

A Thrilling True Crime Story
by Joseph Fulling Fishman

DETECTIVE FICTION

JUNE 1
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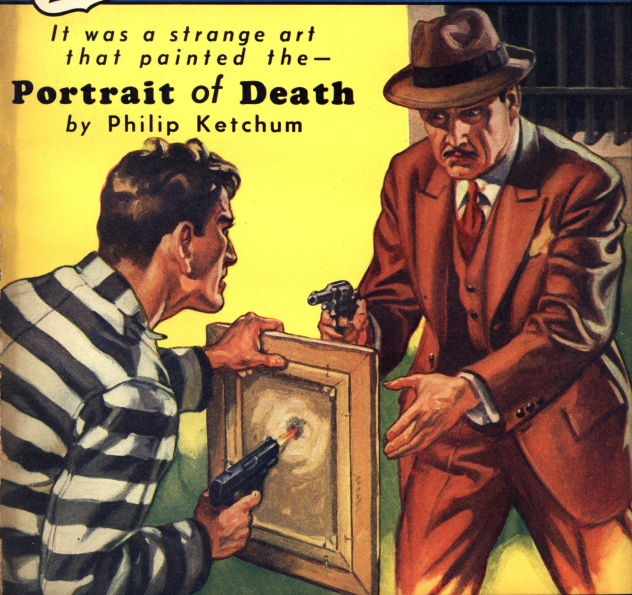
FORMERLY FLYNN'S **WEEKLY**



*It was a strange art
that painted the—*

Portrait of Death

by Philip Ketchum



"I'M FROM MISSOURI— and Listerine certainly showed me!"

says Mrs. Madge
Purdy Van Cott



When I became a nurse I first heard of the peculiar bottle-shaped bacillus, *Pityrosporum Ovale*—nearly always found in high concentration in infectious dandruff conditions—and how important it is to keep this and other organisms under control. Time and again I prescribed Listerine Antiseptic and massage . . . time and again I saw dandruff's scales disappear.

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FICTION WEEKLY



TITLE REGISTERED U. S. PATENT OFFICE

Formerly FLYNN'S

Volume 137

JUNE 1, 1940

Number 3

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A RED STAR Magazine

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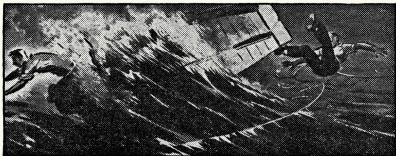
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"A WAVE SMACKED us broadside, and over we went! Then I felt a heavy drag on my leg. I was caught in the trot-line and was being pulled to my doom. In the darkness, my companion couldn't untangle me!



"BUT ONE OF OUR PARTY ON shore brought his flashlight into action. Its powerful beam cut the distance and darkness—and in a minute I was free. I shudder to think of what might have happened except for those dependable 'Eveready' fresh DATED batteries!

(Signed)

C. J. Latimer

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At a warning
movement I
ducked



Portrait of Death

THE letter came air mail special delivery. It was from the Tri-State Construction Company and it asked me to report at once at their Phoenix office. It said that I could go to work as assistant engineer on the Cobalt dam and it named a salary that was twice what I had any reason to expect. In fact, I hadn't even expected a chance at a job and the letter stunned me to such an extent that when Margo asked me what was up I couldn't even frame an answer.

"What is it, Sam?" Margo insisted. "Someone die and leave you a fortune?"

I reached for the telephone and dialed Gwen's number and when I heard her voice on the other end of the wire I stammered out the good news. I was pretty excited. "Here and now," I vowed, "I'm closing up the agency. I'm through with detective work forever."

"Honestly, -Sam?" Gwen asked. "You really mean that?"

Her voice was low and there was a happy tremble in it. I could imagine just how she looked, all flushed and starry-eyed.

"You bet I mean it," I declared. "And besides that, you're going to Arizona

But the shot was low and
it caught me



*The condemned man ate oysters
and talked of art—and murder
was to follow*

By Philip Ketchum

with me. I've got to take along a wife. The letter said so and you're the only prospect on the list."

"I don't like telephone proposals, darling," Gwen answered.

"Then I'll be right out," I told her. "Start packing."

Margo was reading the letter from the Tri-State Construction Company. Margo was about twenty-five, short, freckled, and as level-headed and sensible as they come. She had worked as my secretary, office girl and general assistant since I had first opened the office a couple of years before.

"Just what you wanted, Sam," she nodded. "I'm mighty glad you got it. You've always wanted a chance at an engineering job, haven't you?"

I nodded and reached for my hat, got as far as the door and then stopped and looked around.

"Go ahead," Margo offered. "I'll wind things up."

"What about George?" I demanded. Margo shrugged. "That was a crazy notion I had. Forget it, Sam."

I shook my head. "You really love the punk, don't you?"

Margo didn't make any answer. She didn't have to. I knew that she loved George Acuff and she knew that I knew it.

"I'll go up there with you tomorrow," I said quietly. "I can take a plane West tomorrow night."

A smile came to Margo's face. She said a little hesitantly, "Thanks, Sam."

"I—it's just that I can't help but be worried. I want to get George away from here. You can help me with him."

I wasn't so sure about that, but I nodded. George Acuff was doing time in the big house for larceny. He was due to be released the next day, and the reason Margo was worried was that about two weeks before, on the night of his execution, Fats Melody had chosen George Acuff as the prisoner to whom he said his farewells. That was a custom at the prison. A condemned man was allowed to say goodbye to any prisoner he selected.

The reason Margo was all worked up was that a tip had come to her that perhaps Melody had told George where the loot of a dozen or more big robberies had been hidden. A guard, of course, had been present during the farewell between Acuff and Melody, but prisoners had been known to pass information to each other under the very noses of guards. And it wasn't at all unlikely that if Melody had wanted to give George any such information, he could have managed it. In police circles and the underworld it was rumored that Melody had quite a pile hidden away.

Margo hadn't told me where she got her tip and I hadn't asked her. But one thing was pretty clear. If there was any truth to it, George Acuff was surely heading for trouble when he got outside. The law as well as the underworld would certainly love to lay its hands on Melody's hidden treasure.

I turned all this over in my mind as I hurried out to Gwen's but I didn't think of it very long. After all, I was pulling out. And with Gwen. That is, if she would have me.

THERE wasn't much of a crowd waiting outside the prison walls the next day. A couple of newshawks and

photographers were parked in a car behind mine and there were a few other people standing around, maybe wondering about going through the place. Margo was very tense. She hadn't relaxed a bit on the drive out from the city. I tried to get her mind off the possibility of any trouble. I talked about Gwen and the job out West and even offered to see that George got work if we could get him out there. Now and then Gwen nodded, but most of the time she kept her eyes on the prison gates.

George Acuff came out alone. He was a short, thin fellow, with stooped shoulders and pale, colorless cheeks. Margo got out of the car the minute she saw him and called his name, then she started running toward him. Just as she reached him, a car, crawling up the street, swung into the curb near where they were standing and someone in it rolled down a window and said, "Hey, Acuff, how about a lift?"

I got across the street as fast as I could and said to the driver of the car, "Move on, Buddy. You're blocking traffic."

The driver was a sallow-cheeked youth with sandy hair and a long, hooked nose. He jerked his head around at me as though I had jabbed him with a pin. The man in the back of the car was older, but was just as thin. I thought that it was Leo Rossignal, an attorney who was supposed to have been pretty close to Fats Melody, though some other mouthpiece had defended the murderer. But I wasn't sure. As soon as I spoke the man in the back of the car turned his head away from me and ordered the driver to go on.

I made a note of the car's number as it pulled away, then looked over at George Acuff and Margo. They had their arms around each other and neither one of them acted as though

they had even noticed the car which had stopped. A photographer was snapping a picture. He grinned at me and said, "Nice, huh. Maybe I wouldn't mind doing time myself."

I broke up the clinch and got Acuff and Margo across the street and into my machine. Margo was bawling and there were tears in Acuff's eyes. I felt a little thick in the throat, myself. The car started without any trouble, which was a wonder for it often didn't. I eased it out into the street and started back toward the city, paying close attention to my driving and trying not to listen to what Acuff and Margo were saying to each other. About half way home I came to a place where a detour sign had been placed across the road and I almost turned left as directed. Then I recalled that car at the prison gates and I remembered that there had been no sign of road trouble on the way up. I eased around the detour sign and drove on. The road was clear. There was no indication anywhere as to why a detour was necessary. That gave me more food for thought.

When we were almost home Margo brought up the name of Fats Melody. "Why did he send for you, George?" she demanded. "What did he tell you?"

George Acuff shook his head. "I don't know why he picked me, Margo. He didn't tell me anything."

"He said goodbye to you," Margo pointed out.

"Sure, but . . . well, he didn't say anything special."

"But what did he talk about?"

"About the things he liked. Food and paintings and things like that. It was as funny an experience as anything I've ever had."

"What do you mean, funny?" asked Margo.

"Well," said Acuff, "when I was

taken to his cell he was eating and to begin with it was a funny meal. They say most condemned men ask for turkey or chicken or steak for their last meal. But not Fats Melody. He was eating oysters, dozens of them. He had ordered them fixed every way he knew and for several minutes he talked to me about oysters and how good they were, what a fine food. I—the very sight of them made me sick."

"What else did he talk about?" I put in.

"He talked about where they served them best, named several restaurants. Then he got off on the general subject of beauty and mentioned a painting which he said was the finest painting in the world. I'd never heard of it before."

"What was it?" I demanded.

"*August Sunset*," Acuff answered. "By a man named Pierre Lascalles. He said he would rather own it than anything else in the world. He told me not to hurry through life and miss all its beauties. And all the time he kept gorging himself on oysters."

"That's all?" asked Margo.

Acuff nodded. "Let's forget about Melody. There's so much more we have to talk about."

MARGO seemed relieved. Most of the tension went out of her body. She let her head drop on Acuff's shoulder and Acuff started whispering to her. They didn't seem to give a damn about me being along. I shot a glance at Margo. Her cheeks were flushed and already she looked younger and not at all like the very efficient woman who had worked for me.

In mid-afternoon I pulled into the curb in front of Margo's apartment house and let them out.

"Come on up for a minute, Sam?" Margo invited.

Acuff said: "Sure. Come on up."

I nodded and they both looked disappointed, but I was thinking of that car out at the prison and of the detour sign on the road and of the very curious interview Acuff had had with Fats Melody. "Sure," I agreed. "I'll come up for a minute."

We took the elevator to the third floor and walked back together to Margo's apartment. She unlocked the door and she and Acuff stepped in first. I heard Margo's gasp of astonishment while I was still out in the hall, saw Acuff's body stiffen. Then with one hand curled around the gun in my pocket, I followed them inside. The first man I saw was the sallow-faced youth who had been driving the car out at the prison. He was holding a gun in his hand and seemed pretty nervous. Beyond him was the man who had been in the back seat of the car, Leo Rossignal. The attorney was leaning against the wall over near one of the windows, wholly at ease. He was even smiling.

"Come right in," he invited. "Let's talk it all over."

II

I LOOKED blankly at Rossignal. "Tell that monkey of yours to put up his gun," I suggested. "Guns make me nervous."

Rossignal reached into his breast pocket for a cigarette. He said, "Keep them covered, Jock, especially the tall, skinny guy. His name's Sam Harris and he's pretty fancy with a rod."

"What do you want?" Acuff asked hoarsely.

"Don't you know?" said Rossignal.

Margo pushed forward. Her face was pale and she was trembling. "Get out of here," she ordered. "Get out of here or I'll—I'll call the police."

Rossignal laughed. "Take it easy, sis-

ter. All I want to do is talk to Acuff."

"That why you had the detour sign on the road?" I demanded.

Rossignal looked puzzled, shook his head. He said, "All right, Acuff. Spill it. What did Fats Melody tell you?"

Acuff looked over at me and I nodded. "Go ahead, George. Tell him."

Acuff told his story and I watched Rossignal closely. From his expression I couldn't tell a thing.

"That all?" he demanded when Acuff had finished.

"That's—that's everything he said," Acuff insisted.

"Got it figured out?" I asked quietly.

Rossignal glanced over at me. He had thin, black hair, a high colorless forehead. His face was boney and unpleasant. "You keep out of this, Harris," he said flatly. "I don't think much of you, anyhow."

"The feeling is mutual," I nodded.

Rossignal shrugged. He said, "Let's go, Jock."

"Suppose we take the shamus with us?" Jock suggested.

Rossignal shook his head. He walked past me to the door and stepped outside. Jock followed, still watching me very closely. His eyes were a pale blue, a watery blue.

I slammed the door after them, forced a laugh and said to Margo, "Well, your tip was right. Where did you get it, anyhow?"

"From Ranny Spurgeon," Margo answered.

Ranny Spurgeon was the owner of the Silver Terrace, a night spot south of town. He was a fat, pink-cheeked man who looked as pleasant as Santa Claus. He had a good thing in the Silver Terrace. It was a popular place. And so far as I knew, Ranny kept his nose clean.

"That's all Fats Melody said to me," Acuff muttered. "Honest it is. He didn't

give me any damn message for anyone."

I lit a cigarette and looked over at Acuff and Margo. They were standing close together, holding hands. Both of them looked worried. I said, "All right, Acuff, maybe Melody didn't give you any message but you were the last one to talk to him and a lot of people in this town may have the same notion Rossignol had. Margo's idea is a good one. She wants to get away. If you take my advice you won't lose any time about getting out."

Acuff's lips tightened stubbornly. "To hell with that. I never ran out in my life and I'm not going to run now."

"It's not running away," said Margo. "What have we got here, George? There's nothing to keep us. I always did want to go to the coast. Why not pull out today?"

I finished my cigarette while they argued. Margo, I felt, was bringing George to the point of seeing things like she did. I butted in and told Acuff my plans and finally he agreed to look me up when they reached Phoenix. We left it that way and I headed for home to finish packing. I had reservations on the nine o'clock plane.

GWEN called me at five. She seemed relieved to hear my voice. "I've been worried about you, darling," she said over the wire. "I've been afraid something might happen."

I laughed at her. "Not a chance. I'll be over in an hour with a minister, some rice and a couple of old shoes."

My apartment buzzer started sounding off. I scowled, held my hand over the mouthpiece of the telephone.

"In an hour," said Gwen.

I took my hand off the telephone long enough to whisper goodbye, then hung it up and went over and opened the door.

Nan Binner stood just outside. Nan was the other half of the Fred Binner Detective Agency. She was a tall, sleek brunette with an olive-tinted skin and eyes which sometimes seemed purple. I had often wondered how Fred Binner had managed to get a wife like Nan. She seemed completely out of his class. Fred was short and fat and homely. Nan had the figure of a goddess and the clothes to show it off.

"Going somewhere, Sam?" she asked, looking past me into the apartment.

I nodded. "Pulling out, Nan. You and Fred are too good for me. From now on, the town's yours."

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

Nan came on in. She sat down on the davenport, opened her pocketbook and got out a cigarette. I supplied the match, told her about my offer from the Tri-State Construction Company and mentioned that Gwen was going along with me.

Nan leaned forward. She said, "Sam give us a break. Fred and I have been struggling along for a year. We've been having a hard time but maybe you knew it."

I nodded. No one knew better than I just how tough it was sometimes to make ends meet. "How can I help?" I asked bluntly.

"You went upstate this morning with Margo to meet George Acuff. You drove them back to town."

"So what, Nan?"

"So maybe you heard George Acuff say something about Fats Melody."

"Are you and Fred interested too?"

"One of the places Melody knocked off before he was sent up was the Holtz Jewelry Company. Fred was retained by them to recover the loot. We're still interested.

"Even though you're not definitely sure that Melody did the job."

Nan shrugged her shoulders. "How about it, Sam? What did Acuff have to say?"

"He said that Melody talked about beauty and a picture he loved, a picture named *August Sunset* by Pierre Lascales; that he talked about oysters and how good they were and where to buy them. That's all."

Nan's lips tightened. "I didn't come here to listen to a fairy story. I guess I had you figured wrong, Sam. I went to your office, saw the sign on your door announcing that you were through. I thought you might give a couple of pals a break."

The telephone started jangling. I said, "That wasn't a fairy story, Nan. I told you just what Acuff told me."

"You mean it?"

I nodded, swung around and answered the phone. George Acuff's voice rasped over the wires, "They've got her, Sam! They've got her. She went downstairs to see the janitor about shipping out her trunks and she didn't come back. A minute ago—"

"You're talking about Margo?" I interrupted.

"Yes, Margo."

"She's gone?"

"Kidnapped! Someone just called me up. He said I had half an hour to make up my mind to tell the truth about what Fats Melody told me. He said if I didn't come through it was curtains for Margo."

A note of desperation ran through Acuff's voice. He started to explain about how Margo had gone down to see the apartment house janitor but he became almost incoherent.

"Shut up and sit tight!" I snapped. "I'll be right over. Hold everything until I get there."

WHEN I turned from the telephone I saw that Nan was regarding me curiously.

"What's happened?" she asked.

"Someone else," I said slowly, "wants to know what Fats Melody told Acuff. They've snatched Margo."

"And you're pulling out?" said Nan.

I shook my head. I didn't know what I could tell Gwen, how I could explain things to her, but I knew that I couldn't leave tonight, if what Acuff had said was true. Margo had stuck by me during many a week when I couldn't pay her salary, she had worked overtime so many nights that I could never have counted them. A fellow can't turn his back on a person like that.

"Well?" Nan asked.

I opened my bag and got out my gun, slipped it into my pocket. I dialed Gwen's number and when I heard her voice I said, "Something's come up, Gwen. I—I may be a little late getting out to your place."

"We—we're not going, Sam?" Gwen asked.

"I've got to do something first. Maybe it won't take long."

"But if it does you still have to do it?"

I nodded at the phone. "I still have to do it."

There wasn't any answer for a moment, then Gwen's voice came over the wire. It sounded very tired. All the life and sparkle had gone out of it.

"I was afraid of something like this, Sam. It would always be this way, wouldn't it. I guess we'd better call everything off. It was nice to—to have known you."

Gwen's voice broke on that last sentence. My grip tightened on the phone. I said, "Listen, Gwen, listen! You've got to understand. I—"

And then I slowly lowered the re-

ceiver and turned away for there's no use talking over a line that's gone dead.

Nan Binner came over and put a hand on my shoulder. She said, "Buck up, Sam. Gwen's just disappointed. She's been after you to quit this kind of work for a long time, hasn't she?"

I nodded.

"When she understands what pulled you back it'll be all clear sailing. She'd want you to go ahead. Come on. Let's get over to Margo's apartment. Suppose you and I and Fred tackle this thing together."

I didn't answer her but turned to the door and stepped outside. Nan Binner followed. We went downstairs. She had a car at the curb and drove me over to Margo's apartment. We picked Fred Binner up in the lobby. He didn't seem surprised when we came in. Nan told him what had happened and we went up in the elevator.

"Rossignal," he guessed. "He's been mighty clever in the past but this time he's overstepped himself. I'd like to get that shyser alone in some dark alley."

In spite of the fact that he was short and fat, Fred Binner knew how to take care of himself.

"If it's Rossignal," I said bluntly, "I get first crack at him."

We got out of the elevator and walked down to Margo's apartment. George Acuff opened the door. There was a dazed, anguished expression on his face.

"Have they called again?" I demanded.

Acuff shook his head, turned away. There was a half empty bottle of Scotch on the table. He took a swig, passed the bottle to me. "No, they haven't called. But when they do call, what can I tell them? Melody didn't give me any message. He said just what I told you and that's all."

I sampled the Scotch and handed the bottle to Fred Binner and just then the telephone rang. Acuff jerked around and started for it but I got there first, lifted the receiver to my ear and said, "Hello."

"Don't bother trying to trace this call," said a flat voice. "I'm phoning from a pay station in the depot. Are you ready to talk?"

I said, "Just a minute," and turned to Acuff. "Stall," I whispered to him. "Try to arrange to see the guy. Promise anything."

Acuff nodded and took the phone. He did a good job of stalling, or at least I thought he did but when he hung up and turned around his cheeks were gray.

"Half an hour more," he said huskily. "That's all they gave me. What do I do now?"

III

A SHARP knock on the door punctuated Acuff's question. I swung around that way and jerked the door open. Ranny Spurgeon stepped into the room. The night club owner seemed a little surprised to see me and the Binnners. He looked around and asked, "Where's Margo?"

"Suppose you tell us," I countered.

Spurgeon moistened his lips. "So the buzzards are gathering," he said flatly. "I had heard that Acuff could expect a welcoming committee when he got out but I hadn't included the Binnners or you, Sam Harris."

"To say nothing of yourself," I snapped.

Spurgeon shrugged. "I get mine legally."

"What brought you here?" I demanded.

"Margo."

Acuff pushed forward. "What do you want of Margo?"

"That's my business," Spurgeon replied.

Acuff's fists were knotted. He was breathing heavily. I shoved between him and Spurgeon and said quietly, "Margo's gone. She and Acuff were planning to leave town. She went down to see the janitor about shipping her trunks and someone snatched her. Whoever it was has just given Acuff half an hour to spill the message Melody gave him."

Spurgeon's eyes widened. He whistled softly under his breath and the good-natured expression left his face.

"She told me," I went on, "that you had tipped her off that Acuff might get in trouble when he got out. Where did you get that information?"

"From one of my boys."

"Who?"

Spurgeon shook his head. He said to Acuff, "What did Melody tell you?"

Acuff looked at me and I nodded. "Spill it again. If everyone hears your story maybe someone will figure out what it means."

Acuff drew a deep breath. He told of his visit to Melody in almost the same words he had used when telling Margo and me. Spurgeon listened thoughtfully.

"That all?" he demanded when Acuff had finished.

"That's all," Acuff replied.

Spurgeon nodded, turned to the door but I got in his way. "Not so fast, Ranny," I said bluntly. "Where are you going?"

"You want Margo back, don't you?" Spurgeon asked.

I nodded.

"Then get out of my way. Maybe I know who's got her."

I stepped aside, not sure whether I was doing the right thing or not. Binner shut the door after Spurgeon, then whispered to me, "I'll give him a start, then tail him. If I need help, I'll phone."

That seemed like a good plan. At least it was as good as sitting around here. Binner glanced at Nan but didn't speak to her. He gave Spurgeon time enough to reach the elevator, then slipped outside.

"You think he's in on it?" Nan asked.

I didn't know what to think and said so. Nan lit a cigarette, passed it to me. She glanced over to Acuff who was leaning against the wall.

"I've a notion," I said slowly, "that the reason Melody talked to Acuff instead of someone else was that he knew Acuff was due to get out, and I think maybe if we could find that picture, *August Sunset*, we might be able to figure out Melody's message."

Acuff straightened. He crossed to the table and took another swig of Scotch. I glanced at my watch. It was just six. There was a radio in the room and I switched it on and turned to the station that had a six o'clock newscast. After the war news the broadcaster read a local bulletin that stiffened me like a shot. The words whipped into the room:

"The body of an unidentified young woman was discovered in the yard of a vacant house on West Fairfax Avenue about an hour ago, according to word just received from the police. A junkman first noticed the woman's body when driving down the alley behind the place at about five P.M. He notified police and a squad car was rushed to the scene. The young woman was taken to the City Hospital where doctors report that her condition is serious. She is suffering from brain concussion, and from bruises about the head and body. The police report that she is about twenty-five. She was wearing a plain blue skirt and a blue-and-white checkered waist which were without any identifying marks. . . . Bulletin: London . . ."

The broadcaster shifted back to the war but I didn't hear a word of that London bulletin. Margo was about twenty-five and when I had last seen her she had been wearing a blue skirt and a blue-and-white checkered waist.

George Acuff had jerked around to face the radio. He was breathing heavily and there was a wild expression in his eyes. "Margo!" he said. "Margo!"

I said, "Look here, George. We don't know. . . ."

"It was Rossignal," Acuff grated. "When I get him—"

He whirled and started for the door. I got in his way, tried to stop him, but like a man gone mad his fists lashed out at me. I ducked the first blow, ducked right into the second. It bounced me against the table. I tripped, went down and the corner of a chair caught me in the side of the head as I fell. I was probably out cold even before the floor came up and smacked me.

I WASN'T unconscious very long. The telephone bell roused me. I sat up, groaned, felt of the lump on the side of my head. It was as big as an egg and mighty tender and my head throbbed as though a dozen devils were working on it with hammers. The telephone went on ringing. I got up, managed to reach it and mumble an answer.

"It's Nan Binner," said the voice on the other end of the wire. "I'm phoning you from a drugstore near Mr. Rossignal's."

That statement and the breathless quality of Nan's voice helped clear my head. "What are you doing there?" I demanded.

"I followed George Acuff here. I caught him outside the apartment after he knocked you down but he wouldn't listen to me. I followed him over here. He rang the bell but there wasn't any

answer. A minute ago he broke in the house through a side window."

"What's the address?" I demanded.

Nan gave it to me. Rossignal's house was scarcely six blocks away. I didn't like to think of what might be happening there. Acuff had seemed like a crazy man when he left this apartment, but murder, no matter how you may justify it, is still murder. The notion came to me to call the police but I had an idea I could beat them over there.

"Meet me outside?" I shouted into the phone. "I'll get there as quick as I can."

I ran most of the way. I was still a little lightheaded and the people I passed may have wondered what was after me but I gave them little thought. Nan was waiting across the street from the address she had given. She looked frightened.

"I thought I heard a shot a minute ago," she whispered.

I looked over at the house. It was an old place, on the corner. There was a hedge around it. The city won't let you plant a hedge around your house nowadays, but this hedge had been where it was for a long time and it gave the place enough privacy so that Acuff might have gone through a window without attracting much attention.

"No one's come out?" I demanded.

"Not this way," said Nan.

We crossed the street and went up to the front door. I tried it but it was locked. The bell didn't get any answer. Nan showed me the window Acuff had entered and I went in that way. It was much darker in the room than outside, but I could still see the figure sprawled face down over near the table. I clicked on the lights, but I really didn't need them to know that it was George Acuff who lay there. He had been shot through the side of the head, just above

the car. The wound was still bleeding.

"What happened?" Nan called from outside the window.

I turned that way and said to her, "You wouldn't want to see it. Wait there for me."

"He got him?" Nan breathed.

I didn't bother to answer. A picture frame over in the corner of the room had attracted my attention. I went over and picked it up. The frame was of heavy, ornamental wood. The picture it had held had been cut out. I made a quick search of Acuff's body but the missing picture wasn't on him.

The back door to the house wasn't locked and I went out that way, still with the picture frame. When Nan saw what I was carrying, she stiffened.

"The picture," she said huskily. "He got it."

I nodded, wished that I had a drink, started searching my pockets for a cigarette. I didn't find one.

"He must have gone out the back way," said Nan. "Should we call the police?"

"It's George Acuff in there," I said flatly. "Not Rossignal. There's a bullet through the side of his head."

Nan caught her breath. "Acuff!"

I THOUGHT of Margo lying near death in the hospital, of George Acuff sprawled out on his face in Rossignal's house. I thought of the way those two had acted when they had met outside the prison gates just a few hours before. I felt pretty bitter at that moment.

"Then it's Rossignal who got the picture," Nan said slowly.

I hung the frame over my shoulder and walked out to the street, looked around for a place where I could buy some cigarettes. I didn't see one. Nan got out a package and gave me one.

"There'll be fingerprints on that frame, won't there?" she suggested.

I nodded. I knew what the police would say to me if they discovered I had taken something from the room where Acuff's body lay, but that wasn't bothering me just then. We turned down the street and on the boulevard I hailed a taxi.

They wouldn't let me see Margo at the hospital. They told me that her condition was just the same, that she had a fighting chance to recover. I had a feeling that they were just letting me down easy but there wasn't anything I could do to help her.

"You need a drink, Sam," Nan said to me when I got back to the taxi.

I agreed and we went to her place. Fred was there, biting his nails and pacing up and down. He said that he had followed Spurgeon half way across town, then had lost him in some heavy traffic. Nan mixed some drinks and told Fred what had happened to Acuff and the two of them discussed the case for a while.

A couple of drinks didn't make me feel any better. My watch showed me that it was just seven. I knew that I could still make the plane for Phoenix, if I just let things go, but I knew something else, too. Even for the chief engineer's job, I couldn't head West that night.

"I'm going after Rossignal," Binner decided abruptly. "I'm going to get that picture. Want to come along, Sam?"

I nodded, picked up the empty frame and we went outside. We spent two hours hunting for Rossignal but didn't find him. The nine o'clock newscast told us why. An hour before Rossignal's body had been fished out of the river. He had been killed by a heavy blow on the back of the head and for good measure there were four slugs in his chest.

IV

ANTON GAUSS was the proprietor of an art shop on the fringe of the business district. I went to see him early the next morning and asked him if he could tell me anything about a painter named Pierre Lascalles. He couldn't. I asked him about a painting named *August Sunset*. He had never heard of it. To be on the safe side he looked through a bunch of catalogues, but could find no reference either to the painter or the picture. He wanted to show me some other landscapes he had for sale but I got away without having to see them.

The morning papers reported the deaths of George Acuff and Leo Rossignal. Both cases were shrouded in mystery. The police connected them, because Acuff's body had been found in Rossignal's home, but the newspapers were very vague as to the possible explanation. A smaller item in the papers stated that Margo's condition was still the same. The girl had not recovered consciousness.

But the police knew more than the newspapers indicated. The night before, Detective Mike Tomassi had called on me and had asked a lot of questions. He knew that I had driven Margo up to the state prison to pick up Acuff and he wondered what Acuff had had to say about his visit with Fats Melody. I told Tomassi what Acuff had told me but Tomassi apparently couldn't make anything out of the mess either.

Ranny Spurgeon lived in an apartment hotel on the river drive. I got past the desk and knocked on his door at about eleven. Spurgeon was just finishing breakfast. He had on a crimson bath robe and was freshly shaved, and he nodded as though he had been expecting me.

"Nice morning," he suggested. "Join me in a cup of coffee."

I took one, black, and lit a cigarette to go with it. "Seen the paper?" I asked. Spurgeon shook his head. "Only war news. I never read it."

"There were a couple local items in it this morning," I announced. "I think they would have interested you."

Spurgeon lit a fat cigar, poured fresh coffee for himself. He had a nice apartment. The furnishings were all new and looked expensive.

"They pulled Rossignal's body out of the river last night," I went on. "He had been smashed over the head and had four slugs in his chest."

"Yeah," said Spurgeon. "Well, maybe the town's better off than it was."

"Acuff was killed, too," I mentioned. "His body was found in Rossignal's home."

Spurgeon shrugged. "Why tell me?"

"You seemed interested enough in Acuff yesterday," I mentioned.

Spurgeon shook his head. "You're wrong, Harris. I was interested in helping Margo out of a mess. She's a nice kid. Much too nice for a chap like Acuff. I had heard that someone might be laying for Acuff when he got out, anxious to learn what Melody had told him. I didn't want Margo mixed up in any trouble."

"So it's that way, huh?"

"You asked me."

"When you heard Margo had been snatched you went after Rossignal."

Spurgeon stood up. He said, "Look here, Harris. I've kept out of trouble in this town by minding my own business. As close as I ever came to poking my nose into other people's affairs was when I came over to Margo's the other evening. When I left I'll admit I meant to go after Rossignal but within a few minutes I heard the news broadcast and

learned that she had been found. I don't care who got Rossignal. He had it coming, anyhow."

"And the picture?"

"What picture?"

"*August Sunset*. The picture Melody mentioned."

"What about it?"

"I thought you might have it. I found the empty frame in Rossignal's home."

Spurgeon shrugged. "I told you I made my money legally. I'm not interested in Melody's hidden loot. Anything else?"

I shook my head, finished my coffee and stood up.

"Acuff was a weak sister," Spurgeon muttered. "What happened to him may go hard on Margo, but she's better off for it."

DOWNSTAIRS I ran into Fred Binner. He was talking to the girl on the desk and seemed startled when I came up.

"I guess we had the same idea, didn't we," he suggested.

I nodded and told him of my interview with Ranny Spurgeon.

"Think he was telling the truth?" Binner asked.

I didn't know. Spurgeon had seemed to be telling the truth but if he really had killed Rossignal I could hardly have expected him to admit it.

"Someone got that picture," said Binner. "It wasn't Acuff, for he's dead. It wasn't Rossignal, for he's dead, too. That doesn't leave anyone else but Spurgeon"

"Or you or me," I added.

Binner laughed. "Yeah. You or me. But if either one of us had it we wouldn't be interested in Spurgeon."

There didn't seem to be any answer to that. I told Binner that I had to be

running along and I went outside and crossed over to the parkway along the river. I found a bench, sat down and tried to figure things out but I couldn't keep my mind on the problem. I kept thinking that by now I ought to be in Phoenix with Gwen. I had called Gwen that morning but hadn't got any answer. Somehow or other I knew that I wouldn't ever get any answer when I tried to call her. On half a dozen other occasions I had promised Gwen to quit detective work and start in at anything I could get in the engineering line, only something had always come up to stand in the way, just as this time. I couldn't blame her for being through with me but I still didn't feel very good about it.

I called at the hospital at noon but still couldn't see Margo. Spurgeon was there, talking to one of the doctors. He nodded to me, drew me aside.

"Dr. Blake," he stated, "advises an operation. Margo doesn't have any people. I told Blake to go ahead, said that I would stand the expense. Any objections?"

I shook my head. "None excepting that I will foot the bill. She worked for me, Spurgeon."

"It's quite expensive, Harris."

"What do I care."

Spurgeon drew a cigarette out of his pocket, frowned at it and put it back.

"What am I supposed to make out of this?" I demanded. "Is it for effect that you are making that offer, or are you in love with Margo?"

Spurgeon flushed. "I ought to slap you down for that, Harris. Someday I will."

