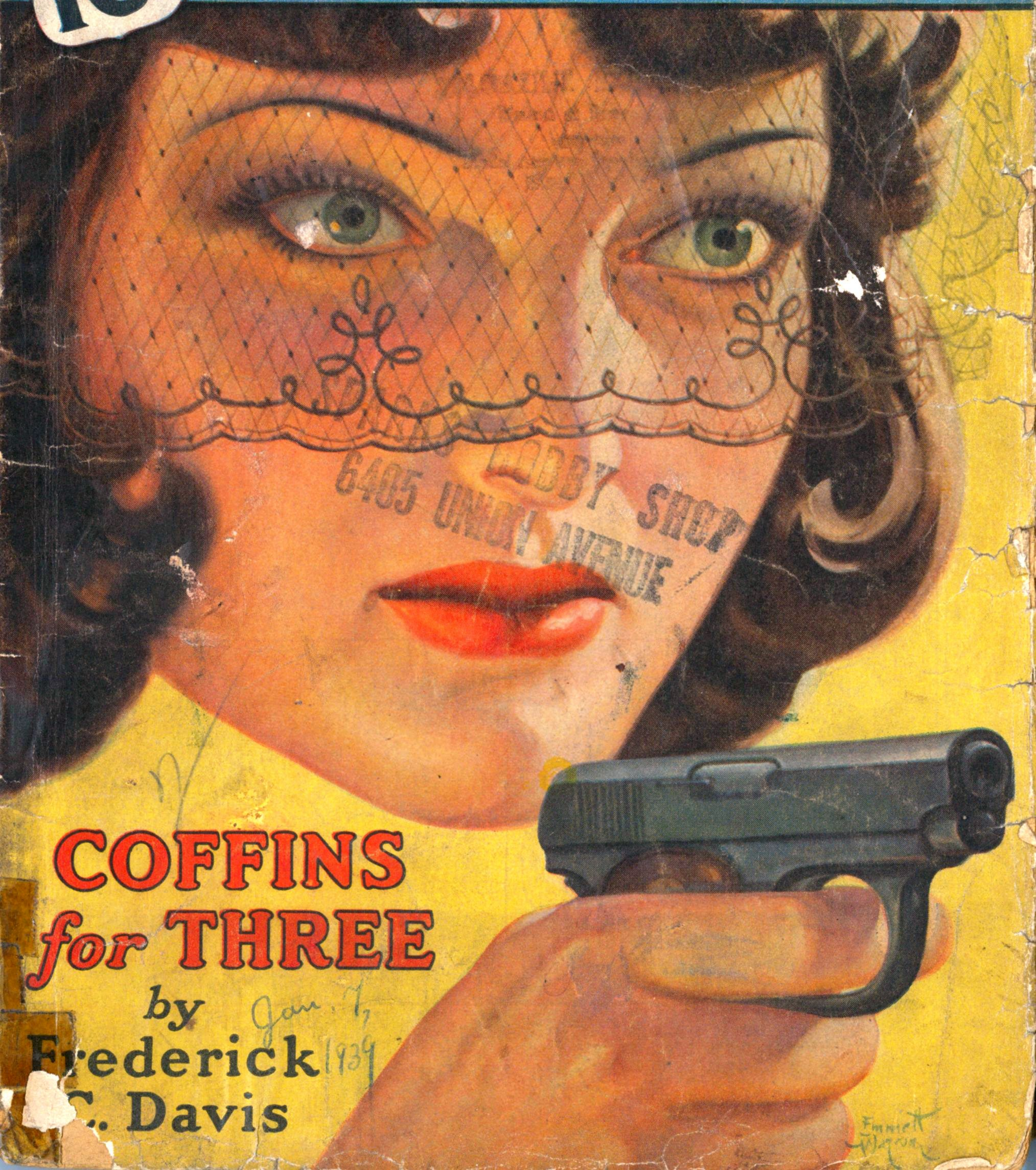


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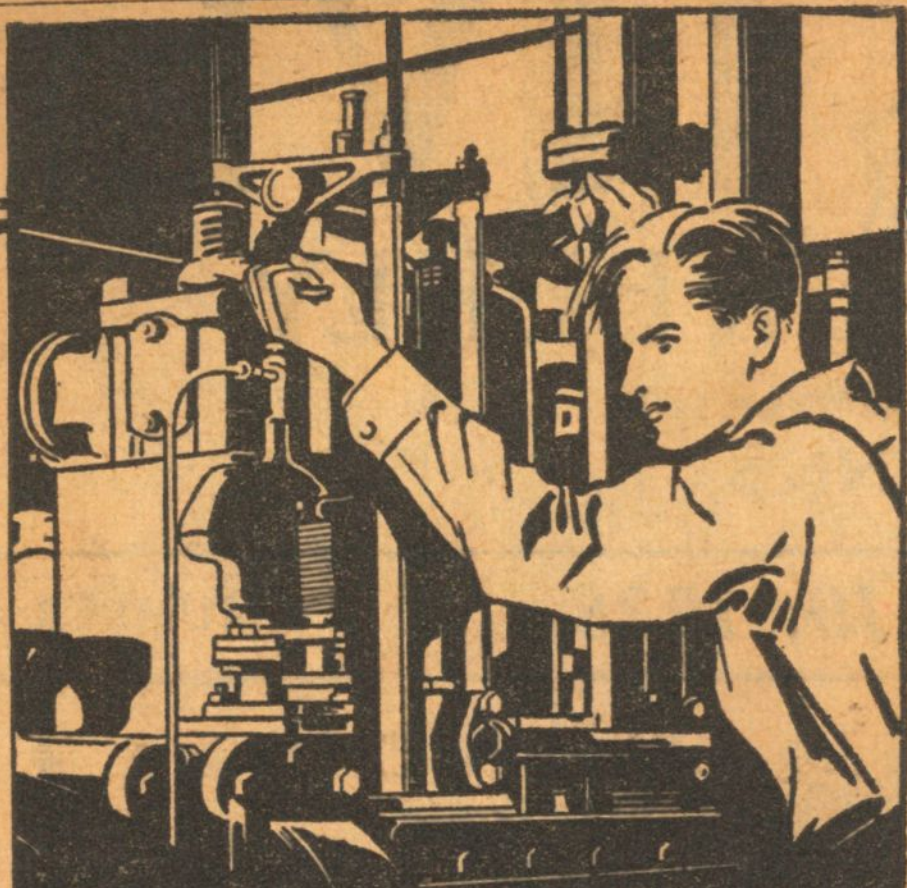
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Coffins for Three

By Frederick C. Davis

Author of "Front Page Dynamite," etc.

Three generations of cops, plus an education, made Cyrus Hatch a criminologist. But it didn't keep him from tangling with the law and his Police Commissioner father when an unnamed model was framed in a nightclub murder. . .

PART I

CYRUS HATCH and Danny Delevan stepped into the Club Grotto at 11 P.M.

Once inside the blue entrance, they began running a gauntlet of welcomes. The hat-check girl, the captain, the bar-men and two waiters greeted them by name. Towering six feet four, Hatch strode through the bar while Delevan, who scarcely reached his shoulder, followed him like a faithful but cocky little bulldog. At their favorite table they paused.

It was occupied.

Max, the majordomo, was bowing

over it. "If you please, madam," Max was murmuring. "Pardon, madam, but perhaps you wait for friends?"

A young woman was sitting alone at the table. "I've been waiting for Mr. Hatch," she said.

Her eyes implored Hatch to pretend that he knew her.

Beaming, Max placed two chairs. Hatch folded into one of them. Delevan perched on the other.

"Good evening," Hatch greeted the young woman. Noticing the empty glass on the table, he inquired, "May I buy you another Martini?"

"Thank you," she said. "Another Martini is exactly what I need."

A New Dramatic Novel



There was a note attached
to the pigeon's leg

firm breasts. Her eyes were a smouldering blue-green.

"We've never met before," Hatch said. "How did you know me?"

"Six or seven people called you by name as you came in," she said.

He nodded. "My friends call me Cy. Mr. Danny Delevan," Hatch introduced, "Miss—" He noted on her left hand a wedding ring and a ruby solitaire. "Mrs—?"

"Doe," she said. "Joan Doe."

"How do," Delevan said. "Pleasure."

Hatch smiled at her. "Really?"

"Of course not."

"Won't you tell me your real name?"

"Under the circumstances, I prefer not to."

"In any case, I'm grateful for your invitation," Hatch said. "You see, I'm a professor."

"You're a professor?" Mrs. Doe asked. "I'd take you for an explorer, or a polo star, or a transport pilot, but I'd never take you for a professor."

"Thank you," Hatch said, "but the president of Knickerbocker College is under the impression that I'm an assistant professor of sociology."

"He teaches deep stuff about crime," Delevan offered.

"I'm handling several seminars in criminology and penology."

"What'll it be, Danny?"

"Straight Irish," said Delevan.

"Julio," Hatch informed the waiter, "we'll have a Martini, a brandy and soda, and a glass of buttermilk."

"No harm trying," Delevan remarked.

"I don't allow Danny to drink on duty," Hatch explained to the young woman. "Unfortunately for him, he's on duty twenty-four hours a day. He's my bodyguard."

"Bodyguard?" she said. "Why?"

"The result of one of my father's worrying spells," Hatch said.

The young woman's lips were full and red. Her tailored dress molded her

"He wrote a book," Delevan added.

"It's called *Modern Crime Detection*. My students use it."

"If you're a professor," Joan Doe observed, "you certainly don't act it."

Delevan grinned.

"My colleagues on the faculty have noticed that too," Hatch said. "They don't approve of me."

"They're a bunch of bookworms," Delevan said. "The chief he's a real guy."

"You see," Hatch went on, "I happen to be allergic to the dust that gathers in pedagogical cloisters. It causes me to break out in a rash of indiscretion. Also, the mold that grows on academic minds gives me acute asthma. If I don't get a change of air, I strangle."

"That's right," Delevan said. "The chief is a guy he gets so bad that way if he don't do something desperate he goes nuts."

"I'm also susceptible to a strange bacillus which is carried by little innocents who go to college," Hatch said. "It brings on fever and delirium, and I'm apt to fly into a rage trying to figure out how a human head can be utterly hollow and at the same time utterly lacking in capacity. If I should happen to come down with all three maladies at the same time, I'll certainly go stark mad. Then I'll have to be shot."

"I been through this here trouble before," Delevan told the young woman. "The chief he's a guy if something didn't happen tonight he was gonna bust loose and run wild all over hell-an-gone."

Hatch nodded gravely. "That's why you're so welcome, Mrs. Doe," he said.

"We're *both* going to make something happen tonight," said the young woman.

JULIO came with the drinks. Joan Doe sipped her Martini, then fished out the olive.

"I'm using you," she said. "Your friend Max was bothered because I was sitting here alone. In another minute he was going to ask me to leave. He thought I was on the make, but I'm not. I'm waiting for a man. As soon as he comes, I'll go. Do you mind being a convenience?"

"Delighted," Hatch said.

Looking over his highball, he saw a man enter the vestibule, stare at the young woman, then turn around and go out.

"About this friend you're waiting for—"

"He's no friend." Joan Doe's lips nipped off the words. "He's a heel."

"Is he a heel of average height, with a thin face and a mustache, and will he be wearing top hat and tails?"

"No," she said. "He's a fat little heel with a greasy face and eyes like a rat's, and he dresses like the illustrations in *Esquire* and I hate him."

Hatch considered this. "I shouldn't like you to hate me," he said. "You have lovely hands, hands that would be pleasant to hold, but your nails are long and as red as blood and as pointed as knives. You're a luscious young woman, but I think you're a dangerous one. My impression of you is that you consist of a high grade of dynamite. I like you."

She did not smile. "This luscious bundle of dynamite is on the point of blowing up," she said.

Hatch's interest mounted. "In case you haven't noticed," he went on, "you're under observation. There's a couple sitting in the opposite corner. They're watching every move you make. Do you know them?"

Joan Doe looked intently at the cou-

ple in the other corner. The man's face was rugged, and he was gray at the temples. The woman seemed fragile but determined. While Joan Doe eyed them, they pretended to have no interest in her. She sipped her Martini and said, "I never saw them before."

"Then possibly you know the other man sitting at the bar," Hatch suggested. "He's alone. For several minutes he hasn't taken his eyes off your reflection in the mirror. He seems to be trying to make up his mind about something."

The young woman looked searchingly at the man who was sitting at the bar. His curly hair and his eyes were the color of sand. While Joan Doe gazed at him, he found a new interest in his whiskey sour. Joan Doe sipped her cocktail and said, "I don't know him."

Hatch proffered his case. "Cigarette?"

"I have my own," she said.

She removed a flat white carton from her purse. The name printed on the lid was Abdullah. From it she plucked a cigarette that was tipped with a rose-leaf. Hatch applied his lighter to it.

"I noticed you're carrying a gun in your purse," Hatch said.

"Did you?"

"May I ask what you intend to do with it? Kill somebody?"

"Probably."

"Can I be of any assistance?"

"I won't need any help."

Delevan asked, "You gonna murder somebody in particular, or just anybody?"

Julio appeared, bending over the table. "A message, madam," Julio said.

He handed Joan Doe a bit of paper. She unfolded it and read the message. Her cheeks grew redder and her lips tightened.

"Where did you get this?" she asked Julio.

"The gentleman at the bar, madam."

"Excuse me," Mrs. Doe said hastily to Hatch, crushing out her cigarette.

She went to the gentleman at the bar. He was the man who had been studying her reflection over his whiskey sour. They spoke in low, cautious tones.

"How did you know me?" Hatch heard Joan Doe ask.

"Saw you in Seligman's office," the man answered.

"Is this true, what you wrote?"

"It's damned well true."

"How long have you known it?"

"Months."

"How did you find him?"

"The birds," the man said.

She moved abruptly.

"The what?"

"The bloody birds," the man said. Then he glanced around uneasily. "I say, we can't talk here. We'd better go to another place."

The young woman's breath quickened; angry lightning flashed in her eyes. As soon as the man paid his check, they walked to the entrance and went out.

HALF a minute later Cyrus Hatch heard four shots.

He looked around curiously. The orchestra did not lose a beat nor the dancers a step. Only the couple in the opposite corner seemed alarmed.

Hatch went to the entrance. Delevan was following him across the vestibule when Maria, the hat-check girl, screamed with fright.

The door was swinging open. A man was lurching in. He was pudgy and bald. His small eyes were staring out of his fat face. He lost his grip on the edge of the door and dropped to the sill. As he rolled on his back, his coat

fell open. The checkered vest was splotted with a dark, wet stain.

Hatch gazed out the open door, along the hedged lane that led to it. Joan Doe was standing on the sidewalk. In one hand she was clenching a gun. Suddenly she sprang forward. She snatched at the gold watch-chain that trickled across the fallen man's paunch. She whirled away with the watch dangling from her fist.

A patrolman was running from the freight entrance of the hotel next door. Reaching for the young woman's gun, he said, "Gimme 'at!" She whipped the gun upward across his mouth, then sideward across his eyes, viciously. He staggered, folded his arms over his face, then sprawled on the sidewalk.

The young woman ran along the curb.

A man sprang out of the gloom toward her. He was lean-faced with a dark mustache, and was wearing top hat and tails. He gripped Joan Doe's arm, swung her about and pushed her into the open door of one of the parked automobiles.

As she stumbled into the car, a gun clattered off the runningboard and dropped into the gutter.

Hatch stepped over the prostrate figure in the doorway. Delevan climbed after him.

"Where the hell did the guy go that went out with her?" Delevan wondered.

But Hatch didn't answer.

Now the man in tails was at the wheel of his car. Its engine surged. It swerved from the curb and snarled toward Park Avenue.

It was passing from sight at the corner when a second car started up, and spurted after it.

The stunned policeman was heaving himself to his feet. He ran into the street, unbuttoning his holster, then

halted and fired his revolver three times.

The reports rocked between the buildings. A clanging sound mixed with them, as if one of the bullets had struck something hollow and metallic. Somewhere on the opposite side of the street a window cracked to bits.

"Good heavens!" Cyrus Hatch exclaimed. "Think of the innocent bystanders!"

The second car vanished around the corner after the first.

The patrolman ceased firing, closed his eyes and felt of his face.

Max was in the doorway, wringing his hands and stooping over the victim.

His face was chalk white.

"It's *M'sieu'* Seligman!" Max moaned. "*M'sieu'* Seligman!"

Delevan remarked to Hatch, "Chief, that there guy is plenty dead. This here dame she said she was gonna kill somebody, which she sure did."

CHAPTER II

Enter, The Commissioner

ANOTHER car appeared. A blue roadster, bearing the golden initials of the police department, slid to a stop. Two uniformed men charged out of it. One of them tramped across to the doorway and commanded, "Get back, get back." As the other looked around, Hatch pointed to the gun lying in the gutter.

"Evidence," Hatch said.

The patrolman whom Joan Doe had felled was blinking at Hatch. His lips were seeping blood; the skin on the bridge of his nose was broken. His revolver still bared, he gave Hatch and Delevan a push.

"You mugs get back in there," he ordered.

Delevan brought up his fists. "Look

out who you're shoving," he said. "You don't know who my pal is."

"I don't care if he's the Commissioner's son," the patrolman said thickly. "He's going back in there, and you're going back in there with him, or I'll conk you with this roscoe."

"You start trying to conk me with that there roscoe," Delevan challenged, "and I'll slug—"

Hatch tapped his shoulder. "Never mind, Danny," he said. "The officer is only doing his job. Let's go back in."

Delevan obediently relented. A few pedestrians were hurrying along the street to see what had happened. A score of guests were crowding into the vestibule of the Club Grotto and harassed waiters were restraining them. Max was making gestures.

"'Susmaria!'" Max was saying. "Please, we can't leave him so. People go, people come. You want they should walk over corpses? You want they should wade in blood? Please, I beg you, put him in men's room."

A squad-car man was standing at the door. He said, "Can't move him yet. Against the regulations. Anyway, we ain't lettin' anybody out. They better go back where they come from and take it easy."

HATCH and Delevan re-entered the club, stepping over the corpse. The patrolman with the bruised face enclosed himself in the telephone booth in the vestibule. Max thrust his flattened hands at the guests.

"Please, please," Max beseeched. "Please, please, please."

Hatch and Delevan sidled into the bar. Hatch noticed that the table in the opposite corner was now empty. He looked for the man and the woman who had been observing Joan Doe. They were not among the group in the vesti-

bule, nor were they on the dance floor.

The orchestra was playing, raggedly, "That Old Feeling," but no one was dancing. Nick, the barman, was loading two waiters' trays with glasses and bottles.

"Pass around the drinks," Nick was saying. "Make the people stay at the tables. Give 'em all they want. On the 'ouse."

Hatch and Delevan returned to their corner.

"Julio," Hatch addressed his waiter, "we'll have another brandy and soda, and another glass of buttermilk."

"On toppa murder," Delevan protested, "do I still gotta have buttermilk?"

"Julio," Hatch said, "make it a brandy and soda, and a coffee."

"A double demi-tasse," Delevan stipulated. "You had it right, chief. That dame was dynamite which it blew up right under us."

"Are you under the impression that Joan Doe killed the gentleman, Danny?" Hatch inquired.

"Sure she kilt him," Delevan said. "She kilt him dead."

Hatch shook his head. "No," he said.

"That dame never kilt that guy?" Delevan asked in amazement.

"I'm sure she didn't."

Delevan thought hard. The scars of combat under his eyes grew livid with the effort. "What makes you say that, chief, I can't figger it out."

"It's simple enough, Danny," Hatch said. "You see, when Joan Doe—"

The patrolman with the bruised face appeared at the table, his revolver still in his hand. His lips were puffer and the bridge of his nose was beginning to turn blue.

"That woman was with you," he accused Hatch. "Max told me that wo-

man was with you. Whatchur name?"

"Cyrus Hatch, assistant professor of sociology, Knickerbocker College. Home address—"

"Hatch? Next you're going to tell me you're the Commissioner's son or somebody."

Hatch nodded. "Police Commissioner Mark Hatch is my father."

"Yeah, and I'm the Commissioner's twin brother. That makes me your uncle, don't it?" He pointed at Delevan. "Who's this mug?"

"My friend is Danny Delevan, the retired welterweight," Hatch said.

The patrolman frowned darkly at Delevan. "You the palooka who had a bout with Tommy Jonegan last spring?"

"That's me," Delevan said proudly. "There was a stumble-bum I knocked him out inna first round."

"Like hell you did," the patrolman said. "It wasn't the first round, it was the third. You didn't knock him out, *he* knocked *you* out. You cost me ten bucks, you push-over. You stay right where y' are, y' un'erstan'? Both of you mugs stay right where y' are!"

The patrolman tramped back into the vestibule. Max and three waiters were clearing the crowd away from the door. Men and women reluctantly returned to their tables. The dead man was lying on the sill of the entrance, his fat legs stuck out into the hedged lane.

THE patrolman came back to the table, pointed his finger ominously and said, "You mugs stay right where y' are, y' un'erstan'? The Homicide Squad is on the way and so is the Commissioner. Stay right where y' are."

"We un'erstan'," Hatch said.

Julio came with their order. Delevan sneered at his coffee. Max appeared

and sat heavily beside Hatch, heaving a sigh of despair.

"'Susmaria!" Max said.

"Did you know the deceased, Max?" Hatch inquired.

"*M'sieu'* Seligman," Max said.

"Did he come here often?"

"No more," said Max. "No more."

"Know much about him?"

"*M'sieu'* Seligman a lawyer," Max answered. "In firm, Flack, Seligman and Pirano."

"What about the young woman who picked me up? What do you know about her?"

"Not'ing," Max said. "Her name, no. Not'ing."

"Did you see the man who went out with her?" Hatch asked. "Know who he is?"

"*M'sieu'* Sanders," said Max.

"What about *M'sieu'* Sanders?"

Max shrugged. "Used come here with *M'sieu'* Seligman."

"I take it this was Seligman's favorite hangout."

"No more, no more," Max said.

He went into the vestibule and shook his head over the corpse.

AN automobile stopped in front of the club and a group of men alighted, carrying cases. While the sidewalk crowd watched, one of them produced a camera, placed it on a tripod, aimed the lens at the dead man and fired a series of flash bulbs. Another man, after questioning Max, strode to the corner where Hatch and Delevan were sitting. Julio was about to take away the glass which had contained Joan Doe's Martini.

"Let it alone!" the detective growled.

He nudged the glass into a large brown envelope, put the envelope in his pocket, then picked up the table. Hatch rescued his highball and Delevan

snatched up his cup of coffee as the table whisked away. The detective carried it into the men's room.

"They're getting busy with fingerprint powder and a special camera, and in a few minutes they'll have a set of Joan Doe's prints," Hatch explained. "I'm afraid it looks bad for her."

"You say that dame never kilt that guy," Delevan mused. "I ain't so good at figgering these here things out like you are, chief."

Hatch made a gesture.

"As I said, it's quite simple. All a matter of observation. If you noticed—"

A detective came into the corner, accompanied by the patrolman with the bruised face.

"He says his name is Professor Hatch, and he says he's the Commissioner's son," the patrolman said to the detective.

"I don't even know if the Commissioner's got a son who's a professor," the detective said to the patrolman. "Offhand, I'd doubt it."

Delevan inquired of Hatch, "What the hell makes these here guys act so screwy about the Commissioner having a son, chief? Do these here screwballs think the Commissioner is a eunick or something?"

Hatch explained to the two men. "You see, I come of a long line of cops. My great grandfather was a cop, my grandfather was a cop, and my father followed their example. The difference between me and my forbears is that I exposed myself to a college education. The effect of college on the cop's blood in my veins was to turn me into a criminologist."

The detective looked at the patrolman and the patrolman looked at the detective.

"What does your pal teach?" the de-

tective inquired. "Does he teach how the law of gravity works?"

"There's another guy he bet on that Jonegan fight," Delevan said unhappily.

"Danny is my bodyguard," Hatch said.

"Him?" said the patrolman. "You could fight better'n him if you was strapped up in a straightjacket. A big guy like you having a bodyguard is cockeyed, especially him."

Hatch went on, "You must know the kind of man Mark Hatch is. He was an independent cop and he's now an independent Commissioner. He was created by politics, and he's hedged in on all sides by predatory politicians, but he's not a politician himself and he has the courage to defy the system. He is by nature an honest cop, and under pressure he's still incorruptible, though there are powerful influences in the underworld which are continually trying to find the weak spot in his armor."

"If you're trying to tell me the Commissioner is a square guy, you don't have to," the detective said. "I needed a hundred bucks for a hospital bill for my kid and the Commissioner gave it to me out of his own pocket. He won't lose a cent of it, either. What's all this got to do with this palooka?"

"I was coming to that," Hatch said. "As soon as Mark Hatch was appointed Police Commissioner, he began worrying about me. He's a chronic worrier. He fusses over those who are close to him like a mother hen over her chicks, even though they don't need it—you know that—and I'm no exception. He decided it would be just too damned embarrassing if the Commissioner's son should happen to be kidnapped, for instance, and held as a hostage. He insisted upon my having a bodyguard. I didn't want a bodyguard, but finally I agreed, for the sake of

his peace of mind. I selected Danny Delevan because I like Danny."

"With a bodyguard like that palooka," the patrolman said, "you're running a hell of a chance. Look at the way he cost me ten bucks."

He glared at Danny.

"I'm gonna give you back your ten bucks," Delevan said ominously, "and you're gonna be bust inna snoot."

Hatch restrained him.

"There's no cause for confusion," Hatch said. "Remember your *Police Practice and Procedure*. 'If in doubt in any phase of the investigation, consult your superior officer, and in his absence confer with your co-workers. Keep cool. Remember that you are present at the scene of the homicide for three specific purposes: first, to arrest the perpetrator; second, to get witnesses; third, to get evidence'."

The detective and the patrolman stared at Hatch.

"I'm afraid the perpetrator has escaped," Hatch said. "So far as the evidence goes, the squad seems to be doing a capable job. Danny and I are witnesses, eager to do our duty to the best of our ability. Do you wish us to make a statement?"

The detective said, "The Commissioner's on his way," and went back to the vestibule, trailed by the patrolman.

SEVERAL men were lifting the corpse. They carried it across the sidewalk and loaded it into an ambulance. Several other men were questioning the doorman, the hat-check girl and Max. Another detective was moving from table to table, warning the guests that they must remain. Hatch tasted his highball.

"I've seen Joan Doe somewhere before," he said.

"Not that there dame," Delevan said.

"There is a dame if somebody saw her once nobody could forget her."

"But I'm sure of it," Hatch said. "It was at the *Coq Rouge*. She was in the bar, and I can visualize her wearing an ermine wrap. She made a striking picture against the dark background of the photographic murals of Manhattan at night. It was recently, too."

"The *Coq Rouge* is a place which we ain't been there for months," Delevan said.

"That's true," Hatch admitted, "but still I remember seeing her there only a short time ago."

"When you begin saying things which they don't make sense, chief," Delevan observed, "you're getting to feel better. This here murder it's just what the doctor ordered."

A MAN of commanding presence stepped into the vestibule from the street. His face was genial and florid, and he wore his clothes uncomfortably. He gave the impression of being tightly wound up. While he restlessly moved about in the vestibule, he listened to the detectives, nodded alertly and replied with terse orders.

"Here comes your pappy, chief," Delevan said.

The big man, dogged by two members of the Homicide Squad, trudged into the corner of the bar and sat.

"Hello, Cyrus," he said.

"Hello, Mark," said Cyrus Hatch.

"How do, Commissioner," Delevan said.

"Cyrus, how does it happen you're mixed up in this homicide?" the Commissioner inquired.

"I was invited," Cyrus Hatch said. "The young woman you're looking for invited me."

One of the detectives informed the Commissioner, "She's about five feet

eight, with brown eyes and brown hair, and she was wearing a black dress, and she looked like a moving picture actress."

"That's not quite correct, Mark," Cyrus Hatch said. "She's about four inches shorter than that, her eyes are blue-green, and her hair is almost red. Her dress was dark blue. She's the sort of ripe young woman that Petty draws."

"The doorman and the waiters told me different," the detective said.

"Eye-witnesses are mistaken more often than not," Cyrus Hatch answered. "Numerous experiments have proved it. If you like, I'll quote statistics."

"Never mind, Cyrus," the Commissioner said. "Go ahead, Houser."

The detective took time to frown at Cyrus Hatch before he went on. "She left with a man named Sanders. Just then Sidney Seligman arrived in a taxi. Seligman and the woman and Sanders talked together a minute. The doorman didn't hear anything they said, except what Seligman said last. Seligman gave a kind of dirty laugh and said, 'Sanders is a lying crook. You're on your way out, Sanders'. Then Seligman started into this place. Sanders looked scared, and faded. Nobody knows where he scrambled to. Seligman was at the door when the woman took a gun out of her purse and let him have it. She fired three shots."

"Four shots," said Cyrus Hatch.

"Three," the detective said.

"Go ahead, Houser," said Mark Hatch.

"There was a man waiting in a car," Houser continued. "I've got his description. He pushed the woman into the car, and she stumbled and dropped her gun. The car went off like a bat out of hell. It was a black coupé, prob-

ably a Ford. Nobody got the number."

"Look here," Cyrus Hatch said. "The car was a sedan, and it was dark green. It was heavier than a Ford."

Houser's frown darkened into a scowl. "Four different people told me what I just said."

"Tell me about it later, Cyrus," the Commissioner suggested. "Go ahead, Houser."

"Koenig, the man on this tour, let go a few shots and thinks one of his bullets hit the black coupé," Houser said.

"It was a green sedan," Cyrus Hatch said. "Didn't anybody mention the second car?"

"What second car?" Houser asked.

"There was a second car that chased the first," Cyrus Hatch explained. "It was parked on the opposite side of the street, and it started off after the green sedan. The car I'm speaking of now was a maroon limousine. If Koenig hit any car at all, he hit the second one."

"Commissioner," Houser insisted, "what we've got to look for is a black coupé with a bullet hole in it."

"A maroon limousine," Cyrus Hatch said.

"Cyrus, we'll thresh all this out later," the Commissioner interceded. He asked of Houser, "What about the gun found in the gutter?"

Houser gestured to the other detective who was standing at his side, and said, "Vogt's taking care of it."

"It's a Colt's Shooting Master thirty-eight," Vogt said.

"How many times was it fired?" the Commissioner inquired.

"Four times."

Houser colored. "Koenig and the doorman said three shots, and Seligman's got only three holes in him," he asserted.

Vogt said, "The fourth bullet hit

the rubber mat in front of the door. I dug it out. It's mashed a little, but it looks like a thirty-eight."

"Then the gun dropped by the woman is probably the weapon of murder," the Commissioner said.

"We can probably trace her through that gun," Houser said. "We'll nail her with an open and shut case."

The Commissioner asked Cyrus Hatch, "Did you see the woman shoot Seligman?"

"She didn't shoot Seligman," Cyrus Hatch said.

Delevan offered, "That's what he keeps saying right along, Commissioner. I can't figger it out why he keeps saying it, but he keeps saying that dame never kilt that guy."

Houser looked exasperated. "Koenig and the doorman both say they saw the woman fire the shots, Commissioner."

Cyrus Hatch shook his head. "They didn't see her fire the shots that killed Seligman."

"Commissioner," Houser said emphatically, "Koenig and the doorman are both willing to swear under oath that they saw that woman fire those shots."

"If they do that, they'll unwittingly condemn an innocent woman," Cyrus Hatch said.

COMMISSIONER Hatch was worrying. "Let's get this straight, Cyrus."

"By all means," said Cyrus Hatch.

"Did you see the woman on the sidewalk with the gun in her hand?"

"I saw the woman on the sidewalk with a gun in her hand," Cyrus Hatch said.

"Did you see the woman drop the gun as she was getting into the car?"

"I did not," Cyrus Hatch said.

Delevan urged, "Sure you did, chief.

I saw that there dame drop that there gun myself."

"No, Danny, you didn't," Cyrus Hatch said. "I think you and I saw the same thing, but neither of us saw that. We saw the woman with a gun in her hand run over to a car, then while the woman was getting into the car we saw a gun drop into the gutter, but we didn't actually see the gun fall from her hand. If that's bickering, I'm sorry, but it's accurate testimony."

"If the woman didn't drop the gun as she was getting into the car, where did it come from, Cyrus?" the Commissioner asked.

Cyrus Hatch said, "It might have been dropped by the man who was pushing her into the car, or it might have been thrown at her feet by somebody else whom nobody saw. It's pretty dark out there. Somebody might have been hiding behind a car or behind the hedge. Wherever that gun came from, I confess I don't know, but I'm positive Joan Doe didn't drop the weapon of murder."

"What makes you so certain of it?" the Commissioner asked.

"The gun found in the gutter is a nickel-plated revolver, isn't it?" Cyrus Hatch asked.

"That's right," Vogt said.

"The gun in the girl's possession was a blue automatic," Cyrus Hatch said. "The bullets in Seligman's body—if they're the same as the bullets found in the door-mat—are thirty-eights, aren't they?"

"Looks like it," Vogt said.

"The girl's automatic was a smaller caliber, probably a twenty-five, or possibly a thirty-two, but certainly not a thirty-eight."

The Commissioner asked, "How do you know that, Cyrus?"

"I saw her gun twice," Cyrus Hatch

answered. "The first time I saw it was here at the table when she opened her purse to get a cigarette."

"The chief mentioned it to this here dame," Delevan offered, "and this here dame she said maybe she was gonna use it to kill a guy."

"She was probably referring to Seligman," Hatch admitted. "A few seconds after the murder, I saw the same blue automatic in her hand. There you have my reason for saying that Joan Doe didn't kill Seligman."

"I don't get this," Delevan said.

"The girl's gun was a small blue automatic, so she couldn't have dropped a big nickel revolver into the gutter. If the nickel revolver is the weapon of murder, as there's good reason to believe, then logically Joan Doe did not murder Seligman."

"Wait a minute," Houser said.

THE Commissioner and Cyrus Hatch and Delevan sat silent while Houser and Vogt returned to the vestibule. The two detectives asked questions of Koenig and the doorman. When they returned they looked nettled.

"Koenig and the doorman both say they saw the nickel revolver in the woman's hand, and they both say they saw her fire those shots with it," Houser announced.

"That's what they say," Vogt said.

The Commissioner's florid face turned a darker shade. "See if you can find other witnesses," he directed.

Purposefully, Houser and Vogt went back to the vestibule.

"It's your word against the word of several other witnesses, Cyrus," the Commissioner said gravely.

"Mark, I'm damned sure that young woman did not commit this murder," Cyrus Hatch said.

"Two other witnesses are sure she *did* commit the murder," said Commissioner Hatch. "You'd better give me a detailed statement in writing, Cyrus. I hope that will be the end of your part in this case."

"It won't be the end of my part in this case if Joan Doe is brought to trial for Seligman's murder," Cyrus Hatch said.

"Cyrus," Mark Hatch said severely, "the son of the Police Commissioner can't make trouble on the wrong end of a homicide."

"The last thing in the world I want to do is make trouble for you, Mark," Cyrus Hatch said. "But I can't step aside so casually. I can't stand by and see a young woman condemned for a crime she didn't commit, and not lift a finger to help her. If Joan Doe is brought to trial for Seligman's murder, I'll be bound to come forward as a witness for the defense."

"Hell!" Mark Hatch blurted. "You can't do that."

"I'll have no choice, Mark."

"The weight of the evidence is against her," the Commissioner said. "We've got a strong case already. We'll make it stronger. We'll make it unbeatable. By testifying for that young woman you'll stir up a hell of a mess for me and the D. A.'s office, and you'll probably make a fool of yourself."

"Under the circumstances, I couldn't possibly keep quiet, regardless. Without my testimony, she doesn't stand a chance. My testimony should be enough—perhaps it won't be, but it *should* be enough to establish a reasonable doubt of guilt and bring about an acquittal."

"You mean that after I've done my damndest to build up an air-tight case against a murderess, you're going to step in at the trial and do your damndest to blow my whole case to hell?"

"There's only one possible way of avoiding it, Mark," Cyrus Hatch said. "That's to get busy and prove she's innocent before there's time to bring her to trial."

The Commissioner stood up. "Damn it, Cyrus, you keep out of this. You go write your statement and leave the rest to me. If the woman has a break coming, I'll see that she gets it. But you can't get into this case any deeper than you already are. It'll make a hell of a mess. You keep out of this."

"I'm sorry, Mark," Cyrus Hatch said, "but I'm damned if I will."

CHAPTER III

The Girl in The Ad

THE Commissioner trudged into the vestibule; there Koenig, Houser and Vogt closed in on him. The other detectives were circulating among the guests, taking names and addresses and statements. Finishing his highball, Cyrus Hatch gazed at the empty table in the opposite corner.

"When you look the way which you look now, chief," Delevan observed warily, "I am a guy whom I would not want you to put the slug on me."

Hatch rose and strode into the other corner. Delevan came to his side as he touched a waiter's arm.

"Raoul."

"*Oui, m'sieu'*," said Raoul.

"At the moment when the shots were fired," Hatch said, "a man and a woman were sitting at that table."

"*Oui, m'sieu'?*"

"A few moments later they disappeared."

"*Oui, m'sieu'?*"

"What became of them?"

The waiter shrugged.

"Don' know, *m'sieu'*."

"They got out of here in a hurry.

They couldn't do that without help. How did they manage it?"

"Don' know, *m'sieu'*."

"There's another door, isn't there?"

"Service, *m'sieu'?*"

"Did they go that way?"

"Don' know, *m'sieu'*."

Hatch's gray eyes sharpened. "You know who I am, don't you, Raoul?"

"*M'sieu'* Hatch."

"Do you know that that man over there is the Police Commissioner and that he happens to be my father?"

"*Oui, m'sieu'*."

Hatch indicated Delevan. "Do you know who my friend is?"

"*M'sieu'* Delevan."

"Are you aware that *M'sieu'* Delevan is one of the Commissioner's toughest plainclothes men?"

"*Oui, m'sieu'?*"

Delevan looked startled, then grim.

"Now, Raoul, what became of the man and the woman who were sitting at that table when the shots were fired?" Hatch asked.

"Don' know, *m'sieu'*."

"Lieutenant Delevan," Hatch said decisively, "place this man under arrest."

Delevan clamped a hand on Raoul's shoulder. "You come along with me, guy," Delevan said. "I'm gonna take you down to headquarters and grill holy hell outa you."

Raoul blanched. "*M'sieu'!*" he added hastily, "They go out the service."

"That's better," Hatch said. "You showed them the way, didn't you?"

"*Oui, m'sieu'*."

"For how much?"

"Five dol'," said Raoul.

"What made them decide to leave in such a hurry?"

"The gent'man, he look there, he see *M'sieu'* Seligman, he say mus' leave."

"Did he give you any reason?"

Raoul smiled slyly. "No, *m'sieu'*. But the lady, she is not the gent'man's husban'."

"Then you know the lady?"

"*M'sieu'?*"

Delevan said, "You wanna get pulled down ta headquarters and get holy hell grilled outa you?"

"Madame Westcott," Raoul said.

"Madame Howar' Westcott."

"Know where she lives?"

"Once I hear her say Fit' Avenue."

"Who was the man?"

"Don' know, *m'sieu'*."

Delevan said, "I'm sure as hell gonna grill the gizzard outa you, guy."

"Don' know, *m'sieu'*," Raoul protested.

Hatch looked judicially at Delevan. "Well, lieutenant? Shall we take him down and lock him up?"

"Aw, I guess we don't hafta this time, Mr. Hatch," Delevan said. He aimed his forefinger between Raoul's eyes. "Only, you stick around where we can put our mitts on you when we want you, y' un'erstan'?"

"*Oui, m'sieu'!*"

CYRUS HATCH went to the coat room and ransomed his hat. The Commissioner was still conferring with the detectives. Two prowl car men were guarding the entrance. One of them was peeking out into the street.

"Commissioner, there's a couple reporters out there raisin' hell about wantin' to be let in."

"Keep 'em out," the Commissioner said. He gazed at his son. "Don't talk to any reporters, Cyrus. If you want to bring your statement down to my office tonight, I'll be working late."

Cyrus Hatch nodded. "Good night, Mark," he said.

"Good night, Cyrus."

"So long, Commissioner," Delevan said.

Cyrus Hatch went back to Raoul.

"Take us out the service entrance," Hatch said.

Eying Delevan apprehensively, Raoul led them through a pantry, then through the kitchen. A detective on duty at the service door caught a nod from Houser and allowed them to pass. They stepped out quietly, turning away from the two reporters who were leaning against the blue entrance of the Club Grotto.

They climbed into a roadster. Hatch swung his car south on Park Avenue. He drove rapidly, without speaking, and Delevan made no attempt to instigate a conversation. He soon turned the car to the curb in front of a Gothic skyscraper.

An inscription above the doorway read, *Knickerbocker College*. An elevator lifted Hatch and Delevan to the thirty-sixth floor. They approached a door at the end of the corridor. Inside Hatch's office, a girl was busy at a bench which was cluttered with chemical equipment.

"Good evening, Professor," she said.

"How do, Jane," Delevan said, following Hatch in.

"Good morning," Hatch said. "Jane, what the devil are you doing here at this ungodly hour?"

"It's much pleasanter than my room," Jane Porter said. "When I haven't got a date, I'd rather be here than anywhere else."

She had sky-blue eyes and a long bob the color of cornsilk. She looked a healthy twenty. On the bench a Bunsen burner was whispering under a beaker that was filled with a dark brown solution.

"Have some coffee, Professor?" Jane Porter asked.

"I'd love some coffee," Hatch said. "Since you're here, I'll dictate a statement."

"Be right with you," his secretary said.

Hatch sat at his desk. It was loaded with books and neatly stacked papers. File cabinets stood along one wall. Tables were crowded with microscopes and other apparatus used by scientific investigators of crime, and shelves were loaded with chemicals, moulage materials, photographic supplies and more books. Above Hatch's desk hung a photograph of the present Police Commissioner in the uniform of a patrolman.

From behind a medical dictionary, Jane Porter produced a jar of cream and an evaporating dish heaped with cube sugar. She put a beaker of steaming coffee in Hatch's hand, and to Delevan, who was now perched on the stone drainboard of the sink, she gave another. Delevan admired her streamlined legs as she sat beside Hatch with her notebook on her knee and her needle-pointed pencil ready.

"To Mark Hatch, Commissioner of Police. From Cyrus Hatch, assistant professor of sociology, Knickerbocker College. Statement concerning the murder of Sidney Seligman at the Club Grotto . . ." Hatch stopped.

The little radio on the shelf above the file cabinets had been playing, then for a moment it had been silent. Now an announcer was speaking.

"We bring you a special news dispatch from the Press Radio Bureau," the announcer said. "Shortly before midnight tonight, Sidney Seligman, a lawyer, member of the firm of Flack, Seligman and Pirano, was shot to death by an unknown young woman outside the Club Grotto, a night club on East Fifty-Fifth Street, Manhattan. The young woman fled in a car driven

by an unknown man. The police have broadcast her description and have launched a search for her. Detectives are running down several clues which they feel confident will reveal the young woman's identity. Commissioner Mark Hatch is personally directing the investigation.

"District Attorney Harrison Knapp was called to the scene of the homicide. It is unofficially reported that immediately the young woman's identity is learned, the evidence in the case will be presented to the Grand Jury. The Grand Jury is expected to return promptly an indictment charging the young woman with murder in the first degree. Further details will be found in your daily newspapers."

Cyrus Hatch snapped off the radio.

"What you told the Commissioner it don't seem to be doing that dame much good, chief," Delevan said.

"None whatever," Hatch agreed. "Danny, we forgot about the birds."

"What birds?" asked Delevan.

"The bloody birds," Hatch said. "That chap Sanders mentioned them to Joan Doe. Apparently they're important. I wonder why."

"He might be a guy what he's in the poultry business," Delevan said.

"But why should an indefinite number of any kind of a bird be bloody?"

"You got me there, chief," Delevan said.

Jane Porter waited with her notebook on her knee and her pencil poised.

"And why did Joan Doe snatch the dead man's watch?" Hatch wondered.

Delevan grinned, which made his button nose turn pink. "Watch you think, chief?" he said.

"Shut up, Danny," said Jane Porter.

"When a young woman is in grave danger of being seized as a murderess at any instant, there must be a good

reason why she should take time to snatch the murdered man's watch," Hatch insisted.

"She didn't kill him in order to steal his watch, did she, Professor?" Jane Porter asked.

"It seems unlikely. Perhaps it wasn't the watch she wanted at all. Perhaps she wanted whatever was attached to the other end of the watch-chain."

"A thing which it's usually attached to the other end of a watch-chain," Delevan said, "is a little gold knife."

"She didn't kill the man in order to steal a little gold knife, either," Jane Porter said.

"Keys," Hatch said. "There were keys on the other end of the chain. Joan Doe must have known it. She wanted them for some important purpose, and she wanted them desperately."

HE took up the telephone directory. "What about this statement to the Commissioner?" Jane Porter asked.

"Later," Hatch said.

He dialed the number listed opposite the name of Sidney Seligman. For several minutes he thoughtfully listened to the distant bell ring. Then he replaced the instrument.

"I'd swear I saw Joan Doe at the *Coq Rouge* a short time ago," he mused, "even though I haven't been there for months."

"Chief, this here murder it's getting under your skin," Delevan said.

"Damned if it isn't, Danny."

He drained the beaker of coffee, rose and put on his hat.

"You make very good coffee, Jane," he said.

He smiled at the girl.

"What about this statement, Professor?" Jane Porter asked.

"When I dictate a statement in this case," Hatch said, "it'll be a hell of a

lot stronger than I could make it tonight."

"Shall I wait?"

"You belong at home and in bed."

"I'd rather stay here," Jane Porter said. "I think I'll stay here and sleep on the couch."

"Good heavens!" Hatch exclaimed. "If you should do that, and Professor Gillies learned of it, there'd be a scandal and I'd get fired out on my ear."

"Nobody'll catch me," Jane Porter said. "I don't snore."

"You'll look all mussed up in the morning," Hatch objected.

"No I won't," said Jane Porter. "I keep a pair of pajamas and a blanket in one of the file cabinets—that one. I've slept here before, lots of times."

Hatch's eyes opened wide. "Good heavens!" he said again.

"'Night, Professor," Jane Porter said.

She looked at him calmly over her beaker of coffee as he left the office.

"You got something there, chief," Delevan said.

"What the devil are you talking about, Danny?"

"There's a dame what she's nuts about you," Delevan said.

"Nonsense!" Hatch retorted.

"If there was a dame what she was as nuts about me like that dame is nuts about you, I would try hard as hell to believe it," Delevan said.

"Pajamas in the file cabinet!" Hatch said uneasily.

"I would like to know what heading those there pajamas are filed under," Delevan said.

"Danny," Hatch said sternly, "please keep your mind on your work."

The elevator dropped them to the street level. They returned to the roadster. Hatch drove north to Columbus Circle, then veered into Central Park

West. He left the car at the curb opposite an enormous apartment building. A sleepy doorman, wearing a gold-braided uniform, was on duty at the entrance.

"Mr. Sidney Seligman has an apartment in this building, I believe," Hatch said.

"Mr. Seligman's out," the doorman answered.

"I'll say he's out," Delevan commented. "There's a guy what he's out for good."

"Mr. Seligman was murdered," Hatch said.

