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MAGAZINE

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DETECTIVE MYSTERY NOVEL MAGAZINE

Vol. XXVII, No. 3

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

Winter, 1948

FEATURED BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL SELECTION



FOLIO ON FLORENCE WHITE

By WILL OURSLER

When a young woman becomes involved in a complex conspiracy of crime, it takes the finest legal minds in New York to find out whether or not she is the guilty murderess in the case! 13

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SHORT STORIES

NEW YEAR'S DUTY

Johnston McCulley 89

Deputy Sheriff Retland braves the gunfire of two menacing killers

STRANGE GUARDIAN

Carter Critz 98

Betty Talbot could not shake the mysterious man who trailed her

A DEPARTMENT

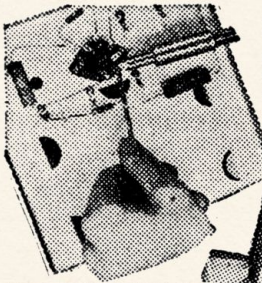
THE LINE-UP

The Editor 6

An interesting get-together for our readers, writers and editor

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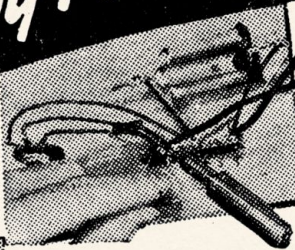
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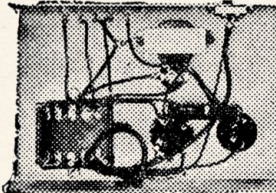
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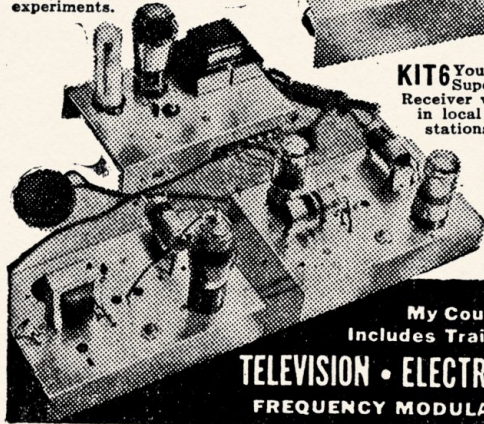
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The LINE-UP

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS
AND THE EDITOR MEET



EVERY business, trade or profession has its distinctive trademark or slogan that characterizes its product, testifies to its performance or, in some other way, clearly identifies it. That is true of the auto industry, soft drink dispensers, razor blade companies and correspondence schools. It is also true of magazine and book publishers and even of detective story writers!

It is reasonably safe to assume that there is no American today who is not thoroughly aware of the distinctive slogans used by the Pepsi-Cola Company and the Calvert whiskey firm. In the same fashion, we are all acquainted with the rising and descending lettering used in the trademark name of Eveready flashlight batteries by the National Carbon Company. And who of us does not readily know that the initials, ICS, stands for International Correspondence Schools?

In the field of publishing the phrase "A Thrilling Publication" has come to represent this magazine and its companion publications. And getting right down to the detective book field, every mystery fan must now be acquainted with that diminutive gunman who appears on all Crime Club books and whose unique shape—look carefully the next time—spells the word C-R-I-M-E. Then there is the locomotive colophon which spells a Mainline Mystery of J. B. Lippincott Company and the sinister bloodhound with his nose to the ground whose figure indicates a Duell, Sloan & Pearce Bloodhound Mystery.

The Saint

But perhaps the most distinctive figure or trademark in all detective fiction is that gay, debonair, slat-limbed wraith with a tiny halo over his head who is employed by author Leslie Charteris to represent Simon Templar, alias The Saint, hero of twenty-six books and many magazine stories.

The Saint, like his well-known creator, has an alarming faculty for getting into jams but the little man with the halo always manages to win through—sometimes by virtue of his

wits, sometimes by the dynamite in his fists and at other times by the speed and uncanny accuracy with which he can handle a gun.

And the Twentieth Century Buccaneer had to use all three of the aforementioned agents of destruction to smash the crime ring that was forging an iron band of horrible enslavement around helpless thousands all over the globe in the gripping Saint novel featured in the next issue of DETECTIVE MYSTERY NOVEL MAGAZINE.

THE SAINT SEES IT THROUGH

By
LESLIE CHARTERIS

This great book, originally published as a \$2.00 Crime Club novel by Doubleday & Company, Inc., opens in Manhattan with Simon Templar engaged in a secret mission that is to involve him in the most dangerous case of his long and adventurous career.

Using only the most tenuous clues and the most meager information, The Saint had taken on the assignment of discovering the connection between Dr. Ernst Zellermann, a suave European psychiatrist; Kay Natello, a strange poetess; Ferdinand Fairfield, a surrealist artist; and the ugly and gargantuan Cookie, proprietress of the bawdy night spot known as Cookie's Cellar.

