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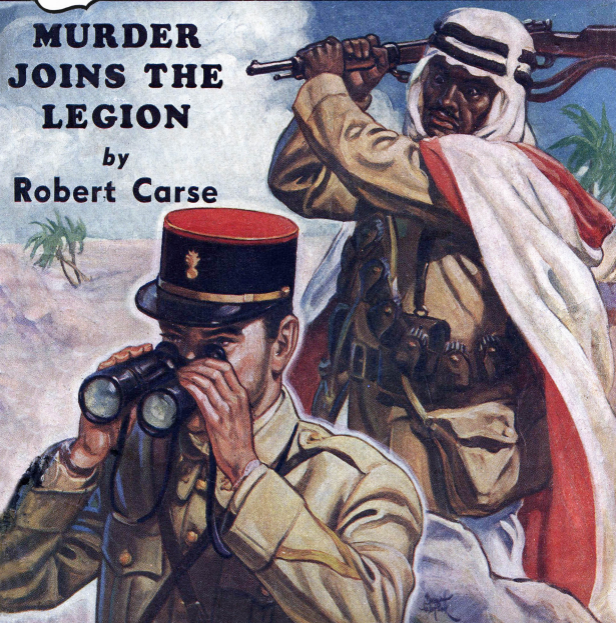
FORMERLY FLYNN'S **WEEKLY**



**MURDER
JOINS THE
LEGION**

by

Robert Carse



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Volume 138

JULY 20, 1940

Number 4

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The medals on Nolan's tunic were no protection from the bullets of a firing squad



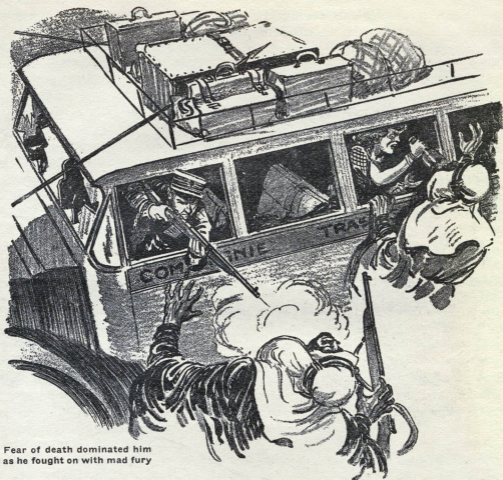
Murder Joins The Legion

H EAT held that place even in darkness. It came in great waves, with the weight, the pressure of a sea. Luther Nolan awoke with the sensation that he was in the sea and was drowning. Then he knew that he was here, at Taouit, in the middle of the Sahara.

He got to his feet and went to the door of his room, stared out into the night.

The desert lay lucent under the Southern Cross, the phosphorous sand catching each star gleam. Beyond the white walls of the fort the palms of the oasis reached in black and regular lines, their shadows unmoving. A dog barked in the native village. A camel let go a whinnying cry. Above on the *mirador* platform the sentry's feet softly passed.

Nolan called up to the man. "Anything new, Mahmoud?"



Fear of death dominated him
as he fought on with mad fury

By Robert Carse

"Nothing new, Sergeant."

Nolan went back into his room, sat on the edge of his pallet. The compact radio set was opposite him and for a moment he thought of starting it, talking to Colomb-Bechar or some of the other Camel Corps posts to the South. But the sound of the motor would arouse the whole garrison, he realized, and he would have nothing to tell the operators anyway. This was just one more Sa-

haran night of boredom, sweat and despair.

He grasped his pallet and pulled it behind him out onto the terrace. The lieutenant, Chardet, slept there under his mosquito netting. Beside Chardet was the Italian lieutenant, and there were holes in his mosquito netting, although the boots he wore were shiny new.

Nolan smiled and lit a cigarette. That

was just like the Italians, shiny boots and a mosquito netting that was worse than none at all. But the Italian had come here to ask aid of Chardet and the French, and Chardet was going to give it. Big raiding parties of the Senoussi had been working both sides of the Libyan border. Their *harkas* had hit the Italian posts three times in the last month, then jumped across into French territory. So shiny boots was over with a letter from his colonel with a demand for "direct cooperation from our fellow guardians of the desert, the officers and men of the French Camel Corps."

Nolan cursed and flung his cigarette over the rampart. He had put that message on the air last night for headquarters at Colomb-Bechar, got the answer an hour later. Headquarters had said go ahead, help the Italians. Which meant new patrols, days on end out in the open *bled* without enough water and always the camel stink in your nostrils.

"What are you doing here, Sergeant?" That was Chardet, erect and half naked, but with his officer's kepi on his head.

"Trying to draw a breath that doesn't burn my lungs out," Nolan said.

Chardet gave him a slow stare, came closer. "You've picked the wrong place. This space is reserved for officers. Return to your room."

Nolan stood still, his body poised. He hated Chardet, he told himself. Ever since the lieutenant had been in command of the post there'd been trouble between them. Chardet came from a powerful and wealthy Parisian family, and had been destined for Saint Cyr and the army from birth. He disliked him, Nolan, thought him a stupid soldier of fortune who was in the corps because of some crime he had committed at home in the States. The way Chardet figured it, any white man in the corps

who wore stripes should be a Frenchman, and certainly every non-com should keep his place.

"*Très bien, mon Lieutenant,*" Nolan said. "But why? I can't sleep in my room. I'm groggy now, and I'm the only guy in the post who can handle your radio. If I get sick, things won't be so good."

Chardet pointed behind him. "This corps has a tradition to maintain," he said. "We have a guest, and I don't wish that he should return to his outfit with bad reports of our discipline. We're at war against Germany, and the old peacetime sloppiness can't be permitted. Go to your room!"

Nolan opened his hands wide, to keep them from fisting, striking at Chardet's jaw. "Lieutenant Kezdac," he said, "the guy who was here before you, didn't think so much of discipline. He just got the work done, kept the *bled* patrolled right. But of course he got killed, and medals don't do a man any good when he's dead."

Chardet was slender and yet well-muscled, and now his arm muscles bunched. "You've refused my order twice," he said. "Refuse it the third time and you lose your stripes, end in prison. *Allez-y!*"

NOLAN went stumbling into the room and straight to the locker by the far wall. He had built the locker while serving with the Legion, had brought it with him when he transferred to the Saharan companies. In the bottom compartment of it were his personal papers and a bottle of good brandy. He had been saving the brandy for the day of his discharge, but that no longer counted, he thought.

He ripped off the leadfoil, pulled the cork, put back his head and drank. "To you, Nolan," he muttered. "You stupid

swab. . . ." Then he started to go through his papers, his license as a ship's radio operator, his letters of recommendation and his union book.

"A lot of good," he said aloud, "they're going to do you. How you going to get to Oran? How you going to get another ship?"

He tilted the bottle, drank until he gasped. The last five years formed distinct and sharp in his memory. He had been operator for a round-the-world American freighter when the ship had been caught in a full gale off Malta. When the mate and a couple of the sailors got him out of what was left of the radio shack, his right leg was badly broken below the knee and the nearest port was Oran. So he'd paid out of the ship, gone ashore to hospital. All that had been all right, and the months afterwards as he got to know the town and the men from the Legion in on leave.

They were a pretty good lot, the Legionnaires—men who knew how to drink and tell a story. Anyhow, they'd talked him into joining the outfit when he was through with the hospital and he'd been assigned right away to radio work. He'd seen some fighting up in the High Atlas with the Legion, but that had been a couple of years back, and afterwards life had been awful dull. His major had told him about the Sahara and the Camel Corps and how they needed radio operators there. Then, after he'd asked for it, the major had arranged his transfer. What the hell, he thought at the time, you might as well see all you can while you're doing your five years. As soon as they're up you're homeward bound.

The five years would be finished next month. Then he could shove on home, go back to Michigan and build himself a cabin up in the woods, hunt deer and grouse and duck, curse the snow the

way he cursed this Saharan sand. But he'd take the snow any day; a man could melt that and have water you could drink.

Outside, hobbled boots grated. A bugle sounded, clear and quick. Nolan looked down and saw that the bottle was empty, rolled it into a corner. He got up, shaking.

It was daylight. The tricolor flag showed pale on the staff against the flat, metallic blue of the sky. The guard was being relieved, and there was the smell of coffee from the kitchen.

"Drunk," Nolan said. "You're drunk, Nolan. But you got to get on that set and do your job."

He was settling the headphones over his sweaty ears when Dereix came to the door. Dereix was the squadron sergeant-major, a tough and quiet man and an old soldier. "A bit of coffee for you, *mon gars?*" he asked Nolan.

"A lot," Nolan said. "But wait a minute. Here's something coming in for my sweetheart, Chardet."

It was a coded call, and from an Italian station. "Must be from over in Libya, at Rhadmès," Nolan told Dereix after he had it down. "Call Chardet's chum, shiny boots."

"Listen," Dereix said, and slapped him hard on the shoulder. "That Italian lieutenant's name is Poggi. Use it; you hear me? Cut out the funny cracks. I've seen a lot of guys like you. When their enlistment's almost up they go a little nuts, and then instead of a discharge they catch a couple of years in prison. Go easy, and I'll call the lieutenant."

Chardet came in the room with Poggi. Both were fully dressed and freshly shaved, and Poggi decoded the message fast. "It's from my commander at Rhadmès," he said to Chardet. "He wishes to inform you that a raiding party of more than two hundred Se-

noussi crossed the border last night and are headed South and West into French territory. They count at least two hundred rifles and many spare camels."

"Very good," Chardet said. "Very fine." He smiled and touched the points of his little mustache. "We'll meet that *harka*, teach it a lesson. And if it turns back across the border, your people can give them another. Sergeant, send Lieutenant Poggi's message, then pack your field equipment. The squadron is going out in an hour."

Nolan glanced wide-eyed up at him. "No message for Colomb-Bechar, sir?" he said.

Chardet frowned, annoyed.

"The Italian post will notify Colomb-Bechar," Chardet said. "This is a joint operation."

THE Chaamba troopers of the squadron stood very straight as Chardet passed them in inspection. Their faces showed dark and tense inside their white headcloths, and at their backs the camels knelt motionless. Chardet turned the line and came back to where Poggi, the Italian, rested at stiff attention. "My men are ready, Lieutenant," Chardet said.

"I thank you," Poggi said, but instead of a regular military salute he gave him the high-armed gesture of the Fascist party. "I know the Senoussi, and they ride fast. We had better start right away."

The brandy had left Nolan with a headache that seemed to work like a trip-hammer. But the heat of the open desert sweated some of it out of him and he was able to ask Dereix, "What the hell is this? We get no direct orders from our own headquarters. We ride out without even telling Colomb-Bechar or In'salah where we're going. What if that bunch of Senoussi gets around us

and slaps down on one of the other posts?"

Dereix rode low in the saddle, his calloused toes braced against his camel's neck. "You American lads," he said, "are surely the ones for the questions and answers. If this isn't being handled right, it's Chardet's mess, not yours and mine. He got his permission last night from Colomb-Bechar. He must've, or he wouldn't be taking us out like this. Keep quiet. Get yourself in shape. There's going to be plenty of work for you out beyond there."

Nolan nodded and raised a bit, gazed ahead.

The direction they followed was East and right into the rising sun. It beat upon them with awful force. The desert glared, the rocky shale and sand casting up a constant shimmer. No man could really describe this, Nolan thought. No man could really understand it unless he was here. He had seen typhoons, hurricanes, gales, all the fury of the sea, but there was nothing more terrible than the Sahara. It frightened him, and he was a man who was not easily called a coward.

He reached out and stroked the neck of his camel and the long-necked beast looked around at him. She was a four-year-old from the Ahoggar pastures to the South, and still carried her Tuareg name of Rokkad. During his desert service Nolan had used no other mount, had come to know the beast's full personality. "How do you like it, Rokkad?" he whispered. "What do you think of this job? That Italian lieutenant with his flippety-flop Fascist salute and his fancy boots isn't the kind of guy we should follow. Either is Chardet. I kind of think Chardet likes the flippety salute a bit, too."

Rokkad's intelligent, broad eyes passed slowly over him, then swung

forward. The slender muzzle raised, and the nostrils distended. Nolan could feel the nervous tightening that passed through all the camel's body. He slid his hand to his saddle scabbard, loosened the Lebel carbine. Rokkad had sensed other camels out there somewhere in the desert, he recognized. They were coming into it, to action.

Chardet and Poggi had halted at the crest of a dune. Chardet had his field glasses out, was studying the Eastern horizon. Then he turned and signed to Aboum Mahomet. The little Chaamba was the squadron's chief tracker and supposed to be one of the best guides in the central desert. He rode up to Chardet and saluted, his carbine already in his hand.

"Men and camels are out there, Lieutenant," Aboum Mahomet said. "Some are to the North, some straight ahead, and some to the South."

"How do you tell that?" Chardet said.

"I've heard them, Lieutenant," Aboum Mahomet said.

"How?" Chardet said. "I haven't heard anything."

"The sound comes to me through the ground," the Chaamba said. "And look, Lieutenant. Our camels hear it, too."

Chardet swore at him. "I need something more definite than that. I need an enemy I can see before I take any action formation. Get out there and scout across those dunes. Nolan, bring your outfit up here!"

Nolan nudged Rokkad up the dune, hauling on the lead-rope of the clumsy Chaamba pack camel that carried his field set. "Quick about it," Chardet told him. "I want you to be ready to send in a hurry."

"This is a bad place for me to set up, *mon Lieutenant*," Nolan said. "I'll be exposed on both flanks."

"I gave you a command," Chardet said, then swung and struck him across the head with his carved camel stick. "Talk back again and you'll be shot."

II

RAGE overwhelmed Nolan. He grasped Chardet's ankle and leg, dumped him from his camel to the sand. Then, as the lieutenant rose, he hit him square in the mouth, felt teeth crunch and give. But Dereix was there, and Poggi, and they pulled him off, back from the lieutenant. "You're crazy, man," Dereix muttered. "He'll shoot you for that."

Nolan did not make any reply. He stood reeling, staring at Chardet. Blood was on Chardet's jaw; he was sucking his split lips. He had his pistol out, half raised, but he looked away, and to the East.

The Senoussi were to the East. They advanced in a galloping charge, their beasts' hooves sending a great swirl of sand up about them. "Squadron, fire!" Chardet shouted. "Shoot, you fools! Stop them!"

The troopers were already firing in volley. Senoussi camels reared, toppled. The warriors flung to the sand and those who lived tried to crawl away towards the further dunes. But there were other Senoussi groups, to the right and left. Bursts of their Winchester fire swept the Camel Corps line in cross enfilade.

Chardet was remounting his camel, Poggi helping him. Chardet made a hand signal, waved towards the Senoussi to the right. "Clear them out of there," he said. "Follow me."

He sent his camel into a run and a dozen troopers followed him and the Italian. Over on the left, Dereix had whipped the cover from an automatic rifle, begun to fire. Aboum Mahomet

was with him, maybe eight or ten more of the troopers.

That was allright, Nolan thought, except for the fact that the main Senoussi force was still up in front. A lot of them were hunkering close along the dune crest. His pack camel was wounded, rolled over thrashing. He saw somber eyes narrowed behind the dull steel barrels of Winchesters, hurled himself flat against the sand.

Men were being killed about him. He heard the bullet impact, then their cries. Can't stay here, he realized. Die stupid and fast, if you do. He took his pistol from his belt holster. It was a big, outsize Luger, a parabellum model he had bought from a Legion adjutant in Meknes. A bullet from that would be any man's ticket, the adjutant had told him, and the adjutant was right.

Nolan fired three shots from the Luger before Mahmoud slid alongside of him. "The lieutenant is in trouble over on the right," Mahmoud said. "He went out too far and the Senoussi have got in between his outfit and us. Dereix says we should fall back, then mount and swing around left, flank that lot up on the dune."

"Dereix has sense," Nolan said. He pushed back foot by foot to where the camels were. Nervous laughter came from him when he saw that Rokkad was unhurt. He took her lead-rope, brought her to her knees, then mounted and whispered, "Run!"

She ran with long, marvelous strides. He clung, bent over in the big leather saddle, the lead-rope wound around his left hand, the Luger in his right. Mahmoud and six more of the Chaambas came after him. Their beasts also ran fast, too fast for the Senoussi to draw an accurate bead on them.

He wheeled out on the left flank, a hundred or so yards beyond Dereix. The

sergeant-major was serving the automatic rifle with short bursts. It was a weapon the Senoussi did not like, and they were falling away from it. "We'll win this yet," Nolan yelled, and waved to the Chaambas of his group.

They turned the side of the dune in a gathered line, their beasts at the open gallop. Here there were Senoussi dead and wounded and riderless camels. He took his group past them, gave the signal to wheel right, back towards the dune crests. Then he heard the cry from the direction Chardet had taken.

The cry had been made by a Senoussi, a man who wore the green headcloth of a Meccan pilgrim. A lot more Senoussi were with the man in the green headcloth. They were all mounted, and they must have broken Chardet's charge, Nolan thought, or they wouldn't be coming now for him.

"Slow up," he commanded the troopers. "They're too many for us. Our only chance is to run, get back to the post before they catch us. Anyhow, that will take them off Dereix and the rest."

THE sun was in their faces as they turned to run for Taouit. Just keep it in front of you, Nolan thought, and you'll get home. Our beasts are fresher, faster than those of the guys behind. That's our job now, to break up the *bicos*.

Chardet can take care of himself, rejoined Dereix.

But the Senoussi got up within short rifle range in the last minutes of sunlight. They wounded one of the Chaambas sent by Nolan to cover their retreat. "No good," Nolan told Mahmoud and the rest of the troopers. "They know the way to the post as well as we do. They can run their beasts in relays, get out in front and head us off. We have one chance left."

"You mean," Mahmoud said, "we can't return to the post."

"That's right," Nolan said. "The Senoussi will knock us off sure if we try. They'll flank us all the way, get us one by one. We'll have to wear them down, finish their camels in a long, unbroken run. The post at In'salah is the place for us to head for, not Taoutit."

"In'salah is more than four hundred kilometers from here," Mahmoud said. "We'll have a hard time getting there."

"So will the Senoussi," Nolan said. "But I've got my compass and my chronometers. I can lead you to In'salah on a straight compass course. We won't just wander around in the dunes."

"The Senoussi will be certain to follow us," Mahmoud said.

"Let them," Nolan said. "As soon as they figure out we're not bound for our post they'll slow down to save their camels. They know we've got almost full food and water rations, and that our mounts are fast. Agreed that we try for In'salah?"

He had phrased his question in the desert style, to be considered and answered by each man. They answered him separately, but what they said was the same. They were all willing to follow him; he was their leader.

A feeling of deep pride came to him as they spoke. They had been born in this desert, would live and die here. Yet they had trust in him, a foreigner and a Christian who had spent only two years in the Sahara. The gold sergeant's stripes on his sleeves had small meaning for them. He had become their leader because they believed him to be worthy as a man.

"All right," he said; "we make a try for In'salah. Take another man, Mahmoud, and go out and hold up those guys for another five minutes. I'll have to take a bearing, set our course."

His compass and chronometers were carried in a small leather case slung over his shoulder. The compass had a radium-painted dial that flickered with a greenish fluorescence as he studied it. Then he snapped shut the case, marked his position on his map. The evening star was up and the Southern Cross was beginning to show faint and fine far overhead. "Follow me, troopers," he said. "We'll camp and sleep whenever the Senoussi let us."

The calculations he made that first night were that they would reach the big Camel Corps post at In'salah within a week. But after the fourth day he recognized that was impossible. The man who led the Senoussi group was shrewd and also knew this desert. There were always warriors out on the dunes ahead at dawn and at dusk. They sacrificed themselves and their camels, but they constantly kept the troopers headed further North instead of straight West.

Nolan called a council at dusk of the fourth day. "We can't make it," he said. "We can't reach In'salah. That Senoussi *sheikh* is too smart. He's foundered four or five of his camels and we've knocked off at least that many of his men, but he's driven us way North of where we should be."

The troopers crouched on their heels, their hands between their knees. Salt from their sweat had stiffened their headcloths, and their robes were splattered with camel lather. But their eyes were still thoughtful, unafraid. "That is no fault of yours," Mahmoud said. "You've done your best. What is the next thing for us?"

Nolan spread out his map. "We need water," he said. "Our bags are nearly empty. Unless we have water in a couple of days we're all through. Here, at Bir Figine, are the nearest wells. I suggest we go to Bir Figine."

"And the Senoussi?" one of the younger troopers said.

Nolan stared off to the East. Senoussi scouts lay along the skyline there, just beyond the reach of carbine fire. But when he and his bunch moved, he knew, they would move. "They'll come after us to Bir Figine," he said. "There's nothing else for them to do. No man can live out here without water."

"Then it will be a race between us and them," Mahmoud said.

"True," Nolan said. "It'll be a race, and the guys who get to water first will win the whole show."

IT WAS his impression during those days and nights of the ride to Bir Figine that he no longer possessed the capacity to experience pain. His body seemed aflame, seared by the sun and by thirst. The hand he used to hold Rokkad's lead-rope was puffed by immense blisters. His feet where they gripped the saddle pommel were rasped raw. He could not see clearly; his vision brought him unconnected scenes: the side of a dune cut by the wind into the shape of a leering lion's head, the eyes of the jackals at night, opalescent jewels of horror in the velvet-smooth darkness. But more often he glimpsed the faces of his troopers, and they were stricken, ghastly.

There was no sign of the Senoussi. The Senoussi were just there, behind. He knew when he heard the distant moaning of their camels, and once, on the next to last day, saw vultures slant swiftly down the sky, rise heavy and slow, gorged with flesh.

Then he went forward alone to find the wells. Rokkad was too weak to carry him. He led her, the rope galling his shoulder with a new streak of fire. But Rokkad smelled the water, nudged against him, made him go faster. They

were both running at a staggering trot as they came to the wells.

Flat stones drifted thick with sand covered the well heads. He stumbled prone and brushed the sand off with his body. He tore his fingers lifting the stone, but it slid back and there below, deep down and shimmering black, was the water.

He wept at the sight and smell of it. He got up and put his arms around Rokkad's neck, spoke to her as though she were a woman. Then he took his leather water sack from the saddle, lowered it into the well. It was full and Rokkad was drinking from it when the troopers joined him.

"Drink," he told them. "But don't drink too much or you'll be sick. We've got to get ready for the Senoussi."

The troopers smiled, showing their teeth between their swollen lips. "Yes," Mahmoud said. "We'll be ready."

It was a little before dawn, Nolan figured, that the Senoussi would attack. Their *sheikh* must have been promising them all along that they would be the first to reach the wells. Now he couldn't hold them out there in the desert through another scorching day.

A single warrior started the attack. He was maddened by thirst, for he came running erect up the slope, his voice lifted in a scream. Mahmoud killed him with a Lebel bullet in the chest. Then the others advanced, from all sides.

He couldn't kill, Nolan told himself—it would be impossible for him to do this if he had lost memory of those days through which he had just lived. But the Senoussi deserved death. They were raiders, killers, and on other patrols he had seen in the desert the bones of the negroes they had captured in the Sudan, marched North in chains to be sold as slaves.

He fired deliberately, waiting for the

Senoussi to get close. He used the parabellum Luger, holding the heavy weapon with both hands. Then Senoussi were easy targets; they were obsessed by the thought of water, careless of anything else.

They littered the dune slopes like dirty sacks. The *sheikh* in the green headcloth crawled near enough to wound Mahmoud in the shoulder, but that was all. The rest stopped after the *sheikh* died. They backed down and lay prone in the sand.

Nolan heard the thuds of their convulsed bodies on the sand, the gasped sounds of their breathing. "Enough," he said. "We'll take them prisoner. We'll take them North with us to Colomb-Bechar."

Mahmoud stared at him. "Why?" he said.

"Why kill them?" Nolan said. "They're licked, and we've got enough water and camel meat now to supply a squadron for a month. When we leave here, we're heading for Colomb-Bechar. That's the nearest post, and that's where I get my discharge. My time's up, was finished last week. . . ."

His voice slowed, became a whisper. Then he said in English, "So long, Chardet! I'm bound for Michigan."

III

THERE were a lot of men to say goodbye to Luther Nolan in the railroad station bar at Colomb-Bechar. They crowded around and bought him drinks, made jokes about the new Colonial Medal on his tunic and the stories he would give the newspapers about his African service.

"I'll tell them you're all a bunch of dog-robbers," he said. "Get back and let me buy you a drink and me a bottle. What do you think I'm going to do be-

tween here and Oran with an empty canteen?"

He had the bottle of anis, was thrusting it into his *musette* bag, when the Legion sergeant and the file of soldiers shoved through the crowd. The sergeant wore his cap strap down about his chin as a sign that he was on military police duty, as did the two soldiers behind him. "Nolan?" he asked.

"That's right," Nolan said. "Have a drink. That train will be pulling out quick."

"But you won't be on it," the sergeant said. He was a ruddy-faced German with hard eyes and a double row of ribbons across his chest. He wore a pistol, Nolan noticed, and the soldiers carried rifles. "The colonel wants you. You're under arrest."

"Listen," Nolan said. "Skip the low comedy. The colonel stuck a medal on me yesterday, told the whole command I was a fine guy for the way I handled the action at Bir Figine. You want a drink or not?"

"The colonel wants to see you more than I want a drink," the German said. "Step along, you. Resist and you'll get hurt."

Several other officers were in the room at headquarters with the colonel. They stood along the wall at his back, silent and erect. The colonel smoked a cigarette, his glance on the stack of papers and photographs before him, and then on Nolan.

"Sorry," the colonel said, "but you'll have to stay in Africa for a few more days, Nolan. A plane just got in from Taouit and In'salah with these." He tapped the papers and photographs. "Captain Fresnot in command at In'salah went out to find what happened to your old outfit and Lieutenant Chardet. You see, only a few of the Taouit lot ever got back to the post, and Chardet

and the Italian lieutenant were among the missing. Well, they're dead. Captain Fresnot found their bodies where you fought that first action against the Senoussi. You'd better tell me again about the action there."

"I gave you my full report before, sir," Nolan said. "There's nothing I can add to it now. Lieutenant Chardet and Lieutenant Poggi and the men with them were cut off from the rest of the outfit when I left. I cleared out without seeing them. But Dereix and the rest were there with the machine gun and I figured the best move for me was to split the Senoussi force."

"You're sure of that?" the colonel said. "Sure you didn't see Chardet after the first Senoussi charge?"

"Absolutely, sir."

"Eh, bien," the colonel said and lit a new cigarette. "If that's your story, stick to it. But how about a fight between you and Chardet just before the action started? Did you or did you not strike Chardet, and didn't you have trouble with him at the post?"

"Yes, sir," Nolan said. "I admit I struck the lieutenant, but only after he'd hit me across the face with his camel stick. And back at the post he was always making things tough for me. He told me he didn't like Americans in the Legion and particularly didn't like Americans in his command."

"Have you," the colonel said, "still got that big parabellum Luger of yours?"

"Yes, sir. It's my own personal property, so I kept it when I paid out yesterday. I've got it here in my *musette* bag."

"Take it out," the colonel said. "Put it on the desk. Lieutenant Chardet was killed by a Luger pistol shot, and so was Poggi. Look at these." The colonel shoved two flattened lead slugs across the desk. "Taken from Chardet's and

Poggi's skulls by Captain Fresnot. Might they have come from your pistol?"

Nolan's hands trembled as he picked up the slugs. "They might have, sir," he said. "But they didn't. I—I wouldn't kill any man like Chardet and Poggi. There's no reason why I should. I wasn't anywhere near them after the action began. Sergeant-major Dereix and Brigadier Aboum Mahomet can prove that. So can Mahmoud and the other troopers who fought under my direct command."

"Dereix," the colonel said, "and Aboum Mahomet testified to Captain Fresnot at Taouit that they didn't see you after you turned their position at the end of the dune. Their statements say you were completely out of their sight from that moment. As for Mahmoud and the other troopers, their testimony doesn't count for much. It's notorious in the desert that a Chaamba will perjure himself for any man he likes, and that lot ranks you pretty close to Allah."

NOLAN looked around the room, at the smartly uniformed officers by the wall, the headquarters clerk busily writing down each word said, the hard-eyed German guard sergeant, the file with bayoneted rifles at the door, and last the colonel, small and quiet, but almost frightening in his quietness.

"What's the charge against me, sir?" Nolan asked. "Murder?"

"No," the colonel said. "But you're being held on a suspicion of murder. And here's another reason for it." The colonel lifted a pair of photographs from the pile, handed them to Nolan. "Do you recognize those?"

They were photographs of Rokkard's fore and rear hoof marks, Nolan saw. The photographer had taken them close

up, showing in detail each characteristic of the great pads.

"They're pictures of my camel, Rokkad's hoof marks," Nolan said. "I don't..."

"Enough," the colonel said. "That's all we need, your admission that your mount made them. One lot was photographed at the scene of the action over there past Taouit. The other lot was photographed just now here at the depot stables. They check perfectly, and they were the only camel tracks—in fact the only tracks of any sort—within two hundred yards of where Chardet and Poggi were killed."

Nolan made no answer. It was impossible for him to speak. He was stunned, stupid, and tears were up behind his eyes. When the colonel spoke again, the words seemed to come from a long distance away:

"A court-martial has been convened at In'salah to try you. The senior trial officer is Captain Fresnot. It's only fair to warn you, though, that this won't be just an ordinary trial. Chardet's and Poggi's deaths have started a lot of international friction. The Italian government wants to know what it's all about, and they're particularly eager to learn how Poggi was killed. Signor Milciano, the Italian consul general at Algiers, is going South in the same autobus with you to be an observer at the trial. I talked with him a moment ago, and he made it clear to me that his government might quite possibly go into the war on Germany's side as a result of this."

The colonel restacked the papers and photographs, placed them in a leather dispatch case with the two Luger bullets and Nolan's pistol. Then the clerk locked and sealed the case as the colonel gave Nolan a final searching glance. "I hope you're innocent," he said. "I hope you didn't murder those two. But you

know French military law; a man is guilty until he's proven otherwise. You're leaving right away in the custody of Sergeant Bosch. Talk to nobody about your case until you arrive at In'salah. That's all. Sergeant, take charge of your prisoner. Report at once to the transport officer at the bus terminal."

Bosch met his heels with a clack, stiffly saluted. "Salute, you," he muttered to Nolan. "You're still in uniform."

Nolan gave the colonel a vague, fumbling salute. This wasn't the way home to Michigan, he thought. This was the way to disgrace, the firing squad and death. . . .

HIS sleep had been so deep that now it seemed as though all this was strange to him. But he had been riding in the huge, white autobus for hours, Nolan knew, and before he'd fallen asleep he had got to identify the other passengers.

Bosch sat next to him, still surly and cursing. Bosch's right wrist was manacled to his left, and the old German was made furious by what he called the injustice of it. "You," he grunted at Nolan, "you're a lunk-headed American, and you admit you popped Chardet on the jaw. But me, Hjalmar Bosch, I've done nearly thirty years in the Legion. I was in Madagascar with that colonel when he was nothing but a green second lieutenant. What the hell's he got against me, that I got to be shackled to you? What's he think . . ."

Bosch checked himself and stared back into the bus. There were only three other passengers. The nearest was Signor Milciano, the Italian consul general. Milciano had a lank, sallow face and eyes like tarnished brass buttons. But he wore a spotless white silk suit and a

carefully pipe-clayed sun helmet. The ribbons of a lot of Fascist decorations made a bright wedge of color on his jacket lapel and his fingers carried expensive rings. Now he smiled at Bosch and Nolan, made a sweeping gesture to the other two passengers. "It's the heat," he said in French. "We should all have a drink."

One of the other passengers was a big blonde woman in a pink rayon dress. She had false teeth and eyes that reminded Nolan of the jackals he had seen out in the desert. But she was very gay, laughed in answer to what Milciano said. "I'm going to Gao," she said. "All the way through. I might as well be drunk as fried alive. But I'll buy the second drink, and you guys call me Athèle. That's the name my friends use in Gao." She turned, her teeth gleaming, and tapped the third passenger on the shoulder. "You going to forget what the Koran says, *sheikh*, and grab a drink?"

The man in back of her was a Tuareg. He was dressed in the long blue *gandourah* of his people. His dark, almost black face was veiled to the eyes. But he wore a French officer's Sam Browne belt and two pistols in brand new holsters. In the luggage rack over his head was a wooden packing case that carried the name of an English firm that specialized in the manufacture of steel-mesh shirts. "Don't drink," he said in very bad French. "Don't smoke. Spent all money in Colomb-Bechar. Only have ticket to get back to Ahoggar, my country."

Milciano laughed at that, and the blonde laughed. "Don't worry," Milciano said. "Money doesn't count, not out here. What'll you drink, Athèle? Come on, Sergeant; let's hear what you and your prisoner want."

Bosch cleared his throat and hunched his shoulders. "I'm on special duty, sir,"

he said. "I've got to keep sober . . . watch this prisoner."

The bus driver began to laugh at that, flung his hands high from the steering wheel. "Bosch," he said. "Bosch says he has to keep sober. . . . Name of a name! Remember when we were in the First Regiment together, Bosch? And the time at Tlemcen you were so drunk we rolled you up and down the hill like a log? Me, Kirvav, I'm a crazy White Russian and I drink a bit, but you're a drunkard. . . . All right, Pajim. That's a double brandy for me. I'll take the sergeant's drink."

Pajim, the Algerian steward, stood in the rear of the bus near the little bar. He already had the brandy bottle out, was pouring. "But that makes a double double brandy for you, *Sidi*," he called to Kirvav. "The sergeant always drinks double ones."

"*Ach du lieber!*" Bosch said. "Enough of this, you two fools. Bring me a small brandy, Pajim."