The doorman grinned. "So was Lincoln," he said.

"Not tonight, Lincoln wasn't," Delevan differed.

"Mr. Seligman was murdered only a short time ago, at a night club," Hatch explained to the doorman.

"Hell!" the doorman said.

"We're investigating the affair," Hatch said. "I advise you to give me all the information you can. Is anybody in Mr. Seligman's apartment now?"

"No sir."

"Did a young woman go up to his apartment within the past hour or so?"

"No sir."

"The young woman I have in mind is about so tall. She was wearing a dark blue dress. She has a lovely figure. You would notice her."

"No sir," the doorman said. "I'm a married man. No young woman went up to Mr. Seligman's apartment since I came on duty at six o'clock. Besides, I got kids."

Delevan, looking across the street, plucked at Hatch's sleeve. "There's a car stopping, chief," he warned.

Hatch glanced at the car. "That's all for the moment," he said to the doorman. "Some of my men are coming in to take charge."

He stepped out of the entrance with Delevan and walked south. Four men alighted from the automobile. One of them was Police Commissioner Mark Hatch. The Commissioner led his detectives into the building without glancing toward Cyrus Hatch and Danny Delevan.

"In case you haven't heard, Danny," Hatch said, "impersonating an officer is legally frowned upon."

HE entered the drug store on the corner. Consulting the telephone directory, he found the name of Howard Westcott listed at a Fifth Avenue address. With Delevan he returned to the roadster. The Commissioner and the detectives were no longer in the lobby of the apartment building.

"They've gone up," Hatch surmised. "They're looking for some connection between Seligman and Joan Doe. It's going to be tough when they get their hands on that young woman."

Hatch took the Eighty-Sixth Street transverse through Central Park. When he reached Fifth Avenue he turned north. He stopped near a white stone building and alighted with Delevan. His eyes narrowed at a car which was swinging to the curb at the far corner.

"A maroon limousine, Danny," Hatch said.

Delevan nodded.

A man stepped out of the maroon limousine. He was strongly built and well-dressed. He stood a moment beside the car, glancing up and down the street, then walked rapidly to the entrance of the building. He directed a sharp glance at Hatch and Delevan as he hurried in.

Hatch observed, "If you'd been at the scene of a murder, Danny, and had been fired at by a policeman, and had rushed away to keep from becoming

involved, you'd probably be as nervous as that man is."

"Especially if I was somebody whom I just killed a guy," Delevan agreed.

A doorman, enormous of belly and dignity, opened the glass door for them.

"I'm calling on Mrs. Howard Westcott," Hatch said. "She's expecting me."

"Mrs. Howard Westcott is not in, sir."

"I'm aware of that," Hatch said. "She asked me to come up and wait."

The doorman appraised Hatch and approved. "The penthouse, sir," he said.

Hatch and Delevan waited at the elevator. The man who had left the maroon limousine turned from a desk in the foyer and nervously shuffled through a pack of letters which he had just picked up. When the panel opened, Hatch and Delevan stepped into the elevator with him.

While the cab ascended, the man ripped the wrapper off a magazine. It was a copy of the *New Yorker*. He glanced at the cover, then turned the magazine over and gazed at the advertisement on the back. He gazed at it long and hard, and Hatch saw the color fade from his face until he was pale as death. He thrust the magazine under his arm and drew a deep breath.

The elevator operator was looking inquisitively at Hatch. "What apartment, sir?"

Hatch bent toward him, cupping an ear. "What say?"

"What apartment, sir?"

"I'm sorry," Hatch said. "I don't hear very well."

"What apartment, sir?"

Hatch turned to Delevan. "Can you make out what this man is mumbling?" he asked.

Delevan shook his head and made signs with his fingers.

"What *apartment*, sir?"

"Oh yes, yes," Hatch said affably. "The park is lovely at this time of year."

The cab stopped. The man with the *New Yorker* under his arm left it hurriedly. Hatch waited until he heard a door close. The baffled attendant was staring at him.

"The Westcott penthouse?" Hatch inquired.

The operator pointed out of the car. "This is it," he shouted. "*This is it. That was Mr. Westcott just went in.*"

"How he's changed," Hatch said. "Thank you."

They stepped into a square hall and confronted a door. The elevator panel closed behind them. Hatch pressed a bell-button.

"What was the big idea making out you are deaf?" Delevan asked.

"I didn't want to tip my hand to a man who drives a maroon limousine," Hatch explained. "He's apparently mixed up in the case somehow, and it might have forewarned him."

The door opened and a girl looked out at Hatch.

"Good evening," Hatch said. "May I see Mrs. Westcott a moment? My name is Cyrus Hatch, and this is Mr. Delevan."

The girl's eyes were hazel and worried. She had a small, bold mouth. Her patrician face resembled that of the woman whom Hatch had seen observing Joan Doe in the Club Grotto.

"Mrs. Westcott isn't here," she said.

"Are you expecting her soon?" Hatch asked. "It's rather important."

"She should be here at any minute. Won't you come in?"

Hatch and Delevan stepped into a room contrived almost entirely of glass. The windows were set into walls of glass bricks. A huge fish tank sat in

one of them. The tables and the grand piano were glass-topped. The bookcases were also of glass. There were vases, jugs, pitchers and platters of glass of all colors, some elaborately decorated. Mirrors made the room seem to expand into infinity, and everything sparkled.

"If you suddenly feel that you're transparent and breakable, don't mind. It's the natural reaction," the girl said with a friendly smile. "Please sit down. I'm Mrs. Westcott's sister, Teresa Alexander."

"Good evening," Hatch smiled.

"How do," Delevan said. "Pleasure."

"If you've heard of the Alexander Glass Works, that'll explain a lot," Teresa Alexander said.

"Of course!" Hatch said.

"Rupert Alexander is my father and Lois'. Glass is his whole life. He makes it, sells it, experiments with it, dreams about it and collects it. Even the tablecloths in this place are spun-glass. I wouldn't dare say so to Father, but personally I'd like my surrounding to be a little less brittle." She looked at Delevan. "Did you say your name is Kerrigan?"

"Delevan," said Delevan. "The chief said it."

Teresa Alexander seemed relieved. She stood as a musical sound tinkled through the room.

"The door-bell is also glass," she said. "That's probably Lois now."

She crossed the room to the entrance. Hatch's eyes followed her. He smiled. Delevan looked at Hatch, then at the girl, then back at Hatch, and also smiled.

The woman who came in was the woman whom Hatch had seen in the Club Grotto bar. She was alone. She was quick of breath and looked harassed. Her features were delicate, but

her purposeful manner made her seem strong. She entered quickly, but drifted to a stop while gazing at Hatch and Delevan.

"These two gentlemen have been waiting for you, Lois," Teresa Alexander said.

She left the room with a curious backward glance. Hatch's eyes followed her out, and he smiled.

"Yes?" Mrs. Howard Westcott said softly.

She had not moved.

"My name is Cyrus Hatch, and this is Mr. Delevan," Hatch said.

"How do you do?" said Mrs. Howard Westcott cautiously.

"How do," Delevan said. "Pleasure."

"I'm here in connection with the affair at the Club Grotto tonight," Hatch said.

Lois Westcott turned white around her firm mouth. "The Club Grotto?" she said.

"You were there," Hatch said.

"No," Lois Westcott answered. "I wasn't there."

Hatch's eyebrows arched. "You were not there?" he asked.

"No," the woman said.

"Have you a twin sister?"

"No," Mrs. Westcott said.

Hatch was silent a moment. "Then you're not aware that a murder was committed at the Club Grotto tonight?"

"A murder?"

"You see," Hatch said, "I was sitting in the Club Grotto bar with a young woman who is believed to have committed the murder. It's a difficult situation, and one of the most difficult things about it is that I haven't the faintest idea who that young woman is."

"I don't understand," Lois Westcott said.

"I thought you could tell me her name," Hatch said.

"But I've no idea what all this means."

"You weren't at the Club Grotto bar tonight with a distinguished looking man, and you didn't see me with the young woman, and you can't tell me who she is or where I might find her?"

"I don't know anything about it at all," Lois Westcott insisted. "I'm at a loss to understand why you should think I would know."

"Evidently there's a mix-up somewhere," Hatch said. "Sorry to have troubled you, Mrs. Westcott. Good night."

"Good night."

Hatch started for the door.

"Mr. Hatch!" Lois Westcott said quickly. "Will—will my name enter into this matter in any way—publicly?"

"Since you've no connection with the affair, I see no reason why it should," Hatch said.

"It mustn't," she said. "It must not."

"I think I understand," Hatch said.

SHE did not follow Hatch and Delevan to the door, but stood gazing after them. They stepped into the hall. Hatch closed the door, went to the elevator and glanced back curiously.

"There's one of the sweetest dames whom I have ever heard her lie like hell," Delevan observed.

Hatch nodded. "It's a decided handicap, not being able to call such a lovely woman a liar," he said.

"Even if she lies like hell, you take the kid sister and I'll take her," Delevan said.

As he rang for the elevator, Hatch heard a voice through the penthouse door. It was Teresa Alexander's.

"What is it, Lois?"

"Not now, Terry!" Lois Westcott answered quickly. Then her voice lifted. "Howard! Hello, darling. How-

ard, I've something to tell you that will upset you."

A man's voice said, "What is it?"

"Someone stole the crate of pigeons."

"The crate— When did it happen, Lois?"

"While I was driving to the express office, to ship them off," Lois Westcott explained rapidly. "I was alone, and the crate was in the back seat. Somebody must have taken it from the car while I was waiting for a traffic light."

"But how could anyone steal a crate of pigeons from the car without your knowing it?"

"I can't explain it, Howard, but when I arrived at the express office the crate was gone. I didn't want to disturb you at the lab, but I've been terribly upset about it. I know they're some of your best birds."

"They are," Howard Westcott said. "My only two night fliers were in that crate."

"I'm terribly sorry, darling, terribly sorry," Lois Westcott said. "But if the pigeons are released, won't they fly back to our loft?"

"Yes, provided too much time doesn't pass," the man said. "This is damned strange. I'd better notify the police."

"Yes," Lois Westcott said. "You'd better notify the police."

A moment later Hatch heard the dial of a telephone spin once, and heard Howard Westcott say, "Operator, connect me with Police Headquarters."

The elevator panel opened. Quietly thoughtful, Hatch rode down to the street with Delevan, and left the building.

"Pigeons stolen. Bloody birds," he said. "There must be some connection, Danny."

He walked to the maroon limousine and began to examine the rear end of it. Delevan kept as close as a shadow.

Below the back window, Hatch found a dent from which the enamel was flaked, exposing bright metal. He inserted his little finger into a hole.

"A bullet made that, Danny," Hatch said. "Specifically, one of Patrolman Koenig's bullets."

"It ain't any black coupé, neither," Delevan said.

"I'll talk to Mr. Howard Westcott about this later," Hatch decided. "The most urgent matter is to locate Joan Doe."

He turned from the car. Delevan tramped along beside him, keeping pace with his rangy stride. On Madison Avenue they stepped into a newsstand. Hatch bought a copy of the *New Yorker*. He looked first at the back cover.

The advertisement pictured a beautiful girl in an ermine evening wrap posed against a background of Manhattan spires at night.

"Joan Doe," Hatch said. "Joan Doe, who smokes rose-tipped Abdullahs, getting a lift from a cigarette."

CHAPTER IV

A Homing Pigeon Returns

HATCH folded the magazine and slipped it into Delevan's coat pocket. He turned to the rack of telephone directories. Having found the listing of the firm of Flack, Seligman and Pirano, he sidled into a telephone booth and dialed the number. He disconnected, then dialed it again. After a few moments he shouldered out.

"Line's busy," he told Delevan.

They left the store. Delevan trotted beside Hatch until they reached the roadster. Hatch folded under the wheel, U-turned and drove down Fifth Avenue. He angled through the financial district on lower Manhattan, where the

streets were dark and deserted, and finally parked the car in front of a low building.

The entrance was standing ajar. In the hall, Hatch consulted the directory painted on the wall. With Delevan he climbed a flight of worn wooden stairs. A double door at the end of the hall on the second floor bore the name of Flack, Seligman and Pirano. Hatch was about to knock when he heard a voice.

"Sam!" the voice said. "Sam, do you hear me? Sam, it's John. Come down to the office, Sam. Sam, can you hear me?"

Silence followed. Hatch tried the door and found it locked. He knocked.

The voice gasped, "Who's that?"

"Open up," Hatch said.

"I can't reach the door," the voice said.

"Why not?" Hatch asked.

"I'm tied," the voice said. "I can't open the door. I'm tied."

Hatch held out his hand. "Let me have your gun, Danny."

"That's right," Delevan said, reaching to his hip pocket. "This gun is something which I'm always forgetting I got it."

He placed an automatic in Hatch's hand. Hatch poked the barrel through a corner of the pane of one of the doors. The glass splintered inward. Hatch reached through the break and drew the bolt. Holding the gun, he opened the door. Delevan followed him through a waiting room into a partitioned office.

A man was lying on the floor of the inner office, near a flat-top desk. His hands were bound behind him with one end of a thin double rope that stretched to the upper corner of the nearest window. A telephone was lying in two parts near his head. Squinting at Hatch and Delevan, he attempted to rise.

Hatch returned the automatic to Delevan, gripped the man's arms and helped him to a standing position. At the same time the Venetian blind in the window clattered halfway down.

"How long have you been tied up like this?" Hatch inquired.

"Oh, damn!" the man said.

Hatch worked at the knots. The man breathed heavily. Sweat beaded his forehead and his cheeks around a number of burns and blisters. The burns were each the size of a dime, blackened and raw. His face was streaked with scratches in which blood had dried. There was a bump on his head, and a wooden letter-tray lay broken near his feet. As soon as Hatch loosened the last knot, he tottered into the lavatory and looked into the mirror.

"Oh, damn!" he said.

Hatch released the cord, letting the Venetian blind rattle down to the sill. He picked up the telephone, listened over the wire and heard nothing. Placing the instrument on the desk, he looked around.

"This place it's like a flocka cyclones struck it," Delevan said.

The drawers of several file cabinets were pulled out. Legal documents, letters and yellow carbon copies were scattered over the floor. The door of a black safe in one corner was gaping. Its compartments had been rifled; ledgers and papers had been dumped out of it. The drawers of the desk had been ransacked.

Hatch opened a door in the partition, looked into another small office and saw that it also was a shambles.

The man came out of the washroom, dabbing at his burns with a handkerchief, and sat heavily. "Oh, damn!" he said.

Hatch removed a bottle of Scotch from the safe and brought two tumblers from the washroom. He poured whiskey

into both glasses, gave one to the man with the burned face and kept the other for himself.

"Would you like a glass of water, Danny?" Hatch suggested.

"I would not like any glass of water," Delevan retorted, "or any buttermilk neither."

The man gulped down half the Scotch. He sputtered and sagged loosely in the chair.

"Thank you," he said to Hatch.

"Don't thank me," Hatch said. "It's on the house." He took his liquor neat. "Do you happen to be one of the partners in this law firm?" he inquired.

"I'm John Pirano," the man said, squinting at Hatch. "Who're you?"

"My name's Hatch and my friend's name is Delevan. Danny, this is Mr. Pirano."

"How do," Delevan said. "Pleasure."

"Who's Sam?" Hatch asked.

There was a pause.

"How did you happen to come in here?" John Pirano countered. "What're you doing in here?"

Delevan said, "Ain't you glad ta see us? Ain't you got any gratitude? You want us ta tie you back up like we found you and go away?"

"Who's Sam?" Hatch asked again.

"Sam Flack, the senior partner."

"You're now Sam Flack's *only* partner," Hatch said. "Sidney Seligman is dead."

John Pirano's hand shook and the Scotch sloshed in the glass. "Did you say Sid Seligman is dead?" he asked.

"Very dead," Hatch said.

"Dead as hell," Delevan affirmed.

JOHN PIRANO mopped at his face, then swallowed the rest of his Scotch. Hatch took up the bottle and poured Pirano's glass half full.

"Murdered?" Pirano asked.

"He never died of the pip," Delevan said.

"Who tied you up?" Hatch asked.

John Pirano squirmed. Sweat was trickling into his raw burns. "A man," he said. "Two men."

Delevan picked three cigarette butts off the floor and placed them on the desk. They were crushed and had rose-leaf tips.

"At least one of those there guys was a guy whom he's got a feminine touch," Delevan said.

"What was she after?" Hatch asked Pirano.

"Who?" Pirano said.

"The woman who knocked you out and tied you up and tore this office apart."

"It was a couple of men," John Pirano said.

"This here coupla men was a her," Delevan said. "The cops think she's the coupla men what killed a guy he was named Seligman."

"She must have come here directly," Hatch said, half to himself. "She must have stayed a while, too. It took considerable time to make such a mess of things. What was she after, Pirano?"

"Couple of men," Pirano said heavily. He drank more Scotch. "Couple of crooks."

Danny glared at him.

"Whatever she wanted, she didn't know just where to look for it, so she tried to force you to tell her where she could find it," Hatch said. "She hit you over the head with that letter-tray, and used her nails on you, and pressed lighted cigarettes into your face."

"This here guy he's lucky she didn't burn him with her gun," Delevan commented. "You had it right, chief. That dame is a dame what she's dangerous."

"What was she after?" Hatch asked Pirano.

"Are you detectives?" Pirano parried.

"Did she get it?" Hatch insisted.

"Couple of men," Pirano said, and took another swallow of Scotch. He wiped his mouth with his blood-spotted handkerchief. "Couple of men I never saw before."

Delevan suggested, "Chief, maybe this here is a guy whom he talks easier if he sees he's gonna be bust inna snoot."

"Take it easy, Danny," Hatch said. "Pirano, I'm curious to learn why you're so anxious to protect a woman who didn't hesitate to torture you, a woman who is being hunted as the murderer of your partner," Hatch said.

Pirano squinted at Hatch. "If you men aren't detectives, you'd better get out of here," he said.

"Why were you trying to reach Sam Flack on the phone instead of the police?" Hatch asked.

Pirano mopped his punished face and squirmed. "You've no right to ask questions," he said, breathing hard. "I kicked the telephone off the desk. After a while I heard the operator and I asked for Sam's number. If Sam wants to call in the police, he'll call them in. You're not detectives. You'd better get the hell out of here."

HATCH heard marching footfalls. He went into the waiting room and looked down the hall. Five men were advancing from the head of the stairs.

"Here comes your pappy again, chief," Delevan said.

Commissioner Hatch stopped just inside the reception room. He put his fists on his hips and frowned at his son.

"Hello, Mark," Cyrus Hatch said.

"How do, Commissioner," said Delevan.

"Hello, Cyrus," the Commissioner growled. "Hello, Danny."

He went into the inner office. One of the five men, whom Hatch had not seen before, hurried past the Commissioner. He was round as a dumpling and his hair was snow white. He was heavy-jowled, like a Saint Bernard. He turned his faded blue eyes around the upset office, then stared at Pirano.

"John!" he cried in a falsetto voice.

Houser was scowling at Cyrus Hatch.

"Who's that man?" Cyrus Hatch asked him.

"Samuel Flack," Houser said. "If I was you, I'd wait and read about this case in the newspapers."

The Commissioner returned to the waiting room. He signaled Houser, and Houser went into the inner office.

"You'll find the Scotch fairly good, Houser," Cyrus Hatch said after him. "Mark, how did you connect with Sam Flack?"

The Commissioner looked steadily at Cyrus Hatch. "We went to Seligman's apartment first and didn't find anything of importance, so we went to Flack's place. Flack got a call from this office while we were there. What're you doing here, Cyrus?"

"I've been attempting a bit of detective work," Cyrus Hatch said. "My knowledge of criminology hasn't been of much help so far. The most useful tool I've yet found is a telephone directory."

"I told you to keep out of this," the Commissioner said.

"I can't keep out of it, Mark."

"Cyrus, I told you to give me your statement and leave the rest to me."

"You put no stock in my testimony, Mark," Cyrus Hatch said. "You discount it because it doesn't agree with the statements of several other witnesses.

That's fair enough; I can't blame you for it. On the other hand, can you blame me for wanting to make sure I have the facts straight, for the girl's sake?"

"No," Mark Hatch said. "I'm also trying to get the facts straight."

"Of course you are, but you believe Joan Doe is guilty of murder, whereas I'm positive she isn't. You're doing your job the right way as you see it, Mark, but I'm going to do my damnedest to prove that Joan Doe didn't commit this murder."

"You're making it tough, Cyrus," Mark Hatch said.

Cyrus Hatch smiled. "Like old times, isn't it, Mark?"

"You haven't changed a bit," the Commissioner said. "You're just the same as when you were a kid. After your mother died I found out I had the toughest job of my life on my hands, trying to bring you up as I thought best while you went right ahead bringing yourself up your own way."

"But we stayed good friends, didn't we, Mark?"

"Sure we did, Cyrus. We always will," the Commissioner said. "But if you don't behave yourself you'll get into serious trouble."

"If I do, you can say I asked for it."

"Does this mean you've made up your mind not to back down?" Mark Hatch asked.

"That's just what it means."

"Then I may have to take measures to stop you."

"In your place, I'd do the same thing," Cyrus Hatch said. "And I don't expect you to show me any partiality officially, Mark, no matter how lenient you might like to be with me paternally."

"It looks like the sooner I put the clamps on you, the better," the Commissioner said.

Cyrus Hatch nodded. "I'm going right ahead, Mark."

"Good luck, Cyrus," the Commissioner said.

"Thanks, Mark."

"I've got a job to do here, Cyrus."

"Good night, Mark."

"Good night, Cyrus."

"So long, Commissioner," Delevan said.

CYRUS HATCH looked into the inner office. Houser was questioning Pirano, and Sam Flack was wheezing with consternation. Vogt followed Cyrus Hatch and Delevan down the stairs. He lugged a black case out of the squad car and carried it into the building.

"They'll soon have more of Joan Doe's fingerprints," Hatch said to Delevan.

They ducked into the roadster.

"You and your pappy are right nice to each other about the way which you declare war," Delevan said.

"That won't make it hurt less when he begins cracking down on me," Hatch said. "The queer part of it is, I wouldn't be doing this if I hadn't inherited his tenacity."

"I'll bet that before we're finished there's gonna be hell to pay," Delevan said.

"If you do, you'll collect," Hatch said. "Danny, that chap Pirano is holding something back."

"So is this here Westcott dame holding something back."

"Everybody's holding something back," Hatch said, "including me."

"Except this here dame whom we met here in the bar," Delevan said. "There's a dame she don't hold anything back on anybody. That there dame she hands out the works."

Hatch drove across to Broadway, then turned uptown. Near Madison

Square he stopped. He left the roadster, went to a newsstand and came back with another copy of the *New Yorker*. He put it in his pocket.

"An army of cops is looking for Joan Doe, and none of them knows there are tens of thousands of pictures of her scattered about," he said.

He continued up Fifth Avenue. When he stopped at the apartment building where the Westcotts lived, he found the maroon limousine still parked. Again the big-stomached doorman opened the entrance.

"Have any detectives from the precinct station called on Mr. Westcott?" Hatch asked.

"Detectives?" the doorman said with a jerk of his paunch. "No sir."

"Then Mr. Westcott is expecting us," Hatch said.

Delevan followed him into the elevator. "The penthouse," Hatch said to the attendant. He stepped with Delevan into the square hall, pressed the bell-button and took his copy of the *New Yorker* from his pocket.

"Keep yours in your hand," he directed Delevan as the elevator panel shut behind them. "Turn it so the advertisement shows."

Howard Westcott opened the door. Hatch and Delevan held their magazines in such a way that the photographs of Joan Doe were clearly visible to him. Startled, Westcott glanced from the one to the other, and his face turned the color of tallow.

"Good evening," Hatch said. "This is Captain Delevan, and I'm Lieutenant Hatch. Inspector Casey at the precinct station sent us over in regard to a stolen crate of pigeons."

Westcott peered at them, then said, "Yes; come in."

They stepped together into the glass room. Lois Westcott and Terry Alex-

ander rose simultaneously from their chairs. They gazed searchingly at Hatch and Delevan.

"This is Captain Delevan and Lieutenant Hatch, from the precinct station," Howard Westcott told them. "They've come about the pigeons."

"Good evening," Hatch said.

"How do," Delevan said. "Pleasure."

The two women gazed at them in troubled silence.

WESTCOTT looked virile and hardened. His bearing was proud and somehow defiant. Both Hatch and Delevan soberly withstood his scrutiny.

"About the pigeons," Hatch suggested.

"Yes," Westcott said. "They were stolen from the car while my wife was taking them to the express office this evening. There were six homing pigeons in a crate. They're worth about fifteen hundred dollars."

"I never knew there was pigeons that was worth so much," Delevan said.

"Ordinary homing pigeons are worth from twenty-five to fifty dollars a head," Westcott explained: "Some birds, specially bred and trained, are valued at as high as six thousand dollars each. Those that were stolen tonight were some of my favorites."

"Whoever stole them must have known they were valuable," Hatch surmised.

He looked at Mrs. Westcott.

"It would seem so," Westcott said. "Still, I can't believe another pigeon fancier took the birds. Anyone who would know of their value as racers would also know they are registered as belonging to me. No one else could possibly enter them in a race under his own name."

"Why not?" Hatch asked.

"Perhaps you'd better come up into

the loft," Westcott said, "and I'll explain."

He strode down a hall. Hatch glanced at the two women. They were still gazing at him intently. He smiled at Terry Alexander, but she did not smile back. With Delevan, he followed Westcott to a flight of stairs.

"Mr. Westcott," Hatch inquired, "do you know a man named Sanders?"

"Sanders?" Westcott said. "No. Is he a pigeon fancier?"

"I'm not sure, but he seems to know something about birds," Hatch answered. "In the terminology of pigeon fanciers, are birds ever termed bloody?"

Westcott halted on the stairs. "Bloody? I don't know what you mean. In war times, homing pigeons often flew back to their stations through gunfire. Several of the most famous birds returned with their messages even though they were wounded. It's not unusual for a pigeon to fly in after having been injured by a hawk. Does that answer your question?"

"I'd heard the term, and I was simply curious about it," Hatch said.

Westcott snapped on a bright light in a room that had been constructed on the roof of the penthouse. One wall was filled by large casement windows. It was crowded with cages built in tiers. Each cage contained one or two pigeons, some dozing on their perches, some sitting on nests, others strutting about. A runway led to each cage. The birds preened themselves and chipped.

"You see," Westcott pointed out, "each pigeon has an aluminum band on its leg. A registration number is stamped on the band. The band is placed on the bird's leg when it is young. The bird grows, and then the band can't be removed without destroying it. Once a band is removed from

a pigeon's leg, that pigeon can never be raced again."

"Why were you shipping some of your pigeons away tonight?" Hatch asked.

"I frequently ship a crate of pigeons to a nearby city," Westcott explained. "The express company has a special foreman who handles them. The birds are fed according to directions while on the way, and released at their destination at an appointed time. Then they fly back to their home loft. It's part of their training. The crate which my wife was taking to the express office this evening contained two barred cocks, two dark grizzles and two red checkers."

"Make a note of that, captain," Hatch said to Delevan. "Two barred cocks, two dark grizzles and two red checkers."

Danny scribbled dutifully.

"You probably won't be able to find them for me," Westcott said. "If the birds should be released soon, they'll certainly fly back to this loft."

Acting on the thought, he opened a pair of the casement windows.

HATCH heard footfalls on the stairs and looked over his shoulder. Lois Westcott and Terry Alexander entered the loft. They paused inside the door and stood silent, watching Hatch. He smiled at Terry Alexander. Terry Alexander did not smile back.

Hatch's ears caught a fluttering sound and he gazed out the window.

"There seems to be something flying around out there right now," he said.

Westcott peered into the night. "Why, yes! It must be one of the stolen birds."

Gray wings whisked out of the darkness. A pigeon darted into the loft and

alighted on a runway. Its eyes shining, it strutted into its cage.

"There's something tied to the pigeon's leg," Hatch said.

Westcott reached into the cage, closed his hand over the bird and drew it out. Hatch and Delevan stepped to his side as he turned to a table. On the table was a row of cannisters labeled *Yellow Corn*, *Maple Peas*, *Millet Seed* and *Grit*. There was also a clock device and a scale. Lois Westcott and Terry Alexander came close. Westcott took up a pair of scissors and snipped the thread that bound a folded bit of paper to the pigeon's leg.

"This is one of my night fliers," Westcott said, looking at his wife. "Whoever released this pigeon must have known it's one of the only two birds in the crate that are trained to fly at night."

He unfolded the paper and rapidly read a penciled message. Suddenly he crushed it into his fist. He turned stiffly to Hatch, his face ashen.

"I—I'm really sorry I troubled you," he said in a husky tone. "I'm—I'm sure all the birds will come back in good time. Please consider—consider the matter closed."

Lois Westcott was gazing deep into her husband's eyes. Terry Alexander was looking boldly at Cyrus Hatch.

"You mean you want us to forget all about the matter of the stolen pigeons?" Hatch asked.

"Yes; yes." Westcott crossed to the stairs, his fist still clinched on the paper. "I—I won't trouble you any longer."

Lois Westcott said quickly, "Perhaps you'd better stay here in case any of the other birds fly in, Howard. I'll take Captain Delevan and Lieutenant Hatch to the door."

Westcott nodded, still pallid.

She went down the stairs. Hatch said

to Delevan, "Come along, captain," and to Westcott, "Good night, sir." They followed Lois Westcott to the entrance. Hatch paused, giving her an opportunity to speak, but she remained silent. Her eyes a challenge, she opened the door wide.

The moment Hatch and Delevan were across the sill, she closed the door firmly behind them.

Hatch rang for the elevator. Delevan watched him expectantly, but he said nothing. They stepped into the elevator, and the cab started down. As the floor levels flicked past, a buzzing sound came from the cab telephone. The operator unhooked the receiver.

"Yes, Miss," he said into the instrument.

Hatch met Delevan's eyes.

Delevan said quietly, "Chief, I can't figger why you didn't get that there

guy in a corner and grill holy hell outa him."

"It wouldn't have accomplished anything, Danny. In fact, it might have defeated our purpose."

"How come, chief?"

"Did you see the message the bird brought in?" Hatch asked.

"I gotta have time to read things, chief," Delevan said.

The elevator operator said into the telephone, "Yes, Miss," and replaced the receiver.

"I just managed to read it before Westcott snatched it away," Hatch informed Delevan quietly. "It said, 'R.Q. is the woman who killed S. If the police come, deny everything. Look out for Cyrus Hatch.' It was signed—"

The elevator stopped abruptly between floors. The next moment it was gliding upward.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Dillinger Profession

JOHN DILLINGER, deceased 1934, is at present contributing to the support of his relatives.

Equipped with wax models of dead gangsters, Dillinger's father and half-brother are touring the country, lecturing. "Crime does not pay" is the subject, and the admission fee is nominal. The Dillingers' argument should be convincing, for if crime did pay, John might have been able to do more for his relatives than leave them a name that pays in small change.

—Nelson O'Grady.

Help 15 Miles Of Kidney Tubes

To Flush out Acids and Other Poisonous Waste

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 Miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. Most people pass about 3 pints a day or about 3 pounds of waste.

Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning shows there may be something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

An excess of acids or poisons in your blood, when due to functional kidney disorders, may be the beginning of nagging

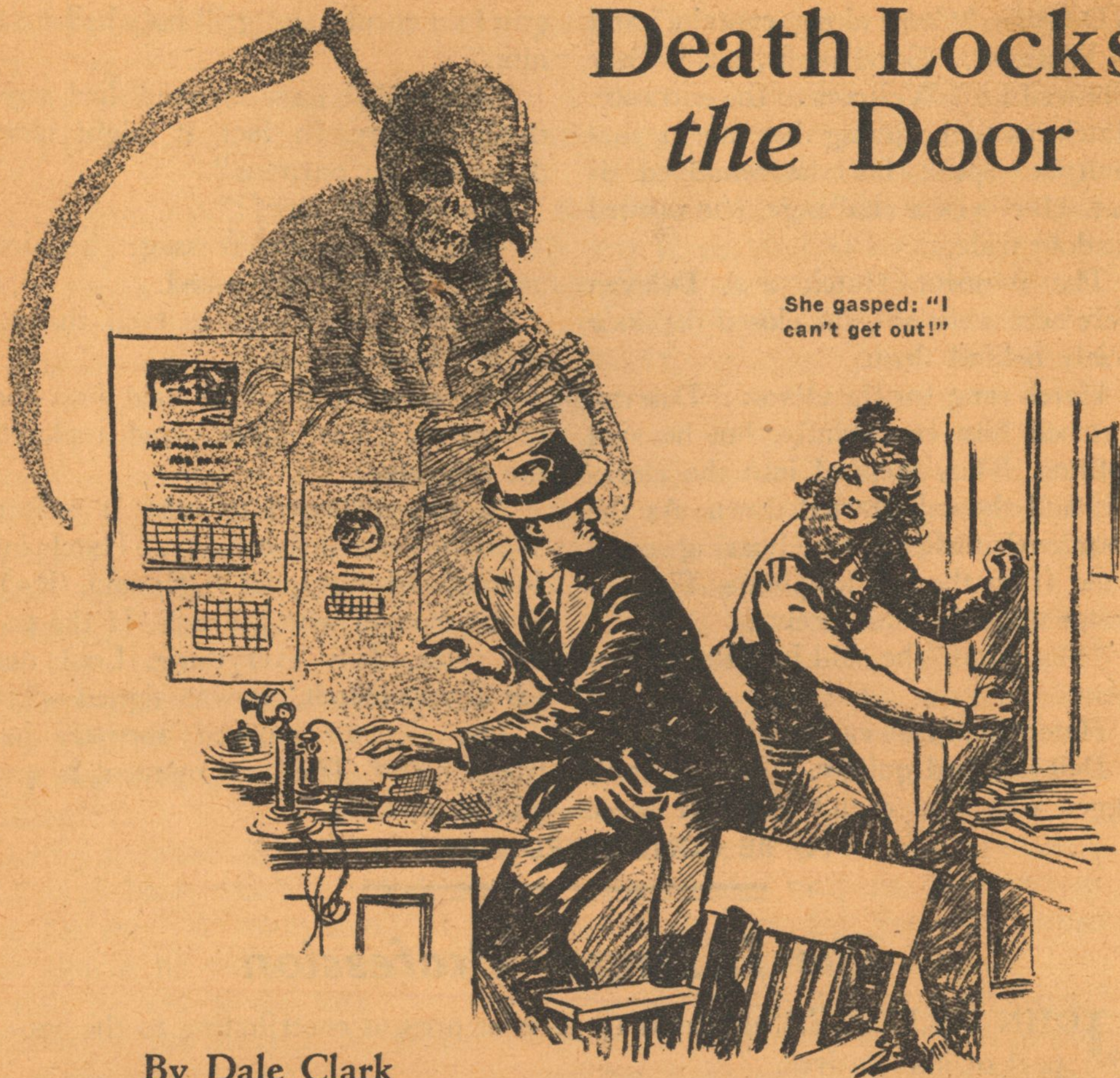
backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 Miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(ADV.)

Death Locks *the Door*

She gasped: "I
can't get out!"



By Dale Clark

Author of "Shakedown," etc.

From a classified ad to a valley farm stretched a steel tape which measured one man's life

TRAWLER was ducking out the side door for a beer when this girl walked into the office. He looked at her—she was worth looking at, twice. She was pretty, with a lot of wavy blonde hair and the kind of figure you see in the swim suit ads. Even her quietly tailored outfit couldn't hide that.

She came up to the polished oak counter and told the phone girl:

"My name is Marian Leeds. I have a complaint to make."

She fished around in her purse, got out a scrap of newsprint, and explained, "About this."

Trawler's gray stare recognized the newsprint, which was six-point type from the *Inter-Ocean's* classified advertising section. He ought to have recognized it, since he was the *Inter-Ocean's* classified trouble-shooter. A lot of people use that kind of advertising; some of these people are phonies, and a metropolitan daily has to protect its readers. Larry Trawler was the detective who did the protecting. He nabbed the noisome birds of

prey who would use the "Help Wanted" columns to extract cash from desperate job-seekers, or lure young women to lonely buildings. It was a private investigator's job, working for the paper, but also he carried a deputy sheriff's badge.

He came back inside the counter and took the clipping from the girl's hand. *Real Estate for Sale*, it said. *Farm acreage, close to city, five room house, don't miss this bargain*, and a phone number.

He asked, "Well, Miss Leeds? You answered this?"

Trawler looked and sounded a little surprised. It was hard to figure the blonde being interested in farm acreage.

She shook her head and said, "No-o, but my father did. He's a chemist with a wholesale drug house, and the doctor told him he had to get out of doors for his health. He—he has been poorly for years. I didn't realize how serious it was, I've been away at school. And then one day he just collapsed in the laboratory. . . ."

She had taken a handkerchief out of her purse, kept winding that into knots as she talked, nervously.

"He had an idea he'd like to get out into the country, anyway," she went on. "Raise chickens and oranges and so on. Of course he hadn't any experience in that line, but—you know—it was a sort of daydream with him."

It sounded like she had a story to tell, and wasn't going to cut the telling of it short. Trawler didn't usually go for that; but the blonde had something, and she could put it across.

"Come in." He waved her to a chair in front of his desk. Dropping into his own chair, he propped an elbow on the desk and fastened his fingers around the empty bowl of a briar pipe.

Trawler was a tall, rangy man; he'd been on the Racket Squad before the *Inter-Ocean* offered double the City Hall pay, and he still wore the indefinable air of a first grade detective.

He said, "So your dad answered this land ad?"

Marian Leeds nodded. "A man named Kingsley drove him out to Pine Heights and showed him a piece of property there. A lovely little place just off the paved road, with acres of fruit trees and equipment for raising I don't know how many thousands of chickens. It had a modern house, too. The price was eight thousand dollars."

Trawler's gray eyes opened a little. "Sounds cheap."

The girl curled her lips into a tight smile. "Father thought so. There was another man looking at the place the same day, a Mr. Baynell. Kingsley was in a hurry to sell, for cash. Baynell said he'd take the bargain if Dad didn't want it. So Dad turned over the money—a thousand in cash and the rest in Gas Company bonds. In return, he got a deed."

The smile went away from her lips.

"Only," she said, "the deed turned out to be a different farm. Up in the hills. And there's nothing on it but brush and stone and a tumbledown cabin—not worth five dollars an acre!"

"**H**OLY-OH!" Larry Trawler stared. "But that gag's got whiskers on it a yard long. Didn't your father even look up the title to the property he bought?"

The girl ran her finger slowly along the desk edge.

"Father isn't a practical man, I'm afraid," she admitted slowly. "He was rushed into the deal, afraid that Baynell would buy if he didn't."

"But anyone—"

"The title is all right—guaranteed by a trust company, in fact. Only it's the title to the wrong land. He got the hill farm instead of the valley one," she said. "'The northeast quarter of the northeast quarter of section 24' when he thought he was buying the 'northeast quarter of the northeast quarter of section 20.' Just one little figure in the papers made all the difference, and he sank his last penny in the swindle."

Trawler tightened blunt fingers on the briar pipe. His gray stare thinned. "That's rotten."

And it was rotten. An invalid rooked out of a lifetime's savings. Larry Trawler hated that kind of rottenness on general principle. And when it was done through an *Inter-Ocean* ad, he hated it on a very special principle of his own. The way any good cop dislikes dirty work on his beat.

"Father went to see Kingsley about it." Marian Leeds lifted her slim shoulders in a despondent shrug. "He wasn't in, of course. His partner, a man named Peleg, said it was a case of *caveat emptor*—let the buyer beware. Then Father went to a lawyer. It seems we're out of luck. We have no witnesses to prove that Kingsley showed the valley farm to Father, we haven't been able to locate Baynell, and anyway he's probably just a shill for the outfit. So Father has no proof. Just his word against theirs."

Trawler grunted: "The cops?"

"They might have other charges against some of those men," the girl said, "but what I'm most interested in is getting Father's money back. That's why I came to you."

Trawler hated to tell her this.

"The *Inter-Ocean* would like to catch up with them, sure," he said. "But Kingsley won't risk running that

ad twice in one paper. By this time he's probably a thousand miles, or more, away."

"No, he isn't." Color came into her face. "You see, I ran a phoney ad of my own—offering to buy a small farm, using a box number address. I got dozens of answers, and one of them was from Kingsley."

Trawler stared at his pipe's stem. "Yeah!"

Marian Leeds nodded, the light in her blue eyes hopeful. The small hands gripped the edge of Trawler's desk as she leaned toward him.

"Suppose he tries that little game once more? He's never met me, I was at school when this other happened. Suppose he shows me one piece of property and then produces the deed to another, worthless one? That would be fraud, wouldn't it? He could be pinned down and forced to give the money back?"

She sounded excited and pleased about this idea of hers. Trawler thought about it, balancing the pipe on the tips of his fingers; finally said, "Maybe. If he falls for it."

"But I need a witness," the girl went on. "The best thing would be a man to pose as my brother or—or even as a husband. A third party whose word would be good in court. I've got an appointment with Kingsley today. And I thought maybe the *Inter-Ocean* would lend me a reporter, considering you printed that swindler's ad in the paper?"

Trawler's grin was sudden, wide.

"Okay!" He pushed the briar pipe into his flannels pocket. "You've got a brother—or husband. Where's this appointment, and when?"

"His office, at twelve-thirty." She glanced at her wristwatch. "That's in fifteen minutes."

IT WAS on the seventh floor of the Cornice Building downtown. A brass plate screwed to the oak door said, *Kingsley & Peleg, Advertising Novelties*. Trawler gave the glass knob a twist, pushed the door open, held it for the girl to go in first.

She gasped wordlessly.

Then Trawler was inside the room. "Holy-oh!"

It was a smallish room with a brown carpet on its floor, a lot of advertising calendars on the walls, a water-cooler in the corner, and a desk in front of the window at the far end.

There was a man behind this desk, slumped in a swivel chair. He didn't look up at Trawler's exclamation.

Marian Leeds whispered, "He's dead!" in a queer, frightened voice. She sounded sick about it, and looked sick, too.

"Yeah," said Trawler. "Seems so." A child would have known this was death, known by the fixed stare of the man's bulging eyes.

He took a couple of steps past her, enabling him to see the manner of the man's death. It wasn't possible to see from the doorway, the body had collapsed so far down in its chair. Those bulging eyes were almost at a level with the littered desk top—littered with the advertising novelties, thermometers, flyswatters, paperweights, and other such items that merchants give away with their names and phone numbers attached. Ten cent store stuff, Trawler judged it.

In the collection were some metal tape measures, the kind wound on spools about the size of a pocket watch.

Trawler's gray stare focused on the scene. He muttered, "Queer thing to kill a guy with—"

The murderer had done just that, though. Had yanked the tape out of

one of the spools, whipped this strip of flexible metal around the victim's plump neck, and twisted. Somewhat loosened now, the steel ribbon still dangled around the fellow's throat. There was a knotted snarl of it back of his head, and red stains where the sharp edges had bitten into the flesh.

The result looked like a particularly barbaric necklace.

Trawler's long legs carried him cautiously around the desk. The victim was old enough to be completely bald, and fat enough to have been short-winded, but he'd put up a fight. The plump hands had clawed desperately at the strand of steel. His feet, flailing in death agony, had smashed a cross-piece under the desk. The writhing of the heavy body accounted for a broken arm on the swivel chair.

Trawler touched one of the hands—still warm. The gesture wrung another, stifled cry from the girl.

Over his shoulder, Trawler saw the look on her face. There wasn't any color left in her cheeks and she held her eyes half closed. But she didn't turn away; she stared as though the sight fascinated her.

Funny, thought Trawler. He growled, "You better stay outside."

Then he circled the desk, reached for the phone. Marian Leeds gasped behind him: "I can't get out!"

SHE was at the door, which had been closed by its spring hinge after Trawler came in. She stood there, almost frantically twisting and tugging at the knob.

"Let me," said Trawler, going over. He gave the knob a twist, too. It turned lightly under his hand; nothing else happened. A screw was out, so the knob had no connection with the latch mechanism inside the lock.

He growled, "Well—?"

The girl's voice was a whisper at his shoulder. "How—how did the m-murderer g-get out?"

Trawler stepped back, looked around. He fixed his stare on another, smaller door beside the water-cooler. It might lead to a closet, or maybe to a storeroom.

He started toward it; stopped.

There were footfalls in the hall outside, noisy ones. The first door bunted open, and a man strode in. A big man, he weighed around two-twenty and carried that much weight loose-jointedly. He had a shock of red hair, with a shapeless felt hat crammed on one side of it.

Trawler's jaw slacked a bit. He mumbled, "H'lo, Garry."

It was Sergeant Garry, of Homicide. A tough cop.

There were two other cops behind Garry, and then another man between these two.

"Happened during lunch hour," this man was saying. "Mr. Kingsley was all right when I went down to get a bite in the drugstore on the first floor here. That was maybe three-quarters of an hour ago. When I returned, five-six minutes ago, I opened the door and saw him like this. Dead. So I closed the door without touching anything, and called the police—"

He was a short, squarish man; his blond face looked as if he'd used sandpaper on it.

Trawler could see that Sergeant Garry wasn't listening carefully to any of this. The Homicide dick marched over to the desk, had a long, hard look at the dead man there, and then pushed the felt farther back on his red thatch.

"Let's have your names," he said wearily.

"Mine's Harry Peleg," the short

man offered. "I'm his partner—was his partner. Kingsley was selling out and going back East. He inherited some money from an uncle in New York."

The sergeant grunted, "Won't do him much good now—" and pushed his face toward Trawler. "What's your angle in this, fella?"

"We came in a minute ago to see this Kingsley about an ad in the *Inter-Ocean*," sparred Trawler.

"And stayed for the party, huh?"

The girl said, "We couldn't get out. The door won't open from this side."

Peleg said, "That happen again? There's a screw falls out sometimes." His bay-blue eyes hunted across the carpet as he spoke. He lifted a soft hand. "There, under the water-cooler. We been meaning to have it fixed."

The sergeant barely glanced under the cooler. "Who's the dame, Trawler?"

The girl didn't like his tone and her eyes showed it. She said, "My name is Marian Leeds, and—"

Thump.

The sound cut off her words. It seemed to come from within that other door, by the water-cooler. Trawler whirled around. So did Garry, but Trawler was faster. He dived past the cooler, yanked the door open.

A man keeled out onto the brown carpet of the office. He was gray-haired, thin-faced, and deathly pale. Dead, wondered Larry Trawler. He gripped the wrist above the bony hand. No, alive; but the eyes were locked in a faint.

He heard the girl's thin, incredulous wail:

"It's father."

"THERE'S your picture," Sergeant Garry said grimly. "Old Leeds came up here and demanded his money

back. They had a row, and he strangled Kingsley. Afterward he couldn't get out, on account of the bum doorknob. He heard someone coming along the hall, so he hid in the closet. It fits like the shoe on my foot."

The sergeant was drawing this picture for the benefit of an assistant prosecutor from the D.A.'s office. The medical officer had come and gone. So had the print and photo experts. Finally, a pair of White-coats from the morgue had wheeled out the body.