That there was some connection—and a sinister one—between them, he was certain. But it was his business to find out just what it was and to find out quickly before it was too late—for him and a lot of other people.

A Woman of Evil

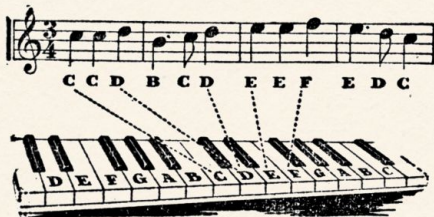
The hunt began in Cookie's Cellar with The Saint among the late supper patrons, watching Dr. Zellermann at a ringside table. The Saint was really a little bored with the entire evening until beautiful Avalon Dexter came out on the dance floor to sing. There was a harmonic richness to her voice. Each note was like a crystal bubble. And The

(Continued on page 8)

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THE LINE-UP

(Continued from page 6)

Saint was surprised to find he could not keep his eyes off the girl.

But he did forget her momentarily after her place was taken by Cookie. For Cookie was a woman who naturally won attention. She weighed well over two hundred pounds. Her features were gross and ugly. She was built like a corseted barrel.

Her large hands looked as if they belonged to a stevedore or a wrestler or—a strangler. Watching her and noting the crude sexless power of her, The Saint told himself that for the first time in his life he was looking at a truly evil woman.

And his instinct was to prove him more correct than even he suspected. The bawdy, off-color songs she played and sang were well received by the revelers in Cookie's Cellar. But The Saint, after his first long study of the woman, was occupied with watching Dr. Zellermann who had been joined by Avalon Dexter.

He saw Zellermann pawing at Avalon. He saw the girl parry his advances time and again until she lost control and slapped his face. She rose to leave his table, but the psychiatrist hauled her down again. That was when The Saint went into action.

A Free-for-All Averted

A few strides took him to Zellermann's table and two swift blows rendered the doctor hors de combat. In a moment The Saint was surrounded by burly waiters and by Cookie herself. He was ready for a free-for-all until Avalon took the starch out of Cookie and the waiters by thanking him and slyly letting slip the information that they were bucking The Saint.

Their attitude changed at once. Even Zellermann, who had been savagely cursing The Saint, suddenly sang a softer tune. And Cookie apologized, offering him a drink on the house. They were worried—all of them—and because he wanted to leave them that way, he walked out on them.

He hadn't meant to reveal himself to them, but perhaps, he thought, it was just as well. The fight had sown seeds of doubt and fear in their minds. And who knew what might blossom forth? For one thing, their obvious panic might force them into some overt action that would give him the wedge of information he sought.

(Continued on page 10)

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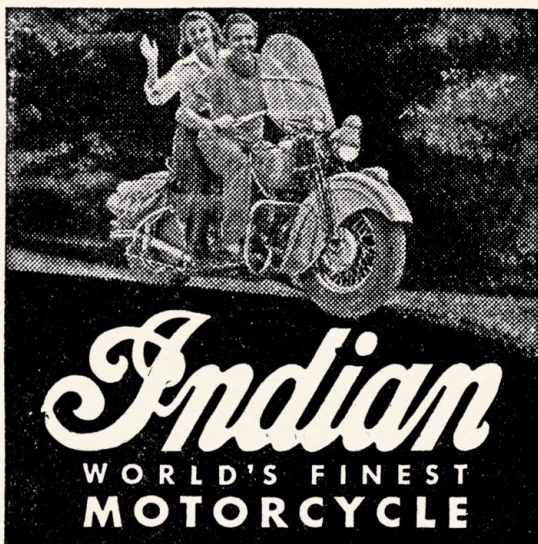
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THE LINE-UP

(Continued from page 8)

Outside he caught up with Avalon and took her home in a taxi. She had recognized him from the dais when she was singing, having seen him several times before. She was a frank girl and she made no bones about liking him. And before long The Saint found himself liking her.

His first regrets about their friendship came that same night when Kay Natello, poetess friend of Cookie, called at Avalon's apartment to convey Cookie's apologies to Avalon (whom Cookie had fired after the fight).

It Meant—Danger!

Only The Saint realized the real reason behind Kay's visit. He knew Kay had been sent by Cookie and her cohorts to find if there was a connection between Avalon and himself. Seeing him in her apartment would be all the evidence they needed. It meant danger not only to him, but to Avalon also.

The web of intrigue began to tighten the next day when Dr. Zeller mann telephoned both The Saint and Avalon and suggested a future luncheon date. Things were due to happen soon. And The Saint, never accustomed to waiting, decided on a counter move.

With a set of skeleton keys he broke into Dr. Zeller mann's office. He found an appointment pad with the names of three people on it: Mrs. Gerald Meldon, James Prather and Gamaliel Foley. He was just ready to rifle the doctor's secret files when the telephone rang. A sudden hunch impelled The Saint to answer it. A vaguely familiar voice said sharply:

"Ernst? I'm glad you came early. I'll be there immediately. Something has arisen in connection with Gamaliel Foley."

