● ● ●

I LOVE YOU DEADLY!

By JOHN P. FORAN



She was tall and blonde,
in a tight, green dress.

*After I saw the murder, the blonde
in green was sent to see that I fell
down dead. Neither of us counted
on my falling — all of my own
accord — for her!*

THE TEXAN'S mouth was as big as Texas. "I'm out for excitement, pardner," he cried, in a foghorn voice. "A thousand bucks a minute, win or lose, I want a fast play!"

I didn't like him; from his sparse, sandy hair and leathery face under a punched Stetson, to his pants tucked into cowboy boots. But Don Prescott, on the *Dispatch*, had passed him along as an oil man who was padded with twenty grand. So I called

Benny Morris and the boys, and set up a poker game in the Sherman Hotel.

The Texan was out six grand when he tore up the cards again. Benny hates that routine. He made a crack, and the Texan hauled off and smacked him.

Benny took the punch and swung back. The only difference was Benny had a knife in his hand. I threw out both hands, hoping I wouldn't get sliced, and managed to hit Benny's wrist. The knife cut through the Texan's sleeve just below the shoulder.

That ended the game—and our chances of cleaning the Texan.

We had a drink and tried to talk it down. The Texan kept glancing from Benny—he's small and dapper, looks inoffensive—to his sliced sleeve like he couldn't believe either one. Finally, he came into the talk when one of the boys mentioned the story Don Prescott had written about George Lewis:

He said, "You boys think Lewis will get to testify before the Grand Jury against that politician, Hal Cunningham?"

"He will," I said confidently. "Cunningham may be the boss in the Progressive Party's tenth district, but he's going up for a long stretch."

Benny stared at me, puzzled.

"You're mighty sure of yourself, pardner." The Texan leaned forward, pale eyes gleaming. "Like to make a little wager—say five hundred?"

George Lewis, a small-time bookie who'd been squeezed out of the east side, had offered to go before the Grand Jury—old books he'd saved, wire taps later; enough to tie Cunningham to Edward Schaeffer, who was then under indictment as the city's gambling czar.

I said, "Make it a grand," and took out my wallet.

"All!" Benny glared at me. "It's three to one Lewis won't reach the courthouse alive."

The Texan started fohorning again. A sucker bet. It was what I wanted, a hook, and I wasn't going to stick around and let

him rub it in for nothing. I got up. "Guess I'll run along."

"Hey, hang around a while." The Texan came after me, gave me a sly look. "Care to make it two thousand?"

"We'll talk about it tomorrow night," I said, "across a poker table."

I left the Sherman and drove home, thinking I'd better call Benny and tell him to stay clear until I finished my play. Benny wouldn't argue. We worked well together, ever since we'd teamed up in a Navy torpedo bomber out in the Pacific.

I turned into Sherman Avenue. There was an ancient sedan slewed sideways, and I made out a man's body sprawled beyond the right front fender. An aged man stood over him.

I didn't want to get mixed up in anything, but the helpless pleading in the old boy's eyes stopped me. I climbed out and went over. The guy on the asphalt was small and wiry, his dark eyes glassy, lips purpled and flecked with dried saliva. With the smell of whiskey, I couldn't tell whether he was dead drunk or just dead.

A low moaning, "He's dead! He's dead!" came from the back of the car.

"He stumbled from behind there—" The man pointed a shaking finger at a parked car. "—like he was drunk, an' Belle screamed, an' I tried to stop—"

"Did you call the police?"

"But I'm not supposed to leave the scene of an accident!" He looked around helplessly, tears forming in his old eyes. "An' he'll die!"

"Take it easy, Pop." I patted his shoulder. "I'll get help."

There were lights in the house next to the corner, a brownstone residence that had been turned into—I stopped. Gold lettering on the front doors said: Headquarters—Progressive Party—Tenth District.

A voice said, "Where you goin', bud?"

He was a cop, a big, hard-faced patrolman.

I said, "I was going to phone for the

police and report this accident at once."

"I'm the police," he said, "so you don't go anywhere." He eyed me, the old man, the man on the asphalt. "You do this?"

"No, I was just driving along and—"

"You?"

"I wasn't driving fast, Officer," said the old man, tearfully. "Belle don't like me to drive fast, an' he stumbled out like—"

"Let's see your license. Yours, too!"

"Me?" I said. "But I was just driving along—"

"Get it up!"

HE LOOKED the licenses over, then bent over the guy on the street and went through his pockets. He was checking some papers in the glare of the headlights, when a radio car rolled to a stop. The officer straightened up and showed the patrol cops the papers he'd taken from the victim's pockets. They looked at each other, one said something I couldn't catch, and then they stared at the old man.

Two men came from behind the parked car. The first one who wore tailored clothes had smooth, even features, black hair and bright, black eyes—a pretty boy. He looked around, chewing slowly, like a director checking a scene ready for a take.

The other one had blonde hair over rough features, blue eyes that darted sideways at me. He asked, "You see what happened, fella?"

"Ask the cop," I said.

He didn't like that. He moved heavy shoulders under bulgy clothes and scowled, "Where'd you come from?"

"From where I was."

Pretty Boy turned his bright, black eyes on me. The chewing rhythm of his jaws stopped for a grin. "Where you going?" he asked.

I didn't like him, his friend, or the way they were crowding me. "Who knows where he's going?" I said.

He eyed me, chewing slowly. He was handsome and he knew it. Confident as hell.

"Ain't it the truth," he said softly. "Let's go, Jack." He headed back to the club.

After a while, a big hulk came out of the club and climbed into the parked car. As he did so, the cop came over and handed back my license. "On your way," he said:

The old man was sitting in the back of his car, talking anxiously to Belle. I couldn't do anything for him. I climbed into my car and drove off. The parked car pulled out and tailed me. . . .

SHE WAS STANDING under a street light three blocks away, tall and blonde; and with the light shining down like the sun, she reminded me of a ripe cornfield. A tight green dress showed she didn't need a girdle—or any other support. The cornfield impression went up in the smoke of a cigarette dangling from her scarlet lips. She turned a long leg, lifted her skirt to her knee, and examined the seam of the stocking.

I grinned, but not from amusement; the hulk tailing me, a blonde staked out up ahead. Obviously, I'd been too cagey back there and I'd convinced the pretty boy I'd seen something. The more I backed away now, the harder he would come after me. Deciding I'd have more luck with the blonde than the hulk, I swung the car over to the curb.

She flipped the cigarette away and climbed in. She came in like a clean, sweet breeze that has tasted a cornfield. Her nearness dug into me, tore at long-forgotten hopes and dreams.

"Lots of excitement back there, huh?" Her voice was soft as cornsilk, but tried too hard for a gum-chewing, Sadie Thompson effect.

"A guy got run over."

"Oh, that's too bad."

Angered by that, and the way I was letting a cheap pick-up set me on fire, I said flatly, "The guy's dead."

"Oh, no!" It shocked her, cracked her Sadie Thompson pose; and in the silence

that followed, I had the feeling both of us were worried about having been sucked into something that was going to turn mean and nasty. She glanced hastily over her shoulder and I thought she was worried about the hulk covering her, but she asked uneasily, "What—what will happen to the driver?"

"An old man like that? Arrest for manslaughter, jail, a trial, he's too old for anything like that, he'll die, too."

I hammered it at her, not knowing what she was going through and not caring; and she sat stiffly erect, her blue eyes lifeless.

We rode that way to my apartment house. I checked the rear-view mirror as I parked. The hulk was far back now, giving us plenty of room. The blonde's hand was icy as I helped her out. We went up to the second floor and into my apartment. I waved to the sofa. "This is it, Sadie."

She went over and sat down, one hand in her lap tightened into a bone-white fist. I asked, "Now what's this all about?" I was more concerned about the signs of shock—her hands icy, her face bloodless, her blue eyes staring blankly. I went over and sat beside her, put my arms around her. I didn't kiss her. I said, "You remind me of a clean, fresh breeze in a cornfield."

That did it, that tore her wide open. Her eyes came alive, shifting frantically. A sob started way down in her waist, a tight convulsive movement that let loose a swelling breath that choked in her throat. She laughed, and twisted her head from side to side. I let her go and she went limp over the arm of the chair, her hair falling across her face.

MORE THAN a little scared, I got up and poured out a stiff shot of whiskey. I grabbed a handful of her thick, yellow hair and lifted her head. I forced her to drink it all. Then I had one myself.

She was watching me. Filmed with tears, her eyes were soft and blue. There was a quiet dignity about her now, an inherent

grace in the way she raised a hand and brushed her hair back.

"Who are you?" I asked. "What are you after?"

"Kathy Lee," she said. "Did you see what happened?"

Just like that. I shook my head. "Who sent you after me?"

She looked down at her long, white hands in her lap. "My—my cousin."

I knew who he was. "Jack?" She nodded. "And the pretty boy?"

"My fiance, Clive Warren."

I compressed my lips. This was getting meaner and nastier by the minute. "And who was the guy got run over?"

"Please don't ask me," she said quickly. "It won't help matters."

I waited.

She said, "George Lewis."

I felt like I'd been kicked in the stomach. I said, "Oh."

"But if you didn't see anything," she said.

"I didn't." Looking at her, I had to ask, "How'd a girl like you get mixed up in this? Didn't you know they'd kill Lewis?"

"No, they didn't!" she cried, the frantic look coming back in her eyes, and her hand tightened into a fist as she said, "Clive only wanted the fake evidence Lewis had connecting Mr. Cunningham with Edward Schaeffer."

"How do you know it was fake?"

"It *has* to be," she insisted. "I've known Mr. Cunningham all my life. I went to school with his daughter. He wouldn't be mixed up with a gambler like Schaeffer."

A gambler. I let it pass. "How'd they get hold of Lewis?"

"I did it. Lewis hung out in a place called Paddy's. He's known as a chaser, so Clive asked me to dress up in these clothes and make a play for him. Lewis asked me to go to his place, like Clive said he would, and we had a cab waiting outside and the driver took us to the club."

"Where Clive was going to persuade

Lewis to confess his evidence was faked and then let him go."

"Yes," she said, and tried to sound as though she believed it.

"And you were handy when I came along," I kept on. "Clive told you I would call the newspapers and tell them a pack of lies."

There was the sting of tears in the way she blinked her eyes. "Clive's political career will be ruined if Mr. Cunningham goes to jail."

It made me feel she would follow the guy she loved to hell, and make some excuse for the fire. Some guys had all the luck.

She got up. "I'll tell Clive you didn't see anything."

I grinned. "You *are* an amateur. You're supposed to have a couple of drinks with me and play me along until I tell you all about the accident. This takes time."

She looked at me uncertainly, as though seeing me for the first time. She lowered her eyes—shy, bashful. I laughed and patted the seat beside me. "Sit down, Kathy, I won't bite."

She moved nicely in that tight, green dress—and the way her lashes lifted over her blue eyes. "Who are you?"

"Call me Al—Albert Farnsworth."

She looked about.

It was a large living room an interior decorator had designed in return for a stud hand that hadn't stood up; paneled walls, gold and gray drapes that matched the upholstered chairs, a solid gray rug.

"What do you do, Al?"

"I'm a gambler."

"Oh."

"If you don't like it," I said coldly, "I'll wash my hands and become a politician—like Clive."

"I'm sorry," she said, flushing. "I was surprised—I mean, the room has such a secure, comfortable feeling."