Garry went on, "The doc says Kingsley had been dead only fifteen minutes, around that, when he got here. Say it happened at quarter-past twelve. Old Leeds admits he got here around that time. You can throw out his claim that he got a phone call from Kingsley, asking him to come—"

The old man in the corner of the room lifted his head. "But that's—that's true," he protested brokenly. "Kingsley did call me on the phone. He was dead when I came in here, and it was twenty after twelve or later—"

The D.A.'s man interrupted. "Huh! And what were you doing in the closet?"

Leeds flushed painfully. "I—why, I lost my head when I heard someone outside. I realized that I had a motive, even though I had nothing to do with his death."

Larry Trawler lounged beside the water-cooler. The briar pipe was in his mouth, but empty. He breathed into its stem, said:

"Sarge."

Garry gave him a what-the-hell-do-you-want look.

"Why should Leeds kill him?" Trawler asked. "Considering that his girl had a way worked out to get that money back without violence?"

While the fingerprint men and photographers worked, Garry had questioned everyone else, alone. The question brought a grin to his lips. "Simple," he grunted. "He didn't know she had any such scheme."

The blonde girl stood beside her father's chair, a hand clasping his shoulder.

"Yes-s." She admitted it reluctantly, Trawler thought. "He didn't know. I didn't want to arouse any false hopes, in case the plan should fail."

The sergeant said roughly, "So he tried a plan of his own, and that failed, too."

Trawler pulled at his empty pipe. "And what did he get out of it?"

"It's none of your business, but since you're horning in on it—" Garry pushed a hand into his pocket, drew out a handful of gilt-edged papers. "We found these on him. Gas Company bonds—seven grand worth."

Leeds turned a haggard face toward the two. "They were on the desk," he protested feebly. "Since they rightfully belonged to me, I took—"

"They've been endorsed over to Kingsley, anyway," muttered Trawler. It didn't make sense. Suddenly his gray stare narrowed.

"What's that card?"

A corner of the card protruded from among the bonds. Trawler reached for that; the sergeant reached, too, and this time Garry got the decision by an inch. The card was engraved, *W. B. Baynell, Realtor*.

A Los Angeles address had been scratched off, and words penned across the foot of the pasteboard: "702 Colanade Hotel."

"**M**UST have been on the desk with the bonds," Garry muttered. Marian Leeds came across the room.

"Baynell!" she exclaimed. "But he's the one who helped swindle—"

"Yeah. He prob'ly killed Kingsley," said the sergeant with heavy sarcasm, "and left his card to show who done it."

Harry Peleg spoke up. "Baynell. He was in about eleven to see Kingsley. It was something about farmland, Kingsley's own private business, and I didn't pay much attention. He stayed only a few minutes."

Trawler eyed the short man. "You knew nothing about your partner's real estate?"

"Well—" Peleg looked at the floor and moistened his lips. "I don't want to speak ill of the dead. I understand he pulled off some pretty raw deals in that line."

"This one was raw enough." The sergeant turned an almost sympathetic glance toward Leeds. Then he recovered and said brusquely, "We're taking you downtown, Leeds. We'll probably have your confession in about two hours."

He made this sound threatening. Sergeant Garry was in the business of catching killers, which is no gentle business.

Trawler understood that; understood that by all the tokens of the trade, Garry was dealing with a killer now.

"That means the rest of us are out of it?" he asked.

"You'll get subpoenas," Garry's lids drooped, "if we need you."

The sergeant stood up. His detectives marched Leeds out into the corridor, the D.A.'s man bringing up the rear of the little procession.

Trawler's moody stare centered on the dejected figure of Leeds. There went a desperate man, he decided. Only desperation could have driven anyone

to snatch those bonds from the desk, right out from under Kingsley's dead hands. It was probably the desperation of a man enfeebled by illness. Trawler had a notion it wouldn't take Garry long to wring a confession out of Marian's father.

On impulse, he stepped out into the hall. "Wait a mo', Sarge."

Garry wheeled around, bleak-faced. "Well?"

"You haven't let me get a word in edgewise," Trawler told him quietly. "What'd you keep me around for, to jump down my throat? I'm cop enough myself to know—"

"Huh! You were a cop," Garry interrupted. He kept his voice low. "Right now you work for a newspaper. And a paper that's been raising hell by the square yard with the Department."

Trawler's brows went up. "I don't write the *Inter-Ocean's* editorials."

"So what? I don't make the Police Department's policies, either."

"Holy-oh!" clipped Trawler. "Meaning, it's a Department policy not to give the *Inter-Ocean* inside news breaks? You've been holding me for questioning so I couldn't tip my paper off on this until the other sheets put the story on the street?"

The sergeant grinned morosely. "If you quote me on that, I'd call you a liar, see?"

But that's the rub, thought Trawler. Politics. And he knew Garry didn't like it any better than he did.

"That being the case," he said softly, "you wouldn't expect me to give you my angle on this job, would you?"

"What for?" The big detective looked entirely unimpressed. "We got the fella barehanded, already."

Garry turned on his heel. He gave no sign if he heard Trawler's mur-

mured retort: "Barehanded. That's just it."

He went back into the office. Peleg was making a nervous pretense of clearing the desk, while the girl stood weeping almost soundlessly at the window.

Trawler grunted. "Better follow to the station, Miss Leeds. Garry'll probably let you see your dad again when they get through quizzing him. The Sarge isn't as rough as he acts—sometimes."

The girl looked around tearfully. "Aren't you coming with me?"

Trawler sighed. "Looks like," he said, "you'll get farther without me. It certainly looks that way."

"But you've got to help. You've got to."

The way she said this, and the look on her face, indicated that Trawler was the only hope left. And not much of a hope, at that.

He held the briar pipe in the corner of his mouth, bit thoughtfully into the stem, and finally said: "Well, I could go see that Baynell. If seeing him will help any."

THERE was a Western Union downstairs, and a drugstore. Trawler went into the drugstore. The place had half a dozen white-topped tables and one waitress.

Uh-huh, the waitress said. She knew Mr. Peleg. He ate lunch there 'most every day. Uh-huh, today too. He came in at the usual time, before twelve, and sat at the usual table over in the corner. And stayed until almost half-past twelve. She remembered, he mentioned the time when he told her to hurry the dessert along.

Furthermore, she'd told all this to the police, too. And would the *Inter-Ocean* be around to take her picture?

Trawler walked along the corridor to the telegraph office.

Yes, sir, said the young woman in charge. There had been a package left, to go by special messenger, but she didn't know if—

"Look here," said Trawler, flashing the deputy sheriff's badge.

Yes, sir, she said. The package was a small one, addressed to a gentleman at the Colanade Hotel. She'd get the name from the slip stub. It was to a Mr. Seeley. No sir, no room number. Just Mr. Seeley at the Colanade Hotel. And she didn't know the gentlemen who left the package, but she was new in this office. The police had not questioned her.

Trawler caught a taxi to the hotel.

No, sir, said the desk clerk. Mr. Baynell wasn't in; didn't know when he'd be in, either. If there was a message—?

"I'll wait in the lobby," Trawler said. "Put a note in the box for him. And, oh—have you a man named Seeley registered here?"

There was no Mr. Seeley on the register.

Trawler reflected he hadn't expected there would be one. He found a chair in the lobby, sat there very solemnly with the empty pipe in his teeth.

It might have been ten minutes later when the page call came for him. "You're to go up to 702, sir."

Trawler went up.

He tapped at 702, the door opened, and—there was no warning at all. Just a light swish in the air as he pushed his head and shoulders into the room, something skimming lightly through the air and falling in a loop onto Trawler's shoulders.

The loop tightened. It bit into his neck and shoulders, jerked, and brought Trawler to his knees inside the room. The door slammed shut.

Two knees chunked against his shoulders, drove him flat to the floor.

Trawler spluttered, "You damned murd—!" and didn't finish; didn't waste the breath. He didn't try to tear the choking steel from his throat, either. Kingsley had died trying to do that.

The other man was gasping, holding the breath between his teeth before letting it go, straining with all his might to twist the metal ribbon at the base of Trawler's skull. He kept his knees on Trawler, grinding the kneecaps into Trawler's shoulder blades, and pinning his victim to the floor.

The other man gave a jerk on the steel tape and Trawler's mouth flew wide open with shock. He began fighting for air that didn't come. His eyes seemed to be crowding out of their sockets.

Trawler made a frantic grab back of his head. He caught a hand. He pulled it in front of him, to his mouth, and bit. The other man screamed an oath. Trawler bit harder. Another scream, this one a bleat; and the man started pounding at Trawler's skull with his free hand.

It was all over then. Trawler's teeth lost their grip as the air flooded his lungs. He did a fish-flop away from his assailant, rolled over, and came to his knees.

He blurted, "H'lo, Peleg."

Peleg didn't answer. He was on his knees too, kneeling there and making a moaning sound under his breath as he looked at his hand. The short man wore gloves, good stout leather ones. But Trawler had bitten clean through the leather.

Finally he wailed, "It hurts."

Trawler spluttered angrily, "I'll fix that." He rammed his fist at the point of Peleg's chin.

THE Commissioner of Police looked at Sergeant Garry; Garry looked at the Commissioner; and both of them seemed to be avoiding Trawler's stare. Trawler had barged right into the Commissioner's office. It's hard to keep a man out of even the biggest shot's office when he has a murder solution all neatly tied up and ready to drop on the official doorstep.

"Sure," Trawler was saying contentedly, "it was Harry Peleg all the way through. Kingsley had those two farm tracts, one of 'em practically worthless and the other fairly valuable. Peleg switched the deeds around, so Kingsley signed over the hill piece to old Leeds. Then he handed Kingsley three hundred dollars, and got the title to an eight thousand dollar farm."

The Commissioner said, "But—"

"You wait! This same Peleg shooed Leeds away when the old man put in a kick about being gypped. Kingsley never learned about the switch at all. When Baynell walked in that office this morning, it was to make an offer of ten grand for the good farm. I looked up Baynell's credentials since; he's a professional land speculator from Los Angeles. Kingsley told him the farm was gone, but that he'd call in Leeds and see if he wanted to take the two thousand dollar profit on the deal. Maybe he intended to try and buy the place back; the bonds on his desk make it look that way."

Garry muttered, "So Peleg killed him then?"

"Uh-huh," said Trawler. "If he didn't, Kingsley was bound to learn about the switched deeds."

The Commissioner looked thoughtful, said, "If that could all be proved, if you had a clue you could show a jury—"

Trawler grinned. "There's his gloves."

"Gloves?"

"Yeah," said Trawler in a pleased voice. "There had to be gloves. You couldn't strangle a man with steel tape and not cut up your hands doing it, not if he put up any fight at all. Leeds didn't have gloves, and his hands were okay, so that let him out. What Peleg did was to take the gloves he used—they're cut up some, and he got blood on them besides—down to the telegraph office. He had 'em boxed up along with his deed to the property, and sent the lot under a phoney name over to the Colanade. He had to get the deed out of the office, too, so he could sell that farm to Baynell this afternoon."

A flush grew under Garry's skin. "Yeah! If you knew all along that Leeds was in the clear, why didn't you—"

Trawler shrugged, got out his pipe, started to stuff tobacco into its bowl.

"Well," he said, deceptively mild, "you called the turn on that yourself. Me, I work for a paper, *and* a paper that ain't in so good with the Department. Naturally I had to print this story in the *Inter-Ocean* first."

The corners of the Commissioner's mouth turned down, hard. "I see. We're the goats for a write-up in the paper because you cracked this case, huh?"

"Read for yourself," said Trawler, taking a damp-ink copy of the *Inter-Ocean* from his coat and tossing it on the desk. He looked at Garry. "Peleg got wise, though," he went on. "Had

to stop me from seeing Baynell, because that'd be the tip-off that Kingsley was on the level with Leeds—"

The Commissioner broke in, bewildered. "Here!" he said. "What's this, Trawler? I don't see any story like that here."

And Trawler shook his head slowly.

"Right," he said coolly. "The story isn't there. I had a little talk on the phone with the *Inter-Ocean* front office before I came over here, Commissioner."

"You mean, they didn't want to—"

"I mean," said Trawler, fixing his gray stare on the Commissioner, "your job is catching crooks, and you can have the credit for catching this one. Only we want our reporters to have a fair shake on other stories when they break. None of this business of holding out on our boys because we happen to be in a different political boat."

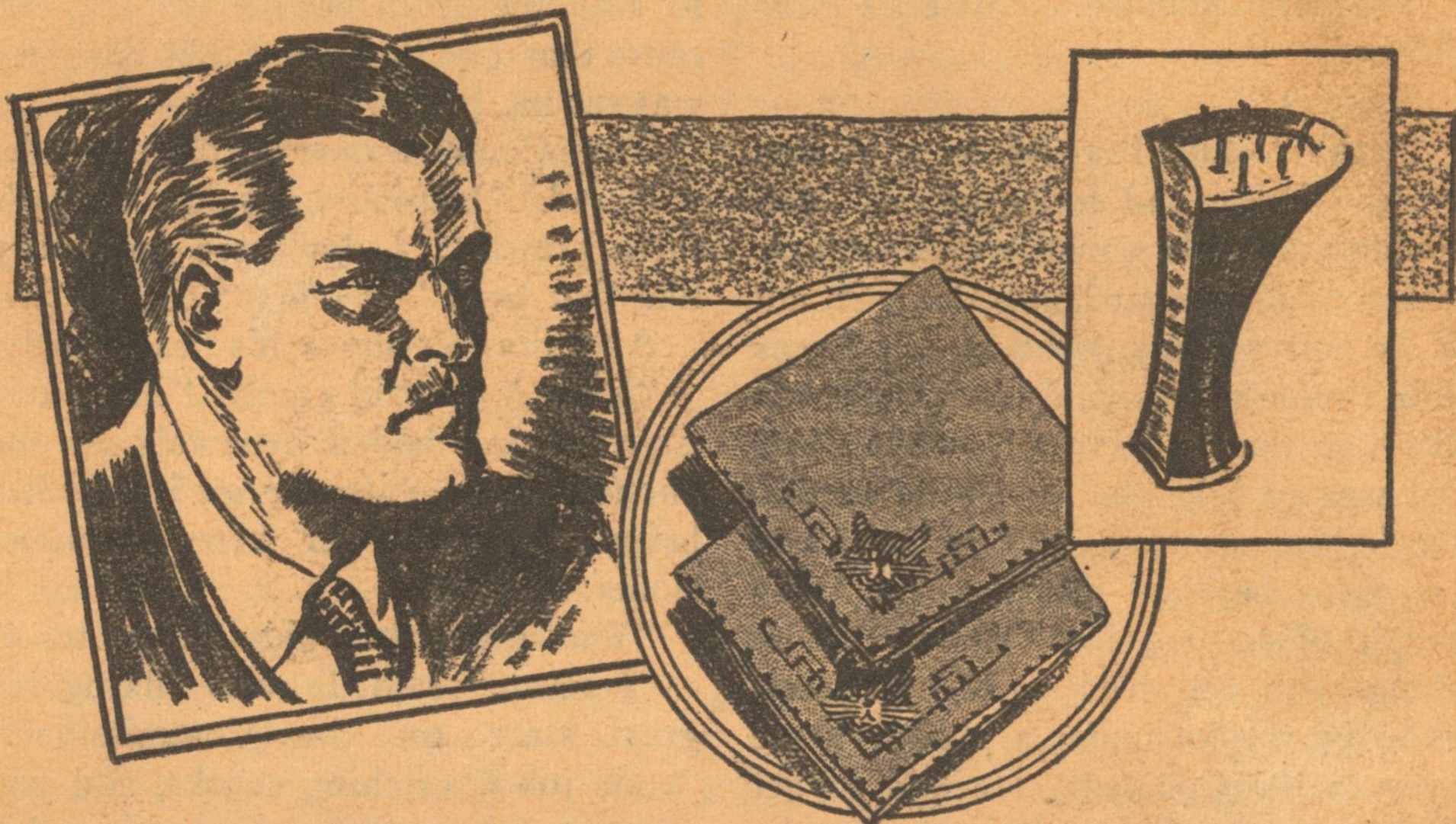
The Commissioner looked startled for a moment; then he looked thoughtful, and began to wag his head.

Trawler winked at Sergeant Garry. "Go on, Sarge; tell that Marian Leeds her old man is in the clear. Tell 'em both that Kingsley talked enough to Baynell so there's no doubt about which land they own."

Garry seemed surprised. "I'd think you'd want to tell her—them, I mean."

"Not me," said Trawler, drawing a match from his pocket. He scratched that along the sole of his shoe, held the spurt of flame to the briar. Puffing luxuriously, he said: "Anyway, the Commissioner and I've got this to smoke. Kind of a peace pipe, see?"





Endicott's Girl

Convinced his daughter was guilty of murder, tough Captain Endicott was willing to trade his reputation for her freedom

JENNY hadn't come home by the time we were through our meal. I couldn't wait because I had to get back to the precinct-house. As I left the table, I growled, "Wonder where she is?"

My sister said, "Oh, she's probably having a soda with her girl friends. She only went out a minute or two before you got back." Her school books were there on the radiator, so I didn't have to be told that.

I looked at the books fondly on my way past. "Duncan's Elements of Trigonometry" was the title of the top one. I shook my head and snorted. Now, what earthly good was it filling a pretty eighteen-year-old girl's head with junk like that? In one ear, out the other. Bad enough to ladle it out to boys . . . There was a tiny light-blue handkerchief, so thin you could see through it, caught between the pages.

I pulled it out, held it between my thumb and forefinger, and chuckled. Now, that was more like it. That was what a girl should be interested in, not trigo-what-ever-it-was. There was a little colored design of a kitten stitched on one corner, and there was an intermingled odor of honeysuckle and chocolate. She probably took candy to school, wrapped in it, I thought as I laid it back again between the pages of the book. I walked on into my bedroom.

I buttoned up my collar, put on my vest, fixed the rope that I call a tie, and slipped into my coat. I opened the bureau-drawer and felt blindly for my gun. Then I had to open the drawer wider and look, because I couldn't find it. I didn't always carry it around with me, being a captain, since it pulled my suit out of shape.

I disarranged all the shirts my sister had neatly piled up in the drawer, and



By Cornell Woolrich

Author of "The Gun But Not the Hand," etc.

still I couldn't find it. "What'd you do with my gun?" I called in to her. "I can't find it."

"It's wherever you put it last," she answered. "Don't ask me where that is. You ought to know by now I wouldn't put a hand on it for love nor money."

That was true, for she was afraid of guns. She used to even ask me to pick it up and move it, when she wanted to clean out the drawer.

"Did you take it with you this morning?" she asked. "Maybe you left it down at the precinct-house."

"No," I said short-temperedly, "what do you think I do, go around cannoned-up like an armored-truckman? I simply wanted to turn it over to one of the guys in the lab, have it cleaned and oiled. It's getting a little rusty."

"Well, I'm sure I don't know what I'd want with it. Or Jenny either, for that matter. And we're the only other two people living in the house with you."

"There you go," I said. Her bringing Jenny into it was pure whimsy, as far as I was concerned. "I didn't say anything about you wanting it. Can't a man ask a question in his own house? I can't find it, that's all."

I was getting sick of this.

"Well, look in the right place and you will!" And that was all the help I could get out of her.

THE front door opened and the kid came in just then. I was in the hall closet by that time, and by the time I could shift around to look, she'd gone by me.

I heard my sister say, "I kept your supper warm, dear. What are you walking like that for?"

"Oh, my heel came off just now, crossing the trolley tracks. I'll have to go around to the shoemaker right after supper."

"Tsk tsk, you could have been run over."

I came back into the room and put on my hat. "Well, I'll have to go without it," I said. "Look for it for me, will

you, Maggie? I want to turn it over to Kelcey."

But she didn't have any time for me now that the kid was back. She was too busy putting food on the table.

The kid was in my room, but that was understandable, since the mirror in there was the handiest and you know how kids are with mirrors. I happened to glance past the door and she was gazing at herself in it as though for the first time.

She must have heard me for she whirled and said: "I thought you'd gone already! I didn't see you! Where were you?"

"Why, you brushed right by me," I said, laughing. "Where are your eyes?"

She came toward me and first I thought she was going to fall, but I guess it was her shoe. I said, "Got a kiss for your old man?" There was no answer.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

She shook her head quickly.

"Nothing," she said.

My sister called her just then to come in and sit down, and she left me like she couldn't get away fast enough. Just hungry, I guess.

The bureau-drawer was still open so, just for luck, I went over and took another look. And there was the gun, between two of my shirts.

I scratched my head and said to myself, "Well, I'm a great one!" You wouldn't think you could miss anything that size and weight, in such a small drawer.

I hadn't quite finished slinging it away as I came through the doorway, and they both got a glimpse of it. The kid must have been hungry and tired all right for her face was white and drawn.

My sister couldn't let a chance like that go by. "Oh," she said, nodding severely, "so you did find it! What did

I tell you?" She continued to prattle on about my carelessness.

In the middle of it, without either of one of us seeing her go, the kid suddenly wasn't there at the table any more. But we heard the bedroom door close and then there was a sound of something heavy dropping on the bed.

I just looked blank. I hadn't been yelling or anything. In fact, I hadn't said a word. But my sister took it out on *me* anyway. "Oh, anyone but a man would understand," she said, and looked wise. What about, I don't know. She picked up the kid's dinner-plate and carried it toward the room, calling, "Jenny dear, finish your supper for Aunt Margaret." Then to me over her shoulder: "Go on to your job!"

Riding down to the precinct-house on the bus, I said to myself: "I'm going to see she eases up a little on her school-work, she's been working too hard at it. That damn trigger-whatever-it-is would make anyone nervous."

THE desk-sergeant put Holmes through to me at about ten that night. He said, "Cap, we've just turned up a homicide out here at Starrett Avenue. Number twenty-five. Guy shot dead in a bungalow. Want to come out and take a look?" The last was just rhetoric, of course.

"Yep," I said briefly, and hung up.

I got in touch with Prints, Pix, and the examiner, told them where to go, and then I picked up Jordan and we rode out. . . .

It was a cheap little house, the kind that are put up a whole dozen at a time. Each one about ten or twelve yards away from the next. It was the only one in the whole row that was lit up, except one way down at the corner. The whole community must have been out to the movies in a body.

We braked, got out, and went up on the porch. The light over it was lit, and Holmes had the door swung back out of the way, with just a screen-door veiling the lighted room. We went right into the room itself from the porch. The man was there, lying on his face, with an arm thrown up around his head, as though he had tried to ward off the shot.

My instinctive impression of the man, even before I'd even seen the face, was that he had been a no-good.

Holmes and the patrolman from the beat were both there with us. The cop was just waiting to be told what next to do, and Holmes was taking stabs at looking around—which I guessed he had only started after he heard us drive up. There's really nothing to be done until after the experts have had their innings, but the average second-grader hasn't the moral courage to sit there with his hands folded when his captain walks in on him. I was a second-grader once myself. And before that, a harness-cop.

"Who is he?" I asked.

The cop said, "Their name is Trinker. His wife is over at her sister's in Mapledale, who's been down with the flu or something."

He had the details all right.

I said, "How do you know?"

"It's my beat, sir," he said. "She stopped on the sidewalk and told me about it when she was leaving Wednesday. I saw the door open and the room lit up, like it is now, when I first came on duty. Kind of cold for the door to be open these nights. But I went on past the first time, thinking he might have gone out for something and didn't have a key. It was still that way the second time I made my rounds, so I went up the walk and called out to him, and then I stuck my head through the door, and

there he was. I happened to run into Holmes down at the call-box—"

"You been relieved on your beat?"

"Yes sir, of course."

"You come on at six, don't you?"

"Yes sir."

"About what time was it when you walked past here the first time?"

"Ten-after at the most, sir."

"That places it for us then," I told Holmes and Jordan. "It wasn't dark enough for lights much before six. And they were turned on, of course, before it happened, while he was still alive. Between six and six-ten."

This needed confirmation, of course. Nothing's ever certain. The lights *could* have been lit long after he was killed, by a sneak-thief stealing in, or the murderer himself, but it was a very slim possibility. The examiner confirmed it as soon as he got there. "About four hours," he said, which carried it back to six—and then the office where this Trinker worked reconfirmed it, if you want to call it that. I had Jordan call the office-manager at his home; Trinker had left there about ten to five. He couldn't have gotten out here in much under thirty minutes, even by bus.

He hadn't been killed right away after he got in. There were four cigarette butts discarded around the living-room—another twenty minutes even if he'd smoked one after another. The soap upstairs in the bathroom was still moist and the ironed folding-lines in a Turkish towel had been erased by recent use. He'd evidently taken a bath and changed after he came home. So the time was figured about right.

I SENT Holmes out to Mapledale to bring back Trinker's wife. "You don't know what about, until I talk to her," I warned him through the screen

door. I like fresh material to work on.

I asked the cop whether there'd been lights in any of the other houses when he went by the first time, or just this one.

"Most of them were lit up. I guess they were all home having their suppers," he said. "The next one beyond is vacant, though."

I said, "Well then I wonder how it is nobody seems to have heard the shot?"

He said, "Well they were getting coal in down one of these long chutes further down the street, and you know what a racket that makes tumbling down."

"What company?" I asked him. "If the murderer left by the front door while they were delivering it there's a chance that truckdriver and his helper got a look at him."

"I didn't notice, Captain Endicott," he said.

"You want to watch those things," I rebuked mildly. "You want to be a detective some day, don't you?" But it was easy enough to find out, there were only three companies in town.

"That's you," I said to Jordan. "Find out which of them delivered a load to this street late today. Get hold of the men that made the delivery, and if they noticed anybody at all come out of here, or even go by on the street, bring them down."

The cameramen took all the pictures worth taking, and then went down to Headquarters to develop. The body was taken out, and I asked for as quick a report on the bullet as Ballistics could give me. Then I was left alone in the house, with the cop cooling his heels by the door while I worked.

The front room, where he had been dropped, was entirely undisturbed. The struggle had taken place in the kitchen

behind it. The rear door of that was locked on the inside, so the murderer had left by the front and those coal-heavers might just come in very handy. It had been no slight struggle either, by the looks of it. The chairs and the table were over on their sides, and dishes and things were smashed wholesale all over the floor. Scattered remnants of food showed he'd been sitting down to a meal by himself when his caller arrived. There were also two highball glasses, one drained, one almost untouched. They hadn't been destroyed because both had been set down out of the way on a low shelf.

The signs of struggle in one room, the lack of them in the other, told me it had been a woman right away, even a rookie could have figured that out.

Instead of trying to run *away* from the assailant, he had gone *after* her, from one room into the next. The bullet hole had been in the front, not the back of his head.

There'd been a complete absence of any bruises or welts on his face. If it had been a man there would have been at least a mark or two showing on him.

Confirmation quickly followed. Even my unaided eye could make out a smudge of red on the rim of the undrained glass.

I went upstairs and looked the rooms over more thoroughly than we had the first time. There was plenty of stuff such as letters, memoranda, and belongings, to fill in his background.

He and his wife had been married four years the previous June. Her picture gave me the impression of an honest, straightforward woman who wouldn't try to hide anything. It was smiling a little sadly, like she was making the best of a bad bargain. A bank book showed that they hadn't put away much money. I jotted a reminder down

in my notebook to find out what salary he'd been paid.

I went downstairs again. The cop had been sitting down resting his legs but straightened up again when he heard me coming. I was sure of that because I used to do the same thing myself when I was a beat-pounder.

"Spooky after they're gone, isn't it?" I muttered. "Still gets me, and I've been on about a hundred of them by now."

He said, "Yes sir, Captain Endicott." But he didn't sound very definite about it.

The phone rang just as I got down to the bottom step, and I went to it alertly, but it wasn't a private call. It was for me. Jordan, to tell me he had the two coal-heavers down at Headquarters.

"All right, keep them there," I said, "I'll be down shortly, I'm just winding up here."

I went back into the kitchen again and scuffed the china-fragments around aimlessly. And then I kicked aside some dishes and uncovered a heel.

Looking at it reminded me of how Jenny's had come off too; it only showed how insecure the average feminine heel was. It was a wonder they didn't hurt themselves more often than they did.

THE screen-door opened and Holmes came in with Mrs. Trinker just then, so I put it into my pocket for the time being and went out to talk to her.

"What's happened?" she said in a sort of helpless, pleading voice. The harness-bull by the door loomed bigger than either Holmes or myself to her, the way a uniform usually does to a layman. "What's this officer doing here? Has Paul done something?"

She was a nice wholesome-looking blonde, of the housewife type. Her

voice was the nicest thing about her. Soft and soothing, the kind that is seldom raised in anger. She was well-dressed and quite nice looking.

"I had to leave my sister sick in bed," she said.

I hated this part of it that was coming next. "Sit down, won't you?" I flicked my eyes at the staircase, and Holmes ran up it unnoticed to the bathroom to try to find a sedative in case she needed it. He knew what I meant by past experience.

"But where is he? This other man wouldn't tell me anything coming down."

I said, "Your husband's been shot."

"Bad?" She got white, not all in one flash, but slowly.

"He's gone," I said.

I don't need to go into it after that. I could tell in about five minutes that I wouldn't be able to question her any that night. A matron came up to take charge of her as soon as she was able to walk, and took her to a hotel in her custody. There was no need to lock the poor woman up in a cell for the night.

A new cop came up on special duty to keep an eye on the premises from outside, and I started to put the lights out and lock up, to go down to the house and work on what we had. We were about through up here for all present purposes. I was the last one in the place. Holmes had gone out to the car and was chewing the rag with the cop, while he waited for me.

The living-room switch was just inside the front door, and as I crossed toward it, my current cigar butt, which had grown too small to handle adequately, slipped out of my lips and dropped to the floor. I stooped down to get it, naturally, not wanting a fire to start after we'd left the place, and with my line of vision way down low like

that, parallel to the floor, I saw this object under the sofa.

People had sat on that sofa all night long, Holmes, the cop, Mrs. Trinker, and their feet must have been just an inch or two away from it, but nobody had seen it. I thought it was just a crumpled piece of paper, or maybe even a ball of gray waste from a vacuum or carpet-sweeper, but I reached in and pulled it out.

It was a handkerchief; a woman's handkerchief, pale-blue and so thin you could almost look through it. It had a little colored design of a kitten stitched on one corner. A faint hint of honeysuckle reached my nose, and when I raised it higher, it got stronger, and there was a whiff of something else; like it had been wrapped around a chocolate bar.

I had a tickling sensation in my memory of smelling, or looking at, or picking up, something just like this, somewhere before. But the rest of my mind was on the job and told me: "She dropped it, all right. It's never Mrs. Trinker's, I know that already."

I started to stuff it into my pocket—until I could go out and show it to Holmes—and my knuckles brushed the heel that was already in there, and the lining of my throat suddenly contracted.

Did you ever get dizzy on your knees? I was on my knees there, upright in front of the sofa, and the four walls of the room suddenly shifted around me. The one opposite me went off to the side, then in back of me, then around to the other side, then they were all back where they started again. But meanwhile I had to reach out and steady myself against the edge of the sofa.

A clock was ticking somewhere in the house. Upstairs in the bedroom, I guess. I could hear it clearly in the stillness.

It had ticked hundreds and hundreds of times, when finally Holmes' voice came in to me from the curb outside: "Coming, Cap? What's holding you up?"

I was still there on my knees, supporting myself with one hand out against the edge of the sofa. I was afraid he'd come in and find me there. I took my hand out of my pocket where it had stayed all this time, and left the handkerchief in there with the heel.

It was a slow business, getting up. I am still only forty, but I knew what it felt like to be sixty. I planted one foot flat and hoisted myself on that, then I dragged the other one up after it, and I groaned with the effort. Or maybe it was a broken mainspring, inside me.

I said something. I heard a sound come out of me that said, "My little girl," and I zig-zagged in the middle and almost went down again.

I dragged myself over to the light-switch and punched it out, and the kindly darkness came around me and hid me. I put the back of my hand against my eyes and held it there. Outside, from the quiet sidewalk, Holmes' voice carried in to me clearly, though he was talking low now. "The guy's as good as fried. Endicott never fumbled one of these things yet. He never misses," he was saying to the new cop.

"What I like about him is, he's so human with it, just like one of us," the cop was saying.

Human was right, if human meant to hurt all over, to be scared all over, to be going under for the third time without a helping hand in sight.

It didn't last very long. It couldn't. I would have gone batty. But it had driven an awful dent in me, left me wide open. I said to myself: "Be a man. You're nuts. It couldn't be. It just *looks* that way now, but it'll straighten itself

out. You'll see." I fought it off that way.

Finally I moved out of the dark room into the pale wash of the street light filtering through the screen door. Holmes was coming toward me up the walk, to see what was taking me so long. He had the makings of a good dick. He could tell even by the pale street light. He said, "What's the matter, Cap? You look funny."

I said, "I had a dizzy spell in there just now. That ever happen to you? I bent down too far to pick up my cigar."

He said, "You want to take it easy, Cap. We can always get you a new cigar, we can't always get a new Cap."

I GAVE the cop his instructions, and we got in the car and drove down to the house. The death-watch tried to gang up on me in the ante-room, but I brushed through them. "Not now, boys. May have something for you in the morning. Query me then."

One of them called after me, "Our papers can't wait till the morning, give us a hand-out at least—"

Holmes showed his teeth, said: "You heard the captain, didn't you?"

I sat down behind my desk and called Ballistics. Kelcey came on, and I said: "Did you get the pill out of him yet? What sweatband does it take?"

"We're giving it the screen-test now. Thirty-eight around the waist," he said.

The same caliber as our police positives.

There was a strained pause. But why should there be a hitch in a call like this, when we both ought to know what we wanted to say? He was waiting for me to give him further instructions, I guess. I didn't. Then he said, "Oh, by the way, Ed, I'm still waiting for that gun of yours you asked me to have cleaned and oiled for you."

I said, "I forgot to bring it down with me."

He said, "Hello? Hello? Oh, I thought I heard us being cut off."

The click that he heard had been me cracking my positive open. Did you ever get nauseated from smelling gunpowder? I hadn't fired it in months, ages, that's why it needed cleaning so bad. The smell came up like a breath of hell into my nostrils. One chamber was empty. I always kept it fully loaded.

"All right, Kelcey," I said, "All right, Kelcey." The receiver landed back in its forked support like a hundred-pound weight, dragging down my hand with it.

I got up and went over to the water-filter and drank a cupful of water. I needed it bad.

I opened the door and said, "Tell Jordan I'm ready for those truckmen now." I went back and sat down behind my desk and picked up a report upside-down, as the men were brought in.

One of them was a big stocky guy, the other, his helper, was a little bit of a squirt. They were both half-scared, half-pleased at being the center of interest like this. Jordan came in with them, of course. The thought in my mind was: "I've got to get him out of here. If this is—what I'm afraid it's going to be, I can't take it in front of him."

Jordan saw the reversed report, but he must have thought I was just using it as a screen to overawe them. He looked surprised, like he wondered why I should bother, with small potatoes like these guys.

THE first couple of questions brought out that the shrimp had been down in the cellar of the house the whole time, it was the other guy who

had been up by the control-lever of the truck. That gave me my out. I said, "Take this other guy out, I don't need him," and motioned Jordan to the door. Then, "Wait'll I send for you." He went out.

I said, "Did you hear anything like a shot?"

"No, boss."

"What house was this you were unloading in front of?"

"Fifteen."

Same side of the street, five houses down. "While you were there, did you see anyone come out of any of the houses to your left, toward Roanoke Boulevard? You know—in a hurry, running, excited, anything like that?"

"No sir, I was too busy tipping and adjusting my truck."

I had no business being so glad. I loved that dirty mug standing there before me, for saying that. Fine captain of detectives. But they must have had some information for us, otherwise Jordan wouldn't have brought them in.

"Well, what *did* you see?"

"A girl comes hustling along the sidewalk. I didn't see her come out of no house, but she did come from that direction . . ."

A girl. I thought: don't let him say he got a good look at her.

"A cripple, like. You know, game-legged. Went down lower on one side than the other, every step she took . . ."

The heel. He didn't know what caused the unevenness, attributed it to deformity.

"She was in a hurry, came hustling along, hobbling like that, and looking back behind her every minute . . ."

"Would you know her again if you saw her?" I asked afraid to hear his answer. "Now answer me truthfully. Here, have a cigarette." Stalling, fighting for a minute more of grace for

myself. I passed him a package I kept on the desk for visitors. My hand shook so, in offering it, that I had to pivot my elbow on the desk-top to steady it. My other hand was gripping the cloth of my trouser-leg tight, in a bunched-up knot.

"I couldn't see her face," he said. "It was dark, y'know, under them trees along there."

The papers in front of me rippled a little, so I must have blown out my breath without knowing it.

"It was the way she was hustling along on that game leg attracted me attention, and the way she kep' looking behind her. She didn't see the truck until she nearly run into it; we were blocking the sidewalk, y'know. But imagine anyone not seeing a truck in front of 'em! I said, 'Watch it, lady,' so she cut across to the other side of the street."

"Was she young or old?"

"Just a chicken. Not more than eighteen. I couldn't see her face, but her shape was young, if y'know what I mean."

I pulled the knife out of my heart, to make room for him to stick in a few more. "Could you gimme an idea of what she was wearing?"

"On her head one of them round skating-caps, like boys wear." I could see it so well, back there on our hall-table, carelessly thrown down. "And then a leather coat, like a—whaddye-call them things, lumber-jacket, only fancier, for a girl." I could feel the cool crispness of it against me again, like when she bent over me to kiss me . . .

"Damn," I said, deep inside of me.

"Then a minute later"—his voice went on, somewhere outside my private hell—"a guy in a car came cruising along, slow and easy. I guess he was

trying to pick her up or follow her home or something. He just stayed back behind her, though, about half a block behind her. Funny to be out on the make after a girl with a game leg. I guess that's why she was in such a hurry and kep' looking back . . ."

He was dead wrong about that, but I grabbed at it like a drowning man does a straw. It didn't do *me* any good, but it eased him and his damnable testimony out of the picture—for the present anyway.

I said slowly, "I guess that let's her out. I guess that's not what we're after. She the only one you saw?"

"Only one."

"Okay, that'll be all." But then as he moved toward the door, "Did you tell the guy that brought you in about this girl? What she was wearing, and all like that?" I felt lower than the boards on the floor.

"Not about what she was wearing, no, they didn't ask me. I just told them about seeing her go by."

"Well, keep what you just told me to yourself, you understand? Don't talk about it to anyone, you understand?"

"Yes sir," he said, feeling he'd gotten in wrong in some way.

"Now, see that you don't forget that," I added belligerently. "Gimme your name and address. All right, you can go now. And don't forget what I told you."

"**A**NYTHING?" Jordan wanted to know when I sent for him again.

"No, false alarm. He saw some flapper trying to dodge a pick-up artist, that's all it was." I passed a hand limply across my brow. "I'm going home now. I feel rotten."

"You look kind of worn out," he admitted.

"Not so young as the rest of you

guys. Check up on the neighbors first thing in the morning, find out what kind of a reputation he had, who his callers were. We can't really get under way until I have a chance to question Mrs. Trinker, and hear what she can tell us. Holmes, give her movements a going-over, find out if she really was at Mapledale all day yesterday and today. G'night. Call me if anything pops between now and morning."

I trudged wearily out into the street, calling myself a liar, a hypocrite, and a traitor.

I was shivering standing there in the pool of light waiting by the bus-stop. Just a man with his life and hopes all smashed. I let the one for my own street go by, I took the one behind it, that went past Starrett Avenue.

Jogging along on it, on the top deck in the dark, I kept thinking: I've got to shield her, got to cover her. It's not the murder-rap, the trial. It's the implication of her being mixed-up with him. Acquitted or guilty, either way she's finished, she'll never live it down. I'm not going to let her be dragged through the sewer. I'd rather put a bullet through her with my own hand. I've got to protect, got to cover her.

And it wasn't as easy to decide as it sounds. Do you think duty, loyalty to the men over you, the trust of the men under you, don't mean anything after twenty years?

I staggered off the bus at Starrett Avenue and went back to the Trinker house. The cop was lurking there in the shadows under the trees, keeping an eye on it.

"It's me," I said, "I forgot something," when he flashed his torch at my face.

"Yes sir, Captain Endicott," he said, and quickly cut it off again.

I went up the walk to the porch, took

out the key, unlocked and put the lights on. He stayed out on the sidewalk, since I hadn't told him to come in with me. I went through into the kitchen, lit that, eased the door shut after me.

I picked up the glass, the one with the rouge-smear on its rim, and looked at it. They'd missed it. They hadn't dusted it. It was one of those flukes. If it stayed here they'd be bound to discover the oversight. Nothing could be done about the prints they had already, and they had plenty, but something could be done about this. I tilted it slowly, hypnotizedly, emptied the stale contents down the sink. Then I stuffed it in my pocket, not caring whether it bulged or not. Then I put out the lights, locked up, and came out again.

"Did you get it, Cap?"

"Yeah," I said, "I got it."

He called after me, "G'night, Cap," as I moved down the street.

"Good night, officer," I said.

I took out the glass and smashed it against the curb, on a quiet corner near my own place. Shoveled the fragments down into the mouth of a sewer with the edge of my foot.

THEY'D both gone to bed long ago.

I spent a long time in the kitchen with a piece of rag, scouring my gun. The ashes still glowed red underneath the white when I lifted the stove-lid. The handkerchief went right away, with a flare of yellow; the heel, leather-covered wood, more slowly, burning down to a char. A heel, a handkerchief, a highball glass.

Maggie had left a bottle of beer and two slices of rye on the table for me, like other nights. But I couldn't touch it.

I eased open the door of their room, peered in. There was no light behind me but enough in there coming through

the window, to see them by. Maggie was asleep with her mouth open. *She* wasn't. She was lying perfectly still, but I could tell she was awake. She had her face turned toward the wall, and her two hands were up hiding it, and she was crying into them without making a sound. I could tell by the way her shoulders kept shaking a little. It had been going on so long, it was mostly reflex by now.

When daylight came I was still sitting on the edge of my bed holding onto the back of my neck with both hands, staring—staring at nothing that anyone else could have seen.

YOU'D think hope would have been all gone, but it wouldn't die. It flickered up weaker each time, but somehow it still was there.

She sneezed at the breakfast table and blew her nose on one of those handkerchiefs, a pink one with a rabbit's head on the corner. I said, "Where do you get those handkerchiefs?"

"Kringle's. They come by the set, a half-dozen for a dollar."

"You can't buy them separate?"

"Yes, but you've got to buy them six at a time to get that price. All the girls are going in for them."

All the girls—anyone at all could buy them. But honeysuckle, chocolate—

I said, "Did you take your shoe over to have it repaired?"

"Yes, last night, after you left."

It flickered up again. Maybe she had the heel. Maybe. . . . "How much is he going to charge you?"

"A dollar," she said. She looked down at her plate and closed her eyes. "I lost the heel. He's got to make me a new one. It fell down in that conduit where the trolley transmission-cable is laid."

I said, "Where—what were you do-

ing at six yesterday, what kept you out that long?" Trying to make my voice sound kindly, casual.

"I was having a soda at Gruntley's. . . . She suddenly threw her hands over her ears. "Don't! Don't ask me any more questions! I can't stand it!" She got up and ran out, with a stricken look.

Maggie started to lace it into me. "What are you trying to do, practice up for your duties on her? The poor child didn't sleep a wink all night!"

She pulled herself together in about five minutes, came out again, picked up her books, went past me into the hall. I said "Jenny," got up and went out there after her. She was standing by the clothes-tree, getting her jacket. I said, "Don't—wear that leather jacket any more, leave it here where it was."

She didn't ask me why not. I noticed that; as though she didn't have to be told. I reached out and took the knitted cap off her head too. I let them both drop on the floor behind me. "Don't go out in these things any more," I said helplessly.

I half-stretched my arms out toward her, dropping them again. I said huskily, "Isn't there—is there anything you want to tell me? You can tell me anything. Is there—any way you want me to help you?"

She just gave me a stricken look, turned and ran out with a sort of choked sob.

I went over to the window and stood there looking out after her. I watched her go down the street. A minute later a car came drifting along—very slowly, at a snail's pace. It was going the same way she was. There was just a young guy in it, a sleek-looking young guy with a mustache. It was hard to tell exactly how old he was. He was inching along so slowly, you had an im-

pression he was stalking somebody. If I'd seen him try to close in on her, I would have rushed out. But he didn't, just kept his distance, creeping along so slow the spokes of his wheels didn't even blur. I grabbed out my notebook and jotted down his license number.

I opened the bureau drawer where she kept her things and looked into the box of handkerchiefs. There were three left in it, two whites and a pink. The lid said they came two to each color. She'd taken one pink with her just now. The blue I'd seen between her books yesterday was in the laundry-bag. It was the only one in it. One blue was missing entirely.

I stopped in at Gruntley's on my way to the precinct-house. I said to the soda-jerker, "Do you know my daughter, son?" When he nodded, I went on. "What was that sweet stuff you gave her last night just before supper-time? It came near ruining her appetite."

He looked surprised. "She didn't come in here last night, sir. First time in weeks, too. I had her special kind of a sundae all made up waiting for her, but she didn't show up. Had to finish it off myself."

I STARTED off with the usual, "Do you know of any reason why your husband should have been killed?" Holmes had already established Mrs. Trinker's alibi, she hadn't budged from her sister's house in Mapledale for two whole days.

"No, Captain," she said dully, "I don't."

This was only beating around the bush, and we both knew it. "Were there any other women in his life?" I blurted out.

"Yes," she said mournfully, "I'm afraid there were."

"He was killed by a woman, you know."

"I was afraid of that," she admitted.

"Can you tell me who they were?"

"I tried—not to find out," was her answer. "I did my best not to know."

"You want to see justice done, don't you? Then you've got to help me."

"Several times there were folders of matches in his pocket, from that roadhouse out at Beechwood, the Beechwood Inn. I never went with him there. I suppose somebody else may have." She smiled a little. What a smile! "I tried not to look, I tried not to find things like that, I kept my eyes closed. That's something to be grateful for: I don't have to try—not to know—any more."

She was a fine character. That didn't make things any easier all around, either. . . .

I had Jordan go out to the Beechwood Inn and lay the groundwork. "Find out just who the interest was out there, who he was seen with. When you've got that, call me for further instructions before you tip your hand."

Prints called, all elated. "We've got the finest set of trade-marks you ever saw, clear as a bell. If you don't go to town on 'em, Ed, you're losing your grip."

"Outside of his?"

"Sure outside of his. What're you trying to do, be funny?"

Holmes reported in, after spending all morning casing the neighbors. "He had a bad rep. They all had a hammer handy when I brought up the name. The one next door told me a blonde dame rung her doorbell by mistake one morning about two months ago, asking if he lived there."

It was the first good news I'd had all day long. Even if it was two months old, at least it meant another candidate.

I needed another candidate, even if it was only a straw one.

"Let's have her," I said eagerly.

He opened his notebook, read hieroglyphics that didn't mean anything to anyone but him. "Tall, blonde, flashy-dressed, night-life type. Blue eyes. Mole on chin. There was a man waiting outside for her in a car."

"Did she give you anything on him?"

"Being a dame, she was only interested in this other dame."

I said, "We've got to get that jane, I don't care if she was only the Fuller Brush lady making her rounds. That the only time she saw her?"

"Only time."

When I was alone in the room again I called up the license-registration bureau, read from my book: "060210." That was the car that had dawdled past our place this morning. There had also been a car escorting the blonde, you see.