There was a click, then the mysterious caller hung up. The Saint was torn between a desire to linger and eavesdrop on the conference and visit Gamaliel Foley. He decided on the latter course. It proved to be a fateful decision, for the trip brought him face to face with murder.

A Perilous Masquerade

That killing merely set the stage for other more violent events to come as The Saint, still lacking the information he required, was forced to adopt a dangerous masquerade to get closer to the criminal ring. Every step

(Continued on page 112)



What Strange Powers Did The Ancients Possess?



EVERY important discovery relating to mind power, sound thinking and cause and effect, as applied to self-advancement, was known centuries ago, before the masses could read and write.

Much has been written about the wise men of old. A popular fallacy has it that their secrets of personal power and successful living were lost to the world. Knowledge of nature's laws, accumulated through the ages, is never lost. At times the great truths possessed by the sages were hidden from unscrupulous men in high places, but never destroyed.

Why Were Their Secrets Closely Guarded?

Only recently, as time is measured; not more than twenty generations ago, less than 1/100th of 1% of the earth's people were thought capable of receiving basic knowledge about the laws of life, for it is an elementary truism that knowledge is power and that power cannot be entrusted to the ignorant and the unworthy. Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; nor recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs a multitude of details about things, but goes through life without ever knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the inner mind—that mysterious silent something which “whispers” to you from within.

Fundamental Laws of Nature

Your habits, accomplishments and weaknesses are the effects of causes. Your thoughts and actions are governed by fundamental laws. Example: The law of compensation is as funda-

mental as the laws of breathing, eating and sleeping. All fixed laws of nature are as fascinating to study as they are vital to understand for success in life.

You can learn to find and follow every basic law of life. You can begin at any time to discover a whole new world of interesting truths. You can start at once to awaken your inner powers of self-understanding and self-advancement. You can learn from one of the world's oldest institutions, first known in America in 1694. Enjoying the high regard of hundreds of leaders, thinkers and teachers, the order is known as the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. Its complete name is the “Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis,” abbreviated by the initials “AMORC.” The teachings of the Order are not sold, for it is not a commercial organization, nor is it a religious sect. It is a non-profit fraternity, a brotherhood in the true sense.

Not For General Distribution

Sincere men and women, in search of the truth—those who wish to fit in with the ways of the world—are invited to write for a complimentary copy of the sealed booklet, “The Mastery of Life.” It tells how to contact the librarian of the archives of AMORC for this rare knowledge. This booklet is not intended for general distribution; nor is it sent without request. It is therefore suggested that you write for your copy to Scribe J. M. B.

