

25¢  
AUG.

DIME



# DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

**HOT NUMBER!**

by **STEWART  
STERLING**

**TALENT FOR  
VIOLENCE**

by **DOROTHY  
DUNN**



MISSING IFC (PAGE 2)

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# 25¢ DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE



Combined with  
**DETECTIVE FICTION MAGAZINE**

**Vol. 68**

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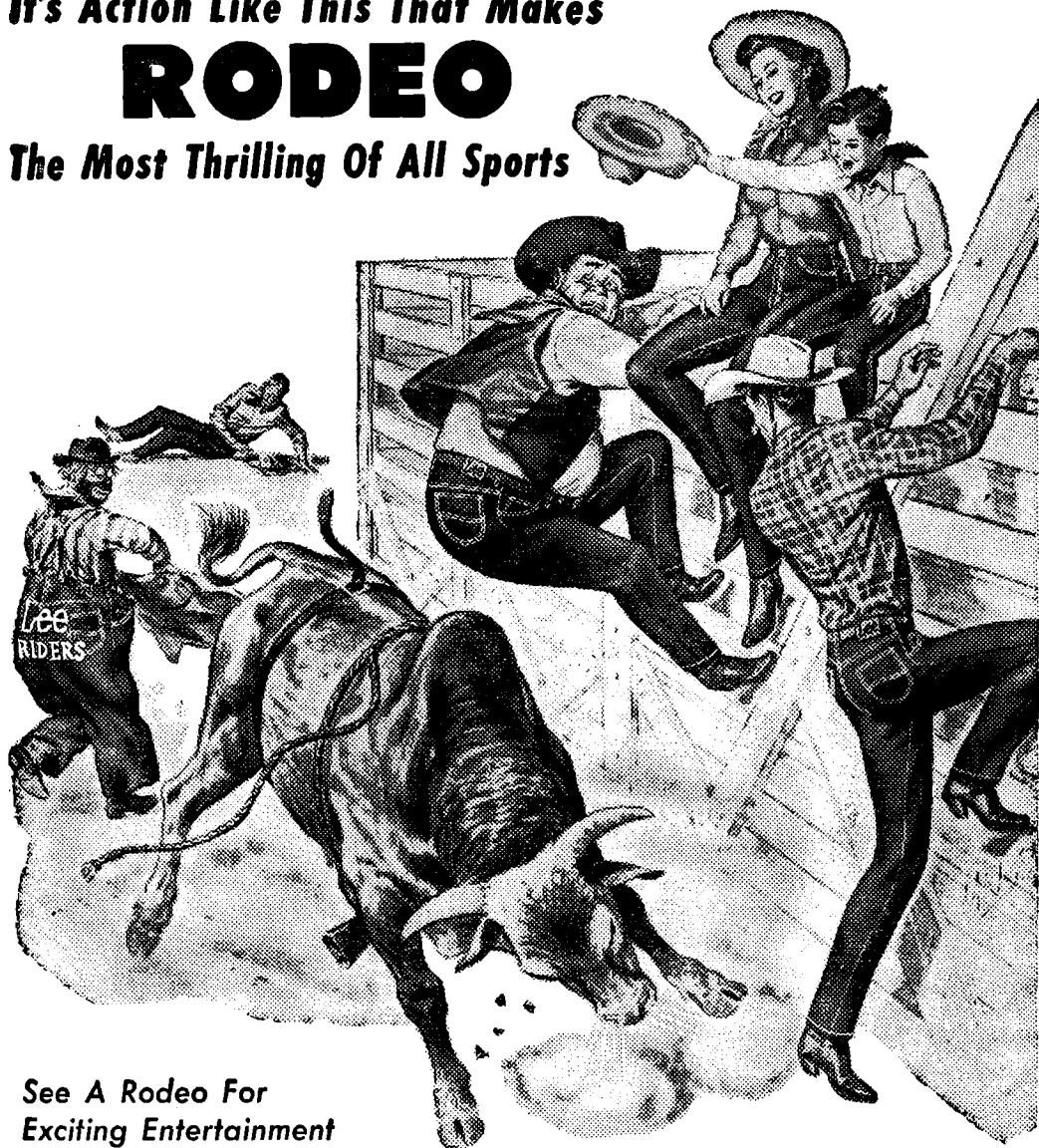
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**It's Action Like This That Makes**

# **RODEO**

**The Most Thrilling Of All Sports**



**See A Rodeo For  
Exciting Entertainment**

**and . . wear the cowboy pants preferred by millions coast-to-coast**

## **Lee RIDERS**

*Lee Riders, Snug-Fitting in True Western Style . . . Lee 11-Oz. Cowboy Pant Denim . . . Ladies' and Boys' sizes of 8-Oz. Denim . . . U-Shaped Saddle Crotch for Comfort . . . SANFORIZED for Permanent Fit . . . Buy Your Correct Size . . . Complete Size Ranges for Men, Ladies and Boys*

**GUARANTEED:** A new pair free or your money back if Lee Riders do not look better, fit better and wear longer than any you've ever worn!



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San Francisco, Cal.—Kansas City, Mo.—Minneapolis, Minn.  
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# READY for the RACKETS

## A Department



### Misuse of the Mails

Dear Sir:

I lived on a farm; in a farm magazine I saw an ad that convinced me that I could make a small fortune raising the giant cantaloupes the company advertised. I bought seeds from the company, which was away off somewhere, and my family and I worked hard to clear the acres for the melons.

The vines came up and grew off fine, and I never saw so many young cantaloupes to the vine in my life. I made arrangements to market the melons, but when they reached maturity my entire crop of melons were little, useless guinea gourds!

Carl F. Morgan  
Hapeville, Ga.

### Hair-Raiser

Dear Sir:

About a year ago, I was desirous of buying two braids of real hair that would match my own, that I could wear coronet-style around my head. I looked in the pages of the classified telephone book for the names of dealers in wigs and hair goods. I was finally successful in locating one who had a sufficient quantity of golden blonde hair that was long enough to be made into braids and that just matched my own in color and texture.

Delighted, I gave the order—although the two braids were to cost me slightly over \$100—cash in advance. This was quite a sum for me as I am a stenographer and have to work for a living. The dealer—a seemingly reliable woman—explained to me the cost was almost entirely labor although the hair was more expensive than most,

being unusually long and of an uncommon color.

On the whole, I was very happy about it and paid over the money without question.

When I came to pick up the finished braids about a month later, I was dismayed to find that the braids I had longed for and dreamed about for so long were a dirty, washed-out, drab color—in fact, they did not even appear to be made of real hair. Unquestionably, a substitution had been made—the hair I had selected and paid for had not been used at all.

No doubt I was foolish in not demanding a sample when I placed the order but it never occurred to me that this woman would make such a change. How easy—how profitable—to sell that same blonde hair over and over to dim-wits like me! For of course there was nothing I could do about it. What could I hope to prove in court—assuming I would care to go to court about such a personal matter as false hair? I could only say that the hair I bought and paid for that matched mine so perfectly was not the same as that furnished in the braids—while the woman, of course, claimed it was the same.

So I had to swallow my chagrin and my loss—accept the substitute, which was of absolutely no use to me—or nothing at all.

Betty L. Arbogast  
St. Paul, Minn.

### Calendars for the FFA

Dear Sir:

Last fall a salesman from a Midwestern publishing company offered an attractive money-making project to Arkansas FFA (Future Farmers of America) chapters. He proposed to furnish special calendars, with a cover featuring a

*(Continued on page 8)*

# CHEW IMPROVED FORMULA CHEWING GUM! REDUCE

Up to **5 lbs.** a Week With Dr. Phillips Plan

Reduce to a slimmer more graceful figure the way Dr. Phillips recommends—without starving—without missing a single meal! Here for you *Now*—a scientific way which guarantees you can lose as much weight as you wish—or *you pay nothing!* No Drugs, No Starvation, No Exercises or Laxatives. The Amazing thing is that it is so easy to follow—simple and safe to lose those ugly, fatty bulges. Each and every week you lose pounds safely until you reach the weight that most becomes you. Now at last you have the doctors' new modern way to reduce—To acquire that dreamed about silhouette, an improved slimmer, exciting more graceful figure. Simply chew delicious improved Formula Dr. Phillips Kelpidine Chewing Gum and follow Dr. Phillips Plan. This wholesome, tasty delicious Kelpidine Chewing Gum contains Hexitol, *reduces* appetite and is sugar free. Hexitol is a new discovery and contains no fat and no available carbohydrates. Enjoy chewing this delicious gum and reduce with Dr. Phillips Plan. Try it for 12 days, then step on the scale. You'll hardly believe your eyes. Good for men too.

**\$1**  
12  
DAY  
SUPPLY  
ONLY



## Money-Back Guarantee! 10 Day Free Trial!

Mail the coupon now! Test the amazing Dr. Phillips KELPIDINE CHEWING GUM REDUCING PLAN for 10 days at our expense. If after 10 days your friends, your mirror and your scale do not tell you that you have lost weight and look slimmer you pay nothing.

AMERICAN HEALTHAIDS CO., Dept. CH857, 318 Market St., Newark, N. J.

Just mail us your name and address, and \$1.00 cash, check or money-order. You will receive a 12 day supply of KELPIDINE CHEWING GUM (improved Formula), and Dr. Phillips Reducing Plan postage prepaid.

NAME.....ADDRESS.....

STATE.....CITY.....

Send me Special 24 day supply and FREE 12 day package for \$2.00. I understand that if I am not delighted with KELPIDINE CHEWING GUM and Dr. Phillips Reducing Plan, I can return in 10 days for full purchase price refund.

**SENT ON APPROVAL — MAIL COUPON NOW!**

*(Continued from page 6)*

group picture of FFA boys from the local chapter. His plan sounded good, and his credentials appeared to be in order.

The FFA chapter of the local high school made a deal with him. Ads were solicited and a total of \$300 was raised, with half of that amount paid to the salesman. His part was to print and deliver the calendars in time for distribution. However, no calendars were delivered and this smooth-talking salesman disappeared with \$150 of the funds.

You can estimate his total haul from this state, when you consider the fact that most of the 100 FFA chapters of Arkansas "took advantage" of this deal.

Marie H. Robertson  
McCrory, Ark.

### **The Vanishing Photographer**

Dear Sir:

Two years ago, a well-dressed man approached me at a counter in a downtown store. He asked me if I had any children. When I said yes, he promptly displayed a large folder of baby pictures. "Have their picture taken," he said.

My son's birthday was that month, so I asked him for details on price. He said \$4, \$2 down and the balance when the pictures were ready. I paid him \$2, so did several of the clerks at the store. The following week, I went to the hotel where his studio was to be. When I asked the hotel clerk which room the photographer was in, he pointed across the room. There sat about twenty women and their children, and no photographer was registered. I looked at the receipt more closely; the only clear thing on it, was the company's name and \$2 marked paid.

Mrs. Charlotte V. James  
Cumberland, Md.

### **No Experience Necessary**

Dear Sir:

The ad in a Pittsburgh newspaper stated: **Wanted**—distributors to pass out free samples, no experience necessary.

After answering the ad, I received a letter, containing a number of pamphlets, explaining the money that could be made passing out samples of leading concerns.

I sent them the \$10 fee asked for the local franchise. A week later, I received a letter from a Chicago firm on a fake cosmetic company's letterhead advising me that they were packing samples for me to pass out, and I would receive them soon.

A month passed, and not receiving the samples or hearing from them, I checked and found that the address was only a letter drop. I notified the postal inspectors who advised me they were watching these fellows. Later they were picked up and brought to trial. I never did get my money back, but sure was glad they were caught.

G. Barron  
Donora, Pa.

### **Two for the Price of One**

Dear Sir:

Here is a scheme that two young confidence men worked on a hotel one summer.

One day, a well-dressed young man, carrying an expensive suitcase, checked into the hotel and was assigned to one of the higher-priced rooms. Later that day, another young man, carrying two pieces of luggage, registered and also asked for an expensive room. Both of them ran up a moderate bill on room service, drinks, and telephone calls; yet they never appeared together around the hotel.

Five days later, the second guest paid his bill, tipped the bell hop liberally and departed. Next morning, the room of the first guest was empty and he was nowhere to be found.

An investigation by the manager and hotel detective brought out the fact that the second man came to the hotel with two pieces of luggage, but left with three. They knew then that the two were confederates and No. 2 had carried out No. 1's suitcase.

If they split expenses on the deal, they had nearly a week's pleasant stay at only half price.

Jess F. Blair  
Lamesa, Tex.

### **The Doctor's Chance**

Dear Sir:

While working as a waitress in Omaha, I made the acquaintance of a young man who claimed to be a doctor. He had a lot of medical equipment, including a stethoscope which he often wore around his neck. As several of my friends were receiving free medical advice from him, I had no reason to doubt that he was as he claimed, a practitioner at the local hospital.

One day he came into the restaurant very down-hearted. When I asked him what the trouble was, he stated that all that stood between him and the dream of his lifetime was a hundred dollars. He said he had the chance to become a surgeon at the famous Mayo Clinic, if he had train fare and the money to meet his living expenses. He emphasized the need for haste as he had to be there soon.

I borrowed forty dollars from my brother and put sixty dollars of my own hard-earned money with it to help him get his big chance. He faithfully promised to repay the loan within a month.

After a month passed with no word from him, I began to inquire among my friends who had received his free medical advice as to whether any of them had heard from him. It was then I learned that they too had answered his plea for the big chance with their money. Just from our circle, we estimated he had been given over five-hundred dollars.

By careful checking, I found he was not a practicing physician, but had been just recently released from prison. Having no receipts, we did not attempt to prosecute. I hope this may serve to warn someone else who is approached by similar frauds.

Mrs. R. L. Mulvaney  
Spokane, Wash.

*(Continued on page 111)*



# HERNIA? RUPTURE?

## Amazing New "EASER" Offers Magic New Comfort to Hernia Sufferers!

The WRIGHT EASER for your rupture must be the best **EASER** for your **RUPTURE** you ever wore. It must give you more comfort and better relief or you get every cent back at once.

No matter how many **EASERS** you have tried for your **RUPTURE**, we believe no other **EASER** for your **RUPTURE** can do more for you than the **WRIGHT EASER**!



The soft flat groin pad of the **WRIGHT EASER** is **guaranteed** to be the best you ever had! You can now say "Good Bye" to old fashioned leather bands or steel in your Easer! You can wear it after your operation and get amazing support!

### DON'T RISK SERIOUS DELAY

We urge you to order your **WRIGHT EASER FOR YOUR RUPTURE NOW!** It washes and dries amazingly fast. You never offend with the **WRIGHT EASER** for your **RUPTURE!**

### AVOID SERIOUS DELAY — MAIL COUPON NOW!

Make this Amazing Test—  
**WRIGHT BRACER'S  
NO RISK  
GUARANTEE!**

Order the **WRIGHT EASER FOR YOUR RUPTURE** — wear it for ten days — wash it; give it every test you like — compare it for ease, comfort and relief with anything else. **If you are not satisfied, return for refund.**

### DON'T DELAY . . .

Join the thousands of happy wearers who now find joy in work and play and fun with the **WRIGHT EASER FOR THEIR RUPTURE.**

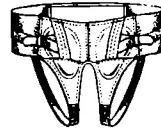


Stop wearing old fashioned and expensive devices. . . . Switch to the **WRIGHT BRACER!** It enables you to work on your old job. It will enable you to enjoy sports. **IT WILL MAKE LIFE WORTH LIVING. ORDER NOW!**

### PERFECT FIT GUARANTEED!

#### IT'S ADJUSTABLE . . .

It's comfortable, and gives the relief you have been looking for. Just send measure around the lowest part of the abdomen and specify right side, left side or double. That's all there is to it!



**\$4.95**

#### IT'S WASHABLE TOO!

It must be the strongest, best form-fitting easer you ever had — it must give more relief, it must fit better or you get your money back!

### GET SCIENTIFIC SUPPORT!

No laces to bother with . . . simply step into it . . . adjust the leg strap and side straps . . . **That's All! It's guaranteed not to show through clothing.** No one — not even your dancing partner — can tell you are wearing it.

### WORN BY EVERYONE!

**THE WRIGHT EASER FOR YOUR RUPTURE** comes in every size to fit **men, women and children!** It's worn by people in all walks of life! It has enabled printers to work on their printing presses 8 hours a day with ease and comfort! It is so inexpensive that many people buy two or three so they have one to change off with. It has **made life worth living for many people.** It enabled people to take part in all kinds of dancing, bowling, sports and enabled them to stand on their feet with ease and comfort . . . more than they have ever dreamed possible!

### DON'T DELAY—MAIL COUPON TODAY!

**WRIGHT BRACER CO., Dept. 38, 318 Market St., Newark, N. J.**  
YES! PLEASE RUSH MY "WRIGHT-EASER" on approval. If not delighted I may return within ten days.  I enclose \$3.95 for one side type.  I enclose \$4.95 for double type. (I save up to 75¢ postage by sending payment with order.)  
Measure around lowest part of my abdomen is \_\_\_\_\_ inches.

Right side  \$3.95 Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Left side  \$3.95 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Double  \$4.95 City & State \_\_\_\_\_

**SOLD ON 10 DAY MONEY BACK GUARANTEE**

For Comfort

For Relief

# TALENT FOR

*Private-eye Bill Spence could hold his liquor and his life with any trigger-quick torpedo, but could anybody hold the little gunman who left Bill holding the door for Death?*

I PEGGED the little guy with one glance as a small time grifter around the small time clubs, or maybe as a tiny kicked-up clod from a big piece of turf somewhere.

Dice, cards, or horses, it didn't matter. Wherever there's a place that sells a chance on luck and invites the suckers in to lose a threadbare shirt, you'll find little guys like this.

I've dreamed a few dreams about Lady Luck myself, and the track certainly owes me money, so I wasn't exactly looking down my nose at the little guy. Not at all.

I was looking down my nose at a great big .45 which he was poking into my gut where it would hurt for a long time if he blasted. I was looking at that oversized

caliber, thinking about my luck and muttering to it. "You can't do this to Bill Spence, dear lady. Not a big .45 from such a little guy. Let some long shot come pounding up the home stretch for good old Bill. Don't let me lose to such a little guy with such a big gun. Not that, please!"

The talk that went with the gun didn't make any sense. The man's voice was just

Rosie is good on description. They looked like what she said . . . a vulture and an ape man.



# VIOLENCE

By  
**DOROTHY**  
**DUNN**



a slice of wording that was clipped off at the side of his mouth like lunch meat coming out of the cutter. It all added up to baloney. If he wasn't lying, somebody had lied to him.

"You want the job, or don't you, Spence?"

I'd said it before, but I tried again. Different words.

"What job? I keep asking! I didn't hear about any job. You just barged into my office, pulled out that heavy artillery, and got tough. I haven't had a whisper of a new job for a month. Outside of routine stuff. Believe me. Put away that iron and talk business, if that's what you want. I'm listening. My rates are fifty a day. . . ."

"The business is been talked," he sliced. "But you ain't showed. We're gettin' tired you're not showing. We didn't give you no grand for just sittin' downstairs drinking Scotch in that two-bit bar."

"Hold it," I said. "You didn't give me no grand. Nobody has give me no grand for a month." Knowing how hard I work for smaller change than that, the little man's beef suddenly amused me. "I'm practically broke," I told him. "That's why I drink the Scotch. The devil finds Scotch for idle. . . ."

"Cut the chatter, Shamus. You make this deal, or don't you?"

"You got a deal, sure. I'll make it. But give it to me again, yes? Somehow, the first client didn't get here. But I'll always listen to a business proposition. Just tell me."

The gun came a decimal point away from my belt buckle. But his voice was still doubtful.

"You're working on the Bart Lacy smear. Supposed to be. But the boys notice you been working on the Scotches instead. Downstairs in that place you sit, and you ain't out like you're supposed to be, wrapping the Bart Lacy corpse into the package you was paid for."

"Once more," I insisted. "Let's take it

once more. Nobody came to hire me. Nobody paid me. Something must have gone wrong at your end. See?"

Repetition. It was beginning to penetrate through his moronic brow. The gun moved back a little more and was held now with the relaxed "maybe-I-don't-kill-the-guy" attitude.

"You never got no grand?"

"No grand."

"You never talked to Max Fesser?"

"He didn't show up."

I relaxed as much as the gun had. I reached slowly for my cigarettes, and nothing happened. I shook the package.

"Have one?"

"Thanks."

**WE** LIT up. He slipped the gun back into the pocket of his checked loafer jacket.

"Damn funny," he said, the heavy brow puckered with indecision. "We had a good tip that Max Fesser come here to buy his way out of the Bart Lacy kill. You sure you're tellin' it straight, Shamus?"

"Yeah, I'm sure."

Suddenly, I got thoughtful myself. I was telling it straight, but little boy blue had just blown the wrong horn. His first story, probably the one he'd been told to tell, was that I'd been hired by his outfit and why wasn't I working? But the gun was bigger than the brain behind it. Thinking was such a great effort for him that he had just thought out loud.

"So you're looking for Max Fesser? Why didn't you say so? Why the big tale about a phony grand?"

His eyes got smaller and he slipped his hand into the gun pocket.

"You know where Max is, Shamus?"

"You want to hire me to find him?"

"I asked do you know where he is?"

"No, but we could talk about the fee for—"

He pulled the .45 out and pushed it back into my area.

"Maybe we don't talk about hiring. Maybe this gun just says for you to find Max Fesser. See what I mean?"

He was dumb. He had the cold eyes of the professional killer. I've seen them before. I saw what he meant, all right, and I didn't like what I saw. If he'd been halfway intelligent, I'd have jumped him and made him eat the .45, but these dumb ones can make you play along for awhile.

I gave him a snide smile and a great big lie.

"You've got me, pal. That gun talks. I'll find Max Fesser for you. Give me until tomorrow at five. Come back then?"

That suited him. He needed time to report back and get instructions. Somebody was after Max; somebody had been given a tip that Max had come to me; somebody had been having me watched so I'd lead them to my "client." Somebody was going to have to tell this little guy whether to plug me or not.

He backed toward the door, holding the .45 close to his hip. This was where he'd come in.

"Tomorrow at five, Shamus. You find Max Fesser and have him here at five. Find him, or else. Any tricks, and I'll pop a slug into your gut."

I didn't doubt it. He was probably a good little shooter, and I'd be surprised if he ever played for fun.

"That's a deal. You come back. What's your name?"

"Never mind. See you, Shamus."

He left, the narrow shoulders squared, his second-rate self preening behind the security of a big gun.

Actually, he didn't worry me too much. I had made him in the first five minutes as small time, and I'd take care of him the next time he showed.

But Bart Lacy, dead, and dipping his not quite cold trigger-finger into my office, was something else again.

Lacy wasn't small time. Lacy was top man of the top gambling syndicate, and

very big time. Lacy was, as rumor had it, the boy who could fix a traffic ticket for you, or sell you a pinball machine, or let you have a piece of a fight or a race, or help you get a candidate elected to office.

I discounted a lot of it. The legendary figures who become a fix in a town often gain mysterious proportions through exaggeration.

But I knew for sure that Bart Lacy had climbed over the backs of a lot of dead people to get his power. The cops knew it, too. But knowing isn't proving.

I was glad the big boy had been murdered. The killer should get a medal.

It was four in the afternoon. It was depressing in my shabby office on Olive Street. I never feel at home when the rent isn't paid.

I closed up the place and went downstairs to the bar for my pre-dinner Scotches. I had until five tomorrow. No hurry. Just to keep the record straight, I decided I'd find Max Fesser and straighten out the twisted story the little guy had handed me. Finding him shouldn't be much of a trick. If somebody expected to trace Max through me, that meant that he must be close, that he must have hit the stem to hide out. And I know the stem like my own backyard. It is my backyard.

**T**HE THIRD Scotch always puts me in a philosophical mood. I forget about the unpaid rent. I stop hating myself for not having snapped up the last crooked proposition that could have netted me a fat fee if I'd been willing to risk my license and forsake my integrity for the money.

The third Scotch is always the time I turn down an empty glass and think about what a great guy this Bill Spence is. I think about this ratty section of town, where I settled on purpose, having had the idea when I was young and strong that this little stem of mine needed me. I think about the years I've been here, the way I know the little people—the cokies, the ex-cokies, the news-

boys, the bookies, the dames, the hackers, the cops. And I think about the small slice of decent people I know who work in factories and catch just a short beer on their way to the chain store to pick up the groceries that will half-feed their kids for another day.

I like these people, and my third Scotch always tells me that they like me, too, that some of the good turns I've done them have been appreciated.

But the fourth Scotch always does a nasty thing, and I never pay for it. No matter how much money I have, I always refuse to pay for it and let them charge me double for the fifth.

My fourth Scotch calls me names. Bill Spence, quite a guy! Big sentimental sap! The bums on this ratty stem would turn on you for a buck. One false move and they'd forget any good you ever did. You sit up here feeling sorry for the guys that catch just a small beer on the way home. You see the factory dirt under their nails and assembly line grooves under their hollow eyes, and you wish to hell they could have things better. You get fifty a day and expenses. And they get maybe ten with a flock of kids to feed. But look at you. You're broke. They could probably buy and sell you. Wasted sympathy. Get smart. Grab the next fat fee, even if you have to let somebody down. Get wise. Dirty money is still money.

My fifth Scotch is better. I don't mind paying double for it. By that time I don't have any praise left for myself, nor any blame left, either.

I begin to think about eating and about working.

So now, halfway through the fifth, my mind began to buzz around Max Fesser, and that meant horses. Bart Lacy had a string of expert men—one for each racket he controlled. And Max was the bangtail boy! Monitor, in charge of running races.

Bart Lacy was the syndicate man, the big cut receiver, but a figure in the back-

ground with too many activities to be known to the public, or to be proved by the police.

But Max Fesser was tops in one branch of the syndicate. Max Fesser, in his own field, was no slouch.

There was one guy on the stem who ought to be able to put me in touch with Max before Junior came back to my office with his cannon and his low I. Q.

Whitey Kincaid was my man. An ex-jockey who made book on the stem, on what he thought was the sly. He had a second-hand bookstore for a cover and carried a line of greeting cards for sale. It was a joke. Some of the losing suckers were always buying the "Get-well-quick" cards for each other. Whitey would know all about Max, if anybody did.

I told Rosie to put my drinks on the tab, then I walked over to the Sheraton Hotel for a steak dinner. The Sheraton is five blocks removed from the stem, and the filet mignon comes three bucks higher, but that's a luxury I allow myself. The guys I feel sorry for—the ones who could buy and sell me—can eat the shoe leather at the Checker Cafe for ninety cents and thrive on it. But I'm a big-time operator, living a high-voltage life at fifty bucks a day. I figure I'm worth a three-fifty steak, even if I'm not working. And if I'm not working, it's a nice place to settle down with a brandy after dinner.

Tonight, I had the vague feeling that I was working.

Whitey lives in a hotel, a flat, old building that's scaling off under the whitewash. And when Whitey closes up his hole-in-the-wall book shop, he usually goes home to his other hole-in-the-wall, where he drinks alone and pores over the *Sporting News* and counts his day's take and doodles on a scratch pad, the figures getting fantastic as the drinks start to hit him.

Whitey's a good steady character. I knew he'd be there when I wanted him. I ate slowly, soaking up the soft, mellow at-

mosphere of the place and the mushroom gravy around the steak, with a polite fragment of garlic bread.

I leaned back and relaxed with my coffee, feeling good and strong and happy.

This Max Fesser thing wasn't really a job. But the night was young, and I had nothing better to do.

It was about nine when I got back to the stem. I waved to the guys and gals I knew until I got to the Acorn Hotel, just three blocks from my office.

Oliver, the hollow-cheeked clerk, peered out through the squares of the metal cage around the miniature desk. He had a yellow-stained mustache, and the veins stood up an ugly blue across the thin skin of his nervous hands.

The mobile unit of the T. B. society had been parked in the neighborhood for a week, offering free chest X-rays. I'd even shoved my own bosom at the machine, but I'd be willing to bet that Ollie hadn't gone near.

He just coughed and spat and gave up to his sinking cheeks and his bloodless look and his secret hemorrhages. The Acorn Hotel would put up with anything, and this was probably the last-chance job for him. Once, he'd been a certified public accountant.

"How are things, Bill?" he wheezed.

"Fair to meddlin'. I've been meddled with, Ollie. A little squirt with a big gun, yiping about Max Fesser. You know Max Fesser?"

The veins popped up bluer against his thin skin, and the burning eyes treated themselves to a quick frisk of the deserted entrance.

"No, I don't know any Max Fesser."

"Oh. Whitey in his room?"

"I think so. Two-oh-seven. You know?"

"I know. I'll take a look. See you, Ollie."

"See you," he mumbled. Then he hissed me back.

I leaned close to the grille.

"Take it easy, Bill. I mean, Whitey's

been awful touchy the last couple days. I don't know. Just be careful, huh? Be careful, Bill."

I gave him the old wink, the tongue click, and the check sign.

It was kind of nice at that. Not since I was a kid have I been told to wear my rubbers or change my shirt or keep out of trouble.

I knocked at the door, whistling *Someone to Watch Over Me*. And some day, over a third Scotch, I'd be remembering how Ollie had liked me and had wanted me to take care of myself. I'd be telling myself the little people were my friends.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Everybody's Friend

WHITEY OPENED the door just enough to let one bloodshot eye peer through the crack.

"What do you want, Bill?"

"Fine welcome! I want some talk, Whitey. I want you to—"

"Not now. Busy, Bill. My books are closed, and I don't want any more bets. Take your five bucks somewhere else."

"If I had five bucks, I'd take it to Max Fesser," I said. "I'm on a job, Whitey. I've got to find Fesser for a client of mine. You know the track layout. Let me in, Whitey. Be a good guy and give me some help."

He opened the door and practically pulled me in.

"You crazy fool, Spence," he said in a hoarse whisper. "Don't stand outside my door and yell names like that!"

"I wasn't yelling. What the hell, Whitey!"

He closed and bolted the door. Then he came over and sat down at the oilcloth-covered table that was littered with papers and stained with dried rings that would just fit around the empty cheese glasses he drank his whiskey from.

He handed me one of the glasses. It had violets on it. The one he used had red tulips. The cozy touch. He lived here. On a shelf above the sink there was a box of crackers and another glass, this one full of pimento cheese and decorated with yellow daffodils.

One swallow of the rotgut he drank made me wish he'd passed the crackers instead of the bourbon. I could hardly drink the stuff. But that's the difference between Whitey and me. Whitey has money under his mattress.

I said, "Max Fesser rang a bell with you, Whitey. Give!"

He swirled the throat-blistering liquid around in the glass, and, as soon as he got it tip-toeing good through the tulips, he downed it all at one gulp. Then he coughed, put down the glass and wiped his lips, all to give himself time to figure out the answer he wanted to give me.

"Sure, I've heard of Max Fesser. I've even done business with him. What book-maker hasn't?"

"How long ago?"

"Look, Bill—"

"Last week, or yesterday? I'm looking for him."

"What for?"

"A little guy with a big gun wants him, and it has something to do with the Bart Lacy kill. Max has nothing to do with me; but the little guy thinks he has. I've been dragged in by a rumor. I want to get it straight. The little guy is coming back to my office tomorrow at five. He expects me to give him Fesser."

Whitey poured himself another drink, looking shaky and scared. When he extended the bottle to me, I shook my head no. Free or not, this was the only throat I'd ever get.

"I might be able to contact him, Bill. I don't know. Suppose you come back in two hours? I'll see what I can do."

"Make it an hour," I said. "Ten o'clock."

"I'll try," he said nervously. "You come back."

"Thanks, Whitey. Tell Fesser just what I told you."

"Yeah, if I can find him. Sure, Bill."

I went back downstairs and waved at Ollie on the way out.

Great jokers, these guys. Very subtle. It wouldn't take Whitey three minutes to get to Fesser. Ollie's scared eyes had told me that much, and Ollie's warning, and Whitey's shush when he accused me of yelling in the hall. I'd bet my .38 against a cap pistol that Fesser was holed in right at the Acorn, maybe right next door to Whitey.

I could have got to him in three minutes, I knew that. But let them play their little game. Maybe Whitey could collect something for his information. He was a boy for a fast buck, and the news ought to be something interesting to Max. Besides, I needed a decent drink to get the taste of Whitey's firewater out of my mouth.

I went back to the Blue Moon Bar, over which my office windows face the street. I've even been known to pull the corny gag that home is where the bar is. But I dropped that one when people began coming back with, "You ain't kidding." And maybe I wasn't, at that. The Blue Moon is a lot more than a drinkery sometimes to me.

Rosie, the buxom waitress who would give you the size 36 off her back, made a face when the bartender took down my bottle of Black and White. She was stacking beers on a tray.

"My Lord, Bill. Even your big toe is hollow. We filled that leg up this afternoon, didn't we?"

I gave her a scientific discourse on the peculiarities of my particular hollow leg. I explained that there was a secondary suction in the marrow of the tibia that produced a slow leak at the knee cap, which resulted in a scrofulous condition known as Scotch on the knee, which kept the leg



Itself always drained and ready for more.

She picked up her tray with a wink.

"That open wound must be a disgusting sight," she said, laughing louder than she usually laughs. Then she leaned close to me and gave me the score, low and fast.

"Couple of wrong G's down there interested in you, Bill. The skinny vulture and the ape man with him. Asked me about you. Take care of that knee, baby!"

"Thanks, Rosie."

She was a smart gal who had been reared on the stem. I could remember her from the days when she'd been a tubby kid at the Gorrie School, too fat for the jeans she wore for the softball games. That was maybe five years ago. She was a graduate of the stem now, and she could spot a stranger and smell trouble as quickly as she could toss you a drink when you needed it most.

Some private eyes have office girls. I have Rosie.

I kept my back to the interested pair for the space of the first Scotch. But when Emil poured my second, I let my eyes roam the room.

Rosie is good on description. They looked just like what she said. A vulture and an ape man. But they weren't looking at me. They seemed to be very much interested in not looking at me. I stared at them long enough to know that anybody not watching me would have looked at me in that space of time.

Amateurs! Amateurs at a casing job. I could tell by their faces that they had certain talents, but I knew I could lose them in three minutes when they started to tail me out of the Blue Moon.

This seemed to be my day for the wrong guys for the wrong job.

Junior, in the checked loafer jacket, had been a killer, but he hadn't been sent out to kill. And these two characters would add up to muscle man and brain, but they wouldn't be able to tail a firefly on a dark night.

I lowered the level of the Black and White bottle by one more, and Emil raised the figure on my tab by one more. We call it balancing my budget.

I decided that two back alleys and a quick jaunt through Cudder Way would get rid of the two men Rosie had fingered. But I was wrong.

It took only one alley and a quick side-step through the Taylor's back yard to get me to the Acorn Hotel without escorts.

**I** WAS RIGHT on time when I knocked on Whitey's door. Ten o'clock, on the tick of sixty.

This time, he opened it wide and had to hang onto it. He was just about ready to pass out among the tulips.

"Hiya, Bill. Hiya!"

"Did you get Fesser, Whitey?"

"Got him. C'm in, boy, c'm in!"

I came, supporting him toward his empty cheese glass. The bottle was almost empty, too.

"So you found Max Fesser for me," I said, sitting him down in the chair.

"Sure, sure. Knew I could. And you know what?"

"What?"

"Wants to see you. Max Fesser, himself, wants to see you. Told me so himself. Wants to see you tonight, Bill. Know something?"

Whitey's such a little guy, being an ex-jockey, that he usually frowns, and scowls, and talks deep to make you forget his size. But when he's boiled, he bubbles and comes out shrill and thin like the bantam he is. And the unguarded gleam in his eyes lets you see all the way down to the bone of his avarice. Maybe he's smart to do his drinking alone.

"What should I know, Whitey?"

He leaned forward, as though he were letting me in on a great international secret.

"Max Fesser is just down the hall in Room Two-ten! He wants you to stop by on your way out."

"No kidding!" I breathed. I couldn't let Whitey down by telling him I knew it all the time. Whitey was enjoying this moment of doing something for me.

"Not kidding at all. He really is." he  
"Yeah."

"He's a big man. Big money. Don't be silly, Bill. I mean he's got money."

"Has he passed any of it your way, Whitey?"