"All gamblers yearn for security, Kathy." I didn't mean to say it in a way that included her in the yearning.

She lowered her eyes and said, "Al—"

Suddenly, I couldn't take it any longer. "Go on back to Clive," I said harshly. "Get the hell out of here!"

She rose and walked over to the door. She had a way of holding herself, shoulders up and head high. She looked back, not wanting to go like this and didn't know what to say.

I got up. I wanted to go to her, take her in my arms, and kiss and caress her. "I haven't asked for anything," I said, holding my voice steady, "because I meant it. You remind me of a clean, fresh breeze in a cornfield."

It broke her up again. A quick rush of tears and she fled.

I mixed a drink and thought about the way she brushed her hair back, the way she walked across a room: A couple of ideals another blonde had kicked in the teeth ten years ago opened bright, hopeful eyes.

"Don't be a dope," I said, and sipped the drink.

Tangling with Cunningham, who had a Big Inch pipeline direct to City Hall, could be murderous. One word to the cops or the district attorney and I'd be reduced to furtive two-bit crap games in garages. My best bet was to take the first plane out of the city and head for the California ranch I'd won from Gerald Graft, the movie actor. I'd paid the mortgage for two years and all I'd gotten out of it were some vague snapshots, along with the monthly letters from the caretakers. I could stay there until Lewis' death faded from the headlines.

It meant losing the Texan and the fourteen grand still in his wallet. That hurt.

Of course, I was assuming—hell, it wasn't an assumption; Lewis *had* to be dead! I decided to prove it. I dialed the *Dispatch*, asked for Don Prescott.

"Hi'ya, Al, old boy," he said. "Got any oil fields you want to sell?"

"Only a couple of barrels of oil so far," I said. "But thanks for sending the Texan

along. Did you get the flash on Lewis yet?"

"Flash?" he said, puzzled; then, swiftly, "On Lewis?"

"Call the Bellemar Hospital and get me the dope."

"Geez! Don't tell me Lewis didn't make it after all! The heck with oil fields. Al, this is a gold mine!"

I said, "Don't forget to call me back." The line was dead.

I REPLACED the phone and picked up the drink. Kathy Lee, a nice name, a nice girl, and tied to a cheap-ward-heeler. Maybe some day she would find herself standing under a street light, the tight green dress, a cigarette dangling from her lips. Only it wouldn't be an act. This time, she would be hard and bitter, disillusioned.

The phone rang. Don's voice exploded in my ear. "Lewis is dead, Al! Automobile accident, skull fracture, internal injuries. Boy, is that Cunningham a lucky guy! See you, Al, I gotta write a story."

I put the phone down and leaned on it. There it was. I'd not only lost the Texan, but the grand I'd put up as well. I thought of calling Benny and offering four to one Lewis would never testify. It wasn't funny.

The phone rang again.

Kathy sounded breathless, as though she'd been running; and suddenly I felt the same way, as though I'd been running after her and caught up with her and she was in my arms.

She said, "Al, I couldn't go back to the club. I came home and Hoke must have followed me and phoned Clive, and then Clive came here and kept asking me questions. He wouldn't believe me, Al; he kept saying something happened between us and I was lying to protect you. And then, he—he hit me."

Pretty Boy, I thought. I couldn't leave her to him. No matter what happened, I couldn't do that. "Toss some things into a bag, Kathy. We're taking a trip to California. What's your address?"

"I'm in the Court Apartments, Northcliffe Avenue—but Al, I can't possibly—"

I hung up, and took the automatic out of the table drawer. I hadn't used a gun since the war. I set it by the phone and dialed Benny's number.

Instead of Benny's sleepy voice, a loud blustery one cried, "Say, if you don't get over here with that bourbon in five minutes, I'll come over and take the hotel apartment by room!"

The Texan. Behind his foghorn voice I could hear music and women laughing. Passing over what he was doing in Benny's apartment, I said quickly, "Tex, you said you have a plane at the airport. Can you get hold of the pilot?"

"Sure, if I have to." I heard Benny ask and he said, "It's Al. He wants a plane. Yeah, I'll ask him. What's the trouble, Al?"

I said, "George Lewis is dead and I have to—"

"Ha, ha!" he chortled. "You don't have to leave town, Al. You put up the dough. Ha, ha, ha! What'd I tell you, Al? I'm an old hand at politics."

I gripped the phone and my temper. "Stop clowning. I'm up to my ears in this, and I have to get away fast."

"Give me the story, pardner," he said, cheerfully.

I wondered why I'd stopped Benny from sliding a knife between his ribs. "Let me talk to Benny," I shouted.

"Talk to me, pardner. If there's any excitement, I want in on it."

I told him the story, and he relayed snatches of it to Benny. "So now you're going over to the Court Apartments to rescue the lady in distress, eh?"

"Never mind that," I snapped. "What about the plane, the pilot?"

"Pilot, hell," he snorted. "I'll fly you myself."

I slammed the phone down. The loud-mouth! At that very moment, he was probably chuckling drunkenly and calling his

hotel for more bourbon. Well, I had plenty of poker money and I had to move fast.

I drove over to Northcliffe Avenue and along it until I came to the Court Apartments. I pressed the Lee button. The latch clicked. I rode a service elevator up to the fourth floor.

Kathy opened the door wide. She'd changed to a pin-checked gabardine suit and gotten rid of the heavy make-up. Her natural color was almost as vivid. She looked real pretty.

Even though a bag stood in the middle of the living room floor, I expected an argument. Kathy looked ready to give me one, so I said cheerfully, "All packed, I see," and went on into the living room and picked up the bag. I turned. "Let's go, Kathy—" I stopped.

Pretty Boy stood in the doorway, flanked by Jack and Hoke. He had a gun, a big .45, in a hand that was as steady as his bright, black eyes.

"Where you going, Al?" he said mockingly.

For a bitter moment I thought she'd sucked me into this, but I could see her left cheek now, the red welts where Clive had hit her. He'd given Kathy the chance to call me, and I'd been just a little too hasty.

They came on in, Jack scowling and shifting his shoulders, proving he wasn't as confident as Clive. Hoke was bigger and heavier, with a scarred face and the detached air of a professional fighter.

"Drop the bag, Al," said Clive. "Frisk him, Jack."

Jack circled me and located the automatic. Scowling, he dug the wallet out of my back pocket. "Hey, look! There's over five grand here!" He lifted startled eyes to Clive.

"Well, a big-time operator." Clive worked a grin over the chewing motion of his jaws. "We get paid for tonight's work." He held out a hand and Jack tossed the wallet over. "Sit down, Al." He waved

the gun at a high-backed chair. "Get behind him, Hoke, and if he makes a move let him have it."

Looking at Kathy, who was standing in the doorway, but talking for Clive's benefit, I said, "Was it his pretty face, Kathy, or did he feed you a smooth line about devoting his life to good, clean government?"

Clive's hand tightened around the gun. "You're asking for it, pal," he said, gangster style, "and I'm going to love giving it to you."

HE WAS PERCHED on the edge of the table. Avoiding Kathy's eyes, Jack fumbled with a crushed pack of cigarettes. Hoke towered over me, a placid threat. It occurred to me that we were waiting for something.

"So you killed Lewis," I said, settling back comfortably, "and then you got rid of the body. But instead of letting it ride out clean, you had to louse it up by dragging me into it."

He gave me a hard smile. "You didn't see what happened, so how do you know who killed Lewis?"

"You've kept me thinking about it until I have it figured. You worked on Lewis until he told you where the evidence was hidden. Then you killed him. Jack and Hoke, here, carried him out of the club and tossed him from behind the parked car into the path of the old guy's bus."

Clive's face was blank. Jack's blue eyes shifted to Kathy, then away. I glanced up quickly; it was written on Hoke's scarred face.

"You've talked me into it, Pretty Boy," I grinned, "me and the Grand Jury."

"You and Lewis, you mean." He came away from the table, a vicious twist to his lips, the gun lifting to rake me. The shrill sound of the doorbell stopped him. Jack stiffened, took a warning look from Clive. "Answer it, Kathy," Clive said, and settled back against the table.

Kathy tore frightened eyes from me and

hurried out. I heard the hall door open, her voice flooding with relief, "Oh, Mr. Cunningham, I'm so glad you're here!"

"Now, now Kathleen," said a deep, resonant voice. It smiled, it patted her on the shoulder, it said, "Now don't be upset, child, everything's going to be all right."

Cunningham came into the room, the smile fading from his heavy, blooded face. White hair and gray eyes made his face seem even redder. He carried a lot of weight to go with the face. A thick, manicured hand waved a gray fedora negligently in my direction.

"This him?" he said pleasantly.

Clive said, "Al Farnsworth."

"Farnsworth," he repeated distinctly. He didn't know me. "Kathleen." A fatherly smile softened his blood-red face. "My dear, why don't you go powder your nose?"

Kathy hesitated, one hand covering the welts on her cheek. "Yes, Mr. Cunningham," she said, obediently, and went out.

"Now." Cunningham lowered his bulk into a chair. He set his hat on what was left of his lap. The fatherly attitude hardened into a flinty stare. "What's this all about?" he asked Clive.

"You're going to love this," I said.

Hoke's hand clamped on my shoulder. "Keep shut, you," he rumbled.

"He saw it happen," Clive told him. "Recognized him right off and took off for a phone, but the patrolman stopped him. He played it cozy when we questioned him. Kathy tried her hand at it and when he played innocent, I got him over here so you could question him."

Cunningham eyed me coldly. "What's your angle?"

I said, "I'll stack all Pretty Boy has just said against the five grand he just took away from me and didn't tell you about."

It helped. Cunningham shot Clive a frosty look.

"Until I came here I didn't see anything," I went on, "and I was breaking my neck to keep on *not* seeing it. But Pretty Boy, here,

was too smart. He sent Kathy out to pick me up, then wouldn't believe nothing happened between us and slapped her around. I came over here to get Kathy and myself out of this stupid mess."

I stopped. Now I know why Clive hadn't believed Kathy. I'd helped Kathy when she needed it, given her a lift, and Clive had noticed the change. Because something had happened to her, I thought, my heart starting to pound, the same things that had happened to me.

Cunningham was leaning toward Clive, his gray eyes blazing, his face a flaming red. "You *hit* Kathleen? You had that child do your dirty work?"

"But Kathy was the only one I could trust," said Clive uneasily, "and I had Hoke keeping an eye on her."

Cunningham ripped into him, "Why didn't you use my own daughter?"

Clive licked his lips. He stared sullenly at the gun in his hand.

Cunningham made a violent attempt to control his blood pressure. He came back to me, "Now, what's your angle?"

"He's my angle." I pointed to Clive. "I want him."

Cunningham smiled faintly. "Frankly, at the moment I'd like to give him to you."

"You have to give him to me," I said more confidently than I felt. "I called Don Prescott, the *Dispatch* reporter, and asked him to confirm Lewis' death. I told two friends I was coming here, they're waiting for me now." I thought wistfully of Benny and the Texan waiting at the airport—if they were waiting at all.

"A very corny routine," sneered Clive.

"Shut up!" rasped Cunningham. "You need more than that, Farnsworth."

