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THE HOMICIDAL HANGMAN
A LONG NOVEL OF EERIE MYSTERY
by **ROBERT TURNER**
MURDER WALKS IN THE STREET
A MYSTERY - MENACE NOVELETTE
by **WILLIAM R. COX**

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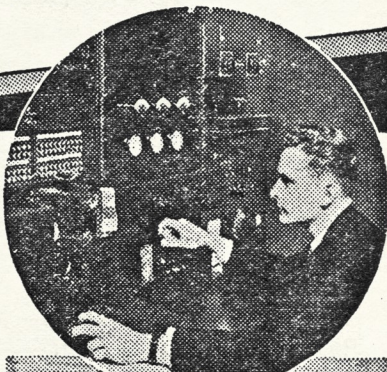
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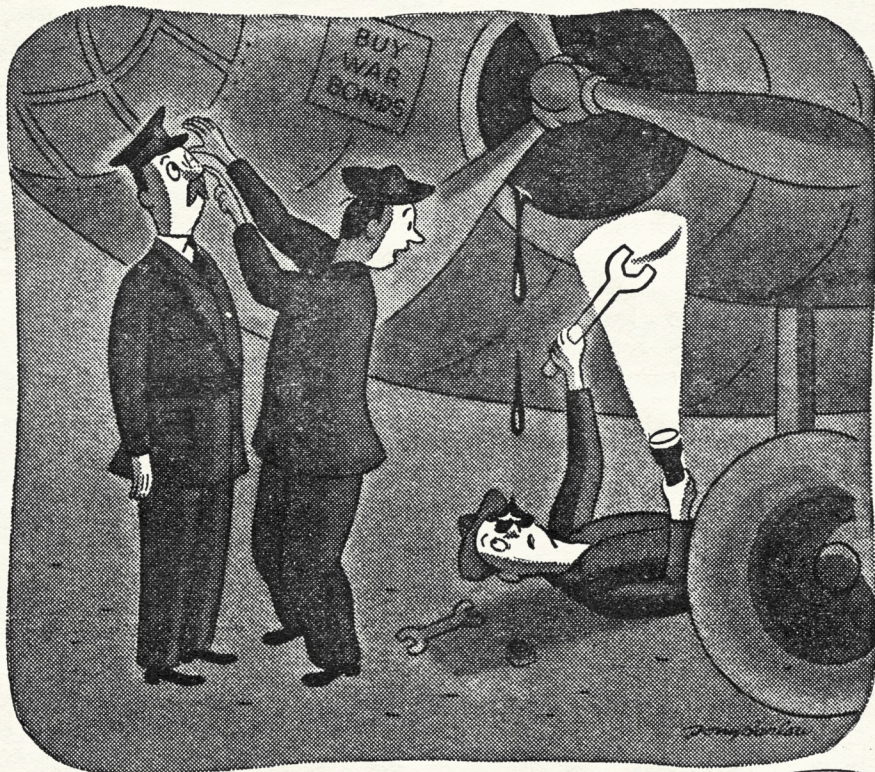
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NEXT ISSUE ON SALE APRIL 9th!

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A FULL-LENGTH NOVEL OF SPINE-TINGLING DRAMA

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The "perfect criminal" succumbed to his own machinations!

THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU  **AGAINST REPRINT FICTION!**

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THE OBLIGING KILLER

IF YOUR daily paper is a reflection of the times and place in which you live, so too is your modern magazine. For fiction as well as news, if it is to be alive and vital, must catch and mirror the drama of the passing scene.

Authors, to be worth their salt, make every effort to incorporate within their stories the incidents, developments and modifications of a changing world. Bruno Fischer, we believe, has done a good job of adapting factual development to fictional drama in his story "ONE THOUSAND WAYS TO DIE."

All of us know what havoc the booby trap—first developed by the Germans—has wrought in modern war. It remained for Mr. Fischer to show us the true ghastliness of such a device adapted to civilian life. Perhaps after reading "ONE THOUSAND WAYS TO DIE," we on the home-front will be moved to even greater effort toward final victory.

Oddly enough the police of New York City had had some experience with a booby trap killer even before the start of the war.

It was on February 3, 1912, that the first of the explosions rocked a quiet, five-story apartment building at 193 West 77th Street, New York. In a first floor apartment, the police found the body of a woman, and a cowering male visitor who told them what had happened. The woman, a Mrs. Grace Taylor, had received a parcel in the mail, and when she'd opened it, it had exploded, killing her instantly.

Strewn about the room and embedded in the victim were bits of metal—nuts, bolts and nails—such as are generally found in amateur bombs; bits of red cord such as druggists then used, and a piece of the wrapper, with three or four words of the dead woman's address.

Those few scraps of typed lettering, the police soon discovered, were their only clue to the killer. They embarked on the seemingly endless task of testing all typewriters of a given make in the city.

This enormous proposition was some months old when the killer struck again. This time a Bronx housewife named Ferrera was the recipient of the murderous package—the explosion killed her.

And then, while the newspapers were still playing up the two deaths, murder through the mails knocked on the door of a New York jurist, Judge Rosowsky—but the judge, together with most New Yorkers, had grown wary of unidentified postal parcels, and called in an explosives expert.

The expert opened the package—and was nearly killed in the ensuing blast! If the killer had sought to demonstrate his own effectiveness, he couldn't have managed it better. The clamor of a defenseless public rose to a fevered pitch.

The police, on the spot, questioned the judge for personal enemies, but found no common denominator to link the three bombings. They combed the scenes of the explosions for clues—and were left with what they'd had before: meaningless nuts and bolts and bits of red cord, and three partially destroyed addresses—all written on the same elusive machine. The task of checking typewriters went on until there remained only a few, which were in use in the Bronx Borough municipal offices—and just as the last and only lead to him seemed hopeless, the killer struck again.

The latest victim was one Henry Klotz, a draftsman and civil engineer in the employ of the City, under the direct supervision of the Bronx borough president. Klotz was not killed, and was rushed to a hospital, seriously injured. Detectives questioned him, hoping to find the name of the person they sought among his associates. To their surprise, Klotz's efforts to co-operate were evasive.

They searched his apartment, and found enough explosives to blow up a city block, nuts and bolts to correspond to those in the bombs, red cord to match their evidence, and the clincher—a diary of the bombings! Klotz had nearly succeeded in diverting hitherto non-existent suspicion by becoming his own victim!

Confronted with the evidence, Klotz refused to talk—until he realized that he had been too realistic in his cover-up, and was about to die of his wounds—a ruthless master criminal so "perfect" as to succumb to his own machinations and save society the expense of his disposal!

THE EDITOR



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"Look out!" Sullivan
screamed...



THE HOMICIDAL HANGMAN

By ROBERT TURNER

Sailor Sully wasn't a killer—yet he killed a man in the greatest fight of his ring career, in the dead of night, on a lonely New Jersey bluff. Nor was he found out by anyone save the murdering corpse!

CHAPTER ONE

A Dab of Death

THESE nights, as the date of the fight drew closer, Sullivan found it increasingly difficult to get to sleep. Must be nerves, he decided. Maybe I'm training to too fine an edge. Better taper off a little. Or maybe some of the newspaper boys, referring to him as the "old man", were right. Perhaps he was crazy trying this one-fight comeback. After all, he was thirty-eight . . .

He looked at the luminous dial of the bedside alarm clock. It was ten o'clock,

already, and he had been lying here, thinking like this, for an hour. He remembered in the old days how he used to hit the pillow at nine p. m. and be all corked off at nine-one.

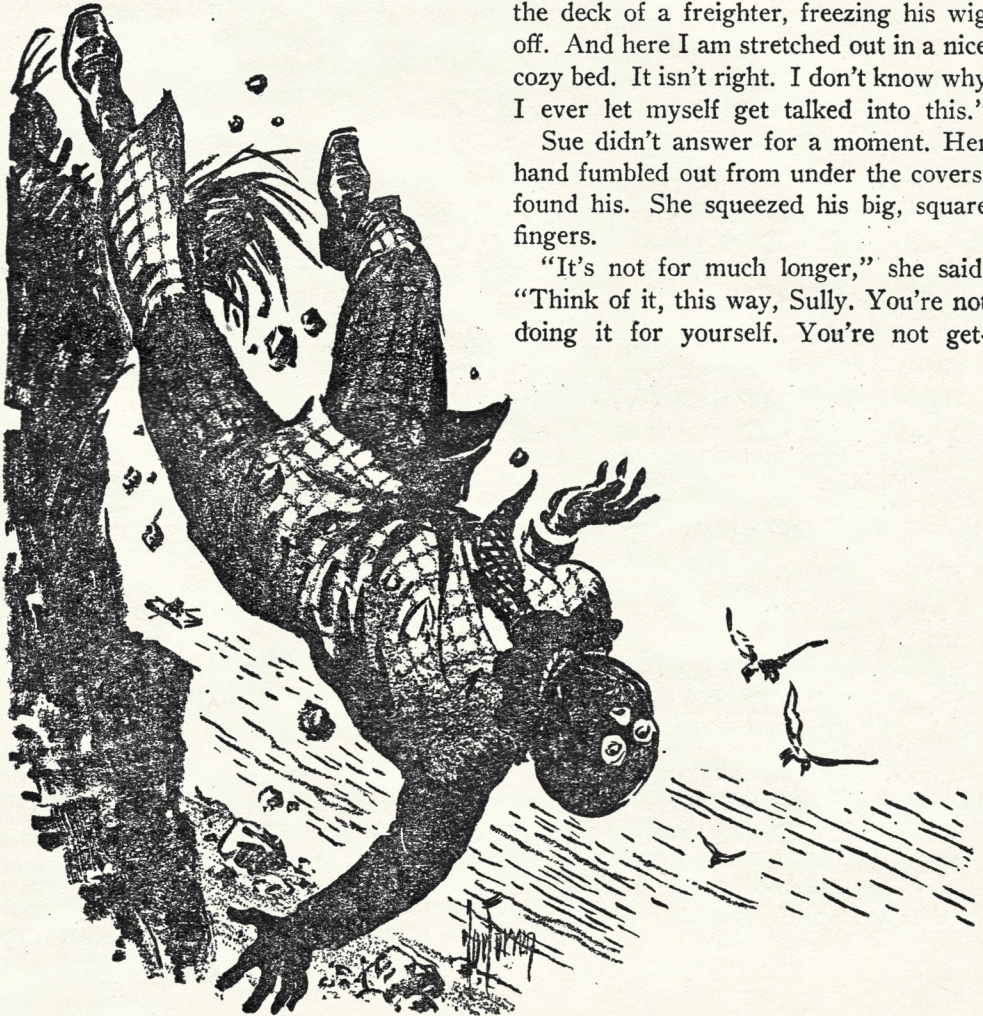
Out in the harbor a boat hooted mournfully. The sound gave him a guilty little thrust. He had no right to be playing hooky like this from his real job. He rolled over and said: "Sue—Sue, you awake?"

The warm, curled-up figure of his wife moved restlessly. "Yes," she said. "I'm not asleep, Sully. What is it?"

"This is a hell of a thing," he said. "Right now, somewhere up in the Barents Sea some guy is standing watch on the deck of a freighter, freezing his wig off. And here I am stretched out in a nice cozy bed. It isn't right. I don't know why I ever let myself get talked into this."

Sue didn't answer for a moment. Her hand fumbled out from under the covers, found his. She squeezed his big, square fingers.

"It's not for much longer," she said. "Think of it, this way, Sully. You're not doing it for yourself. You're not get-



ting anything out of it, but Merchant Marine Relief is. I'll bet the boys all feel you're doing something pretty swell." She loosened her fingers, patted his hand. "Go to sleep, Sully. Think of it like that and get to sleep."

"Mmmm," he said, and yawned. "You know what Mike Griffo said, Sue?"

"Who's that?" she said, sleepily. "Who's Mike Griffo, Sully?"

He gave a little chuckle. "One of the guys I fought in the old days, the second time I defended the title. Leo Earnshaw, the sports columnist, is digging up all the old fighters for an interview on how they think I'll make out. He had Mike Griffo in tonight's column. Mike told him: 'The old man'll nail the kid to a ring post before the first round's over! When a guy has a punch like Sailor Sullivan, he don't lose it in ten years—or a hundred.' . . . Good old Mike! He was a game guy."

"Is *that* what he said!" Sue snorted. "Old man, indeed! He has a nerve, why you're only—"

"He did have some cheek at that," Sullivan cut in with a little laugh. "Why that would make you an old lady, wouldn't it, hon? An old lady of thirty-three. Ha!"

They both laughed, then, and they didn't say anything more for awhile. Sullivan thought about Leo Earnshaw and the rugged lines of his face deepened in a scowl. Somehow, every time he saw Earnshaw, or thought about him much, it brought back all that old trouble of long ago. All that old, hellish trouble, the living nightmare he had gone through that year before he had hung up the gloves.

EARNSHAW had always known, or at least suspected, something of the truth. He had never fully accepted the suicides, or the accidents. For a long time after Sullivan had retired, Earnshaw had kept prodding in his column. *Why*, his copy would demand, *did*

Sailor Sullivan retire at the peak of his career? The Sailor had another good two years in sight and no really tough contenders for his crown to worry about. The guy gives up a half million bucks for another easy year's work. It doesn't make sense. There's something big and wrong, somewhere.

Earnshaw had done his best, but he had never learned the real reason, because nobody knew it but Sullivan himself. And he couldn't tell it. Nobody would believe him. It was too crazy.

After a little struggle, Sullivan put Earnshaw and thoughts of all that other out of his mind. That was all over, and right now he had to get his sleep. He let his mind wander and after awhile he dozed off.

How long he had been sleeping, Sullivan didn't know. But all at once he was awake, sitting up in bed, tensely, staring into the dark. He listened. There was no sound. His eyes traveled through the gloom, all around the room, over the bulky shadows of familiar objects. There was nobody there that he could see. The bedroom door was still shut so that the rest of the house wouldn't chill up from the cold night air coming through the bedroom window.

And then he saw it.

Moonlight was pouring through the opened window, in slanting bars, striking the wall, directly in front of the bed. In the middle of that patch of pale light was a shadow. It was quite distinct. There was no mistaking it. It was the shadow of a hangman's noose.

Sullivan rubbed sleep from his eyes. I'm still asleep, he thought. I'm dreaming. That's it. . . . But then he looked again, and shook his head, hard, like he used to do in the ring when he was hurt. The shadow was still there, and now it swayed a little.

He looked quickly toward the window, but there was nothing there. There was no

sign of the thing that was throwing the shadow. Sullivan reached out a trembling hand to awaken Sue, then caught the movement. Instead he pushed back the covers, swung his legs down off the bed.

Just as he started toward the window, he heard the noise out in the yard. There was a pound of feet against frozen turf and then the rattling scuff of shoes over the graveled driveway.



SULLIVAN reached the window, threw it wide and leaned out. He saw a blurred, bulky figure race through a patch of moonglow on the lawn, and then out to disappear in the thick, dark tree-shadows on the street. Sullivan opened his mouth to yell, but no sound came out. His tongue seemed to dry up and fuzz over and he couldn't yell.

He stood there for some moments, leaning out the window, his breath making clouds of steam in the cold night air. Finally he pulled his head in, shivering now, damp with perspiration. He heard Sue stirring in the bed. She cried out:

"Sully! What—what is it, Sully?"

"It's—nothing," he said. "I thought I heard someone prowling around. I guess I was wrong."

"Sully!" Sue's voice rose. "Sully, that shadow on the wall! It looks like a—"

She couldn't finish the description. She made a sobbing sound and Sullivan reached up quickly and yanked down a small piece of string that had been tacked onto the bottom of the raised window. It had been tied like a noose, so that it hung in the moonlight and cast a greatly magnified shadow on the wall.

"Oh, that," he said. "It frightened me, too. Just a piece of string that got caught on the bottom of the window."

He looked down at his hand. The noose had been made quite carefully, expertly. It was a perfect, miniature hangman's

knot. *Just a piece of string*, he thought. *Yes, that's all. It couldn't be anything else. He—he's dead. I killed him, myself. I know it!*

Back into bed he climbed, and pretended elaborately to be going to sleep again. Sue must not be alarmed. Then he lay there a long time, flat on his back, his arms stiff at his sides, staring at the open window and at the place on the wall where the shadow had been.

After quite a while he began to rationalize that it was just freak coincidence. There had been a prowler, yes, and when he'd tried to raise the window so that he could climb in, a piece of thread or something had caught from his sleeve. When Sullivan had become aroused and gotten up, the prowler had gotten scared and run off.

So Sullivan talked himself out of it and went back to sleep again. Only he didn't rest well because in the innermost recesses of his mind, he knew that he had been right the first time. Now that Sullivan had come back to the ring, *he* had come back too. *He* was going to be in on it. And Sullivan had a lot of dreams that night and the four men who had died were in those dreams—the two fighters and the old rubber and the manager.

CHAPTER TWO

Call From the Grave

UP AT six the next morning, Sullivan was through his breakfast and out in the garage starting his morning workout by seven. He'd been at it two hours when Sue came out.

She stood in the doorway a few minutes before he realized she was there. She watched him pounding and wrestling the heavy bag. She watched the heavy ripple of the punching muscles in his back and shoulders. She noticed that he was sweating well and that all the fat had gone

from the back of his neck and from his legs. She smiled. Her Sully was no old man yet, not by a long shot. They'd all find that out, Saturday night.

"How's it going?" she said.

He turned around and grinned and smeared the moisture on his face with one big red glove. He was breathing hard but evenly. He slammed the gloves together in front of him. "Swell," he said. He walked toward her, thinking how lovely she looked with the colored shawl over her head. "Look at those roses in your cheeks," he said. "You shouldn't come out here like that, Sue, looking so pretty. Training or no training—"

"Go away!" she laughed and held him off with one hand. "You're all slick and wet. Besides, some of the newspaper boys are here. You want to see them? There's a cameraman, too. They want pictures of you training out here in the garage, and all."

"Sure," he said. "Send 'em out."

Sue left and a few minutes later three men came in. They didn't have their hats turned up in front and their clothes weren't baggy and they didn't droop cigarets from their mouths. But they were newspapermen, all right. Three pairs of tired eyes roved all around the home-made gym. Sullivan knew them all. They were from the *Globe*. They were Leo Earnshaw, the sports columnist and Ben Hinkle, a feature writer and the camera man was Frank Gilly.

"Quite a place," Hinkle said. He was tall and lanky, with a bony, sad face. "Who'd ever think the wilds of Staten Island was hiding anything like this?"

They all looked around at the modern gym equipment, and then they turned to Sullivan. "Glad to see you, boys," Sullivan said. "Can you make it quick? I've got another couple of hours to go."

"Sure," Earnshaw said. He was an elderly man with silvered temples. He was dapperly dressed. Once Earnshaw had

been big and heavy but recent years of illness had used up the flesh and left only the loose sagging skin around his jowls. But his eyes were bright. He said: "You take him first, Ben. I can wait."

HINKLE pulled out a sheaf of loose copy paper and went to work on Sullivan. He asked a lot of questions and Sullivan answered them patiently and intelligently. He told what his life as a seaman on convoy duty had been like, about the long nights up north on the route to Murmansk and the Nazi's constant attacks. He told how he felt about going back into a ring again, and how hard he was working, and how he figured he was pretty well back into shape again. But he wouldn't comment on how he thought the fight would turn out.

"It'll be a tough one," he said. That was all. "I promise you that. It'll be tough."

"How come you signed for this match with young Stevens, anyhow?" Hinkle prodded. "Whose idea was it?"

Sullivan made a face and nodded at Leo Earnshaw. "Your colleague's," he said and watched the old columnist take a deep, mocking bow. "Leo's been yelling for months that even though Jackie Stevens is the champ and none of the current contenders can go three rounds with him, he's greatly over-rated. Leo claimed that any of the old timers could make duck soup of him. That right, Leo?"

"Unquote," Earnshaw said. He helped Gilly set up his camera. "And since Sailor is the youngest of that old bunch I talked up a match in the column."

"You'd never of gotten away with it," Sullivan said, "if it wasn't for the terms. I don't want any part of the ring any more, but when Stevens and his manager took to the idea and said the whole take could go to any charity I named, what could I do? Besides, the boys on the ships wouldn't let me slip out of it."

"Well, I wish you luck," Hinkle said. "Stevens is a tough kid."

Hinkle signalled to Earnshaw then and he walked over. He had the morning copy of the *Globe* under one arm. He asked a few offhand questions half heartedly until Hinkle walked away. Then he said: "How you feeling, Sailor? I don't mean physically. I mean is anything worrying you?"

"What *do* you mean?" Sullivan said. His voice got cold. "I've got nothing on my mind but this fight."

"Oh," Earnshaw said. He pulled at a button on his coat. His chin was down on his chest and the folds of skin at his jowls flapped up over his jaw bone. "I was just wondering. Wondering if you'd heard from Mr. Lynch, lately."

"What?" Sullivan said. "What did you say?"

Earnshaw quietly repeated but Sullivan didn't hear it. There was a roaring in his ears. His eyes blurred. Once again he was seeing the noose-shadow on the wall of the bedroom.

"*Mr. Lynch?*" he said, and the name came out in an almost strangled cry. Then Sullivan fought and found control. Quietly he added. "I don't know anybody by that name, Leo. Who's Mr. Lynch?"

"Okay." A sly grin spread over Earnshaw's thin old face. "Okay, just let it go at that . . . By the way, Sailor, has Brooks Lancaster, the betting commissioner, been out here to see you, at all?"

"Eh?" Sullivan said. "Oh, Lancaster. Yes, yes, I think he was, Leo. Yes he stopped out a couple of days ago and watched me work out. He said he wanted to get a line on me to get an idea how to fix the odds on the fight."

"You must have impressed him," Leo Earnshaw said. He twisted his thin, bitter mouth. "He's giving ten to one against you winning."

Sullivan shrugged. "So what? So he figured I'm too old. . . Listen, Earnshaw,

what did you mean asking me about a— a Mr. Lynch? What was all that?"



EARNSHAW pretended not to hear. Instead of answering he asked another question of his own. "What do you know about Brooks Lancaster, Sailor—I mean about his background—who he is, where he came from?"

"Why, nothing much." Sullivan frowned. "He makes his living booking bets on sporting events. I know he's supposed to have lots of dough and he's been in the business quite awhile. Why?"

"Do you know his wife?"

"I don't *know* her. I know Lancaster married the widow of Harry Jung—that—that fighter who killed himself." Sullivan drew a deep breath. "Look, Leo, you're evading what I really want to talk about. This Mr. Lynch."

The heavy lids half closed over Earnshaw's little bright eyes, but he didn't say anything. Then before Sullivan could speak again, Hinkle and Gilly came over.

"We've got a lot of shots of your little home-grown gym, Sailor," Gilly said. "How about a few pics of you batting the bag or jumping rope or something."

"Okay," Sullivan said. He did everything they asked, automatically, thinking of the things Earnshaw had said, and they took their pictures.

Then they were through and getting ready to leave. Just before they stepped outside, Earnshaw thrust the newspaper he had been carrying at Sullivan. "I guess you didn't see the sport pages this morning, Sailor," he said.

The eyes of both men met and held for a long time. Sullivan was the first to break the stare. He looked down at the newspaper in his hands. Then he heard Earnshaw say, "So long," and he looked up just as the columnist touched his forefin-

ger to the brim of his homburg and sauntered off with the others.

"Wait a minute," Sullivan shouted. "Leo, there's something I want to—"

"Later," Earnshaw called back, interrupting. "Later, Sailor, we'll have a long talk."

Slowly Sullivan unfolded the paper. It was already opened to the sports page and a small boxed item was circled with red pencil. It said:

JACK STEVENS' SPARRING
PARTNER TAKES OWN
LIFE.

Underneath, a brief paragraph said: "Late last night the dead body of Nick Jaro, chief spar-mate of Jackie Stevens, who meets Sailor Sullivan in the big fight this Saturday night at the garden, was found hanging from the light fixture in his hotel room. There was no note of explanation found and acquaintances were at a loss as to why the young boxer had committed suicide. He had been known to be in good spirits. Jaro had fastened two neckties together and formed an almost perfect hangman's noose, and . . ."

SULLIVAN could not read any further. He did not have to. He crumpled the newspaper up into a tight ball in his fist and looked after the newspapermen's car as it sped away. His lips moved, silently forming a name over and over. "Mr. Lynch," he whispered. "Mr. Lynch."

He walked woodenly toward the house. He stepped into the kitchen. "How'd you make out?" Sue asked. She stopped putting a pie into the oven and turned to look at him. Suddenly the tin fell from her fingers, clattered to the floor. The pie plopped to an ugly pile of dough and sliced apple. Sue stood up.

"Your face, Sully!" she cried. "What happened? You're white as death. Sully!"

"What?" he said. He stared dumbly at the spilled pie. "Oh, I—I guess I worked out a little too hard," he explained. "I'm all right, Sue."

He walked over and helped her clean up the mess. She kept looking at him from the corners of her eyes. She said: "You go sit down, Sully. I'll clean it up. Sit down and have a class of milk. You—you're sure you feel okay?"

"Yes," he said. He forced a grin. "Sure." He reached out and tugged at a stray strand of hair on the nape of her neck. "You worry too much about me, honey."

When he had finished the milk, Sue said: "Oh, I almost forgot to tell you, Sully. Someone called on the phone. I told them you were busy out in the gym with some newspapermen, and he said it was all right, I could give you the message."

"What was it, Sue?" Sullivan said. He reached down and started untying the laces of his gym shoes. "Who was it?"

"A Mr. Lynch—at least I'm pretty sure that's what he said. Lynch, yes, that was it. Who is he, Sully? Do you know anyone—"

"What was the message?" Sullivan kept his head down. He could feel the blood roaring through it. He tried to keep his voice steady. "Go on, Sue."

"He just said to tell you that everything was the same as before, that the instructions were the same. He said you would know what he meant. What did he mean, Sully?"

He got up, carrying the gym shoes in his hand and turned quickly toward the door before Sue could take a good look at his face. "I don't know," he lied. "I don't know anyone by that name. Some crank, probably."

Sullivan went into the bathroom and showered and then he put on his street clothes and started to go out. "I'm going over to the city for a while," he called

through to the kitchen. "I won't be late, Sue."

"Hey!" she answered. "Didn't you forget something?"

"What?" he said. "What did I forget?"

She came out into the hall, wiping soap-sudded hands on her apron. A lock of chestnut brown hair clung damply to her forehead. She was smiling and she looked very pretty and sweet and not a day over twenty years old. She stood on tiptoe in front of him and pursed her lips and waited.

"Oh," he said. He bent his head and kissed her, then turned quickly and went out the door.

On the way to the ferry, in the bus, he kept thinking about it all. One thought repeated itself, over and over.

I must have made a mistake, he decided. He must not have died after all. Mr. Lynch is still alive. This time he means business. He's starting to kill *before* the fight this time, just to show me that he does!

Then he went back over his conversation with Leo Earnshaw and it suddenly hit him. It caught him completely helpless, that thought, like a blow when he wasn't looking. *Mr. Lynch could even be Leo Earnshaw.* It must be that. It would all tie in. When he got to Manhattan, he would go see the columnist and he would find out for certain. Or at least make Leo explain.

The bus driver shouted back at him: "Hey, buddy, are you just on for the ride?"

Sullivan snapped out of it, looked around, saw that they were at the ferry slip and all the other passengers had got off the bus. He said: "Oh, sorry," and got off.

On the long ride across the bay, he went back over the whole thing, to make sure he had made no error, that it could be Earnshaw.

CHAPTER THREE

Hangman's Bluff

IT STARTED one broiling hot day in June, ten years before. Sailor Sullivan was twenty-eight then. He had been champ for three years and there was no one in sight to take the crown away from him. He had the world by the tail. The following week he was matched to fight Harry Jung, but it wasn't worrying him. The odds were fifteen to one on Sullivan. Harry Jung was an old ring tramp who had been built up to a contending spot by a string of set-up victories. Jung would be lucky if he even hit Sailor Sullivan, Leo Earnshaw had written in his column, and, he'd added, they should hold the match over in one of the Eleventh Avenue slaughter houses. It was due to be that bad.

On this afternoon, Sullivan was going through a light workout in Monohan's gym when he was called to the phone.

"Hello, Sailor," a muffled voice said. "This is Mr. Lynch."

"Lynch?" Sullivan said. "I don't know anybody by that name. You must want one of the other—"

"No," the voice broke in. "You're the one, Sailor. I want to talk to you about a little dive you're going to take."

Sullivan didn't answer for a moment. He took the receiver away from his ear and stared at it, unbelievably. He shook his head, said: "Me—Sailor Sullivan—take a dive? Now I know you've got the wrong party, mister."

"No," the voice was pleasant, optimistic. "You'll do it all right. And you'll make it look good, too, just like the real thing. You'll do it because you wouldn't want Harry Jung's death on your conscience."

"What do you mean?" Sullivan started to get mad. He didn't like this. If it

was a gag, it wasn't his kind. "Listen, if this is one of Jung's crew trying to crack wise, trying to upset me so I'll fluff the fight, you're wasting your time. Get off the wire."

"All right, Sailor," Mr. Lynch said. "I can see your point. I can see how this would be hard for you to take. But if we could have avoided deaths, it really would have been much better, but I guess you will have to be convinced. Sailor, do you know Magraw, the old rubber who works out at Jung's camp?"

"Yeah, I know Magraw," Sullivan said. He wanted to hang up on this idiot. He wanted to cut the whole thing short. But somehow, he couldn't seem to do that. It was as though something held him there to the phone.

"Well, you wait and see what happens to Magraw," the voice said, "and then you remember my name—*Lynch—Mr. Lynch!*"

Then the phone went dead. Sullivan jiggled the receiver furiously. He called the operator, tried to have the call traced, but without success. Somehow, he never told anybody about that call. Several times he started to talk it over with his manager, Pete Devlin. He even meant to mention it to Sue, his wife, just for the laugh it would give her. Because he was sure that it was Harry Jung, himself, or one of his crew, trying to be clever. Jung was a bad actor. He was in debt up to his neck. He had a prison record. This was just like something Harry Jung would pull.

But every time Sullivan went to talk about it, some inner warning stopped him. So no one ever heard about that phone call.

A FEW days later, Magraw, a broken-down old man who had been Harry Jung's rubber for years, was found dead in his own backyard. He had gone out that night to fix a clothesline.

When some time passed and he didn't return, his wife had gone out to investigate. She found Magraw hanging from the high clothespole, with the rope all tangled around his throat. He was dead. He had fallen, the police said, and the rope had caught about his neck and strangled him.

But Sailor Sullivan had a different idea. Especially when he got a note in the mail that morning. At the top of the letter was pasted a silhouette, cut out of black paper, of a man hanging from a gallows. The note said:

"Poor Magraw! Now do you believe, Sailor? And don't get any ideas about going to the police with this, or about this. You wouldn't want to have anything like this happen to that lovely little wife of yours, would you? And if you ever say anything, it will. You may protect her for years, but some day, somehow, I'd get my chance at her. So let's be sensible, Sailor and take that dive."

The note was signed, *Mr. Lynch.*

Sullivan didn't go to the police. He didn't want to take even the slightest chance of anything happening to Sue. But he didn't take the dive, either. He knocked Harry Jung out in the third round, and then waited to see what would happen.

He didn't have to wait long. Two days after the fight, Harry Jung committed suicide. He tied a belt around his neck and around an attic ceiling beam and then kicked the box on which he had been standing, out from under him.

Sailor Sullivan knew then, that *Mr. Lynch* was a man of his word. Just to make sure Sullivan didn't have the wrong impression, Mr. Lynch called him up right after the news of Jung's death broke in the newspapers.

"Don't let them kid you, Sailor, that Jung killed himself," the familiar voice said. "Just because Mrs. Jung says he was despondent over losing the fight with you, don't let them kid you. *We* know

Jung was murdered, don't we. You'll be hearing from me again, Sailor."

Even though Jung had been a pretty useless, unpleasant character, his death got Sullivan. Mr. Lynch's psychology was working fine. No matter how hard he tried not to, Sullivan couldn't help feeling a responsibility for the fighter's death. And even though he had never been a friend of Jung's, he went to the funeral. A lot of people from the fight racket were there, because Jung had been a colorful, well known figure. Sullivan thought that maybe Mr. Lynch would be there and do something, give some kind of a tip-off to his true identity.

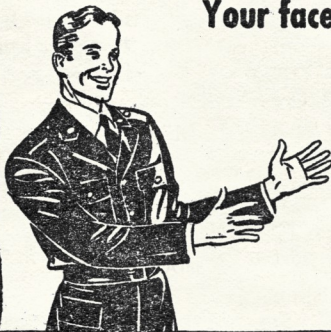
Sullivan watched carefully, kept his eyes on all possible suspects, but it did him no good. There was no giveaway. All he got was a crazy feeling of guilty helplessness when he saw Jung's beautiful young widow, standing by the casket, weeping.

LEO EARNSHAW, the sports columnist was there at the funeral.

It was around that time that Earnshaw's sharp news sense first scented something bad. He started asking Sullivan a lot of questions about his opinion on the strange strangling deaths of Magraw and Harry Jung. Earnshaw was the first one to tie the killings together, to notice a certain similarity in the deaths. He brought it up in his column several times, but nobody picked him up and nobody paid much attention.

Right after Jung's death, Sailor Sullivan went on his first bat. He was gone three days. He came home to Sue, bearded and disheveled. She was hurt and bewildered, but she didn't get angry and even though he didn't explain, she never questioned. She nursed him through his hangover and never brought the subject up again, afterward. Sue had been pretty wonderful.

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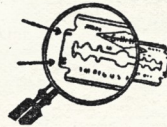
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3. TWO EDGES double blade life. Marks indicated above identify edges, enabling you to give both equal use and get extra shaves



4. CLEAN BLADE in razor by loosening handle, then rinsing in hot water and shaking. Wiping the blade is likely to damage the edges

Pete Devlin, Sullivan's manager, told her that a fighter was like a fine watch, a complicated, delicate piece of human mechanism, which could occasionally go haywire for no apparent reason. And Sue let it go at that.

Then Sullivan was signed for his next fight, and the thing started all over again. Mr. Lynch called and wrote and threatened and instructed him to throw this, fight, too. Mr. Lynch said that he was getting impatient.

Sullivan didn't do too much training for that bout. About every ten days, he would go off and try to lose himself on a drunk. But Sue and Devlin would go after him and bring him back. He became nervous and irritable and he went into the ring for that fight in the worst shape he had ever been in. But an ingrained stubborn streak wouldn't let him accede to Mr. Lynch's demands. He won that bout on a close decision, but anyhow he won. And that apparently was all Mr. Lynch needed.

The very next day, the manager of Sullivan's opponent, a man named Ralph Hertz, had a peculiar accident. He was up in the mountains on a picnic with his family and he fell off a small cliff and got lodged halfway down in a tangle of vines. Most of the vines were around his neck. Hertz died of strangulation. Just as though he had been hung.

The police never tied any of those crimes together. Mr. Lynch was clever inasmuch as he varied his victims. A rubber, a fighter, a manager. And even though there was a certain similarity in the fashion of their deaths, it still could have been coincidence. The police couldn't see any pattern to it, even though this time, Leo Earnshaw made quite a fuss about it in his column.