I didn't say anything more. Spurgeon turned back and talked to the doctor for a while and then left without a glance in my direction. I stared after the man, distinctly puzzled. Somehow or

other I couldn't imagine that he was in love with Margo, yet I didn't know. Margo had spoken of him several times during the past year but only casually. She hadn't ever indicated that Spurgeon was interested in her.

I had wired the Tri-State Construction Company the night before, asking a couple days to close up my business affairs here. The notion that an answer might be awaiting me at my apartment was responsible for my decision to return home. I took a cab from the hospital to the place where I lived. There wasn't any wire in my box. I went upstairs, unlocked my door and stepped inside. The place was a mess. It looked as though half a dozen cyclones had been holding a convention there. The rugs were rolled up, the overstuffed furniture was hacked to pieces, my bags had been unpacked and their contents were piled out on the floor.

The bedroom was as badly messed up as the parlor and the kitchen was worse. It would have taken a long time to check things to see what was missing but my thoughts went at once to the picture frame I had brought from Rossignal's home. I had set it in the clothes closet. It was still there. Whoever had searched my room, then, hadn't been after the picture frame, for a novice couldn't have missed it.

I telephoned the janitor and he told me that some man had called for my bags and that he had unlocked the room for him. He couldn't give a good description of the man, but from what he said I knew that it hadn't been Spurgeon. Spurgeon was too big to have avoided special notice. Anyhow, Spurgeon wouldn't do a job like that himself. He would hire it done.

After thinking things over for a while I called the janitor again. "Listen," I said, "was this chap who

called for my bags a short fellow, light-haired, plump?"

"That was him, Mr. Harris," said the janitor. "I—I hope I didn't do wrong to let him in?"

I grunted and turned away from the telephone. Fred Binner was short, light-haired and plump. Yet why would Fred Binner have been searching my apartment? I got to thinking about Binner and the more I thought the more puzzled I got. Binner was pressed for money, of course. With a wife like Nan he couldn't help but be broke most of the time. As a wild guess, it was entirely possible that he might have kidnapped Margo, that he might not have followed Spurgeon when Spurgeon left Margo's apartment the night before but that instead he had hung around outside and followed Acuff when he left. If that were true, it might have been Binner who entered Rossignal's home, killed Acuff and escaped with the missing picture.

That didn't fit, of course, with the notion that Binner had just searched my place. But it might not have been Binner who had searched my apartment. It might have been one of Spurgeon's men.

I LEFT my apartment and walked over past Rossignal's house, caught a cab and rode back to the hospital. The doctors told me that there was a slight improvement in Margo's condition. One of them said, "A Mr. Binner has just been here. He wants to be notified as soon as she is able to talk. Is he a relative?"

I shook my head.

"Is he connected with the police?"

I wondered if Fred Binner wanted to hear what Margo had to say or if he wanted to be sure she didn't say anything.

"Binner has no connection with the police," I stated bluntly. "And neither does Spurgeon who was here this morning. As soon as Margo is able to talk, you call Detective Tomassi. Play it safe."

"Sam," said a voice at my shoulder.

I jerked around. There with an armful of flowers stood Gwen Nelson. There were tears in her eyes but she was trying to smile.

"I—I didn't understand last night," she said softly. "But when I read what had happened to Margo I knew why you had to put things off."

In spite of the people standing around I swept her into my arms. The flowers, meant for Margo, were damaged a little, but I didn't care at all about that.

"This is almost finished," I whispered into Gwen's ear. "And this is my last case. Honestly, my last."

"All right, darling, I believe you; I shouldn't have doubted you."

We left the hospital together and I told Gwen all that had happened. We sat in her car out in front. I saw Tomassi enter the hospital and I wondered if he had been sent for, but I didn't bother to call him.

Gwen dropped me downtown. I told her that I was going to the police with my story, that I would let them clean up the case. But I wasn't quite ready for that. As soon as she drove off I headed for Fred Binner's apartment. I didn't announce myself but took the elevator up to his floor and moved quietly down to the apartment door. Before trying it I examined my gun, then I knocked. The door was unlatched. I pushed it open. The first person I saw was Ranny Spurgeon. He was bending over a silent figure on the floor, the figure of Nan Binner. Fred Binner lay on his face over near the wall. He looked

as though he might have been asleep. He was. Asleep forever. A soggy pool of blood had soaked into the carpet under his head.

Spurgeon had jerked around as I entered. His face was ghastly. His jaw moved up and down as though he were trying to speak, but no words came from his throat.

"Steady, Spurgeon," I said flatly. "Mover over to the wall and keep your hands in plain sight."

"I—I didn't do this, Harris," Spurgeon gasped. "I walked in on it—just like you."

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Nan Binner's arm twitch. Her lips parted and a groan escaped from them. The side of her head was bloody.

I made Spurgeon turn around and I searched him for a gun. He didn't have one. I ordered him to call a doctor and while he was doing that I knelt down at Nan's side. There was a bullet gash across her temple but it wasn't bleeding much. I did the best first aid job I could, then turned my attention to Fred Binner. He was lying across a rolled up canvas. I drew it from under him, spread it out and stared at the painting. From its size I knew that this was the picture which had been cut from the frame in Rossignal's house and I expected it to be the picture, *August Sunset* by Pierre Lascalles. It wasn't. It was a copy and not a very good copy of Gainsborough's *Blue Boy*.

For several minutes I studied that picture, or rather I stood there looking at it but not thinking about it at all. Spurgeon finished his telephone call to the doctor and started explaining that Nan Binner had called him and asked him to come over here but I didn't pay much attention to him.

After a while I turned to the telephone and called Detective Tomassi.

V

MIKE TOMASSI, in spite of his name, was a dour Scotchman. He had a square, rugged face and sharp, dark eyes. He didn't talk a great deal. To most people he might have seemed pretty dumb, but he was really about as clever as they come. He was unlike most detectives that I knew in that he didn't give a damn about getting his name or picture in the paper.

I met him in the hall outside the apartment and told him about Nan and Fred Binner and Spurgeon. I showed him the picture and said that it had come from the frame in Rossignol's house.

"That's what everyone was after, isn't it?" he demanded.

I said it was.

"How do you know?" he snapped.

"Send for the frame," I suggested. "It's in my apartment."

I gave him my key and Tomassi sent a man after the frame. Then we went inside. Spurgeon was sitting in a chair near the window. He didn't look very happy. The doctor was bandaging Nan's head. She was lying on the davenport. I had covered Fred's body with a sheet.

Crossing over to the davenport I took Nan's hand, smiled at her and said quietly, "Feel like talking, Nan? Can you tell me what happened?"

Nan bit her lips. She was very pale. "What difference does it make now?" she asked flatly. "Fred's—Fred's . . ." She couldn't seem to finish the sentence.

"You've got to face it, Nan," I insisted. "Just tell me what happened."

Nan Binner swallowed, closed her eyes. "I had been down to the office," she said slowly. "I came home, about three, I guess. I was out in the hall when I heard a shot. The apartment

wasn't locked. I opened the door, saw Fred on the floor, rushed in and knelt at his side. Then I heard a sound behind me. I jerked around. A gun went off almost in my face. That's—that's all I remember."

"You didn't see the man?"

"No, I—I just caught a glimpse of him. Then there was a flash and after that . . ."

"Did you call Ranny Spurgeon and ask him to come over here?"

"No."

I glanced at Spurgeon. His face was flushed. "That's a damn lie," he said bluntly.

"Tomassi," I asked, "has Margo been able to talk? Is she still unconscious?"

Tomassi shook his head. "I've talked to her, Sam."

"Did she name the men who kidnapped her?"

"The man," Tomassi corrected. "And it wasn't a kidnapping."

I nodded. "She named George Acuff, didn't she?"

Tomassi got out his pipe. "That answer's right, Sam. Do you have all the others?"

I thought I did. Everything had seemed to click into place when I stared at that painting I had found under Fred Binner's body.

"Acuff," I said slowly, "was the last man to talk to Melody, but he lied to us about what Melody said. Like most liars, he stuck as close to the truth as he could. Melody must have named Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* as the clue to his hidden loot but Acuff invented another picture and artist. All the time he meant to get the *Blue Boy* for himself and from it to solve the riddle. When Margo and I tried to talk him into leaving town, he agreed, then he took her out to that vacant house and

struck her over the head. He probably thought he had killed her, but he reported her as having been kidnapped. Someone helped him out on those telephone calls but they weren't important. What was important was that the faked kidnapping gave Acuff an excuse to break into Rossignal's home and steal this canvas."

"Who killed Acuff?" Tomassi asked. "Rossignal?"

I shook my head. "Let's take this as it happened. While the Binnings and Acuff and I were in Margo's apartment, waiting for a call about Margo, Ranny Spurgeon showed up. When he heard Margo had been kidnapped he left again. Fred Binner tried to follow him but lost him. And maybe it's lucky he did, for Spurgeon found Rossignal and killed him. Didn't you, Spurgeon?"

"Another lie," snapped Spurgeon. "Where's your proof?"

I shrugged. "I don't have any, Ranny, and I'm not interested in the proof. If Tomassi wants to go after you for Rossignal's death, that's up to him. I'm only fitting the pieces of this puzzle together."

"Why the hell would I kill Rossignal?" Spurgeon asked.

"You had the finest motive in the world," I replied. "You heard that six o'clock radio broadcast describing the discovery of the body of an unidentified girl. You guessed it was Margo and you thought Rossignal had killed her for you knew Rossignal was after the Melody loot. You love Margo. You killed the man you thought had killed her."

Spurgeon bit his lips, shook his head.

"Now about Acuff," I went on. "When he heard that newscast he acted like he was supposed to act. He slugged me, knocked me out, and started for Rossignal's, really after the picture, although he wanted Nan Binner and I

to think he was after Rossignal. Nan followed him. There was no one at Rossignal's and Acuff had no trouble in getting in and cutting the picture out of the frame. Before he could escape with it, however, he was murdered."

"By whom?" Tomassi growled.

"By Nan Binner," I answered.

Nan caught her breath, sat up. "But—but I—"

"You called me, I know," I admitted.

"You said you were calling from a drugstore within three blocks of the place where Rossignal lived. I checked that this afternoon. I remembered that the other night I was out of cigarettes and that I looked around for a place near there to buy some. There wasn't a store in sight. You made the phone call to me, of course, from Rossignal's house, just after you had shot Acuff."

NAN wiped a hand over her face. She looked a little dazed. I moved away from her, stared at Tomassi. "Here's the rest of the story. I met Fred Binner this morning and we decided that either he or I or Spurgeon must have taken the picture. That must have set Binner to thinking. He went to my place, searched it, then probably came here. And when he walked in he must have found Nan studying the picture, trying to puzzle it out. Once he knew she had it, he must have known that she had killed Acuff. Fred Binner was square. Under the circumstances, I don't know what he would eventually have done. We'll never know. He didn't move fast enough. Nan shot him before he could take any action at all. She then wounded herself and framed up the story she told. To make it better, she called Spurgeon to come over here. That would complicate things a little. Maybe she thought she could pin Fred's death on him. I don't know."

Tomassi sucked noisily on his pipe. "A paraffin test of her hands will back me up if I'm right," I suggested.

Nan was sitting up. The muscles of her face were twitching spasmodically. Her hands suddenly shot down between the pillows on the davenport and came up with a gun. Tomassi yelled a warning and threw himself forward. I ducked, but the bullet was low. It got me in the hip.

There was a grim satisfaction in Tomassi's attitude as he slapped the bracelets on Nan Binner's wrists. To him, a killer was a killer and sex didn't make any difference.

"Now what about Spurgeon?" Tomassi asked.

I shrugged. The doctor was working on my leg. "That's up to you, Mike. Maybe you can pin the Rossignol killing on him. Maybe not. If you don't, maybe he can make things easier for Margo. She faces a pretty tough time."

"I'll pin it on him," Tomassi said.

Spurgeon laughed. "You'd better let well enough alone, Tomassi." But Spurgeon's laugh wasn't very hearty.

The policeman Tomassi had sent for the picture frame brought it in. Tomassi took it. He held the *Blue Boy* up to the frame. It just fit. Then he laid the frame aside to study the picture.

"You won't find the answer there,"

I told him. "If it had been in the picture, Nan Binner would have figured it out."

Tomassi said: "What do you mean?"

"According to Acuff's story, and I think this part of it was true, Melody was eating oysters for his final meal. Oysters suggest pearls and oysters are in shells. Hand me the frame."

The detective gave me the frame and I broke it apart. It was a thick frame but the wood had been hollowed out and inside it were some of the finest pearls I have ever seen, as well as a handful of diamonds and several wads of bills.

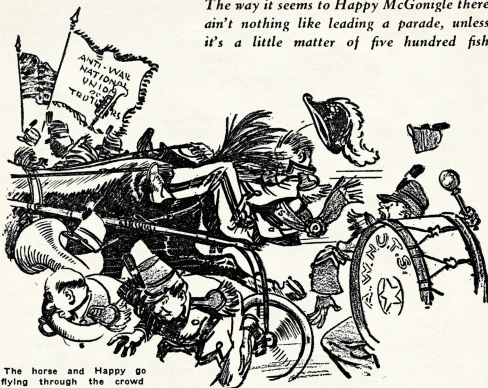
Tomassi didn't even get excited. He looked the stuff over, nodded and said, "There's a reward out on some of this stuff, Sam. I'll see that you get it."

That was good news. I had a feeling that no matter what the Tri-State people said in answer to my wire, it would be some time before I would be able to handle an engineer's job. Then the notion struck me that maybe if Gwen and I got married right away, she would have a lot more time to work on me about quitting the private agency racket.

The doctor started talking about taking me to a hospital but I vetoed the suggestion. "Help me over to the telephone," I insisted. "I feel a proposal coming on."



The way it seems to Happy McGonigle there ain't nothing like leading a parade, unless it's a little matter of five hundred fish



The horse and Happy go flying through the crowd again

Grand Marshal McGonigle

By Paul Allenby

I AM just after buying a horse, Blackie," Happy McGonigle says to me this day.

I am busy with my racing form and I do not pay particular attention to what he is saying, so I say: "That is very nice indeed, but do not bother me, I—" Then I get it.

"A horse?" I ask. "A oat-eater? For why, for cripes sake?"

"I got a idea," he says. He smiles and he gives me a look which is genuine Fu Manchu, but I am not having any mystery today, thank you.

I ignore the look, and I say sarcas-

tically: "Well, there has always got to be a first time, Happy, and a idea is a idea, indeed, even coming from you—but why a horse, if you do not mind my wondering?"

"Oh, not at all, Blackie," he says, "I do not mind your asking me that question. I am going to tell you anyhow. We do not have secrets betwixt us."

I let that go and I say: "It is very big of you, Happy, to feel that way—but let me get this straight right off the bat, I do not want to share a horse with you!"

He smiles and he shakes his head and says: "You do not have to do anything

at all, Blackie, about the horse—except maybe laugh when the time comes.”

“When the time comes? Okay I shall ask the question you want me to: when is this time and why do I have to laugh?”

“Oh, you will laugh all right. It will be very funny. And a very good joke.”

“Okay,” I say, “the build-up is terrific, now give it to me slow and easy.”

“Well, Blackie,” he says, “I read somewhere about a lug who plays a very funny trick on the people of the horse show and—”

“Do you mean to stand there with your face wide open and tell me you have just bought a goat to put in the horse show?” I interrupt with.

“Do not interrupt me, please, Blackie,” Happy says. “I shall go on. This funny citizen buys a milk-wagon horse. He feeds it very well, indeed, and when the time comes, he puts it in the horse show under a alias, and what do you think happens?”

I know the story so I spoil the ending for him. I say: “The horse wins a prize. The newspapers find out it is a plain milk-wagon joke and everybody laughs but the people of the horse show—and I do not think it very funny, even now.”

Happy gives me a look like a baby who has just had his bottle taken away from him, and says: “You spoil it, Blackie, but that is indeed the case, and that is why I am going to do the same thing. That is why I am after buying the horse, and I think it is very funny indeed, no matter what.”

I am always very patient with my dim-wit pal, Happy McGonigle. I do not like to spoil his fun, but I cannot help but point out to him some very important points about why we, or he because I do not want any part of it, cannot get away with this thing he plans.

I say: “If you decide to put stink-bombs in the City Council’s meeting, or if you decide to put itching powder on the police blotter, I do not interfere with such childish enjoyments, Happy. But I do not think you, or anybody else short five million bucks, can get away with this thing.”

“Oh, it is not a question of money, Blackie,” he says. “I only pay a hundred bucks for the horse, and it does not cost very much to feed him.”

“I do not mean that, Happy,” I say, “but the lug who pulled that trick the first time had a lot of dough and he could afford to be funny. You, Happy McGonigle, cannot afford it at all, see what I mean?”

By the look on his puss, I am sure he does not see, does not care, and I am not going to talk him out of this thing which will probably see him in the can before he is past his first titter.

I let the matter drop then, and I hope for the best indeed.

THIS horse which Happy buys is not a very bad looking animal when I see it on a farm upstate where Happy is fattening it up for the big moment. It is not a very large animal and, in its day, maybe it was a very good oat-eater, but it is still all milk-wagon and a yard wide, so to speak. Only Happy tells me he has bought it from a junk dealer who tells the big dope it is once a very good racing horse. Happy believes it, naturally, which to him makes the joke he is about to pull indeed funnier. I still think it is a joke which is going to lay a very big egg.

I make several trips to this small town where the horse is being given his beauty treatment and I find it is a town where people go nuts twice a year over horse and buggy racing. They call it trotting and pacing and I understand it

is very interesting indeed but I do not have my mind on such things at the moment. Happy, I see, is very interested and he hangs around the barns where the horses is kept and talks to the handlers and lugs who know these buggy goats.

My mind is busy figuring what I can do to put a stop to this great practical joke Happy is intent on pulling and as the day draws closer and closer I am as yet no place. It looks as though this is one time I can do nothing to save Happy, which makes me very sad indeed.

But my mind is given a rest when we go to the races up there one day. . . . I try my luck against these bookies. I do very well. It is very new to me and a little silly but a bookie is a bookie and a horse is a horse and betting is in my blood—so I win a little, lose a little, but I come out of it very solvent.

Happy explains to me what it is all about as we watch the first race, which the yokels call a heat. The horses do not line up like in running races, but they are spread out four apiece: four in the first line, four in the second, and four in the third line and there is a lot of rigamarole about the start.

They make an even dozen starts before it is okay with a citizen with a bell up in the judges stand and the word "Go" is yelled out. In the meantime, before the horses finally get going, they come up the track, as I say, a dozen times and then the guy gives them the bell and they turn around and come back to start all over again—in that time, the bookies are making interest on your dough.

Happy explains to me that this business of starting down the track slow-like at first is the first part of what they call scoring, which is nothing more than a running start to me. When they are all

lined up okay, then the guy gives them the go and they're off and you start earning hopes on your dough.

There is no jockeys, as maybe you know, but several guys with long beards weighing two hundred pounds sit in little two-wheel buggies behind the horse and get the ride of their life. It is not everybody that can be a driver, Happy tells me, and not every horse can be a pacer or a trotter.

I do not care at all as long as they run and I can bet. I do not know one horse from the other but Happy digs up a lug with a long white beard who knows the ABC's of this racket and we do all right, as I say before.

Well, we come back to the city, after Happy has made arrangements about shipping his oat-eater to Madison Square Garden where the horse show is to be, and I am several bucks richer but I do not know much more about trotting and pacing than when I go up there in the first place. I am back with my problem of keeping my pal of long years' standing, Happy McGonigle, out of the can.

The next day it is too late to do anything. Happy leaves me in our room at the Oasis Hotel all decked out like he reads a horse-shower should be and I am all wrapped up in a mental fog which is very thick no matter how you slice it. I wish him well.

"Let me know when visitors' day is, Happy," I say, sadly, "and I shall bring you cake and pie and ice cream and stuff and maybe a bottle of rye if I can smuggle it in."

"The trouble with you, Blackie," he says, giving me a smile, "you are a pessimist. The world appreciates a good joke and this will be a good one, I tell you."

I shake my head. "Happy," I say, "I am indeed a pessimist, as you say, and

maybe the world does appreciate a good joke—the first time. Goodbye and give my best regards to Sergeant Moran when you see him.”

“If he is at the horse show, I shall see him and I shall give your regards.”

“He may not be at the horse show, Happy,” I say, “but nevertheless, you will see him, I am sure.”

I DO not need to go into details about that which happens at Madison Square Garden that night. You have read it in the papers, I am sure, and you know that Happy McGonigle and his horse are concurrently and bodily tossed out on their collective ears in the first round of the horse show.

It seems that the citizens in charge of the horse show do not appreciate the joke and are not the same chumps who got fooled many years ago when that lug Happy read about pulled the trick the first time. They do not waste words nor time—but take one look at the horse, another look at Happy McGonigle and they give both the gong.

I bail Happy out and say hello to Sergeant Moran on my way out and I make arrangements also to have the horse Happy is stuck with taken care of in one of the horse stables in town. In all it costs a hundred bucks and that makes two hundred which this big joke of Happy's costs our partnership.

I do not say a thing to Happy when we get back to the hotel and he is very sheepish and he mumbles he is sorry and all that. I do not rub it in. It will do no good.

After a while, I ask: “Well, Happy, you have your fun. Now what do we do with this horse? Do we give him back to the junk dealer, or have you some more very bright ideas by which you can become the Jack Benny of the horse world?”

He shakes his head and I can see he does not have any ideas about his horse, or anything. I pour him a drink, take two quick ones myself, when the phone rings. It is for Happy.

I pay no attention to what he says on the phone, but when he hangs it up, he is excited, I can see, and his moon face is beaming. I do not need to ask why; he tells me:

“I am indeed very lucky, Blackie,” he says, all agog. “A very nice gentleman on the phone wants me to lead a parade.”

I groan. Parades, yet! “I do not care what he wants you to do, Happy McGonigle,” I say, “but you are not going to get within ten miles of that horse again, no matter what!”

“Oh, but this is different, Blackie!” he says. “It is for a very patriotic cause.”

“Patriotic cause! I know. We get into something like that once before and we come out of it very close, otherwise we would be now numbers in Atlanta.”

“Well, we come out of it, didn't we? And this is nothing like that, Blackie. This is a very good thing to do and it is legitimate.”

“Well, I will listen,” I say, “but I am against it, no matter what, on general principles.”

He gives and it seems harmless indeed. The gent on the phone is Mr. Junius F. Spencer and he is president of the Anti-War National Union of Truth Seekers, and he wants Happy and his horse to lead a big parade on May Day.

“And why does he pick on you?” I ask.

“Oh, he reads about me in the papers and he figures I am a public figure and just the guy to lead this parade. It is a very important movement, Blackie. These citizens is against war and propaganda which is leading this United

States into war one of these days maybe. The parade is a protest against anything like that happening. I am very proud indeed to lend a hand for such a good cause. What the hell are you laughing at?"

While he is talking a very funny idea hits me and I start to laugh as he is half-way through this very pretty and silly speech of his. I cannot answer him right away because I am laughing so hard, but I manage to get it out, finally:

"I do not know whether it is a good cause or not, but if you will put the initials of the organization together, I am sure you will get a pretty good idea about what I think about it, Happy."

He looks at me as if I have two heads and he thinks a minute, and finally he gets it—but he is short on a sense of humor this day, because he says:

"I do not think that is funny at all, Blackie Roberts. These are very serious and sincere citizens and only a lug with a mind like yours would see anything funny in the initials, A. W. N. U. T. S."

I can say nothing back at him, I am laughing so hard still. I manage to squeak out: "Aw, nuts!"

Happy McGonigle slams out of our hotel room, on his way to talk things over with Mr. Junius F. Spencer of the Anti-War National Union of Truth Seekers.

I DO not object to this parade thing when Happy comes back on the subject that night, especially after he tells me that the organization will give him one hundred bucks for the use of his body and horse.

I am wondering about one point, though, so I ask: "Have you ever been a gentleman jockey, Happy?"

He looks at me as if he does not understand, so I go on: "I mean have you ever ridden a horse?"

He shakes his head. "No, I never think of that."

I smile. "Well, maybe it will be a good idea if you see whether maybe you and your horse are compatible, as they say in the divorce courts."

We go to the stable where Happy's oat-eater is and we have the flunky bring him out. The horse is very frisky and I can see he is having no bad effects because the horse-show people did not think he was a leading contender for Mickey Mouse honors. I can see also that Happy is a little afraid of him, and from the way this goat tries to step on our toes all the time, I can see also indeed that he knows we are afraid of him.

We hire a saddle and the man puts it on the horse finally. The goat does not seem to like it, but the man gets it on tight and the big moment is about to break.

Happy stays on top that horse four seconds by anybody's watch. The horse gives one buck and Happy lands six feet away on his neck and general epidermis. It is very apparent indeed that Happy McGonigle is not going to ride this horse in any parade. Tom Mix maybe could do it, but from the look on Happy's face, I am sure he can never become a bronco buster.

On our way home—we take a cab and Happy tells the driver to take the bumps easy—we consider the problem of how Happy is to lead the parade for the AWNUTS when it is not possible for him to sit on that horse, even with chains.

I make a suggestion which is on the right track later. "Why do you not buy the junk man's wagon and lead the parade in that manner?" I ask.

Happy shakes his head. "That would not be dignified, Blackie."

I look at him. Dignity, he wants—

with his figure, no less. "Well, how about a milk-wagon, then? Maybe he is a soul-mate with a milk-wagon, maybe."

Happy looks very hurt indeed. He says: "I do not intend to turn a very serious affair into a travesty."

"My, my grandma, such big words you find. Well, you cannot ride this goat, so you have got to have it pull you, or something very like that. Or maybe you would like to pull the horse—that would be different?"

"You are not taking the right attitude on this thing, Blackie," he says, getting sore. "I wish you wouldn't make fun. After all, I need not point out again that there is a matter of a hundred bucks—"

I cut out the clowning. A hundred bucks is a serious matter indeed. I shut my yap and I start thinking.

All of a sudden I get the big idea. "I got it, Happy," I say. "Why not use one of those buggies which they use in those trotting races we see upstate? They is dignified, I am sure."

He likes that, I can see. "That is *it*! I shall get me one of those. I am always wanting to see could I maybe ride in one of those—but, Blackie, maybe the horse does not like that sort of a thing. Maybe he will not pull it."

"It would appear to me," I say, "that the goat should be delighted indeed to pull such a vehicle after lugging a junk wagon behind him all these years. It is a step up—maybe you can reason with him about it."

Happy gives me a look to see if I am kidding, but I am as serious as a parson looking at a lead quarter in the collection plate. I have a mental snapshot of Happy talking turkey to his horse, but I do not let him see how funny that appears to me.

He leaves then to buy himself a sulky,

which is the name they give to these two-wheeled wagons in trotting races, and to have a man-to-man talk with his horse. I have a little work to do on the racing form and I give the parade no more of my valuable thoughts.

THERE are two things which have me upset on May Day, the time of this big parade. Happy is very happy indeed because his horse is also happy pulling a sulky. In fact, the horse is even more frisky now with that two-wheel shoehorn behind him.

But what is batting at my brain, and it becomes too late to do anything about it, is a impression of a guy and a story I overhear in a pool parlor.

The impression I get is of Mr. Junius F. Spencer, the loogan who is the head of Awnuts. He is a long-haired cuss; his hair is very long indeed; his cheaters is very thick and he has a very funny looking bunch of assistants I see the day I go to the organization's headquarters down town. I get a mental picture that this guy Spencer and probably Poppa Joe Stalin belong to the same fraternity and coffee klatch. I am not sure of this, so I do not say anything to Happy who is all agog about the principles of this long-haired bunch.

At the pool parlor, I hear things which sound like maybe they are the McCoy. The reports I hear say that this Awnuts bunch is a load of communists, only the guy calls them "comyoonists." If this is true, then Happy is building himself up to a awful let-down, which will probably come when the flatfeet arrive and corral Awnuts and Happy McGonigle together.

I start counting up my money, and figuring where I could maybe raise a grand or two, so that I am prepared when the minions plank Happy into the can—again. This time it is no joke

which is going to backfire. This time it is a serious consequence indeed.

I go to 14th street where the parade is going to start and I hope maybe I can get to Happy before he starts and tell him what I hear and he will give up this idea of being grand marshal for the AWNUTS. But I am stymied when I get there.

There is a lot of citizens on both sides of the street. There is a lot more on Broadway and on University place where the AWNUTS will come together for a start, there is also a lot more. I can figure that Happy is riding the clouds considering how many people are going to be around to see him do his stuff. I realize this is not the time to tell him anything, even if I can get near to him. He would not even listen, much less believe what I hear and believe is true. I walk away from 14th street and find me a spot at about 18th street which gets me alongside the curb and I am hoping will be near enough to get out and grab Happy before things really begin to happen.

I hear the drums begin to roll and the first part of the parade starts up Broadway from 14th street. I see three lugs in front, the middle one carrying the American flag. The other two have slogans which I do not pay any attention to because I am trying to see Happy.

Next comes the band. And behind the band, looking as big and bright as a Broadway neon sign, sits Happy McGonigle, all decked out like a admiral at least. The horse is very pretty indeed too with bells and ribbons and stuff, but it is easy to see that Happy McGonigle is the star of this half-wit parade.

I see, too, that the crowd is not a serious one; that they have come here for a big laugh and that gets me a little

sore, because, dim-wit and blockhead as Happy McGonigle may be, I am the only one who has a right to laugh at the lug. I am about ready to lift one to the chin of a very large citizen who is making cracks when the thing happens.

Some very comical citizen yells "Go!" very loud just as Happy and his horse reach 18th street.

The horse perks up its ears and the next thing I know he starts off like maybe the Preakness prize is setting at 19th street waiting for him. He pays no attention to the band in front of him, and he is very particular, it seems, to pay no attention to Happy's attempts to make him slow down, or even to stop.

The horse, trotting like a very good trotter indeed, plows through the band like a Notre Dame fullback going through the P. S. 42 line, and the whistle blows.

A LOT of whistles blow. A lot of commotion happens and Happy and his horse are off through the mob making for 23rd street when a fire engine comes around the corner at 22nd street, gong going like wildfire.

The horse stops, perks up his ears, and like a good trotter which I suddenly realize he must have been once upon a time, he turns around and starts back toward the crowd which is now one-third cops, one-third AWNUTS, and the other third citizens who have come just for the fight.

Happy and his horse do not do so well this time and when I get to where Happy is tangled up with his little wagon, I am wondering whether maybe there will be anything left of Happy for the cops to pinch. I think maybe it would be better that way, after all.

But I am wrong. Happy gets up and it is a dead heat between two cops who is going to arrest him.

I start talking fast as soon as they put their mitts on him. Happy is both too scared and too dazed to know what to say. I hear one of the cops talk about "causing a riot," "disturbing the peace," and I know Happy is a few minutes short of having the whole book thrown at him by some very unkindly judge.

I try to tell them that Happy is a innocent bystander, so to speak, in this thing. That the man they should put in the can is a man named Mr. Junius F. Spencer, who is the head of this Awnuts bunch.

"Look," I say, "Mr. McGonigle here is too dumb to do any of these things on purpose. He is a dupe, a tool of this Spencer lug."

"He is a dope, you mean," one of the cops says, "and a menace besides, to say nothing of a dirty, damned comyoonist."

At that last word, Happy perks up and he is very sore indeed when he says: "Now, you look here, officer, I am an American citizen and I am proud of it and if you say I am a comyoonist, I shall gladly break your neck, with pleasure."

"Oh, yeah?" says the cop. "Threatening an officer of the law, huh? Break my neck, huh? Why you dirty com—"

I break in there before mayhem is done and I am very lucky indeed because who shows up just in the nick of time, so to speak, but my old friend—well, acquaintance, then—Sergeant Moran. I grab him and start explaining things to him.

Moran is a nice guy and he is willing to listen which is indeed a lucky break for Happy and me. I tell him all about it, how Happy is called up by this Spencer guy and how Happy is told this Awnuts is a very patriotic organization and is very 100% American and all that and I say besides:

"You know Happy McGonigle for a long time, Sergeant. He does not do things like this on purpose. He is a quiet guy who would not even kill a fly. He is a tool of these comyoonists, that's what he is."

Moran laughs very hard and I am hoping he will stop very shortly because I can see Happy is getting redder and sorer and I do not want anything to spoil things right now. Finally, Moran stops and he turns to one of the cops and says:

"The guy is a dope, Mulhall, and not exactly accountable. Any of our men hurt when the horse went through the crowd?"

Mulhall shakes his head. "No, sir. The horse runs down a lot of those comyoonists, that's all."

"Well, in that case, we might say—" Moran winks—"that Mr. McGonigle did us a favor. Let him go."

A voice pipes up loud behind us. "Oh, no, you don't. Arrest that man!" I turn and I see a small, fat lug with a mustache draped on his red face coming at us. He is a guy I never in my life see before. I am sorry I see him now.

THAT man stole my Rye Highball! Arrest him!" the guy says again as he comes up to us.

"Why, I never!" Happy says. "I never stole nobody's drink never. What the hell would I snatch a drink for? I got enough dough to buy my own. Anyway I like my rye straight."

"What's this all about?" Moran asks the little, fat guy. "Or are you nuts? We do not go around arresting people because they steal somebody's drink. You should not go into places where barflies snatch your drinks. You should hold on to your drink always. That is what I do."

The little guy jumps up and down

mad as hell. "No, nobody stole my drink. Somebody—this man, it must have been—stole my Rye Highball. Two years ago, about."

I look at Moran, and I make motions with my finger like circles up near my temple. I say to the little guy then: "Mister, if a rye highball is not a drink, maybe you can tell me what it is. There are people who say it is a tonic, or panther sweat, or some such thing, but to us it is still a drink."