He shook his wobbly head. "No. Course not. Nothing for me. But you get clients. You could . . ."

"Sure, Whitey, thanks. I believe you. You didn't get any money."

I believed him—yeah! He was smiling when I left him, and nothing except money can make Whitey Kincaid smile.

I left him slumped over the oilcloth, grinning to himself, and walked down the hall to Room 210.

The door opened before I got a chance to give the discreet knock I'd been planning.

Max Fesser was a giant. Most men over six feet are thin, as though they'd been stretched upward instead of sideways. Max Fesser was both. The height, up and down, and the big hard muscles on the bias.

But he had a winning, ready smile. Tough, but oh so gentle? I wondered.

"You Bill Spence?" He leaned down toward me, showing the smooth, oily wave in his jet-black hair. He seemed polite and polished.

I admitted I was Bill Spence.

"Come in, fella. Whitey was telling me that you had an unpleasant experience with Cannon Gorman. An idiot, that Gorman."

I came in. Max had it nice, for the Acorn Hotel. He had a big bowl of ice on top of the dresser, and several bottles of good bond, along with a seltzer bottle that had a splash gadget in it. And his glasses were plain, not cheese flowered.

He made me a drink without asking and I took it without refusing. Then we sat there clinking ice in the glasses like a couple of men of distinctoin.

"I'm sorry you were bothered by that punk this afternoon, Spence."

I sampled my drink. I smiled at my host.

"I wasn't bothered. He was a professional killer, a boy with that flat look in his eye."

Max Fesser smiled back at me.

"You're right about the killer part. Cannon Gorman would liquidate his grandmother for a price. You're lucky the Ace Syndicate just had an eye on you, not a paid fee to Gorman."

"The Ace Syndicate?"

"Sure. They've been trying to take Bart Lacey's holdings for a long time. They're big in Chi, and they're out to expand."

"Lacey's out of the picture now," I said. "Are you in line for Lacey's job?"

"Not really. But the Ace boys have me fingered for their next kill in the muscling-in program. That's what Cannon wants to find me for. Murder. They got word somehow that I'd come to the stem. Maybe you were just a wild guess with them. Not a bad guess, at that. Everybody in town knows how much a part of this district you are."

I didn't know whether that was a compliment or not. But I did know that Fesser was putting on the charm, that he wanted me to take it as a compliment.

"Fair enough. But I'm supposed to have you in my office at five tomorrow. Junior says I produce you, or else."

Max Fesser's eyes twinkled at me, very amused, very much with a we're-a-lot-alike expression. Another compliment, he'd think.

"You're pretty scared about that, I imagine," he said, dryly.

I rose to the bait and bragged.

"Scared stiff," I said, joking along with him. "I just thought you ought to know about it, that I'd like to know what outfit the punk represents. You've told me. I guess that's all, Mr. Fesser."

I stood up, ready to leave, but he stopped

me. He mixed us both a short refill, taking all the while to keep me there.

"That isn't quite all, Spence. Not by a long shot. I know Cannon Gorman's reputation better than you do. Don't let them fool you just because he's little. He's dangerous. I wonder if I ought not protect you by showing up in your office to meet him."

"Any time I need protection, I'll get a new job," I told him. "I can handle Junior by myself, don't worry about that."

"If you feel that way, Spence," he said in a reflective tone, "if you feel that you can handle Gorman without me—"

"I don't feel, I know," I cut in. "I was just curious about his backers. You wouldn't be in back of him, would you, Fesser?"

He couldn't have faked his look of scorn and hatred.

"Get this straight, Spence. Gorman's boss got Bart Lacy, and now they're out to get me. The Chicago syndicate against the top syndicate here. Frankly, I'm hiding out, laying low. You can see that."

I can't always see what they tell me I can see. I didn't think Max was trying to hide, really. If so, he'd have done a good job of it. I felt sure that Max had spread his own rumor, had brought me into it on purpose. I felt sure that he had been leading up to a deal.

And it was a nutty deal.

"If what you said is true, Spence, about being able to handle Gorman alone—say in self-defense—you'd be earning a good fee. Could I hire you for that, Spence?"

"Not all the way," I said. "I won't kill Gorman. I'll just boot him out of my office. I'd do that anyway, fee or no fee. I don't like little guys holding a big gun on me."

"I like the way you talk," said Max Fesser. But I didn't like the way he said it. Too much salesmanship in the tone. "Let's say I don't hire you," he continued. "Let's just say that I'll want to buy you a drink for taking care of Gorman. Here. . . ."

He slipped a plain envelope into my jacket pocket.

"Just a minute, Fesser. . . ."

He held up his hand in the grand manner.

"Don't open it, Spence. Strictly between friends. Just buying a drink for a friend, that's all. I can call it entertainment tax. I get a great kick out of thinking about you getting tough with Cannon Gorman. But be careful. Be sure you take away that .45 before you get playful. And hang onto the gun. Be sure to do that."

I GRINNED. This was my day for people to watch over me. Ollie, then Rosie, and now this slick, smiling Judas. I had a feeling he didn't give a damn about me, but was placing too much emphasis on my getting and holding the gun.

"That .45 wouldn't match the slugs in Bart Lacy, would it?"

His eyes flattened.

"It might. It might be worth a try, Spence. A good try."

So that's what he wanted me to do. Get the gun and get it to the cops and get an answer for him.

Could be. There was just a chance that he was playing it straight for his dead boss, that he was mad about the murder of the top man who had been giving him orders. Just a small chance. It seemed to me that the boy who was due to inherit the syndicate could afford to be very philosophical about sudden death. It seemed to me that he had more reason to be glad than sorry.

But I gave him credit, for the time being. I kept his thirty pieces of silver in my pocket. If Fesser was on the level, fine. I'd have earned it. If it was dirty money, I could always stuff it back down his throat.

Right now, I had every intention of going back to the Sheraton Lounge, where the service is luxurious and expensive and strictly for cash. I don't have a tab there, the way I have at the Blue Moon.

"I'll take care of that gun, Mr. Fesser.

You don't have to worry about me at all."

"Good boy."

We smiled at each other, with a play at mutual admiration, and I left.

Ollie's feverish eyes burned into my back as I walked out the front door of the Acorn Hotel. I knew he wished like hell he knew what was going on, but I didn't quite know myself.

I had three singles left in my flat wallet, so I hopped a cab. There, in the corner of the back seat, I opened the plain envelope and thumbed the bills. Five of them. C-notes all.

That's one advantage about a place like the Sheraton. They didn't bat an eye when Max Fesser paid for my first drink with a hundred dollar bill. And, somehow, the change looked lovelier than the original.

I had a creme-de-menthe water highball to wash out everything I'd had to drink that day. Then I settled down and made a night of it.

When I got home to my efficiency apartment, I felt pretty good and relaxed. I could pay the office rent, I could eat a few more steaks, and I didn't have to show up until five the next afternoon for my skirmish with the question mark Cannon. I listened to the late dance music as I shed my clothes and showered.

I wondered if it were possible that Max Fesser was on the level—if a moron killer had got close enough to Bart Lacy to let him have it.

I wondered if Fesser had any real hot tips on the dogs that run at Arlington. I wondered if he'd paid Whitey Kincaid to make a little book for him while he was holed in on the stem.

I wondered who the two dopes were that Rosie had fingered. Follow-up boys for Max Fesser, or interested parties from the Chicago syndicate who were trying to muscle in?

But right now, none of it mattered very much. I snapped the radio off right in the middle of a sultry sax sobbing *Star Dust*,

and only tripped once on the way to bed. Once I hit the sack, I had that smug body-tingle that meant a good night's rest. It was late, but I could sleep until noon. I must have smiled in my sleep, thinking of that, thinking about how good I felt.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Counterfeit Corpse

I HOPE I smiled. I woke up at six, my mouth full of hot coppers, my head out to here.

There was milk in the ice box, cold and soothing. I sloshed it out of the carton into a bumper beer stein and propped up in bed with it, lighting a cigarette to test my T-zone.

Morning always does things to me, no matter how rough the morning.

The milk got me ready for coffee, and the weed woke me up enough to go out and load the percolator.

I located a still-fresh hard roll and a stick of sweet butter. I sat myself at the chrome dinette table that came with the apartment and sniffed the perking coffee, and my mind began to perk right along with it.

I was facing a day. The night had put money in my wallet, but I had to do who-knows-what to earn that money. I had to be on my toes. I had to get myself more protection than the liquored-up bravado of last night. I had to get on the beam.

By seven-thirty, I was shaved, dressed, and had followed up my hard roll with a plate of ham and eggs and more coffee at the lunch counter down the street.

I got to my office at eight.

I diddled through some stuff on my desk until it was late enough to catch Pat Feeny at homicide. Pat and I are about even on favors at this point, so we were both at the conversational level of being civil to each other.

I put it nicely. I wanted to know what

caliber had liquidated Bart Lacy, but I was careful to intimate that I might—just might—have some follow-up on the Bart Lacy murder.

I knew Pat Feeney would be chewing his nails over the Lacy kill. The racketeer rub is the hardest smear to see through and often impossible to prove.

Feeney was in a what-have-I-got-to-lose position, and he knew it.

“Just a second, Bill.”

I could see his wide, honest face as he riffled reports on his desk. I could visualize his big forefinger moving down a report as he checked for me. I had no doubt he knew the caliber, but wanted to look at the sheet again for a double check.

“Yeah, Bill. Here it is. Forty-five, in the gut. Lacy hurt for a while. One slug where he could think about his past and feel the pain and slowly bleed to death. That help?”

“Lacy was a bad boy,” I said. “It’s nice to know that he suffered. Don’t you think?”

Pat’s voice took on the John Law tone that’s the real motivation behind nine out of ten good cops. It put me in my place.

“Lacy was murdered,” he said, coldly. “You got anything, Bill?”

“Not yet, Pat. But that .45 makes me think I may have something later. I may even give the Lacy killer to you, and if I do, I’m sure it couldn’t happen to a nicer guy. Thanks, Pat.”

“Just a second, Bill!”

“I’ll call you, Pat.”

I hung up, wishing it hadn’t been a .45, wishing I could face Junior with my last night’s assurance. I’d have to be careful now. Bart Lacy had been big time, inviolate. But Bart Lacy was dead. It could happen, I preached to myself. It could happen to you.

I took my .38 out of a file drawer and cleaned it and checked the load and tried to get used to the way it felt in the sling where it seldom rests. I told myself that life was worth living, for the laugh if noth-

ing else, that my knees had room for a lot more Scotch, and I’d be damned if a little guy behind a big gun was going to liquidate me for not having Max Fesser all tied up in a clove-hitch against my filing cabinet.

I decided I’d kill Cannon Gorman, if need be.

I decided my breakfast was digested by now, that I ought to go downstairs for a dog’s nose to get me in condition for lunch, which would, in turn, get me in condition for five o’clock.

I was just pushing myself away from the desk when the phone rang.

“Spence,” I barked, caring more about the dog’s nose right now than a new client, or beefs from an old one.

It was Special Agent Adams, a nice guy from the FBI that I’d brushed with before on the stem. We’d merged on the night he closed down the morphine traffic.

“How’s business, Bill?” he asked, which, from a busy guy, is just like telling you to sit down and wait for some big pitch.

“No complaints. How are the Hoover boys?” I wasn’t in any mood for the palsy build-up.

“Fine, fine. Bit of a money problem right now, but—”

“Anytime anything Federal has a money problem, I’ll trade my cash for beads and firewater. What’s on your mind, exactly?”

He sounded relieved to cut the foolish chatter. He got official.

“You were in the Sheraton Lounge last night, Bill?”

“In it, on it, and under it. But what does the state of my hangover do with the FBI?”

“You cashed a hundred dollar bill there?”

“Right again. Legal tender for a headache. I paid for every butterfly. But what’s all that to you, Adams? Why the quiz program?”

He got sticky again, and I could just see his round, serious face looking cordial and

gentle behind the shell glasses he wore.

"I met you once, Bill, and got some idea of the way you want to operate on the stem. I admire your principles. That's why I feel sure that you wouldn't pass a hot C-note on purpose."

"A hot C?"

"That's right. The Sheraton manager got a call from the bank this morning after their deposit. The waitress remembered you. But the manager was sore. He called us in, and here I am. Where'd you get that hundred dollar bill? It may be that you can help us wind up something we've been working on for months."

I let out a long, low whistle as part of the puzzle fell into place.

Max Fesser, loaded with counterfeit bills, meant just one thing, and I blessed the thirst that had made me pass one of the bills ten minutes after leaving my generous client. I was finding out a lot quicker than Fesser expected me to find out.

**I** ASKED Adams, "Mind telling me what angle you've been working on to trace the hot money?"

"I do mind. Just tell me where you got the bill, Spence."

I might have known. The Federal boys are never chatty about what they've been doing.

"Mind if I guess?" I persisted.

"Guess all you want."

"Okay. The first hot money appeared in Chicago. The Feds began to get close, and suddenly the operations ceased there, and the bills began to show up here. So the bureau transferred the problem to Special Agent Adams. Am I right so far?"

"It's interesting, Spence. Go ahead."

"All right. You got a glimmer that the counterfeit bills were being shoved out at the pari-mutuel windows. You traced some of it back to the track, but couldn't quite put your finger on the whole system. Knowing you, I'd guess that you wanted the whole case wrapped up before you

moved in. Maybe you even went to see Bart Lacy about it. But Lacy got murdered."

Special Agent Adams had an eager overtone in his words now. "Maybe we're in business together again, Bill. You're into something on the stem, aren't you?"

"Right. But I didn't know until now just what I was into. Ever hear of Max Fesser?"

He laughed. It was a satisfied, tight, exultant laugh. It's the way you laugh when you've chased a lot of blind leads and finally come up with something good enough to stick your boy with. There's no mirth in a laugh like that, just relief of tension.

"Max paid you for something?"

"Max paid. I got four more of those phony bills from him, along with a story just as phony. Right now I need a little time to see a guy, Adams. But I'll have something for you by six this evening. Drop around."

"Sure thing, Spence. See you."

He didn't push me with the right-now pitch. He probably had enough of a new lead to keep him as busy as I was going to be. The Fed boys don't go off half-cocked and excited. They work like machines, and I had a feeling that Adams was getting ready to oil up the works.

I called the Sheraton manager and told him I was an innocent victim, that he'd get his money back, and he was nice, very nice, about the whole thing, giving me the soft talk reserved for good customers. Listening to him, I made a side bet with myself that I could get a tab running there if I wanted it.

But I was too sore at a couple of boys at the Acorn Hotel who had made a sucker out of me to follow through at the moment. I told the manager good-by, slammed my office door, and went down to the Blue Moon for my dog's nose.

Rosie said she knew I'd be needing it, and she poured the shot of gin into the beer

with a gentle hand and a gentle smile.

"Don't look so mad, baby," she said. "You guzzle all night, it's your own fault you feel bad."

"I'm not mad about that. Did those two characters show up again last night, Rosie?"

"They left right after you did, and never showed again."

"Ever see them in here before?"

"Not before last night."

"You sure?"

"Look, boy. I don't hit the hooch the way you do. Anytime I see a couple of creeps like that, I can remember it."

"Okay, Rosie. Draw me a plain beer this time. I'm almost well again."

She did it, but she didn't approve. "You'll be starting all over again this afternoon," she said. "Disgusting. I hear the old Romans used to do the same thing with their food. And the size of your tab almost makes you a partner in the business. You're too nice a guy to—"

"Save it, sweetheart. And shut up. I'm about to do my heavy thinking for the day. Mustn't interrupt me when I'm working."

She sniffed and went back to the end of the bar to polish glasses.

By the time I had polished off my beer, I felt better and knew just what I wanted to squeeze out of Whitey Kincaid at the Acorn Hotel.

The little ex-jockey had been riding in Chicago at Arlington, when the racing commission kicked him out of the Sport of Kings for good, for being bad.

It was possible that Whitey was still friends with the racketeers he'd worked for in Chi. It was possible that Whitey was planning a double-cross on the great Max Fesser, that he was steering his friends from the Windy City into the small corners of our own town. Cannon Gorman, from Chi, walking into my obscure office, with Whitey pointing the way. That made sense. Or Max Fesser could have pointed me out. Or both of them together.

Any way I looked at it, it made me a patsy. Nothing to gain and my life to lose. For a couple of dirty syndicate robbers.

I always carry a lump of anger in my stomach that catches on fire if injustice strikes a match. I could feel it beginning to burn slowly as I finished my beer and my thinking for the day.

I felt as feverish as Ollie as I walked past the desk to the stairs that led to Whitey Kincaid's room. I didn't care how little the bookie was. I was going to choke the truth out of his skinny throat, and then give him a hell of a beating to let him know that my office wasn't a place for Chicago monkey-shines.

**O**LLIE TRIED to stop me, but I didn't listen. I took the stairs on the double and pounded my fist against the thin panel of Whitey's door.

"Open up, or I'll break it in, Whitey!"

No answer.

I stepped back and hit the panel with my shoulder. The old-fashioned lock snapped, but I'd forgotten the slide bolt on the inside of the door. The bolt held, and I knew Whitey was in there.

I pounded and called to him, raising quite a racket.

Ollie came creeping up the stairs. "For Lord's sake, Bill. You gone crazy, or something?"

"He's in there," I said. "I'll get to him if I have to tear the door out!"

Then I noticed the ring around Ollie's neck, with a pass key dangling. I remembered the fire escape and the window.

"Let me have that key, Ollie. I'll go through Fesser's room." I lifted the ring over his head.

"Bill, please! Fesser's a dangerous man. You don't know—"

"Don't worry, Ollie. Fesser checked out last night. His room's empty."

"He hasn't! He hasn't checked out. I've been on duty, watching. He's in there, Bill!" Ollie was whispering now. "After

the racket you made out here, he's likely to start shooting if you open his door."

"Then stay here, Ollie. But it won't happen. Just don't let Whitey get past you before I have a crack at him."

I inserted the pass key into the door of 210 and walked into the room that contained no more of Fesser than his empty bottles and a bowl of melted ice that was surrounded by a watery pool on the dresser.

The window was open and I climbed through to the rickety iron fire escape and walked down it to the window of 207. I pulled my .38 out and hugged the wall.

The window was shut, but not locked. I eased up, wary. The only prayer that a pint-size like Whitey could have would be the first shot.

Silence. Nothing stirring. I got an eye to the pane and it focused on the bed.

I put the .38 back in the sling and opened the window, which was up a few inches from the bottom. I stepped into the room and crossed to the slide bolt, shooting it back, and opening the door.

Ollie was still huddled at the bend of the stairs. I passed him the ring that held the key.

"Call homicide, Ollie. Get hold of Pat Fenney and tell him to come out for Whitey Kincaid. Tell him to come himself, that it ties in with a big kill he's interested in. Got that, Ollie?"

His thin lips were trembling, and I hated the cough that bubbled in his throat. But action is good for shock.

"Go ahead, Ollie! Pat Feeney. Tell him I said to rush it. Don't just stand there. Max Fesser has a big head start already."

"But Max Fesser—"

"Left by the fire escape. Get going, Ollie!"

He got. I realized that it had been fear of Max Fesser behind the coughing, not the murder of Whitey Kincaid.

I went back to the room, disgusted. The empty rotgut bottle was on the bed with

him, the flowered cheese glasses were stuck to the oilcloth, and roaches swarmed around them. Whitey's roaches were probably all dipsos, the way they went for the liquor stains.

The runt had been strangled, and his tongue was an ugly, swollen thing, his eyes a bulging horror.

I didn't feel much pity for him, only revulsion at the way he looked, the way the room looked. Dirt and scum. Degenerate scum. There's too much of that on the stem. We could do without Whitey Kincaid very nicely.

I doubt if he knew what had happened to him. He'd been drunk and getting drunker the last time I'd seen him, when his eyes had lusted after the big change that Max Fesser had.

Maybe Whitey had spotted the counterfeit, I didn't know. Or maybe he just had got too smart for his size. Anyway, he'd passed out on the bed with his bottle, and Max Fesser had squeezed on the skinny throat, and I doubted that Whitey's brain had been clear enough to know.

I was counting on Fesser. I'd bet the five phony C-notes that Fesser had done it. I'd even bet the good change that I'd picked up at the Sheraton.

But Pat Feeney doesn't work that way.

After his boys cleaned up the mess and moved Whitey out of the Acorn, after he'd given the room a quick check, he left the technicians there to go to work for fingerprints.

"Don't bother with the glass with violets," I said, as we were leaving. "That was mine. The tulips were Whitey's. And I'm on the window frame, too. Catch a Max Fesser print, and you're in."

The boys grunted and went about their dusting in their own way.

**I** WALKED Pat down to the Blue Moon for a kosher corned beef on rye and a beer. We sat in a back booth, and Rosie was all service. She recognized the law and



was silently pleased to know that I was working, and respectably. She brought us a plate of French fries and the mustard pot without being asked.

I told Pat everything I knew. Everything except the call from Special Agent Adams about my passing hot money. I told him about Fesser's talk last night, about Whitey's talk. I told him about Junior in the checked coat, but I didn't tell him the punk's name, or the caliber of his gun. I just told him that the whole mess was related to the killing of Bart Lacy, in some way.

"You were interested that Lacy took a .45 slug, Bill. Why? What have you got there?"

"Just a guess, chum. When I know for sure, it's yours. Want another sandwich?"

"Yeah, they're good. Spicy. I'll take coffee with the next one, though."

"Right."

I ordered coffee with my next one, too. Rosie beamed as she served us up.

"The Danish is good today, Mr. Spence," she said.

"Fine. Let's look."

Pat and I each picked a roll out of the cardboard box for later, and Rosie couldn't wait to give us a coffee refill at just the right moment.

"Sometimes these little places surprise you," said Pat, wiping crumbs off his fingers. "Good food."

"Not everything. You have to pick. Their hamburgers stink, and their gravy is greasy. They can't do an egg, either."

"Eggs are tricky," said Pat. "But my wife has a swell gadget for poaching. Never misses. She's spoiled me for eggs I get out. Sure you don't want to tell me about that .45, Bill? I'd give a lot to wrap up this Lacy business."

"I'd like to see it wrapped up, too. By six tonight, where can I reach you?"

"Office, unless something pops. If I'm not there, I'll leave a number for you."

"Good. If I don't call by then, you'd

better call me," I said in a low tone.

I didn't like the way that sounded, but Junior had killing experience, even if he didn't have any brains.

Pat Feeney frowned.

"What's in this for you, Bill? I mean, where's the dough coming from?"

"It isn't coming, and there's not a damn thing in this for me. Unless you want to count the defense of my pride. If Whitey pulled me in to play me for a sucker, I'd have throttled him myself. And I have the same kind of score to settle with Max Fesser. In other words, I'm working for myself, and I'm a bum client when it comes to paying off. I ought to be out chasing a skip trace for beer money."

"Yeah," said Pat. "Well, take it easy. I'll go back to the Acorn and see what kind of an oak the boys grew out of it. What about this Ollie?"

"Clean," I told him. "Consumptive, but clean."

Pat reached to pay for his lunch, but I waved him off and told Rosie to put it on my account.

She didn't approve. Almost, she'd gotten her hands on some cash. But she made with a pencil, like a good girl, and Pat Feeney must have thought the Blue Moon was my private club.

It was three o'clock.

I went up to the office to play solitaire and wait for Cannon Gorman.

Reaction time would be at a premium and the afternoon Scotch was set aside for some dull day when there was nothing to do.

I left the door wide open, and sat at my desk with my gun in my lap, waiting.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Return of the Ape Man

HE HAD on a different coat. This one was dark blue, solid, nothing that would slap a person's memory in the face, nothing flashy. Just a neat little guy on

the street; he was almost not there at all.

His work clothes, no doubt. Yesterday, he hadn't been sent out to kill, but today I was sure he had his final order.

I had my fingers all placed on the .38, the safety off. A split-second could get my hand out of my lap.

He had the .45 in front of him, primed for less than a split second. But he had to pull for a little information, too.

"Hello, Gorman," I drawled. "How are things in Chi? You wouldn't have a hot tip for the fifth at Arlington, would you? Friend of mine, used to be a jockey, thought maybe. . . ."

His head lifted, and if he'd have been a horse, the ears would have flattened back the way a nag does when it gets sore about something.

"Wipe off the smile, sucker," he snarled. "Where's Fesser?"

"He wanted to come, but I talked him out of it," I said. "I decided you Chicago boys better go back home. Pick up your bundles of play money and get away from our mutuel windows, see? I decided that all by myself. When I cash in on a long shot, I don't want to get paid off in Chicago currency. I'm not going to give you Fesser."

The hand muscle twitched on a .45, and this was the moment. But it took him a half split second to figure that I wasn't going to be any good, alive.

That put us even on the draw.

I jerked up my gun and shot at the spot on his wrist I'd been watching.

The .45 blasted at the same time, but my slug tore through his wrist tendons soon enough to spoil his aim.

I threw my gun into his face as I hopped over the desk.

It wasn't even a fight. He was too small, and I wasn't that mad at him. He was bleeding in two places, and whimpering, and his gun was on the floor.

I landed a solid, mercy blow behind his ear to serve as a sedative. He went to

sleep in my arms, and I hauled him over to the file cabinet corner and propped him up like a teddy bear, his legs sprawled out in front, his head tipped to one side.

I picked up the .45 by the barrel and dropped it into my desk drawer.

Then I dialed Pat Feeney, ahead of schedule.

He was still at the office. I told him to come out for a little man with a big gun, and I told him to hurry. If this was my day's work, I'd done it, and it was time I started relaxing. I needed a beer for my stomach, and several Scotches for me.

I was standing at the lavatory, washing some of Cannon Gorman's nose bleed drops off my hands, when a whisper of sound came in louder than the running water. I wheeled just in time to see it coming, to know it was going to land.

I made it worse by turning. Rosie's ape man of last night had aimed at the head bone that paralyzes quickly, without much pain. As it was, I put my ear in the way and the sap, which felt like a sockful of pennies, crashed against my eardrum and set up one hell of a pain vibration in my head.

I clawed out for the big man, but the skinny vulture had moved up on the other side. He smashed the base of my skull with what must have been the butt of a gun. Creeps. Characters that couldn't tail a fire-fly. But they had moved in.

I swayed, had a brief second of knowing this was it, then I felt myself dropping into a dark pit, sliding down and down, and the motion was dreamlike, almost pleasant. Then, even that faded.

I COULD smell the river, the dampness, the foggy air of the bottom lands along the Meremac, where farmers moved out long ago and left the treacherous land to city folk who liked a weekend hide-away and didn't have to worry about spring floods.

I wasn't sure, but it smelled like that,

and I was thinking about an overnight I'd taken with the scouts from Gorrie a few years back. Beyond Valley Park, above Times Beach. The air had been like this, damp and wet at dawn, and the scoutmaster had crawled out to fry bacon, and the kids had clamored around the pan, as if bacon cooked in the river fog was the best thing in the world.

I was remembering that, even before I opened my eyes. That tough bunch of kids from the stem, getting a taste of the outdoors.

I opened my eyes slowly, memory all mixed up with the present air that revived the memory.

I was lying on a plank floor, trussed. I rolled over on my side, and the wall was a cabin wall, a typical river retreat. What light came into the room was the gray light of early morning. I'd been conked, but good, and maybe conked again during the night for extra assurance.

I rolled over on the other side, and wished I hadn't.

Max Fesser was sitting in an old-fashioned Morris chair, watching me with a smile like a benevolent parent watches a mewling infant. I was helpless, and he was the dignified observer.

"Good morning," he drawled. "Sleep well, Spence?"

"Get me on my feet, and I'll tell you."

"Certainly. You do look a bit cramped down there. My boys lack the finer touches. They could have laid you on the couch. Here. Let me help you up and we'll have a little chat. I just got here. Easy now."

His powerful arms circled my chest and he practically lifted me onto a wicker davenport. His face was so close that I could have spit in his eye, but I was wrapped up as tight as a mummy and decided to save my spit until later, when my arms were free.

"My host, my generous client," I said. "How about a drink and a cigarette?"

"But of course!"

He chuckled. He was enjoying this. I wondered if Bart Lacy had been a velvet-covered sadist, if Max were trying to ape the big boy with the syndicate throne in sight. I wasn't important enough for the act. Maybe he was practicing on me, practicing on me, practicing to be like Lacy.

He took out a jackknife, pressed a button, and cut the rope that had my wrists as stiff as a Dixie Cup too long on dry ice. He lit a cigarette and handed it to me. He turned his back and built me a drink from the stuff on a round wicker table.

I knew this wasn't his cabin. The furniture was strictly homey, discard stuff from family people. There was an old victrola, there was a shelf of kids books and a box of toys. The townspeople put a quarter padlock on the door and anybody can move in. Discard stuff. Nothing to steal, and they don't worry. Chances are against the padlock being busted.

I was sure there was nothing to tie Max to this place, except his brand of bourbon, which anybody can buy.

He handed me the glass, dipping his oily wave of black hair at me, and smiling.

"Now, Spence. This is more like it. Right?"

The drink cut some of the cotton that had grown in my mouth during the night. The cigarette made me feel like any other morning.

This was a day, and I was testing my T-zone.

**I** WAS alive. A dull headache, but it didn't feel like a fractured skull. And Fesser was my boy. I was almost glad to see him.

"I was looking for you," I said. "Thanks for saving me the trouble."

"No trouble at all, Spence. I had the details carefully worked out. Everything came off just right. Once you took care of Cannon Gorman, my two boys were all set to take care of you. They tell me their timing was perfect. They let you call the

cops before they took you. They tied Cannon up to be sure the cops got him."

"Then you really wanted Cannon Gorman to check into homicide with his .45?"

"Naturally. I traded guns with the moron from Chi. Same model, different gun. He was too dumb to know. He's holding the Bart Lacy gun, and I like it that way."

"So you killed Lacy?"

"So what do you care? There's nothing you can do now."

"And Whitey Kincaid?"

"You get around fast, don't you, Spence?"

"Fast enough. Why did you give me the five C-notes?"

His smile was infuriating.

"I wanted to con you into delivering Cannon Gorman to the cops. I hired you to keep you interested."

"You didn't hire me, you cheap chiseler! You gave me five phony bills, and one of them kicked back to the FBI. Didn't know I'd be such a fast spender, did you? You thought I'd go home last night like a good boy, that I'd have no time to spend your dough until you had me tied up. But you played it too close, boy, and overlooked my hollow leg and my lack of spending cash. Now the Feds are interested. The race track is one thing. A personal pass is another. Why'd you kill Lacy? Did you forget to give him his cut out of the counter-feit take?"

"Damn you, Spence! It doesn't matter what you know."

"Maybe not. But it matters what the FBI knows. I got called for a phony C-note, and I named a name. You're not going to be happy with a Fed that much on your tail."

His olive skin looked slick now, wet and slick, and his mouth wasn't smiling the nasty smile. It was a tight line of anger.

He came over and slapped me, back-handed across the cheeks. Brave boy. My legs were still tied, and he topped me in

weight by fifty pounds. I flipped my lighted butt in his face. He raised a fist from the floor and drove it into my jaw with all his weight and all his anger behind it. My head snapped back with a jerk like a chiropractic adjustment, every vertebrae getting a small work-out.

I came out of it with my eyes watering.

"Did I say something to upset you, Fesser?"

I was asking for another treatment, but he was over pouring a long slug of bourbon for himself.

Thinking. He was thinking about the FBI and who knows what other angles of his dirty business.

"You're checking out, Spence," he said at last. "You know that, don't you?"

"I'd have made book on it. You'll brag to me, you'll inflict some minor torture, and then you'll have the creeps take me out on the river and let me have it. Maybe I turn up a floater, and maybe not. If I do, there's nothing around here with your name in neon. You're in a borrowed cabin."

"You're so bright," he said, with an attempt to return to the smug security of the upper hand. "It's almost a shame you have to die."

"I'll go along on that," I said. "And I'd be crying real hard, if I didn't know for sure that you're going down with me. I named a name to two people, Fesser. You're a clay pigeon once you dump me. That makes me happy."

He'd recovered from the slick sweat that the FBI initials had produced on his skin.

"A name isn't proof," he said. "You're just bluffing along for time. But you can save yourself the trouble. There's a certain amount of time. No more, no less. The boys are getting the boat ready. It's all set. You die the minute they walk in, no horsing around. So relax, enjoy yourself. Another drink?"

I nodded mutely. Right away. As soon as the boys walked in. The boys with the

talent for swift violence, cold and sure. Fesser would step aside and one of them would blast me, without even saying good-morning. I could see myself riding the current of the Meremac, maybe getting hung up on a rock at the bottom, where I'd linger with flowing hair and bulging eyes, like a marine plant waving its tendrils at the fish and the crawdads and the water snakes.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Waiting for Satan

**M**Y HAND shook as I took the glass from Fesser, and he loved that. I didn't care. I gulped the bourbon and asked for another.

"Sure, boy. Last requests. I'll even give you a cigarette if you promise to be polite with it."

I promised. There's a time for humility. The rope started at my ankles and was spiraled around my legs up to my belt buckle. Like a top ready to be spun. I didn't see a gun on Fesser, nor anywhere in the room, but he had a knife, and he had muscles that could crack the back of the Swedish Angel.

I couldn't see an out. And now that I thought about it, I didn't really feel any better because of knowing that Fesser would die someday, too. I just felt suddenly very sorry for that nice Bill Spence. I thought of some of the good things I've done on the stem, and it didn't seem fair that I was going to end up as a jungle jim for the baby fish.

"This must be my third drink," I said, foolishly.

"So you've had three drinks. I'm a human guy," exulted Fesser. "Have all you want in the time that's left. What's three drinks?"

"The mellow point," I said, with an ache in my throat for Rosie and the Blue Moon and the little people on the stem. "It's

when I like myself. Let's make it four, shall we?"

I held the glass and he poured. I considered stopping the whole thing up into his face and kicking out with both feet toward the groin. But my legs were too stiff, and I couldn't have followed through.

The fourth. The one that makes me hate me. Softie. Sucker. Dumb, honest pauper.

I gulped that one fast, feeling them now. "You're quite a planner, Fesser. But one thing I don't get. Gorman. Why Gorman in my office? Why not a phone tip to the cops, easy and straight?"

He poured himself a drink and lit cigarettes for both of us. His damn chuckle again.

"Whitey was Gorman's friend. I told Whitey I wanted Gorman picked up with the rod on him. I gave Whitey a little change, and you were Whitey's answer. He said, 'Guy I know on the stem is a helluva guy. All we got to do is for me to tell Cannon that you're crossing the Chi boys, that we want you, and he can find you through Spence. If he goes up to see Spence, which I'll tell him to do, that Spence will twist the wrist right off him and turn him in.' That's what Whitey said. But he thought you were more of a guy than you are, didn't he?"

"I'm not so sure. Seems to me I caused more trouble for you the way I played it about Cannon Gorman. And any trouble I caused you makes me a better guy. Why'd you have to kill Whitey?"

"Once I used him, it was on the work sheet. It's not ever a good idea to leave a mouth around. Lacy taught me that much. Same reason for you. The mouth."

"A mouth isn't evidence," I reminded him. "I couldn't do you half the damage alive that I'll do you dead."

"Don't beg, Spence. It doesn't become you. Have another drink. A long one. Roll it around on your tongue. The boys are about due, but I'm a human guy."

"You're as human as a wet oyster. But

go ahead and make it a long one, damn you."

The fifth. No praise for Bill, no blame. Just clear, abstract thought. Just business.

"I always pay double for the fifth," I said.

"That's crazy talk. You drunk?"

"Not like Whitey. Not dead drunk like that."

My eyes were exploring the room, every crack, every inch, trying to locate the gun that Fesser might be keeping handy. My brain was clicking off the odds, not worrying too much about them now, but working for a chance, for a try at least.

"You drunk?" asked Fesser again, watching my rolling eyes. "You want to take the slug passed out, it's all right with me."

"Like Whitey," I said, my eyes continuing the search.

"Yeah, like that. He hardly woke up, the money-hungry little snake."

"He'd been drinking poison all night. You don't give me that much time." My eyes kept probing, inch by inch, and I worked on the drink by respectable sips.

Close to the last sip, I saw it. Not a gun, nor the bulge of a gun, but something, pray God, even better.

