

NOVEMBER



15¢

# DIME MYSTERY MAGAZINE

COMBINED WITH 10 STORY



TWO TOP-FLIGHT

NOVELS OF CRIME - MYSTERY

HELL COMES IN BOTTLES! | Dr. DIGGORY'S GLASS GRAVE

by WILLIAM R COX

by FREDERICK C. DAVIS

# Girls Can't Resist this KISS ME NECKTIE as it GLOWS in the DARK!

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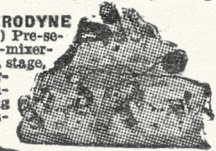


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**MYSTERY**  
**MAGAZINE**  
COMBINED WITH 10 STORY MYSTERY

NEXT ISSUE OUT NOVEMBER 3rd!

Volume 31

November, 1944

Number 1

**TWO FEATURE-LENGTH NOVELS OF EERIE MENACE**

- HELL COMES IN BOTTLES!**.....William R. Cox 10  
One drink of George Grey's exclusive brand of poisoned Scotch launched Tom Kinkaid on a mad killer-chase that threatened to have that fighting trouble-shooter bottled—in bloody bondage!
- DOCTOR DIGGORY'S GLASS GRAVE**.....Frederick C. Davis 40  
What ominous secret of his hidden past forced the scientific Gordon Diggory to stand helplessly by, while his most hated enemy made a murder-pawn of the girl he loved?

**TWO SPINE-TINGLING NOVELETTES**

- DIE, AND YOU'LL WEAR DIAMONDS!**.....Ken Lewis 60  
The red-headed canary, the strange scholar-recluse, and his hateful son—all were talented in the dark arts . . . but which one was especially talented in dealing death?
- THEY KILL BY NIGHT!**.....Cyril Plunkett 76  
Through the silent, shadowed streets that vicious, invading legion threatened a million honest folk. . . Only Johnny Quane had a hint of the ghastly plan behind that wholesale death-in-the-making. . .

**FOUR TENSELY DRAMATIC SHORT STORIES**

- IT BURNS ME UP!**.....Ray Bradbury 28  
Filled with a silent, icy anger, I saw my friends revealed for what they were!
- SING A SONG OF MURDER**.....Francis K. Allan 33  
Blind Sam had his ears wide open—for music that spelled m-u-r-d-e-r!
- SCHOOL FOR CORPSES**.....Wayne Rogers 53  
Benedisto would snap your picture—then send flowers to your funeral!
- LIE DOWN, YOU'RE DEAD!**.....David X. Manners 70  
Capt. Darrow's brogans seemed far too big for McGrady—until Darrow came back from the grave to make them fit!

—AND—

- MYSTERY'S DARK PORTALS**.....A Department 6  
Two great mystery magazines—for the price of one!
- KILLERS' KINGDOM**.....Ryerson Johnson 8  
Where it was a case of live and let live—or die sudden!

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## Mystery's Dark Portals

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Once before, faced with the problem of the nation's paper shortage, we experimented with narrower margins, smaller type and found that it was possible to bring you the same amount of wordage in a somewhat smaller magazine. Now, starting this issue, we have found a way to bring you *two* magazines—recognized as leaders in their field—for the price of one!

That is one reason why the contents page of our first new combination issue is headed by such outstanding writers as William R. Cox, Frederick C. Davis, Cyril Plunkett and Ray Bradbury! We are confident that the new *Dime Mystery*, combined with *10 Story Mystery*, will be one magazine you'll read and thoroughly enjoy—from cover to cover!

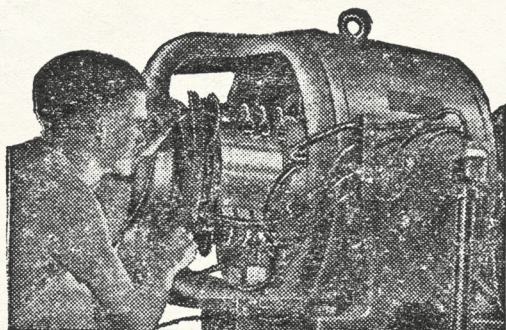
\* \* \*

Day Keene, top-flight murder-mystery writer, returns to head the bill in the second appearance of our new magazine with a rip-roaring tale of that one-armed, elbow-bending dick, Matt Mercer, who suddenly finds himself entrusted with a secret obtained at bayonet point by his friend, Steve Polos.

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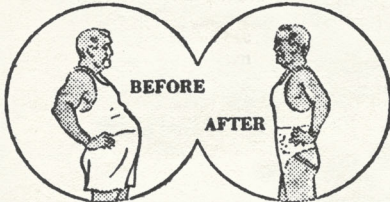
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# Killers' Kingdom

By RYERSON JOHNSON



*Honest citizens living in the old Cave-In-Rock region kept their eyes shut and their ears closed. . . . It was a case of live and let live—or die!*

“THREE hundred dollars a head” to be paid out of the Public Treasury agreeably to law . . . for the apprehending of Micajah Harpe, alias Big Harpe, a man about six feet high, of a robust make, ill looking and with a downcast countenance, with hair black and short, and coming very much down on his forehead. When he went away he had on a striped nankeen coat, dark blue woollen stockings—leggings of drab cloth and trousers of the same as the coat.

“There is also Wiley Harpe, alias Little Harpe, very meager in his face, with short black hair not quite so curly as his brother’s. He looks older though really younger, and has likewise a downcast countenance. He had on a coat of the same stuff as his brother’s.”

Thus did the State of Kentucky put a price on the heads of “the terrible Harpe brothers,” who had cut a bloody swath through the lower Ohio and Mississippi valleys, robbing and murdering wantonly, slitting the belly of a victim as they might a carcass of veal, cramming rocks into the abdominal cavity and sinking the body in a muddy creek for the eels to feed upon.

Posses scoured the wilderness trails, gunning for the “terrible Harpes.” Did they find them? No. Not then. That was because in 1780, as now, outlaws had their hideouts.

It is not too much to say that a criminal’s continued defiance of the law is possible only if he has given sober thought to the location of his hideouts—lonesome places where he cannot be found, where the people are sympathetic—or at least apathetic—and where he can rest up until the heat is off, licking his wounds and planning new crimes.

Many a crook is tracked down by the simple expedient of covering all his known haunts, shadowing his known associates. Many a big-time crook goes home to pa and ma! There, in his home-town environment, he is remembered rather for his boyhood pranks than for his present newspaper scarehead criminal activities. Law abiding citizens sheepishly pass the time of day with him, accept his limp handshake, or even “hist a stein” with him at the local bar after closing hours.

The most elusive criminal of them all, John Dillinger, went home for an Indiana week-

end, parked his car under the dusty-leaved sycamores alongside of those of friends and relatives, ate fried chicken with the home folks, and lounged around, smoking and chatting—while the police of an entire nation looked for him!

But the original hideout of the Harpe brothers, Cave-in-Rock, is now a state park in Illinois. It hasn’t changed much in appearance through the years: deep caves in limestone cliffs buried in bottomlands scrub—water maple and willow, wild plum and dogwood—and fronted by the broad Ohio River.

At the time Big Harpe and Little Harpe were using it, the Cave was the outlaw kingdom of the middle west. Honest frontiersmen lived in the region, tilling their farms, tending their country stores. But they kept their eyes shut and their ears closed to the infamous goings-on at the Cave. It was a case of condone or die.

The Cave was ruled by first one “strong” man then another. The outlaw fraternity, haunting the dim trails that led up from New Orleans and Natchez, robbed and killed—and came to Cave-in-Rock periodically to rest and hide-out.

The Cave, however, was more than a rest camp. It was at the same time the working headquarters for the most nefarious skullduggery of the times—river piracy. Flatboats floating down the Ohio from the Pittsburg region were set upon, boarded and robbed, the cargos looted, the boats sunk, the passengers killed. Often running battles would progress for miles along the river, with the outlaws swarming the shores with long rifles, and trailing in row boats, ready to swoop in for the kill.

In spite of all attempts to murder everyone who was robbed in the callous belief that “dead men tell no tales,” news of the depredations eventually filtered back East. Men faced with the necessity of making the river trip, ganged up in convoys!

The outlaws then attacked in greater numbers; the battles were bigger and bloodier. And this went on for years, until steam boats on the rivers and steam engines on the newly laid rails put both the river and land pirates to route.



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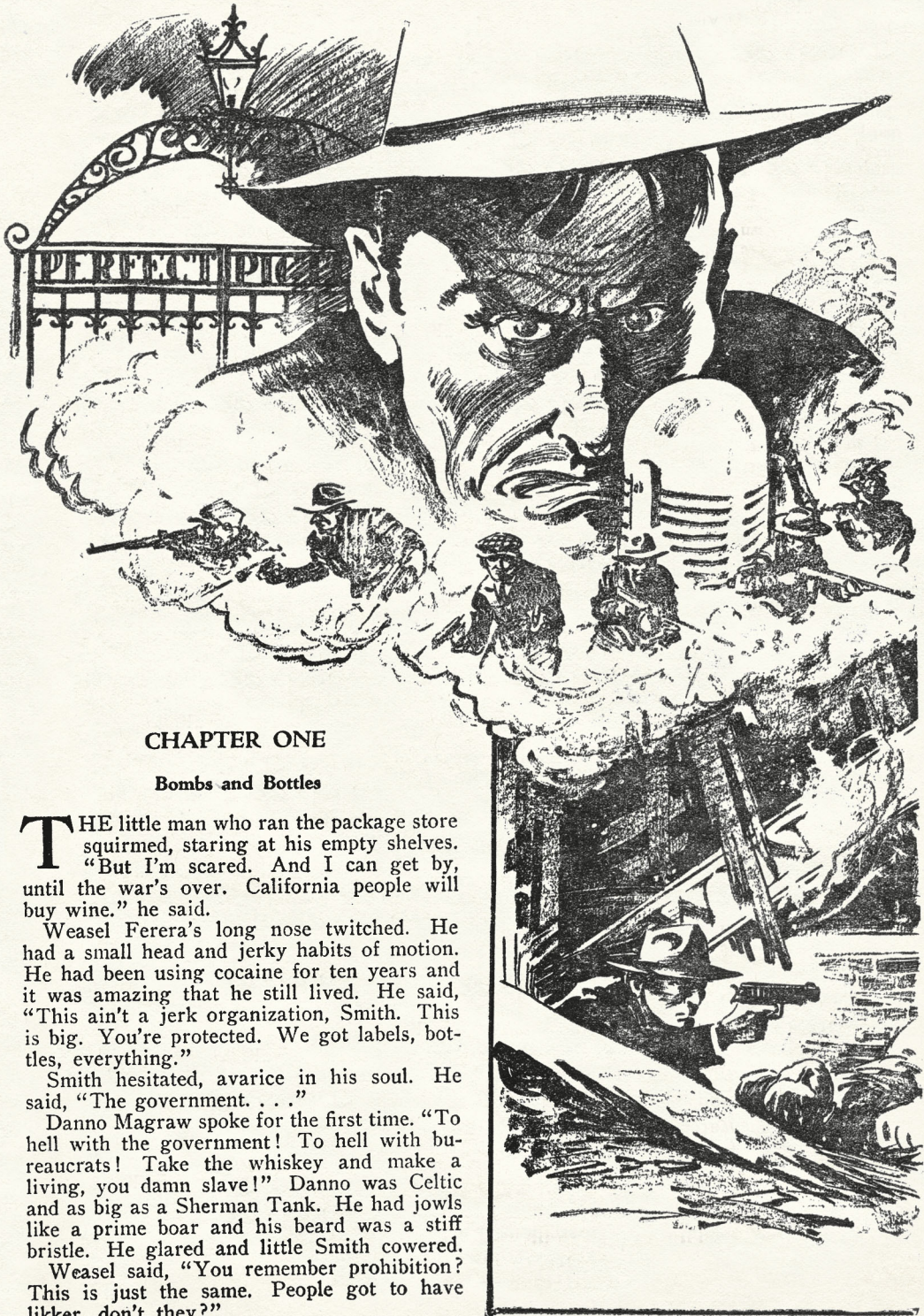
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## CHAPTER ONE

### Bombs and Bottles

**T**HE little man who ran the package store squirmed, staring at his empty shelves. "But I'm scared. And I can get by, until the war's over. California people will buy wine," he said.

Weasel Ferera's long nose twitched. He had a small head and jerky habits of motion. He had been using cocaine for ten years and it was amazing that he still lived. He said, "This ain't a jerk organization, Smith. This is big. You're protected. We got labels, bottles, everything."

Smith hesitated, avarice in his soul. He said, "The government. . . ."

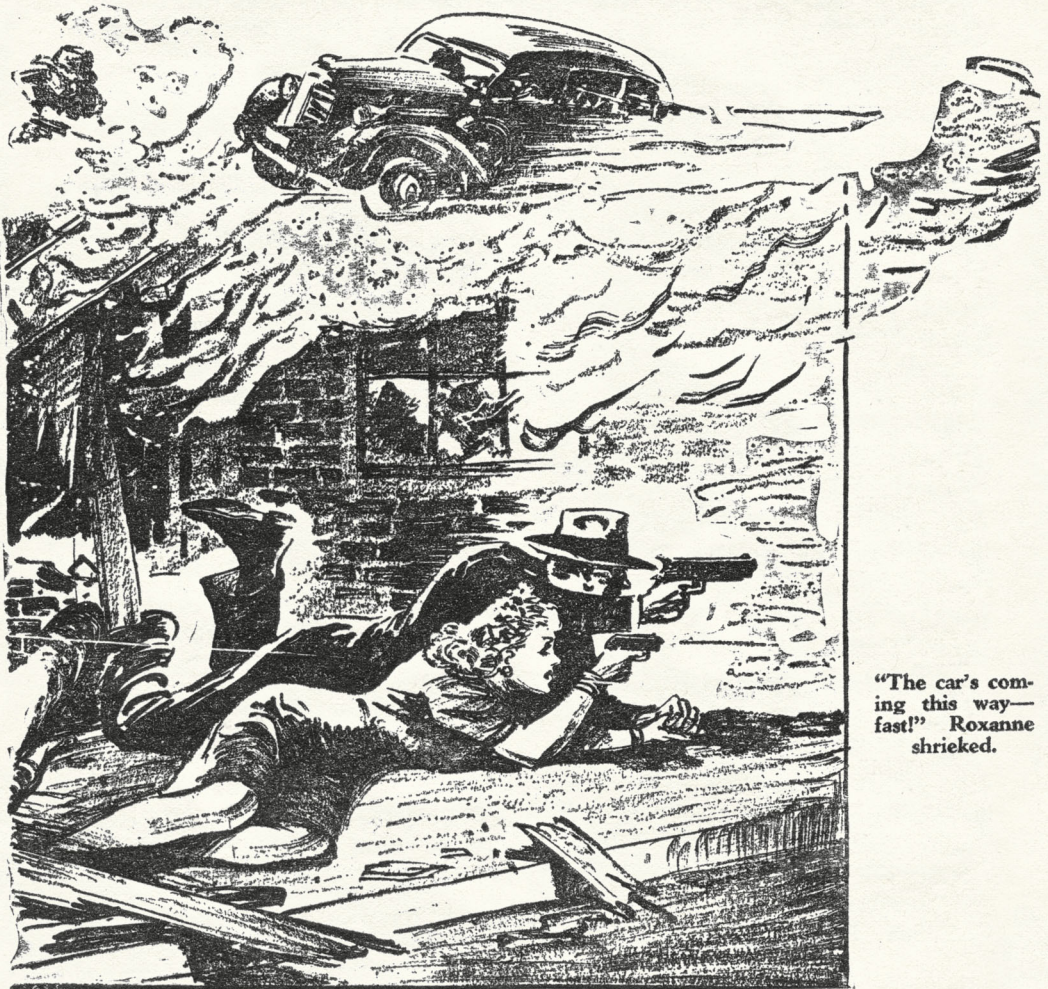
Danno Magraw spoke for the first time. "To hell with the government! To hell with bureaucrats! Take the whiskey and make a living, you damn slave!" Danno was Celtic and as big as a Sherman Tank. He had jowls like a prime boar and his beard was a stiff bristle. He glared and little Smith cowered.

Weasel said, "You remember prohibition? This is just the same. People got to have likker, don't they?"

# HELL COMES IN BOTTLES!

By WILLIAM R. COX

*George Grey and his murder-monger mob were reaping fabulous profits in bloodstained gold, forcing fascism down America's throat with poisoned Scotch as a chaser. . . . Could Tom Kincaid hope to smash their dark dream of Empire that stretched from Hollywood to the Atlantic, when he set them up to drinks of their own strange and deadly brew?*



"The car's coming this way—fast!" Roxanne shrieked.

Danno said, "You'll take it and make a profit."

Smith signed the order blank. He watched the two walk out onto Broad Street and within him was the uneasy sensation of having let himself in for trouble. . . .

Jones, who ran a liquor store, was not so amenable. He was a sturdy, middle-aged man who growled, "No bootleg for me. The stuff's no good and it leads to worse things. I can sell wine. . . ."

Weasel said, "So you don't want any, huh?"

Danno Magraw roared, "Ye'll take it and like it!" thrusting his prognathous jaw into the face of Jones.

Jones brought up a short piece of lead pipe from beneath the counter. He slammed it against Danno's head, rammed the end into Weasel's thin midriff. He caught the two by the elbows and ran them the length of his counter, then pitched the precious pair into Chestnut Street, to the delight of Los Angeles passersby.

Three hours later an automobile turned into Chestnut Street, rode slowly to a spot in front of Jones's little liquor store. Three citizens known as Jake Krum, One Lung Tighe and Morty Wise, unsavory gents with long police records, lounged for a moment. Weasel Ferera stood across the street, pointing and nodding.

A small metal object seemed to float from nowhere across the momentarily deserted sidewalk. Jones, coming from behind his counter to sell a bottle of wine to a customer, walked smack into it—staggered. There was a loud sound, the thunder of explosion.

Jones and the customer were unidentifiable when the morgue baskets arrived.

Late that night, in an underground chamber somewhere deep in the heart of the city, the bootleg ring gathered. Weasel and Danno and the thugs sat about a table. Weasel and Danno had their reports ready; the others listened admiringly as Weasel, twitching with the itch for more cocaine, read from his sheets.

In the wall was a two-way public address system. When Weasel had finished the switch clicked and there was a moment's pause. Then a dry, precise voice said, "You are three cases short in your figures. However, that's not bad. You will continue to take orders. Again I impress upon you that this is a large scale operation. First Los Angeles, then California, then the nation shall be flooded with our product. There will be millions in it—millions!"

Weasel and Danno sat and grinned. One Lung and the gunsels and shiv-men beamed with pleasure. The voice said sharply, "You are only one small gang among thousands who have organized for this work. Sugar must be acquired. Stills must be built. There is much to be done. Get out and work. Co-operation

of all units is imperative!" There was a pause. Then the dry voice asked, "Questions?" and the switch clicked.

Weasel said, "Boss, just one thing—are the cops fixed? I mean, how far can we go? I mean, is there any chance of a come-back if we just beat on a gee?"

The voice said, "Go as far as you like. If you are caught—you will be released. We do not buy policemen. We overpower them with force!"

Weasel whispered, "By the ghost of Dooney the Killer! It's heaven, that's what it is!"

"Beatin' cops! That's for me!" chortled One Lung. "Eemagine! What a boss we got now! Beats Capone!"

The voice crackled suddenly, "Magraw, I want you to go to Seventh and Marathon at exactly midnight. I have a special mission for you."

Magraw did not allow himself to smile. He merely said in his affected, thick brogue, "Yuss indeed, sir!"

The speaker went blank and the gang broke up, going separately and quietly about their nefarious ways. Magraw alone was solemn, thoughtful. . . .

**R**OXANNE QUEEN was serious, for once. The lissome blonde actress stood squarely on her neat, brown brogues and faced the two men who shifted uneasily. She said, "Tom Kincaid, you've chased George Grey for years without catching him. You've grown grey, you've been beaten and shot and stabbed. You've accomplished wonders in thwarting this character and half the police in the country now have Grey's description and believe that he must be apprehended."

Tom Kincaid, burly, tweeded slightly ruffled, grinned. "You sound like the introduction to a B-mystery picture. Come on, Rox, give us that big smile. We'll be back. I wouldn't say good-bye to a girl like you. . . ."

"The hell you wouldn't!" said the ladylike movie star.

Matt Durkin, flamboyant in a mauve sports jacket and fawn slacks, his bare feet sandaled, his slick hair shining, said flatly, "You're right, Rox."

Tom strode up and down the open porch of the house which Roxanne had built upon the Hollywood hill. It had been the nearest thing to a home Tom Kincaid had ever had. Even in the days of his coast-to-coast gambling empire, before the nefarious and ruthless George Grey had moved in to destroy his life plans, Tom had never roosted long enough in one spot to become a homebody.

He said, "Rox, you're the sweetest gal in the world. But I've got to go after George Grey. I have to destroy that man—or he'll come close to destroying America."

She said firmly, "You can spare me a few weeks. I have this new set-up with Perfect Pictures. Its my big break. I've never starred—Samuel Slope wants to build me into a big name. I want you to meet Peter Abbot, my producer. And I want you to check on the fascistic friends of Arlene Devine, who is gunning for me."

Tom said, "Samuel Slope has fifty million dollars and is crazy about you." It was amazing how difficult the thought could be to him. He scowled.

"Sure," said Matt. "And Rox is crazy about you!"

"You're damned right, I am," said Roxanne Queen sturdily. "Tom promised to marry me when he caught Grey—he can at least give me some time now!"

Tom said, "There is no one like you, Rox. You can put me on a spot neater than Grey himself!"

Her mobile, humorous face softened. She had a large mouth, warm and full, which added to the almost tomboyish beauty of her. She had never cared for stardom in pictures, being content to have the boys of America crazy for her, to swing her way through secondary, serio-comic roles, always working, always making money. Only since she had met Tom Kincaid had she aspired to reach the heights, as though perfection was the least thing Tom Kincaid should have. Tom knew this, and it stirred him to depths no other woman had ever touched.

She said softly, "You'll stay—awhile!"

"Yes," he surrendered. "I'll stay. We'll check the Devine gal right away. I've got to get word of Grey—I'll put out lines. . . ."

She said, "Thank you, Tom," and shook hands like a man. He never loved her more than at that moment.

Matt moved to the rumpus room at the end of the porch and said briskly, "Good! We'll have a shorty and go to the studio." He rummaged among the bottles. "Damn! The Scotch is low again. At six bucks a bottle it'll stay low, too!"

Tom said, "The liquor situation grows tough. There is a huge black market opening up. I hear you can buy whiskey, at a price in hundreds of stores in this district—and that it is strictly bootleg."

"The gangs are bound to open up again," said Matt. "They've been playing with pin ball machines and other little rackets and they're hungry."

Tom scowled. "We all like to drink. Americans will have their whiskey, come what may. But there's a war going on. Mobs can't operate without impeding it. . . ."

"I'm not buying bootleg," said Roxanne. "I'm for quitting the stuff—not that we drink very much."

"I'm not quitting," said Matt, draining his glass. "There'll be a way out—there always is. Let's go see the beautiful Devine and your rich friends. . . ."

They drove into Hollywood, to the independent Cinema Service lot, where Perfect Pictures would be made on a lease basis. In his large, airy office President Samuel Slope met them with unctiousness, concealing his suspicion of Tom and Matt under a hearty air.

**S**LOPE had made his money in banking and was spending it on motion pictures. He was a soft man with a small, selfish mouth and hard, predatory eyes. Undoubtedly he would get back, with huge interest, the money he was splurging on Perfect Pictures.

A narrow-faced, ascetic man in whose dark eyes a fever burned, arose and said, "I'm Peter Abbot," as though a supreme pronouncement was being made.

Roxanne greeted him, and Tom knew he was looking at the greatest director-producer of psychological films which Hollywood had produced. Abbot was all brain, scarcely able to stand the strain of work upon his puny body. He said, simply, "It will be fine working with you, my dear. I know your capabilities well."

The door to an inner sanctum opened and Arlene Devine, with her leading man, Sidney Standerly, swept in. Arlene was a vivid brunette. Standerly was a handsome profile, at whom you had to look twice to perceive his abysmal stupidity. They moved like a king and queen to meet the others.

Samuel Slope said, "Ah! All together at last! This is the nucleus of our company—the beginning of great things. Roxanne, dearest, here is your contract. Take it home and have your lawyer read it. Arlene, Sidney, here are yours. The figures will be satisfactory, I assure you. . . . And now Peter wants to discuss the first of our ventures in cinema-making." The man's air of geniality was lost upon Tom. Underneath he perceived a watchfulness, a suspicion, directed at him and Matt, primarily, but also at the others.

Abbot talked well, delineating the story. Arlene, Roxanne and Standerly were to have equal billing in a modern triangle yarn calling for some action and much polite comedy.

Arlene was dangerous to man or beast, he knew. She had been a star for several years, attaining the highest possible spot in pictures, then she'd slipped. She had fire, she knew drama, and she was deliberately setting after Samuel Slope.

Standerly was nervous, unhappy, obviously enamored of Arlene. Slope seemed to be enjoying the situation, but certainly preferred Roxanne. Only Abbot was intent wholly upon the making of a good picture.

When Abbot had finished, Arlene said, "You'll want some character actors, good ones. How about Jason Bee and Marilyn Hale? And you can use that boy, Bob Galleon. I know them all—we work well together."

Roxanne's brown eyes slid around to rest upon Tom. Slope was saying smoothly, "Leave their names on my desk. I'm sure Peter knows them."

The director's thin face pinched tight. "I know them. I don't want them!"

Arlene was clever enough to smile. She said, "But they *are* good, aren't they, Peter dear?"

"Fine!" said Abbot shortly. "Little happy people!"

The star was scribbling the names on a pad. Slope did not alter his set smile. He said, "I've a case of Scotch. I want you each to take a bottle. Had a time getting it! Sort of an offering—for an auspicious beginning of our new picture."

In the car Roxanne said, "Bee, Hale and Galleon are all nasty fascists. Peter can't help himself, though, if Slope hires them."

Tom was turning the bottle over in his big hands. He said, "I don't like your millionaire. This bottle of Scotch has a faked stamp."

"What?" demanded Matt incredulously. "That old gag?"

"Bootleg," said Tom succinctly. "I recognize the work of an old forger named Higginbotham. I knew him well, fifteen years ago."

A giant of a man with a protruding jaw walked along the sidewalk, turned off and went into the offices of Perfect Pictures. Inside, he turned and stared out the upper glass of the door, one hand caressing his stubborn beard. Tom Kincaid's eyes met the glare, held it until Danno Magraw drew back and proceeded to the ornate, pretentious office of Samuel Slope.

A cycle had been completed. Inside Tom a little warning buzzer began to agitate, so that the big gambler's heart beat faster and his solid jaw hardened involuntarily. The pig-like face of Danno, strange to him, had nevertheless registered upon him with the impact of a slap in the belly. The tension in the office of Samuel Slope had aroused him to a pitch of nervous sensitivity which presaged trouble and plenty of it.

Matt was saying, "Perfect Pictures is paying you plenty to make a picture Rox. Just go ahead and work—we'll watch the little grounded gremlins of local fascism. They ain't tough."

Tom spread his gambler's hands, staring down at the large, straight fingers. He could not rid himself of the feeling of impending trouble. Roxanne stopped to buy a paper and he read a headline: "ANOTHER LIQUOR STORE BOMBED."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Death Strikes Again!

THE man in the package shop said, "I could let you have a bottle of Scotch—but I can't sell at the ceiling, brother. You unnerstand?"

Tom said, "Sure. Let me have it."

The man went in the back and brought out a bottle of Black Horse, the brand Samuel Slope had provided. Tom glanced at the government stamp, at the state stamp. He gave the man seven-fifty and walked out. He put the bottle with a dozen others in Roxanne's car and drove slowly up towards Hollywood Hills.

Matt was already there with another dozen bottles. He had one of them open and was cheerfully sampling it. "It's been tampered with," he said. Weak as water. There's no doubt, chum, the bootleggers are in."

Tom said, "This is a big operation. I hear from New York, from Florida, from Chicago that the stuff is flooding the market. Bourbon, rye and Scotch. Four Federal Agents have been killed. The retailers are thoroughly terrorized. Fascistic elements are boldly defending the 'rights' of the people to have whiskey. The people have the old Prohibition spirit. They're buying this bootleg with their eyes open."

"Someone is getting rich as hell," Matt said. "The mob behind this is terrific. Nation-wide organization—" He paused, his mouth open.

"Yeah," nodded Tom wearily. "Who could do all this in such a short time?"

"George Grey!" said Matt.

"And we don't even have a ghost of an idea where he is," said Tom bitterly.

Matt considered for a moment. Then he said, "The little fascists down at Perfect Pictures are buying the stuff by the case and getting plastered nightly. Could be a starting point."

Tom gathered together the bottles and put them in the back of the liquor cabinet in the rumpus room. The two went out and got into Roxanne's car and drove to the Cinema Service lot.

Samuel Slope was in the corridor, talking with a big man. He stopped them with a wave of his pudgy hand and said, "Have you met the new assistant director, Danno Magraw? Lucky to get him. He's had experience abroad. This is Tom Kincaid and Matt Durkin, the famed—er—gamblers, Danno."

The deep-set eyes bored into Tom. The giant had a grip like a hand-press. He said, "Glad to know ye, byes!"

He was as phoney as a three dollar bill, Tom thought, but mean and strong. Matt put his hands in his pockets, nodded cheerily and said, "I'm Irish myself, Magraw. Nice to meet one of our lads."

Magraw said in his throaty voice, "It's a fine gang we have on the picture. Hope you drop in often!" He had the air of one much at home.

The two went into Slope's office, arm in arm. Tom and Matt walked towards Stage One, where the first scenes were being shot. They heard Peter Abbot's small, clear voice saying, "Quiet, please. Roll them!" The sound man's voice echoed, "Quiet—shooting— We're rolling!"

Tom and Matt stopped, motionless. Arlene and Standerly were on a divan. Jason Bee, an elderly actor, spoke a line, then exited left. Arlene approached Standerly registering deep love. . . . A door banged open and Roxanne appeared, a breath of fresh air, lovely, giving life to the scene. Abbot's face glowed a bit under the glaring lights as he sipped a glass of lemonade.

Arlene blew a line. Abbot's mercurial features suffused with anger. He said bitterly, "Cut!"

Roxanne wheeled, stared at Arlene. She said, "You never used to go up in your lines, sister!"

Standerly piped, "You crossed us on the timing—"

Jason Bee, a pompous, stout man, called, "Rox is chewing it up. That's four times—"

Marilyn Hale, an acrid, blondined woman, sat near the not-so-young juvenile, Bob Gallean, a weak-faced, petulant man. They chorused, "Rox, you're pressing too hard. . . . You've lost the cadence."

It was unprecedented for members of a company to criticize a star openly, Tom knew. He moved forward. Matt hunched his wiry shoulders and his dark face glowed with rage. Peter Abbot was standing, shocked, furious.

Samuel Slope and Danno Magraw came blithely through the door and approached the set. Roxanne, arms akimbo, shapely legs spread, was cool and dangerous. She said, "Peter, was I wrong?"

"No, my dear," said Abbot quietly.

Roxanne said, "I'm quitting. Right now." She came down, her face pale beneath the make-up, but steady-eyed. She said, "Tom, you're right about everything. Let's go."

Samuel Slope put out a hand. He said, "This will finish you, Queen. You signed the contract." He did not seem alarmed, nor anything other than slightly regretful.

Danno Magraw sneered, standing slightly to the rear and at one side. Peter Abbot said with dignity, "I do not care to go on with the present cast, Mr. Slope."

Danno's voice boomed, "Looks like an insurrection, sir. A plot to ruin the picture."

Slope said, "You can quit, too, Abbot."

**Your face looks swell, feels better yet  
When you shave with a Thin Gillette.  
This blade saves time and dough what's more—  
For one dime buys a pack of four!**



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The faces of them all were contented, Tom thought. It was a strange scene, with undercurrents running deeper than the Pacific.

Abbot came to where Roxanne held to Tom's arm and said, "Shall we go together? There is something I must tell you, Tom. I've learned of a bad angle to all this. . . ."

**T**HEY went through the heavy door, conscious of the babble of voices behind them, of Magraw saying loudly, "We'll throw out the junk he shot and start over. I've a yarn for ye, folks—a good un!"

The outer door opened into bright California sunshine, so that they were blinded for a moment. Tom turned to locate Abbot. He saw only Roxanne and Matt.

Abbot was on the ground, crumpled in a heap. Tom bent and snatched the light form into his arms and began to run. No one was at the gate, he saw, except the studio policeman within the little watch tower, and that worthy was examining a visitor's pass. Lightly Tom sprinted, swerved, making for Roxanne's car.

Matt leaped behind the wheel of the convertible and said, "What is it, Tom?"

Tom's face was white. "Get to the hospital, quick!"

Roxanne whispered, "Poor Peter. His heart was bad."

Tom said, "Look at his face. This wasn't a heart attack. This was poison of some kind."

Peter Abbot was accustomed to suffering, but the pain in his set features was apparent to them all. Matt drove like a fiend to the nearest hospital. Tom bore his burden to the emergency room and the overworked young doctors got busy. In a half hour one of them came out and said, "Too late. It was either cyanide or prussic acid. He has obviously been ill. There will be an autopsy of course. I suppose it was self-administered?"

Tom said, "It certainly was not. Please inform Captain Jack Clarke of Homicide and tell him Kincaid brought the body in."

He led the others to the car. He said, "Someone gave it to him in the lemonade he always drank. He had learned something—he told us that."

Roxanne said, "Do you think they meant to get me, too?"

Tom shook his head. "They meant to ruin you. They got you to sign a contract, then to quit. There can only be one reason for that."

"Sure," said Matt. "On account of us. And that means the fascistic crew was behind it."

"You'll be blacklisted in pictures," said Tom flatly. "You walked out. Peter is dead—and they'll say he committed suicide because the picture was going wrong. He was sick, remember. Slope's money will carry them

through a B picture directed by Magraw—and they have the block booking through Amalgamated Players to get back some of the investment."

"But Slope is a millionaire," protested Roxanne. "He can't be tied up with these people!"

"Slope was a banker. So was Grey," said Tom grimly. "The seeds of revolution can grow a strange crop. America never really loves war. These crafty people can stir up so much trouble, sniping at the conduct of the war, bellowing for a negotiated peace, undermining the economic structure by black market operations, that anything might happen."

Roxanne said, "But it doesn't seem possible, Tom. . . ." She stopped, tears in her brown eyes. "Peter lies back there dead—and I say these things can't happen! Oh, Tom, we must do some damn thing! Anything, to pay them for killing Peter!"

## CHAPTER THREE

### Draw Five!

**"T**HERE'S no clue—nothing," Captain Clarke said uneasily. "We're checking sales of prussic acid. There's a crime wave, all over L. A. This bootlegging business fosters crime. . . ."

Tom said, "The poison was probably flown in from the east. You'll never prove Peter was killed. But you'd better watch this bootleg crowd."

Clarke said, "We've got Grey's description in every cop's book. Weasel Ferera is around, but we can't seem to pick him up. He's an oldtimer, a cokey."

Tom arose. "Run down every little thing. Maybe we'll get a lead somehow. This inaction is killing me."

He went out of Headquarters and got into the car. Rox and Matt were at home this evening, waiting. The three had done nothing but wait for a week. Murders, robberies, extensive bootlegging were rife throughout the country and government agencies were cracking down, but manpower was scarce and the leaks innumerable. Congress was aroused but impotent. The home front was being torn to pieces by underground, powerful forces.

Tom stopped in a little, downtown store and asked for bourbon. The man said, "Haven't got any. Won't have any."

He was a small man with rugged features and a slightly battered left ear. His name, the sign said, was "Jones."

Tom said, "Look, I'm willing to pay for it." The little man said, "You won't get it here. They killed my brother for not taking it. I'm waiting for them to get me—but I'm not taking bootleg hooch!"



Tom leaned forward. He said, "Weren't you the featherweight champion out here a few years back? Spike Jones?"

The little man said, "And I can still fight! With this!" He produced a revolver from under the counter and his grey eyes were pinpoints of rage.

Tom said, "You're the man I've been looking for. Here is my phone number. I'm Kincaid, the gambler. If anyone threatens you, or even tries to sell you some bootleg whiskey, call me at once. Whoever answers, just say 'This is Spike and I'm ready.' Don't say anything else. Understand?"

Spike Jones said, "Kincaid? I know you. How's Durkin? I used to play cards with Matt, years ago. Sure, I'll call you. Workin' for the cops now, Kincaid?"

"For myself," said Tom. "I want to know who's behind all this. 'Don't kill anyone unless you have to! 'I want to track them down to their headquarters.'"

He took leave of the little man and got into the car and drove out Sunset. It was his first lead and he felt encouraged. Every other storekeeper had been either supplied with whiskey or cowed. Spike Jones could easily be the means of swinging the tide.

He had no hope that George Grey was in L.A. The last affair had made the ex-banker and arch criminal known to the police of Southern California.

In fact, since Roxanne's debacle at the studio, there was no reason for Tom to remain in L.A.—except that he wanted to learn who had killed Peter Abbot and to restore Roxanne to her profession.

He detoured, driving past Cinema Service, where Danno Magraw was directing Pete Abbot's picture for Perfect. The high fence and long buildings about the lot told him nothing.

**I**T WAS dusk, and the studio was seemingly closed. There were a couple of cars parked at the curb and Tom mechanically noted the numbers, wondering if the big Cad was Slope's and if Magraw owned the sporty Banner Eight with the top down. He slowed a bit, edging Roxanne's car toward the gutter.

He had not noticed the third car across the street, the battered small sedan. As he clambered out from behind the wheel of Roxanne's convertible, his back was half-turned. The eruption of four men, coming from each door, going into synchronized action caught him by surprise.

He saw a missile coming at him from the corner of his eye and his good reflexes caused him to duck and swing to the right. His hand went to his left arm-pit, where the pearl-handled gun snuggled in its holster. His draw was a lightning sweep of the right and his

left arm went up to shield his face. A blackjack crashed against his elbow as he fired at the nearest attacker. It spoiled his aim, but he had evaded the thrown rock and a knife slid past his sweater-vest, slicing the wool but missing his ribs.

As he brought the gun around, realizing that they wanted him alive or that he would have been dead by now, he saw a sharp-featured little man with the eyes of a hop-head, and struck out. The man went away. Tom raised his weapon and had the four of them lined up.

From behind a hand reached out and stopped him. He doubled forward, bringing this new opponent close, then kicked back with his heel. He got home on a shinbone and heard a loud bellow. Then he leaped for Rox's car and shelter from which to open a barrage.

The attack from the rear had given the enemy precious seconds. The four had leaped into the sedan and the little car bucked, then scooted ahead in second gear.

**T**OM straightened, looked about. He went back cautiously and examined the owner's certificates fastened to the steering post of the two automobiles he had first noted. The Cad belonged to Slope, all right. The convertible job was registered in the name of Danno Magraw.

He strode to the gate of the studio. The cop tried to stop him, but Tom waved him aside with the gun still in his hand and the watchman immediately retreated to dial the local precinct.

In the spacious office of Samuel Slope sat the President of Perfect Pictures and Danno Magraw. They glared at Tom, paled at the sight of his gun, sat very still. Slope said, "You'll be arrested for this, Kincaid."

Tom said, "Fine! That suits me." He walked through the various offices, looking in closets. After a few moments a siren sounded and three uniformed policemen came on the run. Tom said sharply to them, "I'm Kincaid. Help me look for a man hiding on the lot—a big, strong man with a scar on his shin. I kicked him, once."

Slope bleated dismay, but the cops said, "Yes, sir!" and scattered.

Tom said, "You can have me arrested later by swearing out a warrant. You see, the police are co-operating with me on this case."