The blonde had got up from her seat. She came along the aisle and leaned past Bosch and close to Nolan. "You've had bad luck, *mon petit*," she said. "That's no good, to be stuck beside this old goat. How about a cigarette for you, with your drink?"

Nolan wanted to laugh, and yet a strange, inner sense warned him. A woman of her kind wasn't uncommon in these Trans-Saharan buses, he knew. There were more than a few like her in all the big military towns bordering the desert. But it wasn't their habit to bother with prisoners, and right now Athèle wasn't watching him. She had slightly swung her head, was watching the Italian, Milciano. "*Pas merci, chérie*," he said to her. "I think I'll stay away from the stuff. It's no fun to drink wearing manacles."

"But the sergeant's going to drink.

aren't you, *mon vieux*?" Athéle said. She smoothed her fingers down the back of Bosch's close-cropped skull. "And you're going to take the manacles off pretty soon so you and this boy and all of us can have a real good time."

"No," Bosch said. "*Gross Gott*, no! Get away from us. Got tell Kirvav he's crazy, or the Big Father of all the Little Russias. But leave us."

HE SHOVED Athéle, sent her almost sprawling down the length of the coach. She ended up against the windshield beside Kirvav. The Russian had a drink in each hand, was steering with his knees. "Here," Athéle said calmly, and took one glass from him. "It's quite a walk to Gao. You drive, and trust me to get your liquor down your throat."

"A splendid woman," Kirvav said. "One for whom I will do my finest, fastest driving. But I am unhappy. I wish to cry."

"I know," Athéle said. "You want another drink."

"I need it," Kirvav said. "I am a man of great sorrow, and great capacity. I'm saddened, though, because the *sheikh* doesn't drink. He came North to buy French belts, French guns, English chain mail. And all that is good, except he doesn't drink. Tell Pajim that in the rear compartment there is a bottle of vodka. It has the color of water and the taste of fire. The *sheikh* will drink it if you say it's water."

"He's afraid of me," Athéle said. "He thinks I'm a *hour*."

The Russian grinned.

"Maybe he's right," Kirvav said. "But he'll listen to Pajim, who's a believer in his faith. Pajim is a broken down rug peddler, and he can lie to any man. Be sure that he marks down the vodka on the company's expense sheet.

I paid two hundred francs for it, and here my price is only five hundred. Fair enough?"

"If you live," Athéle said, "you'll own the company."

She tipped Bosch's kepi over his eyes as she went back along the aisle. "Stop scowling at me," she said. "Good liquor is wasted in a stomach as sour as yours."

She winked at Nolan.

Bosch lifted out of the seat to strike her, but she was gone and Milciano was there. "We'll have a merry trip to In'salah," Milciano said. "Don't worry about her. I plan to sit here so she can't bother you. But why not take the manacles off and rest in comfort? I'd like to talk to you both about the affair beyond Taouit. What evidence are you carrying in that dispatch case, Sergeant?"

Nolan spoke before Bosch could make more than a rumbling sound. "I'm sorry, *signor*," he said. "I don't talk to anybody until I talk to the court-martial. Bosch wasn't there; he doesn't know what happened. And if he did try to tell you anything he'd lose his stripes and go to prison. Right, Bosch?"

"Sure," Bosch said. "Sure." He squirmed uncomfortably on the seat, peered up at the dispatch case in the luggage rack. "You can't ask us any questions, *signor*."

Milciano gave a broad shrug. "As you wish," he said. "Of course it might very well be to your advantage to talk to me, American. I will represent my government at the trial, and my attitude can have a great deal to do with the decision of the court."

"To hell with it!" Nolan snapped. "Don't bother me."

He closed himself away from the others in the bus after that, shut them out from his brain. The bus would stop tonight at Bir Zegour, he realized, and be at In'salah by tomorrow night. In the

meantime he must figure out what had happened, why he was being brought South on a suspicion of killing Chardet and Poggi.

IV

IT DIDN'T make any sense, he repeated to himself over and over. According to what the colonel had said, it was shots from his pistol that had killed those two men. Tracks made by Rokkad were the only ones anywhere near the place the bodies were found. But he hadn't been there; he hadn't killed them. He and Rokkad had been at least a full kilometer away, and the whole time he'd been busy fighting the Senoussi.

Somebody had framed him, and framed him good. Still there wasn't any motive for it that he could understand. True, he was the guy to be framed because of his scrap with Chardet. But out of the bunch there from the squadron he knew of no man who would have any desire to kill Chardet and fix it so he, Nolan, got the blame.

Poggi might have wanted to for some reason, but Poggi was dead, killed with the same kind of bullet that killed Chardet.

"You'll have to wait," Nolan whispered. "You're still too shocked and confused to make sense now."

He opened his eyes, looked around him.

Kirvav was driving the bus wide-open. He sang in Russian, wild Cossack tunes and sad laments. He stood straight up at times, took his hands from the wheel, let the machine careen from side to side. But nobody seemed to notice. Milciano and Bosch were in low-voiced conversation, the consul general in the seat across from the sergeant. Back in the rear of the bus, Ath  le and the Tuareg *sheikh* and Pajim stood close together by the

bar. They, too, sang, and all of them were drunk.

The *sheikh* held an empty vodka bottle. "It's water," he said when their song was finished. "Water that burns like fire. Listen, you of the white coat! Find me more!"

"No more here," Pajim told him. "But more at rest-house. Cost you one thousand francs or one of those pistols. You pay?"

"Yes," the *sheikh* said and flung his arms around Ath  le. "I pay and pay. . . ."

They came to the rest-house in the first hour of darkness. It was built like a fort and there were machine guns on the roof. Kirvav let his headlights play across it, loudly blew his horn. Then he slammed on the brakes, threw them all to the floor. "Bir Zegour," he yelled. "Food, liquor and music. Get out, you dogs! Don't forget that it is I, Kirvav, the Big Father of all the Little Russias who has brought you."

Nolan staggered with stiffness when he got down from the bus and Bosch staggered with him, the dispatch case under his arm. "Walk straight," Bosch said. "Gotto make a good impression here."

"The only good impression you'll make," Nolan said, "is on another bottle of brandy. How many drinks did the Italian buy you today?"

"Just a few," Bosch said. "But what's the difference? He says Italy and France are going to be allies in the war. . . ."

They went in.

A sad-looking Algerian in a dirty fez and baggy trousers was in command of the rest-house. He served them a dinner of tinned beef and vegetables, gave the key to the bar to Pajim and then retired to the roof. "Knows what's good for him," Kirvav said. "We're going to have some fun here tonight."

"What kind of fun?" Bosch said, his eyes red-shot and blinking.

"Athéle will do the dance of the seven veils for us," Kirvav said.

"Where's the veils?" Bosch said.

Athéle indicated her dress. "I'll make them out of this," she said.

"Very small veils," the *sheikh* said.

"Wait a minute, you," Bosch said.

"You're a Moslem. You can't see that dance. Against the Koran, you understand?"

"No," the *sheikh* said, and touched one of the pistols in the new holsters.

Bosch reached into an inner pocket of his tunic and took out a key and unlocked the manacles. "Go sit over there," he said to Nolan. "I'm going to take that Tuareg apart like a clock. Send the pieces back home in that tin shirt he bought."

"A pretty sentiment," Nolan said. "But put back the manacles. I don't want to be around here with them off."

"You do what I tell you," Bosch said. He pulled his pistol free from the holster. "This is your last night out of jail. Just go over there and sit down and get drunk."

KIRVAV took all the bottles out from behind the bar. "Help yourselves," he said. "On the company. Company's subsidized by the government and the government's in a war. Doesn't matter. Let's sing."

They sang for hours. Kirvav finally slid down to the floor, sang lying there. Bosch sat staring at the Tuareg, his pistol on his knee. "When do you do the dance?" he asked Athéle.

"Later," she said. "When the Big Father is off the floor." She crossed the room to Nolan, murmured, "Would you like to go out for a little walk with me? These drunks are stupid."

Nolan glanced past her at Milciano

in the far corner of the room. Bottles were scattered around the Italian's chair, but he was a lot more sober than drunk. He still wore his sun helmet, had drawn the brim down over his eyes. Something wrong was going on here, Nolan sensed. Between them, Athéle and Milciano were trying to put over a job.

"I think I'll stay right here, Athéle," Nolan said. "Take the *sheikh* out for a walk. Show him the short cut to Mecca."

"You Legionnaires don't know a nice girl when you see one," Athéle said. "Come on out where I can talk to you. I know a bit about that scrap beyond Taout. I can help you."

Bosch had shoved from his chair, was stumbling towards them. "You let my prisoner be," he said. "Dangerous character. Damn American cowboy who never should have joined Legion in first place. Got proof in this case here to show he murdered those two lieutenants. Come on. Walk in the moonlight with me. I'm a Legionnaire who likes nice girls."

Nolan took Bosch by the arm. "Don't be stupid," he said. "Go out with her if you want, but leave the case here. If you lost it I wouldn't have a chance."

Bosch rapped him across the forehead with his pistol barrel. "Shut up! What are you trying to do—get me to leave it with you?" He wheeled around and to Milciano. "Here, *M'sieur le consul*, you keep it. You're the only guy I can trust."

"Quite correct, Sergeant," Milciano said. "But don't stay outside too long with Athéle. We'd all like to see her dance."

Athéle had gone to stand in the broad doorway. The moon was up high beat a silver light against her body. "Too bright for lovemaking," she told Bosch.

"Let's wait for another time. I'd feel ashamed out there now."

"Ach, not with me," Bosch said. "See, over there are shadows . . ."

The bullet hit with a cracking sound. Bosch had been right in the middle of the doorway facing the desert. He took a backward pace and then another, dropped to his knees and prone. He was dead before he reached the floor.

"The lights," Kirvav said. "Turn out the lights." Then he jumped to do it himself.

Nolan crawled to where the sergeant lay, brought the body back into the room and out of line of the door. Even in that semi-darkness he could see where the bullet had struck. It had squarely pierced the gold-embroidered grenade emblem of the Legion on the front of Bosch's kepi, gone on to smash the brain. "Turn on the lights," he said. "The guy who fired that won't shoot again. He knows there's machine guns on the roof."

It was Athéle who turned on the lights. Kirvav was crouched behind the bar with Pajim, his eyes wild. The Tuareg sat on the floor, his pistols out and lifted. Milciano had moved, too, up from his chair and to the center of the room. "You were wrong to turn out the lights Kirvav," he said. "Somebody's stolen the dispatch case, snatched it off my knees. I demand in the name of my government that it be returned."

Kirvav hysterically laughed. "Search me," he said "I am a man of clean conscience and clean underclothing."

"You're a drunken idiot," Milciano said. "But I doubt if you stole it. Nolan, I'm forced to suspect you."

"But that," Nolan said in a slow, hard voice, "won't do you any good, or me." He pointed to the Algerian caretaker sliding down the ladder from the roof. "Manacle me to him or Pajim.

I'm a prisoner and I demand to be treated as such. Then if you want to be real funny, go out and see if you can find any traces of the guy who killed Bosch."

"You believe I had any part in this?" Milciano said.

"Yes," Nolan said. "I suspect you, and I suspect Athéle. That bullet was meant for me, not for Bosch."

Athéle came over to him, her hands on her hips. "I make my living the hard way, soldier," she said. "I don't like murder."

"Only the money that goes with it," Nolan said. Then he nodded to Milciano. "All right, *M'sieur le consul*. Put on the manacles. You can have me killed with them on just as well as off."

THEY left Bir Zegour right at dawn the next day, heading on South. A sober and quiet Kirvav talked with In'salah first on the radio. "Captain Fresnot says it's useless for us to stay here," Kirvav told all of them. "We're going to keep going until we reach In'salah."

"Who does he place in command of the party?" Milciano said.

"Me," Kirvav said. "But if anything happens to me, you're supposed to take over."

Milciano smiled. "Of course," he said, "nothing will happen to you."

"I'm not so sure," Kirvav said. "I always have bad luck when I keep sober. But let's go."

He drove with great care and much more slowly than he had before. That was a country of high dunes broken by deep gullies and ridges of raw volcanic rock. He was forced to back and turn the bus, take the dune slopes in low gear.

"About as close to Hell as anybody can get," Athéle said. "Two busses

broken down out here last year and had to be abandoned."

"Keep still," Nolan said, "or you'll be left here." He sat in the rear of the bus both wrists manacled and then secured to a solid steel stanchion. Pajim sat next to him armed and watchful. In the next seat the *sheikh* stretched full length. The *sheik* was suffering the effects of a vodka hangover. Faint moans came from him, and confused prayers to Allah. He looked at Athéle with pleading eyes and asked her, "There is more of the water that is hotter than fire?"

"No more," Athéle said. "If there was, he wouldn't let you have it." She nodded towards Milciano. "He told me back at Bir Zegour that one of us could have a drink today. He's afraid to let us start drinking because he..."

Milciano whirled his face pale with anger. "One more word from you," he said, "and you'll be dumped out into the desert. This is very dangerous territory. In'salah reports a raiding party along the trail. Shut up. Put on a pair of those earphones and listen and you'll know what I mean."

"Zut, alors!" Athéle said. She took a pair of the radio earphones from a wall clip, slid them in place.

"Stick a pair on me too, will you lovely?" Nolan said. "I can't figure how any raiding party could get this far North."

A racketing whine came through the phones Athéle clamped over his ears, then the clear sending call of In'salah. It was the post operator and he was trying to pick up Kirvav.

Kirvav had stopped the bus on a dune crest, was listening. The In'salah operator talked fast in military code. Funny, Nolan suddenly thought that Milciano should understand this stuff. How come he knows French signals? He squirmed

his aching body around so that he could watch Milciano.

There was an odd half-smile holding Milciano's mouth. He sat tensely crouched, peering out the window beside him to the East. His cuff was pulled back to expose his wristwatch dial, and he counted the minutes.

It's coming, Nolan thought. There's going to be action here. The guy at In'salah is warning Kirvav to look out for a *harka* of forty rifles reported by a patrol from Fort Flatters. Forty rifles, this far North. . . . And who shot Bosch last night? Some guy who was an excellent marksman, but who'd been told to shoot only at Legion kepis. Bosch's kepi was the same as mine. He and I are about the same general height. Bosch last night, me today, or vice versa. It doesn't matter much. They're out for both of us and I think that Milciano is their skipper. Get yourself set. Watch Milciano all the time. He or the blonde starts anything, kick 'em smack in the jaw. That's one trick the Legion taught you, and it's a good one. . . .

V

KIRVAV had put the bus into gear. The heavy, six-wheeled machine pitched down the dune slope, began to drag through the limestone shale at the bottom. Bits of gravel flung up from the tires rattled off the sides and windows. The crash of rifle fire was not much louder.

Kirvav cursed. He stood to reach the Chatellerault rifle held in clips above the windshield and a bullet caught him through the chest. He dropped across the wheel, then to the floor.

"Up on the ridge," Pajim whispered. "They're up on the ridge. Tuareg in blue robes."

Nolan could see the men up on the

ridge, and Pajim was right; they wore blue Tuareg robes. But Milciano had turned, was moving. Milciano held a long-barreled automatic pistol in his right hand.

Nolan stretched back in the seat, braced himself and kicked. His aim was a little low and his boot heel missed Milciano's jaw. But it drove solidly against upper facial flesh and bone. Milciano did a kind of backward, vaulting dive. Window glass shattered as he flung through it, out and down to the sand.

"Soldier," Athéle said, "you kick better than a Sudanese mule."

Nolan stared at her, his arms strained taut against the manacles. "Who are you with?" he said. "Us, or Milciano?"

"Milciano made me a lot of fancy promises," she said. "He's a fancy guy. But that bunch are here to kill us, and I'll never have any fun dead. I'm with you, *mon peti*". Wait until I get these irons off you."

She crawled along the floor to the tool box, came back with a hack saw.

Nolan looked at her questioningly. "Milciano had the keys to these," she said, "When you kicked him out, you kicked out the keys. But the saw will do it."

"Where's Milciano now?"

"Doing a glide around the back of the dune."

"Where's the *sheikh*?"

"He's getting set to use that new artillery he bought in Colomb-Bechar. The *sheikh's* all right. And Pajim has got a rifle. We're going to be able to take care of ourselves."

Nolan smiled at her. "What did Milciano do with the dispatch case last night?"

"Burned it," Athéle said. She kept right on working with the hack saw. "Waited until you guys had fallen

asleep, then went out in the desert with a gallon can of gasoline."

"Then he was afraid," Nolan said, "that the trial wasn't going to go the way he wanted at In'salah."

"He was scared stiff it wouldn't," Athéle said. "That was why he took the chance of bringing me along. My job was to get you all so drunk you wouldn't know what was happening."

"You almost did," Nolan said. The manacle chain had snapped and his hands were free. He flexed them, flexed his whole body. "Now you stay here," he said. "Keep down out of sight. I'm going to get Kirvav's automatic rifle. I guess the Big Father of the Little Russias is through for good."

He had the automatic and the bag of clips for it, was working a fresh clip into the gun as he heard the screams of the camels. The blue-robed men were charging the bus. They came from both sides and they kept their beasts at the full gallop.

Nolan aimed at the camels, brought them down, then the men. The men carried Winchesters and long Tuareg lances. They attempted to advance after the camels were killed, and a number of them got very close.

Lead screeched and hammered through the bus. Pajim and the *sheikh* ran the length of the aisle, clubbing at the men who tried to climb in the windows. Athéle held a shattered bottle in each hand. She used them like knives, making downward, slashing blows. Her hair was loose about her shoulders and there was blood on the pink dress. A tough gal, Nolan thought, and worth a couple of those blue-robed guys any time.

The blue-robed men were in retreat. A shout sounded on the ridge, calling them back. They took their wounded and dead, huddled for cover behind the

camels. But a steady drum-fire raked across the bus. Most of the force was still up there on the ridge.

"Got to get out of here," Nolan said to Athéle. "They won't try another charge here. They'll just wait until dark and then come down and jump us when we can't see them. Stretch out on the floor and hang on tight."

"What are you going to do?" Athéle said.

"Start up the bus and run down this gully and out into the open *bled*."

"They'll knock your head off."

"Not unless they fire at me through the floor."

Nolan had pressed the starter button. The motor pulsed deeply. He shoved into the clutch, pulled the gear lever into low. Then he reached up and grasped the wheel, but still kneeling, steering by memory, his head well below the cowl.

FRAGMENTS of glass from the windshield cut his shoulders. Bullets tore the cowl, lashed through the door panels. But he had turned the bus, was running it down the gully. He advanced to second gear, pressed harder on the gas pedal. Then he raised his head for one short look.

The gully end was about a hundred yards away. A sharp slope led to it and the slope was thick in loose shale.

You've got to keep your head up, Nolan, he told himself. No more ducking down. This is a one way job. . . .

He was very frightened. The men in the blue robes were massing at the gully end. They could see him plainly, and they were doing their best to kill him. They rested flat in the sand, firing with deliberate care.

"Nice boys," Athéle said. "But they didn't pay the price of admission to this shooting gallery. How do you work the damn automatic rifle?"

"Just shove the clip down," Nolan said, "and then keep the trigger back. But take care of yourself."

"I'll take care of them, the lice," Athéle said.

She sent bursts from the Chatellerault from right to left across the gully end. She stood up and yelled as she shot, and her voice was a concentrate of furious mockery. The *sheikh* and Pajim were also firing, bent behind windows at opposite ends of the bus. Nolan heard the swift punctuation of their shots as he hurled the bus up the last of the slope.

Barbs of broken glass had started blood smearing down his face into his eyes. He saw the further desert in a great, blinding haze of light. But he knew the bus was up and out of the gully; he could feel it by the motor

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pulsation and the gathering rush of speed. "Very good, Nolan," he grunted.

Athéle sat akimbo on the floor. Dark blood came from a bullet hole in her side. She had her hands over it, was softly cursing. Pajim was dead, the whole back of his head shot away. The *sheikh* seemed unharmed. He was picking up Pajim's rifle, reloading his own pistols.

"Come up here," Nolan called to Athéle, "and I'll take care of that for you."

"No, you won't," Athéle said. "You keep the bus running. I bought a ticket for Gao."

Nolan stopped the bus out on a smooth stretch of sand. Those men behind still had a lot of fast camels, he realized, but here he was able to see them, get going again before they were within accurate range. He lifted Athéle up onto a seat, cut away her dress from the wound, cleaned and bandaged it. "I won't be able to drink for a week or so, hey?" Athéle said.

"For a month or so," Nolan said. "But your ticket still reads for Gao."

Athéle smiled at him and then fainted, her blood-marked, dirty face inert against the seat.

The *sheikh* gave Nolan help to get Pajim out of the aisle. "We keep going," he said.

"Not right away," Nolan said. "I want to talk to In'salah, tell them about this. But do you think those guys back there are your people? Do you think they're Tuareg?"

The *sheikh* spoke fast in the Tuareg language and Nolan didn't understand him. Then he repeated a few words in French. "Not my people. No—no. They have Tuareg *gandourahs*, Tuareg camels, guns and lances. But men not Taureg. Don't talk my talk."

"Right," Nolan said. "I figured that,

It's too far North for Tuareg, and your people are at peace with the French."

"Some man try to trick my people?" the *sheikh* said. "Make trouble for them?"

"A lot of trouble and maybe war," Nolan said. "But I'm not sure about that. I'm going to talk to In'salah. You watch those folks back there. They're not going to get away from us, if I can help it."

He raised the operator at In'salah almost at once. "Nolan, former sergeant attached to Mobile at Taouit," he rapped out on the key. "We've been attacked about three hundred kilometers South of Bir Zegour. Kirvav and the steward have been killed. Milciano, the Italian consul general, has either been captured or surrendered to the enemy. Only one other passenger and myself are left in fighting condition. Enemy is well-mounted, counts at present less than thirty rifles. Come in; I want to hear from Captain Fresnot."

Fresnot's message was very simple. "Protect yourselves, I'm heading North right away with eighty men. Should reach you soon after dark."

"Difficult for us to stay here," Nolan answered. "We'll head on South."

"Which direction do you think the enemy will take?" the In'salah operator asked.

"The same one we do. We won't lose contact with them. I'll fix it so they follow us."

The In'salah operator began another long question, but Nolan did not wait to listen. He took off the headphones, picked up the automatic rifle. Behind him, the *sheikh* had just uttered a low cry of warning. "They come," the *sheikh* said.

"Stupid bunch of boys," Nolan said. "They must figure we're afraid to fight."

• VI

HE DROVE the bus right into and through the charging camels that time. The front fenders crashed under the weight of the hurtling bodies and two men fell directly beneath the wheels. Then the bus was running free and Nolan climbed into the driver's seat, let go a long, whistling breath.

The *sheikh* came to stand beside him at the wheel. "I like that," the *sheikh* said. "I like more."

"Sure," Nolan said. "But our luck won't last forever. We've got to keep on South. Not so fast, though, that they'll get the idea they can't catch us."

He maintained an average speed of fourteen miles an hour during the rest of the daylight hours. He followed the regular trail, and several times he slowed at the dune crests to allow the camel-mounted men to come closer. They rode in double file and among them he could distinguish Milciano.

The Italian made no more attempt to disguise his rôle. He carried a rifle, openly directed the pursuit. "That man no good," the *sheikh* said. "I want to kill him. He make the trouble."

"You'll have your chance at him soon," Nolan said. "We're almost out of gasoline. Then we run, or we get killed, or the Camel Corps saves us."

"No good to run," the *sheikh* said. "We fight."

A wind rose with dusk. It flurried sand over the bus, created great, whirling curtains that obscured the desert. It's funny, Nolan thought, but when you were a boy at home and you dreamed of the Sahara at night it was like this. Rescue always came at the last minute, though, and it's not going to here. You've got half a gallon of gas left. Then the bus is going to stop and you and the *sheikh* are going to get

killed. Milciano wants you dead, very dead, and he's the guy who must have fixed the killing of Chardet and Poggi. But don't bother thinking about that now. Just think about how many of those guys behind you can take with you when you go. . . .

The engine was already knocking, missing. It stalled on a steep grade, half way up a dune. "Here we are, *sheikh*," Nolan said. "You can have a little talk with Allah in the morning."

He took the automatic rifle and one of the last remaining clips, went to the back of the bus and crouched by the rear window. Milciano was spreading his men out fan-wise from the trail. They rode singly and in pairs, then dismounted, came forward on foot.

The *sheikh* yelled as he saw them. "They are false Tuareg," he told Nolan. "I will go out and kill them."

"Then you'll get killed," Nolan said, but the *sheikh* was down, out of the bus.

He went hunching on his stomach towards the men who flanked the trail. Nolan heard his pistols, and one high yell, a lot more confused sound.

"So long, sport," Nolan said, and began to fire the automatic rifle.

Men were all around the bus. One sprang up squarely in front of him, jabbing with a lance. Others jumped in the door and through the windows. Clear thought left Nolan. His entire nature was dominated by the fear of death. His shots knocked the man with the lance back from the window, kept from him the men who had come through the door and windows.

He was alone here except for Athéle. The others were dead, and most of them he'd killed. He thickly laughed and put a new clip in the gun. Let them come in, too, the rest of them. He'd take care of them. He wasn't going to die. He was

going to live and go back to Michigan.

WHEN the Camel Corps troopers descended the slope he saw them as distorted figures in a fearful dream. He almost shot at them, for the Chatellerault was still in his hands and his brain was still possessed by the need to kill. But then he heard men who spoke in French, and they were beside him, taking the gun out of his hands. "I'm Nolan," he murmured. "And that's Athéle, over there. . . ."

They led him down from the bus and gave him a drink of brandy from a canteen, put a lit cigarette between his lips. The taste of the coarse Algerian tobacco was so familiar he smiled, and the mood of partial insanity went from him. "Where's Captain Fresnot?" he said.

"I'm Fresnot," the tall man in front of him said. "You've done very well, Nolan."

"Maybe," Nolan said. "But there's a couple of things I haven't figured out yet. I didn't shoot Chardet, Captain, and I didn't shoot Poggi. Neither are those guys out there Tuareg."

"Who are they?" Fresnot said. "They're using Tuareg gear and riding camels."

"I think they're Senoussi," Nolan said, "from over in Italian Libya. That Italian consul general, Milciano, is leading them. Milciano is here to raise big hell."

Fresnot slowly stared at him. He said, "You'll have to do quite a lot before I'll believe you."

"Yes, sir," Nolan said; "I will."

There were carbine and rifle flashes off across the dune to the South, and the jarring of a machine gun. The Camel Corps had outflanked Milciano's bunch, Nolan thought. In a few minutes they would be bringing in the survivors. But maybe Milciano would get

away, or get killed. He had to prove this thing himself, establish his own innocence. "Do you mind if I show you something, *M'sieur le capitaine*?" he asked.

"No," Fresnot said. "I'm your senior court-martial officer."

They walked side by side along the trail to where the Tuareg *sheikh* lay. There were four blue-robed men sprawled dead around the *sheikh*, and Nolan identified him only by the Sam Browne belt. But he knelt down and pulled back the man's robe. "See, sir," he told Fresnot. "This guy's a real Tuareg. He wore one of these blue *gandourahs* all his life. His skin's turned blue by the stuff with which they're dyed. But not these other guys; their skins haven't got any sign of dye."

Fresnot turned on his flashlight, held it close above the bodies. "You're right," he said. "But still that doesn't clear you. The two really damaging bits of evidence against you are the tracks of your camel near Chardet and Poggi, and your pistol bullets in their heads."

"Well," Nolan said, "I've got a hunch about the camel tracks. When I was a kid at home I used to read cowboy stories. There's an old trick the rustlers used. They'd tie pads on their horses' hooves, make them look like horses belonging to somebody else, and they'd get away from the sheriff. Maybe somebody out here in Africa picked up an old American cowboy magazine."

Fresnot swung his flashlight beam out over the sand. A camel carrying a splendid Tuareg saddle rested at the bottom of the dune, blood drooled black from the nostrils. Nolan went running to it. "Pads," he called to Fresnot. "Leather pads tied tight over the hooves. Take them off and no tracker in the Sahara would recognize the real hoof marks. But it works the other way for

me and my beast, Rokkad. Some guy at Taout got an impression of Rokkad's hoof marks, then had pads made to match. Do you believe me, captain? Am I making sense?"

"I'm beginning to believe you," Fresnot said. "If this bunch had got a half hour's headstart on us we'd never have caught them. All they would have done is found a rocky stretch of ground, taken off the pads there and kept on going. That would have broken their trail for good. But you're not free yet. I still have to be shown that Rokkad's hoof marks were faked, and how bullets from your pistol killed those men."

Nolan was panting with excitement and elation. He turned and pointed up the slope. "There's the outfit, sir," he said. "They're bringing in the prisoners, and they've got Milciano. . . . I think he knows that answer about the pistol. Can I talk to him?"

"All you want," Fresnot said.

The troopers formed a ring about Nolan and Milciano. Fresnot stood in back of the ring, but close enough to hear.

Nolan made sure of that before he began to talk to Milciano.

He walked forward to the Italian, halted within a pace of him. "You did one job fine," he said. "But you were stupid about the second. Why did you have Bosch shot? Burning up those pictures of the camel marks wouldn't have stopped me from figuring out in time how they were made. I was the guy for you to get, not Bosch. I just showed Captain Fresnot the trick with the hoof pads, and that the guys working for you aren't Tuareg, but Senoussi from over in Libya. Come and talk, *M'sieur le consul*. Tell us why you killed Chardet and your own boy, Poggi, and Bosch. What are you trying to do, get Italy in the war against the French?"

MILCIANO had been mauled a bit by the troopers who had captured him. His jacket was torn and his tie was missing, but he was still strong, swift in motion. He hit Nolan a flat-handed slap across the mouth. "Be still, liar!" he said. "I was taken prisoner by those men who attacked the bus. I'm here to report to Captain Fresnot, not to be questioned by you."

"Who's a liar?" Nolan said, and put an uppercut right on the point of Milciano's chin. He looked around at Fresnot as Milciano landed on the sand, but the captain didn't seem to have seen the blow. He was glancing off into the desert night.

"Get up," Nolan told Milciano. "Try calling me a liar again. Nobody but me will stop you. He maybe you'll get tired of it. Athéle is over there in the bus. She'll live to testify in court that you burned that dispatch case at Bir Zegour. . . . Get going! Talk, or fight."

Milciano lunged at him, striking out with his fists and knees. Nolan let go a crossed right, and a left.

Milciano got up more slowly from the sand. His eyes were distended, his body shook. "Captain Fresnot," he said, "I must talk to you."

"No," Nolan said. "To me." He drove Milciano around the ring, no longer hitting with his fists but using short, quick slaps.

Milciano squatted down in the center of the ring and wept. "I'll talk," he said.

"Tell about Chardet and Poggi," Nolan said. "How and why you had them killed."

"They were killed by Senoussi sharpshooters," Milciano said. "Men who were part of the force I sent across the border. But they killed them with Winchester shots, not a Luger."

"How come Captain Fresnot found Luger bullets in their heads?"

"We wanted it believed that you had committed the crime. Chardet supplied me with slugs that you had fired from your pistol in target practice at the post."

"You're sure you mean Chardet?"

"Yes, Chardet. He was a Fascist, a traitor to his people and France. He was a member of the Croix de Feu organization, wanted to see Italy enter the war on the side of Germany against France. So he got in touch with me, and Poggi went over to Taoutit."

"Who made the pads for my camel's hooves?"

"Chardet himself, then brought them across the border with the Luger slugs. After he and Poggi were killed, my Senoussi took out the Winchester slugs, put in those from your pistol. We figured that the bodies would be there for several days, and decomposition would hide any signs of the change."

"Who's 'we'?"

"The men from whom I take my orders."

"Why was Chardet killed?"

"Because he knew too much, and we were afraid that at the last moment he might still be loyal to France."

Nolan felt suddenly very tired, very weak. "You guys," he said, "just don't give a damn who you kill, huh? Well,

I'm alive, and so's Athéle, and that helps. I got no more questions for you. But the captain has."

Fresnot moved forward through the ring, held Milciano tightly gripped by the arms. "You planned to start war against France by the creation of these incidents?" he said.

"Yes," Milciano said, his voice a rasping whisper.

"Then you admit to all that you've been accused by Nolan?"

Milciano slightly inclined his head.

Fresnot stood back from him, pulled Nolan back. "You have my permission," Fresnot said, "to take him out in the desert and shoot him."

"No, thanks, sir," Nolan said. "Just give him a pistol and one bullet and let him start walking for Libya."

Fresnot led Milciano silently out from the ring into the desert. Then he returned, stood with Nolan and the troopers.

Jackals prowled the outer darkness. They snapped over the bodies of the dead. The shot Milciano fired was dull, gave faint echo to their snarling cries.

Fresnot reached and shook Nolan's hand. "You were right, soldier," he said. "But where are you going now?"

"Michigan," Nolan said. "Michigan's where I belong."

USE SPEEDWAY DE LUXE BLADES
FOR FAST, SMOOTH, ECONOMICAL SHAVES



Death of a Good Guy

By Charles Ingerman

THERE was a time—and not so long ago, either!—when Bill Barnaby got a big bang out of living. He ate his forty-five-cent supper in the café where Nick the Greek presided, and he smoked his five-cent cigar afterward, and he meditated, after his own fashion, on how good it was to be alive.

He was a good guy, this Bill Barnaby—a swell egg. Even if he was a private detective, everybody liked him. Including the men on the Force, who usually think that all private cops stink.

Bill Barnaby wasn't that kind of a private dick. He wouldn't take the smelly cases—boudoir burglaring and

key-hole pecking—which so often make private dicks rich. By far the greater part of his work he did for nothing—teaching numbskulls not to beat their wives or steal the grocery money from kids on their way to the store. Little things like that.