**U**NDER THE old victrola, buried in the rolls of dust, was something. I could see a flake or two of clean wood, where a saw had cut through the floor. I squinted, trying to be sure there was a small rectangular hole under the dust.

My whole body did a nipup and even my legs were capable of a tiny twitch of hope. I could see just enough of the brown metal through the dust, just a tracing of wire mesh about the size of a four-bit piece.

"Talk if you want," said Fesser, jovially. "You don't have to stare at the floor. It won't do you any good to think about things you might have done. I need you out of the way, but I'm a human guy."

I raised my eyes and my empty glass.

"I'll bet that's what Bart Lacy used to say. Right?"

"Right. And I said it back in his teeth the night I plugged him. I got a helluva kick out of saying that back to him."

"I can imagine. How about pouring me one for the road?"

Most of the river cabins are built on stilts. The water comes up and in once a year, but the builders try. There'd be at least a six foot space under this cabin, maybe piled with some planks, some dry logs, some windblown debris.

And down there in the debris was my only hope, my wild guess that maybe Lady Luck and a mild-mannered man would get me out of this.

"You been using this cabin long, Fesser? Or did you get it just to put me up for the night?"

"I've had it ever since I found out the owners are in Europe. It's farther from town than you think, and way off by itself. You could hide a fortune in plain sight, and nobody'd be along to pick it up. I know how to pick a place for work like this, but why the hell should you care? With only minutes left, why?"

I rubbed a hand across my brow. I was sweating now, big drops of it. Hope was bringing it out, but he'd think it was fear.

Then I pulled a dilly.

"Shoot me now, Fesser. I can't stand this waiting. If you've got a gun, shoot me now!"

"With my build, I should carry a gun? I got my boys. I got my hands. I got a knife. You want it with the knife, Spence?"

Very hoftly I said, "What are you waiting for, Adams?"

"Huh?" asked Fesser.

I made like a nervous drunk, delirious.

"No gun! You won't even give it to me with a gun. I can't take the knife. God, Fesser! You ever wait like this?"

"Don't cry. The boys will use a gun, and it won't be much longer. Have another drink and be a little man."

"Would you cut this rope off my legs?" I begged. I imagined that I heard a soft set of footsteps outside. A whisper of sound, like last night. Just a rustle, a suggestion.

"Don't be a damn fool. You're lucky I gave you your arms back."

"I suppose so."

He had just handed me a new drink, and he had his back to the door.

I said thanks and lifted the glass high. I said he was a human guy. I said I enjoyed telling him that.

I tossed my drink at him, and Adams moved into the room and put a gun into Max Fesser's back.

"Hold it Fesser. I'm a Special Agent of the FBI. Put your hands up, move to the wall, and place your hands above you on the wall. My men just picked up your boys down by the river, so you're all alone. The fat boy is dead, the skinny one hurt. So behave."

"Adams!" I moaned. "You took so damn, damn long!"

"Sorry, Spence. I thought he had a gun on you, and I didn't want you to get plugged. Why didn't you give me the tip on no gun sooner?"

"It took me five drinks to find the gadget."

Fesser bubbled against the wall. "You haven't got anything on me. You haven't got any evidence! This guy's mouth isn't evidence!"

Adams laughed, no mirth in it, but great relief, the last relief, the end of the job laugh.

"No evidence, he says! Oh, Bill! The questions you asked, the things he said. I loved you every minute!"

From the dignified, serious, crisp Agent Adams this was indeed something. Saying he loved me every minute. That to me, from a tight-mouthed Federal boy. That to me, and that boyish grin on his round face.

He gave me his gun, careful to the last

rule. Then he walked up behind Fesser with the handcuffs.

"All right, Fesser. Put these on, if you want a trial. Get cute with your fists, and we'd love to plug you right here."

Fesser turned, his wrists together, his face a shattered mask of whimpering fear. Adams snapped the cuffs and came back to me.

He took Max Fesser's knife off the table and cut my leg ropes. I stood up and did a few knee bends, almost toppling with each one.

Then I looked at Max Fesser, and he looked at me. I flexed my knees and looked at Adams. Adams was turned the other way, pouring himself a snort. I knew that Adams wasn't the type to take a snort without offering me one, too. But he was doing it. Doing it deliberately to give me time and permission.

I stretched my arms and smiled at Max Fesser.

I WALKED toward him, and I said, "I know a very human guy, Fesser. Special Agent Adams is a human guy. He knows this is going to do me a lot of good, that I have to do this."

I picked my arm up off the floor and blasted it into his jaw. His head snapped back, and he covered his face with his handcuffed wrists, cringing.

I started to do it again, but didn't. It was out of me now, all gone, all washed away with one sock.

I turned my back on him and joined Adams in a drink.

"You didn't come up here just for me," I said.

"No. We've had Max tied to this cabin for two months. The gadget is a recorder, and the roll I got this morning is just one of several. We had pieces before. But you gave us the whole thing so we could move in. I had a man detailed to you ever since our phone conversation about the hot C-note. You had lunch with Pat Feeney.

We were behind you all the way. I've been shivering down in that hole under the cabin all night. Not smoking, not sleeping. All night. Waiting for the talk. You did swell, Bill. It was worth it."

I didn't yell at him for letting me go through a private hell, when all the time I was surrounded by Federal guns. These boys work like machines, patient, tireless, and efficient. They were willing to take it out of their own hide for decency. I shouldn't complain about the skin off my nose.

His men showed up with a car, and we herded Max Fesser into the back seat. He was quiet, beaten, sullen. The other boys waited by the river for a meat wagon to pick up the stale flesh on the bank. They had given the skinny vulture first aid.

Adams brushed at the dirt on his suit. "My wife thinks I went to Jeff city," he said. She'll think it was a rough train trip."

"You don't even tell your wife, Adams?"

"We don't tell anybody. A system. But you'd be surprised how it pays off."

"I'm never surprised. Not after the way you took the dope away from the dopes on the stem. I haven't even seen a stick of tea since."

He smiled his quiet smile and gave me a cigarette. We were riding down highway 66 a lot farther from Valley Park than my smell had placed the cabin.

"You've been a valuable help on two cases of mine, Bill. You ought to switch to the Federal payroll."

"They wouldn't put up with the Blue Moon and my afternoon Scotches. But I ought to be working for money, at that. On this case, I was working for nothing."

"You were working for a lot, Bill. For the stem, for yourself, for society. That's one thing. For another thing, you were working for more money than you know."

"Yeah. Counterfeit. Big stuff."

"No. Chicago's best. There's a price up there on Cannon Gorman's head. He's a

badder boy that you'd think. It's a good price. The way I hear it, you tied him up in your office for Pat Feeny, and he now rests in a detention cell and awaits extradition. You're in line for a nice hunk of dough."

It was a helluva nice day, with the afternoon just around the corner.

I owed myself some Scotches from yesterday. I had some coming for today.

I owed myself a filet mignon at the Sheraton.

As we neared town, Adams said, "Office, or home?"

"Home, if it's not out of the way. I want to dress up. I'm going to shave and put on my cheviot suit. . . ."

They dropped me at my apartment, and Adams said he'd call me tomorrow to tie up the formalities.

"You do that," I said.

I didn't tell him not to try before noon. I didn't tell him that reward money coming was giving me the nerve to think about calling on the Sheraton manager to ask for a tab. I had just decided that a tab would be nicer than paying for my steak and all the brandies I was lining up in my mind with their own change from a hot C-note.

But first, I wanted Rosie to see me all dressed up.

Back there, when I was dying, it was Rosie and the Blue Moon I wanted. It was the stem in my blood, crying out with regret for the job there I hadn't finished.

Rosie first, and the Sheraton second. I had it all planned.

But once home, I flopped on the bed for a few minutes. It was another morning before I woke up to test my T-zone.

I scrambled four eggs, and wolfed them. I made coffee. I showered. I drank coffee.

I looked like a million and felt like a million, when I started out in my cheviot suit at eight o'clock.

Only four hours and two minutes, and it would be afternoon again. ● ● ●



# DIE A LITTLE

By RICHARD DEMING



I started to say something, but couldn't when I looked into the glittering bore of a .38.

*Private Investigator, Manny Moon, was hired to protect a gal from her man-killing, ex-husband. He didn't figure on getting the job as her late heart throb!*

**T**HE FIRST thing I noticed was her curves. Not that they were unusual either in number or softness, though they rated better than average on both counts. It was their behavior which fasci-

nated me. They flowed as she walked.

I have watched women in high heels walk fast many times, and even the most streamlined tend to jiggle like a plate of jelly. But this woman's heels striking the tile floor created not a single jiggle. She moved with as much oiled grace as though she were strolling barefoot instead of nearly trotting on three-inch heels. Her curves were dynaflo.

When it occurred to me if she kept moving straight toward me, she was bound to notice my preoccupation, and might resent it, I raised my eyes to her face.

And I got another surprise. Though she was a complete stranger, her expression was one of soulful delight at joining the one man in the world she loved.

She was beautiful, clear from the tip of her finely chiseled nose to the carmine tinted nails which peeped from her open-toed pumps. Her complexion was milk white, its whiteness stressed by jet black hair which framed her face in a long, page-boy bob. Her eyes were wide spaced and deep blue, and her only makeup was a vivid lipstick which matched the color of her toes.

Her figure equalled her face. It was her real figure too, without benefit of elastic support.

I was seated on a stool with my back to the bar, sipping a rye and water and idly gazing over the Sheridan's cocktail hour crowd, when she entered. Her progress across the floor was so fast, I didn't even have time to rise like a gentleman before she grasped my free hand in both of hers and breathed, "Darling, did I keep you waiting long?"

"Only all my life," I breathed back, and then I noticed the man behind her.

Even before I spotted him, I should have realized it was not my beauty which plopped such a lovely gift in my lap. While not exactly revolting, even the kindest flatterer could only describe my face as battered. Once, before I learned all the tricks of

dirty fighting ever invented, I stuck it in front of a brass knuckle duster, with the result I have a permanently bent nose and one eyelid which droops slightly. I don't automatically repel women, but neither do they routinely single me out from a bar full of men. Not for romance anyway.

Her choice of me was for protection, I reluctantly decided after looking over her pursuer. And it didn't swell my ego to suspect she had picked me for my lack of beauty, probably in the hope that my face would scare off her bogey man.

The man stopped when the woman and I exchanged greetings. He was a tall, lank individual with a cold gray face and smoky eyes deep set in dark circles.

Slipping from my stool in order to offer it to the lady with the curves, I deliberately kept my eyes on the man's face. He returned my examination without expression, and finally gave a small shrug. The shrug was to let me know he was not impressed by my toughness, but was conceding the pot only because the Sheridan was jammed full of people.

Doing about-face, he disappeared through the street door.

"Thanks," the girl said softly. "Thanks awfully."

"You're welcome," I said. Since there were no vacant stools at the bar, I pressed between the one I had surrendered and the next one, and signaled the bartender for a drink. "I'm Manville Moon. Generally called Manny, unless you prefer to stick to darling."

She smiled at me, a smile not nearly as intimate as the first, but still friendly. "How do you do, Manny?"

The bartender arrived for our orders at that instant. I ordered my usual rye and water and she asked for straight gin with a water chaser. When the drinks came, she tossed hers off fast, made a face, and ignored the chaser.

"I'm Nina Darlene," she said. "Not really, of course. That's a stage name. I'm

Doris Schwenk back in Centerville, Iowa, but Nina Darlene in the theater."

I searched my memory for the name Nina Darlene, but drew a blank. "You're an actress?" I asked.

"Cabaret. Not local. I'm from Chicago, but I start two weeks at the Golden Palms this Saturday."

Again I searched my memory. I came up with a dim recollection of a dim but expensive night club which featured a floor show of naked women and an M. C. who didn't mind a funny joke as long as it was dirty.

"Chorus girl?" I pursued.

She looked disdainful. "The feature act."

"Oh. A stripper."

Her nose elevated indignantly. "I am not! My act is an expression of artistry!

Since all strippers insist they are guilty of art, I didn't argue with her. "I'm sure it is," I said soothingly. "Now let's change the subject to who the guy is you were running from."

She gave me a steady and decidedly less friendly look, but when she finally spoke, I discovered it was not my question about her pursuer which disturbed her.

"I am *not* a stripper," she said. "No one, not even Sally Rand, ever had an act as purely artistic as mine. You drop in at the Golden Palms next Saturday and see."

"I'll have to take your word for it," I told her. "I flunked art appreciation in high school, so I couldn't possibly distinguish art from ordinary bump and grind. But to get back to the villain I saved you from. . . ."

Her expression grew completely unfriendly and she let me look at her profile.

"Who is probably waiting for you outside," I continued after a pause.

**H**ER EYES jumped back to my face and her expression grew friendly again. "You deserve an explanation, I suppose," she conceded.

When I merely waited, she went on, "His name is Jet Chard, and he has some kind of business connection with my husband. He was trying to kidnap me and take me back, I think."

"Back?" I inquired.

"Back to my husband. He's a rotten beast."

"Jet Chard?"

"My husband, Gerald Patton, I left him in Chicago a week ago, and I suppose he sent Jet to try to drag me back by force. I didn't wait to find out when Jet suddenly jumped out of a taxi a few minutes ago and started after me. I simply ran in here."

Thoughtfully I considered the intimate manner in which she had greeted me for Jet Chard's benefit.

"Look, Nina," I said. "I don't mind rescuing beautiful damsels from ogres, but I've no desire to become corespondent in a divorce suit." I contemplated her moodily, then continued. All you have to do is holler copper. Kidnapping is a federal offense."

She gave a delicate shiver. "Gerald would kill me. He's a—well—kind of a racketeer. He and Jet both. I'm frightened to death of both of them. Not only for myself, but for Henry too."

"Henry?"

"Henry England. He's a dear friend of mine who helped me escape from Gerald." She added quickly, before I could get a wrong impression, "Just a friend. He's old enough to be my father. I'm sure Gerald must have guessed it was Henry who helped me escape. I'm deathly afraid that if he catches Henry, he'll kill him or have Jet kill him. Henry drove me here from Chicago and lent me enough money to last until I got an engagement. I didn't have any money because Gerald took it all, you see."

"I see. And where is Henry now?"

"I suppose he went back to Chicago. Would you be kind enough to take me home?"

I grinned at her. "I'll be kind enough to call you a police escort. You're an interesting gal in a slightly insane sort of way, but why should I get a couple of Chicago hoods mad at me?"

She pouted. I suppose chivalry is too much to expect these days."

"From me it is," I assured her. "I'm a private investigator and I specialize in bodyguarding. You sound too much like a busman's holiday."

She gazed at me wide eyed. "You're a professional bodyguard?"

"Mostly. I don't restrict my cases to that, but that's mostly what I get."

"How much do you charge?"

"Twenty-five a day, plus expenses, if any."

Delving in her purse, she produced a slim roll of bills, peeled off a twenty and a five and laid them on the bar. "Now will you kindly take me home?"

I eyed the bills dubiously. "I thought you were broke."

"I told you Henry England is a dear friend. He is also generous."

Shrugging, I picked up the money. "You've got me for twenty-four hours. Let's see if your friend is still waiting outside."

He was. We found him leaning against the building ten feet from the glass, entrance door. His smoky eyes watched us unwinkingly as I escorted Nina over to him.

I said, "My name is Manville Moon and I'm a private detective."

"So?" he asked.

"So the lady thinks you're bent on kidnapping her and dragging her back to her husband. She just hired me to guard her body, and I'd like either to verify or dissolve her fears."

His dark circled eyes flicked at Nina with something like amused contempt. "When a dame runs out on Jerry Patton, he just crooks his finger and a dozen more come running. Jerry wouldn't take you

back if you came crawling. I just wanted to talk to you."

"Then go ahead and talk to her," I suggested.

He looked me over deliberately, then said in a quiet voice, "Sure. You know what I'm after, Nina. Just tell me and step aside.

"Then nobody's going to bother you any more."

"You mean about Henry England?"

"You know what I mean."

"I don't know where he is," Nina said. "I haven't seen or heard from him since he dropped me at my hotel five days ago. I suppose he went back to Chicago."

He lifted his shoulders in a small shrug. "Okay, if you want to play games, Nina. But don't cry when you get burnt."

I said, "Listen, buster, I know you're a tough Chicago hood and probably scare hell out of people in Chicago, but if that's meant as a threat to my client, back off of it fast."

He stared at me until a tic began to develop in his cheek. Finally, in a tone suggesting he was resisting mayhem only by supreme effort, he said, "I never buy trouble unless it's going to get me something. Tangling with you wouldn't get me anything but busted knuckles. I don't think you have to worry about Nina being in any physical danger."

"Good," I said agreeably. "Then I probably won't have to kill anyone."

For a bare instant his mask slipped and allowed him to look startled. But it soon settled over his face again. He smiled with bleak amusement, turned without saying goodbye, and entered the Sheridan Lounge.

Nina said, "I guessed right about Henry's danger. Gerald has sent Jet to kill him."

"But you don't seem to be in much danger," I said. "Want your money back?"

She grabbed my arm. "Don't you dare leave me! I won't feel safe until Jet leaves town."

My Plymouth was parked in the Sheridan Hotel's parking lot. As we pulled from the lot I had to brake for a passing car, and Nina glanced down at my feet with a startled expression when I used only one foot for both pedals. Since my right leg is made of cork and aluminum below the knee, when I brake I turn my left foot sidewise, the heel hitting the brake and the toe the clutch.

Catching her expression, I explained it all to her.

"Oh," she said, and looked embarrassed.

Why, I don't know. People accept false teeth, wigs, and even glass eyes as a matter of course, but a false limb seems to throw them.

I told her I wasn't sensitive, and she needn't worry about my infirmity lessening my efficiency as a bodyguard, as I customarily squeezed a trigger with my fingers rather than my toes.

"I was just surprised because I hadn't noticed any limp," she said.

**N**INA DECIDED I should have a room next to hers at the Sennett, the second class hotel where she stayed. We drove to my flat first, where I packed a small bag and strapped on a shoulder holster containing my P-38.

Then we started toward the hotel, but changed our course after we heard a news announcement over the car radio. A newscaster reported that a man registered at the Sennett Hotel under the name of Howard Smith, but whose papers indicated he was actually a Henry England of Chicago, had been found dead under suspicious circumstances in his room about noon that day. The body had been moved to the city morgue, but the police had issued no statement concerning the case so far.

I cocked an eyebrow at Nina. "Be quite a coincidence if this guy was the same Henry England. You know he was staying at your hotel?"

"Of course not." She had turned pale

and looked quite frightened. "Jet must have killed him."

"And then forgot he did it?" I asked. "Fifteen minutes ago he was still looking for Henry."

Changing direction, I drove to police headquarters. We found Inspector Warren Day in his office giving his chief satellite, Lieutenant Hannegan, hell about something or other.

The chief of homicide lowered his skinny, bald head to peer at us over thick glasses. He scowled at me and blinked rapidly when he looked at Nina. Hannegan gave both of us a grateful look and scuttled from the room.

"I must not have heard your knock, Moon," Day said sarcastically.

"The door was open," I said, and introduced Nina.

Ordinarily Day would have pursued the subject of knocking on doors until he ran it into the ground, but, as always, the presence of a beautiful woman left him momentarily speechless. The inspector isn't exactly afraid of beautiful women. He just doesn't know where to look or what to do with his hands when one is around.

I said, "We heard over the radio you've got a corpse named Henry England. Nina knows a man by that name, so I brought her down to tell about it."

Nina said quickly, "I don't know him well, Inspector. I don't even know what his business was. He was a customer at a club I worked at in Chicago, and I used to sit at his table occasionally."

"You knew him well enough to hitch a ride here from Chicago with him," I suggested helpfully.

"Well, that," she said with a dismissing gesture. "That was nearly a week ago, and I thought he'd returned to Chicago."

Warren Day rose from his chair. "Before we go any farther, let's make sure this is the same guy."

So we took a trip to the morgue and viewed the body of a middle-aged, fat man

with gray hair. An ugly knife wound was high on the left side of his chest.

"That's Henry," Nina said without visible emotion. "Didn't he have any clothes on when you found him?"

"The morgue attendants remove them," the inspector explained. "Though as a matter of fact, he was only wearing undershorts."

When we got back to Warren Day's office, Nina repeated the tale of her flight from her husband with Henry England's aid, and her suspicion that Jet Chard had been sent by her husband to drag her back by force. Parenthetically she added that her husband, Gerald Patton, was some kind of racketeer, but she didn't know just what his racket was.

"Probably every racket, if he was tied in with this Henry England," the inspector growled. "We phoned Chicago about Henry, and he's got a record covering everything from extortion to narcotic peddling."

Nina looked surprised. "Henry? He seemed such a gentleman."

Day asked, "Did your husband know it was England you ran off with?"

"He probably guessed. He knew we were friendly, and I never talked much to other men at the club because Gerald was so jealous. He didn't seem to mind Henry, because Henry was older and never made passes at me."

"It's pretty obvious he knew," I put in. "Jet Chard was looking for Henry."

"I'll put out a pickup order on this Jet Chard," the inspector said. "Also on Gerald Patton, on the off chance he's in town too."

Day took Nina's address, and when he learned it was the Sennett Hotel, he asked if she had any idea why England had registered under an assumed name at the same place she was staying, but made no attempt to contact her.

Nina shook her head. "Maybe he knew Jet was after him, and didn't want me in-

involved. But then I should think he'd have picked a different hotel."

The inspector told her not to leave town.

Before we left, I got some details of the killing from the inspector. Henry England's room had been on the floor below Nina's. A chambermaid had discovered the body just before noon. He was lying on the bed in his undershorts with the six inch blade of a clasp knife in his heart. The knife apparently was his own and there was no sign of a struggle, but the medical examiner had ruled out suicide because of the angle of the thrust and because the knife haft had been wiped clear of fingerprints. Time of death was estimated at sometime between eight and eleven that morning.

There had been signs that the room had been thoroughly ransacked.

At the Sennett we learned a room adjoining Nina's on the fourth floor was vacant, and I registered. I was pleasantly surprised to find my room, while hardly luxurious, was both comfortable and clean.

When I had dumped my bag, I went next door to Nina's room. By now it was nearly seven, and I asked if she was ready to eat.

"When I change my dress," she said, and disappeared into the bathroom.

While waiting, I glanced about the room and noted on the floor under the window what I took to be a small suitcase. Then I saw the folding crank sticking from its side and realized it was a portable phonograph.

Idly I lifted the lid, the underside of which had a compartment holding a dozen records. Choosing one at random, I wound the machine and a moment later was treated to the tinny strains of *Stardust*.

Nina came out of the bathroom like an arrow shot from a bow. She had changed to a shoulderless dinner dress of blue, but she had not quite completed the change, for the zipper at her side gaped wide, exposing a foot long strip of milk white flesh.

Rapidly she crossed to the phonograph,

glanced from it to me in a worried manner, then recovered her aplomb and carefully closed her zipper.

I said, "Don't you like people to touch your music box?"

"It's a little temperamental," she explained. "Unless you set the needle just right, it can ruin a record. I wouldn't care except I need the thing. I have to practice my dance act an hour every day or my muscles get flabby and I lose control."

Moving to the dresser, she began to brush her hair. When *Stardust* ended, the phonograph automatically shut off, and I made no move to start another record. Nina lay down her brush, put the disk back in its slot, and shut the machine's lid.

"Maybe later tonight I'll let you watch me practice," she said.

**I**T WAS AN hour and a half before we returned from dinner. Nina unlocked the door, pushed it half open, then abruptly

stepped backward and planted a sharp heel down heavily on the instep of my only good foot.

I started to say, Ouch, but couldn't when I looked into the glittering bore of a thirty-eight revolver. The man pointing it opened the door wide and gestured us in.

He was a tall, good-looking fellow with an athletic build and hair nearly as jet black as Nina's. His face was square and almost good-natured except for his eyes, which looked as though they would emit sparks if you struck them with a piece of flint.

When we had obeyed his gesture and he had closed the door, Nina belatedly squeaked, "Gerald!"

"Yeah, baby," Gerald said. "Your loving ex-meal ticket."

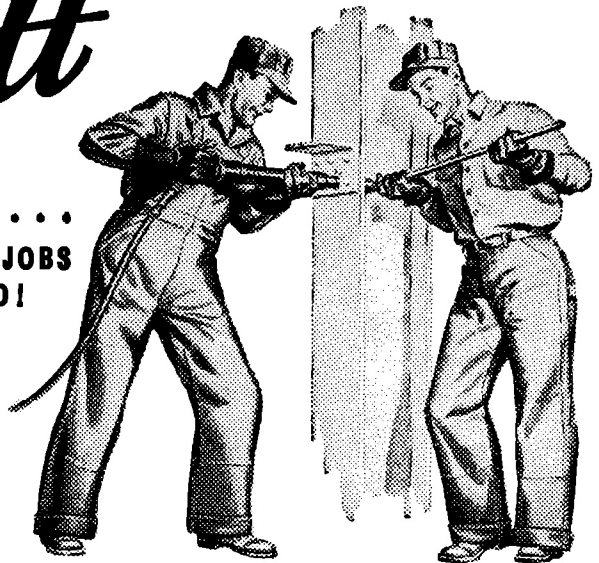
Across the room. Jet Chard had stopped rummaging through one of Nina's suitcases in order to examine us without expression.

# Carhartt

## BROWN DUCKS . . .

**FOR THOSE TOUGH, HE-MAN JOBS  
...And They're SANFORIZED!**

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I said to the man with the gun, "You must be Gerald Patton. I've already met your partner. You boys know the cops want you on suspicion of homicide?"

Ignoring me, Gerald said, "Where is it, baby? You got about ten seconds to tell, if you don't want a slug between those pretty eyes."

Nina was dead white. "I don't know what you mean, Gerald. Why did you kill Henry?"

I wouldn't have believed it possible, but Gerald's eyes became even harder. "We heard on the radio Henry was dead. That's why we're here. Quit stalling. We've turned this joint inside out without finding it, but we know it's here. Now you got about five seconds."

"What is it you're looking for?" I asked.

His eyes briefly swept my face, then returned to Nina. "Three seconds."

"Maybe I've got it," I said.

Abruptly his head turned to me. "Yeah," he said after a moment. "Maybe *you* bumped Henry. Okay, I'll give *you* three seconds."

"Go ahead and shoot," I said cheerfully. "I've got it hidden where you'd never find it, and even Nina doesn't know where it is."

Gerald glanced back at Nina, who wet her lips and whispered, "He's telling the truth, Gerald."

Jet Chard said tonelessly, "Maybe I can get it out of him." He drew a shiny set of brass knuckles from his pocket.

Maybe we both can," Gerald remarked, drawing his gun back to his left ear and swiping it viciously at my face.

Unfortunately, for Gerald, this required momentarily not aiming it at me, and gave me time to employ a dirty trick taught me by a Paris apache during the war. Leaning away from him, I brought up my aluminum foot and planted it solidly beneath his handsome jaw.

He decided to lie down and take a rest

without even bothering to uncross his eyes.

With his fingers laced through the holes of a knuckle duster, Jet was in no position to make a pass for his gun. Instead he swung his fist.

Moving my head just enough to avoid the brass studs, I flattened his nose with a right cross. When he took an involuntary step backward, I kicked him in the groin.

He sat on the floor and began to make whimpering sounds.

Nina had picked up the gun dropped by Gerald. Dipping under Jet's coat, I acquired his and dropped it in my pocket. Then I crossed to the phone.

"What are you going to do?" Nina asked.

"Call the cops."

"No!" she said, and her voice was so tinged with hysteria, I glanced at her in surprise.

She was pointing the thirty-eight straight at me.

I took my hand away from the phone.

"Let them go," she said. "Get them out of here, but don't call the police."

"Why?" I asked reasonably.

"Gerald would kill me if I turned him in."

"Looks like he intends to anyway. Put down that gun."

She shook her head. "If I have to, I'll shoot you in the leg. The good one."

Short of suddenly dropping to the floor, drawing my gun and attempting to outshoot her, I couldn't think of much I could do. And since I have an aversion to shooting beautiful women, particularly when I have been engaged professionally to prevent their being shot, I simply did nothing.

It was ten minutes before Jet could navigate, and another ten before Gerald could make it, but eventually both were able to walk somewhat unsteadily. I took no further part in activities during this time, contenting myself with leaning against the dresser and eyeing Nina's gun with disapproval.



Before they left, Nina made it clear to them she was allowing them to escape only because Gerald once meant so much to her. But she warned them the police wanted them for murder, and she was letting them go only in the expectation they would return to Chicago at once.

**A**FTER SHE HAD locked the door behind them, she laid her pistol on the dresser. I laid Jet's next to it and scowled at her.

"Don't be mad at me, Manny," she said. "I couldn't turn Gerald in."

I said, "What were they looking for?"

"I have no idea."

"You do," I said irritably. "You knew when Jet asked you about it this afternoon too."

I walked about the room examining the evidence of an intensive search and decided there was no point in going over things again, because they obviously had missed nothing. Finally I lifted the lid of the portable phonograph, pulled out the records and peered into the compartment. It was empty.

As I slid the records back in place, Nina pulled me around, took my chin in one hand and planted a light kiss on my lips. "Would you stop being mad at me if I let

you watch me practice my new routine?"

"No," I said shortly.

"I want to prove to you there's a difference between burlesque and art," she said.

Pushing me gently to one side, she put on a record, wound the machine and carefully set the needle. In its tinny tone the machine again began to emit *Stardust*.

"Look, Nina," I told her. "*Ars longa, vita brevis*, as the Romans say. I haven't got time for an art exhibition at the moment."

Pushing her gently to one side, I switched off the phonograph, removed the record and began to lift the record disc from its spindle. With a hand on my shoulder she swung me around, twined her arms about my neck and flattened her body against mine. Then she kissed me as I've never been kissed before.

There was no coyness in this kiss, no assumed reluctance such as the gentler sex generally exhibits during a first kiss in order to convince the man he is the aggressor. As a matter of fact, I would have had to break her arms to avoid it. She got a stranglehold on my head, pulled my face down to hers and went after my lips like a trout after a fly. After about a minute she let me come up for air.

With her lips still nearly touching mine,

## SEEING IS BELIEVING

By George B. Black

A trial was recently conducted in Atlanta, Georgia, without a word being said by any witness!

Some 35 members of the Atlanta Club of the Deaf entered suit against 30 other members, to restrain them from incorporating and taking over the club rooms.

Judge Virlyn B. Moore secured a special assistant, a Sunday School teacher of the deaf, who relayed attorney's questions to witnesses by sign language. Then, as they answered with their fingers, she gave the reply aloud.

About 100 members of Atlanta's deaf community filled the courtroom and craned their necks so they would not fail to see a word of the testimony!

she asked, "Still mad?" in a sultry voice.

Reaching behind my head, I grasped both her wrists and pried her loose. "Still a little mad," I said. "Enough to take a look in the one place your friends probably missed."

In self-defense I still had hold of her wrists, and I could feel her arms stiffen.

"Where's that?" she asked.

"The place you keep steering me away from," I said. "First you don't want anyone but yourself to operate the thing. Then when I merely start to look at it, you try to divert my attention by offering to do your artistic act, and when I won't bite on that, you become suddenly amorous."

"What are you going to do?" she asked as I turned toward the portable phonograph.

"Unscrew the top of this thing. There's lots of empty space in the part containing the works."

"Don't you dare harm my phonograph!" she said, and tried to sidetrack me by again twining herself around me.

Reaching out to her, I administered a caress on one of her rosy cheeks with such enthusiasm, it made a noise like a pistol shot. Her mouth popped open, and she stepped back and began to rub the caressed spot. Then suddenly she rushed toward the dresser.

I grabbed a wrist as she went by, tossed her none too gently on the bed, and transferred the two guns on the dresser to my pockets.

She sat on the bed alternately rubbing her wrist and her cheek while I went to work on the phonograph. And as I had suspected, it was the hiding place. In each of the box's four corners I found a square cardboard carton taped to the wall of the box. They were about three inches square and felt as though they weighed about a half pound each.

When I opened one, I discovered it was filled with a white, fluffy powder.

"Heroin?" I asked casually.

Nina merely watched me.

"About two pounds," I guessed. "Cut ten to one with sugar and powdered milk, you'd have twenty pounds. How much would that bring you on the retail market?"

"Between thirty-five and forty thousand dollars," Nina whispered. It's half yours, with me thrown in the bargain. Come over here and get better acquainted."

"I'm already getting better acquainted by the minute," I said. "I'm beginning to understand everything."

Nina said nothing, but her eyes contained a mixture of invitation and pleading.

"Your husband's racket is narcotics," I said. "And your platonic friend, Henry England, not only helped you escape Gerald, he helped one of Gerald's narcotic shipments escape too. Jet and Gerald didn't come here after you. They came after their merchandise. How'd you get it?"

"Henry gave it to me to keep for him," Nina whispered.

I shook my head at her. "A guy low enough to peddle this stuff would be too greedy to let it out of his sight. Both his informal attire when he died and the fact there was no struggle, indicates Henry was taken by surprise by someone he knew well. He wouldn't have given either Gerald or Jet a chance to surprise him. Was he watching you practice your art when he got it?"

She slid from the bed and came toward me with an expression of entreaty in her eyes. Her arms reached out to encircle my neck, and I caught the glint of metal in her right hand just in time. She must have had the knife under her pillow.

My left hand grasped her wrist as my right caught her openhanded alongside the jaw. As the knife clattered to the floor, she stumbled backward, tripped and sprawled on her hands and knees.

She stayed there on all fours like an animal, mouthing curses at me all the time I was talking to Inspector Warren Day on the phone.

# FELONY FOLLIES

by Jakobsson and Waggener

A little-bruited-about experiment, now going on, may change the whole penological system of civilization, as we know it. An habitual burglar, Millard Wright of Pennsylvania, was sentenced to the penitentiary for the umpteenth time in 1947. Fed up with the pattern of his life, Wright consented to undergo brain surgery, in the hope of curing his criminal instincts. The operation was performed. Wright now works in Pittsburgh as a chef—a less modest career than it sounds, for science is watching him.

If he makes a go of it—if the operation was a success—it may close half the jails on earth, or turn them into hospitals.



Nowadays, they say a cop killer hasn't a chance. Too many of the deceased brother officers will see to it that the culprit gets a short, quick trip to another world. But in old London, a hundred years ago, quite the opposite happened. Rioters, protesting an unpopular law, killed a bobby, were charged with murder. So unimpressed was a coroner's jury with the sanctity of the municipal police force—a new thing in the world at that time—that it returned a verdict of justified homicide, acquitted the rioters.

And the people of London, pleased with the verdict, presented each juryman with a silver loving cup!

Don't be too dismayed if family research reveals that your grandma fell afoul of the law at some time or other in her youth. She probably wasn't a horse thief—she may merely have been doing research, and that would have gotten her arrested.

For, old laws tell us, a woman was disturbing the peace in New York in 1870 if she entered a library.

What could they have kept there? Books?

It was all right, however, for a lady to go into a saloon, provided she used the family entrance.



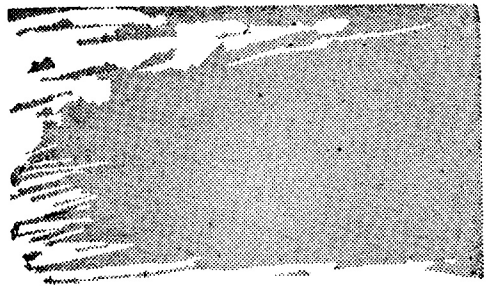
History's most spectacular jailbreak—and most successful—was the premeditated work of one man. Strange as it seems, it was accomplished without tear gas, bullets, or even much noise. The leader, whose name has been hushed, was not a prisoner, but a guard. Notified that political expediency indicated that someone else would shortly get his job, he bided his time till the last day of his employment.

On that day, he unlocked all the cell doors and directed the inmates to run like hell.

They did!



