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DIME



MARCH

MYSTERY

MAGAZINE

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**DRINK
AND DIE**

*GRIPPING CRIME
NOVEL* By
FRANCIS K. ALLAN

**THE FACE
THAT KILLED**

*NOVELETTE OF
EERIE MENACE*
By **EDWARD
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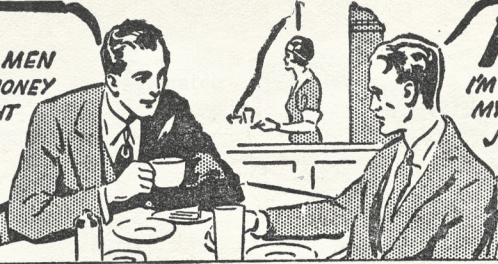
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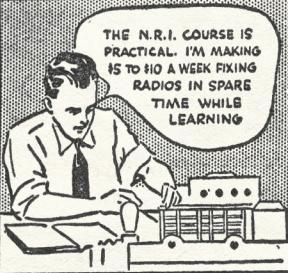
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Volume 30

March, 1944

Number 1

FEATURE LENGTH NOVEL OF BIZARRE MYSTERY

DRINK AND DIE.....Francis K. Allan 8

The man wasn't thirsty. Then what appalling urge sent him clawing—and *killing*—for a mere glass of water? What was the Water Curse of the sinister Dr. Zerlin that threatened to put all mankind into a gibbering global madhouse?

THREE MENACE-DIPPING NOVELETTES

THE FACE THAT KILLED.....Edward S. Williams 50

A ghastly floating face barred Falconer's escape from the old Wolfe House mouldering on the Cove. Bullets couldn't touch it, so Falconer—holding secrets of life and death for Mary Hayes, and the cause of the United Nations—flung himself at the Thing on the stairs. . . .

HEARSE RIDE TO MURDER.....W. T. Ballard 66

Did you ever take a ride in a hearse—and live to tell about it? Bart Brady did. Climb with him from the suffocating swaddle of a coffin to meet the menace that stalked the diggings of a company-owned copper town.

THE DEVIL'S WOODWINDS.....Fredric Brown 82

From the hell of a Nazi concentration camp, the death curse of the Picard clarinets reached to the hot-jazz haunts of Broadway.

TWO STRANGE, SENSATIONAL SHORT STORIES

ADOPTED FOR DEATH.....Donald G. Cormack 29

The little old lady who came from nowhere, looked like somebody's fairy god-mother, but she was down in the road kid's book as, "The Case of the Smiling Crone".

WIRE SERVICE TO THE GRAVE.....Joe Kent 39

Can the dead talk? By direct wire from the grave a vengeful voice told Charles Grand: "I send you my hate, . . ."

—AND—

THE EVIL FLAME.....The Editor 6

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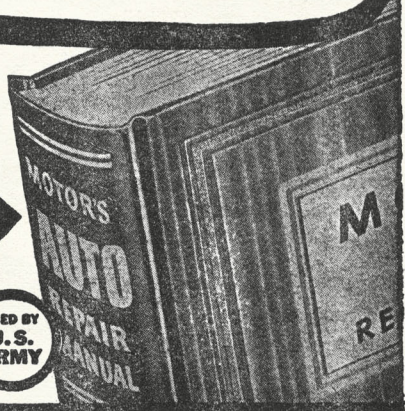
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THE EVIL FLAME

IT WAS cold in the prison yard—a dead-man's night, empty of wind and stars. The high stone walls were wrapped in a shroud of ice. . . . Inside it was warm. Within the electrocution chamber the prison electrician checked his switchboard and made last minute adjustments to the most horrible piece of furniture in the modern word. . . .

In the harsh light from overhead bulbs, tight-faced reporters and prison attendants strained forward when La Quintrala, wafting her exotic perfume, came to sit in the chair. They had seen criminals die before, but never such a one as La Quintrala, The Scarlet Flower . . . the dancer, the hauntingly lovely—killer.

Four lovers had died by her hand—and who knew how many more? The Poison Flower! There were those who said she was not human. They said she was soulless . . . a witch.

La Quintrala, herself, admitted it. "I am an evil flame," she said, "which cannot be extinguished. I laugh at your man-made laws."

But the chair was the chair, and death was death, the warden said. Old Doc Egg wasn't quite so sure. He read the note left by La Quintrala after her lovely body had strained against the straps under the death jolt of electricity . . . after the electrodes had clamped on their lethal bite.

The note in La Quintrala's own quaint phraseology said,

Senors:

I, La Quintrala, The Scarlet Flower, now speak to you from hell. You think you have killed me. It is to laugh. From hell the Scarlet Flower will come back to haunt you . . . and to kill those of you whom I hate. Watch for me, amigos. I am close to you even now. You cannot kill me, damn you. La Quintrala cannot die.

As proof of what I say I will take the matron with me at the moment your electric switch is turned . . . and at the second that the prison doctor pronounces me dead, I will cut the throat of the judge

who sentenced me to die. Many, many more deaths will follow unless you heed the words that shall be whispered in your ears."

The letter was unsigned, but when Doc Egg shook the envelope, a scarlet pressed lotus bud spilled out.

"It's just a gag," the Doc said firmly.

Then an attendant came running in, gray-faced and shaken, to announce: "The matron—like it said in the—The Scarlet Flower's note—she's dead!"

Doc Egg and all of them, there in the death chamber, were staring starkly at the scarlet bud which had dropped from La Quintrala's envelope. The scarlet bud was no longer dried and withered. It looked alive and vital. Even as they watched it, a blob of scarlet velvet blood against a snow white paper on the warden's desk, the petals began to unfold. There was something fleshy about them.

They all thought then of something else—La Quintrala's other threat. "At the moment your electric switch is turned, I will cut the throat of the judge who sentenced me."

But that was obviously absurd. The judge was far from here—And then the phone rang.

It was Judge Eric Benson speaking. His voice babbled, panic stricken, into the tight little room where the body of La Quintrala sat slumped in death in the electric chair.

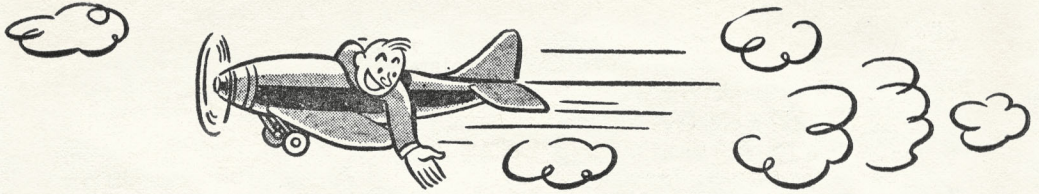
"She's here," the Judge gasped. "In my room. She came through the wall . . . right through the wall. She's going to kill me—!"

"Who . . . who's going to kill you?"

"La Quintrala! . . ."

This is only the curtain opener for Day Keene's complete novel, HELL'S SCARLET FLOWER, in the next issue of DIME MYSTERY. Follow Doc Egg on his "break-neck" pursuit of the illusive La Quintrala. The Doc believed first to last that she was not a spirit. You won't know what to believe, but you will revel in every exciting word of this bizarre mystery.

(Please turn to page 98)



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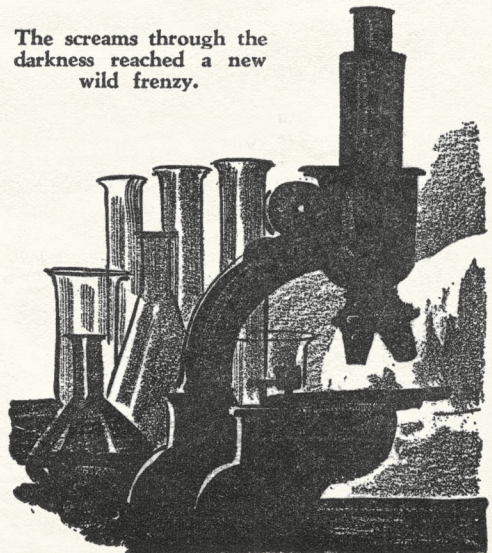
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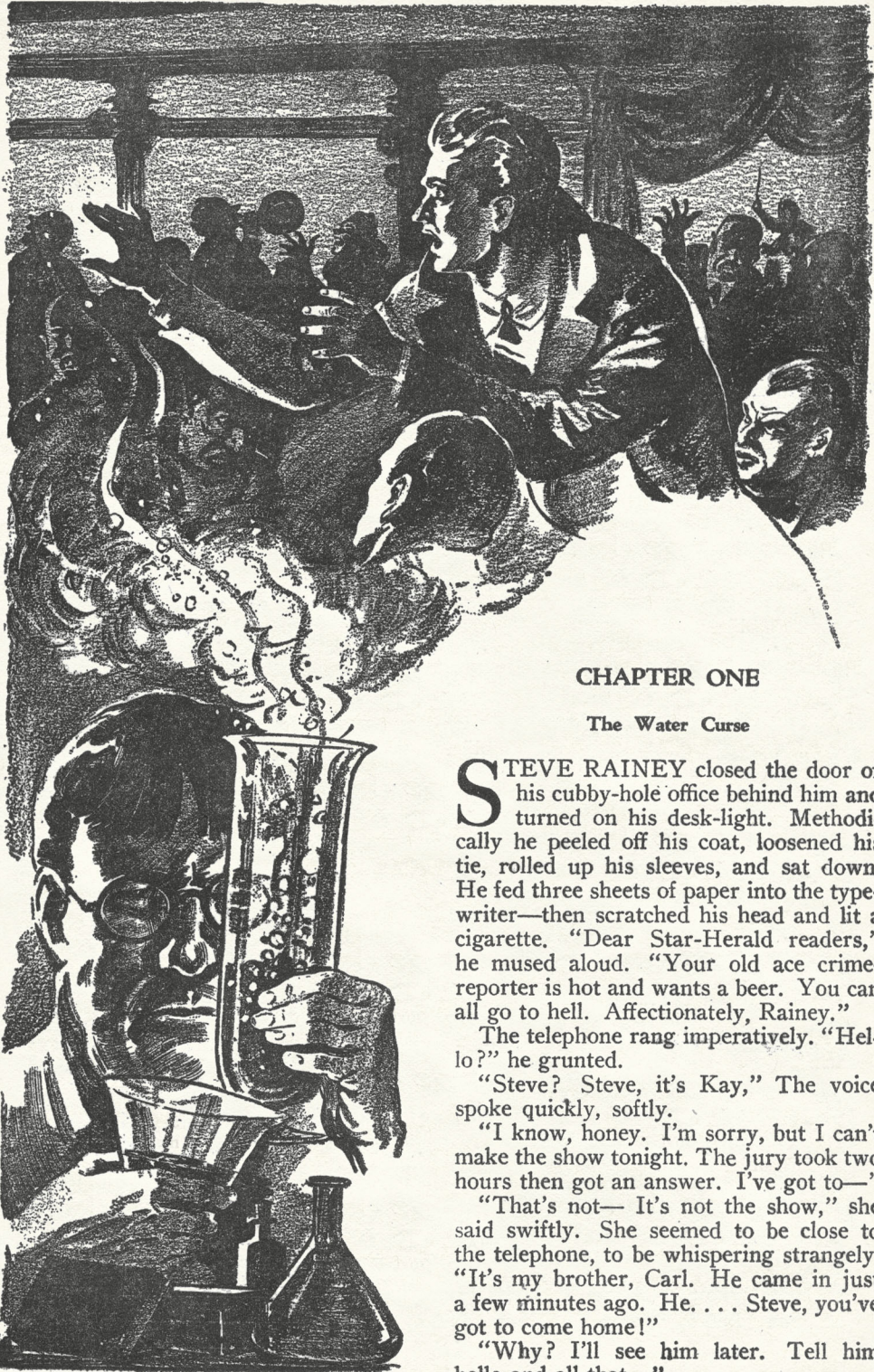
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darkness reached a new
wild frenzy.

Carl drank 16 glasses of the water of Life and Death—and screamed and clawed for more. But the doom was not to Carl alone . . . for the Water Curse of the sinister Dr. Zerlin threatened to engulf the world!





CHAPTER ONE

The Water Curse

STEVE RAINEY closed the door of his cubby-hole office behind him and turned on his desk-light. Methodically he peeled off his coat, loosened his tie, rolled up his sleeves, and sat down. He fed three sheets of paper into the typewriter—then scratched his head and lit a cigarette. "Dear Star-Herald readers," he mused aloud. "Your old ace crime-reporter is hot and wants a beer. You can all go to hell. Affectionately, Rainey."

The telephone rang imperatively. "Hello?" he grunted.

"Steve? Steve, it's Kay," The voice spoke quickly, softly.

"I know, honey. I'm sorry, but I can't make the show tonight. The jury took two hours then got an answer. I've got to—"

"That's not— It's not the show," she said swiftly. She seemed to be close to the telephone, to be whispering strangely. "It's my brother, Carl. He came in just a few minutes ago. He. . . . Steve, you've got to come home!"

"Why? I'll see him later. Tell him hello and all that—"

"Steve, listen to me! Something's wrong! He's not like he's ever been! He's going to do something! I don't know— Steve, please come home!"

"But Kay, honey— I can't just—"

"Steve! I've never called you like this before! You've got to!"

Her voice, raw and abject with its hint of terror, stopped his words. He frowned uncertainly. "Okay. Twenty minutes," he said.

It was eight-thirty when he left the cab before the apartment-building on West 112th and walked quickly toward the stairs. When I'm a millionaire, he told himself, we won't live in a walk-up. At the fourth floor he turned and opened the door of 45.

"Kay?" he called. "Kay? Carl?" He waited for the answer that did not come. From the kitchen came the spitting sound of something frying; a burning odor filled the apartment. He looked into the living-room. There was a man's bag—Carl's. It was half unpacked. The radio was playing with a quiet intensity in the sudden silence. He turned toward the bed-room. No one was there. He pushed open the swinging door to the kitchen. A cloud of greasy smoke flooded past him, blinding his eyes.

"Damn! Another pork-chop like mother didn't cook!" He felt his way toward the window. He stumbled and nearly fell. The window rasped up. Slowly the smoke thinned. He wiped his wet eyes and blinked about him.



"**K**AY!" he strangled abruptly. He dropped to his knees and lifted her head. Her short black curls were damp on his fingers. "Kay! What happen—" The words vanished into nowhere. The dampness on his fingers turned dark and red. Blood!

He jerked. A scream started in his throat. Then her eye-lids trembled weakly. A faintest moan slipped from her lips. Steve cursed in blank fear and anger. Quickly he carried her from the kitchen. From the bath room he got a wet towel. When he returned to her, her dark eyes were opening. In the dawn of consciousness, her throat corded. She screamed—

a sound of broken, hysterical horror! Again and again the scream tore from her throat.

"Don't! Kay, don't!" Steve begged. He knelt down beside her. "Look! It's me! It's all right! Nothing's going to happen to—"

Abruptly the screams hushed. Her frantic eyes caught a light of recognition. Uncontrollably she began to cry. Finally she was still. Steve sat down close beside her.

"Now—what was it, honey?" he asked gently.

"I don't—I'll never be able to tell it," she whispered. "It was insane. Nothing about it was real. I almost can't believe it happened. I—Carl came. It was about seven o'clock. And Steve, he—he looked dead! His eyes were just blank and bottomless. He needed a shave terribly. He was white as a sheet and so nervous he could barely speak. He hardly seemed to know me. Then—"

"Yes?" Steve prompted gently.

"He asked for a glass of water. I went to the kitchen to get it. Before the glass was half full, he jerked it from my hand and gulped it down; he ran another glass and swallowed like—like he was dying of thirst. And Steve, he—he drank nine glasses of water, as quick as he could fill the glasses!"

Steve stared at his wife steadily. Now her eyes were lucid; her words were clear and sane.

"But nine glasses, honey!" he echoed. "You must not—"

"Oh, wait until I get through!" she interrupted sharply. "That's not even the beginning! After he drank the water, he slumped down in a chair in the living room. He kept mumbling and half-crying to himself while he tried to find something in his bag. I tried to question him, to find out what the trouble— He just kept whispering that he wanted me to keep something, destroy something for him! 'I've got to get rid of it! Got to get it away from me!' That was what he kept repeating in a wild hypnotic sort of whisper."

"What the Devil was it?" Steve asked.

"I don't know. I don't think he ever found it. Maybe it's still in there. He stopped searching all of a sudden and stood up. He moved to the window. He

raised his hand, like he was going to throw something out. Then he seemed to freeze! Then he began to pant, like something horrible was happening inside him. I tried to speak to him; he didn't hear. I saw his eyes, and they were—wild! He didn't recognize me! And then he sobbed—the most horrible, sad, terrified sound you can imagine! He plunged to the kitchen! When I got there he was drinking water again! Steve—he drank seven glasses more!”

“Seven!” Steve exploded. “Then—you called me then?”

She nodded. “I was frightened. I knew something terrible was wrong. I was—was afraid of my own brother! It was like he was a wild inhuman stranger! But he didn't try to hurt me. When I hung up, he was slumped back in the chair. He kept whispering: ‘I tried. I didn't want to. I can't stop. I'll never be able to stop. Pigeon can't help me! My monster's killing me!’” She stared at Steve steadily. “That's what he said.”

“Pigeon . . . monster— What the hell could he mean?”

“Oh, Steve, I don't know! I tried to quiet him. I asked him if he'd eat something. I went to the kitchen to cook him something. I kept hearing him murmuring and sobbing to himself. I thought you'd never get here! Then I thought I heard another voice—a strange voice speak in the living room. It said, ‘Now, now. . . it's going to be all right, Carl. Don't worry anymore. Wait for me a minute. I'm going to help you.’ It was a soft voice, like someone speaking to a child. I thought I must be imagining things. Then I heard a sound behind me. Before I could turn around, something hit me. I tried to scream. I couldn't. I don't remember anything else.”



STEVE swallowed. A sensation of insane fantasy clouded his mind. He forced himself to recall; to repeat: “A soft voice, saying I'm going to help you. . . .” He stopped and rose. He walked quickly through the apartment. “Carl's not here anywhere,” he said when he returned. “You don't know where he could have gone?”

“I don't know anything. I was sure he was still in New Jersey, Steve. You know how seldom he comes to New York.”

“His clothes are still here. He'll probably come back. Then we can—”

“No, he won't come back!” Kay interrupted anxiously. “You don't understand how he was! We can't let him wander around like that! He'll do something—to himself, or others! He's mad, Steve!”

“But where did he go? What could he—” Suddenly Steve moved to the suitcase and emptied the contents. There was one suit; three shirts; some ties and handkerchiefs and underwear. There was an over-night case with shaving equipment and tooth-paste. That was all. Nothing that could possibly have been the ‘thing to keep. . . . to destroy. . . . to get rid of. . . .’”

Steve sighed blankly and straightened. Then he saw the coat on the couch. Quickly he searched into its pockets. There was half a pack of cigarettes and some matches; a set of assorted keys; the return portion of a round-trip ticket from a town in New Jersey; and there was a scrap of plain paper. He read the scrawled, almost illegible writing on it:

ZO 8-5983

18 Sanders Street

“A telephone number and an address downtown,” he realized. “No name. Nothing to say what—” He looked at Kay, then turned from her worried eyes. He dialed the number on the paper. There was no answer. “We could call the police, but they'd only put him on missing-persons and— What's that doctor's name that Carl worked with in New Jersey?” he asked suddenly. “He might know why Carl came, or what's been the matter—”

“Dr. Zerlin. Joseph Zerlin! Call him! He'll know! He and Carl were good friends. If anything was the matter, he'd know!”

Steve lifted the telephone. At that moment a knock sounded at the door. He turned the knob. A small bright-eyed little man was there. His head was shiny and bald, his clothes baggy and formless. He blinked owlishly from behind his horn-rimmed glasses.

"I beg your pardon, but I'm searching for a Mrs. Rainey. I believe that she is the sister of Carl Johnson."

"Mrs. Rainey's my wife. If you will please come in—"

"Dr. Zerlin!" Kay exclaimed behind him. "Oh, I'm so glad. We were just going to call you! About Carl! Carl was here and left! I'm so worried."

"And so am I, my dear," Dr. Zerlin agreed. "I took the next train when I learned he'd come to New York. I knew that you lived out here somewhere. I was hoping he'd come to see you and—"

"But do you—do you know what's the matter with him?"

"The matter?" Dr. Zerlin blinked again. "Nerves, I suppose. We've both been working too hard. Why? Was there anything peculiar?" His last question was sharp and tense.

"Peculiar! Everything was peculiar! The way he talked, and cried and whispered! The way he drank that water! Glass after—"

"What?" Zerlin exploded harshly. "He drank water? You saw him drinking lots of water?" The question was almost hysterical.

"Nine glasses! And then seven more! And then—"

"Oh— Oh, no!" Zerlin choked. His fingers started toward his throat. His face drained bloodless.

"What's the matter?" Steve erupted. "What in hell is all—"

"Where did he go?" Zerlin begged.

"I don't know."

Zerlin grasped for the telephone. "What's the police number? Do you know anyone there—someone trustworthy and quiet?"

"Captain Harvell," Steve said. He gave the number.

Zerlin dialed. He got Harvell. He gave Steve's address.

"Please. . . . at once. . . . alone. Do not bring anyone. This is most important, and it must be kept quiet! It *must* be!"

He hung up and sank down, covering his face with his hands.

"I can't—can't believe it yet. I was afraid—I followed. I can't believe. But that *water!*"

Steve and Kay stared at each other. Steve felt a cold slow chill move up his

spine. Kay must have felt the same. Her fingers found his and tightened; they were cold and trembling.

CHAPTER TWO

The Unchained Monster

IN THE torturing interval while they waited for Harvell, Zerlin paced the floor like a nervous animal. Steve got the scotch and went to the kitchen. He poured out drinks and got the ice-cubes. As he turned toward the sink, he saw the match-folder on the floor by the door. Its red and black design seemed familiar. He picked it up.

THE ROMAN CLUB

He read the words again: "The Roman Club."

"What is it, Steve?"

The man who slugged Kay stood in this doorway, Steve was thinking slowly. The man who slugged Kay dropped these matches. . . .

"Steve! Answer me? What is The Roman Club? What's the mat—"

"Nothing, darling. It's just a—a little joint downtown," he lied to her. "It's nothing at all." There was a knock at the front door. He handed Kay the drinks and went to admit Mike Harvell. He introduced Zerlin: "Dr. Zerlin, a chemist. He and my brother-in-law work together. He asked me to call you."

Harvell nodded. Abruptly his eyes widened as he saw the stain of blood in Kay's hair.

"Before I begin," Zerlin said carefully, "I must emphasize one thing. If what I fear is true— If it is true," he repeated, "this case must be solved with the utmost caution and speed. In no way is it a normal matter. And its potentialities for evil are beyond any scope of our imagination. You will have to trust me, Captain Harvell; and you will have to work very fast."

The detective blinked. "Let's have the story."

"I am a chemist, as Rainey told you. Mrs. Rainey's brother, Carl Johnson, has been my assistant for four years in my laboratory in New Jersey. In the last

three years, I have been engaged in a most specific task. I have been—" he paused, then gestured, "trying to analyze, to break-down, and to isolate the various compounds that form morphine. Morphine, as you know, is comprised of many qualities, as a man's body is made up of legs, arms, a head. . . . It has been my task, in combating the disastrous effect of drugs, to take morphine apart, you might say; to try to find what part of it—what leg or arm of it was the actual cause of its effect."

"What part of it makes a man go on a bat," Harvell supplied.

"Precisely. Such a project involves a great deal of experimentation. Carl Johnson was my assistant. Two weeks ago we found what we wanted to know."

"You got the strong stuff separated?"

"We did. As you may not know, drug-effects cannot be tested on animals, as can some ingredients. One must test on people. I have been allowed to make my tests at the Eastern Addiction Hospital for many years. There are the hopeless cases, merely waiting to die. Johnson and I took our isolated compound to the hospital. We made the test, giving a very small dose to a man. The result," he said quietly, "was horrible. Compared with it, morphine is chalk-dust. The man became violently excited, then within an hour, the excitement passed to abysmal depression. During all this time, *the man's thirst for water was impossible to satisfy.* He drank—"

"Oh!" Kay gasped. "Water! Then. . . Carl—No! Not Carl—"

"Please." Dr. Zerlin said gently. "You see, the drug is given in water—dissolved in water. The after-effect is an overpowering thirst for more water. Really it is a subconscious desire to get more drug; but the dazed mind cannot recall that water is mere water anymore. To the drugged mind, water is the drug now—"

"I'm following you," Harvell agreed. "Then what happened?"

"Try to imagine my position when I realized what we had found," Zerlin said. "In our efforts to understand and combat a drug, we had unintentionally created a new drug, infinitely more powerful and disastrous in effect! To say it simply, we had taken a drug with the power of 10;

we had found its inner ingredient of destruction, its core. And by such a process, we abruptly found that we had made a new drug with the power of—say, 100. And that is a conservative estimate. Remember, it is unknown. No one can estimate the ultimate effect that it possesses."

"That— That's what Carl meant! A monster!" Kay realized.

"A monster is the word," Zerlin said. "Now— It is almost always the practice, when working with such material, to divide the experiment between two or more men. Each man keeps his data concealed from the other. This is a form of protection—protecting each man from his own human weakness."

"You mean," Steve injected, "that neither you nor Carl knew the whole secret of what you'd discovered?"



"T HAT'S correct. Neither of us knew how to make the new drug again—alone. We had created only fifteen small tablets. One was used at the hospital. Of the others that remained, I destroyed four. Carl destroyed—" Zerlin hesitated and frowned. "He told me he destroyed the others. Then each of us agreed that our discovery was too dangerous to exist; we decided that it must be destroyed before it could possibly find its way into traffic. So. . . the morning after our visit to the hospital, each of us took his notes, data, and entire information. Neither knew what the other had done; neither could do it again without years of research. We burned everything! Destroyed the monster we had created in the form of round white tablets—"

"But now you're not so sure?" Harvell supplied slowly.

Zerlin nodded slowly. "Now, Mrs. Rainey, I want you to tell us what happened this evening when Carl Johnson came here."

Kay closed her eyes. It was like returning into the labyrinth of insanity to recall. She began to speak slowly, mechanically.

When she was through, Harvell's brown eyes were pin-points of sharp light. Zerlin's face was grey and lined.

"So you see," he murmured. "Now I will tell you the last. On the morning when I opened my notes to destroy them, I had a faint feeling that they were in a new order, that they'd been changed somewhat, the pages moved. I dismissed it as impossible. Then, four days ago I was walking in a wooded park near our lab. I happened to see Carl; he did not see me, nor hear me when I called him. He had a gun with him. And as I watched, he moved the gun to his head, as if to shoot himself. I shouted! He turned. I don't think he recognized me. His eyes were like a stricken animal's. But he hurled the gun away and ran from me. For two days I could not find him. When he returned to work, he refused to discuss the episode. He was terribly nervous and unbalanced. When, this morning, he disappeared again, I became afraid; I realized that the impossible might have happened! I went to the station and found that Carl had purchased a ticket for New York. I followed. Eventually I remembered that he had spoken of visiting his sister on 112th Stret. So—" He gestured with finality.

"So!" Harvell echoed with a note of irony. "Here's what we've got: Johnson's running loose on a bat. Maybe he has some of the tablets; maybe he has the formula to make more, if he raided your notes. We're sure he's kited now. We don't know where he went or— What about that pigeon?" he asked Kay suddenly.

"I don't know. He just sobbed that pigeon couldn't help."

"As I see it, Johnson could get himself into a hell of a lot of trouble while he's high, but I don't think he'll let go of any of his tablets; so we don't have to worry so much about the secret getting into traffic immediately. If—"

"Mike," Steve interrupted quietly. He nodded to the bed room. The detective followed him in and Steve closed the door. From his pocket he took the book of matches. "I found them in the kitchen."

Harvell turned the book slowly. "The Roman Club." His brown eyes lifted. "Perone!" he whispered sharply.

"Yeah. Zerlin doesn't know. I didn't explain to Kay either."

"Damn! Seven million people for him

to mix with, and it's Louis Perone that gets a lead on him someday! Steve! What kind of a guy was he? The kind that would—sell Perone the formula? Perone would pay a fortune!"

"Yesterday I would have said he wouldn't. He was a quiet, even guy. Tonight I wouldn't bet on myself."

Mike Harvell opened the door. "Zerlin, I'm putting out a pickup call for Johnson. I won't tell why; nobody'll know what he's got on him when he's found. I'll get the stuff myself. You stay in New York; pick a hotel and tell us. We'll call in a few hours—"

"Hours may be too late! If that formula falls into unscrupulous hands, a dope-ring could be established that would represent a menace beyond any scope of—"

"I've got the picture," Harvell snapped. "Pick your hotel."

Zerlin frowned. From an inner pocket of his baggy tweed suit, he took a heavy fountain pen with a gold band. He uncapped the pen. "Damn. . . the thing always leaks." He blotted a stain of red ink from his hand, then scribbled a name on a card. "The Grayson—I always stay there," he said crisply.



HARVELL took the card, blew on the red ink, then slipped it into his pocket. He called Headquarters. He repeated the description of Carl Johnson that Kay gave him, then hung up and nodded to Steve. "Let's take a ride. . . you know where."

"I'll be back or call you soon, honey." Steve kissed Kay and followed Harvell out. When they reached the street, Dr. Zerlin was out of sight. A car was drawing swiftly away from the curb.

They entered Harvell's coupe and turned downtown.

"How long had Zerlin been there?"

"He walked in just as we were about to call him in New Jersey."

"Kay said she heard a soft voice talking to Carl just before she got slugged." Harvell stopped. Steve grunted confirmation.

"And you know," Harvell continued after a moment, "Zerlin has a very nice soft voice."

"I thought of that. But those damned matches! How the biggest dope-merchant in New York could get his finger in so quick—"

"Attention!" the radio crackled sharply. "Car 57! Car 57! Proceed to 6th Avenue and 42nd Street! A drunk has crashed the window of the Quick Lunch. He is inside drinking water. He is violent. Proceed with caution." The radio crackled off.

"Water! Drinking water! That—it's Carl!" Steve exploded.

Harvell reached to the dash-board. The siren sobbed, then rose to a strident wail. The coupe roared into Broadway and straightened toward down-town. Steve leaned forward tensely, watching the side-streets flick past the corners of his eyes. Harvell swung left at Times Square. The tires burned to a halt at the corner of 6th and 42nd. A squad car was already there. Steve and Harvell raced toward the crashed window of the closed shop. They could see a flashlight spraying its beam within. The sound of thick cursing came from the interior.

They waded through the broken glass. Behind the counter, crouched in a corner, was a sweat-stained thin man. His narrow face was contorted; his lips twisted on half-wordless sounds. His eyes blazed back the beams of a cop's flashlight. Like an animal trapped in its lair, he was. And in his trembling fingers he clutched a glass. Water covered his chin and ran down his shirt and coat. The cop was moving in. Steve stopped abruptly.

"It—Mike! It's not Carl! It's not! *The damn thing's broken loose!*"

They all three moved in on him. "Get that man!" Harvell ordered. He fought like a wild cat. But the cop, his chin bleeding from finger nail scratches, clamped the cuffs on. Swiftly Harvell emptied the pockets of the man's clothes and dumped the contents on the counter. There was a tiny roll of bills, a couple of cheap cigars, some wooden matches, a soiled handkerchief, and a limp bill-fold with the name and address:

James Watterfield
365 North Cannon St.
New York City

"None of the tablets," Harvell mut-

tered. He jerked the man erect and shouted: "Where did you get it? Where did you get the stuff? Where, hear me? Tell me where!"

"Got . . . to . . . gotta have water . . . little water." the man cried. His tongue licked at his lips. His tortured eyes rolled toward the fountain-tap.

"Tell me where and I'll give you water! Tell me where!"

"Water! Don't know nothing . . . nothing but water—"

"Take him in!" Harvell snapped furiously at the cop. Tell Marcy to watch him; if he cools down, try to make him talk."

Steve opened the telephone-directory behind the counter and hunted through the W's. He found it: Watterfield, J. S. EY 9-3228. He dialed the phone. The distant bell rang three times, then a weary voice answered: "Harry's Hotel, Eddie talking."

"Does Watterfield live there?" Steve asked.

"Yeah, but he don't come in before three, maybe four in the mornings, hardly ever."

"You don't know where he works? Where I could get him?"

"Wait a minute. . . Here it is: TO 3-3759."

"Thanks." Steve hung up and dialed again. "Hello," he said softly. He listened a moment, then slowly slipped the receiver down. There was a light of curious satisfaction in his eyes. "By a strange coincidence, Mr. Watterfield is employed at The Roman Club."

Harvell cursed savagely. Steve followed him to the car.

CHAPTER THREE

Madness Unlimited

IT was eleven o'clock when they opened the leather-padded door of The Roman Club and wandered into the long low bar-room. The tables, as always, were crowded. Smoke drifted listlessly in the wake of the moving waiters. An endless low chorus of mingled voices murmured through the room, sharpened occasionally by the tingle of ice and glasses,

the call of an order. Harvell leaned against the wall just inside the room. Steve's eyes roamed over the occupants. He stiffened and touched Harvell's arm. "There's Perone and his trouble-shooter, Cotton Nolan. They have a sort of waiting look, Mike."

"And that look's at us. I think I'll just wander over." He moved between the tables toward the corner.

"Scotch and soda," Steve told the bartender. "What happened to the guy around here named Watterfield?"

"I wouldn't know. Drunk, I guess. Waiters get drunk. I—"

"Beg pardon," a voice asked quickly, "has anyone called for Dr. Jerome Pigeon?"

The bartender shook his head. Steve turned slowly. There stood a gaunt tall man of perhaps fifty. His face was long and grey, his eyes blue and sharp. "But I was told to be here at eleven," he worried absently. "If anyone asks, send him to my table." He shambled to an empty table and folded himself into the chair. Steve watched him fumble through his pockets and find a piece of paper. He bent over the table.

"So. . . Pigeon again," Steve mused. From his pocket he drew the telephone number he had found in Carl's coat-pocket. "I just wonder if—" He opened the telephone directory and found the name, Jerome Pigeon. "Damn! They—the same number!" Slowly he turned toward the table where the gaunt man sat.

"I was just wondering. . . . You say you're Dr. Pigeon?"

"Yes, I am," the man agreed eagerly, anxiously. "And you are Dr. Zerlin, I suppose?"

"I—" Steve stopped abruptly. "You were meeting Dr. Zerlin?"

"Why, yes. His message expressly stated that he would—I beg your pardon, but I don't know you."

"My name is Steve Rainey. I happen to have heard a name like yours before. My brother-in-law mentioned you. His name is Carl Johnson."

Pigeon jerked erect, almost upsetting Steve's glass. His blue eyes widened. "You're Johnson's brother-in-law! Then what is the matter tonight? What did Zerlin's message mean?"

"What did it say?" Steve countered.

"Here! I have it! It was slipped under my door when I was out to dinner tonight." He pulled out a sheet of paper. There on the white paper were the neat precise words, written in pencil:

Dr. Pigeon,

I have reason to believe that you have examined my assistant, Carl Johnson today. I know that you must be puzzled by his peculiar condition. But there is a great deal more you have not learned. I strongly urge you to meet me tonight; I suggest The Roman Club at eleven. Until we understand each other, I advise you to discuss the case of Johnson with no one. . . . no one! I think that I can make our interview both interesting and profitable to us both.