"There is no case! This is sabotage!" said Slope. "Just because Roxanne Queen deserted us. . . ."

Tom said, "I'm talking about the murder of Peter Abbot. And don't tell me he killed himself." He went a step forward and suddenly faced Danno Magraw. He snapped, "And as for you, I don't like you and keep your mouth shut!"

Magraw said, "Just a mo', me bucko! Ye're not talkin' to me that way!" He reached out a big hand.

Tom backed away, then slid forward. He beat a fast right to Danno's body. Then he retreated swiftly and Danno had to chase him. Slope begged, "No! Not that! Stop, Magraw!"

Magraw abruptly obeyed, edging behind a heavy desk. Tom dropped his hands and said, "Next time I'll really clip you, Magraw. This is fair warning!"

The police came in and the sergeant said, "Couldn't find anyone, Kincaid."

Tom said, "I was attacked by five men. Four of them got away in an old crate." He described the car. "The fifth just disappeared. There are several doors through which he could get onto the lot—if he had a key. Otherwise, where could he have gone?"

The sergeant scratched his head. "I dunno."

Tom said, "Well, skip it." He jerked his head at Slope and Magraw. "Good evening gentlemen. We'll meet again."

He led the policemen outside. He said in a low voice, "Call Jack Clarke and have him put a tail on Slope and on Magraw. Make it quick, understand?"

The sergeant said, "Sure. We'll do it right now."

The police went away in the squad car. Tom drove back to Sunset and turned off into the Canyon and wound his way up the hill to the top and Roxanne's fine house. It was supertime and he was hungry for the first time in a week. He was also almost happy.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Underground Rebellion!

**I**N THE underground chamber the loud speaker crackled and the deep voice came through. "So you failed to capture Kincaid! You fools!"

Weasel Ferera said, "We could've knocked him off. You said not to. Nobody is takin' that guy without killin' him."

The voice said, "You have been put at the head of our operations here. You have made thousands. Yet you can't bring in one man!"

They looked at one another. Morty Wise muttered, "I'd like to get a look at this character. Tellin' us!"

The voice said, "Magraw is doing special work, very important work. You four are supposed to take up the slack left by his absence. You're not doing it!"

Weasel said, "Danno had hold of him. Danno had the best chance. But Kincaid got that gat into action and Danno ran like the rest of us."

"It should not have been necessary for Magraw to enter the scuffle!" boomed the voice. "If Kincaid discovered him, all would be endangered. Do you understand? The police—the federals—no one is to be feared like Kincaid and his partner, Matt Durkin. I want them, and I want them alive. Next time, don't let either escape. Kill them if you must—but get them!"

Weasel said, "Knockin' them off would be easy, Boss."

The voice barked a short laugh. "So you think. You caught Kincaid unawares, for once. Beware next time! He will be looking for you. He won't sit at home and wait for you. He's probably combing the city for you now!"

"Boss," said Weasel earnestly, "in the old days we bumped off tougher guys than this Kincaid before breakfast. But a snatch is another thing. We ain't snatch artists, and that's a fact."

The voice said, "Enough! Men who work for me must be able to fulfill any task. I have good reasons for preferring Kincaid, Durkin and that blonde dame alive. But I must have them. Go about your regular business as usual—but bring me those three people!"

Weasel said, "There's a tough little ex-pug named Jones. He won't play ball no way we put it to him. He's got a gat; he'll use it."

"Eliminate him!" said the voice harshly. "We're playing for high stakes—higher than your feeble brain can grasp. Leave Magraw's written report on the table and go at once."

Weasel dropped a black notebook on the table. The door at the end of the subterranean chamber swung open, although there was no knob or latch. They passed through into a pitch dark hall which slanted upward at a sharp angle, through a dim storeroom, into a large liquor establishment which was closed for the night. This store had a side entrance into an arcade, part of a large office building of which this was the ground floor. One at a time, they slipped out through this side door and went in various directions, to meet at the private garage a half hour later. . . .

**M**ATT DURKIN said, "I remember Spike Jones. He made a lot of money in the fight game, but he would draw to inside straights."

The telephone rang with startling abruptness. Tom reached for it, his face hardening. It was Captain Clarke. He said, "This Magraw is slippery. My men lost him in downtown Los Angeles. Slope went home and to bed. . . ."

"Have them drag for Magraw. I know he's tied up with something," Tom ordered.

Clarke said, "That professional Irishman has been a nuisance around Hollywood for years, but there's nothing against him on the blot-

ter. He was broke a month ago and now he seems to have dough—that's all I know about him.

"This is all very mysterious, Tom. Slope is absolutely in the clear with us. I can't let him know we're watching him or there will be trouble."

"There'll be trouble anyway," promised Tom. He hung up and joined Roxanne and Matt in the little bar. They sipped at a drink and Tom again examined the bottles of boot-leg he had acquired.

Matt said, "Higginbotham was a funny little gee. He must be pretty old by now. He always made the best labels. Remember how he used to brag?"

"Those nasty little fascists at the studio are my choice," said Roxanne. "Arlene Devine once met Franco's cousin or someone and the others are her pals. If Magraw is in it, they are too. And other financiers have been known to hunger for a fascist state besides Samuel Slope."

"It's all guessin'," said Matt. "And no action."

The telephone rang again. In Tom's ear a husky voice said, "Kincaid? This is Jones."

Tom said, "Where are you? What do you want?"

"I'm at the store," said the voice. "Can you come down?"

"I'll be right there," said Tom. He hung up the instrument and reached for his gun holster. He said, "That was not Spike Jones. We had a code message arranged. They're in his store, probably wrecking it. It's a trap . . . so let's spring it!"

Matt grabbed his .22 and a sweater. Roxanne followed them to the door. Tom stopped and said, "Bring a wrap and come along. Maybe they just want to send me away and get you. I can't take chances with this crowd."

There was no light in the Jones store and no sign of life in the neighborhood. Tom led them across the street and down the block. They stopped in a doorway and watched for a few minutes. Then Tom said, "You two wait here. I'll see what's up."

Before they could answer he was walking boldly across the street towards the little store. Matt held Roxanne by the elbow, whispering, "It's better that way. I've got him covered—and we have to take chances."

"If it's Grey's men, he'll be killed!" she said.

"When you're fightin' Grey, you're liable to be dead any minute," Matt said grimly. "That's why Tom won't marry you, baby. He's got to get Grey first."

**T**HE door to the store was open. Tom nudged it with the muzzle of his gun and

it swung wide. He stepped within and still there was no sound, no motion. He half expected the door to close behind him, to entrap him within the small confines of the place. Nothing happened.

He could see the shelves, filled with wine bottles and some fifths of rum. He could dimly make out the little room in the rear, to which there was no door. For a long moment he crouched, ready for anything.

His nose wrinkled at a slight acrid odor. Turning, he dove towards the door. There was a rustle behind the counter.

He turned and flopped over, reaching. He got hold of a wrapped bundle and ran for the street, reaching the sidewalk just as the bomb within exploded.

He ran through the debris, and saw Matt coming. Roxanne held a revolver and was staring down the street. Matt yanked out a knife with a long blade and when Tom had put the slight sturdy figure of Spike Jones on its feet, Matt cut loose the rope which bound him and jerked the gag from his mouth. Jones stammered, "Four of 'em. They called me, said it was you. I came down and they grabbed me. They had one of them old-fashioned fuse bombs. I could see it sizzle. . . ." Dazedly, he shook his head, cold sweat upon his cheeks.

Tom said, "That type of bomb is hardest to identify. Made out of second-hand materials. Did you recognize them?"

"Got me from behind," admitted Spike. "I fell for it. I was lookin' for you and mebber some good news."

Tom said, "Didn't you put my number down on paper?"

"Yeah," said Spike. "My memory ain't so good, sometimes."

Tom sighed. He said, "Simple, isn't it? They cracked into your store, found my name and number, called you, then called me."

Roxanne interrupted sharply, "There's an old car coming this way—fast!"

The fire sirens were still in the distance, although the little shop was a mass of wreckage and flames. The car came down on the wrong side of the street. Matt forced Roxanne down. Tom went down, rolled over, and began firing at once, afraid to wait and take aim for fear Roxanne would be hurt. But Rox was shooting her little automatic as rapidly as possible and Matt's .22 fanned slugs into the car. Spike came down beside Tom. There was a cry, the battered sedan swerved and was gone at sixty miles per hour.

Tom bent, his eyes narrowed. Spike had not arisen. Matt came and knelt to watch. Roxanne stood, her bright face clouded. Spike made one effort to get up, as though he were in the ring and was waiting for the count of nine.

The fire engines and the squad car rolled up. Spike said thickly. "They're too late ain't they?" He grinned at Tom and said, "My mistake. Shouldn't—have written—it down."

There was a hole in Spike's chest. Someone shooting from that fast moving car had been either very good or very lucky. Another possible witness gone. They had taken no chance that Spike would talk further about the men who visited him. . . .

**T**HE coupe rolled slowly up Sunset. There was no sleep in any of the three. Roxanne carefully inserted a new clip in her tiny automatic.

"We've got to stop them, and quick," said Tom. "They are sharpshooting anyone who might lead us to their hiding place. Of course they have a secret headquarters—otherwise the police would have picked up Weasel Ferera and his pals before now."

Matt was driving. He said, "We're next. It's probably a lousy idea to go home right now. They're hittin' hard and fast."

"We could go visiting," suggested Roxanne brightly.

"It's after one," said Tom. Then he looked sharply at Roxanne. "You mean visiting suspects?"

"Like Samuel Slope," nodded the screen star. "Or even Arlene Devine."

Tom considered. Then he said, "Rox, you've been telling us there was some sort of hook-up between that crew and the bootlegging right along. And Peter Abbot had something to tell us. And there is Magraw, who certainly came from nowhere to be associated with Slope. I am beginning to wonder if you're not right."

"Wouldn't that be strange?" murmured Roxanne.

Matt said, "The big shot lives in Beverly Hills." He drove through the Strip and turned onto Cactus Drive. The street circled and the estate which Slope had rented was huge, lonely, enclosed by a brick wall covered with vines.

There was a gate and Matt parked the car. Tom unlimbered his long legs and said, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained—and all that."

Roxanne said, "Let me approach him. He still has a yen for me in spite of what happened. Arlene must have worn him down by now. She's so heavy-handed in her love making!"

Tom said reluctantly, "Go ahead. We'll be right behind you. Be careful, darling!"

"Sam isn't one to be frightened of," said Roxanne blithely. "He's the slimy but harmless type. And I have the precious little gat!"

She swung ahead and Tom watched the famed figure disappear up a winding drive towards the big house. Matt said, "There's

no gal like Rox. Let's go, chum. This may be it."

They crept along, and soon they saw Roxanne again, mounting a verandah at the front of the mansion.

Tom slipped behind an oleander bush, watching. To his amazement, the door opened promptly and Roxanne stepped within. There was a thud as the portal closed behind the girl.

Matt said, "Hey! Someone was up! She didn't even ring."

**T**OM was already in action swerving to the left of the house, where the porch ran around the edge and faced a large swimming pool. Matt followed. There were no lights.

Tom found steps and leaped them. He crossed the porch soundlessly, seeking a window. There were several, but all were screened on the outside and time was precious now.

Matt hissed, "This way!"

The little man was at the end of the porch. He had discovered a bathroom window, too high to reach, but unscreened. Tom ran and gave a hand to Matt's heel. The sound of falling glass within was faint, but distinct. The two froze, Matt with head and shoulders within the house, Tom supporting him.

There was a cry and then lead winged and loud reports resounded. Matt fired twice. He said, "Heave me in!"

Tom lifted mightily and the dapper figure wriggled over the sill and was gone. Tom groaned, knowing he could not follow the two people he loved most in the world. Then bullets came, clipping stucco from the building, threatening him with death.

He turned and knelt, crawling to change position. He saw a head at the end of the porch and fired. Another man fired from across the swimming pool. Tom took careful aim and heard a howl which proved his aim still good, even at night. He advanced, seeking to force the enemy into the open, reloading as he went.

All the while the ache within him grew. What was taking place inside Samuel Slope's house? Were Roxanne and Matt already dead?

He was gaining ground on them. He counted four bullets which winged their way past him, and moved again to the edge of the porch at the front. He heard the sound of a motor, and emptied his gun at three fleeing figures. One stumbled and went down, but two others lifted the wounded man and dragged him through the gate.

The porch was deserted and no more shots greeted Tom. He rushed at the front door and thrust a big shoulder against it.

The door yawned in his face. Tom went through, keeping his feet only by great effort and came about, seeking an enemy.

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Matt said, "They got clean away!"  
Matt was leaning against the wall, his left arm hanging limp.

Tom gasped, "Rox! Where is she?"

Matt nodded towards the living room. "In there. I never spotted a one, Tom. . . . There were three or four inside. Rox walked right into them."

Tom was already in the huge, ornate room. Roxanne lay on her side on the floor. He picked her up and made for the bathroom, found a light. He started water running and Matt came to stand in the doorway, his face pale, blood running down his arm.

There was a lump on Roxanne's head. Tom rested her gently against the tiled wall and stood, wiping the sweat from him. He put the towel about her temples and went to Matt, probing gently for the wound in his partner's arm. He said huskily, "They only conked her. . . . I don't get this. Where is everybody? Where is Slope?"

Matt said, "I wouldn't know. See if there's some bandage—my little bullet went through, I think."

Roxanne opened her eyes. She put both hands to her head and said calmly, "And look for an aspirin. I seem to have a hangover."

Matt slung his arm in a bandage and Roxanne arose, smoothing her skirt. They stared at one another, then broke for the next room. They went through the house, upstairs and down. Matt ducked outdoors and found a servant's quarters. He returned and said, "They tied up the maid and gardener. Neither saw what hit them."

Tom said, "Slope's been kidnapped!"

Roxanne took the cloth from her head and brushed at her long, golden hair. She said, "I walked into their arms. Someone slugged me. But as I went down I heard a voice."

Tom said, "Whose?"

"It said, 'Niver mind the girrul, get Slope first. She's safe 'till we come back,'" Roxanne repeated. "And there is the connecting link between the gangsters and Magraw."

"But where would they take Slope—and why?" Tom asked.

"We could catch some sleep now," said Roxanne. "Tomorrow the papers—and Jack Clarke—may know."

The police were already coming to find out about the shots in the Beverly Hills estate. Tom picked up the phone and dialed Clarke. "You'd better round up Jason Bee, Marilyn Hale and Bob Galleon and Arlene DeVine. Slope may be a victim of some strange Hollywood plot," he told him.

Clarke said wearily, "They have knocked off a couple more honest storekeepers. The rest won't testify—scared to death. It's the worst reign of terror L.A. ever saw. And I keep gettin' wires from the East. It's nation-

wide, and roarin' like a prairie fire. Congress wants to declare martial law and cut off all whiskey sales, but you know what effect that would have."

"It would throw sympathy to the bootleggers," nodded Tom. "If we could only find where Magraw took Slope—or only knew the reason. . . ."

"If wishes were horses, I'd bet on every race," mourned Clarke.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Snatched from Death

SAMUEL SLOPE writhed at his bonds. "You dirty hoodlums will go to jail for life!" he said viciously.

Weasel Ferera grinned, higher than a B-17 on a fresh load of cocaine. "You won't be around to see it—if the Boss stays mad atcha," he said.

Jake Krum nursed a wounded leg and a grouch. "Mebbe we can bump off this character, huh? He made me get this bum gam."

Morty Wise caressed a lump over his left eye. One Lung came in through the door and yelled. "Shorty Teague just croaked. We kin dump him with this one, when we finish him off."

Ferera said, "Wait awhile. We ain't heard from the Boss."

Slope bellowed, "Let me out of here! Why, I own this building! I know where I am! I'll have you all electrocuted!"

Weasel casually slapped a blackjack against Slope's face. The millionaire's head bobbed and he went deathly pale, groaning as the blood ran down his thick neck. Weasel said, "That's just a sample. When you play with the Boss, you play all the way through, you welchin' rat!"

Danno threw one big leg over the corner of the table and said conversationally to Slope, "You're in this, ye know, up to yer neck, me lad. Ye've always belonged to the fascist group. Ye contributed plenty to the cause. Why back out now?"

Slope groaned, "You murdered Abbot! I found the package of prussic acid where you left it in my house the night before he died."

"After he died," corrected Magraw, grinning evilly. "Shure and I thought the cops might find it and blame you. I never trusted you, me bucko."

Slope said, "I have merely tried to maintain the political status quo. I have fostered the minorities who do not agree with certain elements of our political forces in America. . . ."

"Bah!" said Magraw. "Ye've stolen the people's money right and left and played the game to protect yerself! You're a fake, Slope! Now ye've got a chance to join the great revo-

lution, to make the country ours—and ye welch!”

The speaker in the wall crackled and Magraw was silent, his merciless eyes upon Slope. The four thugs held their breath as the bass voice came through clearly, “Samuel Slope, you refuse to join us in our battle. You refuse a paltry million to aid the cause. You balk at the forced removal of a man who threatened to expose the ramifications of our scheme. . . .”

“It was murder!” whispered Slope, staring at the impersonal throat of the loud speaker.

“War!” thundered the voice. “You further refused to call the blonde Queen woman and Kincaid to a spot where we could get them. We lost two men in the fight, Slope. You are responsible for this.”

Slope said desperately, “I didn’t know about the bootlegging ring when I hired Magraw and the others. Politics is one thing, nationwide sabotage another.”

“You can go back tomorrow,” said the voice. “You can resume making propaganda pictures. You can recover your place in the world—if you obey us. We want full co-operation in all ways. We want Perfect Pictures to help spread unrest and rebellion. We want your money and instant obedience to every command you are given. Magraw will be promoted to executive vice-president of your companies. You will aid in distributing our liquor among your associates, for instance, as a beginning. . . .”

Slope croaked, “And if—if I refuse?”

The voice did not answer, but Jake Krum perked up cheerily, and drew from his garter a slim, sharp knife. “Now, Boss?” he said hopefully.

Weasel was caressing the blackjack. Morty Wise had a gun and One Lung slipped on a pair of brass knucks.

Magraw got off the table and leaned close, his heavy jaw an inch from Slope’s face. He said almost lovingly, “And they won’t kill you at once, Samuel! Noooo! Leetle bits at a time, they will kill you!”

Slope’s eyes rolled in his head. The blood was drying on his face and his scanty hair was disarranged, giving him the dishevelled appearance of a frightened old man. He said brokenly, “All right. I give in. What do I tell the police?”

The voice boomed, “That Kincaid and his friends made an unnecessary fuss. That robbers tied up your servants and went through the house while you were away on private business with Magraw at Santa Barbara.”

“They . . . they’ll know better,” quavered Slope.

“The police never know anything!” barked the voice. “Alibis have been arranged. . . . But beware of Kincaid. We have another scheme to get rid of him!”

Magraw himself cut the millionaire loose. He said, “Of course ye know what’ll happen if ye speak a word to anyone, me friend!”

“My own building!” moaned Slope. He staggered through the door and up the sloping tunnel.

Magraw supported him, saying, “How do you think we got on to you, old fool? We sold our liquor to yer own store!”

They went through the large retail establishment and Slope groaned again. He went into the arcade and Magraw had his car on a side street. Slope was shivering as though with the ague as he got in and prepared for the trip to Santa Barbara through the chilly dawn.

IT WAS late afternoon when Clarke called. Tom said, “Magraw and Slope back? Are you sure?”

“They say you made a big mistake,” said Clarke grimly. “They say they were on a business trip and they can prove it! Slope made me turn loose his actors.”

Tom leaned back. He said, “Fine! Now call off all the cops and detectives.”

“What?” said Clarke. “Are you nuts, Tom? I don’t believe them people! There’s something fishy about this. . . .”

Tom said, “Give out a statement repudiating me. Say that the police have things in hand—you know the guff. Lay off the whole case until you hear from me. Will you do that, Jack?”

After a moment Clarke said, “Okay, Tom. But call me. I’ll be waiting at the phone. I’ll give you twenty-four hours to break it. I’ll sleep right here. . . .”

Roxanne came in, stretching, dressed in slacks and a sweater. She said, “Danno’s back, eh? And he didn’t slug me? What about Slope?”

“He’s wearing plaster on his face,” said Tom. “They had him, all right. Clarke says he looked terrible.”

Matt adjusted the sling in which his left arm reposed. He said, “You’ll have to tail him, Tom. Rox and I can maybe keep you in sight.”

Tom was staring at Roxanne. He said, “Higginbotham. Weasel Ferera. Danno Magraw. Those three we know are in it.”

“Higginbotham? The legal label guy?” asked Roxanne.

“A vain little fellow,” said Tom. “Used to gamble away his money—like poor Spike Jones.”

Roxanne said, “Peter Abbot used to gamble—it was his only vice. There was a crap game on the lot, Tom!”

“A little, cocky fellow, quite old? Was he in the game?” Tom asked.

“I remember him well!” said Roxanne. “He has a wen on his neck!”

Matt said, “That’s Higgys!”

Tom said, "We start on the Cinema Service lot where Perfect Pictures is shooting. How can we slip in?"

Roxanne said, "The cop at Gate Two. I know him."

The aged watchman at Gate Two smiled at Roxanne, took a ten dollar bill from Tom and turned his back. It was very simple.

The Perfect Picture crew was at the far end of the huge premises. They were working an interior, and there was no sign of any of them as the three tiptoed cautiously about. They passed a prop room and Roxanne held up her hand.

From within a voice called, "Shoot the five. Obey me, dice! Shower down, suckers!"

Tom motioned them to silence and stepped into the semi-dark loft room. Five men knelt about a blanket and a small figure in loud clothes rattled the dice in his hand. Tom said quietly, "Five says you don't."

"Right!" said the small, cocky man. He threw the dice on the blanket. They came up snake-eyed. He grabbed at them and said feverishly, "Shoot ten—and ten to you, wise guy."

Tom said, "Shoot, Higgy. You never could roll dice."

The little man whirled, his mouth open. The wen on his neck turned bright red. He said, "K-Kincaid!"

"Roll the bones," suggested Tom.

Higginbotham threw them limply on the blanket. He turned up a nine. His next roll was a seven. Tom pocketed the side-bet money and grinned at the workmen. He said, "Go ahead, boys. Higgy and me have a date. Awful sucker, Higgy!"

**T**HE little man walked outside and stood against the building, facing them. He said, "I told 'em you'd be hot. I told 'em you was tough. But the Boss thinks he's big."

Tom said, "Who is the Boss?"

"I dunno," confessed Higginbotham. "But boy, he pays good!"

Tom said, "I just want to tail Magraw when he leaves. And I want to hide out until then."

"I can't do it! They kill people like flies," said the little man. "This ain't your racket, Kincaid. You and Matt was always square gamblers. This is pretty bad. I'm a little scared of it myself." He strutted a bit, like a precocious child, proud of his villainy.

Tom said admiringly, "You're pretty tough yourself. We just want to get the lay of things for a poker killing, Higgy."

"I heard the Boss don't like you," said Higginbotham. "I heard he's after you."

Tom said suggestively, "I'm thinking about opening a gambling house out here. I could use a man who knew cards and dice. No more forging labels and federal stamps!"

"Sh!" said Higginbotham nervously. "Look, Kincaid. I could hide you in my layout. Magraw don't let nobody come near there. But if I get caught. . . ."

Tom said, "I'll protect you."

Higginbotham said, "Okay, then. But don't mention them federals. They nearly got me in '30. . . ."

He led them through the loft and there were two doors and then they were on a sound stage. A voice boomed from the other side of the partition, "And now, Arlene, you come in an' pick up the whiskey and show it's bootleg, but you don't care—everyone's doin' it, see?"

The little man winked and nodded. He opened another door and they were in a small room. It contained a desk, a chair and a chest of drawers. Higginbotham opened the desk and showed Tom his working materials—ink, drawing paper, styluses of all sorts. He winked and whispered, "Abbot almost caught me once, but Magraw saw him. Then Abbot died. . . ." He grimaced.

Higginbotham said, "I'll scam. . . ."

Tom smiled. He said, "No, Higgy. You stay." He took out his revolver and held it carelessly. "I'm cautious, Higgy."

The little forger's eyes shifted. He grew pale around the lips. He said, "Magraw'll miss me. . . . I got a date with him."

"That's all right," said Tom. "I'll fix it."

Matt was already exploring the room. He found a knot hole and thrust at it with his knife. The soft pine gave way—the room was just a hastily thrown up shack with a tar paper roof for secrecy rather than quiet or shelter. Matt put an eye to the hole and chuckled.

Roxanne went and had a look. She came back and said bitterly, "Devine and Standerly are hamming like two smoke houses on an Arkansas farm."

"It won't be long," said Tom. "I just want to follow Magraw tonight. He shook the cops. Let's see him shake me."

Finally Magraw dismissed the company, all but Arlene Devine, who removed her makeup while Magraw awaited her. The set became deserted before she reappeared.

The lights went down and Magraw had Arlene by the arm, leading her off the set. Tom drew a deep breath and said, "Here we go again!"

## CHAPTER SIX

### Penthouse Pandemonium!

The hired car kept the gaudy convertible of Magraw in sight with ease. Arlene Devine preened herself for the gaping populace of Hollywood, as Magraw turned into Sunset started west, then swung north on Gardener as the light changed.



Tom made the corner, crossed the tracks and saw the convertible disappear into an alley. He said, "Does Devine live here?"

Roxanne said tensely, "No! Look!"

A closed, battered sedan was edging out of the next driveway. A sharp-faced man was driving northward, fortunately away from the U-Drive-It. Roxanne breathed, "Weasel Ferera, no doubt! You were right again, Tom. Higginbotham, Magraw, Ferera."

Tom said, "And Arlene Devine—so you were right, too."

The traffic grew dense and Tom was glad to ease along in the stream. It covered him for the time being. He saw the little black car swerve and stop, saw Magraw and the woman get hastily out and duck into a large office building on Chestnut Street. He waited for Ferera to make a traffic light and go on.

It was growing dark, now. Tom pulled into a parking lot and said, "What building is that?" to the attendant.

The man said, "The Slope Building, now. Moom pitcher guy just bought it earlier in the year."

Tom cocked his eyebrow at Matt and Roxanne. Higginbotham muttered, "I don't get this."

There was a cop on the corner. Tom said to him, "Take this gentleman and hold him safe in jail for me. . . . Then call Jack Clarke and say we are in the Slope Building, Kincaid, Durkin and Miss Queen."

The cop looked suspicious, then recognized Roxanne. He touched his cap, seized Higgy and bore him away, repeating Tom's message under his breath as he went. He stopped dead at the entrance to the large liquor store. There was no sight of Magraw or the woman. He said, "Why, I bought a bottle of bootleg in here, just before I went to Spike's shop!"

"We're gettin' warm, huh?" grinned Matt satirically.

Tom circled, entering the arcade. There was a side entrance to the store, he noted. He said, "It's a secret place. We know that—otherwise Ferera wouldn't get away from the cops. . . ."

He seized the other two and dragged them into a lingerie shop just as Ferera entered the arcade and made his way straight to the side door of the liquor shop. They watched Ferera go through and disappear in the rear of the store.

Tom said, "Look at those clerks. . . . They're guards, too. This is going to be a tough nut to crack."

Roxanne said, "Let me. They won't know what hit them."

She tugged at her sweater, adjusted the slacks. She winked at Tom and Matt and swept into the store, her eyes wide with innocence. She said, "I want some fine, imported wines. I'm giving a party. You know me, of course?"

Two clerks almost knocked each other down, getting to her. One said, "Aren't you Miss Grable?"

"You're teasing!" drawled Roxanne, preening herself. "You know very well I am Hokie Bream!"

The third clerk edged up, bearing wine bottles. He said, "Of course, Miss Bream!" There had lately been a tasty little scandal connected with Miss Bream, Tom remembered. The clerks were googoo-eyed now scurrying to find wines.

Matt said, "This looks good." He slipped through the door and went past a stack of



Arlene Devine

cases and into the rear. Tom hesitated, then followed. He was beginning to think of Rox as an ally, and the warmth around his heart expanded. He was, he thought, a very lucky fellow. . . .

There was a guard in the rear, but Matt had already sapped him with a blackjack. Tom opened the ordinary cellarway and stared down. He muttered, "It can't be this simple. It just can't!"

**H**E WENT down a sloping passageway. There was a cellar, all right, but nothing of interest. Matt whispered,

"Somethin' queer here. It's too open. Grey wouldn't get caught in an alley like this."

Tom picked up an axe and quickly cracked a case labelled "California Burgundy." He picked out a bottle of Black Horse Scotch, with a Higginbotham label.

"We're on the track," he said. "Rox can't hold them much longer. They'll find the hombre you conked and there will be hell to pay."

Matt said, "Maybe Clarke and the cops'll get here."

Tom turned, eyeing the wall. Suddenly he bent, applying his eye to a crack. There was a sliver of light like a thread upon the blank wall. He threw his weight against it.

With a creak the door revolved. Steps led down to another door. A dim bulb burned in the ceiling. Tom crept down, listening intently.

From within a voice boomed, "Miss Devine, you have proved yourself. Now it is necessary to eliminate our mutual enemies, and Roxanne Queen has been allotted to you. . . ."

Matt breathed. "Grey! He's in there." Matt's lips had drawn back; the .22 quivered in his hand. His sharp eyes were dark pools; his whole body quivered, like a terrier scenting a rat. "Just break me in there! This time I'll get him!"

The voice said, "Kincaid and Durkin must be killed! There is no further chance of kidnaping them. They are on the alert, thanks to some bungling. . . ."

Matt said, "Come on, Tom. Crash in there! We'll finish that crowd if we die!"

Tom stood stock still, listening to the voice of his sworn enemy. Time and again he had trapped Grey, sure of success, eager to end the career of the greatest criminal of modern days. Each time George Grey had made good his escape.

He had to act. Upstairs anything might be happening to Roxanne. Grey, always a step ahead, might even now have had word that his guard upstairs had been overcome. The arch crook would gladly throw his minions to the wolves, speak calmly to them, yet escape himself.

Tom said, "I can't believe it. He wouldn't hole up like this!"

Matt said, "You hear him!"

Tom turned, searching the small ante-chamber in which they crouched. His gambler's hands went over the wall, probing, seeking. Within the other room the voice spoke again, "I cannot warn you often enough that Kincaid is resourceful. . . ."

There was a slight crackling sound. Grey's voice changed, became sharp. "He is around here now! Search for him! Kill him!"

Tom said, "That's a speaker! I heard static! Grey's not there!"

He pressed his gun into Matt's hand. He said, "Hold 'em pal! Keep them down here!"

He had found something. He pressed a button and machinery whirred. Slowly, an elevator dropped, pausing behind a hidden door. Again he pressed the button and the portal opened. Tom leaped within, unarmed, his blood pounding. He closed the door and the elevator started up. He heard a muffled shot, heard Matt say, "Come out and die, you rats!"

Matt had ten shots. He would not waste one, Tom knew. If they fired through the door, they might set it ajar and get sight of him, but Matt would be on the floor, comparatively safe. The little man would take a lot of killing, at any rate, Tom thought grimly.

He went up and up. This had been a freight elevator, he realized, but had been sealed for private use. A simple enough device—and somewhere above George Grey sat in safety, with some fantastic means of getting away if disaster threatened.

It seemed hours. The progress of the elevator was excruciatingly slow. What awaited

Tom could guess. Grey was certainly armed. He would be warned by the mechanism's sound, waiting for the door of the elevator to open—for Tom to appear.

He thought long and hard about Roxanne. With her lay his only hope of happiness, he knew. The gay, indomitable actress with her ready humor and warm friendliness, her courage and forthright honesty of soul, was all that Tom could ask for in the world. The elevator hesitated, seemed to sigh, paused. Tom bent forward, ready to die. . . .

THE door creaked, opening. Tom ducked low, sprang, struck it with his bulky shoulder, and leaped aside. Bullets splattered.

It was a penthouse, roosted atop the highest building in downtown Los Angeles, and furnished in Spartan simplicity—George Grey never kept records nor papers within reach. From behind a metal desk, George Grey was throwing lead from a small, hand machine-gun.

Magraw was there, armed with a revolver. The huge man tried to come forward, his jutting jaw set, seeking to throw his great weight at Tom. Tom met him, sidestepped and clipped him with a swinging right fist. With his other hand he tried to seize Magraw's gun.

Grey swore in his deep voice, "You fool! Get away from him and let me shoot him down like a damned dog!" He held the small machine gun on the desk top, raving at Magraw. "I had him, you fool! Get away!"

Magraw tried to retreat, but Tom's hands were like steel, swinging him, keeping the big man between him and Grey. Magraw brought up his knee and Tom took the blow, clutching at the gun.

Grey cried, "All right, Magraw! You brought it on yourself, you colossal fool!"

The gun chattered on the desk top, clanking against metal. Magraw shrieked once, stiffened in Tom's grasp. Grey had shot him in the back.

Tom leaned forward, picking up the body in a tackle grip, and ran forward. He threw Magraw across the desk over Grey's gun. The bullets chunked into Magraw as Grey switched the weapon on full automatic.

Then Tom was scrambling over Magraw's body, trying to reach George Grey with one hand. Never had he been so close to his prey, and the excitement rose within him, all else forgotten. To get a grip was all he asked. . .

Grey broke. He dropped the gun. He leaped backwards, a portly man of medium height, his sharp features gaunt with fear, now. There was an open window behind him. Realizing now that Tom must be unarmed, he scrambled through before Tom could untangle himself from the bloody mess which was Danno Magraw.

In an instant Tom had recovered and was

after the fleeing criminal. He found himself on a roof patio.

There was a tiny gyroplane moored beneath a canvas. Grey was throwing back the cover, moving with amazing speed, at the far end of the roof. Tom just had time to see that the plane was painted Army drab and numbered with an Army stencil. Another piece of Higginbotham artistry.

Then he was driving his big body across the intervening space. Grey was climbing into the plane. Tom made one prodigious leap and grabbed, catching Grey by the slack of his jacket. The cloth ripped, but it gave him time to gain another handhold. Grey kicked, cursing him, screaming, "You can't get me, Kincaid! You never could!"

Behind them, in the office, there were sounds. Roxanne's voice called, "Tom! Where are you!"

Tom took a kick on the head, made a mighty effort. Cloth ripped, and he tumbled backwards—Grey with him. But in the shock of the fall they fell apart, and Tom came to his knees bleeding a little, searching for his opponent.

Grey was running towards the plane. Tom dove like a football player. Grey slipped, skidded. Tom struck him with a terrific bumping motion. Grey, already gaining impetus, flew off his feet and through the air.

Tom swivelled, head down, eyes blazing. He was in time to see Grey throw up his hands with one last scream.

They had been very close to the edge, Tom saw at once. The coping was three feet high, but Grey had been going at a swift pace. As Tom stared, his enemy windmilled his arms, seeking with frantic fear to regain balance. He was on the brink of dizzy space . . . teetering back and forth.

Tom sped forward, one big hand reaching out, and caught at a torn coattail. The two stood, on the edge of the roof, space falling away to the street far beneath, Grey speechless now, the awful fear of imminent death upon him.

Tom grabbed with the other hand for a fresh grip. Grey made one convulsive jerking movement. His foot slipped and he went forward, tumbling. . . .

**T**OM stood, staring into space. From below came a gasping, piercing shriek, descending in volume. Roxanne called, "Tom! Where is Grey? Did you find him? Is he dead or alive?"

Tom turned away from the edge of the roof. His face was stony and deathly pale. He walked on stiff legs. Roxanne was very beautiful, he thought, staring at her. Clarke was right behind, but there was no sign of Matt Durkin.

"Matt?" Tom asked gently.

"Wounded," she said, taking Tom's hand, drawing him close. "Wounded, but he killed three of them and Clarke got the rest. . . Tom, are you all right, honey?"

Tom said to Clarke, "Phone down below. He has escaped before. By God, I'm afraid someone snatched him in midflight!"

Roxanne said, "Oh! He—he went over the edge?"

Tom said, "I knocked him over. Unintentionally—I meant to strangle him with my bare hands."

They went into the office and did not look at Danno Magraw. Clarke turned from the phone. He said quietly, "He arrived at the bottom, Tom. It's all over."

Tom said, "Yes. It's all over. Let's go down and clean up the mess. Let's get these damned fascist fools— Let's get rid of Devine and Slope and the movie actors who are such idiots. Let's spread it all over every newspaper in the land to let people know how close we have come to internal disorganization just when victory is so near."

They came down to where Matt lay, shattered with several bullets, but conscious and grinning and tough as ever. Tom touched his friend and said, "I'm sorry you weren't in on the end, Matt. I know how desperately you wanted it."

Matt said, "You got him, didn't you? That's good enough for me. You should see Weasel—I hit him right in the eye, first shot!"

Roxanne said, softly, into Tom's ear, "So you got Grey!"

Matt winked. He said, "You got to wait until I'm out of the hospital! Then we'll have a hell of a wedding!"

Roxanne said, "We'll hoard some Scotch—not bootleg!"

"Wish I had some now," said Matt feebly. "I'm thirsty. . ."

They took him away on a stretcher. Tom held tight to Roxanne's arm. Outside, the morgue attendants were gathering the remains of George Grey into their gruesome basket. . . .

In the car, heading for home, Roxanne said, "For a tough guy, you can be awful nice, Tom. . . . And I do love you. . . ."

He was thinking back over the days since George Grey had first crossed his path. He was thinking of wrecked lives, of broken bodies, of damage done to property and government. Her words brought him back, as she had meant them to.

He said, "You can say that again—and double in spades!"

He stopped the car in the middle of Sunset and Vine and kissed her while automobile horns squawked, cops stared and cynical passersby thought it was just another Hollywood publicity scheme. . . .

# IT BURNS ME UP!

*"Don't knock a man when he's down," they say. . . . But my cold-blooded visitors paid no heed, as they laughed and wondered how I could talk to Saint Peter—with my throat cut from ear to ear!*

The reporters are buzzing like a hive of tipped bees. . . .



By RAY  
BRADBURY

I AM lying here in the very center of the room and I am not mad, I am not angry, I am not perturbed. In the first place, in order for a man to be perturbed, angry, mad, he must recognize some stimulus from outside which touches his nerves. The nerves flash a message to the brain. The brain kicks back quick orders to all parts of the body: be angry, be mad, be disturbed! Eyelashes, pull back from eyes, let eyes protrude, muscles work! Iris dilate! Mouth pull back tight from teeth! Ears blush! Brow furrow!

Heart beat! Blood surge! Get angry, get perturbed, get mad!

But my eyelashes will not pull back. My eyes simply stare vacantly at a colorless, dark ceiling, my heart lies cold, my mouth is limp, my fingers are lax. I do not madden. I do not anger or perturb. And yet I have every reason to be irritated.

The detectives are swaggering about my house, swearing in the rooms, honking in the night, drinking from bottles in the alley. Reporters are flashing quick bulbs at my re-

laxed body. The flash eyes are glinting into electrical powder, exploding. The neighbors are peering in at the windows. My wife is lying in a chair, turned away from me, and instead of crying she is very glad.

You understand, then, I have reason to be mad. But no matter how hard I try to be incensed, fuming, swearing, I cannot. Nothing responds. There is only an encompassing cold weightlessness over and through me.

I am dead.

I lie here, sleeping, and these people are the fragments of my bloodless dreaming. They move about me, as carrion-eaters over a decaying carcass, carnivores lusting on the hot spilled blood of killing at night, taking that blood and respilling it upon the pages of tabloid papers. But somehow in the transition from body to thrashing presses, the blood has turned an ungodly black.

A little blood will ink a million print-drums. A little blood is chemical enough to drive ten million presses. A little blood is adrenalin enough to pound thirty million literate, reading hearts.