"Figure it," I said quickly, impatiently. "I was on the scene of the 'accident' in front of your party headquarters. I talked to two of your boys, Clive and Jack. A short while later, I phoned a reporter and asked if Lewis was dead. Then I'm traced to Kathy's apartment, she's Clive's fiance, after which

I disappear. It'll stink to high heaven. Not my disappearance," I pointed out carefully, "Lewis' murder."

CUNNINGHAM THOUGHT it out. Clive waited tensely, his black eyes on his boss. Jack kept shifting uneasily. Hoke's breathing made the only sound in the room.

"You must have told your friends you were leavin' with Kathy," said Cunningham slowly, "so if she goes away, I suppose we could say you eloped. It will stink," he admitted, "but it'll be better than letting you loose."

Clive breathed again, shot me a hard, knowing grin. Jack blew his breath out. Cunningham placed his hands on the arms of the chair and gathered himself to rise. It happened then, as they were relaxing all over the place. The Texan charged into it like a mad steer. He flung his Stetson at Clive and grabbed Jack, before we realized what was happening. Benny rushed in, shouting, "Duck, Al!" as he flung his knife after the Stetson.

I ducked. The back of the chair hit my head and I sprawled on hands and knees, dazed, wondering how Hoke could hit so hard. I understood when a second shot blasted, and a white scar appeared on the hardwood floor under my nose. Splintering glass carried the bullet on its way.

I crawled from under the chair. The Texan had rammed Jack into Clive, and was bulling both into a corner. "Hang on, Benny, I'm a'comin'!" he shouted.

Benny was on Hoke's back, mugging with all his strength. I belted Hoke low in the stomach and rushed to help the Texan.

"Hi'ya, Al!" He passed me, wheezing like a steam engine. Clive's gun clutched in his fist. "Here I come, Benny!"

In the corner, Clive was levelling my automatic over Jack's shoulder at the Texan's back. I made the automatic, just as it exploded, and whipped Clive's arm down over Jack's shoulder in an attempt to break

it. Jack slumped weakly between us, and we tripped and rolled to the floor.

I caught a glimpse of Benny's slight body flying through the air. He hit the sofa and bounced off, landed on hands and knees like a cat. He dove at Hoke's legs, as the Texan slammed the forty-five into Hoke's scarred face. The room shook as Hoke hit the floor.

The Texan checked Jack, then squatted down where Clive was giving me a bad time. "How you doing, pardner?" he chuckled.

"You crazy Texan!" I gasped. "The gun—get it!"

"That little, old cap-pistol?" He twisted the gun out of Clive's hand. "Go to it, pardner."

"Pretty Boy," I said.

He wasn't pretty when I finished. The Texan had hold of me, and Benny was pleading, "Cut it out, Al, you wanna kill him?"

Kathy was staring down at me, wide-eyed. I didn't care; I still wanted to kill her Pretty Boy.

Hoke was out cold. Jack was propped up on his left side, his right hand pressed against his ribs. He stared stupidly at the blood seeping through his fingers.

"He got in the way of the second bullet Clive threw at you," said Benny.

The Texan beamed. "Well, I saved your life, pardner, like you saved mine!" He slapped Benny on the back. "Here's the fightingest man I ever met! Boy, I haven't had so much fun since the oil well caught fire!"

"How'd you two get here?" I asked.

"The little lady, here." The Texan beamed at Kathy. "We were cruising along Northcliffe, and Benny was trying to recognize your car. She ran out—"

THE REST OF it was lost in Kathy's cry as she rushed to Cunningham. He was still sitting in the chair. His ruddy face had turned a ghastly gray. His eyes mirrored, the convulsion stiffening him. . . .

"Get to a phone," I said, turning Kathy away. "Call a doctor." I made motions to Benny. "Keep her out of here."

"Let's blow, Al," he said uneasily. "Hear those sirens? The place will be lousy with cops."

"Okay, soon as I clean this up." I got my wallet from Clive's pocket, and knelt beside Jack. "Did you kill Lewis?" I asked.

"No!" he gasped, pressing his side tighter. His blue eyes shifted to Cunningham. He looked worried.

"Your patron saint is dead," I lied. "Heart attack. You're on your own, Jack, so don't be sucker enough to protect Pretty Boy. He shot you, and you saw the way he used the girl he was going to marry."

"I—I didn't like that." His rough features twisted in pain. "Kathy isn't that kind. Please, get me a doctor. I'm hurt!"

"Who killed Lewis?"

"He did." Jack glared at Pretty Boy's puffed face. "He kept hitting Lewis, kicked him like a crazy man, and before we could—please, get me a doctor!"

"Okay, soon as you talk to the cops."

The cops were excited about making the biggest pinch of their lives. They didn't argue about letting us go, after I pointed out I'd broken the case before they arrived.

When the doctor said Cunningham wasn't going to die, I picked up Kathy's bag, took her arm, and marched her out of there. We

were heading for the airport before she came out of it.

"Al, where are we going?" she asked.

"The ranch. California."

"Al, I can't," she said uneasily. "So much has happened—Clive—you really don't want—" She didn't know she was clinging to my hand.

"Do you know why Clive didn't believe you?"

She shook her head.

"The look in your eyes. You had faith again."

She didn't know what I was talking about. I patted her hand. "Just leave it to me."

The Texan and Benny flew all the way out to Las Vegas to watch us get married. They threw rice and congratulated us. I kissed the bride, a formal gesture, and we went on to the ranch.

For a month, the caretakers couldn't figure us out. We were man and wife, acting like friends and living in separate rooms. Then Kathy told me one night. After a year of ranching, I still chuckle every time I think of it.

She came in the doorway of my room, a tight, green dress sheathing her tall, supple body. A cigarette dangled from her lips. She turned a long leg, lifted her skirt to her knee, and examined the seam of her stocking.

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SOMETHING OLD — SOMETHING NEW

THE electric chair is the only really new form of capital punishment to be devised in more than 3000 years! Gas chambers had their ancient counterpart, for Greeks forced the condemned to drink poison. The firing squad is just a modernized version of tying a man to the stake and throwing spears at him. But ancient custom provided a great variety of execution methods in addition to these. Some of them were: decapitation, strangulation, hanging, stabbing, empalement, whipping, crucifixion, drowning, burning, flaying alive, burying alive, throwing from a height, stoning, cutting in two, throwing into a volcano, and sending to sea in a leaky canoe!

George W. Black.



Cash Wale and his pug-faced friend hitched a ride in the old jalopy, driven by a scrawny kid named Hank Dunhill. The Cadillac that had been following them stopped alongside at the roadside diner. The car emptied and the men came to get the kid.



He took one of the men along, hoping to learn something from him. Maybe someone else had seen the letter the kid sent to his father . . . someone who was out to stop him from reaching Dunhill City and claiming his inheritance.



The kid had said that his mother had been dead for five years; but, what a knockout of a brunette was introduced as Mrs. Dunhill! Wale had anticipated the storybook-type of stepmother—not the slender, young thing in a clinging, pink robe.



Wale was in it now, over his head. The kid, shot and hospitalized, was in no shape to be helpful. Read this suspense-filled novelette, "Cash Wale's Second Massacre," by Peter Paige in the June issue, on sale April 3rd.

Fast-Action Murder

Novelette

By **FLETCHER FLORA**

He drew his shoulders forward, his eyes impersonal. "You ready to talk now?"



HAL DECKER sat on the edge of the bed, his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. The bed was really just a shelf, hinged to the stone wall. High above it, sunlight lanced through a narrow opening and fell across the floor in four parallel segments, divided by the shadows of bars.

When the heavy grill clanged shut behind me, Hal lifted his head from his hands, his dull eyes mirroring for a moment a trace of a smile that had the nervous character and brevity of a tic.

"Sol," he said. "Solomon Burr. Sorry

HELL HAS NO FURY-

—like a crossed-up dame, they say, and Burr thought he could use that adage to save a pal's life. But with those dames—he'd better try first to save himself!



to have to get you into this mess, boy."

I sat down on the bed beside him. It was no kind of bed to induce sleep in a guy who probably wasn't sleeping well at best.

"Sorry, hell," I said. "In my office, a client's a client, and it's a long way between."

The tic-smile flickered again. "Hard times? In that case, how are you going to like working for free?"

I shrugged. "It's practice, anyhow."

"Sure. Thanks, Sol. Funny, isn't it. How things turn out, I mean. Few years ago, we were cracking law books and drinking short beers together—just friends. Now everything's changed. Now we're lawyer and client, all mixed up in a big, beautiful murder case."

"We're still friends, Hal. You know that."

"Yeah, I guess I counted on your feeling that way, Sol. Not that you can do much. A guy charged with murder has to have a lawyer, that's all. It's strictly a dry run."

"You haven't been convicted yet."

His laugh was short and ugly. "No, not yet. But I've been framed for a conviction, and it'll come in time. I've been framed by an expert, Sol. All that's left to do is to hang me on the wall."

I found a pack of cigarettes and shook one out for him. "Maybe you'd better brief me," I said.

He drew smoke deeply into his lungs, letting it ride out on a long, quivering sigh. The smoke rose heavily in the still air, drifting and thinning in the shaft of sunlight.

"Funny," he said again. "Funny how the little things never have any significance, until you're about to lose them—like a cigarette." He pulled himself up short, repeating his humorless laugh. "This case won't do you any good, Sol. This one you've already lost."

"That's what you said before. Just for exercise, suppose you let me go through the motions of being a lawyer, anyhow."

He stood up, moving into the slanting projection of the sun and lifting his head to look up along its angle to the distant patch of sky beyond. I was sorry to see him like that, looking up through bars into the rationed light of day. We'd been good cronies once, we'd had good times over those beers. Even now, we hadn't seen much of each other since, memories of the past stirred and came alive again.

Hal was primarily muscular; he'd never really had the cut of a lawyer. After we'd gotten out of law school, while I was hanging out a shingle, he'd gone into enforcement. The metropolitan police department was crying for law students at the time; the idea being that the best way to eliminate inefficiency and corruption was to get top grade personnel. It was one of those movements that the old timers get prodded into now and then by a temporarily-aroused public.

After a while, when the public goes back to business as usual, the reform dies quietly, ignored by the veterans in office. The lure was fast promotion in a field that has an appeal for a certain type. Hal was the type, and he'd gone in. But he hadn't stayed long. In one way or another, he fouled up and he'd landed outside fast, education and efficiency be damned.

Maybe, now, he read my thoughts. Moving out of the sunlight, and returning to the shadows, he said, "You ever hear why I was bounced off the force?"

"No."

"I thought not. It was hushed up at the time, but it makes a good story. Career of an educated copper—Dick Tracy with a degree." His voice sank to a low level of bitterness. "One night we were cruising out East Market, Old Finnegan and I. We were working double-harness. He was breaking me in, getting me started on that nice career everyone was talking about. We got a call to stop at a place over on Forest, a few blocks away. Seems a gang of kids were raising hell in an apartment

over there. Well, they *were* raising hell, all right.

"We walked right into the middle of a flowering tea party—reefer smoke as thick as fog. One of the young guys cut up rough, and I had to put him to sleep. When we booked them, it turned out that this kid was the mayor's nephew, the nephew of handsome Danny Devore himself. That's it—story of a career boy—the end."

"You sure that's all? I hear you made a threat. To be precise, I hear you promised to kill Danny and eat him for breakfast."

HIS SHOULDERS sagged, and his head fell a little forward. He pressed the heel of his right hand against his forehead. "I got a little drunk. A guy says crazy things when he's drunk."

