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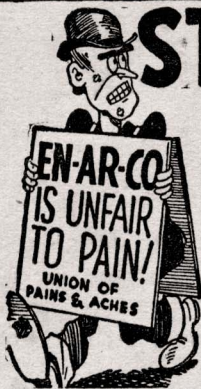
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MONEY TO BURN

By William E. Barrett

Author of "I.O.U. Murder," "Red Ice," etc.

A gripping story of Washington, where the cost of living is the highest of any city in the nation, and the cost of dying is often at bargain rates

ALL day long the money had been flowing into the old house on Mount Vernon Highway; piles upon piles of greasy currency that passed through Greg Cooper's hands for counting and dropped like waste paper into boxes. With the money came a mood. Across the room from him, Cooper could see Senator Bradford Weller sitting smugly behind his desk, his pepper-and-salt colored wig looking more false than ever and his narrow, greedy face relaxed.

Greed! That was the thing that came into the house with the money. That was the mood. It was in the senator's face and it was like something living and tangible in the house itself; driving out all of the things that had existed here before it, even hatred. Cooper mopped the perspiration from his fore-

head with a limp handkerchief, his young face tense.

He was feeling it himself, the unsettling power of money in large amounts. His fingers fumbled as he checked the currency over. None of the bills felt crisp any longer. They felt greasy, slimy. They repelled him and, at the same time, attracted him. He found himself wanting them and, at the same time, wanting to escape from them.

"What is the total now, Cooper?"

The senator's voice had the dry quality of rustling paper. Greg Cooper ran the tip of his pencil across the latest entry on the sheet before him.

"One hundred and fifty-four thou-

Tim Weller rose in protest



A Complete Short Novel

sand, five hundred and fifteen dollars," he said huskily.

The senator put his fingertips together, his elbows resting on his carved mahogany desk. The light of late afternoon came through the Venetian blinds and fell across him in bars. It was a kind light to a man of the senator's years. It softened the pouches under his eyes and the slack lines of his mouth. If the room had not been crowded with currency, he might have looked benevolent. His eyes, however, were hard with money hunger and the light did not soften that.

"Feed that money to the fire, Hito—as fast as Mr. Cooper can check it."



"There will not be very much more," he said. "It is not an impressive sum."

"It is too much to be stacked in an old house."

Cooper's voice was sharper than he intended it to be, but he did not qualify the statement. His lean jaw was hard and there was a vast sincerity in the depths of his level gray eyes. He did not have to pussyfoot when he felt strongly about anything. He was one of those strange products of Washington, a senator's secretary; a young man with legal training and newspaper experience, a sound body and a hard mind—too young to be a senator himself but with more knowledge of the senator's job than the senator would ever have. Bradford Weller turned slowly in his chair.

"A man's money is his own, Cooper," he said, "and he's foolish only when he lets others tell him what to do with it."

Cooper shook his head. "That's rhetoric. Save it for the voters. A man is foolish with his money any time that he takes it to a place where he can't protect it properly. He's being foolish with his life, too. People kill for money."

The senator chuckled. "I have my private joke on you, Cooper. You are going to be surprised. And not you alone."

His voice choked off into another chuckle. He was holding his chin against his chest and he had turned his chair so that the shadows hid his expression. Cooper shrugged and put his attention once more upon the sheets spread out before him.

The penciled figures were the piles of currency reduced to symbols; the record of the senator's resources pulled into this house for some obscure reason. There were bank accounts that

had been closed out, stocks and bonds that had been sold, debts that had been collected. In none of the transactions had a check figured. Every deal, at the senator's insistence, had been closed in cash. And the cash was here in the study of the senator's Virginia home—heaps of it.

The door to the big hall opened slowly and Cooper looked up. Hito, the Japanese man of all work, was standing there, his squat body bent slightly forward, his beady black eyes on the senator.

"A Misser Terry Black to see you. You see him, yess?"

His voice was a blend of hiss and lisp that hit the esses hard. The senator leaned back in his chair. "Terry Black? Ah, yes. Show him in, Hito."

He turned to Cooper as the Japanese bowed out. "This Black," he said doubtfully. "It's that taxi fellow, isn't it?"

Cooper nodded grimly. "It is. He saved your life in 1935. You've got him down as owing you five hundred dollars."

"I'm letting him off for two hundred and fifty."

"I know. I wrote the letter to him. It's a shame to take a dime."

The senator cleared his throat. "It's my money, Cooper. Maybe you can afford to give away two hundred and fifty dollars. I can't."

Greg Cooper snorted. He remembered Terry Black very well; a depression down-and-outer without a job who had jumped off a park bench to knock a gun out of the hand of a man who tried to assassinate Bradford Weller. It had been quite a show. With the newsreel cameras grinding, Senator Weller had publicly presented Terry Black with a check for five hundred dollars and solemnly accepted the

man's note in exchange. He had been applauded for that; for saving the man's pride while he paid him a reward. Nobody who read the newspapers or saw the newsreels took the loan angle seriously. Terry Black brought his wife and youngster to Washington and bought a taxicab. Now Bradford Weller was trying to collect.

THE door to the big hall opened again and Terry Black came into the room. He was a slender man of medium height with lean jaws, high cheekbones and large eyes set deep. He was wearing a blue serge suit that was shiny from much pressing. He had a taxi driver's cap in one gnarled hand and a creased envelope in the other. He bobbed his head rather awkwardly.

"How do you do, Senator. I—I got over as soon as I could."

The senator half rose to extend a limp hand. "How are you, Black? Quite well, I hope. You are prepared to pick up your note, I presume?"

Terry Black swallowed hard. "Yes, sir. I didn't have much warning. You told me, you know, that any time I had the money."

Bradford Weller cleared his throat noisily. "That was two years ago, Black. I haven't pressed you."

"I know." There was a strange expression in the taxi driver's deep eyes. He laid the envelope on the senator's desk. "It's there," he said hoarsely, "but, Senator . . ."

"Yes. What?"

"I'd appreciate it if you could wait a while. I had to get it from a loan shark. They never let go, those fellows. The interest—"

The senator waved his hand. "Quite impossible, Black. I need the money.

I made it easy for you. Cut the note in half."

He reached out one hand and drew the envelope to him. Terry Black watched it across the desk top and Greg Cooper watched Terry Black. There was perspiration heavy on Greg Cooper's forehead again. He was, he knew, looking at an honorable man who met his debts when they were called; whatever the price to himself. The taxi driver's shoulders slumped.

"All right, sir," he said. "Thank you."

He turned to go and his eyes rested on Greg Cooper's desk and on the box beside it; the desk that was stacked with currency and the box that was filled with it. His slightly stooped figure became rigid. He stared hard and then his eyes swung back to the senator. Bradford Weller was counting the money that he had taken from the envelope and he did not look up. Terry Black swore under his breath, put his cap on his head and stalked from the room. Greg Cooper looked after him.

"He was an honorable man when he came in," he thought. "What was he when he went out?"

Something had risen out of that greed-polluted room and entered the soul of Terry Black. Greg Cooper had seen it happen. He passed the handkerchief across his forehead and looked toward the senator. Bradford Weller tossed the currency-stuffed envelope from one desk to the other.

"Two hundred and fifty more, Cooper," he said. "Make a record of it."

Greg Cooper made no comment. There were times when the words at his command were inadequate to express his thoughts or his feelings. He had no awe of the senator. He had

written speeches for Bradford Weller that Weller could never have written himself. He had written diplomatic letters to irate constituents and he had ferreted out the hidden hands behind important bills so that the senator could line up on the right side. He had no more illusions about statesmanship and he knew the senator for what he was. Yet strangely, he had an affection of a kind for the man; the affection of a foster parent for a spoiled and detestable brat which has, nevertheless, a helpless appeal. Bradford Weller couldn't walk alone in a world of politics but he thought that he could and he was quite vain. Cooper granted him his vanity and watched over him. It was all part of a good political secretary's job.

The room was quiet again. Cooper made the pencil entry on a long sheet and the ink entry in a ledger. He checked through the thin sheaf of tens and twenties for which Terry Black had entered the slave ranks of a loan shark, then tossed the bills into the box with the rest.

The door at the end of the room opened. Hito was bowing to the senator again.

"Misser George Arlington. You see him, yess?"

At sound of the name, Cooper raised his head sharply. The senator came out of his reverie. "Yes. Yes. Of course, I'll see him."

He was squaring away behind his desk like a man of affairs rather than like the idle dreamer of a long afternoon. He made a gesture toward Cooper.

"You might drop the lid on that box," he said.

Cooper had acted ahead of the command. The box was closed and he was stacking the last of the unchecked bills

in a desk drawer when the latest visitor came in.

GEORGE ARLINGTON was big and expansive; a massive study in blue and gray. Six feet tall and over two hundred pounds, he looked like a wealthy western cattleman dressed for the city. He was carrying a pearl gray Stetson of the broad-brim type in his hand. A broad, white-toothed smile split his bronzed face.

"Ah, Senator. I'm glad to see you."

A whiff of lilac blew across the room and Greg Cooper wrinkled his nose. His eyes had narrowed and he was sitting stiffly behind his own desk. The name George Arlington had been familiar but he had been willing to grant the fact that more than one man might bear the name. There was no mistaking the big man in the gray suit and the blue shirt, however. They had met before. Greg Cooper had been a newspaper man then and Big George had been under indictment for fraud.

"Leave us alone for a while, Cooper. I'll call you."

The senator had risen to his feet. Big George half turned and the smile left his face momentarily. He was remembering Cooper. Cooper was looking at the senator.

"Do you know who this man is?" he said curtly.

Bradford Weller frowned. "If you are referring to Mr. Arlington, I am quite familiar with—ah, his record."

"He's a con man. A darned good one. He's made his living by trimming suckers for years and he's only slipped once."

"Cooper, this is embarrassing."

Big George laughed. "Not to me, Senator. A newspaper man never quite gets the hang of being a gentleman."

"Thanks."

Cooper looked the big man over briefly. The look of expansive geniality had come back to George Arlington, but his eyes had grown small and narrow. They were small eyes normally, but Arlington had learned the trick of holding them wide open so that they appeared frank and friendly. He wasn't holding them open while his face was turned away from the senator. Greg Cooper stood his ground. He faced the senator once more.

"Embarrassing or not," he said, "this baby can get the fillings out of your teeth. Don't buy anything from him."

The senator threw back his head and laughed. His laugh was a sudden, explosive sound in the room. Big George's chuckle rumbled an accompaniment. The two men looked at each other and Greg Cooper was outside of the secret that they shared. He knew that he was outside and that there was nothing that he could do about it. The senator had taken the bit in his teeth like this once before. He had played with a utility crowd at a time when Greg Cooper told him that it was political suicide to do so.

That was why Bradford Weller was a senator now by courtesy only. He retained the title but the voters had swept him out of office in the last election and he was actually an ex-senator. Cooper shrugged. He could nurse and jockey a man only to a certain point; beyond that point, the man was on his own. He had thrown out his warning and if the senator preferred to laugh, that was the senator's business.

Big George Arlington blocked his way to the door. The con man was holding out his hand. "No hard feelings?" he said.

Greg Cooper took the extended hand gravely. They shook hands as two

fighters might shake before the opening bell. There was a grim smile on Greg Cooper's face.

"No hard feelings," he said.

CHAPTER II

The Promise

IF THE mood of the senator's study was Greed, then the mood of the big hall was Fear. Mike Deshler was the symbol of it. A bulky, heavy-shouldered man with the face of a prize-fighter, he sat in a straight chair with a clear view of both the front door and the door to the senator's study. He had his arms folded across his chest and his right hand was at his armpit. He was a guard who had been hired by the day from a famous detective agency. To that extent had Bradford Weller been careful; he had prepared against sudden violence.

But he had let George Arlington enter the room where he had over a hundred and fifty thousand dollars in currency.

Cooper nodded to the guard and crossed the hall. A girl rose swiftly to meet him from a big chair in the parlor where she had been pretending to read a magazine. She was a slender girl; vividly dark, her brown eyes wide with worry.

"Greg," she said, "I've been wanting to talk to you. What is he going to do?"

Greg Cooper looked down into the girl's face, all the prettier for its pallor, and his heart thudded painfully. Vivian Dawson had the capacity for stirring his emotions as no other girl ever had. She was the lure that had held him to his job on weary days when the senator tried his patience and his soul. She was the senator's orphaned niece and because she was all that she was,

Greg Cooper refused to believe that the senator was all that he appeared to be.

"I don't know what he's going to do, Vi," he said softly. "Let us talk it over a little."

He started into the old-fashioned parlor with her and stopped. There was a tall, thin man with long, curling gray hair in the easy chair by the window. This was Tim Weller, a Federal judge once in the long ago, and the elder brother of the senator. Tim Weller had given up his own political career when his brother started to climb. He was old now, but still the wiser of the two men when he cared to speak his mind. At the moment, his chin was on his chest and he seemed to be asleep. Vivian spoke from behind Cooper's right shoulder.

"The little study might be better," she said.

They went together down the hall to the small study which was used occasionally by Emily Weller, the senator's sister and ruler of his household. The senator was a bachelor and Emily a spinster. She had been a shrewd hostess in a town where a woman can make or break a man by her skill in entertaining. As though being in the room that she used made discussion of her inevitable, Vivian said softly:

"Greg, I am worried and a little frightened. If Aunt Emily weren't in the hospital, Uncle Bradford wouldn't be bringing all of that money into the house. He is going to do something rash."

Her fear showed in her eyes. Greg Cooper bulked above her, conscious of her feminine daintiness, her complete desirability. Some streak of loyalty to his chief made him say what he did not entirely feel.

"Perhaps he's entitled to do what

he wants to do for a change. Emily rides herd on him pretty hard."

"She has to. Where would he be if she didn't?"

Greg Cooper shrugged. He didn't know if it was a good idea for women to dominate men, even for their own good. But he had to admit to his own soul that Emily Weller had a better brain and a sounder judgment than her brother. She was in the hospital now for a minor operation and he had not missed the significance of that fact in connection with the senator's talk of surprises and the quick conversion of assets into currency. Vivian Dawson gripped his arm.

"It's that woman upstairs," she said tensely. "She's supposed to be my house guest but she never comes near me. He had me invite her and she stays in her room. She's an adventuress, Greg. He's going to run away with her."

"Nonsense."

"It isn't nonsense. You can tell by looking at her that she is the calculating type. She used to be an actress. He's going to take all of his money and run away with her."

GREG COOPER tried to hold his face in a poker mold. He had drawn conclusions of his own when Mildred Harney was invited to the Weller estate in the absence of Emily Weller, but the senator had loved them and left them before. He wasn't the marrying type.

"The senator loves his money more than he will ever love any woman," he said.

Vivian tapped her foot. "But suppose he doesn't think that the money is his while he stays here? That he has no control over it? That would make a difference, wouldn't it?"

Greg Cooper met her eyes. "It would," he said.

"Then that's the answer. He wants to take his money away where no one else has any say about it except himself. He's going to take this woman with him. Greg, he mustn't do it. He mustn't. Aunt Emily has given him too much. He would leave her penniless."

She was beating with her small fists against Greg Cooper's chest and she seemed unaware of what she was doing. She hadn't mentioned the senator's name and reputation as a chip in the game—and Greg Cooper did not consider it a very big chip himself. The voters would never send Bradford Weller back into the senate. His political career was done. Political expediency no longer anchored him.

With over a hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cash and a decorative blonde companion, Bradford Weller would be as free as a bird in any country on the globe. In France or England, no scandal would follow or touch him. His money would be his passport.

Vivian Dawson had been looking up into Cooper's face and he never held a poker expression long when she was around. Sensing the fact that she had scored a point with him, she moved to the other side of the room.

"You've got to do something about it, Greg," she said. "You're the only one who can."

Cooper frowned. He wasn't sure that it was any of his business, past a certain point, to interfere in what might be a family matter of the senator's. He took a step toward the girl.

"Why worry about it, Vi?" he said huskily. "You've never been happy here. I've been playing with the offer of a job in Cuba. I'll take it like a shot if—"

The girl was standing motionless. "You're asking me to run away from responsibility, Greg?"

He dropped his eyes. "It isn't your responsibility."

He felt that he should argue the point with her and prove to her that she was not concerned in what the senator did; but he found that the words wouldn't come. He wanted to take Vi Dawson out of here and give her a home of her own—his home. But the senator and his piles of currency could not be dismissed with a gesture and a word. There was drama building up in this old house on Mount Vernon Boulevard, drama and, perhaps, tragedy. Vi Dawson was still looking at him.

"Aunt Emily would stop him from running away with a blonde actress and losing his money," she said, "but we can't worry her while she is in the hospital. We've got to do something ourselves."

"It's his life, Vi—and his money."

"It isn't. A man can't take all his money and run out on his wife, can he? Well, Aunt Emily has managed his house for him better than most wives would. She hasn't any money of her own. He would leave her penniless."

The girl was becoming angry. Angry girls become unreasonable if they aren't headed off. Greg Cooper mopped his forehead. He was more at home in a man's world and he knew how to argue with people like the senator. He was conscious, too, of an inherent handicap—he was by nature reasonable. He could see both sides of an argument so clearly that he couldn't become steamed up over either side.

"You've got to think of the senator himself, too," she said. "No flashy young woman like Mildred Harney is

really in love with an old man like Uncle Bradford. She'll get all his money and she'll ruin his reputation and—"

Greg Cooper grinned wryly. "And his friends won't speak to him and the post office won't deliver his mail and—" He became suddenly grave and gripped the girl's shoulders with strong fingers. "I'm not a meddler, Vi. If this girl is going to marry him, I've got to stay out. If it is a swindle, I'm going to stay in."

"And you'll stop him from running away until you're sure?"

"That's a big order."

"If you don't, I'll find some way to do it."

"How?"

"Some way. He's my dead mother's brother. I haven't any other family left."

Her voice was breaking. Greg Cooper gripped her by the elbows, lifted her off the floor and kissed her squarely on the mouth before she had time to turn her head. He was a little bit shaken as he set her down and his voice was husky.

"Sit tight, Vi," he said. "I don't know what's up, but whatever it is, I'll find a way to block it until we know."

He was thinking of George Arlington more than he was of the glamorous Mildred Harney. Vi Dawson held the tips of her fingers against her lips.

"That's a promise?" she said.

Cooper nodded solemnly. "It's a promise."

CHAPTER III

A Bargain in Burglary

MILDRED HARNEY was sitting in the parlor with Tim Weller when Greg Cooper came back down

the hall with Vi Dawson. The old man was wide awake now and talking in a slow drawl about the old days when actors did their acting on a stage.

"They didn't can human bodies in celluloid and human voices in wax, then," he said. "Not in my day."

The blonde girl laughed. She made a vivid picture with the sunlight streaming through the window on her. She was dressed in shimmery green that molded tightly to her shapely body. She had one leg crossed over the other and she kept the balanced leg swinging. Her teeth were a startling white and she wore her makeup lightly; but for all of her spectacular quality, she did not seem quite real. Vi Dawson sighed.

"She is beautiful," she said reluctantly. Greg Cooper squeezed her arm.

"Wax fruit looks swell in a bowl," he said, "but it's pretty disappointing as fruit."

"Thanks, Greg. You're being sweet."

Vi Dawson left him and went into the parlor. Cooper's eyes followed her briefly. There was an easy grace in her, a gallant straightness to her shoulders. Vi Dawson didn't have to pick a setting or put on an act to win masculine attention; she had only to be herself.

Hito, the Japanese, was standing inside the front door with his hands clasped behind his back. Greg Cooper stopped beside him.

"Did Mr. Arlington come out yet?"

"No, Sar. He still talk to Misser Senator Weller. Yess."

"Okay. Tell the senator I had to go down town for an hour."

Greg Cooper went out into the balmy air of late afternoon. It was Indian summer weather and traffic flowed in a steady stream along the

paved Memorial Highway. He toiled his car out of the broad parking strip behind the house and joined the procession of cars that was moving down the pavement to Washington.

"I'm a sap and a meddler," he said, "but perhaps I am performing a public service at that."

He was frowning at the winged goddess on his radiator cap. Behind him he was leaving a house that contained over a hundred and fifty thousand dollars in currency. Before him lay Hannigan's joint on Ninth Street and, he hoped, a date with Beau Bridwell, one of the last of the old time cracksmen.

Twenty-two minutes after leaving the senator's house, he pulled his car to the Ninth Street curb. There was a burlesque house and a hamburger place, a couple of chili parlors, several saloons, two theaters specializing in Grade B westerns—and Hannigan's.

Hannigan's was a restaurant and a saloon and a club of sorts. Burglars, pickpockets, petty grifters and yeggmen down on their luck made a hang-out of Hannigan's and Big Steve Hannigan minded his own business. He knew his customers by name and reputation and business, but if they behaved themselves in his place, he didn't care what they might plan there against the peace and the well-being of other people. The police kept an eye on him but they didn't tap anybody on the shoulder in Hannigan's; they made their collars outside. On the whole, it was a decent place; a little long on odors and short on beauty, but discreetly shadowed and fitted with booths that were not sounding boards.

Beau Bridwell wasn't there, but Hannigan knew where he could be found. "I'll have him here in five minutes, skipper," he said. Cooper

seated himself in a booth, ordered a beer and waited. Beau Bridwell showed up in four minutes flat. Hannigan's service was always good.

THE years had not been kind to Bridwell. He was undersized and stoop-shouldered and he entered a door with a kind of furtive duck that brought him in sidewise. His pasty white face was covered with dirty gray stubble. His eyes rolled uneasily under bushy eyebrows that were already gray.

"You got something for me, Mr. Cooper?" he croaked. "Hannigan says you were askin'."

"That's right, Beau. Have a beer."

Cooper gave the order for the beer which would keep Hannigan from butting in for a few minutes. He was measuring Bridwell thoughtfully. It was hard to believe that this shabby little down-and-outer had once been an aristocrat of the underworld; a master hand at the art of opening safes.

"I've got a box to be opened, Beau," he said.

The little man jerked convulsively. His lips worked. "Nix. I'm all washed up. One more rap would finish me. I'm running straight, Mr. Cooper."

"This is straight, Beau. I'll take the responsibility. I am Senator Weller's secretary. I'll let you into his house and you open the box. You do not steal anything and you won't have to run from cops or worry about burglar alarms."

The little man stopped the nervous jerking of his features. He lived in a world of sharp dealing, of chiseling, of games and rackets that played along the fringe of the law. His eyes stopped rolling and concentrated shrewdly on Cooper's face. He saw an angle and

he was wondering how far he could play along in safety.

"You ain't risking a swell job and a rep to glom some of the senator's marbles," he said finally. "I guess maybe I can work for you."

"Okay." Cooper was relieved. "Can you still open a safe by listening for the tumblers to fall?"

Beau Bridwell wet his lips. "If the box is 1910 or before that, yes. After that, maybe. One o' them new boxes, no."

"It's pretty old."

"That's swell."

The little man took a deep draught of the beer. He wiped his lips with his fingers. "If you wasn't a friend o' mine when you was on the papers, I wouldn't touch it," he said. "But friend or no friend, I gotta have a bit o' money for my work. I gotta have it now."

"How much?"

Bridwell's eyes narrowed. "A hundred bucks, Cooper."

"I haven't got that much money on me, Beau."

"I'll take a check. I ain't scared o' rubber in your paper."

The little man had thrown off his air of frightened humility. Cooper had come to him and Cooper had hired him for a job that no one else could do. The thought gave him dignity. He had a certain grim stubbornness under the dignity, too. Measuring him, Cooper knew that the man would stand on the demand for a hundred dollars and not a cent less. Cooper laid his check flat on the sticky table top and wrote.

"One hundred dollars, Beau. You won't get drunk on me?"

"This beer is my last. I don't drink when I've got a job to do."

"That's the spirit. Get out to the

senator's house on Mount Vernon Highway at three A.M. The back door will be unlocked and I'll be waiting for you. Better hire a car and leave it alongside the highway."

"Okay." Beau Bridwell took one look at the check and folded it away swiftly. There was a tightening in the man's slack lips, a gleam in his eye. Cooper rose slowly. He could read in the man's face the reason for the swift acceptance of the check idea, the fixing of the amount above what a man might be expected to carry in his pocket.

That check was Beau Bridwell's insurance against a frame-up or a slip. It was his proof of employment by Greg Cooper. Cooper's lips twisted in a wry grin.

He stepped out of the booth and stopped short with surprise. Terry Black, the taxi driver, was sitting on a stool at the bar with a straight whiskey in his hand and his eyes fixed on the booth. When he saw Cooper's eyes on him, he turned his back and huddled over the whiskey glass. Greg Cooper's eyes narrowed.

He strode out to his car. He had taken a long step. If everything went all right tonight, he would take a hundred and fifty odd thousands of dollars from the senator's safe. Provided that he was not interrupted, he would take that money and hide it in a panel that he had discovered years ago in the parlor mantel. There would be hell to pay in the morning but until the senator found his money, he would not be able to lose any of it to blondes, confidence men or second story workers.

It was not stealing money, he told himself; it was removing it from the control of its owner during a period of danger. "I know the senator better than he knows himself," he

thought. "He isn't smart enough to go up against professional talent and win. By shifting the stakes out of the way, I've got a chance of confusing the players and of finding out what the senator is up against."

But he was not entirely reassured. Whatever the moral issue might be, there would be a period of time between the safe and the mantel panel when he would be, in the eyes of the law, a burglar.

CHAPTER IV

Blazing Currency

DINNER at Bradford Weller's was a dull meal for everyone except the senator himself. The senator enjoyed it because he made no attempt to follow the desperate attempts that were made at conversation and because he paid no attention to anyone save himself. He found his own thoughts not only satisfying but exciting.

He was on the verge of a big step—the adventure of his career. A secret blazed in his brain and the knowledge that no one shared that secret in its entirety was thrilling knowledge. He felt like a minor god, with power over the lives of others. He looked down the table.

There was Vi Dawson, a sweet child in her way and quite pretty. He felt a little bit sorry for her because the girl would probably have to bear the brunt of her aunt's peevishness when this business was done. He didn't envy her the experience.

"But Cooper will probably marry her," he thought. "A good man, Cooper."

He smiled smugly. Next to the satisfaction that he felt over breaking free from the thralldom of his sister,

Emily, he was most pleased over the fact that he was going to put one over on Cooper. Cooper had been right too often in the past. It would be good to surprise him, to shock him and to see the consternation on his face.

"Cooper will probably catch hell from little Vivian, too. Unless I miss my guess, that business of his down town had something to do with me. Vivian would like to keep me safely on ice till Emily gets back from the hospital."

His eyes glittered. He felt a hard pounding under his ribs, the speeded action of his heart that always accompanied waves of hatred. The mere thought of Emily Weller was enough to make his heart hammer.

Two years older than himself, she had always dominated him. She was invincibly right on everything; an irresistible force, that would brook no obstacle when she was moving toward an objective—and an immovable object when she settled down to block a project that she did not approve. True, she was a strong character. She had shared his lean days and she had worked tirelessly in the face of many defeats. She had steered his career over many a treacherous social reef and she had saved him a score of times from making an imperishable fool of himself.

He granted her everything that she was and everything that she had been—and still he hated her. He had hated her for years and she didn't know. He had played the hypocrite with her—the loving and appreciative brother—because he lacked the courage to force an issue. For his own hypocrisy, he hated her.

"If I were free, I would be different."

He had said that often when feel-

ings of personal inferiority goaded him. He changed that refrain now to "When I am free," and his soul soared. He was going to avenge himself on them all—on those who had been right when he had been wrong and who had made him feel inferior with their rightness. He would be nobody's man, nobody's creation, nobody's responsibility. At the same time, he would assume no responsibility for anyone else. He was looking at his brother, Tim, from beneath narrowed lids.

Tim, too, had always been an irritation. Tim never forgot that he was the eldest of the family. Showing his age noticeably and far less active than Bradford, Tim had still retained his ego; dismissing with a snort the things which he personally did not approve; refusing to argue and standing pat on the fact that, politically, Bradford Weller was his own creation, his own special protégé—the man whom he had boosted and coaxed and jockeyed into the senate and into political power.

The fact that Bradford Weller knew himself for a pawn that his brother had moved made his resentment deeper. He walked in his brother's shadow, even now when long years led back to the day when Tim Weller's name had meant anything by itself.

Bradford Weller had his own reputation but he could not forget that the reputation had been made for him, given to him.

There had been times when his stomach had rolled and he had turned sick with thoughts like these. But not tonight! Tonight he would break them all upon the shock of his surprise.

All? No. He looked at Mildred Harney and his expression softened. She wore soft blue tonight and there was heaven in a color like that when the woman who wore it had hair that

formed a golden aureole about her head. He would not break her. He would never break her or hurt her. She was his recompense for long years of inferiority and his reward for the bold stroke that would end those years.

With the thought, the senator was young again. The years dropped from him. He was no longer a veteran of the political arena with a governorship and two senate terms behind him; he was a man who had won the love of a glorious golden woman.

DINNER was over; a meal so smoothly and effortlessly served by the faultless Hito that one was not aware of service at all. The senator looked around the table.

"I would like to see you all in my study within the next ten minutes," he said.

He rose and Mildred Harney was beside him. Her hand rested lightly, caressingly, on his arm. He looked down into her eyes and was conscious of a wave of excitement. Her eyes were ice blue and yet, in the depths, he saw a warm glowing spark. He laid his hand over hers and liked the softness of the contact.

The others were taking his "ten minutes" provision literally, so he walked on to the study with the girl. The grim-visaged Mike Deshler was on guard before the door. The senator nodded to him.

"Come in after the others do," he said. "I will want you."

Mike Deshler touched his forehead with two fingers in a rough salute. The senator unlocked the study door and clicked the switch which controlled the wall bracket lights. They were soft lights and did not emphasize the mark of the years upon his face. He could see himself in the mirror over

the mantel and in tailcoat and white tie, he looked taller than his five feet ten. His wig had cost him a thousand dollars in Paris and not even an expert could tell that it was not his own hair. He had been careful, too, about his teeth. When his upper plate was made, he had had the dentist put gold crowns on two of the teeth and fillings in three of the others. His own teeth had not looked more real.

He squared his shoulders and turned to the girl. "You still believe in me, Mildred?" he said softly.

Her fingers tightened on his forearm and her face lifted to his. "You know I do, Bradford," she said. "In everything."

He squeezed her fingers and released her. "Give me your support tonight," he said. "After that . . ."

There was a promise in his voice and she smiled back at him. He looked at his old-fashioned safe in the corner of the room and then at the two boxes beside Cooper's desk. A chuckle rose in his throat. He rubbed his hands together and went behind his desk. Mildred Harney sat down and stretched her legs straight out before her.

The door opened and Tim Weller came in. Tim was a six-footer, a bony-faced man with sunken eyes that glowed as cleanly as the eyes of a young man. He had never had much to do with dentists and the few teeth that he had left were discolored. He was biting a cigar with them now and looking at his brother from under bushy gray brows. Bradford Weller did not meet that questing regard.

Greg Cooper and Vi Dawson had stopped outside the dining room door.

"I'm a silly person, Greg, and bad company and hard to get along with and—"

"And a nail biter, a fireplug parker, an eater of hot dogs with soda pop and—"

"Stop! I'm serious. I know when I'm dreadful. But Greg, I'm worried and scared and I can't help myself. All of that money in the house means trouble and Uncle Brad isn't himself. You won't let me down, Greg. You won't let him be swindled or—"

"I gave you a promise, Vi."

"I know."

They went down the hall together. The senator watched them come in with a cynical smile on his lips. It was a newly developed theory of his that the young neither felt nor understood the true meaning of love. Young emotions, he felt, were essentially shallow, subject to too many future stresses which they probably would not survive. Only rich maturity could know the full flower of love. He looked at Mildred Harney and his shoulders unconsciously squared. Mike Deshler and Hito had come in. He had his full audience.

SLOWLY, with complete appreciation of the dramatic hush in the room, the senator moved out from behind his desk. He stood, as he had often stood before the senate; his head thrown back, his audience in a semi-circle about him. He had a speech to deliver, too, and his eyes were glittering points of light behind slitted lids. He would give them the speech and he would watch it strike and wound them, watch them stiffen with the shock of what he was going to do. It was to be his night.

"A man with money has no private life," he said slowly. "He is a target for relatives who need help, for organizations that believe that they need help, for chisellers and crooks and

prospective heirs who are impatient for him to die."

His voice rose. "I have had too much of all that and I am through. I know enough of the law to know how difficult is the way of escape. If I make a gift of the money that I own, a relative might possibly block that gift by challenging my competence. If I try to spend it in my own way, I am open to suits and annoyance and interference."

He pounded his right fist into his open palm. "There is one thing that I can do with my money—beyond any appeal to the courts and beyond any other appeal. I am going to do that one thing."

He balanced himself like a shot-putter; then literally hurled his words into the room. "I am going to burn every dollar of it," he said.

He stopped and let the echo of his words hang. He saw Vi Dawson sit up stiffly, saw Tim Weller's teeth bite clean through his cigar, saw the forward thrust of Greg Cooper's body. Only Mildred Harney held control of her facial muscles. She bent slightly forward and she squeezed hard on her tiny handkerchief with her right hand, but she was unshaken.

His heart glowed and invincibility swept in a torrent through his veins. She was with him and she was game. He hadn't told her what he was going to do.

"Every dollar," he repeated grimly. "Light the paper under that pile of wood in the fireplace, Hito. You, Deshler, come over here near my desk!"

He snapped his commands, the servants moved forward and the spell broke. Tim Weller came to his feet with a loud snort. "Bradford, you're insane!"

The senator met his glare. "I was

never saner in my life. I am exercising a privilege. I am beset by leeches, by people looking to me for support and by people waiting for me to die. Well, I'm fooling them. When I get through, they will have nothing to get from me because I will have nothing to give."

He was wound up to a speech-making mood but he ran down under the baleful glare of his brother. Tim Weller tapped the floor with his cane.

"Leeches!" he snorted. "Bah! You've lived off the brains of other people all your life. And you talk about burning money. Your right to burn money! Fiddlesticks! No man has the right to destroy what he didn't create. Money is a form of wealth." He shook a long forefinger at his brother. "And you never created wealth of any kind in your life."

Bradford Weller felt his heart hammering hard again. He took a backward step and cursed himself inwardly for weakness. He was afraid of his brother, afraid of the wrath in the older man's eyes. The conciliatory habits of the years ate at his resolve. Then, behind him he heard the snapping crackle of the flames as the paper blazed under Hito's match. His back stiffened at the sound.

"Nevertheless," he said, "the money is mine and I choose to burn it."

Vivian Dawson was standing. She turned toward Greg Cooper, her wide eyes appealing to him. Cooper's jaw was ridged hard, his brows drawn down. Bradford Weller could see him from where he stood facing his brother and he decided suddenly that he was afraid, too, of Cooper. Cooper had a keen brain and he thought things through. He would have to throw Cooper off balance.

"Hito," he said, "you will unpack

those boxes beside Mr. Cooper's desk. Check the packages out, Cooper! Deshler! Come over closer to where I'm standing."

He looked into his brother's eyes as he gave his commands. The anger seemed to have drained from Tim Weller or if the anger still burned in him, he lacked the energy to throw it off in words. He sat down heavily.

"The money is in your name," he said.

VIVIAN DAWSON threw one more despairing look at Greg Cooper and when he did not speak, she faced the issue herself. "Please, Uncle Brad," she said, "you'll leave Aunt Emily penniless."

Bradford Weller's lips thinned to a tight line. The mere mention of Emily Weller's name was enough to steel him in his resolve.

"The best means of making sure that your Aunt Emily does no worrying about my future," he said, "is for me to ignore hers."

He turned his back on Vivian Dawson and on his brother. Hito looked up at him, sweat heavy on his yellow face, his small black mustache limp. The senator felt perspiration heavy on his own forehead, the trickle of it down his spine.

"Feed that money to the fire, Hito," he said, "as fast as Mr. Cooper can check it."

The Japanese made a clicking sound with his tongue and looked at Greg Cooper. Cooper nodded to him. "I put rubber bands around the bills and wrote the amount of each package on a tag," he said huskily. "Read the amounts to me."

The senator felt the support of his armed guard, Deshler, at his back and the need for him. Tim Weller had half

risen in his place again, Vivian Dawson had taken a step forward—and Greg Cooper had hesitated. Hito picked up the first package.

"One sousand dollar!" he said.

Cooper said "Check" and the package hit the flames.

CHAPTER V

Death

IT WAS very warm in the study of Bradford Weller as the flames in the open fireplace mounted higher and the crouching Japanese continued to feed them with packages of bills.

"One sousand, two hundrer dollar!"

"Check."

The litany went on as Hito called the amounts and Cooper checked them off his sheet. Mildred Harney came over beside the senator and squeezed his arm. He patted her hand.

"Good girl," he said.

He knew, himself, that it was an absurd remark but he felt stiff and uncomfortable and a little frightened. There was a feeling of doom in the room as though that small group of people concentrating upon the blazing money threw off waves of hostile force.

Tim Weller was sitting like a statue carved out of ancient wood, his hands crossed over the head of his cane and his eyes expressionless. Vivian Dawson was looking bitterly at Greg Cooper. Mike Deshler had his big fists clenched and the perspiration was running in large, rolling beads through the seams in his battered face.

"One hundred thousand dollars. Isn't that enough to burn?"

Greg Cooper's voice snapped through the tension in the room. He had his pencil suspended and he checked Hito with his other hand while

he waited for the answer to his question. The senator shook his shoulders. He smiled grimly.

"I said every dollar, Cooper."

"Okay." Cooper matched the senator's shrug with one of his own. Hito moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue and lifted another package.

"One sousand dollar!"

"Check!"

Vivian Dawson rose with a sharp exclamation and hurried from the room. Greg Cooper's eyes followed her miserably and he missed one of the packages. Hito caught his mistake for him and did the arithmetic.

"Two package," he said. "Two sousand dollar total. Yess."

"Double check."

Bradford Weller smiled. He was feeling good again. He had been challenged to stop and he had asserted himself. He felt invincible. The blonde girl had one leg across the corner of his desk and she was very close to him. Even closer than the physical contact, he told himself, there was a mental bond. She had shown her faith in him. She had not protested his right to do as he wished with his own money; even though she must have wanted that money for herself. It was the ultimate test of human love.

The senator was feeling better than he ever had. When Tim Weller rose and went out of the room without a word, the senator smiled. The symbol of his enslavement to relatives and responsibility was going up in smoke. The relatives, themselves, were walking out on the show. He almost wished that his sister Emily could be here.

He had a chill feeling along his spine at the thought of her being here and his heart hammered hard against his ribs. He had to drive even the thought from his mind if he were to

enjoy his triumph. She was so completely the ruler of this house and the dominator of all men that he might not even be able to command the allegiance of Cooper and of Hito if she were here.

"She won't be able to do a thing," he reflected.

That was a thought that pleased him and he held to it. He would be out of the reach of her wrath when she learned what had happened and she would be helpless to undo what he had done. The idea of Emily being helpless was the most pleasant thought of all.

There were only a few packages more and he watched them hit the flames and catch fire with a feeling of unholy glee. Hito staggered a little from the effects of the heat as he rose to his feet. Greg Cooper made a couple of marks with his pencil.

"One hundred and fifty-four thousand, seven hundred and sixty-five dollars," he said mechanically.

The senator rubbed his hands. "That's fine," he said.

"Fine if you think so."

Greg Cooper hurled the pencil into the fire and stalked out of the room. The senator called to him and he did not turn around. The door slammed behind him and Hito looked to the senator for instructions.

BRADFORD WELLER looked at the fire. "Scatter the ashes well, Hito," he said. "People have been known to obtain treasury redemptions on burned currency."

He took an envelope from his pocket. "Your pay, Deshler," he said. "I doubled the regular rate to take care of the overtime."

"Thank you, sir. You won't need me any more?"

"There's nothing left to guard."

"Good night, sir."

Mike Deshler walked out like a punch drunk fighter. Bradford Weller grinned after him. Mike Deshler would open that envelope and find twenty dollars—and Mike Deshler would remember that he had seen nearly a hundred and sixty thousand dollars go up in smoke. Mike Deshler would probably get drunk.

Mildred Harney swung her leg down from the edge of the desk. She gripped the lapels of the senator's dinner coat and raised her face to his.

"I think you're wonderful," she said. "That was the bravest thing that I have ever seen anyone do."

He put his arm around her and, oblivious to the presence of Hito in the room, he kissed her hard on the mouth. He held her then at arm's length.

"And you don't mind if I am practically broke?"

"Not a bit. You have ability. I believe in you."

He patted her shoulders. "You are a wonderful girl."