They gave me: Charles T. Baron, such-and-such an address, resort operator, height 6-1 (well, the guy following Jenny had been sitting down), weight 190 (well, he'd still been sitting down), age 45 (he'd looked younger than that to me, but maybe he'd just had a shave), and so on. . . .

Jordon called me about five, from the Beechwood Inn. He said, "The party is a hostess here, name of Benita Lane."

"Got any idea what she looks like?"

"I ought to, I'm sitting out there with her right now."

"Tall, blonde, blue eyes, mole on chin?"

He gasped, "For pete's sake, what are you, a wizard?"

"No, I'm a captain. You stay with her, get me?"

"I've got her going," he said cheerfully.

"I want her prints," I said, "and I want 'em as quick as I can get 'em. I'm going to send Holmes out there for contact-man. You get them across to him. Now here's what else I want, I don't care how you manage it, but these're the things I gotta have: I want to know what perfume she goes in for. I want to know if she owns any colored handkerchiefs with animals' heads on the corners. I want to know if she's got a weakness for chocolate bars. I want to know if she's short a pair of shoes, and why. I'll hold off until I hear from you. If I'm not here, phone me at my house. If you want me to send out somebody to double up on it with you, say so."

He whined, almost like a kid, "Aw, don't make de divvy this up with anyone, Cap; this is too good to split."

"Well, see that you don't muff it," I warned him.

She'd be good for weeks, to wave in front of my men and the commissioner. I could get something to hold her on, even if it was only knowing Trinker, and hold—and hold—maybe until the case curled up and died of old age. It was a dirty trick but—place yourself in my shoes.

HOLMES was back in under an hour. He must have just stuck his head in the place, gulped a beer, and beat it out again. He had a burnished metal mirror from her kit, about the most perfect surface for taking prints there is.

It seemed another hour before I got the report from Prints. It must have been much less than that, since all they had to do was compare the two sets under the slide. In the meantime I'd walked five miles around my desk.

The phone rang and I jumped.

"Doesn't check," Prints said. "Not

at all similar to the ones we got up at Trinker's place."

Jordan's second call came right on top of that, to give me the knockout-blow. "I'm up in her place now, Cap, upstairs over the Inn. She's down there doing a number for the supper-trade, and she's bringing up sandwiches and drinks."

"I'm not interested in your social life," I snapped.

He went on:

"The kind of gas she uses on her engine is called: gardenia. I promised to buy her a bottle. She can't eat anything sweet, her teeth are on the blink. All her hanks are white with just her initials on 'em. The only thing I haven't turned up yet is about the kicks. She admits she knows Trinker, but she doesn't know he's dead yet, I can tell that by the way she talks. Furthermore, she was singing downstairs here at six last night, like she is now, I found that out from the waiters. How'm I doing, Cap?"

I felt like saying, "You're cutting my heart out." But I managed a hollow, "Great stuff. Stick with it. Maybe we'll pull her shortly, just on general principle."

He sounded dubious. "Gee, I hope you pull her soon. I'm a married man, and I'm practically down for the count now." He hung up abruptly, as though he'd heard her coming back.

I couldn't stand it around the precinct any more after that. I flung them the usual, "Call me home if there are any new developments," and got out. That got me home ahead of my usual time, so they weren't expecting me. Maggie must have been out marketing. The kid was there, standing where the phone was, with her back to me. The front door didn't make any noise opening. I could see her in there, in the

room, from where I was, standing in the door. Her voice reached me; it sounded strained, furry with panic. "What do you want to see me about?"

Blackmail! That was the thought that exploded in my brain like a ghastly star-shell. Somebody had seen her—last night; somebody was threatening her with exposure.

Her voice dropped in defeated acquiescence. "The bandstand beside the lake, in the park. . . . Yes, I know where it is. . . . All right—I'll come."

She must have sensed me standing there out in the hall. Her elbow hitched abruptly and there was a click. I heard her give a frightened intake of breath. She didn't turn around, just stood there with her head averted.

I walked slowly up behind her. I rested both my hands on her shoulders. I could feel the spasmodic shiver course up her spine.

"Who was that?"

"A boy I know in school."

I made her turn around and look at me—but not roughly, gently. She didn't want to, resisted, but I made her. I said, "Let me help you, little Jenny. That's what I'm for."

I couldn't get a word out of her. A greater terror held her mute. Just a haunted look on her face, of one on the edge of an abyss. I dropped my arms finally, turned away. Maybe she was right. Maybe it was better not to talk about it, maybe it was better to finish it out in pantomime. To put it into words between us was to give it an even more ghastly reality than it already had.

Maggie came in, bustled around. The meal was an awful thing. We just sat there like two people in the line-up. I would have given anything for Maggie's obliviousness, peace of mind. She said, "I don't know what's the matter

with you two, after I go to all the trouble of cooking. . . ." Afterwards she filled a basket full of jellies and things, said she was going to help out at her church bazaar or something like that.

I heard her go but it was like being in a trance. And then Endicott and his girl were left alone. An old war-horse who had had the tables turned on him, by some dirty trick of fate.

THE phone rang again, and she heaved above her chair. Well, I kind of jolted too, why should I lie about it? I went over to it, but it was only Holmes. "Hey, Cap, Jordan hasn't called back any more from the Beechwood. Don't you think we should have heard from him again by now? He may be in a jam."

"He's probably in bed," I said crossly.

"Hell, he don't have to be that realistic. He's on an assignment."

"All right, see if you can get in touch with him then. Get word to him to bring the dame in, we've kibitzed around enough with her." I wondered what I was going to hold her on. But I had to have somebody; it was her tough luck she'd once asked the way to Trinker's house two months ago.

But all this was just a side issue now to the main problem. I kept saying to myself: "The bandstand—by the lake—in the park. I've got to get him. I've got to get him and shut him up." I only knew of one way to shut him up, to shut him up so that he could never menace her again. I only had to look at her, sitting there gripping her chair, suffering the tortures of the damned, to know that I was going to take that way.

I moved with pretended casualness into my own room. She didn't seem to be watching, didn't seem to be aware

of what I was doing. I took my gun out and pocketed it. I came out again, still casual, moved past her toward the door. I mumbled something like: "Got to go down to the job again. Stay here until Maggie comes back. . . ."

I don't know whether I'm not a good actor or whether it was feminine intuition. But suddenly she was up, her arms were around me like barnacles, trying to hold me, trying to keep me back.

"No! I know where you're going! I know what you're going to do! I can tell by the look in your eyes! You took your gun! Daddy . . ."

I thrust her aside, but she tried to hang on. I just kept stomping forward, with my face expressionless, dragging her after me down the hall like so much dead-weight. She was going wild now, hysterical. I reached up over my shoulder, pried her hands off me, held the two of them together by the wrists, with one hand, pulled her into a little windowless spare-room we had off the hall. I locked the door on her in there, took the key out. She was beating a frantic tattoo on it, almost incoherent, calling for help from someone who wasn't there. "Aunt Margaret, stop him! He's going to kill someone!"

THE phone started up again, just as I opened the outside door. That wouldn't be the precinct, so soon again. There was, I remembered, a hot-dog concession at the park entrance, open until midnight every night. It provided refreshment for homeward-bound spooners. It provided a pay-phone, too.

"Coming, damn you, coming," I growled as I closed the door after me and lurched heavily out into the street. Everyone protects their own, even police-captains.

The lake came into view as I followed the curving driveway, and the

deserted bandstand was outlined against the stars. There were no more leaves on the trees, no boats on the water, no cars in motion along the driveway. It was too late in the year for the park to be used for anything—but blackmail and murder.

Two things glowed red ahead of me as I came along; the ruby tail-light of the car standing motionless in front of the bandstand, and the smaller gleam of a cigarette under the black sheltering roof of the structure. The number checked with the one I had in my notebook, the one I had taken from the car that had gone slowly past our place this morning. I didn't have to refer to it, I knew it by heart. 060210. So his name was Charles T. Baron, was it?

I kept the motionless car between me and the bandstand as I soft-shoed up on him. So he wouldn't catch on, break and run. Then when I was up to its rear fender, I came out around from behind it, went up the two steps into the bandstand, with my gun out. I said, "Come here, you."

He was a silhouette against the lake through the open sides of the structure. I saw him jump with shock, and his cigarette fell down in a little gush of red sparks on the floor.

I didn't wait for him to come to me. I went to him. I said, "Is your name Charles T. Baron?" He didn't have to answer if he didn't want to. It wasn't important. The real answer was behind my curved finger-joint, anyway.

I said, "D'you know me? D'you know who I am?" He was too frightened to answer, could only shake his head.

I did want the answer to what I asked him next. My mind was a policeman's mind, not a congenital murderer's; it had to have its confession be-

fore it executed justice. "Did you see her last night? Did you see her—with this?" I hitched the gun-muzzle upward to emphasize it. "You know who I mean."

I was gripping him by the shoulder with my other hand, holding him in place in front of me. He could hardly articulate with terror. He'd seen the glint of the gun by now, if he hadn't before. "Yes," he breathed, "I—I saw it go off . . ."

That was his death-warrant.

I pulled the trigger and it flamed out, lighting up his eyes, dilated with unbelieving horror.

It had a terrific kick to it, worse than I'd ever remembered—it was so long since I'd fired it last. Such a kick that it pitched upward, the bullet going off harmlessly over his shoulder instead of into his chest. I tried to right it, bring it down again, so the second shot would take effect, and I'd lost control of my arm. All kinds of hands, that didn't belong to me and didn't belong to him either, were grabbing me all over.

Holding my gun-arm stiffly up and away, twisting the gun out of it, pulling me back away from him, holding my other arm fast at my side.

Holmes' voice was pleading in my ears, like a frightened kid begging off from a licking from his old man: "Don't, Cap! This is murder! What's the matter with you, what're you trying to do? Hang onto him, now, officer, don't let him get that gun." He was almost sobbing the words.

He got around in front of me and all I could see was his face, not the other guy's any more. He didn't actually have wet eyes, but he had the whole screwed-up expression that went with them, like I was breaking his heart.

I growled, "Get out of my way,

Holmes—don't do this to me. I'm asking you as your captain, don't do this to me! You don't understand—my little girl . . ."

He kept pushing me back in front of him, not like when you fight, but sort of leaning up against me, crowding me. He crowded me back out of the bandstand, and the running-board of the car caught me below the calves of my legs and I sat down on it involuntarily. He leaned over me, talking low into my face. "It's Holmes, Cap, don't you know me?" he kept saying. "You've nearly killed a man, Cap." He started to shake me a little, as if to bring me to. "What do you want to do, bust my heart? Don't you know how we all look up to you? Endicott, Endicott, what do you want to do?"

All I gave him back was, "My little girl, my little girl . . ."

"But he's just a kid, Cap," he said. "Don't take your gun to him." There was a motionless form lying on the bandstand-floor in there, with the policeman bending over him trying to bring him around. He'd fainted dead away from fright.

"Just a kid?" I said dazedly. "He's a resort-operator, he—"

He kept shaking me slightly, like when you try to wake someone up out of a sleep. "Naw, that's his father," he said disgustedly. "This is just a kid, a high-school senior. Even the car is his old man's. If he didn't go around wearing a misplaced eyebrow on his lip, anyone could see how young he is!"

I ducked my head suddenly, covered my face with both hands. "But you don't understand," I said through them.

"I understand," he assured me, hand on my shaking shoulder. "I'm not a parent, but I guess I know how it is—you just naturally get all burnt up the first time they fall in love. But hell,

Cap, suppose they *were* sweet on each other, suppose she *did* go around with him after you forbid her to, suppose she *did* sneak your gun out of the house to show it to him and then it went off accidentally while they were jiggling it around and they nearly got hurt—suppose all that? Don't take your gun to the brat, Cap! That's no way. You been working too hard . . ."

I said, "How do you know all this? Who told you?"

"She did. Luckily I beat it out to your house when I couldn't get you on the wire. I was afraid something was wrong. And something came up that couldn't wait. I hadda bust the door down to get her out. You shouldn't have locked her up like that, Cap. She told me about it. They had a row when the gun went off, each one blamed the other. You know how it is when you're that age, they take their love affairs and their rows serious, like we do our cases and our jobs. He's been following her around ever since in his old man's car, trying to get her to make up with him."

I'VE been glad ever since, I didn't blurt out: "Then she didn't do it?" like I wanted to. I looked up at him beseechingly, but he interrupted me before I could get the words out: "Come on, Cap, we've got a busy night ahead of us. Forget these kids. Feel better now? Are you over it now? Then come on, let's get going, this can't wait. The prowler's right down the drive a way. You didn't hear us coming up—luckily." He turned to the cop: "Send that punk home when he comes around, and have his old man dry him behind the ears and keep him away from Endicott's girl after this. And O'Toole—if you open your mouth about this, I'll take it out of your hide."

He turned back to me. "Come on, Cap. Every minute counts. I've got bad news for you. . . ."

I just looked at him as I straightened up beside him.

"Jordan's been shot to death out at the Beechwood Inn; we found his body in the woman's apartment when we broke in before. Her and her accomplice, the manager, have lammed out. We've got to get those two. They killed Trinker. Her and this guy that runs the Beechwood must have been shaking him down. . . ."

"But Jordan told me himself, just before he was killed, that she had an alibi—and two clues that I was looking for, a heel and a handkerchief, wouldn't click," I faltered.

"Well, they did after we got there. We found a heelless shoe and the remains of five partly-burned colored handkerchiefs in the roadhouse incinerator. And as for the alibi, naturally the employes there would go to bat for their employer and his lady friend. It meant their jobs."

I could see how the rest of it would be; the kid, my kid, must have come limping through that street on her way home, after her spat with her boy friend, and just after losing her own heel in the trolley tracks. But of all the freak coincidences! It nearly made your hair stand up to think of it.

I said, "But doesn't this punk's father run the Beechwood? Baron, or whatever his name is?"

"He's the owner of the whole chain. But he's a respectable man. It's this manager we want. . . ."

I said, "Hang back a minute, and get word to the kid in that other car: if he wants to stop off at my place on his way home and say hello to his girl, Endicott's girl, it's all right with Endicott."



ILLUSTRATED CRIMES

by STOOKI-ALLEN

VOODOO PACKET

FROM THE SQUALID HUT OF AN AFRICAN WITCH DOCTOR WITH ITS SINISTER PARAPHERNALIA OF HERBS, CHARMS AND DRUMS, TO A MANSION IN OLD PHILADELPHIA IS A FAR REACH INDEED, BUT THE ARM OF VODOO IS LONG....

.... WILLIAM DANZ, PROMINENT QUAKER CITY BUSINESSMAN DIED OF ACUTE GASTRITIS IN 1902 BEQUEATHING HIS PRETENTIOUS MANSION TO HIS WIFE, CATHERINE, WELL-KNOWN FOR HER CHARITIES, AND THE REST OF THE ESTATE EQUALLY TO HER AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE IMMEDIATE FAMILY. THE FUNERAL WAS IMPRESSIVE.

SIX MONTHS LATER THE WIDOW REPORTED TO POLICE THE DISCOVERY, BY HER HOUSEMAID, LUCY, OF A MYSTERIOUS PACKAGE OF ARSENIC. MRS. DANZ SAID SHE COULD NOT ACCOUNT FOR ITS PRESENCE IN THE HOUSE AND WONDERED IF HER HUSBAND MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN POISONED.



THE BODY WAS EXHUMED AND AN AUTOPSY SHOWED ARSENIC IN LETHAL QUANTITIES. THE FAMILY DOCTOR SAID DANZ HAD SUFFERED FREQUENT STOMACH UPSETS, USUALLY AFTER HE HAD BEER TO DRINK, WHICH HAD LED TO THE DIAGNOSIS OF CHRONIC GASTRITIS. THE PATIENT HAD BEEN NURSED BY HIS WIFE, THE MAID AND A NEPHEW. ALL SEEMED ABOVE SUSPICION.



THE ONLY CLUE WAS THE PACKET OF ARSENIC, FOLDED IN AN UNPROFESSIONAL TWO-INCH-SQUARE PACKAGE. ANOTHER CLUE WAS ADDED WHEN DETECTIVE AUSTIN GAVIN LEARNED THAT THE DOCTOR HAD NOTICED A BLACK RABBIT'S FOOT ON THE WINDOW SILL OF DANZ'S ROOM SHORTLY BEFORE HIS DEATH.



MRS. **DANZ**

Coming Next Week—



ASSOCIATING THE OBJECT WITH VODOOISM, GAVIN MADE THE ROUNDS OF THE HEX DOCTORS THEN IN VOGUE. BY SEVERAL PURCHASES, HE GAINED THE CONFIDENCE OF ONE, GEORGE HASSEY, A WHITE-MOUSTACHED NEGRO RIGGED OUT IN A CRIMSON ROBE. FOR \$200 IN MARKED BILLS, THE WITCH DOCTOR SUPPLIED A DEATH CHARM.

"START WITH A PINCH OF THIS POWDER A FEW TIMES IN A GLASS OF BEER," HE ADVISED. "WHEN THE PHYSICIAN PRO-
NOUNCES THE UPSETS GASTRITIS—GIVE A BIG DOSE." HE HANDED OVER A WHITE PACKET IDENTICAL WITH THE ONE IN DANZ' HOME.



GAVIN THREW A CORDON AROUND THE VODOO MAN'S DEN AND DROPPED A FEW SUBTLE HINTS IN THE RIGHT QUARTERS. SOON A VEILED WOMAN VISITED HASSEY.

"HERE IS \$1,000," THE POLICE HEARD HER SAY. "GET OUT OF TOWN."

"AND LEAVE YOU IN THE CLEAR?" HASSEY ANSWERED. "IT WAS YOUR IDEA—I ONLY SUPPLIED THE POWDER. I WANT \$10,000."

THE DETECTIVES BROKE IN AND ARRESTED THE WITCH DOCTOR—AND MRS. DANZ.

TRIED FOR MURDER, EACH ACCUSED THE OTHER, BUT BOTH WERE SENTENCED TO DEATH. GOV. PENNYPACKER, UNABLE TO RECONCILE THE EVIDENCE OF THE WOMAN'S GUILT WITH THE FACT THAT SHE HAD ASKED THE POLICE TO INVESTIGATE, COMMUTED THE SENTENCE TO LIFE. — BUT IT LATER DEVELOPED THAT MRS. DANZ HAD ONLY SUMMONED THE POLICE WHEN THE HOUSEMAID THREATENED TO CALL THEM HERSELF.



The Lone Road Agent

Skeleton Key

By Paul Hawk

THE gray coupe flowed sedately along Grant Avenue, braked, and turned right on Majorca. Patrolman Bob Hamel, turning away from the call box beneath the corner light, hardly noticed it.

Hamel was busy adding one and one. The answer was always two. But the question was: Could those two live as cheaply as one? Kathy would be clever at home-making; take the way she decorated that room—

Hamel's chuckle stopped abruptly. The gray coupe in the next block was acting funny. Its brake light flashed a prolonged red glare, and the whine of its tires on pavement carried up the dark street. Then suddenly its motor roared, and the car careened in a swift

U-turn in mid-street, came zooming back.

Tires screeched again. A man's excited voice yelled, "Officer! Officer! Quick—"

Hamel was already pounding eagerly toward the coupe, alert eyes cataloguing the driver: eyebrow-mustached, thirty or so, professional looking. "Yeah? Yeah? What?"

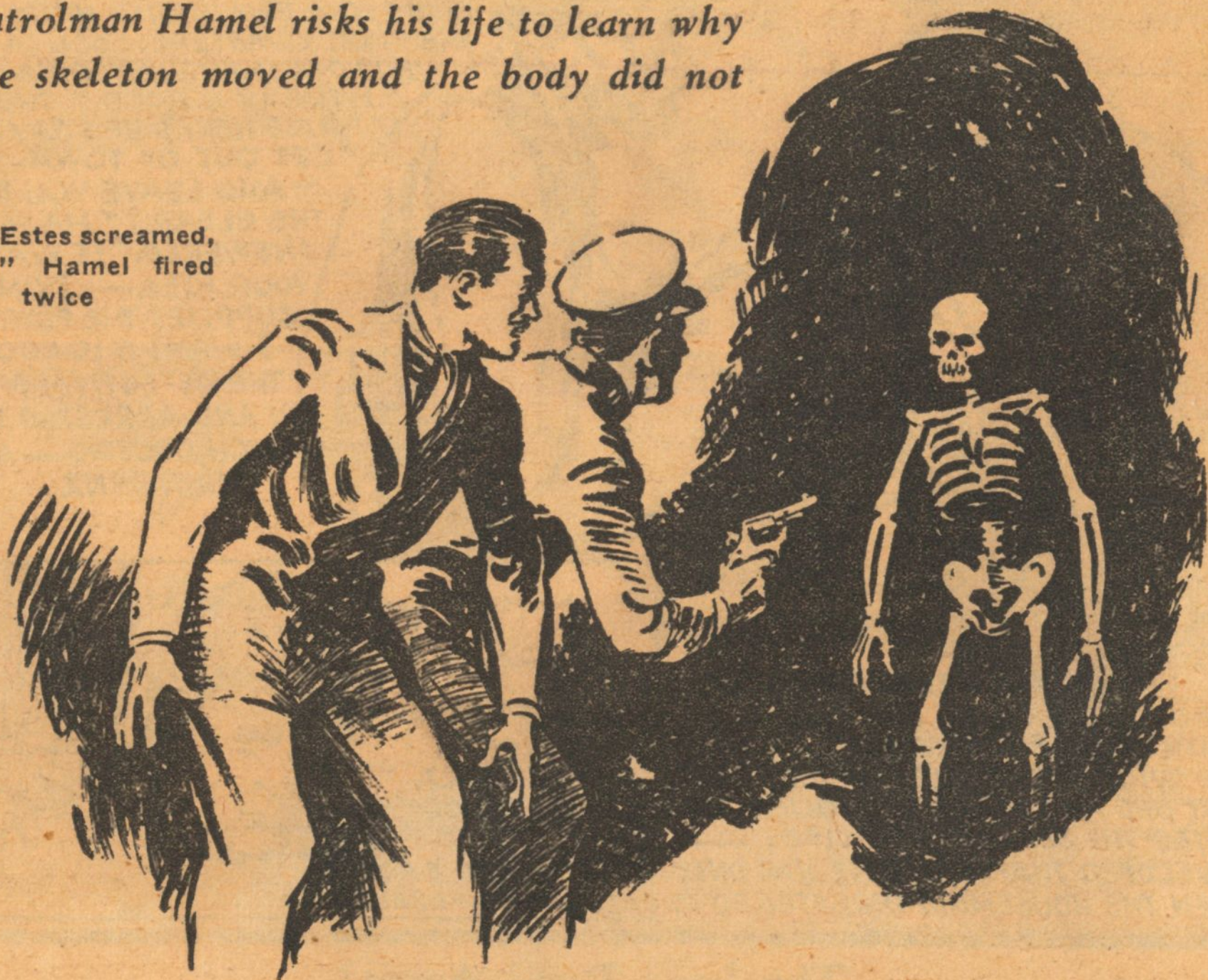
"Back there—in Boncourt's house—I—" The driver gulped, blurted swiftly, "I saw a skeleton!"

Hamel sighed. He took his foot from the running board with exaggerated deliberation. He straightened up, growling gently, "Just go home to bed—"

"But I'm not drunk!" The driver's dark eyes flashed up at Hamel's square-

Patrolman Hamel risks his life to learn why the skeleton moved and the body did not

As Dr. Estes screamed, "Look!" Hamel fired twice



jawed face. "I just happened to look up at the window—Mr. Boncourt is a patient of mine—I'm Doctor Estes—and there it was, shining, looking out the dark window. And it suddenly jumped back, as if to keep from being seen."

"So it shines. And jumps," Hamel said sarcastically. "I suppose—"

"As a doctor," Estes snapped angrily, "I'm not in the habit of imagining things. I happen to know Mr. Boncourt has been receiving extortion notes, with nothing but a skull and crossbones for a signature. When I saw a skeleton, I naturally thought—"

"Why didn't you say so?" Hamel exclaimed. He whirled, started running down the dark block. Behind him, a car door slammed, and he heard Dr. Estes' footsteps pounding after him.

A sudden fierce exultation coursed through Hamel's body. It sounded like a pipe dream. But if not, maybe it was the break he'd dreamed of. A chance for promotion—plain clothes. Maybe Kathy could start decorating *his* home. . . .

"Up there, the middle window," Doctor Estes whispered tensely.

Hamel snapped back to alertness. But there was now no movement, no sign of light. The black window panes looked out of the huge white face of the building with the unwinking stare of a corpse.

"Will you knock?"

"And warn him?" Hamel's grim whisper grew bitter. "But if he saw your car whirl around, he's either gone—or waiting."

He tried the front-door knob, was surprised to feel it turn under his grasp. He shot a whispered question over his shoulder at the doctor's pale face.

"He sleeps on the second floor. I'll—I'll follow and show you."

"Easy then!" Hamel warned.

He jerked his Police Positive from its holster, nudged the door open.

THE hall was pitch-black, soundless. Hamel sidestepped quickly from the lighter doorway, shut his eyes, opened them, and made out two pale streaks leading upward, the edges of marble stairs with a carpet runner in the middle. He tiptoed forward.

He stopped so suddenly that Doctor Estes, bumping him, gasped out. "What is—"

A sound from upstairs; a faint crash as if some object had been dropped or knocked over in the darkness.

Hamel's blood began to pound. Behind him, Doctor Estes made little movements, shivering. His hand suddenly tensed on Hamel's arm.

"Smell it?"

Hamel sniffed, caught a familiar cloying, sweet odor.

"Chloroform," Estes whispered hoarsely.

There was another slight sound, and then a sound about which there was nothing furtive at all; a thumping, muffled thudding that could be only the threshings of a bound body.

Hamel leaped upward. At the top, Estes nudged him, breathed, "There."

Hamel made out a doorway only because it was a blacker hole in a dark wall. Gun ready, he inched through into another room, sidestepped quickly, and put his back against the wall, groping with his left hand for the light switch. He took a deep breath and punched it.

Only a click rewarded him.

The thumping sounds had ceased. In the ominous silence, the minute rustling sounds as Hamel's feet explored their way to the center of the room seemed loud as thunder.

A slight click suddenly stiffened him

in his tracks. In front of him somewhere, a door creaked with maddening slowness. Eyes aching, ears straining, Hamel thrust his tensed gun hand toward that sound, waited breathlessly.

His scalp tingled suddenly, and then Dr. Estes screamed: "Look!"

Shining eerily, it stood on widely braced bony legs, its eye-less sockets leering straight at them through the darkness.

But not a skeleton, it was a man, with shining, bone-like lines painted crudely on face and body.

Hamel's breath escaped in a sobbing sigh. He roared hoarsely, "Hold it!"

"Get him!" the doctor yelled. "Look out!" The doctor's voice was cut off by the sickening *splat-t* of wood against flesh as a shining, bony arm flashed in an arc.

There was a moan and a loud thud as the apparition leaped toward Hamel. He yelled and fired twice rapidly.

The skeleton disappeared.

Incredibly, it had vanished before Hamel's eyes at the double roar of the gun. There was a sound of crashing glass, showering the floor.

For a split instant, Hamel stared uncomprehendingly. Then his stomach contracted as he realized the skeleton was behind him; he had been firing at a mirror.

He was whirling desperately, striving to turn his gun, to dodge, and then he collided with a million comets that seared his brain, burnt out all consciousness.

A CANNON boomed repeatedly. The bombardment finally became loud words exploding against Hamel's ears. "—don't know. Little concussion, maybe."

Another voice said, "Now, Dr. Estes, those thumping noises you and

Hamel heard while you were on the stairs—so Boncourt was still alive then?"

Hamel's eyelids jumped apart. The ceiling was white, and the chandelier had three bulbs and one vacant socket. His eyeballs felt as if they were attached to red-hot wires as he turned them sideways. He saw Doctor Estes nod his bandage-swathed head.

The doctor's voice was dull. "Yes. And then here in this room, I heard a door creak—and there was this skeleton thing. I yelled something. And then I saw it raise its arm, and I thought it was striking at Hamel who was right in front of me. I yelled again, trying to warn him, but instead, the blow landed on the back of my head. Of course, I know now I was looking at the reflection in the mirror and the skeleton itself was behind both of us. That's all I knew until—"

Hamel's scalp twinged suddenly, and the Medical Examiner's cheerful voice said, "Hard head. Only five stitches. Ain't I told you, boy, about breakin' mirrors?"

Hamel groaned, "Seven more years," and sat up, listening dully to the bustle of activity.

Somebody was reporting loudly, "Capn, we've covered the alley. Not a sign of his disguise."

"He had to get rid of it!" Captain Carmichael's bull voice roared. "He couldn't go far dressed like a skeleton. Look some more?"

"And the man next door says it sounded like *three* shots—two inside the house, and then another one in the back yard about a minute later."

"Yeah?" exclaimed Carmichael. "Now why would—"

A flash, a muffled explosion, from the other room. Hamel winced. He made an absent, brushing movement that got the

M. E. away from him, and then he wobbled on unsteady legs to the doorway.

Unpainted boards marked the back of what had been a full-length mirror on the open door. Hamel's shots had made two holes, chest high and an inch apart, in the boards. The mirror itself was in pieces scattered over the floor.

Hamel steadied himself against the door frame, glowering past photographers and print men at the subject for the flashlight picture just taken.

Desk drawers and their contents were scattered around. Across the room, a painting hung askew, its frame resting against the open door of a small circular safe. The desk was near the center of the room, and the bare feet of *it* were tied together and to the desk by a rope. The bottoms of the feet were livid with burns.

It was the subject.

The rest of the body was tied to the chair behind the desk. The graying head hung limply over the chair back. The adhesive gag over the mouth had not yet been removed.

Neither had the bone-handled letter opener that protruded from just over the heart.

On the pallid forehead, like an identification tag, was a square inch of white paper, on which was neatly embossed a red skull and crossbones. Hamel had seen its counterpart in a dozen medicine chests.

Behind him, the room grew suddenly still.

Somebody muttered, "Don't let her in there!" Hamel turned.

With each determined step, green silk pajama legs fluttered loosely beneath a black silk robe. Her face, below the tousled yellow hair, was as pale and set and beautiful as a marble statue's. Her blue eyes, wide like a sleepwalker's,

were focused on the door where Hamel stood.

A pale, jewelled hand cut the air in front of Hamel's face as she shrieked piercingly. Her sudden slump caught him off balance, her shoulders struck his chest, and he staggered briefly, trying to get her rigid body upright, before his weak legs dropped them both to the floor, and he was again looking straight up at the chandelier through a haze of pain.

"Boncourt's daughter?" Hamel gasped.

"She shouldn't have been allowed in here," Dr. Estes declared hotly. He dropped to his knees beside them. "Chloroformed, and then this shock. She's Mrs. Boncourt," he answered Hamel's question.

There was a concerted rush to help. As the man carrying Mrs. Boncourt's feet shuffled by, Hamel was looking past his legs at a face in a dressing-table mirror across the room. The face was Hamel's own, and the mouth suddenly dropped open.

Captain Carmichael finally asked. "You all right, Hamel?" and helped him up. "Tough luck," he went on gruffly, before anger ran away with his voice. "Yeah, tough! A murder committed after a patrolman gets here. And that tag he left on Boncourt's forehead makes it look like it's gonna be a series of killings. Boy, you'll make the headlines."

Hamel's beet-red face opened reluctantly. "Didn't you find anything?"

It *did* sound stupid.

"Find anything?" Carmichael roared. "We found a chloroformed woman, a corpse that's still warm, and two full-grown men unconscious on the floor. And the radio car was here two minutes after the shots were reported too—" He stopped with his mouth hang-

ing open as Hamel suddenly whirled and ran out.

IN the back yard, Hamel hesitated for a brief look. There was no driveway through the yard, but a two-story brick garage loomed up some forty feet back.

Knowing where to look, it was ridiculously easy. Hamel had walked only a third of the way along the garage wall when he caught a glimpse of light. He cut his hand in the haste with which he picked the gleaming thing up.

He didn't stop running until he found the telephone behind the stairs in the lower hall. He fidgeted, studying the little jagged rim of black glass between brass and porcelain; then said, "Honey? I'm at 2510 Majorca. You know that globe you use to decorate with, the black one? Bring it. And hurry!"

Upstairs again, he exclaimed excitedly, "I found it, Captain!"

Carmichael looked bewildered. "A broken light bulb! What—"

"It's the third shot, Cap'n. Don't you see, he unscrewed this bulb out of that socket in the chandelier that's empty now. He threw it against the garage to break it. It sounded like a shot."

Captain Carmichael seemed on the point of tearing his hair. "What's that prove?" he demanded angrily.

"It proves," Hamel said tensely, "that the skeleton and his disguise are still in the house!"

Without thinking how it looked, he grabbed the captain's arm, pulled him into the other room. Beyond the gray-haired corpse was another full-length door mirror. He placed Carmichael in front of it, ordered him, "Stand there!"

The captain stared.

He placed Medical Examiner Carver just behind the captain.

"Did that blow on his head do it?" Carmichael asked anxiously. "He don't act sane."

"I'm wonderin'," Carver grunted.

"You're me," Hamel said unheedingly. To Carver, he said, "You be Doctor Estes. And I'll play the skeleton. Now look in the mirror."

Hamel moved back and to the left of the other two men. "See me now—all of me?"

Captain Carmichael nodded speechlessly.

Hamel stepped in line behind the other two men, raised his hand, and struck at the Medical Examiner's head. Carver dodged, started to protest.

"No. That was the skeleton knocking out Dr. Estes. Could you see all of me in the mirror then?"

Carmichael caught some of the dead earnestness of his tone. "I could see your arm, and part of your head. But you were behind us."

Hamel took up his original position again. This time he stepped forward until he was even with the Medical Examiner; then turned to face him, and struck again.

"Could you see all of me then?" he demanded.

"Well — no," Carmichael said thoughtfully. "I could until you turned to strike at him, but then I could see only one side of you. Say, what are you driving at?"

"That's it! In the darkness, I saw all of the shining skeleton all of the time! And he didn't strike sideways; he was facing the mirror squarely and struck straight ahead."

The captain flung out an impatient hand. "Make sense, or—" He turned, purpling, at a commotion at the door.

"Cap'n, here's a dame says—"

Hamel whirled quickly just as Kathy stiff-armed the protesting cop. He hur-

ried over to her, feasting his eyes on Kathy's clean-cut good looks.

"Attagirl," he whispered.

She flashed him a confident smile. "You may be crazy, honey, but I'm here with the goods."

Hamel took the black-colored light bulb she held out and whirled triumphantly. "Now I can show you what I mean," he told the apoplectic Carmichael. "Get Doctor Estes to help me reconstruct the scene as it was when we came in."

Carmichael's beady eyes were smoldering, but he jerked his head at one of the men.

Hamel was screwing the black bulb into the empty socket in the chandelier. The room grew dim and then dark as he unscrewed the other three bulbs.

Hamel turned and looked.

"Kathy, turn off the switch, and when I say 'lights', you give 'em to me."

"This better be good," Carmichael protested warningly.

"Somebody turn 'em off in the other room. Ready? I'll meet the doctor in the hall. Everybody quiet!"

Down the hall, a door opened, throwing light and moving shadows against a bannister as Doctor Estes and the man who had gone for him came out of Mrs. Boncourt's room.

Hamel said, "They want us to go in again like we did the first time, Doctor. You right behind. Try to get in the same spot you were before."

Estes nodded.

Hamel closed the door. Amid an uneasy silence, they stalked back up the dark hall, and into the darker blot that was the doorway.

To Hamel, holding his breath in suspense, Doctor Estes' breathing sounded loud behind him.

"This is about it, isn't it, Doctor?"

"Yes," Estes said tensely.

Hamel whirled suddenly. "Lights!" he snapped.

A succession of loud gasps followed the click of the light switch. The room remained dark, but in that darkness, not three feet away, the glowing skeleton stood motionless.

THE next moment the shining disguise seemed to writhe in fury. A hard fist caught Hamel in the mouth; another in the eye made his head ring.

He jumped forward, lashing out, and brought a grunt. He kept going and got both arms locked around flesh and blood. The skeleton folded, and Hamel was on top when they hit the floor.

The room was bedlam. Carmichael was bawling lustily for lights, but nobody thought to screw in one of the bulbs.

Hamel suddenly jerked away from tentacle-like arms. He swung a hard right, felt his knuckles go numb against a shining chinbone. The skeleton stopped writhing.

Hamel jumped up quickly, groped for the chandelier, and screwed in one of the bulbs.

Captain Carmichael gasped and shook his head. "It's— It's—" He choked, staring hard.

Unconscious on the floor was Doctor Estes.

"See it, Cap'n?" Hamel panted. "A disguise he could put on and take off instantly. In ordinary light, he's himself. In black light, he's a glowing skeleton."

"Black light?" Carmichael demanded. "You mean—"

"Sure, ultra-violet rays—" Hamel stopped abruptly. "Captain Carmichael, this is Kathy—Katheryn Casey. We were going to get married—"

"Are!" Kathy corrected tartly. Her black eyes were glowing.

"Kathy fixed up a room at home. You can get these ultra-violet-ray bulbs to fit regular electric light sockets—white bulbs for a sun-tan, or black bulbs for fancy decorations. Kathy painted some scenes right over the wallpaper. In ordinary light, they're invisible, but when you turn on black light, they shine right out. Anthracene, the invisible stuff is called, isn't it?"

Kathy's black head nodded.

"So Estes had his victim trussed and the scene all laid before he went out to get a patrolman—"

"Ex-patrolman!" Kathy objected.

"—for his alibi. With his invisible mask already painted on, all he had to do to make it visible was to turn on the electricity, making it appear like the skeleton was already there waiting for us.

"To get rid of the disguise, all he had to do was throw the bulb out a back window to break against the garage, and finish off Boncourt with the letter opener on the way through. But he had to get me out of the way first. And when he groaned and pretended the skeleton was knocking him out first, he was standing where I could see all of him in the mirror. If the skeleton *had* been behind Estes, striking straight ahead, Estes' body would have cut off my mirror view of part of the skeleton.

Since it didn't, the only answer was that only two of us were in the room."

Kathy's eyes were on him.

"But why?" demanded the captain.

"The motive bowled me over, Captain. I mean really. Ever see anybody faint and still be rigid? If you're conscious and you start to fall, you stiffen up. That's what she did, even if she did think I'd catch her."

"Mrs. Boncourt?"

"Yeah. And when a rich man's beautiful wife, almost young enough to be his daughter, has to fake a faint when she first sees her husband's murdered body, something's fishy. With Boncourt dead, she gets his money. Estes gets both."

"And I," Kathy announced, "get you." She widened her big eyes innocently at Carmichael. "You know, Captain, he looks so much better in plain clothes."

The captain said blankly, "Huh? What's that?"

Hamel's face started to burn.

"Yes," Kathy went on, "because he told me that's when we could get married—as soon as he gets in plain clothes."

Carmichael's lips slowly made an O. "Harrumph!" he growled. "But understand one thing—I want an invite to the wedding."





HOOKED

By D. B. McCandless

Author of "Unclean," etc.

HE WAS a big man. He might have been good-looking, if he had not worn rimmed spectacles which spoiled the pure line from his brow to the strong bridge of his nose, if he had not brushed back his dark hair in such a way as to leave the high forehead bare and bald, if he had not clothed his big body in shabby, ill-fitting garments which flapped loosely over his hard muscles and bunched humpily across his great shoulders.

He sat behind the desk at the window, one leg hung over the arm of his chair, a cigarette in his mouth which was lined off from the rest of his face by

two long, slanting grooves from nostrils to lips.

The door to his outer office stood open, the typewriter chair before the small desk out there was empty. The big man's dark eyes were empty as he stared through his window across the airshaft and into the yellow-draped windows of the Gypsy Tea Room.

Rhea was in the Gypsy Tea Room over there, gulping lunch because he had told her to gulp, and hoping, undoubtedly, to have her fortune read in tea leaves before she came back to

work. He couldn't see Rhea through the yellow-curtained window, but it didn't matter. A man can't look at legs all the

Out of the tea leaves came a beautiful woman, a frame-up, and the new beginning of an old friendship

time and the rest of Rhea wasn't worth looking at. That's why he had hired Rhea. He liked 'em good-looking, but he didn't trust 'em.

A blob of ash fell from his pendant cigarette and spread on his coat. He left it there and swiveled to stare as the outer door to his office swung in.

A woman crossed the reception room and walked straight toward the open door of his office. Her high heels clicked smoothly as she came. The long, beautifully molded legs under her skirt moved easily. She didn't seem to mind his stare. She paused in the doorway and lifted her gloved hands to the sides of it and stood. The soft fur sleeves fell down from her arms like black wings.

"Mr. Tenny?" she said, in a throaty voice. "Mr. Tom Tenny?"

Tenny swung his leg off the arm of his chair and rose briefly. "At your service," he said, and sat down again. This one was too beautiful. She was probably dumb.

She moved toward him, sat down beside his desk.

"I was having lunch in the little tea room, across your airshaft there, Mr. Tenny—"

"The Gypsy Tea Room? You look more like the Ritz."

"Thank you. I was sitting near the window you see from here, Mr. Tenny. One of the gypsies came to my table to read the tea leaves in my cup . . ."

She shivered a little as she paused and drew her black fur collar up about her throat. Tenny took the cigarette out of his mouth and chucked it over his shoulder. His visitor opened her handbag, and produced a cigarette. Tenny noticed that her fingers trembled as she held the cigarette to the match he struck.

"So," she said, drawing deeply, "I

listened to the usual things about a journey across water and all that, and, while I listened, I looked across the airshaft—at you. And then—then she began to say things, things I thought nobody could know, things that matter terribly to me, things about me and my husband. . . ."

Tenny looked up, straight into the perfect contours of her face: "Who is your husband?"

"Wait! She said that I was mad with anxiety about my husband, tortured with fear. She said that there was one man in the world who could help me, one man whom I could trust. She said that man was near, very near. She said that he was big, big and dark. And, over here, at your window, you were sitting, staring out, and you were big and dark, and very near."

Tenny leaned forward. "You expect me to believe that? You expect me to believe that you came here to me for help, because an idiot tea-leaf reader in a garish tea room—excuse the vulgarity, Madam, but—well, *nuts!*"

"Really, Mr. Tenny! You must believe me."

"Let it go," said Tenny, fishing in a crumpled cigarette package. "Let's let it go."

"You must trust me, Mr. Tenny. I trust you. I want you to start immediately, to drop whatever else you may have on hand. I will pay well. I want you to follow my husband, to go wherever he goes, to watch—"

Tenny got out of his chair.

"Divorce? I don't handle 'em. There's an outfit down the hall—"

She got up and put her face close to his.

"You're impossible! An impossible brute! Listen to me. This is not a question of divorce. This is a question of

a man's life. My husband's life. My name is Della Seward. My husband is John P. Seward."

TENNY sat down. He reached for the pack of butts and took one out. The butt seemed to stick and he yanked it so that half the paper wrapping came off it and spilled tobacco on the desk. He stared at the ruined cigarette and took another, carefully.

"John P. Seward," he said softly. "Johnnie . . ."

"You know my husband?"

"Who doesn't? He's been in the papers enough. John P. Seward, the Governor's white-haired boy, the People's Prosecutor. John P. Seward, the man who spends his time turning over stones and finding nasty bugs under the stones and quashing the nasty bugs to hell, or up the river, or out in the sticks. John P. Seward, the righteous man, who's driven most of the racketeers and crooked lawyers and hop-eyed killers out of the temples of business and is getting ready now to drive 'em out of the temples of labor. John P. Seward, who—"

"That's enough. Enough. You know why my husband is in danger."

"I know your husband is as safe as a babe in a crib. John P. Seward is bathed in the spotlight of publicity and public esteem. They wouldn't dare."

"They have dared. They've dared twice. Twice in the past twenty-four hours, he has narrowly escaped death."

"Twice!" Tenny threw his cigarette away and got up and turned his back on her. "Has he notified the cops?" he asked.

"He refuses to notify the police. He says he'd look ridiculous, appealing to the police for protection from the very men he's supposed to be stamping out

of existence. Mr. Tenny, will you take this case? Even now, my husband may be in danger. He was supposed to meet me for lunch . . ."

"At the Gypsy Tea Room? John P. Seward?"

"At the Carlton. He didn't come. I wandered into this street, after waiting an hour and telephoning everywhere. Even now, Mr. Tenny, my husband . . ."

Tenny got up and shut the office door on a flash of red cloth and black fur in the outer room. He said: "My secretary. Back from lunch, at the Gypsy Tea Room," and sat down.

"Mrs. Seward," he said, quietly, "the tea leaves lied, or the gypsy lied or somebody lied. I am not the man for your case. In this town, nine out of every ten detective agents are fighting your husband with any weapon, decent or indecent, that comes to hand. Nine out of ten detective agents, Mrs. Seward, make their living out of the very thing your husband is trying now to destroy, racketeering in the unions. Nine out of ten, Mrs. Seward, and I am a detective agent."

"That is not the reason. There's something else. I saw it in your face when I mentioned my husband's name. You know my husband."

"I knew him. Yes. Maybe the tea leaves told you that, too? Fifteen years ago. We were both youngsters, large, uncouth youngsters, studying law together at night, working as day laborers the rest of the time. They had a name for us. We always worked the same construction jobs together. They called us the Beaut and the Beast. I was the Beaut. Don't wince, Mrs. Seward. You know your husband is ugly, so ugly he's almost beautiful."

Della Seward was on her feet. Tenny went on calmly:

"Full of energy and young ideals, we were, heart and soul for unionization of the poor dumb hunks we sweated with every day. We saw salvation for those hunks in the unions. We talked unions and ate unions and slept unions, when we had time to sleep. Then—well something happened. To me. I was approached by a man I afterwards discovered was a hireling of a private detective agency, one of the agencies subsidized by the big employers' associations. Before I knew it, I was hooked."

"Hooked?"

"Hooked. In the language of the racket, Mrs. Seward, that means that I was, unwittingly, transformed into a spy by the agent. I was transformed into a spy who reported, innocently, on the labor leanings of his fellow workers and on their labor plans. When the agent got from me all he could, he managed it so that I was exposed to my fellow workers as a traitor."

Tenny was silent. The crumpled package of cigarettes in his hand disappeared into his palm as his long fingers closed.

"What followed," he said, finally, "is not pretty. It is still history, I believe, among sandhogs. A sandhog, Mrs. Seward, is a man who digs muck out of the depths. Your husband and I were sandhogs then. Don't wince, Mrs. Seward. A sandhog, after all, has to be a man. The fight took place under the river, in one of the caissons of a new bridge, deep down, in darkness lit only by the electric torches of the men who watched, far down below the top of the water, under a pressure of air which would kill an ordinary man. We faced each other with our bare toes gripping the mud of the river bottom and our half-bare bodies slimy with

sweat. I gave your husband that bad ear he has. He gave me—well, the marks don't show any more, on the surface."

Tenny stood up. He bowed stiffly.

"I haven't talked so much in years," he said. "You'll excuse me now, I trust?"

Mrs. Seward stopped snapping the clasp of her bag. She said: "And now, you yourself are one of these private detectives. You, yourself, are doing the same things to labor men that were done to you?"

Tenny bowed again. He said: "Naturally, knowing what you know about me, you would not care to entrust your husband's safety to me, even if I were willing to take the case."