Sincerely,

Dr. Joseph Zerlin

Steve looked up slowly, frowning. "Do you know Dr. Zerlin?" Pigeon shook his head. Steve looked again at the note. "This says you examined Carl today. What about that?"

"It's true. Carl Johnson came to my office at three this afternoon. I tried to examine him. It was hardly possible; he could not answer my questions; he responded to no treatment I could give at once. I realized his condition was extraordinary, dangerous. He refused, or was unable, to let me aid him. He promised vaguely to return tomorrow. I intend to take him to my sanatorium."

"You work with dope-cures, I gather?"

"Dope and alcoholic. In all my years of work, I've never seen a case like your brother-in-law's! Nothing seems to help him! I have tried to think all afternoon. What drug could he have gotten? I know nothing that could affect a man in the way he was—"



THE words were broken by a shrill screaming laugh. At a distant table a man staggered up, lifted a bottle of sodamixer, and hurled it across the room. It crashed, shattering the bar-mirror. The man screamed the shrill wild laugh again. A waiter started toward him. Steve saw Perone half rise. Cotton Nolan gripped the edge of the table. Harvell rose. The man was swaying drunkenly about the room.

"Funny! Funny! Everybody's . . . funny!" he rasped. "Got to laugh at—Water! Gimme some water! Water! I gotta get me some water!" He choked suddenly, reached, fell across a table. A woman screamed. A man cursed and tried to drag the fallen man away. The arms clutched for the spilled water in a gesture of insane thirst. The screams in his throat drained to a thick sobbing.

"That—that man! He's like Johnson!" Pigeon exploded.

"Your damned right he—" Steve started. In the instant another wild wail raked the room. A second man, at another table, threw back his chair and leaped up. He grasped another man and hurled him to the floor. His foot drew back to kick the fallen man. A swift waiter knocked the crazed man off balance. The fellow grasped at another table.

He jerked up the bottle of soda and drank its contents in one long swig. He hurled the bottle away. The room broke into a pandemonium of screaming women, cursing men. And like sudden quick fires through the room, people broke into wild

choking sobs. Throughout the turmoil, one word kept rasping from a dozen lips:

"Water. . . water. . . water. . ."

"It's loose in here!" Steve choked. "The damned drug's gotten out into—" He rose as the stampeding crowd turned over his table. Pigeon could only stare at the mad scene unfolding in the room—a room that, but a minute before, had been sane and orderly. Then Steve caught just a glimpse of a small man, with his coat rolled high about his face and his hat turned low. He was scurrying across the room. He ducked behind the bar before Steve could see his face. But Steve had seen the baggy tweed suit! The suit of Dr. Joseph Zerlin!

"Zerlin! Stop! Come—" The little man reappeared briefly at the hall that led toward the kitchen. Steve cursed. He fought his way against the tide of insane humanity. He was half-way across the room when he saw the little man's hand reach up. He saw the grey glove. Then the hand closed on the master light-switch.

"Don't! Don't pull that damned—" Steve shouted. The room was plunged

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into utter darkness. The screams through the darkness reached a new wild frenzy. Tables crashed and splintered. Moans and sharp cries mingled. Doors slammed with a furious intensity. Steve fell over a chair. Someone kicked him in the darkness. He staggered up again and felt his way toward that hallway.

Above the turmoil, one blasting shot spoke out and echoed above the noise. It faded. A moment later Steve's fingers found the switch. He threw it back. The lights blazed on again, like a flood of sanity after nightmare.

He stared about him, into corners, into the kitchen, into the debris. . . . Dr. Joseph Zerlin was gone!

Then Steve saw Harvell. He saw him at that far table where he had sat with Perone and Nolan. Now he lay across the table, his arms hanging limply down. He lay face down, mouth open.

He did not move.

Steve plunged across the room. He looked down at the detective, then up at the red-faced sweating Louis Perone.

"What got him?" He was sitting with you! You know who—"

"I don't know nothing more than you do, Rainey!" Perone bit out savagely. "Look at my joint! You think I like it, huh? You think I like throwing off a hundred grand to keep—"

"Watch it, Lou," Cotton Nolan interrupted icily. His dark eyes were guarded and distant. Steve turned on him.

"And you wouldn't know who shot him, either?" he raged.

"Take a look and cool down. I did the shooting, but it wasn't at Harvell. I shot in the dark when I heard him get hurt."



STEVE looked again, then moved around the inert slumped figure. Suddenly he froze. His hand reached down. He touched the knife that stood erect in the man's back. A thin pocket-knife, with a rough bone handle on which was a small silver plate, initialed. Steve did not have to read the letters. He knew the knife.

He had used it a thousand times to clean his pipe. It always stayed on his smoking stand.

Slowly his hand drew away. His eyes could not leave the knife, or the deep stain of blood that gathered beneath Harvell's coat.

"What was—" a sharp voice started anxiously. "Oh!" the voice choked. Steve turned. Dr. Pigeon, too, was staring.

"I told you I don't know a damned thing," Perone rasped furiously. "Harvell was starting to ask me something—he never asked it. The place started blowing up. Just at eleven." Again he stopped as Nolan coughed harshly. "Then Harvell must have seen something or somebody. He started, like he was going to leave the table. He yelled. Then he said Veddy or Reddy or Geddy! Something like that! A second later the lights went out."

"Then I heard somebody coming up behind us," Nolan said coldly. "Then Harvell kind of cried out and moaned thick like. I know the sound—I knew he'd been hurt bad. I took one shot and where the sound was. That's all."

"Maybe," Steve said bleakly. He stared about the room. Hardly a table was standing amid the wreckage. Two or three waiters were bending over fallen and hurt customers, trying to help them. Once in a while a moan drained through the room, or a splinter of glass tinkled. From outside in the distance a siren wailed thinly and drew nearer. Perone cursed and sighed.

"This ain't going to be very easy to tell."

"Aw, hell." Steve heard his lips saying. "It's kind of funny . . . funny!" His voice rose into a wild laugh that tingled against his own ears. He waved his arms and kicked at a chair. A sense of wild delightful abandon flooded through him—a surge of unlimited power.

"It's nothing . . . fun, see? Maybe somebody got killed . . . what the hell!"

"Shut up, you fool!" Perone roared. "You want to get—"

"I want. . . I'm thirsty! Want a drink . . . drink!" The thirst, in the space of an instant, turned to a raging burning desire—not for water, alone—but for something else. Water and something else. . . .

He heard his own screams rage in his ears; felt his own muscles twist and fight against the confines of his body. And yet, as he rose and zoomed on the wave of

burning elation, one small core of his mind tried to fight back; one lost whisper in him tried to speak above the screams:

Can't. . . can't do this. . . can't let go. . . got to. . . get out. . . get out of here. . . Oh, God. . . don't let this. . . happen to me. . .

The siren was wailing closer. His fogged vision tried to focus. Dimly, as through the red flame of a fire, he saw the grey long face of Dr. Pigeon. With the last of his fading sanity, he clutched at the man.

Help. . . help me get— Get me out. . . got to tell you—”

The thread snapped. He laughed wildly. Then the starving hot thirst burned in his throat again.

“Please. . . please!” Steve’s voice was begging. Then, mercifully, a fist crashed against his chin. An abrupt utter blackness rose about him.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Devil Phones

STEVE waked with a harsh light in his eyes, with the consuming thirst torturing his throat and lips. He tried to move; his legs and arms were bound. He tried to speak; only a muffled grunt came. He was gagged!

Then he heard a step. Into the narrowed horizon of his vision loomed the gaunt figure of Dr. Jerome Pigeon. The sharp blue eyes peered searchingly at him. A bony long hand seemed to fold upon his throat. A wave of sick, helpless terror assailed him. He tried to scream.

“Please. . . you must be quiet,” Pigeon begged. The hand that had reached for his throat merely loosened the gag. Then the bonds that held his arms and legs were loosened. “I had to tie you,” Pigeon explained. “You were a maniac. Your screams disturbed people in the next building.”

Steve struggled up. His head ached. His stomach felt empty and hot. He stared through his burning fogged eyes at the room, an office. There was a desk, the couch on which he sat, a couple of chairs, and a huge medicine cabinet filled with bottles and instruments. The place was shabby and a little dirty.

“Water— Please let me have water. I. . . What happened back there. I don’t remember.”

“We didn’t wait to see.” Pigeon poured a glass of water. “I had to—to hit you.” He smiled ruefully. “I got you out the back way before the police arrived, but I’m afraid those other men will tell. I don’t believe they cared for you,” he said ironically.

“They don’t. What about Harvell—the man who was stabbed?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t left here since I brought you here. It’s almost dawn now.”

Steve drank another glass of water and hunted a cigarette. “That knife— It was mine! My knife killed that man!” he whispered.

“Am I correct in this guess: What happened there tonight had something to do with the dope your brother-in-law had?”

Steve nodded wearily. “The stuff’s gotten loose.” His eyes widened.

“Pigeon!” he whispered starkly. “There—under that door! Slipping in!”

Pigeon turned sharply. The white corner of an envelope was silently gliding under the door. It stopped and did not move again. Quietly Pigeon tip-toed to his desk, opened a drawer and lifted a small automatic. He crept to the door, grasped the knob, then twisted. The door flew open. Pigeon plunged into the hall and looked both ways.

“Stop!” He lifted the gun. There was an empty click. . . another. Pigeon cursed. Steve stumbled past him and into the hall. He saw the shadow of a figure vanish at the stairs leading downward. He plunged after the man. He heard the steps pounding beneath him. As he followed, he looked down the stair-well. He could see the fingers and wrist gliding swiftly over the railing.

And the wrist was clothed in tweed! Zerlin’s tweed!

He damned himself for having no gun. He plunged across the dim empty lobby of the building and out onto the walk. A car roared away from the curb, leaving him alone.

He cursed impotently as he returned toward the stairs.

“Never use the damn gun!” Pigeon

met him, growling. "Never thought to see if it was loaded." He looked at the white envelope. Back in the office, he split the flap and read. Slowly his brows arched themselves. A white caste spread over his grey face. He held out the note to Steve. "For you, too," he said strangely.

Steve read the rough scrawled words, written in red ink:

Dr. Jerome Pigeon,

I am well aware that tonight you aided a certain Steve Rainey to leave The Roman Club; likewise, I am aware that a knife, owned and since identified as Rainey's, was the weapon which killed Detective Captain Harvell. I know that you are now sheltering Rainey. And finally, as you may not know, a very strong case might be erected against this Rainey. Suppose that the police learned that Harvell was trying to arrest Rainey's brother-in-law for the sale of a new violent dope. Suppose certain letters were found which proved that Rainey planned to aid his brother-in-law in the traffic of this dope. Suppose certain amounts of the dope, as well as the formula for its creation, were found concealed in Rainey's apartment. I doubt that Rainey would be able to prove himself innocent. In that case, wouldn't you be guilty as an accessory, as sheltering a criminal? . . . I think so.

I merely mention these facts, as a friend who holds all the strings. . . . Think about them. In half an hour, you will receive a call.

The note was unsigned.

"IT'S a damned frame!" Steve exploded savagely. "I didn't have any plan for selling the dope! The letters will be forged! I didn't kill Harvell!" He stared at Dr. Pigeon. The man looked back at him. A note of uncertainty, of doubt had entered his blue eyes.

"Where is your brother-in-law?" he demanded.

"I don't know. I swear I don't! Harvell and I were trying to reach him before the dope got loose."

Pigeon sighed. He took the note from Steve and read it again. ". . . will receive a call in half an hour," he murmured.

Suddenly Steve jerked the sheet away and looked at it again.

"That red ink! Zerlin's pen had red ink! And look: this writing is so rough you can barely read it. Zerlin's natural writing is neat and small. That was his

natural way to try to disguise his writing—by going to the opposite extreme! He didn't remember I'd seen him take out his pen at the apartment!"

"Then you mean. . . you think Dr. Zerlin himself is—"

"Think! I'm positive! Zerlin was the man who turned off that switch in The Roman Club! Why? To kill Harvell! And why kill Harvell? Because he saw Harvell talking to Perone and Nolan! Perone and Nolan know something! Zerlin didn't want Harvell to learn! Perone started to say something about a 'hundred grand'! And he was expecting something to break at eleven! I—"

"Listen!" Pigeon interrupted sharply. "Zerlin didn't intend to sell the dope to Perone for a hundred grand! That outbreak there tonight was to terrorize, to blackmail Perone into paying off!"

"But Perone probably doesn't know who Zerlin is! Zerlin's playing himself dark! I'm almost sure that he—" Suddenly Steve opened the telephone directory and found the number of the Grayson Arms. He dialed. "Do you have a Dr. Joseph Zerlin registered?" he asked. There was a brief wait. "Thanks. . ." Steve hung up. "Zerlin never went to that hotel! He's hiding out. He knows I suspect him, at least! That's why he's blocking my move by framing me for murder."

"What are we going to do?" Pigeon asked uneasily. "Those men, Perone and Nolan, may remember my name and send the police here! Then I'll be involved in—"

"Wait until this call comes, Pigeon," Steve argued harshly. "I've got a hunch it's going to be an offer of some kind! That's all it could be! Wait for it. . . We've got to get a line on Zerlin somehow! If he ever makes the deal with Perone, then all hell—"

The telephone rang sharply. Both men jerked with the abrupt sound. Pigeon lifted the receiver. "Yes?" he asked slowly. Steve moved close and listened to the sharp words:

"You've read my letter, Pigeon?"

"I—we've read it."

"Maybe you're ready to listen?"

Pigeon looked at Steve. Steve nodded quickly. "We'll listen," Pigeon said.

"All right. Get this: You and Rainey will take your car. At six o'clock—forty minutes from now—you'll drop him at the I.R.T. station at 14th Street. You'll drive around the block while he goes down. On the up-town side of the station he'll meet somebody he knows; they'll be expecting him. He'll take what they give him. You'll pick him up and drive to Riverside Park, at 110th Street. There's a trash-can there. Rainey will drop what he got into that can. In that can he'll find a small envelope with a red X marked on it. He will take that and go back to the 14th Street station. His friends will be waiting. Give them the envelope. Do you understand?"

Pigeon nodded into the telephone.

"I understand. But what—"

"You will be watched at 110th Street. Do *not* wait to see who picks your package from the trash-can."

"And then what? If we do all that, will you—"

"If you do this job perfectly," the voice interrupted with a note of half-laughter, "I will call you again. I shall offer you a gift."

"What kind of a gift?" Pigeon asked suspiciously.

"A murderer." Again the voice laughed, and then the line clicked.

"Hello? . . . Wait, I . . ." Slowly Pigeon replaced the receiver. "Now what?" he wondered emptily.

Steve paced the room. "It's like trusting the Devil to believe him! We'll just do his dirty-work, and he'll never— But if we don't take the risk, he might set-up the murder frame on me! And it looks like our only chance to get a shot at the dope before it gets sold."

Pigeon faced Steve squarely. "Rainey, I've gone as far as I can," he said. "I don't want to get mixed up in anything that—"

"What about the dope? You're a doctor! You know what it means if the stuff gets out into traffic! You saw The Roman Club tonight! There's a chance—"

"A chance—" The man rubbed his face uncertainly. "A damned slim chance, in return for a share in murder!"

"Listen! Carry me this far: we'll make the deliveries and wait for the last call! I've got to be here to get that last call!

If it's no-go then, I'll walk out and leave you clean. If I'm stuck, I'll do my damndest to clean you."

Pigeon studied Steve's lined face closely. "And I'm not even sure you didn't actually kill that man," he mused. Then abruptly he gestured, almost angrily. "Once! Not for you, but for the dope! Let's go!"



"I 'M getting the picture," Steve explained relentlessly as they drove toward 14th Street. "Zerlin planted a little of the dope in Carl's water sometime, setting him off on the first binge; Zerlin was planning then to use Carl as his guilt-victim. Carl realized he was falling prey to the stuff. He wanted to fight it. But the craving was started. . . He was an easy tool for Zerlin. I should have realized when Zerlin showed up so neatly at my place before I called him! He slugged Kay! He pulled Carl out of there and has him in hiding somewhere to use when—Pigeon!" Steve realized starkly. "I see it now! I know what—"

"What do you see?" Pigeon demanded.

"The murderer that he'll furnish us! It'll be Carl! Carl will be framed for the murder of Harvell! I'll have to use my own brother-in-law to save myself!"

Pigeon nodded finally. "If he lets you save yourself at all," he modified bleakly. Steve simply stared at the unfolding street. The utter futility of his position dawned sharply through his mind. Himself. . . or Carl. . . . Or both, he realized nakedly.

The car stopped. There was the dirty entrance of the 14th Street subway station. Steve opened the door and got out. He walked down the steps. He paid his coin and moved along the platform.

"Okay, Rainey," a cold voice spoke behind him. He turned to face Cotton Nolan and Louis Perone. "So you're not just a reporter anymore." Perone's dark eyes were hot with bottomless anger.

"You've got something for me?" Steve said thickly.

"Yeah." Perone wet his lips. "I've got it now. You'll be bringing me something back?"

"Yes. Yes, I swear," Steve said uneasily. "I—Look, Per—"

"We'll talk some other time, Rainey," the man interrupted. "We'll have lots of things to say. I'm paying, now." From his pocket he took a thick brown envelope. Steve took it and pushed it inside his pocket. Again he started to speak; the eyes before him told him there was no use. He swallowed, turned, and hurried quickly out and up to the street. Pigeon was waiting, gunning the motor fretfully. Steve climbed in and the car moved on down the street.

"It was Perone and Nolan. It's the shake-down for the dope." He fingered the envelope, then peered under the flap. He could see the green and yellow of many bills.

"They're not following us?" Pigeon worried.

Steve looked back. "No. They don't need to. They'll see me sometime. The way they looked, I know. . . ." His words trailed off.

At last they reached Riverside Park and 110th Street.

"There's the trash-can," Steve said dully. He got out and moved down the walk. His eyes roamed about him. A park-employee was picking paper from the grass; a nurse was rolling a baby-carriage; a few children were playing. Nothing else. . .

He lifted the lid of the can and looked in. There was the envelope, marked with the diabolical red ink. His fingers closed about it. Into the can he dropped Perone's envelope. He straightened and looked about him again. Still there was no one. . . He walked back to the car. Pigeon started the motor and they drove away.

Steve fingered the envelope. He found the hard substance of tablets within. He felt the crinkling of paper. He turned it over. It was not sealed! He opened it. Into his hand poured two brown balls. He stared at them.

"It's not. . . not dope!" he realized baldly. "It's wadded paper! It's a trick!" He stared at the sheet. He read:

*Sorry. Give my regrets to Perone.
I find that I have other uses for the
formula.*

"Perone won't believe me! He won't

take this! He'll kill me for not bringing the—"

"What's that inside the flap?" Pigeon asked sharply.

Steve turned the envelope. On the inner side of the flap was engraved:

A Service of The
Barton Hotels
New York . . . Boston

"THE Barton! Zerlin didn't notice it! See? It's on the inside—not the outside! And if it came from the Barton, there's just a chance that Zerlin may be—"

"The Barton's on West 72nd." Pigeon turned toward Broadway. Ten minutes later they crossed the dim, almost empty lobby of the hotel and stopped at the desk.

"Is Dr. Joseph Zerlin registered here?" Steve asked.

The clerk looked it up. "No, sir. I'm sorry."

"Then maybe— You don't remember someone who signed in last night or yesterday afternoon? A rather small man with horn-rimmed glasses and a tweed suit."

"Why, yes. The little man. Rather excited, I remember. John Wilson, that's his name." The clerk again consulted his files. "Suite 945," he reported. "I believe he just got his key and went up. Shall I call him?"

"No, thanks," Steve snapped. He nodded to Pigeon. They crossed to the elevator and rode to the ninth floor. They found 945. Carefully Steve tested the knob. The door was locked. Instantly there was a step within the room.

"Who's there?" came the soft whisper.

Steve thought furiously. He knew he didn't have much time. Zerlin had collected. He'd be ready to run, now.

Steve looked at Pigeon. The man read his thoughts. "It'll have to be now," he whispered. Steve nodded.

"Open up, Zerlin!" he said bluntly. "It's Rainey. I've got a gun and I'm coming in! Open up!"

"Rainey! But how? I won't!"

"I'm coming in! Open the damned door!"

"You can't get me! Nobody'll believe you! The stuff's planted in your apartment! I planted letters in Johnson's room

in New Jersey! They framed you! I'll give you one minute to get out of this hotel, or I'll call the cops and tip 'em right now!"

Steve drew a hard breath. "Call every cop in town! I'm still coming in! You'll get to tell about that money in your pocket! Maybe you can explain the letters you slipped to Pigeon! With the red-ink! Maybe even a finger-print or two—"

Steve could almost hear Zerlin thinking. "Are you coming out?" he shouted.

There was silence, then the gentle tip-

could prove I wasn't guilty! He's framed me! And he's dead! They won't believe you! They'll say we pushed him out! That we killed him! You and me! You were sheltering me! You protected yourself and—"

He stopped as voices gathered in the halls. Pigeon jerked around, his grey face pale and uneasy. Suddenly he trembled.

"I'm getting out! Leave me alone! Don't follow me! I don't want any more!" He fled through the crashed door and raced down the hall.

The life of Riley didn't amount to much. But the death of Riley—brother, there was something! It started out with Riley being four days late to his own funeral! For a chuckle and a chill, read *The Ghost of Riley*, by Fredric Brown in DETECTIVE TALES. On sale NOW.

toe of feet, moving from the door. Steve froze, waiting. Then he heard a rasping sound, long and deliberate.

"He's getting out the window!" Pigeon exploded.

"Zerlin! Stop! You can't—" Savage-ly he threw his weight against the door. He drew back and hurled himself forward again. He felt the door weaken. But from within the room came a shrill high scream that strangled and burst on the edge of hysteria. It started again, then, like the whine of a fading bullet, it seemed to drop into the lonely distance. Somewhere it ended.

"What in hell!" Steve gasped. He hurled himself forward a last time. The door crashed inward. He sprawled on the floor and jerked himself up. He stared about him.

The room was completely empty! There was simply the open window, the fire-escape. Steve plunged to the window and leaned out.

On the concrete alley-way nine floors below, silent and formless, lay a bundle clothed in tweed. The body of Joseph Zerlin.

"He fell!" Steve choked. "Trying to get out, he fell!" Then the hard reality rushed over Steve like the burst of a gun in his head. "Pigeon—" he whispered rawly. "Zerlin was the only man who

CHAPTER FIVE

The Water of Life—and Death

STEVE stood in the room, alone. The voices drew nearer. Suddenly all thought and reason fled from him. The slender hope he had gambled on cracked away. He scrambled onto the fire-escape. Down he stumbled, thinking no more; planning no more. Now it was only run—run! Run now, try to think later!

He dropped the last half-flight of the escape and hit the alley ten feet from the body. Already windows above were opening, heads were craning out, voices were shouting. One instant he glanced at the formless flesh that once had been a man. It was Zerlin—the only man who might have saved him.

A whistle shrilled, jerked Steve awake again. He plunged toward the exit of the alley. Into the mid-morning traffic he darted. Three blocks away he drew himself up, gathered a starved breath, and entered a cab. He gave his apartment address.

"Hurry!" The streets faded by. He tried to think. Where to go. . . to hide. . . He left the cab, hurried across the lobby of the apartment building, and raced up the stairs. He opened his door, then slammed and locked it behind him.

"Kay! Kay, where are—"

"Steve!" she cried. She came from the kitchen. "Oh, Steve! What's happened! The police were here looking for—Steve!" she interrupted herself starkly. "Your face—eyes—what's the matter with you?"

"I can't stop to tell, honey! Listen, I've got to get out. . . hide somewhere. I've got to have a few hours to think. . . to try to clear my head—"

"But Steve! Please, can't you just say what—" she begged.

"Not now. Listen. Somewhere in this apartment there's some of that damned dope! The cops will be hitting here before long! If they find it, it's all over! Start looking. . . small tablets, round and white. I'll get them, then try to get to New Jersey and destroy some letters in Carl's place! After that I might have a chance."

She started to speak again. His frantic gesture stopped her. He was moving frenziedly about the room, looking into vases, behind books, into cigarette-cases. Kay started searching. Behind their silent search, the dance-music from the radio played ironically—*A Love Song*.

From the living-room, he moved to the kitchen. Still he found nothing. The ticking of the clock marked away the moments of safety. He went into the bath. He searched the medicine-cabinet. The only white tablets there were aspirin.

Suddenly he looked at the aspirin again. It wasn't flat, as the aspirin tablets had been! This was more rounded. Slowly, carefully he touched one of the two tablets with his tongue. Instantly he knew!

"I found it, Kay!" He returned to the living room. "Now listen: I'm stuck plenty. Zerlin pulled the dirty work. I don't know where Carl is, dead or alive—probably dead. Zerlin's dead now, but he framed me first. Harvell was killed last night with my knife! I've got to get out and try to wash the fake-evidence against me before—"

He stopped abruptly as the radio-voice snapped into his awareness:

" . . . when he fell from his ninth-floor room at the Barton Hotel half an hour ago. Police are now searching for two men known to have gone to the dead man's room a few minutes before the fa-

tal plunge. One has been identified, but police are withholding the announcement until his arrest. The victim, first thought to be a Mr. John Wilson, has since been identified as the famous chemist, Dr. Joseph Zerlin." The voice drifted out, and the dance-music returned.

"Nothing about the money," Steve realized strangely. "That should have gotten a big play when— Kay! Where did that come from!" He pointed to a heavy gold-banded fountain pen on the table.

"Why, Dr. Zerlin forgot it last night. He left it on the table and it leaked red ink all over the—"

"It. . . leaked. . . red. . . ink. . . ." Slowly, as might a man in a dream, Steve lifted the heavy pen. It was Zerlin's. Suddenly he stared at Kay. And for the first time in many hours, the faintest note of hope stirred him. He plunged to the bed room. When he returned, he pushed a short revolver into his inner pocket.

"You haven't seen me when the cops come. Good-by." He kissed her. He made it long, and his fingers strayed hungrily through the waves of her black hair. He wondered if he would ever— He straightened abruptly. "'Bye, honey."



IT was dark in the news-theater. Across the screen flashed pictures of the war. Dark figures came and left the seats around Steve. He did not move; the hours had seemed endless.

He kept on thinking, retracing doggedly; fitting and refitting the chaos of the day that had passed.

"These are the missing-links," he repeated to himself. "Why was Watterfield, that waiter, given a shot of dope? What was Harvell trying to say when Nolan heard him shout, Geddy or Reddy? What happened to the pay-off money that Zerlin should have had when the police picked him up? Why did Zerlin write the first signed letter to Pigeon, asking Pigeon to come to The Roman Club? Why—" He stopped and slowly shook his head. "Only that fountain-pen with its red ink— The only thing I've got."

He touched his gun. He knew it was dark, now. He rose and moved out of the theater, onto the dark walk. His head

was low as he walked; he kept in the darkness. At last he entered the building and hurried silently up the stairs. He tiptoed along the hall to a dark door. He tried the knob; the door was locked. He tested the keys on his ring. At last he forced the lock and slipped into the dark room. He struck a match as he felt his way about. He found the desk-drawer and started to open it.

"I shall ask you to raise your hands, Rainey," a cold quiet voice ordered. There was a click. The room blazed with light. Steve jerked. His fingers started toward his gun. He froze.

Slowly, almost humorously, a smile drifted over the grey face before him, then vanished. The gun pointed at his head, and it shone in the light. Dr. Jerome Pigeon reached forward, slipped the gun from Steve's pocket, and backed away carefully.

"I had expected you somewhat earlier," he said casually. "Freddie tells me you have enjoyed a long day in the theater."

"Freddie— That . . . Geddie . . . Reddie!" Steve whispered.

"Yes." Pigeon smiled. "Harvell was unfortunate enough to recognize him as he pulled the switch in The Roman Club."

"It wasn't Zerlin! I knew— I've known that all afternoon—"

"Of course not." He paused and listened. "I believe this is Freddie now." A key turned in the lock. Into the room stepped a small wry-faced little man. His ferret-eyes licked over Steve, then traded to Pigeon. "Just like you said, huh?"

Pigeon nodded and agreed. "Just like I said." He smiled at Steve.

"Freddie is quite easily mistaken for Zerlin—when he wears Zerlin's glasses, his clothes, his gloves."

"You held Zerlin captive all the time!" Steve exploded.

"Of course," Pigeon agreed again. "We picked him up when he left your apartment yesterday evening; Freddie did, I might say. He was kept safely gagged and bound in the Barton Hotel until Freddie pushed him out the window."

"But where—" Steve started blankly.

"We took two rooms. I dropped into the next room," the little man chirped neatly.

"And you had Carl," Steve supplied to Pigeon. "Where is he?"

"Oh, you will meet him presently. It's early, yet." He looked at his watch. "Suppose we have a drink, Freddie. We might spend the next hour in pleasant conversation. I'm sure Mr. Rainey would like to have his curiosity satisfied before he . . . commits suicide."

"Oh." Steve drew a slow breath. "I'm going to commit suicide?"

"Presently. And the police will consider it quite logical. You were known to be a murderer. . . desperate. . . hunted. At last you leaped from the top of a building. After midnight, shall we say, when no one would be likely to notice—"

"I . . . see." Steve watched fixedly as Freddie took a bottle of whiskey from the cabinet and poured into two glasses. He filled the glasses with water from a silver jug on the desk. Zerlin took his drink, lifted toward Steve, and smiled.

"Oh, it all worked out quite well," Pigeon said comfortably. "A week ago Carl Johnson first visited me; he had then taken his first bit of the dope. He was terrified at himself; he wanted help. But he refused to tell me what he had taken or where he had gotten it. Immediately I realized that this was something quite unusual. When he left this office a week ago, Freddie followed him to New Jersey. When Freddie reported that he worked with Dr. Zerlin, I realized what had happened; I, being a doctor, had read in the journals of Dr. Zerlin's experiments with drugs."

"And that's where you decided you would market a new drug!" Steve supplied acidly.



"I BEGAN to think." Pigeon smiled. "When Carl Johnson returned yesterday, he had again taken some of the drug. He was hardly sane; yet he was still, instinctively, afraid to release the drug to me; or the formulae. I didn't know whether he had it with him or not. I was afraid to hurry him. So when he left here yesterday, Freddie and I followed him to your place. I saw him take in his bag. I decided this was the time."

"So you came in, slugged my wife, planted Perone's matches, and moved out with Carl."

"Correct. I had already selected Perone as my first . . . customer. And don't forget," he added gently. "I borrowed a knife."

"And planted a little dope in my apartment."

"Yes. Presently the police will find it, I'm sure."

"They won't if—" Abruptly Steve stopped.

"I believe they will," Pigeon smiled. "I left Freddie to watch developments at your place. I left Carl, well secured, in my room and visited the store-room of The Roman Club. By good fortune Waterfield was there in the basement, carrying cases of soda upstairs to the man behind the bar."

"You slipped him a shot of the stuff, then primed some bottles of the soda!" Steve realized. "I remember! I was drinking soda! Those other people who went wild had soda drinks."

"Your intuition amazes me. You're right. Then I called Perone and told him that interesting developments would occur at about eleven. I knew there would be a big trade then; the soda would be used. I told him that, if he didn't care to have the condition repeated, he would be kind enough to get one hundred thousand dollars ready. I refrained, naturally, from giving my name."

"Then you dropped in. But how did you spot me?" Steve asked curiously. Yet, as he spoke, his fingers touched his pocket; touched two tiny tablets, round and hard.

"An interesting point. I had seen your picture in the apartment when I was there. It occurred to me that possibly Carl might have involved my name somehow before I got him. I tried it out by using my name at the bar. You responded. So I began to plan again. You see, I had actually planned to make Zerlin the pawn. Then I wondered about you. It suddenly occurred to me that I could use you: first, to collect the money from Perone, then as my final murderer. So I hastily scribbled the note."

"Then little Freddie drops in when the hell breaks loose!"

"Yes. It was our intention that he should merely be seen, in Zerlin's clothes, in a suspicious position, then vanish in the dark."

Steve nodded tensely.

"That was when Zerlin was going to be the fall-guy."

"Yes. But then I heard Harvell shout Freddie's name. I realized Harvell might understand. When the lights went out, I was forced to. . . liquidate Harvell with your knife. I had planned to use it on Carl, but. . . there are many ways." Again he smiled and his blue eyes glinted in the light.

"And the rest of the way was gravy." Steve recalled bluntly. "I played into you like a trained seal. While I was unconscious up here you called Freddie at the Barton and outlined the new plan: keep on posing as Zerlin; slide the letter under the door here; your gun would be empty; pick up the money in the trash-can; get back to the Barton and change clothes with the poor doomed Zerlin. You'd lead me there on that envelope clue, and Zerlin would go out the window to death as I crashed the door. The result: I'd either run for my life until the cops caught me, or you'd take me if I got smart; you knew I couldn't walk in and tell my story, wild as it was. You knew I'd come to you."

"Yes, indeed," Pigeon agreed complacently. He finished his drink. "But, as always, there was one flaw. In New Jersey Freddie had found some of Zerlin's writing; he found that Zerlin always used red ink. We had no way of knowing that Zerlin would forget his pen at your apartment. That made our red-ink letters rather suspicious. And so, I suppose, you couldn't call it a perfect crime." He laughed shortly.

"But you'll make it perfect by killing me," Steve finished. He looked at Freddie; the ferret-eyes blinked back at him. He looked at Pigeon. He took a deep breath. His fingers were wet; his body was cold. He tried to keep his voice low and even.

"They let guys like me have a drink, in prison—"

"But of course! How rude of me!" Pigeon gestured. "Please— Just help yourself."

STEVE moved toward the desk. He turned half-aside. His wet fingers slid into his pocket. He mixed his drink. Then, in the instant before he turned, he dropped the two tablets into the water. He watched them disappear. He turned.

"I hope this is good," he said wearily. He stared at the gun.

Pigeon looked at his watch. "We should be going now." He turned his glass speculatively. Steve felt a hard chill break through his pores.

"Another short one, Freddie," Pigeon decided abruptly. "To Rainey."

Steve sobbed in his throat. He watched the little man pour the whiskey, then the water. . . Steve began to talk, quickly:

"Listen— Listen, Pigeon. You've got the formula! What you pulled on Perone you can pull a thousand times! Why—"

"And I intend to," the man assured. "I can traffic it, or use it as a club for blackmail; I can disrupt any business, any bank, any company in this city! A few tablets in a water cooler! Think what—"

"I know. Listen. You don't have to kill me, see? I won't talk! I swear I won't!"

"Let's don't be emotional."

"But for the love of Heaven, don't kill me! Don't kill—" He stopped as the faintest flicker of inner surprise darted through the blue eyes. Pigeon stared

strangely at the glass in his hand. Then, one by one, his fingers opened. The glass crashed upon the floor. He spit violently.

"Something. . . I got something in my—" he stammered thickly. Steve turned quickly toward Freddie. The little man was not seeing Pigeon. His eyes were only for his own glass. Then, with an animal delight, he tilted the glass and gulped down the entire contents!

"Damn! Damn, good!" he screamed abruptly. "Good. . . good!"

Steve sobbed involuntarily. He turned again toward Pigeon. The man was clutching his throat with one hand, staring fixedly at Steve.

"You—you did something!" he whispered harshly. "You—" Steve saw him, trying to fire the gun. His stunned nerves were slow to function.