She kissed him, then, swiftly—and, wheeling, ran from the room. He looked after her and he could feel the rush of his own blood. She was his. He would take her with him when he left. He would take her to New York. After that? There was excitement in his brain but he had held winning cards before in his lifetime. He would collect the winnings of the hand that he held before he started to worry about the next hand. That would be his life from now on.

He had made no definite promises to the girl and a girl so obviously crazy about him might not insist upon marriage.

He watched Hito as the Japanese completed his dispersement of the

ashes, then he took a decanter from his desk and poured himself a brandy.

"A big night, Hito?" he said.

"Yess, Sar."

The Japanese waited. Bradford Weller waved one thin hand. "That will be all, Hito."

"Yess, Sar."

The door closed and Bradford Weller was alone. He finished his brandy, looked around the room triumphantly and realized suddenly that he was tired. It had been a strain and he had acquitted himself well under circumstances far from easy.

"I'll go to bed," he said.

He went out into a hall that was silent and deserted. Mildred, he supposed, had retired. His eyes gleamed at the thought of her. The others! Well, there was little to keep them up. He found amusement in the thought of Cooper. He had scored on Cooper more heavily even than he had hoped.

Cooper had been shocked and surprised into complete helplessness. He hadn't even had one of his customary wisecracks. To cap it all, Cooper was in bad with Vivian for not doing something heroic. The senator chuckled. "It's no time for her to be acting uppity and independent," he said. "She hasn't got a dime."

He was feeling like a minor god again. He had stretched out his hand and he had scrambled lives around with it. Every person in that room would date time from this night. He had changed the course of every life with the possible exception of Deshler's. Even little Hito would find things different. He would probably have to hunt another job when Emily came back and found her meal ticket gone.

"They made me, eh? Well, let them make themselves."

He was in his room with the door

closed and he was very tired. His head ached a little and he was glad to remove the wig. He climbed slowly out of his evening clothes. He had never been able to abide a valet but there were times when he wished that he had one. He lacked even the energy for a shower. He filled a glass of water, put his teeth into it and got into his pajamas. He turned out the light, then, and threw himself gratefully upon the bed.

Staring up into the darkness, he imagined that he could see the leaping flames again; flames that danced on stacks of currency—a danse macabre for the hopes of those who had planned to inherit. Freedom had come to him from those flames—and he was not through yet. He had another surprise in store. He chuckled.

He did not hear the door open. A figure glided across the room and he was not aware of the intruder until he sensed a presence by his bed. He blinked to clear the vision of the flames from his eyes and he saw the flash of the knife coming down. . . .

CHAPTER VI

Noises in the Night

GREG COOPER slammed the door of the senator's study behind him with mingled emotions. He was angry because he had just witnessed the clumsy playing of an inept game—and because he had been placed in a position where he did not have a card to play himself nor an opportunity to explain to Vivian Dawson.

"The poor kid!"

He looked into the parlor and into the small study with a vague hope that he might find her waiting for him. She wasn't in either place and he took the stairs with long strides.

Vivian Dawson's room was to the left from the head of the stairs. Mildred Harney's room adjoined it and was connected to it by the bathroom which they shared. Cooper knocked on Vivian's door and waited. There was no answer and he knocked again.

"Vi!" he called. "Vi!"

He heard her stir as though she had risen from a chair or from the bed, but she did not come near the door. He tried again.

"Vi," he called. "Listen! I've got to talk to you."

"Go away." Her voice came muffled.

"Please, Vi."

"Go away. There's nothing you can say. Nothing."

His face was grim and he was trying to frame a phrase that would tip her off to enough of the truth to intrigue her. There was a soft step in the hall behind him. Mildred Harney was standing there with her hands on her hips, a hard smile on her full lips.

"What's the matter, kid? Won't the girl friend talk to you?" she said mockingly.

He looked at her with unfriendly eyes. "You came up those stairs pretty softly," he said.

Her eyes met his and there was none of the melting sweetness in her that the senator saw. "Should I tramp?" she said.

"Tramp is an apt word."

"Oh!"

They stared at each other with undisguised hostility. Dislike had been mutual from the moment of their first meeting, but the buttons were frankly off the foils now. Cooper rammed his hands in his pockets and moved toward the stairs. He no longer wanted to talk to Vi Dawson unless Vi Dawson came

downstairs. This blonde woman was too soft-footed.

"Remind me to tell you some time why you flopped as an actress," he said.

"Did I flop?" There was ice in the inquiry.

"You did—and you made the same mistake tonight."

He was moving down the stairs. She stamped her foot. "Maybe you'll be working for me, too," she said, "and then I—"

"Guess again."

He didn't look back. He was angry but he hoped that Vi had heard the conversation. It might make her curious. He could feel the flush still in his face. He wasn't normally unchivalrous, but he disliked hypocrites intensely. He particularly did not like young women hypocrites who pretended to be in love with dizzy old men.

Hito was coming out of the senator's study and the little Japanese had a nod and a white-toothed grin for him. Worlds might fall but as long as Hito still had jobs to do, he would meet his responsibilities grinning—and with a bow thrown in for good measure if there was anyone around who rated a bow.

"I'll be using the little study for a while, Hito," he said.

"Yess, Sar."

Cooper went down the hall. There was a phone in Emily Weller's study and he dialed Hannigan's number. Hannigan himself answered.

"This is Cooper, Hannigan. Is Beau Bridwell there?"

"Bridwell? Nope. He left a while ago in a taxi, Mr. Cooper. He wasn't drinking a thing so I don't figger he'll be back."

"Okay. Thanks."

Cooper hung up with a frown.

Things got more and more complicated and this was something that he couldn't figure. It was only a few minutes after eleven and Bridwell wasn't due out here until three. Leaving Hannigan's in a taxi, particularly when he wasn't drinking, was an illogical play. There was a rent-a-car place within easy walking distance of Hannigan's.

"I'm letting little things worry me," he growled. "It doesn't make any difference."

He heard the senator close the study door and mount the stairs. Hito was putting out lights in the rear of the house. In a few minutes, Hito would be through and then the Japanese would go out to his own room over the garage behind the house and everything would be quiet. Cooper rubbed his eyes.

"And I have to stay awake until three. Nice going."

ALREADY he could feel the tomb-like silence settling upon the old house. It would be no cinch to stay awake, even with all that he had to think about. He smoked a cigarette and heard Hito putting out lights in the big study.

Cooper gave the man fifteen minutes to clean up whatever odd chores he might have to do in the rear of the house, then rose and went back through the kitchen. There was no sign of Hito and the rear door was locked. Cooper was on the point of unlocking it, but he stopped with his hand on the catch, withdrew it and snapped his fingers. "It will be time enough to do that when I come down at three o'clock."

He went back through the house, turned out the light in the little study and ascended the stairs. His room was in the rear of the house, just across the hall from Tim Weller's. The doors of

all the rooms were closed but there was a line of light under Vivian's door and he stopped. He was about to knock softly when he became aware of the fact that Vivian was speaking to someone. He stopped with his hand raised and then the other voice answered.

He could not distinguish words but the second voice was the voice of the blonde, Mildred Harney.

He let his hand drop and went slowly up the hall. It was natural enough that two girls who occupied connecting rooms should be having a goodnight conversation, but he wasn't quite happy about it. Under present circumstances, Mildred Harney would not be talking to Vi out of any feeling of affection. She was the kind of a person who had axes to grind. And she was likely to be in a mood for knifing Greg Cooper in the back with a great deal of enthusiasm.

"And I can't help that." He went into his room and snapped on the light. A shower would, he reflected, be a help. He slipped out of the dinner clothes. He could not, however, dismiss from his mind the thought of Vivian Dawson.

"If she had only talked to me instead of the blonde," he thought.

VIVIAN DAWSON herself was unhappy. She left her uncle's study with the feeling that she had been let down, that Greg Cooper had failed her when she needed him most. The shock of her uncle's bitter speech and of his destruction of the money had been hard enough to bear, but Greg Cooper's failure to make a fight on the issue had been disillusioning.

"He was so weak, so helpless. And after promising me so much."

She entered her room blindly and threw herself down upon the bed. "I

never want to talk to him again. Never."

She was still crying into her pillow when he knocked. She ignored him at first, then she rose slowly. Two instincts were at war within her. She wanted to ignore him completely—and she wanted to tell him what she thought of him. As she stood in the middle of the room with her fists clenched, she saw her own reflection in the mirror. There were two streaks down her cheeks where the tears had flowed and her fists had rubbed the tears.

She crossed to the mirror and lifted her powder-puff from the bureau top. She heard the voices in the hall and the patting motion of the powder-puff slowed. She could not distinguish the words but she knew that Mildred Harney was out there with Greg and curiosity got the better of her. She walked softly to the door. She recognized Greg's voice and was able to distinguish the tail end of a sentence.

"... and you made the same mistake tonight."

The blonde girl's voice replied, "Maybe you'll be working for me, too."

Vivian flushed and turned away from the door. She didn't want to be an eavesdropper and hadn't intended to be one.

She walked back to the mirror, but when she picked up the powder-puff, she stopped with it in her hand and forgot that she had it. Her eyes were staring at her own reflection and she was looking beyond it, her mind running in desperate circles.

"He hasn't been friendly with her and fooling me. He couldn't."

The fact that Greg Cooper had been talking to the blonde girl about a mistake that she had made, however, did not make sense. And she couldn't ex-

plain satisfactorily to herself the girl's allusion to work.

Mildred Harney had entered the adjoining room. Vivian heard her moving around. Her chin came up and she headed for the connecting bathroom.

"I'm going to talk to her. I've got to know what she plans to do."

She reached the door just as the blonde girl entered the bathroom from the other door. Mildred Harney stepped swiftly into the bathroom and closed her own door behind her.

"You startled me."

"I'm sorry." Vivian's lips felt stiff. "I wanted to talk to you."

"Sure." Mildred Harney seemed nervous. She pulled at the doorknob behind her and then strode into Vivian's room.

"I've been wanting to talk to you, too," she said. "I'm sorry about what happened tonight, kid."

"Are you?"

"Sure."

"You could have stopped him from burning that money. He would have listened to you."

The blonde girl smiled and shook her head. "It would have cost me too much, kid. He'd figure that I was more interested in his money than in him."

Vivian's eyes came up level. "Weren't you?"

"Did I act like it? It's gone, isn't it?"

Vivian blinked. There didn't seem to be any answer to that, but the blonde girl was too flip, too casual and too sure of herself. And she was friendly after a fashion tonight, when she had always been aloof. There was an air of triumphant excitement about her that did not seem natural in a girl who had merely won an old man while losing his money. Vivian stared at her thoughtfully. The blonde girl looked away.

"You were a very good sport about it," Vivian said.

"So were you. Swell." The blonde girl patted her shoulder with an impulsive gesture. She was nervous, however, and seemed anxious to get away. She looked several times toward the connecting door. "I've got to get the beauty sleep," she said.

Vivian let her go. There were many things that she wanted to ask, but she couldn't ask them. The conversation was pitched on too unreal a note. There was no bond of contact between herself and this girl. The friendliness was all on the surface.

FOR ten or fifteen minutes after the door had closed between them, Vivian sat and stared at the wall. She hadn't been able to mention Greg's name at all. She got up slowly and slipped her shoulder straps. As she stepped out of the red evening gown, she heard the soft sound of subdued voices. Her body stiffened.

There was a man in Mildred Harney's room.

The house seemed unnaturally still except for that subdued, cautious murmur. Vivian took a swift step toward the bathroom, then stopped with her face flushing. It wasn't any of her business if someone was in there. She didn't want to know about it.

She moved as far away from the connecting bathroom as she could and took off her other garments. She wanted to take a shower, but she hesitated. Finally she decided that she had a perfect right to take a shower and moved noisily toward the bathroom.

"I'll give them plenty of warning. I'll let them know that I'm not spying on them."

She could hear nothing when she entered the bathroom. She snapped the

catch which locked the door against Mildred Harney and turned on the shower. It made a lot of noise and she was glad of that. Her face still felt flushed.

"It was probably Uncle Brad. . . . I don't care. . . . It isn't any of my business."

She scrubbed herself vigorously and argued with herself as she scrubbed. Then, suddenly, she stopped all movement and stood stiffly under the shower. Suppose that was Greg in there?

The thought chilled her. She tried weakly to tell herself that she didn't care but she was shaken and she hurried with her toweling. When she turned off the shower, she listened deliberately at the door. There were no voices at all now and she flipped the catch off the lock. She went into her own room and locked the bathroom door from her side. Haste drove her and she slipped swiftly into a pink nightgown and a filmy negligee.

The hall was quiet and lighted by only one dim bulb. She moved along it like a ghost and halted outside of her uncle's room. Her heart was thudding painfully but she felt that she had to know if he were in his own room or not. She stretched her hand out to the knob, then halted the gesture.

There was a tinkling sound from inside the room like the breaking of glass.

Vivian backed away from the door, then turned and almost ran. "He is in there. It wasn't Uncle Brad."

She reached her own door and stopped. She looked toward Greg Cooper's door down the hall. She wanted to listen there, too, but she felt embarrassed at the mere thought of doing it. She lifted her chin high. "I don't care what he does."

The quiet of her own room smothered her but she threw herself down

on the bed and listened to the ticking of her small clock. Each tick was like a hammer stroke beating the foundations of her life away. Tears welled into her eyes, but after a while she slept.

She woke with a jerk. As though one part of her mind had never been asleep, she knew that someone had passed her door and that she had heard him pass. She sat bolt upright in the bed and the murmur of voices came to her from the other room; not continued conversation but merely occasional words—as though two cautious people were trying to converse with a minimum of words.

Vivian rose slowly. For several minutes she sat on the side of her bed and she could no longer hear the voices. She looked at the small clock and saw that it was twenty-five minutes to three. She had been awake for perhaps six or seven minutes. "I'm being foolish."

She smoothed out her pillow and was about to lie down once more when she heard a faint sound down the hall like the creaking of a door hinge. She held her breath and in a few seconds she heard the sound again. She got up and moved to her door.

A man walked cautiously down the hall toward her uncle's room—or toward the stairs; she didn't know which since she lost the sound of his footsteps after he passed her door.

"It's like a bad dream, with frightening things happening and nothing that one can do about them."

Vivian went back to her bed, looked at it and looked at the clock. It was nineteen minutes to three. She could no longer hear voices in the next room and the hall seemed quiet but she knew that she couldn't sleep with that feeling of dread and uncertainty hanging over her.

It was a quarter of three. She reached for the negligee. She put it on

and slipped out into the hall. She heard no one and saw no one. There was no light under any of the doors. She moved down the hall, hesitated a moment before her uncle's door; then took a deep breath and turned the knob. She stepped into the room.

CHAPTER VII

The Senator's Safe

GREG COOPER dozed during his long vigil. Waiting for three o'clock in the morning when there is nothing else to do but wait is a grueling test of a man's ability to keep awake. For a half hour, Cooper nodded. He came out of his doze with a quick jerk.

He fumbled sleepily for his watch. He had a panicky feeling that he might be late, and a vague sense that some sound had awakened him.

"Two thirty-two—and everything quiet as a tomb."

He reassured himself on both counts and stretched his muscles. His eyes still felt heavy and he decided that he could not afford to risk another period of inaction. It was close enough to three o'clock to justify going downstairs. His watch had a luminous dial and he had not needed a light. He did not chance disturbing anyone in the household with a light now. He made his way cautiously across the room and opened the door gently. His watch said two thirty-five.

He didn't like the sound that the hinge made and he waited in the doorway, listening. Due to the peculiar construction of the stair well, sound did not penetrate the upper floor from the first floor unless it was an unusually sharp or loud sound; but he was not worried unduly about the possibility of people being downstairs. The chief

hazard, as he saw it, lay in restless sleepers.

No sound came to him from any of the rooms and he stepped out, drawing the door after him. The hinge creaked again but not as loudly as before. He balanced his weight on the balls of his feet and moved down the hall to the stairs.

He was taking his time. He was engaged in a burglary conspiracy, no matter how he might explain his motives to himself. He could not afford to be seen or delayed by any member of a nerve-taut household. He took the darkened stairs a step at a time and paused at the bottom. His forehead creased in a worried frown.

There was a line of light under the door of the senator's study.

He moved forward swiftly now, his nerves strung like fine wires beneath his skin. He had taken a half dozen steps when he was conscious of movement behind him. A masked figure seemed to rise from the ground and there was a gun pressing against Cooper's back.

"Take it easy!" the man growled. "And walk straight ahead."

Cooper grunted. He had turned partly into that gun but only an idiot would try to turn the rest of the way. He saw no percentage in mock heroics.

"I was going straight ahead when you stopped me," he said.

The man in the mask did not reply. He stayed close to Cooper and Cooper marched. Before the study door, Cooper came to a halt. The gun barrel jabbed him.

"Go on in."

There was more nervousness than toughness in the man with the gun. Cooper could sense that from the voice and from the way in which the man gave his orders. Cooper did not find

the fact reassuring. A nervous man was likely to be more dangerous with a gun than a tough man. Cooper turned the knob and stepped into the study.

THERE was a little man crouched in front of the safe, his fingers pressing the dial lightly. At the sound of the opening door, he leaped to his feet. There was terror in his white face as he turned, and Cooper swore.

"Bridwell!"

The man behind Cooper relaxed. He evidently hadn't recognized Cooper in the darkness. Beau Bridwell was leaning against the safe for support.

"You scared me, Mr. Cooper. I—I—"

"You thought you'd try a double-cross?"

"Oh, no. No, sir."

"Baloney. Who's this wolf?"

Cooper turned. The man with the gun was holding it like a man in evening clothes holding a greasy tire iron. He no longer looked formidable, merely disconcerted. Cooper jerked the loosely strung handkerchief from his face and stared at him in astonishment.

The man with the gun was Terry Black of the taxicab. He flushed under Cooper's hard stare, but his mouth was sullen. There was a raw odor of liquor about him.

"I ain't interested in anything but what's mine," he growled.

"You mean the two hundred and fifty dollars?"

"You bet."

"It wasn't yours. You owed it."

"Maybe. I was willing to admit that I did. If the senator needed the dough, it was his, see? But when I saw all that money stacked up—"

"Okay. It still isn't your money."

Cooper turned back to Bridwell, his

jaw hard. "And you, you doublecrossing chiseler, I suppose you just got here early and went to work, eh?"

"Yes, sir. That's how it was. My watch only cost a buck in the first place and—"

"And you're a liar. You gave me the doublecross. You had my check if anything went wrong and you were going to glom off that money for yourself."

"No. You got me wrong on that."

There was white fear in Beau Bridwell's face; the fear of a man who has served too many years behind gray walls and who knows that he will never come out if he goes in again. Cooper stood with his hands on his hips. His eyes shifted from one man to the other. Terry Black showed less fear but he was trembling with nervousness. Beau Bridwell kept moistening his lips.

Two men to one and with a gun in the hand of one of them, they had the advantage over Cooper and they seemed unmindful of it. If they wanted the contents of the safe enough to pull a doublecross to get it, they could still carry out their original intention. With his check in Beau Bridwell's pocket, Greg Cooper was in no position to call for help. The thought, however, did not alarm him. He felt there was no need of help.

He was dealing with a broken yeggman who had dropped into the ranks of petty thievery and with a desperate taxi driver who had turned crooked only because he had learned bitterness and had washed his bitterness down with too much liquor. Small time crooks were always frightened by the size of a big job. Their imaginations were not equal to it. They would steal a hundred or two—and maybe slap a man like Cooper out of the way to get it; but a safe holding thousands was frightening. They let fright paralyze

them. Cooper shoved his jaw forward aggressively.

"Put that gun on the table, Black!" he growled.

The taxi driver stopped trembling. For a second his eyes were hot with defiance; then he shrugged and laid the gun down. "You got most of it wrong," he said. "This ain't a double-cross. It's a different deal, that's all. I was going to bring Beau out here even if you hadn't got to him first. I got desperate thinking of all the money I saw out here and how much that two fifty meant to me. I was going to take it back, that's all."

Cooper looked at him searchingly and believed him. He turned toward Bridwell. "And what were you going to get?"

Bridwell passed his tongue over his lips. "Just a little stake for myself, Guv'ner. I was just going to take maybe a thousand."

STRANGELY enough, Greg Cooper found himself believing Bridwell, too. It was the fear of big money again. Beau Bridwell had sunk to a level where he knew that the mere possession of money in large amounts would ruin him. He wouldn't have dared to take it—even with it lying under his hands. Terry Black was lighting a cigarette.

"It was a different deal," he repeated. "I was going to blow. Beau was going to hang around and when you let him in, he was going to open the box again for you."

Cooper nodded. It was fantastic and it was obviously fact. Beau Bridwell had merely hired himself out to two different men—under agreement to open the same safe twice in a night.

"You set the time pretty close," he said.

Beau Bridwell shook his head.

"Not us. We left lots o' time. We were going to try that box at two bells, but there was somebody moving around down here."

Cooper stiffened. "There was what?"

"Somebody down here in this room."

The two men were looking at him. Cooper shook his head slowly. He was regretting that nap that he had taken upstairs.

"Did you get the box open?" he asked.

Bridwell shook his head. "Nope. But I can do it."

"Okay. Open it up." Cooper sat on the corner of his own desk. He gestured with one hand toward the ashes in the fireplace. "There are people in this house," he said, "who will bet you that there is a lot of money in those ashes and nothing in the safe. I'll reverse the bet. I'll bet you that there is nothing in the ashes and a lot of money in the safe. Go to it!"

The little cracksman looked at him curiously and bent over the dial. It was hot in the study and very still as Beau Bridwell stiffened with concentration, his head close to the steel door of the safe and his eyes fixed in a stare that was almost glassy. He moved the dial slowly, calling upon the skill of his youth—feeling for the fall of the tumblers.

Greg Cooper was holding his breath. It didn't seem quite real and his mind refused to encompass the idea of personal danger. He was looking at the safe as, earlier in the evening, he had looked at the fire in the open grate. That hadn't been real, either.

He had refused to believe, then, that it was possible for a man who had been miserly with money all of his life to deliberately destroy it as a gesture of spite. Trickery and malice were believ-

able in Bradford Weller, but never a big, irrevocable gesture.

Cooper had been intrigued, too, by the fact that the safe had remained locked during all of the time that the money was coming into the house. Bradford Weller, the man who squeezed money till it shrieked, had kept his safe locked and tossed bales of currency into boxes.

It never had made sense and Greg Cooper watched Beau Bridwell's sensitive fingers with a feeling of thrilled anticipation. When that door swung open, he expected to see currency in stacks; currency that had never been destroyed and never intended for destruction.

Beau Bridwell was only four minutes at the safe; four minutes that seemed like hours. Then he straightened. His face was streaming with sweat. "Easy, Guvner," he said hoarsely. "A baby could 'a' opened this old can."

Greg Cooper came to his feet as Bridwell gripped the handle and pulled the door open. The little cracksmen's jaw dropped and he turned incredulously to Cooper.

"Empty, Guvner," he said. "Some papers, but . . ."

Greg Cooper was beside him in a stride. He looked incredulously at the yawning emptiness of the big box. The silence of the room blanketed on him and he felt an emptiness within him that corresponded to that of the safe.

He had sat tamely on the sidelines while the senator had his bonfire and he hadn't worried because he was sure of his hypothesis. Now, for the first time, it occurred to him that he might actually have witnessed over a hundred and fifty thousand dollars going up in smoke.

Beau Bridwell wiped the back of his

hand across his forehead. "What now, Guvner?"

Cooper turned to him—and stiffened. Upstairs, a woman screamed three times.

CHAPTER VIII

• Death Without Dignity

GREG COOPER charged across the study. He heard the other two men behind him. Beau Bridwell's voice was hoarse with fright.

"We gotta lam," he said.

It was no time to argue the question. Greg Cooper did not know what he would encounter upstairs, but whatever it was, if it were sufficiently grave to wring screams from Vi Dawson, he had no time to waste on Beau Bridwell or Terry Black.

Greg grabbed Black's revolver. He took the black stairs three steps at a time and in the pale light of the upper hall, he saw Vivian Dawson. She was reeling away from the senator's room, her arms held stiffly away from her sides. Her features were rigid with shock and her green negligee had fallen away from the flimsy nightgown beneath. Greg Cooper put his arm around her and steadied her.

"Vi! What is it?"

"It—it's in there. Uncle Brad! Dead. I touched him. . . ."

He looked toward the senator's room, then turned. Mildred Harney was coming down the hall. Her face was chalk white.

"What has happened?" she said.

Greg Cooper shook his head. "I'll find out. Take Vi into her room, will you?"

Sure."

The blonde girl seemed relieved at having something to do. She slipped her arm over Vivian Dawson's shoul-

ders. Vivian's lips tightened and she straightened.

"Oh," she said. "Thank you. I'm all right."

She turned as though to go back to the senator's room, but Greg Cooper shook his head at the blonde girl and went down the hall alone. He stepped into the senator's room and closed the door behind him before he flipped the light switch.

Bradford Weller was lying on his back in the bed with his glazed eyes staring at the ceiling. There was an Italian stiletto, that had probably come from his own collection, buried hilt-deep in his chest. His fingers were resting lightly upon the hilt as though he had plunged the stiletto home and then relaxed his grip as death took him away.

In the cruel light of the central ceiling fixture that he so seldom used, his bald head gleamed. On the floor beside the bed his false teeth lay with fragments of broken glass about them.

Greg Cooper stared for a long minute at the corpse and slowly shook his head. "Fake," he said. "He never killed himself."

He moved gingerly into the room, conscious of the fact that he must not touch anything lest he disturb valuable clues. His mind raced over possibilities.

All that he was immediately sure of was the fact that Bradford Weller would never have taken his wig off and removed his teeth if he were contemplating suicide. The senator's vanity would have survived even death.

As it was, death had found him stripped of everything—even of dignity.

"He didn't figure to be murdered. It doesn't make sense."

Cooper shook his head. A few hours ago, Bradford Weller had made a show

out of the burning of currency with the expressed intention of foiling those who had designs on his money and who, he claimed, were waiting for him to die. Now Bradford Weller was dead. There was a fine irony in that but Cooper could not see the possible motive. He did not believe that sane people killed for vengeance unless there was another powerful factor working. There were people in the household who were resentful, but they were people capable of seeing that murder would make a bad situation worse.

THERE was a clicking sound from the direction of the door and Cooper turned. Tim Weller stood framed in the doorway; a tall, spare figure in a faded blue bathrobe, striped pajamas and loose house slippers. He blinked at the light and ran one thin hand through his disheveled gray hair.

"Bradford," he said huskily. "Dead, isn't he?"

He continued to blink into the glare of the room. He did not have his cane but he gripped the door frame for support. Cooper nodded.

"Yes," he said gently. "He's been dead for hours, I imagine. His body is rigid."

Tim Weller continued to stare at the body. "He was mad," he said. "Insane."

"I don't think so." Cooper had started for the telephone but he turned back. "You'd better go to your room, Judge. It's pretty tough."

He never called Tim Weller "Judge" except on special occasions. The old man shook his head. "My place is here."

"I'm going to call the police."

"It's the thing to do. Call Alexandria Police station." Tim Weller crossed the room to the chair farthest from the

bed and sat down. "You know," he said, "I made Bradford. Started him in law. Made a politician out of him."

"I know." Cooper picked up the phone. He swore softly. There was no buzz in the receiver. The old man looked up. Cooper put the phone back on the stand. "The wire is cut," he said.

He was frowning again. There was a cold-blooded, professional touch about cutting the phone wires. He looked casually along the line. He couldn't see the break and because he couldn't, he found the wire-cutting more baffling. A phone in a bedroom would naturally be an extension phone. To isolate a house without phone service, the line would have to be cut downstairs.

"An amateur would never have thought of that," he said aloud.

Tim Weller blinked at him. "What?" he said.

Cooper shrugged. "Somebody figured that he needed a head start."

He moved away from the phone and looked at the body on the bed. Despite his newspaper experience, he felt that queer sense of helplessness that sweeps a person in the face of violent death. He would have to go after help now, and he had a strong disinclination to go. The murderer might want just that.

But he couldn't figure out any reason why the murderer would want him out of the house—except that the safe had been empty when he had Beau Bridwell open it. If the safe had held a small fortune in money earlier in the evening—as he suspected—then its present emptiness provided a possible motive for murder and a good reason for the murderer to want a head start or time to hide the money after the money was considered. Cooper swung around.

"Did you come downstairs tonight, Judge, after once you went to bed?"

Tim Weller blinked. "Downstairs? No."

"Somebody did." Cooper ground his palms together thoughtfully. Tim Weller lifted his head.

"How do you know?"

Cooper did not answer. He was remembering what Beau Bridwell and Terry Black had told him. They delayed their attack on the safe because there had been someone in the senator's study. Cooper's eyes passed over the lean body of Tim Weller. It was easier to believe the Judge than to disbelieve him. It would take a strong motive to make Tim Weller negotiate stairs that he didn't have to climb.

He looked at the corpse. The senator hadn't been down there. He had been dead for hours before Beau Bridwell arrived at the house. Who was left? The girls? Yes. Either one of them might have been in the study. He didn't believe that either one had. Hito? Well, he would have to check up on that. The thought of Hito gave him an idea.

He didn't have to go for the police. He had someone to send.

"I'll have to consider the possibility that Bridwell and Black lied," he thought grimly. "Bridwell may have been closing that safe instead of trying to open it when I came in."

He still believed in his theory of little crooks being afraid of big money, but this had been an extraordinary night—and he was not unmindful of his own position. There was a man with a criminal record who had one of Greg Cooper's checks that had been drawn on the day his employer was murdered.

Greg Cooper had had the opportunity personally—and any one of sev-

eral motives that would look good to the police—for murdering Bradford Weller.

He was aware of Tim Weller's blinking eyes fixed upon him. He didn't know how long the old man had been studying him, but Tim Weller was shrewd. He might be Greg Cooper's worst witness before a grand jury if it came to that. His report on Cooper's unusual actions in the death room would carry weight. The old man was nodding his head slowly.

"It is no disgrace for a crazy man to kill himself," he said huskily. "His mind broke. He didn't know. But you better go for the police."

Greg Cooper stared at him. "You think that he killed himself?"

Tim Weller blinked. "Obviously," he said. He waved his hand toward the corpse with its stiff fingers resting on the stiletto hilt.

For a long minute Greg Cooper stood where he was and some perverse and cowardly thing inside of him said, "Why not?" He could send Hito to tell the police that the senator had committed suicide. They would come prepared to find a suicide, and the dignified grief of Tim Weller, who apologized for the disgrace of suicide by pleading his brother's insanity, would convince them.

It was a temptation but he set his jaw against it. "I'm sorry, Judge," he said, "but it isn't that simple. He didn't commit suicide. He was murdered."

"Murdered?" Tim Weller raised his head, his eyes widening and, for the moment, ceasing to blink.

"That's right. And I'm going to send Hito for the cops."

Greg Cooper was heading for the door as he spoke. He had taken only two steps out into the hall when a gun boomed outside the house. There was

a hushed beat of time and then another shot from a gun of lighter caliber. Somebody shouted and on the highway the brakes of a car squealed.

CHAPTER IX

Suspects

THE door of Vivian Dawson's room opened on the echo of that second shot. Mildred Harney came out, running. She started for the stairs and Greg Cooper was only a step ahead of her. He gripped her arm and she struck at him.

"Let me go!" she said.

He gripped harder and swung her around. She struck at him again and her body stiffened. Then suddenly she went limp. The desperate look went out of her eyes and she clutched at him.

"Oh, please," she said. "Don't go out. Stay with us. I'm frightened."

He shook her, and over her shoulder he saw Vi Dawson. Vivian's face, too, was pale but she had recovered her grip on herself.

"See what it is, Greg. I'll take care of her." There was a catch in her voice. Another shot sounded outside and she flinched; but she kept coming. She caught the blonde girl's arm as Greg Cooper let go, and Cooper whirled to the stairs.

He went down fast. He was thinking of Bridwell and of Terry Black, wondering if they had recovered the gun from the table in the study and if they were shooting it out with someone on the grounds. The sense of personal danger pressed on him. Anything that happened to Beau Bridwell was likely to be bad medicine for Greg Cooper. Apart from that, he didn't want to get the little yegg into anything serious. He was responsible for Beau Bridwell being out here and he had practically

given the man guarantees of safety. Even the later doublecross did not nullify that, unless the doublecross was worse than he knew.

He bounded across the lower hall and out of the front door. Upstairs he had left Mildred Harney in care of Vi Dawson. That was another irony of a case that was full of irony. The girls took turns taking care of each other. But there was a difference.

Vi Dawson had gone to pieces with shock but had found herself when there was danger to be met. Mildred Harney had not been affected by the senator's death but she had found fear in her being when the shooting started. Why?

Cooper expected to find the answer to that question out on the grounds—when he found who was doing the shooting.

Traffic was stopped on the Mount Vernon Highway a hundred yards or so away and Cooper had an idea that the occupants of the cars were under cover from stray shots.

A dark figure moved on the sloping lawn that rolled down to the highway from the house. Instantly there was a flash of flame from a point near the garage. The dark figure folded and went down and Cooper saw another man crawling out of the garage shadow, raising himself for another shot.

"Hold it!" Cooper shouted and started forward. He had lost the sense of personal danger. He knew only that the man out on the lawn had been hit and that, with the car lights from the highway behind him, he would be a still target for the other marksman. There was something chilling about the idea of seeing a bullet pumped into a fallen man. Cooper raced toward the garage.

The man with the gun got up on one knee. He was wobbling badly but fight-

ing for balance. Cooper put on a last burst of speed and struck at the gun with his open hand. The gun spun end over end and the man who had wielded it sank forward on the grass. Cooper recognized him.

"Hito!" he said. "You're hit, aren't you?"

"Shot bad." The Japanese rolled over. He was shaking his head. Blood flowed over the front of his light pajama jacket. Greg Cooper dropped on one knee beside him and the Japanese drew a deep sobbing breath.

"Lady scream," he said, "and I get up. Pretty soon after, man jump out of window and run. Look dishonest. I remember lady scream and I shoot. Yess."

"You fired at him without knowing who he was?" Cooper was wadding a handkerchief against the man's wound and looking toward the road. A car with green lights had pulled in through the gates and there were two men with flashlights moving gingerly toward the man who was lying on the lawn. Hito sighed.

"I shoot to scare," he said. "Not try to hit. He shoot back and I try to hit next time."

"Okay. Take it easy. We'll have a doctor for you. Don't talk any more."

COOPER rose to his feet. One of the cops threw a flashlight beam at him and he knew that there was a gun pointed down the beam. He raised his hands high.

"There's a man shot here," he said.

"There's one shot here, too."

"We'll have to get them into the house."

"Yeah. Who are you?"

"Cooper. I belong here."

The policeman walked up to meet Cooper. He was a young cop with

broad, blocky shoulders and a rolling walk. He was wearing the uniform of the District Park Police that limited his jurisdiction to the Mount Vernon Highway, but he had the aggressive manner of a man who, having blundered into something, intends to see it through.

"What's it all about?" he said. Cooper shrugged.

"I don't know yet myself. Our Japanese servant shot someone running away. He got shot himself doing it."

There was another car pulling into the driveway. Three men piled out and entered into conversation with the policemen down on the grounds. They were Scoutmasters visiting Washington for the Boy Scout Jamboree and while one of their number stood guard to keep curious persons off the grounds, the other two helped Cooper and the two policemen to get the wounded men into the house.

The second wounded man was George Arlington, master con man.

He smiled grimly with pain-taut lips when he recognized Cooper. "I thought we said 'No hard feeling,' Cooper."

"That's right. But I didn't shoot you. And the senator hadn't been murdered then."

"Murdered?" Arlington's small eyes opened wide. Cooper stared hard at him. The blocky policeman straightened from his examination of Hito's wound. He was the senior cop of the patrol and his name was Brennan.

"What's this about a senator being murdered?" he said.

"Bradford Weller. He was stabbed in his bed," Cooper said grimly. "By a person or persons unknown."

"And this guy was running away?" The policeman jerked his thumb at Arlington.

There was a commotion at the door

and Mildred Harney broke away from Vi Dawson and Tim Weller. She threw herself down on her knees beside Arlington and would have put her arms around him if the second policeman, a lean youngster with red hair, hadn't gripped her shoulder.

"He didn't do it," she said. "He didn't do it."

Brennan turned to the Scoutmasters. "We need some authority here," he said. "Be good guys and get us a couple of medicos and some law from Alexandria."

The Scoutmasters saluted and went out on the double. Brennan ran his hand through his hair. "How do you know that he didn't do it?" he said.

Mildred Harney looked up defiantly. "Because he didn't have any reason to do it. And he was in my room all night. That's why he ran away."

She was like a tigress at bay, her eyes flashing. Brennan looked embarrassed. He looked to his partner for suggestions but the red-haired youth didn't know what to do, either. Tim Weller sank into a chair, his eyes on Mildred Harney's face. He looked very old and tired.

"You had promised to marry my brother," he said accusingly.

She looked at him and laughed bitterly. "I didn't," she said. "Your brother was careful about that. He didn't make any offers that he didn't have to make."

"But you would have married him."

"I couldn't. I'm married to George." Her voice caught in a sob and the fight went out of her. She tried to put her arms around the injured con man again. "Are you hurt badly, darling?" she said.

The red-haired policeman kept her back. "He's just nicked, Miss. Thigh and shoulder. He'll be okay."

GREG COOPER had been bending over the Japanese. Hito decidedly was not okay. He had been hit in the chest and he was bleeding internally. There was froth on his lips. His eyes, however, were alive. He seemed to be vitally interested in everything that was being said in the room.

"I am fidelity always," he whispered. "Missy scream. I shoot."

"You were right about that, Hito." Greg Cooper's voice was soft. "Take it easy."

George Arlington was speaking to the blonde girl. "Sit tight and keep your nerve," he said. "We're in the clear, see?"

Mildred Harney nodded. Vi Dawson came over beside Greg Cooper. "Is there anything I can do, Greg?"

"Yes. Try to keep Hito comfortable till the doctor comes."

Cooper rose slowly to his feet. George Arlington was looking at him with narrowed calculating eyes. The blonde girl watched him with open hostility. Tim Weller had his chin on his chest. The two policemen were standing awkwardly, charged with responsibility but lacking authority. Greg Cooper looked slowly around the room.

"Somebody here murdered Senator Weller," he said gravely.

Tim Weller lifted his chin from his chest. He stretched out one thin arm. "Wait," he said. "Let me ask this girl a question." He leaned forward in his chair.

"You couldn't marry my brother," he said. "So you had no chance of collecting his insurance. He had a lot of that and it was all that he did have after you let him burn up his money. What did you stand to gain?"

The girl looked at him and laughed. "Suppose you guess," she said defiantly.

Greg Cooper measured her with his

eyes and there was no friendliness in his face. "Suppose that I do the guessing," he said. "What you stood to gain was exactly one hundred and fifty-four thousand, seven hundred and sixty-five dollars."

The girl stiffened and George Arlington ignored the pain of his wounds to come up on one elbow. Tim Weller was staring haggardly as though only dimly comprehending what was said. Greg Cooper shifted his stare to the con man.

"I couldn't figure out your business with the senator," he said, "until he pulled his grandstand act about burning up his fortune. Then I guessed. I knew Bradford Weller for too many years to believe in that gesture. It would break his heart to burn up a single dollar. *And he didn't burn a single dollar—not one.*"

The room became quiet. "The senator wanted to eat his cake and have it, too," he said. "He wanted his relatives to think that he had no money—and he wanted money to throw away on blondes. He bought hot money or badly made, unpassable counterfeit money and he substituted it for the real thing before that big show of his. And you, Arlington, sold it to him."

Arlington winced but Mildred Harney managed a laugh. "How silly!" she said. "Why those bills that he burned had your tags on them."

"Sure. And the senator had plenty of time alone in his study while I was down town to take those tags from one set of currency and transfer them to another."

Mildred Harney tried to laugh again but the laugh did not quite come off. Cooper's voice was relentless. "You two swindlers could have clipped the senator for every dime of that money and he wouldn't have been able to do

a thing about it," he growled. "His fortune no longer existed legally. He had burned it before witnesses. He could never have accused you of stealing what he had burned. It was the perfect con game."

Big George Arlington found his voice. "You don't arrest people for what they might have done," he said. "Mildred and I had nothing to do with killing him. We had no reason for killing him."

Greg Cooper's face looked drawn. "That's right," he said, "and I don't believe that either one of you did kill him."

Big George and the blonde girl relaxed visibly. The room was very quiet and Greg Cooper seemed reluctant to say more. Hito, the little Japanese, was watching every one of the tense actors in the scene, his eyes unnaturally bright. He coughed to call attention to himself.

"I kill him," he said. "I kill the senator. All okay now."