"Then you won't take the case? You won't—"

"No," said Tenny, and reached for his phone as it rang.

Mrs. Seward's white teeth came out over her full lower lip. She turned and walked slowly toward the closed door. Tenny said something into the phone, then lifted his head.

"Wait, Mrs. Seward. Wait!" he said, sharply, and slammed down the instrument. "I've changed my mind," he told her, grimly. "I'm taking this case whether you want me or not. John P. Seward is in the hospital. An accident. Maybe it was an accident. . . ."

TENNY and Della Seward walked over the echoing tiles of the hospital corridor. Tenny's stride jerked as he held it back to the woman's pace. His mouth was tight. Della Seward had pulled an inadequate veil down from her hat. She was breathing rapidly behind it.

A door at the end of the corridor opened. A nurse motioned to them.

Tenny said: "Go in to him alone, Mrs. Seward. Keep your lip stiff. Remember, they told us downstairs he's not badly hurt. Just shock. It wouldn't do for him to see me now—or any time, as far as that goes."

Mrs. Seward followed the nurse through the open door and the door closed. Tenny advanced to the end of the corridor. A tall, gangling man with a horse face and too much boney wrist showing stopped leaning against the corridor wall. Tenny said:

"What are you doing here, Moxey?"

Moxey leaned against the wall again.

"I asked you," said Tenny.

"Ain't no answer," said the tall, gangling man, shooting his cuffs. "Don't get touchy, Tenny. You're in the midst of death. Look, I didn't mean anything by that, Tenny. I just meant—well, this is a hospital, now, ain't it?"

"Who put you here, outside John P. Seward's door?"

"The boss."

"Who told the boss to put you here?"

"I'm only a poor operative, Tenny. All I know is, when the head of the agency I work for calls me in and says, 'mind the baby,' I mind the baby."

"How long have you been minding Seward?"

"Since this time yesterday."

"Twenty-four hours! You're a swell nurse!"

"Is it my fault the taxi he's in smashes up with a truck? Can I help it when I'm in another cab, a half block behind?"

"I'm not talking about the smash-up. I'm talking about the other two attempts on Seward's life—two in the last twenty-four hours."

"Two?" Moxey's brown eyes widened. "Whadya mean, two? There ain't

been one, till the smash-up, and as far as I could see, I'd swear that was an accident, on the level, is all."

Tenny took Moxey's stained lapels. He said: "Listen, Moxey. I know your boss and he knows me, too well. You tell me the truth, or I'll get your boss, Kruger, on the wire."

"I am telling the truth, Tenny, so help me. I've been on Seward's tail ever since yesterday noon. There ain't been a single queer play. If there had been, Kruger would have had my ears. Kruger's plenty anxious to see that nothing hurts Seward, Tenny."

"Kruger had better be anxious," said Tenny, grimly. "If anything happens to Seward, Kruger would be the first one the cops would go after, Kruger and the rest of the private dicks whose bosses would like to send Seward a wreath."

"Kruger knows that," muttered Moxey, looking down at the hard fingers still on his coat. "Kruger knows that and the guys Kruger is taking orders from know it. That's why I'm here, Tenny."

Tenny let go of Moxey's lapels. He took a fresh pack of cigarettes from his pocket, tore it open and offered Moxey one. Moxey said: "My tongue's hanging out but it's against the rules here."

Tenny stuck an unlighted fag into his mouth and stared at Moxey. "Twice in the last twenty-four hours. I had information to that effect. And yet, you say—"

"I do, Tenny. I do. I never let Seward's big ugly mug out of my sight till I put him to bed and even then, I hung around outside his swell dump for a coupla hours more before I went home to the feathers myself, and I was back again outside his house before he got up. Nobody's made any

passes at that big guy in the last twenty-four hours, Tenny. Get that straight.

"Maybe I am getting it straight," said Tenny, leaving Moxey as the door to Seward's sick-room opened and Della Seward came out.

"I'm so relieved," said Mrs. Seward, in a low voice. "He's not hurt at all, just shaken up. He's shouting in there now for his clothes. I don't know what I should have done if he had been—Mr. Tenny, will you stay right here, now, and keep an eye on him?"

"An eye shall be kept," said Tenny, and watched Della Seward move down the quiet hall.

"Moxey," he said, turning swiftly.

"Moxey, you keep the eye. Seward's safe in that room if nobody goes in through the door. The window in there opens on a blank wall. Keep a wide eye, Moxey."

"Who the hell you think you're bossing, Tenny? I don't take orders from you."

"Not yet, but if you fall down on this, Moxey, you may be asking me for a job." He hurried down the hall.

Della Seward was waiting for the elevator. Tenny glanced at her slim graceful back, then took to the stairs. He was in a telephone booth in the hospital's foyer before the single elevator car started upward.

"Rhea?"

"Yeah."

"Where did you get the tip you phoned in to me while Mrs. Seward was there?"

"Man phoned. He said, 'I must speak to Mrs. Seward. Her husband has been in an accident. He's at the hospital.'"

"The man seemed sure that Mrs. Seward was with me?"

"Yeah. That's all he said. I couldn't

trace the call. I found out what hospital Seward was in before I phoned in to you."

"Brains," said Tenny. "You got 'em. Now listen. What does the sign on our office door say?"

"It says, *T. Tenny, Private Investigator*. Why?"

"The letter T could stand for a whole lot of names beside Tom."

"Sure. Timothy, Terrence, Thaddeus—"

"'Nuff. What would you say of a lady who came into my office and said the gypsies sent her and vowed she had never heard of me until she looked at my name on my door, and then called me *Tom*?"

"I'd say she'd been drinking."

"She had been—tea."

"Listen, you big—listen, Mr. Tenny. About that man who phoned about Seward—"

Tenny hung up. Della Seward had just stepped from the elevator.

Tenny emerged from the hospital as Della Seward got into a taxi. As he ran down the long, shallow steps he spotted a hackman he knew. The hacker had his rear door open before Tenny got there and the cab away from the curb before Tenny slammed the door shut.

"The black and green job," said Tenny, "just pulling the corner. You notice anything about that cab, Jacob, before the lady stepped in?"

"You seen him, too, eh?" said Jacob, without turning his head. "Yeah, there was a guy waiting in that black and green. One of them gardenia guys. Movie mug. The dame's sitting in the middle of the seat, now, looks like from here. Can't see the guy. Want to close up?"

"No," said Tenny, holding flame to the dry cigarette stuck to his lower

lip. "Evidently the gardenia guy doesn't want to be seen. How's tricks, Jacob? How's the wife? How's the kid?"

"So-so. Listen. Ain't I seen this dame we're tailing somewheres? Some looker! Ain't I seen her? Lemme think."

"The less thinking you do, Jacob, the better. Watch it. They're pulling up at the Lion D'Or. Pass it. Make the next corner."

II

TENNY sauntered into the Lion D'Or with his battered hat slanted and his overcoat swinging. The doorman estimated him carefully and let him pass. There was something about Tenny when he straightened to full height. . . .

Tenny's spectacles were folded in his pocket and a brush of black hair covered his high forehead, but he had to take his hat off for the hat-check girl. He paused a moment at the entrance to the main dining room. The head waiter was fussing over seating arrangements for two in a far corner. Tenny wheeled and made for the phone booths.

"Rhea?"

"Yeah. I've been trying to get you at the hospital. Listen. I tried to tell you when you called before but you broke my eardrum. There was a guy in here after you and her left, a swell looking guy."

"With a gardenia?"

"Yeah. How did you—he had something else besides the posey. He had a voice that matched the one that called up to speak to Mrs. Seward. He tried to stall he was selling insurance but he kept eating the place up with his eyes."

"Did he eat you, too?"

"Me? Mister, don't make me crack my enamel. Now, listen. I got up while he was doing his spiel and did things to my face in the mirror and I saw him pick up the *mouchoir* Mrs. Seward dropped and he smelled it and sneaked it in his pocket. She uses Blue Hour perfume, twelve dollars the ounce."

"I'll buy you a gallon, some day. Rhea, do this. Call up Kruger and be a Voice. Just a Voice. Get it? Ask him who ordered him to take care of Seward and wait till he says something and remember what he says."

"Why?"

"Because."

Tenny hung up. He glanced into the dining room, saw Mrs. Seward smiling at her companion over a glass, and withdrew. There was a tap-room opening off at the side. He went in there and stood at the bar, with an ale. He had two more ales before Della Seward and the gardenia guy appeared, walking slowly toward the main exit.

Tenny let them go by, slapped some money on the mahogany and went after, pausing long enough to get his hat and tickle the hat-check girl's chin with his quarter. He had left Jacob waiting out front and he figured he had time.

Jacob swung open the cab door. He said: "All through?"

Tenny stopped with his foot on the running board. "You mean they didn't come out?"

"I've had my eyes on them doors ever since you went in. No, they didn't come out."

Tenny went back to the doorman, double quick.

"The lady in black furs, the gentleman with the gardenia. Where?"

The doorman looked down his nose. He had Tenny placed now. "Search

me. If I'd known you were a lousy dick, you'd never have got by these doors."

Tenny darted through the doors and made for the hat-check girl. "The lady in black furs, the gent with the gardenia. Where?"

The girl looked at him languidly, then pointed a blood-red fingernail at a curtained door between the tap-room and the street entrance.

"Leads back," she said. "Rear exit."

Tenny gave her another quarter but didn't tickle her chin. He went out and put his foot on the cab's running-board and cursed.

Jacob said: "I'll remember them woids. Can't we catch the dame and the gent?"

"We can't. Back to the hospital. That's where I would have stayed, if I'd had any sense."

TENNY didn't wait for the hospital elevator. There was something banging at his brain that made him want to use his legs. He went up the stairs with a rush, two flights of stairs, and down the corridor. Halfway, he passed what looked like a freight elevator just closing on somebody on a stretcher guarded by two men in white.

There was no tall, gangling figure leaning against the wall at the end of the corridor. The door to Seward's room stood ajar. Tenny went in. The bed was empty. Somebody was under the bed. Tenny stooped and grabbed feet and hauled. Moxey came out, spluttering, and sat up and felt his head. He was clad only in purple shorts and a pink undershirt.

"Boy," he said.

"What? Where's Seward? Quick!"

"Boy. What a sock! Listen. I had the nurse leave Seward's door open so I could hear while he was alone. I

heard the phone ring in there and heard him answer. He said an address, a couple of times, loud, and then he hung up. I was close to the door with my back to the hall, and then—"

"And then somebody socked you. You ass!"

"Yeah. You're right. Somebody socked me, but I didn't go out. Seemed like the feller didn't want to sock me too hard. It was only when Seward opened the door and found me on the hall floor and socked me himself that I went bye-bye. And did I go. What a sock! When I got back, I was on the floor, with my duds off and Seward was just legging it through the door with my duds on over his hospital nightie. I caught a glimpse of his legs and they looked like hunks of bologna, the pants were that tight, and I made a dive after him and something happened inside my head and I fell down. I couldn't see anything and I couldn't move, but I could hear, see? I could hear Seward running down the corridor in my pants, and then I could hear wheels, like a wagon or something coming to meet him, and then I heard a smack and a grunt, and more wheels."

"How long ago?"

"Seems like years. Maybe minutes."

"Maybe seconds," said Tenny. "Two men just took somebody on a stretcher down the freight elevator."

"Huh."

"I'm leaving. You'd better report to Kruger that somebody's got Seward. Maybe Kruger will have some faint idea who that somebody might be. If he has . . ."

Tenny made for the door.

"Say! How am I gonna get to a phone? How am I gonna do anything, without pants?"

Tenny grabbed a dressing gown off

the foot of the hospital bed and slung it at Moxey. He put his hand on the knob of the door and somebody turned the knob from the other side. He wrenched it back quickly and went out, shutting the door behind him. Della Seward stood in the corridor, alone.

"Oh, Mr. Tenny, you've been in to see him. I'm so glad! How is he?"

"He isn't," said Tenny, briefly. "Excuse me." He went back into the room and shut the door.

"Moxey," he said softly, "the address you heard Seward repeat, twice?"

"Two-twenty Cypress," said Moxey. "Say, how am I gonna go out on the street in this kimono?"

Tenny went out into the hall again. Della Seward was wringing her gloved hands. Tenny took the hands in his. He said: "It's all right. It's all right. Everything's going according to schedule. We have the address. He got out of bed of his own accord, ripped the clothes off the man I had here, guarding him—"

"Oh! Weren't you here? I felt so safe, thinking you were here. I thought you were going to be here, every minute."

"I was here, Mrs. Seward. I was here, at the right time. Now, we'll just get going."

"Where? Where are we going?"

"Cypress Drive. Two-twenty. Know who lives there?"

"Cypress Drive! Isn't that the district where all the women—"

"All the kept-women, yes. The well-kept women, that is."

"But—but why should John. He never—Mr. Tenny, I can't go downstairs so fast. These high heels . . ."

Her high heels clicked down the hospital stairs, accompanied by the rapid thud of Tenny's soles. They paused a moment in the entrance hall

while Mrs. Seward gasped for breath and straightened her hat.

A girl was standing at the telephone booths, bent over the shelf of directories. Her back was to Tenny but he knew that red coat with the mangy fur and he knew those legs. Mrs. Seward said:

"I must telephone. I must telephone my husband's personal doctor. I must telephone the house, too, and see if my husband is there. I can't believe my husband had any—any business—on Cypress Drive."

She moved away, easily, but swiftly. The girl bending over the directories turned around, looked at Tenny. He jerked his head toward the booth next to the one into which Mrs. Seward had disappeared. A moment later, he walked past the row of booths, headed for the exit.

Rhea joined him at the doors. She said: "Couldn't get it. She talked too low. So I gave up trying and traced the number. The number she called is at Cypress Drive, Two-twenty."

"Rhea," said Tenny. "You've got beautiful underpinnings. I wish you wore your brain on the outside. It's beautiful, too."

Rhea's wide mouth jerked at the corners. A tide of red rose in her face, obscuring the freckles. Tenny said: "From now on, you keep out of this. I've got a hunch things aren't going to be so pretty. Rhea, what would you say about Mrs. John P. Seward. Is she dumb?"

"She's beautiful enough to be dumb," said Rhea, "but sometimes, they have brains *and*. I don't know."

"Neither do I," said Tenny, "but I'm going to find out. Git!"

Rhea went out with a swish of red cloth and black fur. Tenny wondered idly how she'd look in some real clothes

and then Mrs. Seward came out of the booth, drawing the veil over her face. They went out to the street.

Jacob's cab drew up for them. Tenny handed Mrs. Seward in without looking at Jacob, got in himself and said: "Sixty-five Liberty Street," as the cab started.

"Liberty Street!" cried Mrs. Seward. "That's way downtown. I thought we were going to Cypress Drive."

"We are going to Cypress Drive," said Tenny. "Later."

"But—my husband—he may be in danger. He may . . ."

"Lady," said Tenny, fishing for a cigarette. "Listen! You leave this to me. I know what I'm doing but the trouble is I don't know enough. I'm going down to Liberty Street, first, to find out some more. Step on it, driver, hard."

SIXTY-FIVE Liberty Street was an office building. Tenny got out, shut the door on Mrs. Seward and leaned toward Jacob. Jacob listened, said, "Okay." Tenny charged through a stream of home-going office workers toward the entrance. The winter dusk was already down. The sky was dark grey and snow was in the air.

Tenny got off an elevator at the twelfth floor, walked by a door that said, *Kruger Detective Agency*, and turned a corner in the hall. He stopped in front of a door that said nothing at all and tried the knob. The door was locked.

Tenny took out a bunch of keys big enough for a hotel housekeeper. He worked quietly. From around the bend in the hall came the clanging of elevator doors and the chatter of office girls released from work.

The fifth key worked. Tenny pushed in the door. There was nothing in the

room beyond but tiers of dusty filing cases and a door at one side. Tenny went through the door, with a gun in his hand.

Kruger got out of his chair and looked at the gun. Kruger was short and he was soft, especially about the stomach, but there was nothing soft about his eyes.

Tenny said: "If you make any noise or push any buttons, I'll shoot. Back away from that desk."

Kruger backed. Tenny swung around and backed himself till he stood near the door opposite the one through which he had entered Kruger's office. He listened. There was no sound. He knew what was on the other side of that door—the general offices, with rows of stenographers' desks and nothing else. Tenny reached behind him, found the key on Kruger's side and turned it.

"Now," he said.

"What do you want? What's the idea? What the hell are you doing here, anyway?"

"I'm not doing anything, yet. What's scheduled to happen to John P. Seward at Two-twenty Cypress Drive?"

Kruger's small eyes left the gun and flashed over Tenny's face and back to the gun.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Tenny," he said.

Tenny closed the space between them with a leap. His free hand ran over Kruger's soft anatomy and found no gun. He laid his own gun carefully on Kruger's desk and took off his rimmed spectacles and laid them beside the gun.

"No!" bleated Kruger. "Don't! Tenny!"

Tenny's enormous fist and arm came out like a piston. Kruger stag-

gered, holding his jowl. Tenny said:

"What about Two-twenty Cypress?"

"I don't— So help me—"

Tenny hit him again. Kruger flopped against the wall, holding both hands to his face, one on his jowl, one on his eye. Tenny closed the space between them again. He had both fists ready and there was a gleam in his dark eyes.

"No!" piped Kruger. "Don't!"

"Listen," said Tenny, from a tight mouth. "You know what I can do to you, don't you?"

"Yes. But I don't know."

"You know what I can do to you and you know I'll do it. What's brewing on Cypress Drive? Quick!"

"What do you want out of this, Tenny? Seward means nothing to you, anyways, and from what I hear, he means less than nothing. From what I hear, you've hated his nerve for years."

"So you've heard that, too, eh? Who told you?"

"Never mind. Everybody knows it. Everybody wonders why you ain't joined up against Seward long ago."

"Everybody wonders. Every damn, slimy rat like you, Kruger, and the rest of the agency bunch. What's going to happen to Seward at Cypress Drive?"

"I don't know. So help me—"

Tenny's fists made a smacking noise against Kruger's soft flesh and Kruger's soft, bleeding mouth began to make soft, wailing noises, like a baby being spanked. Tenny held Kruger upright for one last blow, then let him slide. Kruger sat down. He stopped blubbering and said:

"Well—"

"Spit it out. Quick. If you spit any teeth out with it, I'll buy you some more. What?"

"I got a phone call a while back from a man. Don't know who the man is. Never have known. Told me to get Seward out of the hospital and out to Two-twenty Cypress. I called up Seward—had a tough time getting them to let me talk to him—and made out I was a labor man with some inside dope on the rackets that I had to spill quick, at Two-twenty Cypress. That's all. So help me. If Seward's gone to Cypress Drive, or anywhere else, my man Moxey is after him."

"Moxey," said Tenny, "won't do anything till he gets some pants. Now listen, what about the two men in white and the stretcher?"

"What two men? What stretcher?"

"Why did you ask Seward to repeat the Cypress Drive address, twice? Was it because you wanted Moxey, hanging outside the door, to hear it?"

"No. That is, yes. Yes, sure. Yes."

"In other words, *no*. In other words, this man, this unknown man who gives you orders over the phone, told you to have Seward repeat the address so that Moxey and *whoever else* was guarding Seward would hear it?"

Kruger looked up at Tenny's big fists. He said, weakly:

"That's right."

Tenny reached out for his gun. Kruger began to slide away, along the wall. Tenny smiled, adjusted his spectacles and put the gun in his pocket. He stooped and took Kruger under his fat arms and dragged him toward a door in the side wall. He opened the door, saw a wash basin and a toilet, smiled again, and pushed Kruger in.

III

DELLA SEWARD gave Tenny her profile as he stepped back into Jacob's cab. It was a nice profile,

but Tenny didn't like the tilt of it. He slid along the seat as the cab started to move and patted her soft shoulder with what he hoped was a paternal pat. She whirled on him.

"Keep your hands off me," she said, furiously. "I don't like it. I don't like you. I don't like the way you're handling things. Why have we come down here and wasted time, instead of rushing, as we should have rushed, to Cypress Drive, where my husband..."

Tenny leaned forward. He said: "Two-twenty Cypress Drive, and rush," to Jacob through the open glass, and then slid the glass shut.

"Lady," he said, quietly, "we are rushing to Cypress Drive. Frankly, we're going there because, at the moment, I don't know where else to go."

"But—but my husband has gone there. We know he left the hospital to go there."

"Yes. We know he intended to go there. We know somebody else intended that he should go there. We know somebody else intended that I should follow him there. All that's clear." Tenny paused and fished for a butt. "But that doesn't account for the two men and the stretcher," he said, thoughtfully.

Della Seward leaned toward him, her eyes questioning behind the thin veil. Tenny looked at her blankly.

"Somebody else intended that he should go somewhere else," he said, "on a stretcher. Maybe I should have smashed Kruger some more." His voice dwindled off and he lit the cigarette. "Still," he said, "if the Beast has retained any of his old habits, he won't stay on the stretcher long."

Mrs. Seward shivered, slid along the leather seat into the corner. She said: "Please don't call my husband by that horrible name. You sit there,

mumbling impossible things and it's getting dark and everything seems strange, like a bad dream. All I know is I want to get to this place on Cypress Drive where he may be. You're impossible, Mr. Tenny, impossible."

"I admit it," said Tenny, peering at her through wreathing smoke. "I admit I'm not conducting myself as you expected. For that, you must blame the tea leaves, of course."

There was silence. The cab swung into a wide street bordered on one side by a small parkway and a wide river and on the other by imposing apartment houses with here and there a small stone residence sandwiched between.

Two-twenty proved to be one of the private residences, a small stone house set in a small square of green. Tenny leaned forward before Jacob could brake. He tapped on the glass and motioned. The cab picked up speed and passed Two-twenty.

"Wait!" cried Della Seward. "That was the house. Why are we driving past it? Listen to me!"

The cab swung around a corner and stopped. Tenny opened the door on his side. He said: "I didn't like the looks of Two-twenty, Mrs. Seward. I'm going back to see if there are any lights in the rear. There were none in the front, if you noticed."

Della Seward gathered her skirts together. Tenny slipped out and shut the door. "I'm going alone, Mrs. Seward. Please!"

Tenny strolled past the small house, reached the end of its ornamental iron fence and vaulted the fence. He walked quickly over soft, black turf, keeping close to the wall of an apartment house, until he was level with the rear windows of Two-twenty.

There was no sign of light. The

grass was as black in the shadow. Tenny crossed and stood before a small, enclosed porch set in the middle of Two-twenty's rear wall. The little house was very dark, very quiet, but Tenny had a prickling hunch that somebody was looking out of it at him.

The outside door of the porch opened under his hand. He had another hunch, this time that somebody was peering at him, from behind. He jerked his head around, saw nothing, then stepped into the small, enclosed space of the porch. He didn't like it in there. He decidedly didn't like going into places where the door was left open for him like that.

The door leading from the porch into the house was open, too. That gave him to think, and he thought a minute and went in, anyway. As he stepped through that second door, a bell jangled hideously. He made an instinctive dive back the way he had come, then checked himself and used his pencil flash to pick out the whirling door bell which was making the noise. The wires leading to the bell were plain on the wall. They led to the front door, not the door through which he had come.

Tenny waited, his flash blacked out. Footsteps began to come down stairs somewhere. Tenny stepped to the white oblong of a door in the wall, found it open and passed through it.

The bell ceased jangling. Somewhere a heavy door creaked on its hinges. Tenny stood in a room with two windows opening on the back lawn. By the smell of it, it was a woman's room; the perfume was heavy.

There were sounds in the hall outside. Tenny inched open the door and heard a voice booming in the darkness.

His straight mouth twitched and he took a deep breath. The last time he had heard that voice, he had stood with his feet planted in the muck of the river depths, his body half naked and slimy with sweat, his eyes burning. The last time he had heard that voice it had called him a spy and a traitor.

"YOU the man that phoned me at the hospital?" said John P. Seward's voice. "Meant to get here before. Delayed by a couple of weak-kneed hoodlums in white coats who thought they could take me away somewhere in an ambulance because they had guns. Hell with that! I'm here—all that matters. What is it you've got to say, man? What's the idea of all this darkness? Why don't you turn on a light? What's so important you had to get me up here out of a hospital bed?"

"Mr. Seward," said another voice, a smooth, slow, soothing voice. "Mr. Seward, if you'll just step upstairs? The lights, of course. Yes. To tell the truth, Mr. Seward, I've been scared, and sitting in the dark. I'll light you up with this flash. I've been waiting for someone. He has not arrived. As soon as he does, we will lay the matter before you, Mr. Seward." Their feet sounded on the stairs, and Seward was cursing steadily."

Tenny went out into the hall with his gun in his hand. As he mounted the steps, he repeated some of Seward's profanity to himself, silently, rolling the words on his tongue.

At the head of the stairs, there was light, a fan of it, coming from a partly open door. Tenny moved to the edge of the light and looked. Seward and the man who had admitted him were both in the room. Only the top of Seward's brushy hair was visible over

the back of a chair. That, and one of Seward's huge legs, hanging over the chair's arm and swinging easily. Tenny noted that the leg was still encased in pants which had formerly hung on Moxey. The leg looked extraordinarily like a magnified section of sausage.

The other man was engaged in pouring drinks. Tenny had never seen him before. He looked like a well-to-do householder, rather on the fat side, heavy and slow.

Tenny fingered his gun in the darkness and backed toward the stairs. Maybe he was making a fool of himself, stealing around after Johnnie Seward, with bated breath and a cocked gun? Or maybe somebody else was making a fool of him?

A hand closed over his arm and a voice spoke close to his ear: "Mr. Tenny? Oh, Mr. Tenny, I couldn't, I couldn't sit there in that cab any longer and wait. What is it? Where is my husband? Is he all right? Is he safe?"

Tenny put his long fingers over the hand curved about his arm. He said, "Down," very softly, and drew her to the stairs. He did not take his hand from hers until they stood in the small enclosed space of the back porch. Then he said:

"It's all right. He's up there, calmly having a drink. The stretcher business was a wash-out. He got away from them. Knew he would." Tenny paused and ran a hand over his mouth in the darkness. "There's nothing to do here now," he went on. "Quite a respectable scene. Everything cozy. We'll just step out, wait around here until he comes out, if that's what you want. . . ."

"Oh, yes. That's what I want. I don't want to let him out of my sight again, ever. Oh—"

In the house, a bell began to ring.

Della Seward suddenly threw her arms around Tenny and clung.

"Nothing but the telephone," whispered Tenny. "Don't be scared."

He opened the back door of the porch. Della Seward stepped down to the grass. Tenny said: "Wait," and closed the door on her abruptly and went back into the house. This time there was no warning bell.

The phone was in the room at the side, the perfumed room which Tenny had stood in not many minutes before. The soft, smooth, soothing voice was talking into the phone:

"Yes. Got him. Yes. Some delay. Couple of guys evidently tried to take him for a ride in an ambulance. Like to know who *that* was! Do you suppose it was—? All right, all right. I'm not mentioning names. He'd like to finish Seward and plant it on us. Yes, she's all set and she knows what she has to do. The other one? She's out back somewhere, of course. Must have been there some time. Her partner's been getting restless. Been in the house, he has. Sure he's gone now. Do you think I'd be talking to you like this if I wasn't sure he was gone?"

In the darkness of the hall, Tenny moved away, then suddenly stood very quiet again. Over his head, someone else was moving, quietly, slipping over the floor of the hall above. It was not John P. Seward. John P. Seward never troubled to muffle his feet. Besides, this was more than one man—two, maybe three.

Tenny's big body tensed. He took one step toward the stairs which led to the floor where John P. Seward presumably sat, peaceably drinking his drink while men moved silently in the darkness. Inside the perfumed room, the man with the soft, smooth voice banged up the telephone. Tenny made

a quick, silent leap for the door to the porch and passed out into the open just in time.

A MOMENT later, the back door of the porch opened and the white blur of a man's face turned from one side to the other, then disappeared. Tenny was standing back in the black shadow at the edge of the lawn, next to Mrs. Seward.

"Who?" she whispered.

"Don't know. Do you?"

"There's somebody out here in the yard with us," breathed Della Seward. "Somebody I heard while you were in the house there."

"Listen," warned Tenny.

There was a sound coming from the dark windows of the room where Tenny had been. It was a window shade rattling on its roller. Light sprang up in the two windows, revealing bright yellow shades, drawn close over glass. A woman's shadow moved across one of the yellow squares. Della Seward gave a soft gasp.

"Couldn't we just go around to the front?" she said, breathlessly, "and ring the bell, and ask for my husband?"

"Is that what you really want to do?" said Tenny softly, without moving.

She was silent. Then she said: "I don't like this house. I don't like his being in there, alone."

"He's not alone," said Tenny, "and you can't treat John P. Seward like a strayed child. I don't think there's any danger yet. . . ."

Suddenly, one of the yellow shades shot up, and Mrs. Seward uttered a stifled cry. The second shade rose. Tenny saw the interior of the room he had known only by smell. He saw the rose-brocaded chaise longue, the rose-

draped dressing table, the bed. John P. Seward was sitting on the bed.

John P. Seward's gigantic body was framed exactly in the center of one of the windows. It was no longer clothed in the tight garments of Moxey. It was no longer clothed in anything at all, except a pair of flamboyant shorts. John P. Seward, with his huge, rough head swaying and his magnificent shoulders bent, sitting on the edge of a tousled, rose-draped bed, sitting beside the woman who had made the shadow on the blind.

Della Seward's cry sounded strangely theatrical in the silence. It began on a low note like the growl of a hurt cat and rose high suddenly. It beat against Tenny's ears as he sprang after her, running through the darkness to the back porch door. It was still echoing in his ears as he burst into the enclosed porch, reaching for her flying garments as she fled before him. His ears were full of it and his head was ringing but, strangely, his mind was very clear, as though all the questions had been washed from it by one conviction.

Della Seward burst through the door from the porch into the house. Without a moment's hesitation, she turned to the white door at the side and flung it open.

The half-clad girl lolling against Seward rose, crouched back, partially shielding Seward's big body with hers. Della Seward said, in a high-pitched, mechanical voice:

"I'll teach you to try to take my husband away from me," and lifted the gun in her hand.

The girl screamed, suddenly whirled herself around Seward, and disappeared behind him. Della Seward steadied her lifted arm. There was a click.

Tenny's hand came out of the dark-

ness behind her as she fired. The muzzle spouted flame at a wide angle. Della Seward screamed again. There was nothing theatrical in the sound of it now. It was the scream of a woman vibrating with insensate rage. She writhed in Tenny's arms, her right hand struggling to lift itself from his grip at her wrist.

"I'll get her," she shrieked, and her arm jerked up suddenly in Tenny's fingers and she leveled the gun again.

Tenny's left fist came down on her shoulder. The gun went off again, streaking its fire perilously close to the swaying head of the man crouched on the edge of the bed.

John P. Seward got to his feet, as though he had just heard a noise. He took hold of the end of the bed and stood there, his body weaving. He said: "Della? What . . . ?"

Tenny took the gun out of Della Seward's fingers, which had suddenly gone limp. He pushed her aside so that she leaned heavily against the door jamb, and he walked in. He put one hand on Seward's wide shoulder and shoved. Seward sat down. Tenny said:

"It's all right, Johnnie. You've been hooked, that's all. Just hooked. Something in the drink, Johnnie, to make you groggy, and the girl and the bed waiting to set the stage for your wife."

Tenny turned and looked at Della Seward. She was still leaning against the door jamb, her Paris hat over one eyebrow, her eyes glazed.

"It's all right, Johnnie," said Tenny again. "It's me, Tom Tenny. You know, the Beaut. I was hooked once, Johnnie."

John P. Seward's ugly face lifted, his eyes, red-veined and bulging, fastened on Tenny's face. He said: "You damn spy!" in a voice that was only an echo of his usual bellow, and knotted

his fists and let them fall apart again, helplessly on his knees.

"It's all right, Johnnie. You were just hooked, that's all. We'll take the girl that was lolling on the bed with you and we'll make her talk, or we'll make her keep quiet, whichever you want. I doubt if the others stayed in the house, after they had you doped and the scenery set. . . ."

A SHOT barked from the hall. Tenny made the distance to the open door in two strides, pushing Della Seward back into the room as he went through, slamming the door shut behind him and leaping to the side.

A bullet went into the door as he cleared it. He fired toward the spot the bullet had come from. A man groaned. Silence.

Tenny slid silently back across the door, crouching, and waited in the angle between the bedroom and the door to the porch. Someone was there in the darkness with him, someone breathing.

"Well," drawled a voice which brought Tenny upright from his crouch. "I guess we got 'em, Tenny. And if the glimpse I got when you opened the door and let out that light means anything, one of 'em is worth dough, plenty dough, Federal reward money. That's the one I shot, of course."

Tenny's pencil flash picked out a long, gangling figure leaning against the wall. Tenny said: "Moxey," and lowered his light to the two figures on the hall floor.

"Beannie Mulligan," said Moxey with an air of intense satisfaction. "Wanted in seven states for extortion and such. Two grand on him. That's my man."

"Take him," said Tenny quietly, as

he leveled the thin shaft of light on the second figure. "If I'm not mistaken, we also have Timmie Schultz with us, still breathing, wanted in seventeen states for murder and such. Three grand on him. I was wondering how I was going to get any dough out of this job."

"Three grand," said Moxey. "A man can't get ahead of you, Tenny. What you say we split the difference, twenty-five hundred apiece?"

"Moxey," said Tenny, "who's behind this setup?"

"Search me. I saw you leave Kruger's office and I saw what you left of Kruger. So, I thought I would come along after you and see what other damage you did."

"Moxey," said Tenny, "who's behind this thing?"

"I don't want to work for Kruger any more, Tenny. I don't want to work for a guy that lets himself get mashed up like that. Maybe I could find out some things about this, Tenny, if I was working for you."

"Maybe you won't have to," said Tenny, turning to open the bedroom door.

There were only two people now in the bedroom, Mrs. Seward, in a graceful heap on the carpet, John P. Seward swaying on the edge of the bed. The girl was gone.

Tenny looked at the open window. He said: "Well, she got away. Hope she catches pneumonia," and lifted Mrs. Seward.

"Take Seward," he said to Moxey. "Wrap him in your overcoat. He ought to be used to wearing your clothes. I've got a cab at the corner."

Moxey bent over Seward. "You have a cab, Tom, old sweet, but you ain't got a driver. Seward's frau whacked him over the head with her

gun butt before she started down here. He tried to stop her from following you. I saw it, but I wasn't close enough to interfere and besides, I didn't want to interfere. Things was too interesting. Say, Tenny, what the hell is all this, anyway? What's this Seward dame been up to, hitting cabbies over the conk and yelling about hussies and then aiming straight at her husband?"

"Moxey," said Tenny, moving toward the door with Mrs. Seward's lovely head cradled in one arm and her feet dangling from the other, "We've got to get out of this before somebody phones the cops about the shots. And put a zipper on your mouth, Moxey, if you're planning to ask me for a job."

IV

TENNY sat in an easy chair before the open fire of John P. Seward's library. He sat with one long leg swinging over the arm of his big chair and one long arm stretched upon the side table where his glass stood.

On the other side of the fireplace, Della Seward reclined in an overstuffed chair.

"Della," said Tenny quietly. "How much?"

"How much? What do you mean? Oh, you're impossible! An impossible brute, insisting that I come down here, when there's the doctor upstairs and John, drugged by those horrible people."

"How much?" repeated Tenny. "How much did they offer you for playing the outraged wife at the proper moment, with a proper witness—me, in fact—to swear that you had only been following your husband because you feared for his life? How much, Della? And who?"

"How dare you sit here in my own house, in John's house, and insinuate—"

"Sit down, Della," said Tenny, quietly. "The gentleman with the gardenia may admire your histrionics, but I don't."

Della Seward sat down, suddenly. Tenny took out a crumpled pack and selected a cigarette and sat looking at it. He said:

"Rhea—she's my maid-of-all-work at the office—Rhea says sometimes they have beauty *and*. In your case, I thought maybe you had both, that is, I thought so for a while. Then I realized that really you were dumb, very dumb. How did you think you were going to get away with it? How did you think, after you had done the dirty work for them and killed your husband, they would let you live? Didn't you know that even if they did let you live, your life would have been a perpetual siege of blackmail because they knew that you had murdered him in cold blood? Oh, yes, I know you would have gone scot-free as far as the law was concerned—jealous woman makes a mistake, shoots wrong person, aims gun at horrible woman seducing her husband and kills husband instead. Only, you didn't aim at the wrong person, Della. You aimed where you meant to aim. . . ."

Tenny's voice dwindled. He put the cigarette in his mouth and gnawed at it. "I hate post-mortems, but if you'll just tell me who thought up this little scheme and approached you with it—"

Della Seward was silent. She sat crouched back in the big chair, very still, her eyes gleaming.

"At that," murmured Tenny, "maybe you thought it up yourselves, you and the gardenia gent, and broached it to some interested parties who were afraid to do the job for themselves. The interested parties, no doubt, recommended Tom Tenny as a guy

who hated your husband's guts and wouldn't make much effort to save your husband's life, even if he saw the play. Yes, it was a nice, quick way of getting Johnnie's money and getting rid of Johnnie, big, ugly Johnnie, who used to be nothing but a vulgar sandhog."

Tenny stood up. He threw his burning cigarette on the thick rug and didn't bother to step on it. He said:

"Better phone the gardenia guy and catch a train with him, somewhere, a train that leaves soon."

"What do you mean? You brute, you impossible— Do you think I'm going to run away?"

"Lady," interrupted Tenny, grimly, "I think it would be much better for Johnnie if you went out of his life. That's why I'm going to make you go."

"You're not going to make me. You can't make me."

"Also," said Tenny, "it will be much better for you, Della, if you catch a train somewhere and keep on going, because it's written in the tea leaves that you may meet with a serious accident if the various gentlemen who set the scenery tonight begin to think you've given them the double-cross. I don't give a damn, beautiful, whether you meet with an accident or not. I'm thinking of Johnnie."

Della Seward rose. She did not look at him. She said, in a tired, colorless voice: "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going home to bed. It wouldn't do for Johnnie to find me here."

"You're lying. You're going to wait till I've gone. Then you're going to buy back John's friendship with the story of what happened tonight."

"I'm not going to tell him anything," said Tenny, wearily. "Johnnie never would listen to me telling him anything, even when it was true."

Fourth Estate Frame



I knew what I was going to see but it was still like a drenching of ice water

By Captain Havelock-Bailie

Author of "Fugitive Authority," etc.

Even being a fugitive doesn't keep Johnny Wink from exercising his curiosity

WHEN I saw that dripping blood, I was scared—and I am not claiming anything else. I was so scared that I could not think, but the realization that I was on a spot was more a part of me than thought.

But scared or not I felt I had to raise the turtle-back of the Managing Editor's car. I knew what I was going to see but it was still like a drenching of ice water.

It was a girl and a fair looking one, or had been. She wasn't very big—dark hair and staring dark eyes, a straight nose. She looked like she might have been around while still alive.

There was something familiar about her that I couldn't at first get. Then I did. I'd seen her picture on a clipping in the *Argus* morgue. I knew that, but I didn't know anything else about it and right then was no time to find

out, because I saw George Slocum sort of indifferently strolling up the alley and I let the lid drop. I guess my heart stopped beating.

Slocum is a city dick and a good one. He's a husky individual, not over forty-five, iron-gray hair and a fog-gray mood. He doesn't like anybody unless it's Taylor, the Managing Editor, and you can take it from me I was a scared man when I saw him dragging toward me, his head cocked on one side and a sardonic glimmer in his eyes and there was this blood dripping from the turtle-back of the car which I had intended driving off. And upstairs there was a story of Johnny Wink on the City Editor's desk.

There is such a thing as coincidence. Anybody knows that; but if I'd not known the difference between coincidence and frame-up, I'd have got the idea right then.

FIRST, Conroy, the City Editor, had thrown one at me that knocked me cold. Like any good newspaper man, Conroy was hard. A fine looking man—tall, thin regular features, brown hair and brown eyes that were cold and reserved and watchful. And he'd sell his soul, or my soul, for a story.

He said: "Garvin, you've heard of Johnny Wink?"

I thought I could hear the goose pimples popping out on me, but I said: "Who hasn't?"

"Well, dig up everything you can about him. Get some pictures from the morgue—pictures of Johnny Wink, Stony Mount and so forth—and give us a half page feature in line with our policies."

I said: "Okay," and looked at him to see if he was trying to give me a

ride. But his eyes were half shuttered and he was blue-penciling copy as though I were nowhere about.

I thought maybe it was all right—just part of the *Argus* policy. That policy, directed by Taylor, the M.E., has to do with crime and police and politics being too close together; and a Johnny Wink yarn might fairly well fit into that.

Johnny Wink had been a newspaper reporter with a strong penchant for minding other people's business. That sort of inclination is all right if you're a prohibitionist or a blue-law reformer or something; and it goes a long ways toward making a good reporter if you don't carry it too far.

Johnny Wink carried it too far. He got caught in the wrong politician's safe, looking for graft evidence. The Court threw a lot of years at him, shipped him off to Stony Mount and he turned that Big House into a rough house when he went over the wall. Since then he'd been the wrong sort of fugitive.

Wherever he went, crime seemed to pop up and he popped it down. He didn't seem to commit any crimes, but he made himself badly wanted and a lot of nets were thrown across his path.

Of course, he'd been lucky and his luck was bound to wear thin. Meantime he was news and Conroy wanted a yarn about him. I worked for Conroy and he got the yarn.

I'd just tossed it on his desk when Taylor, the M.E., called me to his office. He is a gnome-like fellow, with a bald head much too big for his body, which isn't big at all. He is hell on gangsters, crooked politicians and their hook-togethers. Not much to look at, he is one swell newspaper man.

His lashless eyes took in the whole

six-feet and over of me while he sucked at a dead pipe and seemed to think. Finally he said: "Garvin, you don't have to write that Johnny Wink yarn, unless you like."

"It's already written," I said.

"It's not too late to kill it."

I shrugged: "Conroy asked for a Johnny Wink yarn. I work for Conroy. He got the yarn."

"Conroy works for me," he said, his eyes never leaving me. He took a couple more pulls at his pipe, added: "The yarn might cause a lot of trouble. You like your job and we like your work. You have a natural bent in line with our policies."

"Where does this Johnny Wink business enter?"

"Well, Garvin, if you want it, I'll tell you: I'm hell on crooks, but the whole Fourth Estate is in sympathy with Johnny Wink. I've got sort of an eye for faces and styles in writing. I've known since the day you went to work for us that you are Wink. I don't know if Conroy knows it or not. If he does, he took an unfair advantage of you."

I'd known Taylor was going to say that, but I couldn't see my way clear to admit anything. I said: "The yarn is on Conroy's desk—and it's a good one."

I knew it was a good yarn because there were a lot of things I could, and did, say in a yarn about Johnny Wink that no one else could possibly know, because *I am Johnny Wink*.

Don't get the idea that I get a bang out of that fact. It's a situation that exists and I have no control over it. Possibly I'd like to live in a house by the side of the road, but it would have to be a trailer-house because, like any other fugitive, I have to spend most of my time running. I'd got a little rest

while with the *Argus* and that's all I could ever hope for—a little rest.

Taylor knew, or thought I was Johnny Wink. He was willing to give me a break; but if he went over Conroy's head and killed that yarn, the race would be on just the same.

Taylor said: "If that's the way you want it. Meantime, you might dig up a little more on that Fatso Ferguson business. Suppose you see can you dig up anything else before hell pops around here."

He often let me use his car and now he handed me the key. I took it, nodded and passed through the City Room to the elevator. I went down to the ground floor and out the side where the loading platform is. There was nothing out there this time of day, except for a few private cars—some of the brass hats not being above saving a few bucks a month by parking on *Argus* property.

I started for Taylor's car and that's when I saw the blood dripping, then I saw the dead woman and there is Slocum meandering up the alley and a story of Johnny Wink upstairs on Conroy's desk.

NO MATTER if it is a hundred per cent frame or what, Slocum was going to draw up and say howdy. He was going to see that blood, and to wonder what-the-hell; and even if the stiff is in Taylor's car, I've got the key and Taylor and I don't have the same sort of reputation.

Slocum drawled: "How goes it, Scribe?"

"Just right, Hawkshaw," I said, and eased one foot under the car and over that puddle of blood. Then I noticed a drop of blood hanging to the edge of the car and it was getting pretty heavy. I knew it was going to fall and

it did—like a pile-driver, I thought. Then Slocum cracked:

"You know, Scribe, you always make me think of somebody in the picture book. I can't just place who and I guess it don't matter right now. Right now," he added, "I'm on the prowl and mostly I want to know what you got in this car—or am I being personal?"

He was big enough to be just as personal as he liked—yet I am something of a husky myself. I thought maybe I could take him and I didn't want to do that. But I had to take him because I've been accused of everything from arson to larceny and the next letter down brings us to manslaughter and murder—and it was in the back of this crate.

Oh, I know the copybook answers. I should have said: "Look, Slocum, there's a dead woman in this bucket. Let's you and me solve the mystery." I should have said that because my heart is pure or something. Only I didn't say it because Slocum doesn't believe much and neither do I.

I said: "I got a curiosity bump myself, so let's both look," and I got my feet square on the ground and Slocum was close enough, so I hit him.

I brought one up that looked easy, but it wasn't easy at all. It caught Slocum smack on the button and I didn't even help him fall. I just stepped back and watched him and thought if Farr had only got in one like that on Joe Louis and thought he maybe would have if Louis had stepped up to him with both hands down. Then because I've been running so many months, I thought I might as well run some more.

I ducked around the car and climbed in. I flicked the ignition switch, yanked the choke, kicked the starter and the

odor of gasoline reached me. The carburetor was flooded. I sat there, waiting for time to adjust my blunder. I kept one eye on Slocum, kicked the starter again and the motor fired. I whipped out of the alley and high-tailed it several blocks before I began wondering where I should run to. I slowed the car, still wondering and the state of my mind was not much.

I suppose there are people who take a morning like this in their regular stride. There's been a lot of things happen to me at one time and another—enough to teach me I'll never be one of those people. I don't get excited, but my brain gets cluttered and refuses to function.

I could see easy enough how Taylor possibly bumped this gal, had Conroy assign me to a tip-off feature, then elected me, as a fugitive, to take the murder rap. I knew it wasn't going to do me any good to get caught with this stiff. But why didn't Taylor just let me load myself into the car and have his buddy, Slocum, there to pick me up? Why should he spend ten or fifteen minutes telling me how much he loves me, then hand me a key to the hot squat?

And the stiff—if it weren't for her, I'd have a chance of sorts. It was up to me to get rid of her. But where?

I knew Slocum was on his feet by this time and the alarm would go out. I was driving a car known to most cops. It had a *Press* sign on the windshield and over each license plate. The dead woman was still in the turtle-back and it stood to reason I wasn't going to get far.

One way only I had the edge on the law. Because I am a professional fugitive, I live like one. I make it a point to live in a joint with more than one door. I was now living in an auto

cabin camp and I had a car out there. No one in town knew where I lived and no one knew I had a car. A sort of break.

I beat a traffic light by a flash and turned at the next corner, then the next. A few minutes later I was on Baseline and headed for the camp. I could, I thought, load the girl into my car and head for other parts. I'd find some place along the line to dump her off. I'd ditch Taylor's car just any place and the law would find it and a flock of blood, but no stiff—and that wouldn't spell much. Johnny Wink would still be a fugitive, but not from a murder rap.