Steve leaped straight into the gun. His fingers gripped the bony wrist and twisted. Pigeon screamed—a vacant yell, without real fury. And in another part of the room, Freddie was shouting in violent excitement. "Kill him. . . kill 'em all! I don't care—"

Steve twisted. He heard a bone snap in the wrist. The fingers loosened as Pigeon screamed again. Steve grasped the gun and rolled free of the thrashing feet. Across the room he rolled, then scrambled up. His plan was made in his mind.

One! Two! Three bullets he sent crash-

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**DETECTIVE
TALES**

ing into the wall! The thunderous explosion reverberated through the building and echoed into the street outside.

Pigeon seemed not to hear the shots at all. His clutching hand left his throat and started toward the water-jug. Steve moved quickly. He threw a body-block against the gaunt figure, hurling it into a corner. He snatched away the jug as Freddie tried to grasp it. Quickly he backed away into a corner and lifted a chair. He held it out. Pigeon pulled himself up and stared at Steve vacantly. He had eyes for the jug, alone. He came shambling in, sobbing and whimpering in his throat: "Water! Give. . . a little. . . water! Got to have water!"

Steve thrust the chair-legs into the grey face. Pigeon reeled back against the desk and fell again. Freddie came stumbling in. Steve threw the chair at him and backed along the wall.

"Why don't they come—somebody?" he whispered frantically. The eyes of the men were maniacal, burning, glazed as they stumbled in again—always reached, twisting, tearing for the bottle that held the water their lips begged for.

Then Steve heard the pounding feet on the stairs outside. He shouted loudly: "Here! In here!" The feet pounded nearer. The door burst open. Two cops spilled into the room. They jerked to a halt and stared, unbelieving. They recognized Steve. One grabbed for his gun.

"Get your hands—" he started.



"DON'T be a damn fool!" Steve snapped. "Listen to what happens, and be damned sure you don't forget!" Then he grasped for Pigeon. His fingers closed on the sweating bony neck. In his other hand he held out the water-jug.

"Water. You'll get it. When you talk." He threw a dash in the man's face. The tongue licked wildly at the few drops. The eyes rolled. "Who killed Harvell? Answer that! Who killed Harvell, and you'll get water."

"I— Give me— I want. . . killed him. . . I killed him!" Pigeon sobbed. He tried to lick another drop from his cheek.

"Who pushed Zerlin out that window?"
"Fre—Freddie. . . Freddie. Water. . . please give—"

"Where is Carl Johnson?"

"Locked. . . my apartment. . . closet—"

"Where's the formulae?"

Pigeon made a futile attempt to grasp the bottle. Steve poured a stream to the floor. Pigeon screamed hungrily. "Where is the formulae for the dope?" Steve asked again.

"In. . . pocket. . . my pocket—"

"Nobody else knows or has any?"

Pigeon shook his head. Steve stepped back, released his grip, and threw the last of the water across the convulsed face. He turned to the cops. "You heard. Don't forget it." Then, as Pigeon tried to push Freddie from the pool of water, Steve bent over. In Pigeon's pocket he found the slip of paper with its formulae.

In his own pocket he found a match. He watched the flame.

He whispered softly, strangely to himself: "Only a second. . . two seconds of fire and it's gone." The little ash of paper drifted to the floor and shattered. He stared fixedly at the fragment.

"Each," he whispered, "each bit was a murder-to-be. Each ash-particle was death and madness. Now. . . nothing at all. . ."

* * *

He sat in his cubby hole office. He tapped the keys slowly.

Today, in a packed courtroom, Judge Warner named Friday the Ninth as that day upon which Jerome Pigeon and Fredrick Beretto will die.

He leaned back and looked at the names. The telephone rang. He answered. "Steve," Kay said softly.

"I'll be late, honey. Warner set the date. It's—"

"I know. I heard the radio. I just—I just wanted to say something. Just maybe hello, I guess. . ." Her voice trailed away.

Slowly, Steve swallowed. He knew what she meant; it was something they'd never forget. So close, it had been.

"Thanks, honey," he said gently. "Hello to you. I'll be seeing you at ten."

He turned back to write the end of Pigeon.

THE END

ADOPTED FOR DEATH

By DONALD G. CORMACK



When the road kid dropped off the freight train and let himself be adopted by the little old lady of the night, he didn't know that a job, a pretty girl—and a murder frame—went with it.

I smashed an upper-cut to his double chin.

I HOOKED onto the freight in Athens, Georgia, early that morning and after seven hours of riding the blinds I was plenty tired, and hungry. I was out of the deep South by now, though, and that was what I wanted. Maybe you've read about the way they treat prisoners on the chain gangs down Florida way. Well, mister, I

could do without that. I don't mean maybe.

We were nearing a water tank just then and the big laboring hog up ahead was slowing for a drink. I let go the blinds, hopped the rails and heeled it down a steep embankment. At the bottom was a dirt road that led to what looked like a small-sized city. I washed up as best I could

in a little stream that cut through the road, then started out for the city ahead. I hoped to be through there and on the highway beyond before night set in.

It was called Jackson, I discovered from the signs, and a busy, clean looking little layout it was, too—which was bad. Towns like that are apt to be pretty touchy about undesirable outsiders rolling in to louse up the place. When you're on the road, though, you always follow the same procedure, no matter what the community looks like. You keep marching straight through, and lively, as though you were late for an important date somewhere. If you want to stay free you do.

The highway followed the town's main drag, and the lighted windows of the homes I passed made me feel sort of empty inside. In the commercial district, the aroms that flooded out of the public eat-joints made my stomach feel plenty empty too. But, tell me, what can a guy buy with two cents and an old key?

I was past the center of town when I made a little mistake. The main street seemed to branch, and the through highway must have taken the left fork. I took the right. Within a dozen blocks I realized what had happened, but I didn't retrace my steps. Instead, I cut left into a side street, figuring to pick up the other fork within six blocks or so.



THE side avenue was pretty dark, being residential, so I didn't see this guy until he staggered under a street light about fifty feet ahead of me. I stopped too. He was plenty drunk, hanging onto the lamp for support and swaying from side to side on rubbery legs. He wore a camel's hair topcoat, and he had a snappy Homberg on his head. Then, as I watched, he staggered crazily backward and flopped in the tall grass beside the footwalk—out cold.

I remember the flip-up my stomach did when this thought came to my mind: *I wonder how much dough he's got in his wallet?*

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not a crook. I've never swiped anything from a pal or anyone else who needed it. But

this rich young drunk was just asking to give it away—and, mister, I needed a few bucks bad. I know what a lot of people would say: if I worked in some defense plant I'd have all the money I wanted. Well, that's what I'd been doing up to a few weeks ago. But an old case of malaria started nagging me again and I knew I'd have to get North. After a week's spree in Tiajuana, broke, I'd started out. There was plenty of war work in New York, too.

To tell the truth, I suppose I'd have pulled out and hit the road in a little while, anyway. I can't stay put worth a damn. I've never had a home, either—not the way most kids know home. My mom died when I was a baby, and my old man was a circus roustabout—until the day he tried to string a tent with a skinful of ultra-potent firewater. I was sixteen then.

You get the picture? Yeah, I've been around and seen plenty. Take a look at this busted nose—and guess how often.

Well, a car came slowly down the street just then and I jumped quick for the covering grass at the side of the walk. Cop cars prowl slow like that—and I didn't want to get picked up in this section of town. But the car went past, and again that thought came to my mind: *Twenty bucks? Maybe thirty? Hell, I'll settle for the price of a meal!*

The guy was laying flat on his back, his arms flung wide, and the sound of his breathing was a cross between a snore and a groan. But I didn't mess around. His wallet was in the inside pocket of his jacket and I had it out in a second. I flipped it open, made a quick count—eighteen bucks! Then, barely readable in the dim light from the streetlamp, I noticed his draft card with his name: Harold Crowley. I had my fingers around the dough when a voice behind me made me freeze solid, paralyzed.

"Young man, do you realize what you're doing? That's sinful stealing!" There was a clucking sound. Then, "Don't you think you'd better put it back?"

I swear I couldn't move a muscle. I didn't know if some wise cop was giving me the business before he belted me bow-legged with his nightstick, or if some

fugitive from the loony bin was giving his Napoleon hat an airing. I turned around—but slow!—just in case my first hunch was right. And then I froze again.

A little old woman stood there, just off the sidewalk and four feet behind me. She had snow-white hair, leaned heavily on a thick cane and was dressed in the latest style of the Roosevelt administration—Theodore Roosevelt. Her expression was unhappy, forlorn, and she was shaking her head disapprovingly.

I was wishing then I could be lousy enough to belt her one and take it on the lam; then I wondered what her lung-power was like and how far a cops' car was just then. All the time she was clucking her disapproval. Then she simply stepped forward and plucked the wallet from my unresisting fingers.

"It may seem unimportant to you now," she said, wagging the wallet at me, "but in years to come you'd live to rue this day bitterly. And all for a few paltry dollars!"

Her remarks, plus the glittering of rings on her fingers, got me sore. "Without the few paltry dollars, grandma," I told her, "I might not live until those 'years to come' when I'm supposed to do all that rueing."

She stopped flapping the wallet at me and I realized what a dope I'd been. Now she'd howl for the bulls for sure. But her reaction fooled me completely.

"I see what you mean," she said quietly. "I do realize the temptation—and for a selfish moment I'd forgotten what might almost be called the—er—necessity. And I think I can help you, my dear boy. Indeed, I'm sure I can. But first—"

She was holding the wallet out to me to be replaced. I took it from her, noting regretfully the nice bulge of bills within, and was about to slip it into the wheezing guy's pocket when my movement stopped abruptly. Only her urgent words, the quick movement of her cane made me complete the job.



I STOOD up and faced her, both bewildered and furiously angry. She'd just completed the neatest switch I'd ever failed to see! The original wallet was

a light cowhide—and the one I'd just replaced was black kidskin! This loopy old bag with the angelic face and manner had put the glom on my legitimate snatch! I'd been played for a sucker!

She stood there smiling sweetly at me. "Now we can go with a clear conscience," she said, "can't we, dear boy? And I shall see that you are not the loser for your brave act. You have only to come with me to my hotel."

She reached out and put her arm through mine, as though for support, and I was so dazed I swung into line without protest. As we went down the street she said, "Agatha. You must call me Aunt Agatha—not grandma. All my adopted nieces and nephews call me Aunt Agatha—and now you're one of them!"

My own thoughts weren't so happy. I could swear she'd switched the wallets—but was that real dough in the second wallet? It certainly looked and felt like it. And where was she taking me now? Not to the bulls, because she couldn't prove a thing—especially if she had that other wallet. Why take me to her hotel? And what about this see-that-you're-not-the-loser stuff? Maybe she was completely cracked. But what did I have to lose? I played along.

The hotel was only a few blocks away—an ancient, dusty-velvet sort of joint right out of the Victorian era. But it was spotless and it was undoubtedly the best in town.

The old dame stopped before we got to the entrance and I figured this was where she put the bite on me for whatever it was she wanted. So far, she'd done all the jabbering, and all she'd gotten out of me was my name: Jim Powers.

"Can you drive a car, Jimmie?" she asked, and she seemed satisfied when I told her yes. "And would you like to drive for me? I'm headed for New York, and if you'd drive me that far I'd give you shelter and keep in return." When I said okay to that she gushed all over the place.

"It's this way," she explained. "A boy I befriended on the road—my newest nephew, except for you—drove me this far and then disappeared. He left in the middle of the night, as a matter of fact, and he—well—he took along a few things that weren't his, strictly. George was so

thoughtless, so impulsive! And here I am without a strong man to drive my car and look after me. Oh, dear boy, I'm so delighted you've consented to help a poor little lady in distress! So delighted!"

Then she gave me a hotel key, explaining it had been her George's room and that it was now mine—along with the clothes I'd find there. But first I'd have to park the car behind the hotel, if I didn't mind, she told me—and gave me the keys. We parted then, she going into the hotel and me going across the street to the car. It was some jallopy—a V-12 convertible job that could really go places.

She was sitting in the lobby when I entered—my ragged clothes hidden under a linen-duster coat I'd found in the car. I nodded to her on the way to the elevators, but she didn't seem to notice me. I hoped she saw me going up, because I had plans.

The old babe must have, because five minutes later she tapped on my door. "Comfy?" she asked, giggling foolishly.

"This is some shake-down," I told her, noticing her frown of disapproval with satisfaction. "I've been in lots worse fire-traps than this. Good night."

"Good night what, dear boy?" she asked.

She had me for a moment. Then I got it. "Good night, Aunt Agatha," I said—and felt like a damn fool caught playing dolls.

I heard her door open and close, and that's what I'd been waiting for. I gave her five minutes more, spending the time in casing my layout again. It had double beds—real old fashioned double beds. The rest of the furniture matched in massive size. The closet was full of suits—and there I came across a puzzling fact. The suits were in two sizes, like two guys lived here. But I didn't let it worry me then; the crazy old babe probably had "adopted" more nephews than a state orphan asylum.

"That guy George must have been nuts," I said aloud. "He should have taken the car, too, with his clothes piled in back."

Then I figured I'd given old loopy enough time. I could start working on my plan now—and the plan was simple.

I was going back and roll that drunk the way I'd meant to in the beginning.

I opened the door quietly, stepped into the hall—and immediately that voice came from behind me. I spun around.

"Naughty, naughty!" she said, wagging a finger. "Mustn't go out so late." Then her tone became more earnest. "Please, Jimmy boy, don't go out. I know what a temptation that money is, and that's why I stayed here to see that you didn't weaken."



I WENT back into the room, slamming the door, but in spite of my show of bravado and anger I felt suddenly scared. It wasn't anything I could put my finger on; it was a combination of a lot of things, most of them as yet not fully realized. But most of all it had been the look deep in her eyes out there in the hall, a cold, dominating, masterful look—the look of a self-sure killer!

Then, too, there was the missing Georgie; there was the guy who belonged to the second set of clothes; there was the guy laying in the grass up on that lonely street. And there was me here alone in the hotel room. I wished then I could have scrambled, but I couldn't. Be frightened out of town by a little hundred-pound old woman and her sugar-sweet words? I'd never get it out of my mind. Too, there was a challenge before me, and I wasn't used to ducking away from a challenge.

I couldn't figure why the old dame had such a protective attitude toward Crowley, the fancy-pants drunk—but I figured that if I could get a gander at that second wallet she put in his pocket I'd gain more than a few bucks for my trouble. And there was always the fire escape as a way out of this joint.

First, though, I gave myself a treat I'd been anticipating for a long time. I took a hot bath. Afterward, I dressed in clean linen from the well-stocked bureau and picked out a brand new blue serge suit. Then, seeing a wallet in the drawer, I snatched the thing up—and found thirty bucks inside! That was okay by me. I pulled the few personal items out of my old worn-out keister and switched them—especially my draft card.

When you're on the road today, your most precious item is a draft card. Lots of times the cops will stop you and ask to see it. If you've got one, they'll probably say okay but keep on moving. If you haven't, it's just too bad.

Getting out of the hotel via the fire escape was easy, and it was simple to find the block where the drunk had passed out—but after that my luck changed. I saw two cops pulled up to the curb, their spotlights directed down at the guy in the grass, and in the distance I heard an ambulance moaning. I was too late; someone had already spotted him.

As ever, a bunch of curious passersby had stopped to snoop. Dressed the way I was, and with an address for the night, I didn't hesitate to walk right up to the scene. Two guys were standing next to me and I heard one of them say, "I heard he was dead. Poison booze. There's two-three cases every week! When will this state wake up and accept the Repeal amendment? People drink just as much in the wet states, but they pay less—and live afterward. It's criminal!"

Edging through the crowd, I got close to the group of cops. I heard one say to another who was taking notes, "You got that about him carrying a South American passport? Okay. There's three-hundred bucks in the wallet. Some private papers. An identification card agrees with the

name on the passport—Ricardo Montez, home town Rio de Janeiro. Got that?"

Montez—when the first name I'd seen was Crowley! Then the old dame had swapped wallets—eighteen bucks for three hundred! Right then I began to smell murder.

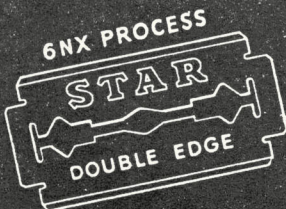
I waited until the ambulance doc pronounced a tentative diagnosis of wood-alcohol poisoning, then I started back for the hotel. On the way back I passed a speakeasy and I talked my way in. The drink of rotgut booze they gave me for a buck didn't make me feel any better and it didn't clear anything up. I figured sleep was the answer now.

I knew someone had been in my room as soon as I got there. For a moment I considered raising hell about it, pounding on the old dame's door and demanding an explanation. I knew she was in the adjoining room, because she'd stepped out of there when she'd caught me in the hall. But then I said the hell with it. I'd only get some double-talk about my rags being "dreadfully soiled" and a pious reminder that cleanliness was next to Godliness. Life was too short to go through that again.

I did examine the connecting door between the two rooms, though, and discovered that it was unlocked on both sides. When I tried to shoot the bolt on my side I found it was jammed—probably

**DON'T BE CHEEKY,
MISTER!**

**WHY NOT?
I SHAVE WITH
STAR BLADES!**



4 for 10¢



on purpose. It opened in on the old babe's room, so a chair wouldn't block the knob. Then I had to laugh. Who'd be afraid of a halfpint old crone? Furthermore, I'd been on the road so long, no one could get within six feet of me without waking me up.



I DIDN'T undress that night, though. If anything unexpected broke, it was the fire-escape for me—and fast. I lay down on top of the spread and drifted off slowly. Just before I went fast asleep I thought I heard the old babe talking in the next room. I figured maybe she was giving herself a lecture on honesty and how it's better to steal on an 18-300 basis. And that was the last I remember for a while.

Once during the night I came awake with a girl's scream ringing in my ears, but I couldn't be sure whether I'd really heard it or if I'd dreamed it. It wasn't repeated, so I went back to sleep again.

It was someone rapping on my door that awakened me next morning. It wasn't loud but it was insistent; the knocking didn't stop until I'd rolled out of bed and groped my way drunkenly to the door. A typical house dick stood outside.

"Complaints," he wheezed. He was fat and bored looking. "Too much noise. Cut it out."

This could be a trick, so I was wary. Maybe he wasn't any house dick. He looked the part too well.

"Noise?" I snapped. "Can't you see I'm alone, that I've been sleeping? I wasn't making a sound!"

Suddenly the guy's eyes jumped wide open; they were surprisingly blue, I noticed. He lifted a trembling finger and pointed over my shoulder.

"It's a cinch it wasn't that corpse sitting in the chair behind you, mister!" he almost whispered.

That was the oldest trick in the books. He expected me to spin around so he could give me the business. I'd been waiting for something like that. I spun, all right, but I spun on the balls of my feet as I smashed an uppercut to his double chin. I had to wince myself when it connected, and again when he hit the opposite side of the hallway and collapsed to a sitting posi-

tion—out cold. Then I slammed the door and turned back into the room.

Now it was my turn to take it on the chin. I stopped cold, gaping, doubting my senses. There *was* a guy sitting in the big easy chair—and he was just as undoubtedly dead. A knife—my pocket knife, probably with my fingerprints still on it—was plunged into his throat, severing the jugular vein. It was a messy, gruesome sight—and it spelled murder and hanging.

I'd prepared for a quick get-away the night before, and I moved fast now. I jumped across the room and whipped the knife out of the guy's throat—but, surprisingly, he didn't bleed any more. The knife I shoved in my pocket. Then, curious as to whom I was going to be accused of killing, I slipped a letter from his pocket. It was addressed to William Schram at some address in New Orleans.

All that occupied but ten seconds, and then I was set. Knowing it was the mealy-mouthed old babe in the next room who had arranged this little party, I whispered a forlorn little prayer that she was still hanging around, that I could get my fingers on her for a few seconds—and went through the connecting door like Mel Hein crashing through left tackle.

The result was beautiful to see. The old babe had evidently had her head plastered close to the door, listening in and never doubting that I'd go along quiet and peaceful with the house detective. The first crash knocked her back a couple of feet—and then the wild-swinging door, with my weight behind it, caught her full on the skull. She sort of arched over onto the bed and never moved a muscle after she landed.

Some bellboys must have found the house dick then, because fists were drumming on my door and other guests on the floor were evidently pouring into the hall to see what it was all about. There was plenty of yelling going on but little coordinated action. I slapped the connecting door closed, locked it, and jumped for the window that led to the fire escape. It was only then that the movements on the other bed caught my attention.

A girl lay there—a young, pretty girl with raven black hair and angry, flashing black eyes. She was bound hand and foot,

gagged, and her only way to attract my attention was to bounce around and hope I'd notice her. One look and I was at her side, ripping away the cords. In seconds she was free.

"Come on, big boy," was the first thing she said. "We want out—and right now! I don't know who you are, but if they're against you, you must be on my side. Let's go!"

We hopped through the window, ran down the fire escape—which, fortunately, was an old fashioned affair with ornate scrollwork that practically hid us from the street. On the way down, I heard the door of my room give under the onslaught of those in the hall. But they were too late.



WITHOUT a word, I grabbed the girl's hand and made for the parking lot behind the hotel. I still had the keys to the old dame's car so it was the obvious thing to do. What was a little matter of larceny on top of cold-blooded murder?

We didn't speak even then—not until we were well away from the hotel, when I pulled up on a quiet sidestreet.

I let out a long breath. "Close. I thought they had us there for a while. We just got out in time."

"But we didn't get out," the girl said quietly. "We're just getting in, big boy."

This girl seemed to know what she was talking about, and she spoke with a quiet authority.

"Okay," I told her. "Then we'll find a way out, the two of us. We'll blast a way out, if necessary."

"I'm glad you're with me," she said

simply. "For some reason I feel I can trust you—and I need help."

"You and me both," I told her.

I noticed the girl was the one who started asking questions. She found out all she wanted to about me, and all I knew about her was her name: Dorothy Crane. But after a time she seemed to come to a decision.

"As long as you're working with me," she said, "you might as well know. I'm on a special assignment for the F.B.I. We've been warned by U. S. agents in South America that two experts in railroad sabotage were landed in Florida during the past week. They are to recruit and train other pro-Axis men here in the methods of railroad wrecking and in the charting of troop transport."

She took a breath, continued:

"Such a warning came through once before, but we never managed to pick up the agents. Before we could do so, they were both found—dead. Probably killed by their own men, as soon as it was known we'd spotted them, to prevent our picking up their contacts and associates—"

"No!" The word exploded as the truth dawned on me. "Look: you had only the names of these men, not their pictures?"

"Yes—and the names didn't mean a thing. As for the pictures, the agents were undoubtedly selected because we wouldn't know them from Adam—or a hundred thirty million other citizens."

"What were the names of the latest two?"

"Schram and Montez," she told me, puzzled.

Then I told her about the "drunk" I'd

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seen, who later died—and about the corpse in my bedroom. “Those two will be identified as Schram and Montez!” I said. “Aunt Agatha saw to that. And there won’t be any complications because when she picked them up on the highway—hoboes both—she made sure they had no living relatives before she adopted them—for death.

“On top of that, both Schram and Montez now have brand new identities—with genuine draft cards to match! What better place for a train saboteur than as a hobo on the tracks?”

The girl nodded slowly, her lovely white features set, her dark eyes flashing. “We’re getting warm. As for your Aunt Agatha, according to the Washington office, she’s the connecting link between arriving agents and the brain of the U. S. receiving center for foreign agents. She hasn’t been picked up in the hope she’d lead us to the head man, as well as the two new members.

“All we know is that they make their headquarters somewhere in Philadelphia—but we don’t know where.”

“What about last night?” I asked. “How come Aunt Agatha took you over without a sound. You knew who she was.”

Dorothy made a face. “I was watching outside the hotel. Dear Aunt Agatha came out about midnight and I figured that was my cue to search her room. I guess that’s just what she wanted anyone tailing her to do. She must have doubled around and returned by the fire escape. By the time I got her door open, she was waiting for me—and the next thing I knew I was done up like a gift package.”

“And that guy in my room this morning—?”

“He came shortly after auntie had taken care of me. He had a bundle she’d evidently sent him for—”

“To get him out of the way while she fixed Crowley—”

Dorothy nodded. “Auntie doped him with a drink, held him in the room until dawn, and then she—she—” Dot shuddered.

“I know,” I broke in. “And what happens now?”

She drew in a deep breath. “Now the fireworks,” she said, her tone desperate.

“First, let’s drive back to the hotel, Jim.”

“The hotel! Listen, are you—”

Her eyes stopped me; I got the car moving. I figured Aunt Agatha would be at the hotel, at that. Why should she run? That would look suspicious in itself. No one had seen her talking to me—or, I was willing to bet, to either Crowley or Schram. A nice old lady certainly wouldn’t commit cold-blooded murder!

Dorothy was the only one who could safely go into the hotel and I didn’t like it. I’d be spotted sure. And I put up a strong argument when she insisted I leave the car, stand a full block away so I couldn’t be seen from the hotel. I lost the argument, of course.



IT SEEMED I stood for hours at the far corner. Half the time I couldn’t see the car because of the passing traffic and I’d be standing on tip-toe to get a glimpse of it. Then I saw Dot—and Aunt Agatha! I let out a yell, started to run—because dear auntie obviously had a gun in Dot’s back, hidden by her handbag!

I was too late. By the time I reached the corner, the car had disappeared. And I knew now why that pretty kid had insisted I keep my distance. She’d intended all along for Aunt Agatha to pick her up! She realized it was the only way to get to the espionage headquarters that night! She hadn’t been willing for me to share the deadly risk.

I don’t know how long I walked the streets, racking my brain. Here I was in Jackson—with Dot somewhere in Philadelphia, in the hands of enemy agents. There my knowledge stopped. How could I hope to find her with nothing at all to go on?

I suppose it was pure luck when I angrily jammed my fists into my jacket pockets—and found the letter I’d taken from the corpse in my bedroom. I couldn’t open it fast enough. It read:

Wilhelm:

This is to confirm the address in Chicago: Quakertown; 423 La Salle.
Yours, C.

For a while I couldn’t dope it out.

Chicago? The girl had said the F.B.I. was sure— Then I realized it was only a blind. "Quakertown" was the key word—and it checked. Philadelphia is Quaker-town. Then the rest must be the all-important address! My heart was drumming and I was breathing hard. All I had to do was dope out that "423 LaSalle" and then I'd have it.

Jackson's public library answered that one, finally. A city directory of Philadelphia told me there was no such street as LaSalle—which I'd expected—but I found out there was a Hotel LaSalle, and that was all I needed. Room 423 was my cue. I grabbed a cab and raced for the railroad station. . . .

The LaSalle was a shoddy red-brick building, a dump, down by the railroad tracks. I didn't think I'd have too much trouble getting in, but after walking casually across the lobby and up four flights of stairs, I saw I was mistaken. Two big husky guys stood in front of room 423. That way was blocked tight as the hinges of hell.

I went back to the street and figured I'd try the fire escape—and was fooled again. A couple of fullbacks were standing guard there too. The roof? I knew if they were watching the foot of the fire escape, they'd also be watching the head. But there was one place they couldn't watch!

I walked up to the fifth floor this time and knocked on the door of room 523. A sour-faced old guy in a long night-shirt opened the door, growling, and I shoved past him with some double-talk about "repairs." I was out of the window and going down before he knew what it was all about. I kept moving—fast.

What the hell I expected to do when I got into 423 I'll never know; I hadn't figured that far ahead. And what I saw going on there made me go cold all over. In one corner of the room, crumpled in a pitifully still heap, lay a young girl. That must be Dot—and maybe dead! I prayed not.

At the other side, Aunt Agatha was battling two husky boys—and was doing all right for herself. They'd evidently managed to knock her gun out of her hand, but as I watched, she twisted suddenly, got some sort of tricky hold on the nearest guy—and a moment later he was flying across the room. The second one was closing in then, while the men in the hall were hurling themselves against the locked door, shattering it slowly. I threw myself through the window in a clumsy imitation of Superman. Those guys needed help!

My one thought was to get Dot safely away, though. Once free, we could call for reinforcements; Aunt Agatha seemed to be too well supplied with muscle men for our small party to handle.

I was half way across the room when the door burst open and four men crashed in. Aunt Agatha was yelling something, but in the confusion she couldn't be understood. The nearest guy I caught with a beautiful left hook. The others were on me then.

I was good at rough and tumble brawling. If these guys wanted it tough, okay—that's the way they'd get it. I shot over a vicious right cross that would've floored Gargantua—and hit only air. A split second later a General Grant tank caught me on the chin and I sailed half



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way across the room. Pure luck, I thought to myself. The second time I went for the guy I was cagier. I bobbed, weaved, fainted, rushed in suddenly—and got the same result, except that when I landed I couldn't see the room any more. It was spinning around dizzily, crazily, and I knew I couldn't get up. I was as good as out—and both Dot and I were trapped. Me, the tough guy, the champ! I'd failed Dorothy in the pinch.



WHEN I finally came out of it, everything had quieted down. The room was full of people now, and Aunt Agatha was standing over me, a look of concern on her face. When she saw I was coming out of it, she smiled roguishly.

"Are you comfy, Jimmie?" she asked sweetly. Then, when she saw the expression on my face, she laughed aloud. "You may call me Aunt Dorothy, dear boy. Isn't that lovely?"

The old woman was Dot—Dot dressed in Aunt Agatha's clothes! She pulled off the white wig now, shook her own lovely hair free.

"After I let the old dame take me prisoner, Jim," she explained, "I noticed the wig she was wearing—which suggested some interesting angles. So, when we arrived here and I found we were momentarily alone, I went to work on her. The whole outfit was a fake. It was simply a disguise to conceal the true head of the spy combine—because *she's* the head man! She only uses that Aunt Agatha get-up for outside work. So I left her in the corner to sleep it off while I called the Bureau for reinforcements, then dressed in her outfit to greet the expected visitors." She nodded to the two handcuffed men sitting on the sofa—the same two she'd been fighting when I broke in. "The outfit fooled them before, so it fooled them again. So, while my men remained hidden, I got the whole story from them—before they became suspicious and jumped me."

"Did we have the right dope?" I asked.

"Just about. Auntie met these two

agents in Florida, told them to report to this hotel tonight for their papers. Meantime, holding their papers, she selected two unattached, wandering hoboes and played fairy godmother to them—even destroying their old soiled clothes and buying them new outfits that couldn't be traced.

"The rest you know. She doped the switched wallet and papers. The poison, by the way, was the same as that in wood alcohol, administered after a number of friendly cocktails in her room."

"But why wait until collapse to switch papers?" I asked.

"Because," Dot explained, "though drunk, when a man suddenly feels sick he might stagger into a drug store or doctor's office and *talk* before he died. He might give names, facts, that could be checked. He might mention her. She took no chances. She sent the victim on an errand that would take him to a deserted part of town and followed along behind."

"Then she suspected I'd seen Crowley's name—as I had?"

"Right. That meant she had to get rid of you—as well as victim number two—so she framed you for murder, knowing you'd take it on the lam. Even if you were caught, who'd believe you?"

That seemed to clean it up—except my dumb play in trying to slug it out with a G-man. They could see how embarrassed I was and they all stood around grinning.

"The way he fought for the gal, you'd think he loved her," one of them said. "We might send him along next time we call Dot in for a special job."

"He found this place by himself," another said more seriously. "We should laugh! With a little training . . ."

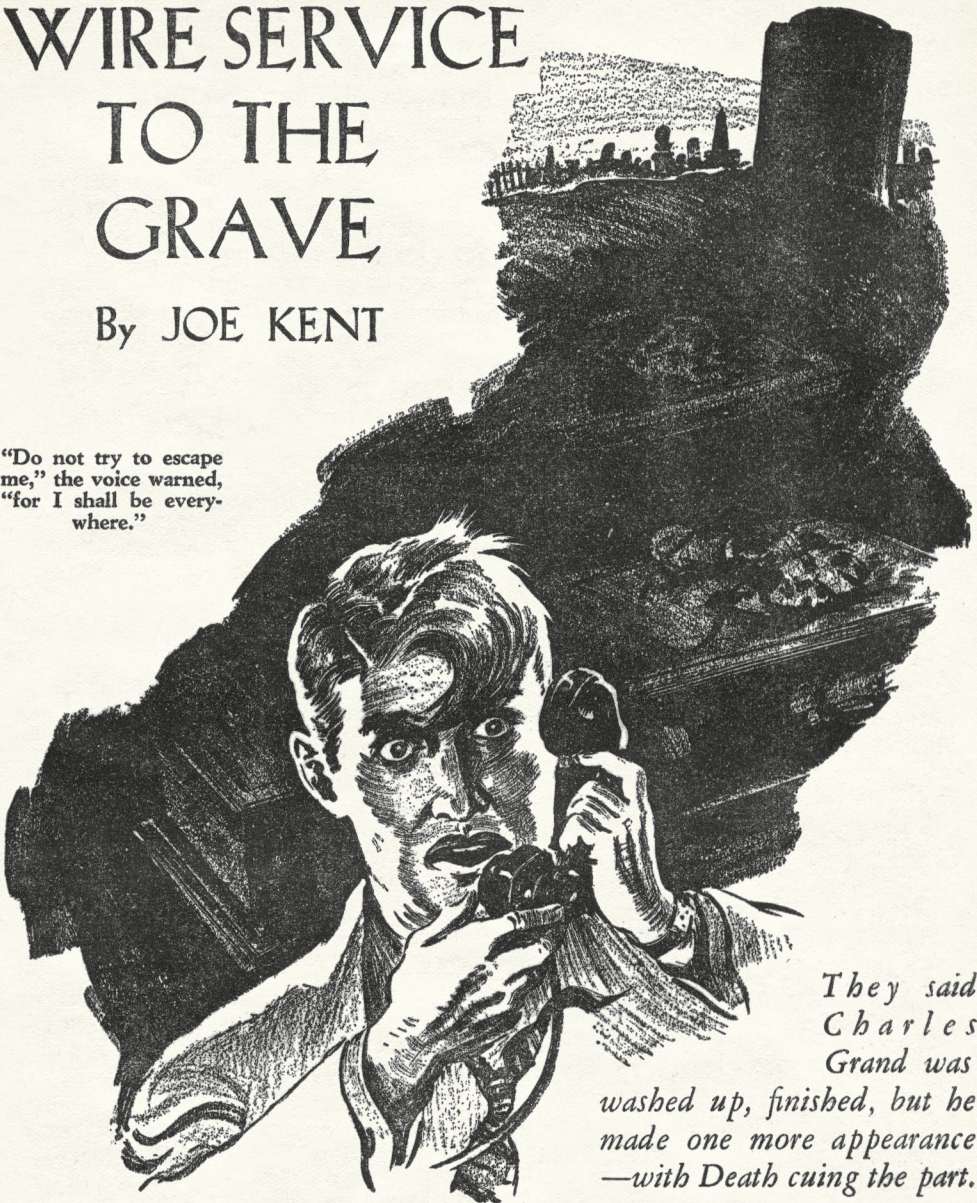
Dorothy was blushing now, too, and that helped some. When she raised her eyebrows, silently questioning about the possible job, I nodded my head emphatically yes. In wartime, I knew—overtaxed as they were—the G-men sometimes called in qualified civilians to aid in certain cases. And working with Dorothy. . . .

After all, I'd come North to get into war work, hadn't I? Well, I'd found it—and something more. A world more.