"And I do not steal your drink, two years ago or any years ago, or anybody's drink at any time," Happy chimes in.

"I am not talking about a drink," the little guy says, "I insist. I am talking about a horse. It's name is Rye Highball and it is that horse there." And he points at the horse which Happy owns and which is the cause of all our troubles to date—and maybe henceforth, I think, as I see dawn breaking on Sergeant Moran's face.

He turns to Happy and says: "A horse thief, eh? On the owlhoot trail, as they say in Western stories, eh? I have suspected you and your partner, Blackie Roberts, of several things but I did not think you were horse thieves, too. Pretty serious." To the little guy he says: "How do you know this is your horse, mister?"

"I know, Sergeant, from several things, but the markings and his gait are the most important. But if you are not sure, I will call the horse by his right name and you will have your proof. Here, Highball!"

The horse looks up and the damn thing looks almost as if he is smiling as he trots over to the little guy.

Happy McGonigle and Blackie Roberts, alias me, are in the soup. Horse thieves, no less, and I am glad we are not out West where I read they used

to lynch citizens who stole horse flesh. I realize we got a chance.

"My partner, Happy McGonigle," I say, "does not steal horses. And I do not like them either. Happy buys this goat from a junkie who, if you will give us our rights as citizens, we will try to produce."

Sergeant Moran, I can see, is not sold on the idea that a couple of city boys like us would mix into such a business as horse stealing. It is fortunate indeed that he feels that way.

"All right," he says, "who is the junkie you buy this goat from and where do we find him?"

I look at Happy and he smiles. "I know where his place is. Shall we go?" He says that like shall-we-go-in-to-dinner, but I am relieved because Happy like as not might have bought the horse from some lug who comes to the door and is selling things so he can go through college.

We go and we find the junkie. He is not very easy to get along with at first but with a little persuasion by Happy, Moran is satisfied that Happy and me are not horse thieves. It seems the junkie says he does not steal Rye Highball at all but buys it from a guy who works for the little fat lug who is accusing us.

"I do not know that he is selling me anything which is not belonging to him," he says, and Moran exchanges prisoners. He gives Happy McGonigle back to me, and grabs the junkie instead. I never do find out what happens to the junkie, but as the cops leave us, the little, fat guy sticks around and walks with us back to the hotel. He is all apologies and since we are all okay now, we do not feel very unfriendly to the guy. After all, he does not know we are not horse thieves when he sees us the first time.

AS WE get near the hotel, he says: "I am really very sorry, boys, to have wrongly accused you."

"That's all right," I say, "skip it. We understand."

"Oh, I mean about the horse."

"What about the horse?" Happy asks.

"Well, you've gone to a great expense. Rye Highball looks very well and you have evidently been kind to him. I feel I should repay you for your kindness—and, after all, though the circumstances were unusual, you got my horse back for me."

"Oh, skip—" I start to say but Happy breaks in.

"Well, that is very nice of you, mister. And we did go to great expense about the horse. I realized he was more than he looked on the surface and, well—" He sort of waves his hand and the guy bites.

"I think that five hundred might pay in part for what you have done," the little guy says. "It is all I have at the moment, but I'd gladly—"

"We shall take the five hundred, mister," Happy says, "and call it even."

The little guy gives Happy the money and leaves us then. And up in our room, Happy is very happy indeed, and I am not sure that things are all cleared up. I am settling down in a

chair, with a double hooker in my mitt when a knock comes on the door.

I get up. "I knew it, Happy. It is probably the cops again."

I open the door and Happy is edging up right behind me. There is standing there before us a tall, thin young man who has a briefcase in his hand.

"I am working my way through college and I wonder if you gentlemen would help me out?" he says.

"We do not want any," I snap.

"Wait a minute, Blackie," Happy breaks in. "Let us see what this nice, young man is selling."

"Books," the young fellow says. "Two very interesting books. One is 'Parades I Have Led' and 'Horses and—'"

That is as far as the young lug got. We grab the young fellow and the last I see of him he is sliding down the stairway, his briefcase sliding down ahead of him.

"Parades I Have Led!" Happy says as he closes the door. "Aw, nuts!"

"Happy!" I bark. "Do not ever use that expression again! I do not ever want to remember those initials—even though they do indirectly make us a profit. But do not say aw, nuts again!"

"Aw, nuts," he says, but he smiles, and pretty soon—what have I got to lose?—I am smiling too.

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. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

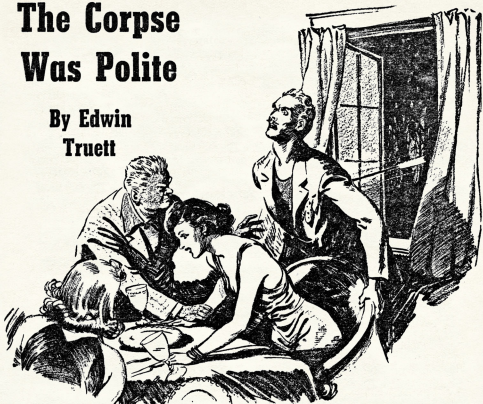
When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up

nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

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

The Corpse Was Polite

By Edwin
Truett



There was a zzzilnnng—and he fell forward gasping

HALLAHAN always says he can forgive pure dumbness, for everyone is dumb at one time or another. But bullheadedness is something else again! Consequently, when I'm wrong, I've found it better to admit it like a man. So, frankly, I admit I was doing wrong when the whole thing began. My only excuse is that it was ninety-eight in the shade, that I'd eaten too much lunch and washed it down with too much beer, that, returning, I had nothing to read but a dry treatise on toxicology. So I went to sleep.

Vaguely I heard the deep, hoarse chuckle, and opening my eyes, seeing the thing I saw, I merely closed them again and tried to continue the dream. I like the Marx Brothers and Bert Lahr

and Ed Wynn and funny dreams. Then a heavy hand was on my shoulder and a voice crackled, "Hey, young feller, young feller, wake up and pay for your bed!"

So I woke up.

Up and down, he was a small man, but horizontally he had the shoulders to go with a six-foot perpendicular. His face was deep tan-red, with a jillion white wrinkles about his eyes, where he had squinted incessantly at the sun. His nose was fat and bulbous, crisscrossed with infinitesimal purple veins, which appeared to lie right on the surface, because the skin had peeled from that nose so frequently. Afterward I learned that he was even up three score, sixty years old, but his eyes were as exuberantly

black and bright as those of a youngster, anxious for adventure. He looked constantly surprised, for the tufted white brows above those black eyes were like inverted *V*'s.

And of course there was the hat. There would be a hat. It was green, a bright, vivid green, a cross between something . . . well, Tyrolean and Sherwood Forest-ish. And so help me, it had a canary yellow feather in it! Not a little retiring feather hiding behind the leather band. Oh, no! This was a magnificent turkey feather, full seven inches in length, dyed brilliant yellow and cocked at a nose-thumbing angle.

The shirt was a sport shirt, greener than the hat, if possible. It *V'd* open at the throat, and the sun had reddened his thick chest so brilliantly that all he needed was a card attached saying "Merry Christmas." He was a symphony in red and green. Where the left hand pocket of the shirt should have been, was an embroidered archery target, the gold center or bullseye a full inch in diameter, the succeeding rings of red, blue, black and white, in proportion.

Eventually I got to the trousers. They were ordinary in texture and color, a sort of russet brown, but they were tight, outlining a pair of heavy legs, emphatically bowed. His feet were thrust into a pair of soft leather Congress gaiters.

He rumbled, "Sleeping, huh, sleeping? Well, what do you think of this? Just got it! Not another like it in the world! My crest and mark!"

This was a bow. Me, Jeff Davis Wallace, I don't know much about archery. The boss likes it, and follows it, and, I understand, in his younger days, was quite adept at the ancient sport. The office was always littered with equipment catalogues and copies of the *Bow-*

man, for, like I say, Hallahan still loved it.

So I knew what *this* was. It was an Oriental bow, reflexed, made of horn and fiber, laminated on a steel core. I'd seen them in the catalogues and, since they were only made to order, knew they were expensive. This one must have cost around \$150. I murmured politely over it, handed it back.

Robin Hood boomed, "Now what do you think of that, young feller, ain't she a beauty? Pulls an even seventy-five pounds and it can't be beat for hunting. It—"

"Roger, maybe the young man isn't interested in archery. After all, there's some business . . . ?"

The voice was cool, and low and throaty, the kind of female woman voice that runs up and down a man's spine, and no matter what time of day it may be, inevitably makes a poor male animal think of moonlight, and canoes, with maybe music from the country club dance floating over the lake.

SHE had the face and the figure to fit the voice, too, leaning against the door, regarding her long, red nails as if she had noticed them decorating the tips of her slim, brown fingers for the first time. Her face was long, not oval, for her chin was a bit too pointed for that, and her skin was olive and her hair as black as a baby grand B-flat. Her eyes were lowered, and her lashes were like the shadow of a bird's wing on her high cheek bones, and her mouth—well, all I can say is her mouth was a deep scarlet shadow, whether there is such a thing or not.

"Sure, sure, okay m'dear! Young feller, I want to see Bacchus. This is Bacchus' office, ain't it?" He shoved the crossbreed hat back on his bald head so that the violent feather pointed toward

the hall door. "I got to see Bacchus."

Hallahan believes in dignity. He says one of the reasons private detectives are in disrepute today in so many cities is lack of dignity. Detectives are salesmen, he says, and they have to merchandise their wares. They sell service and solutions, and the only way to keep prices up is to maintain a great amount of dignity.

So, following Hallahan's teachings, I took out my pad and said doubtfully, "Mr. Hallahan is very busy just now. The—er—the Bishingham affair you know . . . but if you'll give me your name and tell me your business . . . ?" And all the time I was kneeling the button beneath my desk that flashes the red light off and on in the boss' *sanctum sanctorum*.

The fellow laughed. He boomed. He roared. "Just tell Bacchus Jolly Roger's waiting. I'll bet you six, two and even he'll drop whatever he's doing. Jolly Roger Hicks!"

I broke a pencil point. Hicks! Sugar, remember? Hicks! Pineapple! Hicks! Coconut and copra! Yeah. Multimillionaire, and then some, and treating the boss like he was an old pal, tried and true.

I tried to flip on the dictograph and knew from the deadness of the sound that Hallahan's switch wasn't thrown. I grew a bit desperate. Here was a paltry hundred million in our office anxious to see Hallahan, and there was no Hallahan.

The girl with the long red nails moved impatiently, raised hairline brows and twisted her red mouth, as if to say, "Well, produce your rabbit, young fellow, dig down in your hat and bring out Hallahan."

I arose, said, "Perhaps I'd better go in. Occasionally he get so engrossed in his work that . . . !" It all seemed a

little vague and futile as I moved across the floor.

Jolly Roger Hicks chuckled. "Here," he thrust the bow into my hands, "let me surprise him, haven't seen him for years!"

And before I could stop him he opened the door marked *Private*. Only he didn't go in. He lingered there, and his face wrinkled like a dried persimmon, and his sun-reddened hand came over his mouth like a kid trying not to snicker at the teacher. He beckoned for the girl. She tip-toed to him. Her hand went to her mouth, she swelled like she was about to burst, like she was choking.

From the private office of Bacchus Hallahan came the drone of an electric fan. And another drone. The droning snore of a man who sleeps well and soundly, a man who sleeps with a clear conscience and to heck with the world. Sick at heart, red and embarrassed, I peered around the door.

I mentioned that it was ninety-eight in the shade. And you probably know the boss' greatest cross in life is his feet. There sat Bacchus Hallahan in his undershirt, behind his desk, his head down on his skinny chest, his mouse-colored hair hanging in disarray over his closed eyes. His mouth was open, a dollar-sized *O*, approximately the same circumference as the baldspot he had so recently acquired.

His hands were clasped across his round little belly, and every time he breathed—and snored!—they rose and fell, like he was about to break into an explanation of something, or a lecture on crime. Even that could have been forgiven him. But he had removed his shoes and socks, his bare feet were up on the desk and a fourteen-inch electric fan was blowing across a pan of ice water onto his sore feet!

The girl snickered. "The Bishingham affair," she said.

Jolly Roger Hicks boomed, "Hey, Bacchus, wake up and pay for your bed!"

SLOWLY the head came up, the washed out little eyes opened wearily, pipestem arms came up in a stretch—and Hallahan caught himself. He peered uncertainly at his doorway, closed his eyes, shook his head, opened them again. Then, realizing that this was no nightmare, he squealed like a frightened mouse, pushed so abruptly that his chair overturned, and lay weakly on his back on the floor, waving feet and hands and legs like a frantic, overturned beetle.

I will say this: The boss was glad to see Jolly Roger Hicks. Hicks helped him up, all atremble with laughter, and momentarily Hallahan forgot his shirtless, shoeless, sockless state. They literally embraced each other, beat each other's backs. But the spell was broken when Hicks rumbled, "Oh, yeah, Bacchus. A protege of mine—Lili De Long."

The girl smiled and nodded. "So pleased," she murmured in her throaty voice. "So seldom one comes upon a detective with his hair down."

Hallahan looked appealingly at me, like he was about to cry. I touched her arm, said, "Er—ah—Miss De Long, may I—er—that is to say . . . ?"

"Certainly," she said, and put her fingers on my arm. Sweetly, over her shoulder she called, "Roger, I'll wait. You fellows no doubt have much to talk about."

Well, I sat her on the mourner's bench and turned a fan her way, all too conscious of her amused eyes. I even phoned for a couple of Tom Collins. Then I was suddenly aware of the light

beneath my desk, a small flashlight globe hookup that flares on when Hallahan flicks his end of the dictagraph and wants me to transcribe what's occurring in his private office.

She was looking dreamily out the window when I slipped on the headset. I laid the pad on the desk a bit too noisily; she turned. "Just a radio program," I said cheerily, "one the boss likes. Has me make a transcription of it every day." And my pencil began forming the old familiar pothooks and hen tracks across the shorthand pad.

Hallahan was saying dryly, "Don't try throwing me a curve, Roger. You haven't looked me up or even thought about me for ten years or more, so why should you come around today and make it a point to invite me to an archery party on your damnable island?"

Jolly Roger Hicks, that ex-pirate of the high seas of commerce, protested vigorously and hoarsely that there was nothing sinister about his invitation, that he was merely having a group of guests, archers all, over on his private island, that he remembered how he and Hallahan had shot together at school so many years ago and was merely extending a cordial invitation.

Hallahan said, "*Hmmph!*" Which is his method of saying, "Nuts!"

"We'll do a little target shooting and clout shooting and wand shooting, and a bit of hunting, too. I've stocked the north end of the island—the jungle end, we call it—with goats, wild goats from west Texas. We'll polish off with a barbecue. You'll come, won't you Bacchus?"

I could picture Hallahan then, rocking back in his swivel chair, the tips of his fingers making church steeples, peering through his thick glasses at the *Haberdasher's Delight*. My pencil sped

across the pad. The boy came in with the two Tom Collins. I motioned with my free hand for him to set them on the desk, tapped my cuff to indicate they were to be charged. Hicks' voice went on, cajoling, pleading.

"... and there'll be Hohenberger, the trick shot champ, and the Gassmans, my daughter and her husband, you know, and Arch Robinson and a gang of others. Come on, Bacchus, come on!"

A SLENDER brown hand, red tipped at the fingers, came into my line of vision to pick up a tall, cool glass. I looked up, smiling my best smile for lovely young ladies. Lili De Long stood there with the glass in her hand, but she didn't smile. Her face had changed into a hard and enameled mask. She was twisting her head a bit sideways and peering down at my notes. Automatically I picked up Hallahan's dry voice.

"I'm a detective, Roger, I've made a lifelong profession of it. Being a detective entails a lot of psychology and psychiatry. You've been frightened from the moment you stepped in here. You're frightened now. This laughter of yours, this rough, bluff stuff—it's all a false face. I don't know what's wrong with you, but I can guess. You've gotten yourself into this archery party. There's no way you can call it off without loss of face, the one thing your pride can't stand. What are you afraid of, Roger? Tell me why you want me there, what I'm to guard against, what you think may happen."

There was silence for a moment. Some sort of action was taking place that was soundless. Then Hicks' hoarseness again. "There's a thousand. There'll be three more of them when the party's over... providing it's gone off smooth-

ly. You're to keep me out of trouble, that's all. And prevent a couple of things, one thing mostly!"

"And just what kind of trouble?"

"Woman trouble, damn it! That—that—siren out there in your anteroom, she's bleeding me dry, and I like it! I like it!"

"And just what," asked Hallahan in his precise little voice, "am I supposed to prevent?"

Hicks' hoarse answer crackled in my ears. Automatically I put it down. A horizontal line ending in a pronounced V-like character, heading diagonally upward to the right, ending in a small loop.

Lili De Long laughed. It wasn't a nice laugh, not the kind of laughter a man was entitled to, coming from a woman like the De Long. Her red lips curled scornfully. "The coward," she snapped, "the yellow bellied coward. Afraid of me! And *Murder!*"

She could read shorthand! For the thing Hicks had asked Hallahan to prevent, was just that!

Murder!

II

NATURALLY I took off the headset and walked away from the desk. In the state the De Long was in, the way her lips were curled and her eyes flashing and her body tense, a regiment of marines couldn't have kept her from looking over my shoulder, and dictographs are for privacy. I said, "Will you have another Tom Collins?"

For a moment she glared at me, then softened. She said she would, so we did. While we waited, we talked of everything under the sun but Lili De Long and Jolly Roger Hicks and sirens and murder. The conversation being mostly about how she adored detectives and

didn't we find it rather perilous at times but always so interesting?

I looked at her pretty closely when she said that, scenting a slight undercurrent of taunt, but she veiled her eyes with those long lashes, and tipped the glass against her red lips.

Jolly Roger Hicks beamed his way out of the office, his hat on the back of his head. From the pleased smile on his face I knew Hallahan and I were going on an archery hunt. He boomed, "Well, Lili, my dear, are you tired waiting?"

From the way she looked at him you would have thought she positively adored him. She said, "Silly!" And went over and laid her long fingers on his arm and smiled into his round face! And not fifteen minutes before, if glares had the penetrating powers of radium beams, Hicks would have turned to a badly seared human steak right in his chair!

Once they'd gone, Hallahan began pacing the office importantly, a piece of paper in his hand. He peered at me over his spectacles, tugged at his forelock, said, "Read it back to me, particularly the latter part."

I shrugged, told him what had happened, why I didn't even have the latter part.

"I can repeat it practically *in toto*," he bragged pompously. "Now you see the value of my theories of memory training!"

I was afraid he was going into one of his lectures, so I snapped the notebook open and got out the pencil in a hurry. He looked disappointed, cleared his throat.

"A good many years ago Hicks and a man named De Long were partners in a Nevada silver mine. De Long sold out to Hicks for practically nothing, and immediately afterward, a rich lode was uncovered. Rumor had it that Hicks had

found the lode and covered it, before buying from De Long. Which Hicks denies."

Hallahan paused, rubbed his baldspot reflectively, groaned a little and sat down on the edge of my desk. "So she reads shorthand, eh, and got sore when he called her a siren? We must remember that."

He went on with Hicks. "A short while ago Hicks received a letter from Lili De Long, daughter of his old partner, claiming she was in possession of a pair of affidavits proving her father not only was rooked, but was coerced into sale through fear of death. He called on her, purely, he claims, because he wanted no one to believe such bosh about honest Roger Hicks! She refused to show him the actual affidavits, demanded recompense and plenty of it. Hicks claims he fell hard for the girl herself, in spite of her ridiculous story, that he invited her to his Island place to meet his married daughter. Got that, Jeff?"

I nodded.

"Miss De Long accepted. Hicks admits that, swept off his feet, he embarked on a whirlwind courtship, and she shortly succumbed to his charm—" He paused there, peering at me, smiling, as if to say: Well, comment, comment! But I wouldn't humor him. He went on. "—succumbed to his charm and agreed to marry him."

I laid the pencil down. "This doesn't make sense nor consistency, Bacchus. You sure you're remembering right? First he called her a siren and said he wanted to be protected; now you claim he said he loved her and is going to marry her. He told you she succumbed to his charm and agreed to marriage, but I'm telling you that when she read my early notes she looked daggers through the door and called him a yel-

low bellied coward! Besides, he mentioned murder."

Hallahan beamed, he smacked his lips, he rubbed his hands. Murder is Hallahan's dish. He extended the paper in his hand, said, "It makes sense in a way. He called her a siren, with relish, not disrespect. He really wants to marry her, he claims, and means to marry her, but he wants those affidavits. He figures she has been sold a pair of faked papers, but she stubbornly refuses to let him see them. Suppose they came to light? It would reflect on him, in showing the gullibility of his wife-to-be, and the resultant publicity might have a sinister effect on the Hicks stocks. Does that sound convincing?"

I said, "No, but *this* does!"

"The paper you have in your hand," said the boss, "was pinned on Roger Hicks' pillow the same night Lili De Long succumbed to his charm and accepted his proposal!"

It was a sheet of ordinary typewriter paper. The printing was in crayon, black crayon, in heavy block letters such as a child might make. It read:

MARRY THE WOMAN AND
YOU BOTH DIE.

"And what do you think of that?"

WORKING for Hallahan a man learns to hit out straight at a mark. "This occurred on Hicks' private island, inhabited only by the Hicks and their menage. Hicks' proposal to the De Long was overheard. Personally I'd say someone in the family wrote the note, the daughter or the son-in-law, maybe both, knowing such a marriage would cut them out of a lot of money. After all Hicks must be around sixty."

Hallahan nodded, agreeing as to Hicks' age. "Five years older than I am, but he was only a couple of classes

ahead of me in school. But to get on. The writer of the note, by now, must detest Miss De Long, must hate her as a menace to—" He broke off, leaped off my desk and vanished through his own door, slamming it behind him.

The red bulb over our outer door had flashed. You see, we have the only office in this corridor, and far down at the curve we have installed an electric eye, which, when tripped, blinks the warning lamp over the door. This is in case Hallahan is changing his socks, or we are playing rummy, or doing something else undignified.

I went into my act with speed and agility. When the outer door opened I was in the little anteroom we laughingly call our laboratory, clad in a smock and leaning over a microscope. I pretended not to hear the door, pretended not to hear the impatient cough. But I couldn't overlook the arrogant, icicle-dripping voice. "If you'll spare me a little time, Mr. Hallahan?" Refrigerated!

She looked like her voice, blonde, cold, and dressed to a million. The short fellow with her leered at me through his beard. His face, what you could see of it through the brush, was as brown as Othello's must have been. His nose was twisted to one side, his brows didn't curve. They simply met at the apex of his nose, went upward at a forty-five degree angle and faded out near his temples. His clothes were well tailored, and he leaned on a cane.

He said, "Come, come, fellow, if you're Hallahan you must be the chap coming to the island for the hunt? Don't be embarrassed before me." He leered again.

"Why should I be embarrassed before you?" I couldn't help that, I really wondered. He turned the leer on the icicle with him.

I may be wrong, but I think she shrugged a little helplessly. She raised her brows, said, "Really, you didn't recognize Cecil Hohenberger? Trick shot champion of the world?"

The leer changed to a smirk. "And now, Mr. Hallahan, if I might see you privately for a moment . . . ?"

"Sorry," I snapped, "I'm not Mr. Hallahan. I'm Jefferson Davis Wallace, his assistant. We'll fill out a card and I'll see if Mr. Hallahan has time for you today."

And, darn it, I fumbled through every drawer in my desk, conscious of her amused coldness and Hohenberger's leer. And there wasn't a one of those appointment cards there, those cards which Hallahan claims give dignity to our profession. With all the dignity I could muster I said, "Never mind, I'll see if he's busy. Name please?"

"Mrs. Miles Gassman." Whew! Jolly Roger Hicks' married daughter!

I knocked at Bacchus' door. In a few seconds, his voice, forced as deeply as he can force it, said, "Go away, I'm busy."

I opened the door, saw him bending over a desk literally knee deep in papers. He glared at me. I winked at him. "Mr. Hallahan," I said, "have you got a few moments time for Mrs. Miles Gassman, Mr. Hicks' daughter?"

He didn't get a chance to answer. She jerked the door out of my hand and swept in, leaving a cold draft in her wake. I went back to my desk and dragged out the headset. Hohenberger leered with renewed interest. I glared at him. Lili De Long might get away with reading my notes over my shoulder, but not this guy. He leered again, and walked toward the window, limping slightly. He was a bit crippled.

Hallahan, with oceans of dignity, was questioning the Human Icicle. She

broke in. "Never mind this foolishness, Mr. Hallahan, you know who I am and I know who you are. I know you're coming out to the island for the weekend, and though I understand you knew dad years ago, I'm not foolish enough to think you're coming as a mere guest. You're coming as a detective."

Good old Bacchus! He made his voice as cold as hers. "Both Mr. Wallace and myself are coming, Mrs. Gassman. Why should it concern you?"

She was stubborn. "I want to know why my father hires detectives!"

And then Hallahan nearly knocked me out of my chair! He said, "He's afraid he's going to be murdered."

Her gasp nearly tore the headset off. "Murdered!" And suddenly she began to laugh, and I'll swear *that laugh was one of sheer relief!*

SHE wasn't nearly so cold now, she was almost gracious. "Pardon my laughter, Mr. Hallahan, but I find this murder business a trifle on the ridiculous side. Now, since you're going to be with us anyway, do you find it unethical to have two clients rather than one?"

It was, of course, and Hallahan is highly ethical as a rule. Again he nearly floored me.

"There'll be two of us," he said pointedly. "Just what are *you* afraid of?"

"Blackmail!"

And then she went into it and what a mixup it was! I suppose it took ten minutes to tell it all, during which time Hohenberger continued to leer at me with interest. The louse made me nervous. I broke three pencil points, and by the time she paid Bacchus a retainer and came out of the office I was more ready to break necks.

She introduced Bacchus to the world's champion trick shot and

Bacchus managed to look properly impressed. He escorted Mrs. Gassman ceremoniously to the door and said, "Oh, by the way, Mrs. Gassman, I believe the last party your father had was weekend before last?" She nodded. "Do you remember just who was there?"

"Not many." She tried to appear as if deep in concentration. "Mr. Hohenberger, of course, and," her lips curled, "Miss De Long, and—oh, yes, Archie Robinson."

"You and your husband, Mr. Gassman?"

"Of course, we live on the island." And after a few more minutes they were gone. All I could do was stare at my notes, reading them to myself.

Hallahan limped into his own office, opened a drawer and extracted a fresh pair of socks.

"Mrs. Gassman," I read, having followed him, "was recently presented via U. S. mail with a picture of herself and one Archie Robinson in what she declares was quite an innocent situation."

Bacchus winced as he removed the other shoe. I picked up the picture she had left with him. Maybe it was innocent. It didn't look so pure in heart to me. This bird, Archie Robinson, friend of the family, was doing a pretty thorough job of kissing her, and she was cooperating splendidly. "Let's see the note that came with this."

He tossed it over, then arose, barefooted, to limp painfully toward the wash basin. The note was printed in block letters on typewriter paper.

YOU MAY PURCHASE THE NEGATIVE FOR \$50,000. HAVE MONEY PREPARED THIS WEEKEND. REMEMBER YOUR HUSBAND'S FIENDISH JEALOUSY. WE WILL LET YOU KNOW.

Water hissed in the wash basin.

I said, "And Mrs. Gassman is positive that no one else but the catty, terrible Lili De Long, who is so obviously trying to get her father, is the black-mailer! Major Premise: De Long was there two weeks ago, when the picture must have been taken. Minor Premise: De Long will be there this weekend, when the money is to be paid. Conclusion: De Long must be the black-mailer."

This, of course, was in sarcasm, for the same reasoning applied to Hohenberger.

BACCHUS was drying a foot on one of the immense towels he used. He looked at me quizzically, snapped, "Don't forget, we're handling two cases, Jeff. And a little while ago we agreed that the person leaving the murder threat on Hicks' pillow would naturally detest Miss De Long."

"Sure," I agreed, seeing how our two cases dovetailed already. "Mrs. Gassman certainly hates her, and considering that she'll lose half her inheritance if her father married a young woman who would inevitably outlive him, well—!"

Bacchus padded toward the desk for fresh socks. "Her husband would also stand to lose," he said dryly. "Also, let's not overlook the fact that this Hohenberger, or even Robinson, might be in love with Lili De Long, and left the note on the pillow to prevent the marriage. Jeff, my boy, the shortest distance between two points is not always a straight line . . . not in this business. It's half a dozen, or even a dozen, straight ones. Let's overlook no possibilities. Now, did you hear Mrs. Gassman's sigh of relief and her laugh of joy when I told her why her father had retained us?"

"Sure." I waited.

"Mrs. Gassman," said Bacchus dryly, "was evidently afraid that her father had wind of *her* trouble and was bringing us down to investigate that. Roger, as a father, is a pretty strict and hard-fisted man. The Gassman's, I understand, have a place to live, a few charge accounts, but very little cash. Consequently Mrs. Gassman can't raise fifty grand. However, I don't believe, strictly speaking, that it's simple fear of a jealous husband that has her upset. Women like her can usually handle jealous husbands!"

He put on his shoes, groaning a bit, walked over to the stand and got his shapeless panama. He picked up the two printed notes and put them in an envelope, thrust it into his pocket. To me, he said, "We're in for a busy weekend, Jeff. We're to prevent Hicks' murder, we're to obtain a pair of false affidavits from Lili De Long, and we're to catch the blackmailer of Mrs. Miles Gassman! *Tch! tch! tch!*" Like he was saddened at the thought, when all the time he was so jubilant that only his sore feet and off-key voice prevented his dancing and singing with joy.

"I think," he said over his shoulder, "you better go down to the *Telegram* and our usual sources of information and get the dope on everyone that's attending. Hohenberger, Robinson, both the Gassmans, Lili De Long, if any, and whatever street gossip there is about Hicks himself. Then drop by my house for the bag in the corner—I keep it packed—get whatever you're taking and show at the airport at four."

I said, "Where are you going?"

"To the chemists," he answered and limped through the door.

I went over to the *Telegram* and through the morgue, saw Miss George who does Café stuff on the *Star*, found Tony Toscani in his usual place at the

Casino. By the time I finished I had a pretty complete *dossier* on the local doings of all concerned. Some of it was pretty surprising. Then I got my things and Bacchus' things and took a cab out to the airport. They were waiting for me and we took off.

III

HOHENBERGER tried his best to sit with Lili De Long, and even though he had no success, even though Mrs. Gassman appropriated him, he couldn't keep his eyes off the De Long all the way to the Coast. She, however, reserved her charms exclusively for Roger Hicks, who beamed and roared in approval at everything she said. I managed to tell Hallahan what I'd found out.

He sat staring out the window as if he hadn't heard, fascinated by the panorama below, for if the truth be known, this was Bacchus' first plane trip. Eventually he turned, sighed a bit and said, "There are few truth tellers in the world, Jeff. Always remember that. Let's check and see if I have it right. On the last trip to the island Lili De Long was forced to swing a hard right on the beard of Cecil Hohenberger?"

"That's the way I heard it. This fellow Robinson gossiped about it to Tony Toscani, barman at the Casino."

"Mr. Robinson seems to be quite a frequenter of bars?"

"Absolutely. One of the most successful luses in town. Once engaged to marry Marge Hicks, but he ran through his dad's fortune before it came off and she married Gassman. Shortly afterward Robinson inherited from his mother. Now he's drinking that up."

"And the Gassmans don't get along at all?"

"They've fought in some of the best cafés in town," I grinned. Looking up the aisle at the Refrigerating Blonde I couldn't picture her losing her arrogance long enough to argue.

"You see," complained Bacchus testily, "everybody lies. She isn't afraid of her husband's mad jealousy. She's afraid he'll get hold of that negative and use it for divorce grounds. See, how they've all lied! Look, Jeff, always remember this: the average professional man may assume his client is telling the truth until the statements are proved lies. But a private investigator must assume the opposite. Every statement is slightly tinged with prevarication until proved true. Look we're going to land!"

And we did, to be met at the pier by Roger Hicks' expensive Chriscraft and his boatman, Juan. There was only one thing to mar the pleasure of riding in that beautiful boat. The sky had grown dark and sullen with black clouds, the wind had sprung up and rain started falling in one of those sudden squalls so common on the Gulf. Lightning cracked across the heavens like a snakes' tongue, and Hallahan's face began to look a bit ghastly. He clutched at the floppy panama and it flopped grotesquely about his features. Then it began getting really choppy—then rough—and though the boat rode well, Hallahan leaned over the side and was frankly sick.

Hicks' island ordinarily lay fifteen minutes or so offshore. But because of the storm it took us nearly a half hour to make it. Only one thing of importance happened. Tony Toscani's relayed gossip from Robinson was verified. Hohenberger crouched just ahead of me, leaning close to Lili De Long, and the wind brought her angry words distinctly to my ears.

She said, and she said it like she meant it, with that blazing eye and clinched teeth accent, "You little devil! Leave me alone, for the last time I'm warning you! I'm meeting you neither tonight nor any other night, and so help me, if you touch me again I'll fling you bodily overboard!"

Then she got up and moved forward to the cabin to join Hicks and the others. Hohenberger followed her, leaving Hallahan and me alone out under the awning.

I thought: Why couldn't this guy be *it*? He was on the island two weeks ago. He's nuts about Lili De Long. He could have been prowling about and heard her agree to marry Hicks, beat it in the house and left the note on Hicks' pillow. And I kept on reasoning. Professional archers, even champs, couldn't make so much money but what \$50,000 would be welcome. This Hohenberger was a likely suspect for the blackmailer as well! He certainly had the beard and the leer for it!