He was a wizard at reasoning people out of their orneriness. Goodness knows, he had to be, because Nature certainly hadn't designed him to be a man of action and forceful deeds. He was just a whisper over five feet tall, and he weighed well over two hundred pounds.

"Look," Bill Barnaby would say, smiling, to some cross-grained brat who



They held him there,
petting him unmercifully

had been pitching stones at little girls, "You don't want to do that."

"Why not?" would come the belligerent query.

"You might hurt one of them."

"So what?"

Bill Barnaby would smile, and that smile did something to people. "That would make me feel real bad, and when I feel bad, I can't think of any favors to do for kids, like getting them to work on a case for me, or like giving them two-bits to go see the movies."

The belligerence would die out of the kid's eyes then, and he would twist his face into a grin and say: "Well, okay, Bill, if that's the way you feel about it!" And he'd drop the stones and grab the quarter.

That's the reason Barnaby was always so poor. Two-bits here and a buck there—sometimes more. For nobody in Barnaby's social circle ever had any real money. By holding out on the landlord, they got almost enough to eat for a while; and then by holding out on the grocer, they saved enough to move again when the landlord finally got tough about his rent.

"Two things cause crime," Bill Barnaby often said. "Poverty and idleness."

So he gave away all his dough to alleviate some of the worst poverty, and he kept a lot of folks busy doing screwy favors for him which kept them out of mischief.

But naturally, this was all while Bill Barnaby was still alive. It all happened before they found him in MacGruder's alley, around the corner from the Club Martinique, with his head stove in, and the cold, limp cigar still stuck to his bloody lips. This was before Detective Vinnie Edwards took the D. O. A. report from the Assistant Medical Examiner and decided to solve the murder. . . .

DETECTIVE VINNIE EDWARDS looked down at Bill Barnaby's fat body, sprawled on the worn cobblestones, and he glanced at the five new one-thousand-dollar bills that had come out of Bill Barnaby's pants pocket.

It wasn't some hit-run robber, of course, because no robber will pass up five grand. Even in hot money. Even in queer. He can make a good profit on it. No, if someone bopped Barnaby with a length of lead pipe and didn't bother about all that dough, it had to mean that someone wanted Barnaby dead in the worst way.

Detective Vinnie Edwards looked at the corpse, and there were tears in his eyes. "Somebody's got to pay for this," he said between his teeth. "Somebody's got to pay for killing Bill Barnaby."

A bunch of guys and dolls had crowded into the alley, now that a couple of radio cars and the dead wagon were parked at its mouth. There was a low growl of agreement from most of them.

"He was a good guy," Edwards went on. "I lived with him for seven months after my mother died. He got me my first job. Later on, he made me see the light; yanked me out of Porkie Bruggmann's gang and helped me pass Civil Service onto the Force."

"He loaned me the dough to bury my old lady," another man said.

"He sat up all night when my kid sister was sick with pneumonia."

"He helped the doctor when Maizie had the baby."

"He kept me from jumping into the river," one blond wren sobbed. "And he gave me a ten-spot to boot!"

There was a shoving at the back of the crowd, and this tall, tow-headed man came pushing through. "Is this right?" he barked. "Is Bill Barnaby dead?"

"That's right, Sohl," Detective Edwards answered. "He's as dead as he ever will be."

Lester Sohl's face showed pain and shock. "It doesn't seem possible," he said. "It seems like only yesterday that he took the gun away from me when my wife ran away with Heinie Drew. If he hadn't, I'd have fried in the Chair long since. I was going to kill the both of them."

"He was like a doctor . . . and a priest . . . and a big brother . . . all rolled up in one," a worry-worn little woman said. "He was too good for this world. So now he's dead."

"Don't leave him lying there like that," Lester Sohl said. "It—it's not decent!" He rubbed the side of his nose with his long, gambler's finger. "So he's dead. The least we can do is to give him a fine funeral." He paused again. "I owe everything to him: the Club Martinique, the Supreme Photograph Studio, the dough in the bank, my life, too, I guess. I'll stand the cost."

"I want to help," a chap in the back somewhere piped up. "I've got a double sawbuck to help bury Bill Barnaby."

"I've got five."

"I've got seven."

"I've got thirty-five cents," one tear-stained little biddy choked, "if it will help any."

Lester Sohl lent them his new hat, and by the time the dead-wagon attendants had carted Bill Barnaby away, that hat was full of money.

IT WAS a great funeral, with an elegant silver-handled casket and mounds of flowers and swarms of mourners. Detective Vinnie Edwards read all about it in the newspapers. He would have given a lot to be able to go to it, and pay his last respects to his old friend, but he had something

more pressing to do: He had to find out who had killed Bill Barnaby.

He copied off the numbers on the thousand-dollar bills found on Bill Barnaby's body, and he sent copies of the list around to all the banks in town.

Don't try to hurry a bank. Nearly a whole day passed before the sleepy tellers checked Edwards' list against their own. And finally, the Rural Life National Bank came through with the information that their Mr. Lucius Richter had paid out those particular bills.

Detective Vinnie Edwards grabbed his hat and went around to see this Mr. Richter. He was an underfed young chap with watery eyes and the confidence of a thrashed puppy.

"You paid out these five bills, Mr. Richter?"

"Yes. That is, I'm pretty certain that I did."

Detective Edwards glanced at the slip of paper in the teller's hand. "Isn't that your list, with the serial numbers on it?"

"Yes, of course it is. Yes, I must have paid out those bills. But I won't get into any trouble because of it, will I?"

"No. If you can just tell me whom you paid the money to?"

"Well, I'm not sure. You see, these are just the numbers of the bills. I'm not required to report to whom I pay the money."

"But you can't forget passing five thousand dollars over the counter, can you?" Vinnie Edwards asked. "That's a hell of a lot of money."

"I handle a great deal of money all the time," Mr. Richter said apologetically.

"When was this payment made?"

"Tuesday. That is two days ago."

"And couldn't you check back and see what item this was paid on?"

"Why yes," Mr. Richter said brightly. "Naturally I can do that. But it will take a little time."

"The littler the time," cautioned Vinnie Edwards, "the better."

He fiddled around while Mr. Richter slunk into the bowels of the bank again. He made a paper boat, a paper hat, three airplanes and a couple of paper chickens—all out of the bank's best rag content paper—before Mr. Richter returned.

"You found it?" Detective Edwards asked.

"Yes. I think there can be no mistake about this now." He coughed, as if to imply that there could be a mistake about anything—life included.

"Who drew the money?"

"Well, I went through the papers for that day—the records of items, that is—and I found that Miss Clarissa Daniels drew a personal check for five thousand dollars. I'm practically positive that she is the person to whom I gave those five notes."

"You're sure?"

"Well, yes, I'd say I'm sure."

"Miss Clarissa Daniels, the gal who inherited all the money in the world from her grandmother and her dad?"

"Not all the money in the world," corrected the precise Mr. Richter. "But it's true that she's a very wealthy young lady."

"Thanks," said Detective Vinnie Edwards.

EVEN if she didn't have all the money in the world, Miss Clarissa Daniels was getting along all right, thought Detective Edwards. He headed his rattletrap roadster through the ornamental ironwork gateway at the entrance of her estate, chugged over her fine private roadway through acres of trees standing in what might be called her front yard.

The fence around the estate cost more than Detective Vinnie Edwards was likely to earn in twenty years, even with a lucky reward thrown in now and then.

He drove up to the huge white mansion, parked smack in front of the porte-cochère. He legged out of the roadster, and wondered what in heck a dame like Clarissa Daniels would be doing giving five grand to Bill Barnaby.

He took another look at the formal flowerbeds, crammed with brilliant flowers, and he climbed the stairs to the front door and punched the button.

A cute little trick of a maid, decked out in a trim uniform, answered the door. "Trades people at the rear entrance," she said snippily.

"That's not me," Detective Edwards snapped. "I want to see Miss Daniels."

"Just a moment. I'll see the butler."

In a minute or so, the butler came to the door. He was a tall, gaunt Englishman. "You wanted to see Miss Daniels? What name, please?"

"Detective Vincent Xavier Edwards, Homicide Squad."

"Oh! Just a moment, please, and I'll see Miss Daniels' secretary."

He held the door open, ushered Vinnie Edwards inside, left him standing in a foyer only slightly smaller than the waiting room in Grand Central Station.

And by and by, this grey-haired lady came along, wearing pince-nez glasses and a black silk cord over one ear. "Yes? I am Miss Daniels' secretary-companion."

"That's fine," Detective Edwards grated. "At any other time, I'd simply love to have a cup of tea with you. But I want to see Miss Clarissa Daniels, herself, in person."

"So do we!" flared this Mrs. Parrish, and then she looked as if she wanted

to bite off her tongue and spit it out: "Oh, but the lawyer said to say nothing about it to the police!"

"About what?"

"Nothing!"

Detective Vinnie Edwards took a long breath, expelled it. "Now listen, Mrs. Parrish, I'm the Law. You don't want to play cosy with me."

"I certainly do not!" agreed Mrs. Parrish frostily.

"Then what's this all about? What do you mean: So would we?"

"I might as well tell you, although I'm not supposed to."

"Go ahead, then."

"Miss Clarissa is missing."

"Missing? How long has she been gone?"

"Ever since yesterday." Mrs. Parrish daubed at her thin nose with a wispy handkerchief. "She went to town to see a certain William Barnaby . . ."

"Bill Barnaby?"

"I don't know him that well," Mrs. Parrish said primly. "In any event, she didn't return home."

"Why weren't the police notified?"

"Mr. Blake—that's the lawyer who's in charge of Miss Clarissa's things—said that if it were a kidnapping, it would be better if the police didn't know."

"That's just fine," Vinnie Edwards growled. "Everything happens to me."

"What do you mean?"

"So now I've got to solve a kidnapping in order to solve a murder!"

"What are you raving about, young man?"

"Not tell the police! What stupidity!"

"Mr. Blake said . . ."

"To hell with Mr. Blake!"

pocket—the five grand he had collected, evidently, from Clarissa Daniels. There had to be a tie-up there, unless the old law of cause and effect had been filibustered to death in Congress with all the others.

As he turned the roadster around and headed through the lane of trees again, Detective Edwards wondered about it. Was it possible that Bill Barnaby had finally yielded to temptation? Could he have had anything to do with the disappearance of the Daniels girl?

Probably it was because he was thinking so hard that Vinnie Edwards was caught by surprise. One minute he was rolling along, one cylinder missing as usual, and the next minute, he was slamming on his brakes to keep from hitting the guy in the middle of the road. And those other two bruisers were running from behind big trees with saps in their hands, climbing up on the running board and trying to beat him into a pulp.

"Hey, what the hell?" yelled Detective Vinnie Edwards.

"Give it to him, boys!" one of the thugs shouted. "This is as good a place as any!"

He fought like a madman to get from under the wheel, but he didn't have a chance. They held him there, pelting him unmercifully.

"Lay off that Clarissa Daniels business!" one of them grated, landing a particularly vicious swipe behind Vinnie Edwards's ear.

No matter how tough a guy is, or how thick his skull may be, there comes a time when he's had enough. The three of them worked him over merrily, and he couldn't get his gun out, or get the car rolling, or do anything but take it. And so, after a few minutes of it, a big black cloud of pain came over the horizon of Edwards' mind and swallowed

THERE'S no use beating around the bush. It had Vinnie Edwards worried. That five grand in Bill Barnaby's

him up. The last thing he remembered was a thick voice warning: "Lay off! Forget about Clarissa Daniels!" And then, as the story books used to say, he swooned. . . .

When he snapped out of it again, a big lug in a chauffeur's uniform was standing alongside, shaking him. "Your friends play rough, fellow. What were they trying to do, knock you off?"

Vinnie Edwards managed to get his eyes open wide. "Darned if I don't think that's exactly what they were trying to do. Bash my head in."

His whole head rocketed with pain, and he could feel the warm dribble of blood on his cheeks and neck.

"I saw them as I came driving along. They ran away."

"Thanks heaps," Edwards said. "Much more and I'd be dead."

"Is there anything else I can do?"

"Sure. Pull that limousine over a little so I can go on."

"All right."

"What's the matter with that man, Perkins?" a thin, querulous voice asked. "Is he drunk?"

"Some men were attacking him, Mr. Blake."

The chauffeur climbed back into his cab, and Mr. Blake's black, shiny job rolled on smoothly toward the Daniels mansion. Detective Vinnie Edwards shook his aching head, stepped on the starter and drove to Headquarters.

"My God!" Captain Williams said, as Edwards passed him on the way to the Detectives' Room. "Fight?"

"No," Edwards grinned. "I slipped and cut myself up a little shaving."

A glance in his locker mirror proved that he was pretty battered up. While he was standing there, changing his blood-stained shirt for a clean one, Detective Yarnell came in. "Boy, heard the news?"

"No, what?"

"Clarissa Daniels has been kidnapped!"

"Who says so?"

"Her lawyer, that's who. And he says that he'll pay as much for her safe return as the ransom asked for her."

"How much is that?"

"The ransom hasn't been asked, yet."

Detective Edwards slicked his hair back into place, went upstairs to the Inspector. "I want the Daniels case, too," he said.

"I've got good men on that already," the Inspector said. "How are you coming with the murder of Bill Barnaby?"

"The Daniels case and the Barnaby case are the same thing."

"The hell you say!"

So Detective Edwards took off ten minutes and told him all that had happened.

"I see," the Inspector said, when he finished. "Well, you can question her. I'll keep you informed."

Vinnie Edwards started for the door, and it opened. A patrolman named McGinty came in. "They've found her?"

"Found who?"

"That Daniels colleen, of course!"

"Where is she?"

"She's locked in an empty warehouse on Benjamin Place. The patrolman on the beat learned of it when she busted a window and yelled to him."

"Have they got her out yet?"

"The Emergency Squad is waiting for your okay."

"Come on, Detective Edwards!" the Inspector shouted, grabbing his hat. . . .

BOY, it was wonderful! Benjamin Place was crammed with police vehicles—everything from motorcycles to detective cruisers. A big crowd had gathered to watch the fun.

And Miss Clarissa Daniels, the first

heiress to put foot in Benjamin Place for eighty-odd years, was giving them their money's worth.

She was on the fifth floor of the building, and there was an ironwork grille in front of the window so that she seemed to be in a cage.

And she was yelling a million-dollar yell: "Get me out of here. The door's locked. Get me out!"

As the Inspector's car nosed through the gawkers, Detective Vinnie Edwards hopped out and Patrolman Flannagan came puffing up. "The door's locked at the street entrance, too, Inspector. Shall I order a hook and ladder company? We can put a ladder to that window and cut 'er loose with hacksaws."

"Sure," snapped the Inspector. "Good idea, Flannagan. I'll remember you suggested it."

Flannagan headed hastily for a telephone; wearing a proud expression. Detective Vinnie Edwards glanced at the blurred face in the fifth-floor window and walked some seventy yards to the end of the building.

He turned into a shadow-haunted alley, where overgrown rats contended fiercely for venerable garbage, followed the baseline of the building until he came to a coal chute.

He kicked the iron door tentatively, nodded with satisfaction when it swung free. And then he went through it.

It was blacker than night in that basement. Detective Vinnie Edwards struck a match, discovered that he was in a one-time boiler-room. He finally found a flight of stairs, climbed them.

He wandered around in the murky, vast chambers of the warehouse for a couple of minutes before he found more stairs. So while Patrolman Flannagan was still excitedly burbling into a telephone, Detective Edwards was ascending those rickety steps.

As he came to the fifth floor, he could hear now, vaguely, the keening of a fire siren. He could hear Miss Clarissa Daniels calling again: "Get me out of this horrible place!"

Just so are heroes made. Detective Vinnie Edwards walked to the door, turned the key in the ponderous lock. "This way out, Miss Daniels!"

She turned from the window, startled, and Vinnie Edwards got his first good look at her. He'd really thought she would be a dilly; in spite of tears and tangled hair, she was positively no dilly. He'd thought maybe she would be of about the same vintage as his Aunt Minnie. Not quite ready for a wheelchair, but getting along, brother, getting along. And this girl, believe it or not, was perhaps twenty-two!

So when she ran across the dusty floor and wrapped a couple of swell arms around Vinnie Edwards' neck, did he complain? No, sir! He kind of cuddled her downstairs to the front entrance, and he turned the key in that lock, too, and opened the high, wide door.

It was worth a year's salary to see their jaws drop. The Inspector was standing there, bossing the Fire Chief, who was bossing his men. The Mayor was very much there, bossing everything in general.

The big red ladder was reared on its hind legs, aimed for that empty fifth-floor window. It was into that turmoil that Detective Vinnie Edwards, with his arm around Miss Clarissa Daniels' slim waist, stepped out.

No fooling, he felt like God for a moment.

And then it broke up. "This way, Miss Daniels!" bellowed the Inspector lustily. "This way! Everything's all right now."

"I'm not going anywhere at all with-

out—" and she glanced up at Vinnie Edwards.

"Detective Vinnie Edwards," he supplied.

"I'm not going anywhere at all without Detective Vinnie Edwards!" she proclaimed.

HIS HONOR, the Mayor, stormed. The Inspector stormed. The Fire Chief said some very nasty things about police efficiency in general, and as Vinnie Edwards bundled Clarissa into a handy taxi, the news photogs wept briny tears.

Detective Edwards slammed the door in their faces, settled back beside the girl. "I suppose we'd better stop at the first drugstore and get you some warpaint?" he suggested.

Clarissa Daniels looked at him sharply. "Are you married, Detective Edwards?"

"No, but I've got four sisters." He smiled. "I just had a hunch that I I wouldn't get anywhere questioning you until you'd had a chance to untangle your hair and powder your nose."

So they stopped on a corner, and Vinnie Edwards went in and spent some of his hard-earned dough to buy a small jar of cold cream, and some powder and rouge and lipstick and a comb.

And by the time they got up to the swank residential section where Clarissa's town-apartment was, she was looking presentable again. Presentable, hell! Even without hat or gloves or pocketbook, she was looking, quite rightly, like a million dollars.

The flunky in the monkey-suit bowed low. "Good evening, Miss Daniels!"

"Good evening, Jerome."

The elevator operator looked at her with adoring eyes. "Good evening, Miss Clarissa!"

"Good evening, Ambrose."

He closed the grille, tipped the lever. "I took two gentlemen up to your apartment a little while ago."

"Servants, perhaps?"

"No, they didn't have keys. All the servants are on vacation, you know. I told them they could wait downstairs, but they said they'd rather wait in the corridor for you."

"I wonder who they can be?"

The car came to a stop, and the grille and door opened, and she had a chance to see.

They were not ordinary hoods; they were much too dapper and too suave for that. "Open the door, boy," one of them, a sleek, dark-haired ginzo ordered imperiously.

The elevator operator didn't argue. He pulled a ring of keys from his pants pocket and opened the door quickly. Clarissa Daniels didn't argue. Detective Vinnie Edwards didn't argue. There's something commanding about a couple of guns held in taut, nervous hands and yawning at your middle.

"Go inside," ordered the sleek hood.

"These are the men who locked me in the warehouse," Clarissa commented tightly.

"Shut up!" the other gangster, a beefy, thickset blond, barked.

They herded their three prisoners into the living room. The foolhardy elevator boy made a dash toward a telephone, but the tall, sleek mobster overtook him in three swift strides, struck him brutally on the back of the head with his gun barrel. The boy slumped soddenly to the floor, murmured: "Mama! Mama!" a couple of times before he died.

Detective Vinnie Edwards would have tried to make a desperate play during that excitement, but the gun probing the small of his back told him that it would be useless.

Clarissa Daniels face blanched to a sick, pale green.

"Sit down on the sofa!" the blond gangster snarled. And to his partner: "Okay, we got 'em. Call the boss."

THE boss must have been waiting for that call. It took him less than ten minutes to get to Clarissa's apartment. He came in, laid his topcoat on a coffee table, stood looking down at the girl. "Well, we meet again, eh, Miss Daniels?" sneered Lester Sohl.

Clarissa didn't answer him, and Detective Vinnie Edwards was working frantically to put this jigsaw together in his mind. He knew that Lester Sohl had a checkered career and a shady past, but there was nothing on the blotter against him now. Where did he tie into this?

"You'd have been wiser," Sohl said to Clarissa, "if you had bought that negative and those prints as I suggested, so that you could destroy them."

"They're fakes!" Clarissa flared. "It's true that I fainted in the Club Martinique one night, but I certainly was not drunk, and I absolutely did not do what's in those horrid pictures!"

"What pictures?" Detective Vinnie Edwards asked.

"He has some vile pictures, with my face dubbed in, and he was blackmailing me on the strength of them."

"You should have thought of that, my dear," Lester Sohl said oilily. "As it turns out, things are going to be much worse for you this way."

"What do you mean?"

"Instead of paying up like a good little girl—and I wasn't asking too much, either!—you decided to fight me. That was very, very unwise."

"So you're the one who had Clarissa kidnapped?" Detective Edwards mused.

"That's right," Sohl admitted readily.

"And if she'd been smart, she would have stayed hidden in that warehouse until the clamor had died down."

He smiled a chilling smile. "As it turns out now, I have no choice but to dispose of everyone who is in a position to upset the applecart. That includes you, Mr. Detective!"

"What I'd like to know," Vinnie Edwards said, ignoring the threat, "is where Bill Barnaby fits into this mess."

"What makes you think that—?" Lester Sohl began.

But Clarissa broke in on his question. "I hired Mr. Barnaby to . . ."

"Shut up!" Sohl shouted.

"I hired him to get those vile pictures," Clarissa went on saying to Vinnie Edwards. "My maid, Celeste, noticed how nervous I was getting, and I had to tell her what was the matter. Bill Barnaby had helped her out, once, and she sent me to him."

Somewhere in the apartment, a bell rang shrilly. Vinnie Edwards took advantage of that moment of surprise to lean close to Clarissa and say: "Make some excuse. Get out of here!"

"What was that bell?" Sohl barked.

Clarissa rose from the sofa. "That's the front door. I'll answer it."

"Like hell!" Sohl snapped.

"Well, do you mind if I go to the bathroom?" And without waiting for an answer, she turned and walked into another room.

Before Sohl could call her back—before his agile wits could figure she might call the police from another window, Detective Vinnie Edwards sang out: "I can tell you who's at the door!"

Sohl swung to him, teeth bared, gun in hand, snarled: "Who?"

"Oh, just about fifteen cops!"

"What makes you think so? The boys told me over the 'phone that you weren't followed here."

"It isn't that," Edwards reasoned. "It's because of the elevator boy. The doorman noticed, of course, that he didn't return from bringing us up here. He got worried, called the police."

"Damn!" swore Lester Sohl. He turned to his sleek, black-haired henchman. "Go to the door. Ask who it is."

Blackie walked gingerly through the foyer, called: "Who's there?"

"Open up!" a stentorian voice replied. "It's the Law!"

And that was the moment when Detective Edwards chose to act.

Sohl and his men were in a trap, and Edwards appointed himself the trigger. Even as the three gangsters moved back so that they could cover him and the door at the same time, he whipped out his own revolver.

Sohl fired long before Edwards could line his own gun on the blackmailer. A searing pain knifed into Vinnie Edwards' shoulder, and another stabbed his thigh. Then his own gun was barking, and Blackie, with a surprised expression on his face, dropped his weapon and fell across the coffee table.

Sohl fired some more, and by now, the blond hood was in the fight. A half dozen red-hot slugs ripped into Vinnie Edwards.

At the front door of the apartment, there was a tremendous battering and pounding, but Vinnie Edwards knew they would be too late.

There was a savage grimace on Sohl's face now, and he raised his gun slowly, carefully, for the kill.

And at that moment, a miracle took place.

Vinnie Edwards heard guns blasting from behind him, and at one side. He twisted his head, and with dimming vision, saw Detectives Pargin and Swinnerton following those flaming guns into the room. Not from the front door—

from the interior of the apartment!

That was when Detective Vinnie decided to call it a day. That was when he quietly fainted away. . . .

A MAN with a smooth, kindly voice was saying: "He really ought to be dead, but he's not. He'll pull through."

Detective Vinnie Edwards pried his eyes open, found out they were talking about him, saw that he was looking, upside down, into Clarissa Daniels' moist gray eyes, realized that his head was lying on a million-dollar pillow.

"Sohl?" he managed to ask.

Some time must have elapsed, for it was the Inspector who leaned forward into Edwards' view and said: "We've got him. He gave up when the going got tough. He confessed."

"Confessed?"

"Yes, the whole works. You were right. He was blackmailing Miss Daniels, killed Barnaby when the good little private dick promised to break it up. He kidnapped Miss Daniels, and it was his men who beat you up."

Detective Edwards stared at Pargin and Swinnerton. "How'd you get here?"

"Oh, I did that!" Clarissa said merrily. "I just let them in the service entrance while you were trying to fight the whole gang."

"Hey!" said the doctor. "Are you going to talk here all night? This man ought to be taken to a hospital."

"Just one more thing," Clarissa Daniels said, looking down into Vinnie Edwards' eyes. "I'll be seeing you? You're not going to be the sort of chump who holds it against a girl just because she has some money in the bank, are you?"

"No," croaked Detective Vincent Xavier Edwards. "I'm not!"



Coffin Cargo

By Hugh B. Cave

IT LOOKED like a hooligan murder at first. Every now and then, in any fair-sized city, some unfortunate citizen gets mixed up in a brawl, or becomes involved in a card-game argument, or winks once too often at the wife of a temperamental Latin—and comes out of it feet first, with a knife in his back or his head bashed in by a bottle.

Those things happen. You read about them in the papers. We usually clear up any attendant mystery with a few hours of routine investigation, turn the

stiff over to his next of kin and send some guy name Isidore Vicoletti to the gow. It's sad but it's civilization.

This kill seemed to fall into that category because the stiff needed a shave and a bath, badly, and wore old clothes and had holes in his shoes. And because he'd been shivved. And because no one had taken the trouble to remove thirty-seven cents in change, a dog-eared billfold and an old-fashioned door key from his pockets. Planned murders are usually perpetrated with more finesse.

The chief said, "See what you can dig up, Cardin," and I went to work.

He was about forty years old, under the dirt. A routine check of his fingerprints told me nothing, and there was no name in the billfold. There was, however, a pink Chinese laundry slip tucked away in his watch pocket, and in twenty-four hours, which is slow going for Jeff Cardin, I bought the mate to it, along with some laundered shirts, socks and skivvies, for eighty-five cents.

I took the bundle to headquarters and looked it over. The shirts had never before been laundered, and there were four of them. It seemed to mean something. What kind of guy, I wondered, would buy four cheap shirts, wear them one after another and have them all laundered at the same time?

It was small, but something. I wrapped the stuff up again and went back to Dudley Street, to the laundry. I shed indignation all over the place and told the little Oriental behind the counter that the stuff wasn't mine. There'd been a mistake, I insisted.

Well, you know how they are. With a vocabulary limited to "Tickee, shirtie, come Flyday," they all go to pieces under a barrage of Occidental anger. This one spent thirty minutes trying to find my mythical laundry, and then I gently hinted that the guy who owned the four shirts, the socks and the skivvies had probably taken *my* stuff away with him, by mistake.

"So who," I said, "belongs to this stuff?"

He looked it over. He looked at the ticket and went into a trance. The screwy black wiggles on that pink square of paper looked like duck tracks to me, but these Chinese are clever. He scowled at the ticket and said, "He bling laundry Toosdy affernoon. Now

wait. I know. He smallish boy. I see him on street two-thlee time before. He name Tony."

"You're crazy," I said.

"No, no. I have good memblance!"

You never can tell, I figured. Maybe my stiff had sent this dirty clothes down by a kid named Tony. There ought to be plenty of kids named Tony in the neighborhood of Dudley Street. The district was overrun with barrooms, cheap restaurants and rooming houses. Right across the street from the laundry was a window sign advertising tomato pies, fifteen cents. You should try one of those sometime.

I pumped the Oriental for further information but he had given his all, honorably, and was no help. Moreover, he swore up and down he was not making any mistake. "You find Tony," he said. "Maybe he have your laundry. Maybe he c'lect it while I not here, while my son here. You find Tony."

I asked around. When you read about the exploits of a city dick in the papers, you don't get the leg-work that goes with his triumphs. Oh no. You picture him sitting in a dark corner, with his eyes shut, his fingers folded, his magnificent brain leaping nimbly from one clue to another. The papers never tell you how he dug up those clues. Maybe they came parcel post.

Me, I do my own leg-work, and the flat feet of me will verify that statement. And this job was no different from a lot of other jobs, except that I was looking for a youngster and as a consequence, limited my sleuthing to kids. I talked to kids for two days.

Tough kids. This was a tough neighborhood.

AFTER I'd run down half a dozen false leads, talked to fat mamas and suspicious papas and what all else,

a little tyke with a mouthful of gum sent me to a tenement on Mitchell Street. "Tony Mainelli lives there," he said, "with the Dummy."

It was a dump. To begin with, Mitchell Street is dark, dirty and odorous, ending in a footbridge over the railroad tracks. The house was the last one in and was a three-decker, and every train that went by must have choked its rooms with soot and fumes. There were no names beside the door. The lone bell was broken. I used my knuckles.

The door was opened by a slovenly witch who would never see seventy again. She had one good eye. She used it on me, said sharply, "We don't want none, whatever it is you're sellin'!" and if my foot hadn't been over the threshold the door would have spread my nose over my face, so hard she slammed it.

I said, "Madam, I'm looking for Tony Mainelli."

The eye worked on me again. "Why?" she snapped.

"That, madam," I told her, "is a matter of interest only to Master Mainelli and myself. If you please."

She must have thought I was crazy. She said in a sort of dazed guttural, "He lives upstairs, top floor," and then stared at me with that eye of hers while I climbed the stairs.

I looked down and said, "Thank you, madam," and she ducked as though I'd dropped a bomb.

There was a little square hall at the top of the stairs, with a door leading off it. The door was closed. Someone on the other side of it was playing a harmonica—part of Grofe's *Grand Canyon Suite*—and it sounded like a full symphony orchestra. I paused to listen. It would have been sacrilege to break up that gorgeous flood of sound

by clamoring for admission, and I'm not kidding.

It ended in a long, wavering whistle, and I knocked. There were footsteps, slow and shuffling. The door opened and I was blinking into a face that belonged behind cobwebs in a horror picture.

Not a vicious face, mind you. Not the sort that would put you in fear of your life, like that of Dracula. This guy was patently harmless enough, but the empty, sagging waxen map of him numbed me. Mentally he wasn't all there.

He worked his lips and words came out. "Uh?" he said. "Who are you?" And then, as an afterthought: "Whad-daya want, huh?"

This, of course, was the Dummy with whom Tony Mainelli lived. He gave me the creeps. He was damn near as tall as I, which is tall, and he weighed three hundred if he weighed an ounce. Half of it was fat. Loose, wobbly fat.

I said, "Is Tony around?"

He shook his head. "Uh-uh."

"That's too bad," I said. "I wanted to talk to him."

"He'll be back pretty soon now," the Dummy declared with a shrug that moved his whole body. "You can come in and wait."

I moved into the room and sat down. It was a small room; there was barely space enough for both of us. No carpet. No pictures on the walls. Just a cheap sofa, a couple of chairs.

Through a couple of doorless doorways I could see into a kitchen and a bedroom. They were just as bad.

"Was that you playing the harmonica?" I asked him.

He nodded eagerly, fumbling the mouth organ out of his pocket. Wetting his lips, he folded them over the thing and began to play, all the time staring

straight at me. I felt sorry for the guy. There was something in his eyes that got me. You see it in the eyes of a dog sometimes, when the animal wants to be understood and appreciated.

He played *Nola* and a couple of other pieces, and I told him it was swell. I told him I envied him. It was like stroking a puppy, telling him that. He beamed all over his face.

"You know what I'm here for?" I asked him, following up my advantage. "Tony took some laundry down to the Chinaman's for someone, and I got to return it. You know whose laundry it was?"

He looked stupid. I guessed maybe I'd said it too fast, so I repeated it, this time more slowly.

He blinked his eyes and tugged at his lower lip, shaking his head at me. "No," he said. "No, I dunno . . ." Then all at once his face brightened. "Why sure! I bet I know! Them three fellers downstairs—Tony run errands for them quite often. Sure."

"You know their names?"

"Sure," he said. "One of them, the big one, he was—"

That was as far as he got. The door opened behind him and he turned ponderously in his chair to see who it was. Right away, the Dummy knew something was wrong, because the kid froze the moment he saw me.

Evidently he knew me, or thought he did.

"What do *you* want?" the kid demanded.

IT SOUNDED queer, that surly snarl coming from a kid no bigger than a pint of peanuts. He was about twelve years old, thin and hungry-looking, with an untrimmed mop of black hair that curled down around a pair of protruding ears. His teeth needed at-

tention and his face and hands were grimy. His eyes were black and they glittered.

I said, "Keep your shirt on, sonny."

"Yeah?" he snapped. "Why should I? I know who you are. You're a cop!"

"You sure of that?"

"Don't stall!" he yelled. "I seen you the time old man Teena got took away for beatin' up his wife. What do you want here?"

These kids sure do get around, I told myself. That Teena business had happened months ago.

"Well," I said, "it's like this, Tony. I've got a job to do and—"

"You been talkin' to Dummy?" he flared.

"No, I haven't been talking to Dummy. My business is with—"

The kid took a couple of stiff steps forward and said to his fat pal, "He been talkin' to you?"

"Well . . . sort of, yes," Dummy mumbled.

The kid swung on me and said through his bad teeth, "Get outa here!"

"Wait," I said.

"You're a dirty sneakin' cop!" the kid shrieked. "Get out!" Tough? You could have poisoned the city's water supply with the venom in his voice.

I moved toward him, saying gently, "Time out, youngster, time out," and got the surprise of my life. Not from him. Nothing he could have done would have surprised me. But all at once the Dummy was between us, shoving his enormous bulk against my chest, his face close to mine and his eyes thinned to slits.