WIRE SERVICE TO THE GRAVE

By JOE KENT

"Do not try to escape me," the voice warned, "for I shall be everywhere."



They said Charles Grand was washed up, finished, but he made one more appearance—with Death cuing the part.

At last Charles Grand knew it. He sat very still in the projection room. In the darkness his fingers were tight and damp as they clutched the chair-arms. Fixedly he watched the screen. He saw himself—his heavy, wavy black hair; his luminous dark eyes; his small moustache and his heavy broad shoulders. It was the last scene of the new picture.

The film moved into close-up. Angela

was running to meet him; she was crying and laughing together; her golden hair was short and tumbled about her face. Then she was in his arms. It was the fade-out kiss. Then the private-preview of COURAGE, starring Charles Grand and Angela Arden, was over. For one long moment the room was dark and utterly still. Then a weary sigh drifted from the back row. Charles knew it was Fredricks.

The lights blazed harshly. Chairs scraped as the few occupants of the room rose. Voices murmured. Charles drew a deep breath. Before he rose, he straightened his tie neatly and patted his stomach.

"It'll have to go back. Retakes. It needs retakes," Fredricks, the producer-director was saying.

"Sure." In that blunt ironic word, Jake Farrell served his warning. "I'll put in my column tomorrow: 'Retakes to Take Grand Out.'" The eyes of the sarcastic little Hollywood columnist lingered one moment on Charles. "Not even Angela could save that one for you, Chuckie." He turned and walked out. Fredricks cursed wearily. Paul Mason, Charles' agent, lit a cigarette. Charles swallowed uncertainly and cleared his throat.

"I don't think Mitchell is the type to play—"

Fredricks' cold stare stopped him. "Don't try to think, please." He, too, walked out. Charles Grand looked at Mason. The lean freckle-faced agent slowly shrugged.

"That's it, Charles," he said quietly. "I warned you a year ago. Angela warned you. Tonight you saw it."

"I was tired! I was dog-tired when we started shooting that—"

"You were drunk," Mason corrected simply. "You stayed that way."

"Damn you, you can't tell me what I—" Charles started furiously.

Mason's level brown eyes stopped him. "Nobody will ever be able to tell you a damned thing." Mason turned toward the door.

"Wait! I— Listen, Paul, I— I'm sorry. Listen: What can you get me with Sandburn? He offered me four thousand a—"

"Two years ago. Tonight he wouldn't offer a dime. I— Oh, I'll see. I'll call you tomorrow." Mason walked out.

Charles clenched his fingers. "Telling me! A two-bit agent telling me! Why, I can walk in any studio in Hollywood—" In the mocking silence of the empty room, his fury drained away. "I'm all right. I'll be all right," he whispered slowly. Then he cracked. He began to sob harshly. "They—it can't—it can't happen to me! Fredricks . . . Mason . . . Even Angela— They did it! It's them! I—"

Even his choking whispers died away. Charles Grand was frightened—deeply, blindly frightened.



IT WAS better after the drinks. The fear vanished in the warm glow of his stomach. A bright-eyed girl asked him for his autograph. As he handed it back, he patted her hand. People entering the bar said hello. Others nodded and whispered. Charles Grand always sat slightly sideways, to show his profile. He could hear the whispers. He took another drink. "Damn them! Damn them all," he said strongly. "I'm through with Mason. I'll select my own vehicle next time. I—"

"I thought I'd find you here," a slow voice said. "Come over to a booth."

The warmth in Charles' stomach vanished. He turned to face the short thick man—an olive-faced man with deep black eyes. Those eyes were always the same, utterly calm and hot and lazy. They were like twin-windows into the depths of a dying furnace.

"Hello, Borin. I was just—just coming over to see you." Borin smiled faintly and nodded to an empty booth. Slowly Charles followed. They sat down. Borin leaned forward.

"I just saw Jake Farrell. He says you're through, Grand."

"He's a liar! I'm better than— The new picture needs a little touching, but it'll be a—"

"No, thanks," Borin interrupted lazily. "Save it for your fan-mail club. You're through. You never had much, and you don't have nothing now. You're what we call a no-dice man at the Club, Grand. And that brings me to the point . . . the thirty-seven thousand dollars. We don't run the games on credit, you know."

"I told you I'd pay you!" Charles started harshly. He glanced about him, then leaned closer. "I'll be starting a new picture—"

"That's what you said last month, when you only owed twenty thousand. I gave you thirty days. I want the money. I want it now."

"But I—I don't have that much cash handy right—"

Borin laughed bluntly. "You don't have a penny and everybody knows it. But you do have a house. You've got cars. You've got a couple of ponies. You better do a little selling."

"But I can't! Those things— They're Angela's. I can't—"

"Then you better tell your wife you're in a little spot. And you better tell her tonight. Tomorrow is my dead-line."

Lucas Borin stood up abruptly. "I don't care where you get the money or how. But you'll get it. Tomorrow." He turned and walked slowly out.

Charles Grand kept staring at the door. There was a tiny crash. He jumped. The glass had fallen from his sweating fingers. Suddenly he felt lonely—lonely with a blind, frantic pity. It was the oldest of all feeling with Charles—that pity. Pity and vanity. He stumbled to the bar. He got another drink. No longer did the warmth fill his stomach. No longer did the whisper of passers-by soothe his ears. He wanted something . . . something between him and the world. . . .

There was a light shining in Angela's room as Charles turned the car into the driveway toward the rambling stucco house. He hurried through the huge dark living room, up the stairs, and along the hall toward Angela's door. He knocked, then entered.

"Hello! Hello, darling!" he said warmly.



ANGELA ARDEN, his wife, looked up from her writing table. A slightest frown lay between her blue eyes. She pushed back a tumbled wave of her golden hair. "Hello, Charles." Her voice was quiet and slightly boyish. "How was the private showing?"

"Oh, all right. Fredricks says he's going to do some retakes." He leaned over the table and bent to kiss her. Her lips were cool and unmoving. Her eyes were steady as they watched him draw away.

"You want something," she told him simply.

"But I didn't." A flush reddened his cheeks. "Can't I kiss you?"

"You never do unless you have a reason."

"Oh, for the Lord's sake, let's don't start that again." He walked up and down the room. His figure wasn't bad in the mirror, he thought assuringly.

"Sit down, Charles. I've been waiting. I want to say something."

"Huh?" He blinked. "What?" He sat down and lit a cigarette.

Angela took a deep breath. Carefully she fitted her fingers together. "I—I'm leaving you, Charles. I'm getting a divorce."

"You— You what!" he started. "Divorce!"

"Please. Let me finish. This isn't new; I've been thinking a long time. I knew it had to come. I promised myself I'd wait until this picture was finished. If your work is good, Paul Mason can get you another contract. You won't need me any more."

"But I—I never heard of such a fantastic idea!" Charles pushed himself from the chair and gestured furiously. "Why, what—what would you do without me! What—"

She smiled wearily. "I'll get along."

"But people will talk! You know what's been written about us! The Perfect Married Team! Angela and Charles! We can't wreck—"

"I'm sick of being written about. I'm sick of smiling a lie. Perfect!" She laughed with tired scorn. "Every friend I have knows about you and that little dancer. Once it hurt; now I just don't care. I'm just tired and I'm through, Charles."

He did not move. Charles Grand had never been able to think fast. Now he simply stared at her. His cigarette burned his fingers. He threw it down. Angrily he swallowed. "There's somebody else! You want to marry somebody else!"

Her blue eyes stayed level and calm. "I'm not going to lie. There is someone else. There has been someone for a long time. No, don't— It isn't like the dancer, Charles. He wants me to marry him. I—I'm not sure. Perhaps I will, but it won't be for a year. Maybe two. I want to think, this time. I want to be sure."

"Who is it?" he raged.

"There's no reason why I should tell you. You'd only make a scene. You'd start gossip—"

"I know! It's Ben Loring—my stand-in!" His voice reached toward hysterical fury. "I saw it! In that picture tonight! When he took my part for the fight-scene! When you kissed him! I saw the way you—"

"Charles—" Her voice was strange. "What made you think of Loring?"

"Why shouldn't I? He has to be the one! His face . . . his eyes and hair! Everything about him is like me! My stand-in. Of course you want him! Now I see—"

"Oh, Heavens . . . your vanity," she whispered. She laughed, as though at some ironic joke on herself. "So I had to fall in love with a man who looks like you!" The laughter faded. "No, Charles. It isn't Loring. Next time I marry, the man will be as different from you as possible."

"You're lying! It is Loring! I saw! I know! You little—"

"Get out! Please get out," she begged quietly.

"You can't do it! I won't let you ruin my career to—"

Angela rose. Her blue eyes were blazing. Her fingers were clenched at her side. "I didn't want to say it. I helped you get the first contract you ever had. I asked to be cast with you, to help you. I begged Fredricks to renew you two years ago. I've told you— Paul's told you—we've all told you to quit drinking and gambling! I've paid and paid your debts! I can't pay any more. I don't have any more mon—"

"You do! You always start—"

"I don't have any more money to give you," she repeated coldly. "Now please get out and leave me alone."

"But I—" His voice faded from harsh anger. "I've got to have some tomorrow to—" He swallowed. The anger flooded blindly back, whipped by the old pity for himself. "You're lying! Everybody's against me! You and Mason and Loring and— Nobody cares about me!" He turned. He slammed the door behind him. Then he stopped. He waited for her cry that would call him back; for her words that would say she was sorry. . . . Nothing came. Nothing but the silence. . . .

Slowly he moved down the hall, down the steps. "Loring . . . Loring . . . I

know! She was nothing until she met me!" Savagely he opened the liquor-cabinet and pulled out the bottle of scotch.



AS HE drank, the great tide of self-pity drew its soft blanket about him. Things had always been against him— He remembered the men who had hated him: even his father. People had never tried to understand him.

"Damn them all!" he choked. He took another drink. Then he remembered Borin, Borin's eyes. . . . Tomorrow, Borin had said.

"He can't do anything to me! Nothing but a gambler!" The words were no good. Deeply and frenziedly, Charles Grand feared Borin. He feared the lazy words of the man. He feared the thick hairy fingers. He feared tomorrow.

He took another drink. He looked toward the ceiling—toward Angela's room. "She's got it! She's got plenty of money! She just wants me to—to get in trouble! She could give me enough—"

He choked harshly. "She's got to! I can't tell Borin that I can't pay! He'll beat me! He might . . . might even—" Charles closed his eyes. He trembled. Suddenly he stared upward again. He sat down the bottle. Slowly he crossed the room, toward the stairs. He climbed slowly, silently, always watching the ceiling. Down the hall he tip-toed. Slowly he turned the knob of Angela's door. It opened silently. He closed it behind him. He started across the rug. A board creaked beneath his foot.

Angela looked up sharply. She frowned, then the frown faded into a light of sharp uneasiness. "I asked you to leave me alone. Please get out and don't—"

"I—I've got to have some money. Got to have it tomorrow." His voice was thick. He stopped beside her. "You've got it! You—"

"I don't! That money I gave you three months ago was the very last I had! I— Charles! What—" she started.

"You're lying to me! You want to ruin me! Marry another man and get me laughed at! You want Borin to kill me! You—"

"Don't! Oh, Don't!" she cried as he

gripped her shoulder. "I'm not getting you laughed at! Nobody knows! Nobody . . . You're hurting me, Charles!" She tried to pull away, to slap him. He held her.

"I've got to have that money! You're not going to run out—"

"You're drunk! You— Oh!" she screamed as his fingers twisted her arm. Her cry frightened him. He began to pant. He tried to grasp her throat. Suddenly she was fighting with a wild silent terror. Her blue eyes flashed. She tried to bite him, to kick him. And as suddenly Charles was terrified. If she got loose, she would call the police. And there was something else—perhaps the blind fear of his first fight. For Charles had never fought before.

"Oh, don't— Please— My arm—" Angela sobbed. Then she screamed—not loudly. It was scarcely a sob. Charles heard it, as he heard the sickening snap that told him he had broken her arm. He started to release her. She jerked away. One moment she swayed, as though she might fall. Then she stumbled and plunged toward the door.

Charles leaped after her. Down the hall he plunged behind her. They reached the stairs together. He grappled for her. His fingers hit her shoulder but could not hold. She staggered with the impact. She screamed again. Then she fell. Once she hit the marble landing and rolled the rest of the way. She lay quite still and small at the bottom.

"She—I—" he whispered. Hypnotically he started down. He stopped at the bottom. She seemed very small, lying there. She looked as though she were sleeping, with her golden curls tumbled about her head; with her fingers relaxed and open.

"Angela—" he whispered. "Angela! Angela!" Now he shouted. He dropped to his knees. He shook her. "Angela!

Wake up! Don't do this! Don't leave me like—Angela! I'm afraid! What am I going to do! I—" He began to cry.

After his sobs, the silence haunted his ears. He rose and backed away from the stairs. He stumbled across the living room and poured a drink from the bottle.

"Got to think . . . think of something quick," he panted frantically. "The police . . . Loring! He'll tell them it was me! He'll tell them she was going to leave me! If—if Loring couldn't tell—" He stood very still. His ears were remembering Angela's words: 'Nobody knows' . . ."

"Then only Angela and Loring—"



IN THAT moment, in that silence, Charles Grand made the only real decision of his life. He knew that he would have to kill Ben Loring. He knew it would have to be now.

The realization brought a hard hot nausea in his stomach. He trembled violently. He closed his eyes. But the image of Angela remained—still and crumpled on the floor.

"If I can kill Loring—kill him and keep anybody from knowing," he began to think. "Then this house . . . everything of Angela's . . . mine! I'll pay Borin! I'll have money—"

He opened his eyes. Angela had a small target pistol in the garage, he knew. Loring's cottage was away from other houses. He would be home.

He tried to think. A robber might have killed Angela, he supplied. Angela heard a noise! She was alone. She investigated. She found the thief in the house. In the struggle, she was thrown downstairs.

Charles felt a quick surge of pride at his idea. He hurried to the wall-safe behind the painting above the mantle. He worked the combination, then opened the

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round steel door. Within were a few bonds; around fifty dollars in cash; Angela's diamond necklace. He scattered the cash on the floor. He hid the bonds and necklace in the back of the piano.

He looked at his watch. It was twelve-thirty. He took a last drink from the bottle. He did not go past the stairs where Angela lay. He went through the kitchen to the garage and got the 22 target pistol. Silently, with the lights off, he backed the car from the garage.

He left the car in the driveway beside Ben Loring's tree-cloaked cottage. As he crossed the grassy dark lawn, he released the safety of the gun and slipped it into his pocket. He knocked. Presently a light went on inside. Soft steps padded across the floor. The door opened and Ben Loring blinked out.

"Huh? Oh, Grand! Come in," he invited sleepily. He was a man much like Charles—alike in features and build.

"I was out this way. Thought I'd drop in. I—I thought we'd have a drink." His words sound stiff and hollow in his ears. He wondered if Loring could tell.

"Sure, I— Sure, come in," the man said uncertainly. Charles entered the room slowly. He swallowed. He wiped sweat from his chin. "I'll get the stuff," Loring said. He glanced strangely at Charles as he left the room. Presently sounds came from the kitchen—ice-trays clattering; glasses clinking.

Slowly, without breathing, Charles began to tip-toe. Across the room he went. Down the hall. At the kitchen-door, he paused. He could feel the trembling throb of his pulse as he drew out the gun. He looked at Loring's wide pajama-clad back, looked at the thickness between the shoulder blades. Slowly he lifted the gun. It shook. He clenched his teeth. His eyes blurred. He sobbed. He never knew just when he pulled the trigger.

The sharp quick crash hammered through the room. Loring cried out. A glass crashed. Loring staggered against the wall and twisted. His agonized black eyes hung on Charles. His contorted lips strove for some word. It never came. He sank down. His finger-nails made a slow scraping sound on the wall. His breath was a labored sigh. Then his eyes rolled backward. He did not move again.

Charles Grand looked. His eyes would not leave the thin trail of blood that was growing on the floor. He could not breathe. He knew he was going to be ill. Suddenly he turned. Wildly he stumbled through the house. He hurled himself into the car and clashed the gears. Gravel hailed beneath the fenders. A mile away he threw the gun into a small ravine. He drove more slowly, trying to calm his nerves. It was one-forty when he entered his house again.

There lay Angela. . . . A horrible loneliness choked Charles.

He moved to the telephone and dialed. "Police . . . Charles Grand," he said thickly. "Somebody has . . . killed my wife—"

The next morning it moved the war news off the head-lines.

BRUTAL MURDER OF ANGELA ARDEN SHOCKS ALL HOLLYWOOD!

ANGELA ARDEN, AMERICA'S SWEETHEART, MURDERED BY UNKNOWN THIEF!

POLICE SPREAD NET FOR SLAYER OF ANGELA ARDEN! NO CLUES!

Each paper carried their stories: 'Midnight thief clubs actress to death. . . . Death shatters the PERFECT TEAM. Charles Grand, husband of Angela, prostrate with sorrow. . . . Home to be sold. . . . Last rites tomorrow afternoon . . . Manhunt continues. . . . Rewards total fifty thousand dollars. . . .

On the second pages, brief notices were given to the murder of Benjamin Loring, character actor and stand-in for Charles Grand.



THE Chapel was filled the next afternoon. The last rites were done. With many others, Charles cried. As he left the Chapel, a hand touched his elbow. "Over here a minute," a voice said quietly. It was Borin. Charles followed him to one side.

"I've been so upset," he started. "I've had no time to—"

"I'm not dunning you at a funeral," Borin said measuredly. His hot lazy eyes

settled firmly on Charles' face. "And I never gave lectures. I just wanted to say: If you did it, Grand, I hope to hell they burn you."

"What do you mean!" Charles gasped. "What in the—"

"You heard it." The man turned and walked away. Charles began to sweat. Those lazy eyes . . . they had known! A blind choking urge to run assailed him. He swallowed.

"I'll drive you home, Grand," a voice offered. He turned. There was the tall freckled-faced Paul Mason. "I want to tell you something, anyway." He gestured toward his car. Charles followed.

"I'm sorry. Sorry as everything, Grand," Mason said simply. "I know it's not good to start talking business so quick, but I think you better know. This murder has put you back in the public-sympathy. I can get you a one-picture contract with Sandburn. He called me this morning. It'll be a tragedy, kind of modeled after the Perfect Team idea of you and Angela. It'll be a come-back chance. You better take it while it's offered."

"I . . . I don't know. I can't think—" Charles fumbled.

"I know. Take a few days to make up your mind."

* * *

It was hot and still in the hotel suite Charles had taken. He drank a little. No more did the warmth come into his stomach. Now there was only a sick sharp nervousness. He turned on the radio, then snapped it off. The announcer was telling of the manhunt for Angela Arden's killer. He paced the silent room. Suddenly the telephone ripped the stillness. He lifted the receiver.

"Charles Grand?" a man's voice asked—a voice very soft and strangely lonely.

"This is Charles Grand," Charles said. "Who are—"

"I am lonely, Charles Grand. I am so sad and lonely. There is nothing but silence down in a grave. Have you ever been in a grave? . . . Do you know how still it is down here? . . ."

"Who . . . Who are you?" Charles whispered. "What . . . who—"

"I am Ben Loring. I am the man you killed."

Charles screamed. The soft click of the distant receiver broke his cry. The line hummed. He stared. Frozenly he backed away from the black instrument. A violent spasm of chill shook his body. "No! No! he panted. "It couldn't be. Dead men can't—" He stumbled to the bottle and drank. It did no good. Suddenly he rushed to the door and locked it. He lowered the windows, locked them, and pulled down the shades. Now the silence shouted against his ears—shouted with the lonesome words of the corpse. Charles began to cry; crying came very easy with Charles Grand. At last, hours later, he collapsed on the bed. He slept in the realm of nightmare.

It was midmorning when he woke up. A sensation of blank unreality shimmered in his mind. He tried to remember as he stared at the wall. Then he did remember. The call!

He pulled himself up and looked at the telephone. "I—I was just nervous," he whispered thickly. "It didn't happen . . . couldn't!"

He moved to the dresser and studied his heavily handsome face. Absently he smoothed his small moustache. He began to change his clothes. He turned on the radio. Eventually a news-report came on. War news. . . . Then a local report. Police had arrested a fruit-picker on a Los Angeles highway. In his possession the man had a target pistol. It had been proved that it was the weapon employed in the murder of Benjamin Loring. The fruit-picker continued to maintain that he had found the gun in a ravine.

Charles smiled faintly. "A fruit-picker." He smiled again. The telephone rang. Automatically he answered. "Yes? Grand speaking."

"I am not so lonely now, Charles Grand," spoke the sad and distant voice. "Angela is with me now. She has told me everything that happened that night."



CHARLES' breath tangled. His muscles strove to hurl away the receiver. Some inner locking power held him motionless. The sad far voice murmured on: "I know how you killed her, Charles Grand. You killed her

because she was coming to me. But now she is with me. Perhaps it is best that way, lonely as it is down here."

"You— You're mad! You can't be dead and talk—"

"I can't, yet I am, Charles Grand. And all through your life I shall call you. You shall hear from me at midnights, and in the early mornings. Do not try to escape me. Do not try to run, for I shall be everywhere. We send you our hate, Charles."

"You—" And there was only the hum of the dead line.

Charles staggered back from the telephone. He covered his eyes with his hands. One time he screamed. He clawed at his coat, plunged toward the door, and jerked it open.

"What the devil?" In the hall stood Paul Mason. He stared at Charles blankly. "Are you sick?"

"Sick? Charles echoed dazedly." No. I— Oh, I'm going crazy! Things—I need Angela," he sobbed.

"You better sit down. You look like hell." Mason pushed him back into the room and poured him a glass of water. Charles gulped it down. He was glad to hear the dry voice of Mason—glad to have someone with him. He fumbled out a cigarette.

"I wanted to ask you about the Sandburn deal," Mason said.

"No! I can't! I've got to—got to get away from this place! I can hear that—" He stopped and swallowed. "I can't work, Paul," he said more quietly. "I'm shot to pieces."

Mason frowned, then shrugged. "It's your business. I'm telling you, though: You better grab while you can."

"I can't! Paul— What do the police say about Angela? About the man who—about the murderer?" he whispered.

"I heard from Grabbener a little while ago. They're about to tie it all to a fruit-picker. They've identified a gun as Angela's target pistol. It had her initials. The same gun killed Loring. They can't figure out just what the connection between the two murders is, but they've got the heat on the picker. He's got a record downstate for petty theft, too."

"Oh." Charles mopped his face. "I'm so glad." He rose and breathed deeply.

"Let's go have breakfast. I've got to eat."

"Okay. But you're not taking the Sandburn offer?"

"I'll tell you tomorrow. Maybe."

When Charles Grand returned to the hotel from dinner that evening, he felt better. He had read the afternoon papers. They had told again of his perfect marriage with Angela. They had spoken of his great sadness. And in his mind, Charles knew they were right. He realized now: he hadn't killed Angela. She had merely fallen. It had been her fault.

Whispers followed him through the lobby. Someone took his autograph. The distant sad voice of the telephone was far away in his mind. He closed the door of the suite and sighed. He wondered what the house would bring. Perhaps sixty thousand?

The telephone rang. With the shrill sound, a fragment of terror rushed back. He stood, watching the receiver. "I won't answer!" he said harshly. "I won't be frightened!"

The telephone kept screaming. His fingers started out. With a fantastic sensation of self-torture, he longed to hear the voice . . . only once more.

Slowly he lifted the instrument. "Hello?" he said carefully.

"Good-evening, Charles Grand." It was the voice, melancholy and soft. "We have been laughing at you, Charles. Angela and I have been laughing sadly. You will be accused of her murder before morning. You didn't know that, did you, Charles?"

"What do you mean?" he raged. "I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Remember, Charles? She was writing a letter when you found her last night. That letter was to me. In that letter she told me that she had just explained to you that she was leaving you for me. She explained that you had just come in; that you were very angry. She wrote all that after you left the room the first time. And you killed her before she could finish her letter." The voice waited one long moment. "And Charles? . . ."

THAT letter still lies on her table. There the police will find it. They will find it and accuse you of murder. For I am going to



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call them now!" The voice laughed abruptly, loudly. "I am going to call them now!" he screamed. The connection broke.

Charles did not move. He felt the receiver slip from his fingers. He heard it hit the floor. Calling them . . . Letter. . .

"She *was* writing a letter!" he whispered. "No! It's a trick! Borin— He's doing it! He's trying to trick me into going out there and— But he couldn't know all that! Angela would have had to tell someone she was writing and that I left the room once! And she couldn't tell. She died before anyone talked to her!" He froze. "That means that . . . that she is talking to Loring somewhere. Means he is calling me from the grave!

"No, I— Corpses can't—I'm crazy— But he did call! And he's calling the police! They—they will know!" Charles whimpered. The sound was wild and like the baby-cry of an animal.

"I'll go! I'll get there first! I'll destroy it!" he choked. "I won't let them know! They can't prove—" He plunged wildly out the door.

The headlights of Charles' car sprayed over the dark house as he skidded the tires into the driveway. He cut off the motor and ran to the side-door. As the key grated in the lock and the door opened, the still blackness of the house seemed to murmur in wordless whispers. He hesitated, glancing back at the night behind him. He could see nothing, hear nothing. Slowly he tip-toed into the hall. The door whined shut behind him, giving him the sharp sensation of imprisonment.

On through the darkness he felt his way. In his blindness he seemed to see before him the motionless small figure of Angela, crumpled upon the marble stairs. And it seemed that somewhere above the whisper was monotonously saying: "Charles Grand killed us . . . He killed us both, Angela . . . Killed us both, Angela . . ."

He touched the stairs. Step after frozen step he climbed.

"Nerves— Just my nerves," he panted. "Nobody called me— Dead men can't call—I'll show myself . . . I'm not afraid."

Into the upper hall he went, and to the door of Angela's room. He took a deep breath. He turned the knob. Into the darkness he stepped. Across the rug he

felt his way. He found the writing-table. His searching fingers moved over the blotter, over the shelf. He found no letter. He snapped on the light. The table was bare.

He breathed with relief. "I knew it wasn't real! Just my nerves!"

"Here I am, Charles Grand. Here by the window," a voice murmured. Charles jerked around.

"What are—" His voice died in a choking gasp. Ten feet from him stood the figure . . . a figure inhuman and grotesque! The clothes were wet and grey and formless as they sagged from about the frame. Small pools of dripping water were gathered about each shoe. The face was scarcely a face at all. The features were clay-like and grey and damp. The mouth was a scar, as were the eyes and nose. The hair was a mass of the grey mud. Yet through the wet texture, brightly burning eyes gleamed out. And in one sticky hand was a gun.

"I am glad that you came, Charles," the voice said sadly. "For now I shall kill you, as you killed me."

"You— You're Loring!" His tongue turned thick. He wanted to scream. To run. He wanted to beg and cry. He could do nothing.

"I am Loring. I am the corpse of the man you murdered. And now I am going to kill you. Kill you where you killed Angela. Turn, Charles. Walk slowly. We shall go back to the marble stairs. There is where you shall die."



CHARLES whimpered wordlessly. Strangely he felt himself moving. He was walking across the room, and the corpse was walking behind him. He came to the stairs, and in that moment he remembered the golden hair of Angela; the laughter and lips of Angela.

"Don't—don't let him hurt me—" he whimpered to her. "I'm afraid— He—he's going to kill me . . . Angela."

"Down the stairs," spoke the voice. "At the bottom you will die."

Charles obeyed the voice as he might obey the command of nightmare. His glazed eyes watched the bottom step move near . . . near. . .

"Now. Good-bye, Charles Grand," whispered the voice.

Charles screamed. He leaped and sprawled across the floor. Wildly he scrambled up, screaming insanely. He tore open the door and plunged across the porch. He fell into the hedges and felt their sharp briars rake his smooth immaculate forehead. He heard the steps of the corpse, following.

He dragged himself up and fled wildly across the lawn toward the dark street. His endless screams tore against his own ears and echoed back to him from the night. His feet beat a violent staccato as he ran down the concrete walk.

Behind him the following voice cried: "Wait! Wait for me to kill you—"

"Help me! Somebody help!" Charles wailed.

Then he saw the uniformed figure ahead—a policeman!

His screams became more frantic.

"Help me! He—the dead man! He's going to kill me!"

He fell at the feet of the cop and clutched the man's legs.

"Who the devil . . . Grand!" the cop exploded. "Who wants to kill you?"

"Ben Loring! His corpse! I killed him! I shot him! It was me! Now he's going to kill me." Charles tightened his grip on the legs. "Stop him! Stop—"

"You're drunk!"

"I'm not! I know. I killed him. I killed Angela! She was leaving me. Wouldn't give me money. Was going to marry Loring! I— Stop him before—"

"There's nobody behind you," came the blunt answer. Charles turned slowly. There was no one—nothing but the dark and empty street!

"But you killed 'em, huh?" the cop echoed. "That's a nice little story for me to take you downtown with. Let's go."

"But— He was— I saw—" Suddenly Charles collapsed on the walk and began to cry in soft and shaking sobs.

The cop pulled him roughly up.

* * *

Slowly the man closed the door of his room behind him. In the bathroom he began to wash away the grey wet clay

on his face. As he worked, his features were slowly revealed. When he was done, he looked at himself soberly. His eyes were tired. His whole face was tired and plain . . . the homely freckled face of Paul Mason.

He returned to the room. For a long time he merely looked at a folded sheet of paper on his desk. At last he unfolded it. There, in a neat feminine hand, were these words:

Dear Paul,

This is hard to write. I know that you will never really understand, Paul. But let me say . . . I am deeply grateful for your love. I do mean that. I suppose it is just the unreasonable way of a woman that she does not always love the man who loves her. . . .

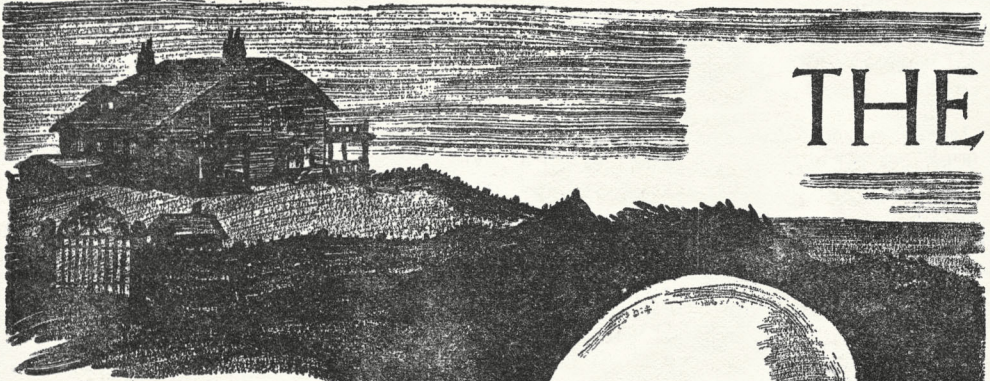
I know all those other things, Paul . . . I know that I shall always have to take care of Charles. I know that he will always drink and gamble. Perhaps he will never be faithful. I really don't know why I keep on loving him. I just do, that's all. And because of my love, I have finally made a plan. Maybe it will work for a little while . . . I am going to frighten him; going to lie to him. I must save him; make him get a grip on himself . . . Tonight I intend to tell him that I am leaving him. I will tell him I love someone else. Perhaps that will wake him up, if only for a while. . . .

I was interrupted. Charles just came in. He is drunk again. I told him, and he was furious. With his childish vanity, he accuses me of loving Ben Loring—simply because Loring resembles him! This hurts, Paul . . . But I must be strong. I must carry out my plan. I must not give him money now. I must make him stand on his own feet. I . . . I hear him coming back. I am afraid we shall have a scene. . . ."

That was all. Slowly Paul struck a match. He watched the sheet of paper blaze, crumble, then sift in ashes to the floor. He closed his eyes.

"Strange," he whispered. "Both of us, trying to help him. The only reason I went to his house that night was to cheer him up. But he'd already killed her. He— But Lord, he wasn't worth helping!" he sobbed harshly. "Angela would still be here if—"

He clenched his fingers. He sighed. "Maybe I shouldn't have done it, Angela—I had to. You see? He killed the only thing I loved."



THE

Novelette of Macabre
Menace

By

EDWARD S. WILLIAMS

What was the sinister secret of the old Wolfe House? The fisher folks whispered of werewolves—and worse. But the Coast Guard was more grimly concerned with the sinking of our cargo laden ships within sight of the Cove.

CHAPTER ONE

The House on the Headland

FROM his window overlooking the Harrington Cove Convoy Base, Bob Falconer watched the harbor activity. Bob had been a naval flyer until his flaming plane had plunged into the debris of Pearl Harbor. Finally he spoke with a bitterness.

"As badly as we need trained men, wouldn't you think they could find a place for me, Dick, in spite of this stiff knee of mine?"

The younger man, in Coast Guard uniform, was Bob Falconer's brother. He commanded a cutter operating from the Cove.

"Bob," he said, "I know how you must



He blazed futile
bullets into some-
thing monstrous be-
neath the face.

FACE THAT KILLED



feel. But you've done a job! There aren't many men who can claim ten Jap planes in as many minutes."

Bob turned, forcing a smile. "Forget it, Dick. You'll carry on where I left off. And I'll finish my book about the Cove's history as a smuggler's base in the eighteenth century."

The youngster said eagerly, "That's the stuff! And look—" he pointed toward the dunes overlooking the harbor, and to the big house that stood in desolate abandonment on the skyline, "there's a story in that old place I was thinking of it today when I took a squad up there on patrol."

"The Wolfe place?" Falconer's eyes lifted. "There is a story there if I can only get it out of old Thaddeus Hayes. He's the caretaker of the place, you know."

"Mary's grandfather?" Dick mirrored surprise.

Bob nodded, glancing at his watch, and thinking of Mary Hayes. He had a date

with her tonight, but Mary had said she had some school work to finish first.

Dick blurted, "Bob, why don't you marry the gal? If you weren't my brother and a D.F.C. hero, I'd damn' well give you some competition!"

Again Bob didn't answer. Mary was one reason why he remained in Harrington Cove. She was why he was trying so desperately to build a new career. Mary could have been a success in any field she chose, but she had returned from college to this backward fishing village, to teach its one-room school and to care for her aging grandfather. A disabled Naval officer—even a Distinguished Flying Cross man—could not expect a girl like Mary Hayes to marry him. Or so Bob thought.

He covered it with a grin and changed the subject. "You boys watching the Wolfe place, are you?"

Understandingly, Dick followed Bob's lead. "It's too close to the Base for us not to—even though there's been no one there for twenty-five years. But how come Mary's grandfather is still caretaker? He's too old and feeble to do much, isn't he?"



BOB agreed. "That's one of the queer things about the place. But this Bertram Wolfe was a queer duck generally. He built the house for his bride. Thaddeus says she was a beautiful woman, but that Wolfe was so jealous of her he hardly let her out of doors. He was a scientist of some sort—always in his basement, experimenting and writing. But to the ignorant people here, he was the Devil himself. They even say that Wolfe had cloven hoofs for feet. It's a fact that he had something wrong with his feet, and wore specially made shoes."

Bob paused. Dick said, "Yeah. The basement's still fitted up as a laboratory. There're tiers of cages—like for rats, or guinea-pigs."

"That's part of the legend about Wolfe," Bob went on. "He was supposed to torture animals in his devilish rites. But the pay-off came when his son was born."