*She was a ball of fire, always wanting to roll on to something new—after burning her men behind her. Even Fire Marshal Pedley hated to tell her, at the end of the hottest trail this side of Hades: "Now you're cooking, killer!"*



# HOT NUMBER

By STEWART STERLING

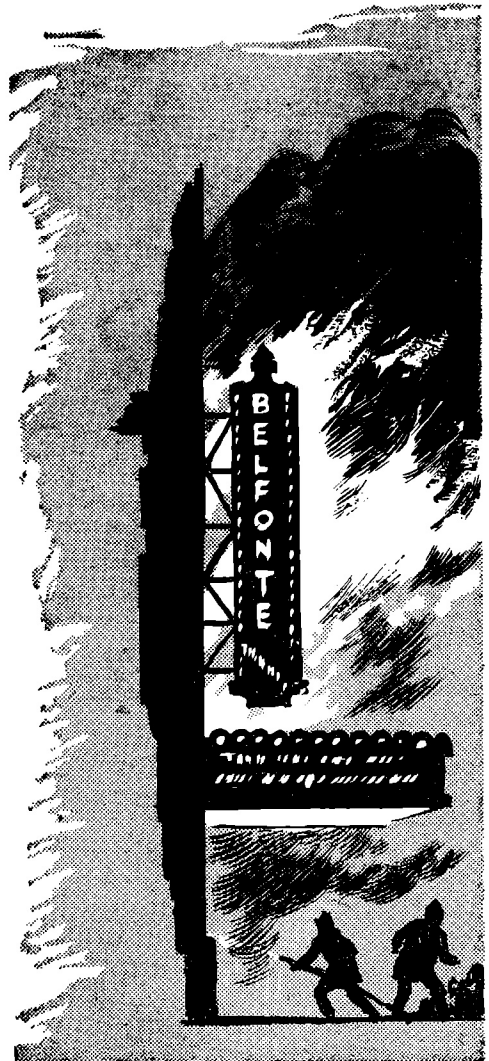
THE WARDEN said, "I don't think you need worry about Wilter, Marshal. Our psychiatrist thinks he's cured."

"You don't cure firebugs." Ben Pedley, chief fire marshal, ran his knuckles along the purplish welt of scar tissue which laced across his bony jaw. "You seldom cure pyros. Never a commercial torch like Wilter. No compulsive mania with him. Just the same old stuff that lands most of the boys up here in your little, stone schoolhouse. Lure of the fast buck."

"Oh, I agree." The warden crackled a confidential report. "What I meant, our records indicate Ted Wilter's learned that lesson—and a trade, in the bargain. At the time of his sentence, he'd been a drifter."

"A bum," Pedley corrected brusquely. "He'd tried everything from panhandling to prestidigitation before he found what he thought was a soft snap, touching off retail stores whose owners wanted to sell their stocks to the insurance companies."

The warden nodded patiently. "Quite right. But now," he consulted the buff card marked *Parole Approved*, "after four years and eight months, he's turned out to be a pretty fair pipe-fitter. He's been taking care of all the plumbing fixtures in the C block for some time."





"Sounds great." There was no enthusiasm in the fire marshal's long, weather-leathered horseface. "Question is, how long'll he be content to fix clogged pipes after he's had time on the outside to think about the quick coin he used to grab off for those bonfires? But I'm not here to protest his release. I came up to give him a word of warning before he's turned loose."

The warden spread his palms. "We don't like to give a man the feeling he's going to be hounded."

"I'm not planning to hound him," Pedley said bleakly. "I wish I could. I don't have enough deputies to watch all the glow-worms who get out on parole so they can try out the gimmicks they've thought up, or dreamed up, here in the pen. If I did, he'd be the first one I'd sic a tail on; two old women died in that last job we got him for, and one of the boys at Engine Thirty-four went to the hospital for a month."

"Assuming he's had a change of heart," the warden laid the release card aside, "you'll—"

"Give him the benefit of the doubt?" Pedley cut in. "I'll do better than that. If he's on the up and up, I'll go to hell to help him get a job. We have a lot of contact with plumbing contractors in the department. But if he's got it in the back of his mind to get back in the bonfire business, I'll go to hell to stop him."

"Yes. Naturally. Your job. I hope you'll find he has no such intention." The warden shook hands. "Let me know what you think, after you've talked to him."

"Chances are," the marshal was brusque, "it'll be the same's I think now. You do scare some of your graduates so they keep clean after they get out, in order not to have to come back. A few of 'em really get religion, turn out as all-righters, none better. I've one working with me, so I know. But, for what it's worth, my opinion is Ted Wilter won't qualify under either of those classifications."

"I understand your feeling so about him. I talked to him myself an hour ago. Difficult to get under his skin. He's—hard, cold."

"Unless he's changed considerable," Pedley said dryly, "he's a slimy so-and-so. I hope I'm wrong, but I'm not willing to gamble on it. Where do I find him?"

"In the interview room. Just to the right of the guard-room time-clock, Marshal."

TED WILTER sat on the battered oaken table, fingering the crease in one trouser leg of his P.I. blues. He was paler than when Pedley had last seen him in General Sessions Court, but even the clumsy cut of the prison-issue serge couldn't hide the slim elegance of his tall figure. His face was a trifle leaner but still darkly handsome; the eyes held the same old watchful arrogance. His voice was bored.

"Whaddya know! The plain-clothes fire-laddie."

"Hi," Pedley said stonily. "You look kind of naked without your mustache. You'll feel better when you've grown it back."

"I'll prob'ly grow a beard so some of you plainneys won't be able to tag around after me so easy." Wilter showed his prison dental work without smiling. "You come all the way up here to rib me about the way I look, Pedley?"

"Came up to offer you a lift—unless you have a car stashed away outside somewhere," Pedley said.

"I don't have any car, and you know it. I've got a ticket to Grand Central, and, if you think I'm in such a rush to get there I can't wait for the train, you're way off your beat." Supercilious eyebrows arched in the familiar sneering expression. "I got nobody waitin' for me."

"Doranne's not going to meet you?" Pedley dead-panned it.

"Oh, she'll meet me, all right—" Wilter

half closed his eyes—"when I'm ready to see her."

"That's what I wanted to see you about," the marshal went on, woodenly. "If you're all set to check out, I'll run you over to the station."

"Why not?" Wilter shrugged. "You ran me in here. Might's well run me out."

Pedley waited while the formality of the final pass-out was concluded. As Wilter tossed his suitcase in the back of the red sedan he said, "You bring me a message from that tramp?"

"No." The marshal drove through the great stone gates, swung up the hill toward the station. "I haven't seen her, or heard from her. Don't even know where she is."

"Neither do I."

"That's okay, then," Pedley said shortly. "Just let it ride that way."

"Look, mister." Wilter's voice was gentle. "I'm on the outside now. Long's I behave myself, I don't have to take any guff from you or anyone else. If I want to see Doranne, I'll see her."

Pedley slurred the red car around on the gravel of the station parking area. "Long's you keep clean, you're entitled to say what you want, Wilter. But not to do what you want. Under the terms of your parole, you're to stay away from former associates. Remember?"

"Nothing in that application about my girl, is there!"

"No. This is between the two of us. Nobody else knows you threatened to kill me, and her, too, if we sent you up." Pedley opened the door. "I don't think you really meant it. I don't hold it against you. But I haven't forgotten it. So . . . watch your footwork, fella. Lay off her."

Wilter got out, took his suitcase. "Thanks for the buggy ride. Sorry I can't spare any cash for the fare, but I'll give you a free tip, so long's there's no one in on this but the two of us. I haven't forgotten, either, mister, and I never say anything I don't mean all the way!"

**T**HE DOORS to the big apartment house in the east eighties were of that tempered plate glass which firemen find harder to break through than sheet steel; the lobby was chaste in stainless steel and gray tile; the magnificently uniformed elevator man bent a polite ear to Pedley's, "Mrs. Fehlman?"

No hesitation to his reply:

"Sixth, sir. Six F."

The chimes which sounded inside 6F, when the marshal pressed the black button, played *Hail, Hail, The Gang's All Here*. Doranne, he thought, had come up in the world, and more than six flights, since the days she'd been the Peerless Peeler of Slansky's Girlesque.

A chic trick in black and white, a starchy frill of abbreviated apron and a figure-fitting maid's dress, opened the door. Who


## AMAZING THING! *By Cooper*

**SENSATIONAL NEW TING CREAM FOR FOOT ITCH (ATHLETE'S FOOT)**

- REGULAR USE HELPS RELIEVE ITCHING - SOOTHES BURNING BETWEEN CRACKED PEELING TOES - AIDS HEALING AMAZINGLY!


FIRST USED IN HOSPITALS NOW RELEASED TO DRUGGISTS GUARANTEED


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was it, please? She would see if Mrs. Fehlman was able to receive Mister Pedley. Mrs. Fehlman rarely received visitors before noon.

He stepped into a sunken living-room, with an ankle-deep rug underfoot and low-slung furniture artfully scattered about. He admired the racing prints, golfing cups inscribed with the name of George T. Fehlman, the aquarium brilliant with flashing tropical fish.

Doranne didn't keep him waiting long.

"Marshal!"

"You're looking better than ever,"—he let her see he admired the well-filled tweedy suit, the wind-blown russet hairdo—"which is saying something."

"How did you find me?" She motioned the maid to go away.

"Yours isn't the kind of light it's easy to hide under a bushel, Doranne. All I had to do was ask Actor's Equity where I could locate the best-looking stripper in the business. When I told them she was a redhead, or had been, used to work for Slansky back in Forty-seven, and had a figure that made General Sherman get down off his iron horse at the Plaza one night, they agreed I must mean Lily Lacazette. Nice tag, too."

"She gave him a tense little smile. "I only use it for professional purposes. I—I'm Mrs. Fehlman, I mean, *really* I am."

"Sure." He knew her when she'd been Mrs. Theodore Wilter, too, but probably that hadn't been 'really.' "Does your husband know about Ted?"

"Oh, no! No!" She pressed one hand to her side. "He doesn't—he—well, he just *mustn't!*"

"That's all right." Pedley made a soothing gesture. "He won't learn anything from me. But Ted's out. I thought you ought to know."

"Have you—did you see him?"

"Yair. He hasn't changed much. I don't think he learned anything. I doubt if he's forgotten anything."

SHE STARED. "I knew he never would. Do you think he'll—?"

"No telling with a cobra like that." He watched her move toward the decanter on the crystal coffee table. "I'll have the precinct put a man on watch here, if you're afraid."

"I'm scared, all right." She lifted the cut glass stopper. "But that wouldn't help. Will you have one for auld lang syne? It's brandy."

"A shortie, to wish you luck in your new setup."

"Luck won't help. If Ted's made up his mind to do anything ugly—nothing'll stop him." She brought glasses and ice from the credenza which turned out to be a portable bar. "You know it's funny; he never could stick to anything worthwhile. A new job, one month and he'd give it up. But if it was something evil—why, nothing could make him give it up."

"He's twenty-nine now, but he's never gotten over being a punk. Somebody sold him the idea you didn't need brains to hold down an honest job, but that only the real wise-oes could get away with being crooked."

"Yes. That's Ted, exactly. I—it seems hideous, now, to admit I was so absolutely mad about him." She lifted her glass to touch his. "Maybe that's a confession that there's something wrong with me."

He grinned. "I'd like to meet the man who'd say so. No. You're tops in my book. You had the guts to play it right when you were in a tough spot. I hope you never get backed into a corner like that again."

The chimes played *Hail, Hail*.

The maid whisked short skirts to the door. The man who breezed in was large, blonde, and winter-tanned.

"Georgie!" Doranne flew to him. His arms caught her in a grizzly embrace, lifted her off the floor, while wary eyes went to Pedley's face.

Set down again, Doranne drew her husband to the marshal. "My very, very good friend, Georgie! Isn't he somep'n, Marshal!



I know you'll really like each other!"

Pedley found a ready explanation. "Knew your wife backstage, Mister Fehلمان, when I was on the Bureau of Fire Prevention. Thought maybe I could get her to do a benefit for the Fireman's Benevolent."

Doranne beamed her gratitude.

George expanded with pride and enthusiasm. "Guess you were the fella they told me about at the box-office this morning."

Pedley said offhandedly, "What was that?"

George slid an arm around Doranne's slender waist. "I guess they meant you, all right. You wanted to leave some message in Lily's dressing room. They should've taken it and put it in there where she'd get it, instead of telling you to come back when the stage door was unlocked at one. But you know those front-of-the-house cheese-brains; you give 'em a rule, they got to throw their weight around at just th' wrong time."

Pedley avoided Doranne's eyes. "No harm done. Worked out okay. Glad to see the swell place you and Lily have, anyway. I'd have missed that, if I hadn't come on up here."

But after the invitations to return had been warmly extended and vaguely accepted and he was on his way downtown in the red sedan, he wondered what show Doranne might be in.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Panic Locks

SLEET RATTLED against the windows of the Municipal Building all the next afternoon, glazing the sill behind Pedley's swivel chair in the chief's office, silvering the trees in City Hall Park far below. In the Plaza, cars crawled with ant-like slowness over the treacherous pavement, toward the bridge.

There were worse things, he mused,

than being on his old job at the rear tiller on Hook and Ladder 14 on a skiddy day like this. One of them was sweating it out until zero hour, sometime between eight-thirty when the *Belfonte* opened its doors, and eleven, when they rang down the final curtain on *Bedtime Story*.

He studied the ticket which had been delivered by Western Union messenger half an hour ago—G-18. In the middle of the tenth row. Just about the toughest seat in the theatre to get out of in a hurry, if he had to.

It wouldn't have been Doranne, though somebody expected him to draw that conclusion; Lily Lacazett's Love Bird Two-ette was featured on the *Belfonte* doorboards as "The Hottest Number in Town." But she'd have known a fire marshal wouldn't need any ducat to get inside the theatre, S.R.O. sign or not.

The phone. His office assistant, Barney Malloy: "It's comin' in kind of piecemeal, skipper, but maybe you put 'em together, they add up."

"Oke. Pitch."

"Well, first, Ed picks him up when he gets off the train yesty ay-em. Wilter subways up to Seventy-second an' Broadway, ties on a few in a crumb-bum bar across the square an' lugs his bag to a broken-down roomin' house called the *Rameses* on Seventy-fourth near Amsterdam."

"He knows the district. Used to live right around the corner. And—"

"About noon he goes over to the precinct, checks in with his parole officer, says he has a job lined up. With Eureka Plumbing, Ventilating, and Heating Service, Forty-seventh, near Ninth."

"He's just the type to be monkeying around with heating devices. So—"

"Ed tails him to an Army-Navy where he lays out for one of those ground-crew coveralls and a couple work shirts. Then over to Eureka. Ed loses him there. Wilter must of gone out the shipping room onto one of the trucks." *Of all the dumb depu-*

ties, Pedley thought. "What in hell'd Ed expect the guy to do? Come out tooting a trombone to draw attention to himself?"

"He does somep'n pretty near as screwy, Ed says. After he loses Wilter at Eureka, he goes back up to the *Rameses*, picks him up there around half-pas' six. Wilter grabs a hack, then for one solid hour he cabs around like crazy, goin' strickly nowhere. In and out. Across town. Back again. Only place he stops is that all-night drugstore on Fiftieth; he's only in there a couple minutes so Ed don't know what he bought."

"Where'd he drop th' taxi?"

"Forty-second an' Broadway. Around seven-thirty. He's down in that Times Square station so fast Ed can't find a place to park so he loses th' cluck again. Don't pick him up until midnight, then he puts Wilter to bed."

"The guy would've had time to bonfire half the midtown section by then." Pedley swore disgustedly.

"That's about it. Wilter goes to work this morning, been in th' shop all day. Ed went in to get an estimate on air-conditioning his Madison Avenoo mansion, an' he met another cluck who works there. Exxon. Charley Lerquick. Just come down from doin' three to five, breakin' an' enterin'. Probly he helped Wilter latch onta th' job."

"Yair. Barney, find out if they do much theatre work. Ventilating ducts, stuff like that."

"It's after six. An' I think they close at five."

"Then get hold of the man on beat. He'll know where to rout out the boss."

"And, Barney. Tell Ed if he misses Wilter tonight, I'll send him back to doing housework on the brass at Engine Sixty." Pedley hung up, went down, climbed in the red sedan.

**H**E DROVE uptown without using the Mars light or touching the siren. A block and a half from the *Belfonte* he

parked by a fire plug, went into the structure housing the big red wagons.

In the captain's office he picked up blueprints of the *Belfonte*, which he studied, and caustic comment from the lieutenant—which troubled him.

"The damn building should have been condemned three years ago, but they keep getting postponements from the Municipal Courts, Marshal. They've fireproofed the carpets and put in spun-glass drapes, but the place would go up like a carload of matches if it ever got half a start. Wood in those dressing rooms is soaked with grease. Plaster's cracking off the laths. Enough old paint ground into the backstage floor from those canvas sets to cover a ten story building."

"Yair." Pedley noted with some satisfaction that the property was owned by one of the giant realty combines; they wouldn't have any interest in collecting insurance; they made their money renting, not rebuilding. "It'll probably be just as big a hazard three years from now, too. I'm just checking around."

The lieutenant knew better, but he didn't say so.

Pedley walked to the theatre, used his badge at the stage door. For half an hour he checked extinguishers, sand pails, exit lights, panic bolts on the huge steel escape doors. All in order.

He was inspecting the house alarm in the lobby when a hearty voice hailed him. "Hey! Marshal!" The big man called to him through the gilt grillwork of the box-office.

Pedley said, "Hello, George. You the manager here?"

"Heck no." Fehlman looked surprised. "I'm the treasurer. Lily and I own one-eighth the company. I just sit in here while the ticket man goes to supper, that's all. You want to catch the show tonight?"

"Thought I might. Hear Lily's sensational."

"Best act on Broadway. Not even a

close second. Up to last night, anyhow." The treasurer frowned.

"What was with last night?"

"I couldn't believe it. She laid the biggest egg this side the Natural History Museum. Must've felt rocky. I don't know what hit her all of a sudden. She was okay when you were up at the apartment, but afterward we went skating at the Arena. She may have caught a touch of flu, didn't realize it."

"That'll knock anyone for a loop," Pedley nodded. "But if I was in this business I'd rather catch cold, than hot."

Fehlman didn't get it.

"You've a fused-up fire trap here, mister. Every time you jampack this place with standees, you're paddling around in a pool of T.N.T."

"But we never admit more than the legal—"

"I'm not fixing to count heads," Pedley cut him short. "But if I were you, I'd make the rounds of the exits every night to see there weren't any obstructions."

Fehlman was disturbed. "You have a fireman here, on duty, every night."

"That's the trouble. He's here every night. He gets used to things. He's probably a good man. But if everything looks all right, he'll assume it is. I wouldn't do that if I were you."

"You expecting trouble *here*?"

Pedley said, "That's my business, brother."

**I**T WAS ten past eight when Pedley knocked on the starred door.

Doranne called, "Come in."

She stood in front of a tiered mirror in wisps of flesh-pink lingerie. A stout woman, with hair whiter than the frilly cap atop it, held out a pair of gauzy pajama pants for Doranne to step into.

Pedley said, "I'll come back."

"You can stay," Doranne assured him. "Plenty of times I don't even wear this much on-stage. If the close-up doesn't de-

stroy all the illusion, it's all right with me."

"No wonder the bald-headed boys go for those down front seats." He dropped into the wicker chair. "You seen Wilter?"

"Yes." She turned for the dresser to unhook the brassiere. "I haven't spoken to him. But he was out front last night—tenth row, center. I noticed him on my first entrance. It practically paralyzed me with fright. George says I gave a miserable performance, but I just couldn't seem to get organized after that."

"Wilter come around backstage after the show?"

"No. No message, either. I don't know what I was expecting, a bomb in a box of flowers, or what. Maybe he figures his being out there once in a while—my remembering his threats—will be enough to send me into a nervous collapse. It might be, too. I'm as unstrung as last Christmas's toy ukulele. I'll probably louse up the show again, tonight."

"Why don't you go away for a vacation?" He watched her in the mirror; it seemed indecent to stare at her, a yard away.

"I told George I wanted to; we were talking about it only half an hour ago. He thinks it'll smash the road trip they're booking; my understudy's a wonderful kid and a lot better dancer than I ever was on my best night—but—" she ran the fingertips of her right hand along her thigh caressingly—"well, she just doesn't excite people, somehow."

"Yair. That's what they pay for," Pedley said.

"So I'm in the middle. I can't tell him why I want to run out on the show, unless I spill the whole keg of nails. If I have to stay on, and Ted keeps coming and giving me that cold, icy stare, I'll crack up for sure. What can I do?"

**P**EDLEY COULD understand why George Fehlman was reluctant to let her spend many evenings away from him.

"You might try for a court order to restrain him from annoying you. But that would mean you'd have to go on record about his threatening you."

"I don't want to do anything to hurt Ted," she cried. "You can't imagine how many bad times it's given me to remember that he might not have spent all those years in prison if it hadn't been for me."

"You didn't send him there," the marshal said. "All you did was help us lock him up a little more quickly than we'd been able to without your testimony. And keep yourself from getting indicted as an accomplice—which you'd have been if you'd backed up that phony alibi of his."

"I know. I keep telling myself that. But you can't expect Ted to feel like that. I don't honestly blame him for being sore; what gets me, if he's going to do something, I wish he'd do it and get it over with, before I pop my top."

The call boy came along the narrow corridor, rapping on each door. "Five minutes—five minutes."

The door burst open.

Doranne whirled angrily. "What's the idea?" Then she exclaimed, "*Georgie!*"

The blond man ignored her. "Marshal! See you a sec?" He was tense, keyed up.

"Hate to give up this reserved seat," Pedley excused himself to Doranne, "Might not get it back after intermission." He followed Fehlman to the cramped hallway.

"Want to show you something." The treasurer took Pedley's arm. "After you threw a scare into me, hour or so ago, I took a tour around the theatre." He urged haste. "It's on the west aisle—and the curtain'll go up in a minute."

The orchestra swept into the strains of the hit tune, *Story at Bedtime*. The house lights dimmed. The hive-like buzz which rose from the audience began to quiet.

"Here!" Fehlman led the marshal to one of the big, steel escape doors. "See this?"

Around the push-bar which opened the panic-lock was a double loop of galvanized

wire, preventing the bar from being shoved inward. Wired so no amount of frenzied pressure on the door could force it open.

Pedley said, "This the only one?" The wire hadn't been there when he'd made his examination; he was sure about that.

"They were all the same way." Fehlman wiped sweat off his forehead. "I got some pliers from the electrician and twisted the others off, but I wanted you to see this one." He produced the pliers.

The marshal used them.

A wave of clapping surged across the footlights as the curtain went up on a row of nightgowned chorines doing a kind of combination conga-hula.

Pedley got the wire free. He strode up the carpeted slope of the side aisle to the curtained partition behind the last row of seats. "Nobody could've done a job like that after the customers began to come in, Fehlman."

"I know it," the treasurer admitted. "But before that the house was dark, anyone could have come in from backstage. The cast, stagehands, dressers, costume people, visitors—anyone of a hundred people."

"Any wire like this around the theatre?"

"House carpenter says it's the kind of stuff they use to hang ventilating ducts. There've been some men working down cellar replacing some that'd rusted out. But why would anyone do a thing like that! Unless—"

"Yair." Pedley moved down the aisle to gaze up at the electricians' booth high above the second balcony. In the funneling cones from the spotlights, dust quivered in the hot air like heat waves above desert sand. Accumulated heat of the crowd might raise the temperature enough to cause that distortion, still. . . .

He moved quietly along the steps leading backstage.

In the wings, a brick-faced uniformed man, with a maltese cross on the visor of his cap, lounged against a property trunk, eyeing with pretended boredom the scanty-

panties doing a shuffle-off to brassy music.  
 "Dickson," Pedley kept his voice low.  
 "Something, Marshal?"  
 "Let's give 'em a quick feel."

### CHAPTER THREE

Fire! Help! Fire!

THEY ran their hands along the side walls, patted the flimsy partition which separated the dressing rooms from the property man's cubicle and the costume mistress's rack-room. Damply warm, but no suggestive heat.

Above them, the thudding cadence of the soft shoe number paced the hit song:

A sto-ree at bedtime  
 And you are the one I'm  
 Telling it to . . .  
 Only to you . . .

Dickson muttered, "They pour on that steam, night like this, Marshal, so th' house'll be good 'n warm when th' show starts. Y' can't have a socko smash like this, with people sittin' on their mitts."

"Feel the floor along that side wall," Pedley said.

"Yes, sir. Them cuties get goose-pimples any time they get th' temperature below seventy."

"You been around while that outfit was working on the vents?" Pedley climbed a bench to stroke the ceiling plaster in the prop room.

"No, sir. Management won't let 'em work on matinee pee-ems. Hammer on those pipes down cellar, *voom!* You can hear it all over th' house like a bass drum."

"Yair." What Pedley could hear was the silent alarm of those wired escape-doors; they made a noise like fear-crazed panic. "You keep givin' em the pat. I'm going up, phone in a Stand By."

"Jeeze." Dickson's eyes bulged. "You got a tipoff they's a pyro in th' house, Marshal?"

"You keep your eyes open. And not on those babes. I'll be back, few minutes."

The chorus was doing precision steps to Lily Lacazette's introduction to the Twette when he came out into the side aisle. A rainbow of negligees swirled around long-stemmed lovelies while Doranne and Val Kreston, her leading man, crooned to a spotlighted cage of ivory-white love birds:

Two is enough  
 When you want to do your stuff.

When he came back from the phone booth, he watched her a minute. *She gets 'em excited, all right*, he thought. Half the guys in the audience looked as if they'd like to climb up on the stage and put the slug on that hunk of he-man who was nuzzling Doranne's throat in the final clinch. And the dames seemed to get a belt out of her sexiness, too.

The encore was the payoff to the Twette. When she came back to let the white parakeets out of their cage to take the bows with her, the birds went to work on the bows that held her dress, her slip, her underthings. The music quickened, mounted. The lights dimmed until the strip tease was focused in one huge amber spotlight.

Doranne pretended to fight off the pecking birds and fled to the wings in feigned embarrassment. The applause thundered. She had to beg-off after the ninth bow.

Val Kreston came on for a burlesque of the strip, the love birds stopping at loosening his bow tie. The chorus returned in Bikinis for the sun-bath number.

Pedley scanned the center bank of seats; no one resembling Wilter. He went to the balconies. No sign of the firebug there, either.

He stopped at the box-office. George wasn't around.

"Maybe he's backstage," the ticket-seller suggested. "He got the house count about five minutes—" He stopped, his mouth open.

THE SCREAM was muffled, but it could be heard indistinctly over the fast tempo of the beach number.

"Fire! Help! Help! F-i-r-e!" It was Doranne's voice, somewhere backstage.

Pedley said, "Phone Fire Department Emergency! Jump!"

The man jumped.

Pedley grabbed the nearest usher. "Yank these lobby doors open. Fast! Now!"

"Y—yessir."

The marshal beckoned another usher. "Get the people in those rear seats up and out. Pronto. Don't let 'em mill around at th' coat check. Hop to it!"

There was no need for a cry of fire, now. The smoke oozed out from the right wings like a misshapen cauliflower. The orchestra leader kept his men playing at top pitch but looked around nervously at the stampede in the aisles. Val Kreston stood front and center with both hands raised in a placating gesture.

"Take it easy, take it easy—*everybody!* This is a fireproof theatre! That's just a lot of smoke back there! They'll have it out in a *minute!* Nobody's going to get hurt! Don't rush! Don't push! Take your time folks."

*Good boy,* Pedley cheered him, wordlessly. *You don't know whether it's just a lot of smoke or a barbecue coming up, but you're playing it right.* He went down the side aisle, shoving open the escape doors as he went. Cold air blasted in from the alley.

The pandemonium was backstage. The smoke was thick, nauseous. The dense fog was pierced only by hoarse shouts, frantic cries.

The fumes lightened at the stairs leading down; the light was sullen orange.

Pedley felt his way toward it. He bumped into someone who seized his arm. "Other way! Exits over here."

"Leggo." Pedley broke the man's grip. He plunged down the stairs, through a screen of heat that made his eyeballs ache.

The fire was there, in the costume store-room. Coils of bilious yellow-green smoke crept along the corridor, writhing like a swollen python.

Pedley kicked open Doranne's dressing room door. A livid sheet of flame puffed along the corridor, head high.

He dropped to his knees, crawled into the dressing room, fell flat across a pair of prone legs.

THE ANGRY clangor of gongs rose above the tumult as he slung the big man across his shoulder. It was George; the soft fabric of the treasurer's expensive suit told the marshal that before his fingers, groping for the pulse, touched the man's throat.

George groaned heavily as the marshal backed out into the corridor. Ten feet to his right the ancient woodwork blazed fiercely, with a continuous snapping like the cracking of twigs underfoot. Sparks fountained over him, stung the back of his neck savagely. He crawled toward the stairs.

Booted figures appeared through the murk. He shifted the deadweight on his shoulder, stood up, put out a hand to shove the heavy nozzle aside.

The nozzleman grunted through his smoke-mask. The hoseman behind him called hoarsely. "Any more down here?"

Pedley coughed out: "Might be—Look out—It's worked into—the ceiling." He slapped at a spark on his eyelid. He labored up the narrow stairs, his eyes streaming, and felt his way by keeping close to the canvas serpent out to the alley door.

A ladderman lifted George off the marshal's shoulder, lugged the treasurer through the milling confusion of helmeted men, laid him on the sidewalk near the big pumper.

George moaned, opened his eyes. "Did she get out?" he croaked.

Pedley looked down at the smoke-smudged face, the singed blond hair. "Don't

know. If she hasn't—" He called to a man in the white helmet of a battalion chief, "Need an L-pipe down there, Matty. It's in the floor; those vent ducts'll shoot it all over the building."

The chief roared an order; men clumped hastily to the nearest hose truck. The chief walked carefully on the glare ice forming from coupling spray. "This one of those things, Ben?"

"Yair." The marshal caught sight of Doranne huddling in a man's overcoat by the hook-and-ladder, half a dozen other scared and shivering girls around her. Beside her, Val Kreston, in shirt-sleeves, stared up at the roof of the theatre. "Smelled like naphtha. Started in the wardrobe." Pedley searched the crowd for anyone who looked like Ted Wilter. Wilter had used cleaning naphtha on the last store job.

The chief rumbled, ". . . get my hands on that—" as he sloshed into the alley.

**P**EDLEY WENT to the hose truck, found an emergency hand lamp. He opened the mask locker, found an extra, and splashed back to the stage door.

The chief halted him. "No good, Ben. I'm calling 'em out. It's through to the sills. Minute they let go, the wall'll sag."

Pedley pushed past. "Only be a minute."

Smoke and steam erupted from the stairwell as from the crater of a volcano, but there were no flames. The hosemen were backing up, dragging the canvas boa constrictor with them. He edged by.

The nozzleman swore. "You don' want to go down there, Marshal!"

"You're damn right." But he went down, carefully, testing each tread before he stepped on it.

The low rumble of the two-inch streams, the hiss of cold water on hot metal, and a curious grinding sound filled the cramped corridor with an oppressive undertone. *The mortar working in the brick walls,* he thought. That was all he needed, a

couple thousand tons of masonry to come crashing down through that charred ceiling.

He made it to the starred dressing room where he'd found George.

The air was clearer now, but plaster crumbled down from the ceiling like hailstones. The grinding had become a vibration which made the hairs on the back of his neck stiffen.

He found what he'd been looking for, just inside the door, where he'd tripped over George. A small Stillson wrench, a pipe-fitter's tool. The handle had been painted a vivid green.

It took him less time to get back up the stairs. There was an odd sensation of daylight, backstage. The roof was burning, dropping fragments down past the platform where stagehands for half a century had handled the fly lines for scenery. The groaning was like steady, faraway thunder.

The alley was empty as he emerged into clean, cold air. A great shout went up from the crowd in the street. He splashed through a bombardment of cornice fragments, brick chips, mortar splinters, and plunged across the sidewalk as the wall came crumbling down.

A man from the *Trib* caught his arm.

"Boy, was that the luckiest moment of your life, Marshal!"

"Yair." Pedley gazed at the eruption of steam, flames, smoke, and dust which pyred up out of the gutted theatre.

"Say, they say this was a firebug's work."

"Was."

"You any idea?"

Pedley rubbed a spark blister. "Nothing official. But—there'll be an alarm out for an ex-con by the name of Theodore Wilter in ten minutes. Just don't quote me, bus-ter."

"How you spell that? Double-you, eye, ell, tee, ee, are?"

"Anyway you spell it, it's cruddy, in my book." Pedley looked for Doranne.

Neither she nor George was to be seen.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Guilty!

**T**HE CHIMES sounded off with *The Gang's All Here*. Doranne answered the door herself. The French maid must be on a day basis, Pedley thought. He said, "How's George?"

"Lying down. I made him lie down." Doranne looked drawn; there were lines of strain around her eyes; her voice sounded listless. "He *says* he feels all right. But after that bang on the head and everything, he might have something wrong with him and not know. I sent for our doctor. He ought to be here any minute."

"Sense." Pedley nodded. "Likely has a dose of smoke narcosis; doesn't affect you for a few hours, then *whammo!* You're drowning to death inside, with your lungs full of liquid. I wouldn't know about the concussion; how'd he get knocked out like that?"

"The smoke blinded him. He ran smack into the door, looking for me. At least, that's all he remembers."

He held out the wrench. "I better show him this."

She squinted, peering at the Stillson. "What is it? Where'd it come from?"

"Plumber's tool. It was on the floor beside your husband when I picked him up."

"*You!*" Her eyes lit up. "I thought it was a fireman. I mean one of the regular firemen. Oh! You saved his life. He'd have been suffocated down in that awful hole!"

"He might have been buried under a brick landslide."

"You'll never know how grateful—" Doranne's eyes misted. She turned, with her hand on the knob of the bedroom door. "That thing! Does it mean somebody tried to kill him?!"

"Doubt if anyone'd use it for putting on makeup," he said drily.

"Ted," she breathed. "I—I told George about him."

"Good deal. You'd have had to, sooner or later, anyway."

"Have you caught him?"

"Not yet."

A spasm twisted the placid features for an instant. "It must sound terrible to say so, but—I'm glad it's over. *If it is.*"

"I know what y' mean."

"You don't, though. Nobody could." Doranne shuddered. "You won't upset George too much? He's had it rough. This'll just about finish the show for the season, and there'll be all sorts of law-suits!"

"I can't guarantee to make him feel better."

"I suppose not. No." She went in, ahead of him.

George lay in one of a pair of twin Hollywoods, pillows banked behind him, the purple, striped pajamas the only spot of color against the whiteness of candlewick spread, sheets and pillowslip.

Doranne clutched Pedley's arm. "George! *He* dragged you up out of that awful basement!"

The treasurer scowled. "You did, Marshal?"

"Happened to get down there first, that's all. One of the boys'd have brought you out if I hadn't." Pedley could see no sign of a scalp wound or bruise.

George's scowl faded, was replaced by a growing grin. "Only trouble is, I'll never be able to get even with you, for a thing like that, pal." He held out his hand. "But I sure won't forget it."

Pedley put the wrench on the outstretched palm. "You see the party who tapped you with this?"

**F**EHLMAN gawked at the Stillson, looked up at the marshal, transferred his glance back to the green-handled tool. "I didn't see a soul. I didn't know, till I came to, up on the street, that Val Kreston



had gone down and helped her upstairs."

"The fire was set." Pedley made no move to take the wrench back. "Somebody spilled two quarts of naphtha on the rayon and satins on the wardrobe racks, touched a match to 'em. Someone who dropped this wrench on the dressing room floor."

Doranne cried, "How'd he ever get down there!"

Pedley took the twisted bit of galvanized wire out of his overcoat pocket. "Anyone who could get around the *Belfonte* without being noticed while the panic-bolts were being gimmicked with this stuff, wouldn't have had much trouble."

*Hail, Hail*, began the chimes.

"The doctor," Doranne hurried out, closed the door behind her.

The marshal hefted the wire thoughtfully. "This turns out to be a murder case, not just a matter of arson, George."

The treasurer huddled down against the pillows. "Did anyone get—"

"One of the stagehands couldn't get down from the flies in time. Some of that brickwork broke the back of a ladderman when they were soaking down." Pedley rubbed the scar welt on his jaw. "If the doc says you're all right to ride downtown, I'll have to ask you and Lily to come along and make some depositions."

George hesitated. "Sure—sure. Anything to help."

"Your wife told you about Ted Wilter."

"Yes." George looked sick. "I hope you get a statement out of *him*!"