I sat watching him, thinking of the mayor he had threatened to kill. A threat to kill doesn't usually mean much before the fact. After the fact, it takes on significance. And this was after the fact, because the mayor was dead. Charming Danny Devore, the bachelor, glamour boy, the smooth idol of metropolitan politics. Hard as it was to realize, he was dead from the slugs of a .38.

"How about the gun?" I said. "Your gun was found in the study by the body, and it had your prints on it."

"Does a man commit murder and leave the gun behind?"

"Who knows? Murderers do idiotic things sometimes. Besides, one question doesn't answer another. How did the gun get there?"

"I've already said—I've said a thousand times—it was stolen from my room. It had to be, I hadn't even looked at it for weeks."

"You never even missed it?"

"No."

"Okay, let it go. How about the witness? This guy Richert happened to be passing Danny's place about the time of the murder. He saw you come out the front door and go down the drive. To make it practically perfect, he just happens to be one of the

district attorney's special investigators."

Hal shook his head, and began to pound his clenched fist into his palm. His voice, paced to the pounding said, "He didn't see me, Sol. He couldn't have seen me, because I wasn't there."

"You think he's lying?"

"Not necessarily. Look. He saw this guy from a distance, and in bad light. Maybe he really thinks it *was* me, but you know how those things are. If there's other evidence, like the gun, it's easy to go along with it. It would be easy for Richert to convince himself that I was the guy."

"True enough. Now, tell me where you were that night, if you weren't out there shooting Danny Devore."

His clenched fist relaxed, the fingers falling open. "I was with a girl," he said.

"At the time of the murder?"

"I was with her all night."

"Then why the hell haven't you said so? What's this girl's name?"

He shook his head, tiredly. "I can't tell you, Sol."

"Why the hell not? Listen, you're on a short road to the hot seat, and you haven't got time for chivalry."

He just shook his head again, turned away from me and looked blankly into a corner of the cell.

"You got an idea of protecting her honor? You actually got a corny idea like that? Listen to me, Hal. So you were with the gal. Who cares? These days they're doing it in headlines all over the world. You get everything but photographs."

He laughed his short, ugly laugh. "You're not thinking well for a lawyer. Like I said, I'm in a frame. It was built by an expert. I'm in it because someone wants me in it, and he wants me to stay there. What do you think would happen if he learned there was a witness who could get me out?"

"She'd get protection," I said.

"Protection? From that outfit out there?"

"You're making it tough for me, Hal."

He lifted his shoulders, still staring at the corner. "I'm sorry, Sol. I told you right at the start that it's a dry run."

I went over to the grill and rattled the bars. Behind me, Hal continued to look into the corner. Maybe, in his mind, it was a symbol of the tight one he was in.

"Thanks for coming, anyhow, Sol."

"Save it," I said. "And don't go contacting any other lawyer. It's the first real case I've had in a century, and I'm damned if I'll be cut out."

I went down the long hall and out into the free air. For a minute I stood on the curb, breathing deeply. Then I crawled into my car and drove back to my office.

THE OFFICE was in a building where the rents were possible for a youngish lawyer with the soft dew of college hardly dry behind his ears. It was on the second floor. If you wanted to get up there, you walked because there was no elevator. Down the hall, you found a door with a pane of frosted glass. And on the glass, in imitation gold leaf, you read the words: Solomon Burr, Attorney-at-Law.

If you pushed the door open and walked in, you were met by the rapid-fire clatter of a second-hand typewriter bouncing under the agile digits of a gal who was by no means second-hand. Her name was Kitty Troop, and she was my secretary. She presented, among other things, the impression of bustling activity under the pressure of many cases pending in court. This was a ruse. Actually, she saw your shadow on the glass and had her novel dog-eared in the likely event that you were a false alarm. Being a clever gal, she kept a clean sheet in the machine at all times, ready for the act at the first sign of any stray character who might turn into a client. If you looked over her shoulder, you saw that she was typing *The sly, quick fox jumped over the lazy, brown dog.*

But you didn't look over her shoulder.

You were busy looking at other things. She showed you first some nice teeth in a smile between the merest hints of dimples. Then she stood up, and you saw a figure that made you forget all your troubles. When you got your breath back and asked if Mr. Burr was in, she replied in a voice that was as soft as a fog that Mr. Burr just happened to be free at the moment and would give you a few minutes. Then she walked over to Mr. Burr's private door, giving you a reverse view from seams to ash-blond bun. By that time, you didn't give a damn if Mr. Burr was the lousiest shyster in town, with the highest fees on record. You were ready to give him your case, just so you could come back for the scenery.

If Kitty was on her toes, she knocked on the door and counted slowly to five. Then, when she opened the door, you saw an alert, clean-cut guy busy as hell with a lot of legal papers and stuff. If she forgot and opened the door without knocking, chances are you got a brace of elevated shoes and a pretty good view of a fairly standard profile. It was profile because this guy was watching the spider who lived in a web up by the ceiling. The spider's name was Oliver Wendell Holmes. The guy's name was Solomon Burr.

This was all on a slow day, which most of them were. As yet, no one had mistaken me for a revised edition of Clarence Darrow. Though there were those exceptional months, I found myself unable to meet with any consistency the world's constant demand for cash. Catch me toward the first, and I could be had for the rent. How Kitty paid *her* rent, I don't know, since she was paid herself only now and then.

Today, when I walked in with the stale air of the municipal dungeons still in my nostrils, the small reception office was crowded. That is, there was one other person besides Kitty in it. A girl. She sat on the edge of a chair so straight and stiff that she managed to give the impression of being coiled like a spring. Dark red hair

between a tiny hat and a face that retained its prettiness under strain; dark green suit, attractively filled.

"This is Miss Wanda Henderson," Kitty said. "She wants to see you."

"How do you do, Miss Henderson," I said. "Come right in."

I pushed open the door to my inner sanctum, and she did a tricky job of uncoiling while rising on the perpendicular, preceded me into the office, and sat down on the edge of my fancy chair for clients with a rigidly balanced bending. She sat with knees and ankles clapped tightly together, hands clutching a green leather purse in her lap. She seemed afraid to relax for an instant. Wanda Henderson was no scarecrow, far from it. As I said, not even the distortions of strain destroyed the basic lines of her face, not even the deep shadow of fear in her eyes.

I offered her a cigarette, thinking it might loosen her up a little. After a slight hesitation, she accepted it and a light gratefully.

"Apparently Hal's never mentioned me," she said.

I'd guessed her identity, of course, from the moment I'd walked in.

"Until this afternoon," I said, "I hadn't seen Hal for a long time. He probably has a lot of friends I've never heard of."

She leaned forward stiffly, clutching the edge of the desk. "You've seen him?"

"I just came from the municipal prison."

"How is he?"

I SHRUGGED and lit a cigarette of my own, taking my time, answering her through smoke. "Licked," I said. "Ready to quit. I'm supposed to be his lawyer, but it's just for looks."

"He didn't mention me at all?"

"Not by name. He said he spent the night of the murder with a girl. That you?"

Delicate color flushed her cheeks. "Yes."

"It's an air-tight alibi, honey. You could save his hide with a dozen words in the right place."

"I know. That's why I'm here."

"This isn't the right place. If you speak up, Hal won't even need a lawyer. All you have to do, is see the district attorney."

"I've seen him."

In his corner, Oliver Wendell Holmes, with no problems, slumbered quietly in his web. The office seemed filled, of a sudden, with a poised and breathless menace.

"Yes? What did he tell you?"

"He told me it was a nice try and that he admired me for the attempt, but said he had a witness of his own who contradicted my testimony. His witness was one of his own investigators. He told me to go home and forget it, otherwise I'd find myself involved in a perjury charge."

Her voice had sunk to a whisper of bitterness. I got up and moved over to a window that looked down into the narrow chasm of a dreary alley.

After a while, I turned back into the room. She still sat on the edge of her chair, the ineffectual cigarette burning forgotten between her fingers. A thin line of smoke ascended past her face. Her eyes met mine, fear swimming darkly.

I said quietly, "You know anyone out of town? Anyone you could visit for a while?"

"No."

"That's too bad. You ought to take a nice trip. You ought to take a quick trip to a far place. You got a job?"

"Yes."

"Get sick. Give me time to figure something out. In the meantime, go home and lock your door. For your sake and Hal's, take care of yourself."

She jerked erect. "I'll be all right. Will you call me when you need me?"

"I'll call you. Leave your address with my secretary."

She went to the door and stood there with one hand on the knob. "Why?" she asked. "He's just one of the little guys. He isn't big enough to rate a top bracket frame."

I was suddenly wishing I had never

known Hal Decker and that this girl was a thousand miles away. I wasn't proud of the feeling, and I said softly, "There's nothing personal about it. Any guy would have done. It's just that someone needs a patsy . . . it's just that Hal pointed at himself with his big mouth . . . it's just that he made himself logical."

She continued to stand there for a few seconds, her eyes fixed in a blind stare of intense absorption. And then, saying nothing, she went out.

I leaned back to study the wall beside the door. Outside in the reception office, the voices of Kitty and Wanda Henderson were engaged in a brief exchange. Then the hall door opened, closed, and silence descended.

Suddenly, beyond my door, Kitty's typewriter began a furious clattering. *Shadow on the glass*, I thought. The clattering ended abruptly, and Kitty's voice rose brightly. Almost immediately, my door swung open, and my reflexes had me reaching for a stack of paper, while I thought unkindly of Kitty's negligence in forgetting to cue me in. But I didn't complete the action. I knew, somehow, that the two guys who entered would not be susceptible to the routine.

One of them leaned against the door. The other moved in on my desk, with a cordial smile on his face. He even removed his hat, placing it carefully on a corner of the desk. His hair was light brown and clipped close to a skull. He was tall, topping six feet, with heavyweight shoulders that moved in easy co-ordination with his legs. A pretty nice-looking guy, really, except that his light tan eyes were cold and shining with conditioned wariness. There was about him the delicate and indefinable scent of violence and death:

"You Solomon Burr?" he asked, pleasantly.

"Yes," I said. "Have a chair."

The cordial smile spread a trifle. He reached into the inner pocket of his coat and removed a thick, green packet. He fanned the edge of it with a thumbnail and

laid it on the desk among the legal papers.

"No, thanks. We won't stay. The girl who was just here—Wanda Henderson—this will pay you to forget her."

It was a lot of money, a hell of a lot of money for a lawyer with a relatively new shingle. I looked at the packet, and my palms were itching.

"Go to hell," I said.

The guy with tan eyes kept smiling. He picked up the money and returned it to his pocket. Leaning across the desk, as if he were going to argue the point, he slashed the horny edge of his hand across my mouth. My chair teetered, crashing over backward, not so much from the blow as from my effort to get away from it. The guy came around the desk and kicked me. I tried to move away, but all my muscles were drawn in a kind of excruciating contraction. I felt myself hoisted, jammed against the desk. Stony knuckles raked my face and the pleasant voice, spaced precisely between blows, reached me faintly on a rising wave of thunderous nausea.

"You could have made a nice bundle, just for turning down a job. Now you'll turn it down without the bundle, just because I ask it. You hear me, counsellor? You hear me real plain?"

I heard him, but I didn't answer. I slipped away under cover of night and descended in soft and sweeping gyrations a thousand sickening miles to the blessed sanctuary of the floor.