"How so?"

"Why, because he'd permit no one to see the child—not even Thaddeus, who'd been his caretaker from the first. So the stories began to crop up. The baby, they said, was a judgment of God on Bertram's dark doings. It was an idiot—a werewolf—half human and half animal—and so on."

"But my gosh—didn't Wolfe call in a doctor when the child was born?"

"That added the climax, Dick. The doctor turned his car over on the way home and killed himself. Accidental death due to a heart attack while driving, was the coroner's verdict. But nobody in the Cove believed it. That was when Wolfe had the wall built around his garden, with the gate-house where all his purchases were delivered. No one ever saw any more of the Wolfes until the day they packed up and left. And the boy, a child of three by then, was *masked* when they drove away"

"Ye Gods, Bob," Dick said, "there's a whale of a story in that!"

"I'm working on it," Falconer went on. "But Thaddeus is the only one left who knew much about the Wolfes, and he doesn't want to talk."

"But he's still caretaker, you say. Where's Wolfe?"

"All over the world. Every year Thaddeus gets a letter enclosing money. Mary says the letter is always the same: 'Keep my house in repair, and keep people out of it. Some day I shall return.' Or some such message. Those letters have come from Asia, Africa, and all the capitals of Europe. Since the war, Mary told me, they've come from Portugal. There's another one due any day. . . And that reminds me." Again Bob glanced at his watch and smiled, "I'm due at the Hayes house any minute myself. More research."

"I'll bet!" Dick mirrored his grin. "But you ought to keep after that yarn."

"I'm going to," Falconer said, as they went out together.

Dusk had yielded to full darkness when the two men separated. Bob walked. His way led him toward the Wolfe place, for old Thaddeus Hayes' quaint cottage was the halfway mark between the village and the dark house on the dunes. Bob let himself through Thaddeus' gate and went up the sea-shell paved walk to the door.

He knocked—and tensed in stunned surprise.

The door was thrown open instantly. Mary faced him, pale as death. Her red-gold hair was wind-blown and dishevelled, blue eyes wild, lips trembling. For seconds she stared at him as at a total stranger, utterly terrorized, speechless. Then she flung herself into his arms. He felt the quivering of her body against his. Her words were barely intelligible.

"Oh, Bob," Mary sobbed, "thank God you've come! I think I must be insane! I saw it! I don't believe it—and yet I saw it!"

Falconer held her close. "Mary," he gasped, "what is it? What's happened? Where's Thaddeus?"

"He's in there," she moaned. "I had to all but carry him back home. He's conscious, but he can't—or won't—speak to me. He just sits and stares and—"

"Bob?" The voice was like the croak of a frog. "Bob—is that you? Come in here—Bob."

It was Thaddeus, and Mary's fingers tightened on Falconer's lapels. Gently he disengaged her grip. He pushed her inside and closed the door.

Old Thaddeus Hayes lay in a chair, his withered hands lax on his thighs. Never a big man, he seemed no larger now than a ten-year-old boy. He seemed to have shrunk and withered. His eyes were strangely alight, yet not with fear—rather with some overwhelming inner excitement.



BUT having spoken once, whatever spell it was that held him silent was broken. "I'm all right now, Mary, honey," Thaddeus panted. "There for a while I—well, I just couldn't talk, that's all. I reckon I must ha' gone out o' myself a little. But that's to be expected when you see a—"

"No!" Mary cried out. "Don't say it again! I don't believe it, but— Oh, Bob—Bob—it was horrible! So ghastly white that it shown in the dusk. The face *without any body*. A face that floated toward me—" She whimpered and clutched at Falconer again.

In spite of bewilderment, Bob felt his

flesh crawl. A face, without a body—floating. Had she been to the beach? Had Mary seen a dismembered corpse from some torpedoed ship washed ashore?

More calmly, now, Thaddeus stated, "Even if I hadn't seen him tonight, Bob, I'd ha' looked for him soon. He always said he'd come back. He'll be an evil spirit, of course, but after all he's only a spirit now. He'll stay up there where he belongs, an' we'll stay here."

Then Falconer found his voice. "Thad," he gasped, "what are you talking about? *What* did you see?"

"Why, the ghost of Bertram Wolfe, Bob," Thaddeus spoke as though Falconer should have known. "He died a month ago, in Lisbon, Portugal, the letter says. It came today. Show him the letter, Mary."

Bob's astonished eyes shot to her and Mary nodded. And then they all congealed where they stood, and their eyes went to the seaward windows.

The house shook. There was a muffled rumble, a deep concussion that they felt more than heard. Dishes in the cupboard by the fireplace rattled. The earth trembled, as with a distant quake.

The blast was like an icy deluge to Mary Hayes. Hysteria drained out of her. Fear was in her eyes, but it was a normal fear of something known and understood, however terrible.

"Bob!" she whispered. "Was that a torpedo? Another ship sunk?"

Falconer opened the door. To the southeast a lurid glow flamed on the horizon and died slowly. "If it was," he said grimly, "it must have been a munitions ship. That blast was more than a torpedo explosion."

Mary said huskily. "The crew—blown to pieces!"

"There's nothing we can do," Bob said. "But this—whatever it was you saw. Where was it, Mary—in the Wolfe house?"

"No, Bob," she shuddered, "it was in the garden. But that doesn't matter now. There may be a few survivors from that ship. They'll bring them here. I must get to the hospital."

"Wait." Bob was still dazed by Mary's terror. Had it been old Thaddeus alone who had seen the bodiless face, Falconer

would have dismissed it from his mind. But Mary was neither superstitious nor easily alarmed. Certainly they had seen *something*. He asked, "What were you two doing up there after dark?"

Mary answered distractedly, "Grandfather thought he'd left the wall gate unlocked."

Thaddeus said, "Bertram Wolfe will haunt his house because that's where his evil was done. Might be he won't ever appear again. Might be that he appeared to me only to let me know I needn't tend his place any longer. But there may be living men out there who'll need Mary's care. Take her down to the harbor, Bob. I'm all right now."

Bob left Mary at the Cove's Red Cross headquarters with a half-dozen women volunteers. Ship sinkings were nothing new to them. Survivors had been brought to the Convoy Base before. In spite of the Navy's unremitting precautions, ships had been sunk almost within sight of the harbor's mouth. But this was war. That was to be expected.

Or was it, Falconer questioned.

There was something at the old Wolfe house. Mary had seen it. Could a spy be the explanation of that seeming apparition? Could there be a Nazi agent in the Wolfe place, in communication with U-boat skippers? A man hidden there with a high-power telescope could see every ship-movement in the Cove.



BOB FALCONER was well known to the sentries at the main gate of the Base area. He was passed through and he went to the office of the commandant, Admiral Thurston, a ramrod of a man, grey-haired and steely eyed and abrupt. But he smiled and welcomed Bob.

Bob sat beside the admiral's desk. "That explosion at sea, sir," he said. "Another ship lost?"

Thurston nodded somberly. "Munitions," he stated tersely. "But whether it was a mine, sub, or accident aboard, we don't know and probably won't. I'm afraid there'll be no survivors, but I've just ordered your brother's vessel out to search the area."

Bob's hands closed slowly into hard fists, and unclenched slowly. He was at a loss as to what to tell Admiral Thurston. Certainly he couldn't say that Thaddeus and Mary had seen a ghost. Yet if he said they'd seen anything, they would be questioned—and no doubt politely dismissed as crazy, and himself with them. Finally he said,

"Admiral, I've been thinking of that old Wolfe place—in connection with ship sinkings. I know you've had the place watched, but—"

Thurston cut in, "We have indeed, Falconer, just as we watch all possible avenues for sabotage or espionage. There have been, I must admit, more than a normal percentage of ship losses lately. But it's simply evidence of a desperately stepped-up U-boat campaign. That Wolfe house is out of the question as a spy base. I'll tell you why in one word—communications."

"You mean—" Bob began.

"I mean that every scrap of mail from the Cove is studied for possible code messages. Every native who leaves here is watched. There is no telegraph wire to the Cove, or near enough to be secretly tapped from here. We have a mobile radio-detector constantly on the job. We keep a watch for blinker signals at night, and manual signalling by day. Even carrier pigeons are watched for. So you see—" He spread his hands in a gesture of finality.

Bob's first reaction was one of relief, but it was short-lived. Mary *had* seen something inexplicable at the Wolfe house—something with implications of the supernatural. But to Bob, there had to be a natural, physical explanation. He sat silent and Thurston went on,

"I assure you that we know all about the Wolfe house and its somewhat macabre history. We even have duplicate keys to the place. Incidentally, you might be interested to know that both Bertram Wolfe and his father had quite a reputation in some obscure field of research."

"His father, too?" Bob said. "What do you know about them, Admiral? I'm writing about the Cove, and I've planned a story about the Wolfes."

"Very little," Thurston replied. "Wolfe, Senior, died a few years ago. He

was a recluse. Suffered from some unusual affliction, I understand, and was sensitive about it. He shut himself up and wrote books.'

"What was wrong with him?" Bob queried.

"I don't know. Doubtless I could find out for you. But at any rate, the Bertram Wolfe who built this house here seems to have inherited his father's dislike for people, as well as his penchant for research and writing."

"Do you know what kind of research it was that they did?"

"No. However, I'll get you a copy of Naval Intelligence's full report on the Wolfes."

"I'll appreciate it." Bob rose to go, adding, "By the way, did you know that Bertram Wolfe himself is now dead? Thaddeus Hayes—the caretaker—was so informed in a letter he got today."

"So? Well, the N.I. boys are no doubt aware of the fact. They don't miss many tricks."

Bob left the Base and started walking. He was very restless; he knew he could neither sleep nor settle down to work on his book until he had solved this mystery. But what could he do tonight—now?

Suddenly he halted and his eyes lifted—to the Wolfe house. Unconsciously he had headed toward it. He stood in the road beside the Hayes cottage.

Bob Falconer grinned. Why not challenge the ghost of Bertram Wolfe at once? He could go up there now and search the house. Maybe Thaddeus would give him the keys, but if not, he'd get in somehow. He'd see what *he* would see.

Bob turned toward the cottage. The door was standing open and he went in without knocking.

Thaddeus was peacefully asleep in his chair. Bob found the ring of big, old-fashioned keys in Thaddeus' jacket pocket. The old man stirred uneasily, but he did not awaken.

CHAPTER TWO

The Thing on the Stairs

FALCONER was conscious of no fear as he approached the dark house on the dunes. He went carefully, but only because of a hunch that if

there were something here it was human, and alive, and possibly dangerous.

The house faced the sea, with a broad porch in front. Beyond, the barren dunes gave way to a deserted beach. Behind the house was the garden with its eight foot wall topped by splinters of broken glass. Rich top-soil had been hauled in to make the garden, Thaddeus had told Bob. Once it had been beautiful. Now the garden was a tangled mass of vines and foliage, gloomy and forbidding.

Bob reached the wall and the small gate-house. The door to the gate-house sagged open on rust-ruined hinges. But the stout door in the wall was closed and locked. After two tries, Bob found the key that opened it.

He stepped through into the garden. The very silence there seemed more profound. The antiseptic quality of the sea air was overpowered by the odor of dank foliage, and of mouldy earth never visited by the sun. But still Bob felt no dread of the supernatural. He simply did not believe in ghosts. Yet he froze when he saw it—

His heart stopped and breath deserted him. Suddenly the fear was there—fear such as he had not known was in him, but which is in us all, age-old and atavistic. Bob Falconer crouched in trembling paralysis. Ahead of him, dimly seen, terrible in its very vagueness, a monstrous figure loomed out of the tangled vegetation.

It was grey. It merged with the gloom and reappeared—moving, floating, swaying. Bob felt his scalp tingle and his spine crawl—then he swore softly.

The moon slid from behind drifting clouds. The ghostly figure stood out in lucid clarity. It was a marble fountain, surmounted by the life-size stone figure of a woman—a statue!

Was *this* the ghost, Bob wondered. Was this what Thaddeus and Mary had seen, its body screened by mist, the head and face alone visible?

But Thaddeus must have seen that statue a thousand times. Mary herself must have known of its existence. How could either of them have been so utterly overwhelmed by so familiar an object?

Uncertain again, Bob went on toward the house. He reached a glass enclosed conservatory and searched through the

keys until he found the right one. Double French doors led into the house proper.

He found himself in a long, low room with a fireplace at one end and an expanse of windows at the other. Furniture was hidden under grey dust-covers, themselves ghostly in the gloom.

He went on. This could be a beautiful house, he thought, and he dreamed of Mary and himself restoring it and living here: a happy ending to a somber tale. Then he remembered his purpose. He found the stairs leading to the basement.

The treads creaked dismally. There was a sudden rustle in the cellar that brought a return of the cold chill to his spine. But it was only rats, he knew.

At the foot of the stairs he struck a match. The tiers of small cages that Dick had mentioned covered one whole wall. There were tables, broken retorts and test-tubes, and other remnants of laboratory equipment. But the rats were the only living things to disturb the silence—perhaps the descendants of the rodents Bertram Wolfe had used in his mysterious experiments.

Falconer went back upstairs and to the second floor. He heard nothing, saw nothing. He found a heavy, dust-coated book on the shelf of a bedroom closet. But his last match went out before he could make out the title. Carrying the book, he returned to the central hall and the open stairway. He stood at the window in the hall, looking toward the dark sea.

He felt a sense of irritation for having taken this thing so seriously. After all, Mary was a woman, and therefore basically emotional. Thaddeus was eighty-five years old. His eyesight was bad; he was uneducated, steeped in the folk-lore of a century ago. Thaddeus was a good man, one of the salt of the earth, but he—

Bob stiffened suddenly. The hair on his neck bristled. He had still seen nothing; consciously he had heard nothing. Yet there was a frantic warning in him that was not of his conscious mind. "Turn!" it cried out. "Danger behind you! Turn quickly!"

The stairs, the only avenue of escape, were behind him. Something—he knew it without reason and in spite of reason—something was on those stairs, watching him, menacing him.

Bob wheeled—and recoiled in horror. He could not move. He ceased to breathe. The pound of his own heart deafened him; he heard the very surge of blood in his veins. A cold sweat broke out over his whole body.



IT WAS in the stairway! The face—the head, a ghastly white oval. It had no body—or did it? He thought he saw something beneath the Face—a dark, shapeless, monstrous mass. But the Face was there—he saw it with his own eyes.

Falconer heard a sobbing, strangling gasp. He didn't realize it was his own, as his starved lungs sucked air. He simply heard the sound, and the Face moved at the same time. It floated downward, backward. A smaller white something—swift as a bird—darted upward and disappeared.

Bob was conscious of a prickling, tingling sensation in his nose and throat. A dizziness assailed him. A mist seemed to interpose itself between Bob's eyes and the Thing on the stairs. A numbness began in his feet and hands. It spread upward through his body as the Face was slowly wreathed in mist, disintegrating as it went from sight.

He reeled drunkenly. He flung out his arms for support and found none. The dizziness increased. He could no longer see anything. His head whirled crazily as he threw himself in the direction of the stairs. And there was a crash of shattered glass, and total darkness.

* * *

Bob recovered to find himself sprawled on the front porch roof. He had plunged through the window in his dizzy blindness, not badly hurt.

His first reaction had been to go back, to search the house, to *know* once and for all. But he immediately realized that without light, with no weapon, he would be completely at the mercy of— Of what? Man, or specter?

He dropped down from the roof and started back to the village, clinging to the book he had found as though it were the only solid, real thing in a world gone suddenly crazy. That strange numbness

in his hands and feet persisted faintly. The prickling in his nose was gone, but there was a brassy taste in his mouth, and his head ached.

Was it man, or ghost, that he had seen? Was it some chemical or gas that had blinded and paralyzed him, or was it a supernatural power? Bob remained unable to believe the latter. But it seemed equally impossible that any human could remain long in the Wolfe house without discovery by patrols from the Base.

Bob reached the Hayes house. He must return the keys. If Thaddeus were awake, maybe he'd be more willing to talk when Bob told him what he had seen. But he didn't have to tell the old man.

Thaddeus was awake. He looked at Bob's face, then at the keys in his hand. Thaddeus nodded earnestly and said, "So you've seen him, eh, Bob?"

Bob handed over the keys. He sat down. "Mary not home yet?" he said.

"No."

"Thaddeus," Bob began, "I saw that white face that Mary described."

"Yes, Bob," the old man spoke with simple conviction. "You saw Bertram Wolfe's face. I recognized him. In life, he had the mark of the Devil on him—his cloven feet. Now the Evil One has claimed Wolfe for his own. He has sent him back to haunt the place where his evil deeds were done."

Bob shuddered—and cursed himself for a weak fool. "You say you recognized Wolfe's face, Thaddeus," he went on. "But did you—honestly, now—see the actual features of Bertram Wolfe?"

Thaddeus said, "No, Bob—I saw Bertram Wolfe's *ghost*."

Falconer swore again, silently. He changed tactics. "Thad, you mentioned Wolfe's feet. What was wrong with them? Did you ever see them without shoes? Do you actually believe Wolfe had cloven hoofs for feet?"

Thaddeus regarded him steadily, silently. Then he shook his head. "No good," he said, "will come of this. It will bring nothing but evil even to talk of him. I'll say no more."

"But Thad," Bob begged, "don't you see that we've got to get to the bottom of this?"

"We must leave him alone," Thaddeus said flatly. "I have been warned. Mary has been warned, and now you. Nothing but evil will come of trying to explain it away. I am going to sleep now. Good night."

"But Thad! In the name of reason, will you listen? We've got to— Oh, hell!"

Thaddeus Hayes had closed his eyes. His lips were clamped stubbornly. He would go to his grave, Bob knew, with the knowledge of Bertram Wolfe that only he possessed. There was nothing that could be done about it.



FALCONER entered his rented house and went at once to the phone. But there he hesitated. Somehow, he must tell Admiral Thurston about this, and get another search patrol up to the Wolfe house. Failing that, he must go himself and get the proof that would bring official action. Then he had a sudden inspiration.

Bob had struck matches all over the house. Perhaps their faint glow had been seen by someone in the village or at the Base. He reached for the phone. The commandant answered finally. Bob identified himself.

"Admiral," he said, "a few minutes ago I thought I saw light in a window of the Wolfe house. I may be wrong, but—"

"Thanks, Falconer," Thurston cut in. "We've already had a similar report and a patrol is on its way to investigate. And

If you like a dash of peppery Spanish temper mixed with hot-headed Irish recklessness, you'll like vivacious Conchita McCoy. You can meet her in the current issue of our companion magazine RANGELAND ROMANCES—in "The Heart of Conchita McCoy" by Ben T. Young. . . . Now on sale!

by the way, that ship that blew up was torpedoed. Your brother found one survivor."

"Only one?" Bob repeated grimly.

"Yes. The cargo consisted of block-busters."

"Poor guys," Bob said.

He hung up and sat in the dark, thinking. Then he reached for his phone again, put through a long-distance call, to a friend in New York. He asked him to find out all he could about Bertram Wolfe, and Wolfe's recluse father, and to call back as soon as he could. Then Falconer went to bed.

He was tired to the bone. He slept . . . and again in his mind, he was at the old Wolfe place. His memory duplicated every move he had made. Every sensation he had experienced was re-lived.

He felt that sudden, inexplicable sense of danger. He whirled and saw again the terrifying Face on the stairs. There was a burning in his throat and nose. His feet and hands felt cold and numb. His fearful chill crept slowly up his legs to his body, his heart, his brain. He was strangling, blind and paralyzed.

Again he fought to free himself from the awful, unknown power that enveloped him. He staggered crazily in a final, desperate attack upon the Face. And there was the crash of shattered glass. . . .

Bob awoke, sobbing, beside his bedroom window. It was broken. Both his fists were cut and sticky with blood. The luminous dial of his watch showed five A.M.; he had been asleep and dreaming. He had broken the window with his fists. Suddenly he swore aloud.

The sound in his throat was like the croak of Thaddeus' voice when the old man had broken the spell that held him speechless. There was the same thickness in Bob's tongue. His legs seemed wooden. There was the brassy taste in his mouth that he had experienced at the Wolfe house. But the thing that brought that hoarse oath to his lips was the fact that his window was tightly closed. It had been raised when he'd gone to bed!

Falconer felt his reason deserting him. How could he have *dreamed* the actual physical after-effects of whatever had happened to him at the Wolfe place? How could he have *dreamed* his window closed?

Someone, or something, had been here in his house, in this room. Then a new thought hit him like a physical blow.

He dressed frantically. Still dizzy and sick, he went reeling out to his car. Minutes later he braked in front of the Hayes cottage. He was out and limping to the door before the car was fully stopped. He didn't stop to knock. He hit the door in stride and the old lock snapped under the impact. He flung himself toward the door of Mary's room.

Strangled, wracking sobs reached him even before he flung open the door. Mary lay on her bed, writhing, struggling frightfully, as though against some beastly attack. There was no one else in the room. Her windows were all tightly closed.

Falconer caught the girl in his arms and carried her out, heeling the door shut. Weakly Mary fought him. He called her name over and over and finally she recognized him. Her arms closed about his neck. She sobbed on his shoulder.

They thought of Thaddeus. Bob put Mary down and lurched to the closed door across the living room. But there was no struggle here.

The room was quiet; the small form on the bed lay in utter stillness. And here, too, all windows were closed, and that faint pricking sensation assailed Bob's nostrils.

He threw open the nearest window. There was a kerosene lamp on the table and he lighted it. Behind him, Mary cried out, "Bob! Bob—he's dead! Oh, no! No—no—"

But Thaddeus was dead.

Bob covered the lined old face and drew Mary out of the room. He urged her to dress, but she clung to him in the darkness, sobbing wildly. "Oh, Bob, it was that Face again! I dreamed I saw it—I couldn't breathe—my feet, and then my—my whole body was cold and numb. But was it a dream? Could a dream have killed my grandfather? Bob, what is it?"

"I don't know," he answered.

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CHAPTER THREE

Horror Unmasked

A GAIN Bob Falconer faced Admiral Thurston—this time in Thurston's quarters. Bob's voice was unsteady; he knew his face must be pallid and drawn. The Admiral's concerned expression testified to that.

Bob spoke first. "Did your patrol," he asked, "find anything at the Wolfe house?"

Thurston shook his head. "Nothing, Falconer. But sit down, my boy. Let me pour you a drink. What's been happening to you?"

Bob tilted down the brandy Admiral Thurston brought him. Then he told the older man exactly what had happened.

He did it tersely, with no effort to play up his own reactions. He knew it sounded incredible, but he told it from the beginning. And Thurston watched him in amazement at first, then with thinly veiled concern.

When Bob had finished, the Admiral said tactfully, "Falconer, I never gave much thought to supernatural phenomena. I know that there are reputable men who have studied the matter seriously. I know that seemingly inexplicable things do happen. But do you believe. . ."

Bob cut in, "You don't have to be polite with me, sir. You think I'm crazy—and maybe I am. But I saw *something* in that old house!

"I believe, Sir, that that Something got into *my* house tonight and tried to kill me. I believe it did kill Thaddeus Hayes and almost killed his grand-daughter. The Lord knows I don't want to believe it was a—a ghost. But if it wasn't, then somebody is hiding—illegally, to say the least—in the Wolfe house. Mary, Thaddeus, and I myself saw *it*, or him, and maybe that's why an attempt was made on our lives. Don't you seen now what I'm getting at?"

"A spy, Falconer?"

"Yes."

"But I've told you why that's impossible. Communications. A spy in the Wolfe house would be corked up like a fly in a bottle. Don't *you* see?"

Bob nodded wearily. Thurston said,

"Falconer, you had a hell of a time after Pearl Harbor. But you did wrong to come here. What you need is your own kind of people—a good time—bright lights. Believe me, you've earned it! But you've shut yourself up here with nothing to do but brood, until—"

"Until," Bob cut in bitterly, "I've gone nuts and started seeing ghosts."

The admiral said gently, "No, my boy, I don't think that. But sometimes our human imagination is tricky. You saw—whatever it was—after you'd heard the story old Thaddeus told you. And what more natural, after such a harrowing experience, than that you all should dream of it? You say neither you nor the young lady suffered any lasting after-effects from this apparent poisoning, or gassing—or whatever?"

"No," Bob admitted.

"Then," Thurston said, "I think you've underestimated the mental strain a dream can exert. Old Mr. Hayes died in apparent peace, you say?"

Again Falconer nodded.

"Well, there it is. Hayes was quite old. He'd had a heavy shock. He simply died. Go on a binge, Falconer—get completely out of yourself. Meanwhile, I'll get that copy of Intelligence's report on the Wolfe place, and the Wolfe family, and you can add an interesting chapter to your book. Right?"

Bob forced a smile. He was too weary to argue any longer. Thurston slapped him heartily on the back. "We'll take care of Miss Hayes at the hospital, and I'll make arrangements for the old gentleman's funeral. You get some sleep now."

"Thanks, Admiral." Falconer saluted, from long habit, and went out.

It was full daylight when he again entered his house. He went to his bedroom and fell, fully clothed, across his bed. Exhausted, he was asleep in two minutes. . .

He awoke to the shrill, insistent summons of his phone.

His brain was numb; he felt drugged. Like a sleep-walker, he dragged himself to his desk and answered. And it all came back with a jolt—the ghost, Thaddeus' death, Bob's inquiry about Bertram Wolfe and Wolfe's father.

"New York is calling Mr. Bob Falconer," the operator told him.

Eagerly Bob said, "This is Falconer. Put him on. . . . Hello, Pete? What did you find out?"

The voice of his friend was genial. "What have you done, Bob—gone scientific on us? Or private dick?"

"A little of both," Bob replied. "You found 'em?"

"I couldn't get anything on the father, but there's a Bertram Wolfe, Junior, in 'Who's Who'. Just a few lines, but maybe they'll give you a lead to whatever you're after. Got pencil and paper?"

Bob uncapped his pen. "Go ahead."

He wrote swiftly. Twice he had to ask about the spelling of a word. Even then, he understood little of it. But finally he had it all down and he stared at it, frowning, while he said,

"Thanks, Pete. It doesn't mean much to me, but as you say, there may be a clue in it. I'm writing a sort of historical novel, and this Wolfe family offers some possible material. . . . Come down and see me. There's good fishing here."



HE HUNG up, and read again what he had written: Bertram Wolfe, Jr.; b. 1883, N.Y. In foreign residence since 1921. Researcher and writer on specialized physiological phenomena. Author: *Teratology* (1919); *Abnormal Embryonic Variation* (1923); *Deviations in Embryonic Development* (1937)."

Finally he dropped the slip of paper and got out his dictionary. For a few minutes he was occupied with that, his puzzled frown deepening. His eyes fell on a dusty book that lay on his desk. Suddenly he remembered it—the book he had found in the Wolfe house last night. He took it up and looked at the title for the first time! *Foetus In Foetu, A Study At First Hand*. The author's name was Bertram Wolfe, Sr. Avidly Bob opened it and began to read. . . .

The fading light awakened him to the passage of time. He glanced at his watch; it was after six, but time seemed unimportant in the mounting excitement and horror that his reading of an old book had inspired. He closed the dusty volume

with a shudder and caught up his phone again.

Mary was still at the Base. Bob inquired first about the funeral arrangements. Mary seemed calm and self-controlled again. Finally he said, "Mary, I've run into a lot of technical words in a reference work, and they're not in my dictionary. If I may, I'll look them up in your encyclopedia. Then I'm coming over to the Base. If you haven't had dinner yet, wait for me. . . ."

It was dark when Bob emerged from the Hayes cottage. Under his arm were three volumes of the encyclopedia, as well as the book by Bertram Wolfe's father. He put them into the car and drove back to his own house. Again he had forgotten time and hunger as well as Mary Hayes. He went to his phone.

Admiral Thurston answered and Bob said, "Admiral, this is Falconer again. And this time I've got something—"

"The Wolfe house again?" there was a trace of acid in Thurston's tone.

"The Wolfe house," Bob confirmed. "I know you're busy, but there *is* something up there in that house. I think I know what it is. I'm coming over. Get hold of Mary Hayes, will you? I want her there, too."

Thurston hesitated, then agreed. Bob hung up and rose—then paused over his typewriter. For the first time he saw the sheet of paper that was in the machine's roller. He pulled it out.

It was a typed note, to him:

Dear Bob:

I can endure this uncertainty no longer. Either there is something terrible at the Wolfe house, or there isn't. Reason tells me that what we experienced—you see, Grandfather told me last night that you had seen it, too—was a sort of self-hypnosis. Reason tells me that Grandfather's death was the result of a shock to an old heart and nervous system, and that you and I actually dreamed our near death last night.

But instinct, or some primordial race-memory, or plain superstition, tells me that I saw a ghost. After all, I was born in Harrington Cove.

I have gone to the Wolf place to try to find out, one way or another, which is right. If I see it again, I shall be convinced that Grandfather was right. I shall have no choice. But if I'm not back by midnight, come for me, will you?

Yours . . . Mary

For an instant after he had read her name, Falconer stood stunned. Mary had gone up there—alone! He forgot his possible answer to a ghostly mystery. He forgot the books, where the solution was down in black and white, for anyone to read and deduce the truth. Bob felt only the unreasoning terror of Man faced with the unknown. He remembered only that paralyzing horror that had come creeping into his bedroom, and into Mary's. Now she was up there alone—with *that!*

He cursed hoarsely as he snatched open a desk drawer and took out his service .45. He checked the magazine. He rummaged frantically for a flashlight, and couldn't find it. Then he could wait no longer. He ran downstairs to his car.



EVEN in the grip of frenzied haste and gnawing fear, Falconer's brain was functioning. He left his car at the edge of the salt marsh.

He reached the gatehouse and found the inner door to the garden gaping open. For a moment he paused there, listening, fighting an urge to shout Mary's name and to storm the house. But he forced himself to go slowly, quietly, across the garden to the conservatory.

Again the door was open. But there was no sound, no sign of Mary's presence. He went in to the central hall. His eyes leaped up the stairs. His fingers locked around the butt of the gun, thumb quivering on the safety. But there was no floating Face. There was nothing. Instinct led him to the rear of the house and the basement stairs.

Halfway down, he stopped. Something, he realized suddenly, was not as it had been when he was here before. And memory supplied the answer.

There was no rush of rats, no squealing and pattering. Something had happened to drive the rats to cover, to quiet them. Was it Mary? Was she down there? Was she still alive, or—

Some soft body was under his foot. There was the sickening sound of its crushing. Bob's throat constricted as he bent down and touched the thing. It was a dead rat. He struck a match.

Within the radius of the match's feeble glow, Falconer counted a dozen furry, motionless forms. The rats were all dead, and again memory gave him the reason for that. His heart skipped a beat. His eyes lifted from the floor. The match burned his fingers and went out, but Bob didn't feel the pain. In the last dying flare-up of the flame he had seen—the Face!

Falconer didn't try to light another match. He raised his gun and emptied it into the total darkness where the Face had been. He surged toward it, shooting. Something dark and formless passed over his head and before his straining eyes. Something soft and enveloping covered his entire upper body. He was entangled in it, as though he had run into a curtain of heavy velvet.

He flung himself to one side. He tripped and fell. He rolled frantically, only to become more completely wrapped, and trapped. A heavy weight hit him in the chest and stomach, driving the air out of him.

Desperately he fought to free himself. He lashed out with fists and feet. He gulped in air again—and there was a prickling in his nose and throat, and a numbness in his body worse than before. He was strangling, swiftly losing consciousness.

He redoubled his efforts to fight free of the folds that held him. It was like beating at a flood with empty fists. But though he felt that he was drowning, there was a conviction in his mind that he had finally clutched something solid in the vortex of this raging whirlpool.

He held on. Sounds he could not identify beat at his fading consciousness. He was tossed and battered by the raging whirlpool in which he was caught. His body had become a numb and useless weight that was dragging him away from the one solid thing to which he clung, and which it was death to lose. . . .

Then, miraculously, there was a cessation of sound and movement. The whirling ceased; the flood receded. He seemed to be coming back from a great depth, gyrating upward toward a light that swiftly became unbearable. And toward a voice that called his name over and over: "Bob! . . . Bob! . . . Bob! . . ."

He saw again, dimly. He saw the Face—white, wax-like, unhuman—like the face of a giant doll, beneath him. His own hands were locked about its throat. Other hands tugged at him, trying to lift him. A woman sobbed and pleaded.

Bob cried out and opened his hands. The Face disappeared. Bob struggled free of the last folds of the torn blanket that had trapped him. He lurched to his feet in his brother's arms.

He recognized Mary, then. She was beside him. The flashlight in Dick's hand illuminated the whole wall where the tiers of small cages were. One section of the cages stood at right angles to the rest. There was an opening in the wall behind it. Bob knew then that the ghost of Bertram Wolfe was laid. The strangled corpse at their feet was flesh and blood. And even though he suspected what was behind the doll-like mask that covered the face, even Bob was unprepared for the horror that was to come.

He knelt again over the corpse. The mask was of some smooth, hard, plastic material—the likeness of a strong-featured, beak-nosed man of Bertram Wolfe, Sr. But the mask was fitted as if to be worn throughout the twenty-four hours of the day.

That fact puzzled Bob—until he tore off the mask. And his breath caught. He shrank back involuntarily. He felt the hair on his neck stiffen; his stomach churned. Hoarsely he cried out, "Mary—don't look!" But Mary Hayes' sobbing scream told Bob that she had seen. He heard his brother's wordless outcry.

Then Bob recovered from the paralysis of his horror. He caught up the remains of the blanket and covered the ghastly thing on the floor. He reeled to his feet.

"Come on," Bob said thickly, pointing to the dark opening in the wall. "But be careful, Dick. This—thing—was a Nazi spy."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Man in the Plastic Mask

"A TELEGRAPH!" Dick Falconer breathed shakily, incredulously. "Bob, how did you get onto this? How was he using a

telegraph when there's no wire running outside the Cove?"

The underground room behind the tiers of cages was well stocked with supplies. It was lighted by a dry-cell outfit. The telegraph instrument was on a small table.

"But there is a wire," Bob pointed to the cable that disappeared into the wall of the chamber.

"Yeah, but where does it go? How could they have buried it without discovery? It would have taken miles of trenches."

Bob didn't answer at once. His eyes came to rest on a wooden box on a shelf by itself. Gingerly he took it down. Inside were a dozen padded compartments—like an egg box. There were seven round, white glass-like objects in the box, about the size of billiard balls . . . Mary watched Bob silently, her eyes still horror-filled.

Bob said, "Look at that cable again, Dick. They only had to dig as far as low-tide mark on the beach, and from there on lay their cable under water."

Dick swore. "A submarine cable! We thought of everything but that! But where does it go? Is there a U-boat stationed on the bottom at the other end of this wire?"

"No," Bob shook his head. "I think the cable runs ashore at some point that's less heavily guarded. Another Nazi agent signals the U-boats from there. Wolfe sent the word of ship movements from here, and the other agent relayed them."

"Wolfe!" Mary cried. "But Bob—that can't be Bertram Wolfe! It was the mask that Grandfather thought he recognized as Wolfe."