CHAPTER X

The Motive

GREG COOPER whirled to the sound of Hito's voice. He stared blankly at the little yellow man who was struggling to sit up against the support of Vi Dawson's arms. Two cars stopped outside and there were strangers entering the room. Brennan was explaining the case.

"Senator Weller has been murdered. We are about to get a confession. The murderer's dying, I think."

Greg Cooper was kneeling now beside the Japanese. Tim Weller had come unsteadily to his feet and was moving forward. A man with a doctor's bag knelt on the other side of Hito. The Japanese smiled, almost happily.

"Very simple," he said. "No money left. Insurance maybe, yess. Miss Boss come from hospital. No money. Very bad. Miss Boss come from hospital. Much insurance. Very good. You see. Yess?"

"All right. I've written your confession as you gave it. It says that you know that you are about to die. Can you sign it?"

"Yess." Hito reached for the fountain pen and scrawled rapidly across the bottom of the sheet. His eyes had a swimmy look but he was staring up at Tim Weller. "Much better," he said. "I have nobody. No family. Nobody."

The police had their confession and they did not pay much attention to that. Greg Cooper did—because Greg Cooper knew that Hito had lied.

He looked at Tim Weller. The old man's hands were clenching and unclenching. There were tears in his eyes and a vast hopelessness; the hopelessness, perhaps, of a man who sees himself chained to an endless responsibility and an unsharable secret. Greg Cooper knew, then, what he had suspected before. He bent above the Japanese.

"I understand, Hito," he said softly. "Fidelity always."

"Yess. Fidelity always. Good motto."

Hito smiled and died. Greg Cooper came slowly to his feet. He wanted to take Vi Dawson in his arms but he couldn't do that yet. He linked his arm to Tim Weller's and drew him across the room to the chair that he had occupied before.

"You better sit down, Judge," he said. "Your sister Emily will need you when she gets out of the hospital. You have to be fit for the job."

The old man looked into Cooper's eyes. "You know?" he said huskily.

Cooper nodded. "I know that you killed your brother, yes. And Hito

knew that you did. He was dying and he took the load from you. He believed in fidelity. You have to carry on, Judge."

Tim Weller's eyes misted. "I will. I made Bradford, you know. I made a lawyer out of him. I made a politician of him. And I made him a senator."

He was mumbling half to himself when Greg Cooper left him. Tim Weller had told his brother in this very room that no man had the right to destroy what he did not create. Tim Weller felt in his heart that he had made the man that Bradford Weller had been—and he had been consistent with his philosophy when he destroyed the man for what he considered the greater good.

Perhaps the officers of the law were entitled to the facts but Greg Cooper felt no obligation to tell them.

He was crossing the room and he saw the young policeman, Brennan. The blonde girl was gripping him by the arm. George Arlington was supporting himself on one elbow and looking at them.

"There's nothing that we can be held for. Nothing," the girl said.

Cooper's jaw hardened. Here were the perpetrators of a callous and premeditated crime; a crime predicated upon the gullibility of an old man who

believed that a young girl loved him. These two people would have stripped a family of money and lived at ease.

Now this precious pair thought that they could walk out. Cooper took a short step.

"No," he said. "There isn't a thing that you can be held for *unless George Arlington took that money out of the senator's safe tonight and hid it in your room.* Take a look, Brennan."

Cooper was watching the girl as Brennan left the room with another officer. The bravado was out of Mildred Harney now and she was wax white. In a few moments, Brennan was back. He opened a bag solemnly and stacks of money tumbled out—thick stacks of currency that were never intended for the fire. Cooper snapped his fingers.

"You killed that Japanese while you were engaged in a burglary, Arlington," he said grimly, "and the girl was your accomplice. Maybe you think that you can't be held for that."

He turned his back and he was suddenly weary of it all.

He stepped out into the hall and Vi Dawson was waiting for him.

"I think I can get a good job in Cuba," he said huskily.

She lifted her face to his. "Cuba would be lovely," she said.

THE END

Many Never Suspect Cause Of Backaches

This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. Most people pass about 3 pints a day or about 3 pounds of waste.

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ADV.

Mercy, Hijacked



By Dale Clark

Author of "Challenge," etc.

*A doctor diagnoses a stickup
—and the patient dies*



DANNY LANE muttered, "Now what the devil?" as the Flood Relief Special slowed clankingly to a dead halt. He peered through the night-blackened, rain-washed window of the smoker coach. Danny saw his own reflected face, nothing more than that.

A big, tropic-tanned, black mustached man came along the aisle. To the brakeman; who was adjusting the wick of his lantern, he said: "Where are we?"

"About twelve miles out of Riverside."

The big browned man's voice held a slight accent, probably Spanish. "What's the trouble?"

"Must be a tree blowed onto the track," the brakie said. "This-here's the old quarry spur—it's hardly been used for years."

"Need any help?"

The brakeman said, "We'll holler if we do," and pushed through the vestibule door.

Shrugging, the tropic-skinned man turned to the water tap. He took a col-

lapsible metal flask from its leather case, drained a thin vein of water into the flask.

It was very quiet in the smoking car. Grave-faced men spoke in low tones. They knew what lay ahead of the Special—there was suffering ahead, and destitution, and terrific threat of epidemic disease. There were a hundred thousand flood victims, some of them ill and more of them homeless—all deprived of sanitary sewage disposal, safe drinking water, milk for their children.

The worst flood in fifty years swung its five hundred mile scythe of destruction through the valley. Riverside lay isolated at the scythe's tip. Tons of crashing water had smashed the city's concrete highway outlets, boiled across the main railroad trackage and left the rusted quarry rails as a last link with the outside world. Thousands of lives depending on two threads.

Help from that outside world would come as the Red Cross and Army battalions fought through the destruction of half a dozen other cities up the river, as planes found landing sites on the rough hilltops.

The doctors in the smoking coach were volunteers, flocking in from the small towns of the state's south-western tip. Bearded grandfathers called out of retirement sat side by side with young internes from the famous Randall sanitarium.

Dr. Randall himself was there—a tall man with a face that had once been ascetic, but was now fleshed out with success and good living. Sanitarium owner and race horse fancier, he was telling a weatherbeaten little country physician: "Now, my experience with typhoid has been—"

There was typhoid fever in Riverside, scourging those homeless folk huddled in the refugee camps.

"So I am lucky to see the new technique put to the test!" The speaker was Captain-Doctor Almonéz, Randall's guest. The public health director of a banana republic, Almonéz was touring the United States; was specially interested in the oral vaccine technique perfected by Randall.

"*He's lucky?*" thought Danny Lane. "What about the victims in Riverside—?"

Danny thought this, didn't say it. Two years out of school, Danny was one of Randall's glorified internes—"resident doctor," so-called. The job didn't pay much in money—paid mostly in experience. Danny, a dark-haired, clean-cut young chap, was building himself a future. But it wasn't for him to rebuke Almonéz's callous expression. The man didn't mean anything by the remark, anyway. People in those banana countries died like flies, any-

way. Almonéz was hardened to wholesale death.

DANNY crushed his cigarette, walked out of the smoker. A few of the white-clad nurses in the coaches pored over magazines. Most of them were wise enough to doze in their seats knowing the sleepless, frantic hours of toil twelve miles ahead.

But one of them neither read nor dozed. Lucy Orr turned from trying to peer through the coach window. "Danny!"

Lucy Orr was one of the sanitarium nurses—blonde, pretty. Danny had a hunch she'd play a big part in that future of his.

He asked, "Well?" and put a lot of fondness into the single word.

"What *can* be holding us up here?" Lucy worried, her blue eyes deeply troubled. "Do you think this track could be washed out, too?"

Danny said, "Oh, the flood's not this high. The brakeman said there might be something on the track."

She tried vainly to see through the window again. "I thought I saw water out there, right beside the train—"

Danny knew the worry which gnawed in Lucy Orr's mind. Her folks lived in Riverside, and not on a hilltop, either. Her invalided mother would have had to be carried out on a stretcher, if she got out at all. And there were kid brothers and sisters. Kids who could only be inoculated against the dread typhoid when the Special got through.

"I'll look, Lucy," he said quickly. "I'll find out what's the matter."

Danny Lane walked out into the vestibule and hopped off into the darkness.

He trudged up the track. There *was* water out there, a dark sheet of it glimmering evilly in the light from the

coach windows. Weeds thrusting up beside the sleepers took wet slaps at the interne's ankles. The quarry spur certainly had been neglected in recent years. But Danny speedily forgot about the weeds.

His feet crunched the cinders faster. Something wrong ahead! That knot of men working beside the slowly puffing locomotive—no, beside the baggage car. They were—they were *what?*

Danny's stare focused on the yellow glow of lanterns beside the track. Good heavens, it looked as if—

Yeah, no doubt about it. They were unloading the baggage car. The medical supplies, those gelatine cells of heat-killed typhoid bacilli mixed with starch, coming out of the car and going down into a scow moored where the water lapped against the embankment.

This couldn't be right. Must be some mistake here. Why the devil unload twelve miles from the track end? Unless there was a washout ahead—

Danny Lane froze in his tracks. That was when he saw the metallic glitter of drawn guns, the train crew lined up beside the tender, hands in the air.

Robbery?

Danny Lane couldn't believe his eyes, couldn't realize anyone would be low enough, contemptible enough, to hijack the relief train.

It was happening though. The realization burst like a bombshell in the interne's bewildered brain. Realization—and fear. Fear because he knew the supply of new type vaccine was so terribly limited—it wouldn't be easy to get more—and it gave maximum protection two weeks sooner than doctors could obtain it with the old subcutaneous vaccines . . .

A yell of warning pushed into the interne's throat as he thought of that. A yell that ended, suddenly, in a

choked grunt. There was no warning for Danny Lane. He never saw the stealthy shadow behind him. The gun butt descended silently, crunched against his skull with sickening force.

Danny crumpled.

A toe prodded his ribs, turned him over. He rolled limply down the embankment. Slowly at first, then faster. A dull splash followed. . . .

A few minutes later, its terrorized crew huddled in the locomotive cab, the Special chuffed slowly up the quarry spur, gathering speed. Lucy Orr sighed her relief at the click-clack on the rails, turned her cheek to the plush cushion, squeezed shut her eyes.

In the smoker Dr. Randall consulted his strap-watch, said, "Lost ten minutes here."

Captain-Doctor Almonez murmured, "Torres, break out the brandy—eh? Where'd that man of mine go?"

The big, tropic-skinned man had disappeared.

THE shock of the ice cold flood-water aroused Danny Lane to semi-consciousness, congealed the agony in his skull to a dull, intolerable ache. But it congealed the strength in his limbs, too. He struck out feebly but his garments prisoned him in a freezing straitjacket of waterlogged cloth, prisoned and dragged him down. The pull of the current swept him out into mid-flood.

Then his fingers locked spasmodically on a wet-slicked length of board. Somehow Danny got his chin out of the water. A blacker outline showed above him against the blackness of the night. He was clinging to the scow's stern.

Voices came to him as from an infinitely great distance. The words might have been uttered in a foreign language

for all the sense he could make of them. Danny did not cry out for help for he knew that none would help him. These men had tried once already to murder him. He concentrated, trying to cling to the scow. It wasn't easy, he had to keep pushing off. The current, moving faster than the scow, tended to push his legs under the craft.

And gradually it did so. Now the least slip of his numbed hands meant death, for once drawn under the scow he would certainly drown. And he was already under it, up to his hands and head.

This could not have lasted long, though it seemed for hours. Could not, because his strength was measured in minutes.

Then the current changed, sharply. Danny heard the grate of poles going over the scow's side. His own body shot out to arm's length behind the craft. One hand was torn loose from its grip.

The scow moved slowly, jerkily. Suddenly it struck with a jolt that ran its whole length. The impact knocked Danny Lane's other hand away. He had an instant's vision of a bridge, a skeleton shape in the night, then the water rushed over his head, blotting out everything.

He no longer felt the current trundling him along, or the weight of his watersoaked clothes. He went spinning into a black void. . . .

In reality, he lay unconscious—half of him in the water, half of him cast upon the weedy bank—a dozen yards below the railroad bridge.

Half an hour later, Danny became fragmentarily aware of life in his being. That is to say, he became aware of pain. His body was a chilled huddle of quivering flesh. His skull, a queer and pulpy weight, was filled with a soggy ache.

Something in the night went *ku-lunk, ku-lunk*. Like a slowly beaten jungle drum. *Ku-lunk, ku-lunk!* Or did he imagine that? Was the drum inside his bruised head?

He passed out, cold. More time passed. Then a ray of light played eerily on the weeds over his head. A voice said: "Only place along the line they could get a boat that close to the rails."

Another voice: "Yeah, that so?"

"I'm telling you. I know. We still roll a few boxcars up here." Danny Lane had heard that voice somewhere before. It went on, "Farmers load a little hay on the siding here. It saves 'em the truck haul downtown—"

THE voices were going away. Danny Lane picked himself groggily out of the weeds, saw two silhouettes walking up the track. One of them carried a flashlight. He was saying, "Can't track 'em across water. Might as well go back and—"

Danny Lane cried, "Hey!" feebly. The blood came storming into his head again, and he fell flat. The men walked away, not having heard him.

After a while, Danny Lane came staggering over the embankment onto the roadbed. The clouds had broken overhead and a full moon shed its cold light over the scene. There was no sign of the two men. Obviously they had come out to investigate the robbery and as obviously had found nothing to investigate.

Danny Lane looked around. Back of him there was nothing but floodwater, a mile-wide bay of it glittering ominously under the moon. The water extended under the bridge to his left, spread a lake on the farmland across the tracks there.

Danny peered up the siding. It had

originally been a double-tracked section, permitting empties to pull off the line for loaded trains coming out of the quarry. That had been years ago. The siding was largely overgrown with weeds now. A little string of boxcars stood there; the door of one was open a bit, and the moonlight revealed the rectangular ends of hay bales inside.

The little strings of boxcars held no interest for the young interne. Danny looked on up the track. Twelve miles to Riverside he remembered the brakeman saying.

It might as well have been twelve hundred. Danny couldn't walk it; not weak as he was, drenched and with chattering teeth, with a head which burst from smouldering pain into red agony at every step he took.

He turned, stumbled across the bridge. There was a dirt grade crossing with a cattleguard, beyond that a wooden gate crossing a clay-packed road. It wasn't really a road, but a lane. At the end of the lane, Danny could see a little dark clump of farm buildings.

The farmer would have an automobile, a telephone, or at least a horse: some means of communicating with the city. He would also have dry clothing.

Danny stumbled up the clay road. He gasped with relief as he reached the farmhouse porch. The building was a small oblong of dingy gray, set in a muddy flat yard with barns and sheds at the rear. The sound of Danny's knuckles on the door echoed across the yard; brought no other response.

He muttered, teeth clacking, "G-got to b-break in!"

But the door wasn't locked. Danny pushed into the stale warmth of a kitchen. Moonlight at the uncurtained window showed a bare table, a stove, a cream separator. He went to the stove,

hunted across its metal top until he found a box of matches.

An oil lamp rested in a bracket over the table. Danny fumbled it lit. Then he turned to the stove. There were cobs in a coal bucket, a packing box stuffed with chopped wood, a tin kerosene can with a potato on its snout.

Trembling with cold, the interne dumped fuel into the stove, spread kerosene liberally, dragged a match across the blacked lids. The flame was instant, bright, warming. It howled pleasantly into the pipe.

A coffee pot with some dark liquid in it stood on the back of the stove. It would be hot by the time he found some dry clothes.

Danny took down the lamp, pushed open the door at the other end of the kitchen, stopped short. "Holy—!"

A MAN lay on the floor just over the threshold. He wore rubber boots, denim overalls, and a denim jacket. An irregular red blotch, the size of a dinner plate, stained the overall bib. There was a good deal more, a lot more, red on the carpet about him. The man had been shot, not through the heart, but in the lung.

Danny Lane stood stock-still a long moment, his throat contracting as he stared. The man might have been fifty or seventy—there were no special characteristics identifying his time-worn face—or at least the interne observed none. After that moment, he turned away; climbed the stairs to the second story. When he returned, it was with an armful of clothes.

He dressed in the kitchen. A half-full bottle of whiskey stood on a window sill back of the cream separator. Danny drank a cup of mixed whiskey and bitter coffee. The stimulation from the rank medicinal dose coursed

through his veins pleasantly. He felt warmed but still weak; his head swollen, charged with heavy internal pressure.

Danny paid no more attention to the dead man in the next room. It did not occur to him that the farmer's death might in any way be linked with the train robbery. He was not one of those super-sleuths who can be knocked cold one moment and wake up the next with a perfect crime solution in mind. He was not a sleuth at all, just an exhausted youth, with one thought inside his battered skull; to get to Riverside and tell his story to the authorities.

Danny went outside. The eastern sky had brightened to a pale mauve which found reflection in the swollen pond covering the lower end of the farm. Fence lines marched down into the water, disappeared; the brown thatch of a haystack made a tiny island in the flood.

His stare stopped on a muddy ring perhaps forty feet in diameter, a few rods from the water and near another stack, sliced in two like a loaf of bread.

It held no particular meaning for him.

He looked across the barnyard. There were a good many footprints in the mud. Water stood in some; these were old, before the night's rain. Others were fresher—and the makers' feet had skidded, leaving furrows and grooves rather than identifiable prints.

The tracks led to the ramshackle barn. Danny followed them. He pushed the barn door open clumsily. A movement inside made his pulse leap, sent a crackle of agony through his bruised head. Then Danny grunted—it was only a rat scurrying along a manger timber. Three cows and a team were stabled in the stalls.

Danny's lips twisted in perplexity.

A salty rime of sweat traced the outlines of harness on the horses. Danny went in, mumbled, "Who-a-a, boy," and touched one of the rumps. The horse was warm. The mud on its fetlocks looked fresh.

Danny Lane muttered, "Well I'll be damned!"

For the first time, his fogged brain began to grip a meaning in all these circumstances. He came out of the barn, hurrying, and looked around again.

BACK of the barn, the cattleyard was a straw-choked quagmire. Danny circled the hen house and implement shed, came abruptly onto a lip of the old quarry. It had been closed commercially for years; but some stone for local use had been coming out lately. A wagon track meandered down to the quarry floor. There was a wide expanse of bare rock across the quarry and beyond that a view of the railroad.

A long ways off, Danny could see a moving dot. He strained to focus his eyes on it. The dot took form—the form of an old-fashioned handcar. Danny could make out the tiny figure of a man pumping it along.

The interne started down the wagon trail into the pit. His jarring footfalls increased the torment in his head as he picked his way carefully. A thin orange-peel of sun slid over the horizon as he pushed through the bushes at the other end of the quarry and came out onto the track siding.

A frown tightened Danny's tired face as he inspected the scene. The muddy road along the track was blandly smooth.

But nevertheless the door of the last boxcar of the string on the siding, was closed. It had been open during the night. And the rising sun discovered

certain tiny marks on the rails—brighter bits visible where the rust was broken.

Danny lurched through the mud, got his hands onto that door. A surge of his body moved it only an inch. On the next try he got it six inches farther. Presently he had an opening wide enough to admit a man's body.

He jumped weakly, succeeded in grasping the latch with one hand. Clawing desperately, he got the toe of a shoe braced onto the metal-stripped sill. He climbed shakily.

The boxcar was filled nearly to its roof. There was barely room for Danny to crawl across the tiers of baled hay. He peered at the bales. Each would weigh around a hundred pounds and was encircled by two wires.

Lacking a pincers, he struggled to break one of the wires. Bare hands couldn't do it. Danny drove his heel into the bale, used all the strength in his leg, and the wire snapped.

The hay bulged out in accordion pleats. Danny muttered, "Yeah!" and drove his hands into the pleats. He twisted out a small wooden box and again muttered, "Yeah!"

He didn't need to open the box. He knew what it contained. It held the bile capsules, administered as a preliminary to the oral vaccination.

Now, why should anyone hijack stuff like this? The oral vaccine was ideal for flood conditions—you didn't need complicated equipment, your patients didn't suffer the severe reactions. But still, it could be used only by a physician. No doctor or hospital would buy anything like that except through legitimate supply channels. What in the devil could the hijackers *do* with it? What was the purpose.

However, that problem wasn't for Danny's aching head to solve. Let the

cops figure out the whys and wherefores.

He wriggled feet first out of the boxcar. The handcar was less than a hundred yards away. It slowed to a stop. The crew of one got off, stared at Dann Lane, walked slowly toward him.

Danny recognized the Special's brakeman. A strapping big fellow, he carried a handful of metal seals and pasteboard cards. The recognition was one-sided, at first. Nothing in Danny's overalled appearance suggested the neat interne of the preceding night.

"Hey, you!" the brakie said belligerently. "Can't you damned hoboos stay out of—great guns!" He dropped the seals, came closer, stared. "Say! Ain't you the guy they *drowned* last night?"

DANNY LANE grinned feebly. "I'm the guy they almost drowned, but never mind about me. How fast could you get a message to Dr. Randall in Riverside?"

The brakeman's broad face remained a map of astonishment. "Well, I'll be a so-and-some-more!" he ejaculated, ignoring the interne's question. "Is the other feller alive, too?"

"What other feller?"

"That foreign one," the brakie said. "Torres. They don't know if he was killed like you—like you're supposed to be—or if he run off with the robbers. It was an inside job. The train stopped because somebody pulled the emergency cord, see? Huh. Where'd you get them overalls?"

"Farmhouse," Danny replied laconically. "How about getting a message into the city?"

The man considered. "First I got to seal these cars and tag 'em. There's a switch engine coming up from Merionville to clear this siding for the milk trains to come in." He kept staring at

the overalls. "What farmhouse, doc?"

"The closest one."

The brakie said, "Oh. You mean Joe Barker's place?" His tone held a nagging curiosity. It occurred to Danny Lane that the man might be suspicious of his sudden reappearance—especially if the robbery had been an inside job. It seemed so, for the brakeman continued warily: "Barker couldn't help you any—getting your message into town?"

Danny spoke earnestly. "Listen. Barker's dead—murdered, I think. Anyway there's a dead man in the house up there." He went on, put that part of the story in as few words as he could. "The hijackers killed him, I suppose. They used his horses and baling outfit. The stuff's hidden inside the bales in this boxcar here. That's the message we've got to get to Randall."

He said this excitedly and the brakeman got excited, too. He exclaimed, "Sure! They musta figured nobody'd look inside them bales. This here hay was supposed to be loaded before the stickup—" He broke off, then: "You bet, doc. You leave it to me. I know this country here, see? Why, I helped shunt these empties onto the siding. That's why they put me on the Special—on account of knowing the quarry spur and her switches. I'll get that message through. The quickest way is for me to go down the spur. There's a phone at the crossroads store, two miles down. You stay here and watch, huh?"

Danny nodded. "And—there's a personal message. Tell Randall to let Miss Orr know I'm all right."

"Miss Orr, huh? What address?"

"She's one of the nurses. Randall will know."

"Maybe you better write the name out, doc." The brakie fumbled in his pocket, found a stub of indelible pencil.

Danny picked up the pasteboard cards the man had dropped in his excitement at seeing a supposed dead man come to life, and wrote the name. He handed the card over.

"Okay, doc. I got it."

The brakeman jumped aboard the handcar and started down the track.

"Hey!" Danny called. "You forgot—" But the man did not hear.

Danny bent over to pick up the rest of the seals and cards and stuff them into his pocket when a word caught his eye. A very familiar word to Danny Lane.

He grunted, stared hard at the card for this hay was consigned to the "Randall Farms"—the farm where Dr. Randall quartered his racing horses.

DANNY LANE gasped, "Holy—" and sat down on a rock. His mind was more of a confused jumble than it had been a moment before but one aspect of the puzzle leaped startlingly clear. If it had not been for his almost miraculous discovery, this boxcar's contraband cargo would have wound up in Dr. Randall's stock barns. How did this tie up with Torres' disappearance?

Danny shook his head slowly. Prob- it was all coincidence—just as much a matter of accident as the fact that he, Randall's interne, had gotten off the train last night.

He stood up, thrust the cards into his overall pocket, turned to look after the handcar. It had already vanished around a curve below the bridge.

He leaned against the boxcar, stared thoughtfully up the barren track toward Riverside. Gradually his stare narrowed. There was something wrong about this scene. Only the rails, the weeds growing up to the trackside, and the gray waste of water beyond. But

there *was* something wrong! Something missing!

Yet for the life of him, Danny couldn't think what. Whatever it was, eluded his pain-numbered wits. He struggled to remember—and failed. Like having a name almost at the tip of your tongue, but only *almost*. Perhaps if he didn't think about it for a moment, the correct answer would come—

Danny jerked around, warned too late by the sound of a footstep. The rising sun silhouetted a head and shoulders leaning around the end of the boxcar, cast a reddish glimmer along the rifle barrel aimed at the interne's chest.

"Come along quiet," the silhouette said. "We got you covered from both ways."

True enough, they had both ends of the siding covered. Another man came up behind Danny, snouted a gun against his back, and said: "Walk a rail, kid. We ain't leaving any footprints, see?"

They all walked the rails, Danny ahead of the others. Sometimes, his head swimming dizzily, the interne would stumble and be rewarded with a curse.

They headed him away from the quarry, down the track and across the cattleguard at the road, until they came to a cindered footpath leading back under the bridge.

"Down here, kid."

The bridge stood on tall, creosote-treated timbers. Flood water had backed in, was within eight feet of the sleepers overhead. One of the men went ahead of Danny, up to the wall of planks at the lower end of the bridge. It was a retaining wall, built to keep the roadbed from landsliding into the creek bottom there. The man lifted two

of the planks aside, said: "You crawl in."

The two planks had concealed a length of concrete ditch tile. The tile was barely large enough for a man to crawl through. Danny could see a glow of white light at the other end.

The man with the rifle prodded Danny. "Now crawl!"

The interne crept into the tile.

He emerged into a cave hollowed under the railroad. It was shored up with boards, lighted by an electric lantern hung on a twisted copper tube. The tube was part of an old still. Clearly, the cave had been a bootlegger hideout during Prohibition.

There were already two men in the dugout. One of these was a pug-nosed fellow, slouch-hatted, with an air of authority about him. Much of the authority derived from the revolver in his fist.

Danny blinked. He'd never seen a gun like it before. An H&R .38, with three inches of knife steel protruding from the barrel end—an ugly little bayonet.

The other man crouched in a corner of the cave, almost hidden in shadow. Knees were drawn almost level with his tropic-skinned features.

Danny muttered, "Torres!"

The big brown man stared but said nothing.

Danny growled, "So it was an inside job!"

THE pug-nosed one turned the lantern, aimed its beam squarely onto Danny. "Never mind him—I'll do the talking for the outfit," he said harshly. "Listen, young fella. You want to get out of here *alive*, don't you?"

The question required no answer, and Danny gave none.

"Sure, you do," Pug Nose said. "And you can—if you obey orders."

He paused, while the other two came crawling into the dugout. Their bodies ringed Danny into an uncomfortably small space. Pug Nose drew a slip of yellow paper from his pocket, and a small pencil.

"You write what I tell you," he said. "Put it in your own words. Just say that a gang has got the vaccine. We want twenty thousand for it. When they come across with the dough, we'll turn you loose to tell them where the stuff is hidden. They'll know it's on the level, having your name signed on the note."

Danny nodded, said, "Sure, I'll do that." Because, by this time the brakeman would be phoning in the message—

"In old five dollar bills," Pug Nose said. "Tell 'em to send one man in a rowboat along the south shore until he sees a blue shirt waved on a stick. Tell 'em—"

Danny didn't hear the rest. He was staring at the yellow slip of paper. A bank check, it had *Mutual Savings & Trust* printed in big letters across its face. At the stub side was pictured a tree; smaller letters said, *Big Oaks from Tiny Acorns Grow*.

Then Danny Lane knew what he'd been trying to remember. And the knowledge of it leaped like flame in his brain. A crazy flame, burning reason clean out of him. He forgot that he was one against four—and that the four were armed. Forgot that he was weakened by exposure, that his skull was a thing of torture.

Danny Lane snarled—and smashed his fist into the pug-nosed one's face.

He didn't knock the man flat. Far from it. The blow was only a gesture, no more hurtful than a woman's slap.

But it brought them all down on him. Pug Nose's backhanded punch

knocked Danny to the wall. The rifle's butt crashed into his groin as he staggered.

And Torres came plunging out of his corner of the cave.

Torres brought plenty of noise with him. There was baling wire around the big brown man's waist, wire firmly twisted onto the boards at that end of the dug-out. Along with the noise, the big man brought the whole boarded-up wall, ripping the timbers right out of the earth.

A shower of dirt cascaded onto Danny Lane's head. The dugout was full of falling dirt.

Danny heard a scream: "She's a-cavin'!"

In fact, the whole roof tottered and groaned. A cloud of dust obscured the lantern. In the gray half-light, Danny saw the three hijackers simultaneously leap for the tile's mouth.

What followed wasn't pretty. There were two men wedged and struggling in the tile, screaming and cursing as they fought. And there was the pug-nosed man standing over them, whipping that bayoneted revolver into the squirming flesh of his partners.

Torres stood watching, twisting his big arms out of the wire. He didn't say a word.

This lasted perhaps fifteen seconds. And then Torres had his arms free. His hand shot out, caught the pug-nosed one by the neck. Shook him, as a terrier would shake a rat, and threw him aside. He reached down and dragged the other two out of the tile, one in each hand, and smashed their heads together. Then he threw them on top of Pug Nose.

A bad hombre, that Torres.

But, quite gently, he took Danny's shoulder and pushed him to the hole's opening. He still hadn't said a word.

"BECAUSE he *couldn't* say anything," Danny Lane explained. This was later, of course. Danny rested on a cot in the refugee camp, with his head swathed in a great many bandages, and talked a good deal more to Lucy Orr than any nurse ought to let her patient talk.

"They had tape inside his mouth, across his teeth," said Danny. "So he couldn't warn me. You see, they'd wanted him to write the note and he wouldn't—figured they'd kill him after they got the money, rather than leave a witness alive. He'd seen a lot too much. He got off the train just before it pulled away, and saw the last of the robbery. Being unarmed, he ran up to the Barker farmhouse to give the alarm.

Lucy said, "But Barker was in it, too?"

"Not in the hold-up itself. He had a team hitched to the hay baler, so they could hide the loot. An old trick that gang had used. They used to ship out booze from Barker's still that way. Anyhow, Barker saw Torres go up to the house. He followed with a gun. And stood guard over him. But Torres made a break, and in the fight over the gun, killed Barker. But when he came out of the house, the rest of the gang were there and had him covered."

Danny thought a minute. "So they baled the vaccine into the hay. That was the *ker-thunk* sound I heard. Then, by the time I got to the farmhouse, they were loading those bales into the car. They ran the car down to the bridge and threw out part of the hay in it, and substituted the contraband. And used a trainman's spud to push the box-car back up the siding, leaving the marks on the rails I saw. That's why

there weren't any footprints around the siding in the mud."

Lucy frowned. "But if the car was being shipped to Randall's farm—?"

"They knew it wouldn't go in a hurry. Common freight like that would stand on a siding somewhere while the relief food trains came through. The car wouldn't be opened for weeks," said Danny, "no matter who'd bought the hay from Barker. Randall being in it was just coincidence."

The blonde girl shook her head and said, "But what possessed you to try to fight all those men when you even thought Torres was one of the hijack gang?"

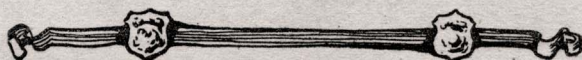
"I know," muttered Danny, apologetically. "I didn't have a chance. But I lost my head when I realized the brakeman was the gang's inside man—that my message would never be delivered by him. Because he was the one who pulled the cord to stop the Special for the robbery—and tipped off the gang in the dugout to nab me this morning, too."

Her blue eyes were surprised, dubious. "How *could* you know that?"

"The check reminded me. The picture of a tree on it. That's what I was trying to remember," said Danny. "The brakeman claimed to know the quarry spur so well. But when the Special stopped, I overheard him tell Torres there was probably a tree blown onto the track."

A slow grin spread over most of Danny Lane's face, the part of his face which wasn't hidden in bandages.

"You see, honey, I had looked up and down that track both ways. There were plenty of weeds—but not one single tree in sight!"



ILLUSTRATED CRIMES

by STOOKIE ALLEN

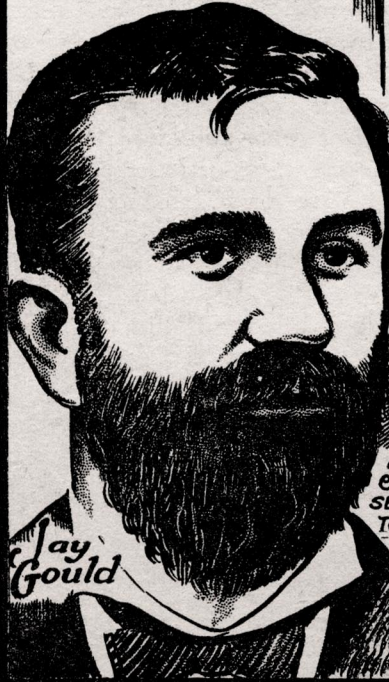
The POISON PEN SPECULATOR

ON OCTOBER 17, 1881, A LETTER WAS RECEIVED BY JAY GOULD, THE WALL STREET COLOSSUS, WHICH BEGAN: "IT IS MY PAINFUL DUTY TO INFORM YOU THAT WITHIN A WEEK YOUR BODY WILL BE RETURNED TO THE DUST FROM WHICH IT CAME AND YOU WILL HAVE PAID WITH YOUR LIFE FOR YOUR FINANCIAL INIQUITIES."




THE WRITER, WHO SIGNED HIMSELF "VICTIM" WENT ON TO STATE THAT HE HAD BEEN ON THE POINT OF SHOOTING THE MAGNATE OUTSIDE THE STOCK EXCHANGE THE PRECEDING FRIDAY, WHEN HIS HAND WAS STAYED BY A VOICE "FROM THE LORD," SAYING, "HOLD, GIVE HIM TIME TO REPENT LEST HE BE SENT TO ETERNAL PUNISHMENT!" DISTURBED NO LITTLE, GOULD TURNED THE LETTER OVER TO POLICE INSPECTOR BYRNES.

POLICE




BYRNES, BELIEVING HE WAS DEALING WITH JUST ANOTHER CRANK, INSERTED AN AD IN THE PERSONAL COLUMN OF THE HERALD INVITING "THE PERSON WHO SENT A LETTER TO A PROMINENT WALL STREET OPERATOR COMPLAINING OF HIS STOCK LOSSES" TO CALL AT THE OPERATOR'S OFFICE WHERE EVERYTHING WOULD BE ADJUSTED. — BUT "VICTIM" WAS NOT TO BE CAUGHT BY ROUTINE METHODS. IN A SECOND LETTER HE REFUSED THE INVITATION, SUGGESTING, HOWEVER, THAT HE MIGHT RECONSIDER KILLING GOULD IF THE FINANCIER WOULD SUPPLY HIM WITH "INSIDE" INFORMATION TO RECOUP HIS LOSSES.

Coming Next Week—

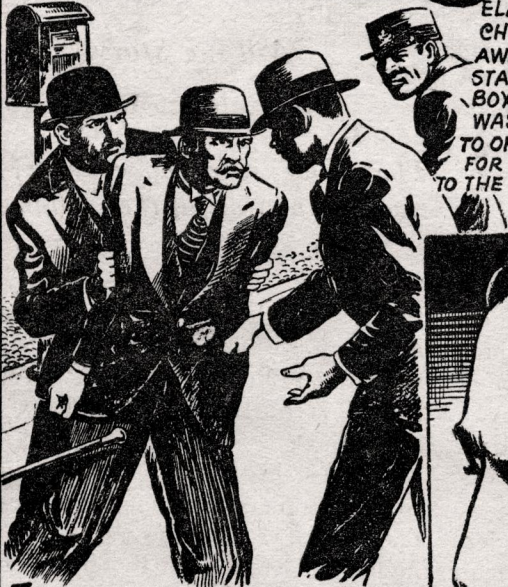


A LENGTHY EXCHANGE OF LETTERS AND "PERSONALS" FOLLOWED WHILE THE POLICE USED EVERY KNOWN DEVICE TO TRAP POISON PEN CORRESPONDENTS, BUT WITHOUT SUCCESS. FINALLY "VICTIM" COMPLAINED HE WAS LOSING MORE MONEY AND THREATENED TO CARRY OUT HIS ORIGINAL INTENTION "UNLESS BETTER TIPS WERE FURNISHED." SOMETHING HAD TO BE DONE.

BYRNES HAD ONE CLUE— ALL THE "VICTIMS" LETTERS WERE POSTMARKED FROM STATION E IN MIDTOWN MANHATTAN. FOR DAYS DETECTIVES WATCHED ALL MAIL BOXES IN THAT DISTRICT— WITHOUT RESULTS!



ON NOVEMBER 13, THE INSPECTOR SET A MORE ELABORATE TRAP. HE RAN A PERSONAL CHARGING THE BLACKMAILER WITH GIVING AWAY THE EXCLUSIVE MARKET TIPS, AND STATIONED A POSTMAN NEAR EACH MAIL BOX IN THE DISTRICT. WHENEVER A LETTER WAS DROPPED IN A BOX A MAILMAN WAS TO OPEN THE BOX. IF THE LETTER WAS MEANT FOR GOULD, HE WAS TO TIP HIS HAT AS A SIGNAL TO THE DETECTIVE COVERING HIM.



THE TRAP WENT UNSPRUNG UNTIL THREE THAT AFTERNOON WHEN AN ELDERLY MAN CARRYING A CANE DEPOSITED A LETTER AT 7TH AVENUE AND 34TH STREET AND SAUNTERED AWAY. WHEN THE POSTMAN SAW THE NAME JAY GOULD, HE GAVE THE SIGNAL AND TWO DETECTIVES QUICKLY OVERHAULED THE MAN. HE SAID HE WAS COL. J. HOWARD WELLES OF 365 FIFTH AVENUE AND UNDER INSPECTOR BYRNES' QUESTIONING ADMITTED AUTHORSHIP OF ALL THE POISON PEN LETTERS. JAY GOULD BREATHED EASIER AFTER WELLES WAS SENT TO PRISON.



INSPECTOR
Byrnes

Big House Cats

The missing prisoner was yanked from the coke pile



A True Story

By Convict 12627

The inside story of convicts who trade in the trust of their fellow men

“WHENEVER three prisoners group together, one of them belongs to me.”

This remark was once made by a well-known official when queried as to his success in keeping down trouble in the prison. While his words may seem cryptical, they are easily understandable to any convict. This man meant that if any three prisoners gathered together to discuss an escape or a proposed rule violation of any kind, one of them could be depended upon to bring him advance news of the plan. In short, it was his claim that one of three prisoners in the institution was a stoolpigeon.

Criminals have different terms which they use in referring to informers,

those men who curry favor by carrying tales of the activities of their associates to officials. The most common term, of course, is a stoolpigeon, but they are also called rats, cats and finks.

In most institutions the punishment of a stoolpigeon, when he makes the mistake of informing on the wrong man, is death, usually by a quick thrust of a prison-made knife. This usually is done in a crowd of convicts going to or from work or the mess hall, and many times the murderer is never identified.

It has been more than 25 years since I, a youth of 16 in jail for the first time, heard an old counterfeiter in the rôle of judge of a kangaroo court, describe a stoolpigeon.

"There are men here in this jail," he said, "although I should not call them men, who will sell you out, send you to prison, or place the hangman's noose around your neck in return for a smile from one of the turn-keys. These creatures—stoolpigeons, rats, finks, or whatever you call them—will gain your confidence and betray you for even less than the proverbial mess of pottage. So, if you are innocent or guilty, keep your business to yourself for there is no one in here who can help you."

This little talk by a crook of the old school, one of those rare criminals who had a code of honor, something that apparently does not exist among criminals today, made little impression upon me at that time for I soon obtained my release, but some months later when I checked into my first penal institution, a reformatory, I recalled his words of wisdom and it was not long before I recognized among my fellow workers, my neighbors in the cell-house, and everywhere in the yard where I went, the species of the human rat. There was at least one there whom I recalled as a schoolmate in my grammar school days and I remembered that even then he bore the reputation of being a "tattle-tale." This caused me to believe, and observation in later life confirmed this belief, that stoolpigeons are born and not made.

Tolerated by prison officials and law enforcement officers for their undercover work, and hated by their fellow criminals, these creatures are a type. They have a shifty, hang-dog look about them, are unable to look in the eye of the person they are about to betray, and almost always they are the lowest type of criminal, the petty thieves, the panderers who live off their women, and drug addicts who would

put their own mothers behind the bars to satisfy their longing for dope.