Tonight, I have died. Tomorrow morning I will die again in thirty million brains, caught like a fly in a web, sucked dry by the multi-tentacled public, and flushed on through the transits of their minds to be replaced by:

HEIRESS MARRIES DUKE!  
INCOME TAX INCREASE DUE!  
COAL MINERS STRIKE!

So here are the vultures circling over me. Here is the coroner, casually examining my vitals, the hyena newsmen digging at the dead thoughts of my love. And here the fauns and the goats with synthetic lion hearts, peering timidly in the window, but safely removed from terror, watching the carnivores stalk about, pruning their manes.

Perhaps my wife is cleverest of them all. She resembles nothing more than a small soft, dark leopard whiskering and licking itself, pleased with its actions, crouched within the chair's patterned inclosure.

The detective immediately overhead now, like a gigantic lion moving in that world of live people, is a large-lipped man. His lips are vised about a long smoking cigar, and he talks with that vise, his teeth gleaming in amber flashes. Once in a while he drops grey ash on my coat. He is talking:

"Well, so he's dead. So we talk to *her* for an hour, two hours, three, four, and what do we get? Nothing! Hell, we can't stay here all night! My wife'll kill me! I'm never home nights anymore. More damn murders."

The coroner, so brisk, so efficient, his fingers like inquisitive calipers, measures my circumference, my diameter. Is there anything

but the purest professional interest behind his slanted, sad green eyes? He lifts his head at an imperious angle and makes his speech importantly:

"Died quickly. That knife certainly did things to his throat. And then, who ever did it stabbed him three times in the chest. A very nice job. Impressively bloody."

The detective jerks his bronze-haired head at my wife, wincing, "And she ain't got a blood-speck on her! How you figger that?"

"What does *she* say?" asks the coroner.

"She *don't* say. She just plumps there crooning to herself and singing, 'I won't spill till I see my lawyer.' Honest to God!" The detective can't fathom the ways of cat women. But, lying here, I can.

"That's all she'll say. 'I won't spill till I see my lawyer' over and over, like a damn-fool nursery rhyme."

**T**HERE is a body scuffle at the door that directs all attentions, immediately. A handsome, finely-muscled reporter is wrestling to get in.

"Hey!" The detective pushes out his cliff of chest. He bites the cigar fiercely. "What-innell goes on?"

A cop face pokes in, hot, struggling. "This gink wants in, boss!"

"Who in hell does he think *he* is?" asks the detective.

The reporter's voice from a distance. . . "Carlton of the *Tribune*. H. J. Randolph sent me."

The detective blows up. "Kelly, you fool! Let the guy in! Randolph and I went to school together! Sure!"

"Ha, *ha!*" says the coroner, dead-pan.

The detective shoots him a hot glance, while the officer Kelly gives way and the reporter Carlton strides sweating inside.

"I had to get in," laughs Carlton. "Or it was my job."

"Hello, Carlton," the detective laughs again. "Pull up a corpse and sit down."

That is a joke. Everybody laughs, except my wife who is curled in a feminine S within the chair arms, contentedly licking her lips like a fed cat.

The other reporters resent Carlton's entrance. They say nothing. Carlton looks at me with his baby-blue eyes:

"Well, a self-surgery! Ear to ear! How will he talk to Saint Peter in that condition?"

The coroner is proud. "Oh, I will sew him up new as paint. I am pretty good at fixing stuff like that. Comes from long practice."

Carlton rushes on, ignoring the coroner, intrigued with scribbling heiroglyphics on papers, shooting questions. He grins while scribbling. "Hotsy-totsy. Love nest, maybe. All the trimmings. God, he looks like Christ-

mas, don't he? Green around the gills and big red ribbons of blood tied in coagulated bows."

Even the detective cannot stomach this and coughs a little. For the first time my wife doesn't look calm and cool as cream in her chair. It is momentary. It passes. Again she adjusts the rim of her chartreuse skirt over her curvaceous legs, blinking at the new reporter as if to fan his attention to flame.

But now the reporter is kneeling at the altar of my desecrated flesh. A cold marble altar, exquisitely carved by the original hands of God, and only recently recarved by—someone.

Mrs. McLeod, from next door, is looking through the south window from outside, on fat tiptoe, her shining grey eyes hippopotamus-like in the night. Her voice is vague, and she is shivering on purpose:

"Wait until I write Susan in Springfield. Will she be jealous. My very own mysterious murder in my own front yard, almost. Who would have thought we'd have things like this in *our* neighborhood? I tell you, though, Anna, come look—. See, that's the detective, that man with the fat under his chin. He don't look like a detective to me, does he to you? He looks like a pot-beer, a villain. Now, take that young reporter guy, he looks just like Philo Vance, only younger. I bet he'll be the one who really solves the case. But they never get the credit, that's the way. Just look at that woman over there in the corner. I bet she was his mistress, not his wife—"

"Get away from the window, lady!"

"Well, I guess I got a right to look in!"

"Lady, move along!"

"Young man, I own this lawn right up to the window. This is my house! I rented it to Mr. Jameson myself."

"Lady, move along."

"Young man—"

*That will do, Mrs. McLeod, that will do for a long time.*

**N**OW, back to the people in the room.

The reporter, Carlton, is now attracted as a planet is attracted to the sun, by my wife. He is darting questions at her, and she is deliberately stalling him. The reporter is fast, and my wife is languid, heavy-lidded and easy-going. She will not be pushed, pell-melled into anything. She will simply have her say. She says it, purringly: "I came home from the nightclub and there he was lying on the floor, staring at the ceiling. That is all I know."

The other reporters scribble, too. They had not gotten a thing from her, until handsome Carlton showed up. Carlton cracks back at her, "You sing at the nightclub Bomba?"

"Yes. I'm a very good singer. I can hit a C above high C if you want. Once I had a chance with the Metropolitan Opera Company. But I didn't consider it; I don't like them."

The coroner has an opinion of this chatter. He does not express it. But he has the same expression on his face that I once had. The coroner and the detective are both irked because the limelight has swiveled from them and their stage to this little chattering divertissement between man and woman. The detective especially is annoyed because he was unable to pry anything out of my wife except her sing-song pleading for a lawyer and now this young reporter—

Somebody outside hoists a small girl up to the window. She is framed in it momentarily.

"Look, baby, you may never see anything like that—"

"Oh, mama, what's wrong with that man?"

"Move along, lady, please. I just chased a couple people away, and I'm tired. I been on my feet all evening. Move away—"

"Oh, mama!"

I am now immortal! Caught in that child's mind I shall be dead forevermore, and on dark nights I will stride drunkenly through the shivering corridors of her body. And she will waken shrieking, ripping the bedclothes apart. Someday her husband will feel her red fingernails in his fleshy arm, and that will be me, in the middle-dark, reaching out a constricting claw to clutch again at life!

"Can it, *can* it!" suggests the detective, glaring hotly at the reporter, Carlton. "I'm the one who interviews her! Not *you*, bozo!"

The lips of Carlton go down. He opens his hands and shrugs slightly, "But you want a good report for the paper, Captain, don't you? With pictures? Sure you do. And I got to get details."

He is getting the details fine. My wife has a thirty-three bust, twenty-eight waist, thirty-one hips. These details are being scribbled on a brain-pad somewhere within the reporter. Remind him, someone, to call her up after the funeral.

The coroner clears his throat. "Now, about this body—"

*Yeah, for God's sake, gentlemen, let's get back to me. What am I lying here for?*

Carlton snaps his voice like snapping his thin fingers, "You had a lot of men tagging after you, didn't you, madame?"

My wife lids her eyes and unlds them. "Yes, I've always been popular. Couldn't help it, I guess. He—" she shakes her head at me, "he never seemed to mind the other men tagging at my heels. It sort of upheld his judgment in marrying a—thoroughbred."

The coroner quickly jabs my ribs in some medical joke. He busies himself over me to

keep from snorting out a laugh at her choice of words.

The other reporters are now buzzing like a hive of tipped bees. My wife would not talk for *them*, but perhaps there is a provocative angle to Carlton's body, perhaps there is something about his look or his lips or the cast of his shoulders . . . anyway, the reporters are angry, "Come off it, Carlton, let us have a try!"

Carlton turns to the detective. "Who did the killing, captain?"

"We're rounding up all her boyfriends," says the detective intelligently, nodding, thinking it over.

Carlton nods, too, and half-listening, looking sidewise and gleaming at my wife, checks his notes solemnly, salutes my cold body and marches across the room. "Thanks, thanks, thanks, I'll be right back. Want to phone a call. Keep up the good work." To me, grinning, "Don't wait up for me, darling."

*Slam.* The door closes.

"WELL," sighs the detective, "we've done all we can here. Fingerprints. Clues. Photographs. Grillings. I guess we can let the body—" He stops, flushing, giving way to the coroner, who, after all, has the right to make his little official announcements.

The coroner acknowledges this courtesy and says, after a due period of serious thought, "I think we can take the body away now. Yes."

One of the remaining reporters pipes, "Say, Sherlock, you think this is a suicide set-up? If you ask me—"

"I'm not asking," says the detective. "How would you explain them stab wounds?"

"I see it this way," the coroner interrupts. "She comes home, finds him freshly dead on the floor, having just killed himself. That explains how she has no blood on her from a spurting jugular. Evidently she took the suicide weapon and stabbed him three times in a frenzy of—shall we say—delight? She was glad to find him dead, and let herself go. There's no blood in these stab wounds, that proves he was stabbed later, after she found him lying there."

"No, no, now," roars the detective. "You're all wrong! You're dead wrong! That's not the way it worked at all! Not at all!" He launches himself, shaking his hair over his eyes, blundering off down blind alleys, kidding himself, chewing his cigar, pounding one fist into one palm. "No, no, you're all wrong!"

The coroner chucks me in the ribs. He looks at me. I look back with nothing in my eyes except cold shining light.

"Oh, but the coroner is right!" My wife, with the swiftness of a leopard paw darting, seizes upon this information and makes it her own. "He's exactly right!"

"Now wait a minute," complains the detective, seeing his case being torn from his hands.

"That's how it was," my wife insists, purring. She blinks big wet dark eyes. "I came in. He was lying there. And—something—came over me. I must've just seized the dagger and yelled I was glad he was dead and stabbed him some more!"

"But," wails the detective feebly, "that just can't be the way it happened." He knows it may be true, but he is slow coming back to reality. In a moment he will stomp his feet like a hurt child.

**THIS IS  
HEAVENLY!**

**SHOULD BE -  
I USE  
STAR BLADES!**



4 for 10¢



"That's how it happened," she says.

"Well now, it stands to reason," reasons the detective vaguely. He purposely drops his cigar so he'll have time to pick it up, brush it off and put it in his mouth before he has to think. "Well, it just don't work out that way," he says tiredly.

The coroner takes over, "Young woman, you won't be prosecuted for murder, but you'll be fined for mutilating a corpse!"

"Shut up, you!" cries the detective, whirling in all directions.

"That's all right," confides my wife. "Fine me. Go ahead."

The reporters are yelling, adding to the wild pattern of voices.

"Is that true, Mrs. Jameson?"

"You may quote me. It is true."

"Oh, God!" cries the detective.

My wife is tearing the case to shreds with her enameled claws, fondling it, loving it, ripping it carefully and intentionally down the middle, while the detective gapes and tries to shut her up.

"Don't pay any attention to her, boys!"

"But it's the truth," she says with honesty in her eyes.

"See?" chortle the reporters.

"Everybody clear out!" yells the detective. "I've had enough!"

But the case is closed. The reporters, laughing, declare it so. Bulbs flare, my wife winks prettily for them. The detective sees the credit for solving the case go fleeting. He manages to calm down, "Say, say, boys, about those pictures of me for the paper, now—"

"What pictures? Ha. Period. Ha. Exclamation point. Ha!"

"Clear out, everybody!" the detective rams his cigar into an ashtray. Parts of it fall on me. Nobody brushes them off.

The coroner is grinning, and outside the window an audience is watching, breathless. One might expect applause any moment.

It is all over. Peever, the detective jerks his head, "Come on, Mrs. Jameson. You reporters want any more, come along to the station."

There is a movement of bodies through the air, over the carpet, through the door. "Boy, what a story! Hotsy, what photographs!"

"Quick, Alice, look through the window. They're going to take him out!"

Someone drops a cloth over my profile.

"Oh, darn it, we're too late. Now we can't see *anything*!"

They leave the room, these reporters with their images of me, one of them even in color, carried under careless, joyful arms. Everybody is rushing for the early morning edition.

I AM pleased. I died before midnight. Therefore I will make the morning paper. Mr. Jones will pick me up with his Sanka. Thoughtful of me.

The detective is making a face. My wife arises and leaves the room. One cop outside the door nods at another cop, "How about some hotcakes and syrup down at the White Log?"

I cannot even lick my lips.

Wearily, the detective mops his brow. He unsheathes a fresh cigar and spits the bit end of it at my feet. He doesn't speak but he thinks a lot. By his face, he is a man with a dominant wife. He is dreading going home to her now; he likes to idle, stay out all night. Bodies give him an excuse. I'm a pretty good one. But I'm not worth much now. He will make a routine report and go home.

The coroner is the only one left. He pats me on the shoulder. "Nobody asked you any questions did they? Well, friend, what about it? Were you murdered by her or her friends, or did you kill yourself over—her. Huh? A fool in love is twice a fool."

Me, I won't talk.

It is late. The coroner leaves. Maybe he has a wife, too. Maybe he likes bodies because they don't argue back like some people.

I'm alone now.

In a few minutes a couple internes will come in in their whites, chewing gum. They'll glance casually at me, tilt me over onto a stretcher languidly and trot me downtown in a slow wagon, in no hurry.

And a week from now a man who is worrying about his income tax will turn a handle and flames will burn me. I will rush up the flue of the crematory in so many grey flecks.

And with some sort of ironic justice, and the providence of a stiff March wind, a week from now, when these various people—Carlton, my wife, the detective, the coroner, the reporters, Mrs. McLeod—when all these people are crossing the street, maybe suddenly they'll get something in their damned eyes! All of them!

*Little pieces of grey ash, maybe.*

#### WASTE PAPER IS A WEAPON OF WAR

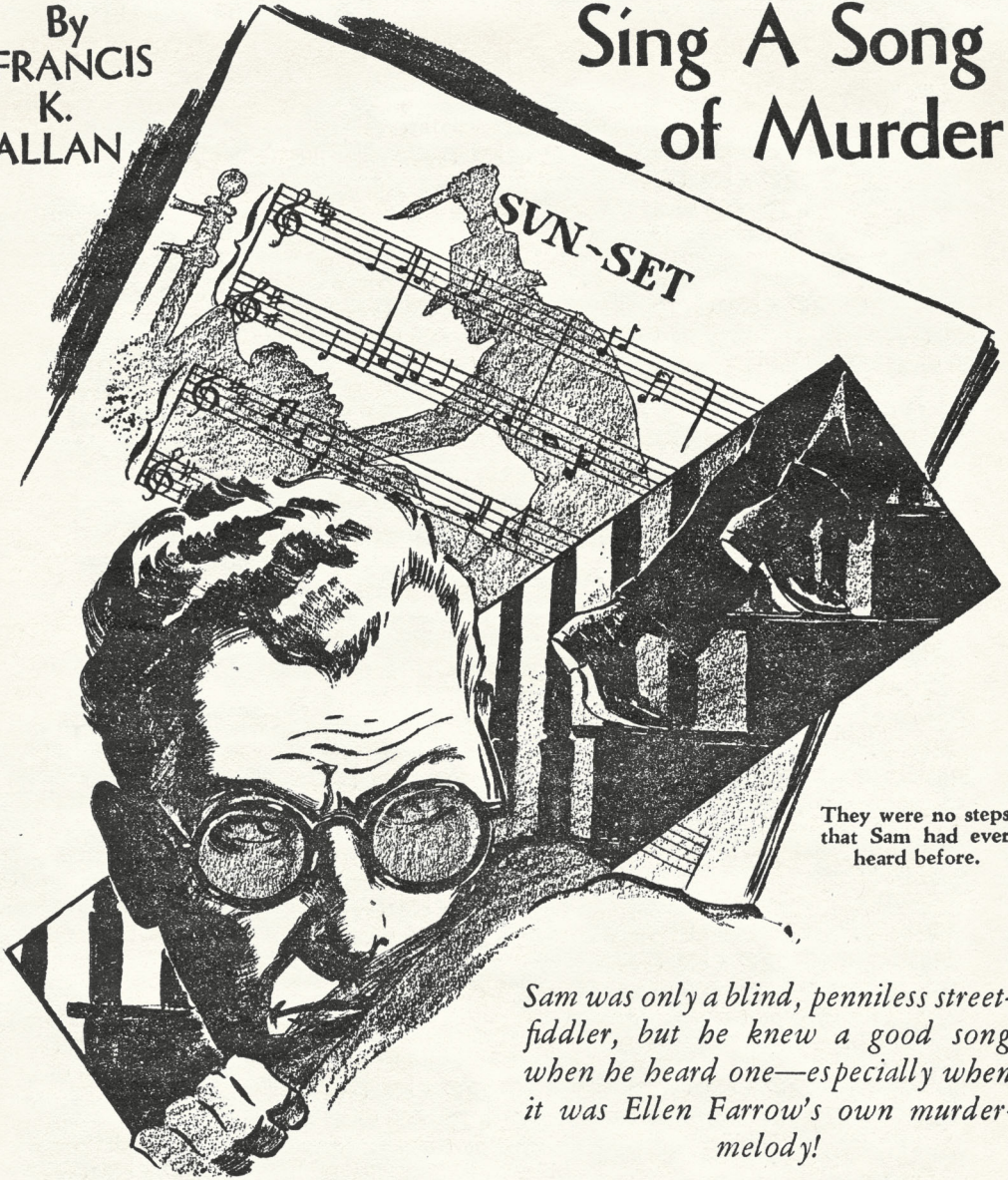
Paper is urgently needed for packing food, ammunition and medical supplies for our armed forces—Don't burn or discard newspapers, magazines, wrapping paper, cartons.

SAVE IT . . . SORT IT . . . CALL YOUR COLLECTOR



By  
FRANCIS  
K.  
ALLAN

# Sing A Song of Murder



They were no steps  
that Sam had ever  
heard before.

*Sam was only a blind, penniless street-fiddler, but he knew a good song when he heard one—especially when it was Ellen Farrow's own murder-melody!*

IT WASN'T even a hotel. It was a three-story, delapidated mansion, and no one ever called it anything but Mrs. Bane's Place. The rooms were not high, and breakfast and dinner were included. It was clean and—most important—it was only three blocks from Broadway's theatrical offices.

Prince Brahmin, the Mind-Reading Act, lived on the third floor. Joey Schultz who, on his sober days, was a hot trumpet lived there too. On the second floor were the girls from Maine, Texas, Ohio and Washington. The girls who had been in the little theaters

back home—who'd come to New York to find that end of the rainbow. But now they lived at Mrs. Bane's because it was cheap, and they could walk to the casting-offices. . . .

And on the first floor, just to the right of the front door, lived Sam Fiddle. Really his name was Johnson, but that was long-forgotten. It was also forgotten that he'd once led his own band on the stage of the old Belvedere, even before Mrs. Bane's time, or the golden-haired girls from Spokane.

Sam's hair was curly grey, and his skin was weathered. His left shoulder was hunched

from the way he held the violin. His clothes were worn, but they were clean. And he lived on that first floor because he was blind, and because he'd been at Mrs. Bane's longer than anyone else.

There was always a sandwich on his dresser when he came back late in the afternoons. Mrs. Bane knew a street-fiddler couldn't afford to buy lunches. He ate the sandwich slowly after he'd taken off his coat and massaged his left arm and shoulder. He emptied the coins on the table and sorted them in denominations. This Friday afternoon, there was three dollars and twenty cents. Better than he'd done in . . . he started to think.

He stopped. His head tilted. He listened. A song was coming from the room above—the room that had been vacant. But it wasn't that—it was the song itself. Sam knew them all, yet this was one he had never heard. A girl's low voice was singing in a slow half-tango rhythm. “. . . someday, when the sun-set reaches home. . . .”

It drifted away, and the girl's heels clicked about the room overhead. Sam kept listening, but she sang no more. He frowned, probing back into memory—He knew he had never heard it, yet the tune lingered in his ears with its haunting melancholy.

Sam finished his sandwich and put on a clean shirt and tie. Usually he listened to his radio in this hour until dinner. Now he moved slowly down the hall to Mrs. Bane's room. He knocked. “Come in,” her big voice called. “Oh, hello, Sam,” she greeted more softly. “How's the music business?”

He nodded abstractedly. “The room above mine—you rented it?” he wondered slowly.

“Sure thing. It's a Miss Farrow, this time. She came in about one o'clock. Acts like she's got a little more sense than those others,” Mrs. Bane added tartly. “She paid cash in advance.”

“She's a musician?”

“Hum,” Mrs. Bane grunted blankly. “I didn't ask her.”

Sam nodded. He kept trying to remember the song. “The sandwich was good,” he remembered to say as he left the room. He moved slowly back down the hall, deciding to sit in the living room awhile.

AS HE sat there, his well-trained ears brought the threads of the house to life before his sightless eyes: the tables were being set in the dining room; Brahmin was using his electric-razor in the back bathroom; Peggy, the little ballet-dancer, was listening to a news-report in her room. Then he heard the new strange footsteps coming down the stairs. He knew it would be Miss Farrow. He waited, and presently she came into the living room.

“Oh . . . Hello, I . . . Oh,” she stammered. Sam knew she had seen his eyes. “Hello,” she repeated simply.

“Hello. I'm Sam. Sam Fiddle,” he said.

“I'm Ellen Farrow.”

He heard her sit down on the couch. “Your room is right over mine,” he said. “I heard you singing a while ago.”

“Oh, was I?” The girl seemed to laugh silently.

“I liked the song, but I don't remember it. I . . . You see, I'm a street-fiddler, and I know most of them. That one—”

“Which was it?” she wondered.

“It was something about ‘When the sun-set reaches home. . . .’”

“Oh, that!” Then she laughed aloud, softly. “No, you've never heard it. But someday, perhaps, you will. I—”

“Hello, Sam!” Peggy's gay voice rushed into the room. “Want to lend me a hundred dollars?” Her voice was mocking, half-laughing. But Sam knew it wasn't all gay. He wondered how much more money she had. He'd heard her crying last night—softly, when the house was still. Soon she'd be going back to Texas.

“Peggy, this is Ellen Farrow,” he introduced. And then the dinner-bell rang. He sighed. He'd wanted to know about the song. Maybe I can talk to her after dinner, he thought.

But after dinner she hurried to her room, then her heels clicked down the stairs and the front door slammed behind her.

Sam played chees with Brahmin until ten. Most of the girls went out. Some of them had dates, but most merely went to walk up and down Broadway to look, to hope. . . .

At ten Sam went to his room. He undressed slowly and raised his window. As he lay in bed, he thought again of the song. Maybe he would see Ellen Farrow at breakfast. The song was so beautiful in its unfinished simplicity. . . .

It was after midnight. Sam had heard the chimes ringing in the Cathedral. The front door opened, softly closed. The tip-toeing steps passed his door and climbed the stairs. The door of the room above whined as it closed; the light-switch snapped.

“Someday. . . when the sun-set reaches home. . . .” a soft whispering voice hummed. Sam lay very still, waiting. . . . The bed creaked. At last the light clicked out. He sighed and turned over.

One by one the others came in. Joey was drunk again—Sam heard his fingers sliding up the rail. The girl from Oklahoma came in. And somewhere between midnight and one, Sam heard the other footsteps pass his door and climb the stairs with slow, dragging steps.

They weren't Brahmin's. Nor were they girl's steps. They were no steps that Sam had ever heard before. He listened as they passed into silence above. He couldn't be sure, but he thought he heard Ellen Farrow's door opening. A full minute passed. He heard the bed creak gently. At last the light was turned on. Papers rustled gently. Drawers opened and closed. At last he heard one clicking sound—peculiar sound, not metallic or mechanical, but softer, more cushioned. He heard a heavy breath, then the same low clicking sound again. The light was switched off. The door closed. Sam lost the trail of sound until he heard the strange and uneven steps pass by his door. The front door closed, and Mrs. Bane's house was silent again.

A restlessness filled Sam. Part of it was the unfinished song. But there was something else—an uneasiness, bred of years of acute blind sensation. He felt something stir and prick his nerves. He twisted beneath the covers. . . .

He heard the girls coming in. It was after one.

**A** FRIGHTENED scream shattered the silence. Upstairs something fell and shattered. A door opened and steps clattered down the hall. "Mrs. Bane! Brahmin! Somebody come here!" a girl cried hysterically. "Come here! Wake up!"

It was the girl from Maine, Inez. Sam threw back his cover and clutched his bath robe. As he stumbled into the hall and upstairs, he heard doors opening, closing, slamming around him; voices calling—answering.

Inez was stammering, ". . . the knife! There in the bath-room! With blood all over it! It is blood!" she cried. "There in the waste-basket!"

"Don't start crying," Brahmin's deep voice commanded. "I will investigate this matter," he announced in his dignified stage-manner.

"Well," snapped Mrs. Bane, "you can start looking at the floor. Unless I'm blind, that's blood down there."

"So it is. Drops of blood. . . . We shall follow them." Sam tagged after them, nervous and impatient in his blindness. "Hah! They come from this room!" Brahmin breathed dramatically.

"That's Peggy's room!" Inez exclaimed. "It's my room!" Peggy's voice cried. "But I didn't have any blood in my. . . . I mean I—"

"Mrs. Bane," Sam whispered softly to the woman. "I don't hear Miss Farrow's voice. Please—quickly! Knock at her door." He followed her quick, padding steps to the next door. She knocked. No answer. "Open it!

Open the door!" Sam urged the older woman.

The door whined open. The light snapped on. He heard Mrs. Bane gasp, choke. "Oh, God!" the woman breathed. "She's dead! Her throat—that knife cut her throat!"

Inez screamed wildly. Brahmin choked and cursed, the stage manner gone. Sam felt a cold knot gather in his stomach.

"The police—you'd better call them, Mrs. Bane," he said.

"Yes. Yes, the police," the woman echoed blankly.

**T**HERE was a stiff hush in the living room.

Sam could hear breathing, swallowing—matches striking, lighting cigarettes. Firm solid steps came down the stairs.

"That's Captain Edwards!" Mrs. Bane panted. "I guess they're through upstairs."

"Now I have some questions to ask," the Detective Captain's deliberate voice began. A hush tightened in the room. Sam felt the man's eyes roaming over his face. "Mrs. Bane, when did the dead girl come to this house? What do you know about her?"

"Nothing, I. . . . She moved in yesterday at about one o'clock. She just rented a room and moved in. Her name is—was Ellen Farrow. I don't know what she did or where she came from or anything about her. Really, I don't," she stammered.

"You don't know what her business was? Where her family lives? Who her friends might be? You don't know where her possessions or luggage are?"

"No. No, I. . . . Nothing, but. . . . She had a big bag, and then a little brief-case and a portable typewriter. She put them under the bed. I noticed that."

"But they aren't there now," Captain Edwards said flatly. "There is nothing in that room but the body and the furniture." He paused. "Now, who lives in the room adjoining that room?"

"I—I do," Peggy Martin stammered.

"You heard nothing unusual in that next room tonight?"

"I was out. I went to a show and then I—just walked," she said. "I was thinking—I was worried about getting a job."

"You had met Ellen Farrow?"

"Just once. Just before dinner, for a minute."

"Perhaps you had noticed her diamond bracelet? Or her ring and watch?" The voice was slow, lazy, yet ruthless.

"No, I—what do you mean?" Peggy stammered.

Sam heard something rattle on the table. "I found these in the drawer of your dresser, hidden in a glove," Edwards stated. "A diamond bracelet, with initials E. F. in the band. I found this ring and this watch. And I

found these. . ." There was a crisp rustling sound. "A hundred in ten dollar bills. And that glove is stained with fresh blood!" he stopped.

"But you—you don't think that I killed her!" Peggy started blankly. "You don't mean that I. . ."

"LISTEN, Captain," Sam interrupted anxiously. "Let me talk. I'm blind, but I hear better than most people, and I know Peggy didn't kill Ellen Farrow! I know it!"

"Oh," came the mincing word. "How do you know?"

"I was awake tonight, see? I can recognize the steps of everyone who lives here. I heard Ellen Farrow come in alone just after midnight. She went to her room, and soon she turned out her light and went to bed. About half an hour later I heard strange steps pass by my door and climb the stairs. They weren't the steps of anyone here, I swear. I heard an uneven sound of one foot, as if the foot was dragging the floor softly. That person—whoever it was—went to Ellen Farrow's room. I heard him slip in. At last the light was snapped on, and he moved around. I heard a strange soft clicking sound once—then again about half a minute later. I never heard Miss Farrow's voice. He must have killed her as soon as he went in that room. I heard him leaving the house—"

"So you heard strange footsteps, a funny clicking sound, and you *know* all about the murder?" Edwards mused ironically. "What about this watch, the ring, all the money, and the diamond bracelet?"

"But I know Peggy didn't kill that girl!" Sam insisted.

"You said you were worried about a job?" Edwards asked Peggy.

"Yes, I don't have any money to . . ." she breathed, and her words vanished.

"What about the trail of blood that leads from your room to the bath room, and the knife? Can you explain that?"

The girl began to cry. "I swear I didn't kill her! I need money but. . ." Her hands started toward her face. Abruptly there was a choked gasp. "Oh God!" Peggy screamed wildly.

"So you forgot to wash your hands," Edwards said very softly. "And there's blood on your fingers." Sam heard him rise. Let's go, Miss Martin. . ."

"What do the papers say, Mrs. Bane?" Sam asked.

"They done it!" the woman said indignantly. "The jury found her guilty this afternoon! She's going to die, they say!"

"They wouldn't listen to me," Sam said emphatically. "Because I'm blind, they think I'm

a fool! I know those weren't Peggy's steps, but—"

"But the proof was smack in her face," Mrs. Bane countered. "It was Ellen Farrow's blood on her hands—those rings and money and. . ."

"It was planted on Peggy!" Sam exploded. "The whole case is crazy! They never have found where Ellen Farrow came from! They don't know a thing about her! On top of that, whatever happened to her bag and that brief-case and typewriter you saw? Why did somebody take those things, but leave the money and diamonds?" He hammered the chair-arms furiously. "They don't know anything about the case, I tell you! She was killed for a reason nobody's even touched! Nobody knows!"

"No use getting hot, Sam," Mrs. Bane said wearily. "The jury's already found her guilty. It's too late now." She sighed. "But I declare, I just don't believe she killed her!" she fretted.

Sam opened and closed his fingers. He rose and felt his way from the room, down the hall, and to his own room. He turned on the radio and sat down. The feeling within him was not merely anger; it was a deep, gnawing frustration—a sense of helpless futility. *He knew*—but no one believed him.

The music grew from the loud-speaker and a voice was singing:

". . . I'll never be alone,  
When the sun-set reaches home. . ."

Sam leaned forward abruptly, his ears tingling!

"That's *her* song! The song she was singing!" he whispered. The voice stopped singing; the orchestra played through the lifting half-tango rhythm again. Then the announcer's voice came on, advertising beer. The program was ended. Sam leaned back. It was the first time he'd heard the song since that night, two months ago.

The next program came on. He rose and reached for the dial. The opening strains of the tango-rhythm again. He heard the announcer saying, "The orchestra opens the Perkin's Hour with the new love song from Broadway's newest hit, *SUN-SET*, by Carlton Porter."

The song filled the room. That same song. . .

WHEN it was ended, Sam slowly switched the dial off. He moved to the closet and reached for his good coat, his good hat. From his cigar-box bank, he took one of the bottom bills—a five.

As he was leaving the house the news-report from the living-room radio blared:

“. . . Peggy Martin, the convicted slayer of the unknown Ellen Farrow, will die in the electric-chair a week from today. The day and time was set by Judge . . .”

Slowly Sam closed the front door behind him. His cane tapped its nervous way toward Broadway.

At Times Square, he clutched an arm. “I’ve got to find a theater—the one where there’s a play called *SUN-SET*,” he said.

“That’s at the Gilwyn on 46th,” a man’s voice answered. “I’m going that way. Come on.” He led Sam across the street, past 44th and 45th. They turned. “Okay, Pop. This is it,” the man said.

“Thanks,” Sam said quickly. His cane tapped across the lobby.

“No peddlers in here,” a voice snapped.

“No, I want to see the manager—the manager or Mr. Carlton Porter,” Sam explained. He pulled out the limp bill. “Please. Just show me where the office is.” He thrust the bill toward the voice.

“Well, I’ll be—” A hand took his arm. His feet moved over deep carpets, up stairs. This door. But don’t tell the boss that anybody let you in,” the voice warned. The steps departed. Sam found the door and knocked.

“Yeah, come in,” a deep voice called. He opened the door and closed it behind him. “What’re you looking— Who let you in?” the voice interrupted itself angrily.

“Please. I’m no beggar,” Sam said quickly. “I’ve got to ask you a question. What is your name?”

“I’m Ed Gorman, but I don’t—”

“Just let me ask a question or two, please.” Sam tapped his way to the desk and found a chair. I was listening to my radio a while ago when I heard a song that came from your play here—a song about ‘sunset.’”

“Yeah, yeah. So you heard it. What about it?”

“Can you tell me who wrote it?”

“Porter wrote it. He wrote the book and music for the play. Why?”

Sam inched his chair forward and lowered his voice. “Can I—I’d just like to talk to him, please. I won’t be long.”

“It’s no skin off my back. He’s in the next office. Hey, Porter!” he called loudly. Sam heard a chair scrape, a door open. Steps moved in the hall, then the door behind him opened.

“You call me, Gorman?” a man asked.

“This—he wants to ask you something,” Gorman said wearily.

“Yes? What did you—” There was an abrupt, blank silence. “What did you want?” Carlton Porter asked slowly.

“My name is Johnson. I heard your sunset song. I had to ask you—did you ever hear of anyone named Ellen Farrow?”

“Ellen Farrow. No. Should I?” came the slow question.

“She was singing that song the day she moved into my rooming-house. And that night she was murdered. She—”

“What the devil is this?” Gorman exclaimed.

“I’m trying to explain,” Sam said anxiously. “You see, the police never could trace her, never could find out who she was or who her enemies were. Now they’ve sentenced a girl to die—a girl who didn’t commit the crime! And that song is all I’ve got—don’t you understand? That’s the only connection with Ellen Farrow or her past. You must have known her, or she must have known you! Can’t you remember?”

“I never heard of such a screwy story,” Porter said. “And I never heard of any Ellen Farrow.”

“But you *must* have!” Sam exploded. He rose excitedly. “Think! Did you—” His cane fell and clattered to the floor.

“I never heard of her,” Carlton repeated. His steps approached. Sam heard a soft, strangely dull click. He heard it again.

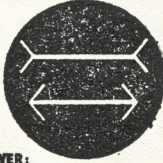
Here’s your cane,” Porter said.

“Thanks. But can’t you—” Sam stopped. He swallowed. He felt Porter’s eyes upon

SIGHT TESTER

THIRST BESTER

Guess which line is the longer—  
but don't bet on it



ANSWER:  
no fooling them  
—both are the same—



him. "Thank you," he said thickly again. "I'll be going now."

He tapped his way to the door and into the hall, a salty bead of sweat on his lips, stumbling swiftly along the hall toward the stairs. He heard the door open and close behind him. As he moved, he could hear the steps that followed.

The steps of the death-night! Uneven! As though one foot were dragging very slightly! Sam knew that the killer of Ellen Farrow was following him!

**H**E FUMBLED his way out the door and across the lobby, onto the walk. He hesitated frantically, then hurried in the direction of Broadway. In the roar of the traffic, in the cross-currents of the crowds, he sought an escape. But in the mingling hash of noises, his ears lost the trace of the following steps. He knew then, that he shouldn't have come this way; the person to whom he turned for help might be the killer!

Sweat coursed down his cheeks and turned salty on his lips; his breath was fast and hard; his cane beat a frantic staccato on the echoing pavement. Everything was clear in his mind now. . .

"Don't make a noise. It's a gun," spoke a dry raw whisper beside him. Something blunt and hard settled against his ribs. "Keep your mouth shut. You're blind and I'm leading you. That's the way it'll look," the voice said. "Come on."

"Walk!" The fingers ground into his arm. He was led, fast, roughly along the walk. The dragging steps beat a hypnotic rhythm in his ears, recalling that night of murder, when first he had heard them.

"Here. In here," the voice commanded. He stumbled up steps. A door opened. Another door opened, then closed. A light-switch snapped on and a key grated in a lock. He was shoved into a chair.

"What happened back there in that office? You found out something! I saw your face when I handed you that cane—what happened?" Carlton Porter asked furiously.

"That clicking sound when you bent down! It's your knee snapping. It made the sound when you bent down to get my cane. And it snapped that night you killed Ellen Farrow—when you bent down to get the typewriter and bag from under her bed. You're lame—that's why your step drags—and why just one knee-joint snaps. One leg is stiff. You killed her! You did it!"

Sam's fear added a mixture of fury. His fingers clenched the chair and his blind eyes bore through the blackness toward Carlton Porter. "You killed her and I know why!"

"Do you?" the voice minced. "Tell me about it?"

"That play—it's not yours! She wrote it! Somehow you read it, heard her music! You knew it would be a hit! You killed her and stole it!"

"You're smart for a blind man, Mister," Porter murmured. "And you're right. We lived in the same hotel uptown. I was trying to write a book. I read what she'd written—it was her first try. I knew it had something. I waited until she'd finished it, then I told her I had some friends in the business. She let me take the manuscript. I removed her name, and got an offer from Gorman of twenty-five grand as a starter. I told her she ought to change her name—it was really Edith Fuller; I said that was corny. Then I told her to move down near the theater-district—that the play was a cinch for a hit. I followed, watched her pick that rooming house, and looked it over. You know the rest—"

"You killed her! You took all her possessions! Her real name wasn't known! And you framed the murder on Peggy! You smeared Ellen Farrow's blood on that door-knob, knowing someone would. . ."

"It was a nice afterthought. I saw that door open—the room was empty. Why not make it perfect?" Carlton laughed dryly.

"What are you going to do with me?" Sam whispered.

"I've got another knife," came the simple answer.

Sam's fingers curled against his palm. His frightened mind was trying to think, to plan. "I . . . can I have a cigarette?"

"I don't smoke."

"You should," Sam said, pushing a note of sarcasm into his voice. "You're going to need one."

"Why?" Porter's voice was suddenly edgy, steely.

"Why don't you take a look out the window? I have a feeling you'll see a cop. You see, I was sort of a decoy. The cops heard my story three days ago. I've been hanging around the theater listening to your footsteps."

"I don't believe you! You're lying to. . ."

"Take a look out the window," Sam mocked.

**T**HE dragging steps moved, swiftly, softly. And just as swiftly Sam's fingers tightened on his cane. He dragged in a hard breath. He remembered the sound of the light-switch—it had been straight ahead, maybe six feet. . .

He bolted from the chair. Squarely into the wall he plunged. Wildly, frantically his fingers raked the plaster, and finding the switch, he smashed down with his cane, shattering it!

Porter cursed. His feet shuffled, then stilled. Sam dropped to his knees and inched along the wall—stopped.

If Porter didn't smoke, maybe he had no matches, Sam thought swiftly. There might be a lamp in the room, but he would hear Porter moving. Now it was blindness against blindness—and blindness was old to Sam. His fingers, cold and damp, shifted nervously on his heavy cane as he listened.

Crunch . . . drag . . .

The sound was small, yet distinct, Sam crept on his knees, following the sound without breathing. A chair bumped slightly. Porter was still. Sam knew where he was—directly to the right and against the wall. He balanced the cane. His lungs ached for air. One more movement, one more sound. . .

Then—the creak of a board.

Sam's cane lifted. He swung it in a wide slugging arc toward the sound.

Porter's scream thickened into a gasping sob as the cane smashed into yielding flesh and bone again and again.