"You get out," he said, "like Tony tell you!"

I could have floored him, I suppose, but what the hell, was it worth it? I already knew about the three guys downstairs, and for the present, at

least, I could afford to tread softly. So, with a murmured "Okay, okay," I backed up and stepped to the door.

They watched me. Tony Mainelli said, "And stay out," in a voice that dripped hatred and suspicion.

And though I'm no Freud, I could see the answer to that hate of his in the black, sultry eyes that followed my retreat. He was afraid of me. Those eyes were full of fear.

II

I WENT down the stairs slowly, puzzled by the mixture of emotions I'd aroused in the Dummy's half-pint companion. No matter what direction this two-bit murder took, I was going back up there some time in the near future, I told myself, and straighten the kid out. He needed it.

The door slammed shut above me just as I reached the second-floor landing. I stopped, and the house was quiet. I reached out to rap on the door of the second-floor tenement, and pulled my hand back because the floor began trembling under me.

No sound accompanied the trembling. It was just a queer, rapid vibration. It spread to the walls, then to the whole house, as if the building were sitting on an earthquake or about to do a rhumba. The damndest feeling ran through me. I was actually scared.

Then I did hear a sound, and it was a low rumbling that got louder and louder, with a rush. The building all but fell apart. The rumbling became an ear-splitting roar. It came straight at me and I stood frozen. Then I knew what it was.

A train, out there on the tracks. An ordinary railroad train consisting of a locomotive and a string of cars. But I want to tell you, my nerves had been

taut as fiddle-strings and I was soaked with sweat. How in hell, I wondered, did the tenants stand that sort of thing day after day without winding up in a chuckle college?

The house was quiet again and I knocked on the door, got no answer. I knocked again with the same results, waited a while, heard nothing, and went on down to the lower hall.

Something moved furtively in the shadows at the rear of the hall as I reached the bottom of the stairs. I opened the front door, closed it without stepping out, and then stood flat against the wall, not moving a muscle.

She came shuffling out of the shadows, saw me and stopped short with a little gasp.

"That's right," I said. "I'm still here."

There's a Jap print in the picture shops—perhaps you've seen it—of a scrawny black buzzard perched on a black limb against a murky gray background. The buzzard has two vermilion eyes and from two or three feet away, that's all you see, and it gives you the creeps. This dame was like that, only she had but one eye and it wasn't exactly vermilion; it was more yellow.

She stared defiantly, and I could see hard sledding ahead. So I grinned, spreading my good nature all over the place, and stepped up to her and said, "It's okay, madam. I'm just a harmless bill collector in search of information."

"About what?" she said suspiciously.

"The three men who live upstairs."

She looked me over, moved past me and sat down on the stairs, showing her bony knees and—so help me—the rolled tops of her cotton stockings. She said, "There ain't anybody upstairs."

"Three men," I began . . .

"They moved."

"Oh."

"Maybe they'll be back and maybe they won't. They paid their rent up to next Saturday."

I said on a hunch, "Was one of them about forty years old, in need of a bath, wore old clothes and had holes in his shoes?"

"Huh?"

I gave her a more complete description, meanwhile lighting a cigarette and offering her one, which she snatched greedily.

"That would be Driscoll," she said.

"And the other two?"

"The one with the queer way of talkin', he was Bates. The other was Selvin." She took the cigarette from her mouth, lapped the end of it and leaned forward for a light. "Why don't you take that tenement," she suggested through a crooked grin, tilting her head at me. "They ain't comin' back."

"You said they might."

"They won't. There was somethin' fishy about them three, especially the night Driscoll got drunk. I seen 'em when they went out of here, the two of 'em holdin' Driscoll up between them. They said he was drunk. He didn't look drunk to me; he looked sick enough for buryin'. It was late—two in the mornin'. They got back about three and cleared out the next mornin', without sayin' a word."

I played with a mental picture of Mr. Bates and Mr. Selvin creeping down the stairs, furtively, with Driscoll between them—the two of them holding him on his feet, supporting him, to make him look alive. "You haven't seen them since?"

She wagged her head.

"They leave any of their stuff behind?"

"They left a suitcase."

"I'm curious," I said.

Her knees cracked when she got up, but it didn't seem to bother her. She grinned at me and nodded, and we went up the stairs.

She produced a key and we walked into the tenement.

It was a mate to the one occupied by Tony Mainelli and the Dummy, and contained the same frowsy furniture. The windows were shut and the place reeked of stale cigarette smoke; on the other hand there were no empty bottles around, as I'd half expected, and the rooms were reasonably clean.

From a closet in the bedroom my companion pulled a worn cowhide suitcase, and from the ease with which she manipulated the straps and catches, I judged she'd been at it before.

The contents confounded me.

The suitcase held a couple of shirts, some silk socks and silk underwear. Expensive stuff, with Fifth Avenue labels. Underneath, in a separate compartment, were bottles and tubes containing powders, liquids. Sealed tin cans without labels. Short lengths of pipe, not long enough or heavy enough to be used for saps. Strips of metal that looked like copper. Now I ask you.

"You think they'll be back for this?" I said.

She shrugged her bony shoulders.

"What line of business were they in?"

She shrugged again.

"Well," I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll run out for a bottle of something to drink, and we'll get better acquainted."

She grinned. "Don't be too long," she told me, "or I won't like you."

IT WAS a waste of money, the buck I spent for that bottle. I had hoped that with a slight lubrication of the adenoids the old witch might loosen

up and produce information of importance—bits of business in which, by poking around, I might unearth a lead or two. Instead of that, she got herself plastered.

It cost me a buck to learn that the guy named Bates was tall, painfully thin and acted like a dope out of the movies, in that he bowed a lot, clicked his heels, and talked with an accent. "Uneducated," the old lady snorted disdainfully.

Selvin, the other one, was stout and more friendly, but not friendly enough, I gathered, to suit the old lady's taste.

Beyond that I got nothing, and by the time I got around to asking a few casual questions about Tony Mainelli and the Dummy, who occupied the top-floor tenement, she was swaying in her chair.

I mixed her a nightcap, patted her hand and said I'd be back some other time. That was that.

But—the breaks were mine.

Just as I stepped into the downstairs hall and reached behind me to pull the door shut, the stairs creaked above me. The house was quiet, the hour was getting late. The stairs creaked again and I saw a white, pudgy hand on the railing.

I hung back in the shadows, waiting. The Dummy appeared.

He was alone, and it was obvious he was up to something. Furtive is the word. For a big boy, he made surprisingly little noise on his way down the stairs, but he moved slowly, stopping every couple of seconds to look back up.

The front door closed behind him, and I moved out of hiding. I closed the door behind *me*, stood there on the stoop, in the dark, and watched him. He went down the street at a clip that made it plain he had a destina-

tion. What I mean, he was not just out for the air.

I tailed him. When it comes to tailing, Jeff Cardin admits no equal.

III

THEY fool you sometimes. I would have wagered a C-note, after following the Dummy a couple of blocks, that he was headed for some dive in the slums. I had it all figured out. He wasn't as dumb as he looked. He'd got that way from too much cheap liquor or too much something else—something that bites deeper than alcohol and takes a permanent hold on a man. You can't always tell a snowbird by his face.

And I was wrong. He made for the Avenue and went across it, into a district of swank apartment houses. His destination was a tall brick building shaped like a horseshoe, with a miniature park in the U.

He hiked into the lobby, rang a bell and vanished upstairs. Naturally I couldn't get close enough, without being spotted, to see which bell he rang, and there I was—licked.

I buzzed a bell at random and a voice asked through the speaking tube who it was. "Hi," I said. "It's me." People always know at least one dope who announces himself that way. The door-release chattered and I was in.

There was an elevator, one of the kind you run yourself. It was on the third floor and I went up there, figuring he might have used it. There are times when even a good dick has to mope along in second, hoping for the breaks.

The hall was long, narrow, floored with rubber tile that made no noise under my feet as I toed along from door to door, listening. If the hour had been later, these tactics might have produced results; the house would have

been quiet then, and I might have heard the Dummy's voice.

As it was, the hall was full of Benny Goodman's clarinet and a radio voice extolling the virtues of a laxative. People in apartment houses have no damn consideration.

The best I could do was twiddle my fingers and wait, and I did so, knowing all the time that he might have crossed me—he might be on another floor entirely.

It was a long wait. Then a door opened.

The Dummy came out.

He emerged backwards, fumbling to put his hat on. He said, "Tomorrow night, huh? All right, tomorrow night. So long, huh?" Then he turned and waddled along to the elevator. I didn't see who he was talking to.

He went down in the elevator and I stayed where I was. I stayed there for a good five minutes, waiting, then crept along to the door and bent an ear against it and was disappointed. The guy in there was moving around—I could hear him—but he wasn't talking to anyone. He was alone, I figured.

The number on the door was 31.

I turned around, took a step toward the stairs. I was thinking what the hell, the easiest way out of this mess was to pick up the Dummy, transport him down to headquarters and work on him for a few honest answers before going overboard. If I got bellicose around here on the assumption that the guy in 31 was one of the two for whom I was looking, and he turned out to be a perfectly honest John Q. Citizen, I'd be up to my nether lip in muddy water, with the chief saying acidly, as usual, "Cardin, damn you, will you never learn? Softly softly catchee pussy!"

You can't go busting into swank

apartments just like that. It gives the department a bad name.

So I started for the stairs. And stopped.

The fellow hadn't made a sound. I mean not a sound. It may seem impossible—I know I couldn't climb a flight of stairs without stirring up at least a few stray whispers of noise—but there he was, and I hadn't heard him, and I'm not hard of hearing.

He was watching me. He might have been watching me for the past ten minutes, for all I knew. He said, "You are looking for someone, perhaps?"

He had an accent. Almost not an accent, almost just a slight stiffness of the tongue or hardening of the palate. Something, anyway. And he was tall, he was thin, he looked like a foreigner. Here was my Mr. Bates, late of Mitchell Street. I glanced around me and thought, "From rags to riches in one jump. Hmm."

To him I said, "I'm lookin' for apartment number thirty-four, mister. The hell of it is, I can't see these numbers without my glasses."

He smiled. Funny thing about thin lips, they don't smile so good even when their owner has good intentions. I could have sworn his intentions were lousy, because he kept his right hand too close to the right-side pocket of his coat, and that pocket was the only part of his coat that didn't fit him. It bulged a little.

He came forward with short, stiff steps, said gently, "That is most unfortunate," and took my arm.

I thought, "Careful, Jeff. They bumped one guy; they'll bump another." Yet, so help me, I was curious. He bewildered me. He wasn't at all what I'd expected and I had an urgent desire to see more of him—and more of his methods.

"This," he said with that ghost of an accent, "is number thirty-four. Shall I knock, please?"

"Do."

HE KNOCKED. The door was the one I'd bent an ear to, and the number on it, staring me in the face, was 31. I fingered my chin, which brought my gun-hand closer to the rig under my left shoulder. If anything happened, I could beat him to the punch, I figured, since he stood on my right with his pocket on his right. You think of those things.

The door opened and I discovered my mistake. He had hands and feet.

Something jabbed between my ankles and I went over the threshold as though blown from a cannon. This is no laughing matter. The guy used his feet like a Jap wrestler. The new high-speed camera at M.I.T. might have caught the secret of his assault, perhaps, but anything less efficient would have registered merely a blur. With pain streaking up my calves, I flew into the room and slid face first along the floor, puckering the carpet under me.

My gun? Hell, he was over me, holding a Luger at my head, before I could find my hands. His pal closed the door and there we were.

"Do not move, please," Mr. Bates said.

I didn't. He leaned over me and removed my artillery. He didn't fumble for it, either. His hand went straight under my arm to the harness.

"Now rise, please," he said, polite as hell, "and be seated."

I got up, feeling like a fool, and slid my stern onto a handy divan. He straightened the carpet with his foot while I stared at him, then I shrugged, looked around. It was an ordinary better-class apartment, three or four rooms,

furnished in good taste. As for the neighborhood, it had a good rep. No thugs.

"Now, please, you will explain your most suspicious actions in the corridor."

"Hell," I said, "I told you, didn't I? I was looking for apartment thirty-four and—"

"There is no apartment thirty-four. The truth will save time, please."

The truth, I figured, would probably jar him to the soles of his efficient feet. I hadn't been meddling in this game long enough for them to get any positive line on me. Trouble was, the truth might write my name on a ticket to the morgue.

I didn't like his looks. His accent and his military stiffness confused me. His pal was no Salvation Army lassie, either.

"Well?" he persisted.

"Well," I said, "giving it to you straight, it's like this. Somebody told me you guys could be hired—for a price—to do a little job for me. I was snooping around to get a line on you before sounding you out. If you're interested. . . ."

He smiled. "And this job we are to do for you?"

"A guy's been annoying me."

"His name, please?"

"Hell," I said, "take it easy. We haven't even talked yet."

"Quite so," he nodded. The nod was not for my benefit. He signaled his pal, Selvin—I supposed it was Selvin—with his eyes, and before I could lift a hand, I was being frisked.

That was that. There was nothing in my billfold to indicate the nature of my job, but even a city dick carries license and registration around with him, and there was the name, Jeff Cardin.

I could have sliced off the chief's ear at that moment. But for him and his ideas, the name of Jeff Cardin might have meant nothing to these buzzards. Nothing at all. The chief, however, had decided of late to make the public police-conscious by lavishly spreading publicity in the press. Jeff Cardin had vied with Hitler and Stalin for front-page honors.

These guys were not illiterate. They could read. Mr. Bates turned his enlightened gaze on me and said softly, through his teeth, "So . . . I see . . ."

All I could see was the Luger in his hand, and it gave me the willies.

"You put us," he said, "in a most difficult situation, Mr. Cardin. However, you are *here*—and in twenty-four hours we shall *not* be here." He frowned, and I could tell by the furrows in his sloping forehead that he was wondering what to do with me.

He glanced at Selvin. "Go out," he said, "and purchase some liquor. Purchase several kinds of it."

The guy nodded and went out.

Bates said, "Might I ask, Mr. Cardin, how you contrived to track us—and what started you after us?"

I WONDERED how much he thought I knew. I wondered how much I could get out of him by pretending to know more than I did know. One thing was certain: the fellow was no ordinary hooligan. His manners were polished, if deadly. He had a brain behind those nasty eyes, and he'd gone higher than High School.

I took a chance and said gently, "We may not be the Gestapo, brother, but we have our methods."

If the barb hurt, he gave no sign of it.

"Just where," he asked, "did the trail begin?"

I took another chance. "With a suitcase."

"Ah. Then you know!"

"Know what?"

"Mr. Cardin," he said, his voice a purr, "perhaps this amuses you. Me it does not. Even though it might, I am not here for the amusement, and I will ask you, please, to answer one or two questions without further levity. The first: How did you come upon the trail of us?"

He wanted an answer. The curl of his mouth said he was going to get an answer, even though it meant bludgeoning me with the Luger-barrel. Well, all right. It was time for lying. I most certainly did *not* want him to know I suspected him of murder.

"Frankly," I said, shrugging, "it was just one of those things. We got a tip the old witch at that Mitchell Street tenement was peddling dope. I went there to look the place over. I found that suitcase of yours and it stirred my curiosity."

"I see."

"Around and around she goes," I said, "and where she stops, nobody knows."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Shakespeare."

He came closer. "Now my second question, Mr. Cardin. It is this: How did you discover my whereabouts?"

That called for machine-gun thinking. I didn't trust this guy. I didn't like him. I had him catalogued as triple-A dangerous, and I could picture him perpetrating a murder, if he had to, without so much as raising a sweat. If I mentioned the Dummy or Tony Mainelli, it might go hard with them.

"That," I said, "was sheer luck."

"Explain, please."

"The old witch described you. Both of you. My girl friend lives on this

particular street, a couple of houses down, and I was sipping a soda with her in the corner drugstore and I spotted you."

"Might I ask when this happened?"

"Hell," I said, "I don't just remember. A couple of evenings ago, I guess."

He shrugged. Maybe he believed me, maybe he didn't. The story wasn't very believable; it wasn't even clever. Dicks in stories sometimes do far better, but the guys who compose the stories have time to think for their dicks and make 'em smart. I was on my own.

At this moment Selvin came back.

He'd obeyed orders, all right. He had a bag under each arm, and out of them he pulled exactly five bottles of liquor—two quarts and three pints. And Lord, what an assortment! The quarts were gin and rye, cheap rye; the pints were Creme de Cacao, domestic muscatel, and apricot brandy!

Bates broke open the rye, filled a water glass and handed it to me. "For your pleasure, Mr. Cardin," he said, smiling.

I shook my head. "I've been on the wagon for months, pal."

"There are times," he purred, leveling the Luger at my belly, "when liquor is good for one."

I got the point. When I'd finished that drink, he poured another. This time it was gin.

IV

LIQUOR is a wonderful thing—one kind of it at a time. Far be it from Jeff Cardin to belittle the stuff. There have been times galore in the life of Jeff Cardin when the world was edged with gray, the skies were heavy, and frequent scowls into the dim future disclosed no decent reason for going on living. Then, presto!—a brief sojourn

in one or more of the neighborhood salons, and the world was rosy again.

But, brother, there are lines over which no human being with an ordinary human stomach may step. Gin and rye and Creme de Cacao do not mix, not to mention apricot brandy and muscatel.

I drank. I can, I think, hold as much as the next man, if permitted to consume the stuff slowly. Mr. Bates, however, displayed an unpleasant impatience. In half an hour there was enough alcohol in me to float a U-boat.

I did my damndest not to be sick, because a glance into his eagle eye told me he was expecting it, and if I lost any of this unearthly mixture, he would make sure I replaced it. The room swam. Little gray roses on the wallpaper became the heads of gliding serpents. The ceiling began to flow like water, and the hitherto smooth carpet assumed ridges and valleys of an Alpine character. My feet vanished in a mist.

"Drink," Mr. Bates murmured. And added softly, "Or else."

I passed out.

It was daylight when I came to. The divan was still under me, and those five grim bottles stared me in the face from atop a coffee-table alongside. One quart and two pints were empty. The serpent-heads were roses again and the room had stopped heaving, but I was in no shape to do any rhumbas.

The head of Jeff Cardin was an enormous, lead-heavy, pulsating mass that reached from wall to wall. There were egg-beaters in my belly.

Selvin came over, grinned down at me and said, "You did all right."

"I don't feel all right," I said.

"Make the most of it," he advised.

I stared at him a while in silence then said, "So what happens now?"

"We wait," he told me, "for the boss. You've got a strong constitution. He didn't expect you to wake up so soon."

Bates, I took it, was out. The thought occurred to me that now, if ever, was my chance to make a break. This lad Selvin was not blessed with the brains of the other one; he could be out-thought and perhaps, in a pinch, out-manuevered.

But I was practically a paralytic.

I asked for a cigarette, got one and tried to smoke it, but the smoke sickened me. I rolled over, holding my head with one hand, my stomach with the other. About an hour later Bates came in.

The next thing I knew, he was handing me a drink.

"No," I said.

He smiled. No need to wave the Luger in my face this time; he just slid his free hand to his pocket. "It is better," he said, "to have a stomach full of alcohol than one incapable of holding anything at all. No?"

So it began all over again.

Time didn't mean much to me after the sixth or seventh drink. There was a drone of airplane motors in my head, and red devils danced before my eyes. He kept handing me the stuff and I kept pouring it down—and he made sure it *went* down. After a few years of this, someone said, "It is nearly time enough. Get your coat on," and I realized the room was dark.

Selvin put his things on, and the two of them poured me into my things. I gathered we were going for a walk. There wasn't a thing I could do about it. What surprised me—and I think it surprised them—was the fact that I *could* walk, even though my legs had ideas of their own.

Selvin hooked an arm around me and we went down the hall to the

elevator, Bates watching us from the doorway of the apartment. It was real chummy. We got downstairs in safety, and there was a bright young thing with a cocker spaniel and a mink coat in the lobby. She stared. She laughed musically and said, "What was the score?" and if there'd been any yen in me to give her an answer, it was dispelled by the sudden pressure of Selvin's gun against my rib.

Outside, he steered me to a cab, poured me into it and told the driver where to go. I leaned back and closed my eyes. The cab surprised me. I had expected a private car with perhaps a couple of hoods in it.

WE STOPPED on a slum street in front of a joint facetiously named the Elite Tap. Selvin got out and pulled me out after him, making it look like an act of brotherly love. He handed the cabby a bill, thanked him, and walked me into the joint. I must have been a sorry sight.

A couple of stumblebums at the bar turned to stare at us, as with Selvin's assistance we drooped along the far end of the bar. The barkeep came over. He stared—not at Selvin but at me, and I stared back at him. Selvin said: "My friend here needs a drink, bad. Make it rye and make it stiff."

The barkeep scowled and I moved my head a little, an inch one way, an inch the other. Selvin didn't see that.

"He looks like he's had enough, brother," the barkeep said.

"He's sick," Selvin said. "Not drunk."

"I wanna drink," I mumbled. "I wanna pick my own."

We were at the extreme end of the bar. One clumsy step and I was around back of it, stupidly reaching for a bottle. It was a spot for Selvin—a spot of

his own making. He'd been judging my thinking ability by the condition of my legs. The legs were numb, all right, but the brain was still functioning.

I fumbled the cork out of a bottle, aimed the stuff at a glass and poured a drink. They were all watching by that time. It must have been hilarious.

It wasn't hilarious—not for Selvin—when my free hand came out from under the bar and aimed the barkeep's forty-five at Mr. Selvin's gullet!

He paled. He took a quick, desperate step backward and like a damn fool went for his gun. That left me no choice. I didn't want to shoot him; I wanted information, a lot of information. I wanted to know all about the Dummy and Tony Mainelli and that suitcase back in the Mitchell Street tenement. Fogged as my brain was, it was still stumbling along and it was full of questions.

But he figured he had a chance to blast me, and his hand streaked to his pocket where lay the Luger that had forced all those drinks down my throat.

I fed him lead.

I almost didn't see him go down. The kick of the gun and the powder-reek just about finished me. I hung onto the bar, my legs melting. The barkeep grabbed me, held me up, and I mumbled, "Thanks, Eddie," and I remember thinking it wasn't so much a break, his bringing me into Eddie Foley's bar. I was known in damn near all the bars in town, and it would have been the same story anywhere—except, of course, Eddie's rod had been a lot handier, there under the counter, than some of the others might have been.

I said, "It's my stomach, Eddie, my poor sick stomach. There's a depth bomb in it. Call Doc Blaine, Eddie. Call him right away, fast, and tell him—if I'm not able—to put the pump to me.

Tell him," I said, "I got work to do this night."

And out I went.

A WONDERFUL thing, the stomach pump. They tell a story about a smart lawyer who downed a drink of poison in front of a jury—to prove to them it wasn't poison—then walked out of the courtroom, hiked across the street to a doctor's office, got himself pumped out and walked back and won his case. It may not be true, but it could be. When Doc Blaine got through with me, I was fit for action again, except for an all-gone, woozy sensation under my belt, which for the time being would have to be overlooked.

The doc gave me some stuff to pep me up and I went back to the Elite, to see Eddie Foley. He hadn't called the cops. He had just quietly shooed his patrons into the night, locked up and sat down to await my return. Eddie is very reluctant to meddle in the affairs of other people.

Mr. Selvin was a corpse.

I frisked him, dimly hopeful of finding something that would steer me to an understanding of his real identity. He had no billfold, no papers; his money was loose in a pants pocket. He did have, however, a folded half-column newspaper clipping.

"BRITISH FREIGHTER'S DESTINATION A CLOSELY GUARDED SECRET," it said. And there was a pseudo-humorous account of a reporter's vain attempt to interview the ship's skipper.

Something else I found in Selvin's pocket, too. A couple of small white pills. Eddie Foley dropped one in a glass of water, sniffed at the result and said dryly, "A Mickey Finn."

I said, "He figured to get me in here and feed me a final drink that would

floor me, keep me benched until the game was over. They didn't know how much I knew. They didn't know but what I might have some pals helping me, and they had to get me out of that apartment, get me back in circulation, before someone followed my trail. This way, it would look as though I got drunk in here and keeled over. The trail would end right here, leaving them free to go ahead."

Why not? Obviously Bates and Selvin were up to one last important job, too big to be dropped even with Driscoll dead and the heat on.

They weren't locals. They didn't belong in this town. But something big, bigger than any threat of capture, was holding them here for a few hours more.

I had an idea what that something was. I had a hunch that if I didn't get my hands on Mr. Accent Bates tonight, I probably never would.

"Phone headquarters and report this," I told Eddie. Then I went out of there, found a cab and rode to that apartment house. It was ten past one. The neighborhood was quiet. I buzzed the janitor's bell, rapped out words of authority and was let in. The janitor went up to 31 with me, and I had Eddie Foley's gun in my fist when I tapped on the door.

No answer.

The janitor opened it and we walked in. The suite was empty. I stood there, looking around, and knew in the heart of me I was too late; the joint would stay empty, even though I waited until daylight. There wasn't even a suitcase this time.

I barged out. The cab was waiting and I piled into it, said darkly, "Water Street, buddy." He gave me a questioning glance, no doubt wondering what any normal human being would want with Water Street at this hour.

"In a hurry," I snapped.
We were on our way.

V

THERE was a dim haze of abortive moonlight over the harbor, but rain had fallen earlier and had sucked up every possible odor native to the surroundings. The quiet was ominous. No doubt it was a natural condition at that hour, with the docks deserted, no traffic rolling, and the inhabitants of the nearby buildings fast asleep; to me, though, it was not natural at all. I'm sensitive to silence.

We swung into Water Street, and with a couple of hundred yards separating us from the street's dead end, I told the cabby to apply his brakes. He did, and I got out. "Wait," I ordered. "Sit here and wait. If you hear any fireworks or see anything out of the ordinary, beat it for the nearest police station and report."

I prowled ahead on foot, the ground damp and muddy under my feet. I knew my destination.

There was only one dock on Water Street ever used by ocean-going vessels; the rest went to the rats long ago or were taken over by fishermen, dredgers, barge-men. We're a middle-sized city. We handle tankers from Mexico and Texas, freighters from up and down the Atlantic seaboard, now and then—but not often—a foreigner. On the other hand, we're a manufacturing center and some of those foreigners come a long way for what we have to offer.

And with the war raging in Europe, some of those rat-infested docks were piled high with scrap iron and other cargoes destined for foreign ports.

I skirted a pile of scrap as big as a house and saw the ship looming just ahead in the dark. She was a freighter,

a big one. In normal times she'd have been painted black, most likely, but now she was gray. Gray all over, even her name painted out. Nothing on her to reveal her nationality; no flags flying, no smallest pinpoint of light visible.

She was a ghost, almost invisible, and when her holds were stuffed with the cargo for which she'd come, she'd be gone like a ghost—but then that ominous hump on her forward deck would be stripped of its tarpaulin, ready for action.

I went toward her, peering into the dark around me. A high wire fence blocked my way.

This particular ship had docked day before yesterday. Her crew, even her officers, had remained aboard, and newsmen had been kept at a distance. She was in peaceful waters now, but her country was at war, her sailors were under the thumb of strict discipline, her destination was a secret—and even the newspapermen had not been able to learn the nature of her cargo.

I slipped along the fence looking for an opening. Then something happened.

Where he came from, I never did find out. It was dark there for both of us, and we saw each other at the same instant. He sucked in a breath and stopped short, but not as short as I did because he had more weight to pull up. Then he lumbered around, began running, and fell sprawling over a length of lumber.

I pulled him to his feet—which was a job for a derrick—and got a firm grip on him. I said, "All right, Dummy, there's nothing to be afraid of. I won't hurt you. I don't bite."

He tried to wriggle clear and almost succeeded, but I'd been through the wars to get where I was, and no guy with only half a brain was going to do me out of it.

"You're working for Bates?" I snapped.

He just stared.

"I won't bite you," I told him again. "It's information I want, that's all. You working for Bates?"

He nodded. Then I saw that he was clutching something under his sweater. I moved his hand and pulled the thing out, looked at it. It was a wooden box, heavy, about the size of a deck of cards, but square. It was making a noise.

Tick-tick. Tick-tick. Tick-tick. Like that.

If the thing had been red hot I couldn't have dropped it any quicker, but I caught it again, with a frantic grab, before it hit the dock. I caught it and heaved it, and Joe DiMag never hit a baseball as far as I flung that softly ticking little box of hell.

It soared through the dark, out over the water, and fell with a splash. Then I grabbed the Dummy's arms and pulled him up close to me and said hoarsely, "Bates gave you that?"

"None of your business," he said. Then, sullenly: "Whatcha throw it away for, ya big bully? That was a special hand-made clock for tellin' the time. It was worth money!"

"Who said so?"

"He did."

"He sent you here? He told you to come here tonight?"

"Yeah."

"What for?"

"To swipe some of the stuff they're loadin' aboard the ship. That stuff, there." He pointed. "He said it was a special important job tonight. He give us them clocks extra. He—"

"Us?" I said. "What do you mean, us? You and who else?"

"Me and Willy Scalzi. He's in there now, inside the fence. He sneaked around the other way."

I GAVE the Dummy a shove and bel-lowed, "Get out of here! Get out!" He went sprawling and landed with a thud, but I only heard it, didn't see it. I was ploughing toward the wire fence. Tough Jeff Cardin, diving into hell for the sake of a kid he'd never met. But you don't go into a huddle at a time like that. You don't stop to think of the consequences. Maybe it's a good thing.

I went over the fence, not through it. It hurled me back when I rushed it, so I got my hands on it and went up. It sagged under my weight and for a moment I teetered there like a bug on a bending blade of grass; then the fence dumped me and I fell in a heap, inside it.

I opened my mouth to yell for Willy Scalzi—which, I suppose, would have made me a target for alert watchmen either on the dock or on the freighter—and right there I got a break. A light winked on about forty feet away.

I went for it. The light stabbed toward me, licked over me and went out. Then the darkness on the far side of the wire fence, quite a distance away on the street side, spat orange flame at me and I dropped.

I began crawling. "Hey!" I whispered. "Hey, kid, where are you?"

Well, I suppose the shooting scared him. I suppose the bullets snicking around me, close but not dangerously close unless one of them caught me in the dark by accident, frightened him stiff. He stayed where he was, a dim blur in the darkness against a mound of big boxes, and I had to crawl to him. I had to crawl thirty feet on hands and knees, knowing all the time that he was toting one of those tick-tick boxes and it might go off before I got to him.

Brother, that was a long thirty feet.

And the sniper on the far side of the fence, doing his level best to pick me off, didn't add to my peace of mind.

I came up to the kid and grabbed him, and got the surprise of my life. He wasn't a stranger. His name wasn't Willy Scalzi. The kid I grabbed was the sultry-eyed youngster who's stood up to me in that tenement house. Tony Mainelli!

"What the hell," I said.

He was shivering. His face was white—even in the dark I could see how white it was—and his teeth chattered. I yanked him against me, caught him as he lost his balance. I said, "Where's the other kid? Where's Scalzo?"

"I left him back on the street," Tony said. "I knocked him out."

"You're alone in here?"

"Yes."

"Did Bates give *you* a clock?"

"No. No, he didn't, but—"

"Follow me!" I said, cutting him short. "We're on our way out of here!"

He hung onto my leg as I crawled. He crawled with me. The fellow with the gun had evidently lost track of us, because the gun was silent now; the whole damned place was silent except for the gurgle of water underneath the rotten planks over which we wormed.

But the gun might begin again at any moment and blast us. I knew it, and I think the kid knew it. His fingers on my leg were like the claws of a bird; nothing short of an explosion would shake him loose!

A voice bellowed from the freighter, but we were not there to answer voices. It sang out again, with a note of authority, "What's going on there? What's going on?" Then directly in front of me, something moved.

I MUST have seen the gun the moment the fellow loomed up to confront me. I don't remember it, but I lashed out with a foot and kicked the kid away, off to one side, where the

first blast, at least, would not annihilate him. I thought of him first, then reared up on my knees, took snap aim at the guy and fired.

He fired, too. The difference was, he was erect, his legs firmly planted under him. His slug pounded my shoulder, spun me around and made me claw the air for balance. I didn't have a gun anymore. It slipped from my hand and was gone.

The guy came a step closer and took aim again. "Damn you, Cardin!" he said. "Damn you!"

He didn't cuss the way you would or I would. The words didn't explode, they came out like paste from a tube. With an accent. I knew him anyway. His stance gave him away. His stiffness. The way he held his gun.

I half expected to hear his heels click, see his arm snap out in salute.

"But for you, Cardin," he said in that pasty voice, "I should not have failed! Damn you for meddling!" His cursing shifted into a foreign tongue that confirmed all my suspicions, and he squeezed the trigger.

He was so burned up that he missed me, but he didn't know it. I fell sideways. I hoped he'd be satisfied. I played dead dog, hardly breathing, and wondered if he could hear the pounding of my heart above the gurgle of the water, which, oddly, was close and noisy.

It dawned on me suddenly that in crawling across the dock with Tony Mainelli in tow, I had lost my sense of direction. We weren't close to the fence. We were a hell of a long way from the fence. The dock ended a few feet from where I lay, and Bates was standing within a yard of the edge.

He raised his gun again. I tensed myself for a forward dive at his legs and wondered if I could make it. My shoulder hurt like hell.

Then I heard something.

Tick-tick. Tick-tick. Tick-tick.

It was so close it could have been an alarm clock under my pillow, if I'd been a normal human being at home in bed, instead of a battered human target for a killer. I almost laughed, hearing that noise. My hand snaked out and closed over the box—the box Tony Mainelli had dropped when I kicked him clear.

I lurched erect.