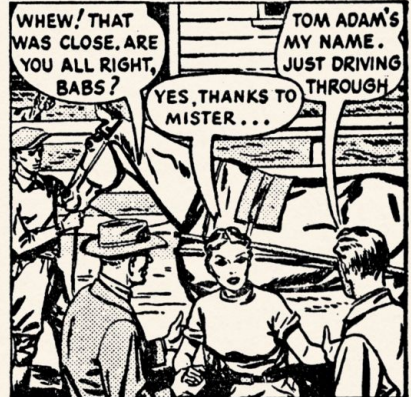
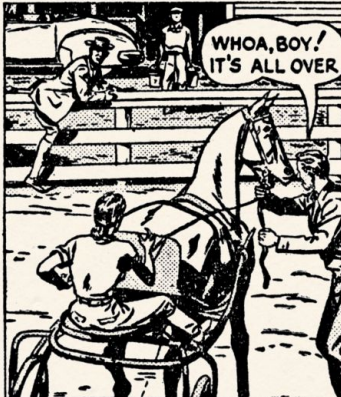
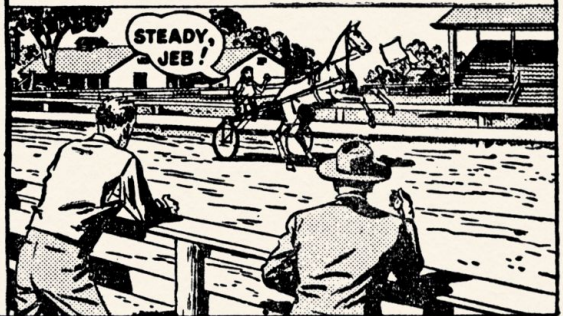
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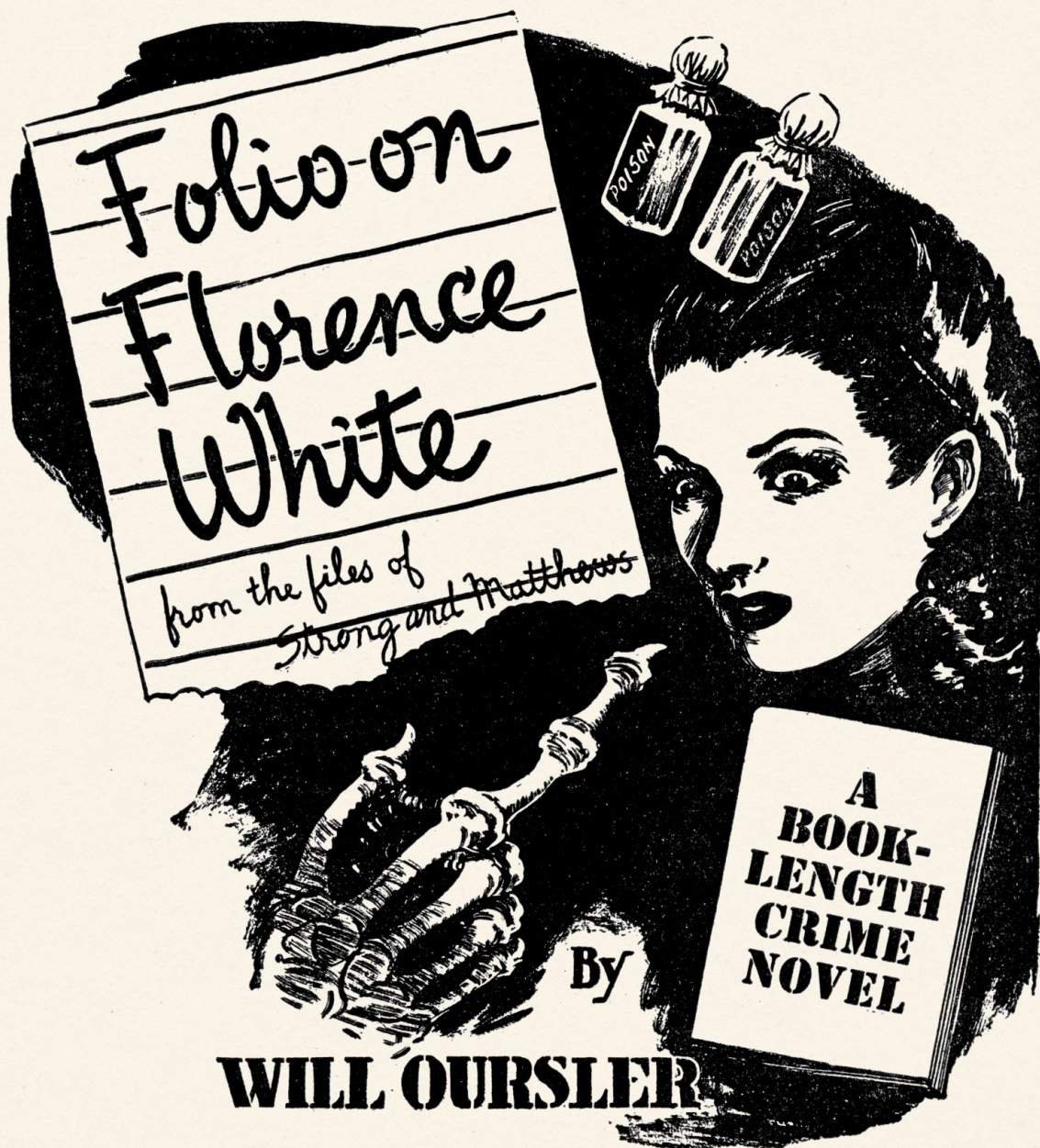
San Jose

California

TOM STOPPED THE RUNAWAY AND THEN...

WATCHED BY HER DAD AND A PASSERBY,
"BABS" WEBB IS GIVING HER FAVORITE TROTTER
HIS MORNING WORKOUT WHEN...





*When a young woman becomes involved in a complex
conspiracy, it takes the best legal minds in New York
to determine whether or not she is guilty of murder!*

PROLOGUE

WHERE the accusation is murder, the burden of proof rests with the People. It is a glib statement, one that rolls easily from the lips of law school professors. It is also a statement that unfortunately holds little truth.

The burden of proof—it rests too frequently

on prejudice, ignorance, superstition. Men still hang because their faces are ugly and they look like criminals. Jurors still return the death verdict because they want to be in step with public opinion, with the ill-advised editorials and twisted news stories they read in the papers.

No case in my experience in the law illustrates this more tragically than the matter of

Florence White. Here one saw not only the spoor of the evil, but the fruition as well. That is why I have elected—against the advice of some friends who feel I have no business in the “literary” world—to tell her story—if possible, to set the record straight.

This, however, will be truth, built not on common gossip or tabloid exaggeration, but on the facts themselves, as they developed under our own investigation. It is a strange commentary on human nature that we remember the accusation, but quickly forget—or never even read—the answers made to the charges, the final proof of their truth or falsity.

Completion of the task would hardly have been possible without the folio. Carefully collected in this file by my secretary, the unquenchable Miss Ring, are all the documents, many of which I would doubtless have hurled into the nearest wastebasket had it not been for her watchful eye.