Porter groaned harshly. Sam heard his finger-nails rasping down the plaster wall and hurled himself forward. His fingers dug into the flesh of the throat! He slammed the limp body twice against the wall. . . His fingers loosened. The room was silent.

Slowly he pulled himself up. He fumbled at the door-key, feeling his way into a hall. Outside, he heard the crowds moving about him. He clutched at an arm. "A policeman! I want a policeman!" he exclaimed.

"What's the trouble, Pop?" an amused voice wondered. "Somebody steal your pencils?"

Sam straightened and stiffened. For the first time in years of blindness, a thundering indignation rose in his throat.

"Get me a cop!" he roared. "I'm a busy man!"

IT WAS better than playing on the street-corners. It was warm in the Club Majestic, and he was making a hundred a week. He had a letter from the Mayor and a letter from the Inspector of Detectives. And when the Club closed, he always had a drink at the bar. Maybe two.

But the part Sam liked best was something else. . . The waiters whispered it behind his back—sometimes customers whispered it when they recognized him: "That's Sam Johnson—the guy that caught the murderer. Licked hell out of him. And blind!"

But after the second drink, Sam thought it over himself. Maybe he wasn't so blind. Maybe not. . .

## The Love that Killed

**Bluebeard:** 1. In Charles Perrault's story of that name, a merciless tyrant, who killed his wives. 2. Hence, a murderous polygamist; wife-slayer.

—Funk & Wagnall's Standard Dictionary

Despite the above definition, Gilles de Rais, Marshal of France, friend and companion-in-arms of Joan of Arc, until her death transformed him into the original monster of the Bluebeard legend, was no waster of wives. He married but once and—when the authorities finally put an end to his bloody career—he left a widow!

He cold-bloodedly murdered, by his own estimate, a thousand persons, hoarding the bodies on various pieces of his extensive real estate. The authorities, awed to the point of silence in the course of their investigations, definitely pinned four hundred premeditated murders on him and called it a day. They had their man—and they had a case!

His victims ran the gamut: he had murdered men, women and children, indiscriminately, but contrary to popular belief, never a wife. They ranged from noted actors and actresses, and children of neighboring farmers, to deliverymen and peasant maidens who called at

his numerous castles to sell their farm produce. He made bonfires of his victims' bones in the fireplace of his own room at his pet castle at Machecoul when he had collected enough for a roaring blaze—and jovially warmed his hands at the awful flames!

He had little motive to give for his crimes when finally arrested, other than the tragic and quite accidental deaths of two women he had loved in his youth, added to his sense of loss at the death of the Maid of Orleans. These convinced him that all those he loved must die and launched him on a career of secret murder which probably has never since been equaled. . . but apparently he was never persuaded that Mme. de Rais came under this deranged concept.

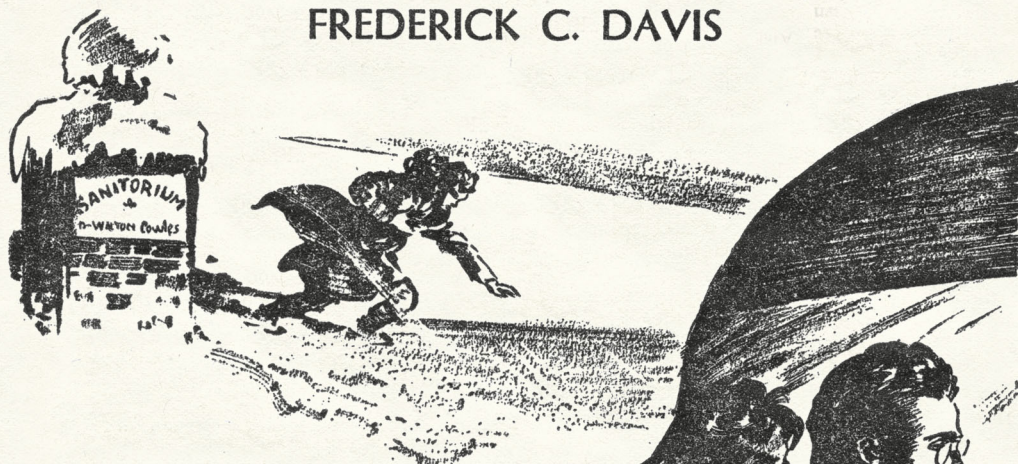
His arrest set the style for future Bluebeards, amazing everyone who had known him. He continued to prescribe the fashion for his successors by denouncing proceedings against himself as absurd, later collapsing at his trial and making a complete confession.

With two accomplices who had helped him to conceal the bodies of his victims, he was sentenced to hang and burn.

—Ejler Jakobsson.

# DOCTOR DIGGORY'S GLASS GRAVE

By  
FREDERICK C. DAVIS



## CHAPTER ONE

### Mountain Pariah

I'D HAD a night off from the strange job that kept me busy at all odd hours and now I was heading back. The highway winding up into the mountains from Cowlesdale was solid white with hard-packed snow. The grade grew steeper near the fork. Here the main road turned toward Dr. Walton Cowles' Sanitorium, a high-fenced cluster of buildings situated on a little plateau. It was visible in the high distance from the town below and seemed to be a sort of monarchy in itself. I'd never been inside its grounds. My destination lay in another direction, along the branch road on the left.

Just as I began to swing the car I glimpsed a flutter of motion in the beams of my headlights. I stopped to peer at a small figure on the main road. It was someone running haltingly down the hill—a girl. Stumbling as she forced herself along, her path wavering drunkenly, she staggered to a stop, as if exhausted, and fell.

Alarmed, I swung back and sent my car upward, the chains grinding, while she lay there. I was still fifty yards away when she lifted herself weakly to her knees, then to her feet. The glare of my headlights seemed to





•     •     **Dramatically Bizarre Novel of Living Death**     •     •

*A voluntary prisoner in a transparent tomb fashioned by his own hand, could strange, silent Dr. Diggory free himself from his own private hell long enough to brand as merciless murderer the town's most beloved benefactor?*



His face set hard as stone, he held the papers in the hot blue flame. . . .



resting motionless against a boulder that had stopped her fall thirty feet below. Then, turning back for a moment to the spot where she'd sprawled in the road, I stared at a stain—bright red.

The headlights of another car were shining at me. Coming down from the sanatorium, it slid to a stop and a self-possessed voice called, "Anything wrong?" The driver hurried to join me—an erect, briskly moving man with the bearing of one accustomed to taking command and giving orders.

He was Dr. Walton Cowles, sole owner and director of the famous sanatorium. Patients were brought to this institution from a thousand miles around—big business men suffering nervous collapse, border-line mental cases and the like. A gold mine, that high-class, private insane asylum of Dr. Walton Cowles—the biggest business in Cowlesdale,

blind her, to throw her into an unreasoning panic. She twisted about as if seeking a way of escape, then went tottering straight across the road. Before I could shout a warning she'd dropped again. This time she'd tripped and plunged headlong down a dangerously steep bank.

I snapped on my spotlight and angled it down. From the edge of the road I could see her—a dark, shapeless mass in the deep snow,

if not the entire county, and it made Dr. Cowles the biggest of the local big-shots.

"There's an abandoned car almost blocking the road on the curve above," he said crisply. "I'd never met him. He probably knew who I was, but he treated me like a complete stranger. 'Has there been an accident?'"

"A girl down there, doctor," I said quickly. "She's been hurt—she fell. You'd better look at her."

He resented the suggestion that I might be telling him what to do about it. "Certainly. Lead the way."

The girl still hadn't moved. We turned her over and saw first the smear of blood on her chest. It steamed a little in the bitter air. There was a rip in her sweater, a bullet-hole. Then we gently stroked the clinging snow off her dead white face.

I knew her. She was Nurse Nora Forbes.

ALMOST an hour later I turned the car off the branch road and stopped it in front of the little white house that sat completely alone on the mountainside, lights shining from all its windows. This was where I worked and lived. A strange job and a strange life.

I remembered the day when I'd first come here, when I'd first become entangled in the web of the mystery to which only one man on earth held the answer.

Dr. Gordon Diggory had said, "No questions, Jim. That's the one hard-and-fast rule I have to make about the job. Absolutely no questions."

It hadn't been easy, even then.

For one thing, Gordon Diggory hadn't said this to me directly. It wasn't his voice I'd heard speaking, but a reproduction of it. Wires had carried it from his laboratory, where he was perched on a stool beside the big bluestone sink, into the outer office where I was standing. He'd spoken into an intercommunication unit and his words had twanged from the little loudspeaker of a second unit placed on the desk near me. In itself, of course, that was one queer thing I might have asked him about. Why did he talk to me electronically, with a doorless wall between us, rather than face to face?

However, we could see each other clearly. The upper half of the intervening wall was plate glass. It partitioned the large room into two sections of unequal size. The rear part, and the larger, was crowded with Gordon Diggory's research equipment. The front part, in contrast, was comfortably homelike, less an office than a living room. There was no passage between them—no communication at all, in fact, except for a small glass panel which he rarely opened, and the concealed wires of the intercommunication system, over

which he conversed with his occasional visitors. From Dig's laboratory, a door led to his small but complete living quarters in the rear of the house. Carrying out his insistence on absolute separation, he had provided for me a more comfortable upstairs apartment.

He smiled at me through the glass wall—a comradely smile. He wore an acid-stained smock and his shoulders were stooped with fatigue. His eyes, dark as midnight in his pale face, were intense—almost fierce.

"This is the way it must be, Jim," he said, quietly. "You'll work in that room. I'll work and live in this part of the house and there'll always be this wall between us. It's an unusual arrangement, of course, but I'm sure we'll get along well together, provided you remember not to ask personal questions. Well, Jim? Do you still want the job?"

Anybody else would have hesitated, and with good reason. This strange retreat of Dig's, halfway up a mountainside, was so severely isolated that there wasn't another human habitation in sight. The job, odd enough in itself—being a sort of combination secretary and errand-boy for Dig—would mean I'd become something of a recluse while associating with a self-made pariah of a scientist who, the buzzing tongues in Cowlesdale said, was probably not quite sane.

But really this job was made to order for me. Although I'd had to give up my lean law practice in the city, I needed to keep myself occupied, not too strenuously. My lungs, both spotted now, would heal best in this crisp, clear air. I'd heard plenty of queer things about Gordon Diggory, whom I hadn't seen in four years, but I'd known him well ever since boyhood as an intensely earnest and brilliant chap, and I was a long way from believing he could be mentally off balance.

Strange as it was then, it had grown stranger. It was February now, and in three solid months I hadn't once seen Gordon Diggory when that glass wall wasn't between us. He did go out occasionally, but always when there was no chance he'd meet anyone. Sometimes, coming back from town, I'd find his foot-tracks in the snow where he'd tramped along a lonely trail and back, for just a short distance. But he never left the house when I was there.

I'd learned to control my curiosity because I'd come to understand that some powerful force beyond his control had exiled Dig to this mountain retreat. Whatever it might be, he closely defended his secret, never for a moment dropping his guard. It affected him deeply. I felt it must be something so horrible that he had resolved no one else on earth must ever learn the truth.

At times, when he worked cheerfully be-

hind his glass wall and seemed quite normal, I forgot myself and slipped—asked a personal question, banteringly, without realizing I'd asked it—and then his face would freeze and his fierce, dark eyes would bore at me while I blurted out an apology and felt myself withering.

At other times he became intolerably restless. When his experiments weren't progressing he'd prow about his lab like a miserable caged beast; during the small hours of the night I'd hear him pacing wretchedly upstairs, in his part of that divided house, like a bitter man sentenced to imprisonment for life with no smallest hope of a reprieve. Then his sounds of suffering would keep me awake too and make me wonder what ghastly thing it was that had shut him so completely out of the world and made him so relentlessly its slave.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Murder Mission

**N**OW I had startling news for Dig. Rushing in, I looked for him in the lab. It was a glittering accumulation of equipment—beakers and flasks in neat rows on the tables, bottled chemical reagents precisely aligned on the shelves, trim ranks of books above his desk. Crowded into its corners were a refrigerator and an incubator for his cultures, a huge sterilizer and groups of cabinets. Dig had evidently been working, but at the moment he wasn't there.

I snapped the switch of the intercom and called through it. "Dig! . . . Dig!" I heard footfalls behind the glass wall and he appeared wearily in the doorway connecting with the kitchen. My news must have been written across my face. He strode forward intently, his eyes sharp with black lights.

"Nora Forbes," I said over the wires. "I found her on the upper road. She'd been shot. It can't be anything but murder."

Gordon Diggory stood still as an image. His thin face seemed to become more gaunt. The fierceness of his eyes grew almost terrifying. Then, decisively, he turned to the telephone. His voice crackled as he asked for 405, Linda Vale's home.

No answer. Dig turned back, full of agitation so sharp that I became bewildered and almost afraid of him.

"Dr. Cowles drove back to the sanitorium to call the police," I said. "Chief Dixon and Coroner Wray came up. They've already taken the body into town—not wasting any time. They acted as if they've a good idea what's behind it."

That seemed to hit Dig even harder. His voice shot out of the loudspeaker.

"Get into town right away, Jim. Go straight

to the Vale place. Never mind if nobody's there. Break in if you have to."

"Break in! Good Lord, why?"

"Lew's office." Dig was speaking tersely of Linda's brother. "Search it. Somewhere you'll find a number of large, brown, sealed envelopes. Each will have a date and a name written on it. Get them. Bring them here—unopened."

I stared at him. "You're asking me to commit illegal entry and burglary. Shouldn't I know the reason behind it?"

"No questions! Do it, Jim! Now—before it's too late!"

His eyes were a command I couldn't ignore.

"Explanations later, then," I said quickly, and left.

**L**INDA VALE—Nora Forbes—these were the women in the life of the man who'd cut himself off inexorably from the world. Only tonight, during my few hours off duty, I'd been talking about them and wondering . . .

I'd gone down to Cowlesdale earlier this evening to spend the evening shooting the breeze with Bob Kirk. Like myself and Gordon Diggory, Kirk was a Cowlesville lad. Our best undertaker, he was young and amiable. We liked to sit in his back parlor and drink beer and talk. I always had to have my corny little joke. "How's business, Bob? Pretty dead, eh?" He was such a nice guy, he'd laugh every time.

As usual, the conversation had gotten around to Gordon Diggory. Although I couldn't ask Dig questions, I could ask Bob Kirk, and I did, plenty, but without getting much satisfaction.

"Saw Linda last night," Kirk said. "She was with Dr. Walton Cowles, at the Grotto bar. They're always together, these days. I asked her about Dig again, for the twentieth time, point blank." Kirk frowned. "She honestly doesn't know why Dig went so deep into that personal Siberia of his."

"A lovelier woman never lived," I said. "Linda was Dig's girl 'way back in her pig-tail days. They were engaged to be married and the date was all set. Then, suddenly, Dig tears his whole life apart and throws it away, including Linda—everything except his research."

After finishing his internship Dig had gone to China for a year of valuable experience in a Red Cross hospital. He'd been taken seriously ill there, and when he'd grown strong enough to stand the trip he'd been sent home. After a long recuperation here, he'd begun his private practice in the city. He'd been named to the board of Highwood Hospital and was well along a career as one of the state's best surgeons. Suddenly, a week before the day set for his marriage, he'd re-

signed from the hospital, closed up his office, abandoned his practice, jilted Linda and retired to his mountain hide-out. There he was still, and there he intended to stay, apparently, as long as he lived.

"Had anything unusual happened on that day when Dig decided to chuck everything?"

"Linda told me once that one of his patients died—a close friend, too," Kirk said. "Well, of course, that happens to the best of doctors. After all, my business is founded on the well-known fact that nobody's immortal. Anyway, Linda's certain Dig couldn't have been at fault that time."

"Then what the devil made him do it?"

"It must be an obsession, or a phobia, or something like that. I think Dig's turned into an extreme type of hypochondriac. He had a close call in China, you know. That experience probably planted in his mind an unreasoning, uncontrollable fear of contamination, of contracting an incurable or fatal disease."

I shook my head. "Mail comes in to him. Food's brought to his door. Besides, Dig cultivates all sorts of virulent bacteria and viruses for his experiments. He's trying to develop a new germicide, you know—something like penicillin, but even better and easier to produce in quantity. He tries it out on those cultures of his—the bacteria of pneumonia, tuberculosis, the social diseases, everything. Of course he handles them with proper care, but he's never shown any abnormal fear of them."

"Good Lord!" Kirk said, sitting forward with a sudden thought. "Do you suppose, then, that it's the reverse—that Dig's afraid of *giving* some terrible disease to someone? Is it possible that Dig's a—leper?"

I laughed outright. "Not a chance! Leprosy breeds in filth—lack of soap, air and sunshine. An ordinarily clean person doesn't catch it. A doctor never would, simply because he's continually scrubbing up with antiseptics. Dig is certainly not a leper.

"Why is it he never even sees anybody except you, then. And Linda once in a while, when she drops in?"

"Linda and Nora Forbes," I said. "That's another queer thing. Nora used to be his nurse in the city. Now she's on the staff of Dr. Walton Cowles' sanatorium. Once a week, on her day off, she drives into town and on her way back she comes in to see Dig. She never has anything special to say, but she always has a letter for him."

"A letter?"

"At least it's something written and sealed in an envelope—no stamp, no writing on it, just plain. She gives it to him through that little glass panel, then goes away. I've seen him pore over those letters by the hour, and I've noticed they're always carbon copies."

I drained my glass. "Thanks for the beer,

pal." And at the door I asked Kirk jokingly, "You say business isn't so good?"

"Only fair. Fewer people are dying these days, it seems." He chuckled patiently. "Good night, Jim."

"Fewer people are dying these days," Bob Kirk had said.

It was only ten minutes later that I found Nora Forbes lying on the bank of the road, huddled in death.

THE Vale home, a fine old place sitting near the center of Cowlesdale, had a separate entrance on which a sign hung: "Lewis Vale, M. D." Linda's brother was the youngest physician in town, a conscientious sort. No one answered my ring, but fortunately I was saved the illegal task of breaking in. The door was unlocked.

Lew's consultation room, usually neat and orderly, seemed a bit disturbed tonight. One of the desk drawers was pulled out several inches. Opening it farther, I found no large brown envelopes. None in the other drawers either. Next I turned to Lew's file cabinet of correspondence and case histories. While I was poking through it the telephone rang—so insistently that I risked answering it.

"Jim!" Dig's voice was tense with anxiety. "Have you found them?"

"Somebody else got to them ahead of me. One of his desk drawers has been forced open. A very neat job—scarcely a mark made. There's a space inside the drawer where the big brown envelopes were, but they're gone now."

Dig's voice came again, a driving force behind it. "They've got Lew for it already."

"The police? Got Lew for murdering Nora Forbes? Good Lord, why should they—" That being a question, probably one of a forbidden nature, I choked off "All right, you seem to know. What next?"

"You're a lawyer, Jim—the only lawyer in town who's independent, who won't knuckle under." What Dig meant by that, I didn't know exactly "Offer your services to Lew. Will you do it? I'll pay your fee. He needs you, Jim."

"Forget the fee," I said. "But sooner or later, Dig, you and I have got to reach an understanding. I can't handle this case properly if you hold out on me."

"Get back here as soon as you can, Jim," he said.

I drove three blocks to Cowlesdale's square which was flanked on one side by the court house and the municipal offices. I headed for the office of District Attorney Robbins.

In the outer room Linda sat beside Dr. Walton Cowles, her eyes clouded with worried bewilderment. Although widely known, prosperous and a power in our community, Dr.

Cowles was not yet forty. Generations ago his family had settled this part of the country; both the county and the town were named after them. With few exceptions everybody kowtowed to Cowles. I wondered just how far the law would dare to move against Lewis Vale with Dr. Cowles practically engaged to his sister.

When I knocked at the door of the inner office District Attorney Robbins appeared—a middle-aged, dusty-looking, shrewd-eyed man. I explained my purpose and he admitted me with a shrug. Inside sat Chief of Police Joe Dixon—sluggish, brutal-faced—and Lew.

Lewis Vale, dark and trimly built, was bristling with defiance. Even his gaze at me was a challenge.

"I'm your lawyer, Lew, if it's all right with you," I began. "We'll have a private talk about it and—"

"Private talk?" Lew said. "I've nothing to hide. I'll have my say right here.

"I'm being intimidated and framed," Lew Vale went on in a tone of denunciation. "I had no reason whatever for killing Nora. Just the opposite. She was giving me inside information about the Cowles Sanatorium. We'd learned too much about it. That's why she was killed, and that's why I'm being threatened with a murder charge. I'm to understand that I'd better keep quiet, or else. But I'm damned if I will!"

Lew Vale had spoken with vehement conviction. Apparently he had a strong reason for making this startling accusation. I hoped to God he had, for it was utterly reckless.

"Hold it, Lew," I cautioned him quickly. "Such wild talk won't do you any good here. We'll go over it together privately—"

"The hell with that!" Lew blurted. "I know the truth doesn't matter here—not with Dr. Cowles pulling the strings. He can commit murder and get away with it, with these dummies of his in office. And he can put the pressure on me damned hard. But I'm not shutting up. What I've learned about Cowles' Sanatorium, and the reason for Nora's murder, is coming out in spite of them all."

This was going to be damned tough to handle. I admired Lew Vale for speaking up so fearlessly; yet the nature of his defense filled me with dismay. But Chief Dixon and the

D. A. weren't alarmed at all. The chief's small, piggy eyes blinked at Lew, and Robbins sighed, frowning.

"That's the way he's been raving ever since we brought him in," Robbins muttered to me. "I've had enough of it."

He politely asked Dr. Cowles to step in. Linda, badly shaken, came with Cowles, gazing at her headstrong brother sadly and incredulously. The doctor seemed concerned principally for her.

"Dr. Cowles," the D. A. said, with marked deference, "this man is making the ridiculous charge that Nurse Forbes, as a member of your staff, had learned something—"

A suave gesture of Dr. Walton Cowles' hand stopped the D. A. "Nurse Forbes," he said smoothly, "was a rather unstable young woman. As a psychiatrist, I'd taken notice of her unpredictable moods. Her imagination ran away with her at times and she was frequently untruthful. In fact, I'd decided she was unfitted for her responsibilities and I was about to discharge her. Whatever she may have told Dr. Vale—"

He gazed almost pityingly on Linda's defiant brother.

"Needless to say, if the authorities here wish to investigate my sanatorium, I'll welcome it. In fact, irresponsible as Dr. Vale's statements may be, I insist that an official inquiry be made. I'm certain it will show these charges to be utterly baseless."

Lew Vale actually laughed, mockingly. "Don't bother! Your official hirelings will paint you whiter than a lily. For my part, I'm sticking to my story, no matter how hard you choose to crack down on me. And I'll back it up with documentary proof."

Documentary proof? He must mean those big brown envelopes which had been locked inside his desk! He wasn't aware, of course, that they had already disappeared. Stolen! I stared at Dr. Walton Cowles, and at the D. A., and at the chief of police, for the first time feeling that Lew might actually be telling the truth. And I also stared at him, realizing he was counting upon defending himself with evidence he no longer possessed.

"Dr. Vale," Robbins said, his manner turning surly, "for a few minutes let us talk facts. It's a fact, for example, that Nurse Forbes

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frequently visited your office and your home, but not for professional purposes. You've admitted this much. The rest is obvious. You're a married man, whose wife is overseas with the Red Cross. Nora Forbes is in love with you. Being emotionally overwrought, she'd insisted that you divorce your wife and marry her; she'd nagged you about it so intolerably that finally in desperation, and in order to avoid a nasty scandal, you had to kill her.

"As a corroborative circumstance, there's the fact that your revolver, which you usually kept in your office, is missing—missing because, of course, you got rid of it after shooting Nora Forbes. That, Dr. Vale, is the case which the State—"

"It's a damned lie, all of it!" Lew Vale snapped.

"That," the district attorney resumed levelly, "is the State's case against you, Dr. Vale. You're under arrest for murder in the first degree."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Untouchable!

"LEW'S in an impossible spot," I said through the glass wall. "He'll never clear himself by making recriminations against the man who's the dominating power in this county.

"Even Linda doesn't believe Lew's charges against Cowles," I went on. "Lew can't back them up. By this time those documents of his have been destroyed. Cowles has such influence that any investigation of his sanatorium will give him a clean bill of health. He needn't be afraid of anybody. Yet I've a feeling that he is afraid. Otherwise he wouldn't be letting the so-called law put Linda's brother through the wringer. He's operating against somebody *through* Lew."

Suddenly I remembered those letters which Nora Forbes had brought to Dig every week.

"You! He's working on *you*, Dig!" That was the answer. "All right. Now I've got to ask questions. Everything depends on them. Go back to the beginning, will you, and give it to me straight!"

Dig's eyes were bright as dark flames. He said quietly, "You remember Dr. Irving?"

Dr. Thomas Irving had first aroused Dig's interest in medicine. From a humble beginning in Cowlesdale he'd advanced to a heart specialist's lucrative practice in the city, and as a sort of patron of Dig's he'd helped to send him through medical school. A year ago, however, he'd suffered a complete nervous collapse and had been committed to—I recalled it with a shock—Dr. Cowles' Sanatorium.

"You also remember Mrs. Irving?" Dig

asked next, his tone still dangerously quiet.

Soon after her husband's commitment, plump Mrs. Irving, jewel-bedecked and frivolously scornful of scandal, had begun romping about with a slick, penniless hanger-on twelve years her junior. They're living royally on the wealth Dr. Irving had accumulated over a lifetime of hard work.

Dig took up a copy of today's *Cowlesdale Sentinel* and pressed its front page against the glass wall. There was a terse black headline, DR. IRVING SUCCUMBS, and the words, "... cerebral hemorrhage."

Dark flames still burned in Dig's eyes.

"When Dr. Irving was committed to that sanatorium his so-called nervous collapse made me suspicious. After I closed up my office in town, Nora took a job on Cowles' staff because I asked her to. She hated the conditions she found there and wanted to help clean them up. Keeping her eyes and ears open, she saw and heard things that wouldn't have meant much to a less intelligent nurse. Questionable practices, Jim. Every week she brought out detailed information about specific instances."

"To Lew Vale."

"You know that Lew also owed a debt of gratitude to Dr. Irving. Besides, Lew's militantly honest; he was eager to work with me on this. Nora took her reports to him—for certain special reasons."

There Dig was holding something back.

"Lew typed them out, had Nora sign them and put them into safekeeping, to wait until we'd accumulated enough evidence. Each time Nora brought me a carbon copy."

"I've got to see those copies."

Dig unlocked a cabinet and brought out a sheaf of closely typed onionskin.

"Give them to me," I said. "Pass them out."

He shook his head firmly. "I can't do that. I'll hold them against the glass."

PUZZLED, and itching to get my hands on them, I read them through the pane. The first report concerned Dr. Irving, and its first page filled me with cold amazement. I nodded, and Dig turned to the next page. Line by line my indignation mounted. By the time I'd finished the last page of the twentieth report, each dealing with a desperate case, I'd absorbed the nastiest story I'd ever seen.

I'd already known that the lunacy laws of this state were lax, so that the testimony of a husband or a wife, plus the signature of any physician, could bring about a commitment. Appearances of insanity could be falsified, and once a man or a woman had been jockeyed into a madhouse, and coerced into signing a power of attorney, he or she was legally buried alive. But I hadn't suspected what reprehensible trickery was practiced, or

how stark greed had operated behind such cases, often without a spark of mercy shown the helpless victim.

Nurse Forbes' reports contained startling phrases. "Power of suggestion used to persuade the patient he was mentally abnormal. . . . Chloral hydrate in his coffee to make him hazy in manner and only half conscious. . . . Then *Cannibis Indica*, also secretly administered in his food, to produce delusions, fits of rage, actual madness. . . . The most powerful hypnotic known, paraldehyde, at time of commitment. . . . Patient kept drugged and treated consistently like an idiot, so that he began to wonder if he really was sane. . . . After months of imprisonment he became timid, frightened of everything around him, and lost all hope of ever being released. . . .

"Hysteria in the case of this woman easily induced by drugs. . . . Forced to associate with patients who are actually insane. . . . Hocus-pocus of obscure terms used to deceive those who inquire concerning her—psychoneurotic symptoms, extraversion, hysterical amnesia, schizophrenia, reintegration of personality, and so on. . . .

"Once this patient was committed, his wife divorced him on the grounds of insanity and married a younger man. . . . This woman was persuaded to sign a power of attorney giving her playboy husband free access to all her wealth. . . . This girl, about to come of age, was committed just prior to the time when the executor of her estate would otherwise have had to make an accounting to her. . . . This highly successful executive was released only after he'd agreed in writing to make an enormous property settlement on his wife upon her coming divorce. . . ."

Ugly stuff, ugly.

"Lew's right!" I blurted. Suddenly I remembered. "This wasn't Nora's regular day off. She must have slipped out, headed for town to tell Lew something about Dr. Irving."

"Dr. Irving's death might have been unintentional," Dig said, his voice ominously level. "Mistreatment, perhaps, too harsh for a man of his age. Or it may have been a deal with Mrs. Irving—Walton Cowles to get a good cut of what's left of her husband's estate."

"Dig, I've got to have those reports."

"I tell you, Jim," he snapped, "I can't possibly give them to you!"

I was losing my temper. "Why the hell not? There's no other chance to get Lew out of this, to pin all these dirty jobs on Cowles, and even this is a million-to-one shot. Without those reports I won't stand a ghost of a chance with the case."

"These reports," Dig said, his voice crackling over the wires, "can never be introduced in court as evidence, absolutely never."

While I sat there, stunned, I heard a car climbing the road. The door opened and it was Linda. She gazed at Dig through the glass with reproof in her eyes, but bewilderment too. Since the abrupt breaking off of their engagement she'd turned to rebuilding her life without him, of course, but her heart wasn't in it. Her heart was here with Dig, on the other side of that impassable glass wall.

Then Lew appeared. "They've let me bring Lew here so he could talk to you, Dig," Linda said. "But I've got to take him back in a little while."

Dig had come close to the glass barrier. "I'm very happy to see you, Linda. And I'm glad you brought Lew." He gazed at her brother. "Jim tells me you won't back down an inch."

"You know why I'm standing my ground, Dig," Lew answered. "I can't honestly do anything else."

Linda spoke before Dig could answer. "I don't understand Lew, Dig. The things he's said about Walton are completely unbelievable to me. I know Walton. He's always been so kind to me, so considerate and thoughtful, I'm certain Lew is mistaken."

Lew smiled at her. "Linda, you're a woman, and you can't see the truth about Cowles because your emotions get in the way. I know why you brought me here. You want Dig to ask me to keep quiet. Then Cowles will let me get out of this mess and everything will be lovely except for the poor devils who get maneuvered into his crooked insanity mill. But I won't keep quiet even if Dig asks me to—which he won't."

"I'm playing it through, even though it means my finish, thanks to the great Dr. Walton Cowles." Lew still smiled. "I know exactly what will save me. Your friendship for me, Dig, and the love you still feel for Linda. Those are important factors, and Cowles is playing on them, Dig. He'll appeal to you for Linda's sake and mine—subtly, of course. Those copies of Nora's reports to be destroyed—your silence—that's what he wants!"

"The moment he gets it, this murder case will suddenly change; Cowles' official dummies will see it in an entirely different light, and I'll be freed." Lew squared his shoulders. "But don't do it, Dig. Never mind about Linda and me. Keep yourself the man of integrity you are now. Never do it. Never!"

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A Switch in Time

**P**ARKING a short distance beyond Bob Kirk's mortuary, I walked back. No other car stood near it. As I'd hoped, Coroner Wray

hadn't yet arrived to perform the post-mortem on Nora Forbes.

I went toward the rear door, looking in the windows. The private parlor where Kirk and I usually sat and talked was empty. Quietly I turned the knob and went in.

In the embalming room an inert figure covered with a sheet lay on the operating table. I looked at Nora Forbes' wan face. The bullet hole was a nasty little puncture in the center of her chest. I covered her again and stepped into the door of the supply closet at the side of the room. Squeezing in, I pulled the door until only a thin line of an opening was left.

Presently footfalls approached the rear of the house. The rear entrance was thrust open and a man bustled in, stamping snow off his feet. Kirk's voice mingled with the gruff tones of Coroner Wray. They entered the embalming room together, Wray carrying his black instrument case. A small, paunchy man, with a sly, insolent face, he was exactly the sort who'd sell out his profession for the sake of pocketing Cowles' hush-money.

"Unusually important case, Kirk," he said pompously. "Shouldn't be any chance of a misunderstanding. I want a witness, so stay right here."

He was making too much of a show of being careful.

Through the slit of the door I watched Coroner Wray insert the points of a long, thin tweezers into the wound. He probed, then nodded and said, "I've got it now." Beginning to lift the pinched tweezers, he cocked his head toward the hallway. "What was that? Someone coming? I don't want any interruptions."

Bob Kirk, good-minded guy that he was, fell for it. He turned from the table to look into the hall. Wray's manipulation was as deft as a magician's. In a flash he had the death slug out of the wound; he dropped it into his left palm and with the fingers of that same hand he inserted a different slug between the tweezer points. He'd brought that second bullet with him for precisely this purpose of switching it for the true evidence. Before Kirk turned back he'd inserted the false slug into the wound and was holding it there. Kirk had had his attention diverted for only a second, and so far as he could know Coroner Wray hadn't stirred a muscle.

"Nobody there," he said unsuspectingly.

Wray shrugged and lifted the tweezers. The planted slug glistened.

I felt a cold, furious impulse to slam out of that closet and pin the lie on Wray then and there, but it was important for me to witness the rest of this clever, crooked play.

The coroner affixed an official tag to the slug by means of sealing wax and had Kirk initial it for identification.

Where had that second slug come from? It had been test-fired from Lew Vale's conveniently missing revolver, of course. Obviously Lew's gun had been stolen by the same man who had taken his original copies of Nora's reports—a quick job, done immediately after Lew was removed from his office for questioning. Very probably the chief of police himself had done it, on telephoned orders from Cowles. Undoubtedly the stolen revolver would be conveniently "found" just before the trial. And now a slug fired from it for the special purpose of incriminating Lew had been expertly substituted for the bullet that had really killed Nora.

With an unnoticeable movement Coroner Wray dropped the true death bullet into his lower left vest pocket. The coroner strode out with his black case, Kirk following him. I heard the rear door close. Then Kirk went along the hallway toward the front of the building, unknowingly giving me a chance to slip out.

Coroner Wray was striding toward the center of town, his head lowered against the flying snowflakes. It was dark and late. No one else was visible along the street. The snow on the pavement made my footfalls soundless. Wray was half a block from the mortuary when I sprang.

I jumped him from behind, hooking my left arm under his chin and clubbing my right fist hard against his jaw. He dropped his black case, sagging against me. I dragged him to the side of the walk where the darkness was thicker.

Wray hadn't glimpsed my face and now he was unconscious. I flung his coats open. My fingers slid into his lower left vest pocket. It was empty.

He had already gotten rid of that slug. At some point between this spot and the mortuary he'd simply flipped it off into the snow without my seeing the move!

I started back in a cold fury, knowing even then that it was an impossible hunt. The snow was thick everywhere, on the sidewalk, in the gutter and on the street. The falling bullet would have made only a tiny disturbance on the fluffy surface, difficult enough to find in broad daylight; and already fresh flakes were covering it.

Skirting along, cursing the futility of the search, I looked back and saw Coroner Wray pulling himself up. I was forced to get out of sight. Running past the corner and heading for my car, I realized bitterly that the true death bullet was lost forever in the deepening snowfall.

Gordon Diggory sat at his desk on the other side of the plate glass, his shoulders sagging and his face haggard. He'd had no sleep last night, knowing beyond all doubt that Lew



Vale's fate depended entirely upon the decision which he alone could make.

The case against Lew was rigged in such a manner that he'd go to the chair unless Dig saved him. And Dig could save him in only one way—with his silence. By bowing to Cowles' power and by permitting the lucrative evils of the sanitorium to continue, Dig could quickly get Linda's brother out of it.

"Dig, the truth in this case is obvious," I said, filled with hopelessness, "but as long as Walton Cowles lives, the truth won't do us one damned bit of good.

"Look at it," I went on. "There was something very wrong with Dr. Irving's death at the sanitorium. Whatever it may have been, we'll never learn now, but Nora Forbes knew. She slipped out and headed for town to report it to Lew. Her car was forced to stop at the curve. She was dragged out and shot. With that bullet lodged near her heart she went on trying desperately to get into town on foot. And I can prove, to my own satisfaction at least, that Lew Vale was not the one who shot her.

"How? It's very simple. To get to the spot where Nora was shot, Lew would have had to use his car. Coming back, he'd have had to drive straight past me. I'd certainly have seen him. There was no such car. To my mind that's absolute proof of Lew's innocence. But there's one thing wrong with it. My testimony isn't worth a hoot against the evidence framed on Lew and the falsified testimony which others are prepared to give against him."

Dig listened without stirring.

"Lew states he was in his office, seeing a patient, a Mrs. Cochran, at the time of Nora's death. Mrs. Cochran denies this. She says she left Lew's office a full fifteen minutes before the time of the crime. Mrs. Cochran happens to be the wife of the assistant county assessor. Naturally she doesn't want her husband to lose his job and his political future in Cowles' machine. Obviously she's lying, and her lie leaves Lew completely without an alibi. And there's not one damned thing we can do about it.

"There's another phony witness. Lew states he didn't leave his office at all last evening until Chief Dixon came for him, but this second witness has given the D. A. a sworn statement to the effect that Lew drove rapidly into his garage ten minutes after the time of the shooting. This man says he happened to be passing and saw Lew. His name is Bains—owner of the Bains Market, which sells tons of provisions to Cowles' sanitorium. Another lie we can't tear down! Add to all this the fact that Lew's revolver is missing, and that the so-called death slug will match his revolver when it finally turns up, and the D. A.'s got an open-and-shut case against him."

Dig simply stared at me, his face clouded.

"Now take it from Dr. Walton Cowles' angle," I continued. "We can't doubt that Cowles saw Nora slipping out of the sanitorium soon after Dr. Irving's death. Cowles must have suspected, or may even have learned definitely in some way, that Nora had been reporting certain dangerous information to Lew. Ordinarily he would have ordered one of his hired men to handle her. But this was too important and too urgent. Nora was already on her way to town. Cowles had to stop her himself, and he did, using one of the sanitorium guns, or one belonging to him personally.

"He might have left Nora there where he'd shot her, but she tore away from him and ran on. With colossal nerve, he went after her. Especially after finding me on the road, he had to make sure she died. If we hadn't found her dead, he'd have killed her with an injection under the pretense of helping her. And all along he was perfectly sure he could get away with it."

I moved back and forth, grim and furious.

"And what hope have we of seeing justice done in this case? None! Cowles owns this whole town and this whole county, including the biggest newspapers, the police, the district attorney and even the judges. Against such power as his, Lew Vale doesn't stand a chance. Or, rather, Lew stands just one chance, and that chance, Dig, is strictly up to you."

Almost imperceptibly, Dig nodded.

"Lew was dead right when he said that Cowles wants your silence, and that once he's got it Lew will be in the clear. And if you don't give it to him, what can I do for Lew? Nothing! You see that, Dig. Your choice must be either to yield to Cowles, or to fight him—and fighting him is hopeless.

"Lew's only defense is his counter-charges against Cowles. Nora can't testify to the truth of her reports, can't support him now. Lew has lost the original copies, so his charges must rest entirely on those carbons you have. They're unsigned, unwitnessed and unsworn. If I attempt to put them in evidence, the D. A. will prevent it, with the aid of a bought-and-paid-for judge handing down prejudiced rulings from the bench. On an appeal—"

Dig was shaking his head. "I've already told you, Jim, those copies of mine can never be offered as evidence."