Bates fired and I threw the box at him. Funny thing, at that exact moment a big searchlight went into operation on the deck of the freighter, and the dock took on a blaze of glory. In spite of the bullet in me and the pain that streaked to my head, I saw the box in flight, saw Bates throw up an arm to ward it off, saw him catch it, lose his balance and sway like a wind-blown tree over the water.

He had the box in his hands and didn't know he had it, *couldn't* have known, or he'd have dropped it. It went with him as he pitched off the edge of the dock and fell.

It exploded as he hit the water.

I take no credit. The laurel wreaths, if any, go to that old whiskered gentleman, Fate, whose timing in this instance was marvelous. All I know is that the roar belted me flat on my back and a waterspout, beautiful to behold, shot skyward in the white glare of the freighter's searchlight.

The dock shuddered under me. The spout subsided. Then a deep, sweet silence settled down, to be shattered by a wave of loud voices from the freighter.

A hand pawed at me and Tony Mainelli's voice, brittle with fright, whispered, "Hey! You all right?"

"Get Willy Scalzi," I mumbled. "Get that clock away from him. Drown it . . ."

"I already took it away from him,"

the kid said. "That was his clock you heaved at Mr. Bates. Are you all right?"

I said I was all right. I wasn't sure of it, but the fact that I could say so, and hear myself say so, was reassuring. I said it again when a small army of lads from the freighter surrounded us and two of them helped me to my feet. They were nice fellows. They were concerned as hell about me.

One of them said, "We saw it, mister. We saw what happened. And God bless you, mister! If that bomb had exploded on the dock here, we'd all be in heaven, every man jack of us!"

I said, "Why?"

"This stuff, sir," he said, waving an arm around. "All this stuff you see here. Munitions."

"Oh," I said. "Munitions." I smiled at him. My shoulder felt big as an elephant's leg and was throbbing. "But of course," I said. "Munitions." And passed out.

THE chief came to see me at the hospital, six hours or so later. An understanding nurse was reading the morning papers to me, but he shooed her away, leaned over to pat my wrist in a fatherly way and said, "Excellent work, Cardin. Excellent." Then he sat down, scowled at me and added, "There are just one or two things, Jeff, that aren't quite clear. What I mean—"

"What you mean," I said, "someone might ask you and it would be embarrassing. Did Foley call you?"

He nodded.

"Well," I said, "you know that end of it, then, and the rest is not very complicated. Tony Mainelli was in a while ago. He put me straight."

"He thinks you're quite a guy."

"He didn't at first," I said. "I was a cop and he was afraid of cops. He knew his cousin was—"

"Cousin?"

"The Dummy is Tony's cousin. The kid knew he was up to something, knew he was sneaking out nights, getting money somehow, and the kid was afraid there'd be trouble with the cops. Actually, the Dummy was being used by Bates and Selvin. He used to work down on the waterfront, knows his way around down there, and they were using him as a sort of scout, to pick up information for them. Bates and Selvin," I shrugged, "were not small-timers. Definitely not."

"War stuff," the chief said. "Saboteurs."

I nodded. "I didn't get it at first, though the stuff in that suitcase should have tipped me off. That stuff is used in the manufacture of small incendiary bombs, great little things for starting fires in a ship's hold or cargo. In the last war we used to call them sabotage cigars—they were shaped that way—but I didn't get it until I saw the newspaper clipping in Selvin's pocket."

"His name," the chief said, "won't be Selvin. Those boys have other names."

I wasn't interested. Anxious to get back to my understanding nurse and the morning papers, I said, "Well, summing it up, this was a cargo of munitions. They had to stop it and were willing to throw some human sacrifices to the war dogs, to gain their ends. They hired the Dummy and a pal of his named Willy Scalzi to go down there; told 'em the idea was to swipe some of the cargo—the real idea being to get them in there where the cargo was, so they'd be there when those time bombs went off. Tony Mainelli followed them, to find out what the Dummy was up to. He fought with Scalzi, took Scalzi's bomb—not knowing what it was—and was trying to locate the Dummy when I ran into him. You know the rest. All I

hope is that Bates and Selvin, or whatever they call themselves, answer for that one in heaven."

"What's left of Bates was fished out of the water an hour ago," the chief said. "He looked as if—" He glanced up as the nurse came back, and was silent.

Then he said, "Just one thing, Jeff. That fellow Driscoll, the dead one who got you into this mess—he had another name, too. On a hunch, I sent his prints to Washington. He was a Federal man, working from the inside. Bates and Selvin must have got wise to him—so they killed him."

The nurse said, "I'm sorry, sir, but Mr. Cardin needs rest."

The chief stood up. "I'll be back later, Jeff. What'll I bring you? Some Scotch, maybe?" He said it without batting an eye.

The mere mention of the word made me hang onto my stomach. "Nurse," I said, "take this ungrateful wretch out of here. Put his head in a can of ether and hold him down."

The chief grinned and went out. The nurse said sweetly, "I'm very glad to know, Mr. Cardin, that you're not a drinking man."

So help me, she meant it!

Coming!

TEE OFF FOR MURDER

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Our arms went up in the air the way we'd practiced

Two for a Corpse

By Lawrence Treat

KINCAID. He's dry and sallow and tireless. He has three citations for bravery and holds every medal awarded. When he grins, you want to knock his teeth in.

The evening I got my detective's rating, Marge and I had a little celebration. Dinner out, with drinks, and then a downtown movie. The extra pay meant we could get married.

The next day I reported to the Seventh Precinct and Lieutenant Bolger shook hands, introduced me all around. And then he said "This is Kincaid. You two'll work together."

My face must have shown how I felt. Kincaid said, "What's the matter? Don't you like me?"

I muttered something or other and shook his big clammy paw. It felt like a slab of dead fish.

Practically everybody in the precinct had tried working with him as a partner. The average was a few weeks and the record just over six months. Eventually they all blew up and said one more day with Kincaid and they'd murder him. And they meant it, too.

He had an uncanny knack of spotting weaknesses, and once he spotted them he never let up. The result was that the whole precinct was out to get him, but they didn't have a chance. He was honest, and he knew the rule book backwards. He could spout every municipal ordinance verbatim.

I'm not claiming that Bolger had anything against me personally. Rather, he was sick of having Kincaid run his men ragged and he saw a way of solving the problem.

"Somers," he said, "as long as you stick to Kincaid, you'll keep your detective's rating. But quit him, and it's back to the ranks."

I was so mad I didn't even answer. Some fools had passed a regulation that all promotions were temporary for one year. After that the appointment became permanent and you could never be reduced. Nothing could touch you except dismissal from the department.

And I needed a detective's pay to marry Marge. A good slice of my salary goes to my sister, you see. She's a widow and has a kid to bring up.

Bolger snapped out, "Somers! You heard me?"

I stalked off without even looking at him. Discipline, hell!

Kincaid followed me into the locker room. "Grade B, probationary," he grinned. It was more of a leer than a grin. "You know you take orders from me, don't you? Well, don't forget it."

I got to know Kincaid a little better, the next few days. His favorite trick was heckling people for a minor violation that nobody else had bothered about. They'd get so mad they'd almost burst a blood vessel, and Kincaid would stand there, cool and leering. I think his ambition was to heckle somebody into a fit of apoplexy. He'd done it once, I'd heard, and was doing his damndest to repeat.

At first I interfered with him, but I learned to shut up. Once you got sore, you were lost.

ID STOOD it for about a week. We were coming back from a routine call and we were walking along Beech.

It's a fairly tough tenement district and I noticed the car as we turned into the block. It was an expensive limousine, well-kept and with white-walled tires. It was parked at the opposite curb, near a street lamp, and if I'd been alone I'd have had a look. The car didn't belong in a neighborhood like this.

As we neared it, Kincaid snorted as if he'd made a brilliant discovery and said, "What's that thing doing here?"

When Kincaid suggests anything, it's human nature to object.

"A man hasn't the right to park his car on the street any more," I said irritably. "We have to investigate, huh?"

"Don't be stupid," he said drily, and started across the street.

I muttered under my breath and followed. The street light shone directly on the radiator and windshield, but the rear was in heavy shadow. I let Kincaid nose around. I stuck my hands in my pockets and whistled.

He was staring through a side window when the shot sounded out. I didn't see where it came from. I heard the report and I thought I heard the bullet whistle past. I ducked and leaped for the protection of the car. Kincaid didn't move.

"What's the matter?" he sneered. "Scared?"

"Sure. Aren't you?"

"No."

I had him then. "All right," I said. "Let's see you step into the light, where the car doesn't hide you."

He stepped forwards and leered at me. "Well?" he asked. "Satisfied?"

He isn't human.

I tried to dope the thing out. We look at a car and somebody shoots. Ninety-nine people out of a hundred would stop worrying about the car and beat it. So there was something about

the car that we weren't supposed to see.

Kincaid must have figured the same way. He strolled back to the rear door and tried the handle again. Locked. He snapped on his flashlight and poked the beam inside. Another shot banged out. His flash didn't even jerk, but a second later he switched it out and bent down.

"Looks like a body in there," he remarked.

Calmly, as if he were doing some minor repair work in a garage, he lifted the hood and disconnected an ignition wire. Apparently the mysterious gunman was no longer watching, because Kincaid didn't draw fire. And he was a lovely target, too.

When he had refastened the hood, he stood up and sauntered to the curb. "Come on," he said.

He headed down the street, casually, as if he'd decided the hell with the car, there was nothing worth looking at, he'd go home. If it had been up to me, I'd have dashed for the line of stoops and stalked every hallway until I had the right one. Or else I'd have gone for the nearest phone and gotten a few patrol cars and an emergency squad to turn that block inside out.

But not Kincaid. He was going after another citation. All I hoped was that it would be posthumous.

I tagged along with him. What else could I do? I was wondering about the guy who'd stood him for six months.

"Nice night," I observed.

"Don't be so damn talkative," he snapped. "Or are you trying to impress me? Pulling the casual line, huh?" I felt as if he could see clear through me and read my thoughts.

At the fourth house he stopped. "Here," he said.

The hallway was musty and dark as

a tunnel. I went in first. I heard someone scurry upstairs but I couldn't see a thing. I had a ticklish feeling as I stepped through the doorway and knew I was silhouetted against a light outside, but nothing happened.

I groped for the stairs and started up. Kincaid was right behind me, with his fingers touching my back for a guide. When I reached the first landing I stopped.

"Where do you figure he went?" I whispered.

A flashlight snapped in our faces and blinded us. A high, shrill voice barked, "Stick 'em up!"

I obeyed. From the corner of my eye I saw Kincaid was doing the same thing. But his tongue wagged.

"You sure got brains," he said sarcastically. "Had to talk. Had to give me away. If I stick with you they ought to put me in the lunatic asylum."

He was right, too. That whisper of mine had been the give-away.

THE shrill voice whined, "Look like dicks to me. Frisk 'em."

The light held steady while footsteps clumped on the creaky wooden floor. I felt hands pat me under the arms and at the pockets. That was Kincaid's chance. He could dive at the man who was disarming me, and in the darkness, with nothing but a flashlight for illumination, Kincaid's chances would be about even.

The man with the torch would fire and get me, of course, but I didn't think that would bother Kincaid. I could feel the jerking of the pulse in my throat. I'd never been shot, and for a second or two I went giddy. Then I cleared my throat and uttered a low laugh. I was all right again.

But Kincaid didn't move, and for the first time I realized he was human.

A wave of gratitude flooded me and I almost liked him. He'd held back because he knew that I'd pay with my life for whatever he succeeded in doing.

Then the man with my gun slid over and took away Kincaid's. I had a glimpse of a thin determined face and sparse blond hair. It looked almost white in the rays of the torch.

The squeaky voice said, "Got their rods?"

Whitey snapped, "Yeah. Now what?"

"What else they got?"

"Usual stuff. Flashlights, handcuffs, keys and a bunch of—"

Squeak-voice interrupted. "Bracelets, huh? Lock 'em up together, and make sure you take good care of them keys."

For the second time Whitey's hands went through my pockets. Then he grabbed my left hand and Kincaid's right and snapped on the steel handcuffs.

The light moved slightly and Squeak-voice said, "Take the other set and fasten 'em to the bannister." His quick burst of laughter sounded like the whinny of a horse. "That'll hold 'em."

Whitey locked Kincaid's left hand to the upright. I thought we'd look plenty silly when the emergency squad sawed us or chopped us loose, but I didn't mind. The laugh would be on Kincaid as much as on me. For once in his life, he was right square behind the eight ball.

Whitey circled us carefully and Squeak-voice started down the stairs. "Don't get lonesome, boys," he twanged. "But then, you got each other for company." Their feet stamped downward. The light switched off and they went out.

"Funny thing," I said, "but when that guy was taking my gun, I could almost feel you get set to grab him, and then

change your mind." I coughed awkwardly. "Thanks," I added.

"Thanks for what?"

"For not doing it. Chances are you could have gotten away with it, but I'd have got bumped."

"Don't be a damn fool!" he said drily. "The only reason I didn't do it was that the gun was aimed at me."

That got me for a second. Then I laughed. Kincaid the hard-boiled . . . wouldn't even admit he'd done anything decent. But I had him, and I pushed him to the wall.

"How the hell could you see, with that light in your eyes?"

"Simple," he said. "Lower your lids till you just see a crack. Then you can look anywheres except at the light itself." He grunted. "Geez! Are you so dumb you didn't even know that?"

I had to clench my teeth to keep from hitting him. I thought the desire would pass off in a few seconds, but it didn't. I had to sock him. Then I remembered he was helpless and couldn't hit back, and that held me for a few seconds. Then I decided to sock him anyhow.

I clenched my fist, and there in the darkness I grinned. This was going to be good.

At that moment Kincaid gave a sudden wrench. I heard wood creak and splinter, but the bannister didn't quite break. He set his feet and gave another tug. Wood ripped and he banged into me and thumped me against the opposite wall. We were free. Except we were still handcuffed together.

"COME on," he said. He almost pulled my arm out of its socket as he started briskly for the stairs.

At the doorway we poked out our heads. The front door of the limousine was open and Whitey was standing on the runningboard. Apparently Squeak-

voice was trying to start the car and couldn't.

Whitey's head turned. When he sighted us, he reached for a gun. We jumped back into the doorway. It was the first time we'd done anything in unison.

Kincaid said, "Got your whistle?"

I felt in my pockets. "No. They must have taken it."

"Mine too."

Kincaid twirled the handcuff dangling from his free hand. He had a vicious weapon if he could ever get close enough to use it. It was hard steel, sharp-edged, and he could swing it with terrific force. It lengthened his reach a couple of inches, too.

It occurred to me that I was the only one that he was close enough to use it on.

He moved toward the door and shattered a pane of glass with the handcuff. Then he let out a couple of terrific bellows.

"Noise'll scare 'em off," he said. "Might bring a patrolman, too. There wouldn't be any telephones in houses like this."

When we glanced at the street again, the two gunmen were at the far corner, and running. Kincaid stared at them regretfully, as if the loss of the chance to kill a man left a permanent scar on his soul. Then he started for the car.

The jerk on the handcuff bit into my wrist. "Trying to peel off all the skin?" I asked sharply. "When you want to go somewhere, say so. It's just as easy."

"If I can stand it, you can," he said laconically.

When he reached the car, he swung the handcuff at the glass door until he'd punched a hole. Then he reached inside, opened the door and turned on the roof light.

The body was covered with a blanket. He pushed it back. A little guy with a long, thin nose lay huddled up like a kid that had fallen asleep and then gotten cold. I knelt on the running-board to ease the pull on my wrist. There wasn't room for the two of us inside.

Kincaid hooked back the handcuff while he searched the pockets. They were empty. He stared for a long while at the dead face. "Know who that is?" he asked finally.

"No."

"You wouldn't," he remarked contemptuously. "It's Johnny Otis. Inherited his old man's sand and gravel business this spring. The old man was pretty close to Charlie Hammond, the political boss."

I knew that part of it. Hammond and the older Otis were supposed to have cleaned up a fortune on city building contracts. Otis had supplied most of the material. Hammond just about owned the fourth ward, which made him a key figure in city politics.

"I heard a story about young Otis," went on Kincaid, knitting his brows. "Hammond's a heavy gambler, and the story is that Otis bragged he was going to try to take Hammond for all he had. If Otis won, Hammond would pay up all right; but if Otis lost, he wouldn't pay Hammond a cent. Could get out of it by threatening to expose the sand and gravel frauds. Young Otis had all the evidence in his father's books, and he was clean himself."

Kincaid stared at the pale face. The kid must have been a little over twenty-one, but he looked a lot younger.

"Hammond," observed Kincaid, "wouldn't stand for a trick like that. He's nobody's fool."

Kincaid jerked at my wrist. I gritted my teeth and planted my feet on the

sidewalk. "What the hell is this?" I demanded.

"We're going over to Otis's place."

"What for?"

"You wouldn't have the brains to understand even if I told you."

I LIFTED my wrist. "We're going to get these things off first. Then we're going to get guns. And then, if you want, I'll clean up every lousy crook in town. But not before."

"You're taking orders," declared Kincaid.

"Not from you."

Kincaid twirled the handcuff that dangled from his free wrist. "You'll do what I tell you or I'll make mincemeat out of your face. With this."

He could and he would. And he was aching for the chance.

"Somebody'll call a cop and they'll take charge of this thing," he added. "And I'm in a hurry. Coming?"

I hesitated. If I could get my hand on that steel weapon, we'd be even. Kincaid was a little bigger than I am but I was younger. And I hated his guts. Then I thought of Marge and what a detective's pay meant.

"Okay," I said.

He jerked on my wrist again and started dogtrotting towards the avenue. I kept up with him. We hailed a cab and Kincaid gave the address of the Otis gravel works. As he climbed in, he yanked at the handcuffs again, just to annoy me. My skin was rubbed raw and I glanced at my wrist. It was scraped red and there was blood on it, but it wasn't my blood. It was Kincaid's. If the jerks annoyed me, they must have been minor torture to him. What kind of guy was he, anyhow?

We sat silently on that ride and I did a little thinking. I saw Kincaid's reasoning. The parked car with the body meant

a lack of preparation. The gunmen had had to stop for something that they should have had done if the job had been carefully planned.

Supposing Hammond had killed Otis, what would he do to protect himself? Get rid of the body, and destroy the evidence of his motive. And since he hadn't arranged in advance for the disposal of the body, it followed that he probably hadn't had time to destroy the evidence either. Therefore the place to look for Hammond was at the Otis office or at Otis's home.

It was a neat bit of work and I couldn't help respecting Kincaid for it. If he guessed wrong, we'd lose nothing but a little time; but if he guessed right, he'd be brilliant.

After a fifteen minute ride, we bumped through an open gate and passed the bins and bunkers and the big piles of sand and gravel. The cab stopped at an old wooden building with an open shed downstairs and the offices on the second floor. There was a light in an upstairs window.

While I paid, Kincaid said to the driver, "Stop at the first phone booth and call police headquarters. Tell 'em there's a dead body in a car parked on Beech Street. Tell 'em Kincaid's on the case and he'll report back as soon as he has something. Now beat it—and snap into it."

The cab skidded on gravel and shot away in a whine of gears. Kincaid said, "Keep your hand where that steel bracelet won't show, and stick close to me. And let me do the talking. I'll break you out of the department if you gum up anything else. Can you remember that much all at once?"

"You ought to have your face smashed," I said, "and some day I'll do it for you. Let's go." I gave a savage tug on the handcuffs, but he didn't even

grunt. He wrenched right back, only harder.

"This way," he said.

I thought of Marge. As long as I could see her, smiling up at me with laughter in her eyes, I could stand anything.

Except Kincaid, maybe.

The door was unlocked. We went up a narrow flight of wooden stairs that was dimly lit by a small, grimy bulb. At the top of the stairs a sheet of light blazed across the landing. To cross that patch was like crossing the platform at the daily line-up. You could see nothing, even with Kincaid's trick of lidding your eyes, but anybody beyond the light could see you perfectly.

We marched up with our bodies close together and our hands touching. Kincaid steered me with a slight pressure on the handcuffs. I tried to see into the room that faced us as we reached the landing, but it was too dark. We swung to the right like a couple of West Pointers. We entered a large shabby office that was brightly lit. A hulk of a man with a bald head, a ruddy, fleshy face and small, twinkling blue eyes looked up from a pile of papers and ledgers.

"Well," he said, "and who the hell are you?"

"Detective Kincaid. I saw lights and wondered whether anything was wrong."

"Wrong? Hell no! I'm Charlie Hammond, from the Fourth Ward. I guess you boys know me all right. I was going over some papers of my old friend, Jim Otis. Died last February, and a better man never drank it straight from the bottle. No, sir. Care for a nip, boys?"

Kincaid shook his head. "We're on duty."

"Sure enough!" bellowed Hammond. "Well, it's nice to know you boys are on your toes. Drop around some time

when you're in my neighborhood. Always glad to see you."

"YOU have permission to be here?" asked Kincaid.

"And what the hell would I need permission for? My best friend, and me executor of his will. I haven't time in the day to go over his books, and so I do it at night."

"Young Otis owns this place. Call him up and show me this is all right, and we'll be on our way."

"Call Johnny at this hour? You don't know that bird. He'll be out somewhere with a girl on one arm and a bottle in the other. Or maybe his two arms around the girl by this time. I'll call him, but he won't be home. Not in a million years."

"Prove you have a right to be here, or come on up to headquarters," said Kincaid. "That's all there is to it."

Hammond stood up and frowned. "I don't get this," he said. His eyes focused on our hands that stayed so unnaturally close together. "You claim you're a cop," he remarked. "And would you produce your identification?"

Kincaid couldn't because the hanging handcuff would give him away. I took out my wallet and slapped my card and shield on the desk. "Somers is the name," I said. "Look it over."

Hammond glanced at Kincaid. "And you?"

"He hurt his hand," I said. "Are you coming?"

Kincaid's pressure on my wrist told me he wanted to circle the desk and examine the documents. They were sorted in two piles.

As Kincaid leaned forward to look, Hammond made a sullen swoop with his arm and shoved. I jolted back and the handcuffs came into sight. He couldn't miss them.

"So!" exclaimed Hammond. "And what the hell's the idea of that?"

Kincaid didn't have a thing on Hammond. Suspicion, yes; theories, yes; but not one straw of honest evidence.

"Better explain that IOU on the desk, first," said Kincaid. "Eighteen thousand, and signed by Johnny Otis."

Hammond wet his lips. He couldn't make up his mind whether to keep up his bluff or try a new line.

"I think we'll look around a little more," announced Kincaid.

"You wouldn't want to do anything foolish," said Hammond. "You wouldn't want to stick your nose into something you couldn't pull out of, would you? Because right now you're heading for one hell of a mess of trouble, and I'll tell you. But if you wanted to go back to headquarters, say for an hour or so, you could come back and do anything you wanted. Nobody'd know you'd been here before, and in a day or two you'd stop in at my office and get a little present in good honest cash. That's a pretty good proposition for a couple of plainclothes boys, eh?"

I saw his play. Give him an hour's time and he'd be out of here, with the Otis papers destroyed and a cast iron alibi to account for his movements all evening long.

Kincaid saw, too. "It's a lousy proposition," he said. "You're under arrest for attempted bribery!"

Hammond jumped and yelled, "Whitey—Earl!" And we were through.

The two gunmen who'd handcuffed us in the tenement plowed through the door and pointed our own guns at us. Or maybe they weren't our own. What difference does it make?

"This the same pair?" demanded Hammond.

Earl squeaked, "Yeah." He had

bulging eyes that made him look sore, a broad, flat nose and a beautiful chest,

Hammond smiled at us. "You see how things are?"

Kincaid barked, "You're under arrest for murder. The three of you."

Hammond laughed. "If they made breezes out of stubbornness, sure you'd be a tornado."

"I am," said Kincaid. "And you know damn well you can't get away with this. Lots of people heard young Otis brag, and so you're the first guy to look for. What chance have you got?"

"A pretty good one," declared Hammond. "You see, Whitey was taking that body down to where they'd embalm it in concrete and drop it in the river. He stopped off to get Earl and then the pair of you happened to look in the car. The car, incidentally, was stolen last week and can never in the world be traced, so I have a damn good chance of getting away with it if I rub out the pair of you. And I'm ready to do it, too. Unless you listen to reason."

"What's your offer?" asked Kincaid. He saw the force of Hammond's words and wasted no time arguing.

HAMMOND sat on the edge of the desk. "I want that body. Otis's. Once I get rid of it, you'll have a hell of a time proving murder. Or anything else. I have influence in this little town and it takes a pretty tight case to get me. Deliver that body to me, and you walk out of here free. How about it?"

Kincaid didn't hesitate. "Sure," he said.

That was my cue to interrupt. "I'll be damned if I make any kind of deal with a—"

"Shut up!" snapped Kincaid. "I'm doing this. Hand me that phone."

Hammond lifted it up. "Whitey," he said, "if either of these men—*either of*

them, understand—tries to give me away or says anything suspicious, let 'em both have it. That clear?"

Whitey grinned as he covered us.

Kincaid dialed headquarters. "Kincaid speaking," he said. "I sent a message and said I'd report back. Has the body from that limousine on Beech Street come in yet?"

Both Hammond and I could hear the answer. "No."

"All right then. Get word that I want to see it. You can broadcast and there'll be a radio car to get the message. I'm at the Otis sand and gravel works. Tell 'em to stop by and pick me up, with the body. And in case they have any trouble starting the limousine, there's nothing wrong with it but a disconnected ignition wire under the hood. Got it?"

I went cold. I'd been hoping against hope that Kincaid would put over a smart one, drop a word or a phrase that would warn headquarters. But Kincaid hadn't. He'd spoken to a general operator whose name he didn't even know. He'd lived up to his promise to Hammond.

Hammond's grin was broad with satisfaction and relief as he saw the phone-piece click back into its cradle.

"Any place where we can park these cops while we clean up?" he asked.

Earl pointed to the doorway behind Hammond. "In there. That closet's as good as a safe."

It was. We had plenty of room to be comfortable, but there wasn't a possibility of escape. I found a light and turned it on. We were in one of those oversized storerooms in which office supplies are kept.

As soon as the door was locked, I turned on Kincaid. "You heel!" I spat out. "The first cop up those stairs is a dead man. They'll never let an armed cop get near them."

Kincaid shrugged. "A cop ought to know there's something phony about bringing a body to a place like this. If he doesn't use his gun in time, that's his tough luck."

"It's a trap and you know it!" I fumed. "One guy at the top of those stairs could hold off an army."

"There was no choice. Hammond would have bumped us, and we're the only ones who can ever prove he killed Otis. Did it right in that office, too. Probably still has the gun with him. Notice the bloodstains in the corner, partly wiped up?"

"And you called me yellow!" I sneered. "At least I don't play with other people's lives just to save *my* neck!"

I felt myself trembling. I tried to think of Marge, but I couldn't keep her image in front of me. I wanted to throttle Kincaid. My fingers itched to grab his throat. I saw a heavy stamping machine within reach. One blow with that could crack his skull.

"I'm playing to get Hammond," declared Kincaid drily. "The first chance we have, we'll go into action."

That steadied me. The prospect of action. And the knowledge that Kincaid had no intention of lying down on the job.

"How?" I demanded.

"Handcuffs. If we do it right, we can knock a man out with these things."

"How?" I repeated.

"Got to work together. Get our hands over his head and yank him back, and then smash him on the temple. Like this."

We practiced that motion, out and forward, down and back, then up and back again. First hook him in the throat, then smash him on the temples. It would be like hitting a guy with brass knuckles, only better.

WE MUST have practiced it a hundred times before the door opened and Hammond called us out. Earl was covering us with a revolver, but Whitey, in the corner, had an automatic rifle under his arm. At the sight of it, I felt sick.

Hammond said, "We'll kill those cops if we have to, but it's never a good idea. The department gets sore, and I was never the boy to go looking for trouble. I take what comes to me and I'll give back better, but I don't go asking for it."

"Damn nice of you," I cracked, and Kincaid snapped a "Shut up!" at me.

"So," continued Hammond, "I'm going to give you a chance. We'll all be in that dark room facing the head of the stairs. The landing will be lit. If you can make the cops put down their guns while they're in that patch of light, there won't be any shooting. I don't care what you say or how you do it, but if you manage, nobody'll get killed. I'll lock the bunch of you in that closet and tie you up, and that'll give me time to get rid of Otis's body and burn these papers." He pointed to a package he had fastened and placed on the desk. "And if you can bust the alibi I'll have by tomorrow morning, I'll deserve the chair." He grinned confidently. "That's playing square with you, huh?"

"Sure," said Kincaid. "I'll manage." He spoke as emotionally as if he'd just promised to buy a bottle of ink on his way home.

The five of us were in the semi-dark room at the head of the stairs when two cars rolled through the gate. Whitey, with the automatic rifle, had the stairs covered. Earl and Hammond, with revolvers were watching us closely. The light was dim, but they were near us and could see every move we made.

From the window, I noticed that a

patrol car was in the lead and the death limousine was trailing it. The autocade stopped in the patch of light from the window and two cops climbed out of the prowler car. One of them yelled, "Hey, Kincaid!"

Kincaid called out "Come on up." If they'd suspected a trap, they were reassured by the confident note in his voice.

Leisurely, they moved out of sight as they headed for the front door. Another cop got out of the limousine. He hitched his thumbs in his belt and gazed up at the sky.

In the room, nobody moved and nobody spoke. I could feel the tension. I didn't trust Whitey. He had an automatic rifle in his hands and two cops knew he was an accessory to a murder. He must have realized that while Hammond had a good chance of getting away with this night's business, neither he nor Earl had a prayer. I swear I could practically feel Whitey's finger itching on the trigger.

He was holding himself back. Firing down a flight of stairs is tricky, and no matter how careful you are you're liable to overshoot. But once those cops were in the glare of the landing, Whitey couldn't miss. Not with an automatic rifle at ten feet.

Kincaid started talking. "Come on up," he said, in a matter-of-fact voice. "Have any trouble finding the place? A taxi took us up here and almost dumped us out on that bump near the gate. Something funny happened. You know that stiff you got in the car?"

The long muzzle of Whitey's rifle weaved slightly, like a serpent's head measuring its distance before the strike. Hammond was staring in fascination. He must have known Whitey was going to shoot and that nothing in the world could stop him. Earl turned his

head slightly in order to see the cops walk into the light and die.

Kincaid's voice droned on. "Well, that stiff passed out with his fingers crossed. You notice it? He had his fingers crossed like dying had brought him luck at last."

I couldn't stand it any more. I nudged Kincaid and yelled "Look out!" At the same time I jerked up my arm.

Kincaid worked with me beautifully. We'd practised it so much that our arms worked instinctively. We got Earl on the throat and yanked him back. His gun spat wildly and I grabbed for it while our two hands went up and down in the motion we knew so well. Steel crashed on Earl's temple and he went down for the count.

Meantime Whitey and Hammond went into action. They'd been so intent on the two cops that they'd forgotten all about us. Whitey started spraying lead down the staircase. With Earl's captured revolver, I ripped three bullets at him. His gun gave a jerk and a spluttering explosion and thumped to the floor. Kincaid's spare handcuff whipped out and smacked Hammond. As I whirled, the gun was slapped out of Hammond's hands and he was raising them slowly and beginning to whimper. He just wasn't used to gun battles.

Kincaid yelled, "You all right down there?"

One of the cops answered. "Yeah. Nicked me a little. But on our feet all right, and nothing wrong. You okay?"

Kincaid said, "Sure," and that was that.

WE WERE handcuffed while we questioned Hammond and handcuffed as we rode back to the precinct house. I couldn't help warming up to Kincaid. The way we'd worked that

handcuff trick had been beautiful, if I say it myself. Teamwork like that means something. The ice was broken at last, and I was proud to work with him. And it was his brainwork that had set us on the trail.

I chuckled to myself. When you've been as near death as I had been with Kincaid, you feel drawn to a man. He might be the same Kincaid to everybody else, but from now on we were real partners. To me, those handcuffs were a symbol.

Bolger got a lot of fun out of it before he unlocked us. Then Kincaid reported briefly on the evening's work.

"Otis had refused to pay on his gambling IOU and had threatened to give the newspapers the evidence of the building graft. Hammond got the kid to meet him at the office and show him the evidence was really there, in black and white. Then Hammond killed him and called in the gunmen to get rid of the body."

Kincaid paused and looked at me. I felt good.

"As for Somers," he ended, and I was watching Bolger to see how he'd react to the new set-up between Kincaid and me. "As for Somers, he got us into the trouble and he questioned every order I gave him. He's dumb, insubordinate and yellow, and I want him brought up on disciplinary charges."

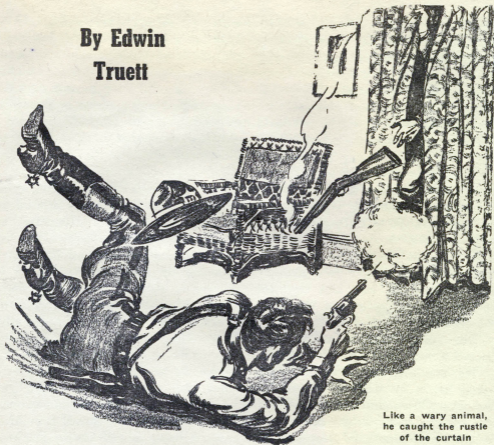
For a second, I was speechless with shock. All I could think of was eleven months, two weeks and four days to go, with Kincaid.

Then I hauled off and socked him.

I saw the look of surprise on his face. Simultaneously, Lieutenant Bolger forgot himself and smiled.

That's why I've still got my detective's rating. But also, I've still got Kincaid for a partner.