That death finished Sailor Sullivan. He went to pieces completely after that, and when his next match was drawn up, a bout with a man named Alec Coons, and

Mr. Lynch began all over again, Sullivan finally broke down.

"All right," he almost screamed the words over the phone at Mr. Lynch. "All right, I'll do whatever you say. Only stop it! Stop it, do you hear! I'll lay down; I'll go in the tank, if you'll only quit!"

"Now, you're being smart." Mr. Lynch chuckled. "That's the way I like to hear you talk, Sailor. But don't you double-cross me, now."



THE night of the fight with Alec Coons came around. Sullivan stalled around for three rounds, staying on the defensive, dancing, waltzing the other fighter all over the place. The crowd sensed something wrong. They started booing and hooting him to the heavens. Then every once in awhile Sullivan let one of Coons' punches slip through. He let himself take it a little. That was the way he planned to do it, to make it look good, so no one would ever suspect.

By the fifth round, Sullivan was a bloody, groggy hulk, wobbling on rubber legs, completely at the mercy of Coons' battering fists. Near the end of the round, he went down.

He sprawled there, flat on his back on the canvas, for the first time in his life. The lights blurred in his eyes. The roar of the crowd was like a million giant dynamos thundering in his ears. Through it, then, he began to catch the count. He heard the ref say: "four—five—six—" Then another voice penetrated as some of the cobwebs blew from his dazed brain. He heard his manager, Pete Devlin, and his wife, Sue, there at the ringside, pleading, begging with him to get up.

As the ref reached "seven", Sullivan rolled over. He saw Sue, pounding her fists together, yelling at him, her pretty

little face all twisted, tears in her eyes and streaking down her cheeks.

Sullivan couldn't stand that. And now, with all that fog in his brain, he couldn't remember how this had all happened. He didn't even think about Mr. Lynch. The instinct of self-preservation, of grit and courage, deep-rooted within him, through all the years of his life, took hold.

Hardly knowing what he did, Sullivan stumbled to his feet at the count of nine, and clinched and clung to Coons until the bell at the end of the round. His seconds worked over him, furiously, iced the back of his neck, stopped up the flow from his cuts, and brought him around.

His brain was still a little numbed, but his body had strength again when Sullivan went out for the sixth. Coons realized that his chance was now or never and met Sullivan as he came from his corner in a headlong rush. Sullivan jogged him to a stop with a vicious left. Then they stood toe to toe and slugged it out. And in the crazy, primitive fury of the battle heat, Sullivan forgot all about Mr. Lynch. He forgot all about everything except pounding his fists into the body of the man in front of him.

It did not last long. Sullivan never knew exactly when it ended. Neither did any of the frenzied spectators. Some claimed it was a dynamite right hook that finally finished Coons. Others said it was a left uppercut. Sullivan didn't know. The first thing he was fully conscious of, was the ref holding up his arm, and the people rushing into the ring.

Afterward, in the showers, it all came back to Sullivan and he realized what he had done. He had double-crossed Mr. Lynch. He hadn't meant to, but that didn't matter. Now it was done.

SULLIVAN left the Coliseum that night by the back exit, slipping out so quietly nobody even knew he was gone. He got into a cab, and had the

driver park near the dressing room exits. He watched for Alec Coons to come out.

He saw the man he had just fought merge some minutes later and climb into his long, expensive coupe. When Coons drove away, Sullivan had his hack driver follow the coupe. Tonight, Sullivan planned to catch Mr. Lynch and end his persecution for all time. That is, if his hunch worked out. He had an idea that Mr. Lynch, mad for revenge for the double-cross, would make an attempt on Coons' life. So Sullivan was not going to let the other fighter from his sight until that happened. Then he was going to step in and grab Mr. Lynch.

Only it was not as easy as that. Coons drove uptown and across the George Washington Bridge and up Route 9 in New Jersey. Sullivan guessed that he was on his way to his home in upstate New York.

A few miles above Alpine, Sullivan saw the red glow of the taillight of Coons' car, suddenly grow larger and seem to come toward them. He realized that Coons had stopped. The cab swung around the big coupe and Sullivan ordered the driver to stop.

Sullivan got out of the cab and started back toward the other car when he saw that nobody got out. Just before he reached the coupe, the door opened and a dark figure leaped out into the shadows. Suddenly red flashes of fire and the barking shots of a pistol came from the shadowy figure.

The bullets whined around Sullivan's head and he flung himself to the ground, rolled over and over and came up behind a thicket. More shots followed and one of the slugs came so close, it ripped a hole through the sleeve of Sullivan's suit. He counted the shots and when six had been fired, he rushed toward the man who had fired.

The figure broke from the shadows and ran toward the edge of the nearby cliff.

Sullivan chased after him. Halfway to the cliff, the figure broke into a moonlight flooded flat of rock, and turned and hurled the empty gun at Sullivan's head. Sullivan ducked and kept on running. He got a glimpse of his quarry there in the moonlight. He was a big man, heavy set, but that was all Sullivan could tell. Over the man's head a black sack had been pulled and tied around the neck. Slits were cut in the front of it for the eyes, and a small hole for the nose. Except for that the black covering was the same as that which is placed over the head of a condemned man about to die on the gallows. Seeing that, Sullivan knew that he had at last met up with Mr. Lynch.

When Mr. Lynch missed beaming Sullivan with the gun, he turned and fled once more into the darkness. Still, Sullivan pursued, and the two of them crashed on through a small copse of trees and came out on a narrow plateau on the edge of a high cliff of the Palisades.

A deadly game of tag ensued there. Several times, Mr. Lynch managed to evade Sullivan, slip almost right through his very fingers. But at last Sullivan brought the black-hooded figure down in a flying tackle.

They rolled over and over, pummeling each other, mercilessly. After a few minutes Mr. Lynch managed a momentary escape and struggled to his feet. But before he could get completely away, Sullivan grabbed him again, whirled him around, and caught him flush in the face with a roundhouse right.



MR. LYNCH staggered backwards. Sullivan went right after him, missed another blow and Mr. Lynch fell against him, clung in a clinch. With a mighty effort, then, Sullivan forced him away, swung a jolting left cross. The blow smashed against the

front of the black hood with paralyzing force.

Spinning around once completely, Mr. Lynch, stumbled sideways toward the edge of the cliff, swaying like a drunken man, his knees buckling every few yards.

"Look out!" Sullivan screamed and ran toward the other man, frantically.

But Mr. Lynch, groggy from the blow Sullivan had dealt him, couldn't heed. He walked right off the edge of the cliff.

Sullivan stood on the edge for a long time, looking down into the black emptiness of space below him. His big chest heaved and his fists clenched and unclenched at his sides. How long he waited there like that, Sullivan never knew. But after awhile when there was no sound, no sign of life or movement from the bottomless blackness below him, he walked away, back toward the road.

All the way, Sullivan kept repeating: "Mr. Lynch is gone. He's dead. I got him. I got him!"

He reached the road and looked into Alec Coons' car. He saw Alec slumped over the wheel. The young fighter's dead hands were at his neck, as though still trying to tear away the copper wire that had been twisted around his throat.

"It's too bad, feller," Sullivan breathed. "I might have been able to save you, if I'd known. But I didn't. I didn't have any idea Mr. Lynch had been hiding there in the back of your car when you'd got in."

Sullivan looked around for his own cab, but it was gone. The hackie must have been frightened by the gunfire and had driven off. Just then Sullivan heard the whine of a police siren.

"The hackie must have told the cops!" he cried. He ran into the woods alongside of the road. He didn't want to get mixed up in this. He circled around through the woods for several miles and then came out on the road again and hitchhiked a ride back to the city.

Back in New York, Sullivan anony-

mously called the New Jersey State Police and described the place for them to look for the body of a man who had fallen off a cliff.

During the next few days he kept searching the papers for the story of the body being found. He was very anxious to learn Mr. Lynch's true identity. But he never did. No story about the incident broke in the papers and when Sullivan again called the State Police a few days later, he learned that they had searched the whole section, but had not found the body.

And when Sullivan drove up there himself a few days later, he found that he could not find the exact spot where he and Mr. Lynch had fought and where the killer had toppled over, himself. So, he let it go at that. He was positive that Mr. Lynch could not have survived the fall, and he figured that his corpse must have rolled under a ledge of rocks or into some underbrush there to remain hidden.

Sailor Sullivan never fought again after that. He hung up his gloves. He bought a little house out in Staten Island for Sue and himself. And when time grew heavy on his hands, he went back to the job he had known before he became a fighter. He shipped out to sea on a freighter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Score One—For the Dead!

WHEN Sullivan got off the Staten Island Ferry, he walked across Battery Park toward the subway. He was so engrossed with his own dark thoughts, he didn't see the little man in the seaman's pea jacket, hurrying toward him, until they came face to face, almost bumping into each other in the park.

The little man grabbed Sullivan's arm. "Mr. Sullivan!" he cried. "I was just going over to the island to see you."

"Huh?" Sullivan said. The dazed look

left his eyes as he recognized the other man. "Hello, there, Lopez."

Lopez' pinched, wrinkled features wreathed in a grin. He said: "You remember me, eh, Mr. Sullivan? You remember when we sailed together on the *Sea Queen*, on a run to Rio, eh?"

"Sure," Sullivan said. He smiled a little. "You said you were coming out to my house? What's on your mind?"

"This," Lopez said. He dug into a pocket of the pea jacket. He was actually beaming now. Any moment Sullivan expected him to gurgle. He held out a pink check.

Sullivan took the check. It was made out to *cash* and the amount was \$10,000. "What's it for?" Sullivan said. A frown formed between his scarred brows.

"It's like this," Lopez explained. "A bunch of us boys from the boats—about fifty of us—got together at the Union Hall and we pooled our dough. We got a syndicate. We want to bet that ten grand on you, Mr. Sullivan. That dough of ours says you gonna win over Jackie Stevens, Saturday night."

"Well!" Sullivan said. He didn't know what to say. He looked at little Lopez. A lump forced its way into his throat. He knew what that money meant. He knew what each man had gone through to earn his share. For lack of anything better, he said. "You guys are crazy, risking your dough like that. You'd do better to buy war bonds."

"We'll do that, too," Lopez said, chuckling. "And plenty of 'em—with the winnings. It ain't no risk, Mr. Sullivan. Us guys know you. We've worked with you. It's easy money . . . Now, what we want you to do, is place this bet with some big shot commissioner, where we'll know it'll be safe and where we'll get good odds. We figured you'd know more about that."

"Well, I don't know," Sullivan said. He looked at Lopez. His eyes were shin-

ing. "All right, Lopez, I'll take care of it. And look—look, Lopez, you tell the boys for me, that they don't know what this means. You tell 'em I'll be in there and I won't let 'em down. You tell them that."

"Sure," Lopez said. He punched Sullivan's arm, gently. "See you Saturday night, Mr. Sullivan. You'll hear us guys yelling."

Sullivan stood there for quite awhile watching Lopez hurry off. He looked down at the check in his hands. He felt his face and his neck and his ears get hot. There's a bunch of guys for you, he thought. Very firmly, he folded the check and placed it in his pocket.

He went on to the subway and rode uptown. First, he stopped at the *Globe's* office and asked for Leo Earnshaw. But Leo wasn't there. Sullivan spoke to Ben Hinkle and learned that Earnshaw had not come back to the office with him, but had instead gone to his own apartment to knock out the column for the next day.



INSTEAD of going direct to Earnshaw's flat up near Columbus Circle, Sullivan stopped at the office of Brooks Lancaster, the betting commissioner, a few blocks away.

Lancaster had a small, cheap office on the second floor of an old loft building. Sullivan pushed open the door, stepped inside. Brooks Lancaster was sitting at his desk. He looked up, startled, when Sullivan entered. He was a peculiar looking man. He was about Sullivan's age and build, with a big, blocky face and mousy grey hair. He had no eyebrows and the places where they should have been, the skin was pale and shiny. Big spots on his cheeks had skin of the same waxy looking texture and on these places no beard stubble grew. It gave his whole

face a strangely splotchy look. But he was an immaculate dresser. He always wore stiff collars and neatly knotted, rich colored cravats.

"Hello, Lancaster," Sullivan said.

The man behind the desk quickly reached for a drawer, slid it open, poked his hand inside and left it there. His green eyes narrowed between thin lids.

"What do you want, Sullivan?" he said. "What is it?"

Sullivan put one hand in his pocket to get the check, started toward the desk. Suddenly Lancaster stood up. As he did so, he pulled a blue-steeled automatic from the drawer.

"Stop right there, Sullivan," he ordered. His voice was icy. "Bring your hand out of that pocket, empty."

"Okay," Sullivan said, surprised. "Say, what's the idea? Why the artillery, Lancaster? I come up here to do some business with you—and good business at that—and you—"

"Shut up," Lancaster said. He came out from behind the desk. He cautiously circled around behind Sullivan and jammed the gun into the fighter's back. With the other hand, he swiftly patted over Sullivan's clothing. Then his hand dipped into a pocket and pulled out the check.

"Say, what's the matter with you?" Sullivan demanded. "Are you crazy?"

Lancaster went back around behind the desk. He dropped the automatic back in the drawer, flicked the check on the desk and sat down. He grinned sheepishly and showed a mouthful of gold teeth.

"Okay," he said. "I'm sorry. My mistake, Sullivan. What's the check?"

"Listen!" Sullivan started to get red. He reached for the check. "The hell with you, if that's the way you treat your customers. I can take this betting money somewhere else."

Lancaster caught his hand. "I apologized," he said. "You don't have to get

sore. You see, I've been having some trouble, Sullivan. There's—uh—there's been some attempts on my life. I heard that it was you who was after my hide, so when you came bursting in here—"

"Me?" Sullivan broke in. "You *are* whacky! Why should I be after you?"

THE BETTING commissioner shrugged broad, neatly tailored shoulders. "Because I've quoted such high odds against your chances of taking Jackie Stevens, I guess."

"But that doesn't make sense."

"A lot of things don't make sense in this business," Lancaster said. "What's the dope on that check? Forget the other. I said I was sorry."

Sullivan shook his head, puzzledly, and told Lancaster about the boys in the Maritime Union. He placed the check, got his ticket, and started to leave the office. Just as he reached the door, Lancaster said: "No hard feelings, Sullivan. I wish you luck."

"I'll bet you do," Sullivan grinned crookedly. "And all bad."

A few minutes later he subwayed up to Columbus Circle and entered the old brownstone rooming house where Leo Earnshaw had a small, furnished apartment. He found the door slightly ajar and pushed it open, walked in.

"Leo," he called. "It's only me, Sailor Sullivan."

Earnshaw didn't answer. Sullivan stepped through a dim foyer, into a small old-fashioned furnished living room. He saw Earnshaw sitting there at his desk, bent over his typewriter.

"Hey, Leo!" Sullivan said. "Are you deaf?"

He walked across the room and touched the sports columnist on the shoulder. He jumped back as the figure sitting at the desk toppled over sideways to the floor. Sullivan stared down at Leo Earnshaw. First he saw the eyes that had once been

small and bright and sharp, bulging out like peeled blue plums. Then he saw the black-purple color of the dead man's swollen tongue, protruding between his thin lips. His eyes jumped down after that to Leo Earnshaw's plaid necktie. It was jerked up tightly into the loose flaps of flesh at his throat. It was pulled so tight that part of the cloth had ripped in the killer's hands.

Sullivan stood there, swaying. He couldn't believe it. It raised hell with all that he had figured. Now, he knew that Leo Earnshaw couldn't possibly have been Mr. Lynch, because now he knew that Earnshaw was one of his victims.

And something was very crazy wrong with the pattern this time. Earnshaw was not connected in any way with Jackie Stevens, the man Sullivan was scheduled to fight. Why, then, was Earnshaw selected?

Before Sullivan had any time to really ponder that problem, the ringing of the telephone crashed through the thick silence of the room. Sullivan stared at it, dumbly. For some time he didn't attempt to answer it. Finally, he walked over to the little table and lifted the instrument out of its cradle.

"Hello," he said, weakly.

"How do you like it, Sailor?" a strangely muffled voice said. "And you haven't seen anything yet. You see, this is my last chance, I guess. You'll probably never fight again. I want to make certain of this one, so I'm giving you plenty of warning. You're going to kiss the canvas, this Saturday night, for sure, Sullivan."

The connection broke loudly in Sullivan's ear before he could answer. He set the phone back down, stared into a wall mirror. He didn't like what he saw. His face was grey as the freighters he used to sail on. His mouth hung loosely and a great vein bulged and throbbed in his forehead. The face that looked back

at him was now that of an old man. It was as though another ten years had suddenly been slapped onto his life, and a terrible, hard decade at that.

CHAPTER FIVE

"You've Got Her . . ."

SULLIVAN turned away from the mirror and stared around the room. His dry, feverish lips cracked apart. He half whispered: "There *isn't* any answer to it. It's just senseless killing. Murders without any meaning. The work of some deformed mind. There's no telling who's going to get it next, now!"

Slowly, he walked about the room. He stopped by Leo Earnshaw's desk. His fingers poked through the litter of copy paper and notes. Absently, he half read some of the stuff. A few minutes later, hidden under the other papers, Sullivan picked up a sheaf of old newspaper clippings. They were held together with a paper clip.

Thumbing through them, Sullivan saw that they were all items about the men who had been killed by Mr. Lynch. There were five of them; one on Magraw, Harry Jung, Ralph Hertz, Alec Coons—whose death had been blamed by the police on a hitch hiker—and the recent item about Nick Jaro, Jackie Steven's sparring partner.

Clipped along with these items was a little note penciled in Earnshaw's hand. It said: "Nick Jaro used to work for Harry Jung. Question him."

Sullivan mulled that over but he got nothing out of it, unless it was possibly the angle that Earnshaw, suspecting that all those men *had* been murdered instead of dying by suicide or accident, had stumbled on some clue to Mr. Lynch's real identity, and that Lynch had killed Earnshaw to silence him.

The more Sullivan thought along that

line, the more likely it sounded. Especially with the note mentioning Jaro and Jung. Jung had been one of the first victims of Mr. Lynch. Suppose Earnshaw had learned that Nick Jaro and he both had information, which when put together would bring a right answer?

Feverishly, then, Sullivan searched the rest of Earnshaw's desk. But he found nothing else. There were no other clues or bits of information.

Finally he left. He went out onto the street and he walked all the way down to South Ferry, a distance of several miles, not even conscious of the time or effort it took. Thoughts whirled within his head and several times, it seemed to Sullivan that he almost had the solution to the whole crazy business. Then suddenly it would elude him again. It was like trying to remember a name that you know very well and have at the tip of your tongue, yet cannot quite bring to mind. It was maddening.

On the ferry back to Staten Island, Sailor Sullivan sat on a bench on the upper deck, a lonely, dejected figure. He kept thinking about all that money his fellow merchant marines had bet on him, of the faith they had in him. They were going to lose that money. And that faith was going to be shattered.

It had been a tough enough thing for Sullivan to face before, making a comeback after ten years, a man considered past the age of a good fighter, pitted against a man fifteen years younger, a savage young killer with everything on his side.

But now, with all this against him, Sullivan knew that he couldn't possibly win. All the vim and vigor and the renewed youth that the training and clean living had seemed to bring back to him, were gone now.

And to top it all off, he couldn't win, even if he was able. Mr. Lynch wouldn't let him.

THERE were no more deaths the next few days and Sullivan didn't hear from Mr. Lynch again. He was forced to keep his spirits up, at least on the surface, and he was forced to keep on training, so that Sue wouldn't suspect that anything was wrong. He couldn't let her know. It would drive her crazy. It would worry her to death. And there wouldn't be anything she could do to help the situation.

The morning of the fight, Sullivan was beginning to feel better. Lots of his neighbors, there on Staten Island, had dropped in. They had all been mighty nice and they were all mighty sure that he was going to win. One day, a group of little kids followed Sullivan all the way to the store, admiringly. One of the boys said:

"It's too bad it isn't a title fight, Mr. Sullivan. You'd be champ again. That Stevens was pretty smart not to risk the title with *you!*"

Sullivan grinned at them, feeling good, and ruffed up their hair. One little fellow kept pleading: "Lemme feel your muscle, Sailor. C'mon, be a good sport and lemme feel it."

Finally Sailor bent down, laughing, and held out his arm and crooked it slowly, swelling his bicep. The youngster gripped hard with his little grimy fingers. His eyes got big and wide. "Jeeze!" he said. "Jeeze, Sailor, you'll knock him for a row!"

Then when Sullivan suddenly straightened up, bringing the little chap up with him, dangling from his arm, the kid had spasms of delight. "Wow!" he shrieked, joyfully. "Lookit, guys! Lookit this!"

All those things meant a lot to Sullivan. And in spite of all that other that had happened, all that was on his mind, he felt more like himself again the Saturday morning of the fight.

When he kissed Sue goodbye at the door, about to leave for the city for the final pre-fight red tape, she squeezed his arm hard. Her eyes were bright and hot.

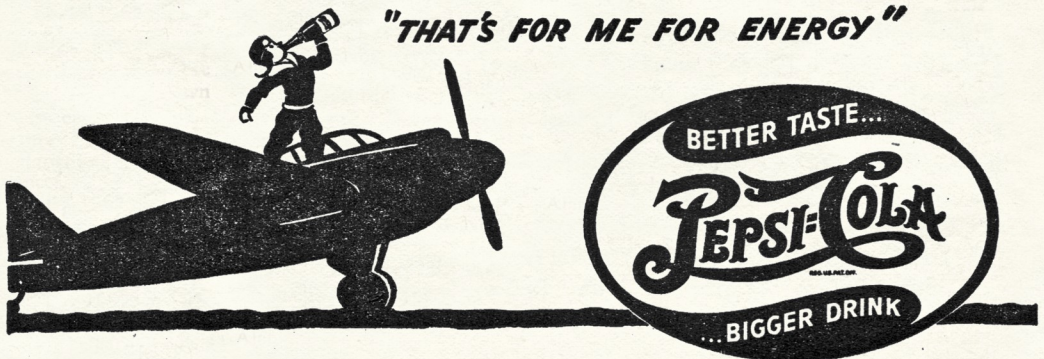
"Good luck, Sully," she said. "Knock his block off. You can do it, Sully. Think of me. I'll—I'll be listening in."

"I'd feel better if you were right there at the ringside," he said, grinning. "I could dump him right in your lap then. Sure you won't change your mind?"

She shook her head. She bit her lip, turned her head quickly. "No, Sully," she said. "Mmmnnn! No, sir."

"All right," he told her. "I understand." He did, all too well. He knew that she meant that if they were wrong, if they were all wrong about him, he would take a brutal beating. And she didn't want to be there. The radio she could always shut off, if it turned out that way.

Sullivan spent most of that afternoon in a hotel room, talking with his manager, Pete Devlin, and his seconds, going



over last minute plans for the battle. They had decided that Sullivan was to give the fight everything he had the first few rounds. If he didn't nail Stevens in those early rounds, he was to take it easy through the rest of the fight, conserving his strength for a last-round whirlwind attack to impress the officials for a decision in his favor.

JUST before supper time, Sullivan sat down in a corner of the room, alone with a pack of cards to play a few games of solitaire. Back when he was the champ, he had always done that before each fight. It helped to soothe his nerves a little, take off some of the raw edge of training.

Shuffling the greasy cards, he thought: It's funny the way a habit can come back, even after ten years. I hope it works the same in the ring. I had a lot of good fighting habits. I could use some of them tonight.

While he played cards, Sullivan's thoughts turned subconsciously to the thing that had never really been completely out of his mind since the night he had seen the shadow of the noose on the bedroom wall. Now, with his mind on edge the way it was, he seemed able to think about it more clearly.

Now, having definitely decided that Leo Earnshaw must have been hot on the trail of Mr. Lynch's identity, Sullivan carefully went over his conversation with Earnshaw the morning of the day the columnist had been murdered.

He remembered Earnshaw bringing up Brooks Lancaster. He also remembered Lancaster's strange actions when he had entered his office to place the \$10,000 bet. But the betting commissioner didn't seem to tie up with the thing at all. Sullivan hadn't even known or hadn't even heard of Lancaster around the time Mr. Lynch first began to operate. And Lancaster had later married the widow of one of

the men slain by Mr. Lynch, Harry Jung. Sullivan decided that angle was out.

He wondered who the next victim would be, if he, Sullivan, won tonight's fight. He tried not to think about that, because no matter what happened, he was going to do his best to win. He concentrated on his solitaire.

Dinner was sent up to the room and Sullivan ate heartily. After that, about seven o'clock, a package came. It was a silken belt with a silver buckle which was inscribed with the Maritime Union's symbol, for him to wear on his tights. The card with it said: "To the winner—from the boys."

After he read that, Sullivan closed his eyes and said a little prayer that they were right. Every second it was becoming more and more important to him that he should win.

He called up his home, then, to tell Sue about the gift. But there was no answer. He couldn't understand her not being there, tonight. But he figured that perhaps she had run over to one of the neighbors, or gone to the store and would be back in a little while. He left instructions for the operator to keep ringing every ten minutes and let him know when she got the number.

Eight o'clock came and Sullivan and the others had to leave to go down for the physical and the weighing in. And still Sue had not answered the phone. Sullivan really began to worry, then. He had the phone company check and make sure the line wasn't out of order. It wasn't, so far as they could tell.

"Where can she be?" he kept asking Pete Devlin. "Something must be wrong, Pete. She should be home. She wouldn't go anywhere tonight."

The old manager kept wrinkling his pug Irish nose and counselling: "Keep your shorts on, Sully. Don't go, now, getting het up over nothing. Sue's probably going to listen in with a neighbor. She

naturally wouldn't want to listen to the fight by her lonesome."

But after the weighing in, Sullivan tried half a dozen of the neighbors on the phone. None of them had seen Sue. She wasn't at any of their houses. He couldn't understand it. After several more calls he got so that he couldn't drop the nickel into the slot, his hands were trembling so.

An hour later in the dressing room at the Garden, Sullivan stripped. Sweat rolled from him. His face, though, was tight and drawn, and the heavy three-day beard stubble on his cheeks and chin seemed almost grey. The room was a constant hum of voices. Several newspapermen were there.



THE door slammed and Sullivan looked up. He saw Devlin coming toward him. He pushed through the crowd, grabbed the manager's arm.

"What did you learn, Pete?" he demanded. "Tell me, Pete."

Devlin shrugged bony shoulders. "Not a thing. And that means you've got nothing to worry about. I called the police and all the hospitals. She ain't had any accident or nothing. I'm telling you, Sully, everything's all right. There's nothing to worry about. Forget it."

"Yeah, everything's all right," Sullivan said softly. "Nothing to worry about." In spite of the heat of the room, he shivered.

Devlin watched the chief second spread out a lot of bandages and first aid medicine for cuts and wounds. He put a hand on Sullivan's sweating shoulder. "I'm going to mope over to Stevens' dressing room to watch them bandage his hands. I'll be right back, Sully. Sit tight."

Sullivan didn't answer. He watched Devlin push through the crowd out of the room. Ben Hinkle came over to Sullivan, perched on the edge of his table.

"Well," Hinkle said, "The first prelim's on. How you feel, Sailor."

"What?" Sullivan looked at the reporter absently. "Oh, Hello, Hinkle. I—I'm all right, I guess."

"Too bad Leo isn't here. He practically promoted this bout all by his lonesome. He could hardly wait to see it. And now he never will, poor guy. I hope the cops pick up his killer in a hurry."

"They won't," Sullivan said, without thinking. "How can they?"

Hinkle jumped up off the table. "What do you mean, Sailor?" he demanded. He eyed the fighter shrewdly. "Hey, what do you know about that? Come to think of it, you and Leo seemed to have a lot of secrets that day out at your place. And on the way back, Leo let drop some remark about what a surprise it would be to a lot of people if it was learned that Harry Jung never died. What do you know, Sullivan?"

"Nothing," Sullivan said quickly. "I don't know what I'm saying, Hinkle. Guess I'm just upset. I—say, what was that about Harry Jung?"

The reporter repeated. Sullivan slipped off the table. His fingers found Hinkle's arms, squeezed through the cloth into the flesh until the newspaperman squirmed in agony.

"Are you sure—sure about that?" Sullivan said. "Leo Earnshaw said that?"

"Of course I'm sure." Hinkle wrenched free. "What's the matter with you, going crazy?"

But Sullivan didn't hear him. He was staring off into space. "I'm beginning to see it," he said softly.

The door opened again and the roar of the audience watching the preliminary bout swelled in on a wave of sound, then was suddenly cut off as the door slammed shut. Some one tapped Sullivan on the shoulder. It was one of the attendants.

"Phone call for you, Mr. Sullivan," the youth said. "Urgent."

Sullivan's face drained white. He grabbed up a bathrobe, followed the attendant to a phone in a corner of the dressing room. "You can take it here."

His hands fumbling, almost dropping the receiver, several times, Sullivan finally managed to gasp out: "Hello, Sue? Is this you, Sue?"

"No, it's not," a dull, muffled voice said. "But I'm calling for her. We'll be listening in to the fight, Sue and I, Sailor. We want to hear it when you take that dive. You're going to take it in the third round. You hear, Sully? The third round!"

"You have her?" Sullivan's voice was no more than a cracked whisper. "You've got Sue?"

"That's right. You see, Sailor, once a guy crosses me up, I can't trust him any more. I'm making sure this time. You're going to do as I say or Sue's going to have a brand new necklace. It'll be made out of hemp. It'll be a good fit, too, Sailor. And if you pull a fast one on me, when I'm fitting that rope necklace I'll also be remembering that little tumble off the Palisades."

"Look!" Sullivan said. His mouth was thick. It seemed almost as though his heart was up there bumping against the back of his teeth. "If I do that—if I throw it—you won't harm her? You swear that?"

"It's a deal," the voice. "But you know I don't fool around, so don't try anything, Sailor."

"Okay," Sullivan said, numbly. "The third round. Okay."

CHAPTER SIX

Death Takes a Dive

HE HUNG up the receiver. He leaned against the wall weakly for a moment. He had to lose now. All his friends, all those swell guys from the ships, were going to get the works.

And it wouldn't be hard, either. It wouldn't take much for him to throw the fight, now. Sullivan didn't feel as though he could hardly hold his hands up before him.

He stumbled away from the phone. Several sports writers looked at him, narrowly. They started to nudge each other. Pete Devlin, back in the room, rushed over to him, put his arms around Sullivan's shoulders.

"What is it, Sully?" Pete demanded nervously. "You sick? Tell me, feller!"

"Sick?" Sullivan repeated. He looked at Devlin, hardly knew who he was. He was seeing something else. He was seeing Sue with a rope around her neck, a carefully fashioned noose like the shadow they had seen on their bedroom wall. He was seeing a strangler's hands pulling that noose tight.

The reporters were forming a little ring around them, then. Suddenly Ben Hinkle's face swam before Sullivan's gaze. Suddenly the words Hinkle had said to him broke through the fog in his brain.

It was suddenly as though a statue had sprung to life. Sullivan straightened. A wild look came into his gray eyes. He swept his long arms out before him, shoved them all back and lunged toward the dressing room door, just as an attendant poked his head in and announced that the second preliminary fight was just going on.

A maroon robed figure slammed past the attendant and out the door. For a stunned minute, none of those in the dressing room seemed to realize what had happened. Then Hinkle and another reporter broke for the door. Devlin and the others followed.

Out in the corridor they saw Sullivan just disappearing around a corner. "Hey, Sully, come back!" Devlin yelled. "The fight, Sully! You can't do this!"

The faint sound of shouted words came

back to them: "I'll be back. Keep the prelims going!"

Sullivan raced out of the Garden, leaped into a hack. "Get going!" he ordered the driver. "Fast!"

"Where to?" the hackie wanted to know.

"The nearest pay station," Sullivan told him. "Please hurry it, mister. Please!"

The cab jolted away just as the rest of the crowd came pouring out of the Garden exit. They all rushed for cabs, but by the time the jam of half a dozen hacks

The cab seemed veritably to leap ahead at that, and a few minutes later it squealed to a halt before a fashionable apartment house. Sullivan got out. "You wait here," he told the hackie. "I hope to be right back. Meanwhile, give me a wrench, or a hammer or something."

The cabbie gaped. "A—a what?"

Sullivan reached in and yanked him out from under the wheel. He ripped up the front seat, fished in amongst a welter of rags and tools and picked out a big monkey wrench. Then he ran into the lobby of the apartment house.

Dale Clark, one of your long-time favorites, has a full-length novel featuring a new brand of hell-brew—and Stuart Sterling returns to these pages with a novelette of two-legged vermin who infest the night, in the coming June issue of this magazine! Watch for it at your newsstand!



all pulling out at once, cleared up, Sullivan's driver had gotten away and out of sight.

He stopped a few blocks away at a drug store. Sullivan got out, dashed into the store, bent over the phone books, rustled the pages. Women at the soda fountain took one look at the white, fierce-looking figure in ring shoes and bathrobe, bare-legged, and went into a chorus of screams.

But Sullivan didn't even look at them. He ran back out to the hack and gave an address in Gracey Square. He sat, leaning forward on the edge of the seat all the way, urging the driver to greater speed.

"Ain't you Sailor Sullivan?" the driver asked, once, glancing back through the rear view mirror. "Say, you're supposed to fight tonight. What's the idea of—"

"Shut up and drive!" Sullivan broke in. "You get me where I want in time and I'll see that you get to watch that fight from a ringside seat!"

A STUPEFIED switchboard operator stared at him, eyes goggling. Sullivan yanked him up out of his seat. He raised the monkey wrench. "Quick!" he ordered. "Take me to Brooks Lancaster's apartment in a rush!"

"But—but—" the uniformed little man spluttered. But he made no further attempt at speech. Eying the raised monkey wrench in terror, he rushed toward the elevator, Sullivan at his heels. The car stopped at the sixth floor and Sullivan pushed the kid off ahead of him.

"You come with me," he said. "When we get to the door, and they don't open up right away, you see to it that they do. Tell 'em the house is on fire. Anything. But get that door opened!"

"Yes, sir!" the operator gulped.

They stopped in front of 6-E and Sullivan rapped hard on the door with the wrench. A few seconds and a woman called through the door: "Who is it? I can't open the door. I'm not dressed."

Sullivan raised the wrench over the

operator's head. In a quavering voice, the employee said: "It's Peter, Mrs. Lancaster. I have the superintendent with me. The people downstairs are complaining of water leaking down from your apartment."

"Good boy!" Sullivan mumbled softly.

A lock chain rattled inside. A bolt clicked. And then the door opened the fraction of an inch. Sullivan hurled all his weight against it, sent it crashing in and open. A tall, thin brunette staggered back from the door. Black hair was piled in a high, exotic coiffure on her head. Her yellow-brown eyes widened and the corners of her carmined lips drew back in a scream.

"Hello, Mrs. Jung," Sullivan said. He pushed her aside, stepped into a big, beautifully furnished living room. "Where's Harry?"

Before the woman could answer, Sullivan looked toward a bedroom just as a head popped out. It had a pale, spotchy face, full of shiny-skinned spots. Beneath it a highly colored cravat nestled in a tight knot against a stiff collar.

"Good God!" the face said, and disappeared.

Sullivan dove toward the bedroom door. He went into the room whirling like a football player in a spinner. It was a good thing he did. The big, well dressed man, with the splotchy face, the man who was known as Brooks Lancaster, betting commissioner, stood by a bureau, with an automatic in his hand slamming out flame and lead. The bullets slapped into the door frame around Sullivan.