I frowned at him. "They're our only possible weapon against Cowles, and an extremely weak one at that. Don't tell me not to ask questions now, Dig! I've got to know why those carbons can't be used as evidence—why you won't even give them into my hands."

For a long moment Dig sat with his eyes closed. He was facing something deeply pain-

ful, something he'd long dreaded. My question demanded a revelation of the secret he'd guarded so closely these many long months. The shadow of defeat on his face became even darker as he saw that he must answer—now.

He turned quietly in his chair, reached to the shelf above his desk and brought down a book. Carrying it close to the glass wall, he allowed it to open itself at a page which he'd evidently pored over countless times. Pressing it against the pane, he stood there wretchedly holding it while I read through the glass.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Death Through the Glass

THE heading was *Asiatic Cholera*.

My eyes, following the lines of type, grew wide. I read that Asiatic cholera was one of the most severe and fatal of all diseases, transmitted by a vibrio which was not air-borne, but communicated through personal contact, or through food, drink or some similar intermediary. The death rate was among the highest of all infectious diseases, death occurring within twenty-four hours at most; or, in an epidemic, the victim's collapse could come so suddenly and completely as to be fatal within one or two hours.

"Those few victims of Asiatic cholera who recover may become carriers. The carrier, apparently healthy, is actually a walking repository of the vibrio. It breeds in the gall bladder, but removal of the gall bladder, a difficult operation, may not successfully eliminate the condition, since the vibrio may then continue to breed in other organs. In practically all cases, once a victim has become a carrier he will remain one. Being untouchable, it is quite impossible, of course, for a carrier to act as a physician or in any other capacity which brings him in contact with others."

I stared up into Gordon Diggory's miserable face. He needed to say nothing. It was quite clear. Asiatic cholera was the disease which Dig had contracted in China. Having recovered and returned to this country, he'd remained unaware that he'd become a carrier until the sudden death of that certain patient who had been his friend. I could imagine the horror he'd felt upon recognizing the dread symptoms. His hands, trained to surgery, had become lethal, so that his merest touch—

I understood now, of course, why Dig had had no choice but to abandon his practice, break off his engagement and make himself a prisoner here. With a start I recalled that although things had been brought in to Dig—mail and food, for example—he had never permitted anything to *leave* that baneful space

behind the glass wall. That was why he'd dictated all his letters to me, and had had me sign them, as well as his checks. This was the reason for everything I'd never before understood about Gordon Diggory, including the impossibility of his allowing me or anyone else to touch those reports.

"God knows, Dig," I said, profoundly shaken, "you're not to blame for this, and no man could possibly be more conscientious about it, but wouldn't it have been better to tell us at the very beginning?"

He smiled bitterly. "I prefer to be known as an eccentric, Jim, rather than as a walking pestilence."

He turned away and sat at his desk with his eyes closed while I stared at him.

My mind had suddenly become full of a burning wonder. Was it possible that Dig might be wrong about his condition? He'd seen only one patient die as a result of contact with his hands, so couldn't it be true now that he was no longer a carrier of the deadly disease? And if this were so—if I could prove it—wouldn't it bring to Dig a blessed release from his inexorable, self-imposed imprisonment? It was this hopeful thought tumbling in my mind that impelled me to reach to the closed panel!

Dig still sat there with his eyes closed. I made no sound. Pressing my fingertips against the panel, I slid it open noiselessly. Now I had a limited sort of access into Dig's forbidden region. I reached through—then quickly drew my hand back and thrust it into my leather glove I'd tossed on my desk so that I'd have no direct contact with anything I might touch on the inside of that transparent wall. Having taken this safeguard, I reached through again, to the top of Dig's desk.

There sat a water bottle with a drinking glass beside it. I picked up the glass, drew it out and quickly slid the panel shut again. My back turned to Dig to conceal it, I stared at the glass. Repeatedly it had touched Dig's lips. If Dig was still a carrier, then the vibrio of the dread cholera would be profusely present on its rim. I could take it to another laboratory, have it microscopically examined and then be certain. But now that I had it, I felt a surge of hopelessness. After all, Dig, himself a scientist, must have made sure repeatedly of his own condition. Actually, then, I told myself, this thing I'd done was merely a futile gesture.

I heard the sound of a car pulling into the yard. Dig stirred. Having no choice but to continue to conceal the glass from him, I kept my back turned, carried it to a closet on the far side of the room and left it there, tossing my glove into the fire crackling in the office fireplace.

Then I went to a window and saw Linda

Vale with Dr. Walton Cowles. District Attorney Robbins had also come. I couldn't doubt the purpose of this visit. From this point on, the case against Lew Vale must take definite shape in either one direction or the other. This was the time when Gordon Diggory must make his momentous decision.

I OPENED the door and they filed in, Linda deeply troubled, Dr. Cowles confidently poised, Robbins with his face set smugly. Dig rose behind his glass wall to peer at them. His voice came over the wires, saying how glad he was to see Linda again, and now it sounded ragged. He was as keenly aware as I was that this must be the showdown.

Dig and Dr. Walton Cowles sharply estimated each other, and Dr. Cowles spoke with an arrogant sort of courtesy.

"Dr. Diggory, I haven't come here to discuss the State's case against Linda's brother. That's a most unfortunate situation, of course, which the law must handle impartially." Undoubtedly he'd made this hypocritical speech in order to impress Linda. Certainly it didn't impress Dig or me except as a cruel and despicable falsehood. "I want to talk instead about the very serious charges which Lew Vale has made against me. It's my understanding that you're in some way supporting the very questionable position he's taking."

Dig rose. He said simply and noncommittally, "Go on, Dr. Cowles."

"I've nothing to fear from such preposterous accusations, of course," Cowles said calmly. "I'm quite capable of defending myself against them. But naturally, I'd like to know just where you stand in this matter."

Dig turned toward the cabinet in the rear corner, unlocked it and drew out the carbons of Nora Forbes' reports.

"In Lew's case, it's leading to regrettable complications," Dr. Cowles continued. "I don't know, of course, whether his attorney intends to enter a plea of insanity at his trial. In any case, the violence of his statements has led Linda to fear that he may be somewhat irrational. If he persists, she will engage several of the best available psychiatrists to examine him. Then, if their diagnosis is what I'm afraid it may be, she will commit him to my sanatorium where he will receive the proper treatment."

Dig and I both stared at Linda. Neither of us could doubt any longer that Dr. Walton Cowles, with his personal charm and his persuasive suggestions, had completely deluded her. Lew had called her blind, and she was—too blind to see that the psychiatrists' diagnosis of derangement was a foregone conclusion, that to commit Lew to Cowles' sanatorium would be to doom him to life imprisonment, if not worse. She was so profoundly shaken,

so completely under the evilly deceptive influence of Dr. Cowles that both Dig and I realized argument would be futile. Turning to gaze at Dig, I saw how deeply he pitied her—pitied her yet loved her.

"I feel, Dr. Diggory," Cowles was saying smoothly, "that perhaps Lew's mistaken attitude rises out of a misinterpretation of certain opinions you may hold. That is, if you happen to have an adverse opinion of me, Lew, in adopting it as his own, may have exaggerated it beyond all reason. In that case, it would be extremely helpful all around if his misconception of your position could be made clear to him."

Listening, Dig struck a match and turned the cock of a Bunsen burner. The blue flame whispered, scarcely visible.

"And if my opinion of your professional practices happens to coincide with Lew's, Dr. Cowles?" he asked. "You'll still feel perfectly confident that both Lew and I will be proved completely wrong?"

"Perfectly!" Cowles answered with sharp emphasis. "Completely! But I'd hoped you'd spare yourselves, and me, the necessity of that."

Dig eyed him. This was the moment when he must declare himself once and for all. He stood there, very still, holding the carbon copies of Nora Forbes' reports. His face set hard as stone, he held the thin papers in the hot blue flame of the Bunsen burner. Instantly they flared up. He held them, watching the fire leaping. Then, with a weary motion, he dropped them into the bluestone sink. They lay there, a film of moisture hissing under them, still burning.

Chilled, I realized that the reports themselves were worthless, and that this was a gesture on Dig's part—a gesture of final decision.

"Then, Dr. Cowles," he said quietly, "there's scarcely any reason for me to answer your question."

Although Linda seemed unaware of the meaning of his act, both Cowles and Robbins sat forward, smiling faintly with triumph, gazing through the glass wall and watching the reports turning into wisps of ash.

"I think," Cowles said, "that when Lew is made to realize how hopeless his position is without your support, he'll reconsider."

AT THAT moment, almost as if by prearrangement, the telephone rang. I answered it at my desk. Coroner Wray was on the wire, asking for the District Attorney. Robbins took over the phone, said "Yes" twice, then looked extremely astonished. He turned to Dig to say quickly, "Perhaps you'd like to hear this over your extension, Dr. Diggory. Will you repeat that, Coroner?"

As they listened, Robbins' face became too damned smug and Dig's twisted into an expression of disgust mingled with deep relief. Dig said nothing as he put down the phone. Robbins turned to Linda and Cowles with his very exciting news.

"Amazing! The best possible break for you, Linda. First of all, it wasn't Lew's gun that killed Nurse Forbes after all! In fact, Lew's gun wasn't really missing. Chief Dixon found it a little while ago in his dresser drawer, upstairs. Obviously Lew put it there instead of in his desk, the alst time he handled it, and he must have forgotten all about it. But even better! Chief Dixon has found the gun that the death bullet really came from—in a snow-drift near the spot where Nurse Forbes left her car."

Linda listened, stunned with happiness, while Dig and I eyed each other.

"It's a gun from the sanitorium, one usually kept in the office of the superintendent. That discovery led Chief Dixon to another. Nurse Forbes was seen hurrying from the superintendent's office just before she left the sanitorium yesterday, and there isn't a doubt in the world that she'd taken the gun. There's only one thing to think now, Linda, especially since we know that Nurse Forbes had grown moody—she wasn't murdered at all. Instead, she killed herself."

Linda sobbed. Cowles and Robbins lavished their elation on her. I gazed cynically at Dig and saw him looking sick, physically and morally.

"Well, well!" Dr. Walton Cowles said expansively. "What a fortunate development! Robbins, you'll free Lew at once, of course! Linda, I'm delighted for you!"

And Lew? How happy would he be made by this "fortunate development?" Being only human, he'd feel vast relief to find a first-degree murder charge no longer hanging over his head, of course, but how would he feel toward Dig? He'd urged Dig, "Keep yourself the man of integrity you are!" and, instead, Dig had yielded. I remembered myself saying, more than once, "Cowles will dominate this county as long as he lives," and now Cowles had won another victory.

"A very happy occasion all around!" Dr.

Cowles was saying. "To make it complete, Dr. Diggory, I have a further piece of news which may interest you. I've asked Linda to become my wife and she has consented."

Dig sat stunned and speechless under this cruelest blow of all.

Linda was speaking now. "Didn't you hear Walton, Dig? He and I are going to be married soon."

I had to break the brittle silence that followed. "Well, this really is an occasion to celebrate! We should all have a drink on that."

As I hurried to the closet at the far side of the room I heard Dig saying in a dead voice, "My congratulations, Doctor. Linda, I sincerely hope you'll be very happy." A moment later I turned back with a tray loaded with Scotch, soda water and five glasses, including one for Dig. Having mixed five highballs, I first placed one in Dr. Cowles' hand, then served the others. Dig opened the little panel and took the last, being careful not to touch the tray. Then I held up mine in a grim toast.

"Happiness," I said, "and your health, Dr. Cowles."

"Thank you, thank you," said Dr. Cowles, and he drank—from the glass that had been sitting only a few minutes ago on the desk of Gordon Diggory. . . .

Ten minutes later they were gone. I felt chilled, yet there was a glow in me, a fierce, hot glow of righteousness. Dig sat silent behind his glass wall. He leaned forward to place his empty highball glass on the desk—and he paused. He stared at the empty space beside his water bottle and suddenly his eyes rose to mine, dark and glittering.

"Dig," I asked quietly, "isn't there any chance at all that this condition of yours may—well, improve, or better yet—disappear entirely?"

His answer had the ring of steel. "Neither," he said. "Never."

I telephoned Bob Kirk.

"How's business, pal?" I asked him, as always.

"Still slow," he answered. "Very slow."

"Don't worry," I said. "It's sure to pick up a little tomorrow."

THE END

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## YOUR COPY MAY BE LATE

Because of the exigencies of war-time transportation, your magazine may be late sometimes in reaching you. If it does not arrive on time, please do not write complaining of the delay. This delay occurs after it leaves our offices and is caused by conditions beyond our control.

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# SCHOOL FOR CORPSES

By  
WAYNE  
ROGERS

Benedisto's satanical face seemed to leer up at me. . . .



*It was only the ordinary group picture of a boys' prep school, but snapped by the lethal camera of Gregory Benedisto, refugee from a fiery grave, it became a ghastly, black and white prophecy—of mass-murder!*

**G**REGORY BENEDISTO looked like the devil—literally. That was my first impression of him. His long face was high cheekboned and came to a pointed chin. His large nose was beaked, beneath a widow's

peak of black hair that dipped down deep into his forehead. But his dark eyes contributed most to the satanic cast of his pallid face. They seemed to be imperceptibly tilted; strangely mesmeric eyes of dark brown that

at times appeared black, and again glowed with an almost red flame.

Something about that face sent a faint shiver trickling down my spine the first time I shook hands with him; an instinctive shrinking from him that later association did little to overcome. I asked myself time and again what manner of man—what manner of creature—Benedisto could be.

Meadesville was one of the most exclusive prep schools in America. Its registration of some three hundred boys listed sons of the wealthiest families in the country—youngsters now eagerly preparing to qualify for the Air Corps. Its faculty was equally hand-picked. And not the least illustrious among them was Gregory Benedisto, refugee scientist from the University of Warsaw, who would be my immediate superior. So I had joined Meadesville's staff with high hopes.

And then I met Benedisto—and felt my first misgiving. Something about the man sounded a vague alarm in my brain. . . .

Not that Benedisto wasn't a first-rate scientist. He was all of that. He was a wizard with chemicals. And he wanted to be regular. He tried to fraternize with the faculty and mix with the student body. But his colleagues avoided him, and the boys called him "Professor Mephisto" behind his back.

Aside from chemistry, photography was his one hobby; so when we began making preparations for the publication of our year book, he made all the individual photographs of the students and developed them in a little dark-room he had rigged up in a closet-like ante-room of the chem lab. I helped him with that; worked beside him night after night.

And that was when the first significant incident occurred. Not significant at first. Just an accident—but later—

Benedisto had just prepared a new batch of developer. He put the first film into it, and almost instantly an unintelligible foreign oath ripped from his lips. Frantically he tried to retrieve the film, but it was too late. Something had gone wrong; the negative was ruined, the gelatin almost eaten off the film.

"That fool clerk! That infernal fool!" Benedisto flew into a raging temper. "What did he give me? Some sort of corrosive acid. The film is ruined!"

"Too bad," I sympathized, "but no great harm has been done. We still have the second pose—or you can make another photograph. Herbert Thompson." I read the student's name from a slip pasted on the side of the film-holder. "I can make an appointment with him when he comes to class tomorrow morning."

"Yes—do that, Pollard," he nodded his head; but his voice was strangely detached, abstracted—as if he had not heard a word I

said. And the savage fury that blazed in his eyes was slow in subsiding.

I dismissed it from my mind and we went on with our work, but twenty minutes later we were interrupted by a sudden ominous clanging. The fire bell! The most dreaded sound on any campus! I dashed into the laboratory and raced out into the night.

**T**HE fire was in Borden Hall, one of the dormitories. It wasn't much of a blaze—couldn't be in that fireproof building. It was confined to one room, but there it had done a thorough job. Out through the smoke-belching doorway the fire-fighters carried a charred figure that could hardly be recognized as anything human.

"That's young Thompson," old Chalmers, the history professor, whispered beside me. "I feared something like this. The boy was an inveterate smoker. He was caught several times smoking in bed—and this time he wasn't caught in time. He set the bed afire."

Young Thompson—Herbert Thompson. . . . For a moment I didn't get anything beyond the horror of his tragic death. Then I remembered, and clammy perspiration soaked the palms of my hands. Herbert Thompson—it was almost as if our accident in the dark-room had been a presaging of the death that hung over the lad. . . .

Ten days later we had our second accident in the dark-room. Benedisto was taking one of the individual film plates from the holder when it caught. He tugged at it impatiently, yanked—and the film suddenly ripped. Half of it came out, crumpled and jagged-edged where it had torn right across the face of the subject.

This time Benedisto did not rage. He caught his breath sharply and stared at the ruined film with the stricken eyes of a miser who sees his greatest treasure being snatched from him.

"Raymond Gulick," he read the student's name in a voice that was hardly audible, and something about his agonized expression sent a chill through me.

In the morning I saw the battered wreckage of the flivver in which young Gulick had met his death. His head had gone through the windshield when the car crashed, and the jagged shards had mutilated his face horribly!

The backs of my hands were gloved with perspiration as I recalled that accident the night before in Benedisto's dark-room—the jaggedly torn film. Herbert Thompson and now Raymond Gulick. . . Surely this was more than coincidence. Surely there was some other connection between those accidents I had witnessed and their ghastly sequels.

My brain shied away from the supernatural

implications of the only answers I could find. I had witnessed two inconsequential accidents, and two of our students had met tragic deaths—that was all there was to it, I told myself firmly.

**B**UT after that I watched Gregory Benedisto as a detective must watch a murder suspect. Yet I could find nothing whatsoever to connect him with the two students' deaths—until the day when I opened a shipment of chemicals that came to us from a firm in New England. The bottles were packed in newspapers, and as I smoothed them out one of the printed pages gripped my attention—held it spell-bound. An obituary page. Up from between the columns of type stared a Mephistophelian face I was certain I recognized! The face of—

Professor Benedisto, was beside me before I could take a second glance. He reached in front of me and picked up several of the bottles.

their photographs had met with at his hands.

A dead man presiding over the destinies of the living—juggling the lives of our boys in his undead fingers?

That was barbaric superstition, abysmal ignorance—and yet, as I struggled to reject it, an undeniable fear closed around my heart.

I stepped into a side room off the main office to glance over my mail, and, lost in thought, I didn't hear footsteps approaching, nor the soft tap on the open door. I was aware of nothing until the last person in the world whom I wanted to see that item was almost at my side. Barely in time, I folded the paper and crammed it into my pocket before Marcia Kirby had a chance to recognize Benedisto's picture.

Marcia was the Meadesville registrar—and just about the neatest and most desirable bit of femininity I had ever met. Now her wide blue eyes were even rounder than usual, her brows half-arched in unvoiced surprise.

"Mr. Latham would like to see you, Dan,"

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**SURE, WE'RE ON THE OFFENSIVE! But now, more than ever before, is the time to realize that it's always more costly to attack—in material and human lives—than it is to defend. And now more than ever our boys need the planes, the guns, and the bombs that your purchase of War Bonds helps to give them! Buy a War-Bond Every Pay-Day! Give More Than 10%!**

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"All right, Pollard—these I will take care of," he said matter-of-factly, and when the bottles were removed, the newspaper went with them.

I searched the laboratory for it that day and the next, but it was gone. Benedisto had disposed of it before I could read the amazing article beside that photograph—but not before my subconscious mind had registered the name of that newspaper and the date it was published. And now the copy I had sent for was there before me, and Benedisto's satanic features were staring up at me.

"Professor Gregory Benedisto, renowned scientist from the University of Warsaw," I read, "died here yesterday at the close of a lecture he delivered before the Haverhill Women's Club. The speaker was seized with a heart attack as he left the Town Hall rostrum and succumbed in a back-stage room a few minutes later."

*Gregory Benedisto had died in Haverhill, Massachusetts, three days before he arrived to take up his duties in Meadesville!*

The explanation was simple. This Benedisto was a fake, an impostor—nothing more. But there was nothing fake about the way those boys had died after the "accidents"

she told me, and then the momentary doubt faded from her face, banished by the smile that always made my heart start pogo-stick leaping. "Good luck—but I *know* you'll have it."

By her manner I gathered that Stephen Latham wanted to talk to me about my next year's appointment and in the urgency of that vital moment I forgot about Benedisto. My reappointment meant more than a job to me now; it meant Marcia Kirby as well.

Latham turned his usual unsmiling face to me as I entered. Tall and thin, bald-headed, small-featured, he looked more like a mortician than a preparatory school president.

"Pollard," he came straight to the point, "your work has been very satisfactory. We want you to stay here at Meadesville next year. Not just as an instructor. You will be in charge of the Science Department, succeeding Professor Benedisto."

He must have read the question in my eyes.

"Professor Benedisto is an excellent man, no question about that," he leaned forward and spoke more confidentially. "No doubt he will find an opportunity more suited to his talents elsewhere, but here we look for a

warmer personality, a more human approach—”

There was more, but it did not register on me. All that mattered to me was that I had secured the appointment. I was to be Benedisto's successor. And in that moment I realized that I must drop my half-formed intention of showing that startling obituary to Latham. It was sufficient that I was to succeed Benedisto; no need to cast suspicion upon him. He would go away, and Meadesville would see no more of him.

Marcia was at her desk when I came out into the front office with my good news. That was the way I wanted it to be; she would be the first to hear it. I told her jubilantly, and when I finished she was in my arms. Just for a brief moment—and then we both were aware that someone was standing and watching us.

Gregory Benedisto!

WE HAD not heard his footsteps, had not seen him enter the office. We had no idea how long he had been there, or how much he had overheard, but he did not keep us long in doubt on that score.

“Accept my congratulations, Pollard,” his dry-sounding voice broke the silence. “The news of your appointment comes very opportunely. I am anxious to get away from Meadesville. It is important that I attend to my affairs. Now that you are to succeed me, there is no more difficulty. I shall turn the department over to you immediately. I fear—” the slightly tilted eyes narrowed in the ghost of a grin—“you must inherit my extra-curricular duties as well. Tonight I shall help you with the group picture film. The rest of the work I must leave to you.”

He was gone before I could do more than mumble agreement, and then Marcia's cold little hands were gripping mine tightly.

“I don't like him, Dan,” she shuddered. “I'm glad he is going; I wish he were gone now!”

I knew how she felt, but Benedisto's abrupt departure would saddle a fine load of work on my shoulders. Only that noon he had made a group photograph of the entire student body and faculty with his rotary Leica, and before commencement night some three hundred prints of that negative must be ready for distribution. Now that job would be up to me.

The group picture film was nearly four feet long. Developing it was a two-man proposition, especially for one with as little dark-room experience as I had.

Benedisto made no reference to our changed status when we went to work that evening. He prepared the developer and fed the long film into the tank. At his direction I drew it out when the process was completed; held

it suspended between my outstretched arms while he got the clips to hang it up for drying.

“Just a minute. Hold it that way,” his low voice came to me out of the semi-darkness. “Hold it that way—hold it—”

He was standing directly in front of me, and suddenly I was aware of his eyes blazing at me. The rays of the safety light reached his face just sufficiently to highlight it. It swam in the darkness like a detached mask with radiant eyes of living fire. Those eyes seemed to bulge, to grow wider and wider, until they filled the whole mask, the whole room.

“Hold it that way—hold it—” Benedisto's low voice came to me in a cadence that was like the muted throbbing of a drum.

Of course, I would hold it. I must hold it.

A curious transformation seemed to have come over the dark-room. Where there had been the single light of the safety lamp there were now two points of light. Two flames that burned over there near the wall where Benedisto had gone. His eyes? No, they were candles; strange black candles that were burning on either end of what seemed to be a small black altar. An altar with a vessel of some sort standing on it. A round, greyish sort of vessel that was the inverted top of a human skull!

I recognized it in the same instant that I saw a cross hanging on the wall behind it. A cross of ebony black that gleamed dully in the candlelight. An *inverted* cross, its long end spearing up into the blackness overhead!

For a moment I thought my eyes must be playing me tricks. Surely that altar, the candles and the cross were no more than shadows, varying shades in the dark-room's blackness. Even the low, droning voice that was the only sound in the room must be a figment of my imagination.

“Sathanus Imperator,” the strange sounding syllables intoned, but the words that came after them did not make sense. They seemed a meaningless gibberish. “—glory the and power the and kingdom—evil from us deliver but temptation into not us lead—us against trespass who those forgive we as trespasses—” Until, against the darkness, I could see Benedisto's lips moving, hear him mumbling the Lord's Prayer in reverse!

And now I could distinguish a darker shape in front of the black altar, could make out Benedisto's blaxing-eyed face uplifted.

“Lord of the Coven, accept this supplicant and delegate unto him a modicum of thy power so that he may be properly equipped to serve thee,” his voice rose to a climax, and he stepped toward me with that skull chalice in his cupped hands!

His burning eyes held me as he came closer, as he raised the skull to my lips and then I



felt its contents pouring into my mouth, searing my throat, as the liquid fire spread with lightning speed to every part of my body. The blood in my veins seemed to boil; my brain seemed to be baking.

Benedisto was kneeling beside me when I opened my eyes. He was laving cold water onto my face from half of a round gourd. The lights were on and the door was open.

"I did not realize—it must have been too close for you in here," he apologized. "You fainted. You will be all right in a few minutes, but you must not try to do anything more to-night."

The raging fire that had threatened to consume me was gone, but my whole body was covered with perspiration. There was a brackish taste in my mouth, and my throat was dry. Groggily I got to my feet and looked around me, but the dark-room was just as it always had been. Where I was certain I had seen an altar, there was only a table with some of Benedisto's photographic apparatus on it. And above it, on the wall, hung a T-square he used for cutting paper.

The whole weird performance had been nothing but a hallucination, a fantastic nightmare that had mushroomed in my brain as my senses faded in the ill-ventilated room!

**P**ROFOUND relief surged through me when Benedisto had gone, and the last of the nightmares his very presence conjured up had gone with him!

I turned to the task at hand. With the aid of student volunteers, I soon had the group-printing organized and under way so satisfactorily that I had time to develop a film of snapshots Marcia had taken. Most of them were photographs of Patsy, her wire-haired terrier. Mighty good shots, too. So good that I gathered them up and took them to the office to show them to her.

Marcia was delighted with them. She spread them out on her desk and was comparing them when a sudden gust of wind swept them helter-skelter to the floor. Quickly I sprang after them and managed to retrieve seven, but the eighth skittered under my foot. When I picked it up it was ruined; my heel had ground down on it so hard that Patsy was almost obliterated.

"Oh—too bad!" Marcia lamented. "This was the best of the lot, too. You'll have to make me another, Dan."

Yes, of course, I would make another print—but something about that inconsequential little accident sent fear tentacles worming into my brain. My nerves tensed, my ears strained—so that I was fully prepared for the agonized yowl that came a few minutes later. A dog's shrill, yelping howl and the scream of brakes!

Marcia looked at me, and her face blanched. "Patsy!" she half-whispered.

But I was already on my feet, started for the door. I knew with awful certainty what had happened. It was a few minutes past five o'clock; the time when Patsy made her daily trip to the Administration Building to meet her mistress. But this time she would never reach the front door—she was crushed horribly beneath the wheels of a truck. When I reached the scene of the accident the mangled body was crushed to a ghastly pulp.

I knew, then, that the truck driver had not killed Marcia's pet. I had doomed the little animal when I ground its photograph under my heel—had slaughtered it as effectively as if I had driven the heavy truck wheels over its body!

Benedisto's satanical face seemed to leer up at me from the blood-spattered pavement. "—delegate unto him a modicum of thy power so that he may be properly equipped to serve thee," his ungodly prayer echoed in my reeling brain. And I knew that my worst fears were realized. That devil's mass in the dark-room had been no hallucination. In some incredible fashion Benedisto's plea had been answered. *He had delegated to me his unholy power over life and death; he had turned me into a potential killer in every move I made!*

I was on my guard constantly after that. I knew that my vigilance must never be allowed to relax, especially while I was in the dark-room. I handled the big group-picture film and the prints that came from it as little as possible, and as each newly finished print was added to the others I breathed a sigh of relief.

The work was almost completed on the afternoon of the last day, when a power breakdown tied us up. That delay disrupted my schedule so badly that the Commencement exercises, at which the photographs were to be distributed, were already started before the last prints had been made.

I handled those last few myself, and my brow was damp with perspiration when the final copy came out of the printing frame. Relief must have made me careless—that is the only explanation for what happened in the next few minutes. I left the film lying there in the opened frame and took the print to the fixing bath at the other end of the room. I was absorbed with the task that I didn't hear the dark-room door open.

A gust of wind must have unlatched it, lifting the long, half-curved film and rolling it across the table against a hot stand-pipe next to the wall. That is the way I have figured it out since—but when a sudden puff and the odor of burning nitrate whirled me around, one end of the film was in flames!

I fairly hurled myself across the little room and flung myself on the table, beating at the sizzling flames with my hands and smothering the blaze with my body. I managed to put it out—but my knees felt weak and I was bathed in cold sweat when I sank back into a chair and rubbed my blistered hands over my face.

**F**OR long moments I did not dare investigate the damage. When at last I forced myself to unroll the shortened film I saw that almost a fourth of it had been destroyed. Almost a fourth of the student body—!

I sat there, helpless, waiting. . . I must have known what was coming, but when the crash did break it shattered the last of my hope and left me stunned. Then, in the hushed stillness that followed, came wild cries of terror and agony.

Somehow I got out of the laboratory and reached the campus. With damning certainty I knew in which direction to turn, even before I saw the sharp flame-tongues that were beginning to poke through a pall of smoke and dust. The auditorium, where the Commencement exercises were in progress!

The next fifteen minutes I spent in a ghastly hell that I never will be able to drive out of my memory. The shattered, roof-caved building, the flames creeping up on trapped victims, the screams of the mangled and dying boys, the still, broken bodies dragged out of the ruins. Every terrible moment of those fifteen minutes is etched on my brain with the acid of self-accusation and self-condemnation.

*I was the one responsible for that holocaust! I was the cause of that fearful tragedy! I was the murderer of 40 young boys! With the hell-distilled power Gregory Benedisto had delegated to me! I the devil's own deputy!*

I must have been very close to madness. I worked frantically, feverishly—as if I could atone for what I had done by such futile efforts! But finally there was nothing more that I could do—nothing but face my horrible guilt. That must have been Benedisto's moment of hellish triumph.

He had bequeathed his diabolical power to me—but by that piece of devilry he had delivered himself into my hands! If I could get hold of a photograph of *him*—

He was not in the group picture; I had to dismiss that possibility. The rest of the faculty were there, but Benedisto had taken the photograph himself. But I knew where there was a picture of him! Marcia Kirby had taken a snapshot of the two of us—Benedisto and me—shortly after I joined the Meadesville staff. That snapshot was in her album in her desk in the office!

There seemed to be nobody near the Admin-

istration Building as I approached it from the rear. I would break a first-floor window and climb through, I planned swiftly, but subconsciously I tried the back door and it opened. That was strange!

Cautiously I picked my way up the short flight of steps to the first-floor level. Only darkness and silence greeted me, until I turned into the main hallway and could see the door of Marcia's office. Then I caught the rustle of papers and, unless I was mistaken, faint illumination came through that doorway!

Swiftly I catfooted the length of the hall and edged around the doorway. Marcia's green-shaded desk light was lit, bathing the desk top with illumination; and in her chair sat a man who was busily ransacking the drawers.

Benedisto!

He, too, had remembered that snapshot! Marcia's album was lying on the desk, ready to take with him. Suddenly I saw red. I leaped to the desk and snatched the album just as Benedisto whirled to confront me.

My onslaught took him off-guard, but his surprise was only momentary. He flung himself around the end of the desk, crouched behind it, a snub-nosed automatic in his hand. Murder gleamed in his eyes. Deliberately he pulled the trigger.

Instinctively my arm went up, in a hopelessly futile attempt to ward off the bullet, and the album was sent spinning out of my hand. Desperation guided me as I dived forward, trying to grab him to seize his gun arm before he could fire again. I missed his wrist, but he staggered backward when I launched into him, and lost his footing to fall against a marble pedestal surmounted by a heavy bronze bust of Benjamin Franklin.

The pedestal rocked, the bust careened crazily—and then like a pile-driver, it smashed into his upturned face. . . .

**“T**HIS fellow who called himself Benedisto was a crook—and a cold-blooded murderer,” Sheriff Newton stated emphatically a few days after news of the Meadesville tragedy had shocked the whole country. “Benedisto—the real Benedisto—died up in Haverhill; we checked that. This fellow looked a lot like him and figured out a way to cash in on it. Sometimes those ‘heart attacks’ are phoney; maybe he bumped Benedisto off. Anyway, he takes the professor's place and comes here pretending to be Benedisto. Comes here because he knows that most of the fathers of these youngsters are millionaires.

“He volunteers to do the photography work so that he can get pictures of all of them. Then he has to get hold of their fathers’

names and addresses, and he's all set to start a slick extortion scheme. That's why he went to the office where you nailed him—to get the kids' addresses. He had the records right out there on top of the desk, when you came in, didn't he?"

"Yes—" I had to admit that— "but the strange manner in which Herbert Thompson and Raymond Gulick died so soon after the so-called 'accidents' in the dark-room. How—"

"Simple," the sheriff cut me short. "This fake Benedisto killed them. He set the Thompson boy on fire, and he probably tampered with the Gulick lad's car so that a smash-up was sure to happen. He figured on you getting jittery about those accidents just the way you did. Then he blew up the auditorium and expected to get away with the addresses while everybody was busy fighting the raging fire."

Maybe so, I made mental reservation. Perhaps those dark-room accidents were intentional—to tie up with the scheduled murders—but I remembered Benedisto's savage rage when the Thompson lad's negative was ruined, remembered his stricken expression when young Gulick's film was ripped, and I wondered. . . .

"After that wholesale slaughter," Newton went on complacently, "it was your cue to crack wide open and tell the newspapers about the mysterious deaths and show them Benedisto's obituary notice. They'd play it up big—supernatural stuff—refugee professor comes back from the grave and kills youngsters by

hocus-pocus with their photographs. And they'd have a nation-wide audience because of the Meadesville tragedy—all those young boys burned to death.

"That would leave him sitting pretty. He had the negatives of all the boys' photographs. You can't find them anywhere, can you? He intended to put a fancy price on those negatives, with death threatened for each kid if his old man didn't come across. Most of the parents wouldn't have needed much threatening—after what happened here. A devilish extortion scheme, that's all there was to it, Pollard. I wouldn't worry any more about it if I were you."

Maybe so. . . I hope to Heaven the sheriff is right. . . . But I have not showed him what remains of the group-picture film. I checked that negative once—checked the lads who are missing from it entirely and those whose images are singed or partially destroyed with the explosion's list of dead and wounded; and what I found fairly dropped the bottom out of my stomach. . . .

The boys burnt out of the film are dead; the boys whose images were singed are horribly maimed today—the rest are healthy and whole! Coincidence? Not to my way of thinking!

And I have not showed him the snapshot album Benedisto's bullet knocked out of my hand. The photograph I wanted was there all right, but it is no use to me now. It already has served my purpose—horribly. Benedisto's bullet tore through it—and left only a gaping hole where his face had been!

... and have you heard this one about . . .

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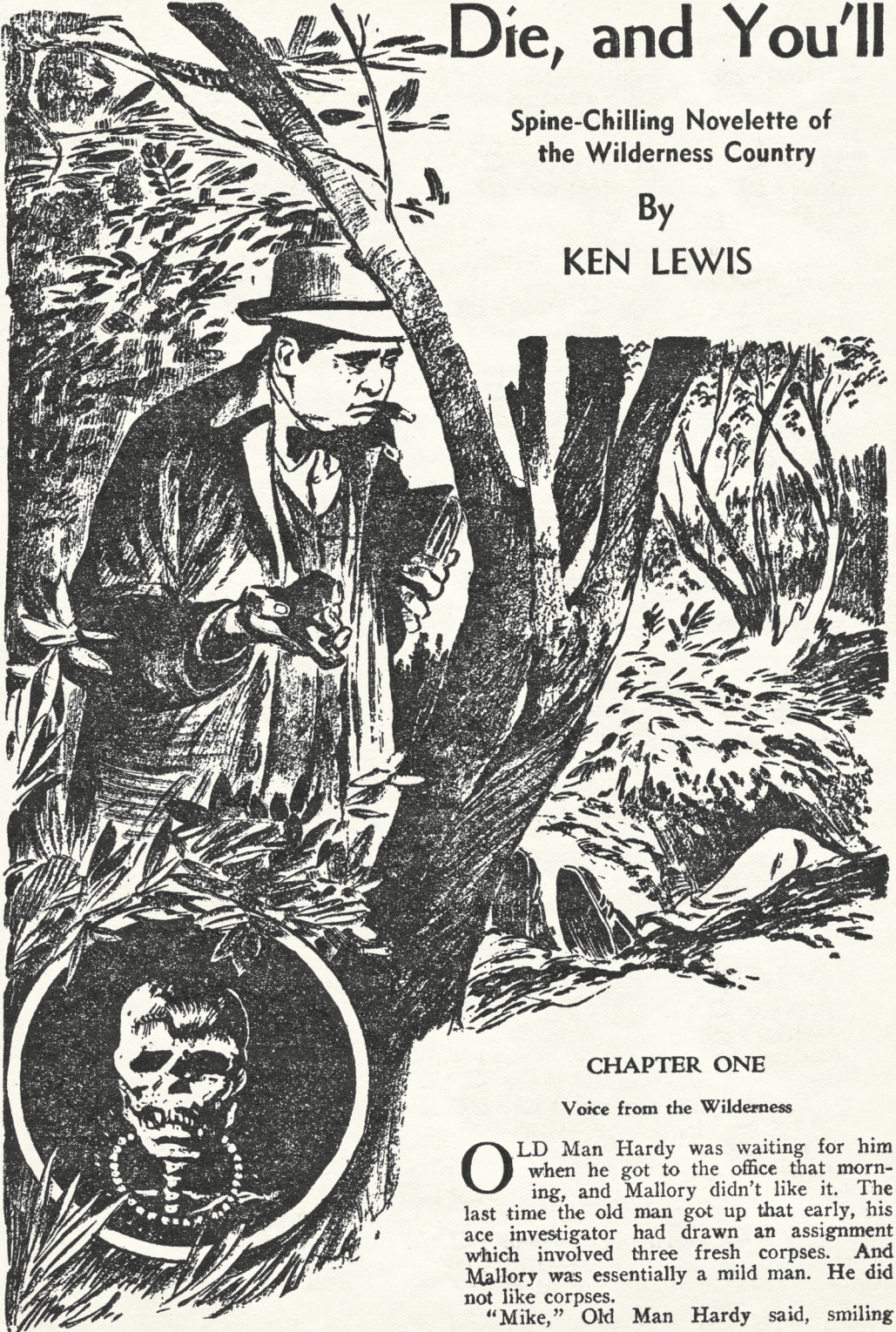
# DETECTIVE TALES

# Die, and You'll

Spine-Chilling Novelette of  
the Wilderness Country

By

KEN LEWIS



## CHAPTER ONE

Voice from the Wilderness

**O**LD Man Hardy was waiting for him when he got to the office that morning, and Mallory didn't like it. The last time the old man got up that early, his ace investigator had drawn an assignment which involved three fresh corpses. And Mallory was essentially a mild man. He did not like corpses.

"Mike," Old Man Hardy said, smiling

# Wear Diamonds!

*It was a weird world, filled with mocking echoes that Mallory walked into at Loon Lake—where lived a Shakespearean scholar-recluse, his strange, "gifted" son, and his red-headed, half-breed sweetheart . . . with only a bejewelled corpse for company!*



She moaned, softly, clutching her ankle. . . .

a little balefully, "What you need is a vacation!"

Mallory did a double-take. "Now wait a minute, Boss!" he said quickly. "You just sit back there and relax. I'll have a doctor here in a matter of minutes!"

"A week or so in the Minnesota lake country," went on the president of Hardy Investigations, blandly oblivious of his employee's concern. "How do you like wall-eyed pike, Mike? Of course I'll pay all the expenses. . ."