There have been times when Miss Ring's penchant for storing away every note and jotting, however unimportant, has annoyed me. Yet I am grateful now, for without the minutiae of the folio, construction of a chronological account would have been most difficult. From these papers, I have been able to summon back the detail of the past.

The brief excerpt from Philip Strong's address was also placed in the folio by Miss Ring. While the paragraphs have no factual connection with the case, it is her contention—to which I heartily subscribe—that they were a prophecy of the crime and the problems we would face.

In presenting this account, it is my purpose to put an end to the misstatements, the distortions and wild rumors which have circulated during past months. It is my hope, moreover, that through this record the public will come to understand Florence White. Not as the siren or Borgia of the early headlines but as a human being, young and bewildered and frightened. Will understand also the causes, malignant and shadowed as they were, behind the crimes of which she stood accused.

JAMES MATTHEWS

I

For White folio

Excerpt from an address given by Philip Strong before the Harvard Law School, Cambridge, Mass., Nov. 9, 1941.

“IT MAY appear that the criminal brain is made of different stuff than that of the honest individual. Let me tell you it is a fallacy. No matter how honest the mind, it

is forever playing a bunco game. We rationalize and sugar-coat our motives. Be it drinking or smoking or loafing or any so-called vice, we provide ourselves with satisfactory reasons; assure ourselves we need the relaxation or the rest or some such nonsense. Such reasons act as sedatives for our conscience.

“To the criminal, as to us, rationalization is essential. Curiously, however, he rarely goes beyond the point of mere justification. While admitting the crime is wrong, he asserts loudly that society never gave him a chance; the gang forced him to do it; the cops hounded him. Sometimes, unhappily, he is telling the plain truth—but that is another subject. For us tonight, it is chiefly important to remember that the criminal's first impulse is to place the moral blame for his act on someone else.

“But I must warn of one type more dangerous than the others. This is the mind which does not admit, even to itself, that its acts are criminal. It has its own ethical code, which, no matter how murderous, is placed above and beyond the codes of ordinary men. Criminals of this breed are often brilliant and usually garb themselves in a cloak of respectability. Their underworld exists only in that dark corner of their brains, where they meet with the evil within them. You will find these mavericks deadlier—more cold-blooded—than the so-called professional—”

II

File White

Miss Ring--now that the White case is over, I'm sure you'll want to put this list in the files for future reference.
J. M.

PERSONS INVOLVED IN WHITE CASE

FLORENCE WHITE, ex-secretary, Mason Aircraft, Inc.

EVELYN EMORY, secretary to Harvey Mason

JOHN EMORY, her father

MRS. IRMA EMORY, her mother

HARVEY MASON, president, Mason Aircraft

MRS. MALVINA MASON, his wife

MARY MASON, their daughter

THOMAS H. MASON, jeweler, brother of Harvey Mason

EVERETT BESSINGER, vice-president, Mason Aircraft

MRS. EVERETT BESSINGER, his wife

WILLIAM NICHOLS, treasurer, Mason Aircraft

MRS. ALICE NICHOLS, his wife

LANG, Mason butler

JACK BROWN, ex-nightwatchman, Mason Aircraft

MRS. CELESTINA BROWN, his wife

MRS. AGNES BASCOM, landlady, 198-97 178th St., New York City
 HARRY TARBY, private detective
 MEDICAL EXAMINER EMIL J. JOSEPH, New York County
 DR. GEORGE BURNS, his assistant
 LIEUTENANT WILLIAM WEST, Homicide Squad, Police Headquarters
 SERGEANT HERBERT TABOR, Bureau of Identification, Police Headquarters
 DISTRICT ATTORNEY STEPHEN P. COLLINS, New York County
 PHILIP STRONG, attorney
 JAMES MATTHEWS, attorney
 KATHERINE RING, secretary for James Matthews
 DAVID SCULLIN, associate in firm of Strong & Matthews

III

File White

STRONG AND MATTHEWS
 Telephone Message

for: Mr. Matthews
 taken by: Miss Gurlitz, switchboard
 at: 9:09 a.m. Dec. 10, '41

MESSAGE:

Miss Florence White called. Sounded scared. Said it was important but wouldn't give details. She'll call back.

THERE was nothing emotional in my reaction to the message from Miss White. Not that the young lady lacked either charm or appeal. She had both, indeed, to a rather alarming degree. Tall and dark haired, with exceptionally large blue-green eyes and high coloring—she had an almost exotic beauty which, I am informed, came from her grandmother, a Russian noblewoman. I had only seen her once, yet the impression she left was a vivid one.

However that may be, there was nothing personal about it. I was, naturally, glad she had called. I had not known whether or not she was still in New York. And she had failed to contact us once during those two years since we obtained her parole. But the note of fear which our little telephone girl, Miss Gurlitz, had remarked, troubled me. It did seem probable that after the prolonged silence, Miss White would have phoned only if some serious difficulty arose.