"Don't fret yourself into a sweat about that," Pedley opened the door. "We will."

He closed the door, stepped to the living-room.

A muzzle jabbed him in the short ribs.

"Stick your thumbs in your ears, fire laddie!" It was Ted Wilter, wild-eyed and pale-lipped, the automatic in one hand, a morning paper folded in the other.

Pedley clasped his hands over the top of his head.

Doranne whispered, "I didn't know who

it was! He came in before I realized!" She stood, rigid, backed against the mantel by the fireplace.

Wilter's voice shook. "You realized enough to spill to th' stinkin' papers!" He hurled the early edition on the divan.

Black type blazoned—

### Torch Sought As Belfonte Burns Killing Two

"Gave 'em my name, the whole story," the ex-con trembled with rage. "What chance've I got now! I'm as good as strapped in the chair already! And I haven't been within a mile of the theatre since four o'clock!"

She whimpered, "Ted—put that gun down!"

"Hah! So ol' horse-puss here'll railroad me up river again! When I haven't done one thing except shell out five bucks to see you."

George coughed gently. He stood straddle-legged by the open door of the bedroom. The gun in his hand might have been a duplicate of the one Wilter held.

"You might," he coughed, "as well take your medicine," George said.

"Think y' got me cornered, don't ya?" Wilter's shoulders hunched forward like a boxer's. "Think you'll pin it all on me, don't ya?" His eyes opened very wide. "Th' dog has a bad name so you can blame him for any—"

George's gun spoke flatly.

Wilter's shoulders straightened with a jerk. His pistol exploded so closely after the other it sounded, in that quiet apartment, like an echo.

Pedley went for the treasurer as Wilter crumpled, wrested George's gun away. "You seem to have plenty of stuff left," Pedley shoved him toward the divan, "I guess we won't send you back to bed just yet."

Doranne held her hands over her eyes, sobbing.

WILTER GROANED. "You really gave it to me. But I'd soon get it this way as get fried for somethin' I didn't do."

Pedley knelt beside him. "You're leaking a lot. But that hole in your shoulder shouldn't keep you in the hospital for four years. Lie still. There'll be a doc here before long. He'll fix you up so you won't bleed to death."

"I never set the fire," Wilter said tightly.

"I know you didn't," the marshal stood up. "The bug who did took a lot of pains to plant it on you, though. Wire from that duct job Eureka was doing at the theatre. A stillson one of you left lying around; all the tools you lug around in your truck's painted green, aren't they?"

"Yeah. But if you knew?" Wilter grimaced with pain.

"One of my deputies was on your tail all evening. I had a report from him ten minutes before I came up here. He says you were in a Seventy-ninth street beer joint at nine-twenty, when the alarm went in."

"Cripes! If anybody'd ever told me I'd be glad I knew you!" Wilter closed his eyes.

Pedley stared down at him morosely. "Told the warden I'd go to hell to help you, if you meant to play it straight. Damn near did, too. If it hadn't been for that ticket—"

George asked, "What ticket?"

"Ducat for *Bedtime Story* tonight. Middle of the tenth row. Idea was, I'd find out Wilter'd been in that seat last night, figure he'd sent it to me."

Doranne took her hands away from her eyes. "Anyone would know a fireman doesn't need a ticket to get into a theatre."

"Not anyone," Pedley was curt. "You would. That's why you sent it to me."

Doranne's face paled.

Wilter groaned.

George came off the divan in a fury. "Damn you, don't you dare—"

"Put it back where you took it from," the marshal said wearily.

George sat down.

"You don't have to play straight man for her any longer," Pedley went on. "If you haven't already doped out you were to be the patsy while Wilter was nabbed as the goat, chances are you won't believe it now. But she clunked you with that wrench after touching off the wardrobe stuff."

Doranne whimpered, "What are you saying?"

He ignored her. "She knew you'd come pelting down to the dressing room the minute you learned she was in danger, George. She waited for you and socked you cold. If I hadn't gone down there, you'd be a shovelful of cinders by now."

THE TREASURER'S face was a contortion. "No!" he muttered. "I don't believe it. Not one word of it. Why would she? Why *should* she? She knows I'd do anything in the world—"

"Yair, she knows, all right." Pedley blew smoke past the muzzle of George's gun. "One trouble with her. Too easy for her to get a man, too simple to hold one. She didn't want that. She wanted the kick of getting a new one. I'd say this Val Kreston, at a guess."

Doranne lifted her head high. "George! Are you going to let him stand there and tell these hideous lies!"

"Yair, he is," Pedley answered. "He's able to figure that you'd have his piece of *Bedtime Story* if he hadn't been dragged out of that dressing room. He may even be able to reason out that you were one of the people who could've gotten around the theatre before the show began, to wire up those escape doors."

Doranne cried, "George! He's trying to crucify me!"

Pedley laughed disagreeably. "You qualify as an expert on that, arranging to

(Continued on page 109)

*Take a mouse with no confidence . . . add a hot doll with a lot of con . . . mix well with a guy with a mine host grin . . . and what have you got? Just a . . .*

# RAT FOR A DAY



Grabbing the knife, I was moving with no thought except to get to Alice Ann.

●  
By  
**DAN GORDON**  
●

**Y**OU TAKE A dolly with no confidence, one of those mousy little wrens, and she looks like she's trying to be invisible whenever she walks into a place, looks like she's trying to disappear.

Alice Ann was that kind of a girl. I mean she looked just fine in Herbie's Grill, which

is the name of the joint where I was a counterman, and she suited me just fine as long as I was only skidding along on my heels, but the kid and I had no future together because where I was going, she wouldn't look right. A nice kid, but strictly from mediocre. The big time wasn't for her.

It was for me though. I wasn't going to spend my life sliding plates over some other guy's counter, and tossing cash into some other guy's register. I was getting out of this, opening my own place. And today was the day I expected the nod from the bank.

If you ever intend to swing a GI loan to open a restaurant, you can't do better than pick the kind of a spot I had. The bank was right next store, and all the people who worked there, right up to and including Handleman, the assistant manager, came into Herbie's for lunch. Ogle, the manager, took his business elsewhere, and I didn't blame him. The price was right at Herbie's Grill, but the food wasn't fit to eat.

It didn't seem to bother the customers though. Like right now, before the noon rush, there were a couple of truck drivers holding down one of the booths in back, and a girl with an uptown look was sitting alone in another slot. Alice Ann was at the counter like she always was on her lunch hour, fumbling around with a crummy little salad and watching me with those big, grey eyes.

She said, "Billy, you think he'll ever come?"

"Who?" I said. I knew she was talking about Handleman, but I had plenty of my own jitters without borrowing hers. Bad as I wanted that bank loan, I didn't want to pounce on the guy the minute he poked his head in the door.

Alice Ann leaned forward over the counter. "Won't it be awful if you don't get the money? After you've already picked out the place and everything?"

I tried not to listen to her. In the back,

this other girl was calmly nibbling a ham on rye. The truck drivers in the opposite booth were looking at her, too, but she did not take at all. The strange gal had poise. In fact, the more I checked the more I realized she had just about everything, and I found myself wondering why I was stuck with Alice Ann when babes like that one could be found around town.

Then I checked the clothes she was wearing, and snapped out of that dream. Whoever was dressing baby wasn't doing it on a counterman's lousy pay.

"You want that girl?" Alice Ann had been watching my eyes.

I looked at her. She was using her super-sweet smile to tell me it was all in fun. I didn't smile at all. "Yeah," I said. "I want her."

Alice Ann kept the smile on, but the edges began to look as if they were tied in place. "Maybe I can fix it," she said.

I let her have it between the eyes. I said, "Don't bother, baby. I can't afford her—yet."

That took the smile off. She looked down at her coffee. Then she began to stir it, fit to wear out the spoon.

Deliberately, I let my eyes wander back to the girl in the booth. She was watching us, and there was a little quirk in one corner of her mouth. I wondered if she had heard.

Then I quit wasting my time thinking of dollies. Handleman was coming in the door. It was funny that I knew the answer long before he opened his yak. He was a little round guy, maybe forty years old, and now he didn't stop at the counter as he usually did. He went floating on by like a timid balloon, and flopped in the corner booth.

I went over. I knew the answer, but I had to hear it from him. I gave him the *Mine Host* grin. "Howdy, Mr. Handleman? How are things at the bank today?"

He thought things over. "Not so good," he said. His eyes flickered around the joint

as if he wanted out. "Bill, I'm afraid it's bad news."

"Let's have it," I said. "I'm braced."

"Mr. Ogle won't approve your loan."

The smile was costing me my life, but I kept it on. "Why not?"

"Well you see," Handleman said, "there's a four percent limit on those GI loans, so most banks aren't too anxious, anyway. And I guess Mr. Ogle feels you haven't been out of service long enough—aren't experienced enough to—"

"But couldn't you have told him? Don't you eat here every day?"

"I did tell him, Bill, believe me."

I knew he hadn't, but it wouldn't do any good to say so. Handleman was the kind of a guy who'd bob every time Ogle blinked.

I walked back to the counter, blind as a bat, cracked my ribs on the corner rounding the turn. And there I was, trapped in this hash joint . . . sentenced to a lifetime of hamburgers and Alice Ann.

**I**T WAS too much. Maybe I had to keep on working at Herbie's Grill as long as I wanted to eat, but I sure didn't need Alice Ann. I looked at her. "Finished your coffee?"

"Yes, Billy." Her eyes were all soft and swimming. She could tell by my face what the answer had been, and now she was sorry for me. "Billy—did he—"

"No," I said. "He didn't. Now why don't you get out of here?"

"But, Billy, what—"

"Nothing," I told her. "I just like the way joints look without girls named Alice Ann."

She came off the stool so slowly it seemed she was hardly moving at all. "'Bye, Billy," she said softly. "I'll be back—after awhile."

"Don't hurry," I said, and looked the other way until after she'd closed the door.

The truck drivers went out soon after, and I made change for them, but my mind

wasn't on it. They could have paid me in seashells. It would have been all the same to me.

Handleman gulped his lunch as he always does. The bank stayed open until three o'clock, and I guess Handleman figured the joint would fold if he took more than ten minutes to eat. He managed to pay for his lunch and leave without looking me full in the eyes.

I picked up the knife, intending to clean up the sandwich board, but I couldn't seem to get started. I was standing there, still holding the knife, when the girl slid onto the stool.

She said, "Put that knife down, buster. You look like you're thinking of cutting your throat."

"It's an idea," I said. I tossed the knife on the board, and swung back to face her. She brought a wallet out of her handbag and laid a ten on the counter. I rang up sixty-five cents and fed her the change.

She kept her eyes on me as she scooped up the money. "I heard your conversation with Tubby," she said. "Sounds to me like you need some dough."

"Everybody needs dough."

"That's true," she admitted. "Only some people always need it, and others only need it at certain times."

"Look, Miss," I said, "Economics and philosophy don't interest me right now. Let's make it some other time."

She lit a cigarette, blew smoke at me. "Grace," she said, "not Miss. Now let's see if you can cool off long enough to give me a few minutes of your valuable time."

I looked around the joint. "Go ahead," I told her. "I'm not going anywhere."

Her eyes dusted the place, not missing any of the corners, then came back to mine. "You want money from the bank. Is that right?"

"Yeah."

"Did it ever occur to you there are several ways of getting money from a bank?"

I could tell from the way her mouth drew down she wasn't talking about mortgages or loans. I said, "You mean like waving a gun in the cashier's face?"

"Something like that. Only more refined."

"You seem to know a lot about banks."

"Not me." She waved her cigarette in a careless gesture. "But I have friends."

"Loose," I said, "or in jail?"

She laughed. "Most of the good ones are loose."

"Sorry," I told her. "I don't know the business, and the cops wouldn't give me time to learn."

"There's nothing to learn. All you have to do is cooperate." She was leaning forward now. "Tell me something. How much was the bank going to lend you?"

"Ten thousand."

She thought about that, nodded. "I'll talk to my friends." As she got up from the stool, I thought of a stretching cat. "You interested?" she said lazily.

"In you—or your friends?"

"Either," she said. "Or both."

I thought about that. Right then, it didn't take much thinking about. I could take a chance, or do a life's stretch in Herbie's or other joints like Herbie's.

I said, "I'm interested."

Her eyes held mine. "I'm glad," she said. "I'll send the boys around."

The way she said "I'm glad" hung in the air like a promise long after she'd gone. In my mind, I compared Grace with Alice Ann, and then I quit that. It was too rough on the little mouse.

**T**HE GUY said, "All you do is to stay in front of the joint. If someone comes in, you flash the light before they open the door, and we knock off the drilling. You got that?"

He was middle-aged, and he looked like a fight promoter or like the manager of a baseball team. His eyes looked like polished, blue marbles. When he talked, you could tell he knew his business. His men, when

they brought in their tool boxes, looked about as nervous as a gang of union plumbers.

I said, "I flash what light?"

"We'll run a wire and rig one. The switch'll be close to your hand. Got it?"

I nodded.

"All right then. Easiest ten grand you ever made."

"Not so easy," I said. "Once you guys are finished here, I'm finished too. I could stick around and try to convince the cops I didn't hear a sound while you built a Holland tunnel through that bank wall, but I don't believe I'll do that. I think I'll use the money to get a good start some other place, and get me another name."

"It might be best," he said carelessly, "but that part's up to you." He walked back through the booths, went into the little place we use for a storeroom, and closed the door behind him. In practically no time, another guy came out and rigged a signal light.

The drilling began. It went on through the afternoon, stopping now and then when I flashed the light to tell them a customer had come in. Toward evening, I remembered I hadn't seen Alice Ann all day. She hadn't spent her lunch hour with me as she usually did.

But I couldn't stay that lucky. She showed for dinner right on schedule. Things were fairly brisk at that hour, and I'd hit the light switch when the evening rush started, and served the guys in the back room with some sandwiches I'd made up ahead of time. They hadn't seemed to mind the delay. Though the joint wasn't doing the business it should, any restaurant is bound to get some play at mealtime, and I guess they had figured on that.

What happened next, nobody could have figured on.

The rush was over, and people kept drifting out until I was alone in the place with Alice Ann. Then Grace came waltzing in. She had changed clothes, and if she'd

looked good the first time I saw her, the things she'd put on for this evening made her look like an absolute dream.

She gave me a fast, "Hi, Bill," and then she saw Alice Ann sitting quietly in a booth. In a lower voice she said, "Sorry, chum. Didn't know your girl friend was here."

I leaned toward her, pretending to mop the counter. "She wasn't." I said. "The job was open until you came. You want to apply?"

"Maybe," she said. She went back and took the end booth next to the storeroom wall.

I looked at Alice Ann. She was watching me, so she didn't see the storeroom door. It opened a crack, just enough for someone to check the restaurant. Grace saw it, too. She jerked a warning thumb in the direction of Alice, and the door closed right away.

So the gang was getting impatient. I couldn't blame them, because the last time I'd looked into the storeroom, there'd been a pile of plaster and concrete as high as a man's head just sitting there in the middle of the room.

I had to get rid of Alice Ann. But how? If I told her to go home and get dressed, she'd wait a little while, then come back to see what was keeping me. She knew the joint closed at nine. Still thinking, I went back to take Grace's order.

Grace said, "Just coffee, please," but I could tell she didn't even want that. She pointed in Alice Ann's direction and raised a questioning eyebrow.

I shrugged. "Cup a' coffee," I said.

I went back to the counter and poured, but before I could serve it, Grace was up there, spinning a dime and talking. "I'm sorry," she said. "Just remembered a date. I won't have time to drink it." That part was loud enough for Alice Ann to hear. Then she added, "Baby won't leave as long as I'm here. Be back soon. Gonna take a walk."

"No charge," I said. I slid the dime toward her, but she left it there, and went out, slamming the door.

It was very quiet. I was left with a full cup of coffee, and Alice Ann, and a gang of safecrackers in back, and a full set of jumpy nerves.

The sound of the drill began. I could hear it back there, spinning hard against reinforced concrete, and I could feel it all through my body the way it is when a dentist bears down hard on a molar.

I didn't look at Alice Ann, but I knew what had happened. The gang had been waiting for her to leave. So when they heard high heels travel toward the door, heard the door slam in the quiet, they figured everything was clear. It hadn't occurred to them that Grace, having just come in, would ankle out again.

All the time I was thinking this stuff, I was flashing the signal light.

The drilling stopped.

Alice Ann said, "Bill, what was that noise?"

"Search me, baby."

"If it came from the front," she said thoughtfully, "I'd think someone was working on the street. Only it's too late for street repairs, Bill?"

"Yeah?" I was staring at her. She was closing in on the answer so fast I didn't even have time to convince her that she hadn't heard any noise.

"You know what I think?" Her eyes were shining with excitement.

"You're thinking too much," I said harshly. "I didn't hear anything."

"But I did," she said. She was getting up now. "Bill, someone's trying to rob the bank."

"That's right, kid." It was the man with the cold blue eyes, speaking from the door in the rear. "Furthermore," he added, "you are holding us up. Would you mind just stepping back here?" He swung the door wider and beckoned to Alice Ann.

I said, "She just—"

"Shut up," the guy said. "Come on, girl."

Alice Ann moved toward him. He hadn't shown any gun, but then he didn't have to. He was that kind of guy. She looked back once before she went through the door, and her eyes were wide and frightened.

**T**HE FRONT door opened, and Grace came in. She looked around and said, "Where's your little friend? I didn't see her come out."

The whining sound of the drill came to me again. I wondered what Alice Ann was thinking. One thing, she'd never believe I had any part of this. She'd think there was a man down behind the counter holding a gun on me.

Grace said sharply, "Speak up, dummy. I asked you what happened to that girl."

I woke up then, really came out of it, and I didn't feel foggy the way you usually do when you've been sleeping a long time. The way I was seeing things now, this Grace didn't look so glamorous. She looked just like what she was, a hard, shiny potato who ran around with a safe-cracking mob.

I said, "She's in back." I was looking at Grace, but I sounded as if I were talking to myself. "She was just talking, just asking about the noise, and they came out and got her, and—"

"She tumbled?" Grace wanted to know.

"Yeah," I said, "I guess. But if anything happens to her—" I couldn't finish.

"Go on," Grace said. She was laughing. "What'll you do? Mix a chocolate malt?"

What *would* I do? I didn't know. The back room was crawling with guys, and there wasn't any point in kidding myself. Those guys might be older, but they were also much tougher than I was.

I picked up the knife. Grace stopped laughing. She said quickly, "Since when is this little chick so important to you?"

I ran my thumb along the blade. "Since

your friends took her through that door."

Grace tried a laugh, but it wouldn't work. "Yesterday," she said, "you were giving the kid a shoving around. Now you're worried about her."

"That's right," I said. The whole thing was clearer now. "Yesterday, and all the other days, it was me giving Alice Ann trouble. And that's all right. She's my girl. But nobody else should kick her around. Nobody but me." It wasn't exactly what I meant, but it was as close as I could come.

Grace looked as if she thought I'd flipped my lid. She said, "Your love life's your own business, buster. But you're out of your mind if you let that chick come between you and ten grand."

"That's right," I said.

"What's right?"

"I must be out of my mind." I wasn't kidding. The way my brain refused to work made me think a cog might have slipped. There wasn't any way out. If I ran for the cops, they'd want to know why I hadn't come sooner, before the gang had dug half a ton of concrete and plaster back there in the storeroom. And while I was running, what would they be doing to Alice Ann?

The flurry of sound, the quick angry voices, came to us from the back room.

Men's voices. "Hey! Watch it! Grab her, Eddie!"

Someone else said, "Holy—" and then everything got very quiet.

Grabbing the knife, I was moving with no thought except to get to Alice Ann. Grace was somewhere behind me as I ploughed through that back door.

I went in, expecting action, sound, explosion.

Everything was different. This was like church.

Piled high in the center of the room was the broken rock and plaster which had come from the hole in the wall. Four men were grouped on the opposite side



of it, and all of them were staring at something to my left. The fear was plain on their faces.

Alice Ann was standing on tiptoe, holding a small leather case high above her head. I looked back at the men. They weren't staring at Alice Ann. It was the case they were worried about.

I said, "Baby, are you all right?" It was a silly question, but I was feeling pretty silly standing there waving that knife.

"Perfect," said Alice Ann. Her voice was bright and strong. "I feel just perfect. Ask them how *they* feel!"

I said, "What's in the case? Dynamite?"

"They were going to kill you," Alice Ann said calmly. "I heard one of them say so. Then when another man warned us to be careful of this case, I knew what I had to do. It came to me all at once."

The little man moaned. "She don't know what she's doin'." He turned to the man next to him. "I thought I'd die when I seen her dive for that soup."

Alice Ann said calmly, pleasantly, "You may anyhow, if you move. Billy, I think they'll stay here. Why don't you go phone the police?"

It was something I had to tell her. "I can't," I said slowly. "You see—I let them in."

"No you didn't!" She shook her head very positively. "They came in the back way. Just before the police get here, you can forget to lock the back door."

"The cops won't believe that," I said.

Alice Ann stamped her foot, jiggling the case of nitro over her head. Three of the men closed their eyes. "Billy, you do what I tell you. There's no law in the world says you have to have good hearing. No law at all. We heard a noise in the restaurant, came back here, and look what we found."

"I'm looking," I told her, and I was. She was smart, and she had nerve. And how could the bank turn down my loan

after we'd saved their vault? I said, "Alice Ann, you've made me an honest man. Now I'd like to make you an honest woman."

She trembled, more like shivering. She said, "Billy, you mean—get married?"

"What else?" I said.

She started to drop the nitro, then remembered in time to catch it.

As I went to phone, I heard the little man say, "Man, how I wisht I was safe in jail." ● ● ●



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# HELL FOR HANNAH

*Hannah had a Latin lover. . . .  
Was he also a lethal lover—or  
would another murder bring her  
back to Carey's waiting arms?*

By  
**FLETCHER  
FLORA**



The plump, little man named Smith was behind her with a gun in his hand.

**H**ANNAH AND Ivan were dancing. The music was soft and sultry, the stuff of muted strings, and they moved to its Latin rhythms in a floating intimacy. Her head was back, her eyes were closed, and her lips stirred in a

whisper of ecstasy. They were a beautiful pair.

When the music stopped, they returned to their table, and I got up and went over. I bowed to Ivan very politely and said, "May I have the next dance with my

wife?" And he stood and returned the bow, also very politely, and said, "But of course, *señor*." Then he turned and made another bow to Hannah, and she stood up with us, her face white and her eyes dark with sorrow. The sorrow was there because she didn't like hurting her husband, but it would have been better for me if she had. It would have been better if she'd sneered nastily and spit in my eye.

The music started again, and she came into my arms, but not very far in. I tried my best, and I think she did, too, but it still wasn't any good. It was like dancing with a wooden doll.

"I'm sorry, Carey," she said.

I said, "Don't be sorry. Be gay."

"Please don't be bitter. Don't hate Ivan and me."

"Who hates anyone? I love you, honey. I love Ivan, too. He's a big, beautiful, Mexican god."

"I tried to lick it, Carey. You know I tried. Remember how I asked you to take me away, back when it first started and there was still time? But you wouldn't do it because you said there was no use running and you'd have to meet the competition where you found it."

"Sure, I remember. Big, proud me."

"I wanted our marriage to last. I wanted it to be forever."

"Marriage!" I said brightly. A technicality, honey."

Oh, yes, only a technicality. When the big passion comes, even though it's late, all the intimate years and all the bright plans are reduced in an instant to the status of a dreary and bothersome technicality. Marriage, then, is a scrap of paper, the somewhat incredible ghost of a relationship that once existed.

We'd been on a kind of second honeymoon . . . Mexican honeymoon. It was something I'd promised her for a long time. After the novel's published, I'd said. And now the novel was out, and quite a few people thought it was worth buying,

and we had been on the second honeymoon. Everything had been wonderful and terribly intense, and then, all of a sudden, everything had been Ivan. The honeymoon was finished, I was finished, and there was no one but Ivan left in the world for Hannah. For me, there wasn't even a world left. There was only sun and sand and a clutter of senseless stars.

I looked down at her now, and there was a kind of puzzled, rousing-from-a-dream look in her eyes, and I thought for a moment that the past was alive again and she was coming back my way. Then it was gone, and she was gone, and it was time to give up.

"I'll go away tomorrow, Carey. Ivan and I. It'll be easier then. You can forget all about me."

"Sure," I said, and it was like being knifed, hearing the way she said it. "Forgetting is an easy thing. Nothing to it. All these little synaptic connections and stuff that go to make up learning and remembering come equipped with little spigots. You want to quit thinking or remembering something, you just turn the right one off."

"You'll forget, after a while. I'll get a divorce down here. Mexican divorces are quick. Maybe we'll stay down, Ivan and I. Maybe we'll go to Mexico City."

The music picked that moment to stop, and we stood stiffly in the middle of the floor. I didn't even have an excuse to keep my arm around her now.

"That'll be nice and romantic," I said. "I hope you'll both be very happy. Which I don't, of course. Really, I hope you're very miserable and cry in your pillow every night remembering good old Carey."

She looked up at me with fog in her eyes, and I knew I might as well have left the words unsaid. They never reached her.

"Tomorrow, Carey. We'll leave in the morning. It was cruel of us to stay on so long. We'd have left sooner, but Ivan couldn't leave. Some unfinished business, he said. Someone he must clear up some-

thing with. After tonight, it will be all right to go."

"I've seen his unfinished business," I said. "She's got black hair and a body, and she deserves finishing. Maybe the two of us can get together. We could weep in each other's gin."

Then there was nothing else to say, so I took her back to the table. Ivan stood up and bowed to me, and I bowed back at him, and we were so polite and civilized about it all that I felt like vomiting. I said good-bye. Hannah didn't say anything because there was suddenly a catch in her throat, and Ivan looked sad in a way that made it plain he hated what he was doing to me.

I turned and walked back to my own table, feeling like the last act of *Othello*. There at the table was the black hair and body, with quite a bit of the body showing. The name, I'd heard, was Eva Trent.

"Mind if I join the discard?" she asked.

"Not at all. You may join me in a drink, too."

"Thanks. Make it big and make it strong."

I ordered two double shots. You can make them bigger than that, but you can't make them stronger. Anyhow, I wasn't ordering for the road. I intended to keep right on going for quite a while, and if she wanted to go along for the ride, she was welcome. I watched her down half the double and gave her extra points.

She was a lovely gal. Ordinarily, any guy in his right mind would have quit looking when he got to her, and it was a lousy piece of luck that she had to run up against Hannah. Just as lousy as it was for me that Ivan had to come along. She looked across the floor with eyes that were hooded and brooding, and she seemed to be in tune with my cerebral vibrations.

"We did each other a dirty trick, darling," she said.

"I shrugged and worked on my double. "An eye for an eye."

"She's something. It must jar a guy, losing that much prime stuff."

"It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. That's someone's poetry."

"Tennyson . . . and it's a damned lie."

"Isn't it! You're one who should know, sweetheart. That big hunk of male Latin. Ivan, yet. I wonder how the hell a Mexican ever came up with a name like that."

"He's only half Mexican. His mother was a White Russian. Once upon a time there were White Russians all over the place."

"I had a feeling right along that the Commies were to blame."

She emptied her glass and lifted one corner of her mouth in a sour grin. "Don't work so hard at it, darling. Your heart's showing."

"The show goes on. Would you like to hear me sing something from *Pagliacci*?"

"Stop it!"

It was about time, so I did.

A WAITER brought us two more doubles. She drank some of hers, leaving her mouth wet. There was a candle burning in a little glass chimney on the table, and the light flickered on her face, making her lips shine. They were full and soft and darkly sullen, dropping at the corners."

"He's a louse," she said. "He's a beautiful, greedy louse, and he isn't even worth killing, but I want him back. I want him on any terms."

"Big love and little pride."

"To hell with pride. I want Ivan."

"It seems to be a phobia with women . . . you and Hannah among others. The names are legion, no doubt."

"I'm just a girl friend. Hannah's a wife . . . yours, in case you've forgotten. If you have, you might start remembering."

"I just got through explaining to myself that marriage is just a technicality in

these matters. A body is not a wife. At the moment, it's all quite clear, and I'll thank you not to confuse me."

"If you want to lie down, little man, it's your business." She finished her second double and stood up. Her eyes were smoky with contempt, and the contempt was for me, the little man lying down. She moved away through candlelight and shadow, the body that deserved better than a jilting in a white gown that hung on for dear life. I thought to myself that competition was hot as hell when something like that finished second.

After a while I moved in to the bar to get closer to the bottle. I had two more quick ones, and they helped a little, but not much, so I had a third one. Next to the dull pain, the feeling of degradation was worst. Losing a wife in public is worse than a public flogging. A guy who loses his wife is a comic sort of character.

Why had I hung on? Why had I stayed around after Hannah moved out of our rooms, and was obviously Ivan's future and my past? To show my independence, I told myself. To make it plain that Carey MacCauley was not a guy to run from a nasty situation. I lied to myself fluently, but I was never a guy who could distort the truth with much success, and I didn't even believe me when I was drunk. I stayed because there was always a chance that Hannah would come back. I stayed for salvage.

The third drink at the bar made progress. I began to feel a little numb, and my mind developed a warm and comfortable furriness. It was like having my thought processes bundled up in a raccoon coat. I ordered number four and began to nurse it. That's the trick. You reach a certain point in solution, then you start nursing. You nurse the alcohol just right, it keeps you preserved without getting you pickled. You can go on and on for hours and hours in a delightful fog.

The minute hand went around the face

of the clock behind the bar several times. Time passed . . . a lot of time. At some point between earlier and later, a brown and white blur appeared at my shoulder. I saw it in the glass. The brown was face and the white was mess jacket. There was a soft, semi-tropical voice.

"It is requested, *señor*, that you come at once to room six-sixteen."

I asked, politely, why the hell I should come to room six-sixteen. The white blur shifted. The brown blur bent a little closer.

"It is urgent, *señor*. Most urgent."

I replied that I could think of nothing more urgent than what I was doing, which was to stay drunk.

The soft voice purred, "It concerns, I believe, the beautiful *Señora* MacCauley."

Hannah? Hannah in distress? I fell off my stool and mounted my white charger. The damned beast was obstreperous, refusing to gallop in a straight line, and the trail we left across the lobby looked something like a graphic representation of the spelling scores in third grade. We made the elevator bank, however, and a small brown monkey in a bright red uniform grinned evilly and took us up to six.

The hall up there was dimly lighted. For a guy in my condition, it should have been equipped with fog lights. The numbers on the doors retreated into shadows, refusing to be recognized. I used the Braille system, working along the hall, and finally I came to it. Sweeping curve down and sharp curve up and over . . . straight line . . . repeat the first movement . . . six-sixteen. I knocked, and a voice that was not Hannah's told me to come in.

The room was small. The man sitting in a chair facing me was also small. Short, that is, but plump. He had straw colored hair that stood erect at the crown of his head. His face was round, and his cheeks jiggled when he talked. There was a brown Mexican cigarette in his mouth that

leaked smoke. He squinted at me through the smoke, and his lips moved in something that might have been a smile. Add up the parts, and he sounds like nothing. But, even drunk, I was conscious of the parts. Some guys, for some reason, just register.

"Good evening, Mr. MacCauley. Or morning, I should say. My name's Smith. Perhaps you'd better sit down before you fall down."

His voice sounded as if he'd make a good first tenor in close harmony, and I'd have bet a bottle of tequilla that his name wasn't Smith. I spread my feet and kept standing.

"Where's Hannah?" I said.

A fat little chuckle crawled up out of his fat little belly. "Mrs. MacCauley? Asleep, I presume. At least, our friend Ivan left her at the door of her room an hour or so ago."

"Ivan is not *our* friend. Maybe yours, but not mine. He's my arch foe whom I have treated, nevertheless, like a gentleman."

"So I've noticed. Well, he's no friend of mine, either, when you come right down to it. And I doubt very much, if I were in your shoes, if I'd treat him like a gentleman. At any rate, if I were you, I'd see my wife and tell her earnestly that she had better, for the good of her soul as well as her pretty skin, rid herself of *Señor* Ivan in a hurry."

"No good, Mr. Smith. My wife's in love. Unfortunately, not with me. Have you ever tried to tell a woman that the man she loves is a louse?"

"I see your point. Women are headstrong in such matters. Nevertheless, the situation is desperate. I suggest you use the opposite approach. See Ivan, I mean. He might be more amenable to reason."

"You think so? I doubt it. At any rate, why should I see him? Are you trying to imply that Ivan is a sort of Latin Bluebeard? As far as I can tell, he seems

to be a healthy and handsome Mexican cad."

"Ivan is deceptive that way."

"What way?"

"I don't propose to go into details. I have no interest in this business other than a natural desire to save a very lovely woman from making a grave mistake. I repeat my suggestion that you see Ivan."

"For what purpose? To ask him if he will, pretty please, not swipe my wife? No, thanks?"

"There are other methods."

"Beat him up? Knock his teeth out? Hannah would just gather up the scraps and tie a ribbon around them."

"You are being facetious, Mr. MacCauley. I assure you it's not a matter for levity."

"You're telling me? Who's losing his wife around here, anyhow?"

"Quite so. My apologies, Mr. MacCauley. A threat, I think, is the proper method. Nothing crude, of course. A very gentle kind of threat. Are you in condition to remember simple instruction?"

"I'm in excellent condition, thanks. I can remember the first canto of *Paradise Lost*."

"Very well. Go to Ivan's room. It's on this floor, around the corner, and the number is six-o-eight. Say to him: *Señor, you are on the border of disaster*. Emphasize the word *border*. It has special significance for him. Have you got that?"

"I've got it for what it's worth."

"It may be worth more than you think. It may, indeed, save your wife."

That struck the note for departure, so I departed. Outside in the hall, leaning against the wall, I tried to make sense out of it. It seemed, at best, a bit queer. And, incidentally, somewhat humiliating. A plump, little stranger who called himself Smith trying to save Carey MacCauley's wife from a fate worse than death. Why? The question wandered around, crying plaintively, in the fog inside my skull.

Border? Let's see, where was I? Mexico, as I recalled. North of Mexico is the United States of America. There's a border between them . . . mostly a river designed for wading. Things get run across borders sometimes: Narcotics . . . aliens. . .

There was within me a guy who can be called Schizo Number One. His immediate reaction was to render a loud and raucous raspberry. But there was also another guy who can be called Schizo Number Two. He was a guy who always wanted to climb on a white horse. When he was drunk, he was a very dominating personality. Almost before I knew it, he had me galloping around the corner to six-o-eight.

**T**HE DOOR was open, which was another queer bird in a nest of them; not far open . . . just cracked a little. Inside, it was pitch black. It was also silent.

I'm not one, ordinarily, to walk uninvited into another person's hotel room at night. Now, however, double shots and odd events had made me a new man. Pushing the door inward, I crossed the threshold. The feeble light of the hall showed me nothing but a small area of carpet. The room retained its impenetrable blackness and silence . . . and its heat, a close, cloying stuffiness left over from the day. The heat and the extraordinary darkness obviously existed for the same reason. The large glass doors across the room, attributes of all outside rooms in this hotel, were still closed and draped against a mid-day heat that had long ceased to exist. They had never been opened to the air and celestial flickerings of the Mexican night.

There is a convenient orthodoxy about hotel rooms. Fumbling in the accepted area for a light switch, I found it. *Might as well make it good*, I thought. If I was going to practice intimidation by some esoteric mumbo-jumbo about borders, I

might as well make it effective by appearing in the night like a descendent of Dracula . . . sudden attack . . . confusion and terror, the old element of surprise.

But Ivan wasn't surprised. He displayed total indifference. If I had been the original Dracula, he would still have been indifferent. The dead just don't give a damn.

He lay on his face on the floor. His arms were flung wide, fingers clawing at the rug. Even in that sprawled position, he looked impeccable. His white dinner jacket fitted beautifully to his broad shoulders, almost as beautifully as the blade of the knife that had killed him was fitted between his ribs. The knife had a pretty little bone handle, the color of ivory. Around the handle, like a red pupil in the great white iris of the jacket, there was a wet stain. It was an eye, and it was looking at me. The stale, hot air of the room pressed in upon me like a fetid cloud, and everything went round and round.