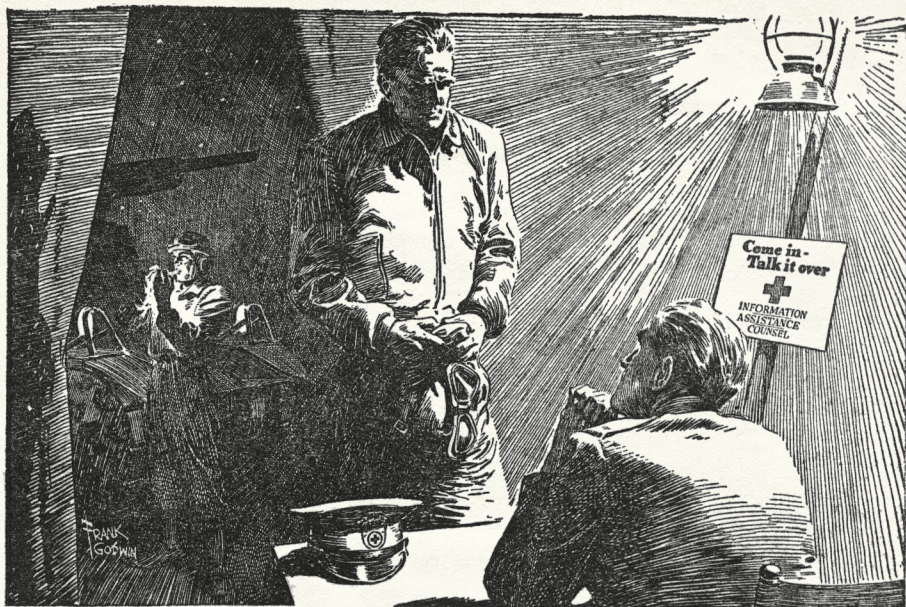
Bob said grimly, "Maybe. But what happened when you came here tonight?"

Again the shadow of terror crossed Mary Hayes' lovely face. "He brought me."

"What!"

"Yes, Bob! He was hiding in your house when I came for you. I thought finally that you must have become so engrossed that you'd forgotten the time. I went to your house—and he was there."

"Ye gods! Then it was he who wrote that note?"



"I'm worried about Ma..."

This boy is a casualty.

A few days ago, he was a hardened fighting man—with a glint in his eye and a set to his mouth that boded ill for his Axis foes.

Tonight he's just a bewildered lad. Bad news from home has hit him—and put him out of action—as effectively as an enemy bullet. Desperately he has tried to solve a problem back home; his mother ill, lonely, helpless—and apparently nothing he can do about it.

Tortured by doubt and uncertainty, he's come to the Red Cross Field Director for help. He'll get it.

It is the job of Red Cross Field Men

to unravel human snarls. Across their desks, sometimes no better than battered crates, more than 1,500,000 men in the past year have poured their troubles—have asked for and received counsel and assistance. Daily and nightly, with our armed forces from Africa to India, from Iceland to New Guinea, they are keeping up the morale our fighting men *must* have.

Not only to the fighting men but to War's victims wherever they can be reached the Red Cross is carrying relief supplies, clothing, medicines. The cost is tremendous and ever-increasing.

The Second War Fund is greater than the First, but no greater than the increased needs.

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"Yes. I pretended to faint when he got me down here. I almost got away from him while he was opening the tier of cages that hid this room. But he threw something at me, and I felt the same sensations of strangling and numbness that I felt last night before you came—"

"Gas, Mary." Bob indicated the box in his hands, and the glass-like balls. "That accounts for the dead rats. *He* knew I'd come up here when I'd read that note. He tried to kill all three of us last night—and did kill Thaddeus. So he laid this trap for me here, after you'd blundered into his ambush at my house. . . . Come on. Let's go to the Base. . . ."

Again Bob sat in the incredulous naval commandant's office. Thurston waited impatiently for Bob to finish reading the report of Naval Intelligence's investigation of the Wolfe family. Dick and Mary had told their story to the Admiral while Bob read. And Thurston sputtered.

"You mean this Nazi got himself up in a mask of Bertram Wolfe to scare people away from that old house? And tried to kill you people with these gas-bombs you found? Why, it's fantastic! And yet you've certainly got the proof too—"

"We've got," Bob cut in suddenly, "the whole story, I think."

He dropped the N.I. report on Thurston's desk. "What you just said is true, Admiral. Those bombs contain some kind of gas. When it's exposed to air it must eat up the container, because I could find no trace of anything like that in my house, or at the Hayes' place. But the gas must dissipate itself very quickly in the air. Thaddeus got enough to kill him. Mary and I survived, because in each case we got fresh air quickly.

"Wolfe almost got me in the end, because he wrapped a blanket around my head to exclude air and to concentrate the gas. But Dick got there soon after I did. He found that note on my desk when he dropped in for a visit. His curiosity was aroused, and he followed."

Dick nodded. Again Mary protested, "But Bob, that man was *not* Bertram Wolfe! He was—"

"BERTRAM WOLFE'S son," Bob said. "He was the baby who was born here, and who was taken away wearing a mask. Wolfe no doubt had that grown-up mask made for his mis-shapen son—with himself as the model. That's why Thaddeus thought it was Bertram Wolfe's ghost. But there's other unmistakable proof that he was Wolfe's son. He was a—"

"In the name of sanity, Falconer," the Admiral barked, "what is this all about? A masked baby?"

"It's local history, Admiral," Bob explained. "It's all in this N.I. report. Bertram Wolfe, Senior—the grandfather of this man we caught tonight—suffered from an unusual affliction. Remember? Because of it, he shut himself up and would see no one. His son—the Bertram Wolfe who built the house here—was also a victim of the same thing. He had club feet, according to the N.I. report. And he transmitted it—in more terrible form—to his son."

"But what was it, Falconer?"

"I got my first clue," Bob went on, "when I learned from 'Who's Who' that Bertram Wolfe was a writer on one obscure subject—Teratology, the science of abnormalities in humans, animals, and even vegetables. Why? Because it had been the Wolfe family curse. It was hereditary. No doubt it affected their minds. Wolfe's father himself wrote a book on one form of it—his own. You see, he was a monster—what is called scientifically an unequal double monster, or a *foetus* in *foetu*. That was the title of his book, and in the title he admitted that it was a first-hand study."

"Good Lord!" the Admiral breathed. "It sounds terrible. What is it?"

"A *foetus* in *foetu* happens when one twin, before birth, not only fails to develop, but is permanently attached to the body of the other, and has its only life as part of the other's flesh and blood."

"How terrible!" Mary gasped.

"Yes," Falconer agreed. "But his own son was the worst of all."

"What could be worse than this *foetus* in *foetu* business?" the Admiral demanded.

"You," Dick blurted, "haven't yet seen what was behind that mask!"

Bob continued, "Wolfe's son was what is called a cyclops monster."

"Cyclops!" Thurston said. "Why that's a one-eyed mythical figure, isn't it?"

"Yes. But it's also proof that myths and legends have a basis in fact. The cyclops monster actually is born with only one eye, in the middle of its forehead, with little or no nose, and sometimes with no mouth at all. They rarely live, which is just as well. But in this case—" He paused and shrugged.

"No wonder the poor guy went Nazi! Cut off from all normal human relations by his awful deformity, who wouldn't welcome *anything* that would attach some importance to his existence? And don't forget that he was taken away when he was only four or five. He was more an European than an American. And, well—there you have our ghost."

Thurston questioned thoughtfully, "D'you think this fellow was trying to cash in on his father's known death, and the resemblance of his mask to his father's features?"

"No," Bob replied. "I don't think he was trying to play ghost. I doubt if he realized that his white mask, visible in the dark when the dark-colored clothes he wore were invisible, gave him a supernatural appearance. But he did know that someone had seen him.

"He must have followed Thaddeus and Mary to their house, and heard them tell me what they'd seen. He was afraid that would bring on a more thorough search of the Wolfe house. So he tried to kill all three of us with his gas.

"But in the meantime, I had found that copy of his grandfather's book, and got the dope on his father's life-work from Who's Who. The encyclopedia enabled me to piece out the explanation. But now that the ghost is laid—and also the spy—I'm starved!"

Bob rose and smiled at Mary, shaking off the horror that had gripped them all. Admiral Thurston glanced keenly at both their faces.

"Miss Hayes," he said, "I'm terribly sorry about your grandfather. If I'd been less pig-headed about your ghost-story, maybe that could have been avoided."

Mary shook her head. "I don't think so, Admiral."

"Thank you," he said. He swung to Bob. "Falconer, I think I can promise you about two weeks leave, if—" and again he glanced shrewdly at Mary—"if you should want it. After that—well, your leg may be stiff, but your brain isn't. Naval Intelligence could use a new member of your talent. Does it interest you?"

Bob Falconer grinned and thrust out his hand.

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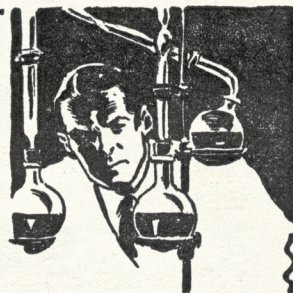
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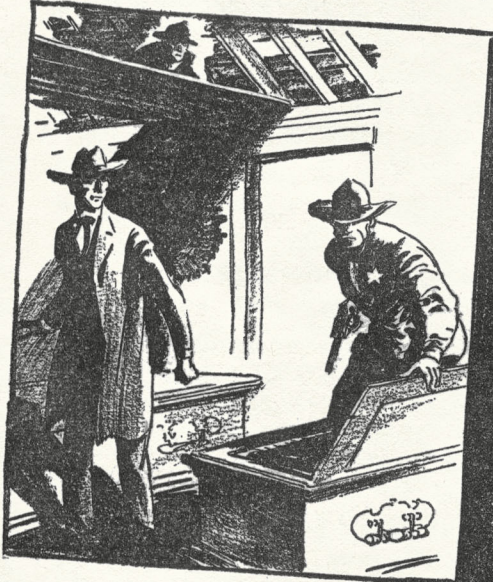
**DIME
DETECTIVE
MAGAZINE**

The February issue is on sale January 7

HEARSE RIDE

Dynamic Hell-Town Novelette

By
W. T. BALLARD



CHAPTER ONE

Graves To Fill

THE procession wound slowly up the shoulder of Rountree Mountain, through the deep cut in the red rock, and swept on down toward the spreading town which lay like a huge checkerboard in the valley below.

The hearse bounced over the chuck holes which the huge tires of the ore trucks had eaten out of the macadam pavement, but I hardly noticed, for the bottom of the coffin had been thoroughly padded.

Oberdine was driving, and he slid back the small panel at the rear of the driver's seat and looked at me.

"Better lie down and be sure that lid is in place. Dave Stoner's liable to have men watching for you and we don't want you pinched, now that we've taken all this trouble to put on our little show."

I lay down in the coffin and dragged the

lid over me. I don't suppose that you've ever ridden twenty miles in a coffin. Personally I don't recommend it as a means of travel.

I wouldn't have chosen it at the moment, but it was very important that I get into Oreton and just as important that

TO MURDER

Dave Stoner didn't know of my arrival.

The hearse and coffin had been Oberdine's idea. He owned the local undertaking establishment, and it would be natural enough for him to be bringing in a new coffin from the railroad. Oreton certainly used enough of them so that one more in town wouldn't make much difference.

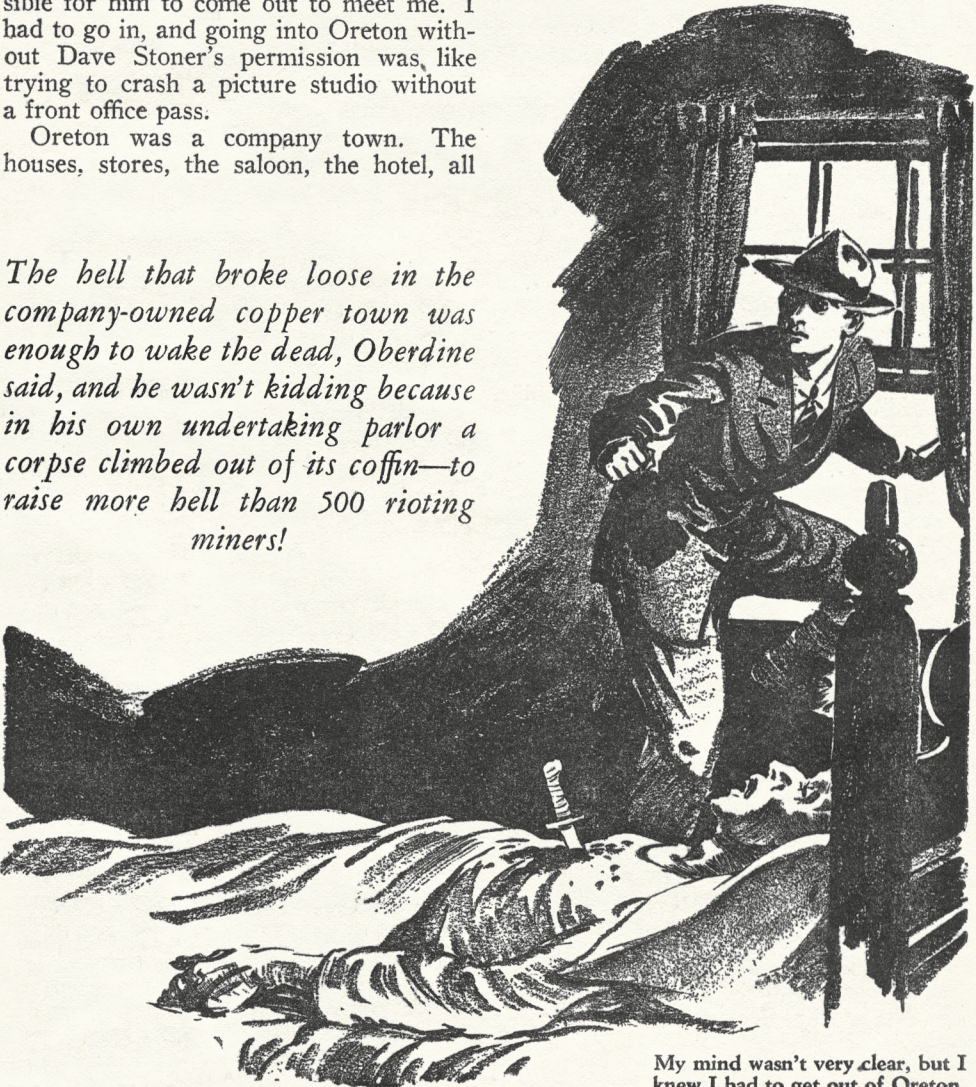
For my part, it was necessary that I see Ed Glade, and since Glade had been bedridden for three years, it was impossible for him to come out to meet me. I had to go in, and going into Oreton without Dave Stoner's permission was, like trying to crash a picture studio without a front office pass.

Oreton was a company town. The houses, stores, the saloon, the hotel, all

belonged to the Adrian Copper and Mining Company, and Dave Stoner as resident manager couldn't have had more power if he'd been a king.

THE town itself was big, for the mines were big. It was a low grade proposition and most of the mines were of the strip variety. That means

The hell that broke loose in the company-owned copper town was enough to wake the dead, Oberdine said, and he wasn't kidding because in his own undertaking parlor a corpse climbed out of its coffin—to raise more hell than 500 rioting miners!



My mind wasn't very clear, but I knew I had to get out of Oreton.

they were open cut, operated in the nature of a huge stone quarry or gavel pit with stiff-legged shovels, draglines, miles of narrow-gage track over which cars rattled, and even a mile long V-shaped conveyor belt that carried the broken rock to the huge smelter which belched out its sulphurous smoke and darkened the desert sky.

It wasn't a spot that a sane man would choose as a home. The fumes from the mill, the heat of the desert sun and the miles of rock and sand which surrounded the place cut it off from the outside world almost as effectively as if it had been located in the middle of an ocean.

I'd lived there once. I'd been a mucker in the pit, a hole which was almost a mile across and at places was four hundred feet deep. And then I'd gone away to study law, and come back, thinking I'd get a piece of the company business.

Dave Stoner had run me out. It wasn't that Stoner had had anything against me personally. I was a threat to his company, and that, in his eyes was worse than being a murderer.

"Don't come back," he'd said, as he and two of his private police had put me on the station wagon stage. "If you do, you'll go out again, riding in a hearse."

He'd been partly right. I was riding in a hearse but I was riding in, not out.

The coffin padding had a dull musty smell which new cloth sometimes has, and it was hot. I prayed that Oberdine would hurry it up. The sooner I got out of the box, the better I was going to like it.

The hearse was in town now. I could hear the street noises faintly and I knew when we stopped for the traffic light at Sandstone and Market. Then we went on, swung sharp right and pulled to a stop.

I could hear Oberdine calling orders, then the box in which I rested was lifted and carried into the building. I could hear the men grunt as they carried it, and one of them swore.

"They keep making these things heavier and heavier," I heard him say.

I lay perfectly still, praying that the lid wouldn't slip.

Finally they set the coffin down and I heard the scuffing noise that their feet made on the floor as they moved away.

I raised the lid a little for air, then raised it farther when I saw no one around.

Oberdine's orders had been that I lie quiet until evening when his employees would have gone home, but I was tired of lying quiet. I pushed the lid to one side and sat up.

I was in the back room that he used for storage and there were a dozen coffins sitting around the big place. I went around the other boxes and moved quietly toward the door which connected the room with the front of the building.

I was about to push the door open and peer through when I heard a voice that I recognized. It was Dave Stoner's. There couldn't be any mistake about that and I froze, listening as Stoner said:

"They called me from the junction an hour ago. The agent saw Bart Brady get off the noon train. You wouldn't know anything about it, would you, Oberdine?"

Oberdine's answer was a protesting rumble. "What would I know about it, Dave?"

"I seem to remember you tried to take Brady's part when I tossed him out of town before, and I thought that if anyone knew his plans, you probably would."

"And I wouldn't tell you," said Oberdine.

"No." Stoner could sound dangerous when he chose and he had chosen now. "You wouldn't tell me. In fact, I wouldn't expect you to, but I can pass on a warning just the same. The only reason you stay in business here is because I let you."

"I've got a lease from the company," Oberdine sounded mild.

"A lease I can break any time I choose," Stoner said. "I'm going to have a look around, just in case you decided to get smart and bring that young squirt in, hiding behind that coffin you hauled from the railroad today."

I didn't wait for any more. I retreated toward the rear door. This was no place for me if Dave meant to search the building. But the door was locked on the outside.

I turned then to the coffin I'd just left. It seemed about the only place of concealment that offered, and I was in a hurry. I pulled off the lid and then stopped. In my haste I'd picked the wrong

box; this one was already occupied. One look at the slate grey face and I couldn't have crawled back into a coffin if I'd had to.

Let Stoner catch me, let his trained thugs beat me up and toss me out of town, I wasn't going to climb back into a coffin for anyone.

I glanced around and then upward. The roof was not sheathed. It had about a thirty degree pitch, and the stringers which held the frame of the building were open.



I JUMPED and caught the center one, two two-by tens, laid edgewise, side by side and spiked together. I pulled myself up, got a leg over the beam and made my way to the edge of the room where the slanting roof came down to the king joist. There I sat down, praying that Stoner would not look up and see me.

Already the room was shadowed, and with luck I might escape detection. I wasn't long in finding out, for I'd hardly settled myself when Stoner came in, trailed by Oberdine.

Oberdine was long and thin, and he looked like the popular conception of an undertaker.

Stoner was short, and thick, his round head set almost directly on his wide shoulders. As far as he was concerned, shirt manufacturers might as well have left the collars off their product. He hadn't enough neck to use them.

He paused just inside the door, squinting around at the partly shadowed room. "Why the devil don't you have more windows in here? It's dark."

"Sunlight fades the boxes." Oberdine was patient. "You know, Dave, sometime this high-handed way of yours is going to catch up with you. The average man doesn't like to be shoved around."

Stoner snorted, expressing his contempt for the average man wordlessly. "Dig him out."

"You dig him out," said Oberdine. "This was your idea. I didn't say anything about him being here."

The company man gave him a long, hard look of dislike and then moved among the rows of boxes. He opened one after

the other, peering in, and I watched Oberdine's long face. I would have liked to signal him, to relieve his suspense, but I did not dare.

However he was a good poker player, and I could detect no change in his manner as Stoner got closer and closer to the box which had been my conveyance.

He lifted the lid finally, held it for an instant and then let it drop. Not until then did I see any change in the undertaker, but there was now, for he was smiling.

Stoner finished his search and turned around, giving the room an angry stare. He even looked toward the roof, but he was looking in the wrong direction and failed to see me.

"Satisfied?" Oberdine seemed faintly amused.

Stoner spun to face him angrily. "No," he said. "I've got a hunch that you're helping the young squirt somehow. I don't know how, but if I find out, I'll build a fire under you that will run you and your coffins out of the country." He stomped past Oberdine and through the door. The undertaker gave the room a careful look before he followed, and I almost laughed out loud. His expression was one of complete bewilderment.

For two hours I stayed where I was. It was hot, up under that roof with the desert sun beating down on the boards and their sheet iron covering, but it was better to be too warm than to be in the hospital, and that would be where I'd be headed if Stoner's men laid their hands on me. He was angry now, angrier than I had ever seen him.

It was completely dark before the door opened again and Oberdine called, "Bart, hey Bart; are you in here?"

I swung down, dropping to the floor within five feet of him and he jumped a good foot, then stared upward at the braces on which I'd been squatting.

"Well, I'll be—" then he chuckled. "Couldn't figure where you'd got to. I brought you some coffee and a sandwich!" The coffee was in a milk bottle. I drank it in big gulps and tried the sandwich. It was good.

"Stoner isn't convinced," the undertaker told me. "All the marshal's men have orders to be on the lookout for you

and they've got two men up at the pass, stopping all cars. If you're going to see Ed Glade you'll have to watch your step."

"I'll watch it," I promised. "Is he still in the same room?"

Oberdine shook his head. "No, they've transferred him to the front of the house, northeast corner. Watch yourself. Glade doesn't like you any better than Stoner does."

"No one likes me," I said. "I've got ideas and my ideas bother them, but I need Glade and he needs me, and together we can show this company up the way we want them."



OBERDINE'S long narrow face was thoughtful. "Don't get too cocky, Bart. Ed Glade is a tough customer. He'll pull a fast one on you, as he has a hundred other men."

I just laughed. "I'll be going."

Oberdine said, "You'll have to get over to Smelter and go in the back way. You can't take a chance going along Market."

What he said made sense. I'd come three thousand miles to take care of this little piece of business, and after I finished it, I had another job I wanted to do, a bigger job.

There wasn't any use in spoiling everything by hurrying, so I sat around an hour and then ducked outside.

I made my way through a sandy alley to Smelter and turned east. The street here was dark, lined with miners' cottages. They were small, unpainted, since the sun would cut the heart out of any paint, but they were clean and well cared for. With all his faults, Dave Stoner was a good boss. He was unmarried, lived at one of the big company boarding houses, ate the same food and played the same games as the men.

Had he been less strong, this might have led to trouble, but Stoner could maintain his discipline by the weight of his fists.

Ed Glade was a different breed. He'd made the original strike and had worked the property himself for several years before selling out to the company. No one knew what he was worth although there were rumors that he had enough money

salted away to have bought and sold the operating company several times hand running.

When he sold out, he'd kept the upper half of Black Canyon, and the ground on which his house was built. The house was the only privately owned piece of ground in the whole town. The rest was company property.

Why Glade had chosen to live in this barren spot no one could guess. He was a little man, dried by the sun and feisty as a bull dog. For years he'd been fighting with Stoner, with the merchants and with the marshal. I guess that there was hardly a soul in town that did not hate his guts.

I grinned under cover of the darkness. I could imagine Ed Glade's startled expression when I came crawling in through his bedroom window. For I meant to enter through the window. I didn't want anyone in town, not even his daughter to know that I'd been talking with Ed.

I paused on the corner, studying the house. It was a big house, square and it had cost a lot to build since every single board had had to be hauled in from the railroad by mule team.

Also, it was painted, and there was something of a yard, fenced in neatly by a picket fence whose white paint had been turned dull yellow by the sulphur.

I stepped over the fence. The grass was brown and almost dead, not for lack of care but because it was almost impossible to grow any green thing in that valley. There were three lighted windows on the lower floor and I knew that the corner ones opened into the room I wanted. I moved forward silently, thinking of what I was going to say, of the arguments I had framed.

I reached the window and peered in. There was an adjustable screen and I removed it carefully. The bed stood on the right and it was screened so that I could not see Ed because of a huge chair. I put one leg over the low sill and stepped into the room.

He lay in the center of the big bed, the only light in the room a small one on a little stand. He lay unmoving and not by so much as the flutter of an eyebrow did he show that he was conscious of my presence.

I stepped around the chair, calling his

name softly as I came and then I stopped for I saw something which I had not seen before. I saw the handle of the knife, sticking upright out of his thin chest.

Ed Glade was dead.

CHAPTER TWO

King Copper

I DON'T know how long I stood there. It couldn't have been more than seconds, but it seemed like hours before I could stir my feet enough to move forward.

I didn't want to touch him and yet something told me that I had to. I did it, finally, putting out a single finger and running it along the back of his work toughened hand. That finger told me what I wanted to know. His body was still warm. He hadn't been dead very long, it was evident.

I turned then. My mind wasn't very clear, but I knew one thing. I knew I had to get out of Oreton, that I had to get out without anyone seeing me if I hoped to survive. I moved quickly toward the window, thankful that I had not replaced the screen.

I don't know whether I made any sound or not. I don't think so, but perhaps I did. Perhaps it was sound that attracted her. I heard the gasp from the doorway and swung around to find myself staring into the eyes of Ed's daughter Lucy. Her eyes were round and dark and very startled and they measured me for a full moment in strained silence, then they shifted to the bed and she screamed, and kept on screaming.

I must have covered the distance between us in a couple of jumps. You do things without thinking and that was the way I was operating now, without conscious thought. I clamped one hand against the back of her head, and held her still.

She must have thought that I meant to choke her, that I meant to serve her as her father had been served, for her eyes got terror stricken and her white teeth fastened themselves in my fore-finger until blood came.

But I didn't dare let go. She could

have bitten clear through to the bone, but I couldn't let her scream again. "Stop it," I said. "Stop it unless you want to get us both killed."

My words didn't make much sense, but they served to stop her for a moment. Some of the terror faded from her eyes and her lithe body relaxed a little. I took a chance and pulled my hand away from her lips, ready to clamp it back if she showed any likelihood of repeating the scream.

Feet sounded from another part of the house and a woman's voice crying in Spanish demanded to know what was the matter.

"Tell her nothing," I directed. "We've got enough trouble here, Lucy."

She didn't understand, but she had recovered from her first shock. "It's nothing, Marina. Nothing, go back to the kitchen."

We could hear the maid retreating, mumbling to herself, and Lucy Glade looked at me. "What is it, Bart? Who killed him? How did you get in here, anyway?"

I told her then, talking fast, watching her eyes, knowing that if I couldn't convince her there was no hope for me.

There might not be hope anyhow. "I found him like this," I said. "I came through the window. I wanted to talk to him without Dave Stoner's permission."

"And why did you want to talk to him?" Her eyes were on mine and there was no sign of grief in them, only a great questioning, an uncertainty as if she were trying to read my innermost thoughts. "Why Bart, why?"

"Blackrock Canyon water," I told her. "It's mine. I've filed on it as you know. The copper company should have filed long ago, but they didn't think it was worthwhile. They had their springs at the bottom of Sandstone grade and they thought the springs would be enough. Now, because of the war emergency, they're trying to condemn my water—take it away."

"Well?"

"Your dad still owns those Shoshone Claims over beyond the ridge. The only reason they haven't been developed is because of lack of water."

"I WANTED to make a deal with him. If we drilled a tunnel at the head of Blackrock Canyon, we could take the water through the ridge and open up those claims. We need copper for the war. Dave Stoner doesn't want them developed. He's had his eyes on those claims for years."

I'd thrown it at her fast, but she was no fool, and she knew the lay of the land as well as I did. "Well?"

"So I came up here and found him dead. I sneaked into town in the first place. Stoner knows that I was at the Junction at noon, and he'll try to blame me with your father's death."

"And you didn't kill him?" Her eyes were still studying me.

"I didn't," I said evenly. "Ed Glade and I had trouble before I left. I tried to buy those very claims from him, and he ran me off the place, but that wouldn't mean that I'd kill him."

"Unless," she seemed to be thinking aloud. "Unless you thought that with him dead, you could do business with me."

I stared at her and realized something that I hadn't before. She was holding herself in check. Her grief was very close to the surface, and she wasn't letting herself go, but one wrong word might crack the mask which she was striving to maintain.

I said, carefully. "You've known me for years, Kid. You know me for what I am. I fought to get an education, and when I came back, I did what no one else in the country dared to do. I filed on Black Canyon water, right under Dave Stoner's nose.

"He's going to take it away from me. You can't blame the men back in Washington. They're busy fighting a war. All they know is that the copper company is producing metal that is badly needed. They don't know how nearly the pit is exhausted, they don't realize that the reason Stoner wants my water is to prevent anyone else from developing your father's claims.

"But if I could show them that I held the claims, if I could show them that by the use of my water I could bring in property that would add greatly to the copper stock pile, then I'd have a chance to fight Stoner.

"All that's true, I need those claims, but badly as I need them, I wouldn't kill to get them."

"Would Dave Stoner?" The question was so direct that it almost took my breath away.

"Yes," I said, when I had recovered. "Dave Stoner wouldn't hesitate at anything to protect the company interest, but I'm not certain that it was he who killed your father."

"Why?"

I hesitated. I'd spoken more on a hunch than from any definite knowledge. "It isn't his way," I said. "He wasn't certain of why I was coming to town. He isn't even certain that I managed to get through his ring of guards. This is a hard country to travel in. You can't just start out and walk. You'd die of thirst. You have to stick to the roads and there are only a couple. No, I don't think Stoner would have struck your father down, at least not until he had tried to make some kind of deal."

"Then who?" For the first time she let her eyes stray away from my face until they rested on the still figure in the death bed.

I shook my head. "I don't know. But I do know that I have to get out of here, that is unless you think I killed your father."

Most of Lucy's life had been spent in these hills. It was a man's world and in some things she faced things like a man. "I don't." She said. "You might have shot in anger, but I can't imagine you creeping in to knife a man while he lies helpless, unable to move."

It was a compliment, and I thanked her. "Then I'll be going. There's nothing I can do to help you."

"Wait," she said, and a new note had crept into her voice. "There's nothing any of us can do to help Ed." She looked again at the quiet figure as if asking his permission, "But we have to go on. We have to keep going, no matter how hard we're hit. I'd like to talk to a friend of mine. You know him—Ben Crawford."

I knew Crawford. He was a young engineer that the copper company had imported a year before. "Do you think that wise?"

"He isn't working for Stoner any

more," she told me, a faint flush touching her cheeks. He quit two weeks ago. He—well, he wanted me to leave with him, but father was alone and—"

"I see," I told her, and I did see. Her face had told me a lot more than her words. I think I managed to keep my voice level. I tried, but in that moment something went out of me, for ever since I could remember, I'd had ideas about this girl.

I'd dreamed of some day owning a mine, of some day making her notice me. It was one reason I'd fought for an education, one reason that I'd filed on the water, and one reason why I was here now.

Well, those things happen. I didn't expect to like Crawford, but I'd gone too far with this to back out now. It was bigger than a kid's dream, bigger than anything that you could let be governed

"How's your father?" the engineer turned to the girl. "I hope he won't learn that I'm here."

She caught her breath, her face going white, showing more emotion than she had shown so far. I saw that she was having difficulty with words so I stepped forward.

"He's dead," I said.

Crawford started. He was as tall as I was, but thinner and he looked younger. "Dead!"

"I found him," I explained. "He'd been murdered."

There was silence in the room. I wanted more than anything else in the world to help the girl, but it wasn't my place. That was made plainer in a moment, for she gave a little choked cry and the next minute she was sobbing against Crawford's shoulder.



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by personal feelings. The world needed copper, and together, we could give it to the world.

CHAPTER THREE

Lead for the Law

CRAWFORD didn't know I was there until Lucy had closed the door. Then he turned and saw me, and he frowned. "Brady. . . I heard you might be in town. There's been gossip at the saloon all afternoon. Don't let Stoner catch you."

"I don't intend to," I told him, "unless you feel it your duty."

"I owe no duty to Stoner." He did not offer to shake hands and I did not extend my own. "I had a disagreement with him about working conditions at the pit and got fired."

I nodded. "Stoner's a bad man to cross."

The dam which she had held across her emotions had broken completely and she seemed almost unable to stop. Crawford looked at me helplessly. Like most men, he didn't know what to do when a woman cried. I walked over and caught her shaking shoulders. I shook her, harder than I intended.

"Stop it, stop it, Lucy, do you hear me?"

She stopped, almost as suddenly as she had begun. Her shoulders shook for a minute as she strove to control herself, then she straightened away from Crawford's shoulder.

"Sorry." She steadied herself and straightened, giving me a wan smile. "I—I didn't intend—"

"It's all right," Crawford slipped an arm around her shoulders and looked at me. "How'd you come to find Ed?"

I told him the whole works and he listened, his good-looking face not altering expression. "You and Ed didn't get

along very well," he said slowly when I had finished.

I nodded. "That's right. We didn't. That's why I took a chance coming into town to see him. I knew that I couldn't sell him on the idea by mail. I had to be here, and if you're about to suggest that I killed him—"

He passed that off with a little wave of his hand. "I'm an engineer, not a detective. We'll let the authorities find the murderer. I understand that Lucy wants my advice on this water deal of yours. Do you mind giving me the details."

I didn't mind, and somehow it didn't strike any of us as strange that we should have my maps spread out on the table and be discussing mining property while a man lay dead upstairs.

We all knew that we couldn't report his death until I had gone, that if Stoner and the officials found me here, our hope of ever arranging an agreement would be gone.

"It looks possible," Crawford sounded interested, but cautious. "I wonder that Stoner hasn't thought of this himself and taken measures."

"He's too busy cutting his own pie," I explained. "He's always figured that Glade's property would pretty much drop into the company's lap when the time came to gather it up. Ed couldn't do much without water. I don't think until I started moving around that it ever occurred to Stoner that we might get together—" I broke off, for someone had come up onto the porch.

We stared at each other in startled silence, then there was a knock at the screen door.

"I've got to get out of here." I was already rolling up the contour maps and thrusting them into the girl's hand. Get these out of sight. I'll try and get in touch with you later after the excitement has died down." I turned and headed for the rear hall but I never made it for a voice short and sharp and very cold told me to stop.

I stopped. I knew that voice, and I knew without turning that there would be a gun in Garland's hand. Garland was an ugly customer.

"Turn around," he said, and I turned slowly.

HE WAS a big man with a heavy desert-burned face and hair so light that it looked almost white under the edge of his hat. He wore a kind of khaki uniform against which his nickle-ed star stood out in sharp relief.

They called him the marshal. Actually he was the head of the company police and deputized by the county sheriff. "You were told not to come back to Oreton," he said. "This is private property. You're trespassing."

"This isn't company property," I reminded him. "This house belongs to the Glades."

That stopped him for a moment. He wasn't very quick witted and he was used to working directly under Dave Stoner. "You had to cross company property to get here," he charged.

"Did you see me do it?" I spoke with a lot more confidence than I felt. I was in a bad spot and no one had to tell me just how tough it really was.

"No, but you did!" His eyes were small for the size of his sun reddened face and they got smaller as his frown folded the sun-wrinkles about them.

"Prove it." I was playing a game that I couldn't win, but I was stalling for time.