I had no way of knowing it was murder.

Tonight, with the folio here before me, from which I shall try to recall and reconstruct some of the terror of the affair, I almost think I should have been able to guess, even then, at least part of it. Not only because she was one of those stepchildren of

trouble, against whom life seems to conspire, but also because of the logic of events. If we were correct in our contention that she was innocent of the theft, then we should have realized that some other force, more dangerous for its anonymity, was at work.

The theft itself occurred five years before—twenty thousand dollars in negotiable securities from the safe of Mason Aircraft, Inc. Florence White, employed there as a secretary, was accused of the larceny. To say the least, the evidence was weak. No one had seen her take the securities, nor were they ever again found. Mr. Harvey Mason, the firm's president, testified he had seen her, at his order, place the securities in the safe. He also said he had himself taught her the safe's combination. Another secretary, Miss Evelyn Emory, and a watchman named Jack Brown, had seen her in the office after other employees had left for the day. That was the substance of the case. It does not reflect well on the intelligence of the jury that they permitted the persuasive powers of District Attorney Collins to convince them on such evidence.

Months later, from prison, she wrote to us. She had heard that we sometimes gave our services in such causes. She needed help. Her attorney, evidently knowing she had no money, had dropped out, without even filing an appeal. She knew nothing of legal affairs, had no place to turn—

Not a little stirred by this letter, I dug into court records and prepared my own case for the parole board. Strong, of course, did the actual pleading—I have never been of much value as a trial lawyer. But in spite of our efforts, it was nearly three years after conviction before the parole was finally granted.

I shall not forget the day she came to our offices to thank us.

She was all in violet. I'm no expert on clothes, but I remember the purplish suit was tight and seemed to accent the grace of her figure, and the chic turban—hardly more than a piece of twisted cloth—matched the suit. Her eyes were bright and you knew, without really knowing how or why, the emotions running within her.

"I've got a job." She was excited as she told us about it. "They said, the other girls in the prison, I wouldn't last long. They said I'd be back. But I won't. They can't—"

The eyes darkened. That was when Strong warned her to forget the past. "Put it all out of your mind," he said in that easy way, as if nothing in the world were more simple. "No revenge or getting even or any of that. Start all over, with the slate clean—"

WE HAD known about the job—it was a requirement of the parole board and her warden had obtained it for her. But Strong's warning to her, while on the surface shopworn and rankly sentimental, was advis-

able. We had no way, you see, of knowing she was innocent. We believed in her, but that was unimportant. What we knew was that the case against her had not been proved and that in a nation run by laws, the whole purpose of justice loses meaning when any person is convicted not on facts but on prejudice, the oratory of a district attorney—on sheer bombast.

I confess that while I found her exciting I also wondered. For she was a book of moods. Cool, self-assured one moment, uncertain and frightened the next. The large eyes would be solemn; an instant later, they seemed almost to laugh at you. Women to me have always been puzzles—the way they act and think.

But of all of them I understood Florence White the least.

She tried to thank us. Strong, with a cavalier gesture, stopped her. "You'll see the parole officer once a month. Beyond that, you're free to make a new life. But if ever again you need help—"

That had been two years before.

I put the message to one side. Tried to dismiss the premonition of trouble—put it down as another example of war jitters, of viewing with alarm even the most trivial things. With some effort, I set myself to the task of drawing a will for a gentleman from Westchester with a cardiac condition.

Nearly an hour later, my secretary, Miss Ring, informed me that District Attorney Collins was on the phone.

I was surprised at his voice. Soft-spoken and calm—a rare thing for the District Attorney.

"Hello there, Matthews. Good to hear you. Where've you been keeping yourself?"

It was too gentle.

"When you sound pleasant," I told him, "I get worried."

He laughed.

"Can't I call you for anything except trouble?"

"I very much doubt it."

"Well, in a way, maybe it is. I'd like to get in touch with that girl. You remember, the one you got free. Florence White?"

He said it so quietly. I almost think he expected to convince me the matter was unimportant.

But his mention of her—with the message from her there before me on the desk—was disturbing.

"I haven't any idea where she is."

"You got the parole, didn't you?"

"We haven't seen her in two years. Last I heard, she was with some textile firm."

"We know that. She lost the job. Besides which, she wasn't home last night. Her landlady hasn't any idea where she might be."

"All very interesting. What do you want her for now—murder?"

I said it as a joke.

"So you do know about it?"

A chill ran through me.

"About what?"

"About a trifling matter of murder." He sounded exultant. "We've got her this time, Matthews. She'll burn."

The benign gentleness was gone. Mr. District Attorney Collins was himself again. The smugness of him outraged me.

"You're crazy. That girl is no murderess. She's a decent—"

"Remember Evelyn Emory? The secretary who testified against her? She's dead. Found this morning, over on First Avenue and 42nd. Poisoned."