THAT'S the way it looked to me and I was balling along at a fair clip, thinking I'd worked something out, when I got the idea I was being tailed. I was almost ready to turn into the camp when this idea came to me, though the car had been tailing me for a long time. I'd been groping with the idea—or some idea—for blocks, and couldn't reach it. I'd had too much else to think about; then I was aware that wherever and however I turned, the shining nose of a black bucket showed up in my rear-view mirror.

I tramped the gas hard and shot ahead and so did the car with the shining nose. I rammed the throttle to the floor and walked away from him, then slowly he crawled up on me. I knew by that he had speed, but it was the gradual speed of a locomotive. Taylor's car was heavy enough for a lot of speed and light enough to jump out from under you—so I started a few angles.

I whirled to a side road and almost got myself in trouble because the road became almost a dead-end. I was lucky

to cut cross a lot and get back to Baseline. After all, I was not downtown now and angles out here were few and far between.

That car was tailing me for no good purpose. Law, or whatever, they'd waited to get me out like this and now they were pouring down on me. Suddenly the broad entrance of the Hillcrest Cemetery jumped around a curve at me and I whirled through on two wheels, with gravel flying everywhere. I didn't like to do it—respect for the dead and all—but the dead offered me a chance that the living were denying.

The road was one-car wide and wound over hills and down glades like a racing snake. For a time I caught glimpses of that shining-nose heap, but it couldn't take those bends like I did. The road had a thousand forks, which I took—thundering over hedge-lined trails that passed through grassy plots and around marble shafts and hoping nobody was being disturbed.

I roared through an old cemetery, where there was little but uprooted headstones and slender firs, then I was on an abandoned road in living territory. There was nothing here but second-growth fir and thick underbrush, with a deep ravine on the right. Then I saw the fork of an intersecting road ahead of me and just as I passed it, the shiny-nosed car bore down on me like a wild cat.

They must have known where I'd come out, I thought—and then I thought something about the end of the world, for that car caught me amidship, there was a sickening crunch and Taylor's car took the ravine like a barrel through a lava bed.

I jumped from the rolling car and somehow landed on my feet, then I was running in long, uncontrolled strides and my face was whipped to

pieces by lashing limbs. Deep pine needles and rocks skittered under my feet and then I fell hard. I lay for a long minute, perfectly still and listening to nothing but a dead silence.

After a while I got to my feet and was surprised to find I didn't seem to be hurt and a little brushing put my clothes in fair condition. I tried to think and while I had enough to think about, it didn't do me any good. For example, I knew I was quite a distance from the road, yet I was in hearing distance and I couldn't hear a soul. Whoever had been on my tail had been anxious enough to overtake me—why stop now?

I started up the incline and possibly a hundred feet up came to what was left of Taylor's car. It was on its side, with the top and turtle-back crushed against a large tree. The dead girl, I supposed, was still there, but it would take many a man to get her out and it looked like I was running from a murder rap no matter what. If I could run . . .

For of a sudden I was conscious of not being alone, yet I could see no one. I could see the crown of the road, but the big black car was not there, nor was anyone else there. But more than imagination told me that eyes were upon me, then a limb cracked and I turned quick enough to see somebody dart behind a tree and for once my head worked a little. Whoever had tailed me was not the law—and they were interested only in seeing that I did not get away with this dead woman. That much I knew and one thing else occurred to me: It was barely possible that Taylor was not in on this frame.

What the frame was, I could not know. I knew my fingerprints were all over that car—and they were on rec-

ord. I knew I now had a murder charge hanging over me. I thought I could do myself very little harm going back to town—if I could get back—for I could run from town a lot easier than I could run from these jungles—and I might find out something that it wasn't smart to look for here.

Nothing bothered me, tried to interfere with my leaving there, yet the eyes followed me. I hiked for two hours, came to a street car line and grabbed a car into town. I left it in a crowded downtown street and started circling through alleys and side streets for the *Argus* Building.

I WENT through the press room, pausing only long enough to pick up a street edition and give a look for the Johnny Wink yarn. It was there in all its glory. I tossed the paper on a pile and the freight elevator dumped me into the make-up room, then I went through a swinging door to a hallway and here I had to face it. I humped my shoulders, ducked into the City Room, cornered to the file room and morgue—and I didn't think anyone paid any attention to me. Anyway, I had to look.

Except for one thing, looking for that dead girl's mug in the morgue would be a hit and miss proposition. But it so happened I remembered what I'd been looking for when I ran onto her picture before. I went to that part of the file and a few minutes later I had it. The name was Margaret Ord. She did not look hard in this picture and it was an engagement announcement five years back. *She was to have been married to Taylor, Managing Editor of this sheet!*

The girl had once been engaged to Taylor. I found her dead in Taylor's

car and he gave me the key to find her; and someone had seen to it that I did not get rid of the body. Was Taylor meant to be the goat—and did he slip the deal to me?

It was a rotten pile anyway you stacked it. I knew Taylor had a very great pride, was ugly as a gargoyle, had possibly been thrown over by the girl and that made for anything you wanted to think about, with Johnny Wink still on the run.

Then I was thinking of something else. Conroy, with a quick look over his shoulder, popped into the file room. I never carried a gun in my life, but I didn't know his intentions so I let my right hand drop to my hip pocket and he yelled:

"Hold it, Garvin—I saw you come in here."

"You saw me come in here and . . ."
I prompted.

"And I wanted to give you this," he said, handing me a small sheaf of bills. "Your salary and a little bonus—and, I'm telling you, you'd better blow." He added: "I'm sorry about that Johnny Wink business. Never gave a thought to you being the guy, but it sure brought the bulls on the run. Tough for you, and a good yarn for me."

"Skip it," I said. "Where's Taylor?"

"Slocum told him something and he beat it. I don't know where or why."

He and Slocum, eh? Trailing down Johnny Wink. I said: "Listen, how come Taylor didn't marry Margaret Ord?"

Conroy looked blank enough, said: "Margaret Ord?"

"You know, don't you?"

Conroy shook his head.

"Never heard of Taylor even looking at a gal."

"How long you been on this sheet?"

"Three years—and why all the questions?"

"You might not know about the Ord gal at that," I said. "And you maybe got a yarn about Johnny Wink with a follow-up; but there's a hell of a swell scoop floating away from you."

"Give, Garvin."

"Not me," I said. "I'm going to see who's a friend of Margaret Ord."

"You'd better blow."

"Presently," I said, but it was quicker than presently, for I got just to the hallway when the elevator unloaded Slocum. His jaw dropped and his hand went to his hip.

"That picture's clicked, Mister Wink," he said.

I was running through the swinging doors, down the aisles of make-up stones and shots poured after me—wide. They did more good than harm to me. They put wings on my feet and I hit the freight elevator, yanked the cable and it started downward—damn slow. I tried to force a little speed from it by the very tension of my body, but elevators don't work that way.

One eye up and one down, I watched for Slocum's gun hand to appear over the half-gate that automatically closed when the elevator started down, and for the gate below to start upward. Just as it did, I leaped over the top of it and landed running in the press room.

I was out the rear door, off the platform and down an alley quicker than a wink—and that's not wise cracking. I ducked into a crowded street and wondered what I'd accomplished—and why. Then I remembered I had a little extra dough and thought Conroy had been swell, giving it to me, remembered an old saw about Greeks bearing gifts,

then thought the one smart thing for me to do was to get out to that cabin camp, get my other shirt and my car and blow. But I'm not smart—curious is the word.

So I found a telephone in a drug store and dialed the *Argus*, asked for the City Room, then for Slocum. I thought he'd still be there and he answered with a gruff: "Yeah?"

I said: "Put me down for the world's prime chump, Hawkshaw, then count ten and break a rule by telling me why Taylor didn't marry Margaret Ord."

"Who is this?" he yelled.

"You're a dumb flat-foot or you might get the idea we are working toward the same end," I said. "Will you tell me that—for your own good, Taylor's good, my good—or do I have to waste a lot of time finding out some place else?"

"Tell me who's talking?"

"All right, single-track—this is Garvin. Don't try to trace this call and tell me what I'm asking."

He yelled: "Look, Wink, I wasn't trying to shoot you, just trying to stop you. I want a talk with you."

"You'll never get close enough to me to talk by tossing lead around my heels. Tell me what I'm asking, because I am hanging up right now."

He was silent just a second and I started to hang up, then he said: "Margaret Ord got to running around with a hood."

"Would the hood be Fatso Ferguson?"

"That's right," he said. "I don't know why I'm telling you this, but put this in your book along with it: I'm coming after you and I'm going to get you. Conroy says you're in the clear and maybe you are, but you're wanted and I'm going to find out what

you did with that car, what was in the car, what you did with Taylor and—"

"With Taylor!"

"That's right; and I'm going to smack you in the puss. You can make it a lot easier on yourself by—"

By what, I wondered as I clicked up the receiver. By beating it out of town, surely.

I GOT just to the door of that drug store when I heard a siren whining maybe a block away and I thought Slocum had traced that call plenty quick—or had the switchboard do it for him. Then I was in the crowd again, watched the car stop and the bulls pile into the drug store and I wondered how much longer this could go on.

I'm too husky to look just like the "average man"; cops are not dumb; my picture is in a lot of books, with fingerprint classification; the town was hot and no man can run hog-wild forever. I had to lam, of course; but I had to find out one or two things before I did it.

Taylor's one-time fiancée was supposed to have messed around with Fatso Ferguson. Taylor had been riding Ferguson and his numbers racket. That told a yarn that tied in with the dead girl in Taylor's car. It could have told a dozen yarns. Possibly the girl had gone to Taylor for Fatso, trying to get Taylor to lay off.

Hell, Slocum had said for *me* to turn Taylor up—and that meant Taylor was on the lam, or what? Slocum didn't think that way. He thought something else.

I walked along trying to figure things out—not just walking like a fashion plate strolling through the park. I walked as a fugitive learns to

walk, or he goes out of circulation. The town was looking for me and so was the world—eyes boring into my back, guns aimed around corners. Waiters, motormen, newsboys—all dicks. I know, it's a lot imagination, but don't ever think you can beat it. You can't.

I cut through alleys when it seemed all right to do so. I walked with my eyes on plate glass windows, seeing who and what was reflected. I stopped now and then in a doorway and watched who passed, or I turned and doubled back—but always I headed the same general direction. After a while I was in a district of hock shops, cheap apartments, flop-joints, lofts, saloons and loitering poolroom cowboys. Fatso Ferguson's bailiwick—and tough as it looked.

A big black car with a shiny nose suddenly eased around a corner and stopped before one of the saloons and a second later a balloon of a man waddled to the curb, the car door opened and he piled in.

The car whirled away, with the transmission singing one sweet song and I was looking for a hack. Believe it or not, one bowled along. I flagged it down, scrambled in, said: "Buddy, I'm not rich peoples, but it gives ten bucks if you don't lose that black job."

"For ten bucks, I'll take it home for you and tuck it in your bed," the hack hand said.

That wouldn't serve any purpose, so I didn't make a deal. I just sat there, leaning a little forward and watching that job purr along. I knew it was the car that had run me down in the marble orchard. I knew Fatso Ferguson was the passenger. That's about all I did know, until it covered a lot of miles, crossed the railroad

tracks, entered the factory district, then on to an older part of town and stopped in front of a square brick house hemmed in by warehouses.

It was growing dark by now and that helped me in whatever I was trying to do. I thought I knew what that was, so I paid the hack driver and wasn't many yards behind that black bucket when Ferguson bulged to the street. "Remember," he growled, "get him here within an hour," then he walked up the stairs to that brick house just as the car rolled away.

He gave a *rat-a-tat* with his knuckles on the front door, repeated and the door opened. He was swallowed by the black interior and I ducked around the house, finding nothing but shuttered windows. The shutters were fastened on the inside and there wasn't a chance of me getting through without an axe.

Well, I thought the front door was worth a trial. I had no idea how many mugs were inside and I'm no miracle man, but sometimes I'm lucky. Ferguson and at least one other were in there, and there should be a lot of answers. Hard to get, maybe, but there.

Ferguson was no panty-waist. I'd got enough dope on him for Taylor to know he could and would take a man on a one-way journey just for the hell of it. Not only could and would, but had. So maybe a few chills romped up and down my spine as I romped up those steps, but I gave the door the same double *rat-a-tat* I'd heard Ferguson give.

I didn't have long to wait for the door to open and I didn't wait long after it opened. There was a white blur in the darkness and it was just face high. I let my left snake out with all the grease I had and it connected with that blur just as I crossed a right, and

it connected too and I was inside and eased the body to the floor. That wasn't all luck.

I closed the door and proceeded to tie up whoever this lush was, using his necktie, belt and shoe laces for the job.

I LISTENED and there wasn't a sound in the house, so it looked like everything was under control. I eased through the blackness and I wasn't dumb enough to stumble over anything. I passed through a doorway and down a hall, then I saw a knife-edge of light that meant the bottom of a door. I heard the mumble of voices, eased up to the door and somebody rumbled:

"You're going out. Don't fool yourself about that—and this honor stuff you're so strong for will be a laugh. The pop-eyed world will *haw-haw* every time your name's mentioned. That's cut and dried. The only thing is, you can go easy if you'll give me the low-down on all you've dug up."

There was a silence and the same voice said: "Okay, take it the hard way. Both ends are covered and we got from now on to find out what you got."

That big voice belonged to Ferguson and I had an idea about the man he was talking to. I decided I'd go in and see. I turned the door knob easy. It wasn't locked. I flung back the door and went in.

Fatso Ferguson was a big man—tall, broad and deep—and I'm not the first guy to be fooled by a fat man. The fat was there but he was chain lightning on his feet. He whirled like an adagio dancer, there was a gun in his hand and I smacked it down, heard it clatter to the floor, then I was mixed up with more arms and

fists than I'd ever seen—or felt. Not only was he fast, that fat guy was strong as a bull and knew how to hit.

Then I straightened Fatso with a half dozen left jabs and followed in with as many right hooks as jabs. He was easy enough to hit, but was like hitting an inner-spring mattress until he began to get squishy and by that time I was on the go myself.

I don't know how we kept our feet, especially when one or the other of us was continually running into a sort of cot or bed. But we stood up and if he hadn't cracked me in the mouth, I don't know what would have happened; but he did and I can't take it there. It makes me mad.

For what seemed thirty minutes, I'd been half on the defensive; but with that crack in the mouth I tore into him and my right made a hole in his jaw deep enough to reach the bone. He bounced on the floor.

I did something then I'm sort of ashamed of, but it was good sense. I bent over him and swung a right to his temple that knocked him colder than January Thirteenth. Then I looked at the cot I'd been bumping and stumbling into ever since I'd tangled with Ferguson. The guy on the cot grinned up at me and said:

"A fair battle, my friend. You could do that for dough."

I said: "Look, Taylor, there's so many things cock-eyed around here I'm going screwy." I started untying him. "Of course, I get some of it. You've been riding Ferguson and he's got your old sweetheart. He bumped her and put her in your car and called the bulls. Then I get the car and they don't want me to get rid of the stiff, so they tail me and wreck your car where they know I can't do much but lam. But what the hell are you here for

and how come about Slocum and this and that?"

Taylor rubbed his numb hands.

"Slocum is my friend. He heard Fatso tell a couple crooked bulls to frisk my car. He starts to beat them to it and you're there purely by accident. You pop him on the jaw, then he tells me about the blood and said I'd better lay low until he can look into things. I just got to the street when Fasto's boys snatch me. That's because you ran off with the car and because he wants to know how much dirt I've got on him."

"Well," I said, "it's still screwy to me. That dead gal should be on an old road leading from the abandoned cemetery at Hillcrest. You can have her and figure the rest out. Me, I'm blowing this town—right now."

"Not right now, Johnny Wink," a cucumber-cool voice said and I turned slowly and there was Conroy in the doorway. He's got a flat automatic in his gloved hand.

I said: "I figured part of this when you gave me that dough. Now I got it all."

"But it took you too long to get it," Conroy grinned.

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as to say that, Conroy," I said. "It took me a long time, but not *too* long. Anyhow, I got it this way: You're a snappy dresser, like the dolls and are tied up with Fatso to make yourself a few extra fish. When Taylor started putting the pressure on Fatso, you got panicky. You built a plan to frame Taylor and with him out of the way, you figure to be Managing Editor and draw the fire. Only I butted in and refused to butt out."

"You're more or less right," Conroy admitted. "Naturally I knew you were Johnny Wink and I know you're

nuts. You been lucky once or twice in breaking up things, so I wanted you out of the way. I gave you that yarn to write. That didn't chase you and you got tangled up in this, so now you and Taylor both take the rap. Only you won't know anything about it, Johnny Wink."

"Hell," I said, "I'm going to write the story." Then: "Don't hit him, Slocum!" I yelled. "He's my meat."

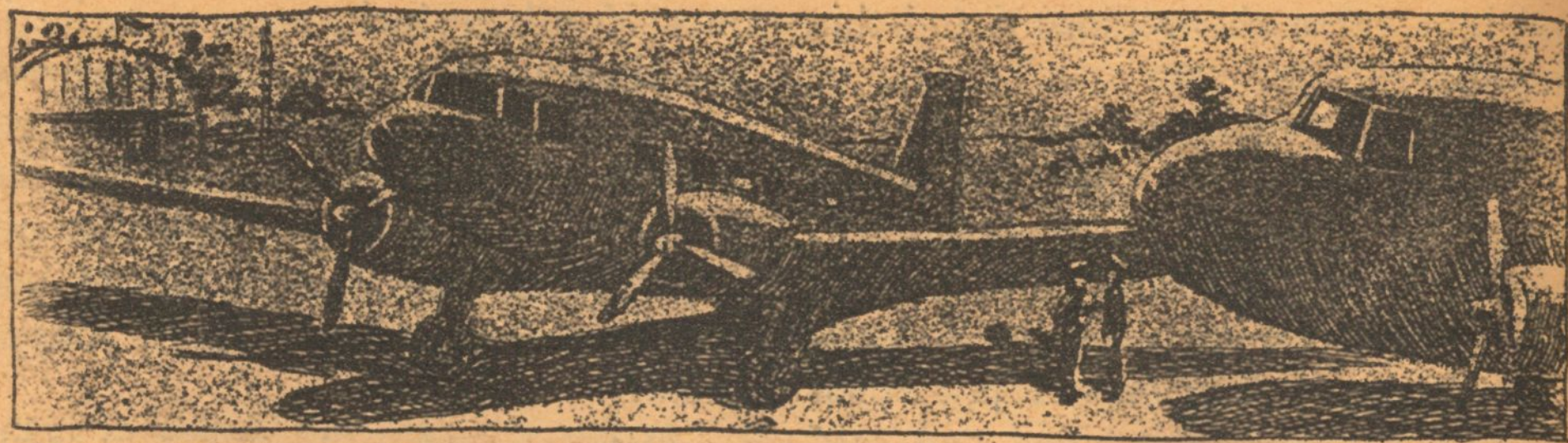
Conroy grinned: "Wise guy, eh? Only it's old stuff—I figured you for something smarter than that." Then he straightened and you could see the fear in his eyes because Slocum was really behind him—had been there two or three minutes.

Conroy whirled and there was murder in his eyes, but he didn't murder anybody else. A gun roared and he fell forty-two different directions. Then he raised up on his hands like a kid playing bear. He watched the blood pour out of his mouth then he gurgled: "Why, why," and fell flat to the floor.

I was wiping my face with a handkerchief and thinking I wished there was some place to run. Taylor said: "*Whew!* let's get some air in here." He opened a window and threw back the shutters and winked at me. Slocum took a look at the window and casually turned and bent over Conroy and said: "This guy sure is awful dead." Then I went feet first out the window. I was at least smart enough to take a hint.

I landed okay and started running like hell. A gun back of me roared and I'll bet those bullets missed me forty feet. Slocum yelled: "Come back here, Johnny. I want to talk to you."

I thought possibly he did, but he sure as hell wasn't using talking tactics. Besides he might not turn his head again.



Murder Makes Things Go Wrong

By Edward S. Williams

Author of "Zero Hour," etc.

*The murderer planned a neat frame but he left himself out
of the picture when he reckoned without Bill Butler*

I FINISHED the last of the routine dictation and leaned back disgustedly in the boss' chair. Dictation was never my strong point. I elevated my feet to the boss' desk-top, and purloined one of the few remaining Coronas from the humidor thereon. And Edna, the boss' secretary, eyed me coldly.

"Bill Butler!" she exploded. "You make me sick! You wouldn't dare do that if Joe Hamlin were here. What's got into you? You've been carrying on awful funny since he left. What's the matter with you?"

I grinned, and sighed. "Ennui, darling," I told her, "boredom, to you. Here I am, in sole charge of a good detective agency—the opportunity of a lifetime to demonstrate the sterling qualities with which I am so liberally endowed—and what happens? Nothing!"

"Nothing!" she snorted. "You call it *nothing* to smoke your employer's cigars? To scratch his desk with your number twelve feet? To take two hours for lunch, and—and loaf like the parasite you are? Just you wait until Mr. Hamlin hears what I'm going to tell him!" and so saying, she gathered up book and pencils and goose-stepped out.

I had to smile, in spite of a three weeks' lack of anything at all to do except hold down the boss' desk. Edna's a great gal even though she doesn't always approve of young William Butler. She's a typical spinster, but also a perfect secretary, and she thinks that Joe Hamlin, boss of the Agency—now vacationing in Japan and points east—is the son of heaven, and none other. But I wasn't worried about what she'd tell him. In the first place, I knew she wouldn't tell him anything. And sec-



"You're covered from three sides. Now move!"

ond, it hadn't been my fault there'd been no business coming in while he'd been gone.

I picked my feet off the desk and looked carefully for scratches. And the door opened again, and Aken came in. "Cherub" Aken—a chunky, angel-faced, dynamite-tempered Irishman, who has the perverse idea that *I'm* the true son of heaven, not Joe, and that his mission in life is keeping me out of trouble. He'd done plenty of it in the past, but anyway, the Cherub had on his hat and there was an eager light in his hot blue eyes.

"Look, Bill!" he blurted. "I think maybe we've got something!"

"Athlete's foot?" I suggested.

"Naw—cut it out! Business, I mean. You've been belly-achin' for three weeks about things being so slow. Well—I've dug something up."

"Oh," I said, "a ghoul, eh?"

"A guy named Ashe," he ignored it, and scowled, "just phoned . . ."

"Ashe? Ashe . . . That," I grinned, "can't be so hot. Sounds, though, as if the guy might be all burned up about something."

"He is," Cherub began earnestly—then my bad pun began to sink in. Aken's jaw stuck out. His eyes snapped. "Okay, wise-guy!" he said. "You stay here and think up some more nifties like that. I'm goin' over and see this guy. And if there's a bonus to be split after this case, it'll be split just one way—mine! So long."

He spun around, with heavy emphasis on the "so long," and I yelped, "Hey, wait! I'm sorry. I apologize. Skip it and consider it unsaid. Cherub, where're you going? Where is this Ashe?"

"In a can," Aken spoke from the door. "An' you know where *you* can

go!" but he grinned before he slammed it. And after that, I did several things of no grave import.

I looked at my watch. It was 2:37. I mumbled the name Ashe over again three or four times, but it still evoked no memory of millionaires. Then I summoned energy enough to get the boss' copies of Dun & Bradstreet, and Who's Who in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

For some time I thumbed the pages of both. I found some Ashe's in each. They were scattered around pretty well—some on the West Coast who had a lot of dough—but none in Noo Yawk worth getting steamed up about. Then I gave up, closed both books, piled one on the other and my feet on top of that. I slid further down in the tall-backed, leather-padded swivel chair—and went to sleep . . .

"BILL! Bill Butler!"

"Huh . . . ?" I said. "Oh, yes—yes . . ." I'd been dreaming I was the survivor of a shipwreck, and that somebody was rocking the boat while a bell tolled lugubriously. But it was only Edna, rocking the chair, and the bell must have been the phone, for she said:

"Would you mind very much answering the telephone, or shall I?"

"Not at all," I told her. "Not at all. This is Morgan, probably, wanting to spend a few million locating his long-lost Aunt Eugenie. You see, Edna . . . Hello!" I slapped the phone to my ear, listened to a grating voice on the other end of the wire.

"Butler?" it inquired.

It sounded official, copperish. I thought I recognized it, said, "Sometimes I'm *Mister* Butler."

"Okay, mister!" it said. "Clown *this* off! Your man Aken . . ."

I sat up with a jerk as he talked, and all the clown drained out of me—fast. I felt as though somebody had just poured a bucket of ice-water down my neck. Felt numb from the neck down—unaware of any sensation except the conflict of emotions that this harsh voice was bringing me. It was a city dick named Corcoran, a good enough egg. He meant to break it easily, but it wasn't in Tom Corcoran's nature to be easy with anything.

Cork said, "He's shot—bad. Maybe he won't live. You'd better come down."

"Yeah," I said, "right away."

"What is it?" Edna demanded shrilly. "Bill, is it . . ."

"Cherub Aken," I spoke grimly. "Somebody's shot him, Edna."

"Shot him! Oh, good heavens . . ."

"Keep the office open," I told her. "I'll phone." And I grabbed my hat and hurried out—only to be stopped again.

Edna came running after me, waving my .45 in one hand and a box of shells in the other. "Bill!" she quavered, "you forgot this! And . . ." she sniffed suspiciously, but there was the light of vengeance in her eyes as well as a tear or two. She went on, "And if Dick Aken dies, Bill, you're going to need it!"

I pocketed the gun, managed a weak grin. "The female of the species," I told her, "is sure bad when she gets her mad up. Sometimes, Edna, you surprise me!"

I SAW the ambulance backed up at the entrance to the shoddy fourth-rate hotel at the address Cork had given me. And that was encouraging. That meant that Aken was still inside—still alive, maybe. I wasn't gentlemanly as I elbowed and clawed my way

through the ranks of the curious on the pavement outside. But I got in, identified myself, and an elevator took me to the seventh floor. The number of the room was 723, and Corcoran was there, with a couple of pavement-pounders I didn't know. The ambulance doc was still working over the naked, bronzed and mighty torso of Cherub Aken on a frowsy bed. And for ten seconds after I got in, nobody said anything and I didn't move. Then the white-suited interne straightened slowly.

Aken's eyes were closed, but his lips moved . . .

"Donald . . . Ashe," he whispered, "seven-two-three . . ." and his sultry eyes flicked open, flamed. His mouth twisted over hoarse words, louder, in what would have been a bellow if strength had been in him. "Damn you!" he raved. "So it's a frame! I'll . . . Ah-h-h . . . Alice Demarest . . . Frans—Fransiola . . . Get Fransiola, Bill . . . Bill!" He collapsed, motionless.

I looked at the red-tinged froth on his lips and suddenly I saw everything red. My insides tightened and my throat felt as though a hand were at it, throttling. I watched the ambulance man finger Cherub's limp wrist, beckon waiting stretcher men. And I found my own voice. It sounded strange to me; strange, and very calm.

"How bad?" I said.

The doc looked at me impersonally. "Bad enough," he clipped. "He stopped two slugs—from behind. One came clear through his left lung. The other's still inside, near his heart. Too near. That never does a man much good."

"What're his chances?"

"About one in ten," he said, "provided we can operate soon enough."

"Then what," I roared, "in heaven's name're you waiting for! Here . . ."

I'd made a deposit at noon in my savings account, still had the bankbook in my pocket. I tossed it to him, added, "That's for a starter. When it's spent, let me know. Now get him to a hospital!"

Tom Corcoran nodded official permission and they took him out, skillfully, gently. They knew their business, those men, but when I looked down into Aken's face, as he passed, I wondered if it was going to do him any good.

Two slugs—from *behind*!

Donald Ashe, Cherub had whispered, seven-two-three. That was the number of this room, but Donald Ashe hadn't waited for the cops. Alice Demarest . . . Fransiola . . . Get Fransiola, Bill!

"Cork!" I whirled on him. "What's this Ashe look like? Who is he? Where'd he come from?"

Corcoran shrugged savagely. "Nobody'll admit they know. Ashe checked in early one morning—Wednesday a week ago. Night-clerk says the guy was sick, or drunk. Says he had his hat pulled low—kept his head down—stayed in his room ever since. Fellow claims he couldn't see Ashe's face . . . But hell, they take anything here."

"Didn't anybody see him leave?" I rapped.

Corcoran pointed silently to an open fire-escape window, then grabbed my arm as I turned and stumbled blindly toward the door. "Wait up, William!" he rasped. "Suppose *you* talk! What was Aken doing here? Who's this Alice dame? What's Fransiola got t'do with it?"

"You guess," I told him, "that's all I'm doing . . . But I'm going to go find out! By gad, I'm going to . . ."

"Get a bellyful of it yourself, eh?" Cork growled, but he's a great copper. He let go of my arm. "Okay, be mulish."

Go ahead. I'll try to keep an eye on you."

II

DID the—Get Fransiola, Bill!—mean something, or was it just part of the incoherent raving of a badly wounded man?

Fransiola was a name well enough known to get into the vocabulary of almost anybody. It was a man's name, though maybe a lot of people didn't know that. "Fransy" Fransiola had been clever enough to keep himself off the front page during prohibition, when he was running liquor and the nobbiest speakeasy in his end of town. In the hiatus after repeal, when the racketeers were dodging around in circles, trying to find other rackets as juicy as prohibition liquor, Fransy dropped completely out of sight. But now he was in the public eye—and willingly—for on the spot of his former speakeasy he had as swank a cabaret as you could find in a night's journey. It was known simply as Fransiola's.

Rumor had it, though, that the cabaret was only a front for a lot of other enterprises. Gambling, for one. And rumor also stated that Fransy was as clever as always. But I couldn't see shooting Aken in the back as a very clever move on anybody's part. It bordered too much on the crude to suit Fransiola's style. But I wasn't passing up any bets, however long the odds might happen to be.

I lounged at Fransiola's bar, with its suave glitter of chromium and polished wood and crystal glassware. The place wasn't in full blast—too early—but there was a liberal scattering of suckers among the tables around the dance floor. The bar was practically deserted, and that's one reason I was there. I wanted Fransiola to see me; wanted to find out

what he'd do about my being there, or say—if anything.

So far it'd been nothing.

I nursed a Scotch-and-soda for half an hour and then ordered another. I was halfway through that when I saw Wohler come in. And Chris Wohler, in case you're not familiar with local skullduggery, is one reason why private detectives sometimes get bad publicity. Wohler's a private shamus himself. Never more than one jump ahead of starvation and the license bureau, he will—and does—take anything from a divorce frame to a perjury buildup.

I swallowed thoughtfully and wondered what about it. Chris Wohler had as much right here as anyone else—except that maybe a Second Avenue saloon would be more in his line. I watched him wander in and sit down at a table with another man who'd been there all the time, but who I hadn't noticed particularly before. The table was in shadow and I couldn't see him closely even now, but I got a general impression of length and leanness. Dark hair; dark, thin moustache. Well enough dressed, but not in evening clothes. And then a voice beside me brought a start that almost jumped me out of my pants.

"Detectives," Fransiola said softly, but he smiled, "seem to be the order of the day!"

I grinned back at him. "Yeah," I said, "the woods're full of 'em. Can't say, though, that the latest addition to the roster enhances the tone of the place, what?"

Fransiola's dead-black eyes slid across the room to Chris Wohler. His long upper lip curved down one-sidedly in a gesture that might mean anything—or nothing. He rested an evening-coated elbow on the bar, and the cigarette in his well-manicured hand

curled smoke spirals upward. Fransiola shrugged.

"Perhaps not," he breathed, "but on the other hand, the presence of William Butler enhances the tone of any bar-room, what? We don't see you often. Is it business tonight, or pleasure?"

"Both," I ignored his sarcasm and wondered what to say next. Fransiola wasn't giving any openings. Should I make one? I covered a thoughtful moment with a sip from the glass, and Fransiola said:

"Business of finding out who killed your friend Aken? The pleasure, you think, will come later. I was sorry to hear about Aken, Butler."

AND that was that! Had Corcoran beaten me here? Had he told Fransiola that Aken had talked, had mentioned his name? I decided to play dumb. I said, "Your understanding is complete, friend, except for one small detail. Would it interest you to know that Cherub Aken isn't quite dead? That he has a chance?"

My eyes stabbed into his and there was nothing there to see. Nothing tangible, nothing to prove that a wild shot in the dark hadn't been utterly wild. Fransiola's sallow face remained politely blank until he put expression into it—a suave expression of sympathetic interest.

He said, "I'm glad to hear it. The rumor I got said he was shot dead, but if he wasn't—splendid! Do you suspect Wohler, by any chance?"

"No more than you," I countered boldly, "or that cigarette girl there." I pointed to the girl who was passing, in a scanty bodice and a short, fluffy skirt, with her tray on a ribbon around her pretty neck. And Fransiola smiled again.

"Cute little trick, isn't she? Well,

enjoy yourself, Bill. I hope you find your man—but do me a favor and don't arrest anybody in here . . ." and still smiling, he turned and went away.

I watched him go, and the mocking overtone in his voice started another merry-go-round in my head. I sorted out and tried to classify every word he'd said to me, tried to remember every nuance of every one of his bland and ready smiles.

My mind was a whirl of Cherub Aken's face, paper white under his tan, with bloody froth on his lips, and his gasped, "Donald Ashe . . . Alice Demarest . . . Get Fransiola, Bill . . ." The blotchy face of Chris Wohler kept intruding for no good reason. And the shadowy, indistinct features of the man with him. There was another one: a worried, wistful, pretty face. A girl—one I'd seen somewhere before, and couldn't place. She was saying something, kept parroting it until it penetrated to my consciousness . . .

"Cigarettes, sir? Cigars? Cigarettes?"

The little cigarette girl, of course! The one I'd pointed to, the one Fransiola had called a cute little trick. And she was. Now that I noticed, the skin of her arms and shoulders was a clear rose-pearl, velvety smooth. Her lemon-yellow hair, cut short, brushed smooth on top, curled out under the impudent pill-box hat on the side of her head. Her legs, in sheer, opera-length hose, were slim and beautiful. But feminine underpinnings, however nice, were farthest from my mind.

"No thanks," I said, and the desperate pleading in her eyes, that I'd seen subconsciously before, registered all at once. She'd turned away, and I took quick strides after her.

"Camels," I said, "if it'll make you stop looking like I'd just robbed an

orphan." I gave her a dollar, got the pack and fifty cents change, and yelped, "My mistake, sister. *You're* the one who's robbing orphans, but . . ."

She was talking, whispering without looking at me directly. Whisperly frantically, "You're Bill Butler? The detective?"

I grunted surprised assent.

"Ask me for a date," she said, "tonight! I've got to talk to you!"

". . . but," I continued aloud where I'd left off, "it's a pleasure, now I think of it. How about robbing me some more—later on tonight?"

She smiled kittenishly. An old gaffer at the nearest table leered up at me and envied.

"What time?" I persisted.

"Four o'clock," she said.

SHE dabbled her spoon absently in a cup of tea. Dressed, she was still cute; even a beauty in her very young way. Marietta Walsh was a nice kid—wouldn't take a cocktail—asked for tea and toast, and pecked at that like a canary. She was a kid with something on her mind, too. I saw that, and I didn't rush her. Things were happening too fast for me to do anything but wonder, and wait, and hope . . .

She said finally, "I don't know what you must think of me, Mr. Butler, and I can't help it. I just *had* to do something. I—I haven't any money, but I've seen your picture in the paper, and read about you. When I saw you talking to Fransiola, I recognized you. And I must have seemed pretty fresh, but . . ."

Her lifted eyes met mine for the first time, fully. I shook my head. "No. You seemed pretty—nice. How can I help you?"

Marietta blushed, but the color faded again as she forgot herself and talked.

"It's a friend of mine," she said. "I liked her a lot. I haven't been in New York long, and Alice helped me when I first came. Now she's . . . Wha—what is it? What've I said that . . ."

"Alice?" I gulped, "Did you say *Alice*?"

"Yes. Why . . ."

I reached across the table and caught her hand, and it wasn't any boy-meets-girl stuff. I blurted, "Alice—*Demarest*! And she's missing?"

"Yes—yes! How did you know? Do you know her—know where she is?"

"Honey," I breathed, "I'd give many, many dollars to know where is Alice Demarest . . ." and then I came back to consciousness with a jolt. Marietta Walsh was staring at me, lips parted, blue eyes big and round.

I said, "Listen, child! It doesn't matter how I know her name, or how I know she's missing. I'm a detective, and detectives know all the answers—sometimes. But suppose you tell me what you know about her. How long she's been missing; when you last saw her, where, under what circumstances. If you will, I'll help you find her—if it's the last thing I do!"

She talked, dazedly at first, not understanding but with a naive trust that was touching. She told how she'd come to New York from a small town in Ohio where she'd graduated from high school and couldn't get a job. How she had to have a job because her family back home couldn't afford to keep her.

Not sob-stuff though. She told it in a matter-of-fact way, as though everyone else on earth was in the same fix. She told how she met this Alice Demarest in an employment agency, and how both of them got jobs at Fransiola's. Except that Alice was a dancer and got into the chorus of the floor show.

They didn't live together, it turned

out, although they were planning to, later on. Alice had a cheap two-room flat—and a lease—where she lived alone. But Marietta was tied up with a room in some sort of a Y W. And that's how matters stood when David appeared on the scene . . .

I STOPPED her there. "Wait a minute." I said, "David who? Let's keep things straight. Who's David?"

"I don't know!" she wailed. "That's the worst of it. He came into the Club one night, alone—oh, two months ago. I saw him first. I mean, I saw him before Alice did, because he bought cigarettes from me almost as soon as he sat down at his table. And I thought he was nice even then. But—but Alice fell for him—hard! Do you see?"

"No," I told her, "but don't be discouraged. Maybe I will sometime . . . Go on."

"Well," she said breathlessly, "you know how they do at Fransiola's. The entertainers have to sit with the guests, if the guests want them to. Alice always hated that part of it, but this time when he—David—asked her to sit at his table, she didn't mind it. I watched them, and I can tell. Women can, you know."

"Yeah," I prompted, "womanly intuition. I've heard of it . . . But get on."

"And—and David kept coming back, to see Alice. Everybody noticed it—even Fransiola! He . . ."

"Even Fransiola!" I exploded softly, involuntarily.

Marietta went on tensely, "Some weeks he'd come two or three nights. Then maybe he wouldn't come at all for a week. And Alice missed him then, even though when I'd kid her about him she'd just laugh it off. She said he was from out of town, and we always just spoke of him as Dave. That's

why I never knew his last name. I never asked. I guess Alice knew it."

Again she paused and I said, "Ashe . . .? Does that sound familiar, Marietta? Didn't you ever hear Alice speak of David—*Ashe*?"

She stared at me in obvious concentration, then shook her head slowly. It was pure hunch on my part, that question. The slight similarity between Donald and David—the thought that maybe Aken's raving had turned David Ashe into Donald Ashe—prompted it.

Marietta said, "Why Ashe?"

"Forget it," I told her. "Go on."

"That," she said, "is almost all. Alice let Dave take her home on Tuesday night of last week. It was the first time she ever had. She was excited about it! She even bought some gin and vermouth to make cocktails, and some things for cocktails. And—and that's the last I ever heard of her—or him! I've been to her apartment three times and it's locked, and nobody answers the bell. I've been everywhere I thought she might have gone. But I can't find her . . ."

And there was real tragedy in her voice as she finished abruptly, stark fear and bitter loneliness. But unless David were Donald Ashe, it made less sense than I'd hoped it might. I tried to piece something out of it. But it was pretty muddled.

"You think," I asked, "that Alice was in love with this David?"

She nodded.

"Then why couldn't they have eloped—got married and gone off somewhere?"

"No!" she was vehement. "Not without a word to me! There hasn't been even a postcard from . . ." she tried to smile . . . "from Niagara Falls! Besides, I thought of that. That's why

I didn't tell the police. That—and what Fransiola said."

"And what," I tried to keep the knife-edge out of my voice, "did Fransiola say?"

"I asked him," she faltered, "if he knew where Alice'd gone. And he said no. When I asked him if he wouldn't help me find her, he just s-smiled, and said that smart people mind their own business—and keep out of trouble! And I kept hoping every day that there'd be a card—a letter—telling me they'd got married. But now . . . You see, now, don't you?"

I said I saw, even though I didn't. But I did see that Alice Demarest and a guy named David were tangled up, somehow, in the shooting of Cherub Aken—in the mystery of Donald Ashe. I saw that this David had taken Alice Demarest home on Tuesday night of last week, and that Donald Ashe had checked into a shady hotel early Wednesday morning! I glanced at my watch and it was nearly 4:30 A.M. I paid the check.

"What are we going to do?" Marietta asked.

"You," I said, "are going home, to bed. And you're not going to tell anyone else what you've told me. Get it?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"But me no buts, woman!" I grinned, and she smiled a tremulous, answering smile.

I SAT in a cab and stirred the muddy sediment in my think-tank. Tried to concentrate on what seemed important: tried to weed out of Marietta's rambling tale the fifty per cent that didn't matter.

A chap named David had appeared from nowhere, had interested a girl named Alice Demarest, had taken her home late one night, and vanished into

nowhere again—with the girl. A chap named Donald Ashe had phoned the office, got onto the Cherub's wire and invited him into an ambush. And Aken had raved three names: Ashe, Demarest, Fransiola.

That Fransiola *could* mean two things: a man, and a place—either or both. Ashe remained as complete a mystery as ever. But Demarest was the common denominator: Demarest had entered into both sides of the equation! Alice Demarest *must* be the link that would weld together the broken pieces of a chain of evidence. Find her.

So obvious—and yet so hard to do. I wavered between two addresses: Fransiola's, and the missing girl's flat. There was something that made me hesitate: something which, like all else about Fransiola, was ambiguous, double-edged, vague. Fransiola had said to Marietta Walsh, "Smart people mind their own business—and keep out of trouble." Smart people . . . hell's hinges!

I came out of my slouch as though the cab had smacked into a lamp post. I barked an address—that of the Y W where Marietta lived—and sat on the edge of my seat while the cabby fed speed into his cylinders. What a dope I'd been! If Fransiola had an interest in this job—and I was gambling that he did—he knew that Marietta, too, was interested in Alice Demarest's vanishing act. I remembered his eyes, and smile, when I'd pointed to Marietta in the Club—and why, in the name of seven devils, had I picked *her* to point at! Since he knew she was interested in Alice's whereabouts, he'd be watching Marietta like a hawk. And I'd let her go home alone—after a date with me!

I glanced at my watch and prayed. It hadn't been long since we'd sepa-

rated, but I'd gone one way and she the other, and it'd been plenty long enough for her to get home. Ten more minutes were added to the odds against me before the cabby braked at the entrance to the dingy stone building, and I was inside at the desk.

"Miss Walsh," I panted, "Marietta Walsh. Has she . . ."

"She came in," the lady said coldly, "ten minutes ago, but . . ."

I heaved a great sigh, grinned. "Tell her, please, that Mr. Butler would like to see her. Just for a minute."

She looked at me as though I smelled definitely bad. "*Butler*, did you say?"

"That's right. It's important."

"It must be!" she countered sourly. "You're the second Mr. Butler in ten minutes. She . . ."

"Second!"

"Just as Miss Walsh arrived, a man followed her in. He said that Mr. Butler wanted to see her. And for your information, sir, our rules forbid . . ."

"Rules, hell!" I exploded. "Did she go with this man?"

"She did."

"Describe him," I ordered. "What'd he look like?"

Her eyebrows went up; the corners of her mouth came down. I swallowed a raging mouthful of more picturesque language and said simply, "Police! Talk, sister, before I run you in."

"He was tall," she gulped, "quite tall and thin. He had on a dark suit. He had dark hair and a moustache, I think. But I remember most distinctly that he was very thin, and tall. Is that . . ."

"That's enough!" I said, and spun toward the door.

Very tall—very thin . . . And another damning finger pointed at Fransiola! Only this time it was two fingers: one at Fransy, and the other at

Chris Wohler. For the man with whom Wohler had sat at the Club, earlier in the evening, was dressed in dark clothes, had dark hair, and even seated he looked very tall and thin.

Dawn was beginning as I raced down the steps to my cab. But there was no mental dawning—no light in my alleged brain.

III

I TOOK one last look around before I closed the door. A grim look, because I had grim cause to wonder, now, whether I'd ever find Alice Demarest—alive. There was blood on her living-room rug. At least I felt sure it was blood.

There'd been no trouble getting in. Her flat was in a ratty apartment house—two rooms, as Marietta had said. Her card was still in the two-by-four vestibule, over her mailbox. I had passkeys that let me in the front door, and opened the door of her apartment.

I found the cocktail shaker, the sandwich fixings moldy and spoiled. I found the vermouth bottle, with maybe a quarter of its contents used. Remember? Alice had bought those things to throw a party for David; a sort of celebration for the first time she'd ever let Dave see her home. And I found the gin bottle—*empty*! It was a fifth, too, not a pint.

All of which suggested some interesting questions.

The first seemed fairly easy: Why hadn't somebody else missed Alice Demarest and come looking for her here? Obviously they hadn't, for nothing seemed to have been touched during the ten days of her unexplained absence. But she had a lease, Marietta had said, and it was the middle of the month. Apparently she was up to date

in her rent, and the landlord wouldn't be around until the first of next month. Meanwhile, nobody gave a hoot where she was.

The second question bothered me, though. It was that *empty* gin bottle!

The vermouth was hardly touched. But some of it had been used, and the shaker smelled of use. Therefore, they'd made some cocktails as per schedule. But had they stopped, and begun drinking straight gin? Had they got stinko—one or both of them—had a fight, maybe, and one of them been badly hurt, or killed? Was it as sordid as that?

That theory didn't chime with Marietta's picture of Alice, or even of David. She'd made them both appear as decent youngsters, in love. Yet here was a fifth of Gordon's Dry Gin—empty. And there was a spot, a blurred stain a foot across, on the living-room rug.

Unmistakably somebody had tried to clean it up. It had been scrubbed and rubbed and spread, but when I wet my handkerchief and rubbed it hard over the stain, it came away tinged faintly with a brownish red. And it wasn't dye, either! That rug was green.

I got a knife from the tiny kitchenette, and scraped up some of the stained nap of the rug. I put it into an envelope I found in Alice's bureau drawer, together with a note to the commercial chemistry laboratory that does such work for the Agency. I asked 'em to analyze it, found a stamp in my wallet.

I closed the apartment door quietly and made my way out unobserved. There was a mailbox at the corner, and I mailed the letter to the lab, hoofed it hurriedly away until I found an early-cruising cab. It was full daylight, now, going on to six A.M. I felt the strain of sleeplessness. My mind was

a whirl of all I'd seen, and heard, and thought: of Cherub Aken's white face, of Fransiola, of the disappearance of Marietta Walsh.

I hated to think about that! I wouldn't let myself think about it until I had something more to go on than I did now. And there was another apartment I wanted a look into: Chris Wohler's. It was ten to one he'd be there, in bed at this hour, and I almost hoped he would be. At least I could club some truth out of him. I could find out the name of the thin man who'd snatched Marietta, and I doubted much if Wohler knew any more than that. Even if Chris were in on it—whatever *it* was—he'd be nothing more than a dirty-errand boy. That's the sort he is.