Then there we were. Juan, the boatman, cut her off, Hicks took the wheel, and Juan went forward past the cabin to the prow, boathook in hand. As Hicks warped her in, Juan cast a rope about a cleat, leaped onto the pier, and with the boathook brought the magnificent boat alongside.

"**H**ERE we are, and we'll have to run for it," boomed Jolly Roger.

Lightning flashed, revealing a boat-house near the end of the pier and a rambling lodge, not more than a hundred yards up the shrub-freckled slope. It also revealed Bacchus, green-faced, scrambling over everything toward that pier. Bacchus had one idea and to heck with all the others! He wanted off that boat! I helped him up, heard Hicks roaring through the storm: "Up to the

house, Juan, tell Maria to have everything dry and ready, then come back for the grips. Come on folks, let's run!"

We were a dogtrotting group thirty feet up the pier when he bellowed, "My bow, damn it, my bow! I'm going back for it!" We shuffled on while he galloped back. It seemed only a matter of seconds before his stentorian roar froze us in our tracks in spite of the beating rain. For that roar was a roar of pain!

I let loose of Hallahan's arm, turned back and met Hicks halfway. Jolly Roger was a fitting name for him—he could swear like a pirate and was doing it. He had that Oriental bow in his left hand and as lightning flared again I saw his right hand was clutching at his left shoulder, that his lips were pulled back from his teeth like an animal, that his eyes were rolling and fear filled.

"Come on to the house!" he screamed. "A fine pair of detectives you are! I'm shot, damn it, shot in the shoulder!"

He was shot, all right, but not by a bullet.

He was chattering and gibbering with fright, looking back over his shoulder like all the devils in hell were out there after him, before we finally got him in the house to a light. Even Hallahan seemed to have forgotten his nausea. But it was Lili De Long who took charge, and gently but firmly extracted the thing that stuck in Hicks' shoulder.

Hohenberger leered, "A blowgun arrow!"

Hicks' eyes rolled even wilder. "A blowgun arrow," he screamed. "Is it poisoned? Is the tip plain or colored?"

Hallahan took it then and peered at it for a moment. He laid it gingerly on a table, took off his thick glasses and wiped them meticulously on a dry handkerchief. He picked it up again, and after a minute examination said,

"There's nothing on the tip, Roger." The tycoon almost collapsed with relief. Hallahan limped to him, took a close look at the flesh where the dart had hit.

"*Humph!* A little iodine is all you need. Wasn't in three-eighths of an inch. Scarcely bleeding."

Hicks roared, "All right, let's get out and get whoever did it! Nobody's shooting a blowgun at me!"

But before we could depart, an apparition appeared.

A long, serape-covered divan faced the open fireplace at the far end of the immense living room where we were gathered. The apparition appeared from the divan, where, apparently, it had been sleeping.

He was a tall man, and immensely broad, with a wisp of a sun bleached mustache and wavy sun bleached hair. He peered at us uncertainly, wavering on his feet, light gleaming on his bronzed body. He wore yellow swimming trunks.

"Howdo," he said pleasantly. "Welcome home and all that. Let's all have a little drink." He turned to clump toward the bar. I said clump, because he wore a pair of cowboy boots!"

"That," said Lili De Long softly in my ear, in a voice rife with sarcasm, "is the muchly sought and magnificent Archie Robinson."

But I wasn't thinking about the man's name. I was thinking that he couldn't have been the force behind the blowgun, for even his hair and his trunks were dry. He couldn't have huffed and puffed the infernal thing and gotten into the house before us.

Hicks watched him at the bar with brooding eyes. He said, "Never mind going to hunt the damned guy. Come over here, Bacchus."

He led both Bacchus and me aside.

"Maybe," he sneered, "I'm the detective. You see here assembled, all of my guests, everyone on the island except Juan who is in the kitchen with his wife. And my daughter, who was in our party. And one more exception, we might say the main exception. My son-in-law, Miles Gassman. Does my meaning elude you?"

It didn't.

"Why," asked Hallahan mildly, "would anyone, Mr. Gassman included, shoot a puny thing like that at you?"

"And you a detective! I got a note warning me not to marry Lili, didn't I? The blowgun arrow is simply another warning. Someone—mind you, I don't positively say Miles Gassman, but who else?—is showing me how easily I could be killed!" He glared at us reprovingly.

MARGE GASSMAN came back into the room. She had been so unconcerned about her father's scream on the dock that she hadn't even turned back, but had come directly to the house. Now, a robe clutched tightly about her, she sailed across the room to her father. Her eyes blazed with anger, her cheeks were redder than any rouge could possibly make them.

"You," she snapped, "have got to do something about that husband of mine. He's drunk again, locked in my bathroom roaring a song about a girl from Baltimore. He won't answer my knocks, and I'd love to get dressed!"

Hallahan said, "Was he singing in there when you first came in?"

"Yes. But what—?"

Hallahan smiled innocently at Hicks. Hicks, like a sullen child, said to his daughter, "Go away, damn it, go away!"

She moved across the room to the bar, where Archie Robinson smiled at

her fondly, if a little drunkenly. She beamed at him, accepted a drink. Evidently, thought I, she doesn't mind Robinson's drinking. These women!

"I wonder," mused Hallahan, "if we could have another visitor on the island? We've accounted for everyone legitimately here, including Robinson drunk and sleeping and your son-in-law drunk and singing."

Hicks looked a little startled. But before he could answer, the boatman, Juan, came bursting into the room. He was wild-eyed, dishevelled and fearful. He rushed directly to Hicks, shrieked, "The boat, Mr. Hicks! I go down to get the baggage and the boat is sunk! She's laying there in forty feet of water!"

Some of us clattered out into the rain again to look at the boat. I was pretty excited by now, and more than a little scared. The only thing I really cared about was our baggage. And the reason I cared so much for that was because *I'd packed the office gun in my kitbag!*

But there she lay, clearly revealed by the flashing lightning that lit the roiling water so plainly. At first I couldn't understand how she could be so deep, until I noted for the first time how Hicks had built his landing. He'd dredged it and shored it with a rock wall. And just as the boatman had said, it was forty feet deep at that point.

Hohenberger stuttered, "But I say, I don't like this! Blowguns, and sinking boats! Let's go phone the police, Mr. Hicks."

There was no phone.

Gloomily Hicks said, "There's a couple of outboards, but I could hardly ask Juan to . . .?"

The boatman looked out over the waves and whitecaps toward the mainland. Wind whistled and roared about us, dashed the storm into our faces. And

the next zigzag of vicious lightning showed his bared teeth, his fearful eyes, and a brown hand making the sign of the cross on a broad chest. Juan wasn't going.

Hohenberger squeaked, "Somebody tried to kill Roger and now they've sunk the boat and we can't get off. There's a killer, a madman on the island with us!"

And *clackety-clack-clack* he went with his cane, went at amazing speed toward the house, the rest of us scuttling after, and, I'm ashamed to say, passing him. It was only then that I realized that Hallahan wasn't with us, for I had had courage enough to glance about for him.

Someone panted up to me, grasped me by the arm. I slowed down. Lili De Long whimpered, "I'm frightened, I'm frightened!"

And she wasn't the cold, imperious beauty of our Milam Building office then! The lady with thinly veiled amusement in her eyes and a taunt on her lips. She was a little girl, thoroughly scared.

And the first thing I knew I had my arm about her shoulders and we were staggering along toward sanctuary, side by side, and me, Jeff Davis Wallace, was saying through chattering teeth, "Don't be frightened dear, don't be scared. I'll take care of you!" And then we were at the house.

The Gassman's were effecting a domestic tableau as we popped into the living room. They were far across the bar and she had stepped back from him, her hair dishevelled, her hand to her cheek. His own arm was still extended; he had just slapped her.

Oblivious to Lili and me, he snarled, "And so help me God I'll kill him dead before he ever leaves the island!" Seeing us, she gasped and fled from the room.

MILES GASSMAN turned toward us. He almost took his hand to force the snarl of fury and jealousy from his face. But he managed a very clever hiccup, staggered against the bar and said, "Doctor Livingstone, I presume?"

Just then Hicks and Hohenberger plunged in. Hicks trotted over and placed his arm about Lili's slim shoulders. I could have smacked him, seeing her shudder. He said, "Don't be frightened, my dear, just a series of accidents!" He beamed down at her, his red, wrinkled face wet and shiny, even the gray tufts of his hair bedraggled. He pulled out a watch. "Now run along and slick up the best you can, dear. Maybe Marge has something you can wear. I want you to look your best tonight, and you know why!"

The fatuous old fool, squeezing her like that!

"Dinner promptly at eight," he said, "and I do mean promptly. You'll tell Bacchus, Mr. Wallace?"

I nodded. He told me where the solitary maid-cook, Maria, had placed Bacchus and me, invited me to a drink, which I refused. I left.

The lodge was laid out rather peculiarly. It ran up the hillside, on a rather abrupt slope. The living room, for example, where we entered, was full two stories in height. From it you went up a few stairs into a wide hallway. The hallway ran the length of the house, punctuated by more short flights of stairs, between levels. There was a high game room on the left, an archery room filled with bows and trophies on the right. Next it was a library and opposite a music room. Then continuing on the left, the bedrooms ran clear to the rear, while across from them were the dining room, kitchen, store-room and all.

Hallahan and I had the fourth bedroom down. I opened the door. The place was dark. I turned on the light—and saw Hallahan's feet. They were protruding from the far side of the bed. I was so scared I was frozen, for the toes pointed straight upward, and I knew Hallahan was unconscious. Or dead. Otherwise he'd never have laid down with his shoes on!

IV

I GUESS I'm funny about Hallahan. To myself, ninety percent of the time, I call him a pompous, overbearing, publicity-hungry little investigator who has the luck of the devil. I snicker at his sore feet and dodge his lectures on criminal detection! But just let something happen to him, and man alive!

I stood there thunderstruck, peering at those motionless feet. Then I was down on my knees leaning over him, peering anxiously at the big blue welt over his left eyebrow, swollen and angry looking. But his glasses were even on his nose, his hair wasn't much disarranged, and he was breathing heavily, like he was snoring in his own bed. It took me about ninety seconds to bring him around with a wet towel.

He groaned, and I helped him to the edge of the bed. He groaned again. A little ashamed of my own alarm, I suppose, I said, sarcastically, "Well, what hurts you now?"

"My feet," he moaned. And, "You didn't by any chance happen to catch him, did you?"

"Catch who?"

"The man that slugged me, of course! Who did you expect?"

"I thought you might mean the man that sank the boat and left us stranded here on this darned island until the storm is over."

And then he threw me. He peered at me like I was some new kind of animal life, some new form of amoeba, functioning but thinking not! He even threw out one of his hands in a derisive gesture. "And you with me for three years! I *know* who sank the boat!" And leaving that one to sink in he limped into the bathroom and began bathing his bruised head.

When he emerged, I demanded, "Who? And why?"

But he said, "Never mind, get this down. And hurry please!"

I never use ordinary stenographer's pads. Mine are specially cut to fit into the inner pocket of my coat, and when we first hit the coast and stormy weather, and I saw the nearly-open boat, I'd very thoughtfully wrapped the entire notes of the Hicks case in a handkerchief where they'd be dry.

He began to talk. In terse English, to make our records complete, he related all that had occurred. The plane trip and the information I had given him on the plane. The crossing, Roger Hicks going back to the boat for his bow, the blowgun arrow. Everything up to Juan rushing in with the announcement that the boat was down.

"Suppose," he said, "you tell me about the boat now and write it down as you go."

It's tough—try it sometime—to take your own dictation. But I said, "The boatman, Hicks, Hohenberger, Lili and myself went running to the pier. As the boatman had said, she was down, in forty feet of water. Hohenberger grew frightened at the thought of not being able to leave the island, due to the blowgun arrow and the mysterious sinking of the boat. Panic took us all, then, for there seems to be the general impression that we have a mysterious and lethal extra guest. So we ran."

I hesitated a few moments, then thinking even the smaller details might mean something, "Lili was so very scared she ran beside me crying and sobbing. We reached the house first, to find the Gassman's quarreling, Gassman having apparently just struck his wife. As we entered he made this remark to her: 'I'll kill him before he leaves the island!' I—"

"What?" snapped Bacchus, tugging at the lock of hair that keeps dropping over his spectacles. "Gassman said that? About whom?"

I shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine. But Archie Robinson, don't forget, is the other man, and he wasn't in the room. I'd say—Robinson."

He said, "Go on."

"Mrs. Gassman, seeing us, ran from the room. Mr. Gassman spoke to us. Hohenberger and Hicks came in, Hicks hastening to reassure Lili."

I couldn't tell whether Bacchus was grinning like the devil or not. I'd have to be careful about jealousy creeping into my voice! I hurried on. "Hicks directed me to my room, where I found Bacchus Hallahan knocked out from a blow on the head."

He touched the welt, which was receding nicely and moaned like a child. He took it up. "After everyone ran out, and Mrs. Gassman and Robinson seemed busy at the bar, I decided to look in the bathroom . . ."

I looked slightly askance. He waved his hand, depreciatingly. "Mrs. Gassman's bathroom, of course! Mrs. Gassman had reported to her father that upon her original entrance her drunken husband was bathing in her private bath and singing a song at the top of his voice. Consequently I went to her bathroom while she was engaged."

He looked at me triumphantly. I nodded.

"The bathroom has a window large enough for entrance and exit. It was closed. Yet the inner side of the sill was damp. Much of the floor was wet, yet directly beneath the window was a dry spot, and in a hamper I found a damp towel, stained by dirty water."

I said, "Sure, I get it. Friend Hicks was right. His son-in-law took a pot shot at him from a blowgun, hustled back to the house and went in his wife's bathroom window. His shoes left some dirty water on the floor and he had to wipe it up. Then he turned on the shower and started singing like he was drunk! Quite a guy, this Gassman!"

HALLAHAN said somberly, "And yet the singing was going on when Mrs. Gassman first arrived, and she left us all on the pier! We ran, afterward, all of us, but she preceded us by a full two minutes and the uproar was going on in the bathroom then!"

Maybe I looked crestfallen enough to suit Bacchus then. For he smiled like a fond mother, looked like he meant to pat my back consolingly.

"From the bath I went to the music room," he continued dictating, "where the record, *I Got a Girl In Baltimore* was found deep down beneath the other records. This I brought to my own room, laid on the dresser. I sat on the edge of the bed to take off my shoes and suddenly the light went off, the switch being near the door, easily reached from the hall. I leaped to my feet in time to receive a blow that knocked me unconscious. When Wallace revived me the record was naturally missing."

I stared in disbelief from the pad to Hallahan. He shrugged. He said, "It must have been Gassman, all right. You scoot down to the bar on some pretense and see if he's there."

I was back in a few moments. Gassman was at the bar, all right, either drunk or playing drunk. And wringing wet, like he'd been out in the rain and just got back.

Hallahan paced the floor again. "Wringing wet," he mused, "which probably means he found the opportunity to toss the portable phonograph and the record into the lake." He moved toward the door. "Come on, quickly."

We walked down the hall and turned into the archery and trophy room. There was a bow on that wall of every shape and description, and arrows as well. Long arrows, and short arrows, feathered in every color of the rainbow. Tacked in a corner was a bark quiver containing five blowgun arrows! Three of them had poison blackened points. And I remembered how frightened Hicks had been, how he had gibbered the question as to the color of the point when Lili De Long extracted the arrow from his shoulder.

In a little receding niche stood several steel fishing rods, looking strangely out of place in that collection. Curiously Hallahan examined each one. He said a peculiar thing. "There's no blowgun in here, Jeff. Nothing but the shafts. Strike you as funny?"

He handed me a fishing rod, lifted one of the blowgun shafts from its quiver and seemed to be examining them, comparing them.

"Listen," I said testily, "what are you looking for? If it's the blowgun, probably Gassman threw it in the lake."

Just as testily he snapped, "And I trained you! Can't you see how all this collection is grouped and classified? Lift a bow off the wall." I did, wondering. "You'll note that you still see the faint outline of the bow on the wall, a lighter place in the paper?" I nodded. He indicated the blowgun arrows. "According

to classification the blowgun should have been mounted somewhere near its arrows. Remember a blowgun is about six feet in length, a real one. Do you see any faint outlines?"

Naturally I didn't. Hallahan is usually right. But following him down the hall carrying that steel fishing rod and a blowgun arrow, I still didn't see his point.

Until we got into our room and closed the door. He took off the handle of the rod, removed the tapering tip. He thrust the arrow into one end of the rod, thrust it down until it disappeared from view. It fit snugly yet slid easily.

"Seamless," said Bacchus triumphantly, and putting it into his mouth, puffed out his cheeks and blew until his eyes protruded. Nothing happened. Disappointed, he handed it to me, tapping his thin chest delicately to indicate his weakness.

I huffed. And I puffed. And finally the arrow slid, but it didn't leave the tube. It stuck out the end for about three inches. I pulled it the rest of the way through and something else came out of the tube with it! It was the negative of the picture showing Mrs. Gassman in the arms of Archie Robinson!

I GROANED. If Bacchus Hallahan had smiled triumphantly and stuck out his skinny chest and crowed that he'd known it was there all the time, I'd have booted him! But he didn't.

"That," he beamed, "is more luck than sense! I knew he had it, knew he was the blackmailer as soon as I found he shot the blowgun arrow at Hicks to frighten him! But chancing on the negative like this! Jeff, the Good Lord aids the intelligent and the pure in heart! I knew it, I knew it!"

"Then you," I told him as sarcastic-

ally as I could, "must be a necromancer. Suppose, from the depths of your superior wisdom, you tell me how you knew the party that shot Hicks was also the blackmailer?"

From his pocket Hallahan took the two notes given us by the Hickses, father and daughter. The first was the note warning Hicks of his death if he married Lili. The other was the blackmail note demanding the fifty thousand.

Before he could launch himself I said, "And why should Gassman blackmail his own wife? Having the picture, why not use it as divorce evidence?"

"Slowly, slowly, my boy. Question One: Why should the blowgun shooter also be the blackmailer? Because the blowgun arrow obviously was meant only to frighten Hicks. He had it right in the living room. It was an added threat to the written threat."

I nodded. It sounded logical.

"The chemist this afternoon," he beamed, "assured me that the same black crayon-like pencil wrote both the threat and the blackmail note! Even the paper is the same. Consequently, it follows that I'm right. Gassman wrote both notes. Gassman shot the blowgun and is trying to blackmail his wife."

"But . . .?" He held up his hand and began to strut importantly.

"You're going to ask why he'd blackmail his wife. Because of Hicks. Like many millionaires Hicks is stingy. The chances are he gives his daughter only a few hundreds a month in money. She and Gassman have been fighting over Robinson, and she, in turn, has probably refused to give her husband any money.

"You wonder why Gassman doesn't, or didn't, use that negative for divorce evidence. Again the answer is Hicks. Hicks is utterly ruthless. Gassman knows he'd never make it. He knows that queer streak of Hicks' would have

him killed before he'd permit Gassman to divorce Marge Hicks. Satisfied?"

I wasn't, entirely, but I nodded. Then I said, "But why didn't he want Hicks to marry Lili? What was it to him exactly?"

"I can only think of one thing," said Bacchus. "Mrs. Gassman's only opportunity to raise fifty thousand is her father. When people get married they go away on honeymoons, don't they? Gassman was afraid Hicks would leave for Cuba or somewhere before his daughter could wheedle fifty thousand out of him!"

I nodded again. "What are we going to do?"

"Settled one of our cases. Suppose you ask the Gassman family to step in here."

At the door I said, "And Gassman sank the boat?"

"Oh, no," beamed Hallahan. "Will you bring them, please?"

WHAT followed was in a way, pitiful. When Hallahan went over what we had, step by step, Gassman didn't exactly break down, he simply took a deep drink from the bottle in his hand and bowed drunkenly to his wife.

"My dear," he said, "when you employ the services of *The Hallahan* you simply thwart me. Transportation being what it is, I can't leave the island until tomorrow. After which I retire gracefully from the Hicks menage, praise God." He raised his bottle to her, lowered it again. "My most humble apologies," he said hoarsely, "for the scene in the bar and I hope your jaw is better." He took the drink then, drank to both Bacchus and myself and reeled through the door.

Women are funny. I'll swear that Human Icicle stared after him with misty eyes, and all at once she gulped

and swallowed hard, and said, "He's not so bad; really he's not so bad!" And she glared at us as if daring one of us to say he was! Then, stiffly, "I'll mail you a check the first of the week." She sailed out of the room in a hurry and it might have been a sob we heard just before the door closed.

Anyway Hallahan glared at me like it was my fault, and sniffed.

Trying to be cheerful, I said, "Well, another case cleared by Bacchus Hallahan Investigations. We found the would-be extortioner and found who made the murder threat. The rest of the weekend ought to be easy. All we have to do is protect Hicks from Lili in a left-handed manner . . ."

"Or vice versa," said Hallahan, and drew a pair of socks wrapped in an oil-skin pouch from his pocket. "Protect Hicks from Lili or vice versa," he repeated, and groaned as he drew off a shoe.

V

I SLICKED up frantically in my wet clothes, finishing long before Bacchus, and hurried down the hall toward the front part of the house looking for Lili. For Hallahan's laconic last phrase kept ringing in my ears. Or vice versa! *Or vice versa!*

She wasn't in the game room, or the archery-trophy room, or the dining room or the living room. There was no one about, in all of those rooms! The house, all at once, seemed a brooding morgue of silence, vast and omnipotent and foreboding!

I guess I lost my head then. I went running back down the hall, up steps and steps, toward our room, shouting, "Lili! Lili!" And only by the grace of God was my foolishness unnoticed, for no sooner had the second frantic

cry escaped my lips when the door of one of the rear rooms opened and Lili stepped out.

I could only stand there gibbering like an idiot. "Lili! Lili!" And this time it wasn't fear that made me do it. It was awe. Marge Gassman had loaned her a dress. What it was like I couldn't tell you, except that it was white. But I can tell you what it did to Lili. It made her throat and bare shoulders gloriously alive and brown, and it made her mouth seem even deeper in color and her eyes more shadowed by her curling lashes.

"Why—why, Jeff, what is it?" she asked, hurrying toward me, her hands outstretched.

I gripped them. "You've been all right?" I demanded. "All right all the time?"

"Of course I've been all right!" A puzzled, half fearful look grew in her eyes, her fingers gripped mine. "Has—has anything else happened?"

I lied like a gentleman. I said nothing at all had happened. And I led her into the living room and over to the bar, mixed us a pair of drinks. The room was more comfortable now, not nearly so stuffy, because the windows had been swung wide. The wind had died, but the rain was still pouring down, and there's nothing like rain to make a couple draw closer together. I think I told her a few of the things that happened when I was a kid. Finally I said, "I'll bet you were a honey as a kid, Lili."

She looked at me sort of strangely, and her jaw set. Stiffly she said, "When I was a kid I lived in a hovel down by the railroad tracks in a mining town. My mother took in washings." She laughed. "Let's talk of something more pleasant."

I said, "Okay, as man to man, have

you really got those two Hicks affidavits? They'd be pleasant to have."

She looked me right in the eye and answered, "You bet your sweet life I've got them, and in a safe place! And the more I think about them the more pleasant they seem. I'm changing my mind about a lot of things, Jeff."

"Such as marrying that clown Hicks?"

It slipped out. And she froze up. It was probably a good thing that the dashing Archie Robinson reeled in at about this moment, to charm us with his violent sportswear and his capacity for liquor. He kept up a flow of conversation, punctuated by frequent glances at his wrist watch. Presently, looking a bit wan, Marge Gassman came into the room. He brightened immediately, left us to push her firmly down to one end of the bar and lean over her confidentially.

Hallahan was next, limping along, looking more like a country lawyer on his way to court than the most successful and famous investigator in our part of the country. He went back of the bar and squirted himself a glass of seltzer.

"WILL you please leave me alone! You bore me!" That was the voice of Marge Gassman. The nasty laughter and the insinuating answer, of course, were Robinson's. Marge joined us, leaving him, and began speaking to Hallahan of archery. Hohenberger came *tapety-tapping* in, looking as if his beard had recently been wrung out. He leered equally at both beautiful women, playing no favorites, and managed to insert himself firmly between them. The louse.

The electric clock that was the bung of a polished beer keg on the back bar said seven-thirty when our host, Jolly

Roger Hicks, came bursting into the room. Sportswear evidently was a religion on the island. He wore a pair of tight, lemon-colored pants, accenting the bow in his heavy legs, but the feet were again lost in a pair of Congress Gaiters—brown. The coat, so help me, was vivid purple, and the open sports shirt, canary yellow. That seemed to be his favorite color.

"Everybody here?" he boomed, patting Lili's brown shoulder possessively. He glanced about quickly. To his daughter, he said, "Your husband?"

The clock ticked full five beats before her low answer came, "Ill!" Her glance went from Hallahan to me. Somehow I was pleased that she hadn't told Hicks.

"All right," he boomed, "into the dining room we go. Archie will take you in, my dear. And he thrust an arm of that atrocious purple coat at Lili. She shrugged, took it, and away we went.

That dining room was no small corner stuck off by itself. The table was swell, and while sportswear and even wet clothing seemed quite *au fait*, it was evident that Hicks believed in table service *commie il faut*. The linen was marvelously soft, the service was gold-rimmed Haviland, the glassware crystal and the silver old and not too ornate. Even the indirect lighting was swell.

The sound of the rain came through the open window behind the head of the table. The only odd note was the chairs. They were heavy, carved, the flaring arms forming a widespread *U*, the backs scarcely reaching a height of eighteen inches. Maybe, I thought, Hicks expects his guests to sit up straight and pay attention when they dine with him. Besides, anything was to be expected from a monkey that would wear a bright purple jacket and lemon colored pants. To say nothing of

a yellow turkey feather in a green Tyrolean hat!

Juan, the boatman, certainly doubled in brass. In a white jacket he was arranging the implements of war on the buffet.

Hicks took his place at the head of the table, seating Lili at his right. I pre-empted the chair next to Lili, Hallahan stilled in next to me. Across from us, starting at the head, which was Hicks' left, were Archie Robinson, Marge Gassman and Cecil Hohenberger. This, of course, was unorthodox, but anything could happen in a place like Hicks' island.

Juan filled champagne glasses. Hicks arose, smiling. "Tonight," he said, "I ask you to drink a toast with the happiest man in the world! That man is Roger Hicks! And the reason I am the happiest man in the world?" He paused. "I ask you to arise and drink a toast to my future wife, Miss Lili De Long!"

I looked at Lili. She was white and tense, eyes downcast. Across the table Marge Gassman looked as if she might throw her glass full in Lili's face. But she relaxed, she shrugged a bit, as if to say that nothing mattered anymore, and slowly came to her feet with the rest of us.

We drank, we sat down like automats. Hicks dropped his napkin, stooped to get it. Something tinkled beside me. Hallahan had clumsily knocked off a fork. When Hicks' gargoyle of a face reappeared Hallahan was already upright, innocent and straightforward.

Thickly Hicks said, "It has always been known that Roger Hicks loved his first wife completely, placed her before himself in every way. I shall do the same with my second wife, beginning . . . *now!*"

Quickly he arose, stepped aside and back, took her hand. "From now on,

my dear, it is you who will preside at the head of my table!"

UNCERTAINLY she arose. He seized her arm, smiling so that his lips pulled far back from his teeth. He literally shoved her toward the chair he had occupied at the head of the table, stepped away. She half stumbled against the chair. Archie Robinson, born to politeness, got quickly to his feet, stepped behind her, bowing, to pull the chair away from her knees.

And it happened.

At first I thought the fellow was so drunk he had fallen, for he literally tumbled over the back of that chair and jammed her against the table, face downward. Then she screamed, and I saw the blood trickling down across her bare shoulder and staining the linen, the stain growing unbelievably fast.

An arrow had sped its way through the open window and literally torn its way through Robinson's back. A full four inches, including the cruel hunting head, protruded in full view from his chest. The blood that stained the cloth was coming from his mouth.

"God!" shrieked Roger Hicks. "He's dead! Murdered!" And he and I somehow managed to lift poor Robinson, who'd never drink another drop, from Lili's back and lay him carefully on the floor on his side. Lili, still sobbing, near hysteria, flew to my arms, and I dabbed dumbly at her bloody shoulder with a napkin.

Marge Gassman shrieked, "No! No! He said he'd kill him, but it wasn't him! It wasn't Miles! He wouldn't! He couldn't!" She fainted, and Hohenberger, for once failing to leer, caught her!

Hicks ran from the room, and Hallahan, in spite of his feet, kept pace with him.

Lili stared at the open window with fascination. "I could have been killed! It might have been me! Murdered!" I held her tight.

Maria, the cook, wide-eyed at the noise, trotted in from the kitchen, face still steaming. She saw the dead man, made the sign of the cross and joined her husband against the buffet.

And Hicks and Hallahan were back, each bearing an armful of bows. "It wasn't Miles," roared Hicks, spittle flecking his lips as he strung a heavy bow. "Gassman's passed out on the bed. There's someone else on the island, someone who's tried twice to kill me, who sank the boat! You, Cecil, and you, Wallace, grab a bow and a handful of hunting arrows. There's not a gun in the house, but we'll get the murdering rat anyway! We'll hunt the biggest game of all, the greatest of quarries, a man and a murderer!"

He ran for the door, bow in hand, Hohenberger following him quickly for all of his game leg. Hallahan hurried to the head of the table after getting and stringing a bow, reached over the corpse and picked up something, dropped it in his pocket. "Don't let Lili De Long out of your sight!" Then he, too, was gone.

Maria hurried to Marge Gassman, threw water in her face. Juan knew his duty. He strung a bow as expertly as Hicks, kissed his wife and went out after the others.

I said, to Maria, "Take Mrs. Gassman to her room then bring back a sheet to cover the corpse. We can't touch it until the police come."

And it struck me that the police *couldn't* come. There was no way to let them know. We were a full two miles out in the Gulf, it was storming, we had no boat that would make it, a fire was impossible and wouldn't be seen

that far anyway! We had no means of communication!

"Don't be frightened," I said to Lili, and put my arm about her shoulders to take her into the living room. "Don't be frightened," I told her. But I was more than frightened. I was scared to death!

I don't know what we talked about or how many ryes we drank. The clock in the polished beer keg went on and on. We must have spoken of something, but for the life of me I don't know what.

THE first to return was Hicks himself. He looked positively done and down, like a deflated balloon. It actually seemed as if part of the flesh had dropped away from his bulky body. He cast the bow aside bitterly, barely looked at us, poured a water glass full of whiskey and drank it straight down. Just then Hohenberger limped in, wringing wet, water dripping from his beard.

"No use looking further in this storm. We went as far as the north end, where the deep brush begins. That's where the fellow's hiding, of course." He filled a glass, carried it across to the serape-covered divan and sat down wearily. Hicks started an interminable pacing that was half a reel, half a stagger. The minutes ticked away. Juan came in and went out again.

Hallahan? Good old Bacchus! Where was he? Did the killer have him, had he been shot like Robinson? I drank quicker and quicker. The clock fairly sped around now, the hands leaped in derision. Desperately I wondered what to do. He'd told me not to leave Lili. If I went out to look for him and he turned up safe and sound, I'd catch it!

Then he was there, good old Bacchus, coming in the back way! I could have

kissed him. This time he didn't drink seltzer. He shook his head dolefully at me, stared into his glass. I wanted to ask him a thousand questions, but I didn't. I knew my Bacchus Hallahan. He had something rolling around in that funny little brain of his.

Hicks came over for another drink. He snarled at Hallahan, "A hell of a detective you turned out to be." He got no answer. Only another doleful shake of the head. He muttered something about dry clothing and went out of the room.

Hallahan went over beside Hohenberger and engaged him in earnest conversation. The champion looked amazed, shook his head. Hallahan continued to argue. And after while Hicks was back. I didn't even notice what he was wearing!

Hallahan said, "Folks, there isn't a thing we can do until we can get a boat or a signal to the mainland tomorrow. I'd suggest we all go into the library for closeness. In times like these it's more comforting to be together."

Lili and I led the way. Hicks shrugged and followed, Hallahan limping along behind. Not for long moments after we entered did I notice that Hohenberger wasn't with us. Then I thought nothing of it, thinking he'd stayed close to the liquor.

VI

HICKS kept bawling Hallahan out for being such a poor protector. And Bacchus took it! I kept getting madder and madder, sitting beside Lili on the leather lounge. Hallahan was sunk on the small of his back, his hands building church steeples over his little round belly. Hicks paced the room.

And suddenly I noticed that as he paced he rolled his eyes from side to

side, along the floor, the furniture, the bookshelves. He paused in his speech, he paused periodically in his striding, one foot almost off the floor. I sat up straighter. He was working his jaws as if he was chewing gum. The black irises of his eyes seemed to shrink, the whites to grow more prominent. He drew down a book, tried to appear casual as he read the title, but his fingers shook. He went to another shelf, did the same, and the next, and the next. He turned to glare at Hallahan, his white brows bristling like the hackles on a dog's neck.

"Do you hear anything, damn you?"

Hallahan said dolefully, "What should I hear? The beat of the rain?"

But I heard it! *It was the pounding click of a clock, the shrill, resonant clatter of a cheap alarm clock!* Beside me Lili was tense and taut. She heard it, too! But as Hicks strode across the room toward us, Hallahan shook his head.

We kept still. Hicks passed us, breathing heavily, white spittle on his lips, bulbous nose swelling and receding with every breath.

And Hallahan reached in the cushions of the chair behind him, got something, sat it in the middle of the floor. He was back in the chair when Hicks whirled. Hicks glared at the cheap, plated alarm clock on the floor, the clock that ticked away so raucously.

Hoarsely he said, "It's a clock! How'd it get there?"