In this reformatory there were "official stoolpigeons," prisoners who were given authority to report other prisoners for rule violations, and their reports carried as much weight as those of the paid guards. These "unpaid guards," known as "non-coms," wore a different uniform than that issued to the rest of the prisoners and were the most hated inmates in the institution. They had their quarters in dormitories in a building separate from the cellhouses in which were housed the 1,000 or more other prisoners. These special quarters were presumably a form of reward, but in reality they were to protect these men from punishment at the hands of those whom they had caused to be punished for rule violations.

I HAD been in this institution but a few months when I saw a demonstration of this stoolpigeons system, which was later to result in a vengeance—delayed, but none the less effective. I was employed in the office of the assistant superintendent, and in this capacity worked after the hours when the most of the other prisoners were locked in their cells. It was my duty to certify the correctness of the count at the close of each day, a count which was made by the non-coms. One evening there was considerable delay in the reports coming in from the various cellhouses, and a little later it was reported that there was one man short in "B" cell block. Immediately all the guards and non-coms were congregated in the institution yard, and then the superintendent made his appearance.

"Now, men," he said, "this man who is missing has not been here long. He was assigned to the print shop and it is

obvious that he has not yet made good his escape from the yard. He is hiding somewhere within these walls. It will soon be dark and if we don't find him before then, he may succeed in getting over the wall. You prisoners who are gathered here are men who have proved that you can be trusted. Tonight you will work with the guards in an attempt to locate this missing prisoner. To any one of you who finds this man or gives any information leading to his hiding place I will give my word that you will receive a governor's parole. Now scatter out and let's see if we can't find him before it gets too dark."

I stood in the doorway of the assistant superintendent's office and heard these remarks. As the superintendent made the promise of early liberty to the prisoner non-com instrumental in locating the missing man, I could see their faces light up with pleasurable anticipation, but only one of them was to be rewarded. The line had no sooner broken than this non-com stepped up to the superintendent and saluted smartly. What he told the official I, of course, do not know, but immediately following this conversation the superintendent summoned two guards and he accompanied them to a huge pile of coke in the institution foundry and in a few minutes the missing prisoner was yanked from beneath the coke. His face and clothing streaked with dirt, he scowled at the smiling non-com who had turned him in.

"Some day," he said, "I will get even with you for this."

The non-com received his conditional parole a week or ten days later while the would-be escape artist went to the punishment cell. Later I talked with him in the recreation yard and he told me that the non-com had suggested that he hide out under this pile of coke,

and it appeared that the informer had deliberately framed the prisoner to further his own personal interests. The man who had attempted to escape was required to serve additional time and although he swore vengeance upon the man who had turned him in I did not think at the time that he would ever have an opportunity to fulfill these threats.

SOME two years later I was at Revere Beach in Boston when I met the man who had hidden under the pile of coke. He told me he had obtained a parole, had received permission to return to Boston, his home, and was working steadily and doing well. I asked him if he had ever met the man who had framed him. He replied that he had not but was sure he would some day. We walked over to a refreshment stand where I bought him a soft drink. With the glass halfway to his lips he stopped and stared toward a group of sailors a few feet away. Then, without a word, he slammed the glass on the counter and dashed toward the group. Before I could catch up with him he had grabbed one of the blue-clad figures by the throat and had him down on the ground pummeling him severely.

There was no question as to the victor of this fight up until the time when they were taken in custody by the police. My friend, the man with whom I had been talking, soon obtained his release on bond provided by his parents, and it was not until then I learned that his sailor victim was the same man who had led the officers to his hiding place in the reformatory several years before. He laughed off the incident and seemed to be well satisfied that he had obtained his revenge even though it had been delayed. . . .

It seldom happens that a stoolpigeon offers his services to a prison official without being asked, and when this does happen the official usually becomes suspicious.

Not many years ago in a midwestern prison there was a man by the name of Mickey Doolin. His commitment showed that he had received a term of 25 years for robbery. Some two weeks after his arrival, he was interviewed by the deputy warden in reference to a work assignment.

"Doolin," said the deputy, "you have a pretty bad past record. This is the fifth prison you have been in besides a number of jails and workhouses. You have a long term here. I know it is useless to try to reason with men of your type. You'll probably try to escape and of course it is our job to try to keep you here, but I want to warn you that when a man tries to escape here we shoot and we shoot to kill."

"You got me wrong, Deputy," said Doolin, "I didn't come here with any intention of escaping. It's true I've got a bad record, but you won't find anything on it about escaping. You can believe it or not but this is a bum beef that got me this 25 years. I'm not guilty of this rap."

"Whether you're guilty or innocent," said the deputy, "is not our concern. The courts found you guilty or you wouldn't be here. If you can prove your innocence and get out we shall not put anything in your way. We'll treat you right as long as you treat us right."

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about, Deputy," said Doolin, pulling his chair closer to the official's desk and leaning forward confidentially. "You see I've done time in so many joints and hung out with crooks all my life and I've got so I know most of

them either personally or by reputation. These men trust me, Deputy, for I've never been known to put the finger on a man in my life. But now it's different. I've got 25 years to build and I'm getting pretty well up in years. I've got sense enough to know that if I play ball with you people you can help me get out of here. Now I always said if I ever turned stoolpigeon I would be a first-class one and I'm ready to do just that. And I'll guarantee there isn't another man in this joint who can do you more good and never be suspected than I can."

"I don't believe you, Doolin," said the deputy. "I think you're trying to work some kind of an angle on me, but I'm willing to gamble a little with you to find out. Our warden here doesn't believe in using informers, but you know as well as I do that no man can run the inside of a prison without using them. I'm going to put you to work in the kitchen for the time being, and meanwhile I'm going to keep an eye on you and see just how sincere you are."

Doolin reported to the kitchen for duty and found several men there he had known in other jails and prisons. These men, knowing him to be trustworthy in the past, put him in right with the others and it was not long before Mickey was in on the petty rackets being practiced in connection with food supplies being stolen from the state. For several weeks he shared in the profits to be made from stolen bits of food, and then almost every night one of the waiters going from the kitchen to his quarters would be called out of line and searched, and in every case the man would be carrying a contraband package of food. The kitchen connivers put their heads together in an effort to discover how the deputy

warden was managing to catch the right men each night. They finally came to the conclusion that some prisoner working in the kitchen was tipping off the official.

"We know it ain't any of the four of us," said Mickey, when asked for his opinion. "We've all known each other in other joints and we know there ain't a stoolpigeon in the bunch."

"That's right."

The others agreed with him and Mickey continued sending the brief notes to the deputy warden which led to the discovery of the men carrying away and selling the stolen foodstuff from the kitchen. The deputy found an opportunity to compliment Doolin on his fine undercover work and the prisoner assured him that he was going to prove to be the best stoolpigeon ever to enter the institution.

The deputy warden was still puzzled at Doolin's attitude and wondered if the man was sincere or trying to work some sort of an angle to bring about an opportunity to escape. He decided to watch Doolin closely, for many years of experience in handling convicts had taught him that it was seldom that a criminal with a long record in back of him ever turned stoolpigeon.

Having disposed of a number of kitchen workers by having them caught with contraband food, Doolin was eventually promoted to the position of night cook. It took Mickey several weeks to have his three close friends assigned to the night shift with him.

"WHAT could be sweeter than this?" Doolin asked his companions one night as they ate their mid-night lunch. "Here we are all long-timers with records and working at night in the kitchen. We are closer to

getting out of this joint than any other guys in the prison."

"I'll have to admit that you have done more in a few months than we have been able to do in several years," admitted Red McCarthy, a bank robber doing forty years. "And I've been curious to know how you did it."

"I'm going to cut you guys in on the secret," said Mickey, "because I know we're all going out of here together one of these dark nights. Some of you may not agree with what I've done, but it was the only out I could see, and we are doing too much time to try to do it all. When I first come here I told the deputy warden that I realized I had more time than I could build and I offered to be a stoolpigeon for him. Well, he knew that I was friendly with all the right guys in the joint, and of course he was tickled to death to add me to his long list of finks. Naturally, I had it in mind all the time to crash the joint but I had to have help. I knew all you guys were doing long jolts and I knew you could be depended on, so in order to convince the deputy that I was on the level with my snitching I had some of these guys carrying chuck to the cellhouses knocked over. They weren't our kind of people anyway, and none of them was doing a long time, so my conscience don't hurt me none for what I done. The result is that we are all working on the night shift and got the best chance we'll ever have of leaving this place without telling the deputy goodbye. What do you guys think of the way I planned this thing?"

"Well," drawled Red, "I'll have to admit that you got us in a pretty good spot to lam the joint, but somehow or other I don't think I could have put the finger on those other guys. Still, I suppose it was necessary in order to

get in the deputy's confidence and have him accept your recommendations as to us guys."

"Those guys who got knocked over with the chuck don't mean a thing to us," said Mickey. "The most of them are 'Honest Johns' anyway, and the few days they put up in the hole ain't going to hurt them. Now we'll have to get our heads together and figure out how we're going to crash the joint. We don't want to lose too much time, but neither do we want to go into the thing without figuring every angle. If we mess up this chance we'll never get another one like it."

Night after night Mickey and his three companions went over every detail of their escape plan. Saw blades to cut the bars of the basement window, civilian clothing to don after scaling the wall, an automobile for a getaway, these were all discussed. Finally, after several weeks discussion, the plans were complete and a definite date was set for the escape. Hacksaw blades had been stolen from the automobile tag plant and were secreted in the kitchen ready for use. Saturday night was set as the time for the escape, Mickey arguing that Sunday would afford better opportunities for avoiding the dragnet which would be thrown out for them. Mickey's companions were jubilant over the prospects of early liberty which seemed to be almost within their grasp and they were loud in their praise of the man who had made it possible for them to escape. Mickey also seemed to be well pleased, but he told the others he was doing this as much for himself as for them. If his companions had been present at an interview between the prisoner and the deputy warden they would have had a better understanding of the patience with

which Mickey had planned the escape and his eagerness for his companions to join him.

"I told you, Deputy," said Mickey, "when I first came here that I would make you the best informer you ever had, and in return I, of course, expect you to do something for me."

"You won't lose anything by helping me," said the deputy. "However, all I can do is make recommendations to the warden, but any time a man does anything for me which I believe deserves a return favor I'll go to the front for him until he is rewarded. You have, as you say, been a good man for me, but still you haven't done anything that warrants me trying to get your time reduced."

"You're right, Deputy," said Mickey "Yes, sir, you're exactly right, but what I've been doing is using my head. I've been gaining the confidence of the desperate characters in the prison. What would you say if I told you that three of the worst men you have here are planning to escape and if it had not been for me you would not have known anything about it until after they were gone?"

"Who are they?" asked the deputy, trying to conceal his eagerness.

"I'm going to tell you that," said Mickey, "but, first you realize that if these men had succeeded in getting away the newspapers would have put you and the warden on the pan for it. Now I think that I deserve some credit for stopping this escape, for I am now in a position to do exactly that. I realize that I have a bad past record and that I haven't been here long but if you will go to the warden I believe he will recommend to the governor that my time be cut so that I can get out in about two years."

"If I find that your story is based

on facts," said the deputy, "and if your information enables me to prevent an escape I will see that you are properly rewarded."

"Okay," said Mickey. "I know your word is good."

MICKEY told of all the details being planned for the escape Saturday night, and of the hacksaw blades already hidden in the kitchen. The deputy listened with interest.

"Now," ended Mickey, "there's one more thing to be considered. These guys expect me to go with them, and in order to throw off suspicion I'll have to pretend that I am going along. They will have a long rope with a hook on it to use in climbing the wall, and you can tell your guards that I will be the fourth one to go over so they won't shoot at me. In that way it won't get spread over the prison that I stooped on these fellows. If you want to, you can keep me in the dungeon a few days to make it look on the level."

The deputy agreed to the plan and promised that the men would not escape.

"Of course," he said, "I could put them in solitary confinement before they tried to escape, but if I did that I wouldn't have any evidence on them except your story and the chances are the warden wouldn't stand for them being kept in solitary on that alone, so I'll let them go through with the escape and have enough guards planted outside the wall to stop them if they have to mow them down to do it."

Mickey was well pleased with himself and began to plan on enjoying his liberty within two years instead of the twenty-five years the judge had given him, but to his companions he talked of the stolen liberty which he said would be theirs within a few days.

Mickey found himself unable to sleep on the Friday preceding the day set for the escape. He wondered if his companions would halt when commanded by the guards or if they would be shot. After all, he was interested only in his freedom. These men meant nothing to him. They were only a means to an end.

Friday night after the last of the late work lines had been fed and sent to their cells Red McCarthy approached Mickey.

"Mickey," he said, "we have decided that we should show our appreciation of your putting us in a position to lam tomorrow night, so we're going to put on a big feed for you. This is one night when you can sit around and take it easy. We're going to do all the cooking and at midnight we'll have a spread for you. In the meantime, you go in the back, get yourself a magazine and read, or take a nap if you want to. After tomorrow night we'll have to split up for a while and there's no telling when we will get together again."

"Well," said Doolin, "I appreciate you fellows doing this for me, but you must remember that I am getting just as much benefit from it as you are. Anyway, I'll enjoy the feed, so you fellows go to it."

It is possible Mickey Doolin suffered some pangs of conscience as he waited for his pals to prepare the big feed. They, he must have thought, probably considered him a swell guy.

It was just past midnight when Mickey was called back to the kitchen to find the table loaded with good food, most of which had been stolen from the prison storeroom.

"This is what we might call a farewell dinner," said Red. "That is, it's farewell to this joint for us. This time

tomorrow night we'll be getting ready to climb that wall and get on our way back to the bright lights."

When the meal was over Mickey leaned back and stretched.

"That sure was a swell feed," he said, "and we're going to have lots more of them in the outside world. We'll pull some big jobs, too, when they get tired of looking for us. Well, I guess we had better clean up these dishes and get them out of the way before the night captain comes in. Gosh, but I'm sleepy. Guess I might have eaten too much."

"We'll take care of cleaning up," said Red. "You go on back and lay down if you want to. We'll wake you up in time to start the main line breakfast."

Mickey went to the back room and stretched out on a bench. In a few minutes he was snoring loudly. His three companions stood over him and smiled.

"He'll be out for at least two or three hours," said Red. "That stuff I got from the nurse in the hospital is sure strong. Well, we'd better start to work on those bars in the basement. It's almost one o'clock and the captain comes through about three."

MICKEY was still snoring lustily when the three men completed the sawing of the bars which would give them access to the prison yard and with but one more barrier between them and the outside world, a thirty-foot stone wall. From a hiding place in the kitchen storeroom they brought forth a long rope to the end of which was fastened a large iron hook. Hastily they discarded their prison uniforms and slipped into unnumbered overalls.

"Well," said Red, "I guess we're all set. All we have to do now is keep an

eye on the guard in the corner tower. He's not likely to see us in the dark and once we hit the ground we'll be in the clear. Won't Mickey be surprised when he wakes up?"

It was shortly after three o'clock in the morning when the night captain entered the kitchen for his usual cup of coffee. Seeing none of the prisoners about the range he tiptoed back to an alcove where he knew they often played cards which was against the rules. He found no prisoners there. Quickening his step he went to the back room. There he found Mickey sprawled on a bench. He shook the prisoner several times before Doolin opened his eyes.

"Where's the other boys?" asked the captain.

"Eh?" said Mickey, still groggy from the dope his three companions had given him. "Why, they are cleaning up the table."

"Table?" repeated the captain. "What are you talking about? I believe you're drunk."

"No," muttered Mickey. "Just too much—farewell dinner." He sank back on the bench and closed his eyes again.

When the deputy warden made his appearance, having been summoned by the captain, he found a way to rouse Mickey thoroughly.

"Where are they?" he demanded. "You might as well come clean. You tricked me into this to have us off guard so these men could escape. God help you if they are gone."

Mickey's remonstrations were of no avail. The deputy refused to believe that the prisoner had been sincere in acting as an informer and he sent him to the dungeon.

It was almost two years before the last of the trio of escaped convicts were apprehended and returned to prison, and when they had completed

their terms in solitary confinement and again appeared in the prison yard they merely laughed when Mickey asked them to tell the deputy that they had doped him, but they did tell all their friends of his informing on the men with the contraband food, and at last reports, Mickey Doolin, distrusted by prison officials and hated by his fellow convicts, walks alone in a crowded prison, knowing not when a knife will be slipped between his ribs, and doubtless as he contemplates the long years in front of him he doesn't care when and if the end comes.

WHILE Mickey Doolin's plans for profiting from being a stool-pigeon ended as most convicts would like to see all similar plans end, there have been instances where convicts gained their liberty by assisting prison officials without any intention of doing so. Bob Durant, an oil stock swindler serving a term in a western prison, was the central figure in a case of this kind.

Durant was educated, more or less refined, and was of a type among whom are seldom found informers. During the day he worked in the prison library, and on five nights of the week he taught a class of journalism in the institution school. Because of his likeable personality and readiness at all times to write letters for other inmates and to advise them, he was liked by both officials and the inmate body.

At some time during his life Durant had done newspaper work and his contributions to the prison publication showed that he possessed some writing ability and for this reason he was permitted to organize the first journalism class in the prison. Durant was smart enough to realize that his success with this class would probably determine the amount of time he would have to serve

on his five-year term, consequently he worked tirelessly with his students. Durant soon learned that his class was more interested in fiction writing than reportorial work, so he frequently gave them story assignments based upon plots which he would outline for them. He was outlining one of these plots one night when the warden un-noticed, stood in back of him.

"Now, men," Durant said, "there is one important rule to follow in writing, particularly while you are learning, and that is to confine your writing to subjects and locales with which you are familiar. That is why I am going to give you an idea for a story tonight which will have a prison as its locale. Here is the situation: A warden of a prison is worried because of the large amount of dope finding its way into his prison. His guards are unable to locate the source of the dope, but its use in the institution has become so widespread that news of it has reached the outside world.

"In this prison the inmates are permitted to make curios for sale outside, such as the ladies beaded bags which some of you fellows make. This is the manner in which the dope is being smuggled into the prison. One of the prisoners, who makes a practice of buying up these bags from other inmates who have no outside markets is the man who is the 'dope king.' He is trusted and unsuspected by the prison officials. He frequently sends out bags in quantities of a dozen or more to outside customers on approval. Some of these are purchased by these customers and others are returned to the prisoner as undesirable. In the lining of the returned bag the dope is concealed, and any of you who are familiar with morphine or cocaine know that many hundred dollars' worth of the

narcotics, at prison prices, could be concealed in one of these bags. Now your problem is to write a story and have the warden find a solution to his dope problem without using a stool-pigeon. You have good material there for a story and I want you to do your best with it. You will submit your completed manuscripts two weeks from tonight and the best story will be published in our local paper."

In less than two weeks after Durant's talk to his class he was called from his cell one night, taken to the clothing department and dressed in civilian clothing. From there he was taken to the warden's office.

"Durant," said the warden, handing the prisoner a long envelope, "I am glad to hand you this pardon from the governor which just arrived. Here also is your ten dollars gate money and a railroad ticket to the city from where you were sentenced. I want to personally thank you for your services which enabled me to break up this dope racket and place the ringleaders in solitary confinement where they will remain until prosecuted by the federal government. I also wish to compliment you on

your clever scheme which you used in informing me of the ingenious plan used in smuggling the dope. When I stopped at your class that night and heard the beginning of your story outline, I knew you were trying to tip me off, and believe me, I didn't miss a word of it. Good luck, my boy, and I hope you never come back again."

"Thank you, Warden."

Durant shook the official's hand, passed through the big gates, and as he walked down the dark street toward the railroad station he congratulated himself upon serving a five-year term in less than a year and wondered if the man who had told him of the dope scheme would believe him guilty of deliberately informing, or if his friends would still believe in him and that he didn't know the warden was within hearing distance when he outlined the story plot. But back in the prison where the beaded bag merchant and his co-conspirators were languishing in solitary confinement Durant was being branded as a stoolpigeon, and doubtless in other prisons which he would visit in the future, the mark of Judas would still remain with him.

Cipher Solvers' Secrets for Dec. 1937

(Continued from March 12)

Twenty-three—Argon, Portsmouth, Va. †Arrow head, Pawtucket, R. I. The Barron, Chicago, Ill. Estece, Riverside, R. I. Irene Friedman, Chicago, Ill. °Hitch, Boonton, N. J. °Mrs. F. M. Ingalls, Glendale, Calif. °Jayem, Bellingham, Wash. °Jonesibus, Austin, Tex. °Retlaw Maldim, Dayton, Ohio. Molinero, Detroit, Mich. †Rengaw, Chicago, Ill. °Hugh B. Rossell, Washington, D. C. Bea Em Sea, Bradford, Mass.

Twenty-two—†Alphabet, Merchantville, N. J. Chemystic, Ithaca, N. Y. Ciphersmith, Tallahassee, Fla. †Donald P. Crane, Quincy, Mass. Drol, South Paris, Me. †L. S. H., Washington, D. C. James G. Karns, New Castle, Pa. °Sue de Nymme, Chicago, Ill. Eber A. Oden, Guthrie, Okla. †Thomas E. Roberts, New Castle, Pa. †Ty N. Twist, London, Ontario, Canada. °W.

R. W., Chicago, Ill. °Ike N. Wynne, Great Falls, Mont.

Twenty-one—Chas. F. Bridewell, Sr., Houston, Tex. †Mabel B. Canon, Philadelphia, Pa. Cryptox, State College, Pa. Dictionary, Dillon, S. C. Franthe, West New York, N. J. †H. H., Coventry, Ohio. Ixaxar, New York, N. Y. †My Pal, Brooklyn, N. Y. °Pangram, Lakewood, Ohio. Half-Pint, Wichita Falls, Tex. †Satex, San Antonio, Tex. †Zarkov, Aberdeen, S. Dak.

Twenty—Case Ace, Chicago, Ill. †Alice, Riverside, Calif. Henry F. Dolliver, Belmont, Mass. Ian, Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, Canada. B. L. L., Oakland, Calif. T. E. McAlpine, London, Ontario, Canada. °Plantagenet, Paterson, N. J. Mrs. J. C. Saunders, Vallejo, Calif. Loula Williams, Stockton, Calif. °Yogi, Jersey City, N. J.

(Continued on page 94)

PUNK



I WAS lower than the well-known snake's abdomen and the day's take from the machines wasn't making me feel any better. Counting up in Luigi's, my last stop, I found I had about two hundred bucks in nickels and while that's a lot of nickels to lift it isn't such a hell of a lot to spend. Not that I had the spending of the whole two hundred. My cut was only ten per cent. Twenty bucks, I thought. A lousy twenty bucks is all I've got to show for two months in the racket. Eight or nine weeks at a daily average of twenty-five to thirty dollars and all I've got is twenty bucks. I wished I was back driving a truck.

It was around nine o'clock. Luigi's was crowded, as it usually was at that time of night. The bar was lined three deep and the tables around the postage stamp dance floor were full up. The slot machines and pin-ball games were red hot and the suckers playing them had been real indignant when I horned in to make the collection. I ought to be ashamed, interrupting their fun like that. If the damn fools had only known it they might just as well have dropped their nickels directly into my bag instead of putting 'em in the machines first. It just made a lot of unnecessary

"Okay," I said, "I'll get you some of Cora's clothes."

A Complete Novelette

By Cleve F. Adams

Author of "Murder Makes a Trade," etc.



work. You couldn't tell the suckers that, though.

Luigi tipped me the wink and we went down along the length of the bar to his cubbyhole of an office. He signed the receipt for his cut and got out a bottle. "You weel have the leetla dreenk weeth Luigi, no?"

"And how!" I said. "In fact, I wouldn't mind having six little drinks with Luigi. Or maybe eight." I watched him pour the Scotch. He was a round, paunchy little guy with very small hands and feet and neatly parted, slicked-down hair. His smile was so white it reminded you of the dental ads, and he had soft, velvety brown eyes, like a setter dog's; wise and intelligent and friendly, yet watchful, too. I rather liked Luigi.

He said, lifting his glass and smiling at me over the rim, "You better lay off too moch from thees stoff, hah, Jerry?"

I set my glass down, empty. "Oh," I said, "like that, huh? Okay, my fraan, I'll buy my own from now on." I picked up my bag of nickels and started out the door.

He laid a hand on my arm. "You theenk Luigi, heesa tight weeth hees liquor, hah?"

"That's what you think," Cora said from the doorway

"Well, what would you think?"

"A smart boy," he said, "a smart guy might theenk mebbe Luigi heesa like you, Jerry? Mebbe heesa try sav- ing you more trobble as you already got, hah?"

I just stood there looking at him, not saying anything for a minute because all of a sudden my tonsils felt funny; kind of all knotted up, if you know what I mean. The little guy was telling me he liked me too, and that most of the jams I'd got myself in were on account of red-eye. He didn't know about the worst one, of course. Nobody did except Big Ed Harmon, the guy I worked for, and a couple more of his boys who'd been in the room at the time. And oh, yes, I'd spilled to Cora, my wife. Luigi and apparently everybody else in town knew about Cora. Just thinking about the little tramp made me see red all over again and I shook Luigi off and went outside to the bar.

THE mob had shifted a little so that there was a cleared space about a foot wide. I squeezed in, ordered a rye. Somebody grabbed my elbow as I picked up the drink and I thought it was Luigi again and pulled the old Olsen & Johnson gag. The one that goes: "Get away from me, boys, you bother me." It turned out to be my wife instead of Luigi and she didn't think the gag was as funny as Olsen & Johnson did.

She said, "So I bother you, do I?" She was a little tight and her lip rouge was smeared. I wondered who'd been kissing her now. She gave me a baby-faced stare. "Okay, so I bother you. Well, for fifty bucks I won't bother you any more. Not tonight, anyway." She smiled then, a mean smile.

The guy next to me said, "Hello,

sugar. If your boy friend ain't got the fifty, see me. See li'l ol' Georgie."

No, I didn't hit him. I'd practically worn out my right fist on other guys' jaws trying to put an end to cracks like that. It just wasn't any use. Maybe I was a little tight too; maybe I was just seeing her for the first time. Really seeing her, I mean. Seeing behind her big violet eyes and her cornsilk hair and all the rest of her; seeing the thing that made cracks like this mug's possible. For a while I'd thought she was just a fool, but now I knew different.

I reached down in the leather bag and got out ten rolls of nickels. Twenty bucks. "Here's twenty," I said. "All I've got in the world. I wish it was twenty grand and you'd use it to buy a one way ticket."

She looked at the loaded bag. "What's the matter, Jerry—afraid of Big Ed?"

"No," I said. My lips felt tight across my teeth. "No, Ed wouldn't care if I gave you the whole works, only I won't." I dumped the ten rolls of nickels in her hands. "Now scam."

Her voice got shrill. "You heel! What am I going to do with four hundred nickels?"

I said I didn't care what she did with them. I didn't, either. All I wanted was to get away from her before I killed somebody. I tossed a quarter on the bar, started toward the front door. Her voice topped the slam of the music against my ears. She was calling the bartender names because he wouldn't change the nickels into bills.

It was raining again; not hard, just a sort of discouraged drizzle. I stood there on the sidewalk for a minute, letting the rain hit my face. It felt good. A couple of guys came out, looked at me, giggled as they went by. I knew they were laughing at me and I faded back

into the shadows. Cora came out. She was laughing too. She was with the guy that had made the crack. I went back inside and hoisted a couple of quick ones.

The bartender looked at me as though he'd never seen me before; the crowd was working hard at having its fun again. Not even a ripple, I thought. Something can happen to you right in plain sight of a couple of hundred people; something that tears the heart out of you and makes you want to get your hands on somebody's throat and squeeze and squeeze—I looked around to see if I was wrong; see if somebody in that mob wasn't reading my mind. And then I got the shakes. Read my mind? Was I actually planning on doing it? No, I thought; no, it isn't me, it's the liquor. And then I got more scared than ever. If I kept on like this I might get cocked some time and . . .

The bartender came back with a fresh bottle. He set it down in front of me, started away. I said, "Hey, wait a minute! I want you to see my latest trick." He looked bored, but waited, leaning his elbows on the bar and watching me. I poured a stiff drink as if it were a very difficult feat. It wasn't so easy at that. My hands were shaking so that some of the rye slopped over on the bar. I lifted the glass and held it to the light; then, very deliberately, I inverted it and dumped the lousy stuff into a gobboon. I gave him a tight grin. "That," I said, "is the trick. It's supposed to be the picture of a guy's last drink. Pretty good, huh?"

He looked doubtful. He said, "Well, if you pay for it I guess I can't stop you doin' what you want with it." He took the bottle away with him, though. Somebody touched my shoulder and I whirled nervously. It was Slats McKenna.

McKenna said, "I heard that, Jerry. Sounded okay to me."

Slats McKenna was a dick; a hell of a good one, according to the papers. I wasn't thinking of him as a dick, though; not even after the tap on the shoulder, exactly the way I'd been expecting it for quite a while now. You see, Slats and I and Big Ed Harmon had all grown up together south of the tracks. Just the three of us for a while. Then big-eyed, skinny-legged Fran had moved into our block. She was Mrs. Ed Harmon now. Funny how things turn out, huh? Big Ed had shouldered his way to the top of the rackets, picking up Frances on the way. Slats McKenna was a dick. And what was I? Well, you've got me there. Just a bum, I guess.

McKenna said, "Let's go outside, Jerry. I want to talk to you. Seeing you dump that slug of rye makes it easier." He was a tall rangy guy with a pronounced stoop and a dark serious face. He hadn't changed much in the last ten years. Marriage and a couple of kids on a cop's pay had given him the stoop, I guessed. The serious look had always been there.

WE WENT out and sat in his car at the curb. The rain was coming down a little harder now. The sound of it on the turret top; that and being with a guy like Slats did something to me; made me feel a little better, somehow.

Slats said quietly, "I've been watching you, boy. Ever since you got crooked and married that little Cora tramp. She's bad medicine, Jerry."

Well, you wouldn't think a guy would let another guy talk that way about his wife, would you? I did. In the first place, McKenna was my friend and he wasn't trying to be funny. In

the second place, there was no argument about Cora being a tramp. All I said was a lop-sided, "You're telling me!"

After a while Slats said, not looking at me, just staring out through the streaming windshield, "Why not try reversing the English for a change, kid? I mean, when Fran gave you the air you got crocked and joined the navy. That was smart."

"Well," I said, grinning, "I learned a trade, anyway."

"I'm coming to that presently, Jerry. You learned a trade but you lost Frances for good. The hitch in the navy kept you out of circulation for quite a spell if you remember. When you finally did get out, and found Big Ed had copped Frances, what did you do? You got crocked again and woke up married to Cora. Smart, huh?"

Well, putting it like that, it didn't look very smart, did it? Being married you're supposed to support the gal and so I'd signed on as radio op on a Standard Oil tanker. Yep, that's the trade they'd taught me in the navy. Only it kept me away from home too much. I'd get back from a three weeks' trip and find Cora hadn't been exactly lonesome, if you know what I mean. Not that I was in love with her; not like I'd been with Fran. But still and all she was my wife and a guy likes to carry his head up.

Slats went on as though I'd been talking out loud. "There weren't any radio jobs ashore and all you could get was the chance to nurse a truck around all day. Only thing was, you weren't making enough dough to please cutie. She kept nagging you about how you'd grown up with Big Ed, and why didn't you get him to do something for you."

I gave him a surprised look. "How did you know that?"

"I've got eyes," he said, and his profile looked older, more tired. Somehow I couldn't get sore at him. He was using No. 4 sandpaper on me and still I couldn't get sore. He said, "You're working for Ed, aren't you?" Explaining quite simply that one and one added up to two. "Working for Big Ed is also bad medicine, Jerry."

I said stubbornly, "It pays some real dough. And what I'm doing is on the up and up as far as the law's concerned. If the D.A. says the machines are games of skill who am I to tell the suckers different?"

He reached forward, wiped fog off the inside of the glass. "All right, what you're doing now is maybe not so bad. But how do you know it'll stop there? Once you're in, boy, you're in."

"Nuts," I scoffed. "Ed would be the first one to mitt me if I got out of the racket. The only reason he gave me the job at all was because of old times. Show me a real job and I'll get out."

He turned then, grinned at me. "Okay, keed, that's a promise. I was talking to Kramer up at C.B.S. I told him how good you were and he said if you were that good—"

"You mean a technician's berth at C.B.S.?"

"Maybe chief. They're having a sort of shakeup. Maybe you could talk yourself up better than I did."

I couldn't say anything for a minute. I mean, this guy beside me was real people. Ed was okay too, of course, but I'd been thinking about what I'd do if he ever asked me to step over the line. This way, I wouldn't have to find out. I could take a brace and maybe pay Cora off some way and . . . I didn't go any farther than that. The reason I didn't was that Slats had gotten tired of waiting for me to say thanks and was talking again. About something

else. "I can't get a line on the lug," he was complaining. "You wouldn't happen to know him, would you, Jerry? Guy by the name of Heinie Ziegler?"

I felt as though he'd just clouted me behind the ear. This guy Ziegler was going to be pretty hard to find—I hoped. He was the mug I'd killed a month or so back. Thirty-seven days, to be exact. You don't forget the date of things like that. I got a cigarette out, scratched the match, but somehow I couldn't get the two together. Then I noticed that my hands were shaking. "Ziegler?" I coughed. "No, I don't think I know him."

Slats reached over, held the match steady for me. "I'm glad you're off the stuff, keed. Another week and you'd be in the D.T. ward out at the County." His eyes burned me. I flipped the match out the window as an excuse to turn away so he couldn't read the fear that must have been plastered all over my face.

He didn't seem to notice.

"Funny you don't know him," he said musingly. "He used to be one of Big Ed's punks. I went up to see Ed and he said the guy had gone to Chicago, but I think he was lying."

The cigarette fell out of my mouth. I just couldn't help it. Slats McKenna wasn't my friend any more. He was a dick and I was a murderer. He leaned down and got the cig where it was burning a hole in the floor mat, took a couple of quick drags, threw it away. It reminded me of how we used to share snipes when we were kids south of the tracks. For a second I almost broke down and told him the whole works. Then I took a gander at his face and knew I couldn't. He was not only a tough cop; he was an honest cop. He'd crucify me if he knew.

I twisted the door handle. "Well,

thanks a million, Slats. I'll go up and see Kramer tomorrow."

"Better make it tonight, Jerry. These things don't wait. I told Kramer I'd have you on deck if I could find you."

"Okay, tonight, then." I was out on the sidewalk now, in a hurry. I had to get to Big Ed and find out what was happening. "I'll go down and check in and then I'll go see Kramer."

"Swell," Slats said. "A shower will snap you out of it, Jerry. Better take something for that breath, though."

I told him I'd do that too, and then I was slogging toward my own car, lugging the sack of nickels. That damned sack was beginning to remind me of an anchor, something I couldn't get away from. I laughed at that. Of course I could get away. Just as I could from Big Ed Harmon. All I had to do was drop them both. Getting in my car I was surprised to note that it was raining. Then I remembered that it had been raining all evening. I reached in the door pocket for the spare bottle that I usually carried, had the cap off and the neck rattling against my teeth before I remembered; remembered what fat little Luigi had said, and Slats. I hurled the bottle through the window. It smashed on the sidewalk and little rivulets of liquor ran down to the curb. Somewhere down the street, back of me, a horn tooted twice. That would be Slats, I thought, applauding me for busting the bottle. I didn't feel very heroic. I felt like hell.

II

THE Title Guarantee Building was all lit up like a church when I got there. Usually at that time of night it was pretty quiet, but it must have been tax time or something because everybody connected with the real estate

racket, title searchers and all, were working late. I'd always gotten a kick out of Big Ed having his headquarters in a building like that. Of course, Ed was the first big shot I'd ever known personally, but nearly every one I remembered reading about transacted his business from a more or less swanky night club. It seemed to be the thing to do. Big Ed was different. He had over half of the seventh floor of the Title Guarantee and the doors that weren't marked "Private" were labeled "The Harmon Amusement Enterprises, Inc." As far as I knew he didn't have any hideaways, or cafés, or any of the usual clap-trap. Maybe he had 'em, but I didn't know about 'em. I didn't want to know about them.

I rode up in the elevator with four or five clerks who'd been out for a snack. A couple worked for Ed, and they looked at my leather grip and grinned. I might have been a collector for the telephone company, even including the gun in my shoulder clip.

Only I wasn't.

I checked in with the cashier, went through a couple semi-private offices and knocked on Ed's door. There were a couple gorillas sitting there in the anteroom, coats off and rods exposed, but they didn't pay me a bit of attention. Believe it or not, they were playing checkers. After a minute Ed himself opened the door.

"Oh, it's you, Jerry." He was a little bigger than I was, though it wasn't his size that got him his name. He wore good clothes as if he were used to them, always had a gardenia in his lapel, and a faint scent of soap clung to him, as though he'd just stepped out of his bath. He looked like a senior executive in a business whose stock was selling above par. I guess he was, at that.

I said, "Yeah, it's me. Could I talk

to you for a minute, Ed? Something has come up that . . ."

He gave me a smile, opened the door wider. I went in. He came around and sat down behind his desk. "Okay, Jerry, shoot."

I told him first about Slats McKenna looking for Heinie Ziegler. "You sure I'm covered, Ed? Sure somebody hasn't popped off?"

Ed looked at his nails. Like everything else about him they'd had plenty of the right kind of attention. He'd come a long way since he and I and Slats prowled the freight yards for scrap iron to sell to the junkie. Somehow I was embarrassed in front of him; not like I was with Slats. I guess it's the same as two guys who go to college together and one of them turns out to be a success. I hadn't gone to college, but I was the other one, just the same. I didn't blame Fran for picking the winner.

Ed looked at me and for the first time I noticed how cold his eyes were. "You're covered," he said briefly. "Unless you've gotten drunk and belched to someone yourself. Have you?"

I thought about how I'd told Cora, my wife, the night I did it. God, I'd had to tell someone! I was half off my nut. Not that this Heinie Ziegler hadn't had it coming; in a way it was even self defense, but there wasn't a chance of making a jury believe that.

Ed's voice had a little undertone of menace in it when he repeated, "Have you, Jerry?"

"Do you think I'm crazy?" I asked him. "It's bad enough to have you and Danville and Skeeter in on it. I'm not doing any advertising, thank you. It's just that McKenna picking me to ask—well, I got the jitters is all."

"I see," he said. And then, giving me a quick, level stare: "What else did

you and McKenna talk about? You were with him quite a while."

I didn't get it for a minute. Then I did and I was sore as a boiled owl. "Having me tailed, huh? What's the matter, afraid I'll knock down a few of your lousy nickels?"

"Now don't get red-headed, Jerry. One of the punks just happened to be in Luigi's and phoned me. He thought you might be in a jam of some kind."

"As if I'm not! And that reminds me, Ed, I've got a chance to go to work for C.B.S. I'm checking out on you."

He went back to studying his nice nails. "McKenna?"

"Yes, he's the one got me the break."

"And will your wife think it's a break, Jerry? They tell me that even what you're making with me isn't enough for Cora."

"To hell with her. I'm through, washed up."

He shook his head. "No, Jerry, I can't let you do it."

"You mean you won't? You mean I can't walk out if I want to? The hell with that. I'm going."

Again he shook his head. He was smiling, but it didn't mean a thing. His eyes were diamond hard. "Nobody walks out on me, Jerry. Maybe they're carried out, but they don't walk. I need good boys, Jerry; boys I can depend on. I *can* depend on you, can't I, Jerry?"

You couldn't miss what he meant. You either stuck—or you got stuck. With me, it was just a little murder rap, of course. Nothing serious. Looking at it from his angle I wondered what he had to be afraid of from me. The answer was nothing. I didn't know a thing more than the whole town knew. He could hire a hundred guys to do the work I was doing. Well, then, why didn't he? Why did he want to

hang onto me? Sort of desperately I asked him. "I wasn't cut out for the big time, Ed. I'm just a punk, I guess. What's it to you?"

This time when he looked at me I actually shivered. "Punks," he said, "are useful sometimes, Jerry. Especially with a rap hanging over them like yours. And if you ever get the bright idea that I could be clipped as an accessory, just forget it. I couldn't." He sat up a little straighter, touched a button on his desk. "I think we'll be able to get along, Jerry. Now that we understand each other."

THE door opened and the two gorillas came in. I took my hand away from my gun. Yep, for a second I'd seen the well-known red. I'd been on the point of letting him have it. Sick, actually sick at my stomach, I stumbled toward the door. Ed's voice halted me. "Better lay off the liquor, keed. It's bad for you."

"I know," I said dully. "You're about the fifth guy that's told me tonight." I went out and got in an elevator and dropped to the lobby. A guy looking at the building directory turned and gave me a screwy stare. "Did you speak to me?"