With sickness churning my insides, I lurched across the room beyond the body and fumbled for the opening in the drapes. The tall glass doors swung open to the night, and I stood there in the opening to the small balcony outside, my back against the jamb, and gulped greedily of the cool air blowing in from the high region of bright stars. I noticed that there was also a moon, so big and near and fantastically bright that it was most certainly a phony trumped up for the deception of romantic tourists. Then I slipped gently down against the jamb to a sitting position and forgot all about lost loves . . . and death . . . and stars . . . and moons . . . and all odd things whatever.

A long time later, I opened my eyes to the vision of a face the color of an olive just beginning to ripen. The face had large, liquid eyes filled with regret. They were nice eyes and appeared friendly, but I wasn't in the mood for them. Avoiding their swimming inspection, I saw that the

stars were still in the sky where I had left them, but some clever devil had moved the phony moon up the arc in imitation of a real one. For the tourists, Mexicans will do anything.

My head rang like a gong with rhythmic regularity. For a minute, I couldn't understand the reason for it, and then I realized that the olive complexioned guy with liquid eyes was slapping hell out of me methodically.

"Cut it out, I said.

He was all apologies. "My most abject regrets, *señor*, but it is essential that you rouse yourself immediately."

Remembering, I roused. Twisting from my sitting position, I looked back into the room. Just inside the hall door Eva Trent, my companion in discard, stood wrapped in an ice blue robe. Farther in was Hannah. She was still wearing the gown she had worn in the lounge downstairs. Her face seemed all eyes. They were wide and dry and hot, and they looked at me with an expression that was neither hate nor grief, but a kind of dumb incapacity for any emotion at all.

The apologetic slapper said, "I am Ramon Tellez of the police, *señor*. I implore you to rise."

With an effort, I rose, closing my eyes on a tilting sky and a shower of spilled stars.

"Quite a gathering," I said, opening my eyes again.

Tellez looked as if he were tempted to resume his slapping. "One must not be hysterical," he said. "My associates will be here shortly to perform the necessary duties in this room. As for us, I think it would be beneficial to utilize another place for our business. *Señorita* Trent has graciously offered the use of her room, which is near. If you will please precede me."

Ivan wasn't going, and Hannah stood very still, as if she hadn't heard, caught fast in her emotional paralysis. By the

hall door, Eva Trent stirred, light shifting fluidly on the ice blue robe. Her voice achieved by softness an accentuation of bitter venom.

"You've had a busy night, haven't you, little man? Get tired of lying down? Pretty soon you can lie down forever. After the cops get through with you. What is it down here, hanging or firing squad?"

Hannah jerked around. "No," she said.

Tellez repeated quickly, "If you will please precede me."

Eva Trent turned and went through the door into the hall. Hannah followed. There was a somnambulistic quality in the way she walked. Her eyes still had that wide, hot look of blindness, and her movements seemed directed by some kind of extra-sensory perception.

In the hall, two Mexican cops stood at tropical semi-attention. One of them was big, almost a giant, with a dark, pocked face. The other was short and slender, girlish-looking beside his overgrown companion. The slender one, apparently in response to a signal from Tellez, fell in behind the group and followed along. In Eva Trent's room, he took a notebook and mechanical pencil from his pocket, and looked efficient. Probably a college boy on his way up.

Tellez cleared his throat musically and permitted his big, liquid eyes to encounter mine. They looked sad enough to break your heart.

"Now, *señor*, it is necessary that you talk. Circumstances, you will admit, do not appear favorable for you. Reflect, if you please. *Señora* MacCauley, with whom you have become estranged over the handsome Ivan, rouses in the night, for reasons which she declines to divulge, and makes her way to Ivan's room. The door is open. Very strange. She looks into the room and beholds Ivan on the floor, as we all have seen him. Beyond Ivan, slumped in the open doorway to the terrace, she sees her husband . . . you, *señor*. You are



sitting there—how shall I say, *Señor*?"

"You can say drunk. Passed out."

He smiled gratefully and bobbed his head. "Thank you, *señor*. Passed out. Señora MacCauley, a lady with a sense of duty, contacts the hotel authorities, who in turn contact the police. So, *señor*, I arrive. While I speak with Señora MacCauley, Señorita Trent arrives. She arrives, as she confesses with charming frankness, to make a last effort to regain the affection of that Ivan. A most popular fellow, Ivan."

He paused, wagging his head from side to side in admiration and staring at me with swimming regret and sadness.

"And now, *señor*, since you are almost certainly guilty of murder, it is time for you to try to convince me otherwise."

I tried until it hurt, but all the time I had a feeling that I wasn't doing much good. My head swelled and contracted like a frog's throat, and my tongue was as thick as a catcher's mitt. Everything was distorted inside my skull and came out worse. Tellez listened in silence, his placid, olive face assuming an intensifying expression of pain, as if it grieved him sorely to see such a fine, young Americano come to such an evil and floundering end.

"This man you mention . . . this Señor Smith. . . . Although your story sounds incredible, it will do much to give it another face if he corroborates it." He turned to the slender Mexican with the notebook. "Manuel, you will go at once to room six-sixteen and request Señor Smith's presence here."

Manuel went, and we waited. Tellez hummed softly a gay, incongruous air of fiesta. Hannah stood very still by the door. Once her eyes met mine, and the blindness was gone for a second, and there was for that second an expression I had once known well and hadn't thought to see again. It looked like love.

Eva Trent sat on the arm of a chair. She leaned back in a posture that should

have been relaxed, one arm flung out along the top of the back, but the effect was not one of relaxation at all. There was about her an atmosphere of passionate tensity, and I remembered that she had loved Ivan beyond pride, and that Ivan was dead. She had wanted him back, she said, on any terms, and now there were no terms left by which she or anyone else could ever have him.

MY HEAD expanded and shrank again and again, and Manuel appeared quietly in the room.

"Pardon, *señor*," he said. "There is no response."

Tellez faced him, tapping his white teeth with a polished fingernail.

"The number was six-sixteen?"

"Most certainly!"

"You made the big effort?"

"Enough to wake the dead!"

"Not Señor Ivan, I hope." Tellez chuckled at his little joke. Then, as if conceding and regretting its poor taste, bit the chuckle off with a snap of the white teeth. "Go at once to the desk and consult the register."

But by then I knew. I knew even before Manuel returned that Señor Smith was not on the register. Señor Smith had ceased to exist. It was apparent from his attitude as he listened to Manuel's report that Tellez was convinced that Señor Smith had never existed at all.

"You are sure?" he asked. "He is not registered?"

Manuel shrugged. "The clerk was positive. No one is registered for room six-sixteen. It is empty."

Tellez turned on me like a sleek cat, purring. "Ah," he said.

I put the heel of a hand against my forehead and pressed hard, but the throbbing kept right on. My brain still refused to cooperate. I thought of the man I had taken for a waiter at the bar downstairs, the one who had requested most urgently

that I come to room six-sixteen. But I didn't even bother to mention him, because I knew that there would be no such waiter. Only one person would remember my ascent to six, the elevator operator. He would remember, and he would tell, and it would place me very patly at the right place at the right time.

"It happened like I told you," I said. "I can't prove it, but that's the way it happened."

Tellez looked pained at my foolish tenacity. He lifted his plump arms with a sigh. "*Señor*, there is much to be said for confession. It cleanses the soul, it pre-disposes the authorities to leniency."

"To hell with the authorities," I said.

His eyes rolled up whitely. After all, what could one do but one's best? One could do nothing more, obviously, except consign the Americano to the inevitable consequences of his own idiocy.

"Very well, *señor*. It becomes necessary for me to tell you that you are not to leave the hotel. It is possible, after reflection, that you will arrive at a more sensible attitude."

On the arm of her chair, Eva Trent moved. Her body came up slowly from its half-reclining position, her dark eyes feverish, bright spots the size of silver dollars burning on the high bones of her cheeks. The feverish eyes were on me, but her voice, an incredulous whisper, was directed to Tellez. "You're letting him go?"

"No, *señorita*. I am letting him retire to his room."

"He's guilty. He's guilty as hell."

"Very possible, *señorita*. Even very likely. But the case lacks completion. There are the loose ends to gather. In the meantime, he is secure. Believe me, the police of my country are not the children playing a man's game. It is better that you leave these things in my hands."

A deep breath fluttered her lips. The whisper came straight my way now,

skipping Tellez. "You killed Ivan, and you'll die for it. Tonight you stood in that hot room and stabbed him from behind because you're a lousy little man who can't even hang on to a wife, and if it's the last thing I do on earth, I'll see you as dead as he is."

I looked at her for a moment, feeling sick, and it seemed impossible that anyone could feel like that about a harmless sort of guy who had done nothing worse than write a best-seller.

"Thanks," I said. "Thanks very much."

THEN, not looking at anyone, I turned and went out and back to my own room. I walked over to the glass doors which were open onto the balcony, and I stood there for a long time, maybe half an hour, feeling the cool air on my face and looking at the improbable stars. They were so close that it seemed I could reach up and rake them down with my fingers. I thought that it would be a satisfactory conclusion to everything if I could reach beyond them to the black velvet sky and pull the whole works down upon a world that had gone both barren and mad. I didn't even hear Hannah come into the room behind me. I didn't know she was there until she spoke.

"Carey," she said.

I turned. Her eyes were no longer blind. They were filled now with a kind of general sorrow for the things that happened and the people they happened to. People like her and me and maybe Ivan.

"Did you kill him, Carey?"

"No," I said. "I didn't kill him."

It must have been the answer she expected, for she accepted it.

"I came to ask you that question, and one other. This is the other one: Do you believe something that seemed bigger than the world, bigger than you or anything that ever happened to you before, could end utterly and finally without warning or reason? No, don't answer. I only want

to tell you that it can. Tonight, when Ivan took me to my room, I thought I would love him forever, and there was no question in my mind, but then, all at once I didn't love him at all. I stood there on my balcony, and I only knew that I was terribly lonely and needed someone very much, and it was you I needed. It was like waking suddenly from an impossible dream. I kept thinking about things that happened to us, little things and big things, and I knew that I would have to have you back or die. That's the reason I went to Ivan's room, to tell him this."

So the world wasn't ending, and I wasn't dying. In that instant, with everything coming alive inside me with the wonderful organic pain of birth, I knew who had killed Ivan. The realization was almost parenthetical, a sudden aside of small recollection tucked into the principal clause of Hannah's homecoming. I went over to her and put my arms around her, and it was as if she'd never been away.

"Ivan?" I asked. "Who the hell is Ivan?"

It was fine then, there in the room with the cool air coming through the open doors from the Mexican night, and after a while she went to sleep. I waited a little, and then I went out and back up to Eva Trent's room. I knocked and kept knocking until she opened the door, still in the ice blue robe, and stood looking out at me. I heard her breath catch sharply in her throat.

"You're good," I said. "You ought to be on the stage. All that love . . . all that hate. But now I know you killed Ivan yourself. I know because I remember what you said, and I'd have caught it at the time if I hadn't been stupid with alcohol. *In that hot room*, you said, and it wasn't hot. It wasn't hot because I opened the windows and let the night air in. But it was hot earlier, when I found him dead. And even earlier than that, when you killed him. Have you decided

as yet whether it's hanging or shooting?"

Then, without sound, the plump little man named Smith was behind her with a gun in his hand.

"Come in, Mr. MacCauley," he said.

There was no sensible alternative, so I went.

"So that's how you vanished so easily," I said. "A simple matter of moving from one room to another."

He chuckled pleasantly. "These things can always be arranged, just as Ivan's death was arranged . . . just as yours will be." His eyes flicked over to Eva Trent. "I hardly know why I bother, really. Such a stupid mistake, my dear. I'll have to think of an appropriate penalty."

I shifted weight, and the gun jerked significantly in his hand.

"You mentioned the border," I said. "That much, I think, was real. You ought to know, because you direct the operations that run across it, whatever they are. It must be quite an organization, and Ivan wanted out. The poor guy was really gone on Hannah, and he wanted out. So you put him out, very permanently. With me around, a guy discarded, a perfect patsy, the setup was perfect. Just get me in the right area at the right time, and the whole thing took care of itself. With Eva's help, of course."

He shrugged. "It's dangerous to have apostates in an organization like mine. The risk is too great. Ivan understood that. He has only himself to blame."

It was late. For me, almost too late. Even as he spoke, my muscles were drawing tight, and I drove toward him, clutching for the wrist above the gun. He skipped back and tripped. The blast of the gun was hot on my neck as I fell sprawling. Rolling over, I looked across into the mouth of the gun barrel, and it looked as big as a manhole, and I thought that it was rotten luck to die with Hannah just back. Then there was another blast, but it seemed to

(Continued on page 110)

*Wherever he went it followed him—the haunting melody to which his worst enemy had died . . . and to which the killer alone knew the words!*

# SING ME A KILLIN' TUNE

By  
**ROBERT TURNER**

**T**HERE were two people in the waiting room of the parole office, that morning when Gregg went in, a boy and a girl. They sat at opposite sides of the room wearing the patiently bored expression of all people in all waiting rooms. The girl was young and pretty, but vacant-eyed. Gregg knew her. She was a shop-lifter, sweating out the balance of her third sentence. Gregg hardly looked at her. He had no use for confirmed criminals. To him she was just one of the many on the other side.

He winked at the boy, though. He was a thin faced, good-looking kid, with no previous record, who had taken aboard too much beer and with some other punks had stolen a car and gotten caught. He was working through his parole nicely.

Gregg said, "How you makin' it, Kronwicz? Keeping your nose clean?" He spoke gruffly but his heavy-jawed, heavy-eyed face was as pleasant as it was possible for such a face to be.

**He half turned and saw Carla standing in the doorway, the gun in her fist still wisping smoke.**



"Yes, sir," the boy said. "It's not too hard."

Gregg nodded and opened the office door, went inside and eased his thick body into a chair next to the parole officer's desk. He didn't hitch up the bottoms of his trousers to save the crease; there wasn't any. He didn't take off his cheap, gray fedora. He just sat there, with his short, stout fingers laced across his solid middle and looked sleep-eyed at the man behind the desk.

Dykes, the parole officer, a conservatively dressed man with a young, round face and quick-moving eyes behind rimless glasses, looked up briefly from the paper he was reading. "Be with you in a minute, Gregg," he said briskly. His eyes reached the bottom of the page. He stopped reading and took off his glasses.

"How are you, Marty?" Dykes asked pleasantly. "How's Doris and the kids?"

"Okay," Gregg said. "What did you want to see me about? I got work to do?"

Dykes pinched the bridge of his nose between thumb and forefinger, squeezed his eyes shut briefly. "Braslow," he said. "Lon Braslow. What are you trying to do to him, Marty?"

Marty Gregg's amber eyes got flat and impenetrable looking. "Trying to do to him?"

"Oh, let's not get coy, Marty. Braslow is being persecuted. The law has no right to do that. We're not Inquisitors."

"Is that so?" Gregg answered tiredly. "What are we supposed to do? Mollycoddle killers? Wait until they take a notion to come around, sit in our laps and confess?"

"No." Dykes put his glasses back on. They flashed in the light. "You get evidence."

"Evidence? There isn't any. No fingerprints, no witnesses, not even the gun that killed Pangborn. What do you want from us? Miracles? And what business is it of yours, Dykes?"

The younger man leaned forward onto the desk. "Braslow's a parolee. He came to me with a legitimate beef, Marty. He can't sleep nights because in the room next door to his, a record player runs at top volume all night long. In the two blocks that he walks back and forth to work every day there are three music shops. In the morning and at night as he goes to and from the job, the loud speakers in front of these stores are always blaring out the same song. Then to top it off, at the soda fountain and luncheonette where he works, you sit and play the jukebox . . . play that same song over and over. This has been going on for two weeks now. Braslow can't get away from it. He can't leave the job or the state because he's on parole."

"Tch, tch," Gregg said. He pulled a cheap, green-looking cigar from his vest pocket, rolled it between his fingers, nipped the tip off with strong, stained teeth. "The same song, eh?" he said. "Could it be the *Ragtime Romp* number that we found playing in Pangborn's room the night he was killed?"

Dykes picked up a pencil, began to beat a rhythm on the edge of the desk. He said, "That song's driving everybody in the country mad when they're exposed to it under normal conditions. You can imagine what it's doing to Braslow, the way you're forcing it on him. Marty, you've got to stop it. The guy's ready to flip. I can tell. He's on the ragged edge. When he goes over, no telling what might happen."

"Well, now," Gregg said. "I see you're beginning to get the idea. In a little while he won't be able to take it any more. Then he'll get smart and admit knocking off Pangborn. That'll end it for him."

"How can he, if he's innocent?" Dykes said patiently.

Before he answered, Marty Gregg made three, beautiful smoke rings as he lit the cigar. His gaze left Dykes' eyes. Finally, he said, "You know Braslow isn't innocent . . . I know he isn't . . . he knows he isn't."

When I know definitely a man committed a murder, do you think I'm going to sit back and let him get away with it because of a little thing like lack of evidence? You think I'm not going to try and sweat it out of him?"

"I know, I know," Dykes said. He permitted himself a careful smile. "I know your reputation for doggedness, Marty, but this is different. Lon Braslow is an over-sensitive, highly-strung man. He's been on the verge of a nervous breakdown for a long time. Perhaps you might torture him to a point of insanity, but that doesn't necessarily mean he'll confess. You guys worked him over pretty well when you had him under arrest on suspicion. You tried everything and couldn't get him to admit the killing. If that didn't work, this might not either."

"It will, because you're right. He is sensitive. He's the type that you can't break physically. A lot of those wiry guys are like that. They're tough as leather thong. But the nerves, Dykes, that's where they're weak. I'm puttin' the final pressure on Braslow today. He's about ready to go, like you said."

Dykes sighed. "Marty, don't you have an ounce of pity in you? Don't you realize a criminal is also a human being . . . that we, on the other side of the law, are also only human, and subject to making mistakes?"

Gregg reached over and tapped two, thick books on Dykes' desk. He squinted at the titles on the bindings. One of them was *The Criminal Mind*, the other was *The Psychiatric Case Histories Of 100 Convicts*. He said, "You read too much of this junk, Dykes. You young guys, you college guys, stuffed with a lot of crazy mumbo-jumbo. Dykes, I'm sick of it. When you've had fifteen years on the force, five of 'em in plain clothes, like I have, then you can call me over here and tell me how to do my job. Until then, get off my back! Understand?"

Dykes looked at the books on his desk. "All right, Marty," he said. "It's your baby."

GREGG LEFT the office. He didn't slam the door, nor did he look, this time, at the two people out in the waiting room. He said to nobody in particular, "They ought to send all those guys back to the social service agencies where they got 'em from. I don't know what's happening to the law these days."

On the way crosstown to the luncheonette where Lon Braslow worked, Gregg went over the case in his own mind for the hundredth time. It wasn't very much of a case. Wayne Pangborn, who owned the soda fountain-luncheonette where Braslow worked, had been shot to death in his room several weeks ago. Neighbors had heard the shot and called the police, but nobody had seen the killer leave the room or the building. Braslow had a room on the same floor. He had been in the building at the time of the shooting, supposedly in his own room. He had been dating Carla Renard, a waitress working in the same place, and had had trouble with Pangborn about that. Pangborn had a crush on the girl. Braslow had admitted that, and that Pangborn had warned him to stop seeing Carla. Pangborn would fire him if he didn't and get him in trouble with the parole board. After that, Braslow and Carla went under cover with their romance, and pretended in front of Pangborn that they'd broken up.

Gregg and most of the others got the picture when they heard that. It was cut and dried. Pangborn, they figured, had found out about Braslow seeing Carla on the QT and was going to carry out his threat and fire Braslow. They had an argument about it in Pangborn's room that night and Braslow shot him in a fit of anger and fear. There didn't seem to be any other answer, but they couldn't bull it out of Braslow. He stuck to his guns that he

knew nothing about the killing and they had no evidence against him . . . only a motive. But neither was there any spot of evidence against anybody else . . . and no other motive.

Marty Gregg had been kept on the case. As usual, when he was vitally interested in making an arrest, he had put his own time into it and some of his own money. He felt that Braslow's getting away with this was a personal affront to the law and to him in particular. In his fifteen years of police work, he had never failed to make a successful arrest on a case to which he'd been assigned. He had worked very hard on this one. He had found out that Lon Braslow hated jazz of any sort and that *Ragtime Romp*, a particularly obnoxious novelty tune that was being over-plugged, was his pet peeve. So Gregg saw to it that the raucously jangling melody and silly lyrics never left Braslow's ears. The fact that Braslow had taken the trouble to complain about it to the parole board indicated that his campaign was paying off.

The luncheonette where Lon Braslow worked was over on the West side in a half residential, half industrial neighborhood. It was a fairly good sized place that did a lot of luncheon business from nearby factories and got a good afternoon and evening trade from neighboring schools. The juke box brought in the school kids.

Gregg timed it nicely, and it was just about the lunch hour when he arrived at the luncheonette. His wide, tight mouth almost loosened into a grin as he thought of the surprise that was planned for Braslow this noon. He didn't think the juke box had gotten a play yet. He hoped not.

He knew it hadn't when he walked in, went to a booth in the back and sat down, without first pushing a nickel into the juke box, the way he had been doing day after day. He saw Braslow look a little startled at this change in the routine and with a little hope lighting up his too gaunt, too tense face.

Braslow worked behind the counter. He was about thirty-five, with good features and sandy, curly hair. He was a good looking guy. Gregg had to admit. He watched him making a sandwich for a lone customer, and wondered what made a guy like Braslow go bad. Braslow had done time for another shooting. That had been for a stickup and the victim hadn't been wounded too badly. Braslow had used a .38 then, and it had been a .38 slug taken out of Pangborn's corpse. Another convincer, even though circumstantial, Gregg figured. Braslow was supposed to be fully reformed, according to the parole board, and almost at the end of his time. Supposedly, they'd found out what had made him tick, what had made him a wrongo and corrected it. If he got half a break, the parole board figured Braslow to become a decent citizen.

Gregg didn't go for that. He figured anyone caught in armed robbery was a gun-boy and always would be. He didn't go for the silly reasons they gave for why a guy could be driven to do something like that, these days. To Gregg, a guy pulled an armed stickup for one reason only, for dough and he was too damned lazy to work for it like other guys, or too greedy to be satisfied with a regular paycheck.

The waitress, Carla, came over to the booth where Gregg was sitting. She was a pretty little redhead, with plenty of meat in the right places under her trim green uniform. She'd looked pale and drawn since the shooting. Gregg's constant playing of *Ragtime Romp* on the juke box had been getting to her too, breaking her up. Almost every day while Gregg was there, she'd drop something. This didn't bother Gregg too much. His pushing of the song was also getting Pete Burkhalter, the middle-aged dishwasher who'd been a long time employee of Pangborn's. He had inherited the place, and was the new owner.

After the first few days of the campaign against Braslow, Burkhalter had told

Gregg, "Please, Sergeant, can't you play some other song. You're getting all of us nervous. You—you're even driving customers from the place. I beg of you, give it up."

Gregg looked at him coldly. "So what!" he said. "You'll all get over it—after I get Braslow." He said that loud enough for Braslow to hear. He didn't say any more. It was settled as far as Burkhalter was concerned. He didn't dare order Gregg out of the place, because there are a thousand little violations that the police can make trouble about for almost any small shop owner. And when Burkhalter had removed the juke box from the shop, Gregg had made him have it brought back.

Gregg wasn't expecting any trouble from Carla Renard. He didn't even look up when she came to his booth. He just ordered his usual Coke, which he would proceed to nurse most of the afternoon, between trips to the juke box. Now, Carla said, "Thanks, Mr. Gregg, for calling it quits. I—I don't know how much more Lon could have taken—or any of us, for that matter. That—that song. . . ." Her voice broke and the words trailed off.

Gregg looked up at her blankly. She bent over his table, picked up two empty soda glasses and began wiping the table with a rag. "You mean you don't care for that song?" Gregg said softly. "I think it's nice. It's my favorite number. Everybody's, in fact. It's caught on so with all your customers, I don't have to play it any more."

HE LOOKED past her and saw three men from the nearby cable factory enter the place, laughing and talking. Gregg made a washing motion with his big, thick hands. He watched two of the factory men swing up onto counter stools. The third one walked over to the juke box, put in a nickel, made his selection, and pushed a button. Gregg waited.

The lights on the juke box blinked and

flashed, and there was a click as the record swung into place. Then a small, brassy jump outfit blared into the ear-hurting monotony of *Ragtime Romp*. Almost instantly, a very nasal, girl vocalist slammed into the lyrics:

*"First you do a bump,  
Then you hop and jump.  
You act a little crazy,  
You do an Oops-A-Daisy  
'N end up in a stomp  
Doin' the Ragtime Romp . . ."*

She wasn't halfway through the lyrics when Carla Renard backed away from Gregg's booth and dropped the dirty glasses and holders to the floor with a crash. She pushed the splayed fingers of both hands into the roots of her red hair at the temples. Her light blue eyes widened and grew glazed, as they stared fascinated at the juke box.

"What'd I tell you, honey?" Gregg said. He didn't smile, he didn't look smug, he showed no emotion whatsoever.

The man who'd put the nickel into the machine, stood looking at it puzzledly. He jammed another nickel into it shrugged, and turned to join his friends at the lunch counter.

With a ragged intake of breath, Carla bent and began picking the pieces of broken glass from the floor. Gregg looked toward Braslow whose deeply-sunken, brown eyes burned with hate as they clung to Gregg's. But Gregg's gaze didn't give way. Finally Braslow sort of shook himself and sliced viciously through a sandwich he'd just made.

The recording of *Ragtime Romp* ran itself through. After it finished, there were several jokes along the crowded lunch counter about murdering the man who wrote it. There was a noticeable air of relief. The turntable clicked on again with the second nickel, and another record swung into place. But the same brassy, novelty melody blared out.



Everybody sitting at the lunch counter swung around in shocked surprise. The man who'd put in the nickels swore loudly, bellowed, "What the hell is this? I put two nickels in that thing and it didn't play my selections either time. What's it, stuck on that one record? Why don't you get that thing fixed. Burkhalter?"

Carla Renard made a thin, screaming sound and ran from behind the counter toward the kitchen in the back. Lon Braslow was poised with a piece of lettuce in one hand and the long, gleaming sandwich knife in the other. He stared stupidly after Carla's hurrying figure, then swung his head, with painful slowness, until he was looking at the juke box.

Gregg could almost see the color draining from Braslow's face, the skin drawing tightly over the bone structure. He saw Braslow, with the knife in one hand and the lettuce in the other, walk deliberately around the counter. Several steps before he reached the juke box, Braslow's legs almost gave out from under him. He began to shake.

Braslow stood in front of the music machine, looking down at it. Then he dropped the lettuce from his left hand, and brought his fist crashing down on the glass front of the old juke box. The glass broke and Braslow's bloody fist went through it and inside the machine. His fingers found the automatic stop and start mechanism.

Gregg and everybody in the now silent place, watched Braslow swing a new record into place. He stopped after a few bars of *Ragtime Romp* gutted out, and swung the next record into place. He did that about five times, then wheeled away from the juke box. He walked toward the booth where Gregg sat. He slowly raised the glittering knife in his right hand. Perspiration showed at the corners of his mouth. His eyes were like nothing human.

Gregg came out of the booth, moving fast, yet gracefully for his bulk. His hand went under his jacket and onto his .32.

He stood waiting for Braslow. He said, softly, "What does it do, Lon, remind you of that night in Pangborn's room? I can fix it so you'll never have to listen to it again. Just tell me what you did with the gun, Lonny."

Braslow said, his voice a choking whisper of sound, "You paid off the juke box operator, didn't you? You made him load the machine with nothing else but that song, didn't you? It—it was supposed to finish me off, wasn't it, Gregg?"

Marty Gregg didn't say anything. He watched Braslow sidling toward him, the knife still raised. When he was only several feet away, Gregg said, "Put the sticker down, son. That won't get you anywhere. Why don't you go and get it from where you hid it, Braslow?"

"All right," Braslow said. His voice thinned out, crept to a higher pitch. His head looked as if it would shake off of his shoulders. "You were right. It's finished me. I'm not taking your persecution any more, Gregg. It—I don't suppose it'll make much difference, now, when I do this, anyhow."

He lunged at Gregg. In that split second, Gregg looked at Braslow's haunted, terror-crazed face and felt something very rare for him . . . a momentary flash of pity. He remembered one hot, summer night when an old and feeble dog that he'd had for years, and was more of a friend to him than any man had been, had become rabid. The dog had attacked him, and he'd had to shoot it through the head, while looking straight into those sick, glittery eyes. And in this broken second, it was something like that again for Gregg. But this time, it was a human being and he couldn't shoot.

He raised his gun. He didn't pump the bullet into Braslow's chest as he had intended, as he had a right to do. He shot the man through his upraised arm. The knife clattered to the floor. Braslow twisted away against the wall, bringing his arm down and clenching it with his other

bloody hand. His eyes filled with fear.

It had seemed to Gregg that the shot had echoed, almost as though there had been two shots at once. It surprised him a little, but not half as much as the pain that suddenly lanced all down his spine . . . pain that doubled him up, and finally settled in a spot of unbearable agony over his right shoulder blade. As he bent and fell to the floor, he half turned around and saw Carla Renard standing in the doorway of the kitchen with a .38 in her fist, still wisping smoke. Her full lips, pale almost as the rest of her face, stretched back across her small, white teeth.

The last thing Gregg thought was, "You see what I get for going soft. I give her boy friend a break, and she feeds it to me in the back. I should have killed the bum!"

WHEN GREGG came to in the hospital, Dykes, the parole officer, was standing by his bed, along with Gregg's wife, Doris. They both looked down on him with the pained, sympathetic, and embarrassed look of all hospital visitors.

"How do you feel, hon?" Doris said.

Gregg didn't tell her. He said, "Okay, I guess."

"You want to hear what happened, Marty? You feel up to it?" Dykes asked him.

Gregg tried to move but pain ran along his back and he gave up. He said, "Yes, if you didn't let Braslow get away, and if you got a confession out of him on the Pangborn thing."

Dykes smiled a little behind his rimless glasses. "He didn't get away. He didn't try. But we didn't get any confession of anything out of him."

Marty Gregg didn't say anything. He just turned his head on the pillow away from Dykes. He heard Dykes go on, "He didn't have anything to confess, much," Dykes said. "The girl did, though. Carla was the one who shot Pangborn. She and Braslow went to Pangborn's room that

night to tell him that they were tired of playing it under cover. They were going to get married and asked him to give them a break. Pangborn got nasty about it, especially to Braslow. Carla asked Braslow to leave so she could talk to Pangborn alone for awhile. He went to his own room, and Carla was to join him there later."

Gregg turned his head back on the pillow. His eyes looked incredulously at Dykes. Dykes continued, "Then Braslow heard the shot. He ran back to the room, got Carla out of there, and down some back stairs. Later she told him that Pangborn had laughed at her, and tried to get rough . . . very rough. There was a little struggle, and she shot him with the gun she'd brought along to try to frighten Pangborn with, if everything else failed."

For a long time Gregg didn't say anything. Then he said: "Hell! Then I—I was wrong."

"Yes," Dykes said.

Gregg's eyes brightened and his tight mouth tipped a little at the corners, some color came back into his meaty face for a moment. "Yeah," he said, "but I still broke the case, didn't I? My method worked. So I made a little mistake as to the one who—"

"You sure did," Dykes cut him off.

Gregg suddenly thought what might have happened if he'd done the reasonable thing and shot Lon Braslow through the heart. He'd have killed a man guilty only of keeping quiet to protect the girl he loved, a man temporarily crazed by Gregg's unfair persecution.

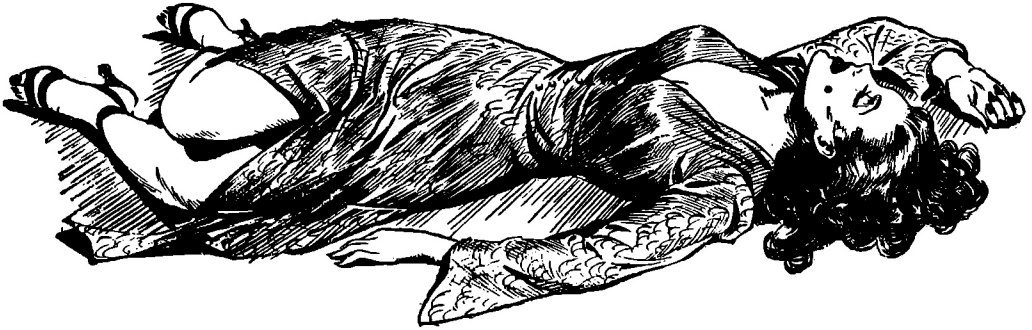
Gregg didn't say anything else. He began to feel a little sick to his stomach.

Dykes said, "Braslow's arm isn't too bad. I don't know what'll happen to Carla. If you don't press charges against her, she might get a break from a jury on the Pangborn thing because of the way it happened. By the way, you didn't get it too bad. You'll be laid up for awhile, but

*(Continued on page 110)*

# THE TWICE-SHOT WIFE

By JACK EICHOLZ



**P**LAYING a role of ever increasing importance in police work, the men of criminal bureaus of science throughout the world are pictured in movies and on television as relentless foes of public enemies.

While it is true that many criminals would still be at large without the aid of crime labs, the men themselves are most proud of the cases where innocent men have been freed by scientific deduction.

One such case, from the files of the Cleveland Police Department, began with a phone call from an excited husband. He sobbed that his wife had shot herself.

Arriving on the scene, police found the dejected husband slumped in a chair, head in hands. His wife's body, with a bullet in the heart, was sprawled across the bed. related, even though they got along well. While one detective questioned the husband, another began a search for the gun. He found the weapon, ten feet from the body, wedged between the wall and an old trunk.

The husband claimed that he had been in the next room when he heard the shot. His wife had often threatened suicide, he related, even though they got along well together.

When the coroner examined the body,

he discovered that two bullets had passed through the heart in exactly the same place. Meanwhile, detectives had learned that the husband and wife had quarreled violently a few hours before the shooting. The husband stuck to his story and maintained that he had heard but one shot.

Most puzzling to detectives, was the finding of the gun behind the trunk. How, they asked, could the woman shoot herself twice through the heart, then hide the gun? The facts indicated that the husband was lying.

But the following day, a report came from the crime lab. The .38 caliber revolver fired only short bullets and one of the slugs taken from the body was longer than normal, although both weighed the same. Rust in the barrel of the gun and a bulge in the center told the rest of the story.

The gun had been fired years before and had jammed because of an imperfect shell. The later shot by the wife had pushed the jammed cartridge before it, both entering the heart. The terrific recoil ripped the weapon from her hand and threw it behind the trunk.

On the basis of the report, the coroner ruled suicide and the husband was released.

• • •

# DEATH DRIVES FASTER

*Keeler's stolen blueprints made a crimson pattern of pursuit for his killer and turned the final thundering race into a slow last mile . . . winner take the hot seat!*

AS HE LISTENED to his partner's build-up, Garvin clamped his mouth to a straighter line, just to make sure he would not be hasty. "We won by a lap, W. J.," he said with a forced quietness that contradicted the crackling fire in his deep-set eyes. "We made a monkey of Torrey and his crate." And then the blast let go.

He slapped the hood of the blue Keeler Special, making the metal rumble and ring, and shouted, "I'm not putting in any overtime tonight! Damn it, I told you once, and I meant it!"