He hurtled across the room and slammed against the other man, slapping the gun from his hand with one fierce blow of the wrench. Even as he did so, Sullivan saw Sue, sitting on the floor in a corner, bound and gagged.

Sullivan's fist rocked into that spotchy, twisted face. The betting commissioner twirled back against the wall and bounded back. His fists beat into Sullivan's body,

half a dozen times. But Sullivan hardly felt the blows. His eyes were glowing. His jaw was set and white as a block of marble. He stood there and measured and timed, and then he let go his right hand.

There was a terrible sound of gristle smashing into bone. This time when Lancaster hit the wall, he didn't bounce back. He stood there for a second, then started to slowly slide down. Sullivan hooked two more punches to that already broken and bloodied countenance before the man crumpled to the floor.

Then Sullivan whirled. He found the brunette standing in the doorway. A little pearl handled pistol was drawing a bead on his back. The woman's eyes were pulled up and back at the corners now into yellow slits. Her teeth showed in a thin white bar between the blood-red pads of her lips. The sound of the shot roared in the room. And at the same instant the pearl handled pistol dribbled from the woman's fingers.



SULLIVAN watched numbly, not understanding, waiting for the shock of the pain of a bullet wound. But it never came. Suddenly, he knew why. He saw a red splotch blossom on the dark woman's dress near the shoulder. Then he turned and saw Sue, twisted around, so that the automatic she held in her bound hands, the one she had scooped from the floor after Lancaster had dropped it, pointed toward the doorway. Smoke wafted from its barrel.

"Sue!" he cried. He walked toward her, bent over and started to undo her bonds. He ripped off the gag. "Sue, honey, I made it!"

She grinned up at him. "You did at that." She was very pale, but she managed a wan grin. "What about the fight, Sully? Is it over? Did you win?"

"The fight?" he said. "Oh . . . Oh!"

He didn't have to answer. At that moment all hell seemed to break loose out in the living room of the apartment. Then Pete Devlin, Hinkle and a crowd of reporters and a couple of cops, came larruping in. They were all yelling at once.

It took awhile for them to all quiet down enough to get an explanation. Then Sullivan and Sue told them briefly what had happened. All the time they were talking, Pete Devlin kept glancing at his watch. Finally, he broke in: "Look, can't the rest of this be settled after the fight? I don't know how long they can keep those prelims going. If we don't hurry, we'll never make it." Devlin looked toward a cop. "How about it, Sarge?"

"Well, I don't know." The beefy faced sergeant looked at Sullivan. "It all depends on the Sailor, here. You see I got half a week's salary bet on him . . . You feel all right, Sailor? After all this, you still think you can lick—"

"Sure," Sullivan broke in. "I feel fine."

They had a police escort all the way back to the Garden. On the way, Sullivan continued his explanations to the sergeant and Devlin who were riding with them.

"What really happened back there when Harry Jung supposedly hung himself, was this," he said. "Jung, down and out, heavily in debt and finished up pretty much as a fighter, cooked up this whole scheme. At first he was just trying to scare me into throwing the fight, on which he had bet all the dough he could scrape up. When it didn't work, Jung got the bright idea of going ahead with the thing. He had already committed one murder—Magraw—to convince me. What would a few more matter? So he dug up some guy about his own age and build and general appearance, dolled him up in his own clothes, with his own papers in his pockets and all, and killed him, strangled him. With the note he left, with the features bloated and distorted

and with his wife to identify the corpse, he got away with it easily."

"So that wasn't Harry Jung who died, back then, at all!" Devlin marveled.

"No," Sullivan went on. "Jung's wife was in on it. She was probably the beneficiary of a big insurance policy and they used the dough to get a fresh start. Jung had a plastic surgery job secretly done on his face, to remove scar tissue and other evidences of his profession and to completely change his appearance. Then he became Brooks Lancaster, a betting commissioner, and remarried his wife under that name."

"But why did he continue to hound you?" Sue asked.

Sullivan pulled his robe tighter about him. "Jung decided to keep up the Mr. Lynch business," he said, "figuring that it was a natural to make a big haul some time. He knew I was hot at that time and had nothing but set-ups lined up for my next few fights. He knew the odds against me being beaten were heavy. And he figured that if he kept it up long enough, eventually the business would get on my nerves and I would either throw a fight, or go into a ring so rattled some night, I really would take a shellacking. With a big hunk of dough on my opponent at terrific odds, Jung as Lancaster, would have cleaned up a fortune. It was more than worth the try, being in it as deeply as he was."

From there Sullivan went on to explain that the night he and Jung had fought on the Palisades and Jung had pitched over, the killer must not have died, but managed to crawl away and hide out somewhere, pay somebody to nurse him back to health on the quiet. From then on, with Sullivan retired, he had been forced to forget about the Mr. Lynch role. Until this year when Sullivan had signed up for the Stevens fight. With that, Jung had determined to really make the thing work, by kidnapping Sue.

He must have killed Nick Jaro and Leo Earnshaw, Sullivan figured, because somehow those two had learned something, become suspicious.

"When he came out to the house, late this afternoon," Sue put in, "he told me that he was Mr. Lynch, and that you wanted me brought to the city to witness the signing of some papers for the fight. I didn't think anything about it, Sully, because of the earlier phone call."

THEY reached the Garden then and went in. A great roar went up from the crowd when they marched down the aisle toward the ring. Jackie Stevens was already in his corner.

While the two fighters were in the center of the ring getting their final instructions, Sullivan looked out over the crowd. He saw a lot of the tanned and wind-burned faces of the men of the merchant marine. They were waving at him. They were shouting and raising clenched fists. Sullivan grinned at them.

He went back to his corner, feeling as though he was walking on air. He flung off his robe, scraped his feet in the resin box. His arms flexed and he highstepped around the corner for a few seconds. Devlin and the seconds were all flinging words of advice at him. Sullivan lost most of it as just a jumble of meaningless words.

All the old confidence, all the old strength seemed to be flowing back into him. A hush fell over the crowd as the buzzer sounded and seconds clambered out through the ropes. Then the gong clanged. The grin fell from Sullivan's hard, stubbled features and in its place came a look of grim, dogged determination. He had a job to do.

It was really a bad break for Jackie Stevens. He was a good strong boy, fast and a good fighter. But he was never really in it. He had youth and lots of speed, but he was a little over-anxious.

Sailor Sullivan had experience and something swelling and filling his heart so that nothing could slow it down. He took a lot of punishment that first round. But this was a special night for Sullivan. He took each punch grinning. He waited his time, let Jackie Stevens get careless and then he set him carefully up and threw his right. It only landed squarely once in that first round, but that was enough.

It was all over in the third. Sullivan did a quick merciful job of it once he had the boy at his mercy. After it was over, in the tumult and the shouting, Sullivan danced over to Stevens' corner and flung his arms around the younger man.

"Swell fight, kid!" he yelled above the roar of the crowd. "You're tough, son, a good champ."

Stevens' dark, battered face looked up at him, wincing and grinning. "I'm glad it was you, Sailor," he said. "I've been thinking about going into the Merchant Marine Academy. Now I know I'm going to. In this man's war I want to be in an outfit where there's guys like you."

A few hours later, on the upper deck of the Staten Island Ferry, Sullivan and his wife stood by the rail, looking out at the Statue of Liberty. Wind whipped Sue's soft hair about her face.

"Smell that salt air!" Sullivan said. "There's nothing like it, is there, Sue?"

"No," she said and snuggled against his broad shoulder. She knew he was thinking about the next convoy that he would ship out on. There was going to be another long stretch of lonely days and nights ahead of her. But Sue smiled anyhow. She knew that there were things a man had to do.

"Good old Sully," she said and hugged his arm. "You showed 'em, didn't you?"

"Hey," he said. "Where do you get that 'old' stuff?" He put his arm around her and laughed. "I've got a hell of a lot more fighting to do before I get old."

CALL FOR YOUR KILLER

By Donald G. Cormack

When Kay Walsh King felt out of sorts, and phoned a physician—she condemned herself to the sort of gangster wipe-out that was spreading like a pestilence through the city.



He was saying, "I hate to do this..."

ANY guy would have stopped and looked at her. She was down in the lobby of my office building, reading the directory on the wall there, and I had just left the elevator, on my way out. I went over to the newsstand

and bought a pack of cigarettes I didn't need, just so I could gander at her a little longer.

I won't try to describe her; I couldn't, anyway. Just try to remember the loveliest little cutie you ever saw, then double every attraction and you're getting close. Dark blonde hair; about five-foot four; wearing a coat and hat of matched fur of the four-figure variety. That's the picture.

I remember noticing one other thing

before the action started—and being a private investigator, this was purely a professional observation. She was wearing one of those shoulder-strap handbags. You know, the kind that's suspended at a girl's hip from a strap that goes up over her shoulder. To my mind, it must have been invented by the Pickpockets' League. What a come-on! Especially with a coat like that carrying it around. Then, instinctively, I began giving the people in the crowded lobby the once-over.

When it's part of your business, a "wire" is easy to spot—and, usually, he's the exact opposite of the layman's down-at-heels, tattered-cap mental picture. This guy was a typical worker: suave, carefully dressed, unobtrusive, friendly. He was looking toward the girl, but his eyes weren't on the girl; they were on her handbag. He was smoking a cigarette, but now he crushed it out under a well-polished toe, took another from his case and sauntered over toward the cutie.

Lifting his black Homburg, he said something to her and she turned. The way they stood now, she had her back to the wall and he was just in front of her, screening the following action from sight of the rest of the lobby. She delved in her handbag for a second, then flicked a cigarette lighter and held it up for the guy. One hand held the lighter, the other shielded the flame, and her eyes were carefully watching the end of his cigarette. With a handbag dangling at her side!

A second later the guy tipped his hat, bowing slightly, then turned and made for the revolving doors at a brisk, businesslike pace—and I was right on his heels. Because the only thing the girl carried over her shoulder now was a strap.

I figured I'd pick him up without a scene, because the dip fraternity rarely puts up a scrap and I saw no reason for grandstanding the pinch and creating a scene. That was a mistake. I was six

paces behind him when he hit the revolving doors, but a fat woman sidled in between the two of us, taking her own good time in getting to the street. The other door was in use for opposite traffic, so I just had to wait. When I got to the street, the guy was gone.

I knew he'd make for the nearest corner to get out of sight, so I trotted there—and saw him standing by a refuse can fifty yards down the quiet side street. He rummaged inside the handbag, found what he wanted and tossed the incriminating "leather" into the can. By the time he heard me coming, it was too late. Steve Owen should have seen that flying tackle! The two of us went rolling, and when we stopped I was on top of the half-groggy dip.

HIS clenched right fist still held the dough he'd taken from the bag, I knew, so I gripped it with both hands and began twisting mercilessly. The guy must've gotten plenty, because he fought like a madman to hold on. I thought the bones in his wrist would snap, but he didn't let go. He writhed on the pavement, cursing and groaning at the same time, trying to knee me, pounding my right shoulder as he swung for a clean shot at my protected jaw.

Finally, with a stifled scream, his hand opened, dropping what it held. Then, with a sudden twist, he kned me aside and was up and away. But I let him go. What the hell? I had the pretty kid's property back and I wanted to catch her in the lobby if possible. Maybe I could win a smile—even a date!

Then I looked at what the dip had dropped, curiously spreading out the crumpled bit of paper. I blinked at what I saw. It was only a doctor's prescription blank, not yet made out!

The only way I could figure it, the guy must have mistaken it for a banknote in his hurry. What a laugh. Then I went

back to the ashcan and got the handbag, opening it.

First thing I saw, big as the Treasury, was a roll of bills that would have made my weekly income look sick!

There was one for the book! Passing up a few hundred bucks in cash, the crazy "wire" had snatched a blank prescription and fought for it with the fury of the damned. Maybe that was it. He was crazy. But he certainly had looked sane enough. I looked at the paper again, wondering if it could possibly have George Washington's signature on it. It was still blank.

The doctor's letterhead was printed at the top: *Dr. Manchester Belknap*, an address over on swanky Lakeside Drive, his office hours and a telephone number. The usual thing. As for Belknap himself, his name and reputation were nationally known—and revered. He was unassailably above reproach.

Then, walking back to the office, I went through the contents of the girl's handbag. Besides the thick wad of bills, there were the usual items a girl carries: lipstick and stuff, a handkerchief, some keys, and a driver's license in the name of Kay Walsh King—with an address to match that fur coat. Nothing more.

Kay wasn't in the lobby when I entered, but I didn't mind so much. At least I had her address and could send her property by mail—or maybe act as mailman myself. I took the elevator up to the eighteenth and went to the office labelled *Gerald Brand, Investigations*. My office.

Molly, my girl-of-all-work—and built to keep a man's mind on his business—was at her combination secretary-receptionist's desk. When she saw me come in she grinned, wiggling her eyebrows up and down and nodding toward the closed door to my private office. That meant a little pretty was waiting to see me.

A loud, she said, "There's a Miss Jean

Fox waiting to see you, Mr. Brand. I told her I thought you could fit her in between your scheduled appointments."

It was my turn to grin. Molly's always like that, trying to be impressive and businesslike with her "Mr. Brands" and her talk of "appointments." At least she is when there's a client within hearing distance.

I spoiled it all for her by saying loudly, "Thanks, cutie-pie. I'll fit her in between that appointment last Monday and the other one for next Friday," and went on in.



MISS Jean Fox had been looking out the window and now she spun nervously about at the sound of my entrance. Her eyes were unnaturally big with fear, her face was white, and she had as bad a case of jitters as I've ever seen. But her jump of surprise was no greater than mine—because "Miss Jean Fox" was my own little Kay Walsh King, whose handbag I carried in my topcoat pocket!

"You're Miss Jean Fox?" I asked after a second's silence. When she nodded without a word, I added, "And may I ask which of my old clients recommended you to me? I like to know."

"No one," she said now in her low, throaty voice, speaking for the first time in my hearing. "I read your name in the newspaper once and I remembered it. I don't know why. Brand. Jerry Brand. It's an easy name to remember, I guess."

"I'm glad it is. Now may I ask why you came to me?"

She was still standing by the window, still jittery but somewhat calmer now. I figured I had better stay on my feet too. The girl hesitated for a moment after my question, having trouble finding words, I supposed. I didn't mind the delay; I was content just to keep on looking at her.

"Certainly I'll tell you," she said at last. "I've read that you're known as an expert on death—accident, homicide and . . . murder. Well, I've got plenty of money. And I want to know just how much you'd charge me to stage someone's death."

Just like that! Her opening had all the elements of a grade-B movie thriller, but hearing it in real life took the wind out of me. I was sort of hanging on the ropes when I said, "Miss Fox, would you mind taking that easy chair so that I can sit down too?"

By the time we were both seated and had lighted cigarettes, I had decided to play her along for a bit. If she was crazy, she should be turned over to a mental institution before she did any real damage; if she was sane, the cops could take care of her. I wanted to find out which it should be. And, mister, was my heart sad that all that loveliness was going to waste!

I asked next, "Could you tell me first, please, before I quote any rates, just whose death you want me to finagle?"

"Certainly," she said again, unhesitatingly. "*Mine.*"

I put out my cigarette and leaned forward over the desk, speaking like a Dutch uncle. "Who are you trying to kid, Kay King? Yourself—or me, maybe?"

Her head snapped back as though I'd slapped her in the face. She gasped, then tried to say something, tried twice, but no words came out. I followed up the advantage.

"Look, Kay," I went on quietly, "do you know anything about law? Do you know that you've just asked me to commit myself as an accomplice in murder? Do you know that you've admitted, by indirection, both premeditation and intent to kill? Youngster, you're far too nice to go up for all the years that would cost you. Now do some talking—and maybe my memory won't be so good."

"I didn't say anything about murder!"

she said wildly. "I didn't ask you to kill anyone!"

"Listen, Kay. You came to me as Jean Fox. You wanted me to kill someone. Who? Why, Jean Fox. But you're Kay Walsh King. This Jean Fox wouldn't be the one you want bumped off, would it?"

"**T**HERE is no such person!" she sobbed, real tears coming to her eyes. "That was only a name I made up! I was afraid you'd turn me down and I didn't want you to know who I really was because you might come poking about in my affairs. And I'm in enough trouble already! Furthermore, I didn't say anything about murder! You said that! I only asked you to 'stage a death.' I meant to fake an accident that would make people think I had been killed accidentally—*so they'd stop trying to kill me for real!* Now do you understand you . . . you dodo!"

There was flashing anger in her eyes now, probably because I'd completely broken her down, made her cry and appear foolish. She was definitely the kind of girl who wouldn't be used to that.

"I'm sorry, Kay," I said gently. "But let's hear some more. Lady, you interest me strangely—you, and your handbag!"

She wasn't paying any attention to that crack about the handbag; maybe she didn't even realize she'd lost it yet. Anyway, I sat back and smoked a cigarette while she wiped her eyes and nose with a postage-stamp handkerchief and her small sobs slowly died away. All the time I was grinning inwardly, if you know what I mean—not at her, certainly, but at the fact she could call me a dodo and make me like it.

"Someone's trying to kill me and I don't know why," she began simply. "I have money, yes, but it's all willed to a married sister on the West coast—and she's got twice as much as I have, anyway."

Furthermore, we're very close. You see, she's my only living relative. So that couldn't be the reason."

"Let me look for the motive, Kay," I broke in. "That's what I'm going to get a big fat fee for. I'll find the motive and the persons responsible—if both actually exist. All you have to do is give me a quick sketch of what's happened lately to convince you you're on the spot."

"Well," she went on, looking out the window. "I've only been in this town for about a month. Before that I lived on the coast. Anyway, I share an apartment with another girl—a showgirl. I can't say I like her friends, but we've always gotten along all right and I suppose her private life's her own."

"Anyway, the other night Ruth, my roommate, and I had a terrible quarrel. It was about a silly thing, but she lost her temper—and I guess I lost mine. I know the neighbors must have heard us. You see—well, we broke some things. It got so bad that I left the house and took a room at a hotel for the night."

"What night was that?" I asked.

"Night before last. Then, next day, a car tried to run me down. It swerved deliberately over to the wrong side of the street and would have succeeded if a man hadn't seen it and dragged me back just in time. Later, when I went to the garage to get my car, one of the mechanics told me he'd been moving it for some reason and the steering knuckle broke. He thought it was very funny because the car's a big Caddy twelve, last year's model. They're not supposed to break, he said, but he added it was lucky, anyway. If it had happened on the highway I'd probably have been killed. But that knuckle didn't just break—it was cut in some way. . . ."

I said noncommittally, "Go on."

"Then listen to this." She seemed a little angry that I was still unconvinced. "Last night I decided to go back to the

apartment. When I got in front, someone took three shots at me from the darkness down the street!"

"Proof?" I asked.

"Two bullet holes through windshield and rear window, and one embedded in the body of the car. It's in the garage."

"Okay," I told her. "You've made your point. What about the police?"



"I WENT to them. They said the two accidents were just that—and that the shooting must have been a case of mistaken identity. And I don't intend to die to prove them wrong. If I can convince these would-be assassins that I am dead. . . ."

Something about her story bothered me still. I didn't know just what it was, and until I did, there was just one thing to do—keep firing questions until I hit on the right one.

I asked, "Do you think your roommate is mixed up with this?"

"Yes," Kay said immediately. "I don't think she wanted any such happenings, but I think that my living with her has caused me to be included in some jam she'd gotten into."

"Did you go to the apartment last night, when you drove around there and someone shot at you?" I saw the girl thinking fast, noticed her sudden tense fear and indecision, and then I had the answer and gave it. I said, "I know you did. And I noticed you spoke of her in the past tense just now. Is she dead?"

When Kay nodded, I added, "I didn't see anything about it in the papers today. That means you didn't go to the police."

Her voice was almost a whisper, "No, Jerry. I came to you. I was afraid—after the violent quarrel we'd had, they'd suspect me. They'd never believe that somebody was after both of us . . . and found Ruth first."

I let out a long breath. "Kay, you sure do push the law around. I'll do what I can to cover you up—but no promises. Now, one last question. What did you two girls fight about?"

"A silly thing!" The red spots of anger came into Kay's cheeks. "One day last week I didn't feel well. I didn't know any doctor in town, but I knew one that Ruth was going to. I'd seen several of his prescriptions around the house, so I searched for one and took it with me when I went to keep an appointment. Later, I called him, but he wasn't even in. His male secretary said he was temporarily out of town and asked who was calling, and asked if I were an old patient. So I hung up."

"That seems harmless enough."

"Doris didn't think so. When I got home she demanded to know if I'd taken the prescription blank and what I'd done with it and why I'd taken it. When I told her what I'd done, she blew up completely—and so did I. I didn't even give her the satisfaction of returning it to her when she demanded it. I told her I'd thrown it away. It's in my bag right now!"

She started looking all around for her handbag and I took it out of my pocket and laid it on the desk, explaining what had happened in the lobby. Then I stood up. "Come on, Kay. We're not faking any fatal accident. You're going to a safe place I know of and stay there until I crack this thing, if it takes a year. But I'd like your permission to keep and use the keys you've got in the bag. I'm going to need them immediately. Okay?"

She was at the door of the office, one hand on the knob and looking back as I put on my topcoat. God, the kid was beautiful!

"Okay, Jerry," she agreed. "And you can keep the money in there for a . . . a . . . container."

I grinned at her. "Swell, cherub. A container like that ought to hold me for some time. Let's go!"

DOWNSTAIRS, I handed her over to Dannie the Hack, a swell little guy who runs a cab in front of the building. With him, I knew she'd be safe—barring heart-failure on Danny's part. I told him to drive her up to Dr. Small's Sanitarium, an expensive joint catering to neurotic women and a favorite hide-out spot of mine. What thug in his right mind would crash a place like that—even if he could, which was a fairly remote possibility.

Back in the arcade of the building I went into a public booth and called Doc Small, making arrangements. Then I took out the prescription blank and called the number listed. Some guy answered, said he was Dr. Belknap's secretary, that the doctor was still out of town and could he be of any help. I hung up.

Obviously, the source of the screwy action was up at Doris' and Kay's apartment—which was the place for me to go. Just what I'd find there, I didn't know—but whatever it was, it wouldn't be pretty and it would probably lead to even uglier things. I went into the street and grabbed a cab.

After I'd paid off the hack and turned to examine the apartment building I let out a long whistle. Boy, it was the nuts! Kay living there I could understand—but what about the other girl? Kay had said she was a showgirl, as I remembered. But then, to Kay, probably the lead in the season's musical-comedy hit would be described in the same way: another showgirl. Or maybe the young lady hadn't confined all her talents exclusively to the stage.

I figured they might snoot me in the lobby and send me around to the service elevator, but they didn't. I stepped into the car, gave Kay's name, and up I went—twenty floors. Then, down the hall and in front of the apartment door, I slid the key into the lock and took a long breath. I knew it wasn't going to be so nice in-

side. Murder's still ugly, just as ugly, in a palace.

It was worse than I'd expected, which was going some. The girl's body lay in the center of the living room—if it could still be called a room. She was sprawled face down, one arm twisted under her, and the hilt of a knife protruded from her back. There was plenty of blood around. But the kid's once-pretty face was what hurt me most. It was black-and-blue and swollen, as though she'd put up quite a fight before some guy had gone after her with his fists and knocked her out. I reasoned she was unconscious when the knife was driven through her back and into her heart.

And the room was a shambles—though I wish I could think of a stronger word. All the stuffed furniture had been cut and disemboweled, drapes had been pulled from the walls, drawers were emptied on the rug, vases were smashed, every conceivable hiding place had been searched.

The bedroom beyond was the same way. A pile of dresses that almost reached the ceiling mounded in the center of the room; a smaller pile of silken garments stood beside it. Drawers had been emptied in wanton disorderliness; the mattress of the bed had been cut to ribbons, and over the whole chaos had settled the feathers of the slashed pillows, like snow on a junk pile.

I went back to the living room then, one fact clear in my mind. The searchers hadn't found what they were after! Had one room still been unmolested, even one closet or bureau, I'd have known the search had ended in success. As it was, it had progressed to the bitter end. And I guessed, too, that someone had strong-armed Doris in an attempt to make her tell something. But what?

Next I did something that could have cost me my license. I moved the girl's body. It was that arm she held underneath her that intrigued me—and I found

her small hand clenched in a fist. Prying the fingers open was difficult but possible. Rigor mortis had set in and was now passing. Elation swept over me when I found that hand holding something, as though passing it to me even in death. A note! But when I had smoothed it out the old frustration returned. It was only another of those innocent, harmless prescription blanks—that someone was ready to kill for.

This blank bore the imprimatur of Dr. Jonathan MacMaster, with an address in a good section of town. I was folding it, to put it with the other, when something struck me like a fist between the eyes! The two prescription blanks were similar in one way!

They both bore the same telephone number!



SQUATTING there beside the pitiful figure, I suddenly noticed something and leaned forward to examine the bare arm. And then I was sure I had the answer! That girl's hand and arm, in death, had reached out to avenge her—and would undoubtedly hang a number of vicious criminals. And she had done it deliberately!

I jumped for the telephone then—because time was beginning to run out. I put through a call to police headquarters, asked for Detective Sergeant Tom Rock and waited impatiently until his familiar voice was on the wire.

"Tom!" I almost shouted. "Jerry Brand. Look, pally, I want another Annie Oakley."

After a moment's pause, he said, "Okay, shamus, you git it."

An Annie Oakley was the name Tom and I had for an agreement we had between us. When I had a case just about broken, was sure of the outcome, but needed police help to crack it—help I

otherwise couldn't have obtained—I called Tom and asked for an Annie. That meant that I'd get anything in reason in the way of help, on Tom's responsibility—and the detective sergeant shared in the final credit. That agreement was to continue until I missed once—and then Tom swore he was going to hang me. Maybe.

"First," I ordered, "I want the address of a telephone number. It's Lake East 1793-J." Which was the prescription number.

I waited impatiently while he was gone from the phone, lighting a cigarette and putting it out after one puff. Then he was back with the address, which was only a few blocks away.

"Send a squad car," I told him. "There's going to be plenty of trouble there in a few minutes. And, Tom, it's big!"

"Yes, sir—one squad car," he said sarcastically. "Anything else? The riot squad, maybe? Don't tell me you've caught someone robbing the poor box, Brand. Oh! By the way—your pal Danny the Hack is in bad shape up at the hospital. Truck crushed his jalopy against a wall. Thought you'd like to know. Just got the flash."

"What about his passenger?" I yelled. "What about her?"

"Then there *was* a passenger," the detective said. "We had conflicting reports on that. Someone said she was taken away by a passing motorist, that she was only dazed. We've had no report, so maybe she went home."

"Home, hell!" I roared. "Tom, make that two squad cars!"

I slammed the receiver down and spun toward the door, striding out of the apartment and taking the elevator to the street. Outside I grabbed a cab and had him drop me a block from the address Tom had given me. I was still in an expensive residential district—but, as in so many big cities, that one block made a big difference.

The slum quarter, with its squalid misery and want, was but a stone's throw away. I covered that distance on foot, keeping well in the shadows and coming to a halt at the corner of the next side street.

It was easy to spot the house I wanted. It proved to be an ancient four-story brownstone, a relic of the horse-car days with boarded doors and windows. What made it so easily identifiable was the moving van that stood in front and the men who were hastily stowing crates and boxes aboard. Half an hour later and they would have been gone.

I eased down the block on the opposite side of the street, realizing that I was one against a gang and that I couldn't possibly wait for Tom and his men to arrive. Every move from now on had to be done on the spur of the moment; I couldn't possibly plan ahead. And when I got opposite the van I got my first break, of a sort. The three "moving men" returned into the house for another load.

The driver of the truck was leaning against the radiator of his van when I walked up to him without the slightest attempt at concealment. My open approach took him completely off guard, even if he had been looking for trouble. I didn't say a word. I slugged him with the butt end of my automatic and he slumped forward into my arms. A moment later I had carried him to the rear of the van, tossed him in and rolled his limp form well toward the front.

The other three men came out again just as I assumed the driver's former position. They were carrying a small but heavy box between them. After getting it onto the tailboard, two of them jumped into the truck to drag it forward while the other pushed from the rear, climbing up as soon as there was room. One of them must have kicked the body of the driver, because I heard a startled exclamation—but by that time I had gained the rear of the truck and was slamming the heavy

doors closed. With one jabbing motion I slapped the padlock through the two hasps and snapped it shut. Immediately a muffled howling and pounding sounded from within, evidently a summons for help from others inside.

It didn't do them much good. I jumped into the cab, gunned the motor as I slid in the gears, and a second later we were under way. But I didn't go far. Two blocks away I came to an empty lot, where I parked my improvised prison and returned to the brownstone house, my biggest job still ahead.

door that had opened directly behind me.

"Maybe you'll *both* take it here, shamus, and that'll clean the slate. Here it is!"

A gun roared even before I had a chance to brace myself—but it wasn't the gun in my back. Wondering, I turned to see Detective Sergeant Rock standing in the doorway. And Rock was a careful workman. At the same time, other cops came from upstairs, having entered through the skylight, and still others came up from the basement, guns drawn.

"Rooms upstairs empty, not even furnished, Sergeant," one of them reported.

If you've ever thought of lying down on a morgue slab for pay, let Donald G. Cormack, whose story you are now reading, tell you how to collect in advance in his startling novelette—

CORPSE WANTED—EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY
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WITHOUT a plan, it's foolish to try being subtle—but there's no sense being foolhardy, either. This time I entered the place by way of the rear basement, gaining the first floor by way of the back stairs—and the first person I saw was Kay, gagged and bound to a chair. A thug stood over her, gun in hand.

He was saying, "The van didn't wait for you, sugar, so I guess that means you take it right here. I hate to do this . . ."

"So do I!" I cut in, and he spun toward me.

Our two shots were almost simultaneous, but not quite. His slug plowed into the ceiling as he went over backward, his shoulders hitting the wall and holding him in a sitting position. And it was then I made a stupid mistake. Before releasing Kay I should have searched the rest of the house. I didn't—and the obvious happened. I was fumbling with the ropes when a gun jabbed into my back, one last gun-monkey having stepped through a

"Ditto the basement," another added. They both looked at me.

Rock turned to me with a face like a thundercloud. "Brand! Did you get me down here to kill a guy because he had a girl tied up in an empty house? 'This is big!' " he mimicked. "All right, shamus, show me how big it is—or else!"

Just then the telephone in the next room started ringing. I nodded toward it. "Answer that, Rock, and you'll find out. Just say 'yes' to everything that they ask you."

Rock picked up the phone. "Hello? . . . That's right! . . . Hey! Wait! No! Hold that party! That's official! Police orders!" Then he turned to me, his expression bewildered. "Some guy tells me it's the Marcus Brothers Drug Store calling and asks if he can speak to Dr. Sadler and if this is him on the wire. When I say yes, he says he's checking on one of my prescriptions. He says he thinks everything's okay, because my narcotics registry number checks, but will I verify issuing a

prescription for morphine sulphate to a George Ball, and he gives an address! What is this, Brand?"

"There's practically the whole answer," I told him. "Since the war, as you know, the illicit narcotics smuggling racket has been wiped out—and the addicts are going crazy thinking up ways to get the stuff. Now, their only recourse is to legal markets. Maybe you read in the paper the other day that they're even trying to steal doctor's prescription pads to forge the orders. That's pretty clumsy—and risky. But this gang put the finishing touches on the thing and built themselves a beautiful racket."

"Forging the prescription blanks, selling them?" he asked.

"Much more than that. Through medical records and registry they could find any doctor's narcotics registry number. So they selected several hundred reputable physicians in this city, looked up the numbers, and had some rum-dum doctor make out properly prescriptions for any number of drugs.

"Take a man like Dr. Belknap, one of their names. They forged prescription blanks in his name in exact copy—except for one thing. The telephone number. So, when a druggist got such a prescription, properly filled and with the right registry number, he might very easily double-check by calling Belknap. Would he look up the number? No. He'd take it from the blank—this number! They had a man here to answer all such calls, admit he was any doctor asked for—so long as it was a drug store calling—and then pretend to consult his files before giving an okay on the prescription."

"But those prescription blanks Doris had!" Kay broke in, released now. "They were all perfectly blank!"

"I think you'll find," I said, "that they've been treated so that some simple process, perhaps steam, will bring out the

prescription. That was a precaution, in case a blank was lost. And another precaution I suspect they took: each addict buying these blanks, probably at fifty dollars a clip, was instructed to go to a certain drug store and no other. Thus, she'd be established as a patient there, and no one drug store would be flooded by a batch of these phony blanks by some mischance."

After I told Detective Sergeant Rock about the van-full of card-indexes, files, printing presses and prisoners he began to feel pretty swell. It was quite a haul for him to make in one night. That way, when I mentioned finding Doris' body but neglecting to report it in the excitement, he passed it off with a clap on my back. He could see a citation dangling in front of his eyes.

"Ask for an Annie Oakley any time, shamus," he said handsomely as we left him, Kay and I, on the street.

"All because of a little piece of paper," Kay said as I walked her to a hotel. "When I called up and asked for Dr. Belknap, saying I knew Doris was a patient of his, they were afraid of what might follow—that I'd call the *real* Dr. Belknap! Then I could put two and two together."

"Get that blank back or kill you, that was their only out," I admitted. "They tried both. Two 'accidental deaths', one outright murder, and a little job of purse snatching. I think they figured Doris was trying to protect you when she said she didn't know where you were. That, and she probably refused to return the rest of her prescriptions, being a cokie."

"By the way," Kay said, "are rescues extra, as far as your fees are concerned? I'd gladly give you another . . . restrainer."

"Then restrain me from kissing you, wench!"

But damned if she did.

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MURDER WALKS

By WILLIAM R. COX

Sam took a deep breath and lunged out of the coffin...



The Yella Boy killed Kate — and tried to murder Sam Cape's brother — but when the master of the Blue Death tried to give the citizens of Beach City his own brand of fatal migraine, Sam risked the plague to prove that it takes more than a headache to kill a tough detective!

CHAPTER ONE

The Corpse Wore Blue

SAM CAPE said disgustedly, "It's a corpse. Your bulls found it. It's plenty dead, too."