I guess I must have been mumbling out loud. I said, "It was two other guys, mister," and pushed out to the street. In the car I reached for the bottle in the door pocket before I remembered that it wasn't there any more. There didn't seem to be anything to do except stop somewhere and get tanked to the eyes, only I couldn't think of any place where there wouldn't be somebody else too and I didn't want to see even a bartender for a while. I went home hoping Cora hadn't found that last pint. She had, though. I flopped on the davenport in the living

room, too tired to even undress. After a while I went to sleep.

The ringing of the front door bell woke me. I didn't identify it as the front door bell right off the bat. I'd been dreaming I was in a broadcast station control room, trying to get an S.O.S. through on account of an earthquake was rapidly making kindling out of our fair city. It was pretty real. I mean, I could feel the building tottering under my feet. But the most vivid of all was Big Ed Harmon holding a gun on me and telling me to lay off; that he didn't want anybody to know there was an earthquake. I kept thinking, "They've gotta know. I've gotta tell 'em," and then I remembered the little alarm button recessed in the floor. I put my foot on this and a dozen alarms started singing so loud it woke me up. The dozen alarms turned out to be the apartment bell. Maybe I should have been relieved at that, but I wasn't. I just lay there for a minute, shivering, wondering if maybe Big Ed hadn't changed his mind about me. Not about letting me go, but about making the parting permanent. Maybe I'd worried him, almost pulling my rod like that. Maybe he'd sent a couple of the boys over to see that it didn't happen again. The bell kept ringing.

Finally I couldn't stand the suspense any more and got up and went over to the door. Maybe, I thought, it's just Cora. She might've forgotten her key. I jerked my gun out of the clip, twisted the knob and leaped back. I was so surprised I couldn't shut my own mouth. It wasn't Cora standing there. It wasn't the couple of hoods I'd imagined. It was Fran. Yep, that's right: Frances Harmon, Big Ed's wife. She was as scared as I was. Her big eyes looked enormous in the dead white of her face, and her dark hair was all

mussed up and wet from the rain. She didn't have any coat on and her gown was sopping, what there was left of it. Somebody had been playing rough.

I grabbed her, yanked her inside before some of the other tenants could see her in case they got curious.

She started sobbing then; not noisily, but as if she'd run her heart out. I put my two arms around her, held her close for a minute, trying to kid her out of it. "It's okay, Fran. I'm here and you know how I've always felt about you. Take a brace, keed. Tell papa."

She put her hands on my chest, pushed me away a little, so that she could look up into my ugly mug. "Oh, Jerry, I'm sorry if I'm putting you on a spot. I—I just couldn't seem to think of anybody else to go to, and I didn't have any money, or clothes or—" She broke off and her eyes sort of rolled up in her head. "Oh, Jerry, I'm scared!"

"That makes two of us," I said. I picked her up and carried her over to the couch. "Come on, Fran, tell me what happened and then I'll see about getting you some dry clothes."

SHE wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. Not like a guy removing the last of the mashed potatoes, but trying to stop her lips from quivering. "Ed just shot and killed a man. I—I saw it."

"Where? In his office?"

"No, at home." Home was a penthouse out in Beverly Hills. I looked at my wristwatch. I'd been asleep two hours. It was just a little after midnight.

"Okay," I said, "tell me about it. Fast, Fran."

"It—it was State Senator Delgado. He'd been waiting for Ed to come home. Ed brought another man with him, a man named Ames, I think. The

three of them went into the library and I went to bed. Not long after that I heard shots. I ran to the library door, got it open and—and there was the senator on the floor. Ames was stooping over him, cursing, but it was Ed who had the gun. It—it was still smoking. I guess I must have screamed at that. They turned and Ames started cursing Ed. Then they both started for me. They caught me in one of the guest rooms and Ames insisted they kill me too. Ed said that could wait. Finally they locked me in and went back to the library, I guess.”

“How did you get away?”

She shivered. “Out the window. I crawled along a ledge till I got to a fire escape.”

I did a little shivering myself. I knew the penthouse; knew how it was built on a corner instead of in the middle of the roof. Crawling along a narrow parapet, in the rain, thirteen stories above the street—well, it was no wonder she was jittery.

I said, “Look, Fran, how much do you know of Big Ed’s business besides this kill? Who is this Ames guy?”

“I don’t know, Jerry. Somebody important, I guess. About Ed—well, I’ve heard rumors, of course. I read the papers. Lately things haven’t been going so well between us.” She gave me a direct look. “I—I guess I never loved him enough to overlook some of the things they’re saying about him. But that’s all I know; he’s never told me anything himself, except to mind my own business.”

“Okay,” I said, “I’ll get you some of Cora’s clothes.”

“That’s what you think,” Cora said. She was standing in her bedroom door, a nasty little grin on her face and not much else on her body. You could see right through the filmy nightie but

somehow I didn’t get a thrill. I wondered how long she’d been there.

She told me that, too. “Long enough to get the whole picture, you heel.” Big violet eyes stared insolently at Frances. “I guess you’re the dame my husband is sorry he didn’t marry.”

Fran’s dark eyes went wide at that, but she didn’t say anything. I said, “Now look, Cora, you and I have had our differences but this gal’s in a spot. Do you give her an outfit or do I have to slap you to sleep?”

“Just try slapping somebody,” Cora said. She brought a hand around, the one she’d been holding behind her, and she had one of those small pearl-handled purse-guns in it. I’d dropped my own rod when I picked up Fran. I felt kind of foolish.

I said, “Now take it easy, Cora. We’ll work this thing out.”

“You’re damned right we will, punk. We’ll work it out so it adds up to some real money. Not the kind you’ve been handing me lately.” She got a curious, speculative look on her beautiful pan. You had to hand her that much; she certainly was beautiful. But she was as hard as nails. She grinned. “In fact, Jerry, I don’t think I’ll need you any more.”

Well, I suppose I could have jumped her gun. At another time I’d have tried it, at least. But she was all keyed up to shoot and she had everything on her side. I mean, she *was* my wife; it *was* our apartment. Fran didn’t have many clothes on either and Cora could shoot the both of us and claim we’d violated the sanctity of the home. Probably Big Ed and this Ames guy would pay her a bonus for doing the job herself instead of just fingering us. A sweet set-up, huh?

I said, “Okay, baby, it’s your play.” She came out into the room, kicked

my rod under a chair. Then, gun held almost negligently, she gestured us into the coat closet in the hall. The key turned. I'd never noticed it before but that damned closet door opened *in*. Fran and I were liable to stay put for a long time.

The situation wasn't funny.

III

CORA'S tinkly little laugh, brittle as glass, came to us. After that we didn't hear any more until the outside door closed. In the dark I wrapped a spare overcoat around Fran. She was shivering with the cold.

I said, "Cheer up, kid. We're not licked yet."

She didn't sound frightened. "I didn't know women like that really existed, Jerry. Do they, or is it all just a bad dream?"

"No," I grated, "it's bad, but it isn't a dream. Cora is just part of the well-known Cassidy luck. Funny, you coming here, Fran. I mean, of the million and a half people in Los Angeles you'd have to pick Jerry Cassidy and his wife." I didn't tell her that she'd run from one killer straight into the arms of another. There didn't seem to be any point to making her feel worse than she did. Well, I thought, I won't have to worry any more about taking the rap for the Heinie Ziegler kill. I'll just disappear like he did. And like Fran will.

Frances said, "You think she will try to sell us to Ed?"

"No, I'm sure of it." I told her to move over out of the way, grabbed the doorknob with both hands, wedged my back against the wall and put my feet up under the knob. You get a lot of leverage that way. My luck still held. The knob came off in my hands. I hit the floor at the same time the other half

of the knob did, only it had the edge. It was on the outside.

Fran flopped down beside me. "Jerry, are you hurt?"

"Only my vanity," I told her. Suddenly I chuckled. Not because that was a new name for the place that hurt, but because I'd just remembered something. Up on the shelf in that closet was a kit of car tools; the ones I'd swiped out of the old car when I traded it in. You've probably done that same thing yourself. It's one of those little not-quite-honest tricks that goes under the head of good sense. You don't get any more allowance for a car with tools than you do without, so why waste 'em? They say crime don't pay. Well, if lifting those tools was a crime, the moralists must have slipped because they sure came in handy. We were outside in two minutes.

Fran picked out an armload of Cora's clothes, went into the bath. I prowled through Cora's vanity, came up with two diamond rings I'd given her and a small roll of bills. You'll maybe get a better idea of Cora when I tell you there were two C's in that roll. Two hundred dollars, and not three hours ago she'd nicked me for my last twenty!

Fran came out. She'd picked the more quiet things: a brown sport suit, brown hat and shoes. She looked tired, but like a million to me.

"Fran," I said, "I've found a little stake. Enough to do us for a while if we're careful and stick together. We can't make it separately. You ready to go with a bum like me?"

She gave me her hand. "Anywhere, Jerry Cassidy. If you're a bum, we'll be bums together."

I couldn't say anything to that. I just took her arm and went out to the living room, stooping on the way to get my

rod from under the chair. We went down to my car. It had stopped raining and I thought that might be a good sign.

WE WERE about half way down the first block when I happened to look in the rear vision mirror. A car without lights had just pulled up in front of the apartment. A couple of guys got out, started inside. Then one of them half turned, looked down the street and spotted my tail-light. Anyway, I guess that's what made him wave his arm in my direction. The car without lights got under way. That's all I waited to see. I romped on the accelerator till the Chevvy thought it was a super-charged vibrator. We raced around the first corner on two wheels, straightened out from a skid that almost smashed us against the curb, reversed at the next turn and did it all over again. We were probably making about fifty but it seemed like ninety.

Fran was on her knees, looking out the rear window and cheering me on like it was a race of high school kids at three in the afternoon. There was a little *pinggg* and a slug cut through the window and smashed the mirror. All right, I thought, you're asking for it. I yelled at Fran: "Get down on the floor, nit-wit! We're gonna play games too."

The scenery, consisting mostly of darkened store-fronts, was going by us a mile a minute; the street was still as wet as the bottom of the ocean, only slicker. Fran was down on the floor now, saying little prayers, and I hoped the Chevvy's body was as good as the ads said. I didn't slam on the brakes. I was afraid to on that greasy pavement. It wasn't necessary, anyway. From the tail of my eye I saw the emblem on the other car's nose creep up, then part of

the hood. All I did was take my foot off the throttle. You'd think we had stopped dead. I put two quick slugs in an open window as the other job leaped ahead, not knowing how many guys were inside, not caring. The big car was a full length up on us before it went into a kind of tail spin. It skidded the width of the street, bounced back to the center, started whirling. Round and round it went and I knew its brakes were locked. I was half around in a U turn by this time. Somebody in the spinning car took a shot at us, missed, then the machine he was in suddenly quit acting like a dizzy ballet dancer and went flying off at a tangent. The last I saw of it was when it crashed a light pole.

I straightened out in the opposite direction and began fanning the air in earnest. The main reason was a prowler car's siren. I didn't want to meet any cops till I'd had time to stash Frances in a safe place. Maybe not even then. What with Big Ed being on familiar terms with State Senators and one thing and another, I had no assurance I'd be any safer in jail. This guy Ames had me kind of worried too. I mean, I thought his name had a familiar sound to it, but I couldn't seem to place it. Fran had said he'd cursed Ed. Anybody big enough to curse Ed must be no small potatoes. Maybe he's lieutenant-governor or something, I thought. Anyway, between the two of them, they were pretty sure to swing a mean drag politically; enough to see that a punk named Jerry Cassidy didn't talk to the wrong cops. . . .

I left the car in an alley and Fran and I walked the two blocks to the Hotel Mercer. It was a good middle-class house, not too gaudy, not too cheap. The clerk lifted an eyebrow at our lack of baggage.

"Fire," I explained. "Practically ruined our flat, and what the fire missed the smoke-eaters took care of. We left it as is for the adjusters to worry over."

He accepted that at face value. I thought it was pretty good myself. I peeled a twenty off Cora's roll, asked for a suite, or at least two rooms with connecting bath. We got the two rooms, registering as John Jones and Frances Jones, brother and sister. Not that I expected Big Ed or Cora to ever use the register in a divorce action.

A hop took us up to the third, opened all the windows in both rooms, put them down again when I yelled at him, finally went away with a dollar and a request for some cigarettes. I gave Fran the old grin.

"Well, kid, here we are. Not so bad, huh?"

She nodded. "Pretty swell, Jerry. You, I mean."

I said, "Nuts. You want something to eat? Drink?"

She said she didn't. She took off her hat and the suit coat. "Mind if I stay in here with you for a while, Jerry?"

I saw she was getting the jeebies all over again. Well, who wouldn't? I wasn't feeling any too good myself. But it wasn't sympathy that made me say, "Baby, you can stay with me the rest of our lives if you want to."

Her nice mouth quirked a little at that. "The rest of our lives," she said. "That may not be very long, Jerry." I let that ride because there was no use kidding her. After a while she said, "Jerry, would you mind kissing me? Just once?"

It wasn't any chore. I kissed her, then straightened and stood looking down at her. "Why did you want me to do that?"

"I don't know," she admitted. "I

just thought it might be a good idea." She got up, took her—or rather Cora's—hat and coat and went to the connecting door. "I'm going to lie down for a while, Jerry."

"But look," I said, "hey, you just claimed you wanted to stay in here with me!"

"I know," she nodded. And then, "We gals are funny, Jerry. You'll find that out some day." The door closed behind her.

I just stood there.

SOMEbody knocked on the hall door and I thought it was the hop coming back with the cigarettes. "Come on in," I said. The door opened quietly and there was Detective-Sergeant Slats McKenna, as big as life and just about as unpleasant.

To give you some idea of how unpleasant he really intended to be, he had his gun out in plain sight. His lean dark face was drawn, tired-looking, and the down-drooping mouth was more than just tired; it was cynical. His eyes looked like two burned holes in a navy blanket. He shut the door quietly behind him, stood leaning against it.

"Well, Jerry," he said, "we do find out things about people, don't we? Why'd you do it? I mean, why did you have to do it *that* way?"

"Why did I do what?" I sparred. I knew, of course. Somehow the guy had found out about the Heinie Ziegler kill. "And what do you mean by *that* way? What difference does it make?"

He gave me a screwy look. "So you do know what I'm talking about! I'd sort of hoped you wouldn't."

Well, I'd certainly left myself open on that one. That's the trouble with cops and a guilty conscience. They ask you two questions at once and you're

so busy trying to evade one that you trip on the other.

He said, "All right, Jerry, turn around. Slowly, now. I don't want to have to hurt you."

"No," I said, "I can see that. All you want to do is have my neck stretched about a yard." I turned around, though, and he came up behind me, reached around and got my gun. He was sniffing it when I looked at him again. Like a bloodhound. I couldn't quite figure this out. I mean, it had been thirty-seven days since I'd blasted Ziegler and even a punk as dumb as me wouldn't be expected to carry a dirty gun all that time. Besides, it wasn't the same gun. Big Ed had gotten me a new one. Then I remembered that I'd just got through using the rod on the hoods that were chasing us. Maybe, I thought, he don't know about Ziegler. Maybe I'm being picked up for this other thing.

I said, "Now wait a minute, Slats. Maybe I can explain."

"You don't have to," he said tiredly. "It's all quite clear. Cora caught you cheating with this other dame and you let her have it." He dropped my heater in his pocket. He could have made it vanish in thin air and I wouldn't have been surprised. I was numb from head to foot already. I was supposed to have killed my wife!

Funny, huh? I'd really killed Ziegler. I'd more than likely killed a hood or two in that car. But was I wanted for either of those things? No, indeed. No, I was being arrested for murdering Cora. It was to laugh—if you felt like laughing. Me, I didn't. My brain suddenly unlocked. Slats was saying: "I knew you hated her, Jerry. Everybody knew it. And you had plenty cause. But to do it over another woman—to just toss her out in the gutter like that—

well, you never seemed like that kind of a guy, is all. Who is this dame posing as your sister?"

I tried not to look at Fran's door. It was closed a little while ago, I knew. I hoped it still was; hoped she wasn't getting a load of this. Oh, I know; it all looks quite simple on the surface. All I had to do was get Fran to tell Slats it couldn't have been me who let Cora have it. She'd say, "Why, Big Ed did it, of course! Right after he got through killing Senator Delgado!"

Only thing was, Slats wouldn't believe it. There was the old record of Fran and I going together back in the days when we were all kids. There was my known hatred for Cora, and my hot gun. Ballistics, of course, could prove that it wasn't the gun that had done for Cora, but at the moment I was all out of ballistics experts. Slats would naturally think Fran was trying to cover me and not doing a very good job of it. He'd say, "Okay, you can come along too, Fran." Suppose he did that. Suppose we all went down to Headquarters. By this time Big Ed and the Ames party would thoughtfully have gotten rid of Delgado's body. There wouldn't be any proof. They'd think Fran was lying, and let Big Ed spring her. Once sprung, it didn't take a very vivid imagination to picture what would happen to her.

I wet my lips. "Look, Slats, how come you found me?"

He gave me a sour grin. "They found Cora first. After that there was a general alarm out for you. A prowler car located your car in an alley near here and it had a bullet hole in it—you must have missed Cora with that one—and so they sent me out because I could describe you better than most. Funny, huh?" He wasn't liking this much better than I was.

I said yes, it certainly was very funny. All the time I kept wondering what to do about Fran. If I didn't drag her into it, let Slats think she'd lammed, then what? Why, then he'd grab me and she'd be left alone. With a general alarm out, he couldn't keep the pinch quiet. Big Ed, knowing Fran had been with me, would send a batch of hoods after her.

I almost went down on my knees to the guy. "Slats," I jittered, "I didn't kill Cora. She had it coming, and I admit I'm not so awfully sorry, but I didn't kill her. I swear it."

His dark eyes said I was a snivelling heel. "Who else would want to, punk?"

WELL, I'd look cute telling him Big Ed had done it. I wasn't even sure he had. He'd probably ordered it done and had an unbreakable alibi. Maybe I wasn't thinking straight; maybe you can figure what I should have done. All I'm telling you is what I did. I took a chance on McKenna's gun, came out of a sort of half crouch and hung a hard right on his lantern jaw. His head snapped back against the hall door. After that he just kind of folded up in sections, a little at a time, till he was sprawled out flat. All but his head. That still leaned against the door. I wondered if I'd broken his neck, got down on my knees beside him. His neck was all right. He was just out.

Fran's door opened and she popped in, gave a little screech. "Oh, Jerry, is he dead?"

"No," I said. "Better get your coat and hat, Fran. We've gotta go places before your dear husband hears where we are." I was going through Slats' pockets now, after my gun. Believe it or not, the guy had a big hole in the pocket he'd dropped my rod in. The

damn thing had slid way down into the lining. I let it go, grabbed his own gun, clipped it under my arm as Fran came back. Together we went out and caught a down elevator. The lobby of the Mercer was L-shaped, the elevator bank around the turn from the desk. Fran and I got to the turn just as the night clerk glanced in that direction. I saw his mouth flop open, saw the movement of his body as his toe reached for the alarm button under the desk. He didn't step on it, just waited to see if Slats McKenna was behind us.

I grabbed Fran's arm, pulled her back out of sight. My left hand located the roll of dough, pressed it into her fist. The elevator operator was watching us now. I said, "Here, kid, don't stop to argue. You've got clothes now, and money. Beat it out the back way, go down the alley and snag a cab on Fifth. Go to the Palais in Hollywood and wait for me."

She shook her head. "Jerry, I can't leave you like this. You're in trouble of some kind. Besides me, I mean. I—I heard part of what Slats said. I can clear you."

"You might," I agreed. "If you lived long enough." I put on the old act here. "It's really for my sake, Fran. It sounds like Ed and this guy Ames might swing a lotta weight. I don't want you picked up by either Ed or the cops till I know just where we stand. In other words you'll do me more good at present if nobody knows where you are." A fat house dick waddled around the ell, looking important. I gave Fran a shove toward the service entrance, tripped the fat guy as he went by. He started yelling bloody murder. So did the kid in the elevator. I took it on the lam out past the desk. The clerk had a gun. He shut his eyes as he pulled the trigger and naturally you can't expect

to hit much with your eyes closed. All he hit was one of the big plate-glass windows and this went out with a booming crash just as I made the sidewalk. Slats McKenna's police job was at the curb; there was not a cab in sight. I scrambled into Slats' car. The well-known Cassidy luck was still with me. Slats had taken his keys with him.

The clerk and the operator and the fat house dick were all stuck in the revolving door. I crawled out the far side of the car just as another car swung into the street. Two men got out, slanted toward me, not running, just a couple of jay walkers headed for the hotel. The car came on. I swiveled, ran smack into a second car. This one was without lights, coming from the other direction. I hadn't even heard it. As I went to my hands and knees from the impact, the brakes locked. Two guns started a sort of rhythmic one-two, one-two blasting and from the sound of falling glass I guessed they were shooting at the revolving door of the Mercer. I had Slats' rod out when the car nudged me again, not hard, just enough to knock me sprawling without exactly running over me. Somebody stepped on my hand. Somebody else kicked me in the head. Then both somebodies reached down and hauled me to my feet.

"Going some place, Cassidy? We'll give you a lift." This polite offer was followed by a swing that practically jerked my head right off and I was only vaguely conscious of being shoved into a car. Motor sound drummed in my ears. Presently that too faded out.

IV

BY AND by I got the idea that somebody was shaking me, and opening my eyes I discovered that this was the first Jerry Cassidy idea that

had panned out all evening. The guy really was shaking me. I was still in the car, in the back seat, and the guy working me over had an assistant. I was sandwiched between them.

Up front, under the wheel, was a third guy who was paying strict attention to his driving. We must have been miles away from the Mercer Hotel. I hoped Frances was too. The guy shaking me found out that I was awake and rapped his knuckles against my teeth.

The other one said, "Hey, cut that out. You been working for ten minutes tryin' to get him awake and the minute you do you wanna slap him back to sleep. Where's the percentage?"

"My pal," I thanked him.

"Oh, yeah?" he said, and smacked me himself. He was nothing but a hypocrite, that guy. He took out a knife and flipped open a four inch blade and tested the edge on his thumb. I watched that knife with a great deal of interest, wondering which part of me he was going to try it on first. First my stomach got goose pimples, then my throat. He fooled me. He jabbed the point into my knee. "Where's the dame?" he wanted to know.

"What dame?"

Jab went the knife again. This time in my ribs. He must have measured off the exact distance because it didn't go past the ribs. He pretended it was a corkscrew, taking it out. The other guy had an arm under my chin. That's all that kept me from yelling.

The guy with the knife wiped the blade fastidiously on the back of the front seat. "All right, Percy, leave him talk." He had a face like a wedge. Percy took his arm away and I began to talk. You learn a lot of nice words in the navy. I gave them the whole works in one breath. Percy got hold of one of my flailing arms, shoved it up

between my shoulder blades. "Shut up, punk."

I shut up. The guy with the knife licked his lips. He reminded me more and more of a hyena I'd seen in the zoo when I was a kid. This hyena had been watching a keeper with a chunk of meat, and it was a toss-up which he wanted most: the keeper or the meat. Hatchet-face made up his mind on the exact spot he was going to carve next. He turned a little more in the seat, got my right ear between a thumb and finger and sliced off a little piece of the lobe. I let him have my right fist in the kidney. Percy snapped my left arm. I passed out.

I have no recollection of being taken out of the car or going up in the elevator or anything. The first I remember was waking up in a chair in front of a big desk, and on the other side of the desk was Big Ed Harmon. My broken left arm was swollen tight inside my coat sleeve and shooting flaming arrows of pain clear out the top of my head. Ed's face would loom up big as a house for a minute, then fade out till you couldn't see anything but the eyes.

Percy and Hatchet-face were telling him all about it. I gathered that they'd left a couple of their pals behind to find Frances, but that they couldn't wait themselves because the blasting had brought down a wagon load of cops. Big Ed told them off as good as I could have done it myself. Not loudly, though. His voice sounded dead level, perfectly controlled.

"You damned fools, you knew there were cops in the neighborhood. We expected that when we heard about them finding the punk's car in the alley. Why'd you have to start blasting?"

Percy cleared his throat. "We never started it. It was the punk himself. He had three-four mugs chasin' him outa

the lobby and we hadda stop 'em, didn't we?"

A new voice said, "But you didn't have to half kill Cassidy."

Big Ed said, "I'll take care of this, Ames."

I turned my head a little and looked at this Ames party. Not until then had I associated the name with the man himself. The reason, of course, was that probably there weren't more than a half dozen people in the whole town who called him Ames. He was A. H. Hutchins to the papers and the public at large. He owned the Title Guarantee Building; the one where Big Ed had his offices. He was chairman of the State Central Committee, on the boards of most of the banks, an honorary police commissioner and a lot of other things I was too busy to think of. He had nice curly white hair and one of those skins you love to touch. Boy, would I have loved to touch it! The fingers of my right hand started jerking I wanted to get at him so bad. My left hand didn't do much of anything except hurt like hell.

THIS Hutchins guy was the first to notice I was awake. He said, "Get rid of these—these men." Meaning Percy and Hatchet-face. Ed told them to get the hell out. I got the impression that they didn't really know what it was all about. All they'd been told was to get me and the gal that was with me. The short wave had given Ed the general locality of where I might have holed up and he'd sent out a couple of cars to patrol the neighborhood. Even the cops didn't know the gal was Big Ed's wife, though.

He got up as soon as the two mugs were gone, came around the desk and held a glass to my lips. I drank. The room stopped going round and round.

Ed sat on the edge of the desk, one foot on the floor, the other swinging. I remember he was wearing spats.

"Where is she, Jerry?"

I gave him a grin. "In China, I hope."

He reached down, quite casually, got hold of my broken arm and twisted it. You could hear the bones grating. I went off my nut for a minute, tried to kick him. It was then I discovered that my ankles were tied to the front legs of the chair I was in. "Where is she, Jerry?"

I screamed then. I couldn't help it. But screaming or not I stuck to my story. "She's in China!" I yelled. "In China, China, China, you hear?"

Hutchins said, "Stop it, Harmon! I can't stand it!" As if Big Ed had hold of *his* arm. I wanted to laugh at that, but somehow all I could do was sob. And here I'd been thinking I was a tough guy.

Ed let go my arm, held the glass to my mouth again. I slobbered all over it. Then I remembered I had *two* arms and tried to paste him one with the right. He just pushed it down as if I was a baby. "Did you tell Slat McKenna anything?"

So he knew about Slat being there too. I choked on the last swallow. "Sure," I gasped. "Fran and I told him the whole works. He oughta be along most any minute now."

Mr. Hutchins said, "Great Scott!"

Ed just laughed at him. "Imagine me working for you all these years. Why, you're a weak sister, Ames, and I thought you were a big shot. I might have guessed when you went haywire and shot Delgado. Well, we'll have a show-down after we get this thing straightened out. Maybe you'll be working for me."

Mr. Hutchins groaned.

Ed said, "Don't worry, the punk didn't tell McKenna anything. He bopped the dick and lammed. All we've got to do is find Frances and then we can wash the whole thing up."

The telephone rang. Ed swung around, answered it. "Okay," he said, "bring her right up." I almost passed out. Something told me the "her" they were bringing up was Frances. Desperately I got the kinks out of my neck and really looked around. We were in the living room of the Beverly Hills penthouse. I hadn't known it before.

The door opened and two guys carried Frances in. They must have brought her up in the freight elevator. Even the dumbest clerk on earth wouldn't have passed them like that. Her feet and hands were taped very neatly and there were two strips of adhesive crossed over her lips. X marking the spot, I thought. The spot where Ed will kick her teeth in. He didn't do it right away, though. He just jerked his big, good-looking head toward a fireside divan and the two lugs dumped her on it. Her eyes met mine with a sort of horrified surprise. I guess I didn't make a very pretty picture. I could feel the smear of dried blood on my cheek where the guy had operated on my ear.

The two guys looked kind of like the ones that had got out of the car, there in front of the Mercer. I couldn't be sure because it had been pretty dark in the street at the time and I'd had one or two other things on my mind. I couldn't see that it made much difference anyway. Neither Frances nor I were going to do any identifying.

Ed said quietly, "You have any trouble?"

"A little," one guy admitted. "She'd already gotten a cab and was on her way by the time we found out all the

angles. We had to wait for the cab to come back. Then it was duck soup. The Palais is a nice dump," he added.

"I'll make a note of that," Ed said, and Mr. Hutchins, over by the windows, cursed him irritably. "Let's get this over with, Harmon!"

Ed said, "Sure, Ames, sure. You want to take care of it personally?"

Mr. Hutchins turned green and looked like he was going to be sick. "Hell, man, no! How can you be so callous?"

"Well," Ed said, "after all, it wasn't I who killed—" He broke off as Mr. Hutchins lifted a shaking hand. Then, smiling a little as at some secret joke, he said, "Excuse it, please," and told the two mugs to scram. They went out. That left only him and Mr. Hutchins and Fran and me.

HUTCHINS said accusingly, "See here, Harmon, it's true I shot Senator Delgado, but it was in a moment of panic. I'm not a cold-blooded murderer."

"No? Then what would you suggest we do with this pair of tramps—give 'em our blessing and turn 'em loose?"

"Couldn't—couldn't you have your men . . ."

Ed gave him a hard little laugh. "Listen, lame-brain, you and I are in this together. It doesn't make any difference to the police who actually pulled the trigger on Delgado. It was my gun and it's my penthouse. Nobody but the four of us here even knows the senator is dead. We'll just keep it that way, and after a while there'll only be two who know. You and I will take care of it."

The telephone buzzed again. This seemed to be Big Ed's busy night. He picked it up, listened a moment and for the first time I actually saw emo-

tion register on his face. He looked scared. Then he slammed the phone down, whirled on Mr. Hutchins. "Okay, punk, we'll have to make this fast. A flatfoot named McKenna is on his way up."

"Can't—can't you have him stopped downstairs?"

"Sure," Ed said. "Sure I can but I'm not going to. Now don't go off your nut. Just give me a lift with the punk's chair."

They lifted me, chair and all, and carried me over to what looked like a solid-paneled wall. I couldn't see how Ed worked it but the wall opened up and there was a cute little room behind it. It was already occupied. Yep, that's right. Senator Delgado was lying on a leather couch with a very pretty Afghan pulled up to his chin and a look of utter peace on his face. Somebody had very thoughtfully closed his eyes for him. I wondered if I'd look that nice—afterward.

Ed had a roll of adhesive. He slapped a strip of it around my right arm, pinning it to the chair. I tried to bite him when he tackled my mouth but it was no go. That got taped too. He went back and got Fran and tossed her carelessly on the floor beside the senator's couch.

Then, appraisingly, he looked at Mr. Hutchins. "You'd better stay in here too, baby. You're too hysterical for McKenna. You'd make him nervous."

"I want a gun," the old man babbled. "I want a gun in case anything happens. I won't be taken alive, I tell you."

"If you don't shut up," Ed said, "I'll take you myself." He went back into the big room and got a gun though. He tossed this through the panel, like a bone to a whining pup. The panel closed.

The little room wasn't soundproof. You could hear Ed moving around out there, straightening things. It seemed like an awfully long time before somebody opened the hall door and said, "Lieutenant McKenna, sir."

Ed said, "Hello, Slats," in a careless voice and there was a faint rustle of papers. I could imagine him sitting at his desk, very preoccupied with his work. "What's new with you?"

"Same old sixes and sevens," Slats said. "Nothing startling except I want that heel Cassidy. You knew he murdered his wife, didn't you?"

Ed said yes, he'd heard about it over the radio. "Too bad about Jerry. I kept telling him to lay off the liquor, but you know how some of these guys are. Have a slug yourself, Slats?" There was a tinkle of glass.

Slats said, "No. No, thanks, I've got a bad liver and I have to watch it." I could picture him walking around nervously while Ed drank. Slats never could stay still very long. Presently he went off at a tangent. "What time did Senator Delgado go home?"

I thought Mr. Hutchins was going to faint. His eyes rolled up in his head and he leaned weakly against the panel, gasping. If it hadn't been for that damned chair I'd have tackled him then. Even bound I could have made something happen.

Ed, taking his time, answered the question. "About eleven, I think. Why?"

"I just wondered. Did he take his chair with him? There's one missing. I can see the leg marks in the rug and there don't seem to be another chair in the room that would fit. Maybe you made him a present of it?"

There was a hell of a long pause this time. Finally Big Ed said with a trace of irritation: "What's on your mind, 6 D—19

McKenna? I paid for the chair. What I did with it is none of your business though I don't mind telling you somebody burned a hole in the fabric and I had it taken out."

"Well," Slats said, "I hope there wasn't somebody tied in it at the time. I mean the hole might have been burned in the party first, huh?"

IT WAS very quiet for a minute; so quiet I thought Slats might have gone and I got jittery. Trying to get out of the chair I overturned it instead and fell on my face, skidding smack into Hutchins. Well, he'd heard everything I had and was pretty jittery to start with. He fell down on top of me and the gun went boom-boom-boom right in my ear. Like an echo another gun blasted out in the living room, only this one did it just once. That was like a signal touching off a whole string of cannon crackers down in Chinatown. Maybe it was because I had my ear to the floor that it sounded so plain; the shooting wasn't going on in the living room. It was farther away than that. I tried to scrooge around to see what Mr. Hutchins was doing all this time, and then the wall panel opened and Slats came in.

He bent down and took the gun out of Mr. Hutchins' fist. Mr. Hutchins didn't seem to mind a bit. He didn't look quite as peaceful as State Senator Delgado but he was just as dead. The last of those three slugs he'd fired had gone in his mouth. Maybe he'd done it on purpose.

Slats still didn't say anything. He righted my chair, went over and untied Frances. There was a lot of noise out in the living room now. Sounded like the marines had landed. A harness bull with a sergeant's stripes came to the panel and said, "All clear, Lieutenant.

Big Ed's awake if you want to talk to him."

Slats nodded gloomily. His lantern jaw needed a shave and his dark eyes had pouches under them. Fran got stiffly to her knees, clumped over to my side. "Oh, Jerry, what have they been doing to you?" She fumbled at the adhesive on my mouth. It hurt so bad coming off I forgot about my busted arm for a minute. Slats seemed to come to some kind of a decision and helped Fran get me out of the chair. When I tried to stand up I fell flat on my face again. A couple of cops came in at that and picked me up and carried me out to the divan by the fireplace.

Slats looked down at me threateningly. "You wanna drink?"

I did. But all I did was give him a grin that he mistook for a sneer and say, "Nuts, I'm off it."

He sneered right back at me. "Oh, yeah?" He turned away to answer somebody's question, turned back after a minute and said carelessly, "By the way, you didn't kill your wife with that gun. We checked."

Frances, kneeling beside me, gave him an indignant, "Of course he didn't! I could have told you that!"

Slats said, "He did a pretty good job on Heinie Ziegler, though."

I nearly passed out. Well, I'd been expecting it and here it was. I said weakly, "How—how did you know?"

"Your gun, sappo, your gun. When they brought Ziegler's body in we checked that too. The slugs matched."

"But they couldn't have!" I yelled. "Hell, it wasn't the same gun! And besides, Ziegler's been dead for—for thirty-seven—"

"Not even that many hours, kid. You killed him when he was chasing you in that car. I didn't know about it when I collared you in the Mercer;

didn't know the gal was Fran, but give a case enough cops and they're bound to fit some of the pieces eventually. Even dumb cops."

I don't know. Maybe it was the news that I wasn't a murderer. Maybe it was just looking at his face, and at Fran; maybe it was my broken arm that made my vision get kind of fuzzy all of a sudden. Somehow I got a handkerchief out and blew my nose and it sounded just like a foghorn at sea. Everybody in the room turned to stare at me resentfully. Even Big Ed Harmon who was cuffed to his chair and submitting to an interne's cursed instructions. Apparently all that was wrong with Big Ed was a creased scalp.

Slats said, keeping his voice low, "If you hadn't been such a punk you'd have smelled the frame, Jerry. It's the old gag, pinning a trick kill on a new recruit so he won't squawk when he's really told to do something. Only sometimes it's a real kill and that's what I was afraid of. That's why I wanted you to break out of the racket before it was too late." He reached down, touched Fran's head lightly. "I've got him a job, kid. Not much dough in it, but it's the right kind."

I COULDN'T see why he was explaining this to her. They seemed to have something in common that I didn't know about. I said, "Okay, okay. I'm a punk and I don't know which end is up. So maybe you'll tell me how you got wise to so much."

"Sure," he said. "I was up here earlier in the evening looking for Big Ed to ask him about Heinie Ziegler. We got a pick-up order from St. Louis on Heinie. An old rap. Well, Ed was still at the office but I saw Senator Delgado who was waiting. That's how I knew he'd been here."

"Then we found your wife, and trying to find you we found where somebody had busted out of your hall closet. I figured that might have been Cora at first. Later on the boys bring in a wrecked car and a dead guy named Ziegler who I knew used to work for Big Ed. You were also working for Big Ed. And when I finally woke up after you bopped me there in the hotel—well, I got curious about this *sister* of yours and got a pretty fair description of Frances, Ed's wife. It all seemed to tie into Ed, see?"

"Kind of," I admitted. The interne was working on my busted arm now and I wasn't feeling so hot.

"Well," Slats went on, "Ballistics reported that your slug hadn't killed your wife, but that it had done for Heinie Ziegler. I couldn't, of course, know that it was Heinie you thought you'd killed before. I just figured it was a similar frame on account of you hadn't gone to see Kramer at C.B.S. like you promised. Again it sounded like Big Ed's work.

"Then there was the battle in front of the Mercer. The clerk and the house dick said you'd been snatched. I wondered what had happened to Fran—if it was Fran. It stood to reason that both of you knew something big; something Big Ed didn't want to spread, and that reminded me of Senator Delgado who I'd seen here. Anyway, it was a fair guess that somebody would make a try for the gal, so I just waited around till a couple of guys

started asking questions of a cabby. Then I followed the two guys out to the Palais and there you are."

"Like hell I am!" I snorted. "Who did kill Cora, and why'd you let those mugs grab Fran?"

"We've got the boys that killed Cora," he said quietly. "She came to Big Ed with the news that she had you locked up in that closet. She wanted money. He paid her off by sending her back with Heinie Ziegler's crew and they just dumped her on the way. About Fran: I didn't have a damn thing but guesses so far. I figured the two mugs would take Fran to where you were, and if I couldn't do any better I'd hand Big Ed a kidnap rap."

I grunted. "Well," I said, "I guess I helped some. I sort of helped wreck Mr. Hutchins anyway."

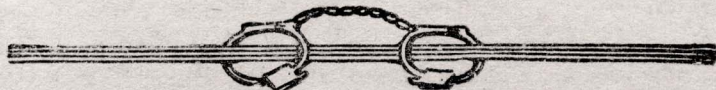
"If he didn't commit suicide," Slats sneered. "The only thing I can think of you're good for is for really tough guys to practice on. Just a punk at heart."

Fran said indignantly, "He is no such thing!"

Slats grinned then, shook his head. "Well, you're entitled to your opinion. When you're finally free of Big Ed maybe you can explain the answers to the punk. You'll probably have to."

I saw a hot flush creep up around Fran's eyes and it made me sore. I said, "Hey, you big lug, whadda you mean by that crack?"

"You wouldn't know," he said. "You'd never guess—punk."



The Miracle Man

By Eric Howard

Author of "Across the Border," etc.



"Let us look for the spirit that dwells within our hearts"



IF IT meant anything at all, it was over my head. But a thousand people, mostly women, were eating it up, nodding their heads, murmuring to themselves "How true!" This fellow up on the platform, in the auditorium, was as handsome as a matinee idol. Mangasarius, he called himself. No first name, no initials. Just Mangasarius; like Caesar or Napoleon. Mangasarius, the Great!

In his forties, perhaps, with a little gray at the temples and a full head of curling dark hair. Big, strong, with a suggestion of great vitality about him. Graceful gestures and a voice that was a velvet flow in the great hall. What he said didn't have to make sense.

He had a good racket, if it was a racket. Free lectures, like this, several mornings a week. Just enough to lure

Mangasarius knew the answers to all problems—except his own murder

them into special courses of lectures, for small groups, at a hundred bucks a course; and private lessons, at still higher fees. Besides that, he collected anything they wanted to give—money, stocks and bonds, property, jewels.

That's why I was here. Mrs. Rufus G. Hyde was about to give Mangasarius something, and Rufus objected. He didn't know what to do about it, so he hired me to watch her and Mangasarius. If she handed him a necklace, a bunch of securities, or a wad of dough, I was to try to get the goods on him, evidence that would show he had unduly influenced her.