"I put it there," said Bacchus calmly, never bothering to straighten in his chair. I thought Hicks was going to leap on him. Hallahan's calm voice said, "I wouldn't, Roger. You couldn't kill all of us."

"Kill? What do you mean?" Slowly, Hicks was regaining his control.

"Mean? I mean you killed Archie Robinson."

Hicks actually managed to pick up a cigarette from a table and light it, though it took three flicks of the lighter to do it. He said, "Disregarding the fact that I was in the room when the man was killed, I had nothing against Archie."

"No," sighed Hallahan. "Archie was the innocent bystander. He happened to walk within range. You really meant to kill Lili De Long. The arrow should have struck her about the base of the skull, I'd say."

Hicks sucked on the cigarette, put the lighter in his pocket and kept his hand there.

"Again, disregarding the fact that I was in the room, why should I kill the woman I mean to marry?"

"Roger, you bore me!" Yes, Hallahan actually said that! "You've insulted my intelligence continually this evening. Now I dare you to sit down there in that chair like a man while I give you all the details!"

For full ten seconds Hicks stood there, then slowly he moved toward the indicated chair, across from Hallahan.

"I never took a dare in my life," he said. "Start in. Come on."

Hallahan recrossed his legs composedly. "We needn't go into the affidavit matter except to say that you lied to me and you probably lied to her about them. They're no doubt genuine, or you wouldn't have taken this chance. You knew they not only proved that you swindled your way to your first million, but they make you accessory to murder. I can picture you, Roger, bluff and jovial, laughing off their significance, demanding to see the originals. I presume she only showed you photostats?"

Beside me, Lili whispered, "I did! I did!" But Hicks merely sat stiff and tense in his chair.

"You can outlaw murder, Hicks, and you know it! So you begin to connive in your usual to-hell-with-the-rest-of-the-world way, the way that's made you a multimillionaire. You probably gave her a few hundred dollars to tide her over until you investigated—?" He looked at us. Lili nodded. "—and invited her to your island. You were playing with the idea of murder even then, but you didn't get an opportunity, your brain wouldn't work. Desperate for time, you pretended to lose your head over her, you proposed marriage. What did he tell you, Miss Long, to get a beautiful woman like you to promise to marry him?"

She stiffened and trembled beside me, but her voice came sure and strong. "He pointed out that he could purchase two hundred affidavits to anything in the world. That I could sue, but that if I did, he could keep it tied up in the courts for years and years. He convinced me that the murder thing was untrue."

"Roger always had a nice tongue. What did he offer you to marry him?"

"A million dollars settlement. I—I—" I like to think this was for my benefit! "—I had some wild idea of getting the settlement and refusing to live with him."

"You wouldn't have lived with him," said Hallahan dryly. "You'd have died with him, even if he married you. The offer was a means of insuring your return to the island, an ideal spot for a murder."

He turned back to the stony faced Hicks. "Then you got a break, Roger, a wonderful break. Somebody threatened to kill you and the woman too, if you married her. I know who it was, but it's of no importance. I can see your brain working now, Roger, see how you gloated over that threat!"

"CAN you see it working now?" growled Hicks, straightening.

"Oh, yes," agreed Bacchus politely. "But let me finish, I like to talk of crime, as my assistant, Mr. Wallace, will tell you. And besides, just think if you kill me how many others you'll have to silence."

"And maybe a fire to cover it up!" Hicks took the gun out of his pocket and laid it in his lap. I took my arm from Lili's shoulders and got ready to jump him. Hallahan raised a restraining hand. Hicks growled, "Go on. You always were a smarty, even as a punk at school. Go on."

"Thanks, Roger. Now let's see, where were we? Oh, yes. You brought the note to me, pretending to be frightened. Jeff and I were going to be swell alibis for you! For you already had more than a faint idea how you'd work it. You'd already made sure she'd be in the party, everything was all set. You had your victim and you had your star witnesses. But you shouldn't have brought that laminated Oriental bow along where we all could see it!" He paused reflectively. "You were so proud of it, being an archery enthusiast, that you showed it to everyone. But let's get on."

"You sank your own boat by pretending to go back for the bow. That was when you opened the seacocks, wasn't it?"

His answer was a surly grunt, a wave of the gun.

"You wanted no one out here until morning, so you'd have the deep, dark night to creep out and get your murder contrivance out of the tree. Quite a contrivance, Roger, I give you credit."

I could see Hicks losing control, I tensed to jump again. Hallahan yawned and patted his mouth!

"You mounted the Oriental bow this evening on the stock you had prepared,

slipped out and put it in the tree, to marks you'd probably already fixed. You put an arrow in the groove, cocked and set your mechanism! Just like the old arbalests." He yawned again. "I left it in the tree, Roger. I only brought the clock down, the clock that set it off at the proper time by winding a string about its revolving alarm key. To check the time, so you wouldn't be shot yourself, you had a watch on the floor beneath the curved table leg. You picked it up to look at it when you dropped your napkin. It was time to move quickly then, and you did, for the watch was set with the clock."

And that darned clock seemed to fill the room with its *tick-tock tick-tock!* Roger Hicks got up slowly, the gun in his hand. He didn't say a word, just stood there swaying on his heavy, bowed legs. The gun flashed up.

Something went *zzziinnng!* The gun dropped to the floor! And it was me, Jeff Davis Wallace that grabbed the .38 and slammed it down hard on that sunburned head!

Hicks crumpled. Hohenberger, bow in hand, ran in from the hall, leering excitedly. "You were right, chappie, absolutely right! But that was the tensest stalk I ever made for big game! And the first big game I ever brought down with a blunt arrow!"

He picked the arrow off the floor. It hadn't even pierced Hicks' wrist! Because it had no head, no point of any kind. The cedar shaft was merely rounded on the end!

Hallahan just looked at him, looked at him like he'd like to hit him in the middle of the beard! Afterward I found he'd instructed Hohenberger to shoot Hicks through the wrist with a regular hunting arrow if the worst came to the worst. And he'd used a blunt head.

"You," he said to the leering little

champion, "get some tape out of the bathroom and tape him up, tight! And you, Jeff, you'll find a case of rockets in the boathouse. Fire off enough to get a boat over here, we need police yet tonight." He limped toward the door. "Me," he said, "I'm going to rob some-

one in this joint of some dry socks!"

He disappeared, Hohenberger with him, but Hallahan's head popped back around the door.

Sourly he said, "Jeff, I guess Lili can go with you."

She did.

**The story of a huge ruby that had caused untold deaths and
was to cause many more.**

THE CALIPH'S CURSE

AN UNUSUAL SHORT STORY

By CHARLES INGERMAN



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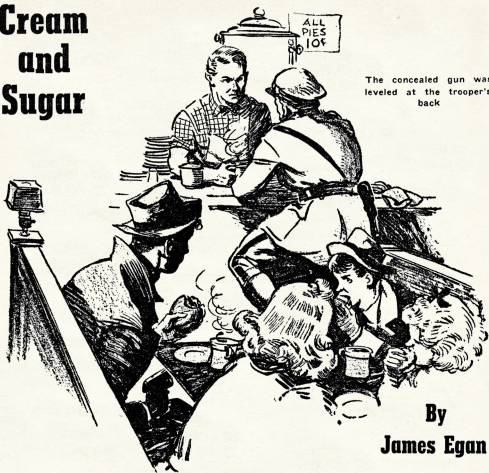
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The concealed gun was leveled at the trooper's back

By
James Egan

Gus wouldn't risk his friend's life for a tenspot; he didn't need to

MY ONLY customer finished his hamburger and went out. I looked at the clock. It was half past ten. Probably be twenty minutes or so before big Cy Balaski of the State Patrol dropped in for his java, if he dropped in. Generally he did.

You can never tell about traffic along the highway after ten o'clock. Some nights it's heavy, and some it's awful light. It was light tonight. Be lucky if I fed a dozen more customers before I closed at midnight.

Without my little radio going, it was kind of lonesome. For two nights now the set had been on the blink. I was taking it into town to be fixed first chance I got. The tubes seemed okay; something else was burned out. Don't ask me what. I'm not any radio expert.

One of those little gadgets can be a lot of company when you're alone at night. I missed the news flashes, and the good dance music you can get on California stations from ten o'clock on.

I picked up after my last customer

and was pearl diving in the back room when a car stopped outside the front entrance. Drying off my hands, I went out to the counter.

Four kids come in. I say kids because none of them looked over seventeen or eighteen. Two girls and two boys.

The tallest boy, kind of good-looking in a dark way, flashed a quick glance around. Him and the other youngster walked nearer the counter, the girls hanging back. I begun to get an unpleasant hunch.

The second boy was scrawny, sharp-nosed. When he opened his mouth I could see an upper front tooth was gone. He said, grinning, "Nobody in the dump. That's a break."

I knew my hunch was correct before the tallest boy's right hand whipped out of a pocket of the light overcoat he wore. The gun in his fist was a blue automatic.

"Stick 'em up!" he snapped. "Anyone in there back?"

"No," I said, putting up my hands, "nobody."

"All right, Montague," he told the scrawny kid, "get around behind that counter and see if he has a rod stashed. Then clean out the register."

Young as he was, the dark boy had a voice harder than a hunk of old-fashioned hardtack. Hard eyes, too. The hand holding the automatic on me was very steady.

The scrawny kid came around, still grinning and showing the gap in his crockery. "At your command, Capulet," he remarked, in a somewhat nasal tone. I understood they were purposely calling each other by phony names. Where they got hold of these fancy monickers I wouldn't know.

Presently the scrawny kid was saying, "Don't see any sign of a heater under the counter, Capulet."

"No, I haven't a gun," I said, which was true.

One of the girls by the door giggled, a bit nervously. But there was nothing nervous about either of the boys. I never saw a cooler acting pair of bandits, and I had some experience.

Oh, sure, I'd been held up before. It's bound to happen, every once in awhile, to anyone running a roadside hamburger stand.

The sharp-nosed "Montague" was digging into my cash drawer. "Hell!" I heard him say. "Less than ten bucks here, Capulet!"

I knew what was in the till. A finif note, a couple of dollar bills and a scattering of nickels, dimes and two-bit pieces. He was right—not quite ten bucks.

THE taller Capulet addressed me harshly. "That all the dough you got, guy?"

"Yeah," I assured him, shrugging, "that's all."

And it was all. Except for seventy-odd dollars I had hid in the back room. I hoped safe.

"Just peanuts!" the tallest boy said, sounding disgusted. "All right, Montague, freeze onto it." He addressed me again: "You don't seem to do much business in this joint?"

"Not much, especially this time of night," I sighed. "You're taking about a week's profit from me tonight. A guy never gets rich selling hamburgers and hot dogs, you know."

"Go on, you bloated capitalist!" mocked Montague. He joined his buddy with the plunder. "Let's scam!"

The dark and good-looking Capulet suddenly smiled. "Maybe the girls could go for some hamburgers and coffee. I feel hungry myself. Put your arms down, mister, and start cooking up four

big Jumbos. Plenty of meat in each."

The scrawny kid shook his head. "We oughta scam. Suppose some customers come in the joint"

The tall boy certainly was a cool young punk. "Supposing they do? The guy ain't going to spill nothing, or he'll lose more than a week's profits. I'll be here at the counter, holding my rod in my pocket. Want a hamburger, girls?"

"Sure!" shrilled one of them. "Leave off the onions!"

A brassy bunch, the whole four. The girls were blonde and kind of pretty, though painted up like fire engines. Far's I could judge, they were tough little tramps, no better than the boys. Maybe their parents ought've used the switch more often. Or maybe it wouldn't have made any difference. I've raised no kids of my own. I should talk.

"You three sit over in that booth by the door," ordered the tallest boy. "I'll stay here until he's done. Hurry it up, chef!"

Already I was frying the prepared pats of ground beef, eight of them. Two pats went into each Jumbo. Jumbos I wasn't going to get any profit out of, either.

Capulet leaned against the counter, watching me. He'd restored the automatic to his overcoat pocket, but his hard eyes—pale blue eyes, they were—shone keen and alert. I didn't make any foolish move. Not me; I was thinking ahead.

Scrawny Montague and one of the blondes parked in the first booth. The other girl, the shrill-voiced one, ankled over to my bum radio, fiddled with the knobs. Vainly, of course.

"Hey, what's wrong with this thing?" she finally yipped.

"It's busted," I answered, starting to brown the buns for the Jumbos.

She muttered a word no nice girl uses and high-heeled to the booth. From Montague she mooched a handful of my nickels and commenced playing the single slot machine I have in the place. Only once in a couple dozen times did she hit, and her language was strong and bitter. A tough little tramp, no mistake.

The tallest boy joined the others in the booth when I served the hamburgers and coffee. Just as I finished, I heard in the distance the exhaust of a motorcycle. That would be Cy Balaski; the clock showed it lacked five minutes of eleven.

The noise of the exhaust grew louder. Capulet's ears pricked up. He stopped biting into his hamburger. I didn't fancy the expression glinting in his hard eyes.

I thought fast. "Listen," I said rapidly, "that's a state highway cop, and he's slowing down. He often drops in here for a cup of coffee. Now, you kids—"

The tall boy interrupted, his right hand darting into his overcoat pocket. "A cop, huh?" he ground out.

Montague looked alarmed. "I told you we oughta—"

"Shut up!" snarled his dark pal. "If he comes in here, guy, he'll be a dead cop!"

There was no doubt in my mind he meant it. Some of these kid criminals nowadays go crazy with a gun. I thought even faster. "Not for a lousy ten bucks!" I croaked out. "I won't crack to him. Not a word! Why not let him walk in, drink his coffee, and then go? He won't have no reason to bother four kids eating hamburgers, will he? After he's gone his way, you can beat it. What little you took from me tonight ain't worth bloodshed . . . I promise not to say a thing about the stick-up!"

GUESS I sounded convincing enough. I couldn't let Cy Balaski shove into my place, unsuspecting, and be greeted with a dose of lead. I had to prevent anything like that.

His coolness returned to the tall, dark boy. "All right, guy," he decided, "we'll play along. See that you don't crack nothing to this cop, if you want to keep on living! My rod'll be under the table all the time, ready to blast!"

On feet somewhat shaky, I moved away from the booth. No sooner was I behind the counter than the six-foot-two frame of State Patrolman Balaski heaved inside. Cy was quite a chunk of rugged manhood in his gray-green uniform. Or out of it.

Before perching on a stool he threw a casual glance at the four occupants of the booth. I swallowed hard. Apparently uninterested after that fleeting look, Balaski transferred his attention to me.

"Evenin', Gus," he drawled, tugging off his gauntlets. "Draw me the usual mug."

"Hello, Cy," I responded, trying to keep my tone normal.

Pouring a cup of black coffee from the silex, I pushed it in front of him. "There's the sugar," I said, nodding at the nearest bowl. "I'll get your cream."

When I'd filled and set the tiny jar of cream by his cup, the patrolman looked at me for a long moment. "Okey-doke," he said, at last. "How's business been this evening, Gus?"

"Kind of dull, Cy," I mumbled, flicking a rag along the counter. Over in the booth Capulet was holding the remnant of his Jumbo sandwich in his left hand. His right mitt was out of sight, his eyes intent upon the officer's broad back.

Balaski creamed and sugared the

coffee, stirring slowly. "Dull night for me, so far. Ain't that radio of yours fixed yet, Gus? You oughta entertain your guests better."

"Ain't had a chance to get into town with it." I forced a grin. "Don't know what's going on in the world, Cy."

"Who does?" His face twisted sourly as he sipped. "Pretty lousy coffee tonight, Gus. One mug is plenty. Gotta be humping along, anyhow. Have to check with Car Seventeen at the Sussqually road crossing, before eleven-thirty. That's five miles north. Don't give me much time."

Cy Balaski slid off the stool, fumbled in his pockets. "Damn it, no change!" he exclaimed. "Can you break a ten-spot, Gus? Afraid it's all I have."

At the question I could sense a sudden tension in that first booth. "Not tonight, Cy," I said, hastily. "You can put it on the cuff."

"Okey-doke." Balaski swung his big frame toward the door, without a look in the direction of the booth. "Well, be seeing you, Gus—when you have better coffee!"

The patrolman went outside. In a little while I heard the sputter of his motorcycle, followed by the steady fire of the exhaust as his machine wheeled down the highway. The noise grew fainter. A funny feeling stole over me. I wondered whether . . .

The quartet straggled out of the first booth. Tall Capulet approached the counter. "Thanks, Gus," he said with a thin smile. "For the hamburgers, and for keeping your trap shut. Don't take that dumb cop's ribbing about your coffee serious. It was all right. We liked it. Nearly enough to pay for it. Nearly."

"Come on," exhorted his scrawny pal, "let's get going! The copper might turn around and come back!"

The tall boy continued to smile. "No,

I think not. He never gave us a second look. The big lug had me worried a bit once, though. When he wanted change for a ten-spot. You stalled him off very nice, Gus. Escort the girls to the jalopy, Montague. I'll be along in a minute."

While his sharp-nosed confederate and the two blondes filed out, he said softly, "I notice a phone in the rear, Gus. Does it work, or is it out of order, like your radio?"

The telephone wasn't out of order. I said nothing.

"Too bad, Gus." He still spoke softly. "You might be tempted to use it after we leave. So—"

I had no time to dodge. He leaned across the counter, combed my hair with his blue automatic. And he didn't rap my skull gently. That's all I remembered for I don't know how long.

I WOKE up to find Patrolman Cy Balaski bending over me, sponging my face and head with a wet cloth.

"Did they get away?" was my first foggy query.

"No, they didn't get away, Gus. All four are prisoners outside, and a patrol car is on the way to pick 'em up. Joe Jenks and Steve Brack rolled in with a load of Interstate freight as the battle ended. Those two husky truckmen are guarding the punks for me. That's a nasty smack you got on the noggin."

"Hell with that!" I wheezed. "How did you manage to collar them? When you popped off down the highway . . ."

It wasn't until after he'd completed first aid treatment and my head was clearer, that I got details from Cy.

"I didn't ride far, Gus. And before pulling out, I quietly disconnected the starter of their car. I ditched my bike down the highway a piece, hurried back through the timber on foot.

"Even though I surprised 'em, I had a fight on my hands. The tall kid tried to do some shooting. A bad egg, that boy. Guess I was lucky to overcome him and his pal without stopping lead. Them punks are tough. Maybe tougher than you realize, Gus. I expect they'll face graver charges than robbing you of your petty cash tonight."

"What you mean?" I asked, startled.

"Early last week an old man was bumped off over in Verdun, a small burg east of the mountains. Living alone, he was s'posed to have a flock of dough hid in the house. Seems all he really had was forty or fifty bucks, but he got the works, just the same. A couple of days passed before discovery of the crime. Suspicion attached to two former high school boys. They'd skipped town in a secondhand car, along with two girls. All four kids had been in trouble before. Worst of the lot was the car's owner. He'd been a honor student in school and even played the lead in the class play last year, *Romeo and Juliet*. The black sheep of a fine family."

"The tall, dark one," I muttered. "He has bad eyes."

Cy nodded. "Well, there was a radio flash tonight that the quartet might be over here on the coast. You'd probably got it, if your set wasn't out of commission."

"But, if you knew who they were when you came in . . ."

"I didn't, Gus. Wasn't thinking about it, particularly. So many of them radio flashes is hooey, anyhow. All I seen was some kids eating hamburgers. Only when you tipped me the distress signal did my mind begin clicking.

"Your answer when I asked change for an imaginary tenner explained the signal. A stick-up. And two punks and two girls in the booth. They could be

the Verdun gang. Short of dough, I figured they'd robbed you and had you covered while I was in.

"Things added up. I knew I couldn't take the punks here. They'd blast me if I aroused their suspicions . . . I'd never be able to draw. That's why I walked out, and maneuvered as I did. We can make 'em talk at headquarters. I think we'll find the punks guilty of the Verdun killing. Looks like that little code we doped out has proved very useful tonight, Gus."

Yeah, I'd tipped off Cy Balaski. Without actually saying anything. Two

months previous the patrolman had dropped in right after a hold-up. The robber was still crouching in my back room with a cocked gun. I didn't dare peep to Balaski at that time. This bandit got away—with more than ten bucks.

So, later, the two of us fixed up a simple routine to tip Cy off to anything wrong whenever he come in at night. All I had to do was serve him cream and sugar with his java.

Ordinarily, you see, he never used cream or sugar.

Patrolman Cy Balaski likes to drink his coffee black.

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The Bloody Isle



Snarling, he snatched a gun from under his blouse

By T. T. Flynn

TROUBLE in the form of two murders broke out when HOLLY BARNES, syndicate writer, attended a house party at the estate of MAGGIE FORRESTER, a fabulously rich and eccentric widow. Maggie's chauffeur and her airplane pilot were the two victims. Shocked as she was, Maggie didn't propose to let this tragedy interfere with a cruise she had planned. She took steps to hire another pilot, a friend of Barnes', in order not to delay the trip to Miami Beach where her huge yacht was anchored.

But Barnes was more interested in getting a big story than waiting for the yachting party to be organized. Sneaking away from the murder scene on the pretext of notifying his papers, he and BONNIE TEMPLETON,

daughter of the owner of the *Washington Press*, began poking into the affairs of LUNGAR PEYTON, former employer of the dead chauffeur, WATSON. The trail lead immediately to Florida. Bonnie stayed behind—to keep him posted on what happened at the Washington end. When she reported that the police were suspicious of Barnes' disappearance, the latter decided to hide out on the Forrester yacht while continuing his search for clues.

Once aboard the craft, Barnes was astounded. The crew was surly, disrespectful; the captain was disgracefully drunk. Something was wrong—definitely—but before Barnes could find out what it was, he found himself locked in a stateroom.

IX

"WHAT the devil's the idea?" I yelled angrily as I rattled the door knob.

His voice was jeering. "Take it easy. You've got a place to stay. Don't make us come in there an' rough you up again!"

"Open this damned door!"

Joe laughed. A moment later I heard him talking to someone—then quiet. I hammered on the door.

"Shut up!" a different voice ordered gruffly.

I tried the port. Nothing short of a sledge hammer would have opened that cast steel cover. I dropped on the edge of the berth and smoked a cigarette, swearing under my breath.

It was a neat trap. I'd walked in like a lamb. Maybe it was a practical joke by Bonnie Templeton and Mrs. Forrester. But the booze-fogged captain, the sloppy crew, the way the boat was being loaded, couldn't be part of a joke. Something told me this was deadly serious.

I'd come aboard unexpectedly. I'd seen the way things were. I'd tried to get away. So I was locked up. I had a hunch I was going to stay locked up. It wouldn't do to let me get out to the police with this story.

So I must be going to sea with Captain Craddock and his crew, whether I liked it or not. And then what? There'd still be trouble when I did get to the police. Or to Maggie Forrester with my story.

That was the moment when a cold little chill touched tight nerves. A captain and his crew, on a yacht like this, never could run away from this sort of thing. Once I talked they were sunk. So why not sink *me* first—as the old pirates and buccaneers had sunk thou-

sands in these shark-filled waters along the Florida coast and through the Bahamas.

The lurid stories out of the past suddenly didn't seem so fanciful. But why? *Why...*?

The crew couldn't have taken over the yacht. Captain Craddock hadn't acted like a prisoner. Someone with plenty of authority had ordered the buying and loading of the extraordinary amount of supplies.

Oh, I tried to think hard. You do at such times. In saner moments most of my thinking would have seemed idiotic. Picture Holly Barnes in a spot like this. I couldn't.

But here I was, in the stuffy, rather luxurious little stateroom and tiny bath, with cigarette smoke making bluish layers in the stagnant air and the activity on the boat making cold reality.

Thought of all those supplies kept recurring. The yacht seemed destined for a long, long trip. I even wondered if Captain Craddock's fuddled mind had shaped ideas of stealing a boat and trying piracy.

Ships and cargoes by the score were vanishing on the high seas as submarines and raiders stalked helpless prey. Why not a little private competition under the safe cloak of a well-known yacht that had departed on a cruise?

Well, why not? Here I was a prisoner on the *Eldorado*. Those excess supplies were still coming aboard.

My thoughts jumped to Bonnie Templeton and the cruise party. If they flew to Cay Oro, expecting the yacht to pick them up, and the yacht didn't appear, after sailing from Miami, wireless alarms would crackle over the world. Searching planes, warships would scour the horizons for the *El-*

dorado. All ports would be warned. No boat would get far under such circumstances.

But suppose the *Eldorado* went to the island and picked up the party on schedule? And sailed out for the expected cruise? What about the cruise party then? Bonnie, Maggie Forrester and all the rest would be as helpless as I was now. They wouldn't have any more chance than I seemed to have.

I paced the little stateroom, three steps one way, three steps the other. Cigarettes were about gone. My watch said it should be dark outside. Still the loading went on. Men worked on machinery down under the decks.

Then, without warning, my door was unlocked. I tensed for a jump as it was opened—and the snout of an automatic poked in first.

JOE was grinning behind the gun. Another sailor was behind him. The door went open only a foot. Joe thrust in a paper sack.

"Hamburgers," he said. "I don't know why they bother to feed you." And he slammed the door again, locked it . . . and there I was again.

I ate, seething inside. Airplanes and speedboats had passed the yacht. I could hear the faint sounds of automobile horns on shore. It was maddening to know thousands of people were nearby . . . and no good to me at all.

At least I had water, food and a comfortable bed. A little after nine o'clock I stretched out and went to sleep. . . .

The low growl of Diesel engines brought me awake. The cabin light still burned. The air was even stuffier. The yacht was moving. After a time I felt the lift and fall of ocean swells.

Biscayne Bay and Miami Beach would be dropping astern. When I

finally went on deck there'd be no land. From what Joe had said when he brought the sandwiches, I'd probably never again see land.

Strangely, I was hungry again. I wanted a smoke, a shave and a bath. I drank some water, showered in the miniature bath, used a comb someone had left in a drawer, dressed again and grimly waited.

It was almost ten o'clock when the door was again opened. Joe stood there unarmed. His grin was nasty.

"You can jump over now, if you like," he said. "No one'll stop you. But don't get curious an' don't shoot your mouth off. The mate wants to see you."

"Where's the Captain?"

"Soused. The mate's aft. Better make it snappy. He ain't a softy."

I found the saloon half-filled with supplies. The fine inlaid paneling would never be the same when the roughly piled boxes were lifted away. Polished tables were deeply scratched. Chairs were carelessly stacked.

The vandalism was a clear warning of trouble ahead. I think I'd retained hope that once at sea everything would be put shipshape and explanations made.

Not now. It was plain that Maggie Forrester didn't matter any more.

Comfortable chairs, a long, upholstered rail seat around the curving stern, and a striped canvas awning overhead made the after deck of the *Eldorado* tops in luxury and comfort. Two men in yachting whites were sitting there sipping drinks. And when I stepped out of the saloon and saw the long, crossed legs, the lean profile of the nearest man, I had my first shock.

That profile had gone aboard the Miami plane at Washington. That man had taxied from Peyton's house and

evidently hurried to join Peyton in Miami Beach. Now here he was on Maggie Forrester's yacht, putting his half-empty glass on a low table, rising to face me.

But the second man, who threw one look and jumped up with a startled exclamation, gave me the greatest shock. He was the heavily-tanned man I'd met in front of Peyton's house. The one who had driven quickly away with a lame excuse. Now he exploded: "Damn! Where did this man come from?"

In the doorway behind me Joe rumbled uneasily: "This is the one you wanted, sir. The one who came aboard to see Cap'n Craddock."

The mate ashore had been merely a bony, middle-aged man. Here he was lean, hard, sure of himself, with a venomous, crackling authority to Joe.

"You fool! Why wasn't I told more about him. He was supposed to be a friend of the owner! He's a newspaper man or a detective!"

No foolishness about Joe now. He was only a big, uneasy lump of a sailor as he replied: "Cap'n Craddock gave the order, sir. I didn't know nothing about it."

"Get out!"

Joe got.

The other man had been scrutinizing me. Seen close and full face he was in his late thirties, with cold angular features and a suave manner. He fitted the owner's deck of any yacht. The tanned and weathered mate looked as if he belonged on the bridge of a ship. Any ship.

"I wonder," the lanky man said in a clipped, cold voice, "if this fellow might not know the Forrester woman and still be a newspaper man . . . or a detective."

And now I knew who had spoken

inside Peyton's house and made Peyton all but cringe. This one, Peyton could be shunted aside. This lanky man topped him.

"Newspaper man," I said as coolly as possible. "Do either of you care to talk for publication?"

Neither cracked a smile.

"I'll talk to him," the lanky one decided abruptly. "Leave us alone, Wolff."

Wolff didn't take that so well, but he went without arguing. More proof that this lanky, cold-eyed man gave the orders.

X

"SIT down," he told me.

"I'd rather have a cigarette," I said, sizing him up.

He gave me one. "Have a drink?"

"Not on an empty stomach. Explanations would sit better."

His angular face was expressionless as he indicated Wolff's chair and sat down himself.

"You fit the description of the man who came to Peyton's house in Washington last night."

"Do I?"

The cigarette tasted good. Astern the yacht's wake was a lane across empty water toward the horizon line. To starboard a school of flying fish planed briefly and skittered over the little waves before vanishing. The morning sunshine was golden warm. The salty breeze had a tang. It was hard to believe this wasn't part of that gay Caribbean cruise on which I'd been invited.

But the cold eyes and bleak, unsmiling face opposite me held no gaiety. I had the feeling the cigarette, the offered drink and chair were curt contempt for my helplessness.

"You do look like the man," he said icily. "Let's see—you came to Peyton's Washington house asking about his ex-chauffeur who had been killed at Mrs. Forrester's house. Today you appear in Miami, asking the same questions. You must have flown down."

"Clever deduction."

Sarcasm failed to move him. He had the same icy assurance that had broken Peyton's fit of fury.

"Turn your pockets out on the table there," he requested. "Everything."

He had the yacht crew to force me. I could jump overboard. I could hit him and do some physical damage. And then where would I be? There's nothing like the empty sea to make you think. I emptied my pockets on the low table . . . change, billfold, handkerchief, pen and pencil, memo book, luggage check.

He examined the billfold, money and blank checks I carried, driver's license, press card. . .

"Holly Barnes. I've seen your name."

"So have ten million others," I told him. "Ten million who'll be curious shortly about what happened to me. . . ."

It should have made him think. He merely said: "I suppose Mrs. Forrester knows why you're in Miami."

"I suppose so."

He had tossed the billfold back on the table and was looking through the memo book. Only one thing in the book bore on this business. He spotted it.

"This is an automobile license number, isn't it?"

I had a thought. "It's the taxi your man Wolff took to Peyton's house."

"Did you look up the number and talk to the driver?"

"Why not?" I said. "I wanted to know where Wolff went." And I

grinned. "That driver is one out of the ten million who'll have an idea what happened to me."

I play pretty fair poker. But this man called the bluff without turning a hair—or ignored it, which was worse. He tore out the page, thrust it into his pocket.

"We'll see that the fellow doesn't think about it."

Once more I had an icy feeling along tight nerves. The man was so damnable sure of himself as he looked me over. It's smart at times not to say all you're thinking. So I looked him over.

But it was bluff. He knew it. He had the passionless detached manner of a man studying a beetle pinned to paper as he commented:

"You seemed to think Peyton was involved in those two murders. You've meddled in this business too deeply." He reached for the drink, sipped it, mused: "You're a newspaper man. You evidently came to Miami alone. You probably did not confide in the police."

"You seem sure of it," I taunted.

"The police would have come asking questions instead of you," he continued thoughtfully. "So they can be dismissed for the time being."

He drank leisurely again. "That leaves the Forrester woman and your friend, Miss Templeton."

I blurted: "What do you know about Miss Templeton?"

In that one mention of Bonnie, the man had become a coldly sinister devil. The feeling intensified when his unwinking eyes stared at me. He waited a moment before replying. If there had been the ghost of a smile about him at any moment, it lurked now behind his reply as he stood up.

"The cook in the galley will give you food. You can walk around the deck.

Don't go below, don't try to question any of the crew. If you need to amuse yourself, sing those idiotic Western songs."

HE TOSSED the package of cigarettes on the table and walked forward, leaving me staring at the empty ocean. My hair had almost lifted. I was struck dumb. Me, Holly Barnes, completely flabbergasted.

He'd been toying with me. He evidently knew as much about me as I did myself. And I didn't know his name, who he was, much less what he was doing with Maggie Forrester's yacht.

He hadn't been at Maggie Forrester's house last night. Yet he knew exactly what had happened there. All of it, I was suddenly convinced.

Probably I should have been elated. I'd followed a shaky hunch back along an obscure trail to exciting discoveries. I'd landed smack at Murder Headquarters. And what could I do about it?

Murder Headquarters knew all about me. I was helpless, facing more mystery than ever. It didn't worry me too much. But the thought of Bonnie Templeton did. Thinking of Maggie Forrester and the unsuspecting cruise guests brought a glum and helpless despair as I sat staring over the yacht's polished stern rail.

The cruise party would fly to the island, if I knew Maggie Forrester. One of the guests last night must be reporting all the plans. Murder Headquarters knew how dangerous Bonnie, at least, now was. What chance did she have? What chance did Maggie Forrester have? Or any of the party?

I grabbed Crowder's half-filled glass and gulped the cold Tom Collins he'd been sipping. I needed the drink badly as I tried to remember all the guests

and place the person who might have reported the happenings at the Forrester house. And I had no luck.

The drink was digging into my empty stomach as I walked forward, found the little galley, asked for and got a cup of strong coffee and a cold sandwich. When I walked on to the bow I was feeling more helpless by the minute.

Below the horizon to the north a ship trailed a pale smudge against the sky. And I found myself clutching the rail and watching a spot in the sky that became an airplane.

Wolff shouted an order from the wheel house. Several sailors hurried on deck and got busy doing nothing. And I felt a lift of excitement and possible hope.