By Edwin
Truett



Like a wary animal,
he caught the rustle
of the curtain

Action For A Ranger

I
RANGER Ford McNelly Jones sat in a straight, uncomfortable chair in the Mayor's office and regarded the toe of his high-heeled cowboy boot with seeming indifference. Ten years ago, when Hizzoner Milo Henshaw served his district in the United States House of Representatives, he had been known as the Baby Congressman. Now, McNelly Jones observed to himself that the baby had not only aged, but had put on considerable weight. For Milo Henshaw's shock of hair was al-

most snow white, his heavy face was as wrinkled as that of a bulldog. His face, Jones decided, was not the face of a good poker player. It reflected his emotions; for example right now, the Mayor was vehemently angry.

He slapped his desk with the flat of his hand, and the report was like the firing of a six shooter! He leaned over the desk, breathed heavily through his nostrils, stared at the assembled group with slightly pop eyes. He roared, "Gentlemen—and this is for publication—I issued a permit for that meeting and I intend standing by it! The Bill of Rights

forces me to do so! If the city of Marlinburg is afraid of one little Mexican seniorita and her ragtail followers—no matter what they call themselves, Communists. Populists, Nazis or Fascists!—I say if the citizens of this city are afraid, their Mayor stands unafraid! That meeting goes on as scheduled tonight, and if there is any gathering of hoodlums or a mob to break it, I give you my word of honor that I personally will lead the Marlinburg police against the hoodlums. That is all, gentlemen.”

He pulled a blue-bordered handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his perspiring brow. Ranger Ford McNelly Jones crossed his legs and regarded the heel of the opposite boot. Suddenly he looked up.

“No, Your Honor, that isn’t all,” snapped a voice in reply to the Mayor.

This man, decided Ranger Jones, looked like a fat butcher, full of his own meat. Even his face, round and full, was the color of butcher’s paper. His eyes were small and deep set, far back in his head, and they glinted angrily.

“Roemer,” snapped Hizzoner, “I’ve said all I want to say. I have no desire to debate with you. Politically, I flatter myself that I’m far from dumb. It’s you—you and Norberry—behind this squabble! You’ve injected the American Legion with your virus, because you’re after my scalp. You’re trying to provoke a riot because a handful of Communists, led by a puny little Mexican girl, have rented a city building for one night! You want trouble! You hope a mob will gather! You hope I’ll have to use force to disperse it, and by the eternal, I will! Gentlemen, that’s all.”

He turned, walked stiffly away from the desk and through a door that led to his own private office. The man Roemer turned to the arising reporters

with a fat shrug. “There you are, boys. Whether it’s politics or not, just print that the Mayor of Marlinburg is standing squarely behind a lot of stinking Communists, allowing them to rent the City Auditorium, paid for by the sweat of good American citizens!”

“How about that crack of his about Norberry?”

RANGER JONES quit looking at his boot then and literally pricked up his ears. When Mayor Henshaw had taken office some months ago, the city of Marlinburg had been nationally noted as being the “wide-openest” town in the entire state of Texas. Henshaw, strictly speaking, was no reformer. Word was out that he didn’t mind a bit of gambling—provided that gambling was on the square. One by one—aided by the Texas Rangers—he had closed down the crooked joints, the gyp joints, where no man ever quit winner. This, of course, had caused a political howl, it being a well known fact that in any city the size of Marlinburg, the politicians reap the benefits of a wide-open town. Mayor Henshaw, had, in fact, publicly named Norberry, the politician-contractor, and Roemer, an ex-Councilman, as being behind the crooked lotteries, the slot machines and the policy games.

Roemer, in answer to the reporter’s question, snapped, “Yes, Tod Norberry is my pardner, has been for years. But the Mayor’s statements are bunk! He’s finding that he can’t keep his political promises and he’s trying to pass the buck! I say—and Tod says—nuts to him!”

Ranger Jones went back to contemplation of his boot heels. He might have sighed a bit, too. For Ranger Jones hated work in the city. Named after two of the greatest ranger captains who

ever forked a saddle, back in the days when Rangers were he-men, not city detectives, he found the pavements of the cities more than merely irksome. They were a pain in the neck, pure and simple. Listening to a fat little Mayor mouth defiance, and to a fatter little politico mouth it back at him! Like a couple of kids talking a fight and each hoping the other would back down.

"What about this latest rumor, Roemer?" Again the tired-looking reporter spoke.

"Rumor? There's always rumors and rumors of rumors around that guy."

"I hear he's really got the stuff on the lotteries hereabouts, mister. Rumor is he aims to present it to the Grand Jury himself, day after tomorrow. Any hair off your back? Yours or Norberry's?"

"That," snorted Roemer, "is too ridiculous to answer!" And he, too, walked out of the meeting. Ranger Jones, sleepy-eyed, noticed a peculiar thing about the fat man. Most men, when angry, walk hard-heeled, to show their wrath. Otto Roemer, in spite of his fatness, walked like a cat, soundlessly, softly.

Reporters filed out, dropping a laconic word here, another there. These men had seen mayors come and mayors go. Statements were usually the same—merely with variations. One of them nodded to the Ranger, said, "Howdy, Nelly. What gives? You looking after the mayor now?"

McNelly Jones got to his feet, a great deal like a carpenter's pocket rule unfolding a section at a time. He yawned, he stretched, he grinned. He said, "Me? Heck no. The mayor's got him a bodyguard. Me, I just come in to tell him goodbye, that's all."

The reporter snickered. "Why'n't you get yourself kicked out of the Rangers,

like Lightfoot did? Then maybe you can get a easy berth bodyguarding?"

Ranger Jones didn't lose his smile. He was too good a poker player. No one ever knew that the name Lightfoot left a bad taste in his mouth, just as it left the same taste in the mouth of every Ranger who believed in Ranger ideals. He widened the smile if anything, raised his hand in farewell and walked toward the door to Henshaw's private office. Funny—he walked in the same manner the fat man walked, softly, soundlessly, like a cat. Like Otto Roemer. He opened the door and went in, closing it behind him, leaning against it.

PRINCE LIGHTFOOT, ex-Ranger, present bodyguard, grinned up at him from the easy chair where he sat on the small of his back. Prince Lightfoot was a tall man, as tall as Ranger Jones. Once he, too, had been wide of shoulder, small-waisted. Now easy living and a fat job had thickened his belt line and laid a layer of flesh on his muscles.

He said, "Hiya, Nelly, how's crime?"

"No crime," said Ranger Jones laconically. "I'm here, ain't I?"

Prince Lightfoot laughed. Whenever he laughed he seemed to wrinkle his lips back from his big white teeth and the scar on his forehead seemed whiter somehow. "No crime, I'm here! That's pretty good, Nelly. Reckon you've got all the free and easy gambling hells right under your thumb, hanh?"

"Reckon," said Jones, and turned to the Mayor, who sat at his desk playing with a gleaming knife with a four-inch blade. "Mister Mayor," said Jones, "I come down here on orders to do anything you said. You gave me a list of gambling places to close up. Reckon they're closed."

He put a slight inflection on the last word. Milo Henshaw arose, sat on the edge of the desk and began flipping the knife end over end so that its point stuck in the ink-stained wood. He beamed. He even shook the knife at Jones like a man might shake a forefinger. "Ah! Ah! You outdoor men! Anxious to be off, eh, Nelly. Well, sir, I don't blame you! Nothing like the good old Border for a little excitement. Sit down, Nelly, sit down!"

Flippety-flop, flippety-flop went the knife in a gleaming parabola. Nelly Jones sat down on the desk, across from Hizzoner. "Prince has been telling me about the Border thrills," said the mayor absently. Jones nodded, grinned at Prince. Prince's smile widened, his white teeth seemed even larger. But the red began to burn on his throat. For it was a Border episode that got Prince Lightfoot kicked out of the Rangers. Nothing definite, you understand. Just that he wasn't where he should have been several nights in a row when a lot of Texas beef went into Mexico!

"You want we should call it a day now, Your Honor?"

Henshaw — still absently — said, "We've cleaned up everything pretty well, Nelly. You've done a good job. You've closed every place I had on my list."

Jones nodded. He might have added, to himself: "Every place, but not the big places. All the small fry, but no big shots."

"Fact of the matter," went on the Mayor, "is that from other sources, Nelly, I've got some startling information to turn over to the Grand Jury in a couple of days. Private sources, you understand? But your job is over and well done."

He went on to explain expansively that he meant to write a letter to the

governor concerning the good work done by McNelly Jones, Ranger. But Jones understood. He, Jones, had done the dirty work, pulled the little places, the little shots. Now Henshaw, the politico, would step in and get the cream, the glory of knocking off the big shots after the ground work was laid. But Jones didn't mind. Things weren't the same with the Rangers in Texas as they had been in the days of Bill MacDonald and John Hughes. When a Ranger could go into a town and do as he pleased, regardless of local law! Now there was—well, there were Henshaws, and Roemers and Norberrys.

Suddenly Mayor Henshaw said, "Nelly, you fellows are supposed to be a sort of junior F.B.I. What do you make of this?"

He opened a drawer of his desk, tossed a letter before the Ranger. It said:

You Damned Bolsheviky—You let that Red meeting take place at the Auditorium tonight and we'll wreck the place. All we hope is that you'll be there, but no doubt you'll leave town if there's any trouble. This is your last warning. Don't let that meeting go on—and if you do—leave town fast, under your own power or on a rail.
"100,000 Americans"

Ranger Jones shrugged. "You said it out in the meeting room," he said mildly. "This is one of them tempests in a frying pan or something. Reds or Pinks, no matter what they really think politically, they got a right to rent a municipal building. Come today?"

Henshaw tossed it back in the drawer, nodded. "If Roemer and Norberry think they can scare me," he snorted, "they're crazy. I don't think much of anonymous letters." Flippety-flop went the knife!

Jones said, "Reckon I better stick around tonight, Your Honor?"

Prince Lightfoot got up. He stretched. He said, "One riot, one Ranger, eh? Look, Mister Nelly Jones, I'm all the protection Milo needs. I'm—"

He didn't finish because the door burst open and a woman came catapulting in as if thrown from a sling. She was small, all black eyes in an olive-hued face—black eyes and red lips, thinly compressed. She wore a cheap sweater and a cheaper skirt, but her very anger, her defiance, gave her the air of a grande dame!

HIZZONER the Mayor let the knife go without his usual luck. It failed to land on its point, bounced, skipped over Ranger Jones' leg and landed on the floor. He reached for it.

The girl snapped, "So you gave orders not to let me in, did you, Henshaw! If you think you can back out on our permit to use the auditorium, you're crazy! We'll sue! We'll send details to the Civil Liberties committee! We'll—"

Prince Lightfoot reached and caught her by the shoulder, whirled her toward the door. She twisted in his grasp, clawed at his face like a tigress. He shook her. "Listen, you little Mex Bolshivicky," he began.

Henshaw snapped, "Prince! Let her alone. Miss Quintinilla, please! I don't understand you. I have no idea of rescinding your permit. I just made a statement to the press that your meeting would be allowed and protected. I didn't—"

Ranger Jones, holding the knife almost at the base of the blade, exactly where it flattened in order to receive the hinging pin, extended it toward the flustered Mayor. Still denying, still asserting, the Mayor took the knife. He dropped it in the drawer with the anonymous letter, closed the drawer, still spluttering explanations, took a ring of

keys from his pocket and locked the drawer.

Maria Quintinilla, still in Lightfoot's grip, said, "Quit spluttering! You mean to tell me you didn't phone this morning, or have your secretary phone, and tell me that circumstances prevented our meeting tonight? You mean to tell me you didn't instruct your secretary—" She waved a hand. In the doorway stood Leo Sharkey, the Mayor's secretary. Nervously he tried to wipe his spectacles, dropped them, picked them up, sighed with relief to find them unbroken. "—tell your secretary to keep me away from you?"

Henshaw roared, "Leo! What the hell is this?"

Leo promptly dropped his glasses again, gulped, didn't bother to pick them up. "You called me from your office this morning," he faltered, "and told me to call her and tell her, and said she wasn't to see you and—"

"Leo!" roared Hizzoner. "Leo! That is a damnable lie! You're fired, Leo! You've gone over to the enemy's camp! You're the one that's been selling information out of my office. Get out of my sight before I commit murder!"

Leo picked up his glasses and went. Ranger Jones decided he had his tail between his legs. Lightfoot called after him, "You double crosser, if I catch you around the City Hall I'll pin your ears back! Selling us out to Roemer!"

Hizzoner said, "Miss Quintinilla, you're a politician yourself. You see what it means not to be able to trust your own secretary! Your meeting is legal, its culmination is assured, if every policeman in the city has to be there to protect you!"

She smiled then. Ranger Jones decided she wasn't bad to look at. Little, sure, a bit underfed, but not bad, not bad. Lightfoot released her. She said,

"We know Marlinburg protection, Your Honor." She said "Your Honor" like it was a nasty name. Jones grinned. "We'd rather not have it. We're not afraid of dime a dozen political patriots. Or anonymous letters that warn us the place will be bombed, or—"

Hizzoner sputtered. He looked as if apoplexy were just around the corner. By the time he had read half a dozen of the anonymous letters received by this Mexican girl, this secretary of the local Communist party, he was weak and played out. Looking over his shoulder Ranger Jones, for the moment, wasn't surprised that most of them, addressed to the Quintinilla girl, were printed in the same childish manner that was used by the writer of the letter to the Mayor. "100,000 Americans" was evidently a prolific correspondent.

After a few moments, reassured, Maria Quintinilla left the office. Prince Lightfoot dabbed at his scratched face with a handkerchief, muttered, "I wish that babe was a man for about ten minutes. How about a drink, Milo?"

Ranger Jones said laconically, "Wish she was a man, Lightfoot? Reckon you'd like that all right. She must weigh all of a hundred pounds, wringing wet." He glanced at Milo Henshaw, who had unlocked the same drawer and extracted a bottle and a nest of cups.

Lightfoot glared at the Ranger, flushed again. When he was in the service his reputation as a beater of Mexicans—mostly small Mexicans—was pretty bad smelling. "Just the same," he snorted, "that Mex babe and her husband Jose are due for something. Something big."

Milo Henshaw took his own drink first. He shoved the bottle toward his bodyguard. The liquor seemed to make him more affable. "Prince," he smirked, "that girl and her organizers have been

victims of police prosecution. I admire her spirit, if not her principles. I know we could never break her, not here in Marlinburg. What does a wise general do under such circumstances?"

Lightfoot drank out of the bottle.

Ranger Jones said, "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em."

Milo Henshaw chuckled. "And it works in reverse, Nelly. Instead of joining her, I persuaded her to join me. Where do you think I got the dossier concerning Roemer and Norberry that I'm taking to a Grand Jury?"

Liquor choked Lightfoot. Hizzoner came around the desk to pat him on the back. Moving out of his way, Ranger Nelly Jones glanced into the drawer of the desk that held the knife and the anonymous letter. He refused a drink himself, said goodbye, reckoned he'd stick around a bit for the fun tonight and went out. Like a cat.

II

JUST before supper he was laying on his back beneath a live oak tree in Hays Park, named after the first of the famous Ranger Captains. There was enough of the plainsman cowboy running in Jones' blood to make evening the saddest time of the day for him. Introspection came with twilight. He liked it here in the park, where so many of Marlinburg's Mexicans loafed. Where the *dulce* vendors and the Good Humor sellers and the wandering guitar players made their headquarters. But it provoked a funny sort of nostalgia in him.

For example that statue, there in the center of the crossing walks. John C. Hays, the first of the Rangers who left a national reputation. He grinned a little ruefully. Injun fighter. Mexicano fighter. Slayer of badmen! Jack Hays

the fearless, the bold, the unafraid. Those were the days when a Ranger rode the border.

Somehow Ranger McNelly Jones felt kinship with Hays, with McCulloch, and with his namesakes. Though he had never known the old days—he was much too young—he longed for them! Now what could a Ranger fight? Cheap gamblers. Politicians. Petty gangsters. No, stand up fights, the old times were dead.

He bought a paper and read the Mayor's blather there in the twilight. A flock of pigeons gathered around the fountain, bobbed their nosey way almost to his boots. He bought peanuts from a vendor, tossed them to the birds. After awhile, feeling disheartened with life in general, he walked across the park to Market Plaza and ate supper at a Mexican stand. He ate nineteen tamales, a bowl of chili, three enchiladas, and half a pound of candy for dessert. He was a bit disappointed in his supper. Even the chili wasn't as hot as it used to be in the old days.

Back at the hotel he strapped a Half Breed Spring Holster on his left shoulder, took a Colt .44 out of his battered suitcase and thrust it in the holster. It was a duplicate of the one that rode at his right hip. He did all this hopefully, perhaps a little vainly. He brushed his broad white hat, used a towel to shine his boots, decided he didn't need another shave, and went down to bask in the limelight of the hotel lobby.

There were a few *oh's*, a few feminine *ahs*, and a few whispered, "Lookit the Ranger." But they didn't set well. He went out of the lobby and down to the Marlinburg River, where it crisscrossed the town on Houston Street. He stared down into the water, black but sparkling, thought: "A hundred years ago maybe the Comanches had their canoes

on this very river. A man could stand here with a pair of guns like this and pick off a boat load. A man could—"

"Got a match, Ranger?" Sort of a sneer in that voice. He turned. The man was a typical tough. Flat-nosed, gold-toothed, squint-eyed. Jones gave him a match, and got no thanks. The man ran his little eyes over Jones' boots, his holstered gun, his hat. He sneered and swaggered down toward the other end of the bridge.

McNelly Jones' poker face didn't reveal the seething inside his chest. Captain Hays would have pistol-whipped the guy, in spite of politicians! He started down the bridge, making himself walk slow. And soft, like a cat.

Now the tough guy wasn't alone. Three others, like small editions of the first, were with him. They nodded at the big guy, one of them spoke out of the corner of his mouth. He said, "Sure, Monk, we know, we know. We got about thirty lined up. How about the dough?" The tough guy pulled out a roll of bills, handed a couple to the speaker. The three men left.

Jones tapped the tough guy's shoulder. "Got a match?" he asked. His light blue eyes looked as bland, as expressionless as usual. But the tough guy had been around. He took it and grinned. He gave him a match and heeled it away from there, and Ranger Jones felt more let down than even the chili had left him.

He went for a walk. And after a little while he joined the mob that seethed and squirmed in the plaza before the auditorium.

THE auditorium was a beautiful building, white and domed, with wide front steps and leaded glass windows. On the steps now was a thin line of blue-coated policemen, motionless,

red-faced, glowering, only their clubs in their hands. At the right of the building stood a fire truck, a dozen firemen keeping straight faces in spite of the mob's insults. The hose was attached and ready, a fireman stood at the hydrant, the wrench in place.

"Bring on the Reds!"

"Down with Russia!"

"Rush 'em boys, they're inside. Hang the Reds!"

Somebody crawled on top of a car, yelled, "Men! Men! Listen to me!" He got a little attention in the close ring around him. Ranger Jones moved closer. He was raving something about Mayor Henshaw allowing such people to use the auditorium. Raving something about the duties of good American citizens. About the boys that fought and died in France so this thing could occur.

Ranger McNelly Jones grinned wryly. He hadn't fought in France but his father had, and his old man had never said anything about fighting for anything else but Democracy. The speaker slipped and rolled off the top of the car. Another man started to climb up, via the back bumper. But a stentorian voice took attention from him.

Up on the steps of the auditorium another man, in shirtsleeves, with wildly waving arms called, "Come on, you Americans! They're inside, they snuck in the back! Let's pull them out and hang them!"

A policeman took him by the hair and the seat of the pants and threw him down the steps. The crowd yelled, surged forward. Somebody threw a rock. The fireman twisted the wrench. A stream of water from the firehose swept over the mob. It gave ground, surged back. The fireman turned it off.

A loudspeaker had been mounted on the steps of the auditorium. A police

sergeant roared, "Stand back, all of you. Don't make us use force!"

"Give us Henshaw! Henshaw!" someone called, and the crowd took it up. "Henshaw, Henshaw the Red. Give us the Mayor, we'll hang him too!"

And now another rioter was on the top of the same car, the car that was an island in the sea of white faces. He yelled, "Are you guys mice or men? We gonna let them cops stop us? Henshaw's a Red! He's inside! Should we get him?"

Ranger Jones grinned. The man urging them on was the tough guy of the match. The tough guy of the bridge. But instead of surging forward, a hush spread over the crowd. For the husky throat of the loud speaker was calling, "Hizzoner the Mayor! Hizzoner the Mayor!"

A group of people came out of the auditorium and grouped about the microphone. Hizzoner the Mayor was a stubborn man. They told him not to come, but he came because of it! Ranger Jones grinned. Standing beside the Mayor, and slightly behind him, was Prince Lightfoot, scowling at the mob, his teeth white and gleaming as a flood light hit the group. A Mexican stood on the other side, and at the Mexican's left, proudly, defiantly stood Maria Quintinilla, La Libertad to her followers.

"Fellow Citizens," roared the Mayor. "You are misled, you are being used as tools! As your elected mayor I call on you to disperse and go home. These people are citizens of our fair city, just as you are citizens! Look at them, José Quintinilla, his wife, Maria Quintinilla! They have their rights, just as you have yours. I beg of you—"

"Henshaw the Red, Henshaw the Red! String them up!"

Ranger Jones, carried forward by the surging crowd, saw the tough guy of the

bridge in the lead. He saw the police brace themselves for the coming rush, glimpsed the firemen pointing the hose, out of the corner of his eye. Someone threw a brick. The next was a club. Glass tinkled. The hose roared into life. Women screamed. And not twenty feet ahead of him, Ranger Jones saw the tough guy draw back his arm and throw something round and big as a croquet ball!

Something exploded. The steps of the auditorium were obscured by smoke. As Jones was pushed forward into it, it blinded him; it was like a black fog, cutting off vision. He laid about him with his fists, felt good when they smacked on bone. He went down when somebody tripped him, and came up fighting blindly and exultantly, enjoying the bony shock, even enjoying the stray blows that came his way. Someone rolled beneath him, the smoke lifted a bit, he reached down and stood a policeman on his feet. The policeman promptly swung his club at him, missed and went down again, blood streaming from his split skull where a hurled rock had caught him.

THE loudspeaker came to life. A woman screamed over it. The sound reverberated from broken doors and white stone walls, bounced out over the heads of the crowd. She screamed again. It sounded to Jones as if she was calling, "José! José!"

And suddenly a new voice roared, "The Mayor's down! Henshaw is killed! The Mayor's been murdered!"

And the riot was over almost as soon as it had started. Murder! Who wanted to be a party to murder. Badgering a few Mexican Communists was one thing. Killing a mayor was another.

A shot spat. But only one! Then Jones was breasting the fleeing crowd,

going up the steps into the smoke. Above the jargon and babble a woman moaned and sobbed. He saw her first. It was Maria Quintinilla. As the smoke cleared a bit he saw that she was down on her knees, that she held the head of a Mexican man clutched close against her bloody breast. "José, José, speak to me!" Tears streamed down her twisted face. "They've killed you! Killed you!"

Then Jones was beside her, shaking her, saying, "Please ma'am, please!"

Dully she looked at him. All about them pounded footsteps in the smoke. She said, "They killed him, killed him! I told him it was dangerous! Murdered him, shot him down like a dog! He and Henshaw, because the dogs of gamblers—!" She fainted.

Jones, pushed over by someone who ran past him, made for the group at the microphone. The smoke was clearing now. Crouched over the Mayor, a gun in his hand, was Prince Lightfoot. The scar on his head gleamed white, his teeth were bared. A policeman and a doctor leaned over the bloody thing that once was Milo Henshaw, the Baby Congressman, the Mayor of Marlinburg. Jones, too, peered close, and retched. For the head of the Mayor was almost cut from his body.

Lightfoot saw him, holstered his gun. "I got the dirty murderer," he grated. "I got him and I hope to God he's dead!" To the policeman he snapped, "It was José Quintinilla, damn him! I was right beside him. I got him, he'll never kill another white man!"

Somebody roared, "Quintinilla killed the Mayor! The Reds got him. Find them! We'll lynch them! Get the woman, get La Libertad!"

Jones hadn't time to think of the fickleness of mobs. He whirled toward the spot where he had left Maria Quintinilla. But she was gone. Evidently

scurried to safety. José was there, yes. Dead, shot through the chest by Prince Lightfoot, after he had killed the Mayor.

THE Plaza was empty. Detectives and policemen gathered around Lightfoot. An ambulance wailed in the distance. Lightfoot was giving his version "—and as soon as that smoke bomb hit, the Mex leaped in with his knife! It was over before I could stop it. Like a dummy I stood there while he wiped the handle on his shirt, then I drew and got him, the dog!"

The knife was passed around. There was nothing unusual about it. A four-inch blade, well-sharpened, and—poetic justice?—the same sort of knife that had gone flippety-flop on the Mayor's desk! Jones took it. And as he looked at it the hackles on his neck rose, his heart beat wildly.

He said to Lightfoot, "Looks like the same sort of knife the Mayor had in his office."

Lightfoot snapped, "There's a million knives like that in this town. It's a good Mex knife. It was a plot, see, to get Henshaw! Look, remember this letter?" He drew the anonymous letter from his pocket and handed it to a detective, explaining that Henshaw had received it through the mail that very day. "Somebody threw that smoke bomb and under cover of it, Quintinilla knifed the Mayor! Give me the knife, Jones, what's—?"

He snatched the knife from the Ranger, handed it to a detective. But his eyes never left Jones' face. The Ranger stared at Lightfoot with no expression at all. From the bleakness of his features no man might have guessed what was going on in his mind.

For a peculiar thing had occurred. Jones knew the knife was the knife the

Mayor himself owned! He remembered picking it off the floor, near the butt end of the blade, where the blade flattened to receive the hinge pin, remembering handing it back to Henshaw. The knife had been oily! The black pall of smoke had evidently touched it as it lay beside the microphone! And there on that flattened piece of steel was a print of a thumb that Jones could never mistake.

For it was the print of his own thumb! He knew it as well as he knew his own signature. The tiny scar at the upper right was there. The whorls were the same. It was his print!

Suspiciously Lightfoot gazed at him. "Say," he crowed, "that cinches it. Remember the girl, the Quininilla girl was there? She could have lifted it, passed it to her husband! She could have—maybe it's the Mayor's own knife!"

He whirled to the detectives, spouted words like water from a tap.

After a while Ranger McNelly Jones said, "No use my sticking around. I can't help none. Reckon I'll go back to the hotel. Funny, Lightfoot, last I saw of that letter you got, and the killer's knife, they was in a drawer at the Mayor's office. And he seemed mighty particular about locking it. Well, so long."

He turned and walked away slowly, waiting to let the ambulance pull up at the curb.

III

AT FIFTEEN minutes after nine, someone knocked on the door of his room. A gun in his hand, he crossed the room, said, "Come in," and twisted the doorknob, stepping behind the door.

A gun came into the room, a gun and a thick hand, wrapped about its butt. Ranger McNelly Jones slashed down at it with his own gun. The thick hand

opened spasmodically. Before the gun hit the floor and exploded, Jones had seized the thick wrist, jerked the tough guy of the bridge and the smoke bomb into the room, kneed him viciously in the face and closed and locked the door.

He stood there smiling faintly, leaning against the door, waiting for what he knew would follow. Ten seconds later the phone rang, a fist hammered on the door. He answered the phone and said he hadn't heard a shot. He hung it up in time to stomp on the tough guy's hand. He was reaching for the gun. Then he kicked him in the jaw and went to the door.

The first person he saw was his friend, the tired reporter. He said, "Hey, by God, it's Nelly! What's wrong, Nelly?" He tried to push in.

Ranger Jones thrust him out. He said mildly, "Can't a hombre drop a gun without someone calling the riot squad? Beat it, newspaper, I'm going to bed."

It took him twelve minutes by his big silver watch to revive the guy that wasn't so tough any more. In fifteen minutes he knew where Maria Quintinilla had disappeared to. The meek guy, bound and gagged, was in the bath tub. And Ranger McNelly Jones, feeling a bit better about these days and times, locked his door behind him and whistled going toward the elevator.

He caught a cab and drove three blocks before he stopped it. When he got out a battered roadster pulled up. The reporter grinned out at him. Jones said, a bit sadly, "As long as you're trailing me you might as well ride the cab. You can put it on your expense account." The reporter got in with him and they drove off.

Outside Tod Norberry's house the reporter said, "Now look, Nelly, use your head. If it's like you say, get some cops. I'm going to—" He gulped and

shuddered as Nelly Jones jovially thrust a .44 into his stomach.

"You're going to go around to the back door and shoot hell out of anybody that comes out, newspaper! And if you take a sneak on me I'll hunt you all through Hell and Texas. *Vamos!*"

The reporter vamoosed.

Ranger Jones rang the front doorbell. He didn't know much about peeping through windows, and tapping telephone wires. He was a Ranger. When he wanted to get into a place, the best way to get in, he'd always figured, was to go through the front door.

After a long while the door opened cautiously. Somebody said, "What do you want?"

Ranger Jones thrust his foot in the door. Mildly he said, "Well, now, Mr. Norberry, I reckon I want in worse than anything right now. Then we can talk about it."

The voice from the darkness said, "Ranger, I'll have your job and your hide for getting me out of bed. Git!"

Ranger Jones said, "I been talking to a fellow named Archibald Samuels, Mr. Norberry. He sent me."

Norberry cursed. Not long. For Ranger McNelly Jones pushed hard on the door and the edge of it caught the politician across the forehead. Only then, when he had fallen backward, did the dim hall light reveal the gun in his hand. Ranger Jones gave him a chance. He waited until the smarting tears had left Norberry's eyes, waited until Norberry had the gun almost level. Then he shot him through the shoulder.

He went to the stairs and called, "You Lightfoot! And you, Roemer, if you're up there. Come on down and bring the girl. Samuels said he brought her here before you sent him after me. Come on, gents, the Rangers is in charge!"

But Lightfoot wasn't upstairs. He was in the velvet-curtained living room. Jones, like a wary animal, caught the swing of the curtain and fell on his face as the gun roared. Most of the buckshot went over his head. But enough of them tore into his shoulder to make him lose his temper. He sent four shots through that velvet curtain. A sawed-off shotgun pitched out, skidded across the waxed floor. The curtains came down, caught in the hands of Prince Lightfoot. Lightfoot's teeth, Jones noted, were still white. Even if they were a good six feet from his dead body.

JONES sat up. He reloaded his gun. He called, "You Roemer, if you're up there, come on, with your hands up!"

His answer was lead, hot lead from the top of the stairs. Roemer, the butcher with the little pig eyes, came down the stairs. He came shooting, the way Ranger Jones liked, with a gun in each fat hand.

Nelly Jones moved over behind the newel post as a bullet spun him in that direction. He waited a split second till the fire slackened, then he shot Otto Roemer neatly through the pig-like paunch, snapped another shot at him when the fat body came end over end down the steps. The second shot caught him between the eyes.

Calmly Jones sat there reloading again, eyeing the steps. His shoulder hurt. His left arm hurt. He called, "Come on down, if there's anymore. Come on, the Rangers are here."

And in a minute, Maria Quintinilla came down the steps, slowly, stiffly. As if she was saying "Good evening," she said, "He left the door open. He was trying to make me tell what José found out about the lottery, what José. My poor dead husband told the Mayor."

She fainted and Jones felt bad because

he didn't catch her. But she lit on Roemer and Roemer was soft. Plenty soft now.

So when the reporter was there, on the phone, bug-eyed, white, perspiring. Prompted by McNelly Jones, who was clumsily binding a handkerchief around his upper left arm, he was saying, "—yeah, yeah, get it straight, see? There was a spy in Henshaw's office, someone that kept Norberry and Roemer informed of all that was going on. The Mayor thought it was Leo Sharkey, but it was Lightfoot, working hand in glove with the gamblers. The Red meeting was too good a chance to miss. They had an opportunity to get several birds with one stone, see? José Quintinilla had made a deal with the Mayor, he'd found out enough stuff on the local lotteries to take before the Grand Jury, and had handed it to the Mayor. See? What's that?"

Ranger McNelly Jones stooped over Roemer and admired his handiwork, decided the wing shot was a work of art. He felt a lot better.

"They wrote the Quintinillas and the Mayor both, practically daring them to be present at that meeting. Catch on? The Mayor was a stubborn guy, may his soul rest in peace! He had to come to save his face! Jones got suspicious when he noticed "100,000 Americans" sent what was practically challenges to both parties."

Ranger Jones said, "No I didn't! I'm no detective! I just noticed—"

"Shut up," snapped the reporter. "No, no, not you, I was speaking to Jones. He's gone modest on me! What really got him going was he ran into Monk Samuels—Archibald is his real name. Yeah, saw him pay some hoodlums on the bridge. And at the riot he heard Monk make a provocative speech, saw him throw the smoke bomb. Hunh?

Dumb luck hell! Wait till I finish."

He went on excitedly to tell how Jones had found his own thumbprint, like a signature, on the knife that had killed Henshaw. How Lightfoot had produced the letter. How Lightfoot, suspecting that Jones knew something was rotten, had bobbed up with a theory that the Quintinilla woman had lifted the knife.

"And that didn't make sense," crowed the reporter to his editor. "Jones knew Lightfoot had access to the Mayor's desk, knew he could have lifted both knife and letter. See what Lightfoot did? He had this Samuels throw the smoke bomb. Then he killed the Mayor, and shot Quintinilla! Samuels admitted getting the woman away in the mixup! Then Samuels went after Jones, Jones leading him on. Hanh? Wait." He turned to Jones. "Where's Samuels?"

"Asleep in my bathtub," said Jones. He was having a tough time rolling a cigarette. His left hand was sore.

After a while, when he and the reporter stood at a bar hoisting a fast one, the reporter shuddered. "I was just thinking," he said, shuddering again. "My God, I'd hate to be a Ranger! You knew at least three of them was there! Where in hell did you get nerve enough to tackle them alone?"