A tough job, but Rufus was paying the bills. Rufus had plenty of the root of all evil; he could afford to let his wife shell out to a grifter, if Mangy—as I got to calling him—was a

grifter. But Rufus hated to see the jack he had taken away from people dropped into Mangy's hand. Rufus hated to be out-smarted.

Mangy spread his hands in a wide gesture. "Let us not pray, dear friends," he said in that dulcet voice. "Rather, let us pause for a meditative moment. Let us look inward. Let us tap that reservoir of power, that well of spirit, that dwells within our hearts."

There was a moment's silence. Then he gestured finally and walked briskly off the platform. Immediately, a beautiful girl in a white dress came out. She was Mangy's niece and co-worker, so he said. She went into a crisp, businesslike number. Mangy's book was on sale in the lobby; they'd better buy it or they'd never know happiness. It was only four dollars. And for those who wanted to take Mangy's special course of lectures, the line formed on the left. For private lessons in the Miracle Way, which was what Mangy modestly called his method, they'd have to see her, Dolores, the niece, and pony up. She announced other lectures. She was a bright, clever baggage, but she didn't have Mangy's velvet flow. But she sold them.

I was watching Mrs. Rufus G. Hyde. She was a little woman, and she must have been very pretty once. Now you could see that she was desperately trying to hang on to her youth. She had been through the mill—diet, facials, hair dyes, massage and all the rest. She looked worked over. She had a kind of silly look on her face, and there was probably only one idea in her head—to try to stay young and beautiful. She was getting on to fifty, and it was hard to take, because she had the idea that she should always be a beautiful twenty-year-old. She had nerves. She

fidged. But Mangy was her hope. He could give her everlasting youth, as no one else could. He had even implied that his dope would conquer death.

I chewed my gum and looked at her. Also, at the girl beside her. Her social secretary, a sweet blonde package named Irene. The blonde wasn't falling for Mangy's line. She didn't need it—yet. She had youth and beauty and allure. When Mangy's dark, beautiful niece, Dolores, went into the sales song and dance, Irene smiled cynically. She knew the ropes.

THE meeting was breaking up. People moving around. All the dames had a glow in their eyes. Mangy had given them something, whatever it was. Faith, hope, but no charity.

My job was to follow Mrs. Rufus. I did. But my eyes were on Irene. She could have had my vote in any beauty contest—bathing beauty, especially. The girl had everything.

Mrs. Rufus was heading for the hall, back-stage, that led to Mangy's office here in the auditorium. That's where he gave his small group lectures. Private lessons were dished out at his home, a big old place on a knoll overlooking a lake on the edge of town. Dolores, the niece, lived there, too. And a few servants.

Dolores met Mrs. Rufus and greeted her warmly, cordially. They were going to collect. For Irene, she had only an icy nod, a cool "How do you do?" No soap from Irene, and she probably knew the secretary was trying to keep the old dame from tossing baubles into Mangy's kitty.

"Darling," Mrs. Rufus gushed to Dolores, "tell the dear master that I have arranged it. I—"

"Don't you wish to see him now,

dear Mrs. Hyde?" asked Dolores sweetly. "He expects you."

"Oh, dear, May I?" Mrs. Rufus fluttered.

Dolores led her to the door that opened into the suite of offices. I saw another girl at a typewriter as the door opened. She got up, at a word from Dolores, and led Mrs. Rufus on to the dear master's private office. Well, I wasn't going to see what she gave him, or hear what she had arranged.

I moved up next to Irene.

"Great stuff, isn't it?" I said.

She froze me, but said, "What?"

"The Miracle Way," I said. "The master, Mangasarius."

"Excuse me," she said, and hurried through the mob to a tall, quick-moving young fellow in gray tweeds who was going towards the master's office. She joined him and they went on together. Just before they entered the office, she looked back over her shoulder. I had been staring at her, but I wasn't then. I was telling the fussy old woman next to me that it was great stuff. She was agreeing.

They went into the office. The typist wasn't at her desk. Then the door closed.

I missed Dolores in the crowd, for a few minutes. Then I heard her talking to a woman near me. She had been somewhere and had come back. She was telling the woman, who wore expensive clothes and some real jewelry, that Mangy would see her soon.

Then Dolores moved off toward the office. But she didn't go in. She went to another door and entered that. Her own private office, I guessed.

Irene, Mrs. Rufus, and the young fellow in tweeds came out of the door, maybe ten minutes later. There was a loud scream and the girl I had seen at the typewriter ran after them, point-

ing her finger, crying "They killed him!"

I CRASHED through the mob and got to the door. Dolores ran out of her room and started asking excited questions. She called to somebody to clear the hall. Mrs. Rufus looked dazed and happy. Irene looked mad. The young fellow, holding both women by the arm, looked silly and surprised.

The typist was still yelling, "They killed him!" And the women of the audience didn't want to be shoved out. If it was their dear master the girl was yelling about, they wanted to lynch the three who had just left him. Several of them—Amazons, too—made a rush for Irene and the other two. I spread my arms and shoved all three back to the door.

"Back up." I said. "You're not going anywhere."

Irene snapped something angrily at me. The young fellow began, "I say, sir, you can't . . ." Mrs. Rufus was still dizzy.

I saw that some of the ushers were herding the gang out, so I shoved these three back into the office.

"Police!" yelled the typist.

"The marines are here," I told her and grabbed her shoulder. I tossed her into the office, too.

Then I joined them and shut the door, snapping the lock.

"Sit down!" I said.

"What authority have you to do this?" Irene asked.

I winked at her and reached for the telephone. Dolores was coming out of Mangy's private office. And she left the door open.

"Dead!" she murmured, like a girl in a trance. "Dead! Stabbed! My uncle . . ."

I could see Mangy. He was at his

big, shiny desk. He had been using the phone. At least, he had his hand on it and the phone was off the cradle. Now he was sprawled forward over the desk, and I saw the bright handle of a knife over his left shoulder.

I picked up the phone and called Headquarters.

"Joe Burke talking," I told the desk sergeant. "Give me Kelly—homicide."

"Another murder? Wherever you go, Joe—"

"Give me Kelly!"

Kelly came on the wire and said he would be right there, with his staff. I hung up and grinned at the suspects.

"We'll wait for the cops," I said pleasantly.

"You fool," Irene snapped at me, "we didn't kill him—we couldn't have killed him."

"Tell it to Kelly," I said. "Don't leave here. I want to take a look at him."

I went to the other door and looked in. The knife must have gone right into his heart. I gave his office the once-over, standing in the door so I could watch the others. The typist was sobbing; maybe she liked Mangy, or maybe she wondered where she'd get another job. The look of goofy happiness on the face of Mrs. Rufus had changed; now she looked stricken, gray, pathetic. Irene was downright mad. The young fellow still looked silly.

There was a coat closet at one side, the door partly open. The office was on the ground floor, with large windows on a court. They were closed. The whole place was furnished like a movie set—a six-inch carpet, chairs upholstered in velvet, heavy drapes at the windows, swell pictures.

Opposite the coat closet was another door, closed. I took a chance and crossed to it. The door was unlocked.

It led into a simply furnished office with a desk, a typewriter, a dictaphone and a filing cabinet. This was where Dolores worked—the room she had entered from outside.

They were all sitting there when I went back. But the young fellow had been leaning over to whisper to Irene. Then Kelly started hammering on the door and I let him in.

"Some day," he growled, "you'll be the corpse at one of these killings. Who's dead and why?"

HIS gang got to work in Mangy's office. Kelly started questioning the others. According to the typist, the three—Mrs. Rufus, Irene and the young fellow—had come out of his office. She had heard the young fellow say, "That's that!" She had gone to Mangy's door, to give him some letters to sign, and had seen him with the knife in his back. She had run out after the others, accusing them.

The young fellow was the nephew of Mrs. Rufus—Ronald Darrow. He and Irene admitted they had followed Mrs. Rufus into Mangy's office, hoping to dissuade her from giving him a necklace worth ten grand, hoping to scare Mangy into refusing it. Mrs. Rufus would not be dissuaded and Mangy wouldn't be scared. He had been smooth and hypocritical; he had said he could not reject the free-will offerings of his devoted followers, who wished to help him with his great work.

"Did you threaten him?" Kelly asked.

"I told him he could be stopped," Ronald admitted.

"And I said we'd stop him," Irene added. She was still angry.

Mrs. Rufus couldn't talk much. She was dazed. But Kelly got out of her that she had left the office a moment or

two before the others, who were still talking to Mangy. The door was open, but her back was turned.

"Then either one of you," Kelly observed, looking at Irene and Ronald, "could have stabbed him without her seeing you. Which one did?"

Ronald put his hand over Irene's. She smiled bitterly.

"You fool!" she said to Kelly.

Kelly grinned at her, said: "We've got a jail matron who likes to work over dames like you."

He had told one of his men to find the necklace. There wasn't any. Mrs. Rufus had given it to Mangy, he had dropped it into a desk drawer. But it wasn't there now; or anywhere else.

I went out to a phone booth and called Rufus. He exploded, when I told him what had happened, and said he'd come right down. I met him outside when his big car slid up to the curb. Rufus was a handsome, gray-haired, Pink-faced old boy; gruff and surly on the surface, but with a hearty laugh. He put away plenty of good food and liquor, and he had an eye for a pretty girl. He grabbed my arm and started cussing; he cussed like a longshoreman. Then we went in.

He put his arm protectingly around his wife, nodded to Irene and Ronald, glared at Kelly.

He suggested to Kelly that they all be allowed to leave.

"Yeah?" said Kelly. "Where were you when this guy was stabbed? If you knew your wife was goin' to toss him the necklace—if there was any necklace—you'd be just the one to bump him."

Rufus got apoplectic. I put my hand on his arm and whispered, "Take it easy, boss. Don't let him ride you."

The reporters were in, by this time, and the camera boys. With all of

Mangy's followers in town, it was a swell story. In spite of Rufus' objections, they shot pictures all over the place.

Dolores, sitting by herself in a corner, was a perfect picture of a grief-stricken niece. I ambled over to her.

"Sister," I said, "where were you when this happened?"

She looked at me, wiping her eyes. "I?" she asked. "Out there in the hall, talking to—"

"You ducked into your office," I told her, "a minute or two before this other girl started yelling 'Murder!' You could have got through that door between the offices and up behind him—he wouldn't expect you to knife him—and out again. Neat timing, but you could have done it."

She stared at me. "You think that I . . ."

I shrugged. "You had a chance, too," I said. "As much chance to do it as they had."

She started sobbing. "My poor dear uncle!" she said. "He was so good! He did so much for others! Now—"

Kelly cut in with an announcement. "I'm holding you, Darrow," he said, "on suspicion. Mr. Hyde, you can take your wife and this girl home. But I warn you—"

Ronald Darrow was as tense as a race-horse. He stepped up to Kelly, said, "You damned fool!", and swung at him. Kelly blocked the punch and socked the idiot. Two bulls grabbed him, then. Rufus protested, but it didn't do any good. There was nothing he could do. Irene put her arms around Ronald, kissed him, whispered something to him. Then Rufus shook his hand and said he'd send his lawyer around, get him out quick. I went out to the car with Rufus.

"If you were any good on your job,

Burke," he snapped at me, "you'd have prevented this."

"Yeah," I said. "And if you hadn't let the missus give Mangy trinkets, it wouldn't have happened. You firing me? Or do you want me to stay on the job and find out who did kill him?"

He was mad enough to bite. Mrs. Rufus and Irene were in the car.

"Ronald didn't do it," he said. "Nor Irene. So it's no concern of mine."

"Okay. Then I quit, huh? No concern of mine, either. But if you think Kelly can't build a case against Ronald, you're wrong. Somebody has to be tried and convicted. Looks like Ronald is the guy—unless Kelly switches to Irene. She'd be an accessory in any case. Or he would. But they're your friends, not mine." I shrugged and started away.

"Wait, Burke!" he protested. "Stay on the job."

"Murder cases come higher, boss. From now on the ante is raised. Fifty a day and expenses."

He growled, but agreed.

I WENT back to Kelly. He was questioning Dolores, pretty gently, for him. I grinned to myself. I was the only one who knew she had had a chance at Mangy. There'd probably be a lot of women willing to testify she'd been talking to them from the time the meeting ended until the typist yelled that he was dead.

The necklace was missing. Kelly's men searched the place, but couldn't find it. The knife belonged to Mangy—an Oriental thing he had picked up in India, Dolores said, where he had studied with the masters, whoever they are.

Kelly had traced the call Mangy had been making. He had been talking to a rich divorcee, Mrs. Lindsey Barrett,

when the knife had silenced him. She was one of his followers. She had been trying, ever since he was silenced, to get him again. One of Kelly's dicks told her he was dead and she must have fainted. A cop went up to her penthouse to see how she was taking it and found her maid had called two doctors and a nurse.

Kelly's mob was moving out, taking Ronald with them. Kelly stopped and said to me, "Joe, if you know anything, come clean! I'll get your license, this time, if you hold out on us!"

"It's open and shut, ain't it?" I said. "Ronald or Irene had to do it, didn't they?"

"I'll know more when we get the fingerprint checkup," he grunted. "I'm just telling you—"

"I'd better come clean. Yeah!" I grinned at him. "Or you'll get my license. Seems like I heard that before, somewhere."

When they had gone, Dolores and the typist, Agnes Smith, were left. They had been warned not to leave town, of course, and to keep in touch with Kelly. He had men tailing them, too.

Agnes was a dumb bunny. She didn't count. But Dolores—there was a deep one.

"What will you do now?" I asked her.

"I don't know," she said. "I can only try to carry on his work as he would have wished me to do. But I am ill-trained. I don't know—"

"He really had something, huh?" I asked. "Not just a grifter?"

She looked puzzled. "Grifter?" she said. "What's that? He was a great teacher, a man who taught people how to live richly and fully. He brought them an ancient wisdom with which to cure the maladies of our age."

"Made money, didn't he?"

"His grateful pupils made him many gifts, of course. But he taught the poor, too, for nothing."

"You think this Ronald guy did for him?"

She spread her hands, gracefully. "I don't know. I don't know what to think. I know only that Ronald Darrow wanted his aunt to give him money and that he and her secretary, Irene Farr, had threatened my uncle before. I heard them. They were angry because they thought he had influenced Mrs. Hyde against them. He hadn't, really. It was her own thought—that money would do Ronald no good until he had learned to live."

"Until he had accepted Mangasarius as a teacher, you mean?"

"Yes," she nodded. "But Ronald was a stubborn materialist. Irene, too."

"Why didn't he get money from Rufus? He's a materialist, too, or I never met one."

Dolores smiled. "He had tried and failed. You see, Mr. Hyde wanted security, always, and Ronald naturally had none."

"Why did he want money?"

"To buy an interest in a business, so that he could marry Irene. So Mrs. Hyde said."

She looked up at me, out of her moist, large dark eyes. She smiled forgivingly.

"And you suggested that I," she said, "might have—stabbed my uncle?"

"Sorry, sister," I said. "I just meant you had a chance. He *was* your uncle, huh?"

She gave me that sweet, forgiving smile again. "How terrible it must be to be a detective!" she said. "Do you distrust everyone, everything? Have you no faith?"

I got red and ran my finger around

my collar. "A dick can't take anything for granted," I said.

I WENT away from there and down to the office of the *Messenger*, where I prowled through the paper's morgue. There wasn't much about Mangy. He had advertised his meetings, but they hadn't run many news stories about him. In one or two brief notices, Dolores was mentioned. Then I dropped around to the printing company that had published his book. Mangy had paid for it, cash in advance, and they had run off five thousand copies. He had just placed an order for another five thousand. At four dollars a crack, he was doing pretty well for himself. The head of the company was moaning because he had read the extras; with Mangasarius dead, the order would probably be cancelled.

"Have you no faith?" I handed him Dolores' line. "Leave it to his niece. She'll carry on and sell his books. Maybe he'll autograph 'em, if there's ink in heaven."

But I didn't gather up any info about Mangy. He had hit town a year ago, returning from years of study in India, so he said. Dolores had joined him a little later. He had gone over big from the start. Once the dames heard him talk, they were sold—and told their neighbors over the back-fence or the bridge-table. The cops had nothing on him; they can't tackle a great teacher like Mangy unless complaints pour in. A few husbands, like Rufus, may have kicked; but it was their fault if their wives tossed presents to Mangy.

Getting into the penthouse apartment of Mrs. Lindsey Barrett, where I went next, was no cinch. I finally got in, but I didn't see the lady. One of her doctors talked to me. She was

suffering from severe shock; she had tried to commit suicide by jumping over the parapet that surrounded her garden. The doctor was a dry, cool, spectacled fellow; he made no bones about his feeling for Mangy. Mrs. Barrett had refused medical care and had put her trust in Mangy's Miracle Way.

"Like hundreds of other fool women," the medico said savagely, "she was in love with the fellow."

"How did he feel about her?"

"Mrs. Barrett is an extremely rich woman," he said. "Excuse me, please. And do not come here again. Mrs. Barrett can see no one."

"Okay, doc," I said, and strolled out past the butler.

I had skipped lunch. I gathered up all the papers and found a steak and chop joint. I chewed a thick one, washed it down with a bottle of beer, and read the papers. Kelly had Ronald hanging. His prints were on the knife along with Mangy's. He admitted he had touched it as it lay on the desk before him while he had argued with Mangy. No other prints. Both Ronald and Irene told the same story: they had accused Mangy of hypnotizing Mrs. Rufus and had threatened him. He had laughed at them, fingering the necklace the old lady had given him. But they hadn't killed him. He was alive, and triumphant, when they walked out. If that was true, he had been killed during the few minutes that elapsed before the typist gathered up her letters and started in to him.

I thought of Dolores again. She might still be the candidate.

Then I saw a sob sister's story. She had been to Mrs. Barrett's penthouse, too, and she had it from the rich dame's secretary that Mangy and Mrs. Barrett had planned a trip to Yuma—

and marriage. They were talking about it when he was stabbed.

"Uh-huh," I said. "And what does that add up to?"

I didn't know, but I checked on Mrs. Barrett's ex. No, he wasn't interested; married again, and on a world cruise. Who else wouldn't want her to marry Mangasarius? Some of her family, maybe; others who might hope to inherit something from her or otherwise get it; perhaps a disappointed suitor Mangy had cut out. But how could any of those get in and stab Mangy at just that time? No dice.

I still gave Dolores a good deal of thought. She was smooth; Kelly didn't suspect her. She put on a good act. Even if the cops had suspected her, they would have a time proving anything. Mangy's followers would spring to her defense; her act would convince any jury. Dressed in white, with her forgiving smile and her dark eyes, she looked too angelic for murder.

I phoned Rufus from the steak and chop dump.

"Listen," I said, "they've got a lot on your wife's niece. How much is it worth to you if I dig up the real killer and get Ronald out?"

"I'm already paying you well, Burke," he said. "Are you earning your wages? No!"

"All right, then. I'll quit. Never let it be said Joe Burke hung on to a job when he wasn't earning his pay. Good-by, Mr. Hyde."

"Wait!" he snapped. "It's worth anything—to get Ronald out. Mrs. Hyde—"

"Ten grand?"

"You mean ten thousand dollars?" he gasped. "Don't be absurd, Burke."

"How much?"

"Well, maybe five thousand."

"Take you!" I said. "Put it in writ-

ing, send it right down to my office. And don't welsh!"

He agreed. "You know who killed that—that faker?" he asked.

"You'll get my report in due time," I said. I didn't like that nickel nurser too well.

"Try to recover my wife's necklace!" he begged.

"For another five grand," I said, and hung up on his sob.

I felt better, then. If I got a break, it would mean money in the pocket.

WHEN I stepped into my two by four office, my confidential secretary, Rose O'Brien, gave me a disgusted look.

"Where have you been, big boy? Playing marbles? I wish you'd stick around and take some of these fool calls."

I leaned over and kissed her ear. "Mister Burke!" she said.

"Tell me, babe. Who's bothering you?"

"Captain Kelly and a dozen others."

"Just tell 'em I'm not in."

"I do, but they think I'm lying. I see you were on the spot at another killing. Tell me!"

I told her, to get it all straight for myself as well as for her. Rose is a bright kid; her father and uncle were cops. She knows the cop business. When I got through, she frowned and tapped her pencil on the desk.

"I wish I could see Dolores and Irene," she said.

"You can. We shut up shop. You're a sob sister, babe. Let's go get your story."

Rose can be anything at a moment's notice—sob sister, actress, chorus girl, tough moll, debutante, or shopgirl. She does a few things to her hair and makeup, gives her mouth a different

twist, switches her accent—and there she is, a new girl.

We grabbed a cab and started for the Mangasarius house.

"Go up and interview her," I said. "I'll wait."

Up she went, swinging along the walk. And I thought, What a gal! She had everything Dolores or Irene had, and plenty of brains in her red head.

She was back pretty soon, too soon to have got an interview.

"The lady is not seeing the press," she said. "So I was told by a couple of servants. They pushed me around, but I got in. I made a plea to her—told her I'd lose my job, my sick mother and three small brothers would suffer. She still wasn't giving interviews. You said she had a sweet, forgiving smile, big boy? She's as hard as nails right now. And the mug with her is a stir-bird or I'm a Chinaman."

"You're no Chinaman," I said. "Who is he?"

"I dunno, but ten to one his picture's in the Rogues' Gallery. She shouldn't play around with his kind, unless—You better go up, big boy. But put on your overshoes, wear your red flannels, and take care of yourself."

"Yeah. You stay here. Understand English? Right here in this cab!"

"Yes, sir," she said, too meekly.

The driver hadn't heard all this. I told him to wait. Rose hopped in. I went up toward the house.

I was saying to myself, "Somebody who didn't want Mangy to wed the widow is the one. And that spells Dolores."

THEY gave me a song and dance, too. Dolores wasn't seeing anybody. But a maid took my name in, and she was seeing me.

She was alone in a big room when

I walked in. Rose's stirbird wasn't there.

"Yes, Mr. Burke, what did you wish to see me about?"

I walked over to her. She was all in white—an evening gown, this time, that looked swell on her.

"Lady," I said, "Ronald didn't kill Mangasarius. The cops are wrong. It had to be someone who didn't want him to marry Mrs. Barrett. See? Now you had a swell chance to do the job. I'm betting you can't prove you're his niece. I'm betting he was shoving you aside for the rich dame and you wouldn't stand for that."

She laughed, in that gentle forgiving way, and then said, "You have a marvelous imagination. But your wild surmises do not concern me."

I had expected to draw the thug out of hiding. Dolores yawned and put her hand up to her lips. That was a signal, I guess, because something bored into my back and I looked over my shoulder into the dark and ugly face of the guy Rose had seen. He was a stir bug all right.

"What'll we do?" he asked hoarsely.

Dolores shrugged. "Better put him away, Jack," she said. "He's the only one that knows I had a chance to go into the office. It would be just as well if he—disappeared."

"Yeah. I'll take him down cellar and put him away."

I laughed. "Everybody knows I'm here," I said. "I told Kelly I was coming. So you didn't stab Mangy, Dolores? This mug did, eh? He was in the closet when the others were with the boy friend. He stepped out and knifed him while he was phoning Mrs. Barrett. He nabbed Mrs. Hyde's necklace and you let him out through your office. Nice work, but—"

The mug kept his gat against my

back, socked me behind the ear. It stung.

Dolores said, "How absurd!"

"Not half as absurd as the arrest of Ronald," I told her. "Who is this thug back of me?"

The guy growled. "She's my daughter," he said. "And if you think I'd let Mangasarius doublecross her an' marry—"

"Jack!" Dolores protested.

"What the hell, kid?" he growled. "He won't be the first dick I've put away. You guess too good, feller. Yeah, Mangasarius was in college with me—Quentin. He read some books up there an' doped out this racket. When he got out, I told him to look up the kid, give her a boost. He was goin' to marry her until this rich dame—"

"Daddy Jack! Don't talk!"

"Okay! Come on, cop. We go downstairs."

There was satisfaction in knowing I was good at guessing games, but I was heading for the door and the cellar, with Jack's gat pushing me along.

"Rufus is only paying me five grand for clearing Ronald," I said. "Why don't we make a deal?"

"No deals with cops," Jack muttered.

But Dolores checked him. "If you took him for a trip, Jack, you know where, until this blows over, that might be the best. You have to duck anyway. I have proof. They won't question that I was his niece. His will still stands. Whether they hang Ronald or let him off, we'll be on top."

"Yeah," he said. "I'll take him up to the mine, then."

"I worked in a mine once," I cracked. "I don't like 'em. I won't go."

That made Jack mad. I hoped it would. He shifted his gat to his left hand and swung with his right. During

the shift, I ducked and socked. He tried to swing with the gun, but I had him winded and half down. I butted him with my head and sent him to the floor. The gun popped and Dolores yelled for help.

I got him by the wrist as he was twisting the gun around. But he was strong, too strong. The gun barrel moved steadily toward my ribs, and in another minute I'd have been out.

I was half-dazed, but I heard a sweet voice. "As you were!" Rose said, and hit Jack over the head with the stubby barrel of an automatic.

He slumped under me like a dead man, I grabbed his gun and got up.

The taxi driver had come in with Rose—he was armed with a monkey wrench—and Dolores and the servants were lined up against the wall.

"I told you to wear your galoshes," Rose told me.

"And I told you to stay put!" I growled.

Dolores went all to pieces and cried

hysterically. I phoned Kelly and told him to come and get 'em. He was there within fifteen minutes, and he started cussing me for holding out on him. I laughed at him and we went away, Rose and I and the taxi driver.

"Where to?" he asked.

"Just keep drivin'," I said. "Anywhere."

It was tough making Rufus pay up. He was one of those guys who wants to settle ten cents on the dollar. But when I got his check, I said to Rose, "Kid, you and I ought to be partners. Let's start with this."

"Why, Mister Burke!" she said. "I am blushing in confusion."

Jack went back to college—Folsom, this time—for life. He took it on the chin, covered up Dolores, and she got off. You couldn't expect a male jury to send her up. The last I heard of her, she was in Frisco town, selling the Miracle Way.

And Mrs. Rufus still contributes to the cause!

Cipher Solvers' Secrets for Dec. 1937

(Continued from page 61)

Nineteen—†Lucille Little, Chicago, Ill.

Eighteen—Larodu Badauba, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. †Ah-tin-du, St. Paul, Minn. Mrs. W. D. Gray, Soudman, Wis. °Makem Harder, Berkeley, Calif. †Joubert, Brooklyn, N. Y. †Fae Malon, Englehart, Ontario, Canada. Nantzey, Brooklyn, N. Y. Peter Penguin, Washington, D. C. Remdin, San Antonio, Tex. Mrs. C. E. Sproul, Sparta, Ill. Geo. Williams, Reliance, S. Dak.

Seventeen—Alvancy, Richmond Hill, N. Y. Ernest H. Carling, New York, N. Y. W. A. Deen, San Antonio, Tex. Robert De Mougeot, New York, N. Y. °Mrs. Robert De Noyelles, New York, N. Y. Enbay, Chicago, Ill. †Doc K., Cicero, Ill. Steve, Richmond Hill, N. Y. Mono Verde, Minneapolis, Minn.

Sixteen—G. Carder, Seattle, Wash. †Cliff II, Branch, Mich. Vasseur and Danette, Denver, Colo. A. M. Fraser, Los Angeles, Calif. Grace M. Groves, Albany, N. Y. °Pearl Knowler, Wendling, Oreg. Walter L. Marquart, Marion, Ind.

Fifteen—†Myrtle Lee Bunn, Arlington, Va.

Cyclamen, Toledo, Ohio. Gregory, Taos, N. Mex. †G. Hirano, Las Animas, Colo. L. E. S., Firebough, Colo. P. Wee, Brooklyn, N. Y. W5FYL, New Orleans, La. Zip, Higginsville, Mo.

Fourteen—President H. H. A., Altoona, Pa. Julius Vass, Passaic, N. J. †Wash, San Diego, Calif.

Thirteen—A. B. I., Springfield, Ohio.

Twelve—†Marie Abild, Staten Island, N. Y. Arbny, Bronx, N. Y. °A. Has-Been, Union Grove, Wis. Mrs. P. C. Bradley, Boley, Okla. Edward H. Carey, San Francisco, Calif. P. B. D. Anaconda, Mont. Lewis E. Hall, Houlton, Me. †Iuocus, New York, N. Y. Richard Landers, Connersville, Ind. †Carl H. W. Oestreich, Grants Pass, Oreg. †Logan Simard, Pasadena, Calif. †Waltraw, Detroit, Mich.

Eleven—Brandywine, Washington, D. C. Mrs. F. G. Elsmore, Duluth, Minn. Ida M. Volk, Kent, Conn. W8EQN, Springfield, Ohio.

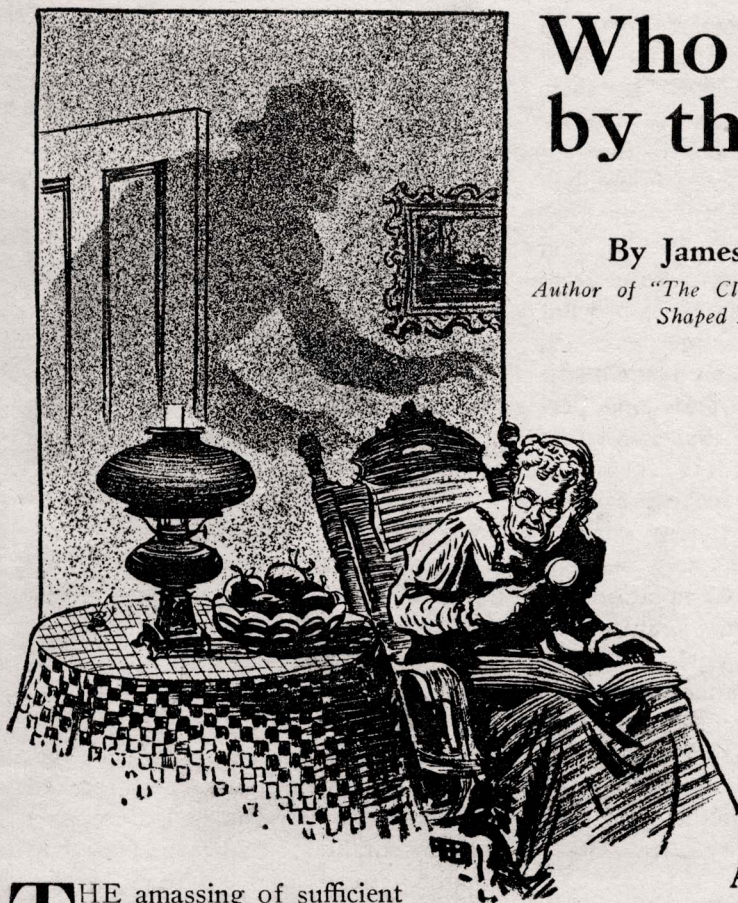
Ten—Boston Bean, Boston, Mass. Bert Hilton, Wilmington, Calif. †Al. Liston, Newark, N. J.

(To be continued)

Who Lives by the Axe

By James W. Booth

Author of "The Clue of the Cylindrically Shaped Paper," etc.



Mrs. Brownell sat reading with her cataract - dimmed eyes

A True Story

THE amassing of sufficient funds with which to purchase return passage to his native Oslo eventually became an obsession with stumpy, hard-vistaged, black-haired Ludvig Halvorsen Lee, caretaker of a stolid, brownstone Brooklyn rooming house.

It led him, on July 4, 1927, to murder his employer, 76-year-old Mrs. Sara Elizabeth Brownell, one-time seamstress who had become a rooming house proprietor when the gray film of cataracts dimmed her vision. After slaying the defenseless woman with an axe, he dissected her body with gruesome precision, and hid the pieces.

And then Lee murdered a second woman in much the same fashion as

he had the first, and disposed of her body in the same way. She was Mrs. Alfred Bennett, formerly owner of the brownstone house, who had come to pay Mrs. Brownell a friendly call. Lee killed her because he feared her suspicions would be aroused if she failed to find his aged employer at home.

But two women can not vanish suddenly and completely without suspicions being aroused and questions asked. Their strange disappearance was reported to the police and detectives commenced a search for them.

They questioned, of course, but their

questions and the answers to them threw no light on the strange case. The bullnecked caretaker replied to their interrogations in a manner which indicated he would be one of the last persons in the world to contemplate murder.

There was no plausible explanation for the disappearance of the two women and apparently no clues to what had befallen them. Numerous such cases are annually entered upon the records of the Bureau of Missing Persons. They vanish and that is all that is ever learned regarding them, although the authorities make every human effort to fathom the mystery of their disappearance.

But no such "unsolved" notation was destined to be listed against the Brownell-Bennett case for, in Battery Park, at the tip of Manhattan Island, several miles from the stolid brownstone house where Lee had wielded the murder axe, a white wing came upon a blood-soaked paper bundle. In it were pieces of two human legs.

EVEN before the Medical Examiner had time to determine whether they were pieces of a woman's legs, instinct told the police that they had found the gruesome answer to what had happened to the two missing women.

But who had murdered them? They still had not the slightest idea.

To find the answer to the riddle of the horribly hacked pieces of limb, they began another methodical and painstaking search for clues in the neighborhood of the brownstone dwelling.

And then, on a Sunday morning while the church bells were ringing, they stumbled on a chemical link which

started an amazing chain of evidence that ended with Lee in the electric chair.

On the floor of a dark, foul-smelling cellar close by the East River, detectives were attracted to several pools of water. The water had seeped into the cellar during a recent rain. It had a dark, oily look.

Bending over, a detective wet a fingertip and touched it to his lips. "Lye!" he announced significantly. At Police Headquarters, analysis of samples of the water proved the detective to be correct.

What proved of even more significance, however, was a brown paper bag with figures penciled on it that totaled up to \$2.04, which was picked up in one corner of the damp cellar. On the chance that this slender clue might lead them to the murderer, the police commenced making the rounds of nearby shops. In a chain store, a clerk recognized his own figures and recalled that the customer who had made purchases totalling that amount had bought ten cans of lye a few days before. More important still, he was able to furnish an accurate description of the customer.

Lee was arrested immediately, but, with black eyes protruding weirdly from beneath his bushy eyebrows, he maintained his innocence even up to the time he was strapped into the electric chair at Sing Sing several months later.

But the jury before whom he was tried had no doubt that he had left the limbs of his victims in Battery Park, and buried the rest of their bodies in the foul-smelling cellar, covering them with lye to hasten their decomposition.

There was a white, lifeless face
staring up from the end of the rope



Coffins for Three

By Frederick C. Davis

Author of "Front Page Dynamite," etc.

*Cyrus Hatch finds plenty of evidence but all it
proves is that everyone is innocent of murder*

CYRUS HATCH, son of New York Police Commissioner Mark Hatch, becomes involved in a murder when he enters the Club Grotto with his bodyguard, Danny Delevan, and finds "Joan Doe" sitting at his table. Later, she leaves the club with a mysterious stranger; four shots sound quickly outside and a man staggers into the club and dies. The murdered man is Mr. Seligman, a crooked attorney.

Rushing to the sidewalk, Cyrus and Danny see Joan Doe, a gun in her hand, being hustled into a car. Cyrus, against the wishes of his father, decides to work on the case, believing that Joan Doe is innocent.

Also involved are Howard Westcott, who Cyrus saw following Joan Doe; his wife Lois, who was in the night club the night of the murder; and her sister, Terry Alexander, who later calls at Cyrus Hatch's apartment to discuss the case. When she enters his apartment, she finds Sam Flack, law partner of Seligman, murdered, and Hatch's secretary unconscious. When Cyrus arrives, accompanied by two detectives, and discovers the murder, they see Terry Alexander running from the house. Refusing to reveal her identity, Cyrus is arrested by his father, but he and Danny escape.

In the meantime, Cyrus discovers that

This story began in *Detective Fiction Weekly* for February 19

Joan Doe is really Rhoda Quinn, an artists' model, who had hired Seligman to find her husband who has been missing for several years. Cyrus suspects that Howard Westcott is the missing Timothy Quinn and Westcott later admits that this is true. Cyrus promises to keep his secret unless it is necessary to reveal it in order to clear Rhoda Quinn of the murder charge.

Cyrus and Danny follow Rhoda Quinn and overhear her talking to Lloyd Daly, a magician who is in love with her, and learn that she is aware that Westcott is Timothy Quinn. She says that she is going to his house to demand money.

Cyrus and Danny start for Westcott's home to warn him when someone holds them up. It is Sanders, the man who had been in the night club with Rhoda Quinn, and for whom they have been searching as the key to the mystery.

CHAPTER XV

The Third Coffin

RAIN blew into the doorway, pelting Hatch and Delevan.

"All I want is a chance to talk to you, Mr. Hatch," Norman Sanders said in an urgent tone.

"How the devil did you know I was coming here?" Hatch asked.

"I've been following you," Sanders said.

"From where?"

"I was watching your home while the police were there. I saw you come out of the house next door and get into a taxi. I've been following you ever since," Sanders said. "You must listen to me, Mr. Hatch."

Hatch was gazing obliquely downward. "I feel something pressing against my spine, Danny," he said. "Something that feels like a gun."

"Me too, chief," Delevan said. "Only, what I feel it's like a howitzer."

"Mr. Sanders is no two-gun man,

Danny," Hatch said. "The thing in your back is a fountain pen."

"Cripes!" Delevan said.

As Delevan twisted around, Sanders jerked the pen away from his back and removed his forefinger from Hatch's. Delevan seized Sanders' necktie and pulled it while pushing his other hand into Sanders' face. Sanders choked.

"Your automatic, Danny" Hatch reminded Delevan.

"That's right," Delevan said.

He bared his weapon and shoved it hard into Sanders' abdomen. Gasping, Sanders lifted himself on tiptoes. With his white-rimmed eyes and his pallid face, he looked like a ghost in the gloom.

"This here gun," Delevan warned. "it ain't anything which a guy he uses it to write with, neither."

"Where've you been hiding, Sanders?" Hatch asked.

Sanders loosened his tie and swallowed. "Mister Hatch, in heaven's name, give me a chance to explain."

"Where've you been hiding?"

Sanders forced out, "I have a room at the Commonwealth."

Hatch nodded. "Keep him covered, Danny, and follow me."

Delevan put the gun in his pocket and pressed it to Sanders' side while they left the doorway. Sanders was docile. Hatch signaled a cruising cab. He waved Sanders and Delevan into it. Delevan crowded Sanders into the corner of the seat.

"I'll be back in a minute, Danny," Hatch said. He added to the driver, "Wait for me."

He hurried into a restaurant and stepped into a telephone booth. A moment later, the dial ceased whirring, a woman's voice said, "The Alexander residence."

"Mr. Hatch calling Mr. Westcott."

"Mr. Westcott does not wish to be disturbed."

"I've got to talk to him."

"But I cannot disturb Mr. Westcott."

"Then call Mrs. Westcott."

"Madame Westcott is not at home."

"How about Miss Alexander?"

"Miss Alexander is not at home also."

"I'll bet a hat Rupert Alexander is there," Hatch said.

"Do you wish to speak with Mr. Rupert Alexander?"

"Good heavens, no," Hatch said.

He disconnected, left the restaurant and returned to the cab. He sat on one of the folding seats, facing Delevan and Sanders.

"Hotel Commonwealth," he instructed the driver.

THE cab ground off and turned eastward. Rain swished against the windows. Hatch closed the glass panel of the driver's compartment.

"You'd like to keep clear of the police, wouldn't you, Sanders?" Hatch asked.

"That's what I must explain," Sanders said with an effort. "It will go blinking hard with me if they catch me."

"Naturally," Hatch said. "Behave yourself, and you'll have a chance to talk."

Sanders strained forward. "I say, that's damned decent of you, Hatch. You see, I had nothing to do with it. That is, with killing Seligman and Flack. I swear I had nothing whatever—"

Hatch gestured toward the driver. "Your room will be safer," he advised.

Sanders sank back, eying Hatch entreatingly, wincing under the pressure of Delevan's automatic.

The cab stopped at a bright marquee. Sanders entered the Hotel Commonwealth between Hatch and Delevan. An elevator lifted them to the fifteenth floor. Sanders took a tagged key from his pocket and opened Room 1521. Following him in, Hatch and Delevan closed the door.

"You're registered under an assumed name, of course," Hatch said.

"Yes. I haven't dared go back to my apartment," Sanders said. "Millie and Gloria are away. If you'll believe me, Hatch, I had nothing to do—"

"Sit down, Sanders," Hatch said. "Danny, keep him covered."

With his gun, Delevan pushed Sanders into a chair. Sanders' eyes clung to Hatch as Hatch took up the telephone and gave the hotel operator the number of Howard Westcott's apartment.

The maid's voice answered, "the Alexander residence."

"This is Mr. Hatch calling again. Has either Mrs. Westcott or Miss Alexander come in?"

"They are still out."

"Then I'll have to speak with Mr. Westcott."