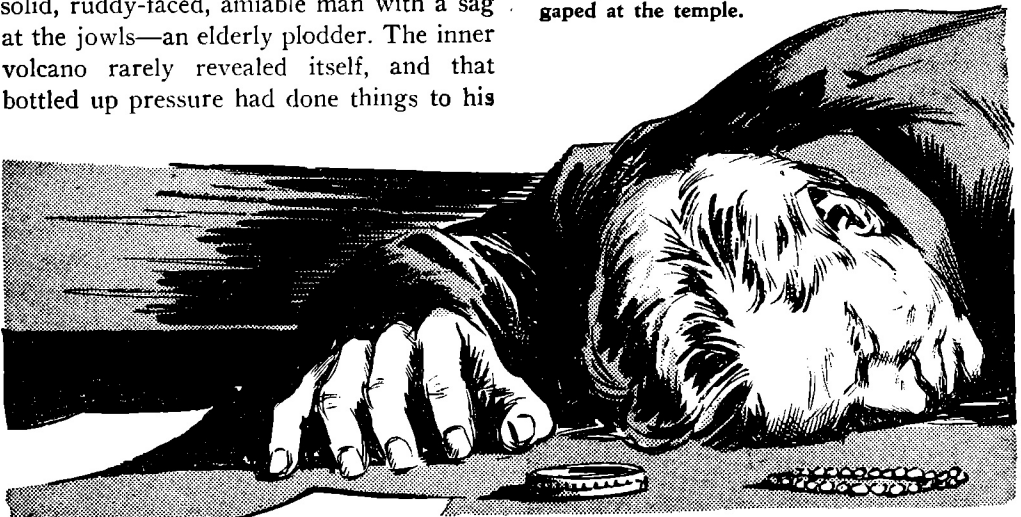
The senior partner, raised his hand against the outburst, and turned on that engaging persuasion and good fellowship with which he masked his drive and impatience. Outwardly, Walt Keeler was a solid, ruddy-faced, amiable man with a sag at the jowls—an elderly plodder. The inner volcano rarely revealed itself, and that bottled up pressure had done things to his

heart, it was no longer very strong.

"Pete," he said quietly, "a hundred miles at San José is one thing. Five hundred at Oakland Speedway on Sunday is something else. She was heating up toward the finish. The valves and injector weren't



Keeler lay in a huddle. Blood made a splotch on the carpet and a wound gaped at the temple.



By  
**E. HOFFMANN**  
**PRICE**



working as smoothly as they might have. You noticed it yourself."

"There's plenty of time. I've been on the job day and night. Enough is enough."

"Pete, wait till after the five hundred is in the bag. After everyone knows that Torrey's engine is outclassed. Today wasn't a fluke. But nothing is ever good enough if you can make it better."

"If it weren't the last minute, I'd tell you right now to shove your partnership and go back to the jute mill!"

"What you really mean," old man Keeler said pleasantly, "is that if it weren't for Julia, you'd walk out." This was so nearly the truth that Garvin was left groping. Keeler went on, "There's more to it than winning the next event. The work you've done since Torrey and I cancelled our partnership is why he was outperformed today. That's why I want to clinch it Sunday." Then he said sympathetically, "You're on edge from sitting there, watching from the pits."

"Who the hell wouldn't be?"

Keeler wagged his head, understanding, kindly. "You've got a date with Julia this evening. Forget it. I'll take care of Glenn Barry!"

Garvin said skeptically, "That's quite a contract. After all, Julia has a mind of her own. You're only her dad."

Keeler winked. "If Barry thinks Julia has a potful of money coming to her when my heart conks out, he'd better recheck his data. I'm setting up a trust so that no matter whom she marries, her income will be exactly equal to what her husband earns. No more, no less. And that's the kiss of death for Barry."

"What's wrong with Barry?" Garvin asked, knowing well that the slave driver was playing for a shift of interest.

"Nothing really wrong. Just isn't enough *right*. Nice guy, but you can't make a career of that. He's trying to be a public relations counsel without the cash to back him, and still he tries to skimp along, in-

stead of earning a stake and then going into the business in a way that'd have a chance to succeed. The more Julia sees of him, the quicker she'll get fed up."

Heading for the door, Keeler paused to add, "I've already taken that trust fund up with Dave Slade. I'm going over now to discuss some of the legal kinks with him. By then, Julia will be back from the dog show. I'll tell her it's all my fault, you're working tonight. See what I mean? I'm looking out for your interests, all the way."

The sales talk sounded good until Keeler nosed his coupe into the ever thickening Van Ness Avenue traffic. Then Garvin was alone with the knowledge that the persuasive slave driver was not and never had been easy to get along with. Keeler and Deane Torrey had broken their partnership in an all-out quarrel. Once the smoke cleared away, Torrey gave the engineering world and the public to understand that Keeler had contributed nothing but cash to the development of a high speed Diesel engine lighter by far than any others of its kind. Torrey claimed he had furnished all the creative imagination, the real know-how.

Keeler's new partner, Garvin, had offset this by improving the original model, and Keeler had contributed after all a good share of engineering knowledge and inventiveness.

Garvin rolled the racing car from its trailer to the shop floor, attached the chain hoist to lift and swing the Diesel to the bench. He decided against phoning Julia. He would drive down to present his side of things, face to face.

Walt Keeler and his daughter lived at Burlingame's outer fringe, where it merged into exclusive Hillsborough. Martelino, the Filipino house boy, admitted Garvin. Though he was about to check out for the day with the rest of the household staff, he took time to bring Garvin a whisky and soda and tell him that Julia would be down presently.

SOME MOMENTS later, she stepped from the elevator. "Sit down, Pete, if you can spare the time. When Dad called me, I made other arrangements." The formal she wore made that quite plain. So did the ruby ear pendants, and the diamond and sapphire bracelets which had belonged to her mother. She and Garvin never went to spots where such trinkets were in order.

Small and shapely, Julia carried herself well, so that she appeared taller than she was. Her black hair accented the magnolia smoothness of throat and shoulders. She had never seemed more desirable than she did now. Her warmth and sweetness toned down the glitter of gown and jewels—they became mere background. For the first time, Garvin knew how stupid he had been in letting his work run away with him. Since his work allowed no time to live, he'd find something that would.

He caught and held her at arm's length for an admiring moment, then drew her toward him. The intoxicating rustle of taffeta and the exhalation of *Shalimar* kept him from at once noticing that Julia did not quite yield at the waist. Though she raised her face, she turned her head a little, offering her cheek. He felt the passing softness of her hair, and the coolness of the ruby ear pendants.

"Ease up, honey girl," he said. "You'll have time to retouch your makeup." Then, aware of her remoteness, he added, "Once this Oakland Speedway race is won, I'm bailing out. For keeps. I came out to tell you, before I told your dad."

Julia let him draw her closer. But he saw that more than makeup was at stake.

"No, Pete, you mustn't quit. You've told me so often that your big chance came when you were able to work *with* Dad, instead of just *for* him, or someone else."

She twisted a little in protest against his arms. "I'm fed up Julia. Every time one emergency is over, he dreams up a new one. High pressure put his heart on the blink, so he retired from business. Now look at

him. I've already given you my last alibi."

Smoothly, Julia freed herself. "Don't quit. Please don't." She drew a deep breath, as though nerving herself for a grim effort. "You and Dad are alike. All that you've said about bailing out is on my account. So I am cutting loose. Now, before it's too late. It'll be better for us both."

Of a sudden, tears brimmed in her eyes. Now that she had told him, made him part of her past, she was looking toward that future which they would not share. This was not the decision of impulse, nor any flare-up that persuasion could subdue.

"Glenn Barry?" he said.

Julia nodded.

He stepped back. "Good luck, honey, lots of luck. The old man'll be happy, now that I'm living for the Keeler Special."

"Pete, it's not just this one thing. It's many things. Glenn is so understanding—so—"

"So perfectly marvelous!" he said, "Have a good time, honey girl!"

Garvin dawdled his way back to San Francisco. Julia's mother had died wondering when she would be more than a minor detail in the enormous blueprint of Walt Keeler's life. Julia's attitude was easy to understand. But just understanding wasn't enough.

ONCE BACK at the shop, Garvin balked at tearing down the Diesel. Julia undoubtedly had him pinpointed when she said he and her father were two of a kind. If they had not been, he would not have volunteered, in his early enthusiasm, to work nights. Eagerness to justify his having taken Deane Torrey's place had started him off. If the development of improved alloys and improved design hadn't taken a year longer than they actually had, no one would have been any the worse off. He himself had made a race of it.

The engine mocked him. It justified what Julia had said and had done. He peeled out of his dungarees, cleaned up, and made

for the street. The time to quit was now. Such a move would convince Julia that he was not a junior model of her father.

He would not be leaving Keeler in the lurch. There was no necessity for the winner to hurry into the next competition. There would be plenty of time to clobber Torrey.

Once more, Garvin headed down the Peninsula, this time taking the winding Skyline route. He drove slowly. While his resolution had not wavered and while logic was on his side, he felt nevertheless that he was knifing a friend.

He was nearly at his destination when he pulled to the curbing.

"W. J.'s heart," he muttered. "He'll blow a gasket."

He reminded himself how for years Keeler had alternated between shouting and wheedling to make people do as he wished. First he put them under obligation, then he made the most of their better nature.

With fresh determination, Garvin drove on, entered the gateway to Keeler's, and parked in the circular drive. He squared his shoulders, drew a deep breath, and gave himself the final bucking up. He needed it. He pushed the doorbell hesitantly. There was no answer. Somewhere a radio mumbled and whimpered. Garvin belabored the brazen knocker, putting his weight behind it. The door yielded suddenly, and he lurched into the vestibule. Recovering, Garvin hurried down the hall toward the right.

A splash of light fell from the doorway of the study. He opened the door.

Keeler lay in a huddle, perhaps two paces from the walnut desk. Blood made a splotch on the blue ground of the carpet.

Garvin knelt. There was no pulse. A wound gaped at the temple. Keeler was dead.

Not far from the body lay a massive silver candlestick. The heavy base had been twisted by the impact. The wall safe was

open, and blueprints lay on the floor. Here and there, pieces of jewelry twinkled against the deep colors of the Persian carpet, spilled from the case which had been dislodged when the roll of drawings was pulled out.

The sheets in sight gave the general plan and section of the Diesel engine. The smaller sheets, those giving details of valves, fuel injectors, and cooling system, were missing; the manila envelope that had contained them lay in a corner, empty.

Garvin got all this without trying to do so. Though numb from shock, he perceived things and understood them.

*Torrey's been here and left, flashed through Garvin's mind. Couldn't take it, losing today.*

## CHAPTER TWO

### A Lost Earring

THE CANDLESTICK was one of a pair. Its gleaming surface would be a natural for fingerprints. The one still on the mantel had a fine film of polish, enough to cloud the metal. Kneeling beside the one which had been used as a bludgeon, Garvin noted that the shank was wiped clean. Only the base remained misted.

The jewelry at the foot of the built-in safe did not puzzle him. The stuff would have been hard to fence, but its presence merely confirmed Garvin's feeling that the plans had been the object of the crime.

There was no sign of struggle. Apparently someone known to Keeler had induced him to open the safe and then had slugged him, catching him totally by surprise, because the blow could have been blocked had there been any warning.

If it was Torrey, Garvin thought *he might've had the combination to the safe. Walt caught him at work. Torrey bounced up, got panicked, and sapped him.*

A moment later, Garvin discarded his conjecture. A half-smoked cigar was on



the edge of the ash tray; the ash was more than an inch long. Keeler must have laid the cigar down deliberately before turning in his swivel chair to face his final caller.

He had been writing with a ball-point pen. Though the last word was not completed, there was no jerk or jab to show that he had been startled. *Someone he knew,* Garvin concluded. *And someone he didn't take seriously enough to be on the lookout for.*

Garvin glanced at the clutter of papers and memoranda on the desk. There were several legal size sheets, and a letter from David Slade, Keeler's attorney. Dated more than a week ago, it referred to the other papers, the typed outline of the trust agreement which would make things rugged for whomever Julia might marry. Between the lines and on the margins, Keeler had been penning comments, objections, picking the thing to pieces.

There were ink smudges from the ball-point. Tiny burning shreds of cigar had pinholed a sheet. On two pages were heel prints. Another had the imprint of a paper-weight, and the half-moon shaped smear from the base of a stem glass.

Garvin phoned David Slade. He knew the attorney, having met him several times during the course of drawing the partnership agreement. Once Slade had recovered from the news, Garvin resumed his account: "I've contacted no one . . . Hell, no, I don't know where Julia is! You hustle out here before I notify the police. I want you here so I won't be shoved into a corner when I try to put an idea across . . . Well, of course it's just a hunch, but if Deane Torrey pulled this trick, there's a chance of catching him off base. While he's still waiting for the news to get on the air. My idea is, sock him before he can get himself set."

Slade said, "Pete, you'd better get set before you are socked. You're in an awkward spot yourself."

"How come? This has been my big day. There's nothing left that can happen to me."

"There's plenty," Slade said, grimly. "Do you mean to tell me you don't know that Walt took out fifty thousand dollars partnership insurance in your favor? So you'd not lose out, in case his heart gave out? You'd be able to carry on, instead of having to drop the whole Diesel deal, and maybe end up by hunting a job."

This was news. It left Garvin blinking and gulping for a moment.

"He did that? When?"

"A month or so after I drew up the partnership papers. Walt was the type that wouldn't mention it to you. Anyway, you can see how it leaves you in a nasty spot."

"Then I am not phoning the cops till you get here," Garvin declared, and hung up.

Slade lost little time in driving from his residence in Burlingame. He was blocky of build, round-headed, with a gleaming bald dome. Tragedy had taken the quizzical twinkle from his eyes; yet for all his softened voice and manner, Slade carried encouragement and force into the house. Garvin told him all that had happened since Keeler left the shop. When he had finished, he asked, "All right, how do I stand?"

Slade shrugged. "He got you in wrong with Julia. And you were griped enough to dash out here to tell him to shove the partnership. No telling what the D. A. might dream up. Good deal depends on what he thinks of Torrey."

"How about having an inventory made of that jewelry?"

"That'd be borrowing trouble. Make it look as though you're too anxious about things. Phone, and then let them carry the ball."

SINCE THE estate was outside the city limits, deputies from the sheriff's office came to take charge. Garvin had a queer sense of letdown as he and Slade waited for the completion of the routine of photographing, fingerprints, and tagging.

Finally, the chief deputy came from the study to talk to the two in the living room. He listened to Garvin's story almost without interruption. At the conclusion, he nodded, made a gesture of dismissal to the assistant who had been taking notes.

"The way it adds up, then, Mr. Garvin, you were at the shop at the time your partner was killed."

Garvin knifed him with a look, and gave it a twist. "That would depend," he answered, "entirely on when it happened. Was that a slip, or are you being foxy?"

"Hey, wait a minute!" the chief countered, good humoredly. "You're getting me wrong."

"I think," Slade cut in, "he got you very properly. I was about to object."

"Objection sustained, counsellor. But one more thing. In going over the insurance policies in the safe, we found one for fifty thousand in Mr. Garvin's favor. Do you mind if I ask when he first heard that that policy had been taken out?"

Slade made an elaborate bow. "Please proceed."

Garvin answered, "When Mr. Slade got the news, he told me. It was a total surprise."

"The beneficiary," the cop observed, whimsically, "is like the husband of a cheating wife. He's the last one to suspect. Well, that's all for now." Then, addressing them both, "You'll be waiting here until his daughter comes in?" At Slade's nod, he continued, "We have a broadcast on the air, but if we don't reach her, have her call us in the morning."

When the law and the reporters had gone, Garvin said, "I was glad Julia didn't barge into all this mess. Now I'm not so sure! I—we—one of us is stuck with it, telling her when she comes home. Did you see anything in there, while you were watching them? I mean, anything that'd give me an idea where I stand?"

"They got a lot of pictures and measurements. Including close-up shots of every

paper on the desk and on the floor," Slade answered. "But I think the only exhibit they took along was the candlestick."

"Didn't take 'em long to find that policy!" You'd think they'd been briefed."

"Pete, you're getting morbid. There couldn't've been a tipoff until after the law was notified. Listen—they didn't have to have anyone give them ideas. That open safe was enough, and looking for insurance is basic routine. Anyway, the insurance company would have told them if they hadn't found it themselves."

"That policy does put me on the hook."

Slade nodded. "If the company can prove you did it, they won't have to pay the claim. And fifty thousand is worth hustling for."

Presently, the sound of tires rolling up the drive brought them to their feet. Garvin, the first to get to the door, saw that Glenn Barry was bringing Julia home, more than a little high. Barry wore dinner clothes, and wore them well. He was tall, blondish, good looking. At the moment, he frowned from concern, painfully well balanced in case Julia folded.

She was still on her feet, and moving under her own power. While she may not have needed Barry's assistance, her gait was as unnatural as the way she held her head. She moved as though she had reached the wooden drunk—the zombie stage. Garvin watched Barry fumble in her handbag for keys. Enough light reached from the vestibule to make it plain that Julia had either suffered severe shock, or else that she was very sick and holding herself together by will power.

"Darling, I don't know what struck me—how long was I out—oh, my head! Give me the keys. I can make it."

She groped the key ring from Barry's fingers.

GARVIN OPENED the door before Julia had a chance to fumble. Surprise at the sight of him and Slade set her and

Barry back on their heels. Julia's recognition was delayed. It was as though her eyes would not quite focus. Her hair was mussed. Makeup smudged her face. The color beneath was greyish. She shivered as though chilled to the bone.

Barry licked his lips and said in a low voice, "For heaven's sake, go back and keep the old man talking, till I get her to the elevator."

Garvin, standing fast, glanced at Slade, who nodded. Better let her have it now, when she could hardly feel pain. Yet Garvin hesitated for a moment, groping for words. Distinct from her perfume, he got a faint bouquet of brandy. Yet he was sure now that she was not drunk.

"Pete," she said, laboriously shaping the words, "let me in, quick. I don't want Dad to see me now."

"He won't see you. He blacked out to-night—for keeps."

"Oh, my. . . . His heart?" She swayed, caught the door jamb.

Barry steadied her. "What happened? Wrangling about that car?"

"Where is he?" Julia demanded. "What happened?"

Slade interposed. "Everything has been taken care of."

Shock had pulled her together. "What are you keeping from me?"

Garvin answered, "It's a police case. A prowler did it. He must've died instantly. I found him lying there on the floor of the study."

Deftly, Slade interrupted, "Julia, what happened to you? We hadn't the least idea how to get in touch with you."

Barry, answering for her, said that on an impulse, they had changed their plans and had gone only as far as the Skyline Lodge. "After dinner," he concluded, "while we were dancing, she got sick. Nearly passed out. Then pulled herself together, and wanted to get home—but quick."

Julia, though hazy about it all, was cer-

tain of one point: that Gil Ferrell, the proprietor of the Skyline Lodge, had given Barry a hand in getting her out by a side entrance which opened to the parking lot. This had saved her the embarrassment of going through the crowded main dining room.

"Hadn't I better call your doctor?" Garvin asked. "You look pretty bleary."

Julia shook her head. "Thanks, Pete, but the worst is over. I'll be all right. Soon as I get upstairs, I'll phone my aunt to come over. It was awfully good of you to stay. And, Mr. Slade, I'll want to talk to you in the morning."

Catching Barry's hand, she turned toward the elevator.

And then Garvin remembered something. "Oh, just a second, Barry. When you came in, you said something about wrangling about that car. What did you mean by that?"

"I was thinking of Deane Torrey. He left a few minutes ahead of us."

"The devil he did!" Garvin said to Julia, "Did he come out here, after I checked out, this evening?" Am I getting things straight?"

She nodded. "Dad and Torrey were in the study. It's not sound-proofed. He was threatening to sue Dad for breaking the partnership, in a way that damaged his professional standing."

Garvin eyed Slade. "That's something for the sheriff's office."

"See me in the morning, will you? Good night!" And the elevator door closed behind Julia and Barry.

As they stepped to the driveway, Slade said, "Pete, I couldn't see us staying until Julia's aunt came over from San Mateo."

Garvin glanced at his watch. "I couldn't've stayed anyway. I'm fixing up something of my own. Did you notice, her ear pendants were missing. I'm hustling over to the Skyline Lodge to look for them."

"Good luck, Pete." He gave Garvin a

friendly slap on the shoulder. "But all it'll get you is a thank you."

"Maybe," Garvin said.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Mickey Finn!

IT TOOK Garvin less than a quarter of an hour to reach the Lodge; he could have made it in under ten minutes by tramping on the gas. The Skyline Lodge was set well back from the highway, on the crest of a wooded ridge. There were only half a dozen cars in the spacious parking lot. To the left of the main entrance was the bar; to the right, an alcove, where a few customers still danced. The girl who waited on the alcove tables took Garvin to the proprietor's redwood paneled office on the second floor.

Ferrell, a chunky little man with a bald and egg-shaped head, got up from his desk with the ready smile of one whose life is dedicated to fixing beefs. Ferrell was all kindness and solicitude even before Garvin said, "A friend of mine lost her ruby earrings here, maybe an hour ago."

"Everything but a missing head has been turned in this evening," Ferrell said. "Can you give me a better idea?"

"They're blossom shaped. I mean, the pendant part that hangs from the ruby clamp-on stud is a blossom gimmick done in rubies. Looks a lot like costume jewelry, only it's the real McCoy. Miss Keeler—Julia Keeler missed them when the boy friend brought her home. I should say, she was too sick to miss them, and he was too worried to pay attention."

"I don't remember the name, but the face, maybe?"

Garvin described Julia.

Ferrell brightened. "Now I get the picture! Fact is, I helped her to her friend's car. She was—well—carrying it bravely, but still—"

"Maybe it was something she ate?"

"Impossible!"

"You helped her?"

"Not quite the way you take it. All I did was show them a way out that would not take them all the way through the main dining room. She was clear-headed enough to be embarrassed about it all."

"Nothing turned in, later?"

Ferrell opened a locker, and gestured. "I'm sure they're not here, but help yourself."

Garvin looked. "Everything but false teeth and a nylon girdle."

"Then she couldn't have lost her earrings here," Ferrell said, gently yet positively. "Our help is reliable."

Garvin shrugged. "They're insured, and pretty valuable. If the company is stuck for the check, they'll give everything and everyone working here an all-out shake-down."

"My help is steady. The whole crew's been with me a long time. I've been strict. I have to be."

"I can buy that. But suppose you let me look where they sat, and where they left to go to their car. Give me an idea, and turn me loose."

Ferrell, agreeable to that, rang for one of the staff. Before following the man, Garvin asked, "By the way, do you have a man in charge of the parking lot, evenings?"

"If we only drew such a crowd!" Ferrell exclaimed.

The dance and dine space was enormous. It had three over-sized fireplaces, one of which was fitted with a power-driven turnspit for the house specialty, roasts done over alderwood coals. Balconies overhung the sides.

"Here's where they had dinner," the man said, indicating a cozy room with leather upholstered wall seats, and several chairs. "It's all yours."

"Where's the john?"

The man gestured. "Right over there." Garvin handed the man a dollar, and took over.

The dinner service had been taken away, but nothing else. He noted a heap of lipstick-smudged cigarette stubs mixed with a few plain ones. That was odd, for Julia smoked twice as much as she need have. The other oddity was that she drank sparingly and carried well what little she did take.

Garvin lifted the leather cushions. Getting on his knees, he played his flashlight under the wall seats. All he found was a red and silver compact, under the bench. It was engraved, J. M. K.—Julia's, and no doubt.

After considerable hesitation and repeated knocking, he edged into the ladies room. Though it was a nightmarish female clutter, there was nothing significant; no evidence that anyone's dinner and drinks had gone the wrong way. But his detour did have an indirect payoff. By making it, he learned that an exit led directly outside.

The resentment of Barry had brought Garvin to the Skyline to find Julia's rubies, and had made him find fault with the story that Ferrell had helped her out through a side door to bypass most of the patrons in the then crowded dining room. This was by far the most private exit.

He stepped to the small balcony and went down the stairs. It was not until he came to ground level that fairmindedness took charge and told him that, while safe enough, the steep stairs were certainly not for anyone who needed steadying.

The floodlights of the parking lot reached well past the corner of the building. He noticed a handkerchief. It was moist from the heavy mists which billowed in from the ocean. Initial and perfume identified it as Julia's. The angle of the lodge and the position of the side entrance made it impossible for her to have dropped the handkerchief in any place from which the wind could have whisked it against the foundations at the rear. Instead, it would have been blown toward the front, had Barry and Julia gone from the side en-

trance to the parked car. And Garvin could hardly doubt the proprietor's truthfulness.

Not far from the corner, was a trash burner made of a hundred gallon oil drum, with the head cut out. It was mounted on piers of brick. A fine mesh screen guarded it. This cover was shaped like the lid of a can. The ground about the burner was raked clean. That was what made the one-ounce prescription bottle conspicuous. It had apparently been tossed there by some one not aware that it would bounce from the nearly invisible screen cover.

The typed directions suggested that it had contained a sedative. There remained a bit of syrupy liquid. Taking a page from his notebook, he protected the bottle from fingerprints while he unscrewed the top. The stuff had a pungent, medicinal smell. Garvin was certain now that, without consciously realizing it, he had sensed that neither tainted food, nor "mixing" her drinks, had upset Julia.

The Lodge was strictly straight. It had a fine reputation. And Ferrell was entirely in the clear. Yet Garvin was now convinced that Julia had been doped. But he was confused; he could not connect any of his findings at the Lodge with Walt Keeler's death. He knew that eagerness to put Barry in the wrong was warping his logic, yet he could not quit.

*The guy needs dough, he thought and he won't work for it. . . That was Walt's idea, not mine. . . Well, see how the insurance company likes it. . . .*

**I**N THE morning, Garvin phoned Slade about seeing him. When he arrived, Slade was waiting for him in the breakfast room. Giving him the bottle, Garvin said, "Dave, maybe the prescription can be traced. Take a whiff while I tell you a few things."

Slade sniffed the bottle. "Smells like *syrupus chloral*—perfectly legitimate sedative and hypnotic, but erratic. Some people are very susceptible, others can lap it up.

Some die from thirty grains, others have recovered after taking six hundred grains."

"*Syrupus chloral*—hell, you mean, chloral hydrate—mickey finn?"

"That's right. Where did you find it?" Garvin told him, and when he was finished, Slade said, frowning, "First I thought her odd look and color was shock at her dad's death. Then I thought it might've been something she ate, or the wrong kind of a drink. But this does look like the answer. Only, I can't see how the hell it'd make sense!"

"Try tracing the prescription," Garvin urged. "Don't get any new fingerprints on it. What're they doing about Torrey?"

Slade shrugged. "I passed the word along, about his being out to see Walt after you left Julia. They'll be picking him up."

"I'm on my way to see Julia. Will you come along?"

"Can't," he said, "but you get there before Barry takes over for the day."

Julia was in the solarium. She did not look as beaten as Garvin had expected. He had left the handkerchief at home, intentionally. Since he could not have Julia, he'd at least have something that had belonged to her. But he gave her the silver and red compact, saying, "This is the best I could do. I went to the Skyline after I left here to look around."

"Oh, thanks, Pete." She blinked, swallowed. "Dad gave me that. I didn't miss it till this morning. How'd you know?"

"When you came in last night, I noticed you'd lost your earrings—the ruby blossom gimmicks. You had enough on your mind, so I didn't mention it. I went to look for them." He made a rueful grimace. "But I couldn't find—"

"Earrings?—Oh, but they weren't lost."

"Honey, you were ready to fold! Don't tell me you took them off! I frisked the powder room and everything. The manager took me around."

"But I've got them." She took his hand. "Come on, I'll show you."

Since she had not seen her father's body lying in the study, the room had no horror for her. She knelt at the safe and, with deft fingers, twirled the combination. Taking out the jewel box, she showed him the rubies.

"Nothing's missing, Pete. I'm awfully sorry you were stampeded—no, I'm not!" Impulsively, she kissed him. "That compact's awfully valuable. From now on, I mean. Those other things—well, they were bought for someone else."

"Your mother," he reminded her.

"The sentiment was for *her*, not me."

An inner voice told Garvin that something was fatally wrong with the story; and, that this was the time to quit discussing earrings. But something prompted him to take another tack.

"You two must have been weaving around! Barry didn't look any too chipper himself. I found your compact near the trash burner, believe it or not. Way off from the parking lot, and well away from the side door."

"I don't know *what* hit me! We might've detoured to Timbuktu! What do you think—about Deane Torrey—he might've known Glenn and I were leaving—so he came back?"

"The D. A. will be tending to that angle," Garvin said, grimly. "Dave Slade's going to see to *that*! Where was your dad when he phoned you last night about me?"

"At the club, discussing that trust arrangement with Dave Slade. I talked to Dave this morning about the partnership. He said he didn't know whether you wanted to buy out Dad's half, or not. The insurance was for that purpose, you know."

"Then I don't have any choice, do I?"

"Of course you do. You can keep the money, and let your interest go to the estate."

"Honey, it's up to you. If you want, I'll buy—that'll give me the car, the equipment, all the rights, but no cash for backing the Keeler Special till it places at Indianapolis. But if you keep your Dad's interest—as-

suming you can do it without a squawk from the other heirs—I'll put the fifty grand in trust, to be used only for promoting that car and engine. The way he had his heart set on doing. See what you can do. See what Dave thinks."

Her eyes were wide and wonderful when she answered, "That's the way it will be, if I can fix it. Glenn's no engineer, so I don't know of anyone else I'd rather have carry on than you." She sighed. "Pete, you're awfully good to me. I hope I can deserve it, some time."

Garvin reached for his hat. "If Torrey hasn't burned those blueprints after memorizing the details, he's nuts. So if you're all taken care of, I'm getting busy."

"How, Pete?"

"Gambling that Torrey did something silly about the blueprints."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A Glass of Chartreux

THAT AFTERNOON, Garvin went to Slade's office in San Francisco to ask, "What's cooking with Torrey?"

"He was picked up and gone over," Slade answered. "If he did grab any blueprints, he destroyed or hid them. Admitted he and Walt had shouted at each other, but claims he went home and stayed there with a bottle and a bad case of depression. Didn't even know Walt was dead until he was picked up."

"No alibi?"

"No alibi. Though he did have a neat hangover."

"Is he out on bail?"

"He's out. Period."

"How come?"

"Torrey doesn't have to prove he didn't kill Walt. The D. A. has to prove he *did*."

Garvin frowned darkly. "I get it. Where does that leave me?"

"You were there, and closer to the actual time of the crime than anyone else the

D. A. knows. Also, fifty thousand is a fatter wienie than a set of blueprints."

Garvin straightened up in his chair. "Why haven't they picked me up?" he challenged.

"Give them time," Slade said, grimly. "Though you can dive for cover now, letting me know where you'll be dug in. Soon as there's a warrant I'll be tipped off. I'll get you and go with you to surrender before you're arrested."

After scowling at the carpet for a moment, Garvin look up. "To hell with that!" he said, stubbornly. "There's something odd about Julia's being doped. Another queer touch is the way she came home without earrings, but had the rubies to show me, this morning. I've looked up Barry's credit rating through a friend in the association.

"The guy is dodging people he owes. There's a judgment against him, but nothing to satisfy the claim. Meanwhile, he's trotting Julia around to night spots. He had plenty motive."

"Motive, all right," Slade agreed. "But no more than you had. After all, her dating Barry didn't settle your chances of marrying her."

"He could've taken the blueprints as a blind."

"So could you," Slade countered.

"Oh, for hell's sweet sake!" Garvin shoved his chair back with a scrape and got up. "You're being helpful."

"Sit down, Pete! I am helping you keep from fouling things up. Suspecting Barry and nailing him are two different things. By the way, I checked up on that bottle. No fingerprints. Probably the paper it was wrapped in smudged the prints of the druggist who filled the bottle, and also kept the buyer's from registering. The wrapper must've blown away when the bottle was tossed to the garbage burner."

"How about the prescription number? The M. D. who wrote it?"

"Phoney. Forged on the blank of an M. D. who's dead."

"Getting nowhere fast."

"But when I told the clerk I was wise to the fake," Slade continued, "he nearly fell on his face to make a deal. He said if I'd promise not to get him in a jam, he'd describe the customer."

"Did he?"

"He described Glenn Barry—without being coached. Meaning, the clerk has been making a sideline of supplying phoney prescriptions for certain kinds of medicines that are popular in an illegal way. He had dickered long enough with Barry to get a clear picture, and to remember."

"Then we've got him! What're you waiting for?"

"Sit down!" Slade shoved him back into the chair. "Suppose Barry did give Julia a mickey. With the idea of lifting her jewelry and convincing her she lost it? Had the rubies in his pocket, let's say, when he brought her home. Then got cold feet from seeing us . . . or from her being shocked to her senses when she learned what'd happened to Walt . . . or, just got cold feet, period quote."

"Did Julia know about the deal that'd put Barry out on a limb?"

"Walt said he'd tell her. No point in sewing things up unless Julia did know. Otherwise she'd not be warned, wouldn't be careful."

"That'd only make her more stubborn! Do you suppose she would have told Barry?"

"What do you think?"

Garvin pondered. "I don't think she would have. Because the whole arrangement would look to her like a dig at Barry. Also, a boost for me, which made her dump me and go all out for him. You could ask her if she told Barry. She might have, come to think of it. Just to let him know how she believed in him and to hell with Dad's notions."

"What's wrong with your asking her?"

"She'd tell me to keep my beak out of her personal affairs, but you could settle it

in the line of business. Look, Dave, let's see her this evening. About my ideas on what to do with the insurance money. Did she speak to you about that?"

"She was keen on the idea. Sit down, quit wearing out the carpet while I phone her!"

HE DIALED Julia, and had barely stated his proposition when he handed Garvin the phone. Julia said, "I've been thrilled all day about your plan. I can hardly wait till we've made it legal. A sort of memorial to Dad. If things weren't in such an upset, I'd ask you and Dave out for dinner. Why don't you come for coffee and liqueurs? Ask Dave if he can."

Garvin asked. "He says he can, but he won't, unless there's pie included with the coffee."

"There'll be pie," she assured him. And then, "Glenn'll be here. I hope you won't mind?"

"Heck, no, honey. That's something I've got to get used to."

Hanging up, he turned to Slade. "Barry'll be there. I'd have no chance to ask her anything. Get-busy drawing the papers. I've got things to do."

"Mind telling me what?"

"Give Barry's apartment a looking over while he's busy somewhere else. Case the building first, to figure a smooth way of getting in, and getting out again."

Slade said, dolefully, "That's breaking and entering—a felony. I'll be having you for a client, one way or another! You know I don't like to monkey with criminal cases. What do you expect to find?"

"The candlestick that finished Walt was wiped clean. Everyone's fingerprint conscious. But whoever hit Walt must've got a fine splash of blood on his clothes. Using a weapon of that sort, he'd have to have been close. You know how a head wound bleeds. There might even have been arterial spurts. Fine drops wouldn't be noticed on anything as dark as dinner clothes.



I say, a fellow so careful of fingerprints is likely to have overlooked the fact that one pinpoint of human blood would show up even if you dunked the whole suit and then tested the tub of water. A man might cut himself shaving, and smear towels or underwear, but he'd have a fine time accounting for blood traces on a dinner jacket."

"Don't skip the pants," Slade reminded him. "Could have been a spray from ankle level, before he could step clear. You're not going to do anything this afternoon, are you?"

"Just size things up."

"Don't do anything tonight, either."

"Why the hell not? He'll be busy with Julia. This is custom built!"

"Here's why not. I'll get copies of the police pictures, and we'll have a look at the wound. See if there could have been arterial spurts. They took at least a couple of pix with that new color film, the one that can be processed locally in a couple of hours. You can make blowups, any size, in another hour."

"That's not finding blood on a suit."

"All right, then. I am trying to stall you off a bit."

"Why? I am going through with it."

"In case you are hooked," Slade explained, "it'd help if I could show that you had reasonable cause of suspicion. As long as you had seen a picture, you could dream up *something*, and claim it seemed reasonable to you. Go ahead and case the place, but let it stop at that."

Agreeing, Garvin went for a look at the apartment building on California street, where Barry lived. That done, he got a window cleaner's belt. From the shop he took a thin strip of chrome vanadium steel.

That evening, when the four met in Julia's dining room, Slade took the new partnership agreement from his brief case. Spreading it out on the table, he said, "The other heirs have no interest in this matter. You agree to enter into a manufacturing and research enterprise with Pete. He

agrees to pay in fifty-thousand, when, if, and as received from the insurance company. While you're dishing out that pie and coffee, I'll read the terms."

When she had done serving them, Slade explained the terms. He uncapped his pen. "Barry, mind signing as witness."

Julia interposed. "Glenn, darling, will you set out the glasses while I get Dad's pen?" And when she came back, she said, "Let's fill them up, first."

On the big, silver tray was an assortment of liqueurs such as Garvin had never seen outside of a bartender's guide.

Slade asked for Drambuie.

Garvin took a pony of cognac.

Barry wanted green Chartreux, and poured crème de cacao for Julia.