I GOT his number from a phone book, paid off the cab at his door, another run-down apartment house in a sleazy district. Again my master keys made entrance easy and I stood inside his door in dim light and looked around. Window curtains were drawn; the place had the breathless silence of abandonment. Two minutes later, I knew that Wohler's flat was empty. His bed hadn't been slept in, and a small white envelope with red printing on it caught my eyes. It was torn open, lying on the floor beside the bed.

It was an envelope such as railroads use to enclose tickets, only this one had a picture of a big air transport on it, had lettered across the top APEX AIRTRAVEL CORP. And suddenly I whirled toward the clothes closet, jerked open bureau drawers. But he hadn't taken his clothes!

Chris Wohler was gone—in a plane. Why? Where? Would he be back? Or had he, for some reason, taken a quick powder? So quick that he couldn't even

pack his clothes! Was it because I'd been interested in him, at Fransiola's?

I stood at the foot of his bed and sought an answer until my head swam and my mind reeled. Until . . .

The sudden sound of the door-buzzer was like a physical blow. The shock of it was paralyzing. I froze where I was, the gun in my hand cocked and quivering. And then tension broke with the second insistent summons. Treading softly I reached the entrance door, turned the night latch quietly. I moved to one side, flung it open—and a kid in a brown uniform, with a badge on his cap that said Special Delivery, looked down the barrel of my gun.

His mouth fell open all of two inches. He gulped, stuttered, "Y-your name Wohler, mister?"

I holstered the .45, pulled my mouth down in a hard grin. "Yeah," I told him. "And forget about the gun, buddy. You hear me?"

"S-sure—oh, sure!" he said. "Registered letter for Christopher Wohler. Sign here."

I signed the sheet he thrust at me, signed C. Wohler, and wondered how many years I'd get if anybody caught me opening registered mail. But I knew I was going to open it. The envelope was plain, no return address, no name on it except Wohler's. The postmark was so blurred that it was illegible. And it was a fat, bulky envelope.

Wohler had a kitchen. There was a rusty gas stove and I found a kettle. I ran water into it, lit a burner and put it on. And the fellow who said that a watched pot never boils knew what he was talking about. I smoked half a pack of cigarettes, waiting for that kettle to boil—but finally a whisp of steam curled up from the spout.

I held the sealed flap of the en-

velope over the increasing jet of steam. It didn't take long then for the glue to soften. And when it did, when I got the letter open, carefully, my breath caught in a choked gulp! Inside, wrapped in a sheet of paper, were ten one-thousand-dollar bills! And on the paper, written in ink, in an unsteady hand, was yesterday's date, East Harrington, N. Y., and a note:

MY DEAR WOHLER:

I have decided to do what you suggest. I don't like it, but that seems the only way. Enclosed is the money. You know that I am anxious, and that I am relying on you. Wire me as soon as you can.

DAVID ASHTON, SR.

David!

David — *again!* And — ye gods — *Ashton!* David Ashton, Senior—David Ashe—Donald Ashe. Holy blue hell, what was it all about? I was finding things, finding them fast, and with each new discovery I was going deeper into mental bankruptcy. With each additional clue the mystery deepened, new elements intruded. And none of them seemed to throw any light on the others. But there had to be a key-piece somewhere that would lock all the pieces together into a coherent whole!

With quick jabs of a pencil I noted the numbers of the banknotes, all ten of them. I stuffed them, and Ashton's letter, back into the envelope, wet the glue again and sealed it. It was a fairly neat job. Unless Wohler were suspicious, it might get by. Then I went out, carrying the letter. I closed the door, shoved the envelope under it and hoped that Chris wouldn't wonder too soon who'd signed for it. I thought he wouldn't; thought he'd be too excited about ten grand, all in one chunk, to do any wondering about anything. And I went out into the street and found another cab.

"EAST HARRINGTON, New York," I said. "Round trip. How much?"

The Apex Airtravel Corp. ticket agent, just a kid, told me. Then he grinned engagingly. "Say, what's at East Harrington, mister?" he asked. "You're the third party since early this morning that's bought a round trip to that burg!"

"Must be a convention," I told him, and tried to keep my voice casual. "Why? Don't you make regular stops there?"

"Oh, sure," he said, "but it's more a service stop than anything else. Small place—about fifty thousand population. Not much passenger traffic. But tonight . . ."

"Who were the other two?" I queried idly. "I used to live at East Harrington. Maybe I'd know 'em."

"Fellow named Wohler went out on the one o'clock plane," he said. "At least he phoned for a reservation, and I sent the ticket to him by messenger. And one named Braxton went on the four o'clock."

I nodded absently, kept my eyes averted, told him, "Oh, sure. I remember Chris Wohler. The other fellow—what's he look like?"

The kid was vague. "Tall," he said, "about your height, I guess. And sort of sallow. Dark—you know what I mean?"

"Black eyes?" I said. "Long, straight upper lip?"

"That's the guy—Braxton. I remember his mouth now you mention it. His upper lip *was* long. Know him, too?"

I nodded again, and the kid smiled, gave me my ticket and change from a twenty. "Your plane," he said, "is tuning up on the east-west runway, but it won't take off for twenty minutes. If you want breakfast . . ."

"Thanks," I told him, and made my way to the restaurant-bar in the waiting room.

Braxton!

Braxton, hell!

I sat at the bar and drank three cups of coffee, black, and felt physical relaxation radiating from the pit of my starved stomach. But it brought no mental ease. Wohler had gone to East Harrington to find out, no doubt, what was holding up the ten grand from David Ashton, Senior. And Fransiola had followed him, three hours later. There might be other men in the world, I thought, with a sallow skin and an extra long upper lip, but my hunch was yelling that Braxton was Fransiola. And my hunch added that I was catching up with something, at long last, that would lead somewhere.

I sat staring into my empty cup, seeing nothing, until a voice over a loudspeaker said something about the plane for Buffalo, etcetera, etcetera. He mentioned an east-west runway, and that was my plane.

I swung around on the stool, stepped down, and as I did another voice spoke—but for my ear alone.

"Easy, Butler! Easy does it, and you don't get hurt. I've got a heater in my side pocket. Feel it?"

I did. It prodded my side as I turned slowly—and nearly fainted. The guy who looked down at me from narrowed eyes was six-feet-three, at least. And he was the thinnest man I've ever seen, and he had dark hair and a mustache like a pencil stroke across his lip.

He said, "We're going out the south entrance, Butler, to a green Buick sedan. You'll know it because the right-rear door is open—waiting for you. And if you've got any ideas of a fast one, forget 'em. You might get me,

but you're covered from three sides. Now move, mister!"

I moved.

It was a bluff, of course. He was all alone, but I couldn't know that. And I couldn't do anybody any good, dead—except maybe Fransiola. Besides that, I'm the kind of hero who wants to live as long as I conveniently can. I went peaceably.

IV

THERE was a bad moment before I came back fully. It was like waking from a nightmare, when you lie bathed in sweat, paralyzed with the horror of what you've just escaped, until full consciousness returns. I thought I was blind. I had a sensation of meteoric flight through space, with a buzz-saw and a rivet hammer fighting a duel inside my head. Then recollection returned slowly.

I remembered the green Buick at the south entrance to the Apex airport—remembered the excessively long, thin man who had escorted me thither. I recalled ducking my head to step into the open right-rear door. There was another man already in the rear seat—one I'd never seen before—and as I stooped, he must have sapped me. That explained this great-grandfather of all headaches. But had it blinded me?

No.

Or at least, maybe not.

Feeling returned to my numb body. By turning my head slightly, I could feel the knot in the cloth that was tied over my eyes. I felt the pull of tape on the stubble around my mouth. And the bite of cords at wrists and ankles and knees. And I was on the floor of the green Buick. Then a voice . . .

"He's alive—he just moved his head," came from above me in a rasping tone, but it was relieved, I thought.

And unfamiliar. Not the tall man's deadly drawl. He was still there, though.

He laughed. "So what?"

"So I didn't kill him, anyway!" the other laughed too, nervously.

"Tender hearted, eh?" the thin man jeered. "What's bitin' you, Steve? Goin' soft on us?"

"Damn you, Slim," Steve's voice was shrill, strained, "I don't like it! *You* got nothing t'lose, have you? What's another dick more or less, to you! But I . . ."

"Steve!" Slim's tone was searing; I could almost see those slit-eyes flaming, see the long, yellowish teeth bared in snarling words. "Shut up, you yellow-bellied . . ."

He went on and said just what Steve was. Steve took it, and shut up. And I lay motionless, frozen by what I had heard. "What's another dick—to you!" *Another* dick! So it was Slim, the long, thin man, I'd seen first with Chris Wohler, who had been with Donald Ashe in Room 723. Slim had shot Cherub Aken!

It reacted like a needle in the arm. I forgot my tortured head, forgot to wonder what was going to happen to Bill Butler. And it takes something to make me forget that! But I forgot it now and began to use what were left of my faculties. And the car slid to a halt, its horn sounded.

I didn't know whether I was in New York or New Haven, didn't know how long I'd been out. There was no sound of traffic, only the subdued throb of the motor as the car waited—for what? It hadn't parked; there'd been no pull over to the curb.

Slim's voice intruded again: a savage, muttered question, "What the hell is this . . . ?"

The answer came from the front, the

driver. "Some new gadget they're tryin' out," he growled. "You blow yer horn, an' it— There it is— See?"

Gears whined as he car thudded over railroad tracks, and all at once I knew I was still in New York. Knew the exact spot in New York where I was. I tried to gage the speed of the car as it went on, up a hill. But it's hard to judge how fast you're going, blindfolded. Try it sometime!

THERE was no more talk. Traffic was light and the Buick went on for what seemed like hours. Then it turned left, swung right in a half turn, went left again, and straight on. I was lost, but I had a hunch I could find this route again. After awhile the car swept into a jolting right turn, and stopped.

Slim ordered abruptly, "Untie his feet," and I felt Steve fumbling at my legs. Then, "Come on, Butler—get up and out."

Somebody grabbed my arms on either side. I lurched drunkenly. Standing made the throbbing agony inside my skull throb harder, but I counted: one—two—three strides, and a stumble.

"Four steps up," a voice directed.

Four—and they were stone steps, or concrete. We all stopped at the top and the man on my left beat a soft tattoo on a wooden door, a signal: 1-2-3—1-2-3—1. I added that to my catalog of things to be remembered. Stone steps, wooden door, in some kind of an alley, no doubt. Cobble-stone paved, judging by the feel of it as we'd rode in. Anyway it had to be an alley or driveway of some sort, sheltered from a view of the street, or they'd never have chanced taking me from the car—still bound and gagged—in broad daylight.

I heard a bolt slide back, smelled a

musty dampness. A new voice sounded, flat, metallic.

"You can't bring him here, Slim."

"What d'you mean I can't bring him here!" Slim rapped. "The boss said..."

"The boss phoned," the other stated. "He said... Hey! What the hell...?"

The thin man must have pushed inside. I heard the scuffle at the door, the sound of the other man's backward steps and Slim's cutting voice.

"The boss phoned, did he? Well, I'm gettin' sicka this whole damned thing. I'm goin' to find out about it. Where's your phone?"

"Gonna get tough, eh? Okay, go ahead. It's upstairs."

"Bring Butler, Steve!" Slim said.

Feet were ahead of me, feet behind, and a shoving, steadying hand. I counted thirteen steps up—a very appropriate number—a left turn, and a door opening six paces from the top. Steve shoved me into a room of some sort, stood holding my arm, and I heard the quick, vicious dialing of a telephone.

Nobody talked—or if they did, I didn't hear 'em. There was a moment after I got in when I don't think I'd have heard an earthquake, or a battle. My mind was too full of what my nose told me, and my nose had told me a lot of things in the last few minutes. My nose had been eyes and brain and guide-book, and now it said—that there was a woman in this room. There was the tenuous, faint odor of perfume, or face powder. I wondered if it was one of the girls.

The dull clack of the phone being slammed on its base brought me back. The voice that had let us in spoke sarcastically.

"See, wise-guy? Like I said, huh?"

Slim ignored it. He said, "Come on!" and again I was prodded, dragged,

half-carried back down those stairs and out to the car.

"I don't like it," Steve was muttering, "haulin' this guy around. Some cop's gonna get noseey, or . . ."

"How's this?" I heard Slim's mirthless laugh, a savage, "Maybe this'll fix it . . ." and the back of my head exploded again like a grenade in a burst of green and purple fireworks . . .

I LAY and stared up at a cracked and dingy ceiling. Not gagged, now; just trussed up until my hands were numb and my legs were like dead chunks of wood from the knees down. I was on a greasy, dirt-caked floor in some kind of a garage. Dimly I remembered the car rolling through big double doors, and my being dragged into this room. A sort of office, I judged. There was a scabrous desk, with a telephone on it, and a steel filing cabinet that had a list to port. Slim sat at the desk with a twisted scowl on his face, and stared at nothing.

Steve was there, too: the man who'd slugged me the first time, but who didn't like killing detectives. I studied him for a long time after I'd regained consciousness, before they knew I was awake again. And I decided that it wasn't decency, or any moral scruples against killing that was the basis of Steve's protest. He was just yellow.

Greed was the dominant instinct of the man. It was in his close-set eyes, his weak mouth. There was fear, too: a constant, gnawing fear that revealed itself in the shiftiness of his glance, in his cringing nervousness.

No, I thought, Steve wouldn't be the man for cold-blooded, dispassionate killing. The tall, thin man would! Slim would kill a man with no more compunction than if he were squashing a bug. But Steve was the sort who would

shoot at shadows in a panic. Cornered, Steve would kill blindly, terror-stricken, and then grovel on his knees for mercy.

How long it was before the phone rang, I don't know. I lay there and they simply sat, for a long time. The thin man lit one cigarette after another, his face wreathed in a haze of blue smoke. The bell was a sudden, shrill blast of sound, and they both jumped. Slim swept the phone to his ear, said, "Yeah . . ." and listened, blank-faced. He grunted, "Okay," once; said, "Sure, I got it," and finished as he had begun. "Yeah," he said again. "Right away."

He heaved himself to his astonishing height.

"What is it?" Steve asked. "What're we gonna do now?"

"We're not," Slim rapped. "You're stayin' here," and he pulled a hat down over his eyes, took out a .38 police positive and whirled the cylinder absently. He holstered it, smiled wolfishly. "I'll be back in half an hour. And I don't need to tell you what'll happen if this guy—or the other—gets away. Understand?"

Steve protested, "They ain't gettin' away, Slim. You know I wouldn't let them get away."

"I know you'd better not!" He turned on his heel and strode out. I heard the grind of a starter, muffled by distance, the soft purr of a motor. And a fragment of a sentence burned in my head, stood out like a red neon sign before my eyes: "If this guy—or the other—gets away."

Or the *other* . . .

"Steve!" I said.

He jumped, then, "Whatd'ya want?"

"You're not very smart, are you?" I mocked. "You could clean up on this, Steve, if you played it right."

"Pipe down, detective!" he rasped.

"I know how to play it without any o' your help."

"Okay, Steve," I said, "but there's money in it."

I shut my mouth and my eyes, but I watched him through narrowed lids. He was thinking—wondering. The idea was taking root. He looked at me with shifty calculation in his eyes. He got up and went to another door, opened it and peered inside—closed it and came back to his chair. But he didn't sit down.

He blurted softly, "What d'ya mean?"

"There's half a grand in it for you," I said. "And that's just a starter. All you have to do is turn me loose."

"Where is it?" he asked.

"I've got it," I told him. "It's on me—you don't have to wait. And I'll see that you get protection!"

Steve laughed raucously. "Nuts, detective! You've been frisked. Look!" He fished my wallet from his pocket. There'd been almost a hundred bucks in it. I laughed too.

"You're a sap, Steve. I'm not. I don't carry all my dough in a wallet—for any light-fingered crook to lift. There're five brand new century notes in my left shoe! All folded up and waiting for you, Steve. Just turn me loose, that's all."

AND it was going to work! There was nothing in my left shoe except my left foot, but the smile that crept over his face was all greedy cunning, all caution gone at the mere mention of money. The grin spread as he came toward me. I tried desperately to keep my own smile hopefully trusting, and I must have succeeded. Steve grinned.

"Speakin' of saps . . ." He bent over my feet. And I jack-knifed my legs at

the knees, straightened them with all the force left in me.

Both feet caught him full in the head. He hurtled backward as though he'd been shot out of a gun, hit the desk, catapulted over it and went out of sight behind it with a resounding thud. I struggled up, fighting the blind vertigo that sent me lurching drunkenly down again.

There was no sound for a full minute. I stayed down until the roaring in my head subsided, until I could see again. Then, slowly this time, I teetered onto my bound feet. The steel filing cabinet was a bare four feet distant. I made it in two hops, leaned against it for a moment, then turned my back to it. There was an edge—maybe a foot long—where the steel side-plate had bulged out of the frame. It had a fairly sharp edge.

I sawed the cords off my wrists, rubbed some circulation back into hands that were blue and cold. Ankle and knee cords yielded to a few slashes of the knife I found in Steve's pocket. I found his gun, too, and left him sleeping peacefully while I made for the door through which he had peered.

The fellow on the cot in the other room sat up, when I cut him free, and looked at me. He had two days' beard, blood-shot eyes, dark, rumpled hair. Maybe he was twenty-one or two.

"Mr. David Ashton," I said, and added, "Junior."

He still stared, hardly breathing.

"Alias," I suggested, "Mr. Donald Ashe?"

His breathing quickened. His eyes took on a glassy, desperate gleam.

"Of East Harrington, New York," I finished, and he rose tiredly.

"All right," he said, "you—you've got me, and I'm glad. I'm David Ashton, and I told that detective I was

Donald Ashe because I didn't want my father to know. But I didn't kill him! I killed—her—I guess, but it was an accident. I swear."

"Wait a minute!" I clipped. "You killed who? When? Where?"

"Alice—" his voice broke. "Alice—Demarest. I was drunk—or crazy. I—I don't know which. I tell you I can't remember! Everything's all mixed up, but they told me I'd killed her, and she was there—dead . . ."

"And," I put in eagerly, "they offered to cover it up for you? For a price?"

"For twenty thousand dollars," he said dully. "It was to—to bribe the policeman. I didn't want to. I wanted to give myself up but—it would have killed my father. He's . . ."

"Never mind your father!" I blurted. "Who was the policeman? What's his name?"

Donald Ashton shoved a hand through his rumpled hair. A wild, hysterical light grew in his eyes. He half sobbed, "I don't know. He had a police badge. He said he was a detective. Oh, I know it was wrong, but with Alice—dead—I didn't care much about anything. I just wanted to keep Dad from knowing. He's crippled, and he couldn't come here to find out the truth. I thought I could get the twenty thousand by just telling him I was in trouble, and needed it. Well, why don't you take me to jail? What're you waiting for? Why don't we . . ."

"Hold it, fella!" I said. "Pull yourself together. I think we're getting somewhere, now!" and I whirled toward the other room and the phone.

STEVE was rolling around restlessly when I got there, showing signs of waking up. I put him back to sleep with the butt of his own gun, then dialed the

number of the laboratory to which I'd sent the stained rug-nap I'd taken from Alice Demarest's floor. And it was blood all right, they told me. But while I listened to the chemist talk, a hunch grew into a clamoring certainty. I disconnected, dialed again—police headquarters, this time. I asked for Tom Corcoran, got him.

"Cork," I yelled, "Bill Butler . . ."

"And where the hell've you been!" he rapped back eagerly.

"Unimportant," I said. "Listen, Cork, I want Fransiola and Chris Wohler arrested!"

"Oh," he said. "Y'do, eh? Well, you listen, William! Last I heard there was an order out to pick *you* up!"

I choked a startled, "*Me!*"

"You," he grated. "Wohler's dead—shot through the head. And your prints, m'lad, were all over his flat. Coming down? Or shall I come after you?"

"Get Fransiola, Cork!" I pleaded. "Take my word for it—just this once—that I've got a case against him. I'll . . ."

"*Look out!*"

It came from the door, that yell. David Ashton stood there and pointed, pop-eyed. And in the other door, open six inches, a gun muzzle blossomed with rose-colored flame.

The slug nicked the desk-top as I flung myself to one side. The gun in my hand bucked twice, three times, merged with the steady drum-beat from the door. And all at once it stopped and there was nothing to hear. But the door opened slowly.

My gun steadied, seemed to line itself, to follow the door's inward movement of its own accord. Then it dropped. I watched Slim as he wavered into the office, one hand clawing at his thin chest, the other struggling to raise

his own gun again, to get in one last shot. And he did . . .

It went into the floor at his feet, and he toppled suddenly, full length, and lay still. I saw the red blotch on his shirt-front spread sluggishly, and I heard my own voice, as though somebody else were talking.

"This the man, Ashton, who shot Aken in your hotel room?"

He nodded and his eyes were fixed on the prone figure at his feet in horrified fascination. Then he gasped, "And he's the man who found me—us—that night in Alice's room!"

I looked down again at the creeping, crimson stain. "Through the left lung," I muttered, "but from the front this time! Funny, isn't it, how things turn out?"

"Come on, Ashton!" I finished.

The green Buick was back in the garage. We helped ourselves to it and headed for town.

V

CHERUB AKEN shot—the thin man dead—and now Wohler was dead. Little Marietta Walsh had vanished, and maybe she was dead, too, by now. And yet I thought I saw a plot in which murder hadn't been thought of. A Machiavellian money scheme into which Fate and David Ashton, Jr., had thrown the monkey-wrench of killing. In which one thing had led to another until some very clever thinking and some very delicate planning had turned into a bloody juggernaut.

And speaking of juggernauts, I was handling that Buick like one. I cut across the city toward the spot where I'd located myself so definitely during my blind ride from the Airport. Where the driver had stopped and blown his horn—remember? And he'd said, in answer to Slim's question, "Some new

gadget they're trying out. You blow your horn and it . . ."

It was an adaptation of the photo-electric cell that works on a sound wave instead of a light wave. It was a traffic signal at a bad grade crossing in one of the city's nearer suburbs. It's red all the time, but at the sound of an approaching horn it turns green unless a train is coming. I'd read about it in the paper a month ago, when it was installed, and remembered the location.

Young Dave Ashton sat beside me in a sort of silent daze. Now and then I shot a glance his way. And gradually the stony hopelessness, the trembling hysteria, worked itself out of him. I noticed his furtive glances at me, at the passing streets. He'd begun to think again, to wonder.

He blurted suddenly, "Where're you taking me! You—you're not a cop!"

I admitted it, saw fear creep back into his eyes. Then I told him who I am, how Cherub Aken meant just about the same to me as a brother. Finished with, "You saw me kill the man who shot Aken. You saw Slim do that shooting. But I'm hard to please, Dave, and I'm going to get the man behind it. When I do, I think we'll find that you were framed!"

"Framed," he said weakly; then in a quick gasp, "*Framed!* You mean I—didn't kill her? That . . ."

"Your father's wealthy, isn't he, Dave?" I cut in.

He nodded.

"How wealthy?"

"He's worth—half a million, I guess."

"And you're an only child?"

"Yes."

"Your mother living?"

David Ashton shook his head, then blurted with tragic bitterness, "But I don't understand! Who killed her—

Alice? Why should anyone so—so lovely be—murdered?”

I couldn't tell him what I thought. I could only wait and hope for the best. But whatever happened, I couldn't change it much. Old Omar Khayyam had it right, I decided glumly, when he said, “The moving finger, having writ, moves on . . .” and I couldn't write a happy ending to a murder tale if it wasn't already in the book.

I said, “Dave, tell me what happened that Tuesday night.”

I drove, and he talked—slowly at first, painfully. But the words flowed more readily as he went on, as though he were glad to get it off his mind and pass it on to somebody else.

It was all of what Marietta had told me. David Ashton was a dreamy, romantic, sensitive sort of kid. He must have been on the level, really crazy about this Alice Demarest—for he convinced me. As he told it, he'd been going to art school in the city, and, with plenty of money to spend, it was natural that he should drift around to Fransiola's eventually. He told me how he had met Alice, and how elated he'd been when she said he could take her home that night. You could tell that he never drank much, but he admitted that he let the bars down that night. He said he'd had three Scotch and sodas at the Club and was a little tight when they started from Fransiola's in a cab.

WITH each sentence, the thing was getting clearer. Dave said Alice didn't drink at all, but that she'd made a shaker of Martinis for him. He drank 'em one after another, without realizing what a quantity of liquor he was putting away all at one time. He said he'd got dizzier, that his head began whirling in a way he'd never experienced before. And—

“I—I grabbed her, Mr. Butler,” he said. “I . . .”

“Bill,” I told him, “cut out the mister. I'm Bill Butler, a friend of yours. It'll make it easier for you to spill it all, and I want everything—straight!”

“It's one of the last things I remember—Bill,” he faltered. “I tried to kiss her. But I was really crazy about her, not just out for what I could get, not just—you know what I'm trying to say!”

I said yeah, I knew. He blundered on, his eyes stark, but the flood of words was easing the pent-up tension inside him.

“She broke away from me, Bill. I followed. It was the wrong thing to do. I should have known she didn't want me manhandling her, drunk as I was. But I caught her, and she pushed me away again—and fell. And—and things started going black. I stood over her—and she was lying on the floor, not moving. And that's all I can remember, until I—woke up.”

He stopped and his eyes were straight ahead, the horror in them real and tangible. He wasn't seeing the rush of traffic, the street, the commonplaces of the scene at which his eyes stared. He was seeing Alice Demarest—motionless on the floor at his feet.

“She was still there,” he whispered hoarsely. “Her head was lying in a pool of—blood. She was white as death. Then I heard a sound and I saw him—that tall thin man. He said he was Alice's cousin, said he'd come in and found her—and me, passed out on the floor. He told me he knew I'd been drinking, and that I wouldn't have a chance to—beat the rap, he called it. And then—oh, it's all so mixed up and confused I'll never get it straight, even in my own head. But that man said he was a paroled convict, and we'd both

have to get away from there. He said if I didn't talk, he wouldn't, because if I was arrested he was afraid the cops'd get it out of me that he'd been there too."

I swung the Buick into the home-stretch, the mile-long avenue that led to the railroad crossing with the latest in traffic signals. And young Dave half-sobbed the finish of a story that was confirming every hunch I'd had.

"I didn't want to go and—and just leave her there—like that. But he—the tall man—made me. And the plainclothesman came in just as we reached the door."

I braked the car to a halt beneath the light, while he told me how they'd worked him up to the point where he didn't know black from white. How the thin man had "talked" the "plainclothesman" into agreeing to accept twenty thousand dollars to "forget all about it." And Dave had holed up in the hotel where Aken found him, waiting for the twenty thousand from his father "to get him out of a little jam he'd got himself into."

What a setup. Who'd fall for it except a scared country kid, inexperienced, a sucker for anything. But I believed it, because it checked all along the line with everything else I'd found and figured. I even thought it was blamed clever, because I knew there was more to it than the angle Dave knew.

He told how, finally, he'd called us and got Aken in a belated attempt to find out something more about the thin man, and the "detective." He described how Slim had stepped into the room, after he'd finished telling the Cherub what he'd just told me, and shot him from behind—without warning. They'd gone down the fire-escape—Ashton at gun's point. Slim had

brought him here. And when, on another obvious hunch, I described Chris Wohler, Dave cried out, "That's the man! That's the plainclothesman! But, Bill, why . . ."

"Dave," I said, "you can drive, can't you?"

"Sure . . ."

"Slide over," I directed. "Honk the horn and that light'll change. Then cross the tracks and turn where I tell you to."

I SAT beside him with my eyes shut tightly. I didn't want to see. I didn't want any unfamiliar sight to blur some remembered sound or odor. Because on that former ride I hadn't seen a thing. I'd only heard, and smelled. We rumbled over the tracks, up the hill I remembered.

"Faster," I told him; and then, "that'll do," when I thought we were at about the same speed as before.

We rode on.

"Y—your eyes are closed, Bill!" Dave said.

"I know it. Shut up."

I knew it was a gamble, too—odds on that I'd lose us both, lose precious time and maybe a life or two when Steve reported that we'd both escaped. But I counted on his being too yellow to report. The car thrust onward, smoothly. And then I began to smell the bakery I'd smelled on that previous trip. The delectable odor of fresh bread and pastry was still in the air. I waited until it got stronger, as strong as I'd smelled it before.

"Turn left!" I yelled.

"I can't, Bill. There's no street here. It's half a block further on."

"Then take it," I ordered, "when you come to it."

He swung the car left into the cross street. I held my breath until we ran

over a slight bump—and I knew we were right, so far.

I asked, "Dave, does the street bend, up ahead? Can you see a half-right turn?"

"Yes! It bears right about a block ahead."

Correct again. I had it. I told him to follow his nose, directed a left turn as soon as we'd straightened out from the half-right. And sat up tensely as we rushed on, waiting for my nose to give the next signal.

It came—the unmistakable water-front smell—faintly at first, but ever stronger. And I opened my eyes to utterly unfamiliar territory. But I'd been expecting that. I knew we were near the spot I sought. My eyes darted ahead, searching the solid row of warehouses, dingy stores, a restaurant or two, until I thought we must have passed it. Then I saw an alley entrance on the right.

"Slow!" I told him. We crept past it—and it was cobble-paved. Then, "Park!" and I was out and peering up the dim length of the alley. Halfway in I saw four stone steps leading to a wooden door in the side of a brick building. I came back to the car.

His eyes probed into mine with pathetic hope and eagerness, and I didn't like to meet his eyes just then. I said, "Dave, I think we've reached the end of the rope—somebody's rope. Maybe ours, because if I don't find what I think is here, I won't know where else to look for it. And if we do—well, that might not be so good either."

"What d'you mean, Bill?" he gulped, and I shrugged. I still couldn't tell him what I thought.

I said, "Anyway, I'm going in. If don't come out—soon—call the police. And if . . ."

I turned away. His stricken face was too much for me. His mind had jumped to the all too obvious conclusion, and even when I heard the car door slam, heard his following feet, I didn't turn or try to send him back. A man has a right to do what he thinks is best.

Dave Ashton caught up with me as I went into the alley. He didn't look at me, just said, "Bill, you think Alice was in on the plot to—frame me. You think we're going to find *that* out, here."

We reached the four stone steps, went up together. Dave's voice rose hoarsely, "You're wrong, Bill! Alice didn't know. She couldn't have known. You can't make me believe that, no matter what we find."

"But suppose, Dave, we find . . ."

and then I cut it short and knocked on the door. We'd find what we find, and I couldn't alter that. I beat my knuckles against that wooden door in a remembered signal: 1-2-3—1-2-3—1. We waited.

"Behind me, Dave!" I said, and the door opened.

YOU do things automatically in a pinch. When the going begins to get rough, I've found, something merciful happens inside your head. Your mind turns off, turns over control to something else. Instinct, maybe. Atavistic reactions. The will to live—to get to the other fellow before he gets to you. That's how it was that afternoon.

We barged into the middle of something big. I didn't know it then, didn't reason it so until later, but I know now that Fransiola was alarmed, on the defensive. Pulling in his lines and covering up busily. What had started as a little adventure in applied psychology, as a rather small business deal—to

Fransiola—had turned into a charge of dynamite under his whole scheme of living. That's why he had *three* men in this isolated hideout, instead of the one I'd expected to find. But of course I couldn't know that, then.

The door opened, and what followed was instantaneous, automatic. I saw the face behind the door, heaved inward and almost broke my shoulder. The door was on a chain. The guy behind it let out a yell. I put my gun through the crack, against the chain, and pulled the trigger.

I went in on my face, off balance from the suddenly-released barrier. And Dave followed, tripped over me and sprawled—and lucky for us both we did. My shot had been the signal for a volley. From the top of the stairs, from halfway up, from the end of the dark hallway in which we found ourselves. It was a hornets' nest, a death-trap, but like I said, your mind turns off in a spot like that. You don't think—you just react. You do the things, mechanically, you've trained yourself to do, and do them better, maybe, for not thinking.

I was flat on my belly, facing the man at the hallway's end. My gun-arm was flung that way. I grabbed my right wrist with my left hand, steadied it and squeezed butt and trigger in the even pressure that puts lead where you're looking. The gun jumped and roared. The winking flashes from the dimly-seen gunman ahead stopped winking.

One down!

I remember wondering why the guy on the stairs had waited. The one at the top was gone. It seemed hours since I'd first raised my pistol at the other man, seemed as though they'd all had time to kill me three times over. But it hadn't been more than seconds. The other man's gun was still spitting

orange flame, and he couldn't have reloaded.

My own muzzle arced upward—found him—held on him. But before I could shoot, his gun went silent, empty. He whirled. The racing thud of his feet on the stairs was the only sound as he went up, and vanished. I surged up the steps after him, counted six paces to the left from the top, to a closed door.

Opening that door was scarier business than fighting three guns had been—because my mind was back on the job now. The bravest man in the world is your low-browed moron with no brains at all, with no imagination to supply ambushes behind closed doors, to see hidden traps, concealed menace. I had to make myself turn that knob. I flung back the door suddenly, crouched there with the gun circling the room.

And then I heaved a great sigh and cold sweat broke out all over me. I wanted to sit down somewhere and have a good cry, but the lady who bounded into my arms was—Marietta Walsh. And the other . . .

"Bill!" Marietta gasped. "Bill Butler! I just *knew* you'd find us. And look! It's—it's *Alice*! She was kidnaped, Bill—so was I! But you found us!"

I LOOKED again at the really pretty girl across the room and I was ready to agree with Dave. She couldn't have known. She stood tense as a drawn bow, her dark eyes fixed on mine in a silent question—lips parted, hands clenched. Neither of us spoke. For I'd thought we were going to find Alice Demarest here. I'd thought that was going to be worse—for Dave—than finding her dead might be. Because the laboratory report on the blood-stains I'd found in Alice's flat said it was

beef blood on her floor not human blood. I knew it was a frame from start to finish, with the odds long that she'd been in on it from the start.

Then Alice Demarest spoke one word, "David!" and I spun toward the door. Ye gods, I'd forgotten him. Left him at the bottom of the steps on the floor—maybe hit. I took one stride, and stopped again. David Ashton stood in the doorway, a blue welt on his forehead where he must have hit his head when he fell. But in his eyes . . .

Well, I'd better let it go at that. There was something in his eyes, *and hers*—while I watched them sway toward each other—that reassured me.

Marietta babbled, "She told me all about it, Bill. I—I mean, Mr. Butler."

I grinned wearily, "What's wrong with Bill?" and she blushed, and then smiled.

"N-nothing," she said. "It's—right nice. But, Bill, what's it all about? That same awful thin man who kidnaped me, got into Alice's flat that night. Dave had—passed out—Alice said. Then that man hit her on the head, knocked *her* out! And when she woke up, she was *here*! Bill, what . . ."

Even the empty gin bottle explained itself, now. The gin had been doctored, no doubt, to insure Dave's "passing out"—to guarantee he'd be so fuddled that he couldn't be sure what had happened. And the rest of the gin had been dumped down the drain to hide the fact that it contained a Micky Finn. But there was one more element I wanted light on.

I asked—and then yelled, "Hey, Dave! If you can spare me a minute, what's your father's phone number?"

"Who . . . What . . . ?" he faltered. He didn't even look at me.

"Never mind it," I told him. "Maybe the long-distance operator's not in

love." I picked up the telephone, halted it halfway to my ear.

That hall door was still open and in it was a man with a gun in his hand. And for a paralyzed minute all I could see was the gun. I watched it, powerless in a sort of hypnotic trance, watched it lower slowly until it menaced nobody. Then I raised my eyes to meet—Tom Corcoran's.

"Hello, William," Cork said, "mind if I join in the fun?"

"How . . ." I began weakly, and he grinned and came into the room.

"I heard the shooting," he explained, "over the phone, when you called me. Traced the call—found Slim Keavney dead, and a guy named Steve something just waking up from a belt on the noggin. We—persuaded Steve to give us this address. And I brought a friend of yours along. Bring him in, boys!"

Fransiola came in between two city dicks. He even managed to come in gracefully, with that mocking smile unchanged—except that when he looked at me it faded momentarily, his eyes smoldered. Almost I admired the man's nerve, his copper-riveted self-confidence! Fransiola still thought he was in the clear. He still thought I couldn't make it stick. And maybe I couldn't, but I was willing to try.

"Operator," I said into the phone, "get me David Ashton, Sr., in East Harrington, New York . . ."

VI

I DIDN'T talk much, at first. I let Dave Ashton talk, prompted him now and then as he told his yarn. Then I put Alice Demarest in the witness chair, and between them I got the whole story, just as they'd told it to me in relays. How they'd met, gone to Alice's flat that night. Morning, rather. About

Dave's passing out on three Scotch and sodas and four martinis. How he'd come to and found Alice "dead" with blood all over the floor and the tall, thin man in the room. I told about the laboratory report on the blood-stains, and then Dave swore—from my description—that Chris Wohler was the plainclothesman who'd agreed to forget about Alice Demarest's death for twenty grand.

It was a gripping, romantic yarn the way those two told it, and when they'd finished there was a moment's tense silence before Fransiola laughed unpleasantly:

"All very interesting. Mr. Butler has avenged the shooting of his friend, Aken, and solved a very nice mystery at the same time. So nice that I suspect it never existed! But if he's quite through, Corcoran, I demand the right to see my lawyer!"

Cork shot a startled glance at me. "Bill, is that all you've . . ."

"That's not quite all," I said. "You may recall, Cork, that Chris Wohler was killed this morning, in his flat. And that the police, the last I heard of them, had the idea I may know something about that. And I do!" I paused, caught the sudden flame in Fransiola's eyes. It was gone instantly, but it was all I wanted to see.

I told them, then, about my visit to Wohler's flat, told of finding the Apex ticket envelope, and of tracing Wohler to East Harrington. I knew it was burning Fransy's ears because he'd made only one mistake in the whole deal, he'd gone to East Harrington, too. But I didn't try to prove that. I didn't mention the special delivery, registered letter I'd signed Wohler's name for. I skipped everything else and went on to the end—where I'd phoned Dave's father.

"The whole frame," I said, "depended on speed, and *nobody's* doing any checking up. They figured Dave wouldn't, because they thought he'd be afraid to. When he fooled 'em, and called in Aken, they shot the Cherub. When Marietta tried to help, she was snatched. They got me, too, for a while, and they were all set to collect. But Dave's father—David Ashton, Sr.—required different handling.

"Any man in his right mind would do some investigating, somehow, when he got a letter from his son asking for twenty thousand to buy himself out of some unspecified trouble. Mr. Ashton is crippled, but even an invalid can hire a detective. That's where Wohler came in. Chris Wohler went to see Ashton, said that David Jr. had been in touch with him and told him the whole truth about the 'killing.' He let Ashton know that the twenty thousand was to bribe a police official. But, and here's the master stroke, Wohler advised Ashton *not to pay!* He offered his services, said he believed the whole thing was an extortion scheme and that he'd try to run it down and clear David. That got Wohler into Ashton's confidence and the rest, they thought, was going to be easy!"

I PAUSED to catch my breath, watching Fransiola like a lynx. But he had sense enough not to talk; there was no further sign that he was even listening. His eyes were on the floor, dead-black, expressionless. Tom Corcoran's eyes were calculating slits as he followed the unfolding of the scheme. I went on:

"Ashton did what anybody would have done: he hired Wohler on the spot. Gave him two thousand dollars: one for a retainer, one for expenses. And that was only the beginning of

what they'd planned for him. Wohler went to 'work' . . . and here's the record. I got it from Ashton over the phone ten minutes ago." I tossed Cork the sheet on which I'd noted the cash items that Ashton had paid to Wohler for expenses during the past ten days. They totaled over seven thousand dollars.

"Then," I said, "things began to heat up. In the original plan, real violence hadn't been contemplated. But there was Aken, Miss Walsh, myself. What had started as a systematic milking of Ashton had to be stopped. But the—brain—behind all this wasn't satisfied with a mere seven thousand dollars. He wanted as much as he could get—finally, and all at once. Wanted to let Wohler 'find' Dave and Alice, because he figured that once they were safe—once it became apparent there'd been no murder—it'd be impossible to prove anything. So Wohler told Ashton that he'd found a man who was in on the frame, and who'd spill it—for ten thousand bucks. And Ashton sent the money, in cash, by registered mail . . ." and I got up suddenly, and stood over Fransiola.

I think he realized, then, that the jig was up—that I knew all about the money he'd taken from Wohler. But even then he didn't betray it. His mouth, as he glanced up at me coolly, was a lipless line across his face.

I shot at him, "Fransiola, you killed Wohler! Funny, isn't it, that after all the really big jobs you've pulled, you'd have to burn for killing a worm like him. But that's how it is, Fransy. You followed him to East Harrington, this morning, because you didn't trust him. And when he found out that Ashton had already sent the money, you followed him back to his flat—where Ashton's letter was waiting—and you killed

him there because he'd served your purpose—because your little pin-money scheme had gone wrong and things were too hot for comfort. But . . ."

I've said that you almost had to admire the man. He had internal stuffing as well as brains, and he did what I'd expected him to do. He surged out of his chair suddenly. There was only one man between him and the door. Fransiola rushed the door, had his hand on the knob before Corcoran's gun was out. I hoped he wouldn't miss.

He didn't. His gun jerked, and the room was full of the roar of it, and the smell of gunfire. And then it was quiet as they brought Fransiola back into the room and sat him down again. Blood dripped onto the floor from the neat hole that Cork had drilled through his leg. But he wasn't in any danger of dying from that. It'd be the chair, after due process of law.

"His wallet," I told them. "There might be ten grand in it in thousand dollar bills. The money that Ashton sent to Wohler."

"There is!" Cork snapped, and held it up. I got out the slip of paper on which I'd noted the numbers of the bills, after I'd opened Ashton's letter. I read them off. They checked.

HE OPENED blue eyes and smiled faintly as I stood over him. The Cherub's face was drawn, almost transparently white. Again I felt an invisible hand at my throat, choking. But the operation, they assured me, had been in time, had been successful. It was a question now, they told me, of his strength and constitution.

"I got him, Cherub!" I said.

The smile turned into a wobbly grin, and the nurse bustled me out.

"He'll be all right," she said. "These Irish are hard to kill."

Clue of the Paper Cylinder

A True Vignette

By James W. Booth

*He had no way of knowing
that his fate was wrapped up
in the piece of brown paper*



THE quaint English town of Slough was shocked in the mid-summer of 1910 by the news that little Mrs. Isabella Wilson had been cruelly murdered. That anyone could have been fiendish enough to snuff out the life of the kindly old lady, who everyone in the village knew and respected, seemed preposterous, indeed.

"It cannot possibly be true," people said to one another.

But it was.

Her lifeless body was found on the floor of her unpretentious second-hand clothing store. She had been smothered to death. A pillow was tied tightly across her face; her slender hands were bound fast with a silk scarf, and there were deep, bloody cuts on her head, where the murderer had struck her.

All about the little shop were signs of disorder. Drawers had been jerked open and their contents dumped on the floor. The cupboard had been ransacked. In one corner lay the slain woman's empty pocket book.

It was quickly obvious to the provincial police that the motive of the heinous crime was robbery. But it was not such an easy matter for them to unearth clues to the identity of the slayer. In fact, they found none at all

and, completely baffled, they called upon Scotland Yard for assistance.

To Slough, came Detective Elias Bower, a bulky, retiring sort of a man, who had long since learned that one of the wisest procedures in criminal tracking is to keep one's eyes and ears open and one's mouth closed. It proved a good policy.

He made a seemingly perfunctory examination of Mrs. Wilson's body, but his keen eyes missed nothing. Particularly did he notice a dark blood smear on one of her fingers.

"I'd suggest you examine the finger-nail scrapings," he told the Medical Examiner. "Let me know what you find."

And then, turning to one of the provincial officers, he asked, "How much money was stolen?"

No one knew the amount. Little Mrs. Wilson had been very secretive about her finances.

Bower merely grunted when he heard this, and began making the rounds of the little shop. It was the sort of a grunt

that seemed to indicate that it didn't make much difference anyway.

He found nothing in the murder room of any particular significance to him. But in the hallway his eyes brightened. There a piece of brown paper attracted his attention. It lay on the floor near the wall. The local police had passed it by repeatedly. They did not consider that it had any bearing on the solution of the crime. Its shape, however, intrigued Bower. It was cylindrical in form, and he realized instantly that paper of such shape is frequently used to wrap up coins. He stooped and picked it up.

Examining it closely, he discovered that it contained a number of faint indentations. They were plain enough for him to count them, however. He found that there were nineteen large ones of the same size and two smaller ones of the same size.

He nodded grimly.

"Now I think I know what was stolen," he told himself, as he stowed the paper carefully away.

It was only a guess, he knew. But there was one way of determining how accurate a guess it was. So, he turned it over to Dr. William Wilcox, a scientific detective, who had rendered valuable assistance to Scotland Yard on other occasions.

Then he listened to the report of the Medical Examiner. Human flesh had been found in the fingernail scrapings of the murdered woman.

"I thought as much," he said briefly. "Now we're making headway. The murderer has a scratch on his face

where Mrs. Wilson clawed him when she struggled with him."

AND so it proved. Investigation by the provincial police revealed that William Brooks, a former Slough resident of unsavory reputation and numerous aliases, had been seen in the town on the day Mrs. Wilson was murdered. Bower trailed him to a nearby town. There, when he saw him enter a rooming house, he set down upon him.

Brooks had a fresh scar on his face. He also had a plausible explanation of how he had received it. Bower searched his room. Secreted between the drawers of the bureau, he found an envelope containing nineteen sovereigns and two half-sovereigns. Brooks had a plausible explanation for them, as well.

But when Dr. Wilcox took the witness stand against him all doubt as to whether he should be condemned to the gallows vanished from the jury's mind.

For the laboratory sleuth testified that chemical analysis of the cylindrically-shaped brown paper had revealed traces of gold clinging to it, and that his scientific measurements of the indentations proved unmistakably that it had been wrapped about the same number and the same denomination of coins that Brooks had so carefully hidden away.

And yet had not Bower realized the important significance of the odd-shaped piece of paper and of the dark blood smear on the murdered woman's finger, the crime, that shocked Slough, might possibly never have been solved.

There was a crashing of glass and Tiny King reached for his gun



Little Dynamite

By Richard L. Hobart

Author of "Flannel Cakes," etc.

When Tiny King drew a gun and started shooting, the spirits of Billy the Kid and Jessie James quivered with envy

THERE were two cars parked at the curb and one of them looked like a death car.

"Tiny" King's china-blue eyes narrowed as he gazed at the black sedan. It was a very heavy car and suggested inch-thick bullet-proof glass, steel-shielded gas tank and puncture-proof tires. And the form of Leo Hawker loitering at the curb twenty feet away and close to the entrance to the McDermott Building lent a still more lethal aspect.

The second car was a mauve Dusen-berg roadster. Somehow it seemed familiar. On the door panel were the

initials, "G.H." Tiny King remembered. The car belonged to Gloria Hope, blonde movie star. He wondered if Manuel Ortega, her fiance, was with her.

Tiny King's body, all five feet-five of it, tightened like some small but very strong steel spring. His pink face—that appeared as if it had never felt the harsh touch of a razor—became as stern as its pink-and-white coloring would permit. For Leo Hawker was walking purposely toward him, his plug-ugly face glowering.