Planes, destroyers, cruisers were patrolling American waters. British warships lurked farther out, blockading enemy merchant ships and watching for raiding battlecraft. This was an American plane coming from land. A big, twin-engined amphibian as it came nearer, bright silver in the hot sunshine.

I gripped the smooth rail tensely as the distant drone grew into the roar of big motors and the plane swooped in a circle across our bow.

The pilot was visible, and faces at side windows. They couldn't hear me and yet I almost shouted at them as I waved frantically for them to come down.

The pilot lifted his arm. One of the observers waved back at me. I could see them smiling as the plane swept around the yacht in a widening circle.

XI

A ROAR of laughter from the bridge brought me around. The mate was still waving at the plane. Two of the

sailors were just lowering arms that had waved also. And they were all grinning at me.

"That's right; be friendly with 'em!" Wolff called. "They'll see that we're safe!"

It was a Coast Guard plane, climbing now and turning away northeast. I watched it grow smaller. The droning motors faded and were lost in the slap and hiss of the yacht's knife-like bow.

Futility struck at me. Every man on the boat was guarding me. I was unarmed, couldn't have done anything if I had been armed. So I paced aft, thinking. From the stern I saw Captain Craddock lurch to the rail. He saw me start toward him and re-entered his cabin. I let him go.

We were heading east or southeast. The Bahamas were east and southeast of Miami. Islands by the hundreds, from sandbanks and reefs to big islands like Andros and Great Abaco. I knew Nassau.

You came in on a big steamer, and the town was there and black boys diving for pennies in the clear water. You heard clipped British speech, bought British goods, rubbed elbows with American tourists—and sailed away knowing nothing about the Bahamas.

I hadn't even asked if Maggie Forrester's island was in British or American waters. Cuba and the Florida Strait were south. We seemed to be heading for the Bahamas or the open Atlantic beyond. I went back to the stateroom, tried to take a siesta, and couldn't. So I got up to see why I shouldn't go below.

I'd marked the engine room entrance. No one seemed to be watching when I started down the steep steel ladder. Light bulbs were glowing below. The air was stifling, rank with the smell of hot oil.

I came down facing the center space between two big racketing Diesel engines. A wizened-faced little man in greasy white trousers and a sweat-soaked singlet was adjusting a valve. He looked up and glowered at me. And my back was punched hard as I stepped on the oily plates. A threatening voice yelled something.

I knew what I'd find when I looked around. I did. A big automatic was against my back. A sweating, surly sailor I'd seen on deck earlier was gesturing for me to get back up the ladder.

The wizened man between the engines was eyeing me with sudden interest. He smiled faintly, shrugged, shook his head as if to say it couldn't be helped. He stood watching his engines as I retreated to cooler, fresher air.

The armed guard stayed below. But a moment after I reached the deck Wolff appeared at almost a run.

"Sneaking below against orders, were you?"

He hit me before I guessed what was on his mind. I was down on the deck in a daze when he kicked me, rasping: "If I'd had my way, you'd be over the side by now!"

I was unsteady as I got up. My head cleared and his leathery face was there before me. I smashed it without caring what happened afterwards.

Wolff bounced off the superstructure and I knocked him back against it again. He reeled off in a crouch with blood on his mouth and grabbed me around the waist.

This was doing something at any rate. My arm whipped around his neck and I tried to throw him or break his neck. It didn't matter much which. Wolff was wiry, hard as nails. We staggered along the deck, neither able to throw the other.

Then help came with a rush—two of the sailors and a third following. I didn't have a chance after they caught my arms.

Wolff was panting, half-strangled as he swiped a handkerchief against his mouth, saw the blood and swore.

"Hold him!" he panted.

Then he hit me in the face. He was smiling now, thin lips curled off his teeth as he smashed me with full-armed swings. Not all to my face. He wanted me conscious as long as possible.

A MAN can take just so much of that before he blacks out. . . . I was a sick man when I came to in my stateroom. The light was on, the door locked again. In the mirror my face was cut, swollen.

I cursed Wolff and the icy man who gave him orders, and Peyton, Captain Craddock and the crew. My watch said I'd been out a good half an hour. I washed, and because there was nothing else to do dropped back on the bed and finally managed to sleep.

I awoke sensing something wrong. It took me a minute to realize that the engines had stopped. The yacht was motionless. Somewhere on deck Wolff was shouting orders.

No one came to the stateroom. Men moved about the deck. I could hear voices away from the boat.

Sometime after eight, Joe, wearing a holstered automatic around his waist, brought sandwiches and a bottle of beer.

"When do I get out of this kennel?" I demanded.

"You don't get out. Them's orders."

"Whose orders?"

"Wolff's orders! An' you talk too damn much!" Joe snapped, closing the door.

"Wait a minute—where are we?"

"New York," Joe jeered as he locked the door.

Outside it was dark now, and quiet. We weren't at Nassau, so this must be Maggie Forrester's island. The hours dragged to midnight before I could sleep again. In the morning Joe brought food, and at noon and night. And the next day, and the next. . . .

Three days Holly Barnes was locked in that stifling, solitary little cell. No fresh clothes, razor, cigarettes or daylight. It was worse than solitary in prison. For I didn't know from hour to hour what was due to happen.

The afternoon of the third day Joe brought me a razor, brush, shaving cream and a change of clothes. "Fix up," he ordered laconically and locked the door again.

He was back in an hour and took me out on deck. The bright light blinded for a moment. Then I saw that the yacht was moored across the outer end of a long, narrow, wooden wharf reaching a good hundred and fifty yards from land.

Shore was a shallow curve of white sand, palms and scrub trees. On the seaward side a protecting arm of the land shut in most of the little harbor from the sea.

On shore, to the right of the wharf, sunshine glanced like molten silver off the corrugated iron roofs of an airplane hangar and a boat house. Beyond the two buildings a sweep of open grass sloped up slightly to a low, massive, tile-roofed house that looked big enough to be a resort hotel.

"Here, Barnes."

It was the lanky man standing on the wharf. My canvas trousers and much washed white shirt were shabby beside his fine tropical weave suit and Panama.

"Well?" I said.

"Mind yourself," he said. "The radio says the Forrester plane is due in a few minutes. I want you to make those people realize that only by following orders strictly will they be safe."

"I won't lie to them," I said shortly. "They won't be safe."

We had started along the wharf toward shore. Joe followed a dozen paces behind. My companion spoke with a trace of regret.

"Wolff lost his head with you. I hope we'll not have violence again. I might not be able to stop it."

"No?" I said sarcastically. "If you can't, who can? You're giving orders."

"Quite so," he curtly agreed. "To a point. Wolff and his men will take orders while everything goes smoothly. Beyond that I can't say. Do I make myself clear?"

"You do not," I said. "And I wish you would."

He stopped instead, looking back into the northwest. I stopped too and heard the drone of plane motors.

"Here they come," my companion said. His voice dropped. "That plane is bringing women, Barnes. I'm counting on you to use your head."

He meant it too, anxiously, and hadn't wanted Joe behind us to hear. Where was the icy threat and certainty of this man who'd been bossing the show? What had changed him?

The plane came in flying low and fast. A multimillionaire's plane, big and costly. It swept over the yacht and banked to circle over the hangar. It was close enough to recognize the broad grin of Lon Sadler at the controls and the faces at the windows.

Lon Sadler circled out to sea and cut the engines as he started a glide back to the smooth water of the cove. We reached the shore and turned to-

ward the hangar. From the side of my mouth I asked: "You mean you're not bossing this show now?"

He looked at me. I couldn't tell what he was thinking. But I could understand well enough what he said.

"I don't know," he said.

XII

A BROAD wooden apron lay from the hangar doors to the water, and there was a landing float for planes and boats. Joe and two more seamen caught the lower wing of the amphibian as it drifted up and pulled the hull alongside the float.

For one fateful moment I had almost shouted a warning to Lon. But the chance was too slim in the face of what I'd just heard.

Lon's broad grinning face appeared at his open cockpit window. "Hiya, feller? I owe you a drink for this!"

"I doubt it," I said.

Bonnie was the first passenger out, waving gaily to me, smiling as we met at the edge of the float.

"Here we are, Handsome. Maggie had her way after all."

"And it'll probably be a lesson to her," I said.

"Your eyes, Holly! You've been in a fight!"

"Listen," I said. "Don't ask questions. Do as I say. No matter what happens, try to keep this bunch quiet! God knows what will happen if they start trouble!"

"I—I don't understand," Bonnie said uncertainly.

"Neither do I," I said. "But that doesn't make the situation any safer. Here comes the Admiral of the deck. Keep her calmed down."

Marilyn Forrester and several other guests had followed Bonnie out, and

Count Karilni was ceremoniously helping Maggie Forrester down to the float.

She waved him aside and thumped her gold-headed cane stoutly on the boards.

"Help girls like Marylin who need it, Mr. Karilni. I'm growing younger every hour. Always do when I come down to this sunshine." She saw me and came spryly toward us, smiling with a kind of grim satisfaction. "I see you changed your mind and joined our cruise, Mr. Barnes." She looked past us to the lanky stranger moving to join us. "Who is this gentleman? I don't believe I know him."

"Neither do I," I said. "Perhaps now he'll explain himself."

I don't know what I expected. What I saw was a stiffly formal bow, Panama in hand, and a polite:

"Smith will do for a name, Mrs. Forrester. I regret to inform you it is necessary to use your island and your yacht. Had you not insisted on bringing your guests here at this time, only the house staff would have been inconvenienced. As it is . . ."

"Just a minute!" Maggie Forrester snapped. "What nonsense is this about borrowing my yacht and my island?"

Marylin Forrester, her Count and the rest of the party were stepping off the float. The first three or four heard Maggie Forrester's words and stopped. The others clustered around. I tried to size them up.

The tanned, stocky man named Foley, who owned the shark-fishing boats in Lower California, was there; and Marylin and her Count; and a young man named Rouch and another named Wingfield; and a Miss Kilbourne, all of whom had been at Maggie Forrester's house last Sunday night. It seemed weeks ago.

In addition two other young men and two girls were in the party. Twelve in all, including Maggie Forrester, and all but Foley were plainly Marylin Forrester's friends. I saw no wedding rings. It was Marylin Forrester's cruise with her aunt chaperoning.

Smith, to use any name he would admit to, looked them over and spoke so they all could hear.

"I must ask your party, Mrs. Forrester, to obey all orders without question. None of you will make an attempt to leave the island or signal any passing aircraft or boats. In the event of unexpected visitors you will all keep inside the house."

One of the girls laughed uncertainly.

Karilni, as tall, pale and blank-looking as ever under his thinning blond hair, bristled haughtily. "Is this a holdup? Barnes, by the looks of your face, you must have some part in it!"

"Keep that man quiet, Marylin!" Maggie Forrester brusquely directed. "Mr. Barnes, what happened to you?"

"A little trouble with the man who's running your yacht," I said. "I was locked up as soon as I came aboard."

She looked at me unbelievably. "Captain Craddock did that to you? That jelly fish? He wouldn't dare, on my yacht!"

"Captain Craddock," I said, "was soused to the ears when I came aboard. He's not running your yacht. A man named Wolff and this man are in charge now."

"WOLFF? I don't know him!"

Before I could say anything, Lon Sadler's angry voice came out of the plane. "What the devil's the matter with you? Put that gun up!"

I shouted in warning: "Take it easy, Lon!"

But the amphibian rocked to a quick

scuffle inside. A body bumped heavily into something. My heart was in my mouth as I dived for the plane to try to stop Lon before he got himself shot.

Joe, the big sailor, standing on the float, had drawn his automatic.

"Keep back!" he warned me, bringing the gun up.

A second later Lon came reeling out of the plane, holding a bloody handkerchief to the side of his head. I caught his arm and steadied him on the float as Joe growled: "Maybe that'll teach you sense, mug!"

"Slugged me with a gun!" Lon mumbled dazedly. "What'n hell's wrong around here, Holly?"

"God knows," I said. "These birds have pirated the yacht and taken over everything. Watch your step. They mean business."

Lon looked at the bloody handkerchief, and at my face, and smiled sourly. "I might have known there was a catch, if you were mixed up in it."

The group had instinctively parted to let us to Maggie Forrester. The old lady indicated the bloody handkerchief with her cane and spoke harshly to Smith.

"Is this what happens if we disregard your highhanded orders?"

"I regret that women have come here, madam. I hope violence will not be necessary."

"Who is this man Wolff?"

"The mate, madam."

Red spots of anger were on Maggie Forrester's cheeks. "I haven't hired any mate by the name of Wolff! Where is Captain Crowder?" She thumped the cane. "Stealing a ship is piracy! If you are trying to get money out of us, not a dollar will be paid! Not a dollar!"

Smith gave her another stiff bow. "You will all go to the house, please. Your luggage will be brought to you."

Lon Sadler's treatment had been a warning they could understand. In dazed silence the group skirted the big hangar and walked toward the house.

"Will you explain this, Mr. Barnes?" Maggie Forrester demanded.

I shrugged. "I can't explain something I don't understand. Saloon, staterooms and most of the spare space on your boat are packed with supplies. Five times as much as you could use on a cruise. As soon as I got on the boat I was locked up."

"I should have discharged Crowder long ago. But Marylin hired him, and he buttered up to her and her friends so much that they liked him."

"Don't blame this on me, Aunt Maggie!" Marylin said resentfully. "What are we going to do?"

That loosened their tongues. "Horrible . . . terrible . . . an outrage . . . they can't get away with anything like this. . . ."

All very indignant, with an undercurrent of fear among the girls, bravado in the young men. Foley, I noticed, was thoughtful; Lon didn't say anything, so I spoke up:

"They *are* getting away with it. Take my advice and for the time being do exactly as you're told."

"And just what," Marylin's count sneered, "is your advice worth? You sound as if you might be working for them."

"They'll act differently when they get in court!" Marylin said angrily.

Maggie Forrester snapped: "All of you listen to what Mr. Barnes says. Kidnappers have killed people before. Sometimes a month passes without even a fishing boat stopping at this island."

That seemed to make them realize their helplessness. They'd been thinking in the mold of well-to-do people who

lived with protection on every side. Who couldn't be missed for a day without someone asking questions and investigating a police search. Who, even if kidnapped, could be certain the F.B.I., newspapers and police would go into quick and relentless action.

Now, suddenly, they were snatched from that world into loneliness, isolation, helplessness beyond anything they'd known. You could see the chill uneasiness clamp down.

I hadn't much considered the kidnapping angle. Now as I calculated how much money these well-dressed young people and their families represented, I wondered.

It would be a new angle in kidnapping, colossal, daring. But suppose the yacht took the party to some hideout on an unfrequented island or coast and left them with food and guards while the yacht, perhaps, was sunk at sea and intricate negotiations started ashore for ransom money?

Right or wrong, you think of funny things at such times. We reached the house—the sort of tropical place you might dream about, with terraces, patio, airy rooms, tennis court, swimming pool, flowers and vines. And four employees, two men and two women, who lived on the island, hurried to meet us. The two women cried hysterically.

XIII

WE HEARD that the yacht's crew had made free with the house. They'd rifled wine and choice tinned food, tramped through the rooms, tried the beds, played the radio, forced the servants to wait on them.

The two husbands had tried to stop it and had been roughly handled. The women had been frightened, rather

than seriously harmed—as yet. But they'd seen and heard enough to make them deathly afraid.

It didn't sound like the icy control I associated with Smith. It convinced me as nothing else would have done that Smith had been in earnest when he asked me to keep the cruise party quiet.

Maggie Forrester calmed them by brusque firmness.

"That will do, Mrs. Kerr. You too, Mrs. Hall. You've had a difficult experience, but I'm here now. Show the guests to their rooms. Hall, you and Kerr wait for the luggage. If one of those men tries to enter the house, call me. We will eat what is already in the house until fresh food is brought from the yacht."

The old lady was rather magnificent about it. Our privacy was not invaded by the armed seamen who brought the bags from the plane. But they demanded luggage keys and searched the bags out in front for weapons.

We dined rather well from tinned food. One could almost believe the big house was shaking down to normal, no matter what was wrong outside. But uneasiness and apprehension dined at the long table with us. There was no stopping the talk, the questions that were fired at me.

"I don't know any more than the rest of you," I told them. "You can see the situation. Better make the best of it for the present."

"What were you doing in Miami in the first place?" Marilyn demanded spitefully. "That sheriff back home is trying to have you arrested."

I laughed at her. "Suits me. Who would like to go back home under arrest with me?"

I could have gathered them all in willingly with a warrant. But my try

at humor wasn't appreciated. After dinner everyone gravitated instinctively to the radio in the big, beamed living room.

Miami came in as if the announcer was in the next room. Then a network program from New York . . . an evening news broadcast. War news first. Men and women were being shot, bombed, slaughtered. Subs and mines were sinking ships. A raiding warship was loose in the South Atlantic. Crews of two torpedoed ships had been picked up some hundreds of miles east of the Florida coast. . . .

American news followed . . . but nothing that affected us. No suggestion that the world knew or cared where we were or what was happening to us.

The radio shook the safe, rather smug background of the faces around me, taunted them with the illusion of safety and security back home and switched to music that mocked the empty open sea around the island.

One of the girls began to snifle. "I c-can't help it," she wept. "Listening to them back there makes me feel *gruesome!*"

Maggie Forrester cut off the radio.

"We'll try bridge then," she said firmly. "Marylin, get the cards."

I caught Lon Sadler's eye and we started outside. Before I could step on the front terrace a voice spoke from the darkness.

"Stay in there tonight, you mugs, if you don't wanna get shot! We're watching the joint!"

Lon spoke at my shoulder as I closed the door. "Nice playmates you have, Holly. I wonder if they're afraid I'll swipe the plane."

"If they are," I said, "they'll probably slit your gullet and stop worrying.

You saw what happened to the other pilot."

"Don't tell me that had anything to do with this!"

"How should I know? But I followed a lead from those two murders and ran smack into this. Can you add two and two and get four?"

Lon spanned his throat with thumb and forefinger and grimaced.

"And you got me to take that dead pilot's job! I'm probably next on the list! What a pal you turned out to be!"

"They've searched the house and luggage," I said. "Kitchen knives seem to be about all we have to use against their guns, if it becomes necessary."

"You do scatter sunshine," Lon said sarcastically.

So I told him all I knew, from the bodies in Maggie Forrester's garage to Smith's request for cooperation and cryptic admission that he might not now be boss.

"If I could get Captain Craddock alone, I could choke the truth out of him," I said. "And don't forget that little fellow in the engine room. He was working down there under guard. He might be some help."

"Amazing," Lon soberly confessed. If that gorilla hadn't clipped me with his gun when I wouldn't take his orders, and if I hadn't seen the cops all over the place in Washington, I wouldn't believe all this. So you think it's kidnapping?"

"How do I know what it is? Smith's behind it—and from what he said to me, and the way the crew acted ashore here, I'd say Smith's losing his grip on them. They're outside the law now, with nothing here to stop them. Smith knows it. He seems to have some decency. He's worried about the women. . . ."

Lon swore huskily. "The plane has

a fine two-way radio and enough gas to reach the mainland. If we can surprise them, load everyone in while I start the motors, I can taxi out toward the reef and in a few minutes warm the engines enough for a take-off."

"Too dangerous to try tonight," I decided. "No telling who'd get shot. It might let loose the hell that seems to be worrying Smith. We'd better bolt and bar the house, have the men take turns keeping watch, and see what happens. I'll tell all this to Foley. He looks like a good man in a tight spot."

Lon nodded. He had been thinking. "Look," he said abruptly. "If we try to get that plane into the air and anything happens to me, the hull sticks pretty hard to smooth water. You may have to make some waves to break the surface tension. It's got the power and the motors are running sweetly."

"Nothing's going to happen to you," I said gruffly. "Let's get organized for the night."

It was an uneasy night. I doubt if the women slept much. I talked with Foley and found him a lean-jawed, calm, sensible man who was missing no tricks. He agreed that watchful waiting was best. And he thought better of Rouch and Winfield and the two other young men than I did.

"They'll back us up," he said confidently. "If only because of the girls. Even that Count Karilni isn't as soft as he looks."

THERE were no alarms during the night. We breakfasted in one of those clear, clean mornings when living is a joy. The party cheered up somewhat, especially when word came from the yacht that we might go outside if we kept away from the hangar and wharf.

Maggie Forrester tried to go aboard

her yacht and see Captain Craddock. A sailor refused to let her on the wharf and she returned to the house muttering in anger.

I set off alone to scout the island. It was about a mile long and less than half a mile wide, much of it covered by scraggly trees and brush. There were reefs offshore, a smaller island and some naked rocks miles to the south.

I was at the south end of the island when I heard motors droning, and a few minutes later saw the Forrester plane gaining altitude into the southwest.

Maybe Lon had made a break with the plane! I was panting when I got back to the house and found everyone there. Foley told me that Lon had been summoned to the plane and had taken off with Smith and one of the armed seamen. No one knew why.

We were still wondering two hours later when the plane returned. Lon was mystified himself when I got him off alone on the side of the island.

"All we did was fly around," Lon told me. "Saw a British destroyer and Smith waved to it."

"Why didn't you crack up on the water beside it and get some attention?"

"Don't be silly," Lon told me. "I was getting enough attention from a gun the sailor was holding at my neck. Smith had already told me that he could fly a plane if anything happened to me. I didn't even have a chance to touch the wireless."

"Just flew around, eh?"

Lon nodded. "He wants to go out again this afternoon. There's a tank of high-test gasoline at the hangar. I'm to start filling up at three. I got the idea he was looking for something."

"Probably making sure no boats were coming to visit us."

"Something else," Lon said. "He used a pair of binocs, and once he seemed to get excited and ordered me to turn back in a circle over a certain spot. Wasn't a thing down there on the water but just the same he looked. It must have been a fish."

"Deep water?"

Lon nodded again. "If it was a fish, he didn't look too happy about it as we went on."

"You know," I said, "that gives me a crazy idea—but it's suddenly clicking with everything else."

"Yeah?" Lon said, opening his eyes. "What?"

"A fish you'd have a hell of a time hooking and landing," I said. "A big fish that no one would suspect so close in to the Florida coast. But one that might take a chance to get badly needed food and fuel oil in some quiet hide-away."

"My God!" Lon burst out, staring at me. "Maybe we're dumb! The yacht's been here four days now! It hasn't made a move to leave! It *could* be holding those supplies and the Diesel oil in the tanks for a submarine!"

XIV

WE SHOOK hands, grinning. Facts were jumping into place faster than I could check them.

"This Peyton," I said excitedly, "this importer from Washington, has foreign contacts! God knows where they all lead or what dirt he's been pitching from his Washington and New York offices! But supposing he wanted to watch the owner of an island and a yacht? Wouldn't putting his own man in as chauffeur be the best way?"

"Hold on," Lon objected. "The chauffeur was murdered too!"

"Maybe he was double-crossed," I

guessed. "There might have been too much danger of his talking to the police."

"I can't swallow that," Lon disagreed dubiously. "After all, murder's murder. And what would that other pilot have to do with this?"

"You heard Smith tell Maggie Forrester that if she hadn't insisted on bringing her guests here at this time, only the four servants would have been troubled. Hell, this was all planned before the cruise was thought of!"

I was jabbing Lon in the chest with my finger as I made points. "And what happened? The cruise party decided to fly down here just at this time! How could a stranger head it off? Go on, tell me how?"

Lon knocked my hand away and shook his head wryly.

"I wouldn't know—when a woman like Mrs. Forrester makes up her mind."

"You're soft," I scoffed. "No guts for a job like that. Smith had 'em. The pilot who was to fly the party down here was killed. And so was the only other man around the Forrester place who might talk. No, not the only one. Someone else was there reporting to Smith. Why couldn't the former chauffeur also have been killed so Peyton's man Watson could get the job?"

"You're thinking like a lunatic!" Lon declared, staring at me. "But you're damned plausible. It all fits. A dead pilot and a murder mystery would stop anyone but Mrs. Forrester from making her yacht trip on schedule."

I went on excitedly:

"Smith left Washington thinking all he had to do was get the yacht here to the island. And then I flew south and landed in the middle of his party. So I was brought along to keep me quiet. The crew wanted to throw me off the

yacht as soon as we were at sea. Smith wouldn't let 'em."

Lon grinned crookedly. "I could throw you over, seeing what you got me into. But this Smith kills two up north and then goes soft about killing you? Oh, no! Not you!"

"Save the wisecracks. Killing me wasn't necessary. Stopping the cruise bunch from coming here to the island would have seemed necessary if we've guessed right about everything."

"You guessed it," Lon corrected cautiously. "I'm still full of questions. How did he take over the captain and the yacht this way? What about this plug-ugly crew that Smith seems so nervous about all of a sudden? Hell, you don't swipe yachts and islands like pulling rabbits out of a hat, and then bow off the stage."

"Who's worrying about their bowing off?" I snapped. "I'm worrying because they're stuck with us now. Look at that crew. They'd cut a throat for a dime. They know what'll happen if they're caught. They're getting out of hand."

"Well, what do we do?"

"Take Smith up this afternoon and see what happens. I'll talk with Foley. Maybe I'm all wet. I hope I am."

"You probably aren't," Lon said pessimistically.

BUT Lon didn't have any idea how soon hell was to break. I didn't. Foley didn't, when I talked with him. An armed guard or two was staying around the plane and hangar; another one or two with rifles patrolled the outlying parts of the island. Lon and I met one of them with his high-powered rifle before we returned to the house. He patted the gun and grinned nastily.

"Anyone who tries to get away or signal a boat, gets popped."

Speedboat and rowboats had been made fast at the yacht's deck. The men weren't working. Just waiting. Once we heard them singing. Once I thought I saw a fight.

Lon had gassed the plane. A little before three he came out of the house and told me he was ready to fly again. Marilyn overheard him and chose that time to let her sultry anger break out.

"We can't get them off the yacht right now, but we won't fly them around in our plane!"

"This isn't the time to get nasty," Lon said coolly. "Besides, I'm taking orders from Mrs. Forrester."

Half the party was sitting listlessly in beach chairs on the terrace. They snapped to attention as Marilyn let out her feelings on Lon.

"My aunt is asleep! You'll take orders from *me*! I forbid you to touch that plane this afternoon!"

She was stormily pretty when she flared up like this. I suppose it worked most of the time. I'd seen it work with Karilni back there in Washington. But Lon only grinned at her and walked to the hangar.

Marilyn flushed and turned wildly to her audience.

"Did you see him? Just as if he weren't an employee! I'm going to the hangar and stop this!"

"Don't be a fool, Marilyn!" Bonnie said sharply.

"I don't need your advice!" Marilyn flounced off to the hangar like a spoiled brat.

"Holly, hadn't you better stop her?" Bonnie said anxiously.

"Might be a good idea to let Smith tell her off," I decided. "I'll walk down there and watch it."

Young Tony Wingfield caught up with me. He was my pick of the young men, a clean-cut young fellow just un-

der six feet, with a ready smile. I'd marked his interest in Marylin. He was sober now as he said:

"She's a good egg—but she's never had to meet anything like this before. I'll try to stop her."

Lon was starting the motors, Smith was standing on the float as we neared the hangar.

The guard met her and stopped her. Marylin was in a helpless fury when we reached them. She cried to Tony Wingfield: "This man says I can't go to my own airplane!"

Wingfield had to lift his voice as Smith entered the plane and the motor exhausts racketed.

"Come on back to the house, Marylin. You're not doing any good here and you know it."

"Don't tell me what to do, Tony! I've had enough of this!"

Lon gunned the motors and the big amphibian moved away from shore. Two sailors, who had cast off the ropes came up to us grinning expectantly. One of them, who had an unshaven, undershot jaw, staggered slightly. They'd been drinking. It gave me an idea how things were on the yacht. I looked around and saw Bonnie, the Kilbourne girl and two more of the young men coming to join us. I said curtly to Tony Wingfield: "Get her

back to the house. She doesn't realize what she's doing."

Wingfield was realizing. His face set with purpose as he caught Marylin's arm. "Stop this and come to the house! I mean it, Marylin!"

She slapped him and wrenched away. "Don't you try to order me, Tony!"

The sailor with the undershot jaw was grinning as he lunged forward, jerked Marylin close and clamped an arm around her.

"I'll show you how to handle 'em, buddy."

Marylin was too furious, too astonished to scream. Young Tony Wingfield reached them before I could. He hit like an amateur boxer who knew his business, a short, hard uppercut that smacked audibly against that undershot jaw.

The seaman would have dragged Marylin down as he fell if Wingfield hadn't caught her. "Come on!" he said roughly. "You see what a fool you are!"

"Look out!" I yelled, trying to get past them.

The sailor had come up to his knees, groggy and swearing, as he jerked up his blouse and whipped out an automatic. Before I could reach him, two crashing shots drowned Marylin's scream of horror.

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It's Harder To Live

By D. L. Champion

IT WAS five-thirty when Latham got out of bed. Quietly, so as not to disturb Janet who slept beside him. He tiptoed shivering into the warmth of the living room and closed the door behind him.

His clothes lay neatly upon the over-stuffed couch. The suitcase was open on the floor. Latham stood for a moment over the hot-air register. Waves of heat flowed through his pajamas, bringing him warmth but not comfort. There was a coldness inside him beyond the touch of physical heat.

He sighed heavily, stared at his face in the mirror over the mantel. The reflection was not reassuring. Concave cheeks, prominent Adam's apple, sparse grey hair upon his head, and shadowy,

lifeless eyes. He looked old enough, God knew, and he felt twice as old as he looked. Almost like a corpse, he thought. Then laughed silently at the irony.

He dressed slowly. His body grew warmer with the movement. But the cold within him did not abate. His mind functioned automatically like a machine which has done the same thing a hundred times.

On the other side of the bungalow, his son slept. Tommy was a fine, husky boy almost arrived at his eighth birthday. A smart lad, alert and curious. And he was growing up. Inevitably he would acquire the knowledge Latham never wanted him to acquire. Soon would come the disillusioning day when he

*Some day a look would come into his son's
eyes and Latham could never face that . . .*

would learn what had been so assiduously kept from him. No longer would his eyes shine with laughter and hero worship when they romped together.

Latham jerked his tie into place and stared again into the mirror. Dark, lustreless eyes with darker circles beneath stared back at him.

There was Janet, too. For years she had been both wife and bulwark to him. Now a subtle change had come in the relationship. At meal times she avoided his eyes. It seemed, too, that she avoided his touch. Sometimes, he would catch her looking at him with shining repulsion in her gaze as if she watched a sleeping snake.

Latham put on his vest and said aloud to the mirror, "I wish I were dead."

The words hung flatly in the room, sounded flatly in his ears. They were words he had spoken so often before that the sincerity behind them was not apparent in his tone.

If he were dead there was a matter of twenty thousand insurance dollars. Enough to put Tommy through college; enough to secure Janet against poverty and want.

The policy was the single thing he had salvaged from the past—the happy past when he had earned his bread honestly and creatively. Before the complete crackup of his business had forced him into his present circumstances.

While he lived that money did nothing for him or for his family. First he must die. He had often thought of suicide. But a very definite clause in the policy precluded that.

Dressed, he moved away from the mirror. He lifted the suitcase to the couch. He placed a pair of shorts, a shirt, a tie, and a toothbrush inside. He straightened up abruptly, having heard a scraping sound from the direc-

tion of the kitchen. He turned to see the man with the gun upon the threshold.

Man? Boy, rather. Certainly he was not a day over nineteen. Bareheaded he was, with wild and bloodshot eyes. His face was drawn, white and tired. His shoes and trouser cuffs were wet as if he had walked long in the dewy grass of the dawn.

LATHAM regarded him calmly. For three years he had expected something like this. He met it without emotion.

The boy with the gun moved into the room, closed the kitchen door behind him. He spoke in a high-pitched voice just this side of hysteria.

"It's taken me four months to find you, Latham. Four months to find where you lived. I guess you know what I'm here for."

Latham took a deep breath. "Yes," he said. "I know. Who are you?"

The boy's eyes narrowed. "If you don't know who I am," he said in a queer lilting tone, "how can you know why I'm here? How can you—"

"There can be but one reason why you come here with a gun," said Latham. "Does it matter who you are?"

The boy considered this for a moment, then nodded his head in understanding.

"My name's Arnold," he said. "I'm Harry Arnold's brother."

"I see," said Latham very quietly. "And you've come to kill me."

The restraint went out of Arnold's tone then. "Why not?" he flamed. "You killed my brother, didn't you? You murdered him!"

"Your brother was a killer," said Latham unemotionally. "A cold-blooded killer. He deserved to die."

Arnold laughed and there was no

mirth in his laughter. "Coming from you," he said, "that's very good."

"I see your point," said Latham with an almost judicial air.

The automatic moved with the tremble of Arnold's hand as he said, "So, I'm going to kill you, Latham."

Latham stared at the gun. In the past three years he had become quite familiar with death. He was not afraid. On the contrary he felt vastly relieved. The coldness inside him was dissipating. He was tired, old. And there was deep rest within the grave. Rest and freedom and twenty thousand dollars for Janet; for Tommy, perhaps, eternal ignorance of what his father had been.

A wry smile crossed his lips. Arnold's revenge was no revenge at all. It was the thing for which Latham had been praying.

"All right," he said steadily. "So you're going to kill me."

Arnold raised the gun slightly. "I'm going to kill you," he said, and there was a swift desperate note in his voice. "I'm going to kill you because you killed my brother. I'm going to kill you to stop your killing anyone else."

It seemed to Latham that the words were calculated more to steady Arnold than anything else. The boy's lips twitched nervously. He uttered an odd, strangled sound and his bloodshot eyes

were suddenly moist. His right hand dropped to his side and the automatic fell clattering to the floor. There were tears on his white cheeks and in his voice as he spoke.