Sam Cape looked like a prize-fighter

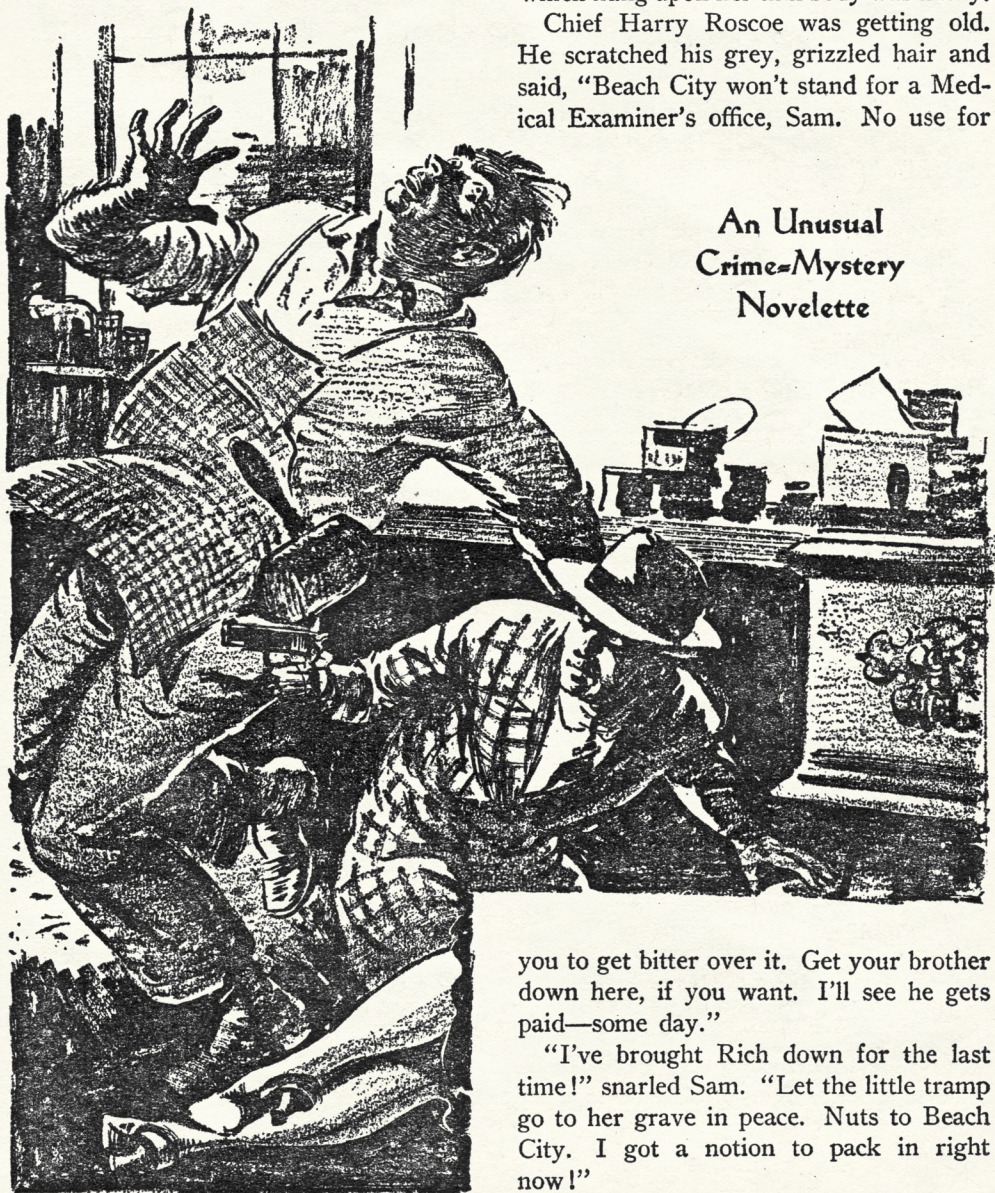
IN THE STREETS

with his hooked, short nose, his thick brows and heavy chin. He was dark and satanic and violent. The Beach City morgue was dimly lighted and Sam's shifting, physical volatility contrasted horribly with the still remains upon the slab.

The dead woman's face was bluish. The pupils of the eyes were dilated. She was still slightly warm and the relaxation of her limbs was complete, as though she had died while unconscious. She was a small woman, and the cheap clothing which hung upon her thin body was flashy.

Chief Harry Roscoe was getting old. He scratched his grey, grizzled hair and said, "Beach City won't stand for a Medical Examiner's office, Sam. No use for

An Unusual Crime-Mystery Novelette



you to get bitter over it. Get your brother down here, if you want. I'll see he gets paid—some day."

"I've brought Rich down for the last time!" snarled Sam. "Let the little tramp go to her grave in peace. Nuts to Beach City. I got a notion to pack in right now!"

"You won't quit me," grinned the Chief. "You've been with us too long, Sam. You've got sand in your shoes."

Sam Cape flung himself outdoors without answering. The hot Florida sun beat through his thin sports shirt and warmed his body. His hard mouth turned up at the corners. Harry was right. He wouldn't leave Beach City.

The famed West Coast resort town was full of soldiers and brave winter visitors who had dared the conditions of war travel, and of gamblers and gambling houses. Over beyond the business section the Causeway led to the white, shining sand and the varying blues and greens of the Gulf. It was too familiar—too much like home. No, he wouldn't leave.

But he was damned sick of Coroner Jay Beasely, that long-nosed fraud. He was weary to death of not being able to force the City Council to give his brother Richard the job of medical examiner. Sam had worked many years to put his young brother through medical school, through his internship. Always he had wanted Beach City to reap some benefit—because his salary as city employee had paid for Rich's education.

But Jay Beasely had been re-elected coroner, although he did not even know when a corpse was a corpse. The political ring which handled the bolita and policy racket, with the help of Yella Boy Yaller and his henchmen, had defeated any attempts to gain more law and order.

Sam swung into the one-storeyed building which housed Jay Beasely's varied enterprises—the coffin-manufacturing shop, the wooden curio sales-room, the odd jobs carpenter shop. Sam moved silently on his suede, rubber-soled shoes, and there was movement in the rear.

JAY BEASELY came forward, an immense man with workman's strong hands, a long-nosed, predatory man with the unction of an undertaker and

the sharp eyes of a buzzard. A door closed, and through a window Sam saw fleetingly the backs of two hurrying figures. Sam said bluntly,

"Buying numbers from Skrim and Herman Modell, Jay? And you an officer of the law!"

Beasely said, "I've warned you to stay outa my business, Sam. You're gettin' unpopular with people."

"That's fine," Sam nodded. "Just dropped in to say there's another of those blue-colored corpses at the morgue. You can go over and solemnly pronounce her dead. It's Kate Waite."

Jay Beasely's eyes did not flicker. He said, "Don't know her."

Sam laughed. "Not much you don't. Saw you out at Yaller Boy's place with her last week!"

"You see too damned much," growled the big man. "I'm gonna. . . ."

Sam's short patience cracked. He moved forward in gliding anger, his right hand caught the shirt of the coroner, bunched it, slammed the bigger man against the wall. "One more threat outa you and I'll beat your head off! Understand! I'm sick of you and your mob. You walk easy, Jay, or I'll take care of you myself."

Panic rode into the shifty eyes, they dropped, staring at Sam's feet. The coroner did not resist. He said, "I didn't mean anything bad, Sam. It's just—you ride me all a time. I know you're a good officer—the best we got—the best Beach City will ever get."

Sam released him, stepping back. He said, "You heard me. I'm cleaning up Yella Boy. I'm beginning right now—with you!"

He turned and went silently out of the establishment. He had been waiting for more evidence, but he was impatient by nature.

If there was a direct tie-up between Yella Boy and the political ring, he hadn't

discovered it—but he could run out the gamblers. Chief Roscoe would stand by him, and the newspaper would help. He could take the chance, using only his muscles and known courage. . . .

He came to the Professional Building and turned in. He always liked to see his brother before starting anything. The kid was smart. He wasn't getting a very good hold in Beach City, and the Army would have him soon enough despite his bad eyes. Sam worried about Richard.

Sam worried about himself, too. He had two bullets in him, and although they did not bother him, the Army refused to accept a good peace officer who was laden with lead in the bargain. It made Sam restless. There was a fight and he couldn't get in it. All his life he had been fighting—at forty he was just in his prime. His body was strong and willing enough. . . .

Humpy Santella wielded a brush over a pair of officer's boots and said, "Why you never get a shine, Sammy?"

Humpy Santella was dark and Latin and his button eyes were quick as a lizard's tongue. Sam stepped close to the shoe shine chair and said, "Anything new, Humpy?"

"Skrim and Modell sell tickets right in my nose," grinned Humpy. He had sal-low cheeks and sharp, white teeth. He seemed to take pleasure in retailing the news. Sam was under no illusions about him. The little hunchback would tell Yel-

la Boy as well as the police. He just liked to gossip—but he had been useful. A boot-black could pick up many things during a day. . . . "They say you scared, Sammy. . . . Why you no wear shoes I can shine, copper?"

Sam said, "Nuts and carry six. Keep your eyes open. I mean today—and tomorrow."

He handed the hunchback a quarter and took the elevator up to the tenth floor. He got out and went down the corridor. If he could get one little sale of gambling tickets on Yella Boy or any of his men, he would take immediate steps. The soldiers at the airport were buying too many of them. Colonel Donald Espee had complained—that was spark enough to touch off Sam's dynamite.

He turned in at Room 1010, whistling. There was no one in the reception room, so Sam called, "Hey, Bud, it's me!" and went right on through into the sparsely furnished office beyond.



H E SENSED it as he crossed the threshold, but it was too late. He ducked and weaved away from the bludgeon, but it caught him over the ear and sent him reeling. He just had sight of a masked face, a glimpse of a man in dark clothing, and then they had the sack over his head.



It was like fighting in a nightmare. It was almost impossible to make any kind of a fight. The club beat at him. They were trying to kill him while he was in the sack, of course, so that it would be easy to dispose of him.

He got his right arm free. His senses were reeling, but he had the instinct of battle in his soul. He grabbed at the arm bearing the bludgeon. He made a quick twist and levered on the wrist.

There was a howl. The club dropped to the floor. Sam heard it bounce, heard a voice cry, "The shiv! Stab him!"

He did not waste time on the sack. He kicked, hard. The voice had helped him locate the second foe. He felt his soft shoe go home in softer flesh. He plunged forward, chopping the air with his flailing right arm.

A man fell back against the wall. Then some other element entered, and he heard crashing sounds. The hoarse voice said, "Sam's shuckin' his sack! Get outa here!"

He eeled the thing over his head. A door slammed. The shades had been drawn and the room was in semi-darkness. Sam plunged for the door, trying to wrench it open. He fell over something on the floor.

He was getting up when he saw the fraternity pin, clasp broken, laying loose. He forgot everything in that moment, except the boy who lay there, white and silent, blood flowing from the crack in his skull.

He leaped up and stared wildly around. Where was Mary Lee, Rich's nurse and fiancée? He jerked at the door of the closet. She fell into his arms, bound tightly, gagged.

She was a tall, fair girl, and Sam thought she would faint, but she did not. She stood trembling while he unbound her, staring down at Rich. She muttered thickly, "Is he—can he—let me at him, Sam!"

Sam brought water, cotton. The girl knelt, working feverishly. She said, as she regained the power of speech,

"Two men—big—both of them. . . . they came in, pleading headaches. There've been a lot of headaches. . . . strange ones. . . . A little tart, Kate Something-or-other. . . ."

Sam's mind clicked on that. He said, "You didn't know the men?"

"I didn't see them!" she said bitterly. "I was in back. When I heard a scuffle, I came out, but they threw something over my head—pushed me in the closet. . . . Sam!"

Her last word was a wail.

Sam had already sensed it. The pulse of the white-faced, smaller, more sensitive replica of Sam himself was fluttering weakly. The eyeballs showed as Rich's head rolled.

"A fracture," moaned the girl. "He may die, Sam! He almost surely will die!"

Sam was dialing the hospital. His face was rigid. In his dark eyes was a terrible purpose. He called for the ambulance in a tight, controlled voice. He was thinking about Skrim and Herman Modell, the two big bodyguards and numbers-peddlers of Yella Boy Yaller.

Maybe they didn't kill Rich. Maybe they were not the two who had attacked Sam. But they would do for a start. Sam felt instinctively for his brass knucks and blackjack.

Sam was a cop who never carried a gun. He was not any good with firearms, he said. He killed people with them!

With just his hands and his knucks and his sap, he often brought them in alive. It was handier, he said. It would be very handy to take Skrim and Herman with such weapons!

He looked at the kid he had so carefully raised and put through school. The fair hair of the girl hung down as she wept. They had been happy despite the war,

despite the lack of business. Now it was over, and Rich, even if he lived, had a crack in his fine skull. Sam just sat and stared until the ambulance came. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

Murder Is a Headache

THE back of Jay Beasely's shop was accessible through a narrow alley which led from the side street. The rear door had been cunningly contrived so that to casual inspection it was not a door at all. To enter, it was necessary to push a certain spot four feet from the actual portal, whereupon the panel slid back, just wide enough to accommodate a large man. The stout mayor of Beach City had trouble getting his belly through.

It was past midnight, and there were no lights within. The long carpenter's bench served as a table and the unfinished coffins were pushed aside. Mayor Porter Fall shivered a little. He was not a brave man. Right now he was a frightened man.

As his eyes became adjusted to the dimness, he could make out the brooding, tall Jay Beasely, dapper, saffron-skinned Yella Boy Yaller, the bulks of Herman Modell and Skrim. None of the others would be present—the lesser lights took their orders from above.

Beasely said in his nasal voice, "Ah, Mayor! Just on time. Big things, Mayor! We're about to branch out!"

Yaller spoke incisively, with a slight drawl. "And here is your cut, suh. A thousand dollars, this week!"

Money changed hands. The bills crinkled in Porter Fall's pocket. He said, "We're doin' mighty good now. Why branch out?"

"Herman and Skrim are not safe," explained Beasely. "That damned detective is lookin' for them."

"Yeah," said Yella Boy. "There'll be some changes made. We're goin' to make this the gambler's paradise. We're floodin' the camps with tickets. We want to open a house for the tourists."

"You can't do that, boys!" pleaded the mayor. "The sheriff won't stand for it. And—you went too far with Rich Cape. He's likely to die! We can't have murder!"

Yella Boy said, "Why not, Mayor?"

Porter Fall moistened his lips. "I won't stand fer it! I'm in this for all I can get, yes! But to kill people—it ain't necessary!"

There was a small silence. Then Jay Beasely said quietly, "Sam Cape was to see you today."

Porter Fall choked, "I—he didn't have to see me for me to know about his brother. The kid ain't recovered consciousness, but when he does—"

Modell and Skrim shifted uneasily. Yella Boy's voice crackled, "Yeah, they bungled that job. After he saw them, they shoul'da made sure. Only Cape came in. . . . We'll take care of Rich, Mayor. He'll never leave that hospital . . . nor talk!"

Porter Fall said, "Now listen! Send Herman and Skrim away! I can protect you on the numbers. But this other thing—it can't be done! I'm warning you!"

Again the silence. Yella Boy broke it. "You're warning us?"

Porter Fall was a fat man, but he attained dignity in that moment. He said quietly, "Yes! I won't squeal—naturally. I'm no martyr. But I'll see that you get picked up on other charges! I'll ruin you if this violence is not stopped!"

He turned and walked out of the building without waiting for the answer he knew he would get. He thought that if he gave them time they would see he was right. He was a politician, and venal, but he was shrewd enough not to go too far.

And Sam Cape had frightened him. Sam knew—or guessed—too much. Sam

was gaunt from lack of sleep, and if Modell or Skrim showed around town, Sam would surely kill them on suspicion. Sam wouldn't worry about warrants, Porter Fall knew.

And then all hell would be to pay. Porter Fall hurried over back streets to his home. He knew he was right.



BACK in Beasely's shop, Yella Boy was saying softly, "No, Skrim. Not that. We'll take care of Fall, another way."

Beasely said uneasily, "I don't get all this, Yaller. Kate died awful sudden and strange like. She was blue as indigo and her blood was dark brown—"

"You don't have to get it!" said Yella Boy sharply. "You certify the deaths! You collect your money! That's enough."

Skrim got up, a hulking fellow with a cast in one eye. He growled, "Let's get outa this coffin-factory. Jay's got the jitters too. They're all scared of Sam Cape."

"Yeah," said Herman Modell in his strange, high voice. "We'd of had him, on'y my foot slipped." Modell was a giant with soprano tendencies.

"You can both get out—and stay out—and stay under cover—or I'll let Cape have you!" snapped Yella Boy.

The two turned in the darkness, surveying their leader. Yella Boy was small and wore drape suits and effective cravats. He had been brought up in a swamp somewhere in Northern Florida, but his viciousness had soon sent him to Jax, to Miami, finally to the west coast. He was like a small, virulent snake. Skrim and Modell hesitated, and were lost.

"Get out!" Yaller repeated. "You're bunglers!"

They left. Jay Beasely took a deep breath. He said, "You really are good, Yella Boy. You got 'em where you want 'em. There's plenty like them."

Yaller said, "You feel bad about them clipping Rich Cape?"

"Only that they didn't kill him!" said Beasely viciously. "And his brother, too. And some other people!"

"Some other people are gonna get it," said Yella Boy softly. "You can start makin' coffins, Jay. I'm takin' over in this town. I think you c'n be Mayor. Yeah—I reckon you'd make a good Mayor, Jay—for me!"

Beasely said, "You damn right!"

They shook hands. It was like the wedding of a pair of Gulf mullets. Then Yella Boy slipped out through the sliding door. Beasely went to the single room in which he kept the sloppiest of bachelor quarters and lay down in his underwear to sleep the sleep of the just. . . .



IN RICH CAPE'S office the fair-haired girl was white but calm. She said, "This girl—she came in with a headache and muscular weakness. Gyp Mason and Donny Bell had the same symptoms. Weren't they all connected with Yella Boy's outfit at some time or other?"

"They were probably casing the joint for the attack on Rich," said Sam gloomily. He pored over the careful notebook Rich kept on his few patients. He saw the entry,

"Colonel Espee . . . dropped in for chat about Army . . . Headache and vertigo . . . they can't fathom it."

"Now that's damned funny," said Sam. "Espee is G2, and has been crabbing about the gambling. . . . I wonder. . . ."

Mary said, "There's still no sign of those two thugs?"

"No," said Sam sadly. "I'll have to wait. Humpy says they haven't scrambled. Is Rich any better, do you think?"

"It's a bad fracture," she said wearily.

"He's always incoherent when he's conscious. It would never do to question him—excite him. Oh, Sam—there's still danger around, in the air. I feel it. Sometimes I'm sure I am being followed. . . ."

"Most times you are," said Sam drily. "I've got cops on you, baby." He got up and closed the book. He said, "I'll go down to Headquarters and check up. Come on, I'll run you home first. It's after midnight."

They used the private elevator, operating it themselves. The lobby was dark and gloomy, its marble floors echoing the tap of Mary's nervous high heels. Humpty's stand was a draped shape, the doors to the bank on the ground floor were barred and tight.

Sam had the front door open when he heard the slight sound. He wheeled, drawing his flashlight, sending its beams to the bootblack stand. Humpty stood grinning at them, quite at ease. The top of a can of polish rolled on the floor. Humpty said, "Oh, it's you." He flicked on a light of his own, found the can-top, limped over to pick it up. "Thought it was some nosey somebody, Sammy."

"What in hell are you doing down here at this hour?" demanded Sam.

"Checkin' my stock," shrugged the hunchback. "I been lookin' around, Sammy. Modell and Skrim were in town. On'y they ain't now. You won't find them, Sammy."

"I'll find Yella Boy," growled Sam.

"Yeah, but you cannot push Yella Boy around," nodded Humpty maliciously. "He has got that City Hall protection—say, did you know? Colonel Espee died. On the street—boom!"

Sam said, "Colonel Espee? . . . Damn!"

He took Mary's arm, rushing her into the street. He said, "Can you stand a morgue scene?"

"Of course," she said tightly. "I'm a nurse."

He drove above the speed limit, in fear

that the Army would have already claimed the Colonel's body. He pulled up at the morgue in back of Headquarters. He ushered Mary in without delay.



CHIEF HARRY ROSCOE, pale-faced, was staring at the body on the slab. He turned and saw Sam, passed a weary hand across his brow. He said, "This ain't natural—there's two more over yonder."

Sam stared at the blue face of the Colonel. This had been a rugged, if elderly Army officer. This was no bedraggled, undernourished girl. Yet the signs of death were the same. . . .

Roscoe said, "Gyp Mason and Donny Bell . . . two of Yella Boy's runners—or they used to be."

Mary Lee was staring at the dead Colonel. She said, "If Rich could be here! It's—I don't understand it. I've never seen that sort of death before."

Sam walked over and looked at the other two—wizened men, veterans of the gambling racket. He came back and said heavily, "Well, they weren't just casing the joint for Yella Boy when they called on Rich. We can take it for granted that a headache and lassitude are the beginning of whatever killed them."

"They dropped dead, just walking around," sputtered Roscoe. "It ain't right, Sam."

"Just walking around, eh?" said Sam. "Walking death! Somebody's gettin' awful smart in Beach City! Call in your coroner, Chief. Let's get some action."

He took Mary outside. She said, "Maybe Rich will be able to talk tomorrow. I'm sure he could tell us about it. He's studied all the methods of murder in the books you gave him. You've been awfully good to us, Sam."

Sam said, as if he hadn't heard, "Walking death! Beasley will call it 'natural

causes'. Mary—I'm keeping those cops on you. Lock your doors and keep that gun handy. . . ."

He sent her home in a prowler car and went out into the night of the warm Gulf coast. He walked, wondering when it would strike him, turn him into a blue corpse—now that the first attack on him had failed. He almost felt a tiny twinge of fear—except that Sam Cape would not have recognized fear. He would have thought he was ill!

CHAPTER THREE

Pay-Back

YELLA BOY'S place was a jook joint out on Route 12. It was large and sprawling, one-storeyed, with two wings. Yella Boy and his aides conducted a pair of gambling rooms in the left wing. This, Sam Cape conceded, was none of his business. This was County business.

In the main hall there were booths and dim lights and the stale odor of beer and many soldiers dancing with the few girls of the town who would come to Yella Boy's—and with the dispirited women from other places who followed the army camps when they could. It was very unappetizing and Sam drank his beer straight from the bottle.

Harry Cook, the bartender, was a lout well known to Sam. He said churlishly, "You got no right here, Cape. First thing you know, you'll be in trouble."

Sam finished the beer. He was thirsty and impatient, and again he wanted action. He said, "I came to see Yella Boy. Do you trot him out, or do I go in?"

Harry Cook sneered, "He won't talk to a jerk cop. You can suck wind and wait, for all of me."

Sam almost absently flicked the beer bottle across the bar. Its heavy end struck right over Harry Cook's eye, and the bar-

tender went down. Two waiters started for Sam. He slipped on the brass knucks and drew the limber, foot-long black-jack with the spring in its handle.

The waiters slowed down. Sam went towards the left wing, but one of them called, "Yella Boy ain't in there. He's got—company."

Sam said, "Okay." He turned right. Two more waiters came up. Sam went straight to the quartette which blocked the door. They parted, then one attempted to close in, drawing a short club from under his apron. Sam kicked out with his foot, catching the knee joint of his attacker. The man screamed in agony and went down clutching at a broken bone.

The relief of action was tonic. Sam belted another waiter with the blackjack and the remaining pair ran. The patrons of the place were in a turmoil. Sam said loudly, "I'm the Law. Go sit down and be quiet."

Several of the soldiers did not like it, but they held back at sight of Sam's badge. He opened the door to the right and stepped quickly through.

The waiters would be re-forming and there would be some tough characters in the gambling room. The night promised well. Sam grinned frostily, going down the hall. Yella Boy's rooms were in the back of the place. Sam wondered if Skrim and Modell were out here. That would be wonderful. He did not feel that he was getting any closer to solving the walking blue death, but he was getting hunk for Rich's beating.

He was scarcely conscious of being a police officer. His kid brother had been attacked with intent to murder and he was striking back. He had no tangible evidence that Yella Boy was the guilty party, but he wanted Yella Boy's activities in Beach City to cease. He was proceeding on that old police premise that where there are crooks there is crime.

He got down to the door and put his

shoulder against it without knocking. It gave, and he was in Yella Boy's apartment. The room was laden heavily with furniture in the worst possible taste. Sam flicked at a wall switch and light sprang from a central fixture.



YELLA BOY started up from a divan, his face livid. A tousled blonde shrank back, frightened. The girl was not more than eighteen, Sam noted, the hatred welling up in him. Sam said, "Relax, rat. I just came in to warn you."

Yella Boy had control. He did not make a move. Only his white face, devoid of its customary saffron color, showed his rage. He said, "This is wrong, Sam. You got no right busting in here."

"I'm telling you," Sam grated. "I want Skrim and Modell. And I want you to stay out of Beach City."

"I haven't got your friends," said Yella Boy tightly. "And Beach City ain't out of bounds for me!"

The blonde was taking courage from Yella Boy. She shrieked, "Ask him what killed Kate! Tell him to solve his murders, Yella Boy, and not bother decent people."

The gambler said without turning, "Shut up, Sybil. . . Sam, you'd better get out. You're on my home grounds. There's enough men outside to hurt you, bad. You'd better go."

Sam scratched his nose, looking at the girl called Sybil. He said suddenly, to her, "Kate was your sister?"

"Don't talk to this copper" Yella Boy growled. His eyes glowed like coals.

The girl shrank back. Sam said, "My brother got bad hurt. I know how you feel. Kate had been to my brother for treatment for headaches. What do you know about it, Sybil?"

"Damn you!" shouted Yella Boy. It

was strange that he should raise his voice. Usually he kept rigid control of himself. Sam's animal-like sense of danger roused, he knew he should now begin to beat his retreat. But he could see that the girl was defiant, angry.

Sam said, "I'm trying to find out why Kate died. Maybe she should have laid off that Beasley. Maybe she shouldn't have hung around out here. Maybe Gyp Mason and Donny Bell did not do themselves any good out here, either. . . ."

Yella Boy said, "You're goin', now! If I have to gun you, Sam!" He had a flat pistol in his hand. He held it tight against his hip, not aiming it, but his eyes had turned to ashes and he was ready to kill.

The girl screamed, "Don't kill a policeman!" and clutched at Yella Boy's arm. He had to shake her off, cursing violently. Sam grinned for the first time in two days. He was in like a panther, leaping and striking all in one gesture.

Yella Boy caught it in the face. He tipped sideways, not unconscious, but battered from his balance. Sam did not bother with the knuckles. He drove his own fist into Yella Boy's belly and watched the gambler collapse, gasping and choking.

Sam said, "Kate, Gyp and Donny all died the same way. They were all connected with Yella Boy. How about it, Sybil? You wanta go out of here with me?"

She was back against the wall, her wide eyes horrified at the spectacle of the all-conquering Yella Boy coughing out his courage upon the floor. Sam kicked the automatic away. He said, "You'd better come. He'll beat you—maybe send you to the kind of death he handed Kate."

The door behind him opened roughly, and there were sounds of men coming swiftly. He turned and lashed out with the blackjack. He stood to one side of the door, not letting two of them get into the room together. He belted away gleefully,

dropping the newcomers over the still choking Yella Boy.

THERE was no sign of Skrim or Modell. Sam looked eagerly for them, but they stayed out of sight—if indeed they were present at Yella Boy's jook. Sam hit a largish gorilla with the knucks and felt bone crush, and then the girl, Sybil, was saying,

"Out this way, copper! I'll go along! Hurry!"

She had a side window opened. She wore a coat and carried a small hat in her hand. She was already out of the window when Sam rolled two more of them into the doorway, blocking it. He sort of hated to leave, then, because they were sure getting hell beat out of them, and each time it relieved him a little of the pain of knowing that Rich rolled feverishly upon a hospital cot. But he ran and clambered out, at last.

The girl was waiting at the corner of the building. There was a big negro with a long stick, but Sam got in close and kicked the negro's shin, which finished him and left him screaming in agony. Then they were running for the car with the official license plates and the soldiers were milling around, wondering what it was all about and wishing, Sam knew, that they could get in on the fight, uncertain only as to which side to choose.

The girl huddled in the seat while Sam drove out on the road and started back for town. He said to her, "Miss Lee, Dr. Cape's nurse, will take care of you. I'll see that you are hidden. I think your boy friend, Yella Boy, had something to do with the deaths of various people—including your sister."

"Headaches!" she breathed. "Kate never even had a hangover, before. She wasn't strong—but Kate was tough inside."

"When my brother can talk again," Sam explained, "you may be able to tell

him everything he needs to put it together."

"I'm scared!" said Sybil. "That Yella Boy is dangerous, like a snake. I—he fascinated Kate . . . sort of—"

"He fascinates me, too," said Sam cheerfully. "And if I find Skrim and Modell, I'll fascinate *them*, too!"

CHAPTER FOUR

Death-Bait

BUT three days later, Sam had not found Skrim or Modell. And Rich had not spoken a coherent word. In the lobby of the Professional Building the mayor was getting his shoes shined. Sam leaned against the wall, his eyes weary from the long vigils at his brother's side.

The mayor whined, "I've had headaches lately, and I ain't so strong. . . . Yella Boy is not moving into this town while I'm in office, Sam. He's been goin' a leetle too far, anyway. I wanta see you, Sam. Maybe about noon today."

Sam said, "Okay. I'll be there." He had little use for the fat politician. He wanted to talk to Humpty, to ask if there was any news of his quarry. He fiddled around while the stout city official waddled off the stand and rolled uncertainly out the door.

Humpty said, "Fonny fella, huh? No good!"

"Don't criticize the City Fathers," said Sam cynically. "What's cookin' with the bad boys, Humpty?"

"All the time you wear those no-good shoes," complained Humpty. "I no can shine soch shoes."

Sam said, "I'll give you the price of a thousand shines if you'll deliver Skrim and Modell."

"Can't do!" said Humpty earnestly. He scowled. "Yella Boy says you steal his gal. Says you keep gal for you'self. But

Yella Boy does not come to town no more."

Sam said, "Here's ten bucks. Find out for me what Yella Boy is doing about opening a gambling house here. You've got my private phone—don't call me at Headquarters." He stared at Humpy, "You talk more like a ginney every day," he said anxiously. "You used to act half educated—haven't got one of them headaches, have you?"

"You crazy?" Humpy asked, "I call you, if I get something."

only the personal belongings and the clothing of the victims, all arranged in a long locker. Sam fingered the garments, stared at the row of pathetic, empty shoes, neatly polished on the floor.

THE CHIEF pleaded, "Sam, if you have got any little thing, make your arrest before we all get killed! This is wholesale murder! There's a madman loose!"

"Like hell!" said Sam. "Like hell there's a madman! This is cold-blooded



William R. Cox, author of the absorbing story you are now reading, has a stirring novelette—"Model For Manslaughter"—in the April issue of our brother magazine DETECTIVE TALES. You can pick it up at your favorite newsstand TODAY!

Sam went to the hospital. He checked the guards—they were on the job and inconspicuous. He was taking no chances on another attack upon his brother. He was entering the elevator when one of the detectives hurried up and said,

"Chief wants you, Sam. The mayor just kicked off."

Sam started. "I just saw him. He—damn it!"

He went outside and caught a cab. At the morgue, Chief Rosco was pale as a sheet. He said, "It's the same damned thing. They're after us all! Now how do they do it, Sam?"

The flesh of the fat man seemed to have run away in the short hour since Sam had seen him. He lay on the slab, somehow indecent—already the blue coloring was mottling his skin. Sam looked for a long moment. Then he said,

"It has to be poison. But what kind? And how do they administer it? Lemme see the exhibits again, Chief."

They went into the room where all the meager evidence rested. There were

and smart. . . . Look, when the next edition of the paper comes out, see who announces for the mayor's job! And then do some thinking."

He left the place abruptly. He went back down to the hospital. His brain was working clearly for the first time since Rich had been attacked. As he entered the hospital he saw the detectives in their places, and waiting for him were Mary Lee and Sybil. They went up in a quiet elevator and Mary said,

"He was better this morning. But I wouldn't question him too closely at first, Sam. It's not good for him. . . ."

Sam said, "It'll be all right." They went into the ante room of the large private chamber which Sam had insisted upon for his brother. A nurse came out of Rich's room, a new woman, unprepossessing, big-framed, bold-eyed. Sam stopped her and said, "What's your name?"

"Elsie." She tried to push past.

"Elsie Beasley," nodded Sam. "You're fired."

She snapped, "That's what you think."

Sam said, "If you ever come back in here, I'll have you beaten to death. Understand that?" His face was like stone, thrust close to hers. The woman shrank away, then slipped past him and ran outside. Sam thrust into Rich's room.

There was a glass on the table, half-empty. Rich's lips were damp, and he was breathing stertorously. Mary Lee took one look and raced through the door, without words.

Sybil said, "Gee! What is it, poison?"

Sam stood helpless, staring at the thin, fair face of his brother. A young interne came in on the double-quick. Mary Lee bore a basin and a bowl of ice. The interne went to work immediately, testing the semi-conscious youth's reactions, then administering his antidote.

Mary said, "Only a sedative, I think. She wanted to keep him quiet. She didn't dare risk anything worse."

"Sedatives were not prescribed," insisted the interne.

Sam stepped out and spoke to one of the detectives. "Have Elsie Beasley arrested at once. And put a tail on Jay Beasley."

The detective drawled, "I heard Jay was goin' to run for mayor. Fella just drifted in to pass the word around."

Sam said, "Ahhh! Then I don't have to wait for the newspapers! Pass it on to Roscoe when you go in, O'Malley."

His clenched fist pounded against his palm. He went back to the sick room. Rich's eyes were open—and they were sane. He was staring past Mary, whose hand he clutched tightly, as though eagerly awaiting something. With a slight shock, Sam realized that it was himself for whom Rich waited.

The bond between them was strong. They were more than brothers, they were friends, and each dependent on the other. Sam's great physical strength complemented the keen and delicate brain of the

younger lad. Rich's eyes grew even brighter, and color came to his cheeks as Sam stood at the foot of the bed, saying, "Hiya, chum?"

Rich's voice seemed to come from far away, but it was recognizable as his normal mode of speech. "Terrible! I'll have to sleep a lot. . . . It was Skrim and someone else, Sam. . . . I only know Skrim. . . ."

Sam nodded. "I guessed that . . . Rich, I got to ask you about Kate Waite. . . . This is her sister, Sybil. . . . I got to know what was the matter with Kate Waite."

"Headaches and debilitation," said Rich. His brow furrowed. "I only saw her once. . . ."

"You talk, Sybil," said Sam grimly.

The girl's frightened voice went on and on, describing symptoms as only a woman can. Sam scarcely listened. There was another picture in his mind—of clothing hanging upon a locker wall, newly shined shoes sitting in a row on the floor, never to be used again. Sybil finished.

Sam said, "She turned blue. Several others have died, and they turned sorta blue. The blood was deep chocolate brown, after they were dead—"

Rich said, "Poison, of course. . . . volatile oil, probably." He closed his eyes and Sam was shocked by the thinness of his face, the way his cheekbones stood out. Sam said, "Maybe you hadn't oughta think hard, Rich. Maybe later—"



RICH'S lips smiled. He said, "You are tough—but I'm tough, too, in a different way. . . . I may be very sick—for a long while after this. . . . But it's got to be cleared up."

Mary Lee clung to his hand. Moments ticked away and the effort of using his mind was obviously torture. Sam writhed with pain and the rage mounted again

within him. He fought it down, knowing that it interfered with his thought processes. Rich was always telling him to be calm, to think without rancour. . . .

Rich said, "Possibly—nitrobenzine. . . . mirbane . . . Poured on them, it would enter through the skin . . . Through the pores . . . but I couldn't tell you—"

Sam leaned forward, his knuckles white on the foot rail of the bed. He said, "All right, kid. I got it, see? You can rest now. I'll take care of it."

Rich's eyes did not open, as if the effort of raising the lids was too much. He said, "Okay, Sam. You're . . . all . . . right."

Sam dragged Sybil out of the room. Mary stayed there, never releasing her grip. But Rich's head sagged and the interne came running and pretty soon the doctor was there, too. Sam's last glimpse was of a tense scene, with everyone serious-faced and nurses coming at double speed. He trembled a little, from his feet to his sturdy neck, but he went on, even stopping to admonish the guards to double vigilance.