Ranger Jones just smiled into his beer. He didn't say anything, but inside he was glowing. Times weren't so bad. And as far as nerve, or confidence went, he was remembering what Captain Bill MacDonald, famous Ranger, had once said. It was:

No man in the wrong can stand up against a fellow that's in the right and keeps on a-coming!



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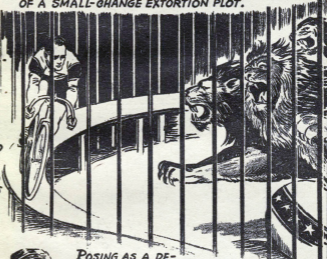
RUM-
RUNNER

CON-MAN DE LUXE

ARTHUR "DAPPER DON" COLLINS---AMERICA'S BEST-DRESSED SWINDLER WHO GARNERED \$4,000,000 BY PLAIN AND FANCY FRAUDS---WENT TO PRISON LAST YEAR FOR WHAT MAY BE THE REST OF HIS LIFE, BECAUSE OF A SMALL-CHANGE EXTORTION PLOT.

ALTHOUGH COLLINS CLAIMED DESCENT FROM A FINE OLD SOUTHERN FAMILY, HE WAS BORN ARTHUR TOURBILLON IN A PARIS APACHE QUARTER. HE FIRST APPEARED IN THE U.S. AS "DAREDEVIL TOURBILLON," RIDING A BIYELE AROUND A TRAKK IN A CAGE OF LIONS.

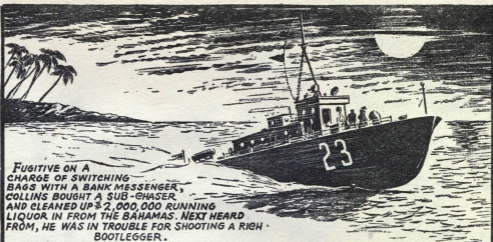
IN 1908 HE PAID A \$5 FINE IN NEW YORK FOR ROBBING TELEPHONE BOXES. A PERIOD AS A SALESMAN FOR AN EXCLUSIVE TAILOR GAVE HIM A TASTE FOR FINE RAIMENT, AND CAME TO AN END WHEN HE WAS SENTENCED TO 8 MONTHS FOR A HOTEL STICKUP.



POSING AS A DETECTIVE, COLLINS SHOOK DOWN A WANTED EMBEZZLER FOR \$5,000 AND WENT TO JAIL FOR A YEAR. USING THE TIME TO PRACTICE SLEIGHT-OF-HAND, UPON HIS RELEASE HE INVESTED THE \$5,000 IN A LAVISH WARDROBE AND WORKED THE TRANS-ATLANTIC LINERS AS A CARD SHARP.



HIS GENIAL, SUAVE CHARM INSPIRED CONFIDENCE AND BROUGHT IN MONEY FROM ONE FRAUDULENT SCHEME AFTER ANOTHER. WITH A BEAUTIFUL ACCOMPLICE HE COLLECTED SOME \$300,000 VIA THE OLD "BADGER GAME," AND SPENT 2 YEARS IN THE ATLANTA PEN.



FUGITIVE ON A CHARGE OF SWITCHING BAGS WITH A BANK MESSENGER, COLLINS BOUGHT A SUB-CHASER AND CLEANED UP \$2,000,000 RUNNING LIQUOR IN FROM THE BAHAMAS. NEXT HEARD FROM, HE WAS IN TROUBLE FOR SHOOTING A RICH BOOTLEGGERS.

FLEEING TO FRANCE, HE BROKE THE DEAUVILLE BAGGAGE BANK 3 TIMES FOR A MILLION FRANCES.

NEW YORK DETECTIVES ARRESTED HIM AT A PARIS SIDEWALK CAFE AND HE SERVED A YEAR FOR THE BANK MESSENGER JOB. FROM THEN ON HE SEEMED TO HAVE LOST HIS TOUCH. THINGS WENT FROM BAD TO WORSE.



LAST YEAR DON COLLINS-- A THIN, HAGGARD OLD MAN OF 59, BROKE BUT STILL DAPPER -- WAS SENTENCED TO FROM 15 TO 30 YEARS FOR IMPERSONATING AN IMMIGRATION OFFICER IN ATTEMPTING TO EXTORT \$300 FROM A WOMAN BY THREATENING TO DEPORT HER HUSBAND.

IN SING SING HE WAS, IRONICALLY, ASSIGNED TO THE BROOM SQUAD-- TO KEEP THE PLACE CLEAN!



Jan was fast as well as heavy
and his right fist connected

Things To Worry About

By David Goodis

PRETTY, isn't it?"
"Yeah—very pretty."

"Whoever did it must have been sort of peeved about something. Looks as if she's been stabbed a million times."

"It's a shame. Such a good girl."

They were standing on a canary-colored rug in the canary-colored nineteenth floor apartment that belonged to Vina Villon. But the classy set-up wouldn't do Vina any good now.

She was dead. She was lying on the

canary-colored rug and making it turn red.

The two detectives turned to the mob of cops, reporters, photographers and the sprinkling of wizards from the homicide squad.

One of the detectives was a fat guy named Mike. He had a big mouth and now he used it. "Fade from the doorway, you phonies, and let Abner come in."

Abner came in.

His name was Abner Neven and it

was a well-known name because this guy was a thirty-three-year-old playboy who made all the columns because he was a wise guy and a sharp guy and he dressed smooth and acted smooth and actually accomplished something in this pesky world. He was not a big guy, nor was he pretty-faced. He was quite average.

He was about five eight and he weighed a ski and squash and jiu-jitsu-trained 150. He had healthy light brown hair and light brown eyes and kind lips.

He had a lot of money and he lived very well and every once in awhile he made public exhibition of his talents in criminology. A few weeks before this Villon trouble he had solved a tough one for the D.A., and now they had called him in to see if he could open up a few wedges in a case that looked troublesome.

"Hello, lads," he said. He looked down at Vina Villon and shook his head and took a silver-cased notebook from his pocket. He flipped the pages, murmuring, "I made a few notes on this job while on my way over. Just a little background material, sort of. . . ."

The other detective, a tall, thin guy named Joe, made a face and said, "We know all about the background. Tell us who did it. That's what we want to—"

"Aw shut up," Mike said.

"Who you tellin' to shut up?" Joe said.

Abner stepped between them and murmured, "Be friends, be friends." The crowd in the doorway was thickening and Abner looked at them and said, "Did anyone see this lady get killed to pieces?"

They all looked at him as if he was a wise guy, which he was.

Joe and Mike were offering each other dark looks and then they were staring at Abner, because he was say-

ing, "Here's the story, lads. Vina Villon, as you can readily see, is quite an attractive lady, even in death. In life she was in a racket where it is quite easy for a lady to make enemies. She was in show business. Once she was a striptease artiste. Two nights ago she signed a contract to play the lead in a new musical comedy that is being produced by Jan Wanchisse. On that memorable evening there was a party to celebrate the historic event, and several colorful personalities were present, and . . ."

"Does that tell us who did it?" Joe said. The big, tall guy looked like a crane when he got sore, and he was sore now.

"Do you really want to know who did it?" Abner said.

"No, I'm tryin' to find out who won the third race at Pimlico today," Joe said nastily.

"Brainless Max," replied Abner, "paying \$28.50. And if you'd like to know who ended the existence of Vina Villon, I can give adequate answer."

"When?" Joe said.

"Now," Abner said.

"Who?" Joe said.

"Jan Wanchisse," Abner said.

JAN WANCHISSE was fifty-three years old and he was five nine and he weighed 250 when he was in training. His fat man's face looked just like a fat man's face and he wore a thousand dollar wig that helped matters very little.

He was sitting behind the teakwood desk in his teakwood and chromium and bottle-green velvet office on 45th Street off Broadway when Joe and Mike and Abner Neven walked in.

"Good morning, Abner," he said.

"Hello, Jan," Abner said. "Meet Joe and Mike. . . ."

"Sorry, Abner," Jan said. "The cast

is made up already. I have all the comedians I want. I don't care how good these boys are. . . ."

"You tryin' to be witty?" Joe said. He was sore. He hauled off to punch Jan Wanchisse in the nose.

Abner pushed Joe gently, and then turned to Jan and said, "What did Vina do?"

"What do you mean?" Jan said.

"She must have done something."

"What are you talking about?"

"You killed her, Jan."

"What?"

"You killed her. If you don't believe me, I'll show you. I'll take you up to her apartment and show you her corpse. Then I'll tell you how and why you killed her and you'll tell me what a bright lad I am."

Jan Wanchisse was on his feet and he was moving out from behind the desk and he was making a lunge for Abner. Abner was dodging, but Jan was fast as well as heavy and his right fist connected. Abner took the sock on the side of the jaw and took a fall.

Joe and Mike were closing in on Wanchisse and the fat man was out to do real damage. His eyes had a lunatic glow and he swung a fist that was a hammer and knocked Mike across the room. Mike's head came in contact with the metal base of an ashtray and Mike went out. Jan turned on the big, tall guy, swinging wide and wild.

He clipped Joe in the mouth and Joe turned a somersault. Then he was taking queer intakes of breath, and he was jumping on top of Joe. His fingers were around Joe's throat and his thumb was pressing into Joe's jugular vein. He was choking the big, tall guy to death and he was out to make a quick job of it.

Abner was semi-conscious, feeling a lot of lead in his brain and a lot of pain in his jaw. He was trying to get to his

knees and at the same time he was looking at Jan Wanchisse, straddling Joe and choking the guy to death.

There wasn't time to walk over there and pull Jan away. And besides, Jan was too big to be pulled away. There was just about time enough to use a bullet in order to stop Jan from killing Joe.

Abner took a short automatic out of his coat pocket and pointed it at the big fat man and pulled the trigger. The rod had a nifty little silencer and there was very little noise as Jan rolled away from the tall guy and then tried to crawl across the dark green rug toward Abner. He crawled very slowly, and then he stopped crawling and died.

Joe was coughing and getting up off the floor and holding his throat. Mike was snapping out of it. Abner was looking at the dead body and then staring at the telephone on the teakwood desk, because the telephone was ringing.

"Hello."

"Hello—Mr. Wanchisse?"

"No, it isn't Wanchisse. It's Neven."

Abner recognized the voice at the other end of the wire. It was Donnell, the D.A.

"The boys told me you went over to see Wanchisse," the D.A. said. "You took Joe and Mike along, didn't you?"

"That's right," Abner said. He looked at Joe and Mike, who were staring at him and then staring at the corpse on the floor. Joe was rubbing his throat. Mike was holding a handkerchief to the back of his head.

"Well now look, Abner," the D.A. was saying. "I'm sorry to have put you to all this trouble, but the whole thing's cleared up now."

"Yes?" Abner said. "Tell me about it."

"There's been a confession," the D.A. was saying. "A kid named Henshaw.

He's in the outside office now. Damn shame, because he doesn't look like a murderer. The old story. Very young, only about twenty-six, a tall, handsome kid. Trying for years to get a break on Broadway. He was slated for juvenile lead in Wanchisse's new show. But Vil-lon loused it up for him. He went up there and stabbed her. It's first degree, all right. Pre-conceived stuff. And . . ."

"Is the confession on paper?" Abner said. He saw Joe and Mike go white when he said it. He grinned at them.

"No," the D.A. was saying. "But I'm going to let Henshaw start on it now and—"

"Hold it," Abner said. "Hold it until I get over there." He put down the receiver.

"**W**HAT'S the deal? What's the deal?" Joe was saying. "What's this big deal about a confession?"

"Some lad confessed," Abner said.

"Whaddya mean? Whaddya mean?"

Joe was yelling. Perspiration was running down his cheeks. Similar agitation had gained a hold on Mike.

"I mean that some lad confessed," Abner said.

"But look what's on the floor," Joe said.

"I'm looking." Abner looked and grinned.

"He's dead," Joe was saying. "You shot him. Do you realize what a stink this is gonna raise?" Joe was getting excited.

"Now don't get excited," Abner said.

"He's tellin' me not to get excited,"

Joe was yelling. "He goes and shoots an innocent man and he's tellin' me not to get excited." Joe turned to Mike and yelled, "This guy brings us here and then gets us in a fight with a one hundred percent innocent party and then kills the guy, actually kills him." He

turned to Abner and yelled, "All right, wise guy. You pulled a funny one this time, all right. You got yourself in a sweet little jam. Let's see how much good that smooth talkin' is gonna do you now."

"Don't talk so loud," Abner said. "The secretary in the next room'll think there's an argument in here."

Joe and Mike looked at each other and then they looked at Abner.

"Let's take a walk, lads," Abner said. He put his hand on the back of Mike's head and drew it away bloody. He gazed at the marks on Joe's throat and smiled contentedly.

"Good," he said. "Very good."

He looked around the room, and frowned.

Very carefully he overturned a few chairs, pulled the rug out of place.

"What're you doin'?" Joe said.

"I've been taking a course in stage settings," Abner murmured, "and this is my homework." He looked down at the corpse and said, "You used to be a producer, Wanchisse. What do you think of this job?"

"The guy's insane," Joe was saying. "He's stark insane."

"Save the psycho-analysis until we get to the D.A.'s office," Abner said.

In the reception room the young secretary looked at Abner searchingly. He returned the glance and then he frowned and said, "Maybe you better come along with us."

"I didn't do anything," she said. She was a blonde kid, good-looking and scared.

"What did she do?" Joe said.

"Shut up and let him handle this," Mike said. "He knows what he's doing."

But Mike didn't get that one across, not even to himself. His face asked a lot of questions.

IN THE D.A.'s office there was the usual crowd and then there was this kid Henshaw. He was sitting across the desk from Donnell, and the D.A. was near tears. Henshaw had a True Blue Harold look on his face.

Abner walked over and put his hand on Henshaw's shoulder and said, "Why don't you cut it out?"

The D.A. was clearing the office, except for the principals and one strong-arm cop. Then he was turning to Abner and saying, "He's all ready to write the I-did-it."

"He's not writing anything," Abner said.

Henshaw was standing up and sobbing, "I hated her. I killed her and I'm glad of it. I'd kill her again if I had the chance. I hated her! I hated her!"

"All of which seems to imply that you hated her," Abner said. "But you didn't kill her."

"I don't understand this," the D.A. said.

"I do," Abner said. He was taking the silver-case notebook out of his pocket and saying, "It's quite a simple matter, with very little tedious deduction required." He glanced down at the opened notebook, let his eyes move casually about the faces in the quiet room and said, "Whenever I hear anything that might be of useful reference in the future, I make a note of it. It's a good habit."

"... hated her. And I killed her!" Henshaw yelled.

"Aw shut up," Mike said.

"It so happened," Abner was saying, "that I was present at the party two nights ago. And two very interesting things took place at the party. Vina Villon played a major role in both these pleasant interludes. The first was a debate, Villon versus Wanchisse. This was witnessed by practically all the guests,

and had to do with Jan's signing up another great lady of the stage to share Vina's star billing. The Villon temperament triumphed, with Jan Wanchisse making weak surrender, with every important name on Broadway looking on. Item number one.

"Item two concerns a quiet discussion between Vina Villon and a lad named Henshaw . . ."

"You didn't hear—"

"Oh yes I did, Henshaw. I saw and heard and all because I have a dirty little habit of not minding my own business," Abner said. "I saw you and Vina walking out on the balcony and I heard you calling each other names. I decided to listen in on the open wire and I heard everything. . . ."

Henshaw was sobbing. "Then—you know—"

"Yes, lad, I know." Abner turned to Joe and said, "We are now ready for the psycho-analysis, and if you don't mind, I'll take care of that end of the matter."

"I still don't understand . . ." the D.A. was saying.

"You will—in another moment or so," Abner said. "Henshaw did not kill Vina Villon, for the very good reason that he loved her."

"I hated her!" Henshaw yelled.

"... and loved her at the same time," Abner said. "That's what I heard you telling her out on the balcony. Then and there I analyzed you, Henshaw, and the conclusion is that you're a very weak-minded lad. You feel now that Vina, as well as a career, is lost to you. And so you're becoming a much-publicized martyr. You're trying to commit the most sensational suicide possible—by confessing to the murder of Vina Villon."

Henshaw broke then. His sobs were those of a child.

THE D.A. was banging a fist on the desk. "I still don't get it, Abner. If Henshaw didn't kill her, who did?"

"Wanchisse."

"When, how and why?"

Abner grinned and said, "The coroner will tell you when and the homicide geniuses will tell you how and I will tell you why."

"More psycho-analysis," Joe said.

"That's right, Joe. It's good stuff, too. I majored in it at Dartmouth and took a master's degree at N.Y.U., and . . ."

"What about Wanchisse?" the D.A. said.

"A very quick-tempered type," Abner murmured. "Joe and Mike will back me up on that. And when a quick-tempered type loses out in an argument to someone like Vina Villon, the results are sometimes quite violent in nature. Vina shamed Wanchisse, made a fool out of him in front of all those Broadway biggies. And Jan knew that there were scores of others beside himself who were just aching to murder the lady. He must have thought the whole thing over and become quite excited and so he went up there and killed her."

The D.A. was walking around the room, chewing up his lips. "But that's all flimsy stuff," he was saying. "You know as well as I, Abner, we can't send a man to the chair on those assumptions."

"You won't have to send him to the chair," Abner said.

"What do you mean?"

"He's dead."

"What do you mean?"

"I killed him," Abner said. "Take a look at Mike's head and at Joe's throat. Then get them to tell you the story. Then check up on it by going back to Wanchisse's office and looking over the

scene of our little quarrel. You'll see for yourself that everything fits in quite nicely."

Joe was looking at Mike and then they were both looking at Donnell and Donnell was looking at the huddled, sobbing form of Henshaw and Abner was grinning at all of them.

Then Donnell was shaking his head slowly, and his expression said, I-still-don't-know-but-it-must-be-so. He looked at the blonde secretary, who sat alone at the opposite side of the room.

"What about her?" he said, frowning at Abner and pointing to the girl.

"Yes," she murmured, an expression halfway between fear and bewilderment clouding her features. "What has all this got to do with me. Where do I come in?"

"Right about here," Abner said. "First I'll ask you a few exceedingly necessary questions. Are you married?"

She shook her head slowly.

"Have you had lunch yet?"

She shook her head slowly, and now it was a tie between bewilderment and indignation. She saw Joe and Mike and the D.A. nodding at each other knowingly.

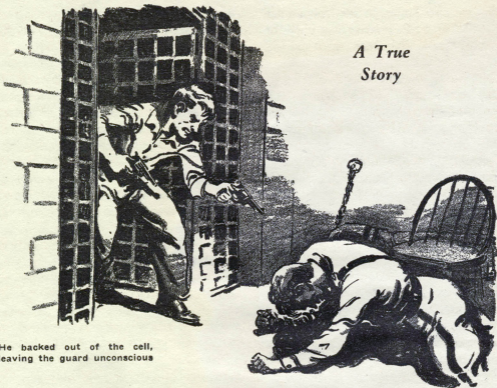
"May I take you out to lunch?" Abner said.

The blonde frowned at him and then she smiled and when she smiled she was really very pretty.

She and Abner walked out of the office together.

"... never saw her before in his life," the D.A. murmured. He and Joe and Mike were staring dazedly at the door. Even Henshaw was trying to figure it out. He had paused in his hysterical sobbing, and puzzlement blanked his features, and then he stared foggily at Joe.

Joe was saying, "Psycho-analysis—I gotta begin studyin' that stuff."



*A True
Story*

He backed out of the cell,
leaving the guard unconscious

Casshel's Escape

By C. V. Tench

FROM the condemned cell in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police barracks at Calgary, Alberta, Ernest Casshel, one of the very few men who ever escaped from the custody of the Mounted, could hear the sound of carpenters at work. They were erecting in the small, enclosed exercise yard the gallows on which Casshel was due to be hanged within a few days—a fate all agreed he richly deserved.

Beneath a pleasing personality, Casshel concealed a mean and treacherous nature. Befriended by a well-to-do rancher who gave him a good job, Casshel had repaid his benefactor's

kindness by killing him with an axe as he slept for the sake of the few hundred dollars in the old safe in the living room of the ranch house. It was a crudely executed crime and Casshel was speedily arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced to be hanged. Now he sat in the death cell awaiting the day of his execution.

Actually there were two men in the death cell, Casshel and a young constable, for in Canada the death watch regulations are rigidly enforced. After a murderer has been sentenced to be hanged three policemen are told off for death guard duty. They take it in turns

spending two hours in the condemned cell and four in the guard room until the death sentence has been duly carried out.

It is an unpleasant, tedious duty cordially disliked by all policemen and usually relegated to the youngest members of the force. Another rule rigidly enforced is that the member of the "Death Watch" in the cell with the condemned man must not carry his service revolver for fear a desperate prisoner might catch him unawares and snatch it from him. It was, perhaps, this last regulation that helped Ernest Casshel to make his sensational break for freedom.

Of the two men now in the cell the young constable was far more visibly affected by the grim sounds of sawing and hammering than was the condemned man. The policeman sat stiff and erect on a plain wooden chair. Casshel sat at the small table, chin cupped in his hands, studying a letter he had received that morning. The authorities had allowed him to exchange letters with his only living close relative—an older brother who had hastened to Calgary as soon as he had heard of his young brother's terrible predicament.

In addition to letters, Casshel's older brother was permitted to visit him for a few minutes every three days. The letter Casshel was now studying told him that his brother would be visiting him again soon and also that his brother would come armed and to prepare for a desperate break for liberty!

This was all in a seemingly harmless letter that had been read and studied by the officer in charge of the Calgary detachment of the Mounted, the provost-sergeant in charge of all prisoners, all three members of the death watch, and then passed on to Casshel. Yet, in spite of these rigid precautions, Casshel and

his brother had actually been writing to one another in code, a very simple code known as the "punctuation cipher."

The punctuation cipher was the most crafty Casshel and his brother could have used for they both posed as more or less ignorant ranch hands and stated openly that they hadn't had much schooling. Therefore, when censoring their notes to one another, the authorities took this factor into account and concluded that both brothers were exceedingly weak in the matter of correct punctuation.

But actually, Casshel and his brother were exceedingly careful in the matter of punctuation, for the punctuation cipher consists of placing a punctuation mark after every word which comprises part of the real message, regardless of how garbled it may make the whole letter read. The last letter Casshel received from his brother read like this:

Dear Ernest:

I shall be visiting, and bringing, the smokes with me I heard from Jim the other day he is now with the Field Artillery, and seems to like it the tailor has put a new inside, lining in my overcoat.

Lem

From this, using the code, Casshel deciphered:

Visiting bringing artillery inside overcoat.

THE older Casshel brother also timed his last visit so that it exactly coincided with the changing of the death watch in the condemned cell, which to a great extent distracted attention from himself and his movements.

Lem Casshel was not, of course, allowed to talk to his brother inside the cell, but the front of this was open to view, with long steel bars, having considerable space between them, reaching from floor to ceiling.

There came a brief moment during the changing of the death guard when no policeman was actually in the cell. Instantly Lem Casshel leaned forward against the bars as if to attempt a last embrace, his overcoat—with two revolvers sewn loosely in the lining—flapping open as he did so. Pressing in his turn close to the bars, it was the work of a second for Casshel to withdraw the weapons and swiftly tuck them away inside his shirt. All the time, in voices choked with pretended sobs, the two brothers kept up what was supposed to be their last conversation with each other in this world. It was a seemingly poignant moment and the guards were reluctant to intrude, but at last one of them suggested quietly that time was up and Lem Casshel, still shaking with forced sobs, turned away, leaving a desperate and heavily armed killer in the custody of his unsuspecting jailors!

The hours dragged slowly on and presently, with the coming of darkness, the sounds of the grim preparations in the exercise yard ceased. And then, half an hour before the mounting of the night guard the provost-sergeant unlocked the door of the death cell to carry out the nightly routine procedure of searching the condemned man.

As he fumbled with keys and lock, the provost-sergeant called over his shoulder to the guard further along the corridor to take his place in the anteroom. In the ordinary way he should have waited until the constable was actually in the anteroom and had buckled on his revolver, but routine of long usage tends to make men careless and the provost-sergeant did not wait to see this done before proceeding to the cell.

In accordance with the rigid rule not to carry small arms when in close contact with a condemned man, neither the provost-sergeant nor the constable of the

death watch actually in the cell with Casshel carried weapons. The third member of the death watch was in the dining room of the barracks, five hundred yards away, getting some supper.

Casshel and his brother had timed everything perfectly and now luck was also on Casshel's side, for the corridor guard did not go to the anteroom at once and buckle on his heavy service revolver, but halted on his way to shut and fasten a window.

Again, on his way to the cell the provost-sergeant had to pass through a small door in a steel lattice. He unlocked this and left it to be refastened by the corridor guard—whose duty it was—then the provost-sergeant opened the door of the death cell and entered.

"All right, Casshel," he said curtly, "let me just search you; usual routine, you know."

What followed happened in a flash. Casshel, who had been awaiting this moment, leaped to his feet, at the same time snatching free the two revolvers hidden beneath his shirt. Before the surprised provost-sergeant could move, Casshel had brought both guns smashing heavily down upon his head. With a grunt of pain the provost-sergeant sagged half unconscious to the stone floor. Then, covering the nearly paralyzed young constable of the death watch with both revolvers, Casshel backed outside of the cell. While he was fumbling with the lock, the provost-sergeant scrambled dazedly to his feet and made a rush at him. Casshel thrust both hands through the bars and smashed both revolvers into his face, sending the provost-sergeant reeling back against the constable and both policemen tumbling to the floor.

By the time they again got dizzily to their feet the door was securely locked and they were prisoners.

With a last mocking jibe, Casshel turned and ran along the corridor. At the lattice door he came face to face with the corridor guard, still unarmed. The constable—a youngster and new to the force—was helpless beneath the menace of the killer's two guns. In seconds Casshel had forced him into the ante-room, handcuffed him and locked the door upon him.

THERE was now only one door between Casshel and freedom—that leading out into the open air. Still without firing a shot that would have aroused the whole barracks, Casshel got the door open and made his way to where his brother was waiting with a car. Ten minutes after his departure the night guard marched in and the escape was discovered.

At once the alarm was raised, but it was an exceptionally dark, stormy night and the border was not far away. With the help of his brother Casshel got safely into the United States and then all trace of him vanished. In fact, he might possibly have outwitted the Mounted and got clean away had he not been guilty of the almost incomprehensible foolishness of returning to Calgary!

It was, it transpired later, the charms of a girl with whom Casshel had become infatuated while working as a ranch hand near Calgary that caused him to risk his freedom by returning. But the girl, after Casshel's conviction, had transferred her affections to a young Mounted Policeman, one of the very men now searching for Casshel. The girl betrayed the whereabouts of the killer, who had taken refuge at the homestead of a man of doubtful reputation named Brown. A detail consisting of a sergeant and ten men was at once sent to recapture the murderer.

In the meantime—such is the long arm of coincidence—another detail of six men under command of Detective-Sergeant Biggs, also hunting for Casshel had called at the same house. Just as Biggs entered the door he caught sight of a man disappearing into the cellar through a flap in the floor, and his suspicions were aroused.

"Who's that?" Biggs demanded. "And what's he doing scuttling out of sight?"

"Sergeant, that was Casshel, but I ain't helped 'im 'cos I wanted to. He's got a gun an' made me give 'im grub."

There seemed to be only one way of getting Casshel without risking the lives of his men, Biggs saw, and that was to try and smoke the killer out of hiding. But while posting his men about the building in order to block every possible avenue of escape, Biggs observed the approach of the other patrol and realized that if he and his detail were to receive the credit of recapturing Casshel he must work fast. Taking a desperate chance he accordingly leaned over the flap in the floor and opened it.

"Better come out, Casshel," he called down in the cellar. "You're surrounded."

"Yeh?" came sneeringly up from the darkness. "Well, I've got a gun and lots of shells. If you want me, come and get me, but I'm betting I'll get a few of you first."

"We can burn you out," Biggs warned. "Be sensible. Come out quietly before you get hurt."

"And I'm telling you again," came Casshel's voice, "that if you want me you've got to come down here and get me—if you can."

"I can," Biggs replied, and pluckily jumped straight down into the cellar!

Even as Biggs' feet struck the soft soil of the cellar floor and he over-balanced and fell, Casshel fired. The bullet

missed, but the weapon was so close to Biggs that his eyes were badly seared by cordite fumes and he was temporarily blinded. Before the killer could again press trigger Biggs had grabbed his ankles and brought him tumbling to the earth beside him. Then, within the cramped confines of the cellar, they fought it out—a grim, silent finish fight.

Twice more Casshel managed to squeeze the trigger of his revolver before Biggs could wrench it from his hand, but it was blind shooting and both bullets went wild.

The shots brought the other policemen crowding into the house on the run. Two swarmed down into the cellar with lights while the others stood around the trap door with guns ready. But they were not needed. The lights revealed Biggs sitting astride a dazed and badly battered Casshel locking on the hand-

cuffs. A Mounty had got his man!

But Biggs paid heavily for his plucky, single-handed recapture of a desperate killer. His eyes were so badly burned that his sight was never fully restored and a few weeks later he was invalidated out of the force.

Later, Casshel was duly hanged, walking unflinching to the scaffold.

Casshel's escape had serious consequences for the provost-sergeant and the two constables who were on duty at the time. All three were dismissed from the force and sentenced to imprisonment for neglect of duty—the sergeant for twelve months, the constables for six. The discipline of the Mounted Police is adamant. No extenuating circumstances are allowed to weaken it. That is what makes the force what it is—perhaps the finest body of disciplined men in the world.



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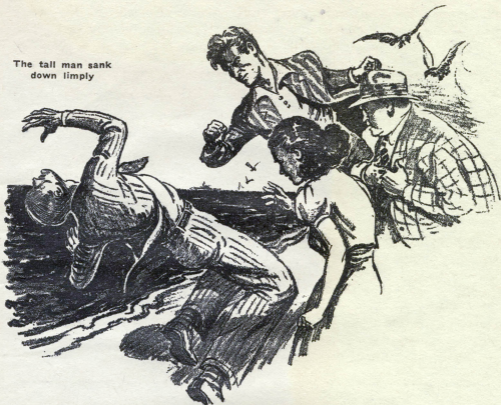
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The tall man sank
down limply



We've Got Time

By Edward Ronns

BRADY was kicking at the sand in an apparent excess of animal spirits. With each kick he turned sidewise, so he could glance backward without being too obvious about it. At the top of a grass-grown sand dune he paused and said:

"Delia, I think we're being followed."

It returned to her then, that suffocating sense of terror and bewilderment. It was still with her. It hadn't gone away these past two days. It was like a heavily overcast sky that would never clear again. Or a weight dragging endlessly at her feet.

So she hadn't lost those two men; they hadn't left her. It was bad enough with the police after her, but with those two hanging like birds of ill-omen everywhere she turned—grinning, winking, smirking, muttering a warning as she passed, or a knowing look—it was too much. She couldn't go on.

Casually, she said: "Are you sure?"

Brady nodded and looked at his cigarette. They were standing still now, on the crest of the dune. The sun was a blinding glare to the west.

"Pretty sure. Turn around and look, but take it easy."

She had felt herself secure here. May-

be it was Brady's presence that had given her that false sense of release. Seabury stood alone on an island four miles from the Jersey mainland, cut off from the world by flat tidewater marsh zigzagged by crooked, secretly running salt-water creeks. Sunlight glittered hotly on the placid bay. A seagull screamed low overhead. Wind rustled through the tough clumps of grass that grew miraculously out of the fine, white sand.

Turning, she saw the two figures plodding behind them. There was the tall, thin one, the one with the paper-white face and small, viciously knowing eyes; and the shorter, plump one, whose cheerful smile was worse, if possible, than the other's bitter scowl. She shivered.

Brady was watching her with thinly veiled curiosity.

"Know 'em?"

"I—yes."

They were coming straight toward them over the grassy dunes, walking from the direction of little Seabury at the other end of the island. There seemed to be something purposeful and relentless about their approach. Like two juggernauts, Delia thought.

Brady said: "You don't seem glad to see them."

"I'm not."

"Then let's—"

"No, they've seen us." She turned and closed cold, convulsive fingers on Brady's tanned forearm. He was wearing a striped singlet, slacks and tennis shoes. His red hair was afire with afternoon sunlight. "Please—I want to talk to them. Alone."

"Delia," he said, "you're frightened."

"I'm not."

"Don't kid me. You were scared sick yesterday, when we met. I've been trying to coax you out of it ever since. I

thought I was doing all right, but these two mugs coming up have rattled you again. If you want me to, I'll . . ."

Her lips were white, and she was trembling. "I want you to go away, Brady. Please, for your own sake."

THEY had argued about it too long.

The short one was already puffing up the slope of the dune. His face was red and peeling from sunburn. His tall companion still had that dead-white look about him. The short one was wearing a double-breasted green gabardine suit and cocoa-colored summer shoes and a heavily ornate signet ring on one pudgy finger. The tall man was dressed in somber blue serge and looked shabby.

The pudgy one jerked a bent thumb toward the Atlantic and spoke without looking at Brady.

"Scram, you."

Brady didn't move. His green eyes were queerly bright. Delia drew closer to him, shivering, her soft eyes enormous in her white face. She made swallowing sounds, but she didn't say anything.

The pudgy man said in a flattish voice: "Can't you hear?"

"I can hear," Brady said.

"Then scram."

"No."

"We want to talk to the girl."

"I'll wait."

"Then wait someplace else."

"No," Brady said again.

The pudgy man rubbed a hand over his face and stared. The tall one stood by in somber silence, looking at the girl without expression.

Delia said faintly: "You'd better go. You don't know these men, they'll . . ."

"I know them." Brady's voice was harsh. "They're a couple of cheap, tin-horn hoods."

"Miser," said the pudgy man.