"Damn you," he said dully. "I can't do it. I can't shoot a man in cold blood. I'm not a butcher like you, after all, Latham. I can't do it. I can't!"

His words trailed off. He stood sobbing nakedly, his hands still at his sides. Latham felt embarrassed.

"Arnold," he said with strange gentleness, "you'd better go home."

Arnold blinked through his tears. "I'm yellow," he said. "Just no-good yellow. I swore I'd kill you. I let Harry down. I swore I'd have my revenge."

"Go home," said Latham again. "And remember if it's revenge you want, it's harder for a lot of men to live than to die. Now go home."

Arnold stared at him for a moment without understanding. He swung around on his heel and disappeared.

Latham sighed and closed the lid of the suitcase. He glanced at his wrist watch. It was just six-fifteen. He could make the train nicely. It was a long eight-hour run to Ossining where three hard-faced men, much like Arnold's brother, waited in the death cell for State Executioner Latham to throw the switch.



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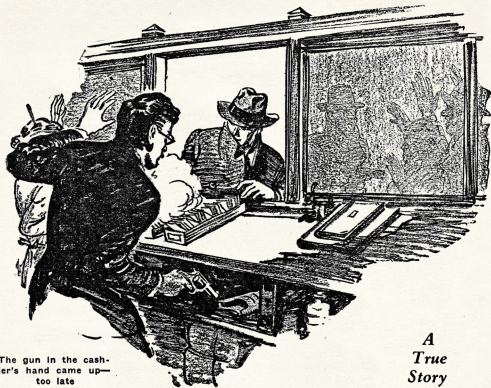
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*A
True
Story*

Minor Incident

By Joseph Fulling Fishman

IN THE early part of March, 1929, Joe Kornecki, a none to reputable citizen of Buffalo, New York, was superintending the operation of a still in the basement of his home. Kornecki knew nothing of steam gauges and very little about the tremendous power of steam. All he knew was that bootleg liquor of even the worst kind was bringing a fantastic price, and that he wanted to get some of the easy money.

As he bent over to see how things were getting along, the still exploded with a roar which could be heard sev-

eral blocks away. Pieces of the metal container flew in every direction, some going through the floor and others sailing out through the low cellar windows. There followed the usual gathering of cautious crowds on the outside, and then the scream of police sirens.

Kornecki—miraculously alive—was picked up in a corner of the cellar where he had been hurled. He was unconscious, but as he was rushed away to the hospital he regained consciousness for a few moments in the ambulance. Then he fell off again, to come to con-

sciousness once more as he lay in bed at the hospital. Two doctors were bending over him, while a nurse stood nearby with gauze and instruments as they were needed.

Kornecki moved his lips. One of the doctors saw that he wanted to say something and bent his head close to the patient's mouth.

"All—over?" he whispered.

The doctor didn't reply. He knew that Kornecki's death was a matter of a few hours at most, and that he didn't have a chance in a million to recover.

The lips of the patient moved again. "Tell me—not afraid," he mumbled.

"I'm afraid it is", the doctor admitted.

If this news worried Kornecki, he didn't show it. He evidently had something on his mind he wanted to get off before he died.

"Send for—Kalky," he commanded huskily.

"Who?"

"Kalky—gimme pencil—paper—hold me up."

While the doctor and the nurse supported him he scrawled on the paper handed him the name *Anthony Kalkiewicz*, together with the address. The doctor rang for an orderly and directed him to take the message and bring the man desired at the earliest possible moment.

"Take a taxi," he said. "He hasn't much time left."

Within twenty minutes the man Kornecki wished to see was at his bedside. Kalkiewicz' hard face showed as much concern as it could when he saw the plight of one of the members of the mob of which he too was a member.

"Sorry, Joe," he said. "You'll pull out okay."

Kornecki shook his head. "No," he contradicted. "All over. Sent for you

because—wanted see—Big—Big Korney. Know where he—is?"

"I'll find him; don't worry."

"Gotta see him—gotta—something 'portant—gotta . . ."

The dying man drifted off, and Kalkiewicz hurried out to the roadhouse on the outskirts of town where John Kwiatkowski, the leader of the mob, spent most of his spare time. "Big Korney," as Kwiatkowski was known, was a huge hulk of a man with a beefy, red face, small, cruel eyes, and a set, determined mouth. He was standing at the bar drinking with another man and two women who were perhaps just a little tougher than the men.

"Hiya, Kalky," Big Korney yelled, "C'mon and have a drink. Do you good."

Kalky ignored the invitation. "Come here a minute, John," he said. "Got something to tell you."

Big Korney left the little group and swaggered over. "What's on your mind?" he inquired, his manner a bit more surly than usual because of the interruption to his favorite occupation.

"It's Joe," Kalky responded. "Had an accident this morning."

"Yeah? What?"

"Still blew up. He's in the hospital. The doc told me he was dying. Joe sent for me because he knew I could find you. Wants to see you before he goes. Says he's got something to tell you . . . something important."

"What is it?"

"I don't know. He didn't tell me. He won't last long. Better hurry."

Big Korney made a grimace of distaste. He glanced back at the bar at the three he had just left. They were laughing and drinking. That was much more pleasant than talking to a dying man. Big Korney hesitated. One of the women at the bar yelled:

"C'mon, John. We're one up on you now."

Big Korney walked slowly over to a table where he had flung his hat. He put it on and started with Kalky toward the door. Then he looked back at the laughing trio. He took his hat off, threw it back on the table, and went back to the bar to join his companions.

"To hell with him!" he said briefly.

Had he but known it, those four one-syllable words were to have amazing repercussions not only on himself and those he knew most intimately, but also on strangers whom he had never even seen. And they were to open up an amazing vista of some of the most cold-blooded and sadistically cruel crimes ever perpetrated in the city of Buffalo.

A LITTLE less than four years prior to this time, on August 12, 1925, Ward J. Pierce, secretary and treasurer of the Art Metal Works in Buffalo, was arranging payroll envelopes in three large trays. The company had a considerable number of employes and there were several thousand dollars in wages paid out each week. This particular payday, on the surface at least, was no different than countless others which had gone before.

But it was different—at least to one of the several dozen employes who came trooping down into the office to take their place in the pay line. This one did not go directly into the line. Instead, he sauntered over and glanced out of the window facing on the street. He saw the usual line of automobiles belonging to the workers lined up at the curb, some empty, some with wives or other members of employes' families impatiently waiting for them.

But what interested the observer most was a Cadillac sedan parked about twenty-five feet up from the entrance,

and particularly three men lounging alongside it as though they too were waiting to take some of the workers home. The observer waited a few seconds until one of the men turned casually. When sure that the latter had seen him, the man inside turned and lounged back toward the end of the line. But before he did so he unlatched the door and opened it an inch as if he intended to go out. He closed it again, *but not all the way*. Then took his place among the laughing, gossiping group of men and women waiting for Mr. Pierce to give the signal for the line to advance so that he could begin paying off.

"All right," Mr. Pierce called at last. "Give your name and number as you come up."

The door to the street opened silently. Three men stood in the room. Startled exclamations came from those in line, whispers, sibilant half-phrases on the edge of a suddenly-caught breath, and a gasping, "*Stickup!*" from one of the employes.

"Stickup is right," said the leader of the trio, his gun held at his waist. "Don't anyone move. Try to get funny and we'll let you have it. Stay where you are and—"

One of the women in the line exhaled sharply, swayed and dropped to the floor in a faint. The man alongside her started to bend over to help her.

"Straighten up, you," said the bandit sharply. "Let her lie. Get the envelopes, boys . . . three trays."

Two of the employes had not lost their heads. They were Mr. Pierce and Miss Florence Ottinger, his assistant. The instant she heard the whisper, "*Stickup,*" Miss Ottinger dropped one of the trays and kicked it under the counter. One of the thugs glanced around at the vague sound. She was not sure whether he had seen her motion or not.

But Mr. Pierce's action was of an offensive rather than defensive nature. Under the counter a few feet away was a gun. Keeping his body perfectly still, Mr. Pierce's hand felt along the ledge. As his hand crept closer and closer, he realized he would not be able to reach the weapon without shifting his position.

He took a cautious step to the right. A sense of movement, even so slight as this, startled the leader. He whirled around. For the first time he noticed that Mr. Pierce's hands were not in the air like the others. Only one hand was up.

"Hey, there, don't try—" the desperado began.

But Mr. Pierce's hand had closed on the gun. He jerked it off the ledge and swept it up over the counter.

The bandit fired. Mr. Pierce quivered as a bullet tore into his chest. The gun was still in his hand. He was still conscious. Desperately he tried to fight over the numbing weakness stealing over him and to pull the trigger. But another shot from the bandit's gun went through his arm. The cashier's numbed fingers relaxed. His weapon dropped to the ground. Slowly, Mr. Pierce swayed from side to side and then fell unconscious to the floor.

Near-panic seized the lined-up employees. There was a hesitating, restless movement among them. It needed but the slightest spark to send them screaming in all directions. The leader noted it.

"Steady there!" he shouted. "The first one who moves will get the same thing. Here, you—"

The last was to Stephen Fisher, a young man who, either because of panic or faintness, took a step or two backwards. The bandit's gun barked again. Fisher screamed with pain as the

bullet bored into his hip and flattened itself against the bone.

"Anybody else want it?" the bandit demanded. "All right, boys. Got the trays?"

"Got two. You said there were three."

"Three is right, but we ain't got time. Someone may have heard the shots. C'mon."

Keeping the wavering line covered, the three men backed to the door. As they reached the sidewalk they turned, ran to the car, swung themselves in and speeded up the street and out of sight.

"A clean get away," the leader gloated, as the car spun around a corner and sped toward their rendezvous on the outskirts of the city.

BUT the next morning Miss Dorothy Littlewort, a school teacher in Buffalo, appeared at police headquarters and asked to see the Chief of Detectives.

"I think I might be able to help you on the robbery of the Art Metal Works," she said. "I was sitting in my car right in back of the one those men had, and I noticed one of them particularly."

"Thank you, Miss Littlewort," said the chief. "But tell me, how did you happen to notice just that one?"

"Because he looked exactly like a boy I used to go to school with. In fact, I thought it was the boy, and I was just about to call him when he turned his face in such a way that I could see it wasn't. But even then I wasn't entirely sure. I did not want to ask him because if it was really a strange man, he might think I was trying to flirt with him."

"Would you know the man if you saw him again?" the chief inquired.

"Yes, indeed."

"Do you think you could recognize him from his picture?"

"I believe so."

The chief took her over to the Rogue's Gallery. From her description of the man he felt sure that the police had his picture. But he let her, without any suggestion from him, turn over one page after another. Finally she stopped.

"That's the man!" she exclaimed.

"You're sure of it?"

"Absolutely. There's that same resemblance to the boy I used to know at school."

The man whose picture Miss Littlewort had pointed out was Edward Larkman, and his record was far from savory.

Born August 23, 1900. Arrested for truancy when 15 years of age. Paroled.

Found guilty of robbing freight cars in 1916. Sentenced to Industrial School at Rochester for 15 months.

Robbing freight cars in 1917. Sentenced to Randall's Island for 15 months.

March 5, 1919. Assault, third degree. Fined the sum of \$25.00.

March 1, 1920. Guilty petit larceny. Fined the sum of \$25.00.

June 21, 1921. Non-support. Two years' probation and directed to pay wife \$10 per week.

May 22, 1922. Defrauding hotelkeeper. Restitution of \$8.50, amount involved in fraud, and probation for one year.

August 9, 1922. Arrested for nonsupport on charge by wife. Placed on six months' probation.

June 25, 1923. Vagrancy. Sentenced to thirty days in the Erie County Penitentiary.

December 28, 1923. Criminal assault, first degree. Five to ten years in Auburn. Suspended, placed on probation, when it was found that Larkman had been living with the woman for six months.

A CALL was sent out for Larkman as the man who had so brutally murdered the courageous cashier at the Art Metal plant. The next morning Larkman read in the papers that he was wanted. He fled to Niagara Falls. Here he met a man named Jerry Nugent. In a car which Nugent had stolen Larkman accompanied him to

Toledo. There the two men separated. When the trail began to get hot at Toledo, Larkman went to Detroit.

Four months later a Detroit detective noticed a man whose features seemed vaguely familiar, working on an ice wagon. He walked up to get a closer view. As he did so, the man noticed him. He sprang on to the driver's seat and threw the truck into gear. But the detective sprang up beside him.

"Just a minute," he said. "What's the hurry?"

"No riders," the man growled. "Sorry, but them's the boss' orders."

"I'm not riding," said the detective, as he suddenly placed the driver. "But you are. Get em up."

The driver's hands went into the air. "What's this, a stickup?" he demanded.

"No . . . Larkman," the detective came back.

"My name's not—"

"Your name's Larkman," said the officer.

"Well, what if it is?"

"Nothing, only you're wanted for a little case of murder at Buffalo."

"I didn't have nothing to do with that job."

"What job?"

"The Art Metal job."

"What made you think that was the one?"

"Because I saw it in the papers. I didn't have nothing to do with it, I tell you?"

"What'd you take it on the lam for if you were so innocent?"

"Because the bulls are always on my trail. Everything happens they try to stick on me."

"That's too bad," said the detective, with mock sympathy. "But we'll take a little ride over to headquarters. Maybe you can prove it to a jury."

So Larkman was taken back to Buffalo, where, on February 5, 1926, he was indicted for first degree murder. Several of the employes of the Art Metal Works failed to identify him at his trial, but they all admitted that they may have been so frightened that they could not have identified anyone. One employe, Victor Chojnicki, was particularly certain that Larkman was not one of the three men.

But Miss Littlewort was sure. She insisted that she had had ample opportunity to observe the defendant on the day of the murder, and that his resemblance to her former school friend was so striking that she took particular notice of him. The defense attorney, Paul Worthley, a young attorney of Buffalo who had never previously tried a case, and who had been appointed by the court, took Miss Littlewort over the ground again and again. But she stuck to her story.

"I would not want to do anything to convict an innocent man," she said. "What possible reason could I have?"

"Well, you might be just mistaken?"

"I might be, but I don't think I am."

"You think. But do you know?"

"Yes, I am positive that he is the man."

"You know, Miss Littlewort, that if he is convicted it may mean the electric chair?"

"Yes, I know. And I would not make the identification unless I was absolutely sure."

SO, ON March 4, 1926, Larkman was convicted of murder in the first degree. A few days later he stood before the judge and heard the fatal words which meant that he was to die in the electric chair at Sing Sing. When asked if he had anything to say prior to sentence, he merely reiterated:

"I'm innocent, Your Honor. I hadn't a thing to do with it. I wasn't there. You're just convicting me on my record."

He was taken back to jail. The next day he was transferred to the death-house in the low, gray building beside the Hudson, where so many men have entered, never to return.

An appeal for a new trial was denied and Larkman made ready for his end. During the long, tortuous days and weeks which dragged by between the appeal and its denial by the higher court, Larkman kept insisting upon his innocence, just as do so many others who seem to feel that if they can only assert it often enough they may be able to make others believe it.

The day of execution came at last. Larkman said a last farewell to his wife, who had stuck by him throughout. He was given his death clothing, the trousers legs were slit and his head shaved so that the electrodes could be applied. The hours ticked on until the last one; then the minutes, one by one. The door of the death house clanged and the priest and other members of the death procession came in. Then it clanged once more and a guard hurried through.

"Good news for you, Larkman," he exclaimed. "Governor Smith has commuted your sentence to life imprisonment!"

The happy prisoner was taken out of the deathhouse and into the prison proper. Shortly thereafter he was transferred to Dannemora, the so-called *Siberia of America*, to begin the sentence which could end only with his life. Within a few weeks, both he and his case were completely forgotten.

Three years later events in no way connected with Larkman began to shape in the great world outside—the world which Larkman was doomed never to

see again. The first of these events took place on April 26, 1929, when several bandits entered the office of the Fedders Manufacturing Company in Buffalo and demanded the payroll. Here, as in the Art Metal stickup, the bandits were free with their guns. As here, also, one man, John H. Perrator, was shot and killed.

The bandits, with the payroll in their possession, piled out of the Fedders building and ran for the Ford car in which they had come. They raced around the nearest corner and out of sight. But then, as if declining to take further part in robbery and murder, the car stalled. After a few frantic seconds, the occupants abandoned the stalled machine, walked a few blocks, took a taxicab, got out within a half-mile and then proceeded to their rendezvous, where they divided the several thousand dollars which the holdup had netted them.

In questioning the employees of the Fedders Company, the police found out that one of the bandits wore amber glasses. One of the holdup men on the Art Metal job had had on glasses of a similar kind. But this was a minor slip, compared to that of the car. For, instead of using a stolen car as in the Art Metal case, the robbers used a Ford which belonged to one of the members of the mob. It was of course easy to trace.

The police found that it belonged to Anthony Kalkiewicz, or "Kalky"—the same Kalky who had taken the message from Joe Kornecki to the roadhouse where Big Korney, enjoying himself with his friends, had refused to go to the hospital to receive a dying message from his pal. That following afternoon the police picked up Kalkiewicz.

"Sure, that's my car," he admitted. "Someone stole it from me."

"Well," he was told, "we'll see if anyone there can identify you."

There were plenty who did. So Kalkiewicz went to jail. Big Korney sent him word not to worry, as the mob was working for him and would soon be able to spring him.

Kalky waited with such patience as he could. A week went by and nothing further was heard from the mob. Then another week. Kalkiewicz began to get restless. Also, what was strange for him, he began to think. And the thing which he began to think about the most was Big Korney's response in the roadhouse when told about a pal in trouble—"to hell with him." Things began to shape themselves in a pattern in Kalky's mind. He saw it all clearly now. Big Korney was your pal—so long as everything went along okay. But the minute you got into a jam—well, he just wasn't there.

KALKY waited a few more days. He wanted to give Korney the benefit of the doubt. But when this time dragged past and he heard nothing from any of the mob, Kalkiewicz sent for Chief of Detectives John G. Reville.

That careless, brutal curse of Big Korney's, uttered in the roadhouse just four years previously, had come home to roost at last!

"Chief," said Kalkiewicz, when Reville stood in front of his cell, "I was in that Fedders job."

"Tell me something new," responded the chief. "Everybody there has identified you."

"Sure, I know. But what you don't know is *who else* was in it, and I'm going to tell you."

Chief Reville looked sharply at the prisoner. Kalkiewicz wasn't the squealer type. The chief suspected some kind of a trick.

"What are you after?" he demanded.

"Nothing. I'm telling you because . . . well, because I'm not going to take all the rap. It was Big Korney's mob. Korney was in it, and I was, and Bolly, and Ziggy."

"Who're Bolly and Ziggy?"

"I don't know Ziggy's name. Bolly is Steve Ziolkowski."

"Are you willing to make a written statement?"

"Sure, I am. And I'm going to put something else in it too."

"What's that?"

"About a guy that Bolly and some of the mob bumped off."

"You mean Perrator, on that Fedders job?"

"No, I don't. This guy was *in* the mob."

"Who is he?"

"His name's Victor Chojnicki?"

"Who's he?"

"He was the fingerman at the Art Metal stickup. He worked at the place then. He fixed the door so we could get in."

"All right," said the chief, "tell me the story. First about this Chojnicki."

"Well, it was right after Joe Kornecki died. You remember he was blown up by a still. Korney came down to see me and he told me that he had given Chojnicki a century for the Art Metal tipoff, and that Victor was asking for more money. Said he wanted to blow the town and go to Chicago. Korney said he told him he wouldn't give him any more, and that Victor began to get nasty and to make some cracks about what he would do. So Korney asked me to ride around with him so that we could find a place to bury Victor."

"Bury him? You hadn't killed him yet."

"I know," came the cold-blooded re-

sponse, "but we wanted to get it all arranged. So we rode around, but finally we thought it might be a good idea to plant Victor in the backyard of my home. So I went up and put some old clothes on and we dug a ditch. We must have gone down about a foot. And then we stopped. It was hot work, so we went up to the house and got some beer."

"What time was this?"

"About nine o'clock at night."

"Where was Chojnicki then?"

"I don't know. But Bolly had been sent out for him and he was to drive him back, tell him we were all going to have some beer or a party or something. So we went back and did some more digging, and we hadn't no more than finished than in comes Bolly with Victor."

Chief Reville could scarcely credit what he was hearing. Kalkiewicz was reciting the story in the same impersonal way as a man would read a newspaper aloud about affairs which didn't concern him particularly.

"You mean to tell me," the chief demanded, "that you dug a grave for a man before you'd killed him, and that you made him think you were having some kind of a celebration so as to get him to attend his own funeral?"

"Sure," said Kalky, calmly, "that was the plan. Then Ziggy comes in and Bolly and Ziggy and Chojnicki go in the barn. Bolly and Ziggy told him they wanted to show him something there. Then when he got into the barn Bolly waits until Victor's back is turned and then he lets him have it in the back of the head with a Luger automatic. Sent ten or fifteen shots into him. Korney and I hears the shooting of course, and then we go into the barn, and we lift Chojnicki up. I had hold of his hands. They were still warm. And then

Ziggy grabs him by the feet and we took him over to the ditch and threw him in and covered dirt over him."

"How long did all that take?"

"Oh, we didn't hurry none," came the calm response. "Must have been almost midnight before we got through. Then we went into the house and had some drinks, and after a while they all left."

Chief Reville was frankly skeptical. It sounded like a fantastic dream, or a fabric woven from the imagination. But its falsity—if it was false—could be easily proven.

"Where's the body now," the chief demanded.

"Out there. Same place. I can show it to you if you take me out there,"

"So that's the game, eh?" the chief came back. "Want me to take you out there so some of the mob can try to spring you?"

"No, sir," Kalky protested. "You can take all the cops you want with you. How could they do anything. That's the reason I'm squawking," he added. "The mob promised to spring me and they ain't done anything."

EARLY that night a picked group of police under the leadership of Chief Revelle went out to the barn in back of Kalkiewicz' house. The latter was with them. He was closely guarded, as the chief was not yet convinced that this was not a trick of the prisoner to provide opportunity for an escape. But Kalkiewicz, with an officer on each side of him, walked slowly through the yard for several feet, and then stopped.

"Here she is," he said, pointing to a spot on the ground.

The police looked at a slightly raised mound, with two small sticks planted about six feet apart.

"I marked it," Kalkiewicz went on

matter-of-factly. "I made up my mind to level it off and plant some grass seed here when I got a chance. Looked too much like a grave the way it was."

The officers began attacking the rather soft earth with picks, shovels and spades. And there, a foot or so down, just as Kalkiewicz had said, lay the body of Victor Chojniki, fingerman of the Art Metal stickup, with at least a dozen bullet holes showing!

"I've seen some cold-blooded work in my time," Chief Reville exclaimed, "but this is tops. They glad-hand the guy and tell him they're going to give him a party and then wait until his back's turned and kill him. Then they dump his body in this ditch, do a little more drinking as though killing a man was all in the day's work, and then they scatter."

Kalkiewicz, standing nearby, grinned as though he had been complimented.

"I've got more to tell you, Chief," he said, "enough to fix that mob plenty."

An hour later they were back at police headquarters. "Now," said the Chief, "let's hear the rest of it."

"It's about that Art Metal stickup. Big Korney's mob did that, as I told you. But I didn't tell you who was in it, besides Big Korney."

"All right, who was it?"

"There were four of us—Big Korney, Bolly, Kornecki and myself."

"You forgot one," said the chief, "that'd make it five."

"There were four, I tell you," Kalky insisted. "I ought to know. I was there."

"Five," said the chief, equally insistent. "You forgot one."

"Who?" Kalkiewicz demanded.

"Why, Larkman, of course."

"He wasn't there."

"He wasn't!" Chief Reville could scarcely believe what he was hearing.

"Why, he's doing a life stretch up at Dannemora for it!"

"I know it," Kalkiewicz came back, but he didn't have a thing to do with it. I never even heard of him until I saw in the papers that the cops was on his trail. Don't think Big Korney knew him either. We thought it was a pretty good joke when we read about his trial. We were glad to hear though that the Governor give him life instead of the chair."

"Sweet of you!" exploded Chief Reville savagely. "You know he's already done four years, don't you?"

"Sure," said Kalkiewicz indifferently. "Guess you can spring him now though."

For a few moments Chief Reville sat searching the hard face of the man in front of him, and turning over in his mind the astounding words which he had just heard. But still the chief was not sure that Kalky was not weaving some kind of a fantastic story which he thought might help him out of the tight fix which he was in. The chief's mind went back over the details of the Art Metal holdup which had appeared in the papers. There was one thing which had happened there which had not received publicity. Only those who had actually been present would know of it. Reville decided to test Kalkiewicz out.

"You say you were in on the Art Metal job?" he inquired.

"Sure I was."

"Did you see anything happen there in connection with the girl who was helping handle the money trays?"

"Yes, I saw it," came the prompt response. "As soon as we came in, she dropped one of the trays to the floor. We only got two. We knew there were three, but after the shooting we were afraid to wait and dig up the other one, so we scrambled."

The Chief waited to hear no more. He was at last thoroughly convinced that Kalky's story was a hundred percent true. In a few moments officers in fast cars were going through the city with instructions to pick up Big Korney, Bolly and Ziggy. Big Korney was located immediately at his favorite roadhouse—that same roadhouse where he had first received news of the accident to Kornecki. He raged like a madman when told that Kalkiewicz had squealed, and that the body of Chojnicki had been found.

"I'll get him," he stormed. "I'll get the dirty rat!"

"You're not going to get anyone," one of the officers assured him. "You're 'got' yourself this time, and you're right on the road to the hot seat."

NEITHER Bolly nor Ziggy could be found in Buffalo. An arrest circular was broadcast throughout the country, and particularly to every village and hamlet in New York State.

The circular bore quick fruit. In less than a month Chief Reville received word from Bennington, New York, that one of the men answering the description of the arrest sheet was boarding in a house on the outskirts of that town.

"Looks like he might have selected that house because of its location," the Bennington officer said. "It's high up on a hill and there are no other houses around. It'd be impossible to approach it without being seen. And there are some woods right in back, so you'll have to be careful. I'm not sure it's your man, but you'd better come over."

Bennington was about forty miles away. The police car from Buffalo reached the little village in about an hour, and the house which the Bennington officials pointed out, a few moments

later. The men parked the car a short distance away and cautiously approached the house.

"Be careful," Sergeant Whalen, the detective in charge, warned. "They're all killers. Remember what they did on those two jobs. Don't take any chances."

Crawling on their stomachs up the hill, the detectives gradually approached the house. When up against the side of the porch they stood upright and, guns on the hair trigger, rushed to the door, expecting shots to come pouring out at any moment.

But none came. In answer to their knock the farmer's wife appeared. A detectives showed her a picture of Bolly.

"Did you ever see this man?" he asked.

"Why yes," she replied without hesitation. "He boards here. Who are you and what do you want?"

"We're police, and we want him."

"He's not in now. Went out a short time ago."

"Where did he go?"

"Out through the woods. He goes in them a lot. Fact is, he's out there more than he is in."

"How soon do you think he'll be back?"

"Probably not until late this evening."

Whalen decided to remain with Sergeant John Czajkowski, sending the rest of the men back to Buffalo.

For three hours the two officers waited in the house, peering out at the woods through the window. Then Bolly appeared some distance away, but walking slowly and cautiously toward the house. Every move indicated that he was suspicious. He would walk two or three feet forward, then go behind a tree, peer out around it, then walk a few feet further, only to conceal himself again.

"Probably saw the car," Whalen whispered. "Maybe saw it leave, but isn't sure whether there's anyone here or not. Look at him now."

Bolly had stepped out from a tree once again. He was now within twenty-five feet of the house. He took a step or two forward, hesitated, stopped completely and then turned. He retraced his steps and then came forward again. Then, as if his mind was made up, he again turned around and started to walk rapidly away.

"He's not coming in," Whalen said. "We've got to go after him. Come on."

HE JERKED the door open and raced out followed by Czajkowski. Bolly whirled and saw them. He leveled his gun and fired, then turned and raced for the thicker woods a few feet away. Czajkowski stopped, took deliberate aim and pulled the trigger. The bullet sank into Bolly's back above the kidney. The fugitive spun around, fell to his knees, got up again and ran with undiminished speed toward the thicket.

Czajkowski fired again, aiming a little lower. The bullet struck Bolly in the leg, bringing him to the ground. The officers raced up. Bolly, on his stomach, was still full of fight. He rolled around and, when Whalen was just a few feet away, fired again. By some kind of a miracle the bullet went wild. Screaming curses, the killer tried to pull the trigger once more. But the officers leaped upon him and tore the gun from his grasp.

He was badly wounded, probably dying. Nevertheless he still kept struggling and trying to grab the gun from Whalen. Then weakness overcame him and he lapsed into semi-consciousness.

"Come on," said Whalen, "Got to get him to the hospital."

They piled him into the farmer's

dilapidated Ford car and hurried him to a doctor in Alden, the nearest place where a physician was available. The doctor gave temporary aid, but expressed the opinion that the prisoner didn't have one chance in ten of living.

Again the two detectives bundled the thug into the car and raced to the City Hospital in Buffalo. When they reached Buffalo the killer was so weak from loss of blood that the doctors there gave greater odds, those of a thousand to one, that Bolly would not last through the night.

But Bolly was tough. Although raging with thirst, the doctors had denied him water because of his condition. The minute the latters' backs were turned, the supposedly dying man got out of bed, took some flowers out of a vase standing nearby and drank every drop of water in the vessel. The physicians were now sure that his end was only a matter of minutes. But, despite their opinion, Bolly recovered. Within a month he was able to walk out of the hospital and to the jail, where he was held for the murder of Perrator in the Fedders Manufacturing Company stick-up.

It had been planned to use the confession of Kalkiewicz against Bolly. But it was not necessary. There was plenty of evidence without it. Bolly was convicted and sentenced to death. His attitude throughout the entire trial was one of insolent indifference. He cursed the prosecuting attorney, the judge, and even his own attorney. He was particularly abusive when sentence was pronounced upon him.

And he carried the same attitude with him to the electric chair where he died on May 29, 1930. He swaggered into the execution chamber smoking a cigar. Here was enacted one of the most astounding scenes which had ever taken

place in that chamber of horrors. Bolly grinned around at the witnesses in the room, made two or three obscene remarks, glanced at the chair, and then puffed rapidly on the cigar until the end was a little knob of fire.

Suddenly he pulled the cigar from his mouth, hurled it squarely into the face of one of the witnesses and then shouted:

"Okay boys. Let 'er go."

A few moments later he was pronounced dead.

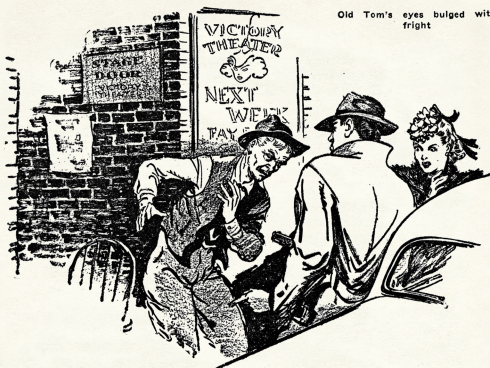
In contrast to his attitude toward Kornecki when the latter was lying in the hospital dying, Big Korney testified for Bolly and did his best to save him. Then Big Korney, in turn, was tried for the Fedders stickup. He was acquitted, but was promptly tried again for perjury in the Bolly case and was sentenced to from twenty to forty years in Dannemora.

Kalkiewicz, placed on trial for the Fedders robbery, was convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for life.

Anthony Piocharski (which was found to be the real name of Ziggy) is the only one of the mob who has not been brought to justice.

But, after all these trials were over, Larkman, completely innocent of the murder for which he was serving life, was still in Dannemora. It was now 1930. Because of the change of governorship of New York and other complicated legal factors in connection with the case, which need not be gone into here, it was December 19, 1933, more than four years after Kalkiewicz' confession, that Larkman was released from Dannemora!

He had spent eight years in prison for a crime which he did not commit. And he might have been there yet had it not been for Big Korney's brutal treatment of a dying pal!



Old Tom's eyes bulged with fright

Stage Door Snatch

By H. H. Stinson

*There was no applause, no curtain calls, but
it was the best performance of his career*

OLD TOM BOYD didn't notice the three men who strolled by the end of the alleyway where he sat, his chair propped against the brick wall of the Victory Theater.

The three men, on their part, looked him over in covert, sharp-eyed fashion but there was no particular reason why he should have paid any attention to them. Thousands of persons passed the alleyway every day and Old Tom was interested only in those individuals who turned from the street and headed for the stage door, of which he was the watchdog.

Besides, he was basking in the late afternoon sun, which felt good to the aches in his bones, and thinking of the days before the automobile crack-up had put the aches in him and written a closing notice to what once had been a rather promising stage career.

He hadn't been Old Tom Boyd back in those days; he had been a good-looking young fellow with an unusual voice and a personality that used to reach right out over the footlights and wow them. He wasn't really so very old now, but you can't go through an accident that has ripped your flesh, shat-

tered half a dozen bones, robbed you of your voice and whitened your hair, without putting on years in a hurry. The ruin of his voice had been the worst blow. After all, unless you happen to be Harpo Marx, you can't go far on the stage with a voice that won't raise above a whisper.

Once he had felt very bitter about that lost career but he had gotten over that. This wasn't a bad job he had; at least he was still part of the show business he had always loved. So he sat there enjoying the sun, a frail, small man with a pallid, mobile face and friendly eyes.

Patrolman McGlone sauntered into sight and stopped at the alleyway, his fat, red face perspiring gently. He said in the growl that belied his good-natured self, "And how are ye today, Tom?"

Old Tom said in his husky whisper, "Fine, Mac. Spring's here early, isn't it?"