CHAPTER TWO

More Women in the Act

MY HEAD WAS lying on something delightfully soft. Far off above me, a voice said, "Damn it, you're getting me all bloody."

Opening my eyes, I saw through a swimming pink mist the shimmering, elusive face of Kitty Troop.

"Pardon me," I said, shutting my eyes again.

The effort detonated a bomb inside my skull.

“Shut up,” Kitty said. “If you’ve got to bleed, bleed quietly.”

When I’d accumulated enough strength to lift my lids once more, the pink mist had thinned a little, and Kitty’s face was closer and clearer.

“You’ve been crying,” I said.

She sniffed. “Like hell I have. You think I’d waste any tears on a guy three months delinquent on my salary? What the hell you trying to do, sonny, make like Perry Mason?”

“Perry Mason never gets beat up,” I said. “Perry Mason is a hero. Has anyone ever told you that you’ve got nice legs?”

“You’d be surprised,” she said. “Anyhow, you ought to use a more direct approach. Between you and me, lover, this is a damned devious technique. Now get up. The fun’s over.”

I tried a grin and suffered for it. “You’re profane, honey. You’re a very profane dame.”

“To hell with you,” she said.

Slipping an arm across my shoulders, she made enough clearance to draw her leg out from under. Then, very gently, while bells rang and sirens whined in a vivid shower of colored sparks and streamers, she deposited me into a chair.

She went away, and I let my eyes close. Pretty soon, she returned, and I let them stay closed. She swabbed the cut on my cheek bone with liquid fire.

“Ouch,” I said.

“Merthiolate,” she said.

“Take it easy, honey.”

“It ought to have a stitch.”

“Nothing doing.”

“Okay. I’ll pull it together with tape. That way, it’ll leave a cute little scar. Make you look experienced.”

She did things with gauze and tape, and after a while, I began to feel much better, the fire diminishing in my face. With the tips of my fingers, I explored tenderly a

swelling along the line of my jaw, the bloat of my lips. Kitty held a small mirror in front of me, and I was surprised to see that the reflected face wasn’t nearly so misshapen to the sight as it was to the touch. It had its purple patches and its distortions, to be sure, but the damage was minor to a face like mine.

“Nothing much I can do for the lips,” Kitty said.

“You might try kissing them.”

“No, thanks.”

“All right. I wouldn’t let you kiss me, anyhow, because you’re vulgar. You’d have to wash your mouth out with soap and water first. By the way, where’d you get all the first aid stuff?”

“I keep it in the drawer with my novel. I’ve been holding it for the day you get tired of watching your lousy spider and start looking around for more basic entertainment.”

“I’m not the rough type, honey.”

She gave me another grin, a little firmer around the edges this time, and perched on a corner of the desk. The nylon, even with runners, was very alluring.

“I was keeping it for you, lover, not me. Any guy who can’t handle a couple of gorillas wouldn’t get far with Kitty.”

I eased my head back wearily against the chair, and her hand came out suddenly, her fingers trailing lightly down my bruised cheek.

“It isn’t funny, Sol.”

“No,” I said, “it really isn’t.”

“What’s it all mean? Why do you rate a treatment by professional gorillas?”

I sat there with my head back, looking up at the ceiling. It was still the same old ceiling. Kitty sat on my desk, and she was still lovely, desirable, and unpaid. Everything was the same and in order. Yet nothing was the same, and nothing was in order.

“It means, honey,” I said quietly, “that a very deadly character wants Hal Decker to burn for a murder he didn’t commit. It means that anyone who gets in the way will

get to be considered strictly expendable.”

“Who is he, Sol?”

“That’s something I’ve been thinking about real hard, and I keep getting an answer that scares the hell out of me. On the evidence, it’s really a pretty simple problem. Wanda Henderson is Hal Decker’s only alibi. Hal hasn’t told anyone about her, because he’s afraid of what might happen to her. On her own, Wanda went to Austin Stark, the district attorney, and told him Hal had spent the night of Danny Devore’s murder with her.

“What did Stark do? He laughed politely and sent her home under threat of a perjury rap. But Wanda didn’t go home. She came here instead, because Hal had mentioned to her that I’m a lawyer and that we used to be pretty good friends. She leaves here, and five minutes later a trio of gorillas make an appearance. One of them tries to buy me off the case. When I won’t buy, he gives me a sample of available consequences. Here’s the point, honey. How do they know Wanda Henderson is an alibi for Hal Decker? What’s the only way they could know?”

KITTY WAS perfectly still, her eyes shining. After a while, she said, “The district attorney, Sol? Don’t be silly.”

“It figures.”

“The way you look at it, it figures. Look at it another way, it doesn’t figure at all. In the first place, Stark isn’t part of the old crowd at City Hall. Danny Devore’s crowd, that is. He’s a crusader, a clean-up guy. As a matter of fact, Danny was one of his principal targets. He’s the white knight of the righteous.”

“He wouldn’t be the first saint with a brass halo. Maybe he feels appointed, and anointed. Maybe he looks upon the death of Danny Devore as a kind of holy assassination. I sort of see it that way myself.”

“What about the frame of Hal Decker? Is that holy, too?”

“It could be. A holy sacrifice on the

altar of pure politics. Saving the great man for the great work.”

“You’re making him a maniac, Sol. You don’t believe it, yourself.”

“You’re right as usual. I don’t really believe it. I was just talking.”

She scooted over on the desk and put her feet in my lap. “Look, Sol. You sure you aren’t off on the wrong scent? Austin Stark is an ambitious guy. He’s got a long way to go in politics. His first step up was going to be on the dead carcass of Danny Devore. Dead politically, I mean. Danny’s death was the worst thing that could have happened to him. Because of the old martyr angle, Danny’s gang is playing it for all it’s worth. Already people are forgetting what a louse Danny was beginning to look, and one of his boys is sitting in Danny’s chair. He’ll be there a long time now. Danny’s murder has set Stark’s career back five years. Can’t you see that?”

“Sure. I can see it, all right. I can also see Stark’s connection with the gorillas. I can see that he has made a blunt effort to intimidate Hal Decker’s only witness. I can see that his own key witness is one of his own key men. I can see it all, and I can smell it. It stinks!”

I sat up in my chair, removing her feet from my lap, and putting my hands flat on the desk. Slowly, with labor and sweat, I pushed myself erect and stood quietly, leaning on the desk, until the room quit revolving and everything settled in its place. Kitty put an arm around me, contributing to my equilibrium, and that part was fun.

“Go get the city directory, honey,” I said. “Look up the address of Wash Richert.”

“Stark’s witness?”

“He’s the guy.”

“You going to see him?”

“That’s the idea.”

“Why?”

“When something smells, you sniff around.”

Her arm dropped away from me, and

she went out into the reception office. While she was gone, I tried on my hat for size. Except for a tender spot above one ear, my skull seemed to have escaped abuse. I took a turn around the room, checking my motor reactions and finding them adequate. Kitty came back and stood watching my test run with critical eyes.

"It's nine twelve South Twentieth," she said. "You want me to go along to put you together again, just in case?"

I walked past her. "Don't be facetious, honey. Remember, I'm your boss."

She snorted. "A hell of a boss, you are. Working the help without pay . . . brawling in your office . . . getting involved with politicians. How the hell can you ever expect to amount to a damn?"

I ignored her, opening the outer door, and putting one foot into the hall.

She said, "Sol."

I paused and looked back over a shoulder, my eyebrows making interrogation points.

"Be careful, Sol."

I went on out and down the single flight to the street. I leaned against a lamp post. As I stood there, the yellow light came on above me, casting my abbreviated shadow to the pavement at my feet. Getting into my car, I drove away.

Out on South Twentieth, I found nine twelve to be a three-story brick walkup, with a narrow front and a high stoop. I went up the steps and into a short hall with a weak bulb burning at the ceiling under a dirty globe. Along the wall on my right, as I entered, were six mail boxes. Examining the names on the boxes, I discovered that Wash Richert lived on the third floor. Cursing my luck and my condition, I made the long climb up the worn, dark flights.

Outside Richert's door, I knocked and waited, hearing within the sound of approaching footsteps. *A woman*, I thought, and when the door opened, it was. For a woman, she was tall, almost as tall as I, dressed in a navy blue sheer that gave her

arms and shoulders, where there was nothing, under a soft, smoky look. Her platinum hair was phony, but the dye job and the style were good enough to make the phoniness unimportant. Her eyes were warm and her mouth was soft, almost pouting in repose, but you got a quick impression that the eyes could freeze fast, the lips thin and harden.

"I'm looking for Wash Richert," I said.

Her voice had a minor nasality, whining slightly in her nostrils. "He isn't here."

"You know where he is?"

"No."

"You know when he'll be back?"

"No. Probably not for a long time."

"You his wife?"

"I could be. What is this, mister? What you after?"

"Just conversation. May I come in?"

She looked at me with her platinum top cocked a little to one side, her eyes speculative. She seemed to be trying to make something interesting out of me, something that would do to pass the time.

"Why not?"

FOLLOWING ME into the room, she wondered if I'd like a drink to match one she'd been drinking when I knocked, and since I needed it, I said I would. She went off into a small kitchen to mix it, and I dropped my hat onto a chair and listened to the pleasant sounds of glass and ice. Pretty soon she came back and handed me a glass that was dark enough to look promising. Her own, I noted, was just as dark.

"Must be lonely without your husband," I said.

She looked at me over the rim of her glass with an expression in her warm eyes that left everything open. "You're only lonely if you let yourself be," she said.

I swallowed a piece of my drink, and it was as strong as it looked. The warmth from the pit of my stomach was potent, prompt, and welcome.

"Where'd you say Wash went?"

"I didn't. I said I didn't know."

"I guess you did, at that. I'm the forgetful type."

"I'm not. If you'd tell me your name, I'd remember that."

I had another drink and inspected the lowered cubes. "It's Burr." That didn't seem to register, so I added, "I'm a lawyer." She was still waiting, so I finished, "Hal Decker's lawyer."

When she lowered her glass, I saw that I'd been right in my analysis, of her eyes and mouth. They could change very fast. The former were now cold, and the latter was a thin line.

"You can finish your drink before you go," she said.

I laughed. "It just goes to show you. A girl ought to insist on a proper introduction."

"No wonder you're all beat to hell. You're a very snotty guy. Maybe you'd better go *before* you finish your drink."

I walked over to a table and deposited the glass, wishing I'd emptied it before she pinned me down.

"I just want to talk with you," I said.

"Don't waste your breath."

"A guy's life may depend on it."

"I'm all broken up."

I retrieved my hat and moved to the door. "I thought you would be. Thanks a lot, baby."

I went down and crawled into my car and sat there wondering what Perry Mason would do. After a while, I thought to hell with Perry Mason and drove a couple of miles downtown to an apartment house that had more floors than Richert's and an elevator to get you up and down. At a desk in the lobby, I asked a young clerk if he would please call Mr. Austin Stark and state that Mr. Solomon Burr humbly requested five minutes worth of precious, unofficial time. I expected a bounce and was surprised when I didn't get it. The clerk pulled a plug and told me I could go right up.