"Mr. Westcott say I must not disturb him for any reason," the maid protested.

"All right," Hatch said. "Has a young woman called and asked for him?"

"No one has come."

"Thank heaven for that," Hatch said.

He broke the connection, consulted the directory, and asked for the number of the Hotel Trafalgar.

"This is the *Morning Mirror* calling," Hatch said. "Give me the manager."

A girl's voice said, "Mr. Lucas' office."

"This in the *Mirror* calling," Hatch said. "Let me speak with Mr. Lucas."

A man's voice said curtly, "Yes yes, what is it?"

"Carson of the *Mirror*, Mr. Lucas," Hatch said. "What are you doing about your magician, Lloyd Daly?"

"His contract has been canceled."

"Has he a room in the hotel?"

"Entertainers are usually given rooms," Lucas answered, "but Mr. Daly will not remain in the hotel."

"Thanks," Hatch said.

He disconnected, then again called the number of the Trafalgar.

"Mr. Lloyd Daly's room, please," he requested.

The line purred several times before a man's voice answered. "Hello?"

"Mr. Daly?" Hatch asked.

"Speaking."

"You don't sound like Daly," Hatch said.

"I've got a cold," the voice said. "Who's calling?"

"You're a poor liar," Hatch said. "This is Mallet, the Commissioner's secretary."

"That's different. This is Sergeant Martin talking."

"The Commissioner's calling," Hatch said. "Hold on." He lowered his tone, imitating his father's. "Commissioner Hatch, Sergeant."

"Yes, Commissioner."

"Daly will probably show up soon. Watch for him. You have your orders?"

"Yes sir. We're not to take him to the precinct station, but bring him straight down to Headquarters."

"That's right, Martin. That's all."

HATCH left the telephone. His shining eyes turned upon Sanders. Sanders leaned entreatingly toward him.

"I know your position in this case, Hatch," Sanders said. "The newspapers made it clear enough. You're doing your best to learn the truth and you're being damned fair about it. That's why I decided I'd jolly well better talk to you before the bloody police catch me."

Hatch started. "The bloody police! Great Scott! You didn't mean the birds were actually bloody. You use that word as a synonym for bally, or confounded. A hell of a fine detective I am, not to have thought of that."

Sanders seemed confused. "When I was in the Club Grotto—"

"Not now, Sanders," Hatch said. "Your story will have to keep. Danny, stay here with him. I'll be back as soon as possible—if I don't bump into any cops."

"This is a guy he won't try anything funny if he knows what's good for him, chief," Delevan said. "Where you gonna go?"

"I'm still trying to head off that damned woman," Hatch said.

He hurried from the room and waited impatiently for the elevator. When he reached the sidewalk, he found it swarming with a home-bound crowd. The rain had not abated. Hatch lost precious minutes while the starter whistled for a taxi.

Ducking into the cab, Hatch gave the driver the address of the Westcott apartment.

Congested traffic delayed him. Forty minutes passed before he reached his destination.

WHEN he pressed the button in the vestibule of the penthouse, the maid peeked out.

"Mr. Hatch calling."

The maid looked puzzled and uneasy. "Madame Westcott and Miss Alex-

ander have not come back," she said.

Hatch stepped in. The living room was empty. Some of the tension went out of his bearing.

"You'll have to disturb Mr. Westcott, regardless of what he told you," he said. "It's damned important. But whatever you do, don't go near Mr. Alexander."

The maid glanced around uncertainly. "Be seated, please," she said.

She disappeared down the hall as Hatch moved across the living room. He noticed that a blue glass vase lay on the rug near a table. He took it up and replaced it on the table, then glanced about with sharpened interest.

The maid returned. "Mister Westcott is not here," she informed Hatch. "He has gone out."

Hatch frowned at her. "Do you mean he left without your knowing it?"

"Yes sir."

"I suppose you've no idea how long he's been gone?"

"No sir."

"You're worried about something," Hatch said. "What is it?"

The maid shrugged. "It is nothing," she said.

"Don't be evasive. You know I'm a friend of the family. What's wrong?"

"It is nothing," the maid said again. "A lady was waiting."

"A lady was waiting here, in this room? Who was she?"

"She say her name is Mrs. Westcott."

Hatch's lips drew thin. "Had you ever seen her before?"

"No sir."

"Who did she want to see?"

"Mr. Howard Westcott."

"What became of her?"

"I don't know," the maid said. "Perhaps she left without seeing Mr. West-

cott because of the call on the telephone."

"What call?" Hatch asked.

"The call came on the house phone," the maid explained. "Ambrose, the doorman, said a man wish to speak with the lady who is here."

"Who was the man?" Hatch asked.

The maid shrugged again. "I tell the lady there is a call, then I go back to my room. Perhaps because of what the man said, the lady left."

Hatch said, "I'll wait here until Mrs. Westcott and Miss Alexander come back."

The maid said, "Yes sir," and withdrew.

Hatch circled the room. In front of the fish tank he paused. He stooped to peer at a dark object lying on the bed of gravel on the bottom of the tank.

It was a blue automatic.

Hatch bared his arm and reached into the water. The colorful fish scattered in alarm. He hooked his forefinger through the trigger-guard of the automatic, lifted it out and looked at it closely.

It was the Mauser automatic which Rhoda Quinn had taken from the office of Sidney Seligman.

With his handkerchief Hatch dried his arm, then lowered his sleeve. He laid the gun on the handkerchief, carefully removed the clip and counted the cartridges in the magazine—ten. He replaced the clip, wrapped the gun in his handkerchief and put it in his hip pocket.

Continuing his circuit of the room, he returned to his chair. The lines around his eyes grew dark with thought.

Suddenly he jumped up and crossed into the corner where the glass-topped grand piano sat.

A red silken rope, an inch thick, was

tied around one leg of the piano. Other ropes like it were in use to bind the window drapes, but the drape of the window nearest the piano lacked its cord. The red line led tautly from the leg of the piano across the sill, and out an inch-wide crack of the casement window.

Hatch opened the window and looked down. A few inches below the sill, a dead white face was hovering in the gloom.

It was the face of Rhoda Quinn.

THE lower end of the rope was knotted around Rhoda Quinn's neck. Her upturned face was swollen. Rain was falling upon her staring eyes and her parted lips. Her hair was matted with water and blood. The top of her head was broken as if by powerful blows. She was hanging heavily against the wet wall of the building.

Far below her, the puddled pavement reflected the street lights. People were scurrying through the downpour. Cars were crawling like beetles.

Hatch drew back, his mouth grimly tense, his lowered lids darkening his eyes. For a moment he gazed at nothing. Then, with sudden decision, he crossed to the opposite corner and took up the telephone.

He dialed the number of Police Headquarters.

The glass door-bell tinkled. Hatch turned his pinched eyes to the entrance. The maid appeared from the hall. When she opened the door, Terry Alexander and Lois Westcott came in.

The telephone receiver was twanging faintly, "Police Headquarters. Police Headquarters."

Hatch disconnected.

The maid retired. Terry Alexander and Lois Westcott hurriedly took off their raincoats and hats and hung them

in a closet. They came to Hatch together.

"Cy, don't you realize you mustn't come here any more?" Terry said.

"I realize you're a lovely little liar, Terry," Hatch answered.

Terry colored. "Why—why do you say that?"

"Where have you been?" Hatch asked.

Lois Westcott answered. "We went to Mr. Kerrigan's office."

"Together?" Hatch said. "Then you no longer have any secrets from each other."

"Terry and I had a talk," Lois Westcott said in a low tone. "We told each other everything."

"And you both went to explain the whole business to Kerrigan," Hatch said.

"Yes," Lois Westcott said.

"Now the three of you know exactly how Howard is involved."

"Yes," Lois Westcott said. "But—he still mustn't know that I know."

"Where is Howard?" Hatch asked.

"Isn't he here?" Lois Westcott said. "When I left, he told me he wouldn't be going out."

"He's gone," Hatch said.

Lois Westcott turned away and went down the hall. Terry gazed boldly at Hatch.

"Lovely little liar," Hatch accused her again. "I ought to whale hell out of you."

"Of course I lied," Terry said. "I told you I wouldn't say anything that might harm Howard and Lois. It was the least I could do for them."

"There isn't any damned thing you wouldn't do to protect Howard," Hatch said.

Terry's chin lifted.

"You *are* in love with him," Hatch said.

"Cy! When I told you it's not—it's not like that between Howard and me—I was telling you the truth then."

"I'd be a damned fool to believe it," Hatch said.

"I swear it, Cy."

"Terry," Hatch said, "I made you a promise. It seems like a year ago, but it was only last night. I agreed not to drag Howard into this mess if I could help it. I've kept that promise as long as possible."

Terry's eyes widened. "What do you mean?"

"Howard can't be kept out of this any longer."

Terry's breath caught. "What do you mean?"

Lois Westcott hurriedly returned. She took Hatch's arm.

"Howard packed a bag," she said.

Hatch's right hand closed hard. "Go on," he said.

"He left me a note."

Lois Westcott put a slip of paper into Hatch's hand. He read the message aloud.

"I've just had an urgent phone call from Pittsburgh. Tell Rupert it's in connection with the Amalgamated deal. I'll be back as soon as possible. Don't worry, darling. Kiss Peter good night for me. I love you. Howard."

He returned the note to Lois Westcott.

"What's wrong with that?" Terry asked defiantly. "Why shouldn't Howard leave for Pittsburgh suddenly on business?"

Hatch said, "Mrs. Westcott, please call your maid."

Terry's eyes challenged Hatch as Lois Westcott pressed a button on the wall. In a moment the maid appeared.

"What time was it when Mr. Westcott received a long-distance call from Pittsburgh?" Hatch asked her.

The maid hesitated.

"Answer Mr. Hatch's questions, Suzette," Lois Westcott said.

"I do not know," Suzette said.

"Did he actually receive such a call?"

Hatch persisted.

"I know nothing about this call," Suzette said.

Hatch stepped toward her. "I've got to have all this straight. A short while ago a woman came here, saying she was Mrs. Westcott, and asking to see Mr. Westcott. What did you do?"

"I go to Mr. Westcott's room and I knocked. Mr. Westcott did not answer. I went into the loft, and Mr. Westcott was not there. I think perhaps Mr. Westcott has stepped out for a moment, so I came back to the lady and say, 'Mr. Westcott is occupied. Please wait just a few minutes,' and she say she will wait until she sees him."

"Then there was a call on the house phone from a man who was in the lobby," Hatch said. "You called this woman to the phone and she spoke to this man. Did he come up? Did you see him?"

"I do not know if he came up," Suzette said.

"What next?" Hatch asked.

"Then the door ring, and it is you, and the lady is gone."

Hatch nodded. "That's all, Suzette."

The maid left the room. Terry and Lois were anxiously searching Hatch's face.

"Cy, what does all this mean?" Terry demanded.

"You'll find out soon enough."

"Answer me, Cy!"

"I don't think I will," Hatch said levelly.

"Why not?"

"In the first place, if you don't know already, it'll be to your advantage to remain ignorant of it," Hatch said. "In

the second, I'm not sure what I'm going to do about it. I want a chance to think it over."

HE strode to the entrance. Lois Westcott gazed daintly at the note left by her husband. Terry followed Hatch into the vestibule.

"That's not fair," she said.

Hatch pressed the elevator button. "It's the best strategy I can think of," he answered. "You'll soon understand why."

"If anything goes wrong now, Cy Hatch," Terry said, "it'll be all your fault."

Hatch smiled dourly. "When the whole world comes crashing down around your ears," he said, "you'll realize it simply couldn't be helped."

The elevator panel opened.

"Stop talking in riddles," Terry said. "You've got to tell me—"

"Goodby, Terry," Hatch said, and stepped into the car.

Terry's eyes flashed at him. The attendant closed the panel. The car started downward.

"Herbert," Hatch said, "a short time ago you took a woman up to the penthouse."

The elevator operator considered an answer, then said, "Yes, sir."

"A few minutes later a man came into the foyer and spoke to her on the house phone. Did you take him up too?"

"Yes, sir," Herbert said.

"Can you describe him?"

"Why, he was about average looking, sir," Herbert said. "Except he had a beard."

"A beard!" Hatch exclaimed. "What was he wearing?"

"Why, I think he had on a dark suit, and a dark felt hat," Herbert said.

Hatch's eyes grew keener. Stepping

into the foyer, he found the big-bellied doorman seated on a bench beside the entrance.

"Ambrose," Hatch inquired, "do you remember the man who spoke to the Alexander penthouse over the house phone?"

Ambrose stood with great dignity. "Of course, sir," he said.

"Can you describe him?" Hatch asked.

Herbert came from the elevator to listen.

"As I remember him, he was rather a heavy-set fellow," Ambrose said.

"No, he wasn't," Herbert said. "He was average."

"He was heavy-set," Ambrose said.

"Anyway," Herbert said, "he had a beard."

"No, no," Ambrose said. "He didn't have a beard. He was clean-shaven."

"He had a beard, Ambrose," Herbert said.

"Herbert, that man hadn't a hair on his face," Ambrose declared. "I recall him distinctly."

Hatch said in an exasperated tone, "Describe the clothes he was wearing, Ambrose."

After a moment of thought, Ambrose said, "He was wearing a dark gray suit and a dark gray hat."

"That's wrong," Herbert said. "He was wearing—"

"A dark gray suit and a dark gray hat," Ambrose repeated immovably. "And a herringbone topcoat."

"He wasn't wearing any topcoat," Herbert said. "No topcoat at all."

Hatch said, "Don't waste time arguing about it. You both can't be right, and probably you're both wrong."

"What I told you is perfectly right, sir," Herbert insisted.

"He doesn't know what he's talking about, sir," Ambrose said with an air

of hurt dignity. "I saw the gentleman twice, once when he went up and once when he came down."

"Did you notice whether he had bits of plaster stuck on his face?" Hatch asked.

"No, sir, he didn't," Herbert said.

"No, sir, he didn't," Ambrose said.

"On second thought, sir, he may have had," Herbert said.

"Yes," Ambrose said magnanimously, "he may have had, sir."

"Did he have a small black mustache with pointed ends?" Hatch asked, frowning.

"He had a large brown mustache and a beard," Herbert said. "Brown, light brown, kind of curly."

"Nothing of the sort, sir," Ambrose said. "He was clean-shaven."

"I suppose you both got a good look at the woman as well," Hatch said, "and you can describe her as accurately."

"Why, certainly, sir," Herbert said. "She was—"

"Never mind," Hatch said. "Good heavens! Sometime I'll ask you two men to help with an experiment to demonstrate the worst faults of eye-witnesses."

"Huh?" they both said.

HE hurried out to the sidewalk, leaving Ambrose and Herbert in a hot altercation. Rain was still falling thickly. Keeping close to the building, Hatch strode around the corner. Half-way along the block toward Madison Avenue, he paused and looked up.

The dark shadow of Rhoda Quinn's corpse was visible high against the side of the building, directly below a bright open window.

At the corner Hatch entered a chemist's shop. The position of the phone booth enabled him to gaze through the

store window and still see the suspended corpse.

He dialed the Headquarters number.

"Police Headquarters," a man's voice responded.

"Connect me with the Commissioner's office," Hatch said.

His eyes caught a movement at the penthouse window. A woman was looking out. Hatch could not discern whether it was Terry Alexander or Lois Westcott who was gazing down into Rhoda Quinn's dead face.

"Commissioner Hatch's office," Mallet's voice said over the line.

"This is Cyrus Hatch calling."

"Just a minute."

The woman's head disappeared from the window.

The telephone line hummed.

In a moment the woman's head reappeared. She bent over the sill. Something in one of her hands reflected the light. She reached down to the head of Rhoda Quinn.

"Hello!" a gruff voice growled in Cyrus Hatch's ear. "Is that you, Cyrus?"

"Hold the wire, Mark," Cyrus Hatch said.

"Damnation, Cyrus!" the Commissioner said. "You listen to me."

Cyrus Hatch did not listen.

The woman bending out of the penthouse window was making sawing motions with her right arm.

Suddenly the corpse of Rhoda Quinn dropped. It seemed to roll swiftly down the side of the building. Then, striking an ornamental projection, it bounded out into the air. It became a blurred motion in the rain. It struck the pavement in the center of the street, bounced once, and became a dark, almost invisible mound.

The woman disappeared from the window.

Mark Hatch was growling over the line. Cyrus Hatch did not hear him.

He was watching.

A car turned into the cross-street from Madison Avenue. It proceeded slowly through the beating rain. The dim shine of its headlamps approached the body of Rhoda Quinn.

"Cyrus!" Mark Hatch was saying wrathfully. "Damnation, Cyrus, do you hear me? If you don't give yourself up, I'll be forced to crack down on you so almighty hard—"

"Sorry," Cyrus Hatch broke in, his voice strained. "I may have some important information for you later. Goodby, Mark."

Hatch disconnected, shouldered out of the phone booth and hurried from the shop. As he rounded the corner, he heard a squeaking of brakes. The car was now in the middle of the block. It came to a quick stop.

Its left door swung open and a man climbed out. He stood in the rain, staring down. The body of Rhoda Quinn lay huddled behind the front wheels of the car. The man looked around, stooped, straightened quickly and stared around again.

Hatch shifted away from the light of the chemist's windows. He removed the blue automatic from his pocket. Retaining his handkerchief, he threw the gun. It skipped over the wet pavement and splashed to a stop in a puddle near Rhoda Quinn's body.

Another car swung into the side-street from Madison Avenue. It slowed as it neared the other. Its headlamps were bright. The dripping beams clearly revealed the broken corpse of Rhoda Quinn.

Hatch turned away. At sight of a yellow sedan drifting through the rain, he shouted.

"Taxi!"

CHAPTER XVI

Sanders Talks

HATCH left the cab at the Hotel Commonwealth. Long strides carried him to Sanders' room. In answer to his knock, Delevan opened the door.

Sanders, his face haggard, was still sitting in the corner.

"Cripes, chief, what happened?" Delevan asked, the gun still in his hand. "You look like a guy he would like to putta slug on somebody."

Hatch snapped a wall-switch. The music of a dance band issued from a grating above the switch. Allowing the hotel radio to continue playing, he took up the telephone.

"Chief," Delevan complained, "I get sorta tired, pointing this here cannon at that guy. How long we gonna keep him here?"

"I don't know," Hatch said grimly, as he gave a number.

His call was answered by Suzette.

"This is Mr. Hatch again. Let me talk with Miss Alexander."

After a moment, Terry said, "Hello?"

"Why did you do that?" Hatch demanded.

Terry was silent.

"I saw you," Hatch said. "It was the damndest, coldest-blooded act I ever witnessed. And of course, you did it for dear Howard's sake."

Terry said quietly, "They—they won't come here now."

"You mean the police? If they don't, it'll be the luckiest break you ever had in your life."

Terry hung up.

Hatch replaced the telephone with a thump and swung around. Delevan was not in the room.

"Where the hell's Danny?" Hatch demanded of Sanders.

"He just went out," Sanders said.

"What for?"

"He didn't say."

Hatch looked into the hall and found that Delevan was no longer at the elevator door. He turned back with his fists clenched and sat facing Sanders.

"Listen," Hatch said, leveling a finger. "I'm in no mood to be lied to. Don't try it. If I catch you lying to me, I'll break your damned neck."

Sanders swallowed.

"You killed Sidney Seligman last night, and this morning you killed Sam Flack," Hatch declared.

"No!" Sanders blurted. "I swear I had nothing to do with it."

HATCH opened his fists and closed them again. "Be damned careful you don't give me an excuse to get rough," he warned. "You were coming out of the Club Grotto with Rhoda Quinn last night when you met Seligman. Seligman said something that scared the pants off you, and then you disappeared. Where the hell did you go?"

"I—I simply left," Sanders said.

"Sanders, you be careful," Hatch warned him again. "You had Rhoda Quinn's gun. You hid behind the hedge, and just as Seligman was going into the club, you shot him."

"I didn't!" Sanders blurted.

"This morning you and Sam Flack had a hell of an argument in my apartment. While my secretary was gone, you killed Flack. She came back just as you were sneaking out, and you knocked her unconscious, you rat."

"I swear I didn't kill Flack. I didn't kill either of them," Sanders insisted.

"I'm going to break your neck," Hatch said.

"I swear it!"

Hatch shrugged and turned away.

"Got anything to drink in this place?"

"There's a bottle of Scotch in the dresser," Sanders said.

Hatch found the bottle. It was three-quarters full. He brought a glass from the bath, poured Scotch into it, handed it to Sanders and kept the bottle.

"Want any water in that?" he asked.

"No, thanks," Sanders said. "The man who made it knew how much water to put in it."

"Like hell he did," Hatch said, sitting on the bed. "They always put too damned much." He drank from the bottle, rolled the liquor around his tongue, swallowed it and sighed. "Go ahead," he said.

Sanders took a long drink. "Let me tell you in my own way. Let me explain everything from the very beginning."

"Don't try to put anything over on me," Hatch said. "I feel like beating hell out of somebody, and it might as well be you."

Sanders strained forward in his chair. "I began working in Seligman's office four or five months ago."

"You forged your law degree," Hatch said.

"I say!" Sanders took another mouthful of Scotch. "Very well, I admit that. In London I was a clerk in a barrister's office. I knew law, but I hadn't a degree. I needed a good job here in America. Flack thought I was a bit of all right. He thought an Englishman would give his office class. The trouble began when Seligman put me to work on the Quinn case."

"Doing what?"

"Tracing Timothy Quinn. Rhoda Quinn had told Seligman a great deal about her husband, and Seligman had taken a great many notes. I studied them and began investigating. Before long I'd found Timothy Quinn."

"Through the bloody birds," Hatch said.

"That's right," Sanders said. "Timothy Quinn had kept a loft of homing pigeons in Chicago. I knew that racing pigeons are registered. I looked into the files of the American Racing Pigeon Union and the International Federation of Homing Pigeon Fanciers. Most of Timothy Quinn's pigeons were still registered in his name, though his wife had gotten rid of them—she'd said she poisoned them after her husband left her—but a few had been transferred to another name. To Howard Westcott, of New York."

"As simple as that," Hatch said.

Sanders nodded.

"Timothy Quinn had taken a few of his best birds with him when he'd left home. In order to race the birds here, he'd transferred the registration to his assumed name. I felt sure Howard Westcott and Timothy Quinn were the same man, because Westcott answered Quinn's description."

"Today Rhoda Quinn took the hint you dropped and traced him in exactly the same way," Hatch said.

"I say!" Sanders blurted. Then he went on, "I turned my information over to Seligman. He warned me to keep it strictly confidential. Then the bloody crook began playing Westcott and Rhoda Quinn against each other."

"Seligman had you forge a letter. He took it to Westcott, and Westcott thought it was from Rhoda Quinn."

Sanders stared and said, "That's right."

"Seligman told Rhoda Quinn he hadn't found her husband, and kept getting money from her," Hatch said. "At the same time he blackmailed Howard Westcott."

"That's not the half of it," Sanders said.

"No?" Hatch said. "What's the rest?"

"Seligman found out my law degree was forged. He'd checked up on me. But he didn't tell Flack about it, and he told me I could stay on at the office, if I'd follow his orders and keep my mouth shut. He said if I didn't do as he ordered, he'd send me to gaol."

"What has that to do with Rhoda Quinn and Howard Westcott?"

"Seligman made use of what he'd learned about me. He had me prepare a death certificate," Sanders explained. "I forged a set of papers showing that Timothy Quinn had died and been buried in the Potter's Field three years ago."

"What was the idea behind that?" Hatch asked.

"Seligman showed a copy of the papers to Rhoda Quinn. He told her that was the end of her search. Several weeks later, Rhoda Quinn married Lloyd Daly."

THE bottle stopped midway to Hatch's mouth. "What! Do you mean to tell me that Rhoda Quinn and Lloyd Daly became man and wife?"

"That's right," Sanders said.

"Good heavens!" Hatch said. "She didn't let me in on that, and neither did Daly. Doesn't anybody ever tell the whole truth? No! The answer is no."

"And they hadn't been married a week before Seligman called Rhoda Quinn into his office," Sanders continued. "He told her there'd been a terrible mistake. He said he'd gone on investigating and discovered that the Timothy Quinn in the Potter's Field wasn't her husband after all."

"How could he get away with that?" Hatch asked.

"He showed her where the fake death certificate said that the Timothy

Quinn in the Potter's Field had died of dementia paralytica. That's another name for general paresis. He said he'd checked back over some records in Chicago, and found that the real Timothy Quinn had taken a Wassermann test just before his marriage, and of course the test was negative. The lapse of time between the test and the date on the death certificate wasn't long enough for paresis to develop. That's the way Seligman convinced Rhoda Quinn that the imaginary Timothy Quinn in the Potter's Field wasn't her husband at all."

"Good heavens!" Hatch exclaimed. "Seligman pulled off all this skulduggery to clear the way for Rhoda's marriage to Daly, is that it?"

"That's it exactly," Sanders said. "He deliberately jockeyed her into a bigamous marriage. She found herself in a position where she couldn't prove she'd acted in good faith, upon sound evidence that her husband was dead, because Seligman got rid of the forged death certificate—said he'd lost it. And of course Rhoda Quinn couldn't find the original, because it didn't exist."

"Then Seligman proceeded to blackmail Rhoda Quinn on the basis of her bigamy, and at the same time he went on blackmailing Timothy Quinn for the same reason."

"That's right," Sanders said.

"The guy deserved to be killed," Hatch said.

He refilled Sanders' glass and took a long pull from the bottle. He peered at Sanders.

"Where do you fit into this picture?"

"I knew what Seligman was pulling off," Sanders said.

"So did John Pirano," Hatch said.

"Seligman was too smart to tell Pirano much about it. Pirano knew Seligman was pulling off some kind of deal,

that's all. Pirano tried to bribe me to tell him what it was all about."

"Did you tell him?"

"No, because if I had, Seligman would have finished me."

"Then Pirano still doesn't know who Timothy Quinn actually is?"

"No. All he knows is that Rhoda Quinn is married to Lloyd Daly."

"Flack didn't know anything at all about it?" Hatch inquired.

"That's right," Sanders said.

"You thought you ought to have a share of the swag," Hatch said. "But you didn't get it."

Sanders' mouth drooped sourly. "I jolly well didn't. Seligman sacked me. He warned me that unless I kept mum, he'd report me." Sanders inched forward in his chair. "Hatch, I entered this country illegally. I jumped ship. I married an American girl, Millie Black, and Millie and I have a beautiful little daughter. I could be deported—separated from my wife and child forever."

"Don't try to sound like East Lynne," Hatch said. "Couldn't they join you in England?"

"I—I'm a fugitive," Sanders said. "There's a charge hanging over me. Scotland Yard wants me for forgery."

"Good heavens!" Hatch said. "So this is why you were so anxious to talk to me. You thought I'd sympathize with you and keep you out of it."

"That's right, Hatch," Sanders said, his eyes full of supplication. "Millie and Gloria are visiting Millie's mother in Sedalia, Kansas. Millie's sick. It's pernicious anemia. She took Gloria to her mother's home because I've been stony since Seligman sacked me. I'm down to my last quid."

"This is lovely," Hatch said in a bitter tone.

"If—if you could find out the truth, Hatch—about who killed Seligman and

Flack—perhaps no one else need ever know about my past. If the police arrest me as a suspect, they'll investigate me—they'll discover the whole bloody mess. But if the case is cleared up first, perhaps the authorities won't tumble to me at all. I swear, if I ever get out of this, I'll go straight as a die, Hatch."

Hatch stared at him. "Whether you deserve to get out of it is damned questionable."

KNUCKLES rapped. Carrying the bottle, Hatch opened the door. Delevan sidled in, grinning with satisfaction.

"Where the hell've you been, Danny?" Hatch asked.

"Watch this, chief," Delevan said.

He went to Sanders, removed a pair of handcuffs from his pocket, snapped one circle around Sanders' right wrist and the other around the arm of the chair.

"Those there bracelets they'll hold him, chief," Delevan said confidently. "They sure will."

Sanders stared at the manacles, transferred his glass to his left hand and emptied it at a gulp.

"Where the hell did you get those things, Danny?" Hatch demanded.

"Over in a pawnshop on Third Avenue, chief," Delevan said. "They cost me two bucks. Now we can keep this here guy as long as we want him."

"Very good, very good," Hatch said gravely. "Did the two bucks include a key?"

Delevan tapped his vest pocket. "Got it right here. You been grilling hell outa this here guy, chief?" he inquired.

"Sanders has put me in a worse spot than ever," Hatch said. "Apparently I'm the custodian of half a dozen different destinies. If I don't do the right thing by everybody concerned, I'll leave

a terrible trail of broken lives strewn behind me."

Delevan wistfully eyed the bottle of Scotch. Hatch swigged from it.

"You haven't finished talking, Sanders," Hatch said. "How did you happen to be at the Club Grotto last night?"

"I needed money badly, Hatch," Sanders said, twisting his wrist in the steel cuff. "I knew Seligman often went there. I wanted to ask him to give me another chance in the office."

"Then you didn't expect to find Rhoda Quinn," Hatch said.

"I hadn't the foggiest she'd be there," Sanders said. "When I recognized her, I decided my best chance to get hold of some money was to sell my information to her. I suggested to her we'd better go to another place, for fear Seligman might happen in and see me with her."

"But you ran into Seligman on the way out," Hatch said. "He knew immediately what you were up to. He warned you he was going to make his threat good. He told you you were on your way out, and that meant out of the country."

"He was going to report me, Hatch. It got my wind up. I wanted to chuck the whole business, for Millie's sake, and Gloria's. That's why I went away."

"Seligman's death saved you from being deported and thrown into prison."

"But it hasn't done that," Sanders protested. "Don't you see it hasn't? There's even more danger now."

"You didn't have time to think of that before you shot Seligman."

The radio had been playing steadily, but now it was silent. After a moment an announcer spoke.

"We bring you a special dispatch from the Press Radio Bureau. The dead body of Rhoda Quinn, for whom the police have been searching in connec-

tion with the Seligman homicide, was found a short while ago on Eighty-Second Street, between Fifth and Madison Avenues. The body was discovered by a passing motorist, Charles Wakefield, of Flushing, who immediately notified the police. The cause of Mrs. Quinn's death is thought to be strangulation.

"The police theory is that Mrs. Quinn was choked to death in some other part of the city, then her body was dumped from an automobile. Evidently she was thrown out with considerable force, to judge from the condition of her body, or she was struck by another car which did not stop. No witnesses have been found. Police have begun a search of all garages in the metropolitan area, in the hope of discovering the car in which Mrs. Quinn's corpse was transported."

"Some people have incredible luck," Hatch observed.

"Lloyd Daly has again been taken into custody by the police," the radio continued. "He was arrested when he entered his room at the Hotel Trafalgar this evening. He had just arrived at Police Headquarters when the news of the discovery of Mrs. Quinn's body was received there. He is being held for questioning.

"John Pirano, the law partner of Sidney Seligman and Samuel Flack, both victims of a murderer within the past twenty-four hours, surrendered to the police this evening. Pirano stated that he left his office this afternoon a few minutes after Flack had left for the home of Professor Cyrus Hatch. He said he was in a state of nervous exhaustion and, in order to recuperate without being molested, he rented a room at the Montblanc Hotel. He said he took a sedative, and slept soundly until this evening. Then, he said, learn-

ing from the newspapers that Flack was dead and that the police were searching for him in connection with the murder, he communicated with Joseph Glatzburg, an attorney, and went with Glatzburg directly to Police Headquarters, where he told his story to Commissioner Mark Hatch. He is being held.

"This dispatch comes to you from the Press Radio Bureau. Further details will be found in your newspapers."

The radio resumed its music.

HATCH removed his coat and vest. "Alla time you look more and more like a guy he would like to murder somebody hisself, chief," Delevan observed. "You ain't ate anything since breakfast. Maybe you would feel more like something human if you had yourself some dinner."

"A fine idea, Danny," Hatch said grimly, taking off his tie. "Send a bell-boy out for a bottle of Scotch."

"What I was talking about it was something you eat it, chief," Delevan explained.

"I shall have dinner," Hatch said, removing his shoes. "As an appetizer I shall have Scotch. Instead of soup, I shall have Scotch. I shall have Scotch as the main course, and I shall have Scotch salad with Scotch dressing. For dessert I shall have Scotch. I will top off the dinner with some Scotch."

"After a heavy meal like that, chief," Delevan said, "a guy he can drink all night and not feel it any."

Hatch stretched out on the bed.

"Danny, get on that telephone and find Kerrigan," he directed. "No matter where Kerrigan is, find him. Even if he's flying over the North Pole on his way to Little America, find Kerrigan. Tell him to come here. Tell him I need him. Tell him we might as well all

hang together, because if we don't all hang together, we'll all go to the electric chair separately. Benjamin Franklin said that. Benjamin Franklin wrote Poor Richard's Almanac while flying a kite. Danny, you've got to find Benjamin Franklin Kerrigan right away."

"Okay, chief," Delevan said, taking up the telephone. "What you gonna do now?"

Hatch lifted his head and stared at Sanders. "My friend," he inquired, "have you ever fallen in love with a murderess who's in love with her sister's husband?"

"I love Millie," Sanders said. "I love my Millie very, very much."

Hatch peered at Delevan. "Danny," he said, "have *you* ever fallen in love with a murderess who's in love with her sister's husband? Have you?"

"I never did, chief," Delevan said, "but once I went for a dame she was a lady wrassler."

"That's different," Hatch said. "That's nothing. This is worse, much worse. Falling in love with a murderess who's in love with her sister's husband is one of the worst things that can happen to you. Here's to love. Hur-ray for what."

"Chief," Delevan said, "what you gonna do?"

"To sleep, to sleep, perchance to dream, something something something," Hatch said. "Good night, good night, parting is such sweet sorrow, something something something the morrow. Shakespeare wrote that while Benjamin Franklin was flying a kite. Well, as Benjamin Shakespeare said, the morrow the merrier."

His head sank back.

Delevan gazed at him in dismay. Sanders stared, looking sick.

"Now I lay me down to sleep," Hatch muttered. "I pray the Lord my

soul to keep. Who the hell else would want it, anyway?"

He closed his eyes and slept.

CHAPTER XVII

Hatch Plays His Hand

FEELING someone chipping little bronze letters off his skull with a hammer and a chisel, Hatch rolled over. While the banging persisted, he lifted his head and opened his eyes. "Good heavens!" he moaned, and instantly closed them again. The noise was still reverberating through his brain when he ventured to lift one lid slightly.

He saw the bottle of Scotch standing on the dresser. Delevan was not in sight. Sanders was coming from the bathroom, a glass of water in his free hand, dragging the chair to which he was cuffed.

"What the hell kind of a chair do you think that is?" Hatch demanded. "That's no way to treat it."

"It's worse than a bloody ball and chain," Sanders complained.

Sanders maneuvered the chair into the corner, where he dropped into it breathlessly. The loud knocking continued.

"Where the hell's Danny?" Hatch asked.

"He's gone again," Sanders said. "What's more, the bloody boulder robbed me of fifty dollars."

Hatch achieved a sitting position. "Robbed you of how much?"

"Fifty dollars," Sanders said. "The blinking thief took it right out of my pocket."

"Don't call Danny a thief," Hatch said. "Danny might take your money, but he's no thief. You told me you were down to your last quid. I don't remember just how much a quid is, except

that I'm damned sure it isn't fifty dollars."

"Fifty dollars was all I had, and the bloody crook stole it," Sanders said.

The knocking grew louder.

Hatch howled at the door, "Quit that racket and wait a minute!" He moaned and held his head. "I shouldn't have done that. Why did Danny take your fifty dollars, Sanders?" he asked in a whisper.

"I'm damned if I know," Sanders said. "First he found some sort of paper in your coat and he sat staring at it."

Hatch dragged his coat onto the bed and fished in the pockets. "He took that photostat."

"He sat there grinning like a half-witted baboon, then he went through my pockets and took the fifty dollars and left," Sanders said.

"Did he say where he was going and when he'd be back?"

"He didn't even say thank you."

Knuckles were still pounding the door. Hatch struggled up and opened it. Kerrigan came in with a bundle of newspapers under one arm. He stared at Hatch and Sanders.

"Mr. Kerrigan, Mr. Sanders," Hatch said, "if it matters."

He went into the bathroom. When he came out, Kerrigan was opening the bottle of Scotch.

"That's fine," Hatch said. "Send down for some cracked ice and some seltzer and four or five stacks of sandwiches and a gallon of black coffee and a bottle of aspirin, will you, Kerrigan? Don't forget the aspirin."

Hatch put on his shoes and his tie while Kerrigan telephoned, then he drank a mouthful of Scotch.

After a hopeful moment he announced, "I still feel lousy. I wonder where Danny went."

He unfolded the newspapers and tried to read. Kerrigan gazed from him to Sanders and back, hopelessly, until the bellboy knocked at the door. Kerrigan took the tray and paid the bill. While he made highballs, Hatch munched a sandwich and drank black coffee.

"Pass some to Sanders," Hatch said.

Sanders took a cup of coffee in his left hand and a sandwich in his right. He had to double over in order to get his teeth into the sandwich.

"What time is it?" Hatch asked.

"The night's young yet," Kerrigan said, "but personally I'm aging rapidly."

"I feel older than the hills," Hatch said.

HE placed two aspirin tablets on his tongue and washed them down with a highball.

"What the hell do you want to talk to me about, Hatch?" Kerrigan asked.

"Kerrigan," Hatch said, "the trouble with these murders is that nobody committed them."

"If nobody committed these murders, then Seligman and Flack and Rhoda Quinn are making damned fools of themselves," Kerrigan said.

"Nobody did it," Hatch insisted. "Nobody *could* have done it. It's the only logical explanation."

"Listen, Hatch," Kerrigan protested. "I'm near enough to going screwy as it is."

Hatch drained his cup and refilled it with black coffee. "I will concede a point," he said. "I'll grant you that these murders were committed. I'll go even further and say that—assuming that somebody committed them—all three murders were committed by the same person."

"They weren't all necessarily com-

mitted by the same person," Kerrigan said.

"How many murderers do you want, anyway?" Hatch asked. "One is enough for me."

"There might be one murderer, or two, or three," Kerrigan said, "or more. What do you care?"

"Why shouldn't I care?" Hatch asked. "Do you mind if I care?"

Kerrigan shrugged.

"You and I both wanted to clear Rhoda Quinn. There's no point in trying to clear her now."

"We don't even need to try any more," Hatch said. "She cleared herself by getting murdered."

"Then you can drop out of the case and forget the whole thing," Kerrigan said.

"It's not that damned simple," Hatch said. "The only way I can extricate myself from this case is to collar a murderer."

"The hell with that," Kerrigan said. "I'm not interested in catching any murderer. I don't care a damn who the murderer is. You know why I'm in this case. My job is to keep certain parties out of it."

"I haven't forgotten," Hatch said. "Everybody I know is trying to keep out of it. The whole cockeyed world is trying to keep out of it, except me. I've outdone myself trying to stay in it. I'm in it, all right. Kerrigan, I got the Commissioner into a jam and now I've got to get him out of it. I've got to vindicate myself."

"Go ahead and vindicate yourself to your heart's content," Kerrigan said, "but I'm damned if I'll let you do anything that might incriminate my clients. I'll see you in hell first."

Hatch nodded, then shook his head. "I haven't one little inkling of who the murderer may be."

"What about your handcuffed friend here?" Kerrigan asked.

Sanders winced.

"Maybe he killed Seligman, and maybe he killed Flack," Hatch said, "but I'm sure he didn't kill Rhoda Quinn."

Sanders gripped the arms of his chair.

Kerrigan asked, "Why not?"

"I saw Rhoda alive late this afternoon," Hatch explained. "Sanders has been with me, or with Danny, every minute of the time since then. If all three murders were committed by the same person, that lets Sanders out."

"All three murders were not necessarily committed by the same person," Kerrigan reminded him.

"I think they were."

"Why?"

"Because of that gun of Rhoda Quinn's. Somebody confiscated it. Not for the purpose of framing Rhoda, though. If anybody had wanted to get rid of her, it would have been a hell of a lot simpler to kill her. Anyway, nobody had a reason for getting her into trouble. Just the opposite. It was to the advantage of everybody concerned to keep her quiet."

"All right," Kerrigan said impatiently.

"Whoever took Rhoda's gun did it for one of two reasons. First, he didn't dare use a weapon of his own for fear it would be traced back to him; or second, he simply didn't have one of his own to use."

"All right."

"So, following the Seligman murder, the murderer was without a usable weapon. He probably didn't expect to do any more murdering right away, but he had to anyway. Twice he found himself in an emergency without a weapon, and he had to use his hands.

Flack was strangled. So was Rhoda Quinn. So I say, all three murders are the work of one murderer."