Tiny King knew things about Leo Hawker and all of them were bad. Why the burly gunman had not yet been strapped down in the hot seat was a mystery as complete as why Perrigo, Hawker's employer, had also escaped the same fate. Perrigo was the city's numbers king and Hawker his body-guard.

Once Tiny King, in a quite brief engagement by the Acme Agency, had had the pleasure of helping police take Leo Hawker to Headquarters. The gunman got free on a technicality and immediately set out to locate Tiny King. And only Tiny's quick draw had dissuaded Hawker from mayhem and assorted punishments ranging from boot heels to gouging thumbs.

"Hey, punk, I wanna see you!"

Hawker strode forward, heavy face black, and caught Tiny King by the arm. His little eyes glinted with anticipation of the pain he expected to see in Tiny's face when his spatulate fingers clamped down. He was surprised to find the arm under the tailored coat sleeve hard as a chunk of pig iron.

"Yeah?" Tiny King remarked almost pleasantly.

"I owe you one, half-pint," Hawker growled, "an' I been huntin' you." He held Tiny's arm in his huge hand and although his fingers seemed to make no impression on the hard muscles, the ex-detective knew he could not jerk free. Hawker looked up and down the street. It was just nine o'clock in the morning and few pedestrians came along this side street. Suddenly Hawker drew back his arm, heavy fist doubled for a smashing blow.

"*Tsk, tsk,*" Tiny King said. His right foot slammed out in a vicious kick and a shoe, size 6 AAA, caught Hawker squarely on the shin.

Hawker's fist opened and went to his barked shin, as did the hand with which he was holding Tiny's arm. Tiny laughed pleasantly at the way the big man hopped about, his hands cradling his sore shin.

"Sissy," he accused scathingly. "A grown man playing hopscotch!"

He walked into the building. All at once he frowned and went to the build-

ing directory which he studied through narrowed and very bright eyes. But it was the two men at the far end of the hall that claimed his real attention. Both were of the lug type, counterparts of Leo Hawker. One of the men carried a brief case; the other apparently was a musician for he had a long violin case tucked under his arm. Tongue slightly bulging out his left cheek, Tiny King nodded knowingly to himself, strode toward the elevator.

TINY wore a very ingratiating grin on his face as he nodded to the receptionist behind the railing of the Major Detective Agency. She was a brunette, had deep blue eyes, a straight little nose, a firm chin a bit frecklespattered, and lips that reminded Tiny of a rosebud. At the moment, however, the deep blue eyes were angry, the firm chin craggy and the straight little nose a bit tip-tilted. Tiny had always called her Princess—mostly to himself.

"*Scat!*" Jo Cromwell said disdainfully, and busied herself with the switchboard.

"Why be like that?" Tiny King frowned. Then he grinned. "I want to be friendly! After all, I came here on business. All I want is to see Mr. Major. I just want a moment of his time, and—"

Jo Cromwell sighed, but turned her head so he could not see the interest showing in her eyes. "Listen," she said very seriously, "I've told you time and again you can't see Mr. Major! He's told you three times the past ten days he hasn't a job for you as an operative. He said you were too—er—well, you're asking for it. He said you were too young and too—too small to be a private detective. So there!"

Again Tiny King frowned. It was true. Three times had Clee Major seen

him and each time the answer had been an emphatic "No!" But Tiny King *had* to have a job as a private detective. There were many good reasons for it, reasons that meant life or death.

He suddenly had an inspiration. "Princess, will Mr. Major finish talking to Gloria Hope soon?" It was a shot in the dark but the look on Jo Cromwell's face told him that he had scored.

"How'd you know she was—" She caught herself, an angry look on her face. "Spying, eh? And I told you not to call me Princess!"

"No, not spying. Just a detective out of a job who keeps his eyes open," Tiny King said and his face was a bit taut. He leaned forward, his manner very serious and appealing. "I—I don't think Mr. Major really understands what I mean. I will work for nothing if he'll give me the job. It's really a matter of life and death to—to someone I love. All I want is the backing of the Clee Major Detective Agency; it won't cost him a cent to put me to work."

Jo Cromwell leaned forward, face puzzled. "The queer part of it is, Mr. Tiny King, I believe you mean it! I thought I'd heard all the lines, but yours is a new one. You honestly mean to work for nothing just to become an official private shamus?"

Tiny King smiled and disclosed small and very even white teeth. He reached for his pocket and Jo Cromwell gasped as she saw the Police Positive in its spring holster under his left arm. Then she gasped once more, this time out loud. For in the billfold Tiny held before her eyes was a sheaf of fifty and hundred dollar bills at least an inch thick. She shot a startled glance into Tiny King's blue eyes.

"And why, may I ask, does that hun-

dred dollar bill have the pink ribbon tied around it?"

"Why—er—it's the sissy in me, I guess," he said with a grin. Then his face became very intense, boyishly appealing. "That, Princess, is my—my sacrificial money."

"Sacrificial money?"

"Yes. That hundred dollars is dedicated to sacrifice on the altar of—er—well, the time when we will take in the taverns of the town, dance the gavotte and the polka, drink of the wine that is red, eat of the viands—"

"You mean," she interrupted incredulously, "that *that* money is being saved to entertain me! W-W-Why, I—er—" Her face was very red.

"Exactly, Princess, and your yes is all that's needed to—"

The door of Clee Major's private office opened and the owner of the agency stepped into view. He nodded to someone in the office and stood aside as a girl came into the reception room. Tiny King nodded with satisfaction. The girl was Gloria Hope, the famous movie star.

"Ah-h-h-hh!" he said in sheer admiration and was too engrossed to note the quick look thrown at him by Jo Cromwell.

Clee Major had detective written all over him. Short, the bulldog type, he had a red face, shrewd brown eyes, shoulders thick like those of a wrestler. Gloria Hope looked like—well, like Gloria Hope. Myrna Loy, Claudette Colbert and Garbo done up in one neat package. Tiny King was enthralled. He drank in the soft fluffiness of her blonde hair, the fine cameo lines of her face, the firm contours of her body.

Then a man stepped into view. He was Manuel Ortega, Central American movie actor Gloria Hope soon was to marry. Tiny knew the man was a bit

passe at the box office. He was the Valentino type, sleek and rather tall, with flashing eyes of black and patent leather hair. Tiny King wasn't particularly impressed.

The door leading to the hallway dissolved in a smother of glass and splintered woodwork. Two men stood in the opening, the two who had musical inclinations. But the Tommy-guns, Tiny King knew they carried, were cradled in their arms now.

In the next split second of action, Tiny remembered the blank look on Clee Major's face, the utter horror and terror in Gloria Hope's eyes. And there was a bleat of fear from Manuel Ortega as he drove across the room, cringing into a corner.

One of the men raised his Tommy-gun and pointed it at Gloria Hope and Tiny saw fingers whiten as they tugged at the release. The second man gave a cry of surprise as he saw Tiny King. He jerked at his gun. The Tommy-gun moved a bare three inches, then it fell to the floor from lax hands. A .38 in the temple will do that to you. The first man, a snarling surprise and consternation on his face now, paused a fatal tenth of a second. He started to turn toward Tiny King but a .38 slug spun him about in the opposite direction. He turned around twice like a dog chasing its tail, lost momentum, froze, began to wilt, suddenly collapsed like a wet rag.

For long seconds there was a silence as thick as heavy fog. Then Gloria Hope screamed. She slumped against Clee Major, who picked her up and carried her to a lounge in his own office. Ortega still cringed in the corner, face the color of a toad's belly. Tiny King, pink face taut, slowly put up his gun. He looked across the reception room to where Jo Cromwell sat behind the railing. Her face was ashen

and she was swaying back and forth, shoulders weaving. Things had happened too fast.

"You!" Tiny King rasped. "Phone the police! If you faint on me now I—I'll never take you out to dinner!"

Jo Cromwell gaspingly said: "Y-Y-Yes, *sir!*" and plugged a line.

"JUST dynamite!" Clee Major was saying incredulously. "Not a hell of a lot of it but a little dynamite can go a long way. Let me get this straight. Your dad is Major General Isom King, retired, who made a lot of millions in mining after retirement. He's been everywhere, seen everything. You've had an Army background. In China you learned Chinese and a score of dialects, in Japan you studied *ju jitsu* from the guy who coached the royal princes, in Manila it was something else, and on that exploring trip to Inner Tibet you learned about other queer things, and in . . ." Clee Major sighed, gave it up.

"Exactly, Mr. Major," Tiny King said grinningly.

"As I get it, Little Dynamite," the agency owner continued, "you weren't tall enough to crash West Point and you wouldn't consider the Navy if they turned it over to you to run. The General was pretty disappointed when your size kept you out of the Point. He thinks you're too little to do much good in the world. But you decided to become a private shamus to prove you could amount to something. You were with the Acme Agency until it folded. The General now is flat on his back after a stroke. Excitement and danger have been the breath of life to him for damn near fifty years. In other words, he has to have them almost daily to keep alive. You've never lied to him, can't make up fiction and tell it for the

truth. You have to *do* the stunts you tell him about. That it?"

"Yes, sir. I've never lied to the General and even if I did he wouldn't let me get away with it. You—you don't know him, sir. He's—he's pretty fierce at times, even now when all he can do is talk. I tell you, Mr. Major, I've *got* to do some exciting things to keep the General alive! It's the only way I can repay him for his disappointment. I owe it to him because I can't have an Army career and—I love him. If doing dangerous things will keep him alive then I've got to do them. Of course," his grin was wide, "I get a kick out of 'em too! But that's why I've been up here so many times for a job. The General would rather see me get killed *doing something* than live to be a hundred floating around living sanely! I mean to keep the General alive for many years, sir." Tiny King's face was very intense, very determined and sincere.

"Well, Little Dynamite," Clee Major's use of the new name was with the utmost casualness but his face was grim, "you've made a hell of a nice start! Where'd you learn to crack down with a gat?"

"I had the best pistol instructors in the Army, sir. I've beaten several of the champs at it. I usually can hit where I can see." His grin was wry. "I should've winged those two mugs instead of blasting 'em. Now we can't find out who they worked for. Guess I got excited."

"Yeah, no doubt." Clee Major's words were dry as he thought of two bullets centering the temples of the dead men.

"Had a hunch something was up when I came in this morning," Tiny King said. "I'd read in the morning paper that Gloria Hope had been

threatened. Then when I reached the door downstairs I saw Leo Hawker and a sedan I've seen him drive around town. Gloria Hope's Dusenbergs was there too." Tiny told of his encounter with Hawker and the two men in the hallway. "I thought Gloria might be here as this is the only detective agency in the building. After I got talking to the Princess I momentarily forgot about everything. The—the Princess does that to me." His smile was very soft and reflective.

"Princess?" Clee Major's face was puzzled. Then he grinned. "Jo, eh?" He sighed. "She'll be the death of me yet! Happens I'm her uncle and guardian. She's always trying to get me to send her out as the blonde lure in some case." He sighed again.

"That's what she is in my case," Tiny murmured under his breath.

"Well, let's get back to Gloria Hope," Clee Major said. "Incidentally, Little Dynamite, you're on the payroll. I don't have to tell you how much I appreciate what you did. You're hunting excitement for the General's sake. All right, I'll guarantee plenty! We get screwy cases at times, like this one. Yesterday morning Gloria Hope got a phone call at her apartment telling her to join the Moving Picture Actors' Protective Association; dues just a grand a month. A phony, of course.

"Gloria gets sore and tells the guy to go to hell. He threatens her with something worse than a bullet—to an actress. Acid. He says that unless she pays off he'll use sulphuric acid on her face. Gloria tells the police. Late last night, coming from a Broadway preview, somebody throws a vial of acid at her but misses. The stuff eats a hole in the upholstery of the sedan. Ortega, her trained Airedale, is with her at the time. She doesn't call the police again

because she's too scared by then. She waits until this morning and comes here, wanting a nice bodyguard." He grinned. "You're elected!"

"Hawker being in it ties up his boss, Perrigo, right to the hilt." Tiny King remarked thoughtfully.

Clee Major nodded. "Looks like it although I can't see Perrigo doing this acid throwing. I gave him credit for being too smart for the Tommy-gun stuff, too. He specialized in the numbers racket but maybe he's branching out. But you'll have to watch that girl!"

"I can imagine worse things," Tiny grinned as he got to his feet. "I know where Perrigo hangs out so'll take a turn down that way before I report to Gloria. Police with her now?"

"Yeah. She wants you to get to her apartment at four-thirty. She's giving a cocktail party starting at five. It's a publicity stunt framed by her studio. But it'd be a good time for the guys gunning for her to break out in a rash. Better wear your tea things." The agency owner grinned, then quickly sobered. "And if you go to see Perrigo watch the step! That baby eats ten-penny nails for cereal. He fancies himself a good pistol shot. He's always practicing on that private target range of his on the roof of the Whalan Hotel."

Tiny promised caution and walked out into the reception room. Jo Cromwell was at her switchboard and flashed him a look. Again she glanced away so he wouldn't see the admiration in her eyes.

"Can't talk long, Princess, now I'm a working man again," Tiny said.

"So I gathered," she said, frowning a bit. Suddenly her face showed worry. She reached out, caught his coat sleeve. "Listen, Little Dynamite," she said

softly, "it—it's terrible—people being killed. Even if they were trying to—to shoot Gloria Hope and Uncle Clee. But there's something terrible going to happen. I know it! You must be careful. I know you're working here now. Somebody'll have it in for you, may try to k-kill you because of what happened a while ago."

"Don't you worry, Princess," Tiny said softly. He patted her hand and his china-blue eyes gleamed when she did not jerk it away. "I'll be carefull, won't let anything happen while I'm with Gloria—"

"You're going to be her bodyguard?" Jo Cromwell frowned and a look of deep concern made her eyes narrow. "Oh, Tiny, I don't like it! They may try to—to—"

"Ah, so you *do* worry about me!" There was an eager light in his eyes as he faced her.

"Silly," Jo Cromwell said sharply. "Naturally we don't like to have our operatives shot up and—and—"

"Certainly not, Princess," Tiny King grinned. He turned toward the door, said over his shoulder: "I'll be seeing you. Save that date for me."

OTIE PERRIGO had the makings of a big business man in him but was content to lord it over the numbers racket of the city. Not that the numbers racket was small fry. It paid Perrigo somewhere in the neighborhood of fifty grand a year. Maybe, Tiny King told himself, it was pretty big business after all.

Perrigo was not married. A man with his money and changeable tastes toward women didn't have to be married. He had a penthouse apartment atop the Whalan Hotel, a fleet of high-powered cars and among them, Tiny knew, was a certain black sedan. It all

tied up pretty well. That Perrigo was branching out seemed certain.

That he now was muscling into the protection racket and hitting at the higher brackets of income, rather than terrorizing small shopkeepers, told something of the man's genius. Fewer prospects but a larger pay-off. And with an acid threat rather than bullets, it hit at the payee through a most susceptible source of fear: loss of beauty.

Tiny King got off the elevator at the top floor of the Whelan Hotel, walked up the remaining flight of stairs to the roof. He entered a small reception room, pushed a bell. His small white fingers tapped experimentally on the door. He grinned. What appeared to be mahogany really was cleverly painted steel.

The door opened four inches. It couldn't open farther for it was chained. Tiny King saw an eye and a slice of face in the crack. He nodded at it, said: "I'd like to see Mr. Otie Perrigo."

"What for?" the slice of face asked.

"Important business," Tiny said seriously, "having to do with—Tommy-guns."

"Say-y-y!" The slice of face looked surprised. "I know you!" There was the noise of a chain being unfastened and the door swung inward. The slice of face became Otie Perrigo, a slight grin on his dark features. Perrigo said: "Come in."

"Thanks," Tiny nodded, and stepped through the doorway.

"You're the little squirt who pulled Leo Hawker in three months ago, aren't you? Jeeze, a little runt like you!" There was unmistakable awe in Perrigo's face.

The numbers chief was large, weighed all of two hundred pounds. His heavy jowls quivered when he

laughed but Tiny noticed there wasn't a lot of laughter in his cold eyes. Perrigo waved a heavily fleshed hand. "Come in. Let's see, it's King, isn't it? Tiny King, the guy with the Billy the Kid draw?" His face lost its look of merriment, became stiff as if it had suddenly jelled. "What you want?" he repeated.

"To talk about machine guns," Tiny King repeated.

"Yeah?" Perrigo said softly. Then: "All right, out with it."

Tiny King frowned, his china-blue eyes riveted on Perrigo's coat pocket. His tongue made a slight bulge to his left cheek, a habit of his when he was studying. He looked up, asked: "Do you always have a gat on you when you come to the door to receive visitors?"

Perrigo's face slowly quivered into a smile. "Oh, this!" he said with a wide grin. His pudgy hand went to his coat pocket, pulled out a long-barreled gun. "Been shooting at a target. This is a Colt's .22, Woodsman model. I'm pretty good with it." His face showed interest. "Say, kid, can you shoot a gun that'll stand up with the draw Hawker told me about?" There was an expectant look on his fat face.

Again the tongue went to Tiny's left cheek. His eyes became very bright all at once but it was a hard and brittle brightness.

"I once had a gun just like this one, Perrigo. Got a target?"

Perrigo was aflutter with eagerness. "Sure, Tiny, out on the side roof. They can't hear the sound of the shots up here. In fact," he turned and eyed Tiny King gravely, "it's just like being in a sound-proofed room. This is the highest building for blocks around and I get a lot of privacy. Nice, eh?"

"Oh, very," Tiny agreed, china-blue

eyes glazed. He followed Perrigo into a large library, through a French door onto the roof. The numbers king had done himself up nicely. Real grass grew in shallow boxes on the roof and scattered about were large potted evergreens, vines and a hedge with growing flowers at its base.

They turned a corner and Tiny grinned. Fifty feet in front of him was a large square of sheet iron with flanges on all four sides so there would be no possibility of a bullet ricocheting off into space.

On a small table nearby was a second Woodsman model Colt's automatic, paper targets and a dozen boxes of cartridges, .22 long rifle.

"Lemme show you, kid," Perrigo said. His fat face beamed with pleasure as he leveled the gun in his hand. He turned so his right side was toward the target, brought down his gun arm. He shot the ten bullets as fast as he could squeeze the trigger. Pigeons flew in alarmed circles at the crack of the shots. Perrigo said: "Come on, kid," and started for the target.

Tiny followed. It was pretty good shooting, all right. All ten of the shots could be covered by a man's two hands, but only one of the bullets centered the bull's-eye.

"Not bad, eh, kid?" Perrigo boasted, dark little eyes bright.

"Very, very good," Tiny said gravely. He loaded the magazine of the automatic, hefted the gun for a moment in his small hand. He had done a great deal of target work with this particular type automatic. It fitted nicely into his hand, was of a weight and balance that gave him confidence. Gun resting on his hip Western fashion, Tiny King pulled trigger five times, laid the automatic down on the table. He walked forward, Perrigo at his heels.

"Just want to see if I've got the range, Perrigo."

Tiny and the numbers racketeer inspected the target. Perrigo was frowning as he looked at the three holes in the center of the bull's-eye. "Must've missed with two of the shots, Tiny," he said. "Better not depend on that Western style of shooting too much. Take me, for instance. I always aim—uh—uh—I'll be damned!"

Tiny King's gaze followed Perrigo's blunt forefinger to where it rested on the target. Two of the bullet holes showed a faint widening of the circle at the top, indicating that twice had the lead entered almost in the identical place as the two preceding shots. All five of the shots had centered the bull's-eye.

TINY reloaded the magazine, turned to Perrigo. "Here's some good old Army shooting, Perrigo." There was quiet excitement showing on his pink-and-white face as he picked up both guns. He came down with the gun in his right hand, pressed trigger. Then the left. He alternated—very fast—and the crack of the shots sounded like the roll of a small machine gun. The center of the target disappeared in a shower of confetti snow.

"By the way, Perrigo," Tiny said softly as they walked to the target. "I saw that black sedan of yours up at the McDermott Building this morning. Also Leo Hawker. Don't know why he'd be up there, do you?"

"I wouldn't know, Tiny." He looked at the target. "Hell, this *is* shooting, kid! You gotta teach me some tricks. But about Hawker. Why?"

"Oh, nothing," Tiny said casually, walking back to the table. "A few minutes after I saw Hawker there were two lugs tried to Tommy-gun Gloria

Hope, the movie star, and Clee Major. It's a protection racket gag. They came right into Major's office. Hear about it?"

"No." Perrigo's face was a bit white and strained. "What happened then, Tiny?"

"Nothing much." *Bang-bang-bang.* "I got in a bit of pistol practice with my .38, that's all." *Bang-bang-bang.* "Managed to shoot both the lugs before they fired a shot." *Bang-bang.* "Seeing Leo Hawker out in the street made me think he was there with the two chopper boys I rubbed out. Thought maybe they were your men, Perrigo." *Bang-bang.* His face was taut as he jammed a fresh magazine into the automatic.

Perrigo slowly shook his head, eyes riveted to the center of the bull's-eye where Tiny's bullets smacked without a single one showing out of line. "Believe me, Tiny," he said slowly, "if I *did* have anything to do with it and found out you were on the case I—I'd drag my boys off mighty quick. I'm not sending any of 'em to a place I wouldn't go myself, and I'm not hunting up trouble where you and a gun are concerned. Anyway," his grin was bleak, "I stick to my own racket."

"I just wanted to know, Perrigo," Tiny said naively. He looked around the roof and his eyes were narrowed when he faced Perrigo once more. His face became taut and his left cheek quivered under the very thoughtful prodding of his tongue. "One more trick, Perrigo. I've a full magazine here." He took the gun, turned his back to the target. "I'm turning around ten times without stopping. As I face the target each time I fire a shot. Count the bull's-eyes!"

Tiny King's slight body started to turn, the rate increasing after the first two shots. He finished spinning, face

toward the target again. "Count 'em, Perrigo," he snapped.

Perrigo, face strangely working, walked forward and counted the bullet holes in the target. He looked up. "I count only nine, kid. Hope you didn't miss the target completely on one shot because—"

"No," Tiny King snapped. "I didn't miss because I just shot nine times! I'm saving this last one for—*Leo Hawker!*" He wheeled and faced one of the large potted evergreens across the roof. "Come out, Hawker!" he cried. "I saw you sneak in! You've been there long enough to see what I can do with a gat. Come out or I'll blast you out!"

Perrigo gasped. In another moment a man stepped from behind the cover of an evergreen. It was Leo Hawker, his face white and strained. He held his hands out from his side, walked slowly toward Tiny King. He was limping a bit.

Tiny's small hands searched him, found a Police Positive in a shoulder holster. He threw it across the roof. There was a whirr of wings from above as startled pigeons flew across the rooftop. Tiny jerked up his gun, squeezed trigger. One of the pigeons stopped as if it had flown into a brick wall. Feathers spouted. The bird fell like a plummet to the edge of the roof, bounced off into space.

"That *could* have happened to you, Hawker," Tiny King said softly. "I can't prove anything on you—yet. I don't know if you had anything to do with those boys with the machine guns or not. But maybe you know what happened. Anyway, if you've ideas about the protection racket just keep away from Gloria Hope. She's a client of mine." Tiny King placed the automatic on the table, walked toward the elevator.

On the ground floor Tiny sought out a telephone booth, looked up a number and deposited a nickel. A minute later he heard Gloria Hope's throaty contralto on the wire.

"Miss Hope, this is Tiny King from the Major Agency. I've been making some investigations and think I've arranged things. You have nothing to worry about now. Just go on and have your cocktail party this afternoon. No need of me showing up at all, but I'll drop by tomorrow and explain everything. G'by."

Left cheek going in and out under the urgings of Tiny's busy tongue, he waved to a taxi and clambered in. There was a thoughtful smile on his pink-and-white face as he settled back in the seat.

GLORIA HOPE was beautiful. She also was very gracious, the perfect hostess. She was dressed in a black satin afternoon gown that brought out the curves of her body, played up her strong points and so bedazzled that the very few rather ordinary features were entirely overlooked.

The huge living room in the apartment was a bower of flowers and expensive fittings. Around the walls were small tables on which dregs of a dozen different concoctions in liquors reposed in phalanxes of clouded, finger-smudged glasses. The party was a complete success and Super-Star Pictures—who were signing the bill to the tune of over five thousand dollars—were pleased. It meant reams of publicity but, better still, a soft spot in the hearts of scores of exhibitors, press and publicity agents, movie critics and a large number of worthwhile folk.

Gloria Hope bowed her prettiest over the hand of a woman in tortoise shell glasses—who was about the foremost

movie critic in town but who looked like a realist painting—and ushered her out. She turned to Manuel Ortega, the future Mr. Gloria Hope.

"Manny, it was wonderful, wasn't it? So many important people! Oh!" she was very enthusiastic. "I had a talk with Charles Preston, the famous playwright. He promises to do a play especially for me! Isn't that perfectly marvelous?"

"Yes, Gloria, really wonderful. Preston is so well known now he can pick people for whom to write plays. That he's chosen you is a very great compliment, I think." He yawned delicately.

"I'm so tired too, Manny," she said. She looked across at the littered room. "Please dismiss all the servants. Tell them they can clean up this mess after I leave for dinner. I'll rest a bit; mustn't get too tired." She smiled.

"I understand, dear. I'd better go back to my hotel and rest some myself. We'll have dinner together, as usual, and then go to that night club where you have to put in an appearance. I'll be back for you about eight-thirty."

Manuel Ortega kissed her, rather perfunctorily, got his hat, coat and stick. He hesitated at the door. "Where is Marie, dear?"

"She won't be back until seven-thirty. By that time I'll be rested and she can help me dress. You know," she became thoughtful, "I'm really disappointed that Tiny King—who shot those terrible men this morning—didn't come to the party. He's wonderfully appealing. And a very brave man, too." She sighed, a far-away look in her eyes. "I was afraid something might happen at the party, but after Tiny phoned and told me not to worry I was all right. He must have found the man responsible and put him in jail."

"No doubt. But, dear, he's only a de-

tective. You can't—er—be seen in a social way with people like that!"

"I make my own society, Manny," she retorted rather stiffly. Ortega bored her at times. She smiled at him. "Eight-thirty."

Gloria Hope walked back to her bedroom, managed to skin out of the black satin dress. She donned a negligee, chose a cigarette and sank back on a chaise-longue. She was tired. She dozed off, awoke with a sudden start of terror.

"Don't move!"

The snarling command came from one of two masked men standing inside the doorway. Both the masked men had guns, but one of them carried something in his left hand that looked like a big yellow glass marble. He handled it very carefully.

"W-What do you want?" Gloria Hope faltered, terror showing on her face. Her eyes were distended, wild. Her trembling lips suddenly spread as she opened her mouth to scream.

"If you scream you get—*this!*" one of the masked men hissed at her. He pointed to the glass ball in the hand of the other man. "It's acid—sulphuric! The glass is very thin. You've an idea what that acid will do to your face. Better shut up and listen."

"A-A-All right. What do you w-want?"

"Just this," the masked man snapped, voice low and menacing. "You got a phone call about the Protective Association. You chose to call the police instead of obeying orders. You first were offered protection for a thousand dollars a month. Because you called in the police and the detective agency it now will cost you fifteen hundred. It's that or . . ." He shrugged, pointed again to the glass ball of acid.

"I—I won't pay it!"

Gloria Hope gasped out the words. Petted, a spoiled darling of the screen, she had a sudden stubborn nerve. She sat up on the chaise-longue, a sort of terrified bravery making her face hard, chin craggy.

The man with the glass ball stepped forward, drew back his hand. He looked at the other masked man for instructions.

"Give it to her!" the masked man snarled.

"*I wouldn't!*"

Tiny King stepped from behind a highback chair, his Police Positive out-thrust! His pink-and-white face was taut, and excitement made his china-blue eyes seem glazed, recklessly cruel.

"Drop those guns!" Tiny commanded, and there was a cutting quality to his voice that made it snap like a whiplash.

"Damn you!"

The man with the glass ball jerked back his arm. Without seeming to move Tiny pulled trigger. There was a scream, a shrill shriek of agony and deadly fear. The glass ball dissolved in the man's hand. The contents of the ball, sulphuric acid, now throwing up a yellow fog of hellish vapor, cascaded back and into the face of the man behind.

Screaming out curses, the man who had had the ball shot from his hand jerked up his gun.

All Tiny King said was: "*Tsk, tsk!*"

He triggered his gun once more and there was a strangled scream from the masked man. He fell back, slammed to the floor, a little blue hole in the center of his temple.

Moaning, sobbing, the masked man groveled under the terrible bite of the sulphuric acid that ate greedily into his features. Tiny King stepped toward him and tore the mask from the sob-

bing, screaming man at his feet, but he wasn't surprised.

Manuel Ortega.

"I think you should see his face for just a second, ma'am," Tiny King said gently.

Gloria Hope looked, turned away with a shudder of horror, fell across the chaise-longue in a dead faint.

Tiny King sighed, looked at Manuel Ortega and then at the other masked man. The mask was still on his face. Tiny nodded to himself, stooped and lifted the square of black cloth and disclosed the rugged face of Leo Hawker. He said softly: "I told you to keep away from my clients!"

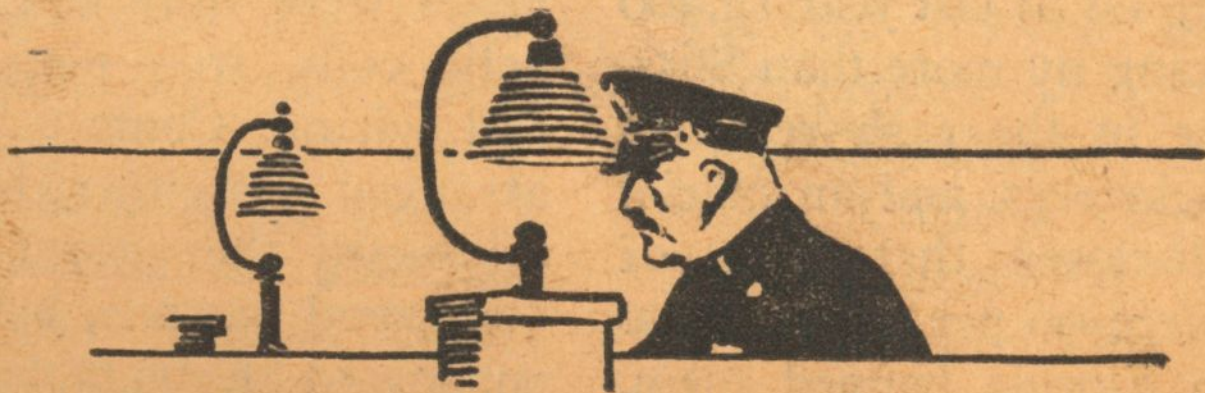
TINY KING dialed the number of Clee Major's house in Yonkers. He grinned when he heard his chief's gruff "Hello."

"Sorry to bother you, sir. Just wanted to report that everything is under control. Perrigo? No, sir. He really didn't know a thing about any of it. It was just Hawker trying to pick up some extra money. Ortega told me that. I told Perrigo what happened to Hawker and he says it's good riddance of bad rubbish. No, sir, Ortega won't die. But he won't act in the movies any more! Yes, I phoned Gloria not to worry and knew Ortega would

be listening in on the line. That put him off guard and I hid in her bedroom until he and Hawker showed up after the party. He had changed clothes and made his voice sound different when he talked to Gloria.

"Ortega was the one who hired the two chopper men I potted this morning. He never loved Gloria, was using her as a front for his new racket. He staged the first acid throwing and the machine gun business in your office to scare her. She wasn't to be harmed, but this last scene in her bedroom was the real McCoy.

"By the way, sir, wish you'd inform the Princess I'll be by for her at ten o'clock tonight. You might suggest it wouldn't pay to turn me down as I just got an offer to go to Hollywood as bodyguard to a gorgeous blonde. Tell the Princess I'm throwing that pink ribbon away. She'll understand. Might also advise her to put on some shoes that won't hurt her feet as we'll have a try at the gavotte and the polka. And it'll be all right if I'm a bit late in the morning? . . . Gee, *thanks!* . . . Sorry, sir, I can't get there sooner tonight. You—you see," Tiny King's voice became very soft and tender, his china-blue eyes a bit blurred, "I've first got to tell the General a little bedtime story!"





They're Swindling You!

Futile Gambling

By

Frank Wrentmore

This is the one-hundred-and-twenty-fourth of a series of articles exposing business rackets that cost you billions of dollars every year! Mr. Wrentmore is an authority on swindles and frauds, well known to legal, financial and commercial associations.—The Editor.

THE average man—and I suppose that includes seventy-five per cent of my readers—welcomes at least an occasional opportunity to risk some money in a game of chance. So do I. Where chance is the mistress, not much harm may be done, but when gambling becomes an obsession and the player disregards all danger signals he may wind up by being forced to take it on the lam in an effort to escape some bonding company's detectives.

Now this isn't going to be a lecture on morals, but merely the setting down of some recent happenings in an effort to prove how frequently the element of chance is absent. The sure-thing boys on the other side of the table don't believe in chance.

Until October 1st of last year 12,500 slot machines rang up more than \$65,000,000 a year in the cash registers of Florida's racketeers, and an official examination disclosed that most of the machines were 90 per cent against the player! So Florida banned them, legally, and they are now in Cuba where a presidential decree admitted them. The Cubans are welcome to that ten

per cent chance of winning the game.

You can't tell when, or which game, is fair. For three years the patrons of "The Pines" at Centerport, Long Island, suspected that the roulette wheel in the house was crooked; the dice were okay. Police found it impossible to raid the place because the proprietors of the place knew all the local cops by sight and wouldn't admit them. But there was a change made in the State Police and a new man came to the Bayshore barracks. His first Saturday night on the job found him togged out in a Tuxedo and inside "The Pines." A signal from a pocket flashlight brought the raiders and when they examined the paraphernalia in the house they found the roulette wheel to be absolutely straight, but all the dice were fixed. And the suckers had shunned the roulette for the dice!

In a Westchester (N. Y.) raid it was different. Both roulette and dice tables were fully equipped with magnetic coils, iron plates, dry batteries and wiring. Contact buttons were so arranged that either the croupier (who conducted the game) or the "shills" (supposed patrons, but actually in the employ of the gamblers and stationed at certain corners of the tables) could control every move of the dice and every turn of the wheel. So you see, it

doesn't do much good to keep your eye on the croupier when the "shills" are actually doing the dirty work.

Some of this electrical equipment is so powerful that if the dice are lying on the table above the magnet when the full current is turned on the dice will almost leap off the table! Now what are you going to do in a case like that?

Not so long ago the New York police intercepted a flock of lottery tickets in process of distribution—about a million of them. They also acquired a list of the winners in a previous "draw" of the lottery. When they investigated, they found all the winners—buried in New England cemeteries!

In the early days of policy—the "numbers" game—the winning combination was based on three digits of published bank clearing totals, stock exchange tradings or Federal Treasury reports. Odds were 600 to 1—the right odds should be 1,000 to 1—but a sure 40 per cent isn't enough for the numbers boys, so, when many of the newspapers discontinued publishing the winning combinations they switched to a more complicated system based on pari-mutuel odds. Now it is comparatively simple for them to control the winning number—to a certain degree—by placing big bets and causing a lightly played number to win. In a game where the New York City gross alone amounted to \$100,000,000 a year, according to "Dixie" Davis, who is reported to have succeeded Dutch Schultz—such bets amount to almost nothing when compared to a day's profits. Not only that, they also cash some of these bets, which, of course, are considered an illegitimate business expense. It is peculiar, but true, that the day the Dutchman was bumped off in Newark in 1935 the winning com-

bination in his Harlem numbers pool was 000.

The recently completed football season, short as it was, found the number racket boys operating football pools, characterized by *Variety*, a theatrical publication, as "the sweetest easy money racket along Broadway." With a "take" of \$1,500,000 a week, the cards containing the team pairings were for sale in practically every office building. As usual, the operators shortened the natural odds very materially, and by way of illustration *Variety* published the proper odds and the pay-off on a 50-cent bet as follows:

	<i>Pool</i>	<i>Pool</i>	<i>Proper</i>	<i>Proper</i>
<i>Conditions</i>	<i>Odds</i>	<i>Pay-off</i>	<i>Odds</i>	<i>Pay-off</i>
9 of 9	75-1	\$37.50	512-1	\$256.
8 of 8	50-1	25.00	256-1	128.
7 of 7	30-1	15.00	128-1	64.
6 of 6	18-1	9.00	64-1	32.
5 of 5	12-1	6.00	32-1	16.

But suppose you get rooked? What happens? Three Grand Rapids, Michigan men went to the Grand Haven county fair last fall. One of the crooked wheels took them for \$135. Looking up Sheriff Frank Van Etta, they laid their collective heads on his broad shoulders and wept out the whole sad story. The Sheriff listened very sympathetically until he had every last detail—and then arrested the three for violating the State gambling law by patronizing a gaming device. They paid their fines in silence.

But the outlook isn't so black. Nevada proposes to repeal that portion of its Constitution which prohibits lotteries. Citizens may vote on the proposition next year. If the Constitution is amended, legislation will be introduced to create a state lottery monopoly to produce a million dollars a month for division between the state and the lucky ticket holders.

Solving Cipher Secrets

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has



M. E. OHAYER
"Sunyam"

used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first cryptogram each week is the easiest.

THE curtains now raise on the 109th Semi-Annual Convention of *The National Puzzlers' League, Inc.*, opening on February 12 for a two-day stand in Cincinnati, Ohio! All sections of the country will be represented at this twice-a-year puzzle festival. And all puzzlers living nearby are requested to scan their newspapers for additional details and to attend the meeting. They will find a hearty welcome and a good time!

A special train over the B. & O., from New York to Cincinnati, will carry puzzlers from the eastern seaboard, picking up others along the route. Among these will be Arty Ess (Rufus T. Strohm), Scranton, Pa., who for fifteen years has been editor and publisher of *The Enigma*, official magazine of the N. P. L. All in all, the convention promises to be one of unusual interest. To the assembled puzzlers the editor of this department extends greetings, and best wishes for a successful meet!

No. X-49. Anagrams. By †Deucalien.

1. BEST O' FARE
2. PAY ERRS
3. AIR CHARM
4. REMIT SIN
5. FINE FRIGHT

According to "Real Puzzlers," N. P. L. textbook, an anagram is "a rearrangement of the letters of a word or phrase to form other words or phrases to have the same meaning as the original; as THEY SEE for THE EYES; etc." This definition and example will help you with †Deucalien's No. X-49, where there are five anagrams for you to solve. Thus, in the first anagram, shuffle the letters in BEST O' FARE so that they will spell another word or

phrase of similar meaning. Do likewise with the other four anagrams. Answers to No. X-49 will be published in two weeks. Can you get all five?

This week's ciphers, which, by the way, are all N. P. L. contributions, start off with Biff's problem in division. The key-phrase runs: 012345 6789. For an opening, note D — B = D. In †Hoodwink's cryptogram, guess the short words I and IVL, also BPM and BPQA, by comparison. Then supply the missing letters in MQOPBP, LMNQVQBM, and AQOVQNQML. †Cryptanalyst's quotation provides LYRL, LYRE, and RE, also OYUE, RHU, and UNUH, for entry. Next, ZEEFSUELCP and LYUP.

†The Griffin's message is a lipogram, certain letters having been avoided in its construction. Note GNK and GKNP, then XNKKND and GNUUNDX. Spot your own leads in the last two ciphers, both of which are of "Inner Circle" difficulty. °Hi Kerr's isologic, using only 10-letter words. And †Viking's is pangrammatic, employing every letter in the alphabet. Asterisks in cryptograms indicate capitalization. Answers to Nos. 43-48 will be published next week.

No. 43—Cryptic Division. By Biff.

SIKE) ONIDHSD (OHN
RIEDS

SKBRS
ISDBD

EEROD
EKDIB

END

No. 44—The Unknown Count. By †Hoodwink.

BPQA ACJABQBCBQWV KQXPMZ CAMA I LMNQVQBM
VCUMZQKIT SMG, MIKP TMBBMZ JMQVO AQOVQNQML JG
BPM MQOPBP QV ILDIVKM QV BPM ITXPIJMB GWCZ BIAS:
NQVL BPM IVAEMZ IVL BPM SMG!

No. 45—Honorable Occupation. By †Cryptanalyst.

“RE FCT KRPZEX LYRL ZK KLZCC RK LHMU RK OYUE
VZHKL KRZT: ‘DUE RHU KUCTFD ZV UNUH DFHU
ZEEFSUELCP UDGCFPUT LYRE OYUE LYUP RHU YFEU-
KLCP DRBZEX DFEUP.’ ”—*AFYEKFE.

No. 46—Cold World. By †The Griffin.

UNBL *ENVB *XVNBKZ TNBTNTZX SNUY XNBL GNK
XVNBKZXZNHX. NKZVNYNR GNUF LNZ XZKNBL XVNTF
GKNP XNBL. UNBL XNKKND GNUUNDX GNK *XVNBKZ.

No. 47—Sob Sister. By °Hi Kerr.

HYSTERICAL OCKEPYHUAD NECSHYUILZ “GCEIUZYMH
NHYRVEUBTD” ILPZYSUCKA; “CKDHYPZUAT HCMAD-
LEIYP CASKHYDUPB VCEATUNGKH ASEKMVCIYP,”
STUJYHECKA.

No. 48—Puzzlers’ Meet. By †Viking.

JQLDYCQ *IZWZVJCQ *PELJQO, RXDWB YZQPVWX, PBWN
JUQZXCQV *VLWICQ TZBSP. GZMJCB *ZWFJEDP, RXCTVK
AWCBZV, HDJRSBK PZBMWF WQJUVC.

LAST WEEK’S ANSWERS

37—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
 DOUBLE CHIN

38—Beneath this slab lies Hobo Pete;
A strong cigar was his daily treat.
But alas and alack!
He was knocked on his back
Whilst plucking a butt in the street!

39—The key to this cryptogram is contained in the following well-known sentence: “The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.”

40—Distinguished ambassador commits *faux pas*, unwittingly offends diplomatic opponent, provoking grave international situation.

41—Bold thugs robbed jeweler, stole old gold. Captured suspect, who sold loot, named other participants. Police spotted hideout, spread net, gathered gang into their fold!

42—Phlegmatic Scotch harpist plays rhapsodic Egyptian rhythmic psalm, whilst placid, buxom blonde soprano howls fiercely weird antique Aztec lament.

All correct solutions of the current puzzles will be duly listed in our *Cipher Solvers’ Club* for February. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.



WE'RE not really angry, but we're terribly hurt. A gnawing suspicion that we're victims of a hoax is swiftly souring our usually sunny disposition. We haven't lost any sleep yet, thank goodness, but we do view the incoming mail with a curious mixture of anticipation and distrust.

You will remember that a young lady (we couldn't have been wrong about that, too, could we?) who signed herself forlornly as LONESOME, sent us a touching, if premature, Valentine greeting.

At the time, we thought we handled the whole affair with becoming restraint and nice gallantry. We were somewhat uneasy, naturally, considering the possibility that more than one LONESOME might claim our joint flowers and candies. We had already thought of a specious way to explain those items when the books were audited.

Of course, we sort of joshed about it, and felt a little silly, but deep down in our hearts, we were pretty pleased. At our age, even this romantic exchange was warming.

So you can imagine our depression now. There have been no claimants. Not even the original and genuine LONESOME. Someone must be laughing

at us, heartily, cruelly. And all we can say is this: We have considerably more faith in Santa Claus than in Saint Valentine.

A lady from Indiana seems somewhat concerned because of the fact that we allow complaints to be published on this page. According to

MISS BETTY BURCKS

this adverse criticism may make the more impressionable readers have wrong ideas about our magazine.

DEAR EDITOR:

I do not think you should allow the letters containing kicks to appear on the FLASHES page. As a rule, those letters have no constructive criticism. They have all the earmarks of being written by semi-professional cranks. Most of them are not fair to the magazine.

But some of the readers might be swayed by such unjust comments. Since DFW must maintain its circulation to go on being the best detective magazine in the world, don't you feel you might be hurting yourself by being so generous with your space to those who do not really deserve that courtesy?

South Bend, Indiana.

Miss Burcks' logic, it seems to us, has one flaw in it. We have always considered our readers as exceptionally intelligent people. We feel that most of them will, as she does, recognize unfair

(Continued on page 144)

NEXT WEEK
in
**DETECTIVE
FICTION
WEEKLY**



FINK

A Short Novel by
Frederick C. Pinton

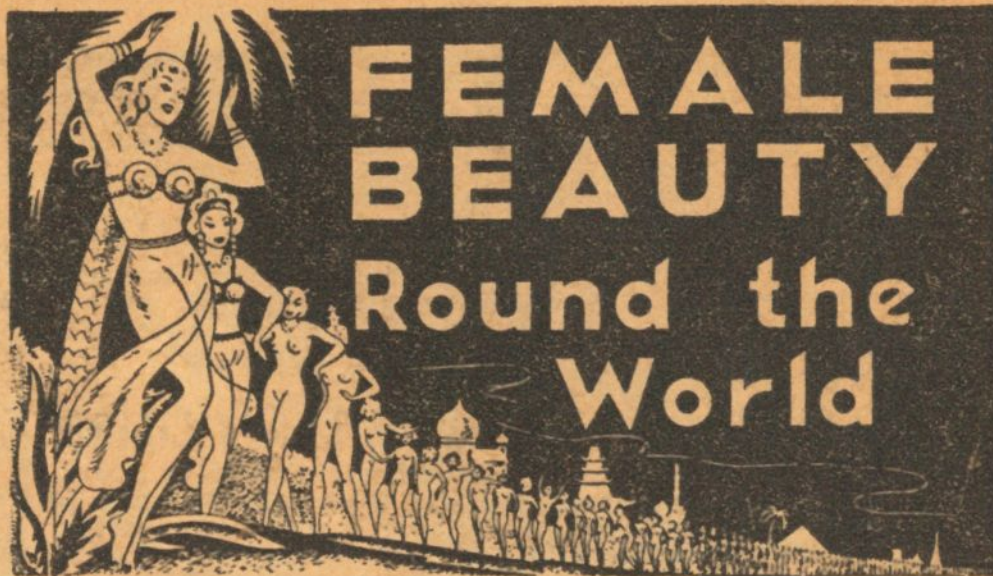
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bitter industrial warfare!*

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criticism when they see it. We know that most readers, after reading even one issue of the magazine, will not be adversely influenced by a single individual's opinion.

There are other letters of complaint which fall into a different category. When we have made a mistake, and it is pointed out to us, we are only too glad to acknowledge the error of our ways and to promise to do better in the future.

All in all, we feel that a liberal policy regarding letters will do us far more good than harm. We believe that a friendly forum, censored only by limitations of space, helps keep this magazine on an even keel. And naturally, we will welcome more letters regarding this discussion.

Brief and to the point is this communication from

EARL JONES

DEAR EDITOR:

We have been reading your magazine for about four years. We find it very interesting. Please have more true stories like *Turkey in the Stir*, by Convict 12627. Columbus, Ohio.

More stories by this particular author, and other outstanding true-story authors, are scheduled for the coming issues.

Don't skip the announcement of next week's issue on page 143. Frederick C. Painton's complete short novel, *FINK*, is a splendid, realistic, modern story—one which you will enjoy reading and will want to pass along to your friends.

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