On the tenth floor, a blond oak door was opened by Austin Stark himself, and I walked into an apartment that indicated a source of income considerably bigger than a district attorney's salary. Not that I suspected anything illegal, for Stark was an honest man in matters concerning the root of evil. He was also a ruthless man. The ruthlessness was apparent in the gray eyes, the strong, sharp jaw and the cruel, pale lips. A man of concentrated purpose and driving ambition . . . a man who, in the final judgment, could do no wrong . . . a man whose final judgment would always be his own . . . above all, a dangerous man.

IN THE RICH living room, we measured each other. His shallow eyes took in my marred face without a flicker of discernible reaction. He didn't ask me to sit down. He didn't offer me a drink. He just stood and waited.

"I'm representing Hal Decker in the Devore murder case," I said.

He nodded shortly. "I'm aware of that."

"You're also aware that I have a witness who will swear that Decker spent the entire night of Devore's murder with her."

"True. She told me the story. She's lying, of course."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because, as you know, I have a completely reliable witness who saw Decker leave Devore's house."

"Yes. Wash Richert. One of your investigators."

He could have drawn an inference, but he chose not to. He merely waited for me to continue.

"I've been out to Richert's apartment. His wife told me he isn't home. She said he probably won't be back for a long time."

His face was bland. "So?"

"So I thought you might tell me where he is."

"Why should I know where he is?"

"He's your witness. I assume you have him under wraps."

"You're wrong. I don't have Richert under wraps."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No."

He was lying coldly and methodically, perfectly certain that any lie he might tell was justified.

"When he reports in, will you let me talk with him?" I said.

"No. Why should I let you influence my witness?"

"I don't want to influence him. I just want to talk with him."

"It's unthinkable."

I turned and started for the door. "Okay. Thanks very much."

I had taken three steps, maybe, when the door opened and a woman stepped in. She stopped abruptly, staring at me, color seeping to the surface of her cheeks, her lips falling slightly apart. She was wearing a long, white gown that seemed to be made of multiple layers of diaphanous material. Her hair was black, loose on her shoulders, gleaming with highlights. Her eyes were blanked out by dark glasses. Under the rim of one lens, I could see the outer edge of an ugly, yellow bruise, and I thought, *Why, this doll has a plain, old-fashioned shiner.*

She said, "I'm sorry, Austin. I didn't know you were engaged."

His voice behind me was measured icily. "It's all right, my dear. We've just finished. My wife Alma—Mr. Solomon Burr."

"How do you do," I said.

She nodded and stepped aside, and I went on into the hall and let myself out.

In my car, I sat for a while and tried to think, but it seemed that my brain wouldn't consider anything but dames—three of them. The only one I really wanted to think about was Kitty Troop; but the other three—black, red, and platinum—kept barging in to spoil the fun.

Finally, I gave it up and decided to go home, because I was very tired. I had done everything I could possibly do tonight.

Even Perry Mason couldn't have done more. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

Homicide Chimes In

WHEN I HIT the office next morning, after seven hours in the sack, Kitty was sitting behind her desk with her knees crossed. Her chair was pushed back far enough to give anyone at the side an unobstructed view of her long legs.

The show was good, but the audience was composed of exactly one short, fat guy with popped eyes and a sour, twisted mouth. His fat was saggy, lapping over his collar and belt, and he looked as if he might reach five-six in his socks. Leaning against the jamb of my private door, hands thrust into the pockets of his pants, he divided his attention about equally between the scuffed toe of a shoe and Kitty. As far as I could see, he showed about as much enthusiasm for one view as the other. His popped eyes, the color of skimmed milk, took no notice of me whatever.

"You're wasting it," I said pleasantly.

Kitty sighed philosophically. "You never can tell about these reserved guys, they're deep. Sometimes they crack all of a sudden. This one's Wiley Shivers. Detective Lieutenant Wiley Shivers, to you. He represents homicide."

"Smart," Wiley Shivers said. "You're a smart pair."

"We're really not so bad," I said. "It's just that we're leary of visitors. We've had bad luck with some recently."

His eyes dropped again to the toe of his shoe.

"Joker," he said. "Some people always reaching for a fast line. You got no call to be funny, counselor. Maybe you better start worrying a little. Maybe you got some more bad luck coming up."

Already I was sick of him. "Is that a guess or a threat?"

He straightened, rocking forward from the jamb to an unsupported perpendicular. I noticed that his feet was very small, almost like a child's, so that the balance of his excessive weight always seemed a little precarious.

"Neither. Call it a prediction based on evidence. I'll come in and talk with you about it." He rolled his milky eyes at Kitty. "See that no one disturbs us, sister."

Kitty cackled and put her legs away under the desk. "That's a very rough assignment," she said.

I went into my office and sat down in my chair, and Shivers came after me and sat down in the chair that Wanda Henderson had sat in yesterday.

"I hear you were out on South Twentieth last night," he said.

"That's right. I went out to see Wash Richert. You've probably heard that, too."

"I hear a lot of things. You see him?"

"No. I saw his wife."

"Yeah? Platinum dame with round heels?"

"I can vouch for the platinum, not the heels. Maybe you're better acquainted with her than I am."

"There you go again. You got a smart mouth, counselor. She tell you where Wash was?"

"No. She gave me a drink and threw me out. She didn't even give me time to finish the drink."

"Tough. All your luck seems to be bad. Why'd she do it? Throw you out, I mean."

"She didn't like my name. She didn't like my job. She thought I was nosey."

"Probably she thought right."

"You're not a nice guy, Lieutenant."

His pale, milky eyes were unaffected. "I'm not paid to be nice. I'm paid to be a cop."

"Are they incompatible?"

"Usually they are. You telling me you never saw Wash at all last night?"

"That's right. I saw his wife. Then I

went to see Austin Stark. After that, I went home."

"Well, someone saw him. I thought maybe it was you."

I looked at his nasty, fat face across the desk, and the pressure was back in my chest.

"Why not come to the point, Lieutenant?"

"Sure. He's dead—Richert is. Someone smoked him in a room over on the east side. Crummy dump where he'd holed in."

I stared at him, and my mind was as numb as a blank can be. After a while, I said, "It doesn't make sense."

"Murder never does. Not in the end."

"Who would want him dead?"

"Hal Decker would."

I laughed caustically. "Use your head, Lieutenant. Decker's an ordinary guy, a little guy. He doesn't have hired hoods to bump off an unfriendly witness for him."

"He's got you."

"I'm a lawyer, not a torpedo."

"He's got the dame—the one who took a story to the D.A.—the Henderson dame."

"So you've heard about her."

"Like I said, I hear a lot of things."

I MASSAGED my forehead trying to muscle my thoughts into some kind of pattern, but it wasn't any good. They kept right on milling around in confusion.

"Look," I said. "I don't expect you to believe it, but I've never been close to Richert. Not even within shooting distance. And I'd stake my life that Wanda Henderson hasn't, either. There's no reason to think she'd have been able to locate him. Damn it, there's just no one loose who wanted him dead, no one who gave a damn about his testimony against Decker."

Shivers' lips twisted with sour sarcasm. "Maybe you think the D.A. bumped his own witness. Maybe that makes sense to you."

"No. That makes no sense, either. Not a damned thing about this makes sense."

Surging up onto his little feet, he said,

"One thing makes sense, counselor. Whoever killed Richert, it's my job to find him. That makes all the sense I got any use for. You think I'm an unpleasant guy, and probably I am, but you haven't seen anything yet. Believe me, you haven't begun to see how unpleasant I can be." He turned and went over to the door, and turned back again. "Be seeing you, counselor," he said.

He went out across the reception office, and I heard his thin, dry voice directed at Kitty from the vicinity of the hall door, "It's not that you aren't good looking, sister. It's just that I'm too old."

Kitty came in and sat down on my desk. "You hear what he said? I thought it was very considerate of him. Restored my confidence."

"Well," I said bitterly, "he didn't say anything to restore my confidence."

She put fingers under my chin and tipped my face up. "I know. Just when you're beginning to look human, too. You look much better without the fat lips, Sol."

Her voice was light, but her eyes were clouded. I got the idea that she might be concerned.

"You been listening at the door again?" I said.

"Of course. Naturally." Her eyes were lifted to the window behind me. "We've been loafing too hard, Sol. We ought to go somewhere on a vacation."

"Together, honey? That's a very interesting idea that I may remind you of later." I stood up and moved around the desk. "Right now I've got a date with another gal. You have Wanda Henderson's address?"

"Yes. Why?"

"I'm going out there."

"Look, hero, a lawyer's supposed to see his clients in his office. He doesn't run around knocking on doors like a census-taker. Damn it, do you have to go looking for trouble?"

"I'm not looking for trouble, honey. I'm looking for a way out of it. In case you

haven't noticed, trouble's all around me. I'm buried in it, right up to my neck."

She slipped off the desk. "Sure you're in trouble. You know why? Because the area's swarming with dames. Scratch a dame, you always uncover trouble. I knew you were out of your depth, Sonny, the minute that red-head showed up here yesterday. Then, as if a red-head wasn't enough, you had to go get involved with a platinum blond, with round heels, no less. This case starts out as a nice, simple frame for murder, and all of a sudden it develops female trouble."

I grinned. "You haven't credited all the cast. There's a black-headed doll, too. Her name's Alma Stark."

"The great man's wife? How does she figure?"

"I don't know how she figures, but she's got a black eye. A dame with a black eye must have been into something."

Kitty eased up close and tapped me on the chest with a red nail. "For your information, you still haven't got the cast complete. There's still another female on the stage. She's beautiful, intelligent, and loaded with charm. Besides, you owe her three months' salary, and she doesn't want you dead until it's paid. Take care, lover."

That put us on an upbeat, and it seemed like a good place to leave us for the time being, so I got the address and went downstairs to my car. After cutting across town for about twenty minutes, I came to the address Kitty had given me. This was another walkup, but Wanda Henderson lived on the second floor instead of the third, and I was feeling better than I had felt yesterday, what with the rapid healing of my bruises and the growing affection for Kitty Troop. Even with Wiley Shivers in the background, my mental state was reasonably bright as I knocked on Wanda's door.

THE door was a little off the latch and swung inward away from my knuckles. Through the crack between door and

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jamb, I could see a kind of dull, red stain on the worn carpet of the room. Having been made susceptible to suggestion by recent experience, I thought at first that it was blood, but then I saw that it wasn't blood at all. It was hair.

I pushed the door open farther and stood there looking at Wanda Henderson, and I could see that she would be cold to the touch. Her arms were spread, the fingers clawed. Her red hair splashed around her head, and there were bruises on her throat. She'd been killed by hands—direct, primitive, the most brutal of all forms. At least it was a change from shooting.

I pulled the door shut very quietly, I turned, and went back downstairs to the car and drove away.

It wasn't that I didn't even consider calling the police. I did. It was my first thought. My second thought, however, was of Wiley Shivers, and I felt that anyone, even in case of murder, was justified in not calling the police, if calling them meant facing Shivers the second time in one day.