"Of course!" Mallory said suspiciously. "You always do. Only sometimes we have to threaten suit first."

His boss waved an expansive hand. "I've made all the arrangements. You take the 8:27 streamliner for Minneapolis, switch there to the bus for Duluth. That ought to get you to Loon Lake sometime early tomorrow morning."

Mallory swallowed. Then he began to breathe more easily. The Old Man hadn't lost all his marbles, after all. He, Mallory, was not really being offered a paid-up vacation in the midst of the manpower shortage. . . Loon Lake was just the place where their old friend, Joey Summers, had last been heard from.

MOTHER McGruder's Bar and Grill sprawled lonely and unpainted, like a festering man-made scab scarring the edge of the evergreen forest two miles from the lake. Mallory stood on the shoulder of Highway 61, where the Duluth-bound bus had let him off, and viewed it darkly.

He had a long green topcoat on his back, a snub-nosed automatic in his shoulder holster, a scuffed brown valise in his left hand, and a longing for Chicago in his heart. But this was where the call had come from, he reminded himself. Joey Summers' last call. . .

"Got the stuff," Joey had said. "Taking the night bus back." There had followed two eloquent hiccoughs and the sound of the connection clicking dead. That was all. Mallory knew, because he had taken the call.

And sometimes during the intervening week this wilderness of trees and rocks and lakes had swallowed Joey, and with him, a diamond booch, a diamond ring, and an emerald ring worth \$25,000. . .

Mallory sighed and hefted the valise. He pushed the front door open and stepped into the dingy tavern.

The woman behind the bar was short and square, with lank mustard-colored hair done in a bun at the back, and a round pouchy face. She slapped down a Liberator-size mosquito which was the room's only other occupant, and eyed Mallory sourly.

"What's yours?"

Mallory winced. She had the kind of voice which always made him want to change the needle.

"I'm looking for a guy who made a reverse-charge phone call from here last Saturday." He described Summers—tall, dark, hawkfaced. "Probably had a few drinks first. Remember him?"

"No."

The word was flat and final. Mallory sighed. Mother McGruder would never inspire any Irish ballads, he thought. For one thing, she needed a shave.

"Have many customers? Now, during the slack season?" he persisted.

Her watery eyes curdled. "Listen, short, fat and copperish! This place gets so stinkin' with guides and lake trash every Saturday I ain't got time to keep track of 'em all, even if I wanted to. Maybe this guy was in, maybe he wasn't. I wouldn't know."

Mallory accepted the personal description philosophically. His purposefully drab appearance gave little indication of the surprising wallop he packed in both stubby fists, or the alert mind hiding behind his sharp blue eyes. To Mother McGruder he was merely a graying, middle-aged little man with a placid Irish face and a slightly paunchy middle.

He glanced at the pay phone anchored in plain sight at one end of the bar, and he knew that, once seen, Joey Summers would be remembered.

"Okay. Let it ride," he said dryly. "How do I get to Bushey's Camp?"

"You just get off the bus?"

He nodded.

"Then the shortest way's to take the dirt road west and turn off at the path through the old cemetery. The road winds around a couple miles farther before it cuts back. . . Hope you brought your hip boots, Copper." She grinned malevolently.

Mallory shifted his valise. "What, no tax-is?" he snapped.

Somewhere Mallory had heard about Minnesota sunsets. Trudging along the dirt road west, he decided this was strictly Chamber of Commerce. How could a place where the sun never shone have beautiful sunsets?

Morning mist dripped from the evergreens walling the muddy, rutted track and now and then a tern screamed or a dove mourned in the darkling woods to his right. Once through a break in the trees he caught the dull, metallic sheen of lake water and heard the soft slap-swish of small waves.

He had slogged almost two miles through the ankle-deep mud before he came to a little hillside clearing filled with rotted headstones. The path Mother McGruder had mentioned snaked among the graves and lost itself in the trees beyond.

This part of the country had undergone a near cloudburst four days before. Mallory was reminded of that when he slipped on a needle-covered rock at the path's edge and fell flat on his face, plastering the front of his topcoat with rich black ooze.

Cursing, he pulled himself to his knees. And it was then that he saw the shoe. Rain-water had dug a small gully along a row of graves to his left, and the shoe protruded into this ditch from the end of one of the mounds.

It had a man's foot in it.

Mallory hunched forward, dogwise. He felt himself beginning to tremble. His first thought was that they didn't make shoes like this anymore—for the stone above the grave said "Lars Olsen, 1858-1903." Yet the leather had hardly begun to age!

Then he looked at the shoe again, and his breakfast began to churn. For the shoe looked very familiar. It looked as if he had found Joey Summers already.

He got up and carefully plastered the black oxford with mud until it was once more hidden. He noticed that there was no grass growing above the grave. Only a carefully laid mat of cones and needles. He added to this mat until it covered the new lump at the end of the mound.

Then he wiped his muddy hands on a branch, unbuttoned his coat and pulled the .32 from its shoulder holster. Dropping the gun in an outer topcoat pocket, he moved on up the path.

**T**HE boy and girl broke apart suddenly when Mallory came upon them five minutes later. They'd been close-huddled on a blanket covered log beyond a turn in the path, and the boy's face was splotted with purplish lipstick.

It was a lopsided, bumpkinesque face with thick, pouting lips and queer blue eyes. It was topped with a shock of shaggy brown hair.

The girl was something else. Burnished copper curls matched her flashing green eyes and the slender quirk of her mouth. But the hair had never come naturally with those high, primitive cheekbones or dark lustrous skin. There was a hard wildness about her—a wierd beauty which made Mallory suck in his breath, despite the flannel shirt and overalls she wore.

"My Lord," he thought. "At my age!"

The boy spoke first, in a voice as odd as his eyes—a curious plastic voice which seemed to play with the scale. "Who the hell are you?" it said. "And whatcha snoopin' around here fer?"

Mallory eyed him bleakly. The kid had a big soft body beneath its blue denims, he decided. "I want Alvin Bushey," he snapped.

The queer blue eyes stared back, inscrutable, and the face grew even more lopsided as it tightened.

"What for?"

"I'll tell him when I find him."

The kid stood up. He began to sidle forward, shuffling oddly like a polar bear. The kid stopped. He grinned suddenly. "Okay," he said. "I'm Egbert Bushey. Pop's down at the shack, I guess. Keep right on goin'."

Mallory's eyes flicked back to the girl. He saw that she had cupped her hands around one knee, left hand outermost, so that it covered the set of the ring he had already noticed on her right hand. But he remembered the frosty green glint of the stone which matched her eyes.

He had never seen Deborah Lysander's jewelry—the jewelry Joey Summers had been sent here to recover. But he had a good description of it. And one of the items had been an emerald ring. . . . He thought about that as he walked on down the path. He had rounded another bend and gone perhaps five hundred yards when the sound of his own voice began to echo hollowly from the wall of green to his right.

"I want Alvin Bushey," it said. "I want Alvin Bushey. . . ."

He froze in his tracks, the short hairs

prickling at the nape of his neck. Unconsciously he clamped his jaws together, listening. . . .

"I'll tell him when I find him," his voice said. "I'll tell him when I find him. . . ."

Damn it, it was his own voice!

He wheeled to race slipping and sliding back up the path.

When he reached the turn, he saw that the blanket-covered log was empty. His hand dropped from his coat pocket.

A derisive, highpitched peal of laughter skirled from the woods to his left. It began again—this time to his right—shreds of falsetto sound hanging in the dank air like smoke.

His pulse stopped racing then and his eyes contracted. He had the answer. . . . He chuckled a little—sardonically, without mirth—as some of the fog shrouding Joey Summers' disappearance began to lift from the corners of his mind.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Corpse Wore Diamonds

**F**ASHIONED of logs and mortar, the cabin was neat and trim as the boat landing beyond, to which were tethered half a dozen outboards. A few hundred yards from shore, Loon Lake lost itself in cottony mists.

The man who answered Mallory's knock was slight and gray, with a high forehead, ascetic nose, thinner lips. His gray eyes twinkled with amusement at Mallory's bespattered appearance.

"Alvin Bushey?"

The slight, gray man nodded and pushed the door wider. "Come in," he said. "I saw you coming down the path. If you just walked out from the highway, I imagine you've had a rather unpleasant trip."

Mallory kicked mud from his shoes at a scraper beside the door, stepped through a rough-finished porch lined with motors and fishing tackle and into a large comfortable room. Pelts carpeted the floor, the heads of two six-point bucks stared moodily from above an unlit fireplace, and there was plenty of leather upholstery scattered about.

Mallory sank into an easy chair beside an unglazed bookcase bulging with the well-thumbed works of Shakespeare, Thoreau, Emerson and De Quincey.

"Damned unpleasant," he said grimly. "The last half mile my own voice followed me—literally."

Bushey's amusement deepened. "You've met Egbert," he said fondly.

Mallory admitted that.

Bushey shook his head. He wore a brown pigskin jacket over gray breeches and puttees, and Mallory noticed that he had on a

gray shirt and tie beneath the jacket's neck.

"My son was born with a remarkable gift," he smiled. "But I'm afraid he would rather frighten strangers with it than put it to any worthwhile use. . . We once had a couple of fishing guests who offered him a fine job doing impersonations over the radio. But Egbert turned them down. He can't bear the thought of leaving the lake. . ."

Mallory thought about this. He'd heard about people with Egbert's remarkable gift—even met a couple, in theatre dressing rooms, people born with an uncanny knack of mimicry, so that they could imitate perfectly every tone, every inflection, of almost any sounds they heard. They were sort of a rare natural phenomena, like those born with true photographic memories.

"Maybe the girl has something to do with his sticking around," he suggested.

Bushey's gray eyes hardened. He sighed heavily. "Rosabelle," he said. "Indian Bob, her father, has a shack across the cove. Helps Egbert and me during the busy season. She's been singing in a nightclub in St. Paul—came home for a vacation two weeks ago and decided to stay. Damn it, sometimes I wish she weren't quite so much like Egbert. . ."

Mallory nodded speculatively. His eyes bored into Bushey's.

"I'm looking for Joey Summers," he said suddenly. "He came here to talk to you about some jewelry eight days ago. He never got back."

The gray eyes widened, then clouded. Alvin Bushey shook his head despairingly. "Then Egbert was right," he mused. "I *was* a fool to give that man those things. Egbert said he'd simply run for the border with them, that we'd never see the reward he promised. Canada's little more than a day's drive from here, you know."

Mallory was beginning to get mad. He made a rude sound with his lips. "Joey didn't skip," he said flatly. "If he meant to do that, he'd never have phoned in. You admit you gave the stuff to him, then?"

Bushey's eyes got big and bewildered. "Why, of course! I'd have given them to the girl herself if I'd been here the next morning when she called. But she talked to Egbert, and he didn't know anything. I didn't find the jewels myself until the day following. . ."

Mallory didn't say anything. Bushey waited a moment, then went on with his story defensively.

"Damn it, she wouldn't leave any name or address, you know! I intended to turn them over to the sheriff the next time I was in Dalton. I had no idea of their real value, of course. . . I wonder she didn't go to the sheriff herself!" He began to eye Mallory suspiciously.

MALLORY lit a cigarette. He knew why Deborah Lysander hadn't gone to the law. That would have meant publicity, and she'd been drunk the night she and three more of the Gold Coast crowd, house-guesting at a private lodge ten miles beyond, had stopped by and rented Bushey's big outboard. Half a mile out they'd decided to go for a swim over the side, and she'd stashed her jewels in a breaker in the bow. The water hadn't sobered her much, and she'd forgotten about them till she woke up back at the lodge the next morning.

Panic-stricken at the thought of publicity or blackmail, she'd made a foolishly half-hearted attempt to recover them herself, and then had high-tailed to Chicago to call in Hardy Investigations.

"Summers got here Friday morning. You turn the stuff over right away?"

Bushey nodded.

"Then why the hell did he hang around till Saturday night before calling in?" The words spattered through the stillness like rifle shots.

Bushey blinked. The gray eyes swelled and his jaw went slack. "B-but that's absurd, man!" he protested. "He stayed around here, drinking from a pocket flash and talking to Egbert and Rosabelle, till about 6:30. Then he said he had to catch the 7:15 bus for Minneapolis, and walked off up the path. That was the last we heard of him."

Mallory considered this. He knew the story would be hard to disprove if Egbert and Rosabelle backed it up. And Bushey would not have told it unless he knew they would.

"What did you all do while Summers was walking back to the highway?" he asked.

"I stayed right here. Rosabelle asked Egbert over for dinner and they left together."

Mallory arose and stretched. "Guess I'm about washed up around here, then," he said. "Unless I can find out what Joey did during the twenty-four hours between the time he left here and the time he made that phone call. You got a phone I can use?"

Bushey shook his head. "Mother McGruder has the nearest telephone."

Mallory nodded. "Looks like I'm stuck then, till the 7:15 bus for Minneapolis," he said dreamily. "And long as I'm here, I might as well get in some fishing. Got a spade I can borrow?"

The gray eyes regarded him oddly. "Why?"

"Gonna dig me some bait."

The eyes twinkled a little. "You don't know much about lake fishing, do you, Mister?" Bushey smiled. "When we want live bait around here, we use minnows."

"Minnows?" Mallory said. "Never took much stock in 'em. I'm going digging for worm bait."



**T**HIRTY minutes later he found it. The worm-bait that was all that was left of Joey Summers. The bait Mallory meant to use to catch a killer. . . There might have been better ways, but he was impatient.

He had left Alvin Bushey behind at the cabin, and he had seen nothing of Egbert or the girl Rosabelle as he plodded back down the path. But he expected to see one of the three now—soon. He stood the spade in the pile of loose dirt beside the grave and waited.

The mud had packed down hard about the fully-clothed body, and Mallory scraped away only enough of it to see that the back of the skull had been battered in, and make positive identification.

Then he pulled up the mud-covered briefcase lying across the corpse's stomach. There was no use worrying about fingerprints now, at least on the outside. He snapped it open.

Even in the dull, grim light of the cemetery, there were enough diamonds on the brooch inside to throw shafts of fire in his eyes. He was still staring at it, part of his mind racing wildly, when that part which was still detached and alert picked up the first signals of what he had been awaiting.

Afterwards, he could never say exactly what it was. Maybe the swish of a damp branch, the squish of a soggy evergreen cone. But it made him straighten and whirl, and for a split second he saw the girl's face staring at him from behind a tree at the clearing's edge.

He dropped the briefcase. The gun was in his hand almost before she had disappeared.

"Hold it!" he lashed. "I know how to use this thing!"

His answer was the soft scuffing thud of feet racing over needle-carpeted mud. Then a cry, a sharp little gasp of anguish, and a faintly louder thud. He followed the sounds, sprinting forward, the gun surprisingly level at his hip.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Gruesome McGruder

**H**E FOUND her crumpled in the underbrush. A half-hidden vine had thrown her and she moaned softly, clutching her left

ankle. The emerald ring was gone from her finger.

"All right," he snapped. "We may as well have it now. Start talking—and fast! Where'd you get it?"

Her green eyes licked at him like a cat's, appraising him.

"G-get what?"

"You know what. The ring."

"I—found it."

He had never heard her speak before. Her voice was slow and smoky, even through the pain.

"Oh, sure," he said. "You think that'll stand up in court? Come on, sister. 'We're gonna see the sheriff.'"

"Oh, no! I can't walk! My ankle—"

He reached over and prodded her with the gun. "All right, crawl, then. But get moving."

She turned on the tears then. "W-wait, copper. . . I'll tell you the truth! He gave it to me. That—that Joey Summers. For helping him get away. He came back to my Dad's shack that night, and offered me the ring if I'd row him across the lake so he could catch the Port Arthur train at Dalton—and get out of the country.

"He said he was gonna powder with the rest of the stuff, but he'd give me the ring if I'd help throw you off the trail and keep my mouth shut. Honest, copper! I'll give it back—"

He put the gun in his pocket and picked her up, roughly. "Babes like you just won't learn, will they?" he grunted. "You don't know you're in trouble, even when you see it. What do you think I dug up back there?"

"Gosh, I don't know, copper. Honest! I followed when I saw you leave Bushey's with the spade. But I sneaked up slow. I just got there when you caught me. I didn't see a thing."

Mallory put her down at the grave's edge. He pointed. "All right," he said. "Now you know. That's Joey Summers, kid. . . Still stick to your story?"

The green eyes turned up until they were almost all white. Her mouth came open, slow motion, like a sleeping goldfish's. He clapped a hand over it.

"Oh no you don't," he said. "You don't

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"Jumbo, I'm back," Lollie called. . . . But the tinny record kept on playing in the deserted lunchroom—over and over—until the girl wheeled and saw what had once been the fat face of her husband staring glassily up at her from the floor. Robert Turner's latest story of love and death in a lonely hash-house packs an emotional punch you won't soon forget. Don't miss it in the January issue of DIME MYSTERY, now combined with 10 STORY MYSTERY.

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yell. Not if you're smart. Not if you aren't the real murderer." He'll probably be here soon enough, without that."

The corded lines of her face gradually relaxed. She seemed to fall apart, then gather herself together again. He took his hand from her mouth.

"Listen," he said. "I don't have to tell you how you rate, as things stand now. I've got to go to Mother McGruder's and call the sheriff. You'd be going along for company, except for that bum ankle. If you're smart, you'll be right here when I get back, though. You won't try to crawl away, and you won't try to tell anybody about this hole. Understand?"

She began to tremble again. "D-don't leave me here, Copper!" she pleaded. "Oh God, don't do that! You said the real murderer might come—"

"He won't unless he finds out I've dug up the corpse," he said. "And I won't tell him."

She began to whimper. He looked away for a moment, then glanced back reluctantly. He saw that her ankle was already beginning to swell. His voice was gruff.

"Okay," he said. "I'll leave you my gun. I'll leave it on a headstone at the other edge of the path, as I go. You can crawl over and get it. It won't take you long. A minute or two. But it'll give me time to get out of range through these trees, in case you aren't leveling."

He picked up the mud-layered briefcase then and walked off, leaving her crouched there in the dirt with the upended spade, the hole and the body.

**WHOEVER** named Loon Lake had made a mistake, Mallory thought bitterly as he trudged along the muddy ruts toward Mother McGruder's Bar and Grill. The "Loon" should have had a final "y" on it. He tallied his suspects:

A penny-ante bartender who couldn't remember her customers.

A kid who turned down a ready-made stage career to be a fishing guide.

A nightclub singer who hated cities.

An obviously cultured recluse who forsook the world to run a two-by-four camp in the wilderness.

And one of them was a thieving murderer who buried his—or her—victim with \$19,000 worth of loot still on the body! . . .

Mother McGruder still shared the bar with the dead mosquito, when Mallory walked in half an hour later.

"Hello, Copper," she sneered, her hairy upper lip curling. "Get your man?"

Mallory eyed her calculatingly. "Surprised?" he asked. "Surprised that I did?"

Mother McGruder was. Her greenish face

turned even greener, and the watery eyes were suddenly hot and dry. Then the eyes narrowed, and the face came back to life again.

"Nuts," she said. "That guy's long gone, Copper. He's in Canada by this time."

Mallory let the corners of his mouth turn up. "He's long gone, all right," he said. "But what makes you think he was interested in Canada? You don't even remember him—or have you changed your mind about that?"

Mother McGruder thought it over. "So what if I do remember him, now you mention it?" she said. "Where does that put me, one way or another?"

Mallory thought she sounded a little worried. "Right behind the eight-ball!" he lashed. "Joey Summers turned up in a very appropriate place. A cemetery. . . .

"Look, short, fat and killerish," he mimicked. "You think I don't see how easy it would be for you to knock him off after he made that phone call? To steal the stuff, then cart him out to that old cemetery and bury him? You think the sheriff won't see it? Or a jury? Maybe you better tell me about it."

"All right," she said sullenly. "I remember him. But I don't know nothin' about no murder. He come back later that night and told me he'd decided to skip. To Canada. He told me if anybody asked for him later, I wasn't to remember him. That's all. I swear it. That's all I know about him, Copper—"

Mallory considered. The speech sounded a little too rehearsed, too familiar. Of course, that could mean it was the truth. Or—

He grinned wolfishly. "Oh," he said. "Just like that. He told you to lie for him, so you did. "You'd only met him twice, but already you loved him enough to cover for him. Fatty, that stinks!"

The watery eyes faltered, began to shift. "All right," she mumbled. "Mebbe he gimme sump'n to keep my mouth shut. Mebbe he promised to send me more, after he got settled and had a chance to fence the stuff. He had plenty with him—"

Mallory watched her paw a flat, wide-mouthed fifth of rum from beneath the bar. He followed as she waddled shakily through the swinging doors into the kitchen, began to empty the bottle into a stew pan. There was a little clunk as something shiny and solid dropped from the bottle's mouth. He fished Deborah Lysander's diamond ring out of the cinnamon-colored liquor.

He held it to the light a moment, lost in thought. Then he dropped it into the briefcase beside the brooch.

"Okay, Fatty," he said. "I'm going to call the sheriff now. You stay with me. Right close. I like your company. Afterwards, we're going to take a little ride, you and I. You must have some kind of bus around here."

He dropped a hand into his topcoat pocket, then remembered he'd left the little automatic with Rosabelle. But he allowed the hand to remain there, anyway. It seemed to do the job.

"The Dodge is out back," Mother McGruder said morosely. "But I ain't got much gas . . ."

"You've got enough to get where you're going," Mallory told her. "To the cemetery."

MALLORY sat beside her, Summers' briefcase touching the back of his neck, while Mother McGruder cursed and sweated and fought the wheel, and the Dodge groaned and skidded from ditch to ditch, making about ten miles an hour in second over the wet, muddy road.

The terns still screamed and the doves still mourned and the mist still dripped from the trees beside the road. But Mallory felt better about all that now.

They were within a hundred feet of the cemetery when the shooting started. The first shot puffed from the trees to the right, pulverizing the ancient windshield, and Mallory cursed the momentary weakness which had made him leave his automatic with Rosabelle. That gun sounded much too familiar. He dove for the cavity beneath the dashboard—and waited.

Mother McGruder wasn't so lucky. Pinioned behind the huge old steering wheel, she made a perfect target. Mallory heard the second shot and felt the edge of the car seat give against his shoulders as she jerked, quaked a moment, then slumped forward, quite dead.

Crouched at her knees, quivering with rage, he reached out and yanked the emergency brake. The Dodge bogged down in a chuck-hole, and lurched to a stop.

Mother McGruder stared down at him accusingly from between the spokes of the wheel, her eyes glassy.

Normally Mallory was a cautious man. But he also had an unpredictable temper, and a disturbing sense of responsibility.

He heard the footsteps scuffing through the underbrush, going away, and he jerked open the creaking car door and plummeted after them. He was half way to the path's entrance when the third shot rang out.

For the second time that day, he sprawled face-first in the mud. He was still lying that way, inert, when the scream ripped out from somewhere beyond the fringe of evergreens screening the cemetery.

He heard the frantic voice cry, "No! . . . No! . . ." And he listened while the second scream mounted in terror, hung there somewhere above high C, then dwindled into a soft, ugly gurgling.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Murder Bids One Spade

THE tableau posed at the edge of Joey Summers' grave was not pretty.

Egbert had Rosabelle by the throat, and Mallory saw that he had been wrong about the kid's big body being soft. Rosabelle's face was a bloated, splotchy purple, her green eyes bulged vacantly and the end of her small pink tongue lolled swollenly between blood-flecked teeth.

The boy's denim shirt was stained a dirty brown below the right ribs, and the stain was still spreading. Mallory's little gun glinted from the mud a few feet to one side.

Mallory wanted to yell, but he couldn't find his voice. As he watched, the lovers seemed to sway a little, gently, like maples in a soft breeze. Then Egbert's hands came away stiffly and the girl's body folded slowly to the wet loam, beside the spade still standing where Mallory had planted it at the grave's edge.

Egbert shook himself like a great dog. "I killed her. . ." he sighed. "I killed my Rosabelle. . ." He sat down in the mud between the corpses and began to snivel brokenly.

Mallory stepped forward just as Alvin Bushey's gray and brown clad figure burst from the path at the other edge of the clearing. Egbert's eyes settled on his father's stricken face and he shivered.

"She made me do it, Pop," he sobbed. "She made me. . . I was crazy for her. . ."

"Made you do what?" Mallory snapped.

Egbert's lopsided face swung around dully. He put a hand to his shirt and the hand came away sticky. He buried it in the dirty brown hair above his ears.

"M-made me help her bury th-that detective," he moaned. "We follered him when he left th' house, and she tried to get me to kill him. She wanted the jewels. . . An' when I wouldn't, she grabbed it a rock and run down the path and d-did it herself. . . He was drunk I don't think he hardly knew what hit him. . ."

He broke off, face twitching.

"She m-made me help drag him back in the bushes. . . And that night she had me git Pop's spade and come down here with her and b-bury him. . ."

Alvin Bushey's face was a gray and frozen mask. He looked down at the girl's body and the left side of his mouth dragged down as though unseen fingers tugged it. But his voice was strangely gentle when he spoke:

"Go on, boy. . . I want Mr. Mallory to hear all of this."

Egbert's queer blue eyes turned up plaintively. "We b-buried the briefcase with the brooch in it on top of him. . . She said it would be safe there till th-the heat blew off and

she could dig it up and f-fence it. . . Sh-she said she knew somebody in St. Paul who'd do it for her. . ."

Mallory's eyes darkened. "What about the rings?" he asked.

"She k-kept 'em out. She was crazy about the g-green one. She said she was a knock-out in it. . . I told her it wasn't safe, but she said she'd only wear it when nobody b-but me was around. Later she was gonna have the stone took out and made into a p-pin."

"And the diamond?"

"Sh-she give that to me to g-give to M-Mother McGruder. She had me go down there th' next night and make that phone call to your office, imitatin' the d-detective's voice. . . Sh-she said th' call would prove he was alive a whole day after he l-left here, if anybody got suspicious later. And she had me give th' ring to Mother McGruder to keep her quiet. . ."

"If you loved her enough to do all that for her, how come you just knocked her off?" Mallory said brutally.

The lopsided face contorted and the light blue eyes filmed with anguish. "Oh, Lord," Egbert moaned. "I didn't mean to! So help me! But I told her to drop the gun, and sh-she shot me, and ever'thing went red. I d-didn't snap out of it till she was already dead. I didn't know what I was doin' . . ."

"She run away after we met you on the path, sayin' she had to hide the ring. She told me to wait for her back in the trees. But she didn't come back and I got worried and begun to move around, huntin' for her.

"I was down here by the cemetery, in that little clump o' bushes over there, when I heard them two shots down by the road and saw her hobblin' back up the path. I jumped out of the bushes and tried to grab the gun and she shot me. . . Oh, God. . ."

**M**ALLORY'S lips pursed and his dark eyes widened deceptively. "Well whaddayuh know!" he said. "So that's how it was."

Alvin Bushey straightened and turned to stare at him, and squatting there in the mud between the corpses, Egbert seemed to stop trembling for a moment.

"You know what I'd have said?" Mallory asked them. "You know what I'd have said, if I hadn't actually heard those screams and seen the kid strangling the girl?"

"I'd have said Egbert did it all by himself. I'd have said Rosabelle was a lady who had her price, and that Egbert thought he saw a way to pay that price when he learned from Summers how much those jewels were really worth, that he found some excuse to send Rosabelle home alone that evening, and then cut through the woods and killed Joey, that he sneaked back later and buried him, all by himself.

"I'd have said that Egbert gave the green ring to Rosabelle later, explaining that Summers had given it to him in return for help in skipping the country, that he dreamed up the phone call angle himself, and gave the diamond to Mother McGruder with the same explanation.

"And I'd have said that even after they found Joey Summers was murdered, both women were still willing to shield Egbert. For this reason: They thought if they kept quiet nobody could prove he did it. And in return for keeping quiet, each figured she could wangle the diamond brooch out of him later. . ."

"You see neither of them had any idea Egbert had left the brooch in what he thought was the safest place in the world—the briefcase buried with Summers' body. They didn't know I'd already found it. Only Egbert knew that!"

He broke off, lips quirking sardonically.

"Yep," he went on. "That's what I'd have said. . . In fact, I'm not so sure I won't say it anyway. When the sheriff gets here, I'm not so sure I won't tell him that Egbert also murdered Mother McGruder!"

Egbert whimpered toward his father and the elder Bushey stepped forward indignantly. "But that's absurd, man! You said—"

Mallory cut him off. "When I tell him about it, I think the sheriff'll find that Rosabelle never made any footprints down to the road and back. And the coroner, or M.E.—whatever you call the stiff expert up here—will prove that Rosabelle died before Mother McGruder."

"The way I see it, Egbert was already hiding in those bushes when I carried Rosabelle back here. After I left, he jumped out and strangled her before she could get to my gun.

"Then he took the gun and came down to the roadside to watch for my return, so he could time his final act to make sure I got in on just the right part. And when he saw Mother McGruder with me, he also saw a swell chance to get rid of the only remaining witness against him, and blame that on Rosabelle, too. Of course, I could be wrong. The sheriff'll have to decide that."

Alvin Bushey stiffened with awe and horror. He seemed to age ten years in the next ten seconds. "Then you—you mean? My God! . . ."

Mallory nodded ironically. "That's just what I mean," he said. "Egbert waited till the car was almost here, ambushed Mother McGruder, then ran back and picked up Rosabelle's corpse. He pressed the automatic against her palm so it would show cordite later, winged himself in the side, then dropped the gun and imitated her screams while he again choked her already lifeless body—just for my benefit. . ."

"It was pretty effective. He could claim self-defense, and I myself would be his witness. He might get a light rap as accessory in the Summers murder, but he knew it wouldn't go too hard with him after a clever defense attorney got through telling the jury how the evil nightclub charmer duped this poor, stupid, defenseless country lad."

**A**LVIN BUSHEY tottered a little as at a blow on the face. But Egbert had stopped trembling. The queer, light eyes seemed to be shrouded with ice as they stared into Mallory's.

Mallory slowly shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Pop," he said softly. "I saw how you felt about Rosabelle this morning, when I told you about finding her on the path with Egbert. You hated her. You've been afraid of something like this, almost since the boy was born, I think.

"You knew he'd get into trouble if he spent too much time around people. There was something animal about him—about his eyes, the shape of his head, his queer shuffling gait. Even about that odd, clever knack of his for imitation.

"Oh he was smart enough. I don't mean that. But you knew he was one of those rare people who can never learn right from wrong.

"You brought him up here to protect him. You thought he might be safe here in the wilderness, away from the world's temptations. But when Indian Bob's girl Rosabelle came along, and learned about the jewels you had found, I think you must have known it was the beginning of the end. . ."

His eyes dropped back to Egbert—too late.

The boy had snaked out a hand while Mallory was busy with the old man. He held Mallory's little automatic now, centered on its owner's belt buckle. And the gun didn't waver.

"This isn't the end, Copper," Egbert said sibilantly. "It isn't the end of anything—except you." The pale opaque eyes regarded him like some curious wriggling thing beneath a microscope. Mallory decided that maybe Egbert was right. He tensed himself for the fiery impact of the lead.

Then he saw Alvin Bushey behind Egbert, step suddenly to one side. The spade standing beside Joey Summers' grave left the mud with a soft sucking sound, arced skyward. It hung there a moment, while somewhere far away the terns called and the doves mourned.

Then it swished down.

Egbert's skull fell apart on each side of the blade, like earth turning before a plow. The gun dropped from suddenly flacid fingers.

And Alvin Bushey stood behind his broken son, bent and awkward and gray with the grayness of death, his hands still clutching the spade handle.

Mallory shook uncontrollably. His mouth opened, but there were no words to say. He thought of the things he loved and now would live to see again. He thought of the bright lights and the loud traffic and the surging crowds of Chicago, and a great wave of thankfulness engulfed him.

Alvin Bushey stirred. His voice was dry and hollow, sere as pine cones after a long drouth. "He—he never would have lived, anyway," he said. "Shut up behind bars. . . in a little cell. . . away from the lake. . ."

THE END



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15¢

# LIE DOWN, YOU'RE DEAD!



By  
DAVID X. MANNERS



*McGrady found that filling his well-loved predecessor's brogans was no cinch—particularly when the guy wouldn't stay dead, but kept hopping up on McGrady's desk and telling him how to run the force!*

Blood streaking down his face, he leaped forward. . .

**N**O, of course I don't believe in ghosts. It really wasn't Joe Darrow's ghost that haunted Police Headquarters. But all the same, it almost did seem as if Joe refused to stay buried in Waynesville's cemetery.

I used to know Joe quite well. Back in the old days, he was the best man on the force—none excepted. Then we were together in the Detective Bureau when Joe became boss of that. That was before a bullet cut him down.

Then it began. . . .

Joe was so used to coming in for his tour

of duty that the bullet wasn't enough to break the habit. After they buried him, he used to come in just the same, and sit right there on the edge of his successor's desk.

Captain McGrady was of the old school, to put it mildly—big mouth, a pair of powerful, hairy fists, and two hundred pounds tough. But that didn't help him much against the towering reputation of his predecessor.

The dicks who'd come in the Captain's office when the Captain wasn't there, would say, "Hello, Joe!" to the ghost. Sergeant Bo

Stanton was the worst offender. He'd come in there, and right in front of the Captain, he'd whisper, "What's your ouija board say for the fifth race, Joe?" Or, "Good Lord, Joe. How can you go around with only that thin nightie on?" McGrady about burst with apoplexy. He couldn't take their kidding.

The Captain, apparently, didn't like Joe. Joe was a cross between a tout and a card-sharp, to hear him tell it. But I knew the Captain really didn't feel that way. After all, he and Joe had been buddies. And wasn't it me and the Captain and Joe who'd been in there together on that last, fatal fight?

The truth was, the Captain liked Joe—and he was aware of Joe's ghost as strongly as anybody else!

The Bureau was in the old wing of the city jail building. Its old-style high windows were stone-trimmed and the brick had been painted over. A sign on its front said, "WORK-HOUSE, 1882." But it seemed older than that. The Captain's office was just off the squad room, with a door that was open most of the time, so that anybody in the squad room could usually see the Captain taking his ten o'clock liver pills, or sitting tilted back in his seat, hands locked around his hemispherical front, staring biliously off into space.

Bo Stanton always said he was looking at Joe.

I remember the day Sam Winn went into McGrady's office. "I'd like to get tomorrow off, Captain," Sam said, as he related afterwards. "My wife's folks are coming in from Columbus. I thought it would be nice to spend the day with them."

"Tomorrow's a working day," said McGrady unblinkingly.

"I know, but it's the only chance in a year they've had to get here, Captain, and if I don't spend it with them now—"

"Your wife's family?" McGrady nodded his great, shaggy head. "How nice. How very lovely. You're allowed so many days leave a year, Winn. You've used 'em up. Now you come to me, asking me to smash the rules." He let his clenched fist fall like a rock on his desk top. "What kind of a Bureau is this we're running here anyway?"

"Well, Joe—"

"I don't care what Joe used to do! Joe's not here. It's me that's running this Bureau now. Not him. Understand?"

**S**AM WINN came out of the office with his ears pricked up sharply and with a crossed look in his eyes like a cat that's been massaged the wrong way.

I folded some money I had in my hand. I said, "Ol' McGrady got his hackles up?"

Sam nodded.

"It's his liver," I said. "That's what it is."

"Oh, no," said Sam. "That's not it. McGrady's scared, that's what. Look at this Pete Wire outfit all the papers are hollerin' for him to crack. They're hiding out right here in town and McGrady can't nab 'em. He's stepped into bigger brogans than he knows how to fill. That's what's chewin' him. He looks tough, but it's all bluff. He knows he ain't got the beginnings of the guts it takes to fill the spot Joe held down."

I stared at Sam Winn, surprised to hear him come out that way, with me being so close to the Captain.

"McGrady's an all right guy," I said. "Don't go popping your cork. Things have been a mite tough for him, that's all. He's got to get his bearings."

"Joe was never like that." Sam shook his head. "It was a sad day we lost a fighter like him."

"Yeah." I nodded thoughtfully to myself, and in nodding, saw the money in my hand. "By the way, have you given yours yet?"

"No," he said. "Here, you better take it now." And he dug down into his pocket for his wallet.

McGrady came out of the office then. He looked around, as if he didn't know what he was looking for. Then he saw us. He stomped right over.

"Listen," he said. "I was just telling Sam here about discipline. For God's sake, what would the Commissioner say if he came in here and saw you collecting money for some damn pool!"

"I'm collecting for flowers for Joe," I said quietly.

McGrady sort of went back on his heels. "This ain't no anniversary already, is it?"

"No. Not yet. It's just two months, but—"

"Well. Here. Put me down for fifty cents. You wasn't going to miss me, was you?"

I looked at the Captain's face, and I felt sorry for him and the strain he was under. The strain of Joe. The Wire hoodlums.

"We're each giving a frogback," I said. "It's not exactly for flowers. We thought with nice weather here soon we'd have someone fix his grave up right, with shrubbery and stuff like that."

The Captain's eyes took on a hurt look. He sucked in his cheeks and I wondered if he was trying to keep from swallowing. He fished out a folded wad of grass and handed it to me.

When he was gone, I unfolded it. Ten dollars!

Sam Winn said, "A guilty conscience, that's what. McGrady's got no more business in that chair than a spotted eel—and he knows it."

"What do you mean?" I growled. But I knew what he meant.

"He tilts back in that chair of his and what does he see? Joe parked there on the corner

of his desk. Maybe Joe sayin', 'How about the Pete Wire crowd, McGrady? Why don't you scrub 'em out like I woulda done?'"

"You better clam, Sam!"

"Me clam?" Sam snorted. "Who's got to be afraid of a guy who's on the greased chute right now? McGrady might be all right, but he came in at a bad time—right after Joe."

**T**HE Commissioner arrived at two o'clock and went directly into the Captain's office. I was sitting at my own desk, looking over the twice-weekly report of wanted cars—wanted either because they were stolen or because of who might be driving them. Listed was license 6V 1592, operated by Pete Wire and company. Wire—wanted for murder, bank robbery, grand larceny.

The walls were thick, but the Commissioner's voice spiked through from McGrady's office. I could hear him berating the Captain.

"Joe didn't do this that way, McGrady. . . . And he didn't do the other. Now, why do you insist on . . ."

It made the fine hairs on my neck into little needles. Why was everyone pulling the wings off poor McGrady? Why couldn't they let him alone? It seemed to be reaching a climax with this Wire situation. McGrady would show himself a fighter, and as good as any of them. If they would only be patient and give him a chance!

But then I thought of Lucilla, and I knew I was whistling in the wind. Frankly, I didn't think McGrady had the stuff either. I was sure he'd lost all the vinegar he did have in that battle when he saw Joe get killed. But could I say that out loud about the father of the girl I was—well, you know how a guy can get about a girl. Out of town three days, Lucilla had me mooning for her like a sick butterfly.

The Commissioner stalked out of McGrady's office and the boys in the squad room eyed each other. Bo Stanton had a smirk that jerked up one side of his mouth. Walt Lamb winked and looked at Pop Harris. Pop drooped his eyelids balefully and wagged his head. The girl at the switchboard sat stiff in her swivel chair as if the cold breeze of the Commissioner's passing had frosted her.

I just glared at them all, and felt washed-out down inside me for McGrady.

Bo Stanton opened his lippy mouth, and I just knew he was going to say something about Joe perched on McGrady's desk. And just then—in barged McGrady.

**E**VEN from where I was, I saw the pin-sweat on McGrady's forehead. I didn't know if the sweat was hot or cold, but to me it looked cold. McGrady looked as if he'd just been bitten by a nightmare.

He stared, saying nothing for a minute. Then his fingers dipped into his vest pockets and brought out a cigar and a clipper. He sheared the tip off the cigar, which he then stuck in the center of his mouth. He looked around at all of us.