"And me with the red flannels still clinging about me legs."

A yellow-haired girl with pert, blue eyes and a swing to her small figure turned into the alleyway in a hurry. She dropped a package into Old Tom's lap, said, "Your tobacco, Tom, honey. And, gosh, I'm late for rehearsal again."

Old Tom grinned and whispered, "Thanks, Elsa. And if you'd cut your lunches with the boy friend short, you wouldn't be late."

The yellow-haired girl made a face at him as she hurried for the stage door. She said, "I'd rather be late."

"A pretty one, that," growled McGlone admiringly. "It's lucky her boy friend is, I'd say."

"She's as sweet as she's pretty," whispered Old Tom. "But she's lucky in boy friends, too. He's this Johnny Morrell, the lad who's gone over so

big with his swing orchestra of late. I've been watching the pair of them for two-three years now and they're young and scatterbrained . . . but nice kids."

"Ah, well," said McGlone, "some folks have all the luck. I'll be going on now, I guess, although the infernal red flannels make me feel like I'm a walking Turkish bath. Good day to ye, Tom."

McGlone strolled on. The three men were now in a parked car across the street and they watched McGlone until he rounded the corner. He didn't pay any particular attention to them but there wasn't any particular reason at the moment why he should have.

TWO of the men looked, in a superficial way, very much alike. They were tall, thick through the shoulders, with impassive features, a cautious and cool look to their eyes. Their clothes were expensive, conservative; at first glance they might have been taken for businessmen of some consequence. But businessmen don't, as a rule, have the somber, wary stare they had bent on Old Tom and on McGlone. One of them, the dark-haired, dark-eyed man of the pair, went by the name of Sid Buckman. The other, who had a long, sallow face and green eyes, was known as Harry Zell.

The third man in the car, by contrast, was thin, rodent-like. His eyes were gleaming little brown beads set close to the bridge of a long nose, and his teeth were long and yellow and sharp. He was dressed expensively, too, but loudly and his name was Willie Link.

Harry Zell said, "Now give Sid the set-up the way you told it to me, Willie."

"It's like this, Sid," said Willie. "A

couple years ago I'm looking for a good racket, see? So, being a smart Joe, I think where would there be plenty dough kicking around among people who let go of it easy and who ain't tough? Well, that is simple . . . it is show business. Lots of guys make big dough in show business and a lot of them are screwballs anyway and always getting in jams. I think, well, that is where I will move in. But I know I got to find out what it is all about first so I get a job on *Tattletale Weekly* and start to learn about show business and show people. I guess right now I am the smartest Joe about show business in the world, if you get what I mean, and it is time I am making big dough out of what I know. See?"

Sid said, bored and cold, "Get to the set-up."

"It is a girl named Elsa Earl," Willie said, rubbing his thin hands. They had long, dirty fingernails, like rat's claws. "She is the girl friend of Johnny Morrell, the band leader, and a month ago he bought her fifty grand of cracked ice."

"So what?" said Sid. "A lot of gals have diamonds and we don't need you to point it out."

Harry Zell said, "Wait, Sid. This is really a sweet touch—not a kickback possible. Go ahead, Willie."

"It is like this, Sid," said Willie. "Morrell bought the rocks from a guy named Jere Duval, who smuggled them in. It is screwy for Morrell to do a thing like that on account of he is already making plenty legitimate dough but, like I tell you, show people are nuts lots of the time. Anyway, knowing about show business like I do, I pick up things like that. All you and Harry got to do is make the gal hand over the rocks. She can't squawk because it would jam her boy friend with

Mister Whiskers and Morrell can't squawk, too, so there will be no heat on the stuff and we can get real dough for it."

"Not bad, Sid," said Harry Zell.

"Hmm," Sid muttered thoughtfully. "Not if it's the way he tells it."

"I've checked," Harry Zell said, "and it looks okay. The gal has been seen wearing the junk and she got it right after Duval came back from Europe when the war started. It adds up."

"Any ideas, Willie, on how to get her to loosen up with it?" Sid asked. His tone was definitely friendlier.

Willie said, "Sure. Didn't I tell you I knew this racket? This Elsa is on in the finale of the show, wearing nothing but a halter and a loin cloth and she has to take make-up off from all over. So she is always the last one to leave the theater and she is always alone. The only one around then will be the doorman, that old monkey I showed you, and even if anything went wrong he could not make a fuss on account of he is only a half-pint and, besides, he cannot talk above a whisper. So I figure you will meet her on the sidewalk after the Saturday night show like you were a John and get her in a car and take her some place. There is no show then until Monday night and she lives alone so you will have plenty time to make her see reason and nobody will miss her."

"How about Morrell?" Sid asked.

"There's more of what I know about show business—Morrell is flying down to Miami Saturday to play a society date and will not be back until Monday."

"Where will that cop be if the girl squawks?"

"I've timed the gal leaving the theater and McGlone will be ringing in at a box a block away by then."

Sid lit a cigarette and let the smoke curl around his dark, hard, secretive face. He said, "Willie, I think you got something here. If you're as smart about other touches in show business as about this, maybe Harry and I and you could team very nicely."

"Listen," Willie said, pleased, "there isn't any Joe who knows more about show business than me."

THE thing went off almost as planned. If the night hadn't been warm and if Old Tom hadn't felt like a breath of air, there wouldn't have been a hitch. Even so, the hitch wasn't of any great moment.

Old Tom watched the last of the show girls except Elsa Earl go out into the night, and then he stepped from his cubicle, lit his pipe and sauntered to the end of the alleyway. The street was deserted save for a tall man standing at the curb and a parked car not far from him.

Sucking at his pipe, Old Tom stood without thinking very much about anything. Some nights he liked to fiddle around the stage for a bit before going home. At those times he could imagine it was a dozen years before and there was an audience out in the dark of the house and he was still a young fellow with a handsome face and a good voice. But this night he felt like savoring the spring odors in the air and enjoying a pipe and maybe stopping for a beer on the way home.

Patrolman McGlone turned the near corner, plodding along at the fag end of his duty. If Old Tom hadn't been standing there, McGlone wouldn't have paused for a moment of chat.

"Well, Tom," said McGlone wearily, "at least it's one more night closer to a pension. Good night to ye."

"Good night, Mac," said Old Tom

in his whisper. "See that you change from those red flannels for tomorrow."

"That I will," said McGlone, "if the missus'll let me."

He went on and after a moment the yellow-haired girl emerged from the stage doorway. Her high heels *tap-tapped* toward Old Tom.

She said, "Night, Tom," and smiled at him as she passed.

"Good night, Elsa," said Old Tom and, knocking his pipe out against his hand, turned to go along the alleyway to the stage door.

A movement of the tall man waiting at the curb caught the corner of Old Tom's glance as he turned. Old Tom didn't know why he paused except that the movement seemed meant to intercept Elsa Earl and it was unusual for anyone to be meeting her. So he saw the girl hesitate, try to walk around the tall man. Old Tom wasn't quite sure the tall man had grabbed the girl's wrist but it looked so to him. He saw Elsa try to back away and then become very still and rigid. After a moment she began to walk stiffly beside the tall man toward the parked car.

Old Tom's feet began to carry him out across the sidewalk almost as though they had a will of their own. Then he began to run. The tall man, who was Sid Buckman, turned a little as Old Tom neared him and Old Tom jerked at his arm, pulled him around a little farther so that the man's right hand showed. There was a shiny, short-barreled gun in the hand.

The gun wavered between him and Elsa Earl and Old Tom jerked back on his heels in a hurry. Somehow he was not so much afraid of the gun for himself as he was for the girl. And there didn't seem to be much he could do about it. From the tail of his eye, though, he got a glimpse of McGlone's

broad back just nearing the corner. Now, if he could just let out a healthy yell for McGlone, it might earn him a bullet but McGlone would be coming on the run the next instant. So Old Tom opened his mouth wide and tried to shout.

It came out in a thick, strained whisper. "McGlone!"

And McGlone went out of sight around the corner.

Somebody in the car laughed. It had been rather funny, at that.

The tall man said, "Stupid, you almost got shot. Get in the car with the girl."

Afterward, with Old Tom crouching in the well between the seats and Elsa Earl on the back seat between Sid Buckman and Harry Zell, they went across town in Fiftieth Street. Willie Link drove, not too fast, and there wasn't much conversation. Once Old Tom moved a little and Harry Zell kicked him viciously in the ribs.

Elsa said spunkily, "You heel, you didn't have to do that to him."

Harry Zell said, "Is that so, babe?" and then there was a little whimper of pain from the girl. Old Tom's teeth ground tightly but he didn't move again.

After a little Willie Link stopped the car in front of a dingy building bearing a faded garage sign. They all got out onto a dark, silent sidewalk, and Harry Zell opened a small door in the big door with a key and they went through into semi-darkness. Old Tom could see vaguely the high, clumsy bodies of dump trucks, could smell the odor of oil and gasoline.

HARRY ZELL produced a flashlight and they went to the rear and up wooden stairs. There were workrooms of one kind or another on the second

floor and Old Tom and the girl were shoved into one of these. None of the three men even bothered to close the door, showing how sure of themselves they felt.

Sid Buckman snapped on a green-shaded light that made a cone of brilliance in the center of the room, left the corners in shadow. There wasn't much in the room except a scarred table, three chairs and a pile of old cartons in one corner. Old Tom was shoved into one chair and Elsa into another and Harry Zell found a length of old clothesline with which he tied them, ankle and wrist, to the chairs.

Elsa managed to turn her small blonde head and look at Old Tom. She said, "Thanks, Tom, anyway."

Harry Zell grinned. He said, "Babe, you're thanking the guy for nothing."

Elsa said steadily, "Just what is it you heels want? Is this a kidnapping?"

"Nothing that crude, sister," said Sid Buckman. "It's this way. You've got some ice—diamonds to you—and we want it. If you're a reasonable wren, you'll tell us where the rocks are and how to get them without any trouble."

Elsa shook her head. She looked scared but stubborn. She said, "Why should I?"

"You wouldn't want to see Morrell jammed with the Feds, would you? We know he bought smuggled stones and you got them. All you have to do, sister, is hand them over and we turn you loose and forget everything. If you don't, we'll work you and this mugg over a little and then tip the Feds about Morrell."

There was a little silence in the cone of light.

After a bit Elsa said, "If I do, will you promise to turn us loose?"

"Absolutely," Harry Zell said.

Old Tom cursed silently. Somehow or other he didn't think these men had any intention of turning them loose and most of the swearing he did was at himself. If he'd only had half the voice that nature gave any man, instead of the croaking whisper he did have, little Elsa Earl wouldn't be in any spot like this. McGlone would have heard him and these thugs would never have got off to a start. But McGlone hadn't heard him.

"All right," Elsa said. "The diamonds are in the bottom of a hatbox in the closet at my apartment."

Harry Zell had her handbag. He rummaged in it and found keys. He said, "Thanks, babe. These the keys for your place?"

"Yes."

"I know where she lives," said Willie Link. He named an address, an apartment number. "I'll go up there and get the junk."

"Not you, Willie," said Sid Buckman. He took the keys. "Me, Willie. And I want to talk to you guys a minute before I go."

The three of them went out into the darkness of the hallway and there was a murmur of talk out there.

Inside the room Old Tom twisted his head a little and whispered, "Elsa, was that true . . . about the smuggling?"

"I—I'm afraid so, Tom," the girl whispered back. "Gee, Tom, Johnny and I just thought we were being smart. And now I guess there's just nothing we can do about it."

"Yes, there is," whispered Old Tom. "When you get out of here, you take Johnny right to the Customs and tell them everything. Johnny will probably have to pay a big fine, but maybe that will teach you kids to be really on the level. It pays, Elsa."

Elsa started to whisper something but just then Harry Zell and Willie came back into the room so all she did was nod.

Harry Zell said, "All right, Willie, you say you know all about show business."

"Sure," Willie said. "Don't this prove it? Look how nice it's all working out."

"You mean," Harry Zell said, "you didn't get what Sid was talking about?"

"Well, all he said was stick around until he got back and keep everything the way it is on account of it would take the three of us to handle it. Didn't he mean turning them loose and making our split?"

"Dummy," Harry Zell said. "He meant this whispering guy butting in has changed everything. The gal wouldn't squawk on account of getting Morrell in trouble but this guy is different. We got no hold on him."

"You mean . . ." Willie said, his mouth open and his rodent's teeth showing.

"Yeah," said Harry Zell. "So get busy thinking how a show girl and a stage doorman can be washed out and have it look kind of natural so it won't point to us."

"You dirty heels," Elsa said, through white lips. "You promised . . ."

Old Tom whispered desperately, "For God's sake, you can't do it. I swear I'll keep quiet."

"We couldn't trust you, chum," Harry Zell said. "Now don't bother Willie while he thinks."

I DON'T need to think," Willie Link said. "Morrell has a shack at South Beach where he goes most week-ends. We take her there and I bet she won't be found for a week and by then nobody could tell how long she's been there. So the cops will suspect Morrell

and nobody will think about us. It's just as easy with this guy. He lives down on Hanley Place and he usually gets beered up on the way home Saturday night. We slug him and put him in the gutter near his home and run the car over him. Hit-and-run, see?"

"Swell," said Harry Zell.

Willie said, "Do I know my stuff or don't I?"

The voice of Patrolman McGlone said from the dark doorway, "I hope ye both know your stuff well enough not to move—or I'll drill ye!"

Willie Link congealed instantly where he stood, his mouth still open. It worked a little and he breathed, "McGlone!"

Harry Zell muttered something, moved as though to turn.

McGlone's growl was savage. "I told ye not to move!"

Harry Zell thought better of his intention. He tried to look over his shoulder without turning too much but he didn't move otherwise.

Old Tom whispered, "Then you heard me after all, McGlone?"

"Lad," McGlone's voice said from the darkness, "so many years I've been hearing your whisper, I couldn't miss it in a boiler factory. So I just tailed along after you in a cab and the cabbie's now gone to phone for a squad. Meanwhile let the big fellow get down on his phiz on the floor while the little one cuts ye loose, Tom. There's two of them and but one of me and I'm a lad for having the odds even at all times."

Old Tom whispered huskily, "There's a knife in my coat pocket."

Harry Zell got sullenly down on the floor, spread-eagled himself carefully. Willie Link was trembling so that he could scarcely find the knife in Old Tom's pocket. He found it after a moment and hacked at the clothesline, cut Old Tom free.

McGlone's growl directed Old Tom. "Just be taking his gun, lad, while I tend to the other thug."

Old Tom found a gun in Willie Link's hip pocket. It wasn't a very good gun as guns go but it was a heavy one. So Old Tom hefted it in his hand and then smashed it down very hard on Willie Link's head. While Willie Link was collapsing, Old Tom spun and struck at Harry Zell's head with the clubbed weapon. There was a hollow, thudding noise and Harry Zell jerked and then lay without moving. But McGlone still didn't show himself at the doorway.

OLD TOM saw the three men at headquarters the next day. They were in a small room there and they looked a bit the worse for wear. Old Tom looked different, too. He had on some smart clothes, for one thing, and he seemed a dozen years younger in spite of his white hair. He didn't look at all like a stage doorman any longer.

A detective said, "You identify them formally, Boyd?"

Tom Boyd nodded. He said in a good, round voice, "Yes, lieutenant. Including the one who knew all about show business."

Willie Link's small eyes got bigger than they had ever been before. He said, "You—you ain't whispering . . ."

"No," Tom Boyd said. "The whisper, you see, was one bit of show business you didn't know about. You didn't know I had a pretty good voice until I got smashed up in a traffic crash a dozen years ago and lost it. The doctors told me I just had a psychological impediment, but that didn't help me any. Then last night you scared the voice back into my throat and put me back on the stage. And I gave my first performance for you."

He smiled gratefully at Willie Link as he went out the door.

"First performance?" echoed Willie. "What's the guy talking about?"

"You're supposed to know all about show business," the detective said. "Didn't you ever hear of Victor the Ventriloquist?"

Cipher Solvers' Club for February, 1940

(Continued from May 25)

Twenty-four Answers

*Sleepy, Bryn Mawr, Pa. *Nick Spar, Lynchburg, Pa. *Sam Spiegel, Butte, Mont. †M. G. S., Bayside, N. Y. Statist, Phoenix, Ariz. *Jack-Stay, Tucson, Ariz. *Dr. Dirk E. Stegeman, Los Angeles, Calif. †Steve, Richmond Hill, N. Y. †Sunny, Chicago, Ill. †Tarheel, Henderson, N. C. *Dick Tate, Battle Creek, Mich. †P. H. T., St. Louis, Mo. *Sunny Tim, Daytona Beach, Fla. *Old Timer, Guthrie, Okla. †Tisen, Milwaukee, Wis. *Tobey, Fairmont, W. Va. *A. Traveller, Washington, D. C. Queer Tune, Traverse City, Mich. *Tyrone V, Perrysville, Pa. †I. Cipher U., Newport, R. I. †W. G. Valentine, Brooklyn, N. Y. †Veegee, Globe, Ariz. †Tru-Ver, Chicago, Ill. *Mrs. James Wallen, Cromwell, Conn. †P. Wee, Brooklyn, N. Y. †E. H. Werner, Alton, Ill. †Geo. T. Williams, Martin, S. Dak. †H. M. Williams, Easley, S. C. †Reg Williams, Toronto, Ontario. *Little Willy, Johnstown, Pa. *E. A. Wilson, Oakdale, Pa. *H. W., Salt Lake City, Utah. †W6BOY, Los Angeles, Calif. *Doctor X, Kansas City, Mo. †Xatl, Milwaukee, Wis. †Y, Harriman, N. Y. *Lew Zirn, Wilkes-Barre, Pa. *A. R. Zorn, Perris, Calif. *7, Niagara Falls, N. Y.

Twenty-three—†Abuelo, Okeechobee, Fla. †The Admiral, Munising, Mich. *Alpha Bet, Merchantville, N. J. †Ernest H. Carling, New York, N. Y. †Cintra, East Elmhurst, N. Y. †Eeslyn, Easton, Pa. †Enbay, Chicago, Ill. †Bordi Enge, Brooklyn, N. Y. Esoteric, Salt Lake City, Utah. †Ges, Philadelphia, Pa. †O.

H., Peru, Ill. *H. H., Coventry, Ohio. *Jayel, Canton, Ohio. *Uncle Jim, Union Grove, Wis. *My Pal, Brooklyn, N. Y. †Papauli, Seattle, Wash. †Roch, Meriden, Conn. †Evelyn Scholz, Chicago, Ill. †Ima Sooner, Oklahoma City, Okla. *Ike N. Wynne, Great Falls, Mont.

Twenty-two—†Amaknapp, New York, N. Y. †Robert De Mougeot, New York, N. Y. †Engineer III, Bisbee, Ariz. †Anna-Lizer, Pittsburgh, Pa. Maigui, Damariscotta, Me. Nomdep, Buffalo, N. Y. †Arab Portal, Brooklyn, N. Y. Ragus, Chicago, Ill. Arline F. Vaughn, Boston, Mass.

Twenty-one—†P. W. B., Abington, Mass. †George, Hornell, N. Y. Mickey, Huntington, W. Va. †Mij, Oil City, Pa. †Nertz, Waukegan, Ill. A Violet Ray, Denver, Colo. †R. B. Shrewsbury, St. Louis, Mo. †Volund, Providence, R. I. C. H. Wady, Ponca City, Okla. †Wilray, Washington, D. C.

Twenty—†Aunt A., Baltimore, Md. N. Alizer, Bronx, N. Y. †See-Ess-Bee, Hawesville, Ky. *Mabel B. Canon, Philadelphia, Pa. †9 A.D., Pittsburgh, Pa. †Icy, Rochester, N. Y. †Iflac, San Francisco, Calif. †Jesse C. Leach, Bradenton, Fla. Marnel, New York, N. Y. †Mrs. J. C. Saunders, Vallejo, Calif. †Loula Williams, Stockton, Calif.

Nineteen—Amajgen, Pittsburgh, Pa. W. C. Babcock, Rensselaer, Ind. Wm. A. Cowger, Mt. Vernon, Ill. †Gregory, Taos, N. Mex. †Virginia Lee, Flint, Mich. Legerdemainist, Chatham, Ontario. *Lucille Little, Chicago, Ill. †Moliner, Detroit, Mich. Pete IV, Detroit, Mich.



Solving Cipher Secrets



ACIPHER 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. Helpful hints appear in this department each week. The first cryptogram is the easiest.

No. 127—Rice and Old Shoes. By Orchid.

*MHXG SP KLG YVXKL YVPK AZVPGZD OPPVASOKGN FSKL
FGNNSXBP, RTSNGP, KTVHPPGOHP, VTOXBG RZVPPVYP,
RTSNGPYOSNP, KLG RGPY YOX, LVXGDYVVXP, GZVUGYGXKP,
OXN O FGOZKL VE TGZOKGN ZVTG OXN PHUGTPKSKSVX.

No. 128—The Rainbow Awing. By Jay II.

GZ UBF SOOH FBGV ZUBZ PKOA FGR UTHVAOV BHV DGDZJ
FYONGOF PD STZZOADXGOF BHV BSPTZ ZCP ZUPTFBHV
EPZUF BAO FNBZZOAOV PKOA ZUO *THGZOV *FZBZOF.

No. 129—Queen of Wonders. By Cosmopolite.

ZY XVUTYS *RVZUZPZ: *ZXOPVNZR *LZKKH, *NZRZGVZR FP
*TFPHOHTFO *LZKKH, *RVZUZPZ *UFPUO, *UFZY *VHKZRG,
*YTPOO *HVHYOP *VHKZRGH, *ETVPKDFFK *PZDVGH, *NZBO
FL YTO *EVRGH, *PFNA FL *ZUOH.

No. 130—A Sully Salesman. By Eve Eden.

BEPOP BUYLGORAGH *BUMGNVUSG BEDFFGAWO BUKKOL
BESN BYZOGATO BERSETFAGH BAGI BYHHTAGH BUGCYAT
BELPAGAOLO. BYQKTOP BELHUG BOUJELPAXON BYGAUL.

No. 131—Father Gander. By Art Hur.

EOVXHO ZOSETSAOF LXTVXH GTHGOSYT; UTLXHO
BRKFSRZOF NRSATRHYOF YPXSF ZVKHOY NKYOVVXYO.
ONGKZKFO KSTRNOF GKHXHO PXVKSXYM; GTHGKLO
YKUVO LONNOV ZVRN UTDVVXQO FXHXHC XAZVOAOHY
DXYPFSOD.

SIX new members inscribed their names on the illustrious scroll of our *Inner Circle Club* last February, thus augmenting the total *ICC enrollment to 173 members, as shown in the subjoined list, where the membership numbers, dates, and qualifying scores are duly registered. Henceforth these members will be known by the degree symbols, *ICC mystic mark, prefixed to their names. To qualify for the Thousand Club, the solver must submit answers to 1,000 of our ciphers, and solutions to cryptograms, divisions, and specials all count toward the goal. Congratulations, new *ICCers!

*ICC members for February, 1940

Number	Name	Date	Score
168	*Eibsirf	Feb. 3	1,003
169	*Dr. Dirk E. Stegeman	Feb. 10	1,005
170	*7	Feb. 10	1,000
171	*Lucille Little	Feb. 17	1,004
172	*Tobey	Feb. 17	1,000
173	*Henry J. Haewecker	Feb. 24	1,000

Any solver may have information concerning his score published on request. Herewith are the total scores of a number of readers, crediting all answers submitted, up to and including their solutions for last February. Solvers who have employed more than one name or cryptonym in sending in answers may have their various credits combined into one total upon proper identification. Several old-timers are welcomed back to our friendly fold in the present list!

Total Solving Scores, February, 1940

906—†Ty N. Twist	401—†Owleyes
764—†F. M. Hansen	362—†Gnilpik
647—†W. G. Valentine	337—†Junior
567—†Black Watch	329—†Peggy Lennox
544—†Cecil T. Partner	327—†Susie Douglas
529—†Howard H. Woerner	324—†Nutmeg
	245—†A. R. E.
515—†Elmer Richardson	194—†The Captain
	190—†Jack II
488—†Doc Tommy	175—†Miny
479—†Frank Roman	112—†Drinkwater
478—†Harold Schlote	109—†Nip
457—†Charles E. Zirbes	99—A. Ball
	40—Determined
418—†Tau Pi	39—Alfred N. Pray
	25—J. S. II

Current Crypts: In Orchid's cryptogram, try the phrase OXN O, also KLG and FSKL, for entry. FGNNXBP and FGOZKL will then follow. Jay II offers ZUBZ, ZUO, and GZ for a starter. Continue with BHV and BAO; and thus to UTHVAOV, etc. Guess YTO and ZY in Cosmopolite's crypt, then supply the missing

letter in *YTPOO, noting FP. Eve Eden's message is both alliterative and pangrammatic. Observe 2nd-position symbols, pattern, etc. Spot your own leads in Art Hur's contribution! The timely key-phrase to Bertha D. Dolbee's division is numbered, 012345 6789. Asterisks indicate capitalization. Answers to Nos. 127-32, next week!

No. 132—Cryptic Division. By Bertha D. Dolbee.

G O O D) A R T I S T S (A O A
 D L B S I
 T L D O T
 T R A R R
 D S T L S
 D L B S I
 A L T O

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

121—The stories in this magazine really entertain! And as for the cryptograms, they occupy my time during my long ride to work every day!

122—Amateur angler, fly-fishing, scorns advice of veterans; flails about with vigor but no skill. Catches hat, also coat of companions, gunny sack, tree limbs. Winds up with hook in own overalls.

123—Cripple hobbles along on crutches. Lady with hand bag approaches. Cripple trips lady with crutch. Lady falls. Cripple makes off, hand bag in one hand, crutches in other. "Police!"

124—Zealous zany jumps jauntily over obstruction. Doffs derby, awkwardly ascends lowered ladder. Slips sidewise, falls flat. Circus capers!

125—Stocky hick, backing tricky truck, lacked knack; struck thick, sticky black muck; stuck. Slick hackman, snickering, mocked: "Quick! Derrick! Wreck!" Plucky truckman thwacked heckler.

126—Key:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
 S I L V E R Y G U N

All answers to Nos. 127-32 will be duly listed in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for June. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

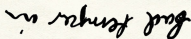
Handwriting Secrets

Character Clues in Pen and Ink

By Helen King

WHEN you receive a letter, do you stop to look at the writing on the envelope, or do you rip it open and peruse the contents immediately? A handwriting analyst can tell at a glance the mood the writer was in, and thus is better prepared for the contents. An amateur graphologist, some time ago, used to look at incoming envelopes and say innocently: "Gee, Mom, I'll bet Uncle Bill is in a bad mood now." His mother, after reading the letter, was inclined to think her son some sort of a genius.

Today when graphology is on the air, in newspapers and magazines, it is a little harder to fool "Mom," but not the analyst. He can still tell the mood by looking at the envelope. If you want to tell the temper, note the shading.



Yes, the writing is upside down; that way it gives you immediate knowledge of the mood of the moment. All that varied shading tells that the writer is angry and upset at the time he had the pen in his hand. The next time the boss glowers, take a peek at his script. If you do, you can find out for yourself whether he really is angry, or is just faking it. Many bosses do appear gruff,

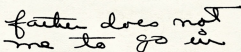
for business reasons, and to impress.

If you find the writing running downhill, you will know that there is a temporary depression of spirits, and it is up to you to try to cheer up the sad one.

Dear Miss King:

I'm terribly worried about my son. He wants to take up beauty culture, and yet he doesn't look or act like a sissy otherwise. Please tell me about this peculiar trait from his writing, which I enclose.

Father.



Dear Father:

Your son's writing shows that he has a sense of proportion, an eye for line, a sense of color and an adaptive art ability. All of which makes him capable for his chosen work. Of course if he made good, like the Westmores of movieland, you wouldn't consider the work sissified, would you? He is really quite masculine, and has the brains to know what he is best fitted for. Be proud of him, not ashamed. Encourage him in his work, and help him to make good.

H. K.

Whenever handwriting figures in a criminal case, or in the news of the day, it invariably finds its way to this desk. This week a reader from California wonders how the local police know that a sample of writing was written by a man of foreign extraction; one who was quite brutal; and who was a laborer.

While the sample of writing submitted here is merely clipped from the newspaper, it will give a fairly good idea.

*sharp in the
front of.*

The foreign extraction is shown in the odd formation of the letters, some of which are German in origin. The brutality is shown in the formation of the *t*, the heavy slashing pressure. And his obvious difficulty in forming letters shows that the writer was unaccustomed to using a pen. Possibly the police had more samples than the two lines shown here, but the facts mentioned are plain.

Handwriting analysis is just one of the methods of crime detection today. Even typewriting is analyzed. Did you know it is easier to trace a man through his typing than through his natural writing? Typists use more pressure on certain letters, and have little idiosyncrasies which show up quickly under the magnifying glass.

PURELY PERSONAL

Robbie—Don't bank too much on an

audition. That merely shows whether you rate further consideration; it does not definitely give you any work, or any promise of work. For every job in radio there are twenty-five applicants for it, so make sure you are better than the rest. Even if you pass the audition, you are still on your own. Keep before the public; sing at clubs; get your name in the papers. In other words, make yourself valuable to the radio stations.

Don E.—Commercial photography requires men of your type; if you have the chance, take advantage of the offer!

Sandra D.—The boy's handwriting indicates a lack of strong will. You would have to be the power behind the throne, and you would be expected to do most of the work. His *wishing* is more powerful than his *willing*.

Ruth E. P.—There are many jobs open in the line you mentioned. Trained workers are needed, however. Those who are applying now do not seem to be willing to undergo further training. It sounds incredible when so many are complaining of hard times, but there is work to be had in various lines.

Tony D.—Your letter is not clear. Write again, and please be more definite.

THE CASE OF THE CALIPH'S CURSE

will get under your skin

Watch For It Next Week

MISS HELEN KING,
DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY
280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

This coupon is not good after June 15, 1940

I enclose handwriting specimen for advice and analysis.

Name..... Age.....

Address

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Prize Letter Contest

Use the coupon below to vote on the stories in this issue, and don't forget that the reader who writes the best letter, of 50 words or more, on the reasons for his (or her) first choice will receive a cash award of \$10.00.

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

In my opinion the stories in the June 1st issue of Detective Fiction Weekly rank as follows:

	No. Here
PORTRAIT OF DEATH by Philip Ketchum.....
GRAND MARSHAL McGONIGLE by Paul Allenby.....
THE CORPSE WAS POLITE by Edwin Truett.....
CREAM AND SUGAR by James Egan.....
THE BLOODY ISLE by T. T. Flynn.....
IT'S HARDER TO LIVE by D. L. Champion.....
MINOR INCIDENT by Joseph Fulling Fishman.....
STAGE DOOR SNATCH by H. H. Stinson.....

Attached is my letter of 50 words or more giving my reasons for selecting
..... as the best story in this issue of DFW. I understand that all letters
are to become the property of The Frank A. Munsey Company.

NAME
ADDRESS
CITYSTATE

(This coupon is not good after June 8, 1940)
(Address all letters to the Prize Letter Editor)

Coming Next Week

The green-shirted storm troopers move in on a well-known large college town and attempt to take over. Their success or failure depends on *The Park Avenue Hunt Club* and their four-man crusade against the fascist hordes and

THE MASKED JURY

By JUDSON P. PHILIPS

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

(On sale next Wednesday, May 29)

FLASHES FROM READERS

REMEMBER how we used to howl about not getting enough space?

Well, after the past few weeks, we're tickled to get even part of a page. When we read the last part of *Southwesterner's* letter, we were almost sorry we had as much space this time as we did. But then we never took a dare in our life. Next week you'll hear about the prize letters.

SOUTHWESTERNER

DEAR EDITOR:

Forget serials. I never read them except for 3 part ones. They are not too long. One serial of this length completed before another one starts would suit me.

Likes: Helen King dept.: Wrentmore's stuff: Allen's pix: Flashes from Readers.

DFW deserves a great big hand on its covers: they're tops.

Since I started with Flynn's you might consider me a regular reader (though I do not read ALL the yarns you have and also I quit buying DFW for a while because it was terrible). I have noticed the different styles in writing that have graced the pages of DFW thru the years and have seen those same styles pop up in more expensive mags. In fact, not so long ago, I read one of those first person "letter" stories in DFW, the one "Dear John or? do you remember", and about a month later I saw the same general idea used in another mag (not

DFW). So what? (Must be good judgment on our part—or bad on theirs!—Ed.)

Let me also turn in two cents worth on guns. Out here many people make their own bullets and shoot the shells without a gun! Did you ever see a bullet sailing on its way without a gun in sight? I've seen 'em take a nail and hit it with a hammer and expode a shell.

Let me sum up what *I don't like about DFW*:

The horse-laughy yarns that even juveniles snicker at. You know the kind where one minute the hero is gulping to the strains of music and the next minute gulping out of bed. Where everybody is dumb but the villain.

Also the yarns where the hero gets bopped on the head. Let the authors get their heroes from one situation to another without having 'em pass out. Too much of the old Shanghai stuff. Nuts.

And the yarns which spoil themselves by having it too apparent that the hero hates the villain's guts. I read a yarn of this type recently. I guessed who did it because I knew that the hero was going to get the girl so the other guy just had to be the fall guy. I was right.

On page 111. March 16, you asked for this so take it calmly like I have to take some of the DFW yarns. But I like you, anyway, even if you do have a disagreeable mole pop up on your nose every now and then. After all, beauty is only skin deep and the moles fade out when a whopper of a yarn gallops across the page.

SILVER CITY, NEW MEXICO

RUPTURED?

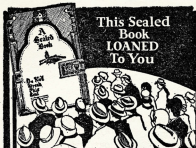
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