I WAS incapable, for the moment, of reply. If Evelyn Emory were dead—poisoned—the implications were clear. The fact that Florence had called already—

"It's news to me," I managed lamely. "Might be suicide. What does the medical examiner—"

"He hasn't done the autopsy yet."

"Then how do they know—"

"I'm telling you straight. It's murder. And the minute identification is complete—"

"No complete identification. No autopsy. But you know it's murder and you know who did it. Must be black magic."

"Identification is a technicality at this point. Waiting for her parents. We're ready to place a murder charge against your dear Miss White the moment we lay hands on her."

Obviously he was holding back information.

But he sidestepped when I tried to question him. "Take it or leave it. She's guilty as hell."

I talked with him a few minutes longer. He was revealing nothing further. But he didn't try to hide his belief that we knew her whereabouts.

"You won't be able to sneak her out of town. We've got the city covered."

"Send over a squad of cops," I said. "I've got her here in the upper left-hand drawer—"

"You think it's funny. Maybe I ought to remind you, it's a felony to obstruct justice. If you or Strong—"

"Obstruct justice? That's a libel. Besides, with you around, how could it be possible?"

There was a click as he hung up.

Strong was already at his desk, professorial in the grey suit and pearl grey tie. But the lean face was tired, the lines heavy, the water-blue eyes behind those rimless glasses were shadowed. I knew he had had little sleep since the Sunday two days before when the Japanese filth struck.

He had doubtless sat up again half the night, listening to radio reports—it is part of his nature to want all the information as quickly as possible. I myself had listened until midnight—but one must sleep sometime, even in war.

He looked up and grunted. "From your face, the enemy had landed in San Francisco."

"In New York, rather. Collins is out after Florence White. Murder."

His hands flattened on the desk. "What happened?"

I told him, as quickly as I could, what I knew.

For a long moment after I finished, he sat there, with masked expression that gave no hint of his thoughts.

"She'll call us back," he muttered. "We'll find out what goes on. Or at any rate what she knows. The entire thing may prove to be a mare's nest."

"Collins was in one of his moods. He's convinced."

"That's of minor importance—to us or the world in general." He walked to the window, stared down at the heavy traffic that threaded through Wall Street. "The truth is, he wants to strike at us. Through her. We got her free. Now, if he can prove her a murderess—"

He turned suddenly.

"But that doesn't explain her call. She must know something."

"Or it's a remarkable coincidence."

"Most unlikely." He was still standing, tall and thin and yet there is a strength about him. "What we need are facts. I wonder—what about Dr. Joseph? What do you think? The body must be at the morgue by now. If we could call him—?"

"It would be better if I went over."

I've known Emil—Dr. Emil J. Joseph, the medical examiner—for many years, as a personal friend. Often in court cases we've been on opposite sides. But that has never interfered with our relationship. "If there's anything he can tell me," I said, "he'll certainly do it."

"Why not, Jim? Now. Take a cab—"

THE urgency in his voice was odd. Ordinarily Strong remains calm, unruffled, on the surface at least. The undercurrent of excitement could mean only that he had some new notion.

Halfway to the door I turned. "You'd better tell me—whatever it is."

There are moments when he enjoys playing the prima donna. This was the wrong time.

Beyond the fact that it looked like a murder, we had no notion what we were walking into. Any ideas he had were important to me.

"Don't want to be an alarmist," he said. "There is another angle. Evelyn was Mason's secretary. He makes airplanes. We're at war with the Axis."

"Then, if—"

"She had access to confidential information which would be helpful to the enemy. If she got involved—they hold life cheap."



The woman turned to fling herself on the corpse (Chap. IV)

IV

for White folio
Dec. 10, '41

STRONG AND MATTHEWS
Office Memo

To Mr. Matthews in re: White matter
From Miss Ring

I looked up Reg. vs. Mary Emmons, 3 House of Lords, 186 (1859), as per your request. It was held that the barrister's actions in behalf of the accused (said Mary Emmons) were valid, even though she had not retained him as attorney. It was ruled that as he had served her in a previous case, he could regard himself as a "friend in proxy." May be helpful if your present actions in regard White are ever questioned in court.

MID-MORNING traffic was heavy. The taxi jolted and honked and cursed its way uptown. Leaning back in the cab, my mind considered that last suggestion of Phil's—and its extraordinary possibilities. Our information at that time was, however, too meagre to allow definite opinion.

Half an hour later, we pulled up before the morgue building, at the southwest corner of Twenty-Eighth Street and First Avenue. I have been there many times in the past and yet the horror of the place for me never diminishes. The rows of "iceboxes" with their square, yellow oak doors. The white tiles on the walls, vaguely reminding me of a gruesome restaurant. The permeating, sickly sweet smell of death. Frankly, though I have dealt in crime and murder for many years, I have never grown used to death.