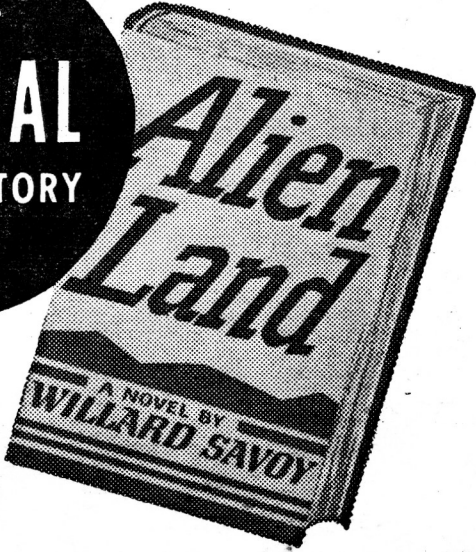
Now the whole affair was a monstrous bit of nonsense verse. Nothing whatever made any sense at all, and I was groping blindly in a maniac world that was filled with wandering women and a fine, indiscriminate slaughter of witnesses. Why? Why the impartial elimination of the key witness on both sides? The only guy who'd figured in the business all the way was Austin Stark. All the way to the murder of Wash Richert, that is. But how could you figure Stark in the elimination of his own man? Of course, he probably had Richert's signed statement, but it wasn't the same. It wasn't the same as a live guy in court putting the clincher on a frame.

Several blocks from the walkup, I stopped at a corner drug store and went inside to the phone. I dropped a dime and dialed. "Hello, Kitty. Anyone there?" "No. Your date over already?"

(Continued on page 102)



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(Continued from page 100)

"It never even got started. Wanda had another date, in Samara."

"What the hell you talking about, lover?"

"You don't get it? A novel reader like you? Never mind, though. It means she's dead."

The wire sang between us, and after a while, she said quietly, "One of the others called in, right after you left—the platinum one."

"Richert's wife? What does she want?"

"She wants to talk with you. She sounded scared. She sounded scared to death. Which reminds me that I'm scared to death myself. I'll bring all the petty cash and meet you at the bus station. We can't afford a train."

"Some other time, hussy. What about the platinum? She coming to the office?"

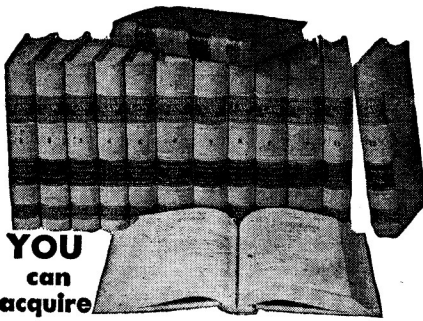
"No. She's waiting in a little bar called The Peanut. They serve them in bowls with beer. It's on Fifteenth, just off Wamego Street."

"I know the place. See you later."

"I wonder," she said sadly, and I hung up.

On Fifteenth, just off Wamego, The Peanut was a dismal, little bar which, like all bars in the morning, somehow gave the impression of having a hangover. In the shadowy interior, behind the peanut bowls, a bartender looked at me as if he wished he didn't have to. Opposite the bar, lining the wall, there was a string of booths, each with its own peanut bowl, and private remote-control box for the juke box in the rear. In the last booth, where the shadows were deepest, I caught a glimmer of platinum, the white movement of a lifted hand.

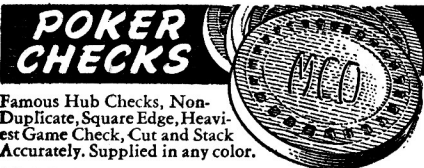
I told the bartender to bring me a shot of rye and went back to the booth and sat down. While I was waiting for the rye, I saw that Kitty had been right. Mrs. Richert was scared to death. Her face was drawn, no more than a shade darker than her hair, and her eyes were still and wary.



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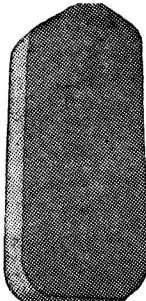
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Hell Has No Fury—

She held a glass in her fingers, twisting it slowly, with odd little jerks.

"You wanted to talk with Wash," she said. "It'll never happen now."

"I know. A cop named Wiley Shivers came to see me this morning."

"Yeah." Her eyes stared into her slowly rotating glass. "Nasty little toad. I wasn't thinking straight, or I wouldn't have put him on you. You got an idea Wash didn't really see Hal Decker leaving Danny Devore's place the night of Danny's murder?"

"Yes. Hal spent that night with his girl. She was willing to swear to it. You get the tense? Was, I said. That was yesterday. Today she's dead. Murdered. I just left her on the floor of her apartment."

Fear moved like a shadow across her face. "The devil," she said softly. "The merciless, arrogant devil."

"Stark?"

The flesh quivered on her bones, and I could see her fingers tighten convulsively on the glass. "So you've figured it out. He killed Danny Devore, and I guess he killed Hal Decker's girl. For that, I don't give a damn. But he killed Wash, too, and Wash was mine. I've played him for a sucker whenever the notion struck; but he was mine, and I never wanted him dead. And I want the guy who killed him."

"And if Hal Decker, an innocent guy, goes clear in the process, that's purely coincidental, I suppose."

HER EYES FLICKED up and down, and the hardness was in there with the fear. "That's right. Wash and I had this fixed up for a big bundle, but now hope for the bundle's dead with Wash, and all I want is to get even. I want the guy who killed Wash. Anything that comes with it is frosting on the cake, as far as I'm concerned."

I looked at her with the first, faint light of dawn breaking inside my skull. "A bundle? So Wash was more than a phony witness. He was also a blackmailer. That ex-

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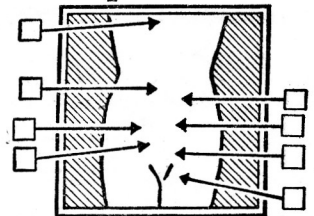
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plains a lot. I saw Stark in all this from the beginning, but I couldn't see why he'd bump his own witness. And there's still something I can't see. I can't see why Stark killed Devore. I know he was after Danny's public hide, but murder's something else. It's too fantastic for belief."

Her lips curled. "Politics," she said, and the word as she said it was incredibly profane. "There was a better reason than politics for Danny's murder. It's really sort of funny, the way it happened. Listen. Wash was Stark's investigator, and Wash was a handy sort of guy. He had a way with gadgets. Things like tape recorders, for instance. Stark wanted something on Devore that he could use, something concrete. Devore used to make a lot of his crooked deals in his study at home, and Stark figured that if he could set up a hidden mike in the study with a recorder hidden outside, sooner or later he'd get something hot.

"He put Wash on the job, and Wash set the thing up. How he did it doesn't matter now. Just take it from me, Wash was a pretty clever guy. He took three spools of tape on three consecutive nights and turned them over to Stark. What Stark didn't know was that Wash played it all back before he turned it over. He not only played it all back, he made copies. Some of it was pretty good. Enough to nail Devore down. But Stark was greedy. He wanted more, and he got more."

She stopped talking and began to laugh. It was deep, soundless laughter that shook her body like a violent spasm. After a minute, she broke it off with a shrill gasp and said hoarsely, "He got something real hot. He got something so hot it blistered the tape and shiveled his own lousy soul. He got Mrs. Austin Stark and handsome Danny Devore in a scene that was strictly unofficial. I guess it was the one thing the arrogant devil never dreamed of."

She began to laugh again, and inside my skull the dawn broke like thunder. The

Hell Has No Fury—

irony of it all was enough to make anyone hysterical. I reached across the table in the booth. I put my thumb on one side of her face and my four fingers on the other. Then I make like a pair of pincers, cutting off her laughter and forcing it back into her throat.

"I get it," I said. "That was something a guy like Stark couldn't take. He went blind. He killed Danny Devore, not for any political reason, but for the old three-cornered reason that's always been valid."

"That's it." She lifted her glass suddenly, draining away the last of its amber contents. "He told Wash to knock off the recordings. But he didn't know that Wash had copies. He didn't realize that Wash knew about Mrs. Stark and Danny Devore. Most of all, he didn't realize that Wash was spinning another spool the night of the murder. He found it out about an hour later. He found it out when Wash showed up at his place all ready to do business."

"What about Hal Decker's gun?"

"Devore wasn't killed with Decker's gun. That was fixed later. Wash remembered Decker's threats. He knew Decker could be made to look like a logical suspect. Wash swiped the gun the same night and planted it by Devore's body. He agreed to swear he'd seen Decker leave the scene of the murder. Wash didn't mind helping with the alibi.

"The way he looked at it, the alibi was a kind of insurance on the tape. Stark had to be free in order to pay. He was a guy going up, and he could pay and keep paying." Her fingers tightened around the glass until I thought it would crack. "There was something else he could do, too," she said softly. "He could kill. Wash should've remembered that."

The front door swung open, and a girl came into the bar. She was, as she would have been the first to tell you, intelligent, beautiful and loaded with charm. Her eyes drifting over me casually; she sat down

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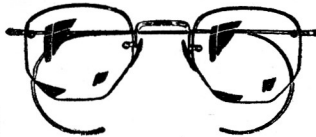
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Fletcher Flora

in a booth up the line and ordered a beer.

"Has Stark got the tape?" I asked.

The platinum head nodded. "Not the two big ones—not the love scene, not the murder."

"Where are they?"

Her eyes sharpened, calculating possibilities of salvage, and I laughed. "No dice, sister. I couldn't rake up more than a fin. It'll have to be for the satisfaction you get out of it."

She shrugged and dug into her purse. On the table between us, she laid a key. The key had the number six hundred and eight stamped on it.

"Public locker," she said. "Union Station. The player is there, too."

I covered the key with a hand, and it was just in time. The bar door swung open again, and three guys came in. Two of them I remembered. They came straight back to our booth.

The guy who'd worked me over said pleasantly, "We thought she'd contact you. She told you where the tape is?"

"Tape?"

The guy's laugh wasn't quite as pleasant as his voice. "I'll play along for a minute, counselor. Recordings, I mean."

The key was red hot in the palm of my hand, under my thumb. "I don't know anything about any recordings. Recordings of what?"

He drew his shoulders forward, his eyes impersonal. "Who knows? Who cares? We're supposed to get the tape and deliver it, that's all. You willing to talk now?"

I looked blank and stayed quiet. After a minute he reached down, and helped me out of the booth. One of the other two did the same for Richert's widow.

We all went out together. On the way, I brushed the table of the booth in which Kitty was drinking her beer with a display of serenity that was, under the circumstances, somewhat annoying. My right hand, hanging at my side, extended just be-

Hell Has No Fury—

low the top of the table. I let the key slip down my palm into my fingers, and flipped it off toward Kitty's lap.

Kitty lifted her beer and drank. She looked as if she were enjoying it. . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

Fitting the Puzzle Together

WE WENT UP from a narrow alley on rickety stairs into a large room that looked like it used to be a place to lay a bet. There was a flat top desk, with an undisturbed coating of dust. On the wall behind the desk, was an old slate blackboard with some faint chalk marks still on it.

The young gorilla who looked like a rah-rah boy pushed his hat onto the back of his head and said politely, "Ladies first."

The bigger of the other two, grinned and smashed the platinum blond across the mouth with the back of his hand. The blow cracked like a rifle shot, and she cringed away with a squeal and a whimper, pressing one hand to her injured mouth.

"Where's the tape?" Tan Eyes said.

Before she could answer, the big guy backhanded her again, and a wet sob gurgled in her throat. Her eyes flared with hate and fear, and all the other hellish emotions that a woman like her can feel for a guy who belts her in the face.

"Where's the tape?" Tan Eyes said.

The big guy drew his arm up and back again, so that his chin was fitted into the interior angle of his elbow, but before he could slash it out and down, I said, "It's in a locker at Union Station."

Tan Eyes turned to me, smiling. "A gentleman. A real, damned gentleman. Can't stand to see a dame knocked around. I thought you'd be soft."