She was about to turn from the table when Garvin checked her.

"Hold it till I get one more glass. For the silent partner—W. J."

The glow of Julia's appreciation brought a momentary narrowing of Barry's eyes and a flash of displeasure at having missed his chance. Garvin, enjoying the reaction, asked Julia, "What was his after-dinner poison? Chartreux or crème de menthe?"

"Didn't Dad ever tell you what he thought of drinking perfume or liquid chewing gum? The Armagnac, Pete, the Armagnac!"

So he filled a glass with that rare brandy from France.

Signatures. . . .

Then they rose to drink to W. J., to the Keeler Diesel engine, the Keeler Special-to-be. Julia raised the fifth glass, ticked it daintily against the others, and whisked it into the fireplace. It shattered with a thin, high tinkle.

Then Garvin nudged Slade. "Dave, let's haul! We've got things to do."

There was a round robin of hand shaking. Garvin wanted to avoid Barry, but thought better of it. Each measured the other for a noticeable instant. Each resumed the mask of affability.

Leaving, Garvin wondered whether he had disguised his aversion or concealed the intent, the knowledge that had flared up only a few minutes previous. He knew now that he and Barry would meet soon, and for the finish of either one or the other.

Once in the drive, Slade demanded, "What was the idea of railroading me away? You'd made such a point of my asking Julia—"

"Nothing left to ask, now that we know green Chartreux is Barry's favorite."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Partnership

THE FOLLOWING afternoon, Garvin insisted on seeing Julia about the partnership. Disposing of the matter he had cooked up as a pretext, he made the first move to shoot Glenn Barry down in flames.

"Torrey," he began, "has fizzled out as a suspect." He gave Slade's views, then concluded, "So I took a fresh look at things. Would have, even if I weren't smeared with suspicion myself. Until I talked with Dave, I never realized how the public has been oversold on alibis. The phoney kind, the kind that doesn't work anywhere nearly as well as people think."

"Pete," Julia said, "what are you getting at?"

He set aside his mask and openly took the offensive. "You are Glenn's alibi. Considering the shape you were in, that night, he could have wiped out an army without your suspecting it."

Instead of immediate protest, there was silence.

"If your dad had lived a bit longer," he went on, relentlessly, "he would have had his estate sewed up in a trust fund, which would have sunk Glenn Barry. He's been in a financial jam ever since you knew him, and he made sure he would not be sunk. You are his alibi."

"I am not! What about the man at the

Skyline Lodge, the one who helped me? Oh, I never dreamed you could be so spiteful! I was so happy last night about your wanting to carry on. And now—now—"

"Now," he cut in, remorselessly, "I am carrying on to help you get the straight of your dad's death."

"Accusing Glenn," she retorted, furiously, "because Dad was going to set up a trust fund is as unjust as accusing you because of that insurance! You're a poor loser—I'm disappointed in you—we'll cancel that partnership!"

Springing to her feet, she looked up at him with fierce eyes. As she was about to turn from him, he caught her arms and held her.

"Hear me out. Sweat this out before it's too late," he demanded. "Before you're hurt worse—and you're going to be hurt to the limit."

"If you're so sure, why don't you tell the police?"

"No matter what the law did, you'd stick up for him. This has to be settled so that you will know with your own senses—not on anyone else's say-so. That's why I've come to you."

She regarded him intently. "Are you sure you're in your right mind? Glenn didn't know of the trust fund plan. I didn't tell him. He has been having business difficulties getting started. Telling him would have worried him."

"He did know, and I'll prove it to you. Prove too that you were doped at the Skyline. Once you had passed out, he drove straight to the house, finished your dad, and came back to take you home. My next move is to go to his apartment and search it for evidence to make a case that will stand up in court."

"You'll plant something!" she flared. "You can't get away with it."

He had her right now where he wanted her. He reached for the phone. "You're going with me to watch every move I make. Or else, I'm calling the police. When they

hear my story, they'll land so fast that you couldn't warn him in time for him to hide anything."

"You know I'd never protect anyone who harmed dad! If I knew who it was, I'd kill him to make sure he couldn't beat the law!"

Garvin shook his head. "If you *knew*, yes. But when Glenn's accused, you'd go to the limit to keep from knowing, and you'd protect him. Shall I phone?"

"I'll go with you. To be there when you fall flat, and have to take back every poisonous word you've spoken. I'll be ready in a minute."

When Julia returned from her second floor suite, she looked years older. Garvin knew that unless he made good, he would have an enemy for life.

"You're expecting him to the house for dinner?"

"Yes."

"Then we won't have to bait him away. Leave a note for him to wait here till you get back."

The drive up the Bayshore to San Francisco was twenty miles of punishment as grim as had been the showdown with Julia.

After parking at the crest of the California Street grade, Garvin stepped into a pay station. Julia stood beside him as he dialed Barry's number. There was no answer. Picking up the brief case in which he had stowed his gear, Garvin made for his destination. Without a word, Julia went with him. It was as though they were shackled together and, at the same time, had a world-wide gulf between them that could never again be spanned.

The apartment buildings in that neighborhood were on such a steep slope that the downhill side had a four-story drop from the floor which corresponded to street level at the entrance. Some of this deep substructure was devoted to garage and service; in some of it were lower priced living quarters. Barry's rooms were way up in

the fancier reaches of the modern building.

Finally Juila asked, "You have pass-keys?"

"No. I'm doing this the hard way. Go up and wait at the door. I'll let you in." After dipping into the brief case, he handed it to her. "Take this along, I'll have my hands full."

**G**ARVIN RODE the freight elevator to the fourth. From there he went through a hall window to the fire escape, which he followed to the eighth. At that level, he stepped to the ledge.

It was wide enough, plenty wide enough for him to edge along. A seasoned mountaineer would have found it no more than the routine approach to something really exciting. But Garvin was neither mountain climber nor structural steel worker. There came a deadly moment when he had the urge to claw the masonry, glue himself against it and yell for help. Though he knew better than to stop, he barely kept himself from freezing against the wall.

He remembered with sickening suddenness that tall buildings swayed in the wind. The Chrysler Building had a sway of four, or was it fourteen feet? He had barely regained control of his stomach by reminding himself that at the eighth floor, the motion of a building would hardly be enough to notice, when he became earthquake conscious.

Waiting for the shudder that would knock him from the ledge was a new enemy to fight his progress until he finally did arrive at Barry's window.

Garvin was ready to fold of his own weight. The window cleaner's belt he wore under his coat gave him new life. Once he had its hooks secured, he set to work with the strip of alloy steel and broke the window lock.

Clearing the sill, he unsnapped the belt and wove his way to the hall door.

Julia was waiting. It was not until she saw his face and noticed the open window

that she knew what a risk he had taken.

He said, shakily, "You can bet I've never done that before—that I'd never do it again. If I'd known, I'd not have done it this time."

He sat down, stretching his legs out as far as they could reach. He was still trembling and ready to come apart.

"Suppose," Julia demanded, "he doesn't wait for me at the house. Suppose he came back here before he went out and found my note?"

"Could happen." He pointed to a closet. "You could duck into that and keep out of sight till the showdown. Unless you want to sit in on the game, you'd better pick your foxhole now."

Bedroom and living room were separated by an archway. From the latter, a short passageway led to a bath and thence to the kitchenette and breakfast alcove. There was a vestibule between the living room and hall door.

Julia watched sharply as Garvin emptied a laundry hamper and went over the contents. "No dice," he muttered, abstractedly, as he replaced the lot.

Julia's silent opposition clamped a vise about his wits. He knew what he intended to do, knew what he was seeking; yet within him, he groped, wondering how to break through numbness and lethargy.

The writing desk was jammed with overdue bills, and notices of overdrafts on the bank. It fell flat when Garvin said, "Just like the credit association claimed."

She gave him a silent, "So what?"

The metal wastebasket was empty, but the inside was fire stained. Flakes of heavy paper stuck to the scorched lacquer of the inside. The outside showed the effects of heat.

The flakes were small and fragile and black. As with burned newsprint, lettered spots reflected light otherwise than did blank surface. Garvin said, "Burned blueprints. Get it? Rhinehart style script—mechanical drawing—and thick paper.

These were blueprints in here, all right."

"Those scraps couldn't prove anything," she said.

"That's what he thought, when he flushed all but these scraps down the john," Garvin countered, harshly. He felt like a surgeon forced to operate without anaesthetic.

Julia's color had changed.

"Let's frisk the clothes closet. Small blood splashes might be hard to see on shoes or dinner clothes, but laboratory tests'll do the job. The smallest drop will show up."

He turned toward the bedroom. Julia pounced after him.

Opening the closet door, he found the dinner clothes on their hanger. Before examining the garments, or the shoes on their trees, he dipped into the pockets. He whisked the handkerchief he brought out. It had a dark smudge.

"See?"

"That's not blood!" she gasped, in relief.

He was going to say, "Of course it's not! But this is it, this is what I wanted, and didn't know it." He was reaching for the words when he heard the metallic sound of a key at the entrance.

Julia shrank back into the closet, as though ashamed of being caught snooping. Garvin bounded toward the archway into the living room.

GLENN BARRY was in the vestibule, taking the key from the lock.

"Just in time," Garvin said, "for a game of drop the handkerchief. This handkerchief—the one you forgot to get rid of."

Barry was too startled to be angry. "How the hell'd you get in?"

"Human fly. Through the window."

Barry straightened up, cocked his head. "How'd you like to leave that way?" he asked, with over-controlled smoothness.

"Might be a nice way for you to leave, before I'm through. You may want it that

way." Garvin waggled the handkerchief. "This is why. Something you skipped when you slugged Walt Keeler."

"That's going a long way, trying to undermine me with Julia. That partnership deal last night was enough. This is too much. Quit being a damn fool and start getting used to the way things are going to be from now on."

"The druggist who sold you that bottle of chloral hydrate will identify you. You doped Julia. While she was out cold, you hustled to the house and killed Walt, so he couldn't tie up her money and keep you from chiseling. You left and came back to the Skyline by the emergency exit, the back stairs from that private dining room. I found her handkerchief where you dropped it when you took the bottle out of your pocket to throw it into the incinerator."

"After you'd finished Walt, you had nothing to do but wait for her to snap out of it. You took those blueprints to make it look like Deane Torrey's job."

"Just what do you mean I killed Walt so he couldn't tie up her money?"

After explaining, Garvin concluded, "You were playing for a bigger stake, over the long term, than any fifty thousand."

"I never heard of any such deal."

"Walt was careless about the way he left papers lying around on his desk. They'd been blown around, and even stepped on. You had plenty of chance to read that trust agreement, and you did read it. There's the print of a liqueur glass on one page—green chartreux stain. Begin to understand last night's drink to Walt? Aside from Walt and Julia and Dave, who else'd be entitled to go over a document of that sort? Can you picture Walt discussing personal business—Julia's personal affairs—with an outsider?"

"And none of them ever take Chartreux. You always do. You stole a peep, and then did something about it. You had the chance, almost any evening while waiting for Julia, and you got a look."

"Garvin, this stops being funny. It's bad business when a fellow goes psycho and dreams up a mess like this. You can pay or pressure some clunk into saying he sold me chloral hydrate. Claiming I am the only Chartreux drinking person who could've seen the papers is silly. Just because Deane Torrey wasn't caught with the blueprints doesn't make me the one who took them. What makes you think Walt would have opened the safe for me?"

"You slipped, that time!" Garvin flashed

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back. "How do you know it was locked until you got there?"

Barry flinched. Before he could answer, Garvin pressed on, triumphantly. "With Julia doped, you took her jewelry and hustled back—an easy six-seven miles. You handed Walt the trinkets saying you two had changed your plans and were going to a spot where stuff like that was out. He unlocks the safe, and you clobber him!

"Here's your own handkerchief you used to wipe fingerprints from the candlestick. The mate to it had a fine film of silver polish when I saw it. The one that killed Walt was bright and clean. See the polish smudge here? Any police technician can identify the kind of polish, the very piece of silver it was rubbed from. The handkerchief can be identified as yours.

"You'll be locked up in the booby hatch to make a career of dreaming up yarns like that. Sit down! Let's have a drink, and let's get this settled. You're going off the beam because Julia's through with you. I'd feel the same in your place, but damn it, you're going too far!"

Once in the living room, Garvin said, "Before you give me a drink, let me hand you the rest. That wastebasket had blueprints burned in it. There are scraps of paper. It has a chemical in it that fire doesn't destroy. It can be identified. Why don't you phone your lawyer and tell him you want to surrender?"

Barry chuckled, shook his head, and made a wry grimace. "You must have overlooked some drawings I have. A house for me and Julia. I scrapped a set I'd rejected. Let me show you the new set."

He stepped through the archway into the bedroom. He opened a dresser drawer.

He turned. In one hand he had an envelope. In the other, an automatic. "You came in through the window. Broke in, with that gizmo lying over there."

Barry wasted no words explaining that an alarmed householder's right to kill a burglar when taken by surprise was rarely

questioned. The hardening of eyes and mouth, the slight sway on his feet warned Garvin that Barry was letting him live on borrowed time. The face was changing. Barry lacked neither the resolution nor the urge. He had merely to be sure that his story would fit the results.

"Better see what's in my brief case, Barry," he said, quietly, "and be sure you know what you want. Unless you're sure you are right, that gun will finish you for keeps. I'm not alone in this."

"Let's hear it."

"There's a picture in the brief case. A police picture of Walt Keeler lying on the floor, with jewelry spilled on the carpet. A color picture—and a ruby earring—Julia's—shows up—in a picture taken before you brought her home. That proves my story—*Watch it! Hey—*"

Barry, grimacing at what he took for a bearded gag, did not budge.

Then a look of wonder loosened his features. It was as if he could not believe that the pistol blast behind him had anything to do with the jolt that made him lurch forward and drop his gun.

Garvin kicked the Colt aside as Barry crumpled to his knees. He caught Julia by the arms, brushing aside her fuming automatic. Enough's enough, honey."

"Why didn't you show me the picture!"

"It wasn't pretty. It was in color, I tell you. That ruby blossom was like a headlight. This way was better. You know for yourself. You've seen, you've heard."

He took the gun from her. "Phone the police, while I see that this fellow doesn't jump out the window. He'd like to, and he's still able." Then, as she turned, he caught her arm, checking her. "Honey, how come you brought a gun?"

"Just in case you tried to plant anything, or play any tricks."

"You're a hell of a partner!"

"When I'm through phoning, darling, you'll know I'm the best partner you ever had!"

# ANOTHER MAN'S POISON

By

HAROLD HELFER

POISON is one of the oldest and most popular methods of committing murder, but perhaps no poison case ever took a stranger turn than one that occurred some two decades ago in the rather staid and quiet community of Haddenham, England.

The curtain on the bizarre-like happening went up one evening in a police station in London. A man, identifying himself as William Baden Staley, stumbled into the station and, obviously distraught, told this story:

The day before he'd poisoned the lady with whom he'd been rooming at Haddenham, Mrs. Lavina Mae Morton. She'd resisted his advances and he'd become angry with her. So he'd slipped into her room and poured some poison into the medicine bottle she kept by her bedside.

He'd come to London and tried to forget about what he had done. But he hadn't been able to sleep all last night, knowing that at the very moment, back in Haddenham, the attractive Mrs. Morton was writhing in agony. And today he hadn't been able to eat or do anything—the thought of Mrs. Morton in torturous pain was driving him crazy.

The London police promptly phoned the officers at Haddenham. They were astonished that anybody would have wanted to take the lovely Mrs. Morton's life and they rushed to her home.

"Somebody tried to poison me?" she echoed incredulously. "Why, that's ridiculous. I don't know when I've felt better."

"Then you must not have been taking your medicine in the last twenty-four hours or so?" put in an officer.

"Of course, I have," declared Mrs. Morton. "I take it regularly."

Despite some reluctance on her part, the officers rushed her to a hospital. It was discovered that Mrs. Morton *did* have poison in her—the dangerous phenol, a powdered form of carbohic acid. What is more, traces of this deadly poison was still evident in her medicine bottle.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Morton did not remain in the hospital. It was plain that she was feeling all right—in fact, as she'd said, was possessed of more vitality than she'd been in sometime. For the strange fact turned out to be this: The phenol, in combination with the medicine into which it had been placed, served as a tonic for her . . . it actually did make her feel noticeably better!

Thus, on the night that her would-be murderer was tossing in his bed because he thought that Mrs. Morton must be in great agony, she was, in reality, enjoying the best night's sleep that she'd had in years.

And at the trial, Staley's attorneys argued that their client couldn't be found guilty of attempted murder when what he had done was actually improve the condition of the supposed victim. How could anybody be a "victim" if they were better off than before?

The judge, though, took a dim view of people going around and poisoning other people with the intent of removing them from this mortal sphere, no matter what the actual outcome, and he gave Staley a nominal jail sentence of eighteen months. But the case really had a weirdly happy ending—it started the "victim" back on the road to health!

• • •

# IT WORKS—FOR A WHILE

By **BESS RITTER**

**I**F YOU'RE interested in "earning" a dishonest dollar, you can do so in a surprisingly large number of original ways—until the gendarmes catch up with you.

What's more, you don't have to execute a brilliant and seemingly impossible bit of Grade-A salesmanship like selling Grand Central Station to a newly-arrived emigrant. (Although hundreds have handed over untold sums of hard cash to unscrupulous confidence artists already, in return for what they ambitiously planned to convert into ideally-situated fruit stands, grocery stores, and super meat markets.)

Instead, you can pull something realistically simple, like selling a gold mine on the outskirts of your own town or city, as was done recently on the stretch of roadway between New York and Yonkers, where a driveway was under reconstruction. Work was held up for a couple of days due to a shortage of materials, and the pneumatic drills and other equipment were left standing on the spot. Straightaway, four confidence men printed up some imposing-looking mining stock and started peddling it. The clincher in each deal was a drive out to the site of the unbelievable diggings—and didn't the machinery and the already broken ground prove the truth of their stories? "Of course," they always added, "keep this under your hat. Because once Wall Street hears about what's going on, the whole thing will be sold out from under." Impossible? Maybe. But before construction was resumed again, a hundred and thirty-five thousand dollars had changed hands.

Or you can read the obituary columns and select the names of recently deceased, fairly well-to-do family men. Call on the widow of each one, the day before the funeral. Tell her with assurance, "I have the deed that your husband wanted." Then pull a long and sympathetic face while she explains that the man just died, and what deed are you talking about? "Oh," you say, and then plunge into your story: He's paid—say—\$10,000 on a \$10,500 piece of property. And as soon as that last \$500 changes hands, so will the land. Well, too bad. Now it will be lost because of default. "Oh no," replies the widow. "My husband had good judgment." And she buys the piece of paper, which gives her title to some land that's a few feet under water, and undoubtedly isn't worth a tenth of her money.

Again, you can concentrate only on children who have just passed away. Then send each youngster's grieving parents a \$2.00 C.O.D. package. The contents can be a cheap baseball, fountain pen, doll, or whatever, which presumably was mail-ordered by the now-deceased. That gives you a \$1.90 gross profit on each deal, which doesn't sound like much. Nevertheless, four men who operated this little "business" recently netted \$42,500 before they were caught up with by the postal authorities.

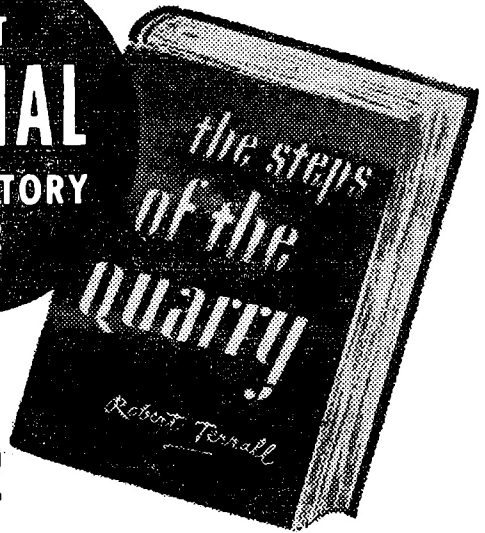
You can also concentrate on the living, and do fairly well if you have a decrepit suit of clothing, a two day old beard and a good appetite. Bring it into a well selected eatery, tell the proprietor you're starving,

*(Continued on page 113)*





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# UNLUCKY IN LOVE



By **STEPHEN STERNE**



**T**HE pasty-faced little landlady protested: "Just because I refuse to let my rooms out to bachelors is no indication that I committed the robberies. I had nothing to do with them." And Edith Annie Riley looked so indignantly unattractive that the two police sergeants in charge of the arrest almost believed what she was saying. For headquarters, up until that very morning in 1938 had been on the lookout for only a beautiful, alluring, young woman.

Each of the one hundred and two persons who'd been burglarized of his money and his jewels in the city of Manchester, England, within the last twelve months, had been an eligible, good-looking bachelor. The kind who has dozens of glamorously feminine friends. And each flat was thickly permeated, immediately after the theft, with an expensive perfume. It was heavy, but tantalizingly and provocatively "different." Ergo, argued the authorities, who but a lovely lady would use such stuff? And who else could enter such apartments unobtrusively?

Miss Riley, on the other hand, didn't fit such a picture. She wore heavy horn-rimmed glasses, flat shoes, a drab skirt and a dull, shapeless hat. Her hair was stringy and straw-colored. Her face was completely innocent of any kind of makeup, and the natural tone of her skin was both sallow and shiny.

Men, as a matter of neighborhood fact, didn't play any part in her life whatsoever. All she was interested in was her work. This consisted of supervising the rental and

the care of two middle-class houses on Withington Road. She devoted practically every hour of every day to her duties, which entailed renting vacant flats and supervising the tidiness of those that were occupied. Her reputation for the former was, "Sorry—no bachelors." And her fame in the latter case was even more widespread. She was considered the world's tidiest and most sanitary person. And a dirty ashtray, fleck of dust, or most minute strand of cobweb **didn't** have a chance as far as she was concerned.

The only time, in fact, that she let up on her perpetual scrubbing and scouring was two days each week, in the middle of the afternoon. Then she put on a shawl, tucked a shopping bag under one arm, and every tenant in the house immediately knew that Miss Riley was stepping out to take care of her marketing.

She had no recreation, except reading books, into the wee small hours of the night, in the privacy of her well-locked, well-curtained bedroom.

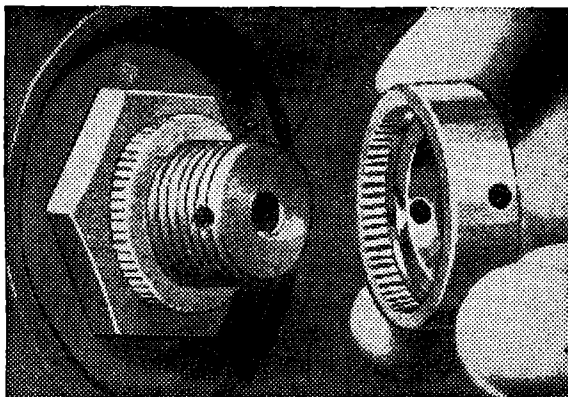
But the queerest part of all about the queer little suspect was that nobody in the neighborhood thought that she was odd in the least. Instead, she was simply "that poor little Edie Riley," who got herself jilted a long time ago to an oily-tongued swindler. He loved her and left her. But before he vanished forever, he'd talked her into signing over the ownership of a couple of houses she possessed so's they'd be in his name. Then he turned around and sold them, and absconded with the money.

*(Continued on page 113)*

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# BLOOD MONEY

By DAVID STEWART



A NUMBER of years ago a clerk in a firm in England, counting the day's receipts, frowned suspiciously at a bank note—and this led to the freeing of a man hundreds of miles away on another continent in what is one of the oddest prison rescues on record.

The clerk thought that the bill might be counterfeit. On closer examination, he saw that it wasn't—it was just that there was some scribbling on it.

With some relief, he put the bill with the rest of the already counted money, then reached out and picked it up again. The scribbling seemed to be a message.

Oh, well, he told himself. Some people were such fools—there was no telling what one might decide to do. But he still couldn't put the bill down. The scribbling wasn't at all easy to make out. The letters were real tiny and there were some obliterations to it.

But there was something about that scribbling, perhaps its strange rusty-looking color that fascinated him and wouldn't let him be. He decided he would decipher it if he had to stand on his head to do it.

It was a very painstaking business. But when he finally managed to make it out it sent shivers up and down him. "If the note should fall in the hands of John Dean," the message went, "his brother is a prisoner in Algiers."

The excited clerk turned the bill over to British authorities who, upon investigation, located a John Dean in the town of Longhill. Sure enough, it turned out that he did have a brother from whom he hadn't heard in many years and who seemed to have completely vanished.

Britain's foreign office got to work, found that John Dean's brother was a prisoner in Algiers on some vague charge or other and had been for more than ten years! Desperate, he had written that message on the bill when it had come through his hands quite some time before by cutting his hand and using the blood as ink and a wooden splinter as a pen!

England negotiated the release of its citizen. But if it hadn't been for a conscientious, counterfeit-wary clerk hundreds of miles away, this Britisher might very well have rotted the rest of his life away in prison.

• • •

## Hot Number

(Continued from page 58)

roast a thousand people alive. You said something about exciting people. You'd have had enough to last you a dozen lifetimes if George hadn't noticed those panic-bolts were mucked up."

George blubbered like a baby.

Doranne ran to him. "He's trying to throw a scare into you, that's all, darling."

"Ask me, there's no more room for scare in George." Pedley took her arm. "Besides, right about now he's realizing you didn't have any business down in your dressing room when the fire broke out, anyhow. You didn't have to change costumes during the act, or your dresser'd have been down there waiting for you. You didn't want something you'd left down there, or you'd have sent George for it. He doesn't have to have it spelled out."

Wilter said between his teeth: "That business about always liking to get men lathered up, you got her right on that, fire-laddie. She's a ball of fire, all right, but she always wants to be rolling along to something new."

The chimes *Hail-Hail*-ed.

Pedley said, "George. Go let the Doc in, will you? I have to hang onto the hot number!"

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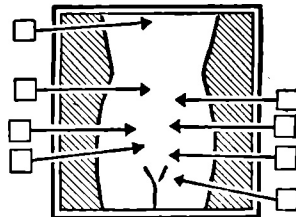
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## Fletcher Flora

(Continued from page 75)

come from behind me, from the vicinity of the door. The plump little man who called himself Smith, kneeling on one knee, coughed softly and folded over, settling himself on the floor as if he were trying to find a comfortable position.

From the door, the sonorous voice of Ramon Tellez, Mexican cop, had a tone of gentle reproof. "You should have consulted the authorities, *señor*. As I said, the police of my country are not children. Did you think we would leave you unobserved?"

After that, there was little or nothing I could do, and pretty soon Tellez shook my hand and said everything would of a certainty be alright, and I went back to my room . . . mine and Hannah's. She was still asleep, with her hair spread on the pillow, and there was a warm and aching happiness inside my ribs as I stood for a while looking out at the paling stars.

*It's time to head north, I thought. It's time to go home.* I • • •

## Sing Me a Killin' Tune

(Continued from page 82)

in a few weeks you'll be back to work."

Dykes turned toward the door. "I'd better let you and Doris have a little time to yourselves."

The gray-haired, soft-eyed woman beside Gregg's bed, bent and pressed his head against her. Her hand was cool on his forehead. She kept saying his name and Gregg kept staring at the ceiling and swallowing. When they both got over it a little and it was almost time for her to go, she asked Gregg if there was anything she could bring him tomorrow.

He said, very gruffly, "Yeah, baby. Go see that creep, Dykes, and tell him he's got a couple of books I'd like to look at. Tell him I want something nice and dry to read in case I have trouble sleeping. He'll know what books I mean." • • •

## Ready for the Rackets

(Continued from page 8)

### Insurance for Eggs

Dear Sir:

A friend who lives on a farm several miles from Knoxville, Tennessee was approached one day by a well-dressed man who asked for some water for his car. While going through the process of filling the car radiator he said he was an insurance salesman. He interested my friend in some insurance and said he would take chickens and eggs at market price for payment. The salesman wrote out a receipt saying the company would mail the policy.

Several weeks passed and no policy arrived. My friend wrote the company explaining what had happened, along with a description of the salesman. The company notified the sheriff. With this information, they located the salesman running a poultry market in a town 100 miles away. He had used this insurance racket to help supply his store.

Wendell R. Pence  
South Gate, Calif.

### Protection for Farmers

Dear Sir:

Last summer my cousin who owns a farm was filched by two slick-talking, middle-aged men. They were seeking new members, so they said, to enlarge their Rural Protection Association. The organization would have expert detectives to help stop rural thievery, and a special attorney would help prosecute the offenders. Each farmer would have a sign on his gate warning would-be thieves of the association's ruthlessness in tracking down and punishing anyone caught stealing or defacing property on that farm.

It sounded good. The men had fancy letterheads, and sample signs to be posted on the farms. Since the dues were only ten dollars a year, my cousin became a member.

The two con men did a good business for a short time, then disappeared. Some farmers may have been ashamed to admit being swindled, but it was estimated that the two must have split about a hundred dollars a day for the week they spent in the county.

Jess F. Blair  
Big Spring, Tex.

### Check Cashing Game

Dear Sir:

When I was a clerk at the local hotel, a Mr. Martin registered. A company letter had arrived for him the previous day. From the contents of the letter he showed me duplicates of orders from local merchants I knew.

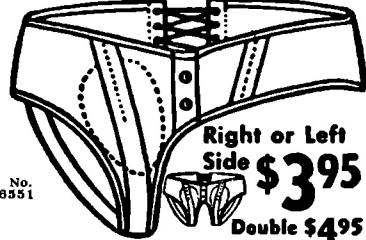
He asked me if I would cash his expense check before he checked out the next morning. The check was on protectograph paper, stamped by a protectograph machine, and signed by the treasurer of the company. It was on the Chase National Bank of New York.

It is customary for hotels to cash company checks for their patrons. Martin left a forwarding address. Ten days later the check bounced. He had no account. Local merchants didn't know

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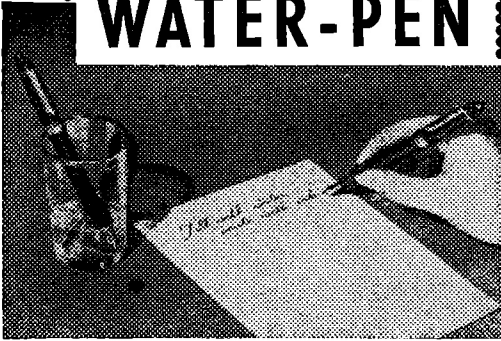
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## Ready for the Rackets

him or the company. A telegram to the company was returned unclaimed and marked unknown.

Martin didn't register at the forwarding address, but many hotels in the state cashed similar amounts on the same company. It was a new method of fraud by presenting company "hot" checks.

Basil Truby  
Durant, Okla.

### Cookies for Credit

Dear Sir:

The young lady came into the bakery and asked the price of our wedding cakes. Then she bought a couple dollars worth of cookies, rolls, and bread. When she started to pay she said, "I have forgotten my purse. What will I do?"

Then she said she was a nurse working for one of the hospitals in town. She said I could call them if I wished.

Finally, I let her have the bakery goods. She was to come in the next day to order the wedding cake and pay the bill.

She did not come the next day, but came in on Saturday night just before closing time. After she had selected another three dollars worth of baked goods she said her wedding had been postponed for a couple of weeks and she hadn't collected her money, but would leave her engagement ring as security.

I took the ring. On Monday morning I took it to the jeweler who said it had come from the dime store. I had called the hospitals and none of them knew anything about her.

I was out the money for the goods. This woman worked the same racket on several stores here, but one grocery clerk said to her "I'll check with the credit bureau." While he was checking, she left the store and has not been seen since.

Cora Robison  
McMinnville, Ore.

### Guess Your Weight

Dear Sir:

My grandson, visiting a carnival, sat in a swinging chair to have his weight guessed.

There were two men running the concession and one of them bet the other a dollar he could guess my grandson's weight by simply lifting him up.

He lost his bet and my grandson lost his wallet. The concession man robbed him as he lifted him up.

W. F. Wood  
Savannah, Ga.

That winds up our racket news for this issue. Thanks for being with us and we hope the letters we have printed will put you on your guard against swindlers and sharpsters of all kinds.

—The Editors



## It Works—for a While

(Continued from page 104)

and get yourself staked to a free five-course dinner. Wolf down the food and then prepare to leave. But before you do so, drop a \$10 bill ostentatiously on the floor. The proprietor will see it and throw you out—after taking the money, deducting the cost of the food, and handing you your change. He doesn't find out until later that your money is quite counterfeit.

But the cheapest little penny-ante scheme of all that will net you a 99¢ gross on each deal can be operated by placing small ads in farm newspapers. They might read as follows: EXCELLENT STEEL ENGRAVING OF GEORGE WASHINGTON SUITABLE FOR FRAMING. ONLY \$1.00. And in return for every dollar you receive, you send the addressee a penny postage stamp, bearing a picture of the president, mounted on a piece of paper. And according to thousands of people who've been swindled in this way, you'll do well for yourself—until the government takes over. ● ● ●

## Unlucky in Love

(Continued from page 106)

Now she worked as a landlady in those very same buildings.

"And that's why I hate bachelors," sobbed Miss Riley to the sergeants. "And is that a crime?" Then she burst into a fresh flurry of uncontrolled tears. "Can't you understand that? That they all remind me of. . . ."

THE men looked at each other. She sounded so sincere that they would have let her go, without another word, if they weren't in possession of the following:

(a) Each of the robberies were committed on the self-same day that Miss Riley went "shopping," according to sworn and signed affidavits made by tenants and neighbors.

(b) Each of the robbed rooms had



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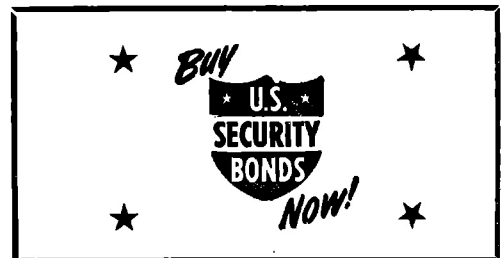
been scrupulously tidied by the person who had ransacked them: The ashtrays were emptied, the wastebaskets cleared, the tables dusted and the mirrors polished.

(c) The name of each victim was found in a drawer of Miss Riley's desk, incorporated in a clipping from a daily newspaper, generally taken from the society section. It usually described the comings and goings of the Man-about-Town, and when he could be found at different cabarets and night clubs.

(d) Miss Riley's flat was devoid of any reading matter whatsoever. But a kitchen cupboard in the apartment yielded an assortment of residential skeleton keys. In addition there was plenty of equipment that would keep any person busy till the tiny small hours, without bother with books: This consisted of a set of Troy weights, such as goldsmiths use, a couple of magnifying glasses, and a pair of delicate pliers. Careful examination with microscope and chemicals showed all contained traces of gold.

But what really clinched the case was the row of fancy little bottles that were neatly lined up in the bottom drawer of her bedroom dressing table. They were filled with a heavy tantalizing odor—exactly the sort that permeated every theft.

When they showed her these, she confessed, but her last words were the saddest: "I only stocked the stuff and used it because Joe bought me my first flacon. I had to use it because—it was the only thing he ever gave me."



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MISSING IBC (PAGE 115)

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and my wife was  
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You rarely see her. Each day she leaves you a "thank-you" note. Then, one afternoon, you bring your wife home from the airport, and you find Nan Ordway is waiting for you... **HANGING** from your bedroom chandelier!

You're horrified! You try to convince your wife, your friends, and the police that there was **NOTHING** between you. But Nan's room-mate points an accusing finger and says, "*Nan told me every sordid detail about you... how you seduced her... how you promised to divorce your wife and marry her! She killed herself because of you!*"

You listen — in **SHOCKED AMAZEMENT!** Then your maid is questioned. She says she found Nan Ordway in **YOUR BED** one morning, sleeping in **YOUR WIFE'S** pajamas! White with anger, your wife leaves you. Your friends desert you... and you begin to live in terrible fear of this dead girl who seemed determined to destroy you...

But the worst is still to come. While you are trying desperately to clear your name, the Police Medical Examiner delivers his report: *Nan Ordway didn't hang herself. SHE WAS KILLED!*

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