"Dave Jones," he said to me, and his tongue shoved the unlighted cigar over into the corner notch of his mouth. "I'm seeing your detail in my office right now." And then he turned away.

Stanton got up, Lamb and Baylinson and a couple others. They followed me. There were five of us standing before McGrady's fumed-oak desk when the last one clamped the door.

The Captain paced before us, looking down at his shoetips, his thick, meaty hands in his pockets, the cigar at a downward angle in his mouth.

Stanton's eyes traveled from the corner of the desk to me and then back again. I caught that veiled, fishhook grin of his, and gave him a stare that stabbed him right between his dark eyebrows.

McGrady said, "Prepare yourselves, men. If you don't already know them, here are the facts. We've located the hole-out of the Wire flock. We're going after them."

He waited till our murmurs settled. "They're in an old frame house on the hill just behind the Zachary foundry. They've been there several days now. One or more of them are the birds who got Joe Darrow. Now remember this—and for God's sake, don't forget it. No shooting unless it's absolutely necessary. We want, if it's at all possible, to take them still chirpin'."

His eyes surveyed us. "That's all. But just remember. We want to act quickly, effectively. It's a dangerous flock—and a deadly one. Stanton, see that the business office provides the tear gas bombs, machine guns and ammunition from the arsenal—and three men to take care of the stuff. We'll try to take these buzzards peacefully. If we can't, tear gas. But guns are to be held in abeyance. We want no one hurt. Is that clear?"

**M**CGRADY drove ahead in a department sedan. With him were two men from the machine gun detail and a fellow named Reynolds from the fugitive squad. It was a snowy, sloppy day, with the sky dirty gray. In a half hour it would be dark, though it was only four o'clock.

I was in the car right behind McGrady. Stanton and Lamb and another of the tommy-gun handlers were with me. The regulars didn't handle the machine guns. It was a specialist's work. Another car with four more men followed behind us. Twelve men, in all, to handle the three-man Wire mob.

Stanton mimicked, "We don't want nobody



to get hurt. That's a laugh! I bet a nickle I know who McGrady's got in mind."

I didn't want to say anything. But it slipped out, "Anybody can bust a place apart like Joe used to do. You can have brains in your pants for that."

"Yeah." Stanton looked at McGrady's car ahead. "But when there *was* fireworks, Joe was in there. He wasn't sitting on his pants."

"You're damn right," Walt Lamb said. "He was in there pitching."

And suddenly I felt alone among wolves. I thought: McGrady will tear hell out of this flock and show these guys how cockeyed they are.

The hill behind the foundry was bare and white with winter, and we stopped short of its summit. The foundry, down below, stood out in severe outline against the drab yellow swirl of the half-frozen river. Leafless trees on the bank were blurred, with falling night smothering them.

The Captain's car stopped, rim-deep in slush. We pulled up, and the third car stopped behind us. We waited, and pretty soon somebody got out of that first car and came back toward us. I wound down the steamed window. It was snowing fairly hard.

Captain McGrady's face was a sallow, frost-breathing nose and a pair of eyes through the window's crack.

"JONES, you and me are traipsin' the rest of the way up the hill, to the house," he said. "The others will deploy and throw a fast cordon around the place. We'll scoot 'em out of there quick."

As I got out, I shot a hurried glance at Stanton, to get his reaction to McGrady now. Then I swore under my breath. Stanton's face was still cynically set. I had the feeling that no matter what McGrady did the boys would never grin for him. They had a golden image of Joe Darrow in their minds, and they'd built a stone wall around it.

A long walk led up to the house, its path almost indistinguishable under the snow. McGrady pointed to it. His face was gray—his eyes wild, the skin around his white lips a bilious green. When I was a deputy up at Sing Sing I once saw a man with a face like that. He was taking a walk to that little room with the only chair in the world with a matching cap.

"Mac—" I began.

"I'm all right," he said. And he tapped my arm.

He started up the slope to the house, following the line of the sidewalk's trough. It was dark, with the snow swirling down more strongly, almost smudging out the house.

I looked off to my right and left. The dark blots of men slogging through the snow were

barely visible. The Captain was ahead of me, and the house was a shapeless hulk ahead of him. He fell back suddenly, and turned to me. His lips quivered. I looked down at the gun he held in his hand.

"I can't. No. Good God, I'm licked!"

I stared at him. The gun was shaking like a winter leaf. "McGrady. What—?"

"I can't go up there, I'm telling you!"

A tremor shook his shoulders. His eyes were bulging like a fish's. The tip of his tongue brushed dry, scaly lips. I felt my heart turning inside out. I grabbed McGrady's arm. My fingers snagged into his coat.

"You can't act like this! Think of how they've been blowing off about you! About Joe!"

"But—but—"

I looked back and the others were closing in. "You can't give them this chance. You'll be through—finished!"

I thought: It was seeing the way Joe died that did this to him. But the boys in the Bureau, they didn't understand a damn thing of what this was all about. They'd put McGrady under their heel and he'd never show his face again.

"It's not only yourself you got to think of," I said. "You don't even know for sure Wire's bunch'll be up here. We been on false prods before. Think of Lucilla. That's who you got to think of. Think of—"

I locked an arm around his and pulled.

"No! No! Don't make me!" He turned on me in a delirium of frenzy. "I *am* thinking of her. I can't go up there. There'll be shooting—bullets—killing—"

His voice rose. I flashed a quick look to the others. "McGrady!" I shook him. But I couldn't shake him from his hysteria. "McGrady!"

"Get away then!" I said finally, desperately. "Get behind that tree. Hide! Where nobody can see you."

I shoved him, and he stumbled off. The snow swirled as the wind whipped it. I moved up the trough of the walk, the blood out of my bones.

LUCILLA—this would kill her. McGrady—this was his finish too. The porch steps were under my feet. I looked back. McGrady was stumbling through the snow—stumbling and falling and dragging himself up again. If he could get away from the place, I thought, maybe it could be fixed so no one would ever know exactly what happened.

Then McGrady fell, and out of the dark a shadow moved up to him as one of our men bent over McGrady.

The house must be ringed now—ringed tight. I stepped to the door. Drifting snow covered its threshold.

My knuckles rapped on the panel. I lifted my left fist and knocked again, holding my .38 low.

There was a pause, then the quick, dry click of shoes on a bare floor. I sensed the pressure of someone against the door—the grate of a latch being slid back.

A dishevelled blonde face looked at me over a safety chain. "Wha' d'yuh want?"

Footsteps sounded behind me and the woman's eyes widened at what she saw over my shoulder. She tried to slam the door, but my shoulder was against it. Suddenly Stanton was beside me, swearing as he barged against the door.

"McGrady! That damn yellow slob. And you said he wasn't chicken!"

A bullet splintered through the door at us. A harsh voice inside shouted, "Get back, or the girl gets it!"

"To hell with you!" Stanton yelled. "Damn this door!"

I heard McGrady's voice then, shouting from somewhere. It seemed to be at the side of the house. "You touch that girl, and I'll tear you apart!"

"Dad!" a girl's voice inside cried. "Dad—" Her voice was suddenly muffled into incoherence.

"Good God!" I said. "Lucilla!"

"What!" Stanton's legs pumped as he charged the door. I lunged in front of him to stop him.

"Stanton—for God's sake—don't!"

And I suddenly knew why McGrady's had insisted so urgently that we hold off shooting. He must have known all along that his daughter was being held by these men.

Glass crashed at the side of the house. A police gun coughed briefly. A burst answered from the house. Then I heard one of our men cry in horror, "*Good Lord! They've shot the Captain's girl! They've killed Lucilla!*"

I went momentarily berserk. I shouted crazy curses and my gun blasted. A bullet struck my side, and I pitched down. I sensed there were more than three gunmen in the house. As I got up, another window crashed—a gun rocketed violently.

Someone shouted. "Look—look at McGrady!"

I didn't see Stanton. The house was rocking with gunshots. I crashed against the door and I went through. Three gunmen were down, and I saw Lucilla on the floor too.

And then I saw McGrady.

Blood streaking down his face, he stood back-to-the-wall. A shattered window showed where he'd come in. Two gunmen rose from behind an overturned table at my entry, and McGrady's gun spit. He leaped forward over the table, and the two gunmen fled toward the stairs, toppling as McGrady's shots cut them down.

"There's more of 'em upstairs," McGrady gasped. "The damn—"

I grappled his arm. He was a fighting wild man. If he'd wait a minute our boys would be there. It was fanatical madness to rush up those stairs alone.

But McGrady tore loose from my grasp, lunging for the stairs. Stanton came inside. His face went blank as he realized McGrady's intention.

Then hell tore the stairs apart. McGrady was shooting. The Wire gang was retaliating. Suddenly the Captain slumped down against the wall at the bottom step and fired a last volley.

I jumped over McGrady's sprawled legs, and two bodies McGrady had just shot pitched down the stairs on top of me, knocking me on top of McGrady. The upper balustrade collapsed and a body that was draped over it came down too. That accounted for everybody!

I shoved to get out from under, sure McGrady must be dead.

Then I heard him breathing in a rasping gurgle. He too was struggling to get free of the bodies piled on him.

"Joe! Joe!" he was moaning deliriously. "You ain't letting me breathe. You ain't letting me breathe."

And in the next room, I heard somebody saying, "Where in hell's some water? Or some rags? Something—damn it! Somebody do something! We can't let McGrady's girl die!"

I DIDN'T know just what the boys in the Bureau would say about the Captain now. I was in the hospital only long enough to get a couple chunks of lead dug out of my side.

Lucilla McGrady, it had turned out, hadn't been shot at all at first. She had merely keeled over in a faint, and one of our boys at a window had yelled that the gunmen had killed her. But she had gotten nicked up some in the fracas that followed. Still, she wouldn't have had to stay in the hospital a whole week. But she did—just to be near her dad.

It seemed a sour thing to me that there should be any doubt as to the welcome awaiting Ed McGrady when he got out. Why, the bluff old Captain had practically lonesided cleaned up that nest of eight Wire men! And yet all the boys in the Bureau were going around with glum looks. Disappointed looks. As if they were sorry McGrady was coming back at all.

I guessed the answer. They all knew about McGrady's acting chicken there just before the Wire battle. And they probably couldn't forget it. It apparently didn't mean anything to them that McGrady hadn't gone after the Wire flock right off only because he knew they had Lucilla, and that they'd threatened to kill her if he did come.

I felt the tenseness in the air the Monday morning the Captain came back to the Bureau. And I wanted to poke that guy Stanton. He was more grumpy about it than anyone.

McGrady crippled in the door. He still had a bandage around his head, and his right arm wore a sling. The second he got by the switchboard, I felt that he sensed it. He looked at the boys and then dropped his eyes.

"I—" he began. He didn't get beyond that. He looked to me. I glared at Stanton.

McGrady caught the way the wind blew.

"Well, Stanton," he said. "Don't stand there like a dripping faucet. Say something."

Stanton looked bewildered. "I hardly know how to begin, chief," he said finally.

"Begin? About what?"

"About how all this week you've been in the hospital, we've been kicking ourselves, not being able to look at our own faces in the mirror, just thinking what it would have been like if something permanent had happened to you."

"What?" said McGrady.

"We want you to know we're sorry for the way we've kidded about Joe—about Joe sitting in there on your desk like a guilty conscience. Hell, Captain, Joe never did anything like your bringing down that Wire flock all by yourself."

"Look," Walt Lamb cut in. He pointed to the open door of the Captain's office. All heads turned. There was a note of surprise and delight in his voice. "Look! Joe's gone. He's not there any more."

I HELD my breath. A cloud came over McGrady's face. It was a joke—a gag. But this was carrying a raw point too far.

McGrady stalked away from them, as nearly as he could stalk without even a cane to help him. "You crazy?" he said. "You all blind?" He walked toward his desk. We didn't know what was coming next.

"Hello, Joe," McGrady said, waving at the imaginary spectre that had so long haunted his desk. "How you doing, Joe?"

And that was his tribute to Joe's reputation which he now no longer feared.

Later, when I was alone in there with McGrady, he closed the door and looked around, as if to make sure there was no one else in the room who could hear.

"They don't know anything?" he asked.

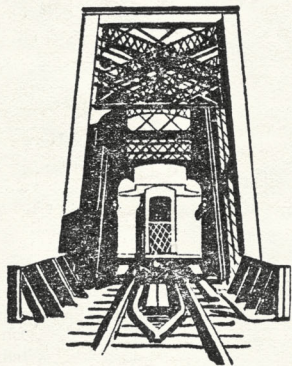
"No," I said. "They don't. They'll never know now."

"I was afraid," he said, and his tongue shoved the smoke into the corner of his mouth, "that I might have said something when I was delirious. I kinda had the feeling I did. Good Lord, that would have been terrible."

"No," I said. "You didn't say anything."

"A fellow does get scared sometimes when he's facing a lot of guns. I really appreciate how Joe must have felt." He let out a sigh, dropped his voice to a whisper. "And I tell you, I had a cold, clammy feeling when I stepped in here and saw their looks. I was sure they knew. I was sure that I'd spilled something about Joe getting that bullet in the back, running away."

He looked over at the corner of his desk, and his voice came back. "You're okay, Joe," he boomed. And there were crinkles at the corners of his eyes. "But, damn it, why don't you get down off that confounded desk and take a comfortable chair?"



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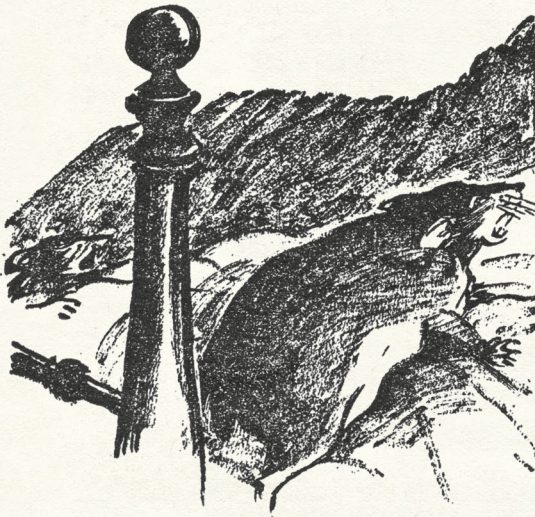
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# THEY KILL BY NIGHT!

*In the chill, dark hours when shadows haunted the city streets, they came stealthily crawling, a sharp-eyed, vicious invading legion that threatened the whole sleeping city. . . . Only veteran Johnny Quane knew part of the puzzle—but he knew, also, that he was marked for death before he could learn the grim, ghastly answer. . . .*

## Bizarre Novelette of Ghastly Menace



### CHAPTER ONE

#### Death Draws Blood

**N**OW, even as Johnny Quane and Sally talked and planned their evening, Joe Wold lay in a ditch, dead. Thus destiny had already shaped events. Death was on the loose, with new blood on its breath; although, had the Quanes known, they would not have been particularly concerned yet. Who was Joe Wold, anyway? What did he matter? They had never heard of him.

This night, one in the war's most vital month of 1944, the Quanes were turning new and exciting pages. After nearly two years overseas, Johnny had come home, and tonight he and Sally were going out to dine and dance



and celebrate with Lou Vincent and his new exotic girl friend.

Frankly, Johnny Quane thought, glancing in the mirror, he looked a little pale; probably



"Hurry! I need help!" Truman pleaded into the phone.



because of old scars made by Jap slugs. But it was natural that he no longer had his old dash and swagger—but then one could hardly compare a tuxedo with the dress blues of a marine sergeant. Now with civilian discharge, once again as a result of his medical discharge, he had the old job on the morning *Bugle*.

He grinned as he turned to Sally, "How's about it, hon; do you miss the medals and the uniform?"

She kissed him, and she was blonde and very slim and tall. She said, "I'll get my wrap, darling, and be with you in a minute—" The phone rang.

It was Lou Vincent. "Johnny, look," he said. "I'm hopelessly detained, hellishly involved—"

Lou Vincent was a pale, thin, intense young man, the kind usually tied up with emotional

problems. He was a lawyer, and two years earlier he'd been desperately in love with Sally. Before Sally married Johnny Quane, that was. . . .

The scene flashed through Johnny Quane's mind quickly. He'd known he was going overseas. He'd had a last short furlough—and he'd married Sally on the last day. So, as Sally said, the best man won, but—as she'd also said—Lou Vincent had carried a terrific torch afterward. According to Sally's letters he hadn't looked twice at a girl, until—

Lou had called a few nights ago, serious as always but friendly again. He'd met a new love, he'd said, a dancer named Vivi. And tonight the Quanes were to have met Vivi, at the Paradise Restaurant where she danced.

"But I'm afraid I can't get away," Lou said now, regretfully, on the phone. "Why don't you and Sally go on anyway? Then if I get a break I'll join you later, and we'll carry out the evening as we planned."

Johnny Quane put down the phone. He looked at Sally, and he saw something queer in her eyes. "Darling," she said, "is it *me*? Do you suppose he's going to be—funny again?"

Once more the phone rang, and this time it was the paper, for Johnny. The cops had found Joe Wold. And who was this Joe Wold?

"How the hell do I know?" the Big Boss at the *Bugle* bellowed over the wire. "This guy's dead, see? Under peculiar circumstances, see? And I got to print it, see? So Benson's got acute appendicitis—they just hauled *him* to the hospital. So Thorpe is out somewhere—damn it, Quane, I've got to get that story!"

"But look," Johnny began, "my wife and I have been planning on this night. . . ."

The Big Boss yelled, "You know damn' well that a good reporter never has a night off! Get that story, Quane!"

So Johnny Quane, in tuxedo, and Sally in her white evening gown decided half a celebration was better than none; they knocked an hour off their plans and drove around to start the night by reviewing a body that had belonged to a nonentity known as Joe Wold. . . .

It lay way out, in the ditch on a narrow, unpaved side street. There were trees and underbrush and a ravine—and, of course, a few houses. The cops said Joe Wold had a cottage at the very end of this dark road. The cops said it seemed that Wold was walking home—at least, he always had walked home from the distant carline. It seemed he'd had a dizzy spell; according to his wife, he'd had these dizzy spells of late. Apparently he'd staggered off the sidewalk, fainted, and fallen in the ditch or gully that was half-filled with broken slabs of concrete. He'd hit his head

in falling, and no doubt suffered a concussion. But death had occurred when a rat had bitten him in the neck and severed his jugular.

Beyond that, it was all rather vague, even to the cops. The cops could guess, though. The rat, bloody, tailless, dead of a broken neck, lay off to one side. Apparently Joe Wold had regained consciousness, and his last act but one had been to grab and fling the rat away from him. Then, with his own blood, he had managed to write *pla-* on a stone slab, but death had come before he could finish the word.

Well, what would *pla* mean? Lacey, Homicide Inspector, finally talked with Quane, but Lacey was brusque. He shrugged.

Johnny Quane walked back to the car. Sally was in the car waiting for him. He got in, kicked the starter, drove on up the dark street, to the last house. Mrs. Wold had returned from the job of identifying her husband's body. She lay on a sofa now, sobbing. A neighbor woman was with her, trying vainly to console.

"He was such a good little man," the neighbor whispered. "Why, last March my boy was sick, and Mr. Wold stayed up with him all night, just so I could get some sleep. And him with an important job in an advertising agency!"

The neighbor said, "And one time his chickens got loose. He didn't have a garden, but they got into mine. He came right around and paid me for the damage. Right was right, he always said, and you could see he meant it. Yes, sir, he was a deacon in his church—"

Quane interrupted. "Would you tell me Mrs. Wold's first name?"

The woman blinked. "Why, it's Martha!" "Know anyone whose name begins with *Pla*? Or anything beginning with those letters? The cops asked that, of course, but—did *she* know?"

The woman shook her head, and Quane walked back to his car, and this time he drove away, and for a while Sally sat close to him, in silence and shivering. She said at last, "It was such a big rat. I saw it, Johnny. It was horrible."

He found her hand, pressed it. "Can't let a thing like this get us down, hon. I'll stop at the first phone and call the paper. Then what's it going to be? The Paradise?"

**T**HE PARADISE was strictly a slice of big-time glamour. It had a suave maitre d'hotel and the finest crew of waiters. Its bands were internationally famous—and the legs of its chorus line the most beautiful in the city. . . . In the city, hell! In America. In the world! Dave Hood handled Paradise publicity, and according to Hood's business cards, "If it's Hood, it's good!" But the Para-

dise had, above all, Nate Rooney—and Vivi.

Nate Rooney was the owner, but despite his Irish name he *oui-ouied* French. "John-ee!" he cried as the Quanes came in. He pumped Quane's hands and exclaimed how *trés* marvelous it was to see him, and he kissed Quane on both cheeks soundly. "You come to see my Vivi, no?"

"And who," Quane said, grinning, "is Vivi?"

Who's Lamour, Chili Williams, Lana Turner?

"Ze light of ze morning!" Nate Rooney kissed his finger tips. "Ze flower blooming in ze heaven! But *non*, that ees not right. Ze passion flower! Come, myself, I geeve you a fine table."

The Quanes sat down, and Johnny consulted the wine list, ordered, looked around. He wondered idly what it was that had delayed Vincent. There was a happy crowd at the next table, three men, two of whom were elderly, and three gorgeous blondes. The third and youngest man looked up, stiffened, and cried out, "Johnny Quane—back from the wars!" It was the press agent, Dave Hood, a dark and handsome man in the late thirties. He rose and came at once to Quane's table. . . .

Not many years past, Dave Hood had covered ships news for the *Bugle*. He had strange ideas, which isolated him from the other reporters at the barge office. The trouble was the *Queen Mary* and the *Normandie* didn't come in every day, and Hood was at a loss if he couldn't use superlatives. He'd bragged he could glorify a tub. He did, and the Big Boss fired him because it turned out the tub was a garbage scow. So Dave began by renting desk space in a room—he called it "The Hood building"—and his talents were to be bought for flesh or product. It was rumored he was immensely successful, although gossip also had it he'd invested not too wisely in factory sites and buildings which hadn't paid off in the war boom.

"How's the little girl who always gets her man?" Dave asked.

"Fine, Dave," Sally said. In the old days, and when Hood was still a reporter, she'd written the *Bugle's* advice to the lovelorn.

"Looking for a story, Johnny?"

"I've got a story," Quane said grimly.

Hood grinned. "Man bites dog?"

Quane said "Rat bites man, and kills him. Fellow in the advertising game. Ever hear of a guy name Joe Wold?"

"My God," Hood said, "he worked for me!"

For a moment Quane just stared. The waiters came and served them smoothly, and Hood sat down, to hear about Joe Wold, and Dave Hood looked sick, Quane thought. "Poor beggar," Hood said at last. "He wasn't worth

a dime to me. No flair, no imagination, but I felt sorry for the guy. I kept him." Hood said, "Johnny, look; what kind of a set-up did he have? Will his wife need help?"

The band blared at that moment, and the lights were dimmed. Only then did Dave Hood rise. "Johnny, it's Vivi, the big event!" He added grimly, "I was going to marry her, until—" Hood's hands were clenched. He opened them, slapped Quane on the back. "Well, old man, let me know if there's anything I can do for Mrs. Wold, won't you?"

"The guy's dead, isn't he?"

Hood took a deep breath. Again he slapped Quane on the back. "Well—bye now kids! And get a load of Vivi!"

The band moaned. But that girl was a passion flower, all right. Yes, Nat Rooney was right. No heavenly flower bloomed to *that* music. It was a wicked, jarring rhythm, and suddenly a black velvet curtain; and then she came upon them like that, Vivi, her body flowing from the blackness.

Quane abruptly stiffened. One searching finger of light found something gray-brown and furry on the dance floor. The lights swept on, paused as though surprised, swung back for a quick second look. The crouched thing was a tailless rat, near Vivi, directly in her path. And someone screamed, a woman in the audience, and Vivi's undulating body drew up instantly, taut with dismay.

The rat's teeth were bared. Then it leaped, savage and snarling, snapping and clawing the air; and now the piercing shriek was Vivi's, and waiters, musicians, patrons from tables nearest her were lunging across the floor. The lights brightened. Someone was swinging a cane. . . .

The band began to play a gay and lilting tune. A waiter scurried off with something heavy in a napkin. Vivi, her maid standing by, was clothed in a long black garment, as by some feat of magic. Vivi smiled, bowed, disappeared. Everything was quite all right again—Nate Rooney gave his solemn word for it. Vivi would return, he said, if ze patrons would be kind and patient. This, Nate said, was veree, veree strange. Wolves, yes, they were always after Vivi, but—someone laughed. The tension was relieved, but there was sweat on Nate Rooney's forehead. And the rhythm of the band sounded still a little jerky.

On the floor, where Vivi had been standing, there was only a little smear of blood.

"Johnny," Sally whispered. "The rat bit her!"

Johnny said nothing.

"Johnny, she—she was bleeding!"

"Yes."

She shuddered. "The night's spoiled for us. Oh, Johnny, I don't want to wait for Lou.

I don't want to stay in this awful place!"

THEY left the Paradise and drove a dozen blocks. And Quane said, "Hon, it won't take ten minutes."

"But Johnny," Sally wailed, "who is this Charlie Lord you've been talking about?"

Quane cut into a side street. She looked at him. "I know you, Johnny," she said. "There's something on your mind." And when he didn't answer, she lit a cigarette and put the lighter back in its dashboard slot before continuing. "Have you noticed the little pieces lately, tucked away here and there in the *Bugle*? About the babies who have been bitten by rats?"

Quane drew up at the curb. They climbed a stairs then, to the third floor, to stop before the first door. When Quane rapped, Sally whispered, "Darling, it's after midnight! He's in bed!"

But Quane only grinned, and rapped again, and suddenly they heard someone coming up the stairs behind them, and they turned. It was Charlie Lord.

He was middle-aged, and his ruddy face was wreathed in smiles now as he saw them. He invited them in, apologizing, "The place is likely to be dusty." He was carrying a black bag.

"So you're back from the war?" he said to Johnny, and then, inside, he set the black bag by the window, and something scampered inside and he chuckled. "Got me a beauty tonight, Johnny. I bet he's eighteen inches long."

"Oh, no!" Sally murmured faintly. "Not another rat!"

"Sure it is, Mrs. Quane. He'll weigh a pound and a half, I'll bet. Want to see him?"

Sally, very white, sat down very quickly.

"But I thought your job was to *kill* rats?" Quane said.

Lord grinned. "I'm not with the Health Department any more. I'm a research expert now, Johnny. Ever hear of *Ratkill*?"

"The poison?"

"That's it. H. V. Moyer—he's *Ratkill*, Johnny; he owns a little plant on River Street. Well, H. V. Moyer hired me a year ago. He's got a pretty fancy outfit, and if things work out, some pretty fancy plans. I'll have me a real laboratory one of these days. Yes, sir, I catch rats, raise rats, and see that H. V. has got plenty of 'em for our experiments. Got me a beauty tonight, all right, down by the Paradise restaurant."

Quane looked at Sally, and Sally bit her lip and then Quane said, "Look, I'm in a hurry, Charlie. I want information."

Something changed in Charlie Lord's face. Quane caught it; was it wariness? "About rats?" Lord said.

"That's right. I want everything that you know. And put it in a nutshell."

Charlie pondered, shook his head. "Nope. Can't do that for you, Johnny, not in a nutshell. Suppose you ask some questions?"

"Could you positively identify a rat-bite, Charlie?"

"Well now, Johnny," Charlie Lord began pulling off his coat, "take the brown rat. That's the one you'll run up against, most likely—and that's the one that's fiercest. It's got strong jaws and long curved incisors, with cutting edges sharp as a razor. It can gnaw through mortar, or brick or limestone. It can gnaw into the plumbing pipes. But rat-bite?" He'd bared his arm, and now he raised a loose gauze bandage.

The wound, fairly new, looked angry. It was a small slash; there was no imprint of teeth. "It might have been made by a knife," Quane said softly. "Then a rat will attack a man?"

"Attack anybody," Charlie Lord said, "if they're hemmed in, or if you come on 'em too suddenly. So don't go sticking out your hand where you expect one of 'em to be. And you be careful how you use a stick, too. A rat will run right up the stick and nab you."

"Smart?"

Lord snorted. "Smart?" The wisest beast on earth!" Lord was rolling down his sleeve again. "Why they kick a trap around until it snaps, and then they grab the bait. An old one, will out-think a man who hasn't made a study of rat habits. Out-fight him if he has the ghost of a chance."

"How about mental capacity? Tests you've run, things like that?"

Charlie shook his head. "I only know what rats will do. If it's their insides and what makes 'em tick and their diseases that's on your mind, you go to the Health Department. The man you want to see is Doctor Ira Truman."

Sally had risen. She walked to the door, and Quane said aside to her, "One more minute, dear." He turned back to Charlie Lord. "Would a rat kill a man?"

There was a fierce scratching sound from the window, paws clawing at the mesh or steel that lined the inside of the bag. Lord looked at it. "Johnny," he said, after taking a deep breath, "if he gets a chance, there ain't *anything* a rat won't do!"

## CHAPTER TWO

### Rodent Invasion!

THE Quanes returned to the street. Johnny nosed the car into an alley, to make the turn by Charlie Lord's building in the middle of the block. Then he jammed on the brakes.



In the gutter ahead, close to the building line, were four brown rats. They quivered in the bright lights. It was as though they measured the strength and size of this mechanical monster. Then they whirled and went slinking away, their claws rasping against the pavement. . . . and these rats all had tails.

Quane backed the car. A queer thought entered his mind: Like gangsters lurking, bent upon the rescue of the rat in Charlie Lord's bag. He drove on slowly, and while the streets were no longer bright taxies still raced violently by. A sign, way up, blocks distant, caught and momentarily held his gaze. It spelled *Ratkill*.

Sally broke into his thoughts. "Remember what I said a while ago? The babies, Johnny?"

When he didn't answer, she said, "Coincidence? And those four rats we just saw—coincidence, Johnny?" She moved a little nearer to him and he felt her body quiver. "Johnny,

night that beast attacked Vivi. Johnny, wouldn't this be the time they *would* strike, while all our energies are occupied, while we're actually straining at war and fighting for our lives and freedom elsewhere? Johnny, fantastic as it sounds, do you think all this is part of a *plan*?"

His mind examined the word, although he'd faced it before tonight, from the moment he'd seen that Joe Wold had written three letters in blood. *Pla*— Was *plan* the word Joe Wold had tried to leave behind, the warning?

But how could an unobtrusive little man, on record for possessing no great amount of intelligence, no large powers of imagination, have discovered evidence or such a plan as Sally had now raised? Quane's mind began to spin. "Sometimes I believe they can even read," Charlie Lord had said. The car swerved beneath Quane's tight grip on the wheel. He could see Joe Wold, the little man, hurrying

**HOSS GREER** figured there was something wrong with the swap that brought him a million-dollar gold mine for a song—and he knew he was right when he found the dead bodies of his two friends sprawled, in a grimly warning X, at the bottom of that boothill mine-shaft! Don't miss Harry F. Olmsted's exciting novel, "*Hoss Greer's Murder Mine*", in the October STAR WESTERN—on sale September 8th!

do rats have brains? I mean we know, Charlie Lord told us, how cunning they are, but—Johnny, can they *think*?"

"How about it, hon," he said, "would it be too late tonight to contact Doctor Truman?"

"You don't want me to help you, is that it?"

"Help me with what?" he hedged.

"The Joe Wold case."

"It's closed. He's dead."

"Is it closed?" she said. "You aren't satisfied. Oh, darling, I know you! Why don't you phone Doctor Truman, even if it is late?"

The car gained speed. Sally said, "Rats are so deadly. They love so to destroy. I mean, like getting into warehouses and ripping holes in sacks of grain or flour. Hundreds of them. Or like attacking poultry, and not killing just what they can eat, but going berserk. Could all that be result of a deep hatred? For us, Johnny—for—for *humans*?"

"Easy, hon," he said. He heard her quickened breathing. "No deep-end stuff."

"But Johnny, suppose *some* rats, like some humans, are geniuses? Suppose these—these Hitlers and Tojos finally realized the futility of guerilla tactics and organized the herds. *Wouldn't* they start cautiously, maybe by first biting babies? Then tonight, there was Joe Wold. He was murdered—but did you ever before hear of a *rat* killing a *man*? And to-

home, excited with the knowledge possessed, unsure, disbelieving—intending to discuss it with his wife, perhaps. His mind could see ugly gray shapes trailing Joe Wold, crawling silently in the gutters. Fantastic, he thought. Impossible. But how else could a man's lips be sealed, except by death?

He left the car at the curb, and though it was after one o'clock now, paged through the phone directory. He found Truman, Ira, Doctor. But the line was busy. Okay, that meant Truman was awake, so he'd run around.

Doctor Truman was very much awake. As a matter of fact he stood on the weird brink of death. . . .

**THE WAR** had made Doctor Ira Truman a busy man, indeed. As Medical Director of the Quarantine Station of the Public Health Service, it was his job to supervise examination of every ship in foreign service that came into the harbor. Doctor Truman's staff was short-handed, and shipping had doubled, trebled—and rat infestation, too, had increased. The danger from rats was Doctor Truman's immediate problem. Casablanca, Suez, a dozen foreign ports were now upon the plague list—and a plague ship lay now in the harbor.

She'd put in with a cargo from the Middle East, with wine, tobacco, seeds. The crew

was fit; the captain had his certificate of de-ratization, but the U. S. Sanitary Inspector had *smelled* rats. And he'd found gnawings, tracks, droppings, nests. Truman ordered fumigation, and in course of time the dead rats were collected. They were, as usual, combed for fleas. The fleas were pounded in a mortar, put into a solution and injected into guinea pigs. The dead rats, too, were autopsied, and bits of their spleen and livers snipped out and prepared in solution for guinea pig inoculation.

The guinea pigs died. Cultures from their blood showed an oval organism, *Pasteurella pestis*. Bubonic. The rats carried the Black Death!

An immediate question rose: Had any rat from the ship escaped fumigation, to swim ashore? Truman's men set break-back traps on nearby piers, and waited. . . . waited. . . . And now each trapped rat was carefully examined, and Truman himself, in his own laboratory at home, worked tirelessly with cultures and strange serums.

All his life Ira Truman's passion and hobby had been directed toward one end: Discovery of a specific, a cure or preventative, for the Black Death. The goal had never been reached, but he was a patient, a methodical man. His children had married, his wife was dead; his chauffeur had enlisted; the chauffeur's wife, Truman's cook and maid, was now working in a war plant. So Doctor Truman lived alone. Thus his spare time was his own, to spend with the cages in the basement of the old house far across town, with the rats he kept for research and with his test tubes.

Now, this night, worried lest a break-out of the dread disease occur in the city, he'd worked late. Shortly before twelve o'clock he'd driven home, far up-town, through the Bronx. It was a dark night. His house set well removed from others, in a grove.

He drank a little wine, for he was tired, and at first he thought he would at once retire. But he felt restless, nervous. He felt a strange foreboding. At last he wandered through the lonely house and down the stairs.

Here, in the basement, the caged rats glared at him with feverish eyes. In a purely reflex way he noted that the door of each cage was tightly closed and latched; if, he thought, he could only lock disease out of the city so easily. Doctor Truman sighed. Was *this* his fear, he wondered then? This pressure and—dread? Was his a psychic warning that death, in fact, stood poised to leap upon a people despite all that he had done and might do?

He looked sadly at his vials, his test tubes; all were nicely labeled, for he was a methodical man, a careful man; but his failure had never before seemed quite so keen; and the future,

oddly, never before so black and uncertain. When, finally, he pattered back upstairs, to his first floor bedroom, something had been changed.

He paused, frowned at the room. Yes, something was different, but though he looked around he couldn't tabulate the change. The window was open a wide crack—it had been; the radio, the phone stood beside his bed, and the bed light was on—but it had been; the dresser drawer was open—but *had it been?* Try as he would he couldn't remember; and then he looked into the drawer and he knew vaguely that something was missing.

But what?

*I'm a silly old man*, he thought grumpily, and muttering to himself he undressed and turned out the light and went to bed. For a while he played the radio, dialing for a news report, but still sleep evaded him. His mind, however he would try to direct it, returned morbidly, anxiously, to rats. At last, he knew this alone was his worry. And almost with that moment he heard a familiar sound in the darkness. Claws on wood. Scratching.

But the cages are all latched, he thought. Tense now, he listened. The scratching seemed at first in the wall, somewhere near the window. A mad thought passed through his mind. Through the many, many years thousands, yes, millions of rats had been killed by his order. Did these rats have spirits? Could these ghosts return, for revenge?

He tossed restlessly in bed, amused, angry, vaguely fearful, until—it was a *live* rat loose in the house, and he knew it. He knew, too, it wasn't in the wall. His thin nostrils twitched. No man of his experience could mistake the rat odor.

The rat was here, in this room.

**D**OCTOR TRUMAN lay another moment stiffly. How could this have happened? How could a rat have escaped from its cage and got so *quickly* upstairs—and why were his muscles tightening like this? Why did cold sweat ooze from his body? True, he had never looked upon a full grown rat with scorn—he knew their cunning, their viciousness. Cautiously, Truman rose to one elbow. He snapped on the bedlight. His heart sank and his stomach began to flutter. A giant gray-brown body sat upon the window sill, a tailless rat.

It looked at him, its teeth showing slightly, as though in a crooked grin. Seconds passed. Then it scamped down the drapery.

Claws rasped on the floor. Claws rasped at the open window, and now Doctor Truman was scarcely breathing.

Then a second rat appeared on the sill, tailless also.

Truman turned to get out of bed. He could-

n't find his slippers in his haste. He shuddered at the thought of stepping barefoot on the floor, but he took a deep breath, leaped for the door.

His fingers turned the knob and pulled—but nothing happened.

Now he understood, in part, why this room had seemed vaguely different. The key was always in the lock on the inside of the door. Tonight someone had transferred the key to the other side, and while he'd lain in the darkness listening to the radio the intruder had locked him in. A scene viewed by his own eyes, long back, exploded in Truman's consciousness.

Once in the basement of an Italian grocery near the water-front, he'd seen a horde of rats, hundreds, try and temporarily fail to reach some cheeses that hung off the floor. They'd jumped and they'd squealed as though in angry frustration, but presently, cleverly—they'd built a pyramid of their own bodies. . . .

So rats in great number could have reached the key. But the plot, the *plan* behind such action? What rat could conceive and carry out the locking of a door? Truman looked at the window. A rat sat on the sill, watching him. Truman stumbled back to the bed, to the bedside phone, and his voice was high and a little frantic now as he dialed and cried, "Police—police!"

There was a sudden scurrying sound; he didn't look down, but the floor seemed angry, alive. "Police—!" Truman said hoarsely. "The rats are here—" A furry brown body leaped on the bed, snarling, revengeful and savage. "Hurry, I need help—!" Truman pleaded on the phone. . . .

**T**HE police were at the Truman home when Johnny Quane arrived. Quane's heart missed a beat. He recognized Inspector Lacey, Homicide.

"Truman?" Quane said.

Lacey looked at him. "He's dead," he said.

"But his phone was busy. He was alive not fifty minutes ago!"

"Come along," Inspector Lacey said.

Three tailless dead rats lay in the bedroom. The detectives had killed them. "The house is alive with rats," Lacey said grimly. "Every cage in the basement is open. Truman called the precinct station. He sounded terrified. He said he was being attacked by rats. Then the phone went dead. It's on the floor. The desk sergeant hung on another minute. He heard shots—"

Quane looked at the body, lying crosswise on the bed. He shivered. The rats had been at work, and however soon the police had arrived, the body wasn't pretty. There was a bullet hole near Truman's right temple—and a revolver near Truman's right fist.

"What's the answer, Inspector?" Quane

said softly. "Don't tell me this time the rats used a gun?"

"Rats?" Again Lacey looked at Quane. Quereyly. "Truman shot himself. It's his gun."

"How about his hand? The nitrate test?"