"All right," Kerrigan said, "and I still don't give a damn."

HATCH took up another sandwich. "I wish I knew where Danny went," he said.

"All we need to make our joy complete is for Danny to turn up dead," Kerrigan observed.

"Don't say that!" Hatch exclaimed. "Listen, Kerrigan. Follow through on this with me." For a moment he chewed soberly. "We've eliminated Sanders. Now take John Pirano."

"I don't want Pirano. I wouldn't take him as a gift. I don't care whether he's guilty or not," Kerrigan said.

"I'm leading up to something you will care a lot about," Hatch retorted.

"If I have a kick in the teeth coming," Kerrigan said, "hurry up and get to it."

"Just keep listening," Hatch said. "Pirano might have killed Seligman. He had a motive—to take over Seligman's blackmailing racket. He also had a motive for killing Flack. Flack was dumb, but he was honest, and being honest he wouldn't stand for any crooked dealing. So, desperate to save himself from exposure, Pirano had to put Flack away. Also, Pirano might have had to silence Rhoda Quinn for the same reason."

"There's your case," Kerrigan said.

"But Pirano said he was asleep, under the influence of an opiate, at the time Rhoda Quinn was killed. It's a lousy alibi—so lousy it sounds true. In case you ever need an alibi for a murder, my friend, the best alibi is none at all. Maybe Pirano can prove it. If he can, he's out."

"All right, he's out," Kerrigan said.

"Next take Lloyd Daly," Hatch said, eating thoughtfully. "Daly was at the scene when Seligman got it. Nobody knows where he was when Flack turned up his toes. But he wasn't anywhere around when Rhoda Quinn was bumped off tonight."

"How do you know he wasn't?" Kerrigan asked.

"I saw Daly get into a taxi over on the west side. I heard him give the driver the address of the Trafalgar Hotel. As soon as he arrived at the Trafalgar Hotel, he was arrested."

"Who's left?" Kerrigan asked.

"Leaving the ladies out of it," Hatch said, "Howard Westcott."

Kerrigan started with dismay and peered at Sanders.

"Sanders knew all about it anyway," Hatch said.

"Oh, damn!" Kerrigan said.

"Howard Westcott was outside the Club Grotto last night when Seligman was killed," Hatch said. "He might easily have been at my apartment this morning when Flack was murdered. At about the time Rhoda was murdered this evening, he disappeared."

"I know all about that," Kerrigan said.

"Do you know *where* Rhoda Quinn was killed?" Hatch asked.

Kerrigan poured himself a new drink and nodded. "That's why I'm damned near going screwy," he said.

"There was a man who talked with Rhoda over the house phone from the lobby," Hatch said. "He may or may not be the guilty party. He went up to the penthouse, and Rhoda let him in, and then he left, but that still doesn't mean he killed her, whoever he was. Kerrigan, do you know whether Westcott left before or after Rhoda showed up?"

Kerrigan drank and said, "No."

"The note Westcott left was a phoney," Hatch said. "It covered up his real reason for leaving town. Now, why did he scam in such a hell of a hurry, and where did he scam to?"

Kerrigan drank again. "I wish I knew," he said.

"Maybe we can find out," Hatch said. "Westcott is the man who chipped the letters off the door of the Seligman tomb last night. We know what his message means, all except the symbol PAC."

Kerrigan sat forward. "Do you think that's where he's gone—to PAC?"

"He appointed a rendezvous," Hatch said. "It's only logical to suppose he'd try to keep it. PAC must mean a city. A city and something else."

Kerrigan said. "It might mean the Pittsburgh Amalgamated Company."

Hatch picked up the telephone.

"Operator," he said, "look in your telephone directory for Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and see if you can find a Pittsburgh Amalgamated Company or Corporation, or any other Amalgamated thing beginning with a C."

"Hold the line," the girl said.

HATCH munched on another sandwich. Kerrigan drank. Sanders sat still.

"I can't find anything like that," the operator said.

"Thanks," Hatch said, and hung up. "No go, Kerrigan, but it's the right idea. A certain city, a certain place—a certain hotel."

Suddenly he dropped his sandwich, opened the drawer of the desk and rummaged through sheaves of stationery and telegram blanks. He turned back with a paper-covered book.

"Eureka!" he said.

"What's that?" Kerrigan asked.

"Travel America Guide and Hotel Directory, Winter Edition, 1938," Hatch said. "Try to think of all the cities you ever heard of beginning with a P."

"Pittsburgh first," Kerrigan said.

Hatch leafed through the book. "No hotel in Pittsburgh has a name beginning with the initials A.C.," he announced.

"Philadelphia."

Hatch turned the pages. "In Philadelphia there's the Adelphia, but there's no C in it."

"Peoria," Kerrigan suggested.

Hatch searched the columns. "Nothing there."

"Paterson."

Hatch's finger pointed over the listings. "The Alexander Hamilton," he said. "That wouldn't be it."

"Palm Beach."

Again Hatch flicked the pages. "The Ambassador, but still no C."

"Pensacola."

Hatch retorted, "Nothing doing." His eyes lighted with a thought. "It might be the A-something Chambers. Do you know any Chambers beginning with an A?"

"Ante-chambers," Kerrigan said.

"Kerrigan," Hatch said severely, "this is serious."

"Try Paltimore," Kerrigan said.

Hatch scowled at him, but turned to Baltimore. "Good heavens!" he said. "There's the Abby, the Academy, the Albion, the Altamont, the Armistead and the Arundel. But still no C, unless it would mean the Academy."

"How about Poston, or Pirmingham, or Puffalo," Kerrigan asked, "or Prooklyn, or Palbany?"

Hatch went back to Scotch. "We're not quite on the right track," he said. "Perhaps P isn't the city. Perhaps P

is the hotel and AC is the city." Suddenly he was galvanized. "That's it! Atlantic City!"

"Damn me!" Kerrigan said.

Hatch split the book. "Plenty of 'em!" he exclaimed. "The Palm-Hall, the Penn-Atlantic, the Palais, the Pennhurst, the Phillips House, the Pierrepont, the Plaza, the President and the Princess."

Kerrigan said, "Let's get to work on the telephone."

"Wait," Hatch said. "Westcott hoped that the letters PAC would immediately convey to Rhoda Quinn the name of a certain hotel in Atlantic City. Why should they? Because they stayed at that particular hotel upon some important occasion. Kerrigan, it was their honeymoon!"

"Now you've got something," Kerrigan said. "Knowing the kind of woman Rhoda was—"

"We'll pick out the one she would consider the classiest," Hatch said.

"She'd take the Palais," Kerrigan said.

"Absolutely," Hatch agreed. "The message meant, 'Rhoda Quinn—you see Timothy in the Palais Hotel, Atlantic City.'" He took up the telephone. "Operator, get me the Palais Hotel in Atlantic City. I want to talk with Mr. Howard Westcott."

"Hold the line," the operator said.

HATCH sipped his highball. Kerrigan sat on the edge of his chair. Sanders watched them intently. Soon Hatch nuzzled the transmitter.

A voice said, "Hello?"

"Hello, Mr. Westcott," Hatch said.

"Who's calling?" Westcott's voice returned cautiously.

Hatch smiled at Kerrigan.

"Damn me!" Kerrigan muttered.

"Cyrus Hatch calling," Hatch said

over the line. "Have you seen the latest papers, Mr. Westcott?"

"Hatch! How the devil did you know— Yes—yes, I've seen them."

"Then you know it's no use waiting any longer for that certain party to meet you there," Hatch said.

"I know, I know."

"You chipped the letters off the door of the Seligman tomb with the idea of connecting with Rhoda and helping her to keep out of the hands of the police, is that it?"

"Yes—yes," Westcott said.

"You knew that if the police caught up with her, and put the heat on her, that would be your finish."

"Yes—yes." Westcott's voice was ragged. "Great Scott, Hatch, what can I do now?"

"Phone your wife and tell her you'll be back on the first train you can catch," Hatch suggested. "Good night, Mr. Westcott."

He sat comfortably on the bed and looked at the light through his highball.

"And that lets Howard Westcott out also," he said.

"I hope it does," Kerrigan said, "but how do you figure it?"

"If Westcott had killed Rhoda here in New York, he certainly wouldn't have rushed down to Atlantic City hoping to meet her there, would he?"

"Damn me!" Kerrigan said with a sigh.

"That eliminates all our suspects except the ladies. I think we should eliminate them also, if only for the sake of old-fashioned chivalry," Hatch said. "Just as I remarked at the beginning, the trouble with these murders is that nobody committed 'em."

"It still isn't necessarily true that they were all committed by the same person," Kerrigan said again.

"I'm still sure they were all committed by the same person," Hatch said.

"A person who couldn't possibly have committed them," Kerrigan added.

"Right," Hatch said.

"We're all going screwy," Kerrigan sighed.

Thoughtfully Hatch finished his highball. Putting aside the empty glass, he took up the telephone.

"Operator," he asked, "is there a public stenographer in the hotel?"

"On the mezzanine," the operator said.

While he put on his coat and hat, Hatch peered at Sanders.

"Listen, Sanders," he said. "You asked me to help you get out of this with a whole skin. I'll do what I can. But I want you to keep one thing clearly in mind. If you let slip so much as one word about the connection between Howard Westcott and Rhoda Quinn, I'll throw you to the wolves. Understand that?"

"I—I understand, Hatch," Sanders said.

"We can't keep the name of Timothy Quinn out of this, but as far as you're concerned, Sanders, Quinn and Westcott are two separate and distinct identities. From this moment on, Howard Westcott is dissociated in your mind from everything and anything concerning Timothy Quinn. You don't know a damned thing about Howard Westcott."

"I—I don't know a damned thing about Westcott," Sanders agreed.

Hatch nodded.

"What's more, you don't know anything about Timothy Quinn," Hatch went on. "You don't even suspect that there was anything crooked going on in Seligman's office. If you accuse John Pirano of blackmail, he'll retaliate, and

your goose will be cooked. So far as you know, Pirano is a thoroughly honest man. If you insist on that, he'll keep quiet about you, because he'll need your support."

Sanders was absorbing every word.

"Last night, in the Club Grotto, you recognized Rhoda Quinn as a former client of Seligman's, and you simply asked her if she knew where you might land a new position. When she began to quarrel with Seligman, you discreetly retired. What Seligman said to you was an angry expression of personal dislike. You've been avoiding the police on advice of counsel. You'd better get busy on the phone and find yourself a lawyer who'll back you up on that."

Sanders nodded eagerly.

"But remember, if you shoot off your mouth about Howard Westcott, you're sunk," Hatch threatened.

"That's right," Kerrigan affirmed.

"I'll do exactly as you say," Sanders promised.

HATCH took Sanders' key from the dresser. As Kerrigan followed him out, Sanders eyed them distraitly.

"Hatch," Kerrigan said while they waited for the elevator, "you're a hell of a decent guy."

"Whatever I am, I'm too much that way for my own good," Hatch said wryly.

They left the elevator at the mezzanine and stepped into the public stenographer's office. A red-headed girl took her feet off the typewriter, closed her book and smiled.

"I want to get off a couple of letters," Hatch explained, "but I'd like to write them myself."

The girl said, "Go as far as you like."

She opened a drawer containing

paper and envelopes, took another chair and resumed her book. Hatch sat at the typewriter and fed a sheet of onion-skin under the roller. Kerrigan watched his dancing fingers and frowned. Hatch paused at intervals, thinking hard. Finally, when the sheet was covered, he folded it and put it in his pocket.

He wrote a second, shorter letter and typed a name on an envelope. He sealed the second letter in the envelope, then rose and proffered a dollar bill to the girl.

"Thank you," he said.

"Thank *you*," she said, taking the bill.

Kerrigan followed Hatch from the office, down the stairs into the lobby, out to the curb and into a taxi.

Hatch leaned forward and whispered an address to the driver.

The cab started.

"What the hell are you up to now?" Kerrigan inquired.

Hatch closed the panel of the driver's compartment, removed the first letter from his pocket and switched on the dome light.

"This is a dangerous thing to do," he said, "but I'm damned if I can see any other way out."

"If you think it'll work, let's try it," Kerrigan said. "Right now I'd bet on a million-to-one chance."

Hatch began reading. "Dear Mr. Westcott. You probably remember my name as that of a man from which you bought a number of racing pigeons several years ago. I must apologize for involving you, even in this innocent manner, in a murder case, and for concealing myself in this way, but circumstances make it necessary."

"What the hell is this?" Kerrigan asked.

Hatch read on. "I am the Timothy

Quinn who disappeared from Chicago six years ago—Rhoda Quinn's husband. Recently Rhoda's lawyer, Sidney Seligman, searching at her behest, located me. I do not know how he accomplished this, for I had severed all connection with my old life and changed my name. Seligman found that I had remarried—bigamously, I confess, and very happily. My situation being what it is, I naturally wish to remain safely out of reach of the law.

"Seligman began blackmailing me. Of course, I was in no position to take legal action against him, but, in hope of escaping his greed somehow, I began watching him. Last night I saw Rhoda leaving his office. The idea struck me that Rhoda was probably also being victimized by Seligman in some way. Hoping that she might forgive me, once she learned my circumstances, and also that she and I, working together, might find some means of beating Seligman's game, I followed her.

"She went from Seligman's office to the Club Grotto. I waited outside, intending to follow her to her home, for a better opportunity to discuss the matter. Later I saw her come out of the Club, with a man whom I did not recognize, just as Seligman arrived.

"I was an eye-witness to the murder."

"Damn me!" Kerrigan said.

"I saw the murderer fire through the hedge at the side of the door, and I saw him make his escape. Through the information and photographs published in the newspapers, I learned his identity. I am determined to see him punished for his crime.

"But—"

"Hatch, you're a terrific strain on my nerves," Kerrigan said.

"But, because I cannot come forward openly, I found it necessary to

make use of some means of communication which would not reveal my whereabouts or the name under which I am now living. I remembered your loft, Mr. Westcott, and recalled that you frequently ship pigeons off by express, as I used to do. I telephoned your home, spoke to Mrs. Westcott as another pigeon fancier, and learned that you were about to send a crate of pigeons to Boston. Seizing the opportunity, I confiscated your crate of birds while Mrs. Westcott was taking them in her car to the express office.

"I have already released all but two of the birds. One of the two remaining pigeons will carry this message to you. The last bird may carry an even more important communication—the name of the murderer.

"But—"

"Hatch you're killing me," Kerrigan said.

"But," Hatch continued, "I hesitate to assume the responsibility of condemning a human being, even a murderer, to death. I write this in the hope that he will realize he cannot escape justice. I take this means of warning him, of giving him an opportunity to confess.

"But if he does not confess tomorrow, I will hesitate no longer. I will write another message, to be delivered by pigeon in this same way, and name him."

"Damn me!" Kerrigan said.

"Please turn this letter over to the Commissioner of Police as soon as convenient, and arrange matters so that he will be present when the final message arrives. Sincerely yours, Timothy Quinn."

Kerrigan moaned, "Hatch, that's dynamite. What if it dawns on the police that Quinn is Westcott?"

"Can you think of any better way

of squeezing out of this?" Hatch challenged.

Kerrigan said vehemently, "It's nothing but a bluff. It won't work. Nobody'll confess. Tomorrow will come and go and the murderer will keep his mouth shut. Then it'll be up to you to name somebody as the murderer. Who the hell are you going to pick?"

"Damned if I know," Hatch admitted. "I'll have to figure that out when the time comes."

THE cab stopped. Hatch climbed out and paid the driver. Kerrigan followed him into the cigar store on the corner, and stood beside the telephone booth while Hatch put through a call.

Suzette's voice said, "The Alexander residence."

"This is Mr. Hatch, Suzette. Is Rupert Alexander within earshot?"

"He is in his study," Suzette answered.

"Good. Call Mrs. Westcott."

In a moment Lois Westcott's voice said, "Yes?"

"Don't worry about Howard," Hatch said. "Has he phoned you?"

"No."

"Then expect a call from him. He'll be back soon, and I think he's in the clear. In a few minutes another pigeon will return to the loft with a message—"

Lois Westcott stifled an exclamation.

"Learn that message by heart," Hatch went on. "You'll grasp the plan behind it. Get Terry to fall in with the plan, and explain it to Howard as soon as he comes. Telephone the Commissioner and tell him about the message. He'll probably send a couple of men around. We'll have to take a

chance with your father, but show him the letter and he'll understand that there's nothing else to be done."

"It sounds—dangerous," Lois Westcott said.

"It's dangerous as hell," Hatch said, "but we've got to see it through. Good night, Mrs. Westcott."

His face was hard when he left the booth. Kerrigan trudged with him to a tenement midway in the block. They climbed to the third floor. Kerrigan unlocked the door. Hatch went in first and gazed speculatively at the two pigeons in the crate.

"You can't go through with this, Hatch," Kerrigan said. "It's a crazy chance. It's too damned risky."

Hatch took a spool of thread from the dresser, broke off a length, then opened the cage, reached in, and closed his hand over one of the birds.

"The night flier?" he asked Kerrigan.

"Listen, Hatch," Kerrigan said. "You can't do this. I'm damned if I'll let you do it."

Hatch rolled the tightly folded letter around the pigeon's leg and bound it in place with the thread. He turned to the window. Kerrigan gripped his arm.

"Put that pigeon back," Kerrigan said.

"This is the only way out, Kerrigan," Hatch said soberly.

"Put that pigeon back, Hatch," Kerrigan said. "Put it back or I'll paste you to the floor."

Hatch opened the window. Kerrigan caught his shoulder and spun him about. He tried to take the bird from Hatch's hand. The bird squeaked with fright. Hatch struck once, a straight-armjab to the point of Kerrigan's chin.

Kerrigan fell back on the bed. He sprang up as Hatch reached out into the darkness, holding the bird.

He opened his hand.

The pigeon darted off into the night. It became a black flutter that vanished in the western sky.

Hatch looked at Kerrigan, and Kerrigan scowled at Hatch, and they gravely wagged their heads.

"Sorry, Kerrigan," Hatch said.

"That's all right, Hatch," Kerrigan said.

"Good."

Hatch closed the window and gazed grimly at the one bird remaining in the crate.

"I wish I knew what's happened to Danny," he said.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK





Picking' Your Own Pocket

Nuts!

By

Frank Wrentmore

This is the one-hundred-and-twenty-eighth 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.

"SALESMAN WANTED—Responsible local man to service established store route. Car required and cash deposit for merchandise on location. Salary \$35 weekly and commission. Write only."

THAT looks like a good job, doesn't it? Well, let's see what's behind it.

A DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY reader who wanted to establish an independent business for himself answered the above advertisement, and at the same time wrote me a letter asking for a report on the company inasmuch as they maintained a branch office in Greater New York. He subsequently sent me the first letter he received from the firm and this confirmed the statement in the advertisement to the effect that the route comprised about 300 established accounts; produced approximately \$275 in weekly collections and stated that his earnings would be based on a percentage of these collections, although the company guaranteed a minimum of \$35 weekly. The letter wound up by stating that the company required a *cash deposit* of about \$700 to cover

the inventory value of the merchandise needed to service the route.

It still sounded very rosy so I dropped around to see the boss. Their office formed a part of their manufacturing plant in a commercial district and the firm's merchandise—nuts and candy in transparent packages—was attractively displayed on neat little racks around the office. I explained that Mr. So-and-So, one of their prospective route managers had **requested me** to get some additional information for him. Well, of course, that was all right so we sat down.

One of the first things I learned was that the route was *not* established, but I was told that the company would send one of their experienced representatives to the town where Mr. So-and-so lived and develop the route for him among the stores there. When I asked how they knew that an *unestablished* route would produce sales of \$275 weekly, I was told that the *average* route produced this amount.

Now the essence of any proposition of this nature lies in the contract a man is asked to sign. Their "Distributor's Agreement" was drawn, of course, by the company's attorney. Even a superficial examination disclosed several interesting points wholly at variance with the impression conveyed by the advertisement and the original letter.

The \$700 "cash deposit" wasn't a *cash deposit* at all but constituted payment for the merchandise delivered to the distributor by the company after the route was established, and the distributor was required to *consign* (to be paid for if and when sold) this to the storekeepers on the "route" to be established by the company's representative. In other words, he was, according to the contract, to engage in business on his own account and be responsible for all credit and other losses incident to the business.

I said, "Suppose this route isn't profitable and the distributor wants to get his money back? What happens?"

"Oh yes," said the manager, "we make provision for that in the contract, read paragraph eight." So I read, "That after six months following the date of this agreement, should the Distributor desire to discontinue his services as Distributor for the Corporation, that he will give the Corporation written notice of same, and upon receipt of said notice the Corporation will make immediate efforts to secure a new distributor for the heretofore mentioned route."

Now that's just fine, except for the fact that it guarantees nothing. If the corporation isn't successful in obtaining a new distributor for that route—and why should they try very hard, they have other routes to sell?—the original distributor's \$700 is represented by a lot of nuts!

In order to qualify for the so-called \$35 weekly "salary guarantee," the distributor must agree to distribute a certain minimum number of packages

of merchandise per week—now how can he do that?—and send in a daily report to the company. Just to make it tricky, the contract terms the \$35 salary guarantee "gross weekly earnings" and out of this the distributor must pay freight or express charges from Chicago, pay his car expense and stand for all losses. How is that for a "salary guarantee"?

Another paragraph of the contract provides: "That if the distributor fails to service the route, and keep records, and make reports according to the agreements heretofore set forth, paragraph six (the "salary guarantee") of this agreement shall be void, and in no way binding upon the Corporation." That, in my opinion, is a perfect "out" for the company, because they can always say that they never received your reports—unless they are sent by registered mail. And a company which asks a man to sign such a one-sided agreement and which uses such misleading "Come-ons" is quite likely to take such advantages.

Most individuals who sign such an agreement and put \$700 in the hands of these companies do so in good faith and because they are honest. They try hard to make a living and are certainly entitled to protection, but first of all they must protect themselves.

Before you place your name on any contract, especially one drawn by the other side, take it to a good lawyer and have him explain it to you in detail. He will charge you only a small fee for such a service and it will insure for you the safety of your principal.

Investigate before you invest.



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



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.

SUPPLEMENTING last week's word-frequency table by †H. Hyman, for 1936-37 Inner Circle ciphers, this week we present †Howard N. Hehr's letter-frequency table for 1937 Inner Circle ciphers; that is, for last year's ciphers Nos. 6, 12, 18, etc., ending with No. 312. These 52 messages total 6,021 letters, averaging approximately 116 letters per cipher.

1937 I. C. FREQUENCY TABLE
By †Howard N. Hehr

Letter	Frequency	Per Cent	(1936)
1. A	534	8.87	1. E
2. E	492	8.17	2. A
3. S	450	7.47	3. T
4. I	409	6.79	4. I
5. R	404	6.71	5. S
6. O	386	6.41	6. O
7. T	384	6.38	7. N
8. N	365	6.06	8. R
9. L	309	5.13	9. L
10. U	298	4.95	10. C
11. C	279	4.63	11. H
12. D	219	3.64	12. D
13. M	206	3.42	13. U
14. H	205	3.41	14. G
15. P	200	3.32	15. M
16. G	154	2.56	16. P
17. Y	137	2.27	17. F
18. B	128	2.13	18. Y
19. K	101	1.68	19. B
20. F	95	1.58	20. W
21. W	92	1.53	21. V
22. V	83	1.38	22. K
23. X	32	0.53	23. X
24. J	24	0.40	24. Z
25. Z	23	0.38	25. J
26. Q	12	0.20	26. Q

Total Letters: 6,021

In Column 1, letters are ranked according to frequencies shown in Column 2. Percentages are given in Column 3. Thus, the letter A occurred 534 times in the 52 Inner Circle ciphers tabulated, making 8.87% of the total of 6,021 letters; etc. Column 4 shows the rank of the letters in †Edw. J. Drumm's table of 30,355 letters compiled from the 312 ciphers published during 1936, as given in our issue of Aug. 14 last. Columns 1 and 4 reveal some interesting variations in difficult (or Inner Circle) ciphers as contrasted with general frequencies in messages of all grades of difficulty. †Howard N. Hehr's table merits your consideration. And we greatly appreciate his contribution.

This week's clues: The key to No. 67 runs 0 12345 6789. In No. 68 note ZMX, RM, and -RMT; then CRMXG, RG, MLC, and LM. In No. 69 consider the pattern of OOGAO and the phrase AT IT. No. 70 provides EUEAMHG and -AMU for entry. In No. 71 try for AZOYNNC, noting twice-used ZO. Answers to this week's ciphers will appear next week. Asterisks indicate capitalization.

No. 67—Cryptic Division. By †Leo Crutchfield.

ONG) UAYIR(YOU
 ONG

 GB I
 NDA

 I I R
 I U G

 NU

No. 68—Seasonable Signs. By Orchid.

HLKV GPRKKRMT, RNNVNLHRZO KZGFRNV LU FSU GKH-
RMT, RG KLKEOZH MLC RM KOZBTHLEMXXG ZMX LM GR-
XVCZOPG. ZMX MRKKB *NZHYS CRMXXG NVZM PRFVG FL
XLAVMG LU BLEMTGFVHG VDVHBCSVHV.

No. 69—Woodland Symphony. By Zip.

AT IT OOGAO KGOOM FANDAT SUGOYN BORNDY PEGPE-
GY BOOR FINOG, SEXX US SITNIYNAK SAYD, ZIGAOCI-
NOB IY BUEJXO GIATJUFY IN OZOTNABO.

No. 70—Painful Surprise. By Wally.

LTZSELH MIGSAMU SOZGH NIZT, NINTMGEZAPR, GSEM
EMBPT HGZOBX EUEAMHG XSEAZ ZIXBTZ DSTM RIO
TMGTZ VEZB ZIIN. NIZEP: BTTL PAUSGH PAG!

No. 71—When Winter Ends. By †H. A. J.

GRENADS PSEUFP, BRAUKA HYNAP, QOHA, FEODSYRD-
EOP PAPP EKKYPREDRDH FYDC JUAKLP, KQYUYKSAU-
RMA GAUDYN AZORDEV. YOSOFDYN TAUREX EBSAD TUE-
GAP AZOYNNC XRPYPSUEOP.

No. 72—Irish Holiday. By Flim-Flam.

*ABCADDEF GHIJ KLBGD MDBNO PQJBG MRBCD SDHCLQJ
HQOBDEGD TCBEU VNBGAJ. *WHGLVBERG LNHILN, GLEI-
HGIBEU YDEBHC, PHIQND IQNEBX, DEOJ IHCA ZQBID HV-
NOXICF. “*DNBE UL VNHUR!”

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

61—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
P T E R Y G O I D S

62—The tinamou, South American game bird resembling quail, lays eggs having a highly polished, glasslike surface that reflects images like a mirror.

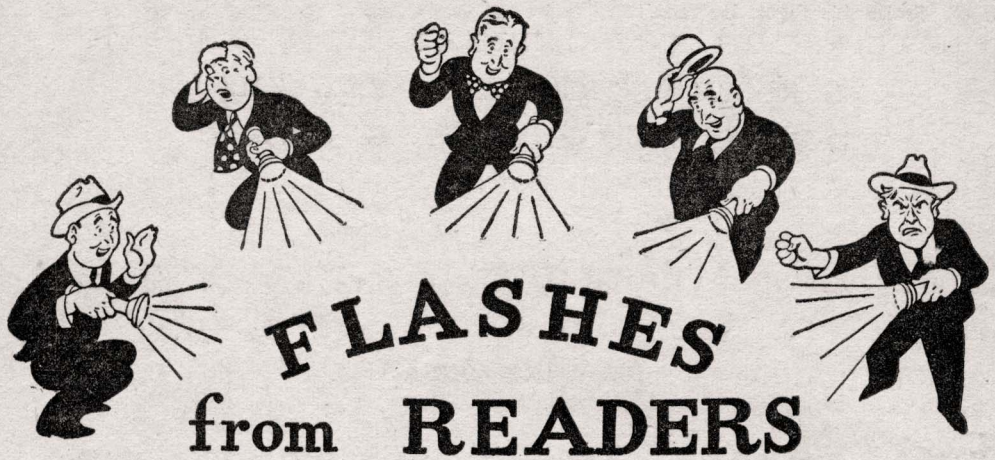
63—Alcatraz, beginning with “a” and ending with “z,” is the “alpha” of modern penal institutions and the “omega” for crooks!

64—High-pressure stock-sharpers induce uninformed investors to purchase worthless securities. Better Business Bureaus advise: “Investigate before investing!”

65—Upstate U. utilizes uneligible undergraduates, upsets unbeatable Unicorn U. Umpire uncovers upstarts, undoes unfairness. Upshot, Unicorn unbeaten!

66—Actively animated ostentatious manifestations articulate more vociferously than orally expressed prolix verbosity!

All correct solutions of the current puzzle will be duly listed in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for March. Address: M. E. Chaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.



GENERALLY speaking, editing a great magazine is exciting work. Sometimes there are dull moments, but what with the constant treasure-hunting among the incoming manuscripts and preparing others for the printer and reading the neat pages of proof and finally holding the finished product, crisp and shiny, in our hands, it's about the most satisfactory work we can imagine.

It really isn't work at all, of course, and we can understand our friends who fail to conceal their amazement that we actually earn a salary by sitting in comfortable chairs and reading stories every day.

Nevertheless, although the excitement-content of any day or week or month is high, it is only rarely that we strike such a peak of pleasure as when we found Mr. Dale Clark's newest novel. It's a baffling story called *Murder Wholesale* and it will set the pace for the issue after next. Probably you had better reserve your copy now.

We are in a quandary over this letter from

GUS BRONSON

DEAR EDITOR:

I've been having a terrible time. Not long

ago, a friend of mine saw a copy of DFW in my room and proceeded to rave. It was an opiate, he claimed. Reading trash like that kept me from using my brains for better things.

I tried to explain that I *enjoy* reading DFW, and that it is an important item in my entertainment. I even went so far as to state that the stories very often gave me something to think about.

My friend was skeptical, to say the least. Finally, to avoid serious trouble, we struck a bargain. I promised to quit reading the magazine for two weeks, and my friend promised to read it faithfully for the same amount of time.

The results are this: I've gone back to reading the magazine, after scurrying around and getting a hold of the two issues I missed. And my friend is a steady customer.

But what bothers me is this: He still claims that DFW, if not actually a narcotic, is a strongly habit-forming drug. And I wonder if maybe he's not right?

We've heard of this phenomenon before. In defense of the magazine and its influence, may we remind hesitant readers that we have read every word in every issue for a long time now, and although it's grown to be a habit, there seem to be no injurious after-effects?

The editors will be interested to hear
(Continued on page 128)

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY HERALD

FOR THE WEEK OF MARCH 26, 1938

EXTRA! EXTRA! EXTRA!

STOOL-PIGEON TELLS ALL!

Extraordinary Novelette of Crime and the Underworld!

Frederick C. Painton, the well-known author, brings a startlingly different story of the activities and life of a stool-pigeon—one of the brave nameless agents in constant jeopardy from both Law and outlaw. This amazing true-life story will be called "Maid for Murder," and no one will want to miss reading Chick Maney's latest adventure.

THE CAPE TRIANGULAR

Mr. Cornell Woolrich will present, in a few weeks, a moving drama of the man who had a single passion—postage stamps—and will show brilliantly how that passion led to disaster. It will be the feature novelette in the April 16th issue of **DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY**.

DETECTIVE IN ARTISTIC MIXUP

Sarah Watson, famous lady detective, has been employed, in a new case, to recover a painting by Mr. Richard VanDeen. Those who know Sarah will not be surprised to learn that she also accepts another commission to prevent this same picture from being discovered. Never before has Sarah shown quite so clearly her amazing talent for clever detective work and her unusual ability to play both ends against the middle.

THREE WENT TO KILL!

A Dramatic Story of Hollywood by the Author of "Me and Mickey Mouse"

Three persons—two men and a woman walked through the streets of Hollywood that night, armed and intent to kill. All three met in a crowded supper club. A gun barked; a man fell

dead. And that is but the beginning of the story, for the events which follow are just as exciting. It will be published under the title, "Death Goes Hollywood" in next week's issue.

GIRL RETURNS

Your reporter has just heard an astounding story of a bitter childless couple who answer the doorbell to find a little girl standing there, claiming to be their daughter who died ten years earlier.

MAN ACCUSES WIFE

While still honeymooning, a certain prominent business man accuses his bride of a few days of attempting to murder him!

A gripping story of raw human emotions—an unusual presentation of a strange, dramatic situation.

RACKETEER AIDS POLICE HUNT

Accused of being implicated in a murder last night, a certain gang chief has promised that his own henchmen will turn in the guilty man inside of twenty-four hours.

AUTHOR FINISHES DETECTIVE NOVEL

Frederick C. Davis, the famous author announces that his novel, "Coffins for Three," has been satisfactorily finished.

The smashing conclusion of the serialization will appear next week.

WEEK AFTER NEXT: MURDER WHOLESALE

A Stirring and Baffling New Novel by
DALE CLARK

KEEP UP WITH CRIME!

LAW

STUDY AT HOME
 Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. They command respect. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Big corporations are headed by men with legal training.

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 We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL. B. conferred. Successful graduates in every section of the United States. We furnish all text material, including fourteen-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 64-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send for them NOW.

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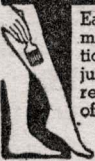
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MEN

Get free booklet about Zo-ak Tablets—the formula of well-known New York physician created especially for men. Zo-ak contains quick-acting vegetable stimulants plus essential vitamin concentrates in adequate amounts to build up health and strength. Ask for Zo-ak (blue box) at any good druggist, and write for free booklet by registered physician. Sent in sealed envelope by Zo-ak Company, 56B West 45 St., Dept. A, New York.

from others who like

HARRY P. NASH

have followed the progress of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY from the very first.

DEAR EDITOR:

For some time I have been intending to write you, to put in my bid for one of the longest readers of your magazine. To date, in your FLASHES FROM READERS I have not seen one letter where the reader started with the first copy and finished with the last issue (January 22). I bought my first copy, also your first issue, on September 20, 1924, at the Beach Drug Store on Grandville Avenue, Grand Rapids, Mich., and my last copy in a corner news stand in Buffalo, N. Y. In between times, I have bought them in about ten different states east of the Mississippi River and will continue to do so as long as you publish it. I have no favorite authors, as they are all good and I usually read it through the night I get it. I can truthfully say that in the thirteen years I have read the magazine that I have not found one that can compare with DETECTIVE FICTION even in the higher price fields. And when I read on the average of about six different detective story magazines a week, that is saying something.

Wishing you a bigger success in 1938 and all I ask is keep the magazine as is and you will have me for a reader a good many years to come.

The reason I remember the date of my first purchase is because it was my first anniversary and I was shopping for my wife's present.
 Buffalo, N. Y.

CRYPTOGRAM FANS!

"Solving Cipher Secrets" is a fascinating word game. Have you tried M. E. Ohaver's popular department in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY? Mr. Ohaver has prepared a book full of advice and hints as to how to play the game. Experts will find the book invaluable. Novices will find it opens up entirely new angles. Get

"CRYPTOGRAM SOLVING"

By M. E. Ohaver

Send 25c to DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY
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\$30⁰⁰ TRADE-IN ALLOWANCE

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REGULAR RETAIL VALUE... \$139⁹⁰
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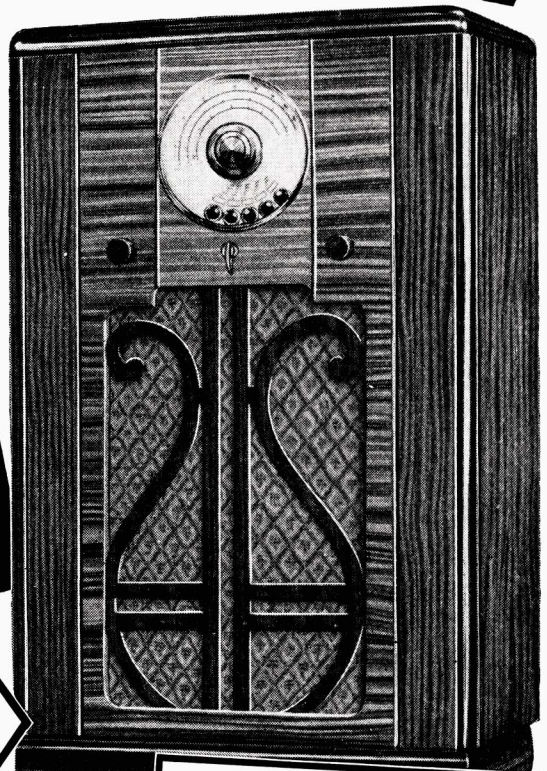
TERMS AS LOW AS 50¢ A WEEK

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LET US SEND YOU THIS BEAUTIFUL MATCHED-WOOD CONSOLE ON 30 DAYS FREE TRIAL IN YOUR OWN HOME

TOUCH A BUTTON—ZIP... YOUR STATION FLASHES IN!



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16 TUBES

WORLD-WIDE RECEPTION

- ★ 16 tubes for price of 8—
- ★ Not a cut-price set, but a bigger, more powerful, super performing COMPLETE radio in a big exquisitely designed console of matched Walnut—
- ★ Faster Dial-A-Matic Tuning—

Let us send this marvelous new 1938 Midwest 16-tube radio to your home . . . on 30 days FREE trial. Use it for four weeks before you make up your mind! If you decide to keep it, you secure \$30.00 credit on your old radio . . . and Midwest will call for it at your home!

Just imagine a radio so big, so powerful, so luxurious—in a big, beautiful,

richly-finished walnut console—selling at such an amazingly low factory-to-you price! Its tremendous range (550 KC to 18,000 KC) and great reserve of power enable you to drive across the world and bring in weak, distant, foreign stations (10,000 and more miles away) like "locals". You'll be delighted with the glorious new tone and brilliant, world-wide reception.

FACTORY-WHOLESALE PRICE SAVES YOU 50%

The famous Midwest factory-to-you plan, proven by 18 years of success, is just as exciting! It enables you to buy at wholesale

prices . . . to save more than 50% . . . to make your radio dollar go twice as far . . . to pay as little as 50¢ a week on the Midwest Easy Pay Plan. You get 30 days FREE Home Trial and \$30.00 credit on your old radio, during this sale!

Write for FREE 1938 Factory Catalog



PASTE COUPON ON 1¢ POSTCARD... OR

Write Today!

MIDWEST RADIO CORPORATION
 Dept. FF-63 Cincinnati, Ohio

Send me your new FREE catalog, complete details of your liberal 30-day FREE trial offer, and factory-to-you wholesale prices.

(Special offer and prices prevail only when dealing direct with factory by mail.)

Name: _____ (PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY)

Address: _____

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User-Agents Make Easy Extra Money. Check Here for details

Check Here for 1938 BATTERY catalog

MIDWEST *Factory-to-You* RADIOS

DEPT. FF-63 MIDWEST RADIO CORPORATION...CINCINNATI, OHIO, U.S.A.
 Manufacturers of Quality Radios Since 1920



Her Throat Insured For \$50,000.

DOLORES DEL RIO* tells why it's good business for her to smoke Luckies...

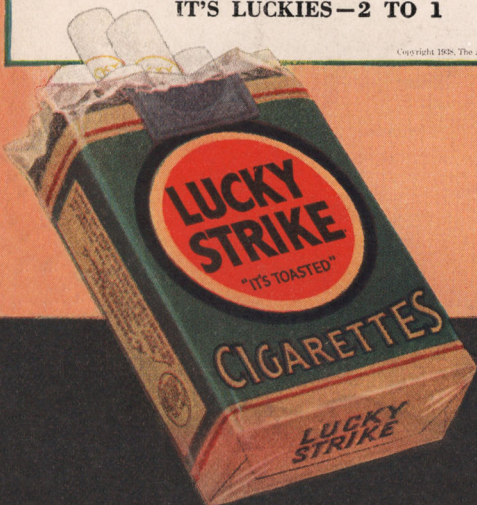
"That \$50,000 insurance is a studio precaution against my holding up a picture," says Miss Del Rio. "So I take no chances on an irritated throat. No matter how much I use my voice in acting, I always find Luckies gentle."

They will be gentle on *your* throat, too. Here's why... Luckies' exclusive "Toasting" process expels certain harsh irritants found in all tobacco. This makes Luckies' fine tobaccos even finer... a *light* smoke.

Sworn records show that among independent tobacco experts—men who know tobacco and its qualities—Luckies have twice as many exclusive smokers as all other cigarettes combined.

**WITH MEN WHO KNOW TOBACCO BEST
IT'S LUCKIES—2 TO 1**

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***DOLORES DEL RIO
STARRING IN THE 20th CENTURY-FOX
PICTURE, "SHANGHAI DEADLINE"**