He considered for a moment in silence. "Ed doesn't like you any better than we do," he said with a wicked grin. "You tried to make up to the daughter, and Ed didn't like people who made up to his daughter. He tried to shoot that engineer Crawford last week."

That was news to me, and my eyes narrowed as I thought about it. "Come on," he said. "Ed's in the back bedroom."

"No," said the girl. She was standing behind Garland. "He isn't. I moved him this evening. He's in front, Mister Garland. But you can't go in there."

"Can't?" It was a word that Garland did not like. He walked toward me, poking his big, double action forty-four into my stomach and feeling my pockets with his free hand. I thought he seemed disappointed when he found that I was not armed.

But he did not let the disappointment hold him more than a moment. "Come on."

The girl's eyes met mine across Gar-

land's big shoulder. There was a look of helpless indecision in them and I could almost read her hurrying thoughts. She was trying to decide whether to try and block the big man.

I shrugged, trying to give her the signal not to. I was enough of a gambler not to try and fight the cards, and they were dropping against us. There was nothing we could do to change that.

I turned on order and walked before him toward the door of Ed Glade's bedroom. It was closed and I pulled it open, hoping as I did so that the girl would stay back, out of the way.

As I got the door wide, I twisted my head and saw that she was still in the hallway. Crawford was not in sight. I guessed that he was still in the livingroom.

I took a step forward, careful to mask the bed with my body until I was ready, then I stepped to one side, turning as I did so.



GARLAND watched me from the corners of his little eyes. His gun was held loosely in his big hand. It wasn't pointing directly at me, or at anything in particular, but I knew that it was very ready for use.

He said, hardly glancing at the bed. "I caught this punk wandering around, Ed. You don't like him any better than we do. I'm going to arrest him for trespassing and—"

Suddenly he realized that Glade hadn't spoken. That wasn't like Ed Glade. All his life he'd had the first word and usually the last as well.

Garland looked directly at the bed. His eyes took in the still figure and the protruding knife handle.

The sense of what he saw was telegraphed to his slow brain, and for the barest instant, the shock jerked his full attention away from me. His loose lips sagged open as his tongue formed the oath.

But it was never uttered for this was the moment I had been waiting for. My weight was forward, balanced on the balls of my feet and I brought my right around in a curving hook into which I threw every ounce of weight that I had. I knew

that I had to make it good, that if I missed with this one I wouldn't get another chance.

My fist struck his cheek, just in front of the ear. It wasn't what I'd aimed for. I'd aimed for the long point of his heavy jaw.

It was inches high, but the force of my blow made up for part of the miss. He went down, the gun spinning from his grasp as he fell.

But he wasn't out, and he started to come up from the floor fast. I'd seen him fight before. He was one of the toughest men I'd ever known. He outweighed me forty pounds and if he'd ever heard of any rules, he'd forgotten them long ago. No holds were barred in this mining country and the man who came out of a fight with his back in one piece was lucky.

I wasted no time. I didn't go after the gun which lay half way across the room. I brought up a knee under his jaw; that and the force of his spring carried him almost to his feet and I hit him with both hands before he could go down again, once under the heart, the other smack on the button.

He went over backwards this time, and he didn't move after he fell. I turned and scooped up the gun, sticking it into the waist-band of my trousers and pulling my sweater down over it.

I turned as the girl came to the door. She was white, save for the crimson of her lips, and her eyes were nervous and uncertain.

"Did you kill him?"

"He won't even have a headache when he wakes up," I told her. "Now listen, get on the phone before Garland stirs and phone the sheriff over at the Junction. We've got to have some real law around here before Dave Stoner finds out what's happened to your father. I'm going, but I can't leave town.

"I suspect that Stoner will have the roads watched and that I couldn't make it if I wanted to. I'll send Oberdine over to help. He's an assistant coroner."

She caught her lower lip in her white teeth, but she had her feelings under perfect control and I couldn't keep the admiration out of my eyes. This girl was all that my imagination had ever credited her with being and more. If it wasn't for

the guy Crawford—I caught myself. There *was* Crawford, and this was no time for me to try and chisel in. The girl had enough trouble as it was.

"I'm not sure that Oberdine will come," she said. "He and Dad hated each other, you know."

I passed that off with a gesture of my hand. Ed Glade had hated everyone in the country and most people had returned the feeling. "He'll come," I said. "Just because your Dad was trying to claim a half interest in Oberdine's business on that old note is no reason for Oberdine to refuse to help you."

She looked doubtful, but I couldn't waste any more time. I moved quickly to the window, took a look at the street to make certain that no more of Stoner's men were waiting in the shadows and slipped out into the night.

CHAPTER FOUR

Coffin for a Killer

OBERDINE stared at me as if I were crazy. I'd slipped into the back door of his house and was standing at his side in the small sitting room almost before he realized that I was there.

"You fool," Stoner probably has had a man covering this place all evening just in case you might turn up. What the devil did you come here for?"

"I had to see you." I was keeping my voice low.

"Did you see Glade? What did he say?"

"I saw him, and he didn't say anything. He was dead. Someone used his chest as a knife sheath."

Oberdine stared at me, his long face getting longer. "You're kidding?"

"I know a lot of funnier things than this."

He stared thoughtfully at me. "Who knows this?"

"The engineer Crawford, Lucy and Garland." I told him what had happened to the marshal and he grinned slightly, then sobered.

"This is bad. Dave Stoner will nail you with this as sure as you're alive. He's just waiting for a chance."

I shook my head. "Not if I stay under

cover. Lucy has already called the sheriff. Once he gets here, Stoner won't have such a free hand, and I've got some ideas about the killing."

"Ideas?"

I shrugged. "I'll wait and tell them to the sheriff. But what I want is for you to go over and help out. You're a deputy coroner and you can't get into trouble doing that."

He considered. "No, I can't get into trouble, but maybe the girl won't want me. I didn't get along with Ed. Remember?"

"So what," I was peevish and in a hurry. "Just because he sued you on that note and won—"

"He'd have gotten my business" the tall man said, "if he hadn't slipped up on that note."

"How do you mean slipped up?"

Oberdine grinned. "Well, he loaned me some money when I bought the new car and hearse and had the chapel modernized. Then I got short and couldn't pay off, not at the interest he was trying to charge."

"But the note?"

"There wasn't any note," Oberdine said. "That was just Ed's story. I never signed a thing, and when he got around to going to court, he had to admit that he couldn't find it. He swore that I stole it out of his safe, remember?"

I remembered. There'd been quite a howl about it several years before. It had ended by the town laughing at Ed Glade and Ed had not liked being laughed at. He'd hated Oberdine ever since, swearing that as soon as he got his legs under him he'd bury Oberdine in one of his own coffins.

But Ed had never walked again. His rheumatism had kept getting worse and worse, and as far as I knew, he hadn't seen the undertaker from then until the day of his death.

"Look," I said. "The girl needs help. Ed didn't have a friend in town, so she can't depend on his friends. She'll have to depend on her own. I'm her friend, and I'm asking you to go over there."

"What about young Crawford? He considered me, unsmiling.

"Well, what about him?"

"They're going to be married," Ober-

dine explained. "At least they were until Ed heard about it and forbade Lucy to see the guy. You know, it might be Crawford?"

"What might?"

"The killer."

I shrugged. "Forget it. Let the sheriff worry, only get over there and help."

He rose slowly and got his hat from the row of pegs in the hall. "All right, but I wouldn't do it for anyone else." He vanished into the night and I went the other way, using the back door.



I DIDN'T dare show myself, but I managed to peer into the rear window of the company saloon and I couldn't see Judge Tyler beside the bar. That could mean only one thing. The old boy had already gotten his bottle and returned to his office.

I went down to the end of the block and climbed the dusty stairs to the second floor.

Sure enough, a thin thread of light showed under the Judge's door and I moved toward it rapidly and went in without stopping to knock.

He was at his big, old fashioned roll-top desk, a heavy man with a red face and a shock of white hair that was so heavy that it looked more like a mane.

As a boy, I had thought him the greatest man in the world. He'd always led the local parades and addressed the miners on the Fourth and Labor Day, his whisky baritone rolling out in sing-song eloquence.

I saw him now for what he was, a hack lawyer who picked up a precarious living from small claims, for drawing wills and notes.

The company tolerated him because he always settled out of court. I smiled as I came in, for suddenly I was sorry for the old boy, knowing that he drank to hide his failure from himself.

He was startled to see me, so startled that he almost knocked the whisky bottle from the desk as he jumped to his feet. "Bart, my boy, Bart. This is crazy. Don't you know that Dave Stoner is looking for you?"

I nodded. Whatever other faults the

Judge had he was honest. He settled claims out of court, not because he did not favor his clients, but because he believed that no little man could win.

"Sure he's looking for me, Judge, and you don't know the half of it. Ed Glade's been murdered."

He put up a thick palmed hand as if to ward off a blow. "No."

"Yes," I said, and sketched quickly what had happened, not forgetting to tell about my fight with Garland.

He sat back so heavily in his old chair that the springs creaked alarmingly. "You shouldn't have done that, boy." He was shaking his big head. "You put yourself clear outside the law, clear outside. I don't know—"

"Sure," I said. "But if I hadn't clipped him, he'd have taken me in. Imagine what would have happened to me then. That's all Dave Stoner's been waiting for. His miners would have had me strung up to a lamp pole in thirty minutes. I've got to stay out of his grasp at least until the sheriff can get over here from the Junction."

The Judge poured himself a stiff drink. He looked as if he needed it. So did I and I took it from the neck of the bottle, and deep.

"So Ed's dead." He sounded sad, and leaning forward pulled an envelope from a desk pigeon hole. I saw Glade's name written on the envelope before he thrust it into the pocket of his rusty old fashioned black coat.

"Well, we all have to go, sooner or later. What was it that you wanted of me?"

"I want to stay here until the sheriff comes," I said.

"Stay here," his head jerked around. "You're crazy. I can't let you do that. Why, if Dave Stoner ever found I was sheltering you it would be the last of me in this town. I'm an old man, Bart." He was almost crying. "I'm an old man, and I can't afford to go somewhere and start over at my age."

"You don't have to," I told him. "I'm hiring you as my lawyer. A lawyer has some rights. He can protect his client, can hide him until a chance comes to turn him over to the right authorities. You know that."

THE old man hesitated. His indecision was pitiful to watch. At heart he was decent and beneath the liquor sodden exterior he still had a spark of courage. I watched that spark struggle with his fears of Stoner.

There was no place else in town where it would be safe to hide. As soon as Garland recovered his senses, the hunt for me would be on. They'd take it house to house if necessary, but they wouldn't be apt to try this office.

For years Stoner had dominated this old man. I knew the kind of contempt the company manager had for him. And Stoner, who thought himself smart, would never believe that the judge had summoned the courage to hide me.

That was why I'd come here in the first place. It was a gamble, and I watched the old man like a hawk.

If he had shown any signs of betraying me, I'd have held him at the office, held him with Garland's gun. But he showed no sign. As I watched, he slowly won the battle with himself, the battle over his fear. His face straightened and hardened and some of the sag seemed to vanish out of his sagging shoulders.

"All right," he said, his chin outthrust. "All right. I'll do it."

"You won't lose," I promised. "I'm not here for fun, Judge. I have a proposition which will stand this country on its head and break Dave Stoner's grip once and for all."

He didn't seem to hear me. He wasn't hiding me in the hope of future gain. This was one action he was taking for himself, in a belated effort to salvage his self-respect.

"I'll do it. The sheriff, he's on his way?"

I nodded.

"Who do you think killed Glade?"

I shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine. A hundred people in this town hated him. A hundred people had as much reason to kill him as I did. I'm not afraid of a trial, a fair trial. I'm afraid of Dave Stoner. I'm in his way. I've got something he wants, something he could have gotten for himself if he hadn't been too stupid to see it until it was too late."

"I'll go down," said the old man, "and find out what is happening. Maybe I can

help you, boy. Maybe I've got an ace that you know nothing about."

I looked at him sharply, half afraid to let him out of my sight. But the look was reassuring. He met my eyes directly. He even smiled a little as if he saw my doubt and found it vaguely amusing.

"Okay," I said. "I'll be here when you come back, but don't bring anyone with you."

He looked for an instant at the whiskey bottle on the desk, then shook his head, rose and moved heavily toward the door. I heard him going along the hall. I heard him start down the stairs and then I heard the shot.

It must have been fired from the stair enclosure for the sound echoed upward through the old building in a way that it would never have done if the killer had been outside.

The gun which had been stuffed into my waist-band seemed to leap out to meet my clawing fingers and I ran along the hall, but I ran on my toes, not making much noise.

I saw the shadow which was the Judge, laying sprawled at the bottom of the steps. I saw also the second shadow which was the man who bent above him, and I snapped my shot without stopping to take aim.

I shot high, not purposely, for I'd have liked nothing better than to put a bullet into the murderer's back, but I was shooting downward and if you've ever handled a gun, you know that the tendency is to shoot high.

I missed and he straightened to fire upward in return. His bullet struck the roof, five feet behind me and brought down a whole shower of old plaster which fell in little rattling dribbles.



I SQUEEZED the trigger a second time. My bullet must have missed for I heard glass fall from the door which was opened back against the wall, but it was close enough so that he turned and fled.

I should have fled also. The noise from the guns was bound to raise the town. But I had something to do first. I raced down the steps and bent over the Judge. He was

dead all right. The heavy bullet had knocked a hole in his chest. I pulled back the old coat and reached in, pulling out the envelope which had Glade's name written on it.

The bullet had gone directly through the envelope, tearing it almost in two. I had no time to look at it then for I heard shouts from the street and the sound of running feet.

I turned and jumped back up the stairs, taking three at a time, stuffing the shattered remains of the envelope into my pocket as I ran.

I went back along the hall, passed the door of the Judge's rooms to the rear. It was a two-storied building and I knew it of old. I lowered the top sash of the window at the end of the hall, stepped over it to the sill.

I held on to the top of the lower sash with one hand and reached up and caught the edge of the roof with the other. There was no overhang, otherwise I'd have never made it.

As it was, it took the last ounce of my strength to drag myself upward and I lay on my stomach on the rough surface, panting.

Below me in the street at the front of the structure I could hear shouts and angry voices and I knew that the Judge's body had been discovered.

I couldn't stay where I was. I knew that sooner or later they would find the open hall window and that some smart boy would guess that I'd gone up rather than down.

I pulled off my shoes, knotted the laces so I could hang them about my neck and made my way across the roof to the next building. In this manner I traveled almost the whole block.

The building at the end was a fire house, and the roof here slanted downward at the end until it was only a story high. I slid down this, paused at the end to put on my shoes and dropped lightly into the shadow of the alley.

I hadn't straightened when a man came out of the shadows to ram a gun against my back, hard, and the deputy, Garland, said in a deep satisfied tone,

"I figured you'd take to the roofs and that you'd come down this way. Come on."

Dave Stoner grinned at me as he came into the marshal's office. It wasn't a nice grin.

"So, we caught up with you finally."

There didn't seem to be any answer to that so I didn't make any.

He had two gold teeth and they showed as his grin widened. He was very pleased with himself.

Garland stood beside the door, his big face still bearing the marks of my knuckles and I could tell by his expression that he thought talking was a waste of time. He wanted to get ahead with the business and get it over with.

"So you finally sneaked in here and killed Glade?"

I shrugged.

"And that wasn't enough. You had to kill the Judge too."

"You'll have trouble thinking up a reason for that one," I told him.

"Not too much trouble." He was still enjoying himself. "We'll find a reason that I think the sheriff will accept."

I started to answer, but there was a noise in the hall and someone tried to open the door.

Garland had locked it and he made no effort to throw over the latch.



WHOEVER was outside started to pound on the panel and Lucy Glade's voice came clearly. "Come on, I know you're in there. Open this door."

Garland looked to his boss for instructions. Stoner shrugged. "Might as well, it won't make any difference."

The marshal opened the door. Ben Crawford was at her heels, and Oberdine made up the party.

One look at his long, yellow face told me that he was here against his better judgment. His black eyes shuttled from Garland to Stoner and then to me. His smile was weak and not very reassuring.

The girl marched directly to Stoner. "What are you planning to do?"

He stared at her. There was dislike in his round eyes, but it was an impersonal dislike. He had no real feeling about her, but he would have given a good many dollars out of his own pocket if she had

been several hundred miles away at the moment.

"Me? Nothing."

"You're a liar," she said, and I couldn't help but think that this was probably the first time that anyone had ever dared call Dave Stoner a liar to his face. "They're already stirring up trouble down at the saloon. If you don't stop them, they'll lynch Bart."

"You should be the first to hope they do." His tone was cynical. "It was your father that he knifed."

"You don't believe that." Her contempt was so obvious that it touched even Stoner. The smile wiped away from his lips and his sun-leathered cheeks got a faint tinge of angry color.

"Don't you? If Bart didn't kill Ed, who did?"

"You should be in a better position to answer that than I am," she flashed at him. "You probably ordered it done."

He was thoroughly angry now, but no trace of feeling showed in his voice.

"If I wanted to have had Ed killed, I'd have done it twenty years ago."

"Then who?" She was shaken in spite of herself.

He shrugged. "Bart Brady gets my vote, but I'm not interested in murder. I tried to keep him out of this town, and he wouldn't stay. He had to come poking back in here, monkeying into things that were not his concern. But I'm a fair man, if a hard one. You want him freed to walk out of here, free to escape the necktie party that's collecting down the street. I'll make a deal. I'll put him into a fast car and see that he gets as far as the pass. The rest will be up to him. I don't want a lynching here any more than you do. It would give the town a bad name."

His mocking smile was back in place now, and his eyes seemed to be daring her to take up his proposition. She looked at him, squarely. "What is it you want?"

"A quit-claim deed to those copper holdings of your father. I'll arrange for you to get a certain royalty, but I'll warn you now that it won't be much."

"No," said Ben Crawford, speaking for the first time since entering the office. "Don't do it, Lucy. Why should you? What's Brady to you?"

She looked at him as if she'd never

seen him before, and then she turned her back. Stoner said lazily. "Remind me to take care of you, Crawford." He swung his attention to Oberdine.

"And what are you doing here?"

"He came to see how his little plot was working out," I said.

Oberdine started and then was very still, his long face a lifeless mask which showed no change.

"Plot?" said Stoner.



I NODDED. "I don't like the word, much, but I also don't know of a better one. A lot of people hated Ed Glade, but none of them hated him as much as Oberdine did."

Everyone in the room was watching me. No one said anything and I went on.

"Three years ago, Oberdine wanted to modernize his business but he didn't have the money, so he borrowed from Glade.

"I don't know how many of you realize it, but all Glade's life was made up of hounding people. He played with them like a cat playing with trapped mice. That's the only reason he continued to live here, Stoner. He knew that it bothered you to have one house, one person, in a company town over which you had no control."

I saw from the corner of my eye that the girl was nodding a little. It was obvious that she agreed with my picture of her father. She had loved him, but she had also been too shrewd and too honest not to see the justice of my words.

"So Glade played with Oberdine," I went on. "He even started suit and then he pretended that the note was lost. Don't ask me why. I'm guessing, but I picture it this way. Glade was bedfast. The few hundred dollars meant nothing much to him, but the joy of seeing Oberdine squirm was worth the price.

"When the note turned up missing, Oberdine thought that was the end of it, but it wasn't. Glade had the note, and he meant to continue to goad his man as long as he could. Only, he picked the wrong man. I think that he sent for Oberdine and told him privately what he'd done. I think that he threatened him with another suit.

"From that day, his fate was sealed."

I was guessing, but it only needed a look at the undertaker's face to see that I wasn't far off the mark.

"Oberdine started to plan his murder, but it wasn't easy. Glade never left the house, and someone had to be accused of the crime. And then, this noon, I arrived at the Junction. Oberdine was there to pick up a coffin. He knew that I'd have trouble getting into town, but if I did get in, I would go to see Glade, and I might be blamed for his death."

"No," said Oberdine.

"Yes," I told him. "You made several mistakes. I knew you hated Glade and I wondered why you should be so anxious to go out of your way to help me, knowing the chance that Stoner might find out and hold it against you."

"Then tonight, you told me that Glade had been moved to the front bedroom. How did you know that? He was just moved this afternoon. You found it out when you went to the house to make certain that you could slip in and kill him. You wanted me to slip in and find him. You wanted me trapped there. I suspect that you even warned Garland."

The marshal said from his place against the wall. "The tip came over the phone. It could have been Oberdine."

The undertaker laughed. "This is the greatest fantasy I ever heard of. None of this is proof."

"Here's some," I said, and pulled the envelope from my pocket, holding it so that the bullet tear wouldn't show. "Here's your note. I took it from the Judge. You killed him for it, but I didn't give you time to get it."

He turned then as if he knew he was trapped and Garland's gun was shoved into his side.

"No," said the marshal and Oberdine looked back at me and his eyes were yellow with hate, almost as yellow as his skin.

"This is what I get for doing you a favor," he yelled.

"You gave me a hearse ride to murder," I corrected him, "and I didn't like it."

STONER'S voice cut across my words. "This all makes no difference to me, Brady. If you think you can come here and—" His words

died as the door was thrust open and the sheriff trailed in, followed by two deputies. Stoner's face got a funny look and I couldn't help laughing.

"What were you saying, Dave?"

He didn't answer. He turned and stomped out of the office.

Later I was talking to the sheriff whom I'd known since I was a boy.

"You were a fool," he said, "to come in here. You knew Stoner and what he would do. It's lucky you found that note."

I showed it to him. The bullet hadn't left much but paper shreds. "You'll have to make your own case," I said. "This isn't much good for anything save bluff."

He stared at me but I turned and walked to the desk. When I finished writing I handed him the paper and he looked at it. "What's this?"

"A deed to my water rights," I explained. "Give it to Lucy."

"Why don't you give it to her yourself?" His old eyes were shrewd.

"I don't want to see her," I admitted. "She and Crawford can develop the copper with my water."

"And where are you going?"

"There's a war," I reminded him. "I'm already signed up. That's why I had to see Glade in such a hurry."

Someone called my name as I stepped onto the street. It was Lucy, and Crawford wasn't with her.

"Bart, where are you going?"

"To the Army," I wasn't looking at her. "I made over my water rights to you. The sheriff has the deed."

"But Bart, I'll need help. I can't develop the claims alone."

"Crawford," I said, but she shook her head.

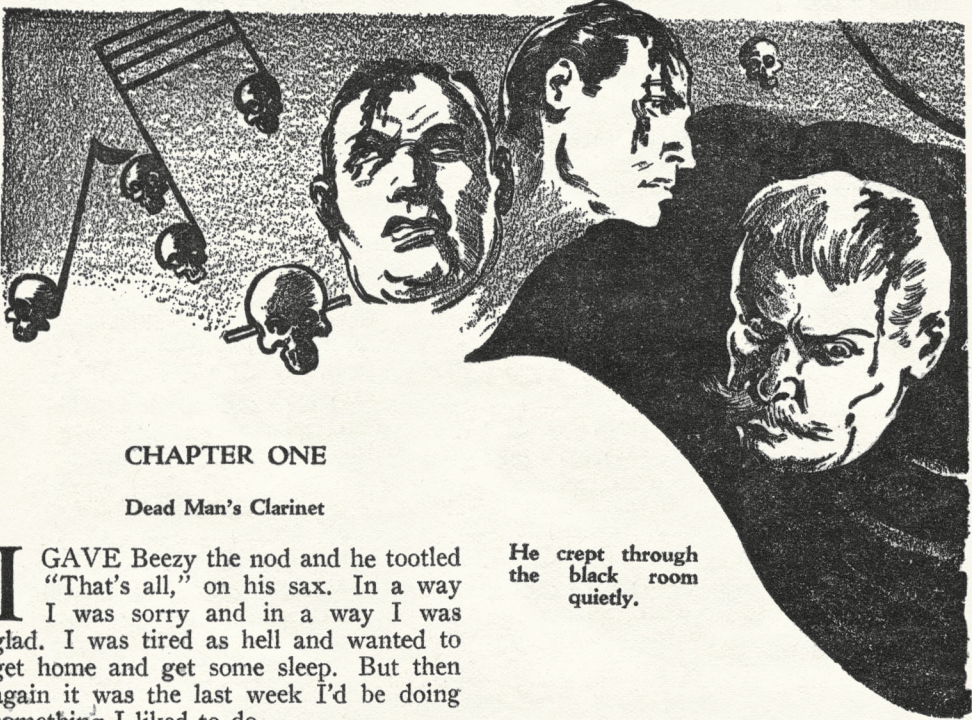
"I found out something in that office, Bart. I—I don't want his help in anything."

There were a million things I wanted to say, but I didn't know the words and it didn't seem the time. "The Army doesn't let you change your mind, Lucy, even if you want to and I don't. You'll just have to carry on until I get back."

She smiled then and gripped my hand. "Okay partner. I'll—I'll carry on; I'll be here waiting, when you come back."

THE DEVIL'S

Novelette of Eerie Murder



CHAPTER ONE

Dead Man's Clarinet

I GAVE Beezy the nod and he tootled "That's all," on his sax. In a way I was sorry and in a way I was glad. I was tired as hell and wanted to get home and get some sleep. But then again it was the last week I'd be doing something I liked to do.

There's a lot of grief to running a dance band and playing in it, but if you've got a right gang, there's something you get besides the money you make.

I took the mouthpiece off my clarinet and got the chamois out of the case. I dried it slowly and carefully; suddenly I wasn't in any hurry at all.

Beezy said, "Here comes a flatfoot. Which of us gets pinched and why and wherefore?"

I looked up and it was Lieutenant Shane Pierson. In plain clothes, of course, but it might just as well have been a uniform.

I said, "Hiya, Shane."

It was hot. Sweat was running down Shane's face and he mopped at it with a wet handkerchief and then fanned himself with his hat. He said, "Got half an hour to spare, Toby?"

He crept through the black room quietly.

"Guess so," I told him. "What's the rap?"

"Want you to identify a body, if you can."

Beezy grinned, and snapped the catches on his sax case. "Murder, He Says. Shall we give him another chorus on that, Toby?"

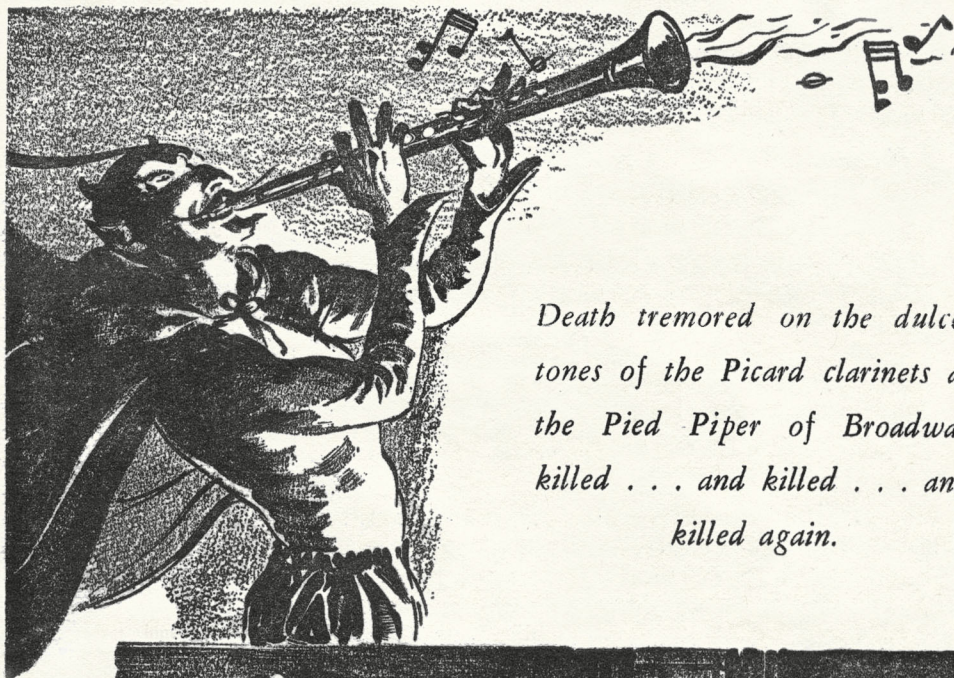
"Who is the guy, Shane?" I questioned.

"Dunno. We want to find out. He had your name and address scribbled on a piece of paper in his pocket and that's all the lead we got on who he is. Hit-run case."

I took my time drying out the clarinet and putting it away. I wondered who'd have my name and address on him, and nothing else. Probably some dance musician wanting to call me for a tryout. If he was dead, I hoped he didn't play

WOODWINDS

By FREDRIC BROWN



Death tremored on the dulcet tones of the Picard clarinets as the Pied Piper of Broadway killed . . . and killed . . . and killed again.



trumpet. I needed a good trumpet, and I needed it bad.

I might know him, at that. You meet a lot of the boys, batting around. But he wouldn't be a close friend or he wouldn't have bothered to write out my

name and address, and carry it around.

Then I remembered the guy who'd been watching. I stood up and took a quick look around but he was gone. Shane noticed and asked me what I was looking for.

“A GUY,” I said. “Came in just before the last number and looked us over like he was casing us. I was just going to ask if you knew him, but he’s gone. Maybe he knew you and beat it when he saw you.”

“What’d he look like?”

“A hood. Tall, skinny guy with reddish hair, but not much of it. I didn’t like his eyes. They looked like a killer’s somehow. And I think he’d been hitting the bush.”

Shane said meditatively, “Tall, skinny, reddish hair. Might be Red Wiman. Small mole on his left cheek?”

“Didn’t notice. But if that is the guy, who is he?”

“Hood, all right. Does errands for Patsy Deegan, who runs half a dozen gambling joints. Nice people your band draws. Ready?”

“In a minute,” I said. “Got to tell Mary; I was going to take her for a drink. Hey, Beezy, you got anything on?”

“Nope, Toby.”

“Come on, then,” I said. We went back to Mary’s dressing room—Mary Baylor is our torch singer—and it was okay by her that Beezy would help her wait for me in the Green Room until I got back from my little jaunt with Shane.

I’d never been to a morgue before. I don’t know just what I expected, but not the row of neat glass cases, each with refrigeration and a dimly-seen body covered up to the chin with a white sheet.

Shane Pierson led me to the third one and snapped a switch that lighted up the inside of it brightly.

He said, “Know the guy?”

I nodded. “Met him yesterday for the first time. His name’s Wazemes, Peter Wazemes. He just got here.”

“What do you mean, just got here?”

“From Europe. From Lisbon via South America. He’d been in France; said he was a Parisian originally, but I don’t know how he got out of France into Portugal, except that it cost him plenty, he said.”

“He a musician?”

“No. Instrument dealer. I bought a clarinet from him. He brought in—Say, do we got to talk here? Come on and have a drink.”

Shane said “Sure,” and we took his car back to the hotel and went into the Green Room, the cocktail lounge. Mary and Beezy had a booth with room for both of us and we joined them. I introduced Shane to Mary Baylor.

I told them who it had been at the morgue.

Mary said, “You mean the funny-looking little fellow you bought the clarinet from?”

“Yes. Tough, isn’t it? He probably went through all kinds of dangers getting out of Europe and reached safety here, enjoys about three days of it and then gets killed by a car.”

“Like the aviator who slips on the banana peel,” put in Beezy.

Mary said, “But was it—just an accident?”

“Huh?” I said. “Why wouldn’t it have been?”

“I don’t know,” said Mary. “But doesn’t it seem funny that he wouldn’t have carried anything to identify himself? You’d think he’d be carrying—well, if not his passport, at least a wallet with his name in it, or something.”

I saw Shane look admiringly at Mary, and wondered why I’d been so dumb as not to think of that myself. There was something in it. Plenty in it, maybe. A European would be so used to carrying identification papers with him that it would be second nature. In Europe, a man without papers is a suspicious character, and they’re likely to stand him up against a wall first and investigate him afterwards if at all. Or peel off his fingernails to make him talk.

Shane said, “You say you bought a clarinet from him? The one you used to-night?”

“That’s it,” I told him. “He brought over three woodwinds—two clarinets and a flute. *Henri Picards*, if you know what that means.”

Shane shook his head.

“Picard is just about the best woodwind maker in the world,” I told him.

“Like Stradivarius with violins?” Shane asked.

“Something like. Of course, woodwinds don’t bring prices like Strad fiddles because—well, a violin improves with age and a woodwind doesn’t. But at

that, a Picard clarinet is worth more than Stradivarius got for his fiddles when they were new. And to get a chance to buy a Picard today—a *new* one—that was pure luck."

"What'd you give him for it?"

"Five hundred," I said. "And it's worth it. He got the same price for the other two, he told me. He sold the flute to Michel Jayles, first flutist with the symphony, and he sold the other clarinet to Joe Barg."

"Who's Joe Barg?"

I said, "Hell, Shane, I thought you knew Joe. He stays at the same hotel I do. Plays with Harry Trent's band. They're at the Crosby Hotel now."

"How did he pick you fellows out? Did he know you?"



I SAID, "Joe Barg had been in Paris; he knew Joe. I think he went to Jayles just because Jayles had first chair in the symphony flute section. He came to me with the other clarinet because Joe sent him, and I owe Joe a drink for that. Man, what a clarinet that is! Smooth as honey all the way up and it fingers itself."

Shane said, "For five hundred bucks it ought to blow itself too. Well, that's a point we'll check; whether Wazemes had fifteen hundred dollars. He didn't have it with him; there was only twelve dollars in his pockets."

"He'd have banked it," I told Shane. "According to his story, he didn't have much left when he got here; those three woodwinds were all he had in the world."

"Maybe there'll be a bank book in his room. Know where he was staying?"

"He mentioned Burgoyne Street, but not the address."

"Good," Shane said. "That saves us checking hotels and rooming houses all over town. Burgoyne's only seven or eight blocks long; we can check every house on it if we have to."

Shane left us and we ordered another round. I was wide awake now, and knew I probably wouldn't get to sleep before morning. But that didn't matter.

I said, "Honey, the night's a pup. Shall we run up to Connecticut and—"

Beezy stood up. He said, "If you dopes are going to start that again, I'm going over to the bar and get soused all by myself. Don't marry him, Mary."

Mary grinned up at Beezy. "I won't, but why not?"

"He'd love that clarinet more than he does you. He sleeps with it under his pillow."

"Beezy," I said, "that's libel. Sit down and have another drink. How'd you go for some prussic?"

He patted Mary on top of her blonde hair, made a face at me, and weaved across the room. He'd had too much to drink already, which meant he'd been hitting the bottle while we were playing. Drink was Beezy's weakness; drink and gambling—neither of them unusual for a dance musician. I drank a little too much myself, but not so often.

I looked back at Mary and she was looking at me, speculatively.

I said, "Well?"

She shook her head slowly. "The answer's the same, Toby."

I sighed and lifted my glass. I said, "Here's to living alone and liking it, only I don't. I wish I was a heel."

"Why?"

"I'd fire you. Then I wouldn't have to watch you every evening, and listen to you sing."

Her sense of humor must have been under par because she took it seriously. "Toby, if you really want me to leave—Joe Barg told me Harry Trent's looking for a singer and I can—"

"Don't be a dope," I told her. "It's fun just looking at you and listening to you. Let's have another drink to celebrate."

"Celebrate what?"

"Anything, I don't care." I caught a waiter's eye and ordered. "Let's drink to the new clarinet. The second prettiest thing in the world."