On the sidewalk he faced Sybil Waite. The girl was just a child, but her jaw was firm and she eyed him steadily. He said, "Well? You satisfied?"

"Yella Boy had somethin' to do with it," she replied quickly. "Kate sort of had somethin' on him . . . and that Beasley."

"Yeah," said Sam. "Look, if you wanted to get a note to Yella Boy, how would you do it?"

"Give it to that bootblack, Humpy," she said.

"Smart girl," said Sam grimly. "That stoolie will do anything for a five-spot. All right—go across to the Shoreman Hotel. Write like this: 'I don't believe you killed Kate. That Doctor Cape woke up and talked too much. Meet me at 7th and Main tonight about twelve and I'll tell you about it.' Can you remember that?"

"I can't forget it," she said grimly. "And I'll be at 7th and Main, too!"

"Good girl!" said Sam. "And so will I!"

He watched her safely into the hotel down the street and assigned a detective to tail her. Then he went into a drug store and asked about "Mirbane". They gave him a copy of the United States Dispensatory and he pored over it for a half hour, making careful notes.

He took a cab down to the morgue. He went over the clothing of Kate Waite, Colonel Espee, the two Yaller gangsters and Porter Fall with great care. He went down and reassured the Chief, who was having a fit of nerves. He ate his meals and called the hospital every hour to talk to Mary Lee. Rich was holding his own, but he had not again regained consciousness. The doctor was not sure they had eliminated all of the sedative.

Elsie Beasley was in a cell, so Sam talked to her for awhile, but she proved a tough case and her uncle was coming any minute with a habeus corpus. Sam grinned and said,

"He's not mayor, yet, Elsie. I think you're good for a long stretch."

He could not scare her, so he drifted downtown and stayed across the street from the Professional Building for a time, watching Humpy shine shoes and trying to spot a possible Yaller messenger. Time went fast enough, and every moment he spent planning. He thought he could wind it up that night. He hoped so—because there would be other deaths if he failed.

Not innocent people, he promised himself. He could not let that go on. No—if he did not succeed tonight by due processes of the law, he would see to it that no more people were killed by the walking blue death.

He would start a small war of his own. They would undoubtedly get him. But

first he would take a few people out of circulation!

CHAPTER FIVE

The Trap

THE FACT that Jay Beasely lived on the premises of his business establishment made it difficult. Sam waited until ten-thirty, and then drifted down Main Street. He had checked all the points where his slim police force was able to cover and there had been no sign of Yella Boy.

He had most of the available men concentrated at the hospital, because he was afraid he might slip up. He was going to do almost everything alone, if possible. He simply could not risk an attack upon Rich while he lay helplessly in bed, and it was morally certain that Yella Boy would make an attempt to forever close Rich's mouth.

Still, it had been necessary to get Yella Boy into town, so he had thrown Rich and Sybil into the millpond as bait. He had to get Jay Beasely along with the others—and he was sure that Yella Boy would not fail to confer with the coroner, especially as the rendezvous with Sybil was to take place almost at Beasely's front door. That had been Sam's mild inspiration.

At the corner of 7th and Main, Sam faded into deep shadows and waited. There was a light in the rear of Beasely's place. Sam walked down 7th and watched from across the street. To his immense satisfaction, Beasely came out the door of the coffin shop, hesitated, pointing his long nose right and left, then took his way to Main Street, where he paused on the corner. Beasely did not look happy, Sam noted with satisfaction, running across upon his noiseless rubber soles.

Beasely turned and started back, slowly. Sam ducked inside the coffin estab-

lishment. There was a dim light and in the corner a half-finished casket stood on end. Sam gratefully hurtled across the room and fitted himself inside the wooden box. It was snug, but he could stand upright and gain a certain amount of freedom by leaning against its sides, balancing his weight to keep it from tipping.

It was a long wait, of course. The smell of freshly planed wood was pungent in the shop. Beasely would not keep still, going in and out, back into the living quarters, then again into the work shop.

Once he came down to the bench and picked up a wooden maul, tapping it on the hard planks in nervous rhythm. Sam could have reached out and touched him. But Beasely dropped the maul and grunted, starting away. The door rattled and there were footsteps and careful voices. Beasely said, "Not in the light. Let's stay here."

Yella Boy said, "All right. Now, Sybil, spill it!"

The girl said rapidly, "I was there, see? Doc Cape woke up. That copper, his brother, asked him questions. The Doc said Kate and all those other people were poisoned, and that you did it!"

"How the hell could he say that!" demanded Yella Boy. "They haven't got a thing on me!"

"It was because Skrim and Modell slugged him," she averred illogically, but firmly. "Doc said Skrim hit him on the head and because they work for you, that makes you guilty. That copper said he is goin' to get all three of you. . . . And they are very sore about Mr. Beasely's niece, too."

"Cousin," growled Beasely. "She slipped Cape the stuff, but Sam caught her. I just got her out of the jail. We've got to finish Sam, I tell you! He's too damned lucky—and that brother of his. . . ."

Yella Boy said, "We've tried it on them both, haven't we? Can I help it if my slob miss? Tonight we'll get 'em all.

You and me are goin' to have alibis—out at the jook. And it'll be all taken care of here in town."

Beasely said hastily, "Don't tell me how! I don't wanta know."

"It'll be done," said Yella Boy. "That Doc'll never talk again." His voice was a trifle uncertain, Sam thought. For the first time, Yella Boy was not sure of himself.

BEASELY seemed to sense this. He said, "If I'm goin' to be mayor and you're goin' to open up houses, it better be taken care of. That Cape is too tough to have around."

"Yeah," growled Yella Boy. "Now what about this broad?"

Sybil said, "I'm all right. I'll be around. You don't have to worry about me."

Yella Boy said contemptuously, "I ain't!" There was a sudden sound of a blow, then a falling body scuffed on the floor. Sam bit his lip until it bled, making himself hold still, waiting.

Yella Boy said, "If I took a chance on her, it'd be my life, too! And if you get outa line, Beasely, it'll be yours. Where can we stuff this dumb broad until it's

over? Skrim and Modell will dump her in the Gulf, later."

Beasely said, "Damn you! I can't have her in here! You've killed her!"

"Not yet," said Yella Boy hoarsely. "But I'm gonna. Hand me that maul over there. I gotta, you understand? This has gone too far. She knows too much. Broads can't be trusted."

Beasely said, "It's too raw, Yella Boy! You—you'll leave a lot of blood all over the place."

"Not with that maul," said Yella Boy. "We'll put sawdust under her head."

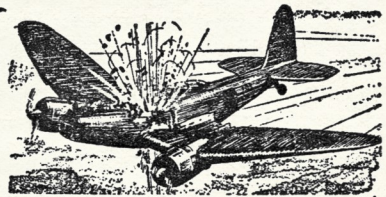
Beasely's hand was trembling. Sam saw it reach for the wooden hammer. The whole thing was up in smoke, now. Sam had intended to follow along after Yella Boy and be on the spot whatever came off. He had expected to gather in Beasely and Yella Boy peaceably and hold them until an attack upon the hospital—and Sam—developed.

Now it would mean the death of Sybil to delay. He watched Beasely's hand hesitate over the handle of the tool. If Beasely refused to permit the brutal murder, all might still be well. . . .

Beasely's hand fastened on the instru-

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ment. Sam took a deep breath and lunged out, kicking at the coffin which concealed him as he drew his own weapons, his right fist armed with the knucks, his left holding the blackjack. The casket made a terrific clatter going down, freezing both crooks with its unexpected and dramatic noise.

Sam's blackjack came down on Beasley's fist. The maul dropped. Sam said, "Hold everything, Yella Boy!"

But Yella Boy's gun came out, he jerked about, throwing lead in spitting, vicious stabs. Sam grabbed the fallen hammer from the bench top. Spinning towards Beasley, he threw underhand. The hammer sped through the air.

Beach City's coroner, trying to get to his feet, tugged at Sam's coat-tails, but he managed to backhand Beasley with the knucks, sending the big man stumbling away. He saw the hammer strike Yella Boy in the face, destroying his already wild aim.

He ducked and picked up a chunk of wood and threw it, harder and more accurately. Yella Boy staggered back, his face bleeding. Sam took a chance and charged. The gun was right in his face, belching yellow fire. He dove straight under it, swinging the blackjack ahead of him.

He felt the leaded end of his weapon go home. He stamped his heel upon Yella Boy's wrist as he lay on the ground and kicked the gun away. He saw Jay Beasley coming at him with a stick of wood the size of a baseball bat. He tried to sidestep and fell over the crumpled body of Sybil Waite.

The stick came down, crashing on his back as Sam rolled. Beasley was a powerful man, and now he was frightened and desperate. Cursing, Sam kept rolling. Beasley was trying for a shot at his head, which would crush his skull like an egg shell.

Sam dove under the bench as the club

came down. Then he scrambled out again, grabbing at Beasley's knees. He took a punishing crack on the head from the butt end of the stick. He lifted, throwing Beasley backwards.

The bigger man slammed across the room and into the wall, but did not lose his grip on his club. He came back, frothing at the mouth, eyes rolling.

Sam met him as he came. The knucks flashed in the air. Sam's fist connected with Beasley's face. The coffin-maker screamed once, then collapsed as the blackjack went home.

Sam bent over the girl. She opened her eyes and said thickly, "He hit me! The dirty rat—"

She got up, staring around. She saw Yella Boy and a lop-sided smile lit her swollen features.

Sam said, "Go in the back and call headquarters. Tell them to come down and get these two. I'll give you Yella Boy's gun to watch over them."

She said, "Where are you going?"

Sam said, "I got a date with Modell and Skirm—and the guy who has been poisoning all these people!"

"But Yella Boy did it!" she cried.

"From that jook joint 'way out there?" said Sam. "We know he wasn't in town. Colonel Espee didn't go there. Porter Fall didn't go there! Use your head.

"Get these two in the jail," he went on. "Tell the cops to put them under the place and throw away the key. I'll see you later."

CHAPTER SIX

The Hump of Death

IT WOULD, he thought, surely be at the hospital. They had already tried it with Elsie Beasley. Sam had a moment's fear that nothing might happen, that he would be left with the battered persons of Beasley and Yella Boy and

only Sybil as a witness that they had been guilty of anything.

He heard the sirens and knew that Sybil had made her call. Those wailing whistles should hasten matters if there was a coup planned. He ran along the street, hastening towards the door of the hospital.

A figure detached itself from darkness and hobbled along beside him. It was Humpy Santella and he was breathless. He said, "Modell and Skrim are behind the hospital. Maybe you get over by my stand, I bring them. They hide there—"

Sam said, "I'm busy, Humpy."

"You want Modell and Skrim," said the bootblack. "I help you. I fix. All the time I have try to fix. Now I got."

Sam said, "Well. All right, Humpy. Only make it fast. I'm afraid something will happen at the hospital."

"Cops all around the hospital," said Humpy. "You go behind my stand, see? You wait. I bring them."

Sam said, "Okay. Make it good, Humpy."

They came to the Professional Building. The hospital was only a block away. Sam ducked inside the darkened lobby, his eyes fastened upon the covered chair, every sense alert. He saw Humpy standing across the street, peering to make sure he was safely inside.

He hit the tile of the lobby floor on his soft soles and pivoted. He ran across the space between the chair and the door at top speed. Then he ducked and swerved his body sharply, like a scat back in a broken field. The echo of the shots was tremendous in the empty building.

Sam almost laughed aloud. He came around on a tangent. He had faced so many guns in the hands of rattled and anxious criminals that he had less fear of lead than he'd had of Beasley's improvised cudgel. He saw the big men squaring around, trying to line him up on their sights.



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He butted into the chair and it toppled. The bottles broke on the floor and tin cans rolled around among the brushes. He hit Modell, he thought, with the blackjack. It only took one cut with that weapon to bring the biggest man down. Modell skidded among the shattered glass, suffering fine cuts. It made Sam very happy.

He closed with Skrim, the strong man. He muffled Skrim's gun with one hand and beat at him with the other. He slipped and his blow did not land properly. Skrim threw him away with insane strength, trying to get the gun up for a shot at close range. For a moment Sam teetered, unable to move.

The gun went off as Sam fell forward. The flash singed his hatless head. He jammed his left fist into Skrim's middle and sought the gun arm again. He pinned the big gorilla to the wall, dropping his blackjack.

He threw the knucks upward, blindly, knowing they would cut whatever they struck. He threw them again and again. He felt Skrim weaken and took one last chop. He jerked away, wheeling, his eyes on the door. Skrim slid down the wall, his face rent to ribbons, the gun resting on his lap.

The door was opening. A figure was coming through, and in the man's hand was a vial which he poised to throw. Sam said sharply, "Stop right there, Humpy!"

"You do not carry a gun, my friend," said Humpy. His voice was pitched high and his English was perfect, now. "You are a brave, stupid policeman. You can conquer these others, these muscular, ox-like creatures. But when this poison touches you . . . that will be the end!"

Sam said, "You can't get away with it. You'll be electrocuted. You're finished, Humpy. You shined too many pairs of dead men's shoes!"

He could see the hunchback stiffen. Humpy's voice said, "You knew? You—a stupid policeman?"

"SOMETIMES you didn't talk so ginney," said Sam. He was reaching down, imperceptibly. He talked fast, stalling. "You were on both sides of the fence too often. You were too handy with news for Yella Boy and you conned me too often. You were not a real good stool pigeon, Humpy."

"That!" sneered the hunchback. "Nothing. You have nothing whatever against me!"

"The blue, walking death," said Sam. "Nitrobenzine! I examined the shoes. You must have talked Gyp Mason and Donny Bell into a free shine—they weren't exactly natty in their habits. Of course Colonel Espee sent his boots here—you were a good shoe shine artist, Humpy, if you'd only stuck to it."

"You pig!" snarled Humpy. The vial trembled in his hand, his arm jerked back. Sam reached a little farther down.

"Just a nice little Fascist boy," taunted Sam. "Shining shoes with mirbane mixed into the polish instead of turpentine. Smearing a little on the inside, where it won't be noticed. The volatile oil penetrates the pores—people die and turn blue. Just a stupid little slaughterhouse of your own. What did you want—a little Italy of your own, so you could get a medal from Musso? Or did you just want to run the town?"

"Die, you—dog!" shrieked Humpy. "Die, like all of the others did, only worse!"

Sam finished his reach. He grabbed the gun from Skrim's lap. He fired from the hip, and he was not a good shot. It was one time his chosen weapons could not prevail. The acid in the vial would splash him as he closed in.

He fired again, with a prayer. He heard Humpy scream. He went forward then, throwing the empty gun aside. He was almost to the fallen figure when he stopped, walking carefully around a small pool of liquid.

Humpy was dying, most horribly. Somehow, by some accident of fate, the vial had been broken before it left his hand. Sam stared, not believing his bullets could have done it.

A small head came unsteadily into view. Just inside the door stood a trembling figure. A voice said, "Gee! I just took a chance and slugged the thing with this!"

It was Sybil. She had in her hand the maul with which Sam had broken Yella Boy's aim. She stammered, "I—I brought it along for a souvenir—and because it was light and I might need a club!"

The acrid odor of carbolic mounted. Humpy did not move any more. One hand was to his mouth, containing a wide-mouthed little bottle. White pellets spilled from it. Sam said, "Killed himself when the carbolic hit him. He must have been a chemist. He was damned smart, you know it? He played stool pigeon and lined

up the whole town through Yella Boy. I got onto that when Yella Boy tried to kill you—that he wasn't the boss, that he was taking orders from someone. He said 'it's my life'—and he meant that Humpy would kill him if he failed."

Sybil said, "Gee, you're smart, Sam!"

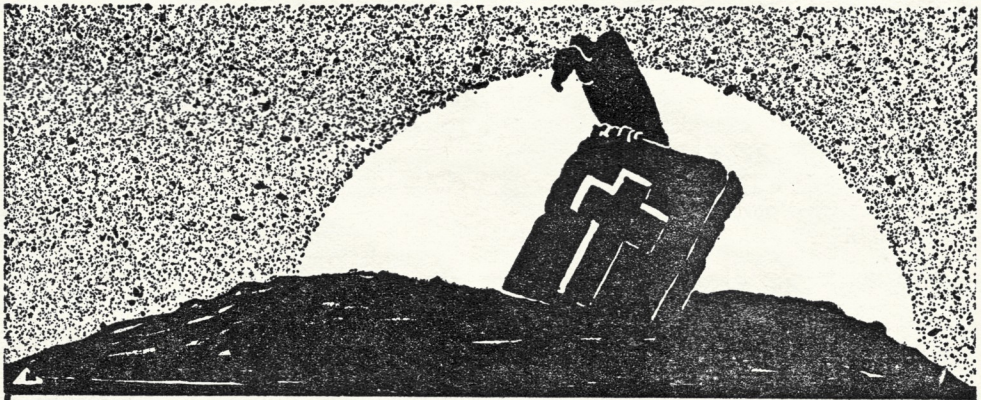
For the first time Sam really looked at her. She was standing very close to him, staring up. She had the widest and most beautiful eyes.

Sam said brusquely, "Well, now—ah—we've got to call Headquarters— And see about Rich. Got to have an analysis made of those shoes down at the morgue. I won't get any sleep tonight, I guess. You better go home, Sybil."

She said, timidly, "Maybe I'll stay with Mary Lee, at the hospital. She's goin' to send me to school, somewhere."

"Well," said Sam, sighing relievedly, "That's fine, I guess! That's great! You'll be all right!"

THE END



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CHAPTER ONE

The Random Death

GRIMLY the woman was drinking herself into a stupor. Rush Dean watched her from five or six stools away. She didn't look like a sot. She looked exactly what she was—a well-dressed housewife in her late twenties.

That early in the afternoon the bar was deserted except for her and Dean.

She banged her empty glass. "Another of the same, Eddie."

With a sigh, Eddie, the bartender, left

off polishing glasses and went over to her. "You've had enough, Mrs. Lawlor."

"That's for me to decide," she said thickly. "Another double scotch, Eddie."

"No, Mrs. Lawlor," Eddie said. "You want I should call your husband?"

She glared. "You call that rat and I'll wreck the joint." Plainly it was the whisky in her talking. "And if you don't give me another drink, I'll scream. I'll bring the whole neighborhood in here."

Eddie shrugged and poured the drink and returned to where Rush Dean was rolling his beer glass between his palms.

ONE THOUSAND WAYS TO DIE

By BRUNO
FISCHER



There was a cloud of smoke and debris where
the coupe had been....

"What can I do?" Eddie complained to Dean. "They're worse than men when they get like that."

"Who is she?" Dean asked.

"The wife of Dr. Alvin Lawlor. You know, the head surgeon at the Riverside Hospital. Nice guy. Him and her come in here now and then, but she never has more than one drink an evening." Eddie sighed again and picked up a wet glass. "Can't you do something, Mr. Dean? I try to run a respectable tavern. You know how to handle people."

"It's none of my business," Dean said.

"Do me a favor," Eddie persisted. "If she passes out, I'm in a spot. There'll maybe be a stink because she's supposed to be a respectable woman."

"I'll try," Dean said.

He swung off the stool. He was a heavy man who carried most of his weight in his shoulders and chest. His thick black unruly hair was streaked with grey. He sat down on the stool next to the woman.

"Hello, Mrs. Lawlor," he said.

She looked at him out of bleary eyes. "Beat it. I hate men."

"I'm not trying to make you. I've got a son in the Navy practically your age."

She downed the double scotch without taking the glass from her lips. Then she put it down and said: "I know you. You were pointed out to me in the Silver Slipper after you solved the Hotchkiss murder. You're Rush Dean, the private detective."

"Consider me your friend, Mrs. Lawlor."

SHE swayed sideways toward him and poked a forefinger into his barrel chest. "You know all about killing. How do you kill somebody? I don't mean a knife or gun. Some way they'll know they're dying."

Dean felt a cold chill on his spine. He heard Eddie cluck his tongue. The woman wasn't pulling Dean's leg. Drink

loosened tongues that otherwise would be restrained.

"Let me take you home," Dean urged.

"Home? I've got no home any more. Maybe he moved *that* woman in already. That skinny tramp nurse. What happens to men, Mr. Detective? I've got ten times what she had. Look at me."

Mrs. Lawlor tottered off the stool. She stumbled and Dean grabbed her arm, but indignantly she pulled away from him.

"What's wrong with me?" she demanded, running her hands down her body. "I've still got my figure. I'm as pretty as I ever was."

She was kidding herself, of course. She had allowed herself to run to fat in the wrong places, and flabbiness was beginning to touch her face.

"Sure," Dean said. "You're beautiful. Now if you'll only—"

Suddenly her eyes rolled and her legs folded under her. Dean caught her before she hit the floor.

"Out cold," Dean told Eddie. "Now what?"

Eddie came from behind the bar. "Her car's outside. If you'll drive her home, Mr. Dean—"

"I guess I'm stuck," Dean said.

He swung her up in his strong arms and carried her as easily as a child. Eddie trotted behind with her handbag and opened the door of the coupe. Dean put her in and slid behind the wheel. In her handbag he found the car key and her driver's license which told him her address.

Her eyes opened when they were halfway there. She seemed somewhat soberer. Without a word she reached in her bag for a cigaret and lit it. Then she said: "What must you think of me?"

"Forget it," Dean said.

"What I told you about wanting to kill somebody, that doesn't mean anything. I didn't know what I was saying."

"Sure," Dean said.

There was no more talk until he reached the address. It was a low stucco house with a semi-circular driveway in front of it. She stopped him before he could turn into the driveway.

"This is far enough. I don't want the servants to see me being taken home in this condition."

"Do you think you can drive?"

"It's only a few feet," she said. "I don't know how to thank you."

"Then don't try."

Dean got out of the car and she took his place behind the wheel. From the sidewalk he watched her make the turn onto the driveway. She cut it too close; one of the wheels hit the curb. But she straightened out all right and rolled the car toward the front door.

He was turning away when sound shattered the quiet afternoon. Whirling, he saw a cloud of smoke and debris flying where the coupe had been. One of the doors sailed through the air and landed in the street.

He raced forward. The fire drove him back. He ran around to the other side of the car to the driver's seat. Then he saw that she was not in the car. Mrs. Lawlor lay twenty feet away, blackened and shattered.



HOMICIDE Lieutenant Steve Boyd had a normally sour expression. Now his face was sheer acid as he surveyed the crowd of gawkers who were being held back by a cordon of sweating uniformed cops. His eyes swivelled over the blanket which covered the body on the lawn and stopped the police mechanics who were taking apart what remained of the coupe.

"Funny," one of the mechanics said. "Why'd whoever planted the stuff dig a hole as big as this? Scooping out a few handfuls of dirt would've been enough."

"You're sure the explosive wasn't in the car itself?"

With his toe the mechanic nudged a ragged metal disc about a foot in diameter. "This was the base of the trap. The car went over it and set off the charge of TNT. Like an anti-tank mine, only smaller. The blast didn't make this hole because the force of it was upward. See this sewer pipe here? Not touched."

Lieutenant Boyd turned to Rush Dean. "What time did you say it went off?"

"About three-twenty," Dean told him. "I spoke to the servants while you were on the way here. There are two—a maid and a handyman. The last car to drive up the driveway before Mrs. Lawlor came at one-thirty—a grocery truck. The handyman explained about the hole. The sewer clogged and was fixed yesterday. The men finished late and didn't have time to fill the hole. They put boards over it. For some reason or other, they didn't come back today."

Boyd said to a plainclothesman: "Check with whoever fixed the sewer." Then to Dean, "That means we have to find whoever was snooping around here between one-thirty and three-thirty. Did the servants see anybody?"

"They say they didn't," Dean said.

"The mine didn't have to be planted during the day," the mechanic broke in. "It could be put in position during the night and then the safety pin removed whenever it was wanted to be effective."

"So somebody removed the pin," Boyd grunted. "Let's see the servants."

The maid had nothing to contribute, or thought she hadn't.

"Snooping?" she said. "Nobody was snooping. I was in the sunporch most of the afternoon and I saw nobody except one man, and he wasn't outside more than a minute."

"What was he doing?"

"Nothing. He came up the driveway to the front of the house and looked at the

number on the door. I guess it was the wrong number, because he walked away without ringing."

"What time was that?"

"Around two. Maybe two-thirty."

"That's the guy!" Boyd said. "It would take him only a couple of seconds to remove the pin as he passed. What did he look like?"

The maid shrugged. "I didn't really see him. Just a tall, thin man. Oh, yes, his nose. You couldn't miss his nose. It was nearly as big as his face."

DEAN said mildly: "Chances are he was looking for an address. Mrs. Lawlor was talking wildly about murdering somebody before she passed out."

Boyd swung toward him. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't have a chance. First things come first." Dean related in detail his experience with Mrs. Lawlor.

Boyd rubbed his jaw with satisfaction. "Now we got something. Mrs. Lawlor set the mine for her husband. She was so nervous waiting she went out to get pie-eyed. Then, crooked to the gills, she forgot about the mine and sailed right over it."

"She wanted to know how to kill," Dean pointed out.

"Doesn't mean a thing," Boyd said. "She was drunk. Or maybe it was the the other way around. Her husband beat her to the punch. Even if he has an alibi, it wouldn't be an alibi. He hired this guy with the big nose to set the pin while he was smugly cutting out appendixes at the hospital."

Dean went along with the lieutenant to the Riverside Hospital.

The woman at the information desk eyed Boyd solemnly when he asked for Dr. Lawlor. "Are you policemen? Isn't it awful what happened to Mrs. Lawlor?"

"How do you know?" Boyd demanded.

"The maid phoned Dr. Lawlor. It's all over the hospital. I heard that Dr. Lawlor went into his office and refuses to see anybody. Should I get him on the phone?"

"Never mind," Boyd said.

They took the elevator to the fourth floor and walked up a corridor to the head surgeon's office. A pretty little nurse was banging on the door.

"Dr. Lawlor!" she said. "Please let me in."

She broke off as the two men approached. She was shaking all over.

"He won't let me in. You've got to make him come out. I'm afraid—"

"Afraid of what?" Boyd snapped.

"I'm not so sure. He acted so strange."

"Isn't there a pass key?" Boyd said. "I'm the police."

The nurse stared at him in horror. Color flooded from her cheeks.

"Oh, God!" she moaned. "He didn't do it—"

The shot wasn't loud, but it seemed to shake the entire building. A moment of taut silence followed. Then the little nurse screamed and other nurses called out and feet pounded down the corridor.

Boyd put his shoulder to the door, but he couldn't budge it. Dean tried next, hitting the door after a running start, and the lock snapped.

The first thing Dean saw was the head slumped on the desk. He ran into the office with Boyd at his heels, and then he saw the smoking revolver in Dr. Lawlor's hand.

"Alvin!" the little nurse wailed. "Dear, God, Alvin!"

Dean turned to her. "You call him by his first name. His wife mentioned a nurse. You were his girl friend?"

The silence returned. Out in the hall there was a crush of nurses and orderlies gaping white-faced into the office.

Boyd grabbed the girl's arm. "Dr. Lawlor murdered his wife. Then when he learned that it worked, he got a fit of

remorse and put a bullet in his head. And it was all over you, wasn't it?"

She squirmed in his grip. "I—I don't know. I told him he had a wife and it couldn't work out. But he wouldn't let me alone. He said he was crazy about me. Please, you're hurting me!"

Boyd dropped her arm. "That's that," he told Dean. "I like these cases where you write 'Completed' on the report in one hour."

Dean walked to the side of the desk and looked down at the dead surgeon. There was not the remotest doubt that it was suicide.

"I don't like it," he muttered. "Some other car might have gone up the driveway after the pin was set and before Mrs. Lawlor got home. Or she might have had a carful of friends with her. I wasn't in the car only through a lucky chance. Love might make a man nuts enough to want to murder his wife, but would he endanger others?"

Boyd shrugged. "You said yourself he was nuts. Anyway, Dean, this isn't your headache. You didn't even have a client."

"I guess not," Dean admitted.

CHAPTER TWO

Corpse-Retainer

THE fabulous Sophie Fuller admitted Rush Dean herself through a side door of her mansion. She led him into her private den which was furnished with mannish lack of frills and turned her back to the fire, facing him.

"Mr. Dean," she said, "my life is in danger."

Rush Dean stood with his coat over one arm and his hat in his hand and studied her. Firelight glittered on the pint or so of diamonds liberally strewn over her buxom person. She looked, now, simply like a vulgar old woman; but Dean found it easy

to understand how she had run through four husbands in her younger years, in addition to building up a fortune largely through her own efforts.

"You were threatened?" Dean asked.

"Nonsense! A woman of my means and character is always threatened. I pay no attention to threats. This is serious." She clasped her plump, jeweled hands in front of her. "My heirs are tired of waiting for me to die."

"You have many heirs?"

"Two. A large share of my money will go to various institutions, but there will be a good deal left over for my son George and my niece Helen."

Dean said: "Surely you don't think your son will murder you? That leaves your niece."

"It's plain that you don't know George."

Dean felt something unclean in the atmosphere. A mother mortally afraid of her son! He had heard of George Fuller, an eccentric playboy who had too much money and too little sense.

"Naturally I am not accusing George," Sophie Fuller was adding hastily. "Or my niece either. But I cannot see who else can benefit materially from my death. I have a feeling—"

"Feeling?" Dean tried not to mock her. "Isn't there anything more concrete?"

"There is. Two days ago George and Helen attempted to bribe Willis Stock, my attorney, to reveal to them the terms of my will."

Dean smiled. "Is that all?"

"It could be enough. I know how they both feel about me. Helen I took in to live with me only because I promised my brother at his death; George and I are almost strangers. Besides—well, call it woman's intuition, which has seen me over a lot of bad spots. I don't believe in taking chances. That's why I'm hiring the best private detective I can find."

"I'm sorry," Dean said. "I don't take

bodyguard jobs. I can recommend a good agency that specializes in that work."

Sophie Fuller stamped her foot in annoyance. "I know what and who I want and I'm ready to pay for it. And I hate to have a discussion standing up. Let's sit in front of the fire and talk."

She seated herself on the leather couch at an angle to the fireplace. Dean had decided that he wanted no part of Sophie Fuller's brainstorm, but he could at least be sociable and hear her out. He moved over to the fire and tossed his hat and coat on a leather armchair that faced the couch.

The world burst into a chaos of sound and flame. The fragments of it whirled in the suddenly darkened recesses of his brain, and then his brain, too was blotted out. . . .



RUSH DEAN was on a couch in a barn-sized drawing room when he opened his eyes. An ambulance interne was bending over him. Standing beside the interne, Lieutenant Boyd sourly contemplated Dean.

"He's coming out of it," the interne said. "Not a scratch on him. I've heard of it happening in the war, but I've never seen it. The concussion knocked him out cold."

Dean tried out his voice, and it felt all right. "How's Sophie Fuller?"

"Shaken, but unharmed," her voice said. Then she added: "So far."

Dean sat up. Sophie Fuller was a quarter of a mile away, at the other end of the room. She perched on the edge of a chair, her jeweled hands clasped tightly, her lips quivering with restrained emotion.

A tall, pasty-faced man of about thirty stood at the side of the chair. No doubt, George, her son, whom she feared. Nearby sat a slender girl in dressing gown and mules. That would be Helen, the niece. She seemed to be very attractive, but at

that moment Dean couldn't be sure. She looked too frightened.

Dean said: "It seems you were right, Mrs. Fuller."

"Of course I was. That was my favorite chair. I spend hours in it each day, reading or listening to the radio. If I'd sat in it—"

"A booby trap worked into the cushion of the chair," Lieutenant Boyd said sourly. "When you dropped your coat, Dean, it set off the charge. It seems you were right. The Lawlor case isn't settled."

"You think it's the same killer?" Dean asked.

"Has to be. The method's the same."

"Nonsense!" Sophie Fuller said. "It is obvious—" She broke off. "George, Helen—please leave the room."

"But Mother," George protested. "Surely you have no secrets from me?"

"Leave the room!"

They went. It was plain that they were used to obeying her orders.

When they were gone, she repeated to Boyd what she had told Dean about her son and niece having tried to bribe Willis Stock to learn the terms of her will.

Boyd scratched his jaw. "Could be. Did you know Dr. Lawlor or his wife?"

"I've heard of him, but never met either."

"No business dealings?"

"Not the remotest."

"No connection," Boyd grunted. "Since the war, everybody knows about booby traps."

"But would the stuff be easy to get hold of for George or Helen?" Dean said. "Do you honestly insist, Mrs. Fuller, that one of them tried to murder you?"

She twisted a monstrous ring on her pinky. "I don't know," she faltered. "But why would anybody else want to kill me? On top of everything else, George and Helen have the run of the house. It would take time to fix up that chair. Still, my own son or niece . . ."

She sank feebly back in her chair. When Boyd started toward her, she held him off with a raised palm.

"I'm all right," she said stiffly. "The shock, I suppose. I trust you have no objection if I lie down in my room for a while?"

"Go right ahead," Boyd told her.

She swept regally from the room. The door had hardly closed behind her when a plainclothesman burst in.



JUST got something from the butler, Lieutenant. There was trouble with the lights in Mrs. Fuller's private study. An electrician was here this afternoon to fix them."

"Check on him," Boyd said.

"That's the funny thing. The butler was busy when the electrician arrived and the downstairs maid admitted him and took him into the study. She figured the butler sent for him, but the butler says he didn't. They don't know his name or where he came from. All the maid remembers about him is that he had a very big nose."

There was a brittle moment of silence in the room. Then Lieutenant Boyd sighed heavily.

"You're still right, Dean. The guy with the big nose. But hell, it's the most careless way of murder I ever came up against. There's always a chance the wrong person will be the victim. Maybe Mrs. Lawlor wasn't the one he really aimed for yesterday; or if he did, there was a fifty-fifty chance he could have got somebody else instead. You were almost in the car with Mrs. Lawlor yesterday, and he almost got you instead of Mrs. Fuller today."

Dean rose from the couch and lit a cigarette. He drew the smoke down over something that jumped inside of him. A crafty killer, ruthless in the victims he

selected, was bad enough—but a man who was willing to kill indiscriminately in order to reach his victim—

The plainclothesman said, "There's something else, Lieutenant. This electrician with the big nose told the maid that he had instructions there was also something wrong with the lights in Mrs. Fuller's bedroom. She hadn't heard about that either, but when he finished working in the study, she took him up to the bedroom and—"

"You fool!" Boyd cut in. "Why didn't you tell me right away?"

Dean was already on his way out of the room. Boyd was right behind him as he burst into the vast foyer and started up the circular stairs. On the turn, Dean met George Fuller coming down.

"Where's your mother's room?" Dean yelled.

"You mean her bedroom?" George said. "Why, it's—"

He got no further. The blast shook all of the huge house.

Dean brushed by George and took the rest of the stairs two at a time. In the upstairs hall somebody screamed. Helen Fuller was staring in horror through an open door.

"Dear God!" she moaned and crumpled to the floor in a dead faint.

Dean leapt over her supine body, took two steps into the very large bedroom, and stopped.

The room was a shambles. The wall against which the head of the bed had rested was out, showing the trees beyond. Of the bed itself, there wasn't much left. Nor of Sophie Fuller. She was not in one piece.