Lacey fingered his chin. "I've a hunch it will be positive—there's powder tattoo on his cheek all right. Yes, I've a hunch Truman's finger pulled the trigger."

"Twice? You said the sergeant heard shots?"

Lacey growled, "And that's the cute one. Two shots—and we've got *one* empty shell. Well, come along, Quane, I want to talk to you."

They crossed the hall, into Doctor Truman's study. Lacey sat down, put his feet on Truman's desk. Then he lit a cigarette. He was a big man, dark, and his voice was rough now as he began, "The other boys were here and gone. The *Times*, the *News*, the *Bulletin*. And Thorpe covered for the *Bugle*. They're going to string along—but how about you?"

"Well?" Quane countered.

Lacey made circling motions with his cigarette, frowned at the curling smoke. "Earlier tonight we found Joe Wold. Now according to the book he was killed by a rat. Okay, it's one of those believe-it-or-not cases, although a rat will bite an adult, if he's sleeping or unconscious. Okay, I've been a cop too long not to take life—and death—the way it comes. Here's the way the Joe Wold case stacks up: "There's no hint of a motive for foul play. The guy's life was lily-white; he fell in the ditch and a rat took a nip at his neck, and what the hell else are you going to do about it?"

"Don't forget the word he tried to write before he died," Quane broke in. "And the rats without tails."

"I'm not forgetting anything," Lacey said heavily, "because *two* such rat cases in one night is too many. But who knows what a guy thinks is important a few seconds before death. A lot of words begin with *pla*. Let's take 'plant'. Say he was thinking about his garden—"

"He didn't have a garden. He kept chickens."

Lacey's glance was malignant.

"And besides," Quane grinned, "it's too late to plant a garden, anyway."

Lacey flipped ash on the floor. "All right, wise guy, let's take 'plasma'. Suppose *that* was the last word in his mind—if somebody found him unconscious, that is, a plea for plasma quick, to save him. Hell, a lot of words begin with *pla* besides plan."

Quane blinked.

"So what are *you* going to do about it, Quane? Spill inflammatory ink all over the

*Bugle's* pages? I know what's in your mind—and don't think you're the only reporter in this town with imagination. Suppose, huh, the rats have declared war on us? Makes good reading, I admit, too damn' good! A lot of people will start believing it. Remember the men from Mars, that time on the radio? What do you want, a few million people losing their heads now, with a real war on?"

Quane studied the Inspector a moment. "How about that second shot?" he said then.

"We'll take care of it. Don't think for a minute we won't run that angle down."

"Uh-huh. Anything stolen from the house?"

"Not so far as we know. Matter of fact, Truman's wallet lay on his bedside table."

Quane said, "Uh-huh. What's your theory for the empty cages? And the rats without tails?"

The muscles tightened in Lacey's square jaw. "We'll take care of all that too. I want no talk of a rat rescue, understand? You can say Truman left his rat cages open."

"Suicide, eh?"

"That's where it stands, for the moment. Well, what's it going to be, Quane—a fight, or co-operation?"

Quane said wearily, "Don't worry, Lacey, I'll play ball with you."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Before It's Too Late!

HE WROTE the piece under wraps. "A serious threat to the welfare of the community, the nation," he wrote. . . . Vivi, the dancer. . . . Four rats in an alley, rats who not only bit babies, but who attacked and killed Joe Wold; they were all in Quane's story, but. . . . "We could lose this war at home," he wrote, which was always a good line, which would make people *think*. "What's the Health Department doing?" he wrote, and that was a good line too. Pan a bureau.

But that night an added entry blazed upon the city's streets. It struck the eye first via a picture, a close-up of a rat, in a quarter page ad. The text ran:

A rat will gnaw insulation off electric wiring. Rats will build nests with matches and other inflammable material. Fire, disease, death are all rat allies. Statistics show there are nearly two rats to every human being in this city. Why kill only Japs?

Rats, too, have declared war on us!

BUY RATKILL  
(The Sure Exterminator)

There were column ads, with tricky headings:

PLAGUE IN THE UNITED STATES?

In twenty-five years, nearly eleven million deaths by plague were recorded in India alone.

While so far, fortunately, this country has been relatively free, there have been sporadic cases and epidemics, in San Francisco, Seattle, New Orleans, Los Angeles. . . .

Every live rat is a potential threat to your life.

Be safe.  
Kill rats.

Buy Ratkill!

And there were barbed little fillers:

Are rats threatening *your* home, *your* security? Want *your* baby bitten by a rat? Rats are *your* enemies, so stop them *now*, before it is too late!

Buy Ratkill!

The columnists were witty and cynical:

Who hasn't longed for the luscious Vivi? At the Paradise last night, a rat took the first bite—and died. What lawyer might well take the hint? . . .

Rat enters Paradise—but then we've wondered this long time why Nate Rooney let the bars down. . . .

Quane, scowling as he read, reached for the inter-office phone. "Who's handling *Ratkill*?" he asked the advertising department.

"Dave Hood."

He called the Dave Hood agency. "Johnny," Dave Hood said. "I've just been reading your piece, and it's fine—"

"Look," Quane interrupted, "about this dynamite *you're* throwing around."

"Don't like it?"

"Well, dynamite's dangerous, isn't it?"

Hood began to laugh. "Ever hear me say I wore a halo? I'm a callous son of a so-and-so, Quane. I'm cold, scheming, strictly an opportunist. I take advantage of every situation—and everybody. So figure it out: Rats declare war on human race—that's my cue. False? True? Either way, I don't know and don't care. It's terrific publicity. So keep *your* nose clean, Johnny boy. . . . And what's the real dope on the Truman suicide?"

Quane said shortly, "Talk to Lacey."

"I did, and nuts he sez." Hood was laughing again. "Get this, Johnny: Nuts *I* sez—to any compromise. No one has ever yet called me a sucker."

Then Quane called the Paradise.

"Such theengs as appear in ze papers!" Nate Rooney wailed. "Thee tables, thee reservations I have had to cancel—!"

"How's Vivi?"

"I do not know! I do not see her! It ees a treek. Someone has done thees to me, Quane. I am to be ruined!"

Then Quane called Lou Vincent. Vincent was reticent. "No, I didn't get around last night," he said. "Yes, I know about Vivi, of course, and I detest this ugly publicity, so she's not seeing anyone, Johnny. I have advised against it. I've hidden her."

"But the wound?"

"I hardly think there will be complications."

"Then perhaps some other night we'll get together?"

Lou Vincent broke in quickly, "Yes, some other night, Johnny. Soon."

Quane hung up. His lips were tight.

A SNOWBALL gathers speed—and more snow—as it rolls downhill. Following the Joe Wold and Truman cases—and aided by Moyer's advertising—rats were seen and reported in ferry sheds, railroads, subway stations. Rats were seen—and reported—in churches, theaters, homes. An influential woman discovered rat burrows in a city playground. The burrows were opened, and photographed, to expose many-chambered colonies. And someone else saw a herd—rats by the thousands, according to the story—march across an after-midnight thoroughfare.

The rats were an "army" now. Commentators on radio stations in cities nearby, broke the word Inspector Lacey had feared. A *plan*. And immediately mothers rushed to doctors with their children's scratches, crying, "Rat-bite!" Women working in war plants began remaining at home. Whispers were heard. Day nurseries were said to be infested—yes, it was dangerous to leave the children there. H. V. Moyer made a terrifying statement on the *Ratkill* program on the air: "I wouldn't be surprised," Moyer said, "if we awoke some morning to find the rats our masters!"

Incidents, these; small parts and little pieces, but Quane—as did Lacey, no doubt, and others now vitally interested—saw *all* of the pieces and the menace of the picture completed.

Quane called H. V. Moyer on the phone. And Moyer said smoothly, "I had no idea anything of this sort was taking place. I don't know, however, what I can do about it."

"Why not stop this panic advertising?"

Pompously, H. V. Moyer refused. "The city is overrun by rats," he said. "There is almost a diabolical, dastardly and dangerous plan afoot, it seems, and the people must be awakened to it. Sir, I don't understand your attitude! We're not living in the Middle Ages. The people have the right to the scientific certainty of my product. Why—why, suppose the *plague* should break out!"

Quane tried to get a word in. He couldn't. "This is a crusade!" Moyer continued. "I'll spend my last dollar in a drive for proper health and sanitation. I—I'll dedicate my life to humanity. Why, I—I'll flood the city with handbills!"

"Mr. Moyer, look. I appreciate your—uh—sincerity. Could I see you personally, for a brief and quiet conversation?"

There was at last a short pause. Then Moyer's answer came cautiously, "I'll have to talk to Hood and my lawyer first. I'll let you know." Moyer cut the connection.

That night, Sally looked worried. She looked away as she said, "I had a dream. I dreamed the rats had gone back to their burrows and their colonies, for a conference. Joe Wold knew of their plan to rule, so they liquidated him. Oh, Johnny, it was so—so real! They caused Truman's death, and rats he'd held captive were there, at this meeting. Now was the time for battle, they said, and the rats cheered, and—and they jeered us. And the leaders, Johnny—they didn't have tails!"

Quane said, very softly, "Hon, you're going right down the line. You're reacting just as someone wants us to do."

She pounced upon the word he'd used. "Someone?" she said.

He nodded. "I'm afraid so."

"—human?"

He took a deep breath. "Isn't that the intelligent answer?"

"But why?"

He didn't reply, and she cried, "What can we do?"

"Sit tight," he said. "Rely on the authorities, on men like Lacey. Don't worry, Lacey's no fool. Before the week is out—"

But before the week was out, the city rocked from a new blow.

UNTIL nightfall, this new and terrible day—Black Friday, as H. V. Moyer later called it on the radio—had augered well for Quane. Dave Hood phoned. "Moyer will see you at eight this evening," Hood said, "at my office."

Nate Rooney phoned. "Johnny, I am desolate," he said. "My Vivi, she weel not dance! You know thees man called Vincent, Johnnee, no?"

Quane said, "Yes, I know him." And as Nate Rooney muttered something, "What about him?"

"I could keel heem weeth a knife, by Joe! It ees he who keeps Vivi from ze Paradise. It ees thees man, Johnnee, who weel ruin me! Tonight I talk to Vivi, and we see though!"

Then Lacey phoned. Lacey said, "We've produced an echo in Truman's bedroom. Matter of acoustics, you know. A shot definitely resounds over the phone."

"After how long an interval?"

"Well—" Lacey said.

"Oh, so there is a discrepancy in the time between the two reports?"

"Well," Lacey said, quickly cautious, "a few seconds, perhaps."

"Can I print that?"

Lacey said, "Quane, you're too damn' smart. The answer is *no!*"

Quane sat staring from the window, but there was nothing much to see, a view of rooftops and the river. Presently he rose, to make a search of deed transfers, as reported

**CASH**  
WHEN YOU NEED IT MOST

AMAZING **NEW**  
**GOLD SEAL**  
POLICY  
COSTS LESS THAN \$1 a month

**PAYS** accumulated **ACCIDENT BENEFITS** for Accidental Loss of Life, Limb, or Sight up to . . . . . **\$6000.00**

**For LOSS OF TIME!** Accident Disability Benefits up to \$100 a month for as long as 24 months, or . . . . . **\$2400.00**

**SICKNESS BENEFITS** For Loss of Time due to Sickness, a maximum Monthly Income of . . . . . **\$100.00 PER MO.**

**HOSPITAL EXPENSES** For Sickness or Accident, including \$5.00 a day for hospital room, up to . . . . . **\$650.00**

**All Around PROTECTION!** . . . Accidents happen to 20 persons every minute of every day; and sickness strikes when least expected. So why take chances? NOW you can have all-around insurance protection, backed by an old-line LEGAL RESERVE Company for less than \$1 a month. Policy pays for ALL accidents, ALL the common sicknesses, even for minor injuries; and disability benefits start from very first day.

**NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION** required! No red tape! Policy issued BY MAIL at BIG SAVINGS. Ages 15 to 69. Actual Policy sent for 10 Days' FREE Examination. ACT NOW! Write for it today. No cost. No obligation. No salesman will call.

**FREE 10-Day Inspection Coupon**

**THE SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY**  
453F Service Life Bldg. Omaha, Nebr.  
Without cost or obligation, send your GOLD SEAL \$1-A-MONTH Policy for 10 DAYS' FREE INSPECTION.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_  
Beneficiary \_\_\_\_\_

by the *Bugle*. Then, as darkness fell, he started for the Hood agency, but now he walked with lagging steps, for there was something wrong. It was vaguely as though a race was to be run, as though he'd bet on the wrong horse; yes, as though now yet he should turn back, and. . . but what was going to happen? And turn back where?

Twice, in the few blocks from the *Bugle* building, Quane did turn sharply around—with the new and uneasy feeling that someone watched, followed him. At last he passed a dark alley, and then swung abruptly into a store front beyond and waited.

A car stopped to park some distance away, but there was no shadowy figure and no sound of footsteps behind him. There was nothing except—Quane tensed, then as he heard a small rasping sound. A moment later a crouched gray shape emerged from the alley.

It wriggled forward a furtive foot, to stop and look about. Quane took a small flashlight from his pocket, shot the ray downward, and for seconds the rat stood its ground boldly. Curiously fascinated, Quane just watched until the foul thing whirled, to slink back into the alley. Then Quane took a deep breath and walked on, and the crossing light was red as he started across the street. There was no warning horn, no blaze of headlights. Seemingly from nowhere a heavy car roared into the intersection and bore straight for him.

The car flashed past as Quane leaped. Its fender grazed his coat, and the car was gone as suddenly as it came, around the corner, and Quane saw only that it was a black coupé; and that its license, blurred with mud and darkness, ended with the figures six and three.

The act had been deliberate. He knew that. The driver of that coupé had tried to kill him. Quane walked on, into the Hood building.

It was grand to see Johnny Quane again, said Josephine. Yes, Mr. Hood was here this long time, in his private office, but he'd left strict orders not to be disturbed until Mr. Moyer arrived. And what was Josephine doing at her desk at this late hour? Josephine flushed. Mr. Hood wished a stenographic record of this meeting.

Quane cooled his heels with Josephine. The minutes passed. Finally heavy footsteps sounded in the corridor, and Quane heard a loud knocking. Then a door up the hall opened, closed, and Josephine whispered, "That was Mr. Moyer!"

Dave Hood opened the inter-office door a moment later and said, "Come in, Quane." Thus Quane, at last, met H. V. Moyer—one of the two elderly men who had sat at Dave Hood's Paradise table the night a rat had bitten Vivi.

## THEY KILL BY NIGHT!

He had very little time, Moyer said importantly. At ten tonight he was to speak on the radio, on the Ratkill hour. He was perhaps fifty-five, his hair white and full; and his eyes were a pale, bleak blue, and he was proud, Quane saw, and pompous, and such people can be not only stubborn but ruthless. Then Moyer touched at once upon the weak spot in Quane's armor.

"No newspaper committee after all? You came alone? Quane, what nonsense is this? I thought the papers were against me?"

Quane spoke then, what was for him a long speech. "I'm afraid the newspapers do not yet view your panic advertising too seriously, Mr. Moyer. And the civil authorities are slow to act against you, no doubt because human rights, the rights of free speech, are bellowed from the housetops these days. Well, Mr. Moyer, you're standing on such rights now, as a citizen—and using them shamefully.

"Yes, I'm alone," Quane continued quickly, evenly. "But I've many friends overseas, the men I fought with, the men who risk and give their lives for these rights and for people like you. These men, like me, expect the nation at home to pull together. The war is the main event, and until the war is over they want no sideshow, nothing to jeopardize their lives needlessly—and the victory. If supplies from just one port were to be delayed now in reaching them—"

"Are you implying I'm sabotaging the war effort?" H. V. Moyer thundered.

"No." Quane looked down at his clenched fist. "You aren't; not seriously, not yet. But there *has* been a local slowdown. And don't forget, the output of a nation flows *through* this port. Mr. Moyer, I too, want to liquidate rats. It's a fine and public spirited idea. My objection is to your methods, the fright you inspire and that's like a leak in a hose that's being used to fight a fire. The fire, the war, comes first. I want to patch this leak before the hose blows out."

Moyer lit a fat cigar. "How else can you awaken the people without scaring them?"

"The people," said Quane, "are smart."

"Dave," Moyer swung around, "where in blazes is my lawyer?"

The lawyer came in at that moment, and Johnny Quane's brows rose. The lawyer was Lou Vincent.

### CHAPTER FOUR

#### Teeth of the Rat

VINCENT wore a dark suit. He was slim and pale. His hand was cold and sweaty as Quane gripped it. Vincent muttered some-



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## CYRIL PLUNKETT

thing, that he'd had a problem on his mind, that he'd been delayed.

"And how's Vivi, Lou?" Quane said.  
"Better, thank you." The woman seemed embarrassing to him, and Lou Vincent cleared his throat nervously as he sat down.

"Well, Vincent," H. V. Moyer growled, "where do we stand?"

Vincent looked aside, away from Quane as he spoke. "The rights to advertise are legally limited only as to price and product. My client certainly complies with the Food and Drug laws. Now, however, if Mr. Moyer sees fit, as a public spirited citizen, to combine advertising with a message, and if this message be accurate, honest, and designed to awaken the public to conditions sinister and of definite danger to them, then no court in the land but can uphold him."

Dave Hood was grinning lazily. "Quane," he broke in now, "crawl into your hole."

"As I understand it," Vincent continued, "you are concerned about the war effort. This campaign, Johnny, is part of our war effort. We must fight also for security at home—"

Quane rose. There was at that moment an urgent buzzing of the phone. Josephine answered it. "For you, Mr. Moyer," she said.

"Hello," Moyer said at the phone—and gasped. "What? Charlie Lord is dying? Wait—you're sure? *Sure!*" Moyer's pale blue eyes began to glitter. He swung around from the phone, faced Dave Hood. "Dave!" he cried, and now he couldn't seem to get the words out for excitement. "Dave, get busy on a new script for tonight's program! Dave, this is—tremendous! Charlie Lord. . . . *Dave, it's the plague!*"

No one seemed to know—or care—what Quane was doing. He stood very still momentarily; then he slipped quietly out of the office. In the hall, he ran, and now the emptiness within him was not alone caused by the swiftly falling elevator. There were little voices in his mind, all crying *plague*. Suddenly, mentally, he could see again the rat leaping at Vivi; and he could hear again Vivi's sharp scream; and here, at last, he knew why earlier tonight he should have made himself turn back.

There were phone booths in the building's foyer. He called the desk.

"Plague?" the voice at the *Bugle* repeated. There was a pregnant pause. "Quane, we'll have to check that. Which hospital?"

"I don't know."  
"Where are you now?"

"I'm going to *be*," Quane said, "at the Quarantine Station. I'll verify from there. Can you get me the Vivi's address?"



## THEY KILL BY NIGHT!

"Call the Paradise."

"No," Quane said, tight-lipped, "I can't do that."

Again the pause, and Quane saw H. V. Moyer leave the elevator and walk hastily to the street. Quane stuck a cigarette in his lips—

"Quane? Gossip department says Hotel Knowlton—but the dame walked out the morning after she was bitten and has been in hiding ever since."

"Get Lacey. Start him looking."

"Quane, what's the angle?"

"Well," Quane said, and his own voice sounded queer to him, "it runs like this: Wold, Truman, Lord. . . . And now watch Vivi."

He lit the cigarette, but didn't leave the phone booth. Lou Vincent was emerging from the elevator. Quane looked after Vincent's slender figure. He knew Vivi's address. Nate Rooney apparently knew also—Rooney had said on the phone that he was going to see her tonight. Now, Vincent stopped just outside, to look quickly up and down the street. He crossed the sidewalk then, and got in a black coupé parked at the curb.

Quane reached the door as the coupé was sliding away. Mud and darkness fogged the license plate, but the last two figures were clear—a six and a three.

Quane caught a cab and said grimly, "The Quarantine Station."

The doctor succeeding Truman in charge freely admitted Lord's case, and the seriousness of the situation. A rat from the plague ship in the harbor had got into the city; that, the doctor said, seemed obvious. The infected rat had mingled with and infected others. Charlie Lord certainly had been bitten by the rodent flea. Crews of trappers were already at work, however, throughout the city.

"How long a period is required for germ incubation?" Quane asked.

"As little as two days."

"Could rat-bite cause the disease?"

The doctor shook his head. "Rodent fleas introduce plague. No, you're confusing plague with rat-bite fever. The rat is host and carrier of a good many diseases, Quane. Typhus, spirochetal jaundice, trichinosis, tularemia—"

"What about the shipping situation?" Quane interrupted. "Will this single case of plague restrict port activities?"

The doctor looked at him. "Frankly," he said, "a good many ships have been allowed to dock, discharge cargo, and pull out again because of the tremendous pressure of the war. A convoy could often be delayed, or component ships miss it entirely, if we held to rigid fumigation. In future? Well, I'm afraid—" The doctor's lips shut tightly.

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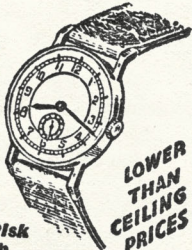
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## CYRIL PLUNKETT

A small radio on his desk was playing softly. The music stopped, and a voice broke in. Quane caught his breath. The voice was Moyer's. And Moyer was saying: "*I care not whose product you buy, but rats must be swept from this city! This, my friends, is R-day. Rat day! On this Black Friday we have seen our first case of plague in this city. Yes, the rats can conquer, for the plague—is here!*"

The doctor snapped the set off angrily. Then the phone rang. It was the Bugle, calling Quane.

"Lacey found the girl's hideout. Sorenson Drive, Number 14532."

"Good!" Quane said.

"No, not so good, Quane. Vivi's dead."

**W**OULD, Truman, Lord—and now Vivi! It was weirdly like reliving an old scene.

"Shot in the temple, Quane," Lacey said.

Vivi wore a white gown, silky of course, and belted, and her waist looked tiny as she lay there. Now she looked not the sullen temptress who had danced sensuously to brass and reeds and the savage beat of tom-toms, but like a child as she lay there. Her skin was very white and satin-smooth, except for the bullet hole. It was blue, powder-pitted.

There was an open window, a fire escape. The gun, this time, had fallen to the floor. It was a pearl handled .32 smug and lovely on the black carpet. The name on its silver stock plate was engraved—*Vivi*.

"How long ago, Inspector?"

"Half hour. Maybe forty five minutes. But after you sent along the tip." Lacey's voice rumbled. "Something funny about that tip—"

Quane broke in, "Motive?"

Lacey chewed his lip a moment. Then he pointed to a desk, a typewriter—and a sheet of paper still in the machine:

I cannot stand it. The wound remains angry. I am confused. I have no strength. Tonight I—I found a painful swelling. It is plague! And I cannot face it, so I kill myself. . . ."

Quane looked at Lacey. "Two shots?"

"That," Lacey said heavily, "is the cute one. One empty shell. But come along."

He led the way across a small burnished hall. Here, with detectives, a little man sat in a little room. He bounded to his feet as Quane came in, cried, "Johnee!"

Nate Rooney.

And he was coming to see Vivi tonight; he'd said that on the phone! Vivi was the Paradise; without her he was ruined—he'd said that. "But I do not do thees, Johnee!"

Lacey said now, "Cut it, Nate. Talk English. Hell, you were born in Brooklyn."

Nate Rooney sighed, deflated, shrugged.

## THEY KILL BY NIGHT!

"Okay. It's the truth, though. I came up the stairs. I was about to rap. It was then I heard the shots—"

Quane swung around to face Lacey and asked again, quickly, "Two shots? How about residents of the building? Did they hear?"

Lacey's quiet voice answered, "Johnny, on the face of it, I'd say suicide. Of course the note is typed, unsigned, but fear *might* do that, to a woman of Vivi's temperament. Only—yes, you're right. A woman living downstairs did hear and swears there were two reports. So the way it looks to me, one was used to kill. And that gun, Vivi's, firing the bullet, was left with the victim. Then a second gun, containing a blank cartridge, was held in the victim's hand, held close to the wound, and fired to provide the powder tattoo. This second gun was carried away.

"Okay, Rooney here had a motive of sorts. According to him, the girl was dodging him, hiding from him, playing fast and loose with her contract. She was costing him big money. But we find Rooney here in the hall, on the *outside* of the door, and the door was locked on the *inside*. I mean the first record we get on Rooney, he busts into the foyer, from upstairs, to yell to the switchboard operator that he heard *shots*, a sucker play, if he was really guilty."

Suddenly, Lacey wore a grim grin. "Want to play it straight this time?"

"Murder? We break the Truman case open again too?"

"That's it."

Quane said, "Is the phone clean?"

He called the *Bugle*. Again a heady warning bored into his brain. Tonight death had ridden in a black coupé, to get *him*. He called Sally. He let the phone ring a dozen times, and Sally should have been at home, but she didn't answer. Lacey, from the doorway, said now softly. "Better give, Johnny. Tips don't come from a crystal ball, and I didn't spend all this time with you for nothing."

The muscles in Quane's cheeks had tightened. "Lacey," he said harshly, "God help the man if he has killed my wife!"

"Well!" Lacey said. "I thought you had a lead, so let's go on it!"

**T**HE officer-chauffeured black police car ran with siren wailing. Lacey sat in the rear seat, with Quane, leaning back, his eyes closed. He was looking at Quane. He reached out, gripped Quane's arm as a police call came on the air:

*Car 18 . . . Report to Inspector Lacey . . . Quane apartment empty . . . Wife seen to leave with man, in black coupé. . . .*



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## CYRIL PLUNKETT

"Hell, did you think she'd leave a note?" said Lacey. "Want to go down for a look-see anyway?"

Still Quane, sitting tensely, made no reply. And again the radio broke silence.

*Car 18 . . . Car 18 . . . Report to Inspector Lacey . . . Wrecked black coupé abandoned in Exeter Park area . . . No sign of occupants . . . Car license number 14-32-763. . .*

Quane's voice exploded. "Exeter Park—that's across the river from the Moyer plant! Cut for the river, Lacey!"

The siren didn't wait now. The police car swung finally into River Street, and here were sprawling dark buildings; here were thin worried tendrils of fog that stole in from the rest-less blackness. A sign bloomed ahead suddenly, small, red, sinister in the inky heavens. The sign, on top a building, spelled *Ratkill*.

There was a car, a big black job aglitter with chrome, parked in the cement court. And there was a watchman at the gate, an old man dozing until rubber squealed beneath the squad car. There was, too, a light in the office; and the office door opened before the watchman could get to his feet.

"Is that you, Lou?" H. V. Moyer called.

Lacey, with his detectives, marched to the door. Quane remained in his seat.

"I am expecting," Moyer was explaining in his smooth and pompous voice, "my attorney, Mr. Vincent."

"And he didn't show?" said Lacey.

"No, he—" Moyer's break sounded worried. And his voice sounded worried as he tried again, "He should be here. . . ." Apparently he recognized the inspector.

"Let's go inside," Lacey said ominously. He turned around. "Where the hell is Quane?"

Johnny Quane was already walking off, swiftly in the darkness, up the street.

Moyer's high barbed fence stopped short of the corner. There was a vacant weeded area, then a lane, scarcely a street, that dropped sharply toward the river. As Quane turned this corner he could see a dark blot ahead, the brick of another big building, and this building right-angled from Moyer's plant, but it was *outside* Moyer's barbed fence. Quane stopped momentarily, looked back. Lacey's officer-chauffeur had got out of the squad car.

No car parked here? But there was something better. A match flared near a window in the second story. A face was briefly, vaguely revealed. Quane knew the face. It was Lou Vincent's.

Quane's little flashray, carefully screened, found a door. It wasn't locked, and again Quane paused, frowning now. A thready pulse was pounding, and his throat began to ache. Then Quane thought of Sally.

## THEY KILL BY NIGHT!

The door squealed on rusty hinges, to swing shut again. Now Quane stood tensely alone in the ebony darkness, and though he listened there was nothing to be heard, until—

Something scampered.

It seemed to come from above. . . . No, Quane reconsidered, from below. *It came from all around him.* He snapped the flashlight. The unused waterfront building was alive with rats! Beady eyes looked at him from rafters and from a littered floor. They were great gray-brown beasts, all sniffing, quivering, as though on the edge of hysteria.

A restless wave began again around the room, and now Quane gulped a deep breath and went swiftly up the steep stairway. The door at the top was ajar.

He pushed it in. His light found a brick wall ahead, and a brick wall to the right of him.

The door slammed shut behind him, driven as though by a strong steel spring! There was a click of the lock. A ceiling light blazed, and Quane saw two people, the strained white faces of Lou Vincent and Sally.

From the third floor stairway, half way up, a laughing voice drawled, "Well, Quane, I knew you'd come!"

Dave Hood sat on these steps, holding a gun.

### CHAPTER FIVE

#### Rat-Race with Death

QUANE looked at Lou Vincent. He wore a gag, and his hands and feet were tied. Quane looked at Sally. She was bound and gagged too, and her eyes were wide pools of horror. Hands clenched, Quane swung back to face the stairway. Dave Hood was grinning crookedly.

"Funny," he said. "I mean your mouth is hanging open, Johnny boy. Surprised?"

"No," Quane said.

"Tell the cops of your suspicions?"

"Yes," Quane said.

Hood laughed. "Johnny, that's off-key. A reporter likes to break a case and *then* hand it to the cops. Besides, if he's wise, why is our friend Lacey still grilling Moyer?"

Now Quane's jaw did drop. "So you know that?" he said. "And the certainty the police will be here any moment looking for me doesn't matter to you? Why, Hood, you fool, you're hooked!"

Dave Hood moved the gun a little, let the muzzle stare at Quane's broad chest. Then he rose lazily from the steps. It's plenty safe—brick walls, no windows . . . and there's plenty of time, his stocky body seemed to say. He even stretched himself.

"I like rats," he said. "They're cunning.

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## CYRIL PLUNKETT

They're cynical. A trap means nothing to the old ones. As Charlie Lord told me, once get an old-timer in your house, there are just two things to do: wait for the rat to die or burn the shanty down. See what I mean, Quane? *They never get caught.* And *I'll never be caught either.*"

Hood's eyes began to shimmer as he took the first step down. "Johnny boy, I've been skating on thin ice the past few days, and I knew it, and I guess tonight is the payoff. If you had come *with* the cops, Vincent and your wife would have been found dead up here, and that's all there would have been to it. Vincent carried the torch for her, as everyone knew, and whatever you might have *suspected*, the evidence would have proved he killed your wife and then himself, just seconds before you and the cops broke in. Don't worry, Vincent would have taken the rap for any loose ends I might have left in the Vivi-Truman-Lord and Joe Wold cases. Hell, I've already got his confession written out; already have it signed! I've got *him* hooked with everything from conspiring with enemy agents to infecting a city with bubonic plague!"

Hood took a second step down. "But you came in *alone*, and that's the way I wanted it, Quane. Now my plan double-checks—it's perfect! According to the record, *you* are going to kill Vincent and your wife. Motive? Evidence will be found to prove Sally was unfaithful to you while you were overseas. Vincent *still* takes the rap for the Wold-Truman-Lord-Vivi murders. And *you*, Quane my lad, will never voice a suspicion against me. Because you'll have a bullet in *your* head, and a gun in *your* hand—"

Quane broke in flatly, doggedly, "You can't get away, Hood."

"Oh, can't I!" Hood said. His feet left the steps and touched the floor. Grinning, his gun level, he backed quickly off to one side, toward a chimney that jutted into the room.

"We're over water, Quane, right at the edge of the river. There's a boat below, the one I used to bring Vincent and your wife across, after ditching Lou's car. I'm going free via the boat, and if the cops are too close, I can swim it. Because they won't see me leave. There's a ladder built into this chimney—I pull a hidden lever and the chimney opens for me. I drop right off the ladder, into the boat."

His left hand, behind him, found a hole in the brick. He stuck his hand in the hole, to find and grasp the lever, and then the front of the chimney shivered.

He twisted half around, his hand jerking from the hole, but a snarling gray-brown body came with it. A rat, clawing and with teeth fixed in Hood's fingers.

## THEY KILL BY NIGHT!

Dave Hood threw the vicious squirming creature, tried desperately to bring his gun into play now, as Johnny Quane leaped. There was a flat report, surprisingly soft in the fastness of this room, but Quane had gripped Dave Hood's wrist, and Quane's smashing drive had already thrown Hood off balance.

The bullet splattered against brick, harmlessly, and Dave Hood discovered then what it was to be on the wrong end of an ex-Marine's commando tactics. Dave Hood, numbed, shaking his head in bewilderment, was suddenly unarmed and looking up from the floor.

Quane calmly took the gun and cracked Hood on the head with it. Then he went to Sally.

**S**HE insisted that she, too, was calm. But that was after Quane had released her. Grinning, he took the cigarette she was trying to light, lit it, and gave it back to her.

Lou Vincent, released at once also, returned now from Moyer's plant with Lacey, the dicks, and H. V. Moyer.

"You see," Lou Vincent was saying to Lacey, "I was worried about this *Ratkill* advertising program from the beginning. Mr. Moyer's affairs were my legal responsibility, and it was fairly obvious to me that Hood was grinding his own ax.

"He owned this factory building, failed to get war contracts for it, and knew he stood to lose upwards to a couple hundred thousand if he didn't get rid of it now. So he sold Moyer on an advertising campaign, Hood's plan a quick boom for *Ratkill*. Then Moyer would have to expand—and couldn't without buying this property.

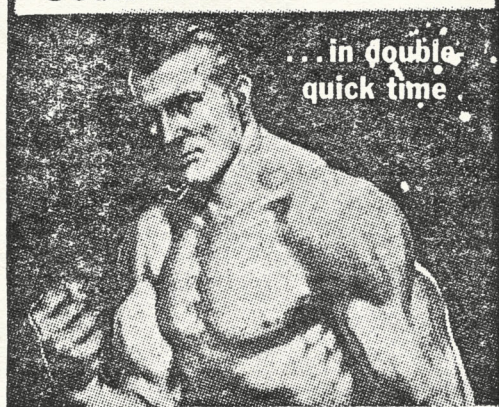
"Furthermore," Vincent continued, "I knew Hood hated me. This was because Vivi had turned from him, to fall in love with me. Tonight Quane got away from our meeting before I could quietly let him know I wanted a confidential talk with him about Hood. I tried to locate Quane at the *Bugle*; he wasn't in. I called at his home—and I'd just arrived when Sally and I heard of Vivi's death. We heard it on the radio."

Vincent paused. His eyes were deeply shadowed. He swallowed hard then, and resumed, "We left at once, intending to go to Vivi's place, but when we got outside, Hood was sitting in my car. We hadn't reached the corner before he pulled a gun on us.

"The rest you know—except that I owned a small share in this property with Hood. He practically gave it to me recently, and his reason obviously was that I too might logically have come here with Sally tonight."

Moyer said, "Lou, I'll take you home."

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SONGWRITERS: PROTECT YOUR IDEAS! Hold Your Poems. Write: SONG SERVICE, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York.

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POEMS WANTED FOR MUSICAL SETTING. Five Star Music Masters, 620 Beacon Building, Boston.

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SONGS PUBLISHED. MUSIC FREE. National Songwriters, 6603 Sunset, Hollywood, Calif.

## CYRIL PLUNKETT

The detectives removed the handcuffed Hood. Then Lacey, Sally, Quane walked slowly up the hill.

"Let's start," Quane said abruptly, "with Ratkill. The alarming increase of rats in the city, the epidemic of baby bitings, gave the prolific Hood an idea.

"Hood hated the government for the brush-off he got on war contracts. Very likely he voiced this hatred—and was quickly propositioned by an enemy agent. So Joe Wold did actually overhear a pair of two-legged rats discuss a plan to play the Ratkill program to the limit, thus to paralyze the port in this vital month of the war, and simultaneously jam the war industries of this city. There was, however, something of the missionary in Joe Wold. He confronted Hood with his knowledge and attempted to change and save him. Very likely Hood played up, then laid for Wold, konked him, produced a gash in his throat that rat teeth *might* have made—and left a dead, bloody rat to show the police how Wold had died.

"That Wold rallied before death, to leave a message of sorts, the first three letters, to spell *plan* or *plague*, only enlarged the rat menace for Hood. He'd already arranged to loose a rat in the Paradise, knowing the incident would be taken up by the newspapers.

"Now psychology was Hood's weapon—and his method was utilization of every situation. A plague scare, a frenzied people, drastic port control—these were but one objective; he had another goal also. Personal gain, as Vincent said, through the forced sale of property to Moyer—and personal revenge. *He'd* wanted Vivi; he'd lost her to Vincent. His murder plan therefore, while subtle, was never *too* clever. It amused him, for example, to leave a sly clue—the tailless rats, symbol of the man behind the plan. He was well aware that Truman's death and Vivi's, so similar in technique, would eventually be proved murder."

Quane paused to light a cigarette. "Truman, because of his experimental work, was the one

# Classified Advertising

(Continued)

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## THEY KILL BY NIGHT!

simple source to plague germs. This Hood knew, through being a ships reporter. Somehow he discovered that Truman owned a gun. And here again he played all the stops, every string, every angle of the situation.

"There was a glaring and dangerous flaw in it, however. Charlie Lord. Charlie was innocently providing the rats—and Charlie could certainly suspect something, as well as the next one. So Charlie Lord had to be eliminated—and again Hood played the situation. *Lord had recently suffered a rat-bite.* Hood used that wound to infect Charlie Lord with Doctor Truman's germ culture.

"Now the threat of plague, so cleverly put into Moyer's mouth, became real. But it wasn't yet *dramatized*—and Hood's revenge was not yet achieved, either. Tonight he borrowed Lou Vincent's car; then he left his office, and returned unseen, by way of a private door. He used Vincent's car in a deliberately bungled attempt to kill me, for I was the last link in his chain. I had to *suspect* Lou Vincent. Because Hood needed Sally to complete his payoff plan, I had to be conditioned to accept Vincent as Sally's killer and, as Hood hoped, also plant Vincent's guilt for *all* the crimes in the minds of the police. Thus to motivate the forged confession and Vincent's death, still to come.

Quane took a deep breath and said, "Earlier tonight I discovered the purchase record of Hood's River Street property. When the chase turned toward the river, I knew where to go."

"Never mind," Lacey interrupted, grumbling. "I got a head on me too, Quane. The Paradise was pretty damn' handy for that rat publicity. And certainly it wasn't Vincent who told Nate Rooney where Vivi was hiding—not when it was Vincent's purpose to keep her from Rooney.

"Don't worry, Quane, I got it figured. Nate Rooney was 'treeked' all right—he didn't want his Vivi killed. So he was going to 'treek' Dave Hood tonight. Only he practically walked in on the murder—and then tried desperately to save his own skin. But don't rats always leave a sinking ship, Quane?"

Inspector Lacey, still grumbling, started for the squad car. "I'm going to the Paradise to pick up Rooney. Want a lift uptown, you kids?"

Quane shook his head. "I'll phone the Bugle, and then we'll take a taxi."

He stood with Sally a moment, his arm around her slender waist. He looked back then, and up, at the *Ratkill* sign.

"It's like a dream," Sally whispered. "But now we'll wake and sing—"


"—a requiem for rats," he told her.

THE END

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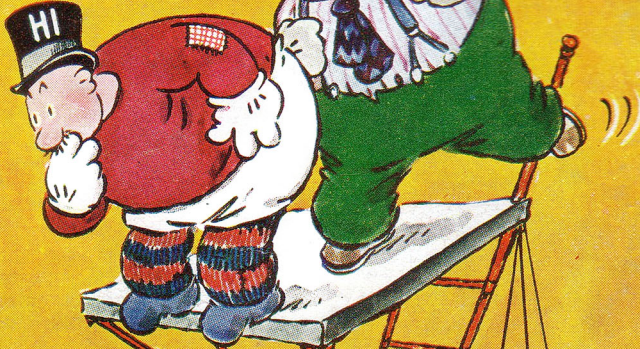
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