She smiled. "Do you really sleep with it under your pillow, Toby?"

"Don't be foolish. Might bend a key, or it might fall off on the floor. Then I'd have to murder Joe Barg to get his, because it's the only other one like it in the world."

"In New York, you mean."

"In the world," I said. "At least if Wazemes was telling me the truth, and

I think he was. Picard's dead, and those three woodwinds were the last he made. He made them by hand, in his spare time, because the Nazis had him working in a factory that made precision instruments—I don't mean musical instruments—for them. Then there was some sabotage in the factory."

"You mean that Picard—"

"Wazemes said he didn't know. But the Nazis shot half a dozen men who might have done it, rather than miss the one who did. That's their way of being efficient. They—"

I stopped myself, because I didn't want to talk about that.

Our drinks came, and Mary clinked her glass to mine. She said, "To your clarinet, Toby."

There was something about the way she said it that I didn't like, but I couldn't put my finger on it. I hadn't been too serious about that toast.

After I took Mary home, I paid off the cab so I could walk the dozen blocks to my own hotel.

I wanted to walk, to get some air. When you play six hours in a smoky room every night you appreciate air when you can get it. Even New York air.

I didn't really want to go home at all, now. For fifteen cents, I'd have gone back to get drunk with Beezy. But I'd promised Shane to talk to Joe Barg, and maybe I could persuade Joe to go out and hoist a couple with me.

Funny, I thought, about that Wazemes fellow being killed so soon after reaching New York, after all the dangers he must have passed through getting here. I wondered if Shane would find the money—the fifteen hundred for the three woodwinds. Probably, though, Wazemes had banked it.

My five hundred had been a check. I didn't know how Jayles had paid for the flute, but Joe Barg would have paid for the other clarinet in cash. Joe was funny that way; always kept his money—figuratively, and maybe literally, for all I knew—under the mattress. Joe wouldn't put money in the bank even when he was several thousand bucks ahead of the game. He either carried it with him or kept it in his room.

I went upstairs and knocked on Joe's door. There wasn't any answer.

CHAPTER TWO

Drink to Death

I KNOCKED again, loudly, before I tried the knob. Joe was a pretty good amateur photographer and once I'd made the mistake of barging in when he had the room blacked out to make some prints. My entry had ruined the prints and Joe wouldn't talk to me for a week.

But now Joe didn't answer, so I knew he wasn't messing around with films. If he was asleep, that was all right. He wouldn't mind my waking him, in a good cause.

So I went on in and flicked the light switch. But I didn't wake him.

Joe was dead.

I could tell that, without touching him, by the sprawled way he lay and by the blood matted in his hair. But I bent over and touched him anyway, just to make sure. The flesh was very cold and felt almost rigid. He'd been dead for some hours, at any rate.

I reached for the telephone. Then I remembered fingerprints, and that I should disturb nothing, and I pulled my hand back. My own room was only a few doors down the hall. I went there and called police headquarters.

Shane Pierson had just come in.

I said, "You'd better come over right away, Shane. And bring the homicide boys. It wasn't a hit-run accident this time."

I added the few details I knew. "I didn't touch anything," I finished. "I'm calling from my own room."

"Good boy," Shane said. "Stay right there. Don't open your door to anybody."

"Huh? You kidding?"

Shane said, "I wonder," and hung up on me.

I sat down on the bed to think, but I didn't like thinking. I'd liked Joe Barg. Not that he was a really close friend, but I'd liked him. And he'd been good with the clarinet, too, plenty good. Harry Trent would miss him badly. Come

to think of it, I ought to phone Harry.

I did. I told him Joe had been killed and waited until he got over swearing, and then I asked him, "He didn't show up at all tonight?"

"No. Didn't even phone. I thought maybe he'd gone on a bender—maybe to celebrate getting that Picard clarinet. He didn't talk about a damn thing else last time he was around."

"Joe didn't go on benders very often," I said.

"No," Harry agreed.

"You didn't try to get in touch with him?"

"I phoned his room about ten o'clock. Nobody answered. Look, is there somebody to handle funeral arrangements and all that kind of thing?"

"He's got a brother in Trenton," I said. "The police will notify him, and I guess he'll take care of all that. You'll probably see the police for that matter; they'll want to check with you on that phone call, and when you saw him last and that sort of stuff."

"Was the clarinet stolen?"

I hadn't thought about that. I said, "I don't know. I didn't look around his room. Who's interested in it?"

"Jerry Schulz will be. I heard him offer Joe six hundred for it. I imagine Joe's brother will be willing to sell it for that."

"Okay," I said, "I'll see he learns about the offer."

After I hung up, I got to wondering about the clarinet. It would have been easy to see whether it was there, while I'd been in Joe's room. He always kept his instrument cases on top of the cabinet he kept his photography supplies in. But I hadn't thought to look.

I heard footsteps of a lot of men in the hall outside. That would be the police, I knew, and I opened my door. Shane was standing in front of it, just raising his hand to knock.

He came on in.

"What luck?" I asked him.

"Huh? About what?"

"You were looking for Wazemes' room, and the money. Find it?"

Oh, that. Sure. He had a room at the Antlers. We found his wallet in the room."

"The whole fifteen hundred bucks in it?"



"COUPLE hundred of it. But there was a bank book showing deposit of the rest. Two five-hundred dollar checks had been put in the bank—yours and Jayles'—and two hundred cash. Joe Barg must have paid in cash, and Wazemes kept out three hundred of it, and spent part."

"I wonder why he left his wallet in his room," I said.

Shane shrugged. "Maybe he just went out to bat around and didn't want to take his money with him. Shoves a few bucks loose in a pocket and leaves the rest."

I said, "Or maybe he had an appointment to which he didn't want to carry identification."

"Maybe," said Shane. "Look, is Joe's clarinet in his room?"

I explained again that I hadn't thought to look.

Shane said, "I'll go see how the homicide boys are coming along. Wait here."

He went down the hall and came back in a few minutes. He said, "How many other clarinets did Joe have?"

"Two," I told him. "Both American made."

"That checks, then. But the Picard one is gone. As for the money you say he was supposed to have, that hasn't turned up either. How much would you say it was?"

"I wouldn't say. But Joe's been making good money pretty steady for a long time. It might run as high as five or ten grand. He made three hundred a week, and didn't spend over half that—even if you average in an occasional big expense—like the Picard clarinet. And his other clarinets he's had two or three years."

"Um," said Shane, "that could add up to some real sugar in the sock. I started to learn trombone when I was a kid; wish I'd kept it up."

"Plenty of musicians starve," I told him. "You get money like that only if you hit the top. Joe was good."

"You net plenty with your orchestra, don't you?"

I said, "I'm good, too. Not as big a shot as Harry Trent, but nobody in my band gets less than two hundred. I pay 'em better than Beezy did when he ran it. If I find myself clearing too much, I slip the boys a bonus."

"You bought out Beezy almost a year ago, didn't you? You worked for him before that?"

"Me? No, I played for Trent. I got some dough ahead, though, and when I heard Beezy's band was going on the rocks, I bought him out—mostly a matter of squaring off the debts. That was when Trent took on Joe Barg to take my place. You're notifying Joe's brother?"

"That's being taken care of. I want a look at that clarinet of yours. Got it here?"

I got the case and opened it.

I said, "Handle it like you would eggs. Want me to put it together for you?"

He shook his head and picked up one of the two main pieces from the case. He handled it carefully, all right. He squinted down the bore and then gingerly pushed a couple of keys.

"Looking for gremlins?" I wanted to know.

He grunted. "I don't know what I'm looking for."

"Nothing can be hidden in a clarinet, Shane."

"No? There are people who can engrave the Lord's prayer on the head of a pin. There's microphotography. Ever look under these key pads?"

I groaned loudly. "Those pads are broken in just right. Over my dead body you look under them. Anything but that; I'll even play you a tune."

"Don't bother," Shane said.

"Anything to distract you from that clarinet," I said. "How's about a drink?"



I GOT the decanter and poured two shots. I handed him one and said, "You're being silly. Assuming Wazemes was a spy or something, which I don't assume, and assuming he brought something into this country hidden in those woodwinds, what's the last thing he'd do? Sell them at random."

"There are wheels in wheels, once in

a while. Suppose Wazemes wasn't a spy but that somebody or something made a cat's-paw of him?"

I shrugged. "You've got to admit that's fantastic. Well—" I lifted my glass—"Here's to intrigue, as long as it lets my clarinet alone."

I got as far as putting the glass to my lips.

And then, so quickly that I didn't know what was happening until afterward, Shane's hand lashed out and slapped mine. The glass went spinning halfway across the room and hit the carpet with a faint thud.

Shane's own glass was lying near his feet, in a little puddle of spilled liquid, just as he'd dropped it to hit at mine.

"Sorry," he said. "I took just a sip first, to wet my whistle before I tossed it down. Habit of mine. And it didn't taste right."

"It didn't *taste* right? You mean—"

He was licking his lips meditatively. Then, suddenly, he started for my bathroom, almost running. Curious and a bit scared, I followed and watched from the doorway as he did a very thorough job of rinsing out his mouth and gargling.

After a minute, he looked up from the washbowl. I saw that there were beads of sweat on his forehead.

He said, "Guess I didn't get enough to hurt me. Got a little panicky when I realized what it was. Potassium cyanide."

I repeated the name, rather blankly.

Shane came out of the bathroom. "Used in photography," he said. "Could have come out of that cabinet in Joe Barg's room. Probably did."

He went over to where my glass had rolled, and picked it up. It was empty, of course, but the inside was still moist. He touched the wet surface very gingerly with his tongue and then nodded. "Both of them," he said. "Somebody put it in the decanter."

He went over to the dresser where the decanter stood, and looked at it without picking it up. He said, "We'll take that in for testing, but I'll let the fingerprint boys dust it first. When did you take a drink out of it last?"

"Yesterday," I said. "Late afternoon."

Shane said, "Looks like it's been polished recently. Not many prints. My

guess is all we'll find will be one set of yours—from picking it up just now."

He stared at me, with his eyelids half-way down. "Well, Toby, still think 'spy stuff' is funny?"

I stared at the clear amber liquid in the decanter, and it gave me a funny feeling to think that—if Shane was right—I was looking at sudden death.

Almost, it had been just that, for me. I haven't Shane's habit of sipping a drink before downing it. I'd have tossed off my shot neat before noticing anything wrong with the taste.

If I'd taken a drink while I was here alone, waiting for Shane—Or if Shane hadn't been so quick in knocking that shot-glass out of my hand—

I glanced down at the clarinet case ly-

Cheer up; maybe they'll try again. Meanwhile—"

"Meanwhile, what?"

"I'm going to see Jayles myself. It was just a hunch when I sent Rogers, and Rogers don't know the right questions to ask." He took out a cigarette and lighted it, and I saw his hand was steady—darned steady for that of a man who's just rinsed poison out of his mouth.

"You really think they'll—?"

"Try again? Sure. You stay right in this room, and there'll be a man on duty in the hall all night. Not entirely on account of you, of course. He'll be watching the murder room. You lock your door before you turn in."

I said, "I'm not sleepy now. How

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ing open on the table. My glass had gone spinning across it, and there were wet stains—little ones—on the green plush of the lid. There was one drop glistening on the polished black surface of the clarinet's bell.

I wiped it off with a clean handkerchief.

I felt a little shaken out of my complacency by that shining drop on the smooth black. A drop of liquid with death in it.

I said, "What about Michel Jayles? Have you—?"

Shane nodded. "I sent a man there to talk to Jayles while I was at headquarters—when you phoned there that Joe Barg was dead. And I wasn't kidding when I told you to be careful. There were three of you bought those instruments. And one man who sold them to you."

I said, "But what possible motive—?"

"I don't know," Shane admitted. "But Joe Barg is dead, and Wazemes is dead. And somebody tried to murder you.

about letting me go see Jayles with you?"

He hesitated. "You know him?"

"Slightly. We don't play ball in the same league, but I've met him several times."

"Come on, then," Shane said.

CHAPTER THREE

Murder Without End

WE DROVE over in his car. Jayles had a studio in a Bohemian sort of building down in the Village. One that was the McCoy—one of the few real ones left. There were a couple other musicians there, and the artists who had studios there really painted pictures.

Shane pulled in to the curb behind a squad car. He said, "Rogers is still here; that's his car."

We started up the steps and then a low whistle behind us made us turn around. A tall thin man in a light gray suit was coming toward us from the corner.

Shane said, "Hi, Rogers. See him?"
The tall man shook his head. "Wasn't in his room."

Shane grunted. "Did you look in Jayles' room or did you just knock?"

"Just knocked. But loud enough to wake him if he'd been asleep. I waked the people on both sides. You didn't want me to bust in, did you?"

"I didn't then," said Shane. "But we're going in now."

We went upstairs, and Shane picked the lock without difficulty.

And we found just what—subconsciously, at any rate—I had expected to find ever since I had first thought of Jayles after the poison in the whiskey.

Jayles hadn't answered Rogers' knocking on the door because Jayles hadn't heard it. He was dead. Killed by a blow on the head, just as Joe Barg had been killed.

I felt a little sick.

There was a phone in the studio and Shane phoned headquarters. In a few minutes, the homicide men would be swarming over the studio here, just as they had over Joe Barg's room.

And over mine, tomorrow or next week? Would the killers, whoever they were, try again and succeed? I was alive now only because of a lucky accident. If I'd taken a drink while I was alone, instead of waiting for Shane to come. . . .

"Is this the flute?" Shane asked.

I shook my head. "That's a metal one, a Haynes. The Picard is wood."

"It's the only flute here," Shane said. He snapped the case shut and put it back on top of the piano in a corner of the studio.

He came back and stood in front of me. "Toby, my boy," he said, "whether you like it or not, that clarinet of yours is going to be vetted. It's the only one of the three woodwinds that's left to vet. We're going to look under those key-pads, and everywhere else, including taking the case apart."

"Over my dead body," I told him.

"You'd rather we'd wait for that?"

"Nuts. All right, listen. I'll agree, providing you'll let Len Strauss do the taking apart and putting together. You know him?"

Shane shook his head.

I said, "He's the best instrument man in town. His shop's on Forty-eighth, west of Broadway. You can watch him do it, and examine it while it's apart. If he takes those pads off, he can put new ones on. The case doesn't matter. He can find me a new case to fit, and you can make hash of that one. The hell with the case."

"Okay," said Shane. "We'll do it tomorrow morning and you can have your clarinet back in time to play tomorrow night. Give me the key to your room, so I can get it."

"Why?" I'll go back with you."

"No. Here's what you're going to do. You're going to go to some other hotel—some little one, where you're not known. Keep out of sight until time to play tomorrow evening. Give us that long without having to worry about you."

He talked briefly to the homicide men who had come in, and then we went downstairs.

He said, "We'll have a drink, then we'll put you in a cab, and I'll follow a few blocks in my car to be sure the cab isn't being tailed. After that you're on your own, but don't go to your room or to any of your usual hangouts. Got it?"



I NODDED. It might have been worse; Shane might have wanted to go so far as to put me in protective custody. Or give me a bodyguard. It wouldn't be bad, merely to stay away from my hotel for one night. Or one day, rather; it was getting almost late enough to be early now.

We found a bar around the corner. We ordered drinks. Shane said, "Look, does something strike you as screwy about these murders?"

"Everything does," I told him. "Everything."

"Yeah, but one thing in particular. Jayles and Joe Barg were killed—uh—you might say face to face by someone who stole their instruments. You might almost say he killed Barg to get that clarinet and Jayles to get the flute. But look at you."

"What's wrong with me?"

"You were killed—I mean, you would have been killed, if I hadn't stopped you—in such a way that the killer *wouldn't* have got your clarinet. He couldn't have been sure when you'd take a slug of that whiskey he poisoned. Unless he expected— Who'd have got that clarinet if you *had* died tonight?"

"You mean, who'd have inherited it?"

"Yeah."

I said, "Damned if I know. I haven't any close relatives, and I've never made a will. I've got distant relatives in Cincinnati and in Chicago. I—I guess I've never thought seriously about dying."

"You might start thinking," Shane said.

"My friend," I told him, "you are a vulture, a ghoul. I hate you to pieces. Hereafter, you can find your own corpses. And they shall not include mine."

"You hope," said Shane.

I finished off my drink. "I shall leave you now," I said, with dignity. "You have me so frightened that I shall probably hang myself to keep anyone from murdering me."

Shane drove me to a cab stand a few blocks away. I looked back out of the window a few times and saw Shane's ear following us. Then the next time I looked, it wasn't there.

I'd given the name of a hotel, but it occurred to me now that I wasn't ready yet for the solitude of a hotel room, a strange one, in which there'd be nothing left for me to do but go to sleep. Funny that, three hours ago, I'd been so sleepy.

I didn't want to sleep now; I wanted to talk. Not about what had happened tonight, in particular. Just to talk, about anything. I thought of going back to the cocktail lounge of the Van Linden to see if Beezy was still there.

But I'd promised Shane to avoid my usual hangouts. Besides, if I did find Beezy, he'd be three sheets in the wind by now, and I was sober. You can't conduct a mutually satisfactory conversation on that basis.

Then I thought of Shorty's Bar on Forty-fifth Street. I knew Shorty and liked him, and I'd probably know somebody else there, for dance musicians hung around there a bit. But I didn't get there very often, not more than once

every couple of months, so it couldn't be called one of my usual hangouts. And there were quite a few inconspicuous hotels in that district.

I tapped on the glass and told the driver to take me to Shorty's Bar instead. He knew the place.

And so it was six o'clock in the morning when I undressed in a fly-specked little room in a hotel only a few doors from Shorty's.

I'd had quite a few drinks, but I didn't really feel them.

Not unless it was because of the drinks that I had so strong a sense of unreality. A sense that tonight wasn't really happening, that there hadn't been any murders and that if I closed my eyes and opened them again, I'd be back in my room and nothing would have happened. That it was all just a bad dream.

But I couldn't close my eyes at first, even when I lay down on the bed. My room was a front room on the fifth floor, just over the hotel sign that flashed off and on interminably. The ceiling overhead was red, then dark, then red, then dark, then red. . . .

I thought about Mary.

The ceiling red, then dark, then red . . . I got up at last and pulled down the shade.

I thought about death. Not my own death, nor that of the strange little man Wazebes. Nor, strangely, that of Barg or Jayles.



IT WAS Henri Picard, I found, that I was thinking about. The best woodwind maker in the world. And what Wazemes had told me about his death. Forced to work in a factory that made precision instruments for the Nazis. Then stood up against a wall and shot, with others, because of some sabotage in that factory.

That was the worst kind of murder. Murder so blatantly unashamed of itself that it didn't have to hide itself, as murder did here. Murder that wasn't even furtive.

Thank heaven that soon now, after waiting so long, I'd have a chance to do my part in avenging murder like that.

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SAYMAN SALVE

When I awoke, my wrist watch told me it was four o'clock in the afternoon. I dressed and went downstairs for breakfast.

Over coffee and doughnuts, I read the papers. Shane had handled the papers pretty well, I thought. There was an article each on the murders of Joe Barg and Michel Jayles, but no mention of a possible connection between the two.

The story on Wazemes was several pages over, and only a couple of paragraphs long. No mention of any possibility of murder there—just a hit-and-run case. No mention of the clarinets or the flute.

I read all three articles carefully, but about the only thing I learned new was the coroner's pronouncements of the times of death. Joe Barg had died early in the evening, between six and eight o'clock. Michel Jayles had been dead less than an hour when we'd found his body; he must have been killed about the time I found Joe Barg dead in his room.

My name was not mentioned.

I phoned headquarters, and found Shane had just come in.

He said, "We looked over that clarinet of yours. Strauss took it apart for me, and it was no dice. The case, either."

"When'll I see you, Shane?"

"Just before your orchestra goes on at the Van Linden. You start at eighty-three, isn't it?"

"That's right."

"I'll be there by eight—with your clarinet. Stay away from your hotel."

"All right," I said.

Then I phoned Mary and asked her how about supper tonight.

"Sorry, Toby, but I arranged to eat with Beezy tonight, at the Van Linden dining room, before we went on. It wasn't exactly a date, and I don't suppose he'd mind if you ate with us."

"He picking you up?"

"No. I just said I'd meet him there."

I said, "Swell. I'll pick you up in a cab around seven and take you there."

I got there a few minutes after seven, and Mary was ready. She had a hundred questions to ask because of the things the newspapers had left out in telling about Joe Barg's murder. I

THE DEVIL'S WOODWINDS

brought her up to date on the parts that had been left out. I even told her about the poison in my decanter.

She said, "But—you'll be careful, won't you, Toby?"

"Sure, honey," I said. "It's only for a week—six days—and then—"

I hadn't meant to tell her; I hadn't meant to tell anybody until the day before. But it had slipped out, and I couldn't get out of explaining.

"The army? But, Toby, I thought—"

"Not the army, Angel. The air force. I managed to stall on the draft because I wanted to fly. I was okay for that except my eyes were just a fraction under their standard. And I've been working with an optical specialist, eye exercises and that sort of stuff and—well, I passed three days ago."

"But, Toby, what about—"

"The orchestra? I'm going to turn it back to Beezy. He doesn't know it yet. But I think—"

The cab had swung in to the curb in front of the Van Linden and we got out. Then, too late, I saw how Mary was looking at me. If I'd seen that sooner, I'd have had the taxi drive once around the park and to hell with dinner.

But *why?* Lord, had Mary thought I was a draft dodger? No wonder she'd been so cool to me lately if that was what she thought. And if so, it'd been my own damn fault, for keeping all my plans to myself.

I took her arm and said, "Listen, Mary—"

But Beezy, grinning, was coming across the sidewalk toward us.

He said, "Hullo, Toby. Put on the feed-bag with us?"

"That's the general idea," I told him, and we went on inside and took a table. Mary said, "I'm going to the powder room. Order for me."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Pied Piper of Broadway

HE left us, and Beezy grinned at me rather vacuously. I could see he'd had a couple of drinks already. That didn't matter so much, with Beezy. He

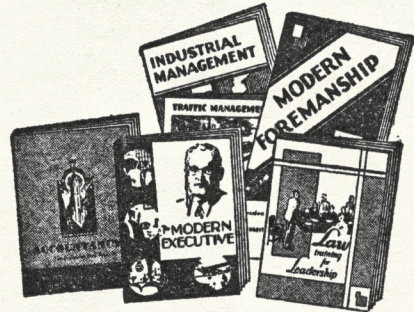
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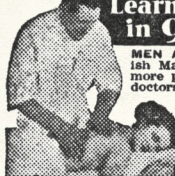
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DIME MYSTERY MAGAZINE

could play as well drunk as sober. Maybe better.

I wondered if I should tell him now about my plans to turn the orchestra back to him.

He said, "Cigarette, Toby?" and held out his case to me. But his hand struck against a corner of the table and he dropped the case. It slid across the waxed floor, under my chair.

I turned my chair half around and bent over to retrieve it. It was the case Beezy always carried; an expensive, flat, silver case, the kind that holds only a single layer of cigarettes. It was lying there open, the cigarettes held in by the spring clip.

But a thin sheet of metal—a sort of lid that fitted within the lid—had jarred open, and there was a photograph under it. A photograph that wouldn't show unless the inner lid was opened. It was a photograph of Mary Baylor.

I picked up the cigarette case slowly, snapping shut the inner lid as I did so, so Beezy wouldn't know I'd seen the picture. But—could Beezy be in love with Mary? Beezy?

My back was still toward Beezy as I straightened up, slowly. It was when I was about halfway back in my seat that I got the second, and worse, shock.

I caught sight of Beezy's face in one of the big mirrors that line the walls of the Van Linden's dining room. Beezy was looking at me and he didn't realize that I could see him in the mirror. There wasn't drunken vacuity in his face now. There was hatred there.

I turned back slowly, to Beezy's grin. I knew the whole thing now, but I kept my face blank for a minute while I thought what I should do about it.

I said, "Heard the latest about Joe Barg's murder?"

"Not since the afternoon papers."
"They know who did it," I said.
"Shane's out making an arrest now."

Beezy's eyes went wide and he forgot to look drunk. "The hell," he said. "Who?"

"A big-shot gambler named Patsy Deegan. They traced a couple of Joe's bills back to him, and Shane went out to get him to make him account for it."

THE DEVIL'S WOODWINDS

"Traced some of Joe's bills? I don't see how—"

"Joe kept the numbers of the big bills he had hid away. Shane found the list of numbers in a notebook in one of Joe's drawers, and put out a notice to all the banks in town. Three of those bills popped up late this afternoon, and they all came from this Patsy Deegan. So it's all over now, but the arrest."

"Oh, said Beezy.

I didn't look at him directly. I had a menu in my hand and pretended to study it, and out of the corner of my eye I could see Beezy try to take a cigarette out of his case and fumble the job because his fingers shook so badly.

Beezy was silent a moment and then he suddenly pushed back his chair and stood up. He said, "I just remembered something important. Will you tell Mary—"

I said, "Sure, Beezy. You'll be back in time to play, of course?"

I knew he wouldn't.

In the mirror, I watched where he went, and saw him stop at the desk to get his key. . . .

Mary was coming back now, and I stood up.

Shane's voice, behind me, said, "Here's your clarinet, Toby. All in one piece, and I see you still are, too."

I held Mary's chair for her and managed to whisper a quick warning to her not to say Beezy had been with us.

Then I said, "Sit down, Shane. I got something to tell you. Beezy did those murders."

Shane slid slowly into the chair Beezy had been sitting in a few minutes ago. He said, "You're not kidding me?"



"I WOULDN'T kid about something like that. Beezy had been gambling heavily. He ran into debt with Patsy Deegan, and that was why that hood was hanging around here yesterday evening. The one you told me was named Red Wiman and worked for Patsy. He was here to collect from Beezy—or tell him what would happen if he didn't."

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DIME MYSTERY MAGAZINE

"You mean Beezy killed Joe Barg for Joe's money, to square himself with Deegan? But why'd he take the clarinet? He couldn't sell that without it being traced."

I said, "He didn't take the clarinet, then. It all pyramided up on him. Listen, I'm guessing on some of the details, but here's what happened. Beezy was desperate for money, because Deegan was sending hoods after him. He knew Joe Barg kept five or ten grand in cash and he went there yesterday evening to steal it.

"Maybe he wasn't even thinking of murder—but Joe walked in on him and he had to kill Joe. I don't know what he grabbed up to hit him with, but—"

"A paperweight," said Shane. "We found traces of blood on it."

"And he made his getaway, and paid off Deegan, and that was that. It might have been all, if Wazemes hadn't happened to get killed by an auto last night. Yes, that was just an accident, as you thought at first."

"But what's that got to do with killing Jayles and trying to kill you?"

"Everything," I told him. "Beezy hated me for two reasons. First because he was in love with Mary, and second because I was running his orchestra. He thought if I was dead, he might get both. He's probably hated me, secretly, ever since he had to sell the orchestra to me."

"But what'd he have against Jayles?"

"Nothing. But look at the set-up this business about the Picard woodwinds—and Wazemes being run over—gave him. He'd already killed one of the three men who'd bought those instruments from Wazemes. Maybe he was afraid he'd be suspected of that murder, by itself. But he had motive for killing a second of the three—me.

"And he got the wild notion—or *was* it so wild?—that if he killed Jayles too, all you'd see would be the three woodwinds from Europe and three men who bought them murdered, and you'd chase your tail all around the case and never solve it."

Shane said slowly, "And damn if I wouldn't have. You mean he got that idea while we were all sitting here talking last night?"

"Sure. And you left to hunt for Wa-

THE DEVIL'S WOODWINDS

zemes' hotel room and I left to take Mary home, and that gave him a clear field. He went back to Joe Barg's room and took the clarinet. And he took some of the potassium cyanide from Joe's photography supplies—it's labeled 'Poison'—and put it in my whiskey. Then he went over to Jayles' room and murdered him.

"After that, all he had to do was sit tight and let you chase spy angles and European complications. But he got his first bad break when you knocked the poisoned whiskey out of my hand in time. And he got his second bad break when he accidentally gave himself away to me, sitting right where you are now."

"Huh?" said Shane. "He was *here*?"

I said, "I told him we had the numbers of the bills that had been stolen from Joe Barg, and that those numbers had been traced to Patsy Deegan. That you were going out to arrest Deegan now."

"He believed me, and he thought he'd run out his string. Because Deegan wouldn't take any rap for Beezy. He'd tell where those bills came from, and quick, the minute you started asking."

Shane stood up. "And he lammed out, huh? Where'd he go? Got any idea?"

I said, "I've got a pretty good idea. He went over to the hotel desk and took a room. I saw the clerk give him a key. It won't be any trouble for you to find out what room he got. I think you'll find him in it, but I don't think you'll—"

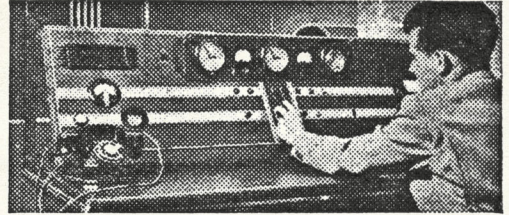
But Shane was already running toward the desk. . . .

Over coffee, Mary smiled at me.

And I knew that it was going to be all right. That the music this evening would help us forget the things we wouldn't want to remember, and that there were six days left. And after that, our whole lives together when I came back.

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DIME MYSTERY MAGAZINE

(Continued from page 6)

THE MAN WHO WOULD BE HITLER

Suppose you had a ray machine which for a distance of several miles would kill every living thing—ants, rabbits, and *men and women and children!* But suppose there was only one man you wanted to get—one or two or three. . . . How would you go about the business of separating your goats from the sheep?

Perhaps even more important to *you*—what would be the effect on you of all this kill-power you possessed? Would you get big ideas? Read about a man who had this sinister power—and what it did to him and to the world—in Bruno Fischer's exciting and thought-provoking novelette, *The Man Who Would Be Hitler.*

THE HOUSE WHERE FEAR LIVED

What was the menace that sent Martha Kazan fleeing from New York City in the dead of night? Why did she live an endless "masked" nightmare.

What strange prompting caused her to return at the last to the house at No 1 Carrl St., from which she had first fled? Why did she lock herself up there, a prisoner of her fears, and live like a crazy hermit among New York City's seven million?

The neighbors saw her lovely daughter flit in and out of the house like a wraith. They reported ghostlike tappings from the house. . . .

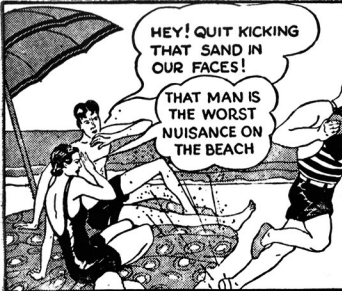
Then came Dr. Merlin Cobalt, who was a self admitted specialist in problems of the mind. Dr. Cobalt sipped his gin and lemon and stood firmly rooted to what he called reality. He didn't believe in ghosts. But here again, *you* won't know what to believe as you chew your fingernails while your eyes race through the long novelette by Francis K. Allan—*Doctor Cobalt Prescribes Death.*

There are many more stories of the same exciting character. For instance, a thrill-packed novelette: *Corpses Leave Me Cold*, by David X. Manners. And stories by such well-known mystery writers as Jack Bradley, Russel Gray. . . . All in the next big issue of **DIME MYSTERY.** On sale March 3.

THE EDITOR

HOW JOE'S BU
BROUGHT HIM

TRAIL OF JOE

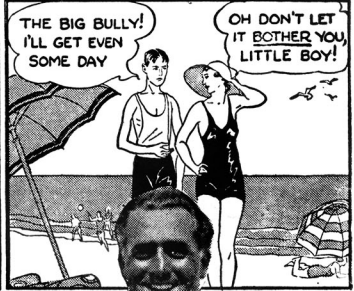


HEY! QUIT KICKING THAT SAND IN OUR FACES!

THAT MAN IS THE WORST NUISANCE ON THE BEACH



LISTEN HERE, I'D SMASH YOUR FACE... ONLY YOU'RE SO SKINNY YOU MIGHT DRY UP AND BLOW AWAY.

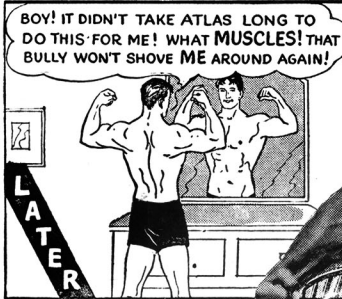


THE BIG BULLY! I'LL GET EVEN SOME DAY

OH DON'T LET IT BOTHER YOU, LITTLE BOY!



DARN IT! I'M SICK AND TIRED OF BEING A SCARECROW! CHARLES ATLAS SAYS HE CAN GIVE ME A REAL BODY. ALL RIGHT! I'LL GAMBLE A STAMP AND GET HIS FREE BOOK!

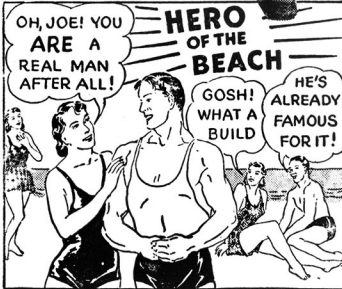


BOY! IT DIDN'T TAKE ATLAS LONG TO DO THIS FOR ME! WHAT MUSCLES! THAT BULLY WONT SHOVE ME AROUND AGAIN!

LATER



WHAT! YOU HERE AGAIN? HERE'S SOMETHING I OWE YOU!



OH, JOE! YOU ARE A REAL MAN AFTER ALL!

HERO OF THE BEACH

GOSH! WHAT A BUILD

HE'S ALREADY FAMOUS FOR IT!



Charles Atlas

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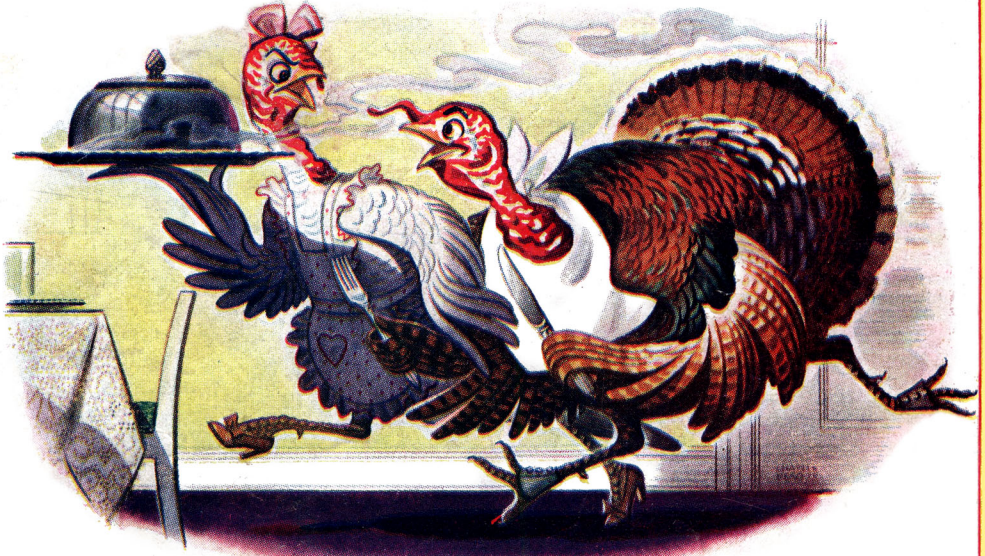
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