Lieutenant Boyd was at his shoulder, muttering savagely. Dean turned towards him bleakly.

"I've got a client now," he said. "I turned her down when she was alive, but now that she's dead I'm going to work for her."

RUSH DEAN had a long wait in the outer office before the blonde girl at the desk gave him the nod to go in. As he entered the inner office, Willis Stock was removing his hat and coat. The lawyer was a slender, dapper man who sported a carnation in his buttonhole.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Dean," Stock stretched out a manicured hand to him. "That incompetent Lieutenant Boyd yanked George and Helen Fuller to headquarters."

"It wasn't an arrest," Dean said.

"Perhaps not. But as the family's attorney, it is up to me to protect their interests. It's preposterous to think that either of them had anything to do with Mrs. Fuller's death. Naturally I compelled Boyd to release them immediately."

"They tried to bribe you to reveal the terms of the will," Dean said.

Stock's head jerked up. "Did Mrs. Fuller tell you that?"

"Yes."

"Frankly, I'm sorry she did," Stock said. "It suggests a train of thought which has no bearing on the matter. George was devoted to his mother, and Helen is hardly the killer type. They were simply normally curious to learn how wealthy they would eventually be."

Dean sat back and crossed his legs. "Any chance of getting a look at the will?"

"My dear man, that's hardly in order. I am even insisting that the police go through the usual routine of a court order. A matter of legal ethics."

"Sure," Dean said. "But I'm asking for something off the record. Sophie Fuller is dead, but she's still my client and yours. In other words, we ought to work together."

Willis Stock tapped a pencil on his desk. "You think there might be a lead to the crime in the will? No. I am aware of its provision. Fifteen percent of the estate goes to Helen Fuller; about sixty percent

to a number of charities; the residue, or roughly twenty-five percent, to her son."

"The charities," Dean said. "One of them might be a phoney. It's happened before."

"Ah!" Stock's eyes glittered. He pressed a button on his desk and the blonde secretary entered. "Please get me Sophie Fuller's will, Miss Horton."

The girl strode across the office to the row of steel files along one wall. As he lit a cigaret, Dean idly watched the sway of her youthful form. He was too old to take a personal interest, but he could still appreciate a charming figure.

And then he did not see her. He saw the sheet of flame and the files collapsing, and he heard the thunder in his ears, and he felt his chair knocked over backward.

The silence seemed to return at once, so deep that he could hear the frantic thumping of his heart. And he could hear a thin whimpering. . . .

HE FOUND that he was lying on his side. He twisted around to his hands and knees and saw Willis Stock sitting on the floor beside his overturned desk. Blood gushed from Stock's forehead where a corner of the desk had struck him. He was staring at something beyond Dean and whimpering.

Dean didn't want to look at what was behind him. He knew what it would be—within twenty-four hours he had already seen the same thing twice. But he had to look. Slowly he turned his head, and there it was.

Miss Horton lay in the middle of the office. She was no longer pretty.

Then shrill voices were rising throughout the building and down in the street. The door of the inner office burst open and Lieutenant Boyd stood there.

His face was not sour now. It was very tired. He looked as if he was going to be sick.

"I have a court order for the Fuller

will," Boyd muttered, as if that any longer mattered. "I was walking up the corridor when I heard it."

Dean got up to his feet. "The killer knew that very soon that will would be looked at. Only he thought Stock would go for it. He's still willing to sacrifice people he has nothing against."

Willis Stock touched his temple, then looked at the bright blood that had stuck to his hand. "But why me? What have I ever done?" His eyes widened. "Unless George or Helen didn't want me to tell that they'd tried to find out the provisions of the will. But no, that can't be."

"Maybe somebody wanted to destroy the will," Boyd suggested heavily.

"No. There's a copy in Mrs. Fuller's vault."

People were milling in the outer office, and Dean glimpsed a couple of harness bulls who must have been brought up from the street by the blast. Boyd barked an order to the cops to get rid of the crowd and to call headquarters. Then he turned back, careful not to look at the girl on the floor.

"What do you know about a man with a big nose?" Boyd asked Stock.

"Big nose?" Stock said. "I know lots of—" He breathed deeply. "So that's the way it was done? When I unlocked the office this morning, a man came out. He said he was one of the porters. There was a leak in the washstand, he said. I thought no more of it. As a matter of fact, I hardly glanced at his face, but I remember that nose of his. It was immense."

Rush Dean said: "So we've got a man

with a large nose—and three murders."

"Four murders," Boyd corrected him grimly. "They found Billy Jenkins, the strong-arm lad for the policy racket a few hours ago on Sunrise Boulevard. There were the shattered remains of a gun in his hand. The gun evidently did the trick. We figure Jenkins took somebody out there to give him the business. But pressing the trigger brought death to himself."

"And he's out to get me!" Willis Stock's voice was as shrill and hysterical as a woman's. He lurched across to Boyd and clawed at his arm. "You've got to save me, Lieutenant! Put me in jail! Anything!"

"We'll protect you," Boyd told him. He didn't sound convincing.

Dean ground his cigaret under his heel. He no longer felt like smoking. There was no stomach in him. All his insides seemed to have gone completely and sickeningly empty.

CHAPTER THREE

A Thousand Roads to Fear

MORGAN was spreading a sheet of Rush Dearn's best letter paper on the desk when Dean let himself into his apartment. Morgan leapt up in confusion.

"I was about to write a letter to my sister, sir," he explained. "I thought you would not mind if I used a sheet of your paper."

"That's all right," Dean said.

Morgan was what the agency had described as a "gentleman's man." When



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Dean's son had enlisted in the Navy, Dean had thought that a full-time man servant would overcome some of the barren, lonely feeling in the apartment. But Morgan was too correct, too aloof. Like this fuss he was making now over nothing. He made Dean feel like a stuffed shirt.

"Are you sure you don't mind, sir?" Morgan asked.

"Of course not, Morgan," Dean said testily. He was irritable enough as it was. "Write your letter."

"Thank you, sir. A gentleman called on you late this afternoon. He did not leave his name."

"Did he say what he wanted?"

"No, sir. I told him I did not expect you for several hours, but he insisted on waiting for you. However, after a few minutes he said he would return later and took his departure."

Suddenly every nerve in Dean's body was taut.

"What did he look like, Morgan?"

"A rather tall man, I should say, sir. Inclined to thinness."

"What about his nose?"

"Nose, sir?" Morgan's eyebrows arched. "Well, sir, it was particularly prominent, I should say."

Dean stood very still, his eyes roaming about the room.

"Morgan, did you let him out of your sight while he was here?"

"Certainly not, sir. He was a stranger."

"Was he in this room all the time?"

"Yes, sir. He seated himself on the couch. Just before he left, he went to that window and looked out."

"Did he have a package with him? Did he fumble at any of the furniture? Did he do anything that looked suspicious to you?"

"Suspicious, sir?" Again Morgan's eyebrows rose. "Not that I can recall, sir. I am certain that he had no package of any sort."

Dean studied the couch. It must be the couch, then, set to explode on the slightest contact like Sophie Fuller's easychair. He could set it off by tossing an object on it, but that would wreck the apartment.

Morgan, thinking the questioning was ended, resumed his seat at the desk. He reached for the fountain pen stuck into the onyx stand.

"Morgan!" Dean barked. "Don't move! Don't touch anything!"

As Morgan turned his head to him with a puzzled expression, his fingers automatically closed over the fountain pen. And it happened.

Even as the detonation thundered in Dean's ears and he was moving forward, he was thinking dully: *There isn't a booby trap the killer doesn't know. Now it's a fountain pen. He learned that from the retreating Italians in Libya who strewed harmless looking fountain pens on the desert for British soldiers to snatch up and get blown apart.*

And then he was at Morgan's side.

Morgan uttered no sound. Not yet, anyway. In his blackened torn face his eyes bulged in horror and pain, staring at his right wrist. He had no hand.

RUSH DEAN was afraid. He had known fear before, when he had been the target of flying lead or had been cornered by a mad criminal whom he himself hunted. All that he had been able to take with only a tightening of his stomach muscles and a sharpened alertness.

But this was a fear that had no beginning and no end, in which there was no relief from tension. Here death struck with no warning and presented no vulnerable point at which one could strike back. It lurked in the opening of a door or a drawer, in almost any casual act or movement. And, if somehow he escaped being blown to bits, the tension might

shatter nerves even as strong as his were.

The killer feared Dean as well. That was why the man with the big nose had substituted Dean's fountain pen on his desk for another—to at least maim him, if not kill him, so that he would be out of the way.

Dean had a friend, Captain Hal Willow of the Engineers. He called him at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, by long-distance telephone.

"Hal, you ought to know if anybody does," Dean said. "What's the Army's answer to the booby trap?"

Captain Willow laughed without mirth. "You tell us. I've been reading about the fireworks in your town, Rush. Looks like you got a madman running around loose."

"As mad as Hitler," Dean said. "That is, a madman with a method. Put my question this way. What does the Army do to counter booby traps left behind by a retreating enemy?"

"Well, there's a simple way. Make a safety catch out of a piece of wire and immobilize the detonator."

"If you know where the booby trap is planted," Dean said dryly.

"That's the major part of the headache. And there might be another trap under the one you've immobilized. That's why we don't devote too much attention to that method. The quickest and safest way is to blow the traps up with a barrage or grenades or Bangalore torpedoes, depending on what you want to clear."

"Simple," Dean said. "All we have to do is blow up the city. You Engineers have it easy; you know when the enemy has just left a place. But we haven't any idea where this guy will leave a booby trap next."

"I told you there's no really effective answer. Not inside a house, anyway, or when you don't suspect a very limited area. Sorry I can't help you out, Rush."

"Thanks, anyway," Dean said.

As he hung up, he saw that his hand

was still steady. But steady for how long?

The phone rang a minute later. Lieutenant Boyd said glumly: "Another one's been blown to hell."

Dean's fingers tightened on the handset. "Who?"

"Some pianist named Robert Baffle. He sat down this afternoon at his piano to practice. I guess it was when he struck a certain key that it happened. We have his wife at headquarters. She was shopping at the time, but she had the night before to stuff the piano with TNT. I gather that she and her husband don't get on so well, and we just learned that recently her husband was insured for fifty grand. She gets the dough. So there's plenty of motive. But—"

"The man with the big nose?" Dean said.

"Uh-huh. Mrs. Baffle says he was in early this morning, while her husband was out, to tune the piano. So I guess we'll have to let her go. Even if by chance she is guilty, we couldn't get an indictment on circumstantial evidence. We can't tie her up in any way with Mrs. Lawlor or Mrs. Fuller or Billy Jenkins or Willis Stock. Me, I think he's just knocking off people at random."

"No," Dean said.

"What's that? You got an idea?"

"Call it a vague glimmering."

"Let's have it."

"Too vague yet," Dean said and hung up.



HELEN FULLER sat opposite Rush Dean at a little corner table in the restaurant. Again he found himself wondering how attractive she really was; he had never seen her under normal circumstances. Strain made her finely molded features harsh; the weariness that comes of a fear beyond fear dulled the luster of her eyes.

"My cousin George and I are all alone now in that big house," Helen Fuller told Dean. "I mean really alone. The servants quit right after Aunt Sophie's death and we can't hire others. They've read the papers."

"Why don't you leave town?" Dean suggested.

"What's the use? If I'm marked for death, the way Aunt Sophie was, he'll learn where I am."

"You mean George will learn?" Dean said softly, watching her face.

Her breath came faster. "No. It can't be George. He's no good, but we always got along."

Dean had no comment to make to that. He drank his coffee, then said carelessly: "What information did you and George want when you visited Willis Stock in his office?"

"It wasn't important. We wanted Stock, who was Aunt Sophie's attorney, to give George a written statement to the effect that George would be rich on his mother's death."

"Not important?" Dean smiled a little.

"You don't understand. George gambles a lot. He got himself head over heels in debt and didn't dare ask his mother for money. His creditors agreed to carry the debt with extortionate interest if George could prove that he would some day come into money. That proof would be a statement from Stock about the will. George asked me to come along because Stock likes me and doesn't like George."

"And Stock refused the statement?"

"He said it wasn't ethical. So we—" She bit her lip, realizing suddenly what she had said.

Dean said: "And then George, needing the money desperately, decided to get his share in a hurry."

Helen shifted her eyes from his steady gaze. "I've been thinking of that all along. It's been driving me as crazy as the fear of dying. But all those others who

were killed—George didn't even know them. And the man with the big nose—he's really the murderer, isn't he?"

"That's what the police think," Dean said. "That's why you and George and several other people under suspicion aren't being held. They're concentrating on finding the man with the big nose."

"He's not really the chief one, is he?" she asked. "I mean, it's likely that he is really working for somebody else."

Dean shook his head. "I think that the man with the big nose does not exist."

"What do you mean? A number of people saw him."

"Like the little man who wasn't there," Dean said. He stood up. "I'll see you home."

Her shoulders drooped as he held her coat for her. "That won't be much help. One booby trap can kill two as easily as one."

CHAPTER FOUR

Boomerang

THE Fuller mansion was aglow with lights. Several police cars were parked in the broad gravel circle in front of the garage. Helen looked at him sharply. "What would they want here? And so many?"

"We'll see."

A plainclothes detective opened the door for them. He grinned at Dean.

"Your troubles are over," he said. "We got the killer."

The library was full of cops. George Fuller stood with his back against the bookshelves, cowering as if at bay. Agitated muscles worked in his pasty face.

"It's a lie!" George said hoarsely. "I never saw those things before."

Lieutenant Boyd laughed. He looked younger, more full of vigor and good spirit. "I suppose it was planted?" he mocked. "That's what they all say. You

have motive, Fuller—at least for killing your mother and trying to kill Stock and your cousin. And we'll find out why you killed the others. And you check with all the people who saw you—tall and thin."

George looked in desperate appeal past Boyd to where Willis Stock leaned against a desk. "Stock, don't let them frame me! You're the family lawyer. It's your duty to get me out of this."

Stock's jaw was hard. "I'm thinking of Miss Horton, my secretary."

Then George saw his cousin Helen standing just inside the library with Rush Dean. "Helen, you don't believe what they're saying?"

Helen opened her mouth, but Boyd spoke first. "You were slated to be his next victim, Miss Fuller. I had my men go over this house with a fine-tooth comb. There was a booby trap in your dresser. When you opened the upper righthand drawer—well, your cousin's inheritance would be increased by fifteen percent."

Helen's fingers, on Dean's arm, dug into his muscular flesh. She had nothing to say now.

"You sure have got him cold," Dean said drily.

"On ice," Lieutenant Boyd chuckled. "I got to thinking that all this stuff, the TNT and detonators and wires and traps, had to take up a lot of room and the killer had to keep them where he could get at them easily. So we searched the homes of the suspects. George Fuller had the stuff in a big valise in his closet. And when we searched his topcoat, guess what we found in the inside pocket?"

"A mask," Dean said. "Probably sponge rubber, with an abnormally big nose."

Boyd looked disappointed. "How'd you know?"

"It became obvious," Dean said. "The killer, though he had an extremely prominent distinguishing feature, took too much

care to be seen. Every cop in the city was looking for him, yet the only time anybody saw him was just before an explosion. The answer was simple, The man with the big nose did not exist. He was a myth created by the killer to keep the police running in circles and give himself a chance to plant the traps."

WILLIS STOCK moved from the desk. "One thing puzzles me. Say he killed his mother and then planned to kill Helen so that the residue of the estate, which would all go to him, would be larger. He tried to kill me, I imagine, because he had asked me about the provisions of the will, and Dean because he thought he was too hot on the scent. But why those others?"

"He had to include others to divert suspicion from himself," Boyd replied breezily. "If he tried for only his mother and cousin, he'd give himself away at once. This way he made it look like a madman who was blowing up people at random."

Dean asked. "Why did Dr. Lawlor put a bullet in his head when he heard of his wife's murder?"

"Shock. Grief. Call it anything you like." Boyd swung savagely toward George. "We got you tied hand and foot. You might as well start spilling."

George shook his head. "You're wrong. Wrong! Do you think I'm a monster who would kill his own mother and all these other people?"

"That's just what I think." Boyd stepped toward George, his eyes gleaming dangerously, then turned away with a shrug. "You'll get plenty of working over at headquarters. . . . Take him away."

George Fuller screamed as two detectives closed in on him. He battled with sobbing fury as they handcuffed him and dragged him out. Those who remained in the library could still hear his shrieks as he was being pushed into one of the cars.

Helen had shut her eyes and was leaning hard against Boyd.

Willis Stock, who had remained after the police left, reached for his hat. "Frankly, Helen, I'm in a dilemma. I receive an annual retainer as the Fuller family lawyer, yet how can I even attempt to defend George after he murdered my secretary?"

Helen made no answer. Stock shrugged and went out. Dean heard the front door close; he heard Stock's car drive off. The silence of the huge house was almost tangible.

"You can't stay here alone," Dean said. "Let me take you to a hotel."

"There's no longer reason to be afraid. And this house is as safe as any place, now that the police have gone through it."

Dean ran a hand through his unruly, gray-streaked hair. "Now all this will go to you, this house as well as George's share of the estate."

Her voice was suddenly razor-edged. "Are you implying that I'm involved?"

"Of course not," he said quickly. "Lieutenant Boyd has this case settled for a second time. Good-night."

He started out to walk the two miles to his apartment. He had gone less than a quarter the distance when somebody threw a bullet at him.



IT WAS a good street for murder. One side of it consisted of empty lots; on the side on which Dean walked there was the foundation of an apartment house under construction. The report of the gun made thunder in the still night, and the bullet chipped the pavement ten feet from Dean.

Dean's gun leaped into his hand as he spun. There was enough starlight to show him the shape, darker than the darkness, at the foundation, but not enough of it for identification.

Dean's gun lifted. His hand started to contract. Then, at the last moment he checked himself.

The killer shot again. The second bullet came no closer than the first. Either he was a rotten shot, or . . . the shape reared itself above the foundation. Again Dean's finger was tight on the trigger. It required an exertion of will to keep himself from shooting at a target he could not miss.

Feet pounded on the sidewalk. Dean glanced over his shoulder; a patrolman was running toward him with his service revolver out. Dean looked back at the foundation. The shadowy figure was gone.

"Don't move!" the cop yelled. "I got you covered."

Dean waited meekly. The cop came up, spraying a flashlight on his face.

"Rush Dean!" the cop said. "Who you shooting at?"

"Somebody tried to ambush me from over there."

"Did you get him?"

"I couldn't see him," Dean said.

Together they went into the foundation. It wasn't any use. The place was a labyrinth. The killer would have no trouble getting out unseen on the other side of the block.

Dean moved in the opposite direction from the policeman, then climbed out to the street. The cop would insist on taking him to the precinct house to make a report. Dean hadn't time for red tape.

He practically ran back to the Fuller mansion. Helen hadn't locked the door after he had left. He burst into the foyer and yelled her name.

"Who's there?" her voice came from upstairs.

He raced up the stairs. Helen Fuller, dressed in a flowing negligee, came out of her room.

"What is it?" she asked. "Has anything gone wrong?"

"Not exactly wrong. Maybe right. Did you touch anything, open anything, in your room?"

Blood left her face; the terror was back. "I undressed and went to the closet and took out my negligee. The police assured me that the house was safe."

"There could be something they overlooked, a tricky little thing. Even trained Army engineers can't spot every trap when they clear out a place."

"Then you think George—"

"No, not George," he said. "Wait here."

Downstairs in the kitchen he found a basket of apples. He filled a pot with them. When he returned to the upstairs hall, Helen hadn't moved.

"Stand back," he said. "If there's anything to detonate, these apples might turn the trick."

In spite of the warning, she followed him to the door of the bedroom. "What do you mean by what you said before? George is the one, isn't he? The police—"

LIKE a baseball player putting a fast one over the plate, he hit the bed with one of the apples. Nothing happened. He threw apples at the vanity table, the two chairs, the chaise lounge. Then he stooped to pick up more apples from the pot.

"George is innocent," he said. "That stuff was planted in his closet."

"Then who—"

"Willis Stock," he said.

There was laughter at the stairhead and the sound of feet coming stolidly toward them. Helen uttered a hoarse cry.

Willis Stock, having heard the tail end of the conversation, was no longer trying to keep from being heard. He came forward, tall and dapper, with both hands thrust into his topcoat pockets.

"Is it nice to speak about me behind my back?" Stock said pleasantly.

Dean straightened up with a single

apple in his hand. He said, "Killing Billy Jenkins, the gungel, was the tip-off. Guys like Jenkins don't get bumped off without a reason. If you took that into account, the rest of it fell into a pattern."

Stock smiled. "I wish you'd explain—so both Miss Fuller and I knew what you were talking about."

"Those unconnected killings," Dean said. "If it hadn't been for Jenkins, your explanation for them might have been plausible enough. But Jenkins was a killer himself—he wouldn't let an amateur plant a booby trap on him, particularly a gun-trap. The gun that killed him was his livelihood."

Stock's smile grew a little frozen. Dean went on,

"You were in business with Jenkins—murder for sale. It's been done before. Dr. Alvin Lawlor wanted to get rid of his wife; you and Jenkins obliged. He committed suicide when he heard Boyd tell his nurse that he was the police—he thought the game was up. Then there was Mrs. Baffle, who wanted to collect on her husband's insurance. But after Lawlor's suicide, you simply had to get rid of Jenkins."

Stock was shaking his head. His smile remained fixed. "You'll have difficulty in making a jury see your point—but go on."

"You had another reason for getting Jenkins out of the way. You were the Fuller family lawyer. You'd played around with the funds in your charge—you were probably named executor of Sophie Fuller's estate. You were ready to quit the general field, and live on the estate, provided you managed to get George framed for his mother's death. You'd already planted the idea in Sophie's mind that her son might kill her. You'd probably encouraged George in his wildness—exaggerated it to his mother. But you didn't want Jenkins to cut in on this plum—you didn't want Jenkins to remain

alive to tie you into your previous murders for profit."

"This is interesting," Stock said.

Dean said, "A little while ago somebody tossed a couple of shots at me. Frankly, I thought at the time it might have been Helen—Miss Fuller—that's why I didn't shoot back. Afterwards I realized that you practically invited me to shoot back, and thought of a reason. The killer was in my apartment. He had a chance to doctor my gun, make it a death-trap, like Jenkins' weapon. Miss Fuller would hardly have had the opportunity to do that to Jenkins or to me—and that left you.

"There was another thing—just before you sent your secretary to get Sophie Fuller's will out of the filing cabinet, you'd told me that letting me see the will was unethical. Then, why let your secretary witness a breach of etiquette on your part—why not get the will yourself? That was because you wanted to frame yourself as a potential victim—"

Willis Stock took his hand casually out of his coat-pocket. It gripped an automatic.

STOCK said, "You don't think I'm going to let the police hear all this, do you? My opinion as a lawyer is that your evidence is pure conjecture, but as you said, I must protect my ethics. I made a slip—I shall make no more. The police will discover that George left a number of booby traps behind him, after his arrest. I hadn't expected to find you here, Rush—I came back to persuade Miss Fuller to take a shower. After that I shall have to dispose of you."

The girl got it immediately—her

knuckles dug into her taut cheeks. "No—you can't make me!"

Dean threw the apple then.

Stock was an amateur with a gun. He tried to duck the apple before he fired. By the time his gun roared, Dean had reached him with a pile-driving right, and then he was pulling the lawyer down to the floor, wrenching the gun out of the other's grip. He swung again and again, feeling the other grow limp.

He stood up, panting. He tossed the gun away. He whispered, "My hands are good enough for you . . . you dirty . . ."

Stock came off the floor with a rush. His knee dug into Dean's groin—and then he was diving for the gun.

Dean saw the gun come up, point at him. The blast was louder than any pistol could make. . . .

When he finally dragged himself to his feet, the girl had already seen the bloody, headless sight. She clung to him, whispering, "You—you switched guns on him. The gun he tried to shoot you with was the booby one—the one he'd planted on you to kill you!"

Harsh, bitter lines etched Dean Rush's face. For the first time in twenty years he looked his age.

He said, "Stock was right. All the evidence I had was conjecture. It wouldn't have held in court." He felt her slim body shivering against him, and his arm around her was tentative, queerly impersonal. "Forget it," he said then, almost harshly. "Forget you saw me do it—it was an accident. We've got to get George out of jail."

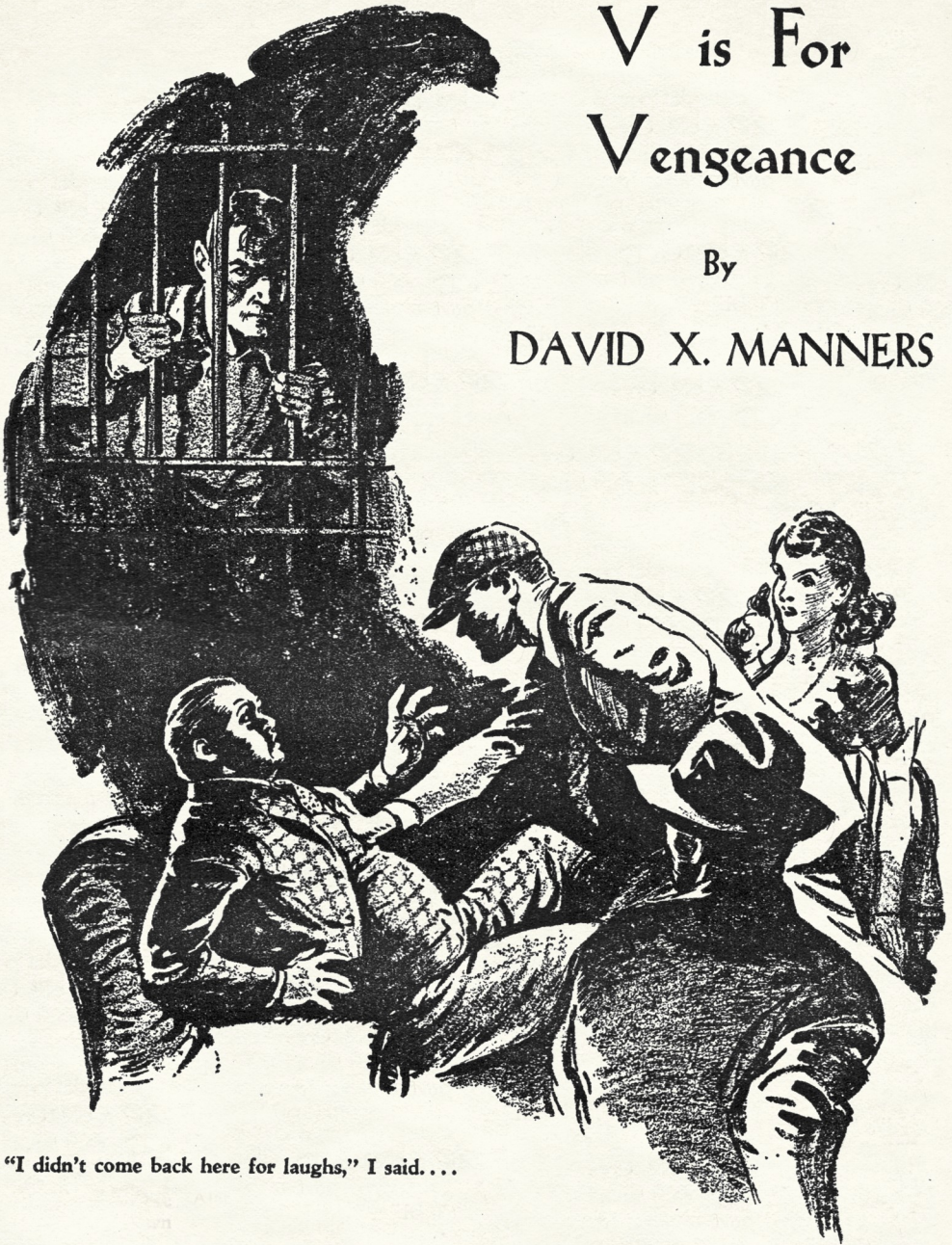
It was a little while before he risked a look at her. But when he did, she was almost smiling.

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V is For Vengeance

By

DAVID X. MANNERS



"I didn't come back here for laughs," I said....

Freshly out of the Big House, Tom found that the only way to prove himself to the woman who loved him was to frame himself again—this time as the killer's victim!

AT LAST it was coming true. In just a little while I'd have Jack Keyhoe where I wanted him. I'd have him where I could beat his face with my fists, choke him with my bare hands. I'd have him where I could grind his nose in the dirt until he talked. Then

I'd make him swallow all those dirty lies he'd been telling my wife, Ann, while I was up at San Quentin. I'd make him cough out the truth about my little girl, Sistie. He said she died, but I was willing to bet every last free day I had in life she hadn't died. Jack Keyhoe had killed her!

The motorcycle cop's radio was turned up loud. I stood aside in a little shovel-ploughed cut-in, leading into the orange grove, and watched the cop bounce by. I didn't want to be seen by any cops now. I watched him trail off into a fading speck. Then all was silent, except a kid yelling off somewhere for a dog.

I pulled the bill of my cap down over my eyes, shading my face that was still a giveaway prison-pale. I turned my coat collar up. A sign along the road said: Los Angeles 39 miles. But I wasn't going to Los Angeles. My trip was ending just about a half mile ahead—if what I'd learned from the attendant, at the filling station a couple miles back, was right.

I looked down the road. The kid who was calling the dog was a little girl in a pinafore. She was seven or eight, I'd say. Just about like little Sistie would have been. Her little fists were rubbing the inside corners of her eyes when I came up with her. Her sobs were catching with jerks that shook her whole body.

"My dog, mister. Did—did you see a little—a little—?"

My eyes fixed in sudden sharpness on her. I caught my breath when I looked at that tilted button of her nose, at her high, dimpled cheeks. No, I said to myself. That dirty Keyhoe did a lot to me, but not this!

I eased down to my heels. I put my hand on the little girl's shoulder. I looked up the road at what cars were coming. Two sedans and then a truck.

"Your name, kiddy," I said. "What's your name?"

She looked blankly at me, catching her

sobs. "My dog, Rex," she said, "he won't come home." Her sobs were tumbling over her pouting lip. "Rex, he—"

"But your name, kiddy. Damn it. What's your name?" I shook her shoulder. "I had a kid once, just like you. A dog named Rex too."

The *put-put* of his motorcycle told me the cruising cop was coming back again now. I dug my fingers in the kid's shoulder. I stared at her lips, waiting for her words. But she began to cry more than ever, and I knew I was a fool for even thinking my kid might still be alive.

I turned away. Fifty yards down the road, I hopped a little cut-bank and crossed into the orange grove. I didn't want a picture of me on any cop's eye. I held stiff, listening, while the motorcycle went by. Yes, I was a fool, I told myself. Sistie was dead, buried. I was going off half-cocked to think this little girl might be Sistie.

I walked back to the edge of the road. The white, shapeless form in the drainage ditch stopped me.

THE dog was a mongrel, barrel-bodied and fat with age. It was stiff and rigid in the trough of the ditch, and its fur had that peculiar bristly look like some dogs have. The blood on its head showed how it had died.

I went cold. "Rex!" I said, remembering the dog I had bought, years before, for Sistie.

Another car whirled down the road. I looked back to where I'd left the girl. I was frantic with thinking she was really my child. She was gone.

Twenty-foot brass-bound poles lay on the ground under the trees, along with lengths of unbleached, brown hemp rope. Over the nearest orange trees were drawn huge canvas tarps. Some workmen were talking, about twenty yards off. This was the season for fumigating for red-scale.

I stepped over the poles and down the

clear aisle. A bulky grey barn loomed out from behind a fringing border of rice palms and bananas. The house was off to the right of it, at the end of a crushed-rock drive. I guessed that was where the kid went. I cut toward it. I was as far as an open packing shed that flanked the barn, when a car turned in the drive.

Silvered metal drums were stacked on one side of the shed. I squeezed in behind them.

Two men got out of the car. The doors closed with slamming clicks. The men were talking race-track chatter. There was the sound of other footsteps and a feminine voice.

Silence was followed by footsteps that crunched under the packing shed. They halted. I shifted so I could see between the stacked drums. The slit of light between them was narrow and irregular. I pressed back, but the wall was behind my shoulder. There was a flicker through the slit.

"All right," said a voice. "Come out of there!"

I came out. I stood there, looking blankly. My eyes moved right past Jack Keyhoe, swept over a hook-nosed man and didn't stop till they came to the girl. Then they had to stop.

Four years hadn't changed Ann much. It hurt my throat. She had everything then, and she had everything now. Maybe the years had just touched her off a little finer. I took my eyes away from her and looked at—Jack Keyhoe. Imagine a sweet, lovable girl like Ann having anyone like Keyhoe even as a half-brother!

Keyhoe had a flabby mouth, with deep, downward lines at each end that always looked as if cheap liquor had just been running down his chin. He'd grown a little bag of fat on the front of him, and he looked worse than ever. But his eyes were plenty alive.

"Hello, Jack," I said.

Jack Keyhoe stared a minute, then a weak smile jerked at the ends of his mouth. "Good night!" he said. "Tom."

I nodded. Ann and the other man came forward, slowly, as if they were afraid I would bite. As if they were afraid I was contagious. Keyhoe put out his hand. His left palm held my elbow when he gripped my fingers.



IT WAS the first time I'd seen Keyhoe since the day I'd been sentenced for running a ringer at Santa Anita. Racing one horse under another's name is serious business, and I hadn't convinced the jury I was innocent. No wonder! I'd been working with Keyhoe. Shrewdly, he'd put everything in my name. He'd bought this ranch on crooked winnings while I was in the pen. Now his face flushed slowly, but his eyes had been on fire from the first second he saw me.

"You—you've busted out then? You run—"

"Yeah," I said. "I'm out—clean. I'm through at Quentin."

"The cops. They after you?"

"What do cops know—ever? I crossed 'em up plenty." I made a quick motion with my hand and laughed, as if all the cops in the world were just so many slobs. "Well, what's holdin' off you other two?" I brushed by Keyhoe's shoulder. "I see you're still runnin' with the same bunch, Jack. Hello, Block. Ol' Big-Nose Block. How's the bookie biz? Hello, Gorgeous." I slipped my left arm around Ann, bent close. For a second, she was soft against me, ripe, luscious. My lips stopped an inch short of her cheek. I didn't kiss her.

Her breath was stiff and quick. "Tom," she said. "You're wild! Reckless! This is the last place you should have come!"

I looked at her. I thought: She hates

me. She damns my guts, but—she'll know the truth if it kills her!

I looked at Keyhoe. He hadn't figured I'd be out for two years yet. But if he was afraid about how he was going to alibi the kid's being alive, or how he was going to smooth his way out of never letting me know where he or Ann were, he didn't show it.

He said, "Come in the house." He turned away.

I said to Ann, "I came here," I said, "because I had some business with your brother Jack, Ann. He's my friend, isn't he? He's the one person I can turn to?"

I watched Keyhoe. I watched the slight twisting of his head when he heard that. I saw the paleness of the girl. Ann didn't understand. She didn't understand anything. Keyhoe kept on toward the side of the house.

It was a big house, but run down for lack of paint and care. In its beaver-boarded living room was an old upright piano and angular furniture no slip-covers could disguise. Ann went into another room. Block, the bookie, slumped down into a chair and picked up a newspaper which he tossed over his lap. I didn't hear or see the kid around. I waited until Ann came back into the room. I had to begin somewhere, so I said:

"I'll come right to the point, Jack. What I want is a couple hundred dollars."