The big guy came over to me and grabbed me by the lapels with his left hand. He brought the heel of his right hand down in a short chopping motion on my bandage.

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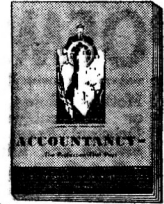
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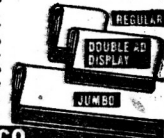
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Fletcher Flora

I could feel the cut pull apart, and blood welled out from under the bandage and ran down my face.

"That's for not saying it sooner," he said.

Tan Eyes held out a hand, palm up.

"You got a key?"

"No."

The big guy hit me across the eyes with the edge of his hand. It was like getting hit with a tomahawk.

"Where's the key?" Ten Eyes said.

I was blind. I had lost my vision in an intense flare of brilliant light that died instantly to total darkness. Now the darkness was diluted slowly by a gray infiltration, and objects and faces reappeared with a strange effect of coming down a line of perspective from a great distance. The big executioner had his chopper drawn back for a repeat, and Tan Eyes had his extended, as before, with the palm up.

I guess I could have taken more, if I'd had to. But I was glad I didn't have to. Kitty had the key. She'd had at least twenty minutes to function, and Kitty was a smart gal. By this time, she was certainly in possession of the tape and the player.

"I dropped it in the coin slot in the juke box control," I said.

The tan eyes faded to a cold and wary yellow. The lips below them barely moved.

"Don't play fancy, counselor. If you say it, it better be true."

"It's true," I said, and when the big one moved in for another cut, I added quickly, "The number's six hundred and eight."

Tan Eyes swung an arm out gently against the other's chest. "To hell with the key," he said. "A public locker's no problem."

The third guy had been standing against the door watching, just as he'd done in my office. It could be that he just went along for kicks, or that he was the coach. The guy who really called the plays and did the thinking when thinking was needed. He

Hell Has No Fury—

was the one who did it now, at any rate, even though it came a little late.

"The tape's not in the locker," he said.

Tan Eyes turned slowly. "No? You thinking of a better place?"

Number three, the Thinker, moved lazily against the door, lifting his shoulders slightly. "The tape's not in the locker," he said. "The key's not in the slot. The dame's got it."

"Dame? This one?"

"No. The blond. The one drinking beer. I just remembered where I've seen her before. It's been bothering me."

The tan eyes were very still, fading again, masking the activity of the brain behind. "The secretary, his secretary!"

The Thinker's lips curled. He nodded agreement. "Sure. I'm betting he passed the key off when he brushed the booth. One will get you ten if the tape's not in his office right now, or on the way there."

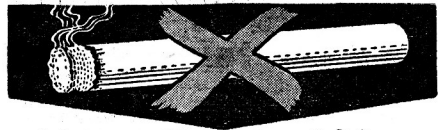
The executioner moved in again. His lips were twisted back off his teeth, and his hand was raised to chop. At the door, the Thinker straightened and said, "Later. We owe him something, but save it for later. Right now we've got no time." He gave the disappointed executioner a placating smile, as one might smile at an unhappy child, promising future pleasure. "You stay here with the dame. She might get lonesome if we left her by herself."

Tan Eyes took my arm like an old friend, and we went out of the room together and down the rickety stairs to the alley. The thinker followed along. In the alley we all got into the Caddy that had brought us from The Peanut; Tan Eyes behind the wheel, the Thinker and I in the rear seat.

"You boys do all of Stark's strong-arm work?" I asked.

The Thinker smiled lazily and said, "Button up, counselor."

The big Caddy rolled along with a pedigreed purr, taking its time and minding the traffic signals. No one seemed to be in a



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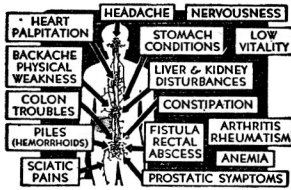
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Fletcher Flora

hurry, which was agreeable to me, and it was probably another twenty minutes before we crawled out onto the sidewalk in front of my shingle. Going up the stairs, like meat in a sandwich, between my brace of escorts, I prayed silently that Kitty had been sensible enough to take the tape someplace else. But Kitty, while clever, was given to being sensible only rarely, and this, apparently, wasn't a rare occasion. She was sitting behind her desk, showing her teeth in a receptive smile.

"Hi, guys," she said.

THE THINKER closed the door and leaned against it, as was his habit. Tan Eyes walked over to the desk and took Kitty's chin between thumb and fingers, tipping her head back on her slender stem of neck. He let his eyes wander over her face and on down the arched stem of her neck. The eyes, she reported later, were tender.

"You're a sweet doll," he said. "You're a luscious hunk of stuff. Wouldn't it be a shame if I had to mess you up? Wouldn't it be a crying shame?"

She kept on smiling as well as she could with the pressure on her face. Her voice was thin and strained from the tension in her throat.

"Anything you want to do, you better do quick," she said. "My friend, Wiley Shivers of homicide, may be slow with a dame, but he can still fire his cannon *allegro fortissimo*. In your language, that means fast and loud as hell."

He was like a guy in slow motion. His hand floated away from her face, and he turned by degrees from the hips, his arm bent at the elbow and suspended outward at his side. He looked like a kid's dream of a gun-slinger. Only the gun wasn't on his hip, it was under his arm. The suspended arm flashed up and inward as Wiley Shivers opened my private door. But Wiley's gun was handier. It was already

Hell Has No Fury—

pointed accurately in the right direction.

Tan Eyes sat down very quietly on the floor and folded over like a supplicant. Against the hall door, the thinker was immobile, spread on the wood in a kind of mock and frozen crucifixion. Wiley Shivers, that remarkable, fat, little guy, looked down at his victim, who was obviously dead, and his expression was precisely the same as when he'd looked at his scuffed shoe, or at the visible charms of Kitty.

"A good gunsel," he said, after a while. "A dead one."

Kitty came out from under her desk, and looked at me across the top. Her voice took off like a wild knuckle ball. "You're bleeding again. Why the hell don't you learn to protect yourself?"

I didn't answer. I watched Wiley Shivers walk over slowly to the body of the rah-rah gorilla and nudge it with a toe. The folded body, in delicate balance, stirred and slipped over, straightening on the floor. The face under the light brown crew-cut had acquired a new softness of line. It looked rather sophomoric. Shivers' sour gaze lifted, roamed around the wall, and down across the thinker against the door. It came to rest on me.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"Sorry? For what? This guy?"

"No. For what I thought about you. I thought you were a crook. I thought you were hand-picked by Austin Stark to pin a rap on me."

"I don't give a damn what you thought."

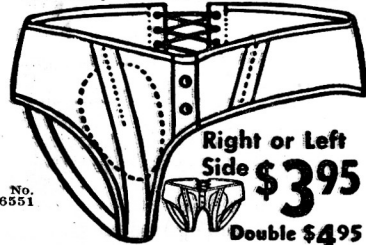
"Thanks, anyhow."

His mouth twisted. His eyes looked like a couple of sneary marbles. When I was a kid, we used to call them snotties.

"That's the trouble with you smart guys," he said. "You think in generalities. We got crooks at headquarters, so you jump to the opinion that everyone's a crook at headquarters. See what I mean? Under all the smartness, no brains at all. I'll tell you something to remember, counselor.

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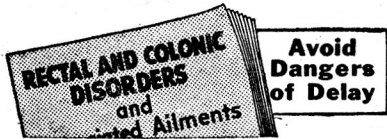
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Fletcher Flora

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He moved over to the door and casually flipped an automatic from under the arm of the Thinker. Without turning, he said, "I'll take this punk in. You two stay here and sit on those tapes. I'll send back for them. And don't worry about the cops I send, they'll be honest. When I send them, they're always honest. Wagon'll be here for the guy on the floor."

He was moving again, when I thought of the platinum blond. "They're holding Richert's widow," I said. "I just happened to remember. The Thinker there can tell you where."

Looking back for a second over his shoulder, he struck an attitude of ludicrous, flabby coyness. He was the only guy I've ever known you could love and hate at once.

"Much obliged. That's real thoughtful of you. She'll probably be very glad you just happened to remember. Incidentally, Stark's in custody by now. I sent a couple men after him just as soon as I'd heard the tape. We'll be springing Decker to make room for him." His lips moved again into that sour twist that seemed to signify hatred for all the world and everything in it. "See you around, counselor."

He went on out with the Thinker, and I said, "Not if I can help it. Never again."

"Oh, I don't know." Kitty picked her way around the body in front of her desk. "Wiley isn't a bad guy. I knew right away he was honest. That's why I called him to meet me here."

"Yes? What made you so sure he was honest?"

She grinned. "That remark he made. About being too old for me. No one but an honest man could have said that! Let's go in your office and play the tape with Mrs. Stark and Danny Devore on it. I've already listened to part of it. He's quite the romantic type. You can learn a lot from Danny, even though he's dead." ●●●

Ready for the Rackets

(Continued from page 8)

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Mrs. Wilma Hastings
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That winds up our racket news for this month. Don't forget that we welcome your letters on your own experiences with tricksters, because they help us to keep ahead of the slick swindlers.

The Editors

Statement required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Acts of March 3, 1933 and July 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233), showing the Ownership, Management, and Circulation of Dime Detective Magazine, published bi-monthly at Kokomo, Indiana, for October 1, 1952. 1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. Editor, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y. Managing editor, None. Business manager, None. 2. The owner is: Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York, Shirley M. Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. 3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None. 4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. Signed, Henry Steeger, Publisher, Sworn to and subscribed before me this 7th day of October, 1952. Eugene Jelinek, Notary Public, State of New York. Qualified in Bronx County, No. 03-1962300. Certificate filed in Bronx and N. Y. counties. My Commission expires March 30, 1953. (Seal)—Form 3526—Rev. 8-50.

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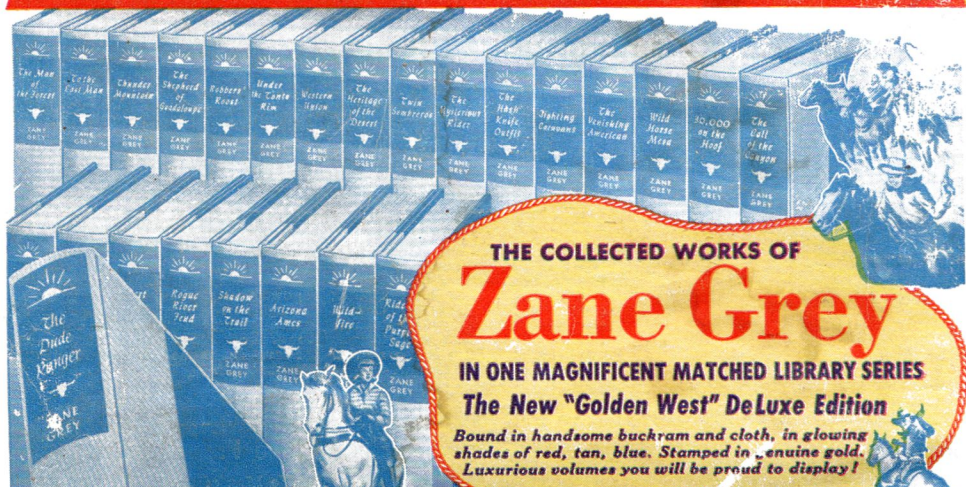
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