The tall one stepped forward without emotion, brushing the girl aside, and swung at Brady's head. Brady ducked. His knuckles spatted on the tall man's lantern jaw, and the other staggered backward and abruptly sat down on the sand.

"Lay off," Brady said. His eyes glittered, grass-green.

The tall man dragged out a heavy sap. Blood wriggled like a bright red worm from a corner of his crooked mouth. His eyes were lidded. Brady stepped forward and there was a swift, brief flurry. Sand hissed underfoot and grass rattled. Then the tall man sank down limply. Brady was holding the blackjack by the loose wrist-thong. He turned toward the pudgy man.

The other gasped: "Geez!" and went for a gun. Brady waited until it was in sight before he threw the sap. It went straight as an arrow, thudding against the man's hand and knocking the gun from his fingers in a glittering arc.

Brady picked it up.

"Beat it," he snapped.

They backed up, facing him, and retreated down the sand dune. At the bottom they turned and began to run. They were still running when they disappeared from sight. Brady stood still with his feet spread a little in the sand, the gun dangling from his long fingers.

There was something awesome about him, Delia thought; awful and wonderful. Quite suddenly she knew that she wasn't afraid any more, that she had built those two men up in her imagination to terrifying proportions. And in three brief minutes this redheaded young man had made them look ridiculous. You can't be afraid of what you ridicule.

Then, like a thunderbolt, she saw

the badge. A shiny metal badge, glittering in the sand where it had fallen from Brady's pocket. She picked it up as he came toward her, and her fingers shook. Out of the frying pan and into the fire. . . .

The badge read: *Allied Jewelers Protection Service*, and had the numeral 9 on the center insignia.

She handed it back to Brady and was surprised at the steadiness of her voice. "So you're a cop."

Brady nodded and stuck another cigarette in his mouth and lit it. "Yes."

She said: "I guess you know all about me, then. I'm Delia Hillard. I . . ." She took a deep breath and felt weights slipping off her shoulders. "I'm wanted for the murder of Lulu Bannister."

THE Lulu Bannister case had made front-page headlines only once, the night the girl's body was found. After that it had been relegated to the middle sections of the newspapers. It wasn't important. Two unemployed girls, rooming together, had quarreled when one, Lulu, seemed to have fallen into luck and gotten some money. Lulu was found with a knife in her breast and the other girl, Delia Hillard, was missing. So was the money the landlady had heard them quarreling about. The Delia girl was suspected of having had a male accomplice who actually drove the knife home.

Brady got into it quite by accident. He was working on something entirely different then, querying the clerks in Michele's about two missing ruby pendants. The Othman rubies. Paul Michele, owner and manager of the jewelry shop, had notions about a so-called mystery woman, and Brady was busy trying to get to the bottom of it.

When he dropped in on Finnegan,

and the Lieutenant chanced to comment on the Bannister girl's death having occurred the same evening, Brady had said:

"They're tied together. It's two cases in one. Lulu Bannister is Michele's mystery woman—the babe who posed as a socialite to get into the shop and stay late. She lifted the rubies."

"You're nuts," Finnegan said. "We turned the apartment upside down. There were no stones in the flat. We're looking now for a kid named Delia Hillard. Seems as if she and a boy friend did the job. There's no connection between the two cases."

"There is. Lulu's the one who stole Michele's stones. That's why she was killed."

"And where are the jewels now?"

"This Delia girl—" Brady began.

Finnegan had snorted. "Yeah. The Delia girl. And where is she?"

"I'll find her," Brady said.

HE LOOKED at her. Her face was white and her lips were trembling, but there was relief in her eyes now that he knew who she was. She'd led him a merry twenty-four hour chase. He had stumbled on her trail quite by accident, when he spotted Matt Deems' two hoods, Miser Bannon and Dooly, the pudgy one, getting on the train at Penn Station. Just luck—and a hunch—made Brady get on with them. In five minutes he'd spotted their quarry—and his. Delia Hillard. They'd all gotten off at Sea Crest, on the mainland, and taken the chugging little ferry here to Seabury.

Delia was looking at him now with slowly widening eyes.

"You knew it all along," she whispered. "You knew who I was."

"Yes."

"And you didn't—"

Brady said gently: "I don't think you killed Lulu Bannister."

"Oh, I didn't."

"Sure not. Sit down," he said.

They sat down on the sand, facing the ocean. The wind played in the girl's dark hair and ruffled her light dress. She had nice legs. She was nice all around. Brady gave her a cigarette and lit one for himself. He said:

"But you know why she was killed."

"No, I don't."

"Then why did you run away?"

She made a helpless gesture. "I didn't; I was kidnapped."

Brady wasn't surprised. "By those two?" He jerked his head in the direction the two hoods had taken.

"Yes." The girl shivered and hugged her knees. "I came home at seven-thirty and found Lu—she was dead by then. I'd been out looking for job—I sing, you see—and I didn't expect anything unusual, not even when I found the door open. But when I saw her . . ."

"Take it easy," Brady said, watching her mouth tremble. "We've got time."

"So I went out to call the police. That's when I was kidnapped, by those two men. They were in a car. They—they didn't mistreat me. They kept me a prisoner for a whole day, and kept asking me about some jewels. I still don't know what they meant by it."

Brady's green eyes were bright. "And then?"

"I got away, while they were waiting for Matt Deems, their boss. You know, the gambler. I couldn't understand it. You see, Lulu had been going around with Deems, and I knew he was a racketeer. That's why Lu and I quarreled."

"Tell me about that," Brady suggested.

"It was just that I thought Lu was playing with fire, if you know what I

mean. That morning she said she was going to make a lot of money, and I said things to her, and we quarreled. That's what the landlady heard. I wanted Lu to give the clothes back."

"What clothes?"

"Deems had given her a complete outfit—a navy blue costume in a four-button length. He even gave her a hat, white doeskin gloves, and shoes to go with it.—Is something the matter?" she asked suddenly.

"Everything's fine," Brady said. Delia had just described the outfit worn by Paul Michele's 'mystery woman.'

"I told you about it because I remember when I found her the costume was missing. Does that help?"

"A lot," Brady said.

Delia went on: "Even after I escaped from Deems' men, I couldn't go to the police. I—I was frightened. Reading my name in the paper and realizing how the case sounded against me—my quarrel with Lu and the talk about the money—it seemed too late to go to the police by then. I—I thought I could run away."

"And Deems' men were content just to follow you?"

"You, too," she said.

Brady stood up, helped her to her feet, and they began walking back to Seabury.

"Do you trust me, Delia?"

She didn't hesitate. "Yes."

Brady looked at his watch. "I'm going back to town. I'll return by midnight, at the latest. You'll be cleared by then."

"But how . . .?"

"The Bradys get hunches," he smiled. "I want you to go to your room now and lock yourself in and wait for me. Don't open up for anybody but me. Got that?"

"Yes," she said.

IT WAS hot and stifling in the city, after the day at Seabury. Brady had dinner at the terminal and then took a cab downtown to an address in the Village. He had been to the apartment just once before, shortly after his talk with Lieutenant Finnegan.

A cop was still stationed on the landing as he slowly climbed the steps. The cop's face glistened with sweat, and he was standing near the back window, trying to get a little air. The hall was suffocating. The cop turned toward him with a tired grin.

"Hello, Red. Come back for another try?"

"Just a look," Brady said.

"Nobody's been around here at all. This place is like a Turkish bath. That Delia dame hasn't showed up yet, either."

Brady borrowed the cop's key and let himself inside, snapped on the light. The place was exactly as the homicide squad had left it. There were just two rooms, a bath, and a kitchenette, over-looking a dingy court. A eucalyptus tree brushed dusty, dispirited leaves against the window.

He walked into the bedroom and went to work on the closets. There was a rack of dresses and three coats and some feminine hats on the shelf. None of the outfits corresponded to Delia Hillard's description of Lulu's navy blue costume—the one Paul Michele had described as belonging to the woman who'd posed as a socialite customer in order to steal the Othman rubies. He hadn't expected to find the costume here, after Delia told him she'd noticed it was missing; although he wondered why he should have taken her word so implicitly. He hoped fervently that the Brady hunch about this girl would pan out. If he was wrong and she took the opportunity to flee again, he'd have

the whole police department down on his neck.

He went down on his hands and knees and pulled out all the shoes from the closet and arranged them on the floor, examining each pair carefully. He separated Delia's smaller ones from the dead girl's. There were no new pairs.

"Even the shoes," he muttered.

He left the apartment, returning the key to the cop, and went back to the street. From the corner drugstore he telephoned to the Allied Jewelers Protection offices, and after a while got Randall, the chief, on the wire. He gave his name and winced as Randall cursed him.

"Where in triple hell have you been for the last two days?"

"Working on the Paul Michele job, trying to save the Old Man a cool eighty grand in insurance. Any objections to that?"

Randall snapped: "You still think the Bannister killing is tied in with it?"

"I know it is," Brady said.

Randall's voice crackled tinnily in the receiver. "You don't know a damn thing. You're just chiseling your vacation a week ahead of time. Get off the case and come in. I've got something else for you."

"But I've got a lead," Brady said quietly.

"To hell with your leads! Come in!"

Brady hung up, his mouth wry, and stepped from the hot telephone booth. He stood with his hands in his pockets and frowned. Shoes. Why had Lulu Bannister's shoes been taken? The rest of her outfit might conceivably have been removed by the murderer to prevent Michele's identification—and now that he thought of it, Finnegan had

had the man down to look at the murdered girl. But the identification hadn't panned out—which was one of the reasons for Randall's irascibility and Finnegan's skepticism. But the shoes? High-heeled pumps, if the lifts were hollowed, could easily have been the hiding place for the Othman rubies.

Brady lit a cigarette and left.

LIEUTENANT FINNEGAN'S office was hot and dusty, lighted by a single gooseneck lamp that stood on the desk beside a snoring fan. Finnegan looked up with a scowl as Brady's tall figure came through the doorway.

"You again?"

Brady did not smile. He took off his hat, hung it on the telephone, and sat down, said: "How would you like to close a couple of cases?"

The lieutenant's grin was sardonic. "I'll bite. What cases?"

"The Lulu Bannister stabbing and the theft of the Othman rubies."

Finnegan stared. "You mean they *are* tied in?"

"Yes."

"Tell me how," Finnegan challenged. Then he sat bolt upright and snapped accusingly: "You found that Delia girl!"

"That's right."

"Where is she?"

"Take it easy," Brady said. "She's in the clear."

"You say so! I think different. I . . ."

Brady's eyes rested on the Lieutenant's straw hat hung on a peg. "Just listen," he said. He picked up the telephone book and rifled through the pages and found the office number of the Midnight Club. "Get me Matt Deems." Waiting, he took a handkerchief and covered his mouth, and then said: "Matt? This Matt Deems?"

Deems' voice was low and thick with annoyance.

Brady's tones were curiously changed. "This is John Doe. I seen you throw away the dame's clothes, big-shot. You know what I mean. Pay up, or else. I'll be waiting outside Frank & Al's—you know where that is. I'll be wearin' a straw hat. I figure I oughta tell the cops, but you're my pal, Matt."

Matt Deems snarled: "Nuts, copper—I don't know what you're talking about!"

The receiver crashed down.

Finnegan was wearing a broad grin. Brady didn't look at him. He used the phone book again and looked up Paul Michele's number. Michele lived in an expensive apartment house overlooking Central Park. A butler answered the phone. After a delay Paul Michele's throaty accent said: "Yes?"

Brady repeated the little speech. He wasn't interrupted. There was a moment's pause, and then Michele said:

"I—I hardly know what to say. You should inform the police. I most certainly will not meet you!"

"You got an hour," Brady repeated. He hung up.

Finnegan said: "Well?"

Brady picked up the straw hat, skimmed it into the Lieutenant's lap, and said: "You can dodge bullets better than I. Let's go."

THE place was a dimly lighted corner on the West Side, hot and black and noisy. The taproom gave out a persistent thumping melody from the nickel recording machine. A few people sat around on steps and tiredly fanned themselves with handkerchiefs and newspapers or just sat limply, suffering.

Brady sat in his coupé with the motor idling, aware of tension on his nerves. Lounging on the corner under a street

light, conspicuous in the straw hat, was Lieutenant Finnegan's big figure.

A car droned by and disappeared around the corner. One headlight was a little dimmer than the other. In three minutes the same car returned. Brady was ready for it when it happened. So was Finnegan. The big cop jumped as the snout of a gun poked through the open driver's window. There was a quick burst of shots, six of them, and bullets spattered the brick wall. Somebody screamed in shrill alarm. Finnegan was flat on the pavement, his gun out, crashing in his hand.

Brady kicked the gas pedal. His car jumped like a thing alive. The oncoming sedan swerved wildly, careened toward the opposite side of the street. Brady twisted the wheel hard. There came a rending crash of torn metal and both cars hit the curb.

Brady's feet socked the sidewalk before his coupé had stopped rocking. He had a gun in his hand. He ran around the front of the sedan and yanked open the door. A white-clad figure slumped over the wheel. A gun dangled from the man's limp fingers. Brady swiped it aside and stepped back.

"Relax, Michele," he said. "You're going to the cooler."

Finnegan was running ponderously up the street. He looked sore. He stopped and stared at Paul Michele's figure and said incredulously:

"Him?"

Brady nodded. "You'll have to pick up Matt Deems, too. Charge him with lifting the Othman rubies and kidnapping Delia Hillard. He'll get a good jolt. But this guy, Michele, killed Lulu Bannister. He trailed her after she lifted the stones to her apartment, probably by the taxi driver. He wanted the rubies back. He got the bright idea that he could collect insurance and have the

stones, too. He stabbed her and took her outfit with him so he wouldn't have to identify it if the cases were ever linked up."

He took a breath. "Deems had engineered the theft, though. He dressed Lulu up as a lady and gave her shoes with hollow heels in which to hide the rubies once she got into the taxi. Michele took the shoes when he killed her. He came here tonight to rub out what he thought was a witness to part of his crime. What it amounts to is that he hijacked Matt Deems, and Deems snatched the Delia girl in an effort to find out what had happened."

Finnegan said: "But how did you tumble to it?"

"I found Delia Hillard and she happened to mention Lulu's new outfit having been missing after the murder. So I got a hunch and played it."

"Hunch, hell," said Finnegan. "Where is the Delia dame?"

"I'll let you know," Brady said.

SEABURY was cool and serene, lulled by the monotone of the Atlantic, as Brady stepped off the little ferry and trudged up the grass-grown walk toward Main Street.

Delia Hillard was asleep in a chair on the veranda of the hotel. He noticed that the little ferry wharf was visible from where she sat.

She was breathing lightly and easily, and there was a little smile at the curling corners of her soft mouth. The lines of strain were gone from around her eyes.

Brady sat down in a chair beside her and stuck a cigarette in his mouth and lit it. He didn't wake her.

There was plenty of time.



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THIEVES and
BLACKGUARDS,
—BUT**

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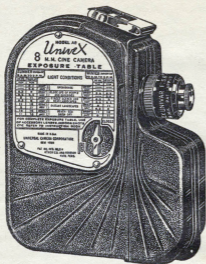
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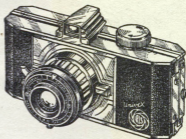


It's terrible to enter a contest and then learn that you *almost* won; that your entry was second choice but that you still won nothing. For that reason we are going to give a second prize that is almost as good as the first one. The sensational Univex candid camera; one of the best values in the small cameras that we were able to find. It takes sharp, clear pictures $1\frac{1}{2}'' \times 1\frac{1}{8}''$ that make superb enlargements. And it costs very little to operate!

We could go on and on raving about this camera but it's better to let it speak for itself. Take a look at the picture of it, then check the special features. Fast f7.9 lens, 3-speed precision shutter, 4-stop Iris diaphragm, precision-type optical viewfinder with minimum parallax error, precision mechanism for fool-proof focusing, hinged cover for quick loading, and yet it's light weight and compact!

HERE'S a chance to win something practical; something you've probably always wanted. First prize will be the new Univex 8 m.m. movie camera which you see here. Simple to operate, it gives you the dependable performance, the thrilling, true-to-life results you'd expect from a larger camera that costs hundreds of dollars. It is equipped with fast f4.5 lens, built-in optical viewfinder, snaplock hinged cover, new improved governor, automatic shutter, and a powerful, quiet motor—features that make this camera one of America's greatest movie camera values.

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY has obtained a few of these and will give its readers the opportunity of winning them. The lucky winner will be able to take his own movies; keep a life-like reminder of memorable events; record the children's progress from infancy to adulthood; make his own travelogue on long trips.



No, we're not crazy! And we are giving the above cameras away! At frequent intervals we will publish a true story, under the title of **YOU'RE THE JURY**, by Peter Paige, which will be unfinished. These will be cases where there has been evidence on both sides. We will tell you the story up to the time it went to the jury. The one who gives us the best solution, as compared with the eventual decision, will win a movie camera. The second best solution gets a candid camera. That's all there is to it. The first story will appear next week. Watch for it!

Solving Cipher Secrets



M. E. OHAYER
"Sunyam"

A CIPHER is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Helpful hints appear in this department each week. The first cryptogram is the easiest.

No. 169—The New World. By Cosmopolite.

VAEV RFYQS GVS RGXYHLVSKS YT R KSOSCGUB TYDCP
*Z-GBLS HGRK, FURNACE HZB-EARCG, TUYRG SCYKXYDH
OUIDPH YT XSGRUUAO ORUOADX; FSUYI HDKES QRHG
HSRH YT UAJDAP VBPKYESC. R OUDS GY HGRK FDAUPACE?

No. 170—A Strange Fact. By †Chemystic.

MS YBYDAOV PRAOPAUTOPT, GCETT KETHAUTOGH RN RZE
PRZOGES, *XRCO *YUYBH, *GCRBYH *XTNNTEHRO, *XYBTH
*BROERT, UATU RO *XZFS *NRZEGC, YOOALTEHYES RN GCT
*UTPFYEYGARO RN *AOUTKTOUTOPT.

No. 171—Cryptic Procedure. By †Betty S. P.

AEXLUAZT BNOONL DYNPU MNPED, GVVUXPL HPNRGD,
EADUALBUACX XLEALHD, YAHY-ZPXKRXLBT DTOSNFD,
ENRSFXE FXUUXPD. BAGYXP DXBPXUD EADBFNDXE!

No. 172—Fond Reflections. By †Drinkwater.

UYOPE, YZAHT, SDFGJZ; CFZCFZXL SUZA LMLSVOL; AZTB
AOPLU, UDZKB UHSLZGU; URNH GFUOV RXLS GRRPAOH
YZHLS; YZSG ULZ TLQDBSU—KZPVL, UYOG, NOUD, UOPE,
ARZN. UBGQRUOFG? IFUH XZVZHORP KSLZG!

No. 173—Summer Morning. By *G. Fulton.

CAZOMPAD BIZAYE JVNY' INEZARIC UNEZARIC; ZWMJYPE
DMJSL RIEZ YIRNE; YIARNEZ YIZARNE, IBAL IRAL IRNE,
RIOYZ RJSE,—RIVAL, EIRN RIPON RICON.

WHEN the "cipher bug" bites you right, you really stay that way! Witness, for instance, the experience of †Esoteric, Salt Lake City, as related in her interesting letter herewith. †Esoteric began her cipher solving in November of last year, and including her April answers, already has 145 solutions to her credit. The first contribution she mentions was No. 29 of Feb. 3, "Lethal Asp," an Inner Circler which many of you doubtless have good cause to remember! And this week's division puzzle is another of her constructions. But now, †Esoteric's letter.

Dear Sunyam:

It was an exceedingly pleasant experience for me to see my first contribution to "Solving Cipher Secrets" published in a recent issue of your magazine. And I almost regret now that I took a pen name.

I can take your magazine, show it to my friends, and pointing to my puzzles, boast in bad grammar, "That's me!" But they just have to take my word for it. However, my friends are not in the habit of doubting my word, and besides it is bad manners to point.

My husband fully agrees with you that I am a "cipher bug." If he ever wants grounds for divorce all he has to do is produce your magazine. When it arrives on the scene, meals, dishes, and housework are of minor importance until I have those ciphers whipped into shape.

He first tried hiding it, but in this small apartment he soon ran out of hiding places. Now he just takes firm hold on the pages and reads a couple of stories until he is sure his food will reach the table at the correct time.

I hope to make ciphers a regular habit from now on!

Very truly yours,
†Esoteric.

Salt Lake City, Utah.

And so to this week's cryptograms! In the first cipher, Cosmopolite's contribution, try common short words for GVS and GY, both with the same initial. Then complete word 4, noting HSRH, R, and HGRK. In †Chenystic's crypt, start with GCT and GCETT, continuing with *NRZEGC, RN, and RZE. *XTNTEHRO will then drop into place.

Type words will help you in the next cryptogram, by †Betty S. P. For example, FXUUXPD, correctly guessed, will give you all but one equivalent in DXBPXUD; and so on. And in †Drinkwater's message, identify suffixes -OPE and -HOP for entry, next substituting in GRPPOH, and following up with UOPE and AOPLU, then ULZ and UHSLZGU.

The Inner Circle cipher, hardest of this week's selection, is by *G. Fulton. Observe here that words 4 and 5 differ only in the initial letter; also that words 10 and 11 use the same letters, and likewise with IRNE and SIRN; etc. The key to †Esoteric's division runs thus: 01234 56789. Answers to Nos. 169-74, next week. Asterisks indicate capitals.

No. 174—Cryptic Division. By †Esoteric.

HIGH) GAINING (HCG
ITKAK

CACAN
AIBCK

IATLG
IBGKI

ALGL

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

163—"O for a lodge in a garden of cucumbers!

O for an iceberg or two at control!

O for a vale that at midday the dew cumburs!

O for a pleasure trip up to the pole!"

—Rossiter Johnson.

164—Frequently cited as "dog days" is the forty-day period usually considered as beginning on July third, and continuing until August eleventh.

165—Your cuckoo clock calls four hours. Guests arrive in afternoon attire, chat incessantly, imbibe tea, nibble cookies, then bid adieu.

166—Cryptographers, emulate this example. Abjure paragraphic posers with tortuous inclusions like "kyanize," "xyster," "vaquero." Such idiomatic distortions oft-times destroy empathy.

167—Crowd, agog, views adroit acrobat affix neon sign above brickkiln. Archaic scaffold folds, artizan flops, quick casualty results. Bathos: journeyman heirs bouquet, cenotaph. Tough!

168—Key:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
I N C U B A T O R S

All answers to Nos. 169-74 will be duly listed in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for July. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Handwriting Secrets

Character Clues in Pen and Ink

By Helen King

IT IS always amusing and interesting to receive a letter which starts out: "I don't believe your work is good, but tell me the results just the same." It reminds me of the person who has no faith in a doctor, yet calls him in just the same. Way in the back of such a person's mind is the little thought "maybe she does know her stuff" after all—that, plus a desire to talk about one's own self! The greatest joy most of us get is in self-discussion, although we hate to admit it.

DEAR MISS KING:

Honesty compels me to say I have little faith in character analysis by any means other than one's actions, but I wonder what would be your opinion of this scrawl. My writing changes often, which will probably upset your opinion a great deal—and which may be a new slant on your work. I've read all of your articles, but never noticed this particular thing discussed.

Jean D.

Dear Jean:

Honesty compels me to say that "changeable writing" has been mentioned in this column several times, thus more space cannot be given to it. It isn't a new slant; ninety-nine out of every 100 think their writings change!

*thing discussed
is this for -*

Your writing shows unevenness—which is also a part of your temperament. Its re-

stricted look tells that you restrict your mind from judging impartially, but once convinced you are the most ardent booster of any idea. Methinks you meant the doubting statement merely as a challenge, that's why you led the column this week!

Many readers have asked for vocational aid. They seldom go into details, probably feeling the analyst should know all the facts, without being told. This has certain points, but one's vocation often depends to a great extent on education and financial status, thus in asking aid, it is advisable to give just a few of the facts about yourself.

DEAR MISS KING:

I find it hard to analyze myself, so cheerfully hand the job over to you. I'm not saying what I do for a livelihood, nor what I wish to do. I'm leaving that up to you so that you will be totally unprejudiced. This may put you on the spot, but if handwriting tells anything . . .!

My wording would tell a psychologist a great deal. What does my writing tell you?

H. H. C.

*cheerfully hand
the job to you*

Now you see what I mean! Here is a chap who has all the earmarks of a scientist. His writing is definitely in that group, yet unless he can get the necessary funds to finance himself, it might

be a bit disappointing for him to learn he is fitted for something he likes, yet cannot pursue. In such cases, one takes the next best job which would be along the same line, and the ambitious fellow tries to study at night to perfect himself for that wanted position.

The next letter is a bit different. This chap has tried various things, but seems to have difficulty hanging on to what he wants.

DEAR MISS KING:

Will you give me the lowdown on what sort of a guy I really am? Nothing I do turns out the way I want, and I stopped making plans. I start out doing what I want, but something always seems to change it.

For one thing, I can't stay married. I've gone through it twice but the wives just don't seem to fit my requirements. What is wrong with them? What business should I go in? I've been a printer for 25 years.

ME.

Dear ME:

You should be a printer. When successful, trained, and liking your work, why consider a change? That changeable streak is your undoing. Maybe that's the answer to your question. You need a new slant on life. Work for what you get—and be thankful. You've had what you've wanted but haven't been satisfied there. That is your mistake.

After reading ME's letter, the following seems pathetic, yet is part of the day's mail.

DEAR MISS KING:

At 26 I'm a night watchman and a slow desperation is eating away a normal disposition. Does my writing indicate any talent? I like music and drawing, but have had only seven years of schooling. I want to get ahead so much.

C. M.

am a night
and eating
normal dispo

Dear C. M.:

Artistic talent is not present, as a creative artist, but commercially you do have ability—and thus I suggest you study during the daytime. A chap as ambitious as you, and with talent, should make every effort to get ahead. With your nature I feel sure you will. Take advantage of your unusual working hours to do extra study.

PURELY PERSONAL

Jed K.—You are an exploiter by nature, and thus should try to make your connections along such lines. Large corporations have exploitation departments, such as advertising agencies, theatrical enterprises, etc.

Mark L.—Newspaper work is not your forté. Selling is in your line, so stick to it. Best of luck.

MISS HELEN KING,

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY,

280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

This coupon not good after Aug. 3, 1940.

I enclose handwriting specimen for advice and analysis.

Name..... Age.....

Address

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(Canadian readers, please send U. S. stamps, or coin. Readers from all other foreign countries should send International Reply Coupon, properly stamped by post office.)

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 July 20th issue of Detective Fiction Weekly rank as follows:

	No. Here
MURDER JOINS THE LEGION by Robert Carse.....
DEATH OF A GOOD GUY by Charles Ingerman.....
COFFIN CARGO by Hugh B. Cave.....
TWO FOR A CORPSE by Lawrence Treat.....
ACTION FOR A RANGER by Edwin Truett.....
THINGS TO WORRY ABOUT by David Goodis.....
CASSHEL'S ESCAPE by C. V. Tench.....
WE'VE GOT TIME by Edward Ronns.....

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 July 27, 1940)

(Address all letters to the Prize Letter Editor)

Coming Next Week

Here is a story which the editors have picked as the best yarn of 1940—and written by a man whom we consider one of the foremost writers in America. It's the exciting story of a cold-blooded murderer who found himself consigned to Hell before he had died. There he met such historical murderers as Jack the Ripper, Dr. Cream and Lizzie Borden and listened while they, and Satan, passed judgment.

THE MAN WHO WENT TO HELL

By THEODORE ROSCOE

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

(On sale next Wednesday, July 17)

FLASHES FROM READERS

YOU'VE probably noticed we don't have much to say about the War. Well, maybe that's smart, and maybe it isn't—but this is sure: we don't exactly like keeping quiet!

The fact is we'd like to say plenty. Our convictions, whether right or wrong, are just as deep as the next fellow's, and this being still a Democracy, Hitler and Mussolini notwithstanding, we have a right to express them.

"Then why the devil don't you?" we seem to hear you grumble.

The answer to that is our deadline—which keeps us at a dead run considerably ahead of the calendar. Our ideas about the War might be perfectly sound—even brilliant—the day they were written, but by the time you read them who knows what might have happened to make us look like a bunch of nitwits?

Suppose we said something disagreeable about Italy today? How would it look a couple of weeks from now if, in the meantime Italy decided to change partners for the balance of the Death Dance?

We want your good opinion. We wouldn't want you to think the War had us punch drunk. That's what holds us back.

This isn't an apology. We just wanted you to know how we felt. Perhaps you're glad we can't sound off. After all, you don't buy DFW to find out how the War is going or what the editors think about it. Actually you're probably trying to forget the whole terrible business—at least for awhile—when you crack into a new copy of your favorite fiction magazine.

And we hope we can help you do just that. The more we think about it, the surer we are that that is our job. From newspapers and more topical magazines you can get all the reading you want about the War. From DFW you can get relaxation—if you will, escape! We'll try to make DFW more absorbing than ever with just that idea in mind. And we'll understand about each other—that we aren't being callous and insensitive to this terrible calamity in Europe, you any more than us, but that in the time that we're together each week, we're making a business of forgetting it.

The very helpful letters continue to pour in—and every day we're getting a sharper, more concise picture of what you want in DFW. At least we hope we are . . . !

Three well-known authors took top honors in the May 25th issue according to final tabulation of the vote. Here it is:

STORY	AUTHOR	VOTES
The Autumn Kill	John K. Butler	13,025
Murder Is Where You Find It	B. B. Fowler	12,575
The Bloody Isle	T. T. Flynn	12,400

This week's \$10 check goes to a fellow who prefers to remain more or less incognito. We know his name, but, for reasons which he explains in his letter, he prefers to be known to youse guys as

MR. R. T. T.

DEAR EDITOR:

"Autumn Kill" is my choice by far. First of all, for the ease with which you slide into it. For the fact that the first paragraph

is so easily *visualized*—a picture no one can fail to recognize. (If you only knew the tears I've shed, too often, in fruitless search for *good first paragraphs!*)

Second, a tug at your heart-strings at mention of the Prison for Women—the Death Cell. None of us, I am sure, can face with perfect equanimity the thought of a young woman being burned to a crisp in the name of the law.

Another tug when you learn that "I" am in love with the woman who is about to die; a feeling of protest that is deepened when you become convinced that she is innocent.

I'm not going to be meticulous and take the rest of this story point by point and extoll its separate virtues. You yourself recognized 'em when you read the MS. But this writer with all the precision of a true craftsman has contrived a yarn which not only holds you, through bitter inevitability, from start to finish, but finishes at the right spot and leaves you with a pleasant taste in your mouth.

I dare say I've read better stories in DFW. (I'll never forget Rex McBride and his trip to Honolulu.) But none that had more genuine unity and compactness than "Autumn Kill." It's the kind of story I'd like to have written myself if I could.

And just because I've put the two True Features down near the bottom, doesn't mean they rate that low. I liked 'em, but I place *true* stories in a separate category.

Naturally I'd enjoy getting the ten bucks but if I don't, what I have said here still goes. We readers really should do more of this sort of thing, a great big hand for the good ones and a generous soft pedal for those not so good. I buy DFW a lot; living much of my life in hotels and railroad trains, I need a lot of readin' matter. Once in a while you slip in a bit of mush or maudlinity or implausibility, and I can only say by way of parting prayer—do all you can to encourage fine writing in your Red Star pulps as they are all that remain between me and the "bleak and barren peaks" of nothing-to-read.

Should I be so lucky as to win the ten dollars, please do me a favor and use only my initials. My name in print would mean a lot of tedious explaining to countless print-shops all through the middle West; and when I go into a print-shop I'm s'posed to sell, not tell.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

One thing we never dreamed of when we started this letter contest was the effect on the authors. We'd always

thought of them as fairly cocky fellows who could take a compliment or leave it alone. But they aren't that way at all, it turned out. They're watching the contest results as avidly as politicians eye the Gallup polls. They blush prettily at a high score for the week or a kindly slap on the back from one of you readers. Yes, sir, we've seen 'em do it—even the hardest-boiled of them.

As long as we've got extra space this week we'd like to put on public exhibit a letter typical of the sort which brings a glow of pleasure to Jud Philips' cheeks. This particular blush is through the courtesy of

MR. ROBERT LEE ALLEN, JR.

DEAR SIR:

I liked "Death Wears Green" in the April 27th issue best because it was as timely as my morning newspaper. Judson Philips really caught a theme that should be in the minds of every American citizen at this time.

Just as he depicted we are face to face with a vital problem. As he, I believe, would have you feel and determine that it is too big a thing for the police organizations to cope with. I believe that is the comparison that he wished to emphasize by putting the Hunt Club against a vast horde, who are working systematically and to make us realize that it is the citizen's duty and part that will eventually rid us of this scourge. "Death Wears Green" really was action packed, and one of the best stories in a long time, and certainly a welcome back for the Park Avenue Hunt Club.

One criticism though . . . please don't have so many stories (in one issue anyway) written in the first person.

Best of luck, from an old friend.
NASHVILLE, TENN.

Now the tone of that letter is not unique. We get scores of them every day praising one writer or another—and us, too!

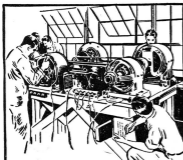
The good Lord preserve us from growing soft and incompetent under all this adulation. Maybe it would be good for our souls if we got a few mildly abusive letters for a change.

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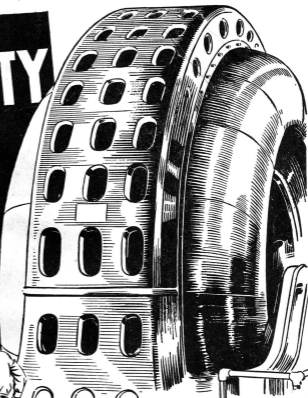
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