Jack Keyhoe's eyes came into focus slowly. Block looked up.

"Yeah," I said. "Two hundred dollars. Maybe that will keep me quiet for a while."

Jack Keyhoe got up from his chair. He shook his head, as if he wanted to clear something buzzing inside it. "Two hundred dollars," he said. "You must be crazy. Where in hell would I get that kinda dough to pass out? What kinda crazy blackmail scheme is this? I don't owe you anything."

I crossed to him. I put the fingers of

my hand to his chest and shoved. Shoved hard.

"I DIDN'T come back here for laughs," I said. "Sit down. I just thought I'd get a line on how deep that grin on your face went. No, I don't want dough. Dough can't pay a man for fifteen hundred days he'll never get back. I'm through bein' a sucker, Keyhoe. Through playin' the goat for the other man."

Keyhoe eased back down on the cushions of his chair. Block shifted where he sat. I saw Ann standing back in the shadows of the room, twisting something small between her fingers. The anger in her eyes made little thorns of light. She was sore at me! I wanted to forget everything and pile into Keyhoe's face right then and there. But that wouldn't get me what I wanted out of him. I had to trick it out of him. I had to make her know!

And Keyhoe was the only man who could bear witness to my innocence. He had to confess his guilt. Then I'd smash him and be satisfied. But first Ann had to know what had been done to me.

I said, "Why'd you write to me, sayin' Sistie was dead? Why'd you move away so I wouldn't know where you were?"

Keyhoe said, "What?"

I said, "You heard me damn well. Why'd you write me Sistie was dead?"

Keyhoe said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

Ann took a step closer. "Jack," she said. "Did you write him that?"

Jack snorted. "Now, Ann—"

"All right," I put in. "Skip it. But can you imagine how I felt when I saw the kid. I hardly recognized her. And she didn't know me. Her own dad! You know what she was doin'? Cryin' like her heart would bust because of what happened to the dog. To Rex."

"A car hit the dog," Keyhoe said.

I laughed, and Keyhoe's eyes turned away. "I had a friend up in Quentin," I said. "Bill Quiller. Bill gave me a few tips on how to spot a rat, and what to do to the kind that would sit back and grow fat bellies while a pal takes the rap for them."

I looked at Ann, while I spoke to Keyhoe. "Jack," I said, "tell Ann why you killed that dog. She won't believe you'd ever kill anything. You're her shining, golden, big brother. She listens to you. You're always nice to her, so she believes your poison. I'm the criminal in the

"Look," I said. "You'll never believe anything I say, as long as your brother says different. But there are plenty of things the cops would believe if I told 'em, and, by Heaven, I got plenty to tell. Now, do I get the kid or don't I?"

I didn't see Block come up behind me. He hadn't said a word in all the time and in my excitement I forgot about him. Suddenly I felt the hand slap around my mouth from behind. He clinched an arm about me.

Keyhoe jumped in, dropping a cigarette he'd just taken from a pack. He

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family. I'm the low snake who brought disgrace on everybody. Was Rex annoying you? Is that why you smashed in his head with a club? Or was it because you remembered he was my dog, and smart dog that he was, he hated you?"

Keyhoe got up, forced his way past me. The attempt he made at friendliness was sour. "Oh, come on, Tom. What's all the quarreling? What are you trying to bait me into?"

I said, "That's it. Smooth it over. Ease it off. Anything to save your own neck—and keep mine where it is. Okay." I nodded my head and my hands went deep in my pockets. "But the little girl. She's mine. I'm taking her. That's little enough for me."

KEYHOE looked at his half-sister. She stared back, startled. Then she looked at me, bitterly, hatefully, as if I were too mean to be alive. I blew up then.

grabbed my wrists. I kicked him in the shins. But he held on.

He shouted. "We'll show you how far you can get with that kind of talk around here!"

I pulled loose one fist and flailed away at Keyhoe's face. Block smashed something over my head. I went limp.

Ann's voice shook. "What are you going to do to him?"

Keyhoe said, "We're savin' him for the cops. Ann, get some rope from the kitchen. I don't like to do this, but the fool is forcing it on me."

Block's hand was over my mouth again, but I managed somehow to say through it, "Ann, you think they'll turn me over to the cops? That's the last thing they'd ever want to do! They're going to hang a concrete block around my neck and drop me where I won't float!"

I didn't have the chance to look at Ann. Something cracked down on my head again.

I could see the darkness through the house windows when they took me out of the little closet. Ann wasn't around. I didn't see the kid.

Keyhoe grinned at me, and I could see he was feeling better. "Ann went to visit neighbors," he said. "We told her we were just going to take you down the road and drop you off. Then we were going to tip the cops. We told her we were waiting for the dark so it would be secret." He laughed and looked at Block. "That much of it was right, anyway."

"What are you going to do?" I asked. As if I didn't know.

"You'll see," Keyhoe said.

My hands and legs were tied. I tried to wiggle them loose. Keyhoe laughed at me.

They drove down the road for what seemed at least ten miles. Keyhoe pulled off finally on a little spur and drove up beside a eucalyptus windbreak. Behind was an orange grove. About a dozen trees at the head of the grove were covered with the canvas fumigating tents for red-scale control.

Keyhoe helped Block take me out of the car. They laid me on the ground.

Keyhoe bent over my head. "Did you ever hear about the hobo from back East who didn't know what these tents were for?" he asked. "He climbed under one of them to spend the night, and in the morning, they found him—dead."

"D-Tane?" I said.



"HYDRO-CY is the trade name," said Keyhoe. "You can figure it out for yourself. Hydrocyanic gas. If you saw how careful the men are when they stick the feeding hose up under the tent, you wouldn't want to get even one whiff of that stuff."

Block threw off some lumps of dirt that were used to keep the canvas weight-

ed down to the ground. He cleared a flap.

"We'll leave him under there for an hour," said Keyhoe. "Then we'll take him out, untie him, then shove him back under. When they find him, he'll be just another bum who didn't know any better."

I struggled when Block grabbed me by my shirt collar. I couldn't see myself getting put under that tent. I kicked out when Keyhoe took my legs. He let go my legs and slapped me in the mouth. Block rolled me over and my head went under the flap. I held my breath and tried to struggle back. Keyhoe shoved hard on my legs. My lungs were bursting, but I knew it was no use to try to breathe. One whiff of that. . . .

The voice that stopped them was so weak and shaken it sounded like a child's. Keyhoe let go my legs, and I rolled my head clear.

"Jack," the voice said. "Untie him—before I make a mistake I'll regret."

I twisted and I saw her. Ann's mouth was tight and her eyes were unblinking, but she was panting too hard to hold the gun steady in her hand.

Keyhoe said, "Ann! How did you get here?" And I saw Block edging to get behind her.

"Ann!" I shouted. "Watch out for Block!"

Ann said, "What a fool I was to believe you, Jack! Oh, how did I ever believe all those rotten lies! Tom *did* take the rap for you!"

Keyhoe tried to interrupt. Ann waved the gun.

"I began to see it in your eyes back at the house," she pursued relentlessly. "Tom—Tom let them crucify him instead of you—and you pay him back now, like this! Thank God, I realized it soon enough!"

I looked at Keyhoe and saw the stubborn set of his jaw. He knew I was too dangerous to let me get away alive.

"Untie me," I said. "You damn fool! You think I'd ever rat on you, Keyhoe? A lot of good that would do me now for the things I want. I want the kid. That's all. And more than anything, I wanted to show Ann what a fool she's been. Now she's had a chance to get it straight from you. Your action was all the testimony I needed. Now she and you too can go to hell for all I care! I'm satisfied. Untie me, Keyhoe."

It took a couple minutes for that to sink in. I could tell by Keyhoe's eyes he was satisfied that that was a bargain. But he wouldn't humble himself to cut me loose.

Ann saw it. She came around and bent over me. She still held the gun, but she untied me.

I got up, rubbed my wrists, dusted the dirt off my pants and coat. I stepped over to Keyhoe then and let go with all I had. My fist caught him squarely on the jaw. He rolled around, holding his jaw.

He got up. I hit him again. I felt the bone of his nose crack under my fist. Then I turned away and walked off through the trees.

I GOT back on the shoulder of the road and started walking up it. I was about a hundred yards up the road when I heard footsteps behind me. It was Ann.

She said, "I'm going with you."

I said, "You're playing hell. I've got my plans made, and you're not in them."

I didn't turn around to look at her. I couldn't, and keep going. I kept my face straight ahead. I squared my shoulders and the slap of my soles was loud on the concrete ribbon of road. Cars and their bright headlights swept by me.

Ann caught up with me. I felt her hand catch mine. "I made up my mind back there," she said. "I want to spend the rest of my life making things up to you."

She stopped by the car I guessed she must have used to follow us. I said, "You don't owe me anything, Ann. That's not what I want." Then I found myself looking at her face and I said, "You don't know what you'd be letting yourself in for anyway. I'm a criminal. An escaped prisoner. They'll be hounding my tail for the rest of my life. That's not for you."

I went ahead, and I knew she was following. It seemed like an hour before we passed the house. Ann went in and got the kid. I waited for her, and she came out, carrying the girl.

"I'm ready," she said.

I looked off to the lights of the cars sweeping down the highway toward me. I remembered the motorcycle cop of a few hours before. How I'd been afraid of him. Then I looked at Ann and kissed her. And I kissed the kid. Ann looked up at me and smiled. I had to tell her then. I knew she was on my side now.

"Look," I said. "I didn't break out of prison. I'm out on parole."

She stared at me. "Tom!"

"I didn't want to tell you I was free. But when you showed you'd come with me anyway, I knew you were with me. I'm only on parole, Ann. A violation—and I go back. And I've been afraid of the police every time I violated my parole and left Los Angeles County to come down here to search for you. But there won't be any more violations now, Ann. I've got a job in L.A."

"Tom! Tom!" she said. "How stupid—blindly stupid I was—"

There was a shining light in Ann's face. I felt all warm inside for the first time since I could remember. "I guess there were mistakes all the way around," I said. "Let's forget them."

Ann's arm was on mine, and my hand was holding Sistie's. The three of us must have made a pretty picture heading off down the road.

For one endless moment Deke stared. . . .



NEW LEASE ON

By FRANCIS K. ALLAN

John Deacon and his girl moved in on the invisible killer who inhabited a modern skyscraper — and who leased space only to the impossible corpses he created under the very noses of the police!

CHAPTER ONE

Move In—On Death!

AT EXACTLY 10:15 on a foggy Tuesday morning in New York City, John Deacon walked into his office, crossed to the desk where Jenny West, his partner without portfolio, was sitting, and quietly closed the top of her desk. He sat down.

"The moving-men are coming at eleven," he announced.

"Oh." She blinked. "How nice. Why?"

"Because we are moving." He tilted his lean face and smiled at her with half amused lips and grey eyes. "I had dinner yesterday with a Mr. Matthew Hall Morgan. We signed on the dotted line. We are now the tenants of his ultra-modern, conveniently located Alhambra Building."

Jenny looked at him uncertainly, as though trying to examine the purpose behind the lingering smile.

"The Alhambra Building, dear," he repeated pointedly.

"I heard you—oh!" Her brows shot up in two smooth arcs, then settled into a firm, accusing line.

A Long Novelette of Weird Menace

John Deacon nodded. "Six bodies discovered there in the last two years. Six murders, all completely unsolved. The coldest, smoothest series of killings that you can find in the records. Matthew Morgan, the owner, is most upset! Leases are being broken, tenants are moving out, things are generally going on the rocks. So on the strength of my glowing record on the Carwile Case, he has made me an offer: Move into the Alhambra, rent free. Solve the killings, and get fifty grand. I didn't say no."

"I see." Jenny sat very still, and her brown eyes roamed slowly about the dusty room. She was a slender girl, somewhat above average height. She was pretty in a quiet way; her eyes and hair were brown, her mouth was even. Her tanned face, usually unreadable, was faintly troubled. Her fingers roamed slowly over her desk.



DEATH



"All right," John Deacon finally asked. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing—" She shrugged.

"But you don't like the idea of moving?" he finished.

She shook her head. "No, Deke, I don't. It gives me an empty feeling—going into that place. I don't like the looks of that thin white building, and I don't like the case. Those murders have continued for two years. The police haven't been able to make a dent anywhere. They've put their best men on it; I've heard you say that Inspector Hallam was the best—"

"Vincent Hallam is good." Deke stared out the window. "I'm just wondering how good I am. And there's also fifty grand."

"Fifty grand never helped a dead man," she said softly.

"Jenny! You . . . You're getting nervous!" He started to laugh. A heavy knock came at the door, then the men from the Atlas Trucking Company walked in. Deke stood up and lit a cigarette. His movements were slow, deliberate.

"Everything goes but the telephone." He looked at Jenny. "You stick around and see it all gets there. I'll be at the Alhambra."



JUST after eleven John Deacon's cab pulled up before the chill white-stone entrance of the Alhambra building. As he paid the driver and started across the walk, he saw the two blue and white police cars parked and empty. Then he saw the cop, standing at the closed iron grille of the front doors. His steps quickened.

"Trouble, Buddy?"

"Maybe. Keep moving."

Deke cocked an eyebrow. "Send in for Matthew Morgan; tell him John Deacon's out in front. If Inspector Hallam's here, tell him."

"John Deacon, huh," the man echoed interestedly. He squinted critically, then opened the iron grille and transmitted the message to someone in the lobby. Five minutes later, a cop appeared inside.

"The Inspector says it's okay." The grille was opened again, and Deke stepped into the bronze and marble lobby. The cop led the way to a waiting elevator. "Four," he told the operator.

"Another murder?" Deke asked. The cop nodded.

"Big gun this time—broker named Paul Addison." The door opened and the cop gestured toward the office at the end of the hall. "They're all in there."

Deke walked in silently and leaned against the wall. It was a large, well-furnished office; a door in the opposite wall led to an even larger room. At the moment Inspector Hallam was crouched at the desk, furiously dialing the telephone, his usually pale face bleak and grey, his grey hair rumpled and tangled. In a corner, Morgan was talking to a detective whom Deke knew vaguely as Wolfe. A photographer was fiddling with his camera, and another man, small and worried-faced, was writing in a notebook. There was no sign of a body. Suddenly Hallam's voice snarled into the telephone:

"Markey! Hallam talking! Get the boys and get over to Eddie Zillic's place! Send Cartright and Gibbs to his apartment! I want Zillic at headquarters in an hour. I'll be down." He hung up and stuck a dead cigar in his mouth.

"Hello, Deke," he greeted sourly. "Morgan tells me you're taking a bite in this."

"No objections?"

"Objections!" he exploded. "If I had my way, I'd pay you to take it! Find anything?" he snapped as a man entered.

"Same old story. The basement is clean as a kid on Sunday. The bars we put up haven't been touched. There's no blood around the service-lift or any-

where else. It didn't come through there."

"It didn't come through the basement! It didn't come through the doors; It didn't come through the windows! It couldn't fly through the roof! But, by damn, the body's here and it wasn't here when the building was locked up!" Inspector Vincent Hallam leaned forward, his face apoplectic. "It couldn't happen, but it did!"

Deke grinned slightly and wandered over to Morgan and Detective Wolfe. "Tell me about things. Where's the body?"

"RIGHT where all the others were—crammed into the electric service lift. It was discovered about an hour ago, the first time anybody tried to use the lift today. The office boy for 421 took a couple of typewriters to the lift-door to send down for a pick-up by a repair man. He punched the button and brought the lift up here. When he opened the door, there was the body crammed into the lift."

"How long had he been dead, Wolfe?"

"About seven hours; that would make it at three this morning. At ten last night, this building was lonely as a grave, but for the two men detailed inside here."

"Two of your men stayed in here last night?"

"Been doing that for four months! At ten, when the last cleaning woman went out, they barred the main floor and basement and second floor windows. Then they went to the top fifteenth and started down. Morgan had fitted them with a key to everything. They searched the whole damn building, locked all windows below the seventh, and never found a thing! They kept moving all night—one up in the building, and one always in the lobby. They know nobody came in! Nobody *was* in! And yet, at three this morning a man was murdered in here!" Wolfe glared belligerently.

"In that case," Deke observed, "two people came in. And one, the killer, left. What does Hallam want with Eddie Zillic?"

"Addison had Zillic's Sky Club phone number in his memo-book, also a new book of matches from there. This makes the third time."

Deke turned as Inspector Hallam moved toward the door.

"If you're back here today, I'd like a little talk, Vince."

The man nodded sourly and walked out. All followed but Morgan and Deke. Deke lit a cigarette. "What about this electric lift?"

"I'll show you." Morgan moved into the hall and to the deadend. There was a small, dark-panelled door. Morgan slid the bronze bolt and stepped aside.

"It's just a high class dumb-waiter," he explained. "Works on electricity and buttons. It takes a lot of stuff that would otherwise demand the freight lift: paper, typewriters, liquor. Lots of tenants don't like to carry bottles through the lobby."

"Couldn't be opened from inside the shaft," Deke observed. "Let's see the main floor opening." They used the stairs and came out at the rear of the lobby. There was an identical lift-door. Deke frowned vaguely. "You gave Hallam's men keys to everything?" Morgan nodded stolidly. "And so far as you know, there was absolutely no way for Addison or his killer to get in or out?"

"It couldn't be done! But it was!"



TO THE left was the entrance of a drugstore. To the right was the Wm. Flower Tobacco Shop. He looked back at Morgan. In that instant he caught a flicker of surprise spreading over the heavy face. The man stared blankly at the main-door; then he gestured. Deke glanced back.

He saw a tall angular man suddenly shift direction and enter the tobacco shop. He bought a package of cigarettes, glanced narrowly back to Deke and Morgan, said something to the man at the counter. Then he hurried out through the shop's street-door.

"I'd swear," Deke said lazily, "that that was Carlos Roman."

"I—don't know any Carlos Roman," Morgan said thickly.

"It's another name for dirty money. He usually dresses in tweeds, carries a cane, and wears a Homburg. So did that fellow." Deacon suddenly ground out his cigarette. "I'll see you later, Morgan." He waited until the man vanished into the elevator, then he walked into the tobacco shop and bought a pack of cigarettes.

"How long have you been here, Doc?" he asked.

"Twelve years," the man behind the counter said sharply. "You want something else?"

"I might," Deke replied evenly. "What did you think of that fellow who just left? Don't see many Homburg hats these days."

"Never thought about it." Mr. Wm. Flower sifted a handful of salted peanuts from a bag and began to work his jaws impatiently. "Get used to seeing him, I guess," he added absently.

"Oh—he comes in a lot?"

"Maybe every month or so. Going up to see the building-boss, I guess. I used to see them together." He looked at Deke again, half curiously, half fretfully. Deke leaned towards him.

"What," he asked quietly, "did he say to you just now?"

"Flower blinked. He said, 'Give me a book of matches.'"

"Not the way I read lips," Deke countered softly. "He said, 'Keep your damn mouth shut' . . ." Deke stood up and walked out.

CHAPTER TWO

Murder Jack-Pot

AT FOUR o'clock Inspector Hallam shook himself into Deke's office and peeled off his dripping black slicker. "What did you get on Eddie Zillic?" Deke asked.

"He's in, some way. We've got a couple of witnesses, a taxi-driver and an elevator boy, who'll swear Paul Addison was at the Herley Building around two last night. The Sky Club's on the top floor there. We finally got Zillic to admit Addison was there. He said he just stepped into the dice-room, then beat it in a hurry."

"Are you holding Zillic?"

"Hell!" Hallam barked. "What would I hold him on? Frobey was waving a writ in our faces before we got the wagon locked."

Deke nodded absently. Then he said, "You've been on this case all along. Have any details shown up consistently?"

"That's what makes the case so cock-eyed! There are four ear-marks alike on every killing so far! First, the jobs are all done with the same gun, a forty-five—and it's always a slug in the brain. Then, all but loose change is lifted off the victims. Third, every damn victim has gotten the right side of his pants in some grease. And fourth, the killings are always at about three o'clock."

"So," Deke mused, "robbery is a part of the motive. It's always the same killer. And all the victims have sat in the same place somewhere just before they were murdered . . ."

"Yeah! And that little point will drive you crazy! Why did they all sit there? Where is a place or chair that's greasy on just the right half? If they all worked in a certain place, or if they'd all been friends, I might have something to work on. But they had nothing in common!

Three had offices here, but two were from out of town and one is still unidentified!"

"What do you think of Matthew Morgan?" Deke asked suddenly.

"Soft!" Hallam snapped. "Sweaty and soft!"

"He and Carlos Roman are friends."

"The hell they are! What's the tie-up?"

"That would be something to find out."

Deke stood up. Hallam shrugged into his slicker again. "You might pick Zillic up again."

"What good is arresting him?"

"Pressure. If it gets too tough, he'll move if he's guilty."

Deacon opened the door. Together he and Hallam entered an elevator and descended to the lobby. Just as they started toward the front, Deke touched Hallam's arm, halting him. He stared ahead.

A tall dark-haired man, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, was entering Flower's Tobacco shop. The counterman and the other were alone. The tall man leaned across the counter and said something; his face was bleak and hard. His lips worked quickly.

"And now," Deke whispered, "Doc has a friend who coddles a gun in his pocket—you ever see that fellow, Vince?"

Hallam was staring narrowly. He spoke from the corner of his mouth: "That's Link Silver, a gambler. He's done time."

"Good-by, Vince," Deke said. Hallam glanced at him sharply. Deke said it again, pointedly. "Good-by."

HALLAM got the point. Without a word he walked out, through the front door, and away. Deke saw Silver turn sharply as Hallam passed the shop's window, saw the gambler straighten, speak roughly to the tobacconist, and hurry through the lobby to the main exit. He vanished in the opposite direction from that taken by Hallam.

Deke wandered into the shop. The

counterman glanced at him carefully, then busied himself with his display.

"My name," he said quietly, "is John Deacon. I'm a private detective. The Alhambra murders are my job, now." He waited a pointed moment. "You know a lot more than it takes to sell cigarettes. What did Link Silver tell you?"

"He—he said he wanted some cigarette-holders; wanted to know if I'd get them for—"

"You're a damn liar," Deke interrupted quietly.

The other started to answer hotly, paused, swallowed, and fumbled out his sack of peanuts. "Murder's none of my business," he grunted. "I'm minding my affairs. Other people ought to."

"How would you like a week-end in jail, Flower?"

The hotness left the man's face. He glanced sharply toward the door, then back to Deke's face.

"Silver told me to keep still—about him having a gambling place next door in the Court Hotel, and about Addison being over there last night. He said he didn't want to get mixed up in police business."

"I can imagine what else he said. So he runs a place in the court. And how did you happen to know Addison was there?"

"I stock the place with cigars and cigarettes three times a week. I took the orders over after I closed here yesterday. I saw Mr. Addison in there then. About eight o'clock, I guess."

"And Addison was there when you left?"

Flower nodded, uneasily.

Deke straightened, smiled slightly, and said, "Thanks." He walked out.

Out on the walk he stopped and looked at the two buildings, the Court Hotel and the Alhambra. Between them there was a dead space of no more than eighteen inches. The Alhambra wall was solid white stone from ground to building-top. The Court wall was solid brick. A perma-

ment, welded iron grille, blocked off the dead space from the walk and rose for fifteen feet. The rear end of the alley was bricked.

Deke sighed, frowned, and rattled a coin.

"I wouldn't like to short-circuit Flower; he's not exactly pulling a confessional, yet—but I think I'll smoke Silver out."

Twenty minutes later he stopped at the classified desk of the Star-Herald and wrote out a personal:

I will pay ten dollars, cash and without question, to any and all persons who saw Paul Alexander Addison after 5 p.m., Monday. I shall want only the following information: Where was he seen? And what was he doing? Please answer this message at once.

John Deacon
444 Alhambra Bldg.

He paid for the ad and caught a cab for his apartment. He wanted a nap before his next move.



AT MIDNIGHT John Deacon knocked at a thick door on the twentieth floor of the Herley Building. A panel slid back and two bright eyes peered out.

"Deacon. This is social. Open up."

The door opened. Deke entered the ante-room of Eddie Zillic's Sky Club. He checked his hat and coat, then moved into the cocktail lounge. A thin mist of cigarette smoke trailed leisurely across the ceiling. The room looked like just what it was: an expensive bar behind whose far doors the customers might gamble—expensively.

"Tell Eddie I want to see him," he said to the bartender.

A large, round-bellied man dressed in evening clothes crossed the room, the muted lights playing over his face. It was loose-skinned and heavy-featured. The eyes were cushioned by rolls of purplish

flesh. The lips were wide, harboring an automatic smile.

"Well, well, Deacon! Glad to see you!" He held out a moist hand.

Deacon ignored the hand.

The smile faded, leaving the mouth lined and grossly hard.

"I'm not in on that Alhambra racket! You can wear out the wagon taking me in, and I'll never change that story."

"Ah, 'Consistency, thou art a jewel!'" Deke sighed. "I wanted to tell you I'm taking a look around. You don't mind?"

He moved past the bar and among the tables, his narrowed eyes constantly searching. He entered the dice room and studied the players, the room. From the dice room, he went into the roulette room. Again he studied the players, the room and furniture. He searched the men's lounge. At last he returned to the cocktail lounge and Eddie Zillic.

"No grease anywhere," he announced. "A very clean place indeed."

Suddenly Zillic straightened. "Listen, Deacon: I'm no damn fool! If I was killing somebody, I'd damn sure clean up the evidence! This Alhambra stink is costing me good high players every time a body shows up! People are hearing I'm on the fire. They don't drop around like they used to."

"Then the victims have been customers of yours?"

"Some, yes," Zillic said bluntly, defiantly.

"And what if a player got lucky and took you for—say, a hundred grand. Would he live to spend it?"

"Hell, yes! My table-odds are all I work on! I run a club, not a murder ring!" The small, flesh-pillowed eyes stared, as though trying to estimate the effect of the declaration.

"Reese! Give me my book!" he suddenly snarled.

The bartender placed a checkbook and

pen on the bar, Zillic scribbled furiously, tore out a check, and blew on the ink.

"Here's five thousand dollars, made out to you! Take it with you. Cash it now or hold it. I'm trusting you. The money's yours if you clear me on the Alhambra deal." He thrust out the check.

Deke studied it curiously, then grinned at Zillic. "You should have been an actor, Eddie," he said.

THE DOOR from the hall opened and a tall man entered. He wore a flop-brimmed felt hat, a well-tailored dark suit with blue pin-stripes, a blue tie, and a pale blue shirt.

The man stared at Deke. Then his foot halted in half-stride. His hand reached quickly behind him, grasping the door before it closed. Then, with a stumbling turn, he plunged from the room. There was the ripping of cloth, the hurry of the fading footsteps. Then the door closed, leaving a fragment of black coat hanging in the latch.

"Who was that, Eddie?" Deke snapped sharply.

"Christopher! Ellis Christopher! But I never saw him act like—"

Deke didn't wait to hear the rest. He jerked open the door, pulled the piece of cloth loose, crammed it into his pocket, and raced for the elevator. When he got there the door was shut; deep within the shaft the elevator hummed—the only elevator that served the club.

Softly and hotly Deke cursed. He returned to the cloak-room, got his hat and coat, and then descended to the dark and rainswept street. He looked at his watch;

it was one-fifteen. He found a cab a block away.

"The Alhambra Building," he ordered. "I'm in a hurry."

This is crazy—impossible! he told himself silently. I've listened to that Alhambra ghost tale too much! I'm making a damn fool of myself. . . .

Yet behind his hard denials remained the immovable germ of suspicion. The blind, unreasoning hunch.

The cab stopped. Deke threw the driver a bill and hurried to the barred front entrance. He knocked. Immediately a flashlight blazed from within, blinding him. And from two dark doorways across the street, two figures raced, guns drawn.

"It's okay—Deacon," he told them quickly. The detectives assured themselves and withdrew. Detective Wolfe opened the bars and let him into the pitch-dark lobby. Again the bars were locked and door closed.

"Nobody in the building now?" Deke asked sharply, quickly.

"Me and Edmonds. He's making the upper rounds. Not another soul. There are five men outside; those two in front, two on the side street, and one on the blind wall behind. The other side's a blank wall, you know."

"I'll stay here. You go to the basement and stay there; stay right beside that door to the electric lift. Stay till I call you up."

Wolfe departed silently. Thirty minutes passed slowly. Then soft steps scuffed across the tiled lobby.

"Edmonds?" Deke called.

"Yeah. Who's there?"

"Deacon." He struck a match, looked

THERE'S NO MYSTERY ABOUT IT

—any of the boys overseas will tell you that this war is played for keeps with real bullets and guns! Help them stay in the game and keep winning—

BY BUYING MORE WAR BONDS AND STAMPS!

at Edmonds, then blew it out. "You didn't find anything?"

"No, and I gave the place a going-over like I was hunting gold. There's not a soul in here."

"How about the elevators?"

"They are all there. The controls are locked."

"All right. I want you to go up to the roof. Walk it like you were walking a beat again. Keep a check on the men on the ground. If you see anything out of order, go to an office and call me on the lobby phone."

"Okay." Edmonds departed, leaving Deke alone in the darkness.

Deacon took off his raincoat, folded it as a cushion, and sank down. He hid a match in his hat and lit a cigarette. He looked at his watch by the glow; it was two-twenty.

"Forty minutes till three," he murmured. Slowly the moments and minutes lengthened themselves into a taut and brittle ribbon.



AT FIVE minutes to three, he rose softly and tiptoed to the rear of the lobby. Cautiously he slipped the latch of the electric lift, pressed the main floor button, and waited. Ten seconds later, the dark cage appeared silently. It was empty.

"There's my big hunch!" Deke sighed. He closed the door and wandered back across the lobby. The silence returned. He smoked another cigarette. It was three-fifteen. Again he straightened and crossed the lobby to the lift door. He opened it and felt into the darkness.

His fingers found cool emptiness.

"But the damn thing was right there—" he snarled silently. He struck a match. The cage was gone. Viciously he punched the main-floor button again. Seconds passed, then, like a derelict ship, appear-

ing from out of a black night, the cage slid into the sphere of match light. It stopped.

Deke swore a strangled oath. There, before him, was the crumpled body of Ellis Christopher. For one endless moment Deke stared, then his muscles exploded. He raced to the front door and loosened the barred gate.

"Close in tight!" he shouted. "The killer's in here now!"

"Close in! Close in, Mike!" a voice shouted across the street.

Steps began to pound. Deke slammed the bars shut again and raced to the lobby telephone. He struck a match and dialed.

"Headquarters? John Deacon speaking from the Alhambra Building! Send a squad immediately! The murderer's in the building! Yes—hell, yes! Just now! Ellis Christopher!" He slapped down the receiver and raced to the light switch. At the flick of his finger, the lobby was bathed in a dim brown light from the chandelier high above.

The lobby was empty. The Alhambra was perfectly silent. The corpse of Christopher sat huddled in its cage.

At four o'clock the detectives began straggling back to the lobby. Each brought back the same report: "Nobody in this building but members of the force."

Deacon searched their faces with hard grey eyes. Hallam, his wet slicker covering his pajamas, stood gaunt and ashen-faced.

He rasped, "All right . . . we've got another murder that couldn't possibly have been committed. The killer's escaped when escape was impossible. What about the rest of it?" He looked at Wolfe.

"Same forty-five slug in the brain," the man said bluntly. "All big money gone. You know the time—the usual three o'clock."

"And the grease spot?"

"It's here. See for yourself."

Deke walked over. The body lay, face down, on a stretcher now. On the dark

pin-striped material, just above and behind the right hip, was the light greasy smudge. The dead man still wore the blue tie and pale blue shirt. Deke turned the body slightly, looked at the face. Lastly, he reached into his pocket and took out the scrap of cloth. He found the hole in the coat-pocket. He fitted the scrap; each stripe and thread matched perfectly.

He sighed. "I saw this man in Zillic's Sky Club around one o'clock. At that time he acted like a man scared of his shadow. He lammed so fast he tore his coat. For no reason! None at all!"

At that moment the guard at the front door opened the bars and a cop walked in. In his hands he gripped a struggling figure.

"I found this," he announced. The figure was Eddie Zillic. "Got him ten minutes ago, slipping down the dark side of 36th."

"Let me go!" Zillic raged. He twisted his shoulders and lunged. His face was contorted with fury. The cop grinned and held.

"I got the news off a parked squad car's radio. I knew you'd had Zillic on the pan. So when I saw him, I figured I'd bring him down. He was carrying his hardware." The cop took a shining thirty-eight from his pocket and gave it to Hallam.

"That's mine! Registered to me! I have a right to—"

"Shut up!" Hallam snapped. "Turn him loose." Then he faced the sweating, harsh-faced club-owner.

"What the hell were you doing around here?"

"He called me! Called me an hour ago! Told me to come down!" He pointed a thick finger at Deke. "You! you framed me! You—"

Deke's grey eyes narrowed into slits. A muscle twitched in his temple. Then his fist crashed into Zillic's jaw with a fleshy thud. Eddie Zillic went down.

"You're a liar," Deke remarked softly. "Take him in!"

CHAPTER THREE

Seven-Eleven

DEKE woke at nine in the morning when Jenny opened the door of the office. He groaned, stretched his arms, removed his feet from the desk-top, and rubbed his eyes wearily.

"You look," he said sourly, "like you've heard the news."

"Is Zillic really guilty, you think?" she asked.

"Well . . . Yes and no."

"Damn," she said, quite distinctly. She took off her coat and sat down at her desk.

A knock came at the door. It opened immediately and a tall, hatchet-faced man of about thirty-five entered. His comprehensive stare slowly raked the room, absorbing each minute detail: Jenny, the furniture, and lastly, Deke. He nodded, pushed back his wet hat, and walked deliberately to the desk.

"My name is Silver. Link Silver," he repeated in an almost mechanical monotone. His face stayed dead-pan. Not a muscle moved, not an expression or emotion broke the glacial mask. "I've been reading the ad you ran in today's Star-Herald."

Deke took out a ten dollar bill and laid it on the desk.

"No, thanks," Silver said tonelessly. "I've got a different proposition—I saw Paul Addison Monday night, from eight until about midnight. He was in my 7-11 Club. At midnight he cashed out and left, alone. That's the last I saw him."

"He cashed out? For how much, Silver?"

"Nineteen thousand. He won fifteen grand."

Deke's brows went up slowly. "Addison was carrying nineteen grand when he

left your 7-11 Club at midnight? Where is the Club?"

"Suite 520 of the Court Hotel."

Deke grinned slightly. "Getting closer than Zillic's."

"I'm not through," the man said dryly. "I saw Ellis Christopher last night. He was in from ten till twelve. He cashed out for twenty-seven thousand. Twenty of it was winnings."

"How nice— For Christopher." Deke looked at Silver's hard unblinking black eyes. "After they cashed out, where did they go?"

"Out the door. Down the stairs. Alone."

"Were any of these men followed from the 7-11? Was it known how much they were carrying?"

"They cashed out in my office, privately. It was not known. They were not followed; they used the stairs instead of the exit elevators. Big winners usually use the stairs."

Deke steeled his eyes on Silver's bleak face. "This is a big ten buck's worth. What's the proposition?"

"How much do you want to represent my interests in this case?"

"What are your interests, exactly?" Deke countered.

"Not getting ringed for murder. Would five grand keep me out?"

"You think you're about to get hooked in?"

"Your note in the paper cinched that," the man said. "Too many people will pick up a saw-buck. I didn't come up here to look honest. I came to beat their holler."

"If you're innocent, why give a damn?"

"Because I'm no fool. You'd look up my record. If you're hunting a fall-guy, I'd be a cute pick." Silver smiled very slightly. "You see, I've done ten years for manslaughter."

"How very frank you are, Mr. Silver," Deke commented.

"Don't exercise your tongue," came the ironic advice. "A smart man knows when

to talk on himself. I had to. I did. Does the five grand interest you?"

DEKE leaned forward. "I have a feeling you're waiting for me to take the money, Silver. If I play on your side, you're going to tell me a little something." He saw the slightest light wake in the depths of the black eyes.

Silver peeled five one-thousand-dollar bills from a thick roll. He placed them precisely on the desk before Deke.

"Now, what have you got to tell me?"

"Why don't you ask Matthew Morgan about Carlos Roman? Ask him why Roman would like to see the Alhambra go busted before a certain January the 1st. You might find out a few little things."

Deke took the money.

"I was wondering when that angle would start gnawing itself out in the open." To the puzzled light in Silver's eyes, he smiled. He stood up. "Good-by, Mr. Silver. You wouldn't mind if I dropped around to the 7-11 tonight?"

Silver's face didn't move a muscle. "I wouldn't give a damn."

"There," said Jenny softly as the door closed, "is a man who would kill a guy before breakfast."

Deke winked. "I'm out of cigarettes— don't know when I'll be back. There may be more answers to that ad. You know the questions. Take down the answers and pay off. Call the paper and have them run the same thing tomorrow, substituting Ellis Christopher for Paul Addison. We're making progress, honey."

"Um-hum. Toward the grave."

Deke walked into the Wm. Flower Tobacco Shop. He found the proprietor getting rid of a lone customer.

"We're going to talk about Carlos Roman and Matthew Morgan," he said quietly. "Roman, as you recall, told you to keep your mouth shut yesterday. What, without any lies or half-talk, did he mean?"

The other shifted. His eyes wandered out into the lobby, then came back to Deke's face. He swallowed. Deke tapped the counter.

"A little lying will get you a lot of trouble," he reminded.

"They're having trouble—" Flower rasped uncomfortably.

"About what? How did you happen to know?"

"About the money—the money Morgan owes Roman. I heard about it when they—when they were arguing one day. They made me swear not to tell. I—I can't—"

"I think you can. Get started. Tell the whole story."

"It was—I guess about two years ago. They were out in the lobby when it started. Then they came in here. Maybe they didn't see me. I was down behind the counter fixing the display. Roman had loaned Morgan a lot of money to build this building. It was three hundred thousand dollars they were arguing about. Seemed like Morgan didn't have it to pay back, and Roman was getting mad. He kept saying, "You're trying to shake me loose. Trying to scare me off!"

"Roman was saying that?"

The other nodded and wiped his sweating face. "They kept arguing, then all of a sudden they saw me. They shut up and went out. Later that day Morgan came in alone. He told me I'd better keep still on what I'd heard. If I did, he was cutting my rent in half; if I didn't—" he gestured roughly. "Then Roman came in. He told me I damn well better keep still. Then he gave me a hundred dollars. I shut up. Hell! Why shouldn't I?"

"That was about two years ago?" Deke asked. Flower nodded.

"And it was two years ago that the first body was found in this building!"

"You—you don't think they have anything to do with the murders—"

"Oh, no." Deke pocketed the pack of cigarettes. "Forget what you've told me.

I'll forget where I've heard it. That'll leave you on half-rent." He winked. Five minutes later he walked into Matthew Morgan's suite.



"THE main trouble with this case is that it's full of liars," Deke observed. "I want your complete file on this building! Every transaction regarding its financing, income, expenditures, and debts. I want that file now!" He waited stonily.

"But I—that information is personal!" Morgan swallowed uneasily. "I can't—"

"You can give now, or wait until I get Hallam up here with a warrant! Take your choice—me or him."

"You can't talk to me like—" The words drained away in the face of Deke's blunt silence. Morgan mopped his sweating face. His eyes wandered nervously to the filing cabinet in the corner. At last he sighed thickly and rose. He took out his keys. Deke stood beside him as he opened the bottom drawer of the cabinet and found the manila folder titled: "Building."

Deke took it, nodded silently, and walked out. He took six heavy steps down the hall, then halted. Silently he tip-toed back and listened. He heard the sharp clicking of Morgan's telephone dial. Then he heard the man's swift, anxious voice:

"Roman—listen! Deacon's gotten on to something! He just took the records out! Yes, all of . . . but how the hell could I? He was going to get Hallam and . . . no! No, I swear I'm not! You've got to believe me! I'm not! I . . . for God's sake, Roman! Don't . . ." There was a sudden silence. "Roman? Hello, Roman?" Then another silence, and finally the click as Morgan hung up.

Swiftly Deke turned and hurried away. He went through the ante-room of his office without speaking to Jenny and a

strange man who was talking to her. He closed the door, picked up his telephone, and dialed.

"Headquarters? John Deacon speaking. Give me Inspector Hallam, quick!" There was a brief wait, then Deke continued: "Vince? Deke speaking. I think something's breaking over here! Yes—don't know exactly, but I've got a hunch Carlos Roman is about to leave town! Yeah! Pick him up! Bring him over here! I'll be waiting." Deke hung up and opened the file-folder.

Two hours later, at twelve o'clock, Deke's pacing of the office stopped; the door opened. Hallam and Wolfe walked in. They closed the door.

"We missed him by just five minutes. He's gone. His desk was empty. There'd just been a paper-fire in his wastebasket."

A deep, twinkling light slipped into Deke's eyes. "Now—get on the telephone, Vince. Call a man you can trust and have him slip Eddie Zillic out of jail. Take him to my apartment and keep him there. Call the papers and announce that Zillic has been released for lack of evidence. We want the story to make the evening editions."

"But what the devil! I don't get the point."

"Make the call. I'll explain later." As Hallam reached for the telephone, Deke turned to Wolfe. "You get up to Matthew Morgan's office. Stay with him until we call you off. Go everywhere with him; check everybody he sees, every call he makes. Got it?"

"Got it." Wolfe walked out.

CHAPTER FOUR

Who Knows He Is to Die . . .

"I'M JUST beginning to get the whole picture on this building," Deke continued to Hallam. "From this file I find that Morgan built

a structure here twelve years ago. He didn't have the money, apparently, to put up a skyscraper then, so he built a one-storey tax-payer; a building that would yield enough revenue to cancel the taxes on the land. He had it built with a foundation that would eventually take a tall building, when he got the money. In those days the drug store, Doc's tobacco shop, and a men's clothing store were here. Then, four years ago, Morgan got enough money and loans to put up the fourteen storeys on the original structure. And," Deke added, "he got three hundred and fifty grand from Carlos Roman. He still owes three hundred grand of that."

Hallam's bushy brows went up. "And what else?"

"The note to Roman matures January 3rd, 1943. If the entire loan is not repaid by then, the building, lock-stock-and-barrel, goes to Roman. Morgan is out—he's finished."

Hallam whistled softly and took out a cigar. "I begin to see—if Morgan can't pay, Roman gets the kitty. And the murders have given the building such a bad reputation, Morgan has lost his profits; so he can't pay. So we ask ourselves, who has been happy to see all the killings? Roman! Perhaps he even—"

"Right! Perhaps he even pulled the killings! The whole thing fits perfectly! From the records and correspondence here, it looks like Morgan's credit wasn't good enough to get a bank loan when he built the upper part, so he had to go to Roman. Then, when the building showed a profit for the first two years and he had retired fifty grand of the debt, he again went to the banks. He wanted to borrow from them to pay Roman. This time they were more interested; Morgan had a good thing here—and then, right then, was when the murders began! When Morgan was about to pull away from Roman's vise! When Roman was about to lose his big pot to the banks!"

"All right! That gets us up to now! Find Roman! But—" Hallam chewed his lip suddenly. "But, damn! What we still haven't cracked is *how*? How did Roman slip in here with his victims? How did he get out? Where does that damn grease come from? Until we crack some questions like that, we don't catch Roman! We know we want him now, but can we hold him?"

"You've put out a call?"

Hallam nodded. Deke lit a cigarette and picked a single sheet of paper from the file. It was a letter.

"Here's something that interests me. It's a letter from a Mr. Robert Haskell of Chicago. It's a year and a half old. I found it in Morgan's file, and there was a newspaper-clipping attached. The clipping was a press-association story of the first two Alhambra murder-mysteries. It hashed up all the hows and whys. And here's the letter:

Dear Mr. Morgan,

Due to my lengthy illness, I've done little reading. However I have just come across the attached story. I am writing immediately, for I am absolutely convinced that I have the secret of this fantastic tale. To say that I am amazed is rank understatement. I feel that I must see you at once! So important is my information that I am flying to New York this coming Wednesday 23. I must talk to you at once in this regard.

Sincerely,

Robert Haskell

DEKE looked up. "Just what do you suppose—" He stopped as he saw Hallam's white, taut face. "What is it?"

"Robert Haskell—that's R. H.!" Hallam gasped. "And Wednesday the 23rd, year before last! Do you know who the third murder victim was?"

"You don't mean—"

"I damn well do!" Hallam exploded. "The third victim was unidentified! The body was discovered on Thursday the 24th. Here—in this building! There



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were only the initials, R. H., on an arm-tattoo!"

"And he had the answer! Morgan knew he was coming!" Deke reached for the telephone. The door opened and Jenny walked in with a sheaf of papers.

"Here are the results on your Herald-Star ad."

"I haven't got time!"

"You better take time. They make very interesting reading. For instance, Paul Addison was seen on Broadway by his second cousin an hour before the murder. At that time Addison is reported to have been practically a lunatic! He snarled at his cousin, refused to shake hands, and then said, 'For God's sake, let me go!' Then he ran into a subway station and vanished. He was seen and identified in five places after midnight, before his death; in each instance he behaved like a lunatic. In fact, three people said that he acted like a man who knew he was about to be killed."

"Well?" Deke cocked an impatient eyebrow.

"I've heard every word you've said for the last half-hour, and if you're about to jump on your horse and go get the big bad man, you better think again. I have intuitions."

"Oh . . ." Deke grinned and winked at Hallam. "Such as?"

"I've seen Roman a dozen times. He's crooked and hard, but he's not too smart. Are you sitting there and thinking that a fool is pulling these murders?" Her voice was edged with feminine scorn. "Do you think that letter would have been left in the files if it was incriminating? Or do you think the records of Roman's loan would have been left if that had been the motive? No! It should be quite obvious to anyone that Roman and Morgan are both deathly frightened; Roman's probably afraid someone will read a motive into the loan; and in turn, he's probably frightened Morgan with threats to pay up

quick and let him get clear." She took a deep breath. "If Morgan was in on this, or knew Roman was guilty, he wouldn't have hired you to come in here; he'd have shut up or told the police. Wouldn't he?" She waited silently. Deke blinked and leaned back in his chair. Hallam's face was expressionless.

"Honey, everything you say is right. But right at the moment, we don't have a killer. And we need one like all hell! Morgan and Roman look funny. Roman's lammed. So we sweat Morgan for the answers."

"Well, just let me sweat you for some answers," she countered. "Why did Addison act so insane for the two or three hours before he was killed? Why did Ellis Christopher act so peculiarly last night when you saw him? Isn't that the Addison story with a different actor and same ending? Why did the murdered men know beforehand? How did they? Why couldn't they escape? They were alone, everyone says that. Nobody was keeping a gun on them." She took a deep breath and leaned across the desk.

"Listen, Deke, please quit this case! I have a feeling—a terrible feeling that you're a long way off the track. If you get close, I have a feeling that you—you'll be in that cage some morning like those others—"

"Don't, Jenny. If you're going to sob, get outside."

She stood very still a long moment, then she straightened. Her face was sober and cool. "I don't sob," she said quietly. "I'll just give an idea; you can throw it out the window—if you've got to stay on this insane case watch out for Link Silver. I don't—like him."

She turned and walked stiffly out. A minute later they heard the outer door close, also. Hallam looked at Deke uncertainly.

"Well, do we still go beat on Morgan?" he asked.

DEKE stood up and stared out of the window at the grey, rain-heavy sky; at the wet streaked streets below. "Jenny doesn't have many hunches . . ." he mused. "She's never acted like she did just now." He turned and faced Hallam. "You go monkey with Morgan; I'll be at my apartment if he sheds any light. There—there's something in what Jenny said about those crazy actions. I—Hallam! Tonight I want sixteen detectives in this building. One for every door onto that electric lift! I'm going to make it impossible to get a body into that cage! I'll meet you here in the lobby an hour before the usual killing time." He put on his hat and raincoat.

"You got a hunch?" Hallam wondered curiously.

"No. A headache." He walked out. Twenty minutes later he stopped before the door of his apartment and knocked. He waited; he knew Hallam's man was

inside with Eddie Zillic. He could hear voices. He knocked again. Then he twisted the knob. The door opened freely and he stepped into his front room. He stared.

It was empty. Yet the voices—then he saw the radio, its dial glowing brightly. A soap opera was moving merrily along. Then he saw the figure lying on the floor. It lay very still. Quickly he closed the door and bent down. As he turned the heavy body, the coat parted and revealed a badge. It also showed the blood that had spread from the welt on the man's forehead.

Deke cursed and snapped off the radio. From the kitchen he got a glass of water and doused the man's face. The other sighed. He moaned, then moved and opened his eyes. He saw Deke.

"Don't tell me. I'll guess: Zillic slugged you!"

"Yeah, He—" The man blinked stu-

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pidly and sat up. "I was standing right here. He was just fixing the radio on the news report. Then he got the report about how he'd been released. He—he just stood there a second, then he wheeled to me like he was crazy. He started yelling! "It's a lie! You're giving me the back-gate stuff!" he yelled. "Tomorrow they'll say I'm missing, and you don't know what happened to me!" Then, before—hell, before I could see straight he grabbed that heavy book-end and slung it straight in my face. I never had a second. He was crazy!"

"Indeed," Deke said acidly. He sighed, picked up his telephone and dialed his office. "Jenny? Is Hallam around? Good." There was a wait. "Vince? Deke talking. You can start hunting Zillic again. Yeah—he dropped a book end on your man's nose and scrambled. He—What!" Deke strangled. Then he sighed. "Well, now we start from scratch again." He hung up.

"You must have a brother on the force," he told the man sourly. "Matthew Morgan has vanished, too. Get—out!"

He set his alarm for eleven, locked the door, and went to bed.



AT EXACTLY midnight, Deke walked into Link Silver's 7-11 Club on the fifth floor of the Court Hotel. From the small cloakroom, he entered a large second room of the suite. He stood in the doorway and took a look. About the room were numerous deep chairs and lamps. In one corner was a very small bar. At a large center table were recent magazines, dope-sheets, and empty glasses. There was a thick rug on the floor, and heavy curtains across the windows. Half a dozen men were in the room, some reading and smoking. Two men at the bar were talking quietly to the

bartender. Where the Sky-Club had had the atmosphere of a secluded night club, the 7-11 was more like an expensive gentleman's lodge. Set in the far wall were two closed doors.

Slowly Deke crossed the room and entered the first door. He was in the dice room. Two tables were working. In the far corner, watching silently, stood the tall, hatchet-faced Silver. His sharp eyes registered Deke's entry. He gave no move or sign. Deke wandered about the room, searching. He entered the next room and looked around. Eventually he returned to the dice room.

"You don't keep grease either," he observed to Silver.

"Should I?" came the mechanical question.

"I wouldn't mind." Deke glanced around. "I don't find this private office you were telling me about."

"You won't until I show you." Silver crossed the room, entered the small hallway that led to the men's room, and stopped half-way down the hall. It was a dimly lit, dark-paneled passage. Silver pushed against one panel. It swung inward, revealing a small but well-furnished room. Deke followed Silver in.

"And the stairs?"

Silver crossed the room to another panel. He twisted a small wall light and pulled. The door opened inward, showing beyond the shadowy landing of an emergency stairway. "That lets out onto the delivery alley," Silver explained tonelessly. "Nobody uses the stairway. The main stairs and elevators are on the other side of the building." He closed the panel and looked at Deke.

"You took my tip on the Roman-Morgan deal?"

"I did. Roman is now the object of a police hunt. We owe you a great debt of gratitude, Mr. Silver. You protect your own fine name, give us another suspect, and identify an unknown murder victim.

It is almost too much!" Deke's voice was ironic.

Silver's eyes lighted slightly. "An unknown victim?"

"The third of the Alhambra corpses. On your advice I took a look at Morgan's files. In them I found a letter from a certain Robert Haskell. When we have properly traced this Mr. Haskell, we might know more than we do now. For which we thank you."

"For which you are damn welcome." Silver lit a cigarette, looked at his watch, then at Deke. "Through here?"

"No. I think I'll stick around in the other rooms and see who drops in. You don't mind?"

Silver merely shrugged, opened the hallway panel again, and followed Deke out. In the dice-room, Deke leaned against a wall and studied the players, trying to spot the big winners. His brain tried again to follow back through the tangled maze of insane detail. There was something that kept teasing him.

"Damn!" he breathed. He stared around. "Silver! Where's Silver?"

"Saw him going into his office, twenty minutes ago," a stickman replied. Deke cursed silently and plunged into the hall. He found the panel-door and pushed. Silver's office was empty!

"Gone! He remembered!" Deke leaped across the room to the stairway panel. Down the dim flights he raced. As he turned the third landing he saw the figure of Silver vanishing below.

"Stop! Silver, st—" The slam of the steel exit door was his answer. Deke plunged the remaining steps and stumbled out into the delivery alley-way of the hotel. To the far left were the street cars, crowds, and the lighted sidewalk. He began to run. As he made the turn, he saw Silver at the far intersection—saw his black hat and black evening suit; his white tie and shining tie-pin. All of that Deke saw as he stared, shocked into stillness.

For Link Silver's arms were raised. Wildly, insanely they flailed at the night and the rain. And the man's usually cool voice was hoarse and wild as he screamed: "Taxi! et me! Come get me, taxi! They're killing me tonight! Killing me tonight!"

A cab slipped to the curb. Silver plunged in. The cab lurched away, leaving a staring, gaping crowd behind. Deke awoke.

"Cab! Cab!" he thundered. There was no other cab. Helplessly he watched Silver's taxi vanish in the tangled traffic.

"A lunatic," he breathed, "who knows he is to die!"

CHAPTER FIVE

Killer's Bloom

TWO-THIRTY. The lobby of the Alhambra was utterly silent. The blackness was broken only by the glowing coal of Hallam's cigar, the tip of Deke's cigarette. Yet, in the darkness and silence was the tension of waiting men: men, waiting with guns on every floor, beside each and every door to the electric lift. Men prowling the roof, prowling the basement—double guards of men endlessly watching the outside. Hallam softly whispered:

"This time it is impossible, Deke. It can't be done."

"No." But the word was automatic. It held no depth or force. Deke ground out his cigarette. "No trace of Zillic or Roman?"

"Nothing. And nothing yet on that Robert Haskell." He put out his cigar. "It ought to be about time, Deke."

"Yes." In the darkness Deke opened the lift door and pressed the main floor button. Presently he felt the cage slide silently to a stop. He struck a match. There was the cage, empty. And it was almost three. He closed the door

again. No word was spoken; Hallam swallowed heavily in the darkness. Deke wet his lips. The muted ticking of his watch grew in his ears to a seeming thunder.

At last Hallam spoke again. "Is—isn't it three, Deke?"

Without answer, Deke opened the door again. His fingers probed. They found only cool nothingness. He started to speak. Then a sound raked his ears—a rasping, grating sound. It came from above.

"Somebody . . . It's gone! There's something—" Deke choked on the word. He struck a match. With the same motion he pressed the lift-button. The sounds ceased at once. Perhaps five seconds passed, then it came—the dark and silent lift, looming from darkness into matchlight. It stopped. There it was.

And there, inside, was the body of Link Silver.

Hallam swore raspingly. "It—it can't be—"

Deke leaped past him, threw the switch and filled the lobby with light.

"He's in!" he shouted up the stair-well. "The killer's inside! Spread out! Shoot on sight!" He raced across the lobby and opened the front door. "Close in on the doors! He's in here now!" A battery of lights came to life. Through the building woke the footsteps of the men, hunting with their guns. The silence turned to an almost inaudible rustle—taut, wordless, brittle. Deke walked to the body.

"It's all the same," Hallam said bitterly. "No money. A bullet in the brain. Three o'clock." He twisted the body slightly. "Even the spot of grease—Deke! There isn't any grease!"

"What!" Deke looked. The smooth, expensive material of Silver's evening suit was clean and unstained, save for the rain. "Hallam," he said softly, "the answer—the answer's there. If I . . . if I could

only think of what . . ." Suddenly he sat down and lit a cigarette. Hallam let him alone.

EIGHT o'clock in Deke's office. Deke stood at the rain-swept window, staring into nowhere. Hallam's voice was grinding into the phone.

". . . no, Commissioner. Yes, we had enough men . . . yes, absolutely. The building was covered, inside and out . . . I'm sorry, Commissioner Paul. It was impossible, and it happened. I . . . very well." He hung up and stared at Deke. "I'm out at headquarters," he said simply. Deke did not answer.

Hallam said, with a kind of savagery, "There was that noise . . . five seconds—"

The door opened and Detective Wolfe walked in.

"I've got news! Two hours ago we found the cabby that picked up Silver. He says he drove Silver to an address on Riverside and let him out. We went to the address; the night elevator boy says he took a man resembling Silver to the eighth floor. We woke up the eighth floor and we found a corpse!" Wolfe waited while Deke and Hallam swung incredulous eyes on him, then he continued: "The corpse was that of an invalid named Roscoe Poteet—a man about sixty-five. Eight years ago he was hurt in a building accident. Since then he's been paralyzed and ill. But the important thing is that he was living with his daughter, a Mrs. Stephens. She says that he was once the senior member of the firm of Poteet and Haskell, Construction Engineers. And they put up the original one-storey building here that the Alhambra sits on. The partnership was broken six years ago."

"They put up the building—they were murdered! Haskell's letter said he had the secret—Jenny!" Deke exploded. "Get out to this Mrs. Stephens! Find out what's happened to all the old blue-prints! Get going!"

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The door closed behind her. Deke began to pace the floor again. Wolfe looked at Hallam. Hallam shrugged wearily. Suddenly Deke snapped his fingers. He turned, his eyes hard and blazing.

"That evening suit Silver was wearing! Did it have back pockets?" Wolfe and Hallam frowned uncertainly. "Get on the phone! Find out!" Deke ordered. Wolfe put through the call to headquarters.

"On the left side of the pants only," he reported finally.

"And the grease has always been on the right!" He looked at them. "Just one more thing. Get me the dope on the size of the various victims. And find out what you can on Zillic and Roman. Hurry, Wolfe." The man left. For the first time, Deke sat down and closed his eyes.

At nine-thirty Wolfe came back. He took a paper from his pocket and handed it to Deke. Deke read it, then folded it into his pocket. "Thanks," he said quietly. "Now, all we need is for Jenny to get here with those plans and—" He stopped and looked at his watch. "Over an hour!" he exploded.

He spun to Wolfe. "Call that Mrs. Stephens! Check on Jenny!"

The man looked up the number and put through the call. When he hung up, his face was lined and puzzled. "She says they found the old Alhambra blue-prints, all right. She says Miss West seemed very excited; she took them and got a cab from there forty-five minutes ago. She should have had time, seems to me . . ."

"She has had time, Wolfe. She won't be coming. She was carrying too much evidence."

"You mean, the killer's got her? Got her now!"

"That's what I mean! And the plans are gone—they were our key to quick action! Our hands are tied now! If Jenny's alive, we'll kill her by bungling. We

NEW LEASE ON DEATH

don't know what the secret . . ." He stopped abruptly and stared at the wall. Then he turned.

"THERE'S one long shot—just a chance! I want the whole case dropped until you hear from me again. Leave me alone. Don't follow me." Deke put on his hat and walked out. In the lobby, he entered the tobacco shop.

"Close up, Flower. Now. We're going somewhere and you're going to do a little long-remembering." As the man frowned suspiciously, Deke handed him his coat and hat. "I said you're closing. I didn't mean tomorrow. Come on!"

Flower took off his tobacco-stained smock, put on the hat and coat, slipped his sack of peanuts into his pocket, and locked up. Deke led the way to a cafe across the street. He took a front table where he could watch the Alhambra.

"Coffee," he ordered. He lit a cigarette and leaned forward.

"Now, I want you to think and think hard. You've tried a little fairy-storying on me before. This time I wouldn't. Now, you said you'd been at the Alhambra since it was built. Right?"

"That's right. I had a shop across the street here before that."

"Do you remember anything at all peculiar in the construction of that first floor?"

"Peculiar?" Flower blinked and stared. "No. I was selling tobacco, not looking at a work-crew building."

Deke cursed the man's surliness silently, hotly. He tried again, steeling himself against impatience. "We know the killer's trap is somewhere on that first floor. He's got my secretary in there now. We can't wreck our way in; it'll hurry the kill! If you've been around all the time, you should recall—"

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"I told you I didn't." Flower shook his head and fumbled out his peanuts. He dried the salt from his hands. "Not a thing!"

Deke mashed out his cigarette and stared for fully a minute at the tablecloth. At last he looked up. "Doc, I want you to listen. I think I've solved the case. Jenny West is either dead or she is alive. Whatever I say now won't change that. So we can leave her out. You listen and see whether you agree with me." Deke lit another cigarette and began:

"We start with the first six murders at the Alhambra. We both know they were committed in utmost secrecy. And now I know how: because there is a hidden section in that original one-storey building; the killer knows of it and has used it for his murder-chamber. And he has also devised a way to enter and leave secretly. The police and I have taken every precaution to guard the building; we are positive the killer does not enter his chamber from the Alhambra, or from the street. Therefore he enters from elsewhere. And the only elsewhere is the Court Hotel! In other words, the killer takes his victims to the Court, and from there slips into the Alhambra; he kills, feeds his victims into the electric lift which he has tapped, and returns to escape from the Court."

"But those walls are solid there!" Flower recalled.

"The killer has made an opening. It would be easy at the Court. Before the Alhambra was built, the Court had windows on that side. They were sealed, but the old casements form individual rectangles that are free from the wall-masonry. The sealing could be opened. And at the Alhambra—see, the first floor is built of large stones. If only one stone could be freed, a man could crawl through the opening. The stone could be disposed of, and a similar block of white-painted wood could take its place. The

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NEW LEASE ON DEATH

wood could be easily removed and replaced. And between the two walls, there are only about eighteen inches—so the killer could easily and safely crawl across.

"You—my God!" the tobacconist breathed. He stared across the street, as though seeing the building for the first time.

"NOW about the Alhambra murders—four factors have always been constant. Death has always been caused by a forty-five bullet into the brain. Then, the victims have always been robbed, so we know that in almost every instance, robbery was a motive. There were two exceptions—Haskell and Silver. As to the third condition—death has always taken place at about three in the morning. I think I know why; because at a certain time closely before three, the night watch changes at the Court, and therefore the killer can slip through the emergency door unseen, go to his secret passageway, and enter the Alhambra to kill his victims."

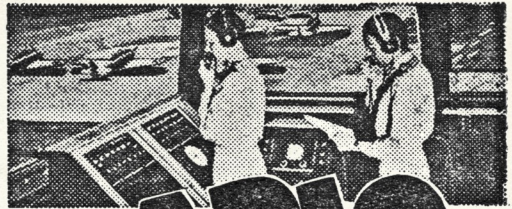
"You mean—you mean, the victims are waiting for him?"

Deke smiled at the wide eyes. "Yes, indeed. But the fourth condition: there has always been a grease-blur or stain on the right side of the victim's trousers—except," he said quietly, "in the case of Silver."

"Grease stain? And just on the right side?"

"Right. And that little detail is what finally broke the case. Yesterday my secretary told me I'd have to solve two questions: the grease stain, and why the victims all acted so insanely the few hours before they were killed. I have.

"From the beginning there have been two strong suspects—Zillic and Roman. And on the side, Morgan has looked very questionable. Silver, himself, was the partner of the killer until he became a vic-



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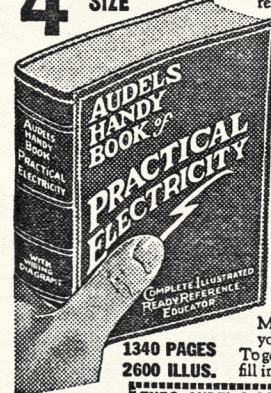
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tim. Now—we know that the killer has to be the man who has been around the Alhambra to learn of the concealed chamber. That could be Morgan, of course. It might be Zillic; Zillic has been around this end of town that long, and he's clever enough to spot a chance for a profit when he sees one. So it could be any of the three. Furthermore," Deke continued, "all three men have been at liberty when the killings were committed. Morgan has slipped a dick we put on him; Roman was tipped by Morgan and is in hiding. And Zillic—I doubted his guilt; I wanted the killer to think Zillic was free. I intended holding Zillic privately. However, Zillic broke away, so nobody can swear to what he's done."

"Then any . . . or all three . . ." Flower started slowly.

"Any or all three," Deke agreed. "And now let's talk about Link Silver; he was the killer's partner. I told you that robbery was the murder motive usually. But the victims weren't murdered for pocket-money. They were killed for their winnings at the 7-11 Club in the Court Hotel. The actual killer, after learning and thinking about the Alhambra's unknown chamber, devised a plan. He took Silver into his confidence. Silver opened the 7-11 Club. When players lost, good profit! When they won too much, Silver paid them off and sent them down a back stairway. Before they reached the street, they were accosted by the killer, taken to the Alhambra chamber, and kept until their murder-time at three."

"But, I thought . . ." the tobacconist frowned. "But the victims have been seen after . . ."

"After they left the Court and the 7-11? Yes," Deke agreed. "And here comes the answer as to why the victims-to-be acted like lunatics. Because they were not the victims! They were all the killer, disguised in the victim's clothes!"

NEW LEASE ON DEATH

"The killer accosted his victims at the Court, took them into the chamber of the Alhambra, made them undress, and then he tied and gagged them. He put on their clothes, used a quick make-up, and returned to the Court. There he took his leave, and circulated around town, creating sensations to draw attention to himself; and yet in such a manner that people wouldn't notice his face closely. That is also why the supposed-victims wouldn't stop and speak with relatives of people they knew well—because that, the killer knew, would risk detection. The idea of these antics was to draw red herrings of fake identification across the murder-trail and, by dropping by Eddie Zillic's, to implicate him and hurt the Sky Club's competition with the 7-11.

"Then, when the fake trail was set, the killer took off the victim's clothes and wrapped them up. He dressed in other clothes, returned to the Court when he could enter unnoticed, and went on to his secret chamber in the Alhambra. There he made his victims dress in their clothes again; then he killed them, stowed the bodies into the electric lift, and departed back through the Court."

Flower frowned, then finally nodded. Deke leaned forward.

"And with that disguise solution, I finally got the solution to the grease-stain problem. The victims, or actually the killer, did *not* sit in any grease; he did *not* go where there was grease! He took the grease *with* him!"

"He—what?"

◆

"WITH him," Deke repeated thinly. "Accidentally — unknowingly. The killer carried something greasy. Customarily he also carried his handkerchief in his right hip pocket—thus, when he took out his hand-

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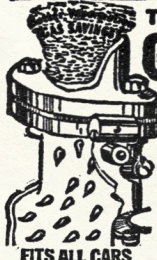
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kerchief from time to time, he left the light stain on the clothes of his various victims. He left no stain on Silver's right hip because Silver wore an evening suit that had no right hip pocket. That was when the case broke—when I found the man who had all the qualifications of the killer, and also carried something greasy!"

"The qualifications?" Flower puzzled slowly.

"Right. He had to know the history of the Alhambra. He had to be of a size that enabled him to assume the identities of his victims. And he had to carry something greasy with him constantly. *Who fits these specifications?*"

"Mor . . . Morgan!"

"Morgan's too short, too heavy."

"Roman!" Flower gasped.

"Too tall, by four inches. And Zillic's too fat and none of those men carry grease!" Deke leaned forward tautly. "Stand up, Flower!"

The man obeyed. Deke laughed harshly, without a trace of humor.

"There's a grease stain above your pocket on the right hip! You keep your handkerchief in that pocket. I saw you take it out when we sat down! You tipped me! You've burned yourself, Flower! You and those damned greasy salted peanuts you're always eating!"

The other twisted. His face was white.

Deke went on, "You were Silver's partner. You killed him after he tried to play smart with me! He slipped when he mentioned the Morgan-Roman fuss to me. He wasn't supposed to know that. He gave me a real lead there. When I told him, he ran to you. You realized he was growing dangerous to your safety, that he might turn you in. You used his disguise to go kill Potet. Then you killed him."

Deke half rose.

Flower stood very still for one moment. Then his muscles exploded. He crashed

over the table and plunged for the door. Deke dragged out his gun and followed. There was a grim smile on his face, a light in his grey eyes. He knew Jenny was alive—and he knew Flower was racing to kill her in a desperate effort to destroy the only real and actual evidence against him. Deke's smile only slightly thinned as he drew a bead on the fleeing figure. Then his grip tightened. The gun kicked.

Flower stumbled, fell forward three steps, then plunged into the curb. He started to rise. His arms stiffened, then slowly folded beneath him.

Somewhere someone screamed. A car's brakes howled. Another scream came. Deke quickly put away his gun, crossed the street.

Deke continued on to the Court Hotel. Thirty minutes later he found the room on the second floor.

He found the unsealed window. It swung inward on heavy hinges. There, across the narrow canyon of daylight, was the Alhambra's white stone wall. Deke tested the large white block across the space. It slipped lightly away. It was a block of white wood. In its place was the dark hole. Deke crawled across the narrow space. He stood up and bumped his head on a low ceiling. He struck a match. He was in a low, rude space between the main-floor ceiling and the original Alhambra roof; a dummy, included to give additional size to the once-low structure. There was a mirror which Flower had used for making-up. There were slugs, and the forty-five caliber gun. There was a heavy box.

He lifted the lid, and there was Jenny, bound and gagged with cotton. He loosened the bonds and removed the gag.

"You!" she exploded immediately. "You . . . you took forever! I could have sworn you'd stood me up!"

"Oh, no, honey." He grinned. "I was just picking a—flower."

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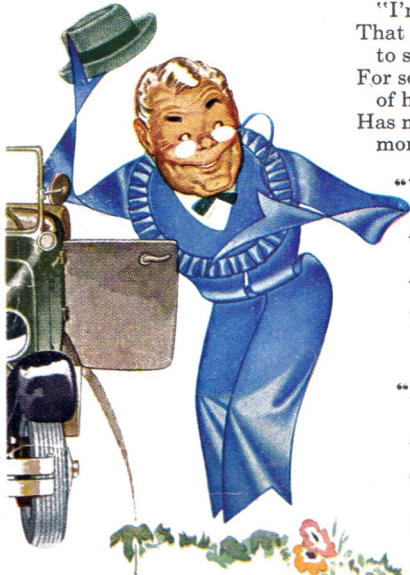
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