As I entered this place, a large gentleman in brown overalls dragged a pine box across the floor. He looked up inquisitively—doubtless somewhat disappointed to see I was not another "stiff" for the collection. I did not bother to explain to him my mission but hurried on through to the little room in back which Dr. Joseph has long used as his office.

A cramped, dusty room, with high bare walls. Plaster has come through in places. Only one small window, facing on the hospital courtyard, where occasionally you catch a glimpse of a nurse or intern hurrying about his or her duties. Above the window is an old-fashioned office clock which ticks noisily.

The only piece of furniture worthy of the name, except for a few straight-back chairs, is the aged roll-top desk, with its conglomeration of papers and letters and notes, piled haphazardly, stuffed onto spike and into pigeon holes. I doubt if Dr. Joseph has ever attempted to straighten it out. It is a mir-

acle that he can ever find anything in this hodge-podge. Yet he prides himself on his ability to reach in and pluck out the precise paper he desires—a prodigious feat which never fails to astonish callers.

He swung the swivel chair around to face me, waved a pudgy hand in greeting. Directly above him, the electric bulb with its conical green shade splashed light down on his mop of white hair.

Across from him, partially obscured in the shadows, was another man. His hair was wavy and appeared to be almost silvery, though the Byronesque profile was that of a man not more than thirty-five.

"Come on in, Jim. This is Mr. Bessinger. Mason Aircraft people. Mr. Matthews, firm of Strong and Matthews."

The man called Bessinger stood up, extended his hand. He was tall and well built and held himself with military bearing. His smile was ingratiating. "Strong and Matthews? Seems I've heard of that concern—"

"Mr. Bessinger's here on the Emory case, Jim." Dr. Joseph's tone indicated that he knew I was there on the same matter.

I glanced curiously at Bessinger. Dressed fastidiously in the dark blue suit, he reminded me more of an actor than a businessman.

He had a magnetic power which one could feel even when he was silent.

"You must realize this is a new and indeed a dreadful experience." The voice had resonance. "In all my life, I have never before been in a morgue. That odor—that smell of death—"

"Formaldehyde," Dr. Joseph said dryly.

"Oh, you're used to it." Bessinger laughed shortly. "I suppose one can become used to anything. I imagine you don't find it depressing here. Probably—probably you resent my speaking of it in this way."

"It's only that you don't understand."

Like most medical examiners, Dr. Joseph has built up a philosophy of death. Life he sees as an unfortunate episode which we must all pass through before final and welcome peace.

"This is a last refuge," he told Bessinger. "Derelicts and bums. People who get lost. They come here."

Bessinger leaned forward. "Just how does one become—lost?"

"Comparatively speaking, it's rather easy." Dr. Joseph was smiling. "In one way or another all of us are lost. Spiritually, maybe you might say. Or emotionally."

"But such men as these you speak of. They have no spirit. Drink dulls them to the point of uselessness."

It interested me, Bessinger's preoccupation with this line of thought. His manner was a little pompous and overbearing. Dr. Joseph was staring off into space and his voice seemed to be far off. "They have emo-

tions, Mr. Bessinger. They always cling to something. Reminds me—"

HE REACHED into the clutter of the desk, lifted out a piece of dirty, torn paper. "Picked up the body of a man last week. Down by the East River. Alcoholism. Nothing to identify him. Found this in the lining of his coat. The coat pocket was full of holes—this must have slipped down."

"What does it say?" Bessinger asked.

It was a page of poetry. The medical examiner passed it to Bessinger, who studied it a moment, shook his head uncomprehendingly, and handed it to me.

The page was torn and soiled and crumpled, torn out of some anthology of verse. On one side of it was a sonnet by Shakespeare. On the other was a poem entitled "The Soldier" by Rupert Brooke. The opening line of this poem was heavily underlined with lead pencil: "If I should die, think only this of me."

"An inebriated bum like that," I said. "Why should he be carrying around poetry—"

"We asked ourselves the same question. Why did he have it? Oh, it doesn't mean anything. We probably won't ever know the answer. Doubtless some poem he had once seen and liked—"

His voice trailed off. Bessinger said softly, "I hadn't realized. Public officials—we think of them as being cold bureaucrats, disinterested in mere human beings. Yet here you are, worrying about such a simple, unimportant thing. I would have thought sentimentality was in disrepute—"

The medical examiner glared at him. "This is the last home, Mr. Bessinger," he said heavily, "of people you never meet."

Bessinger made no reply to this rebuke. With a little smile fringing his lips, he turned to me. "Are you here too about this unfortunate thing?"

"In a way," I said. "I don't know much about it." I looked at Dr. Joseph. "Just who is she, Doctor?"

He had regained composure. "Perhaps Mr. Bessinger can tell you better than I. He used to be her boss."

"Not her boss," Bessinger said quickly. "She was Mr. Mason's secretary."

His hand shook as he lighted a cigarette and exhaled a puff of smoke. "I knew her, of course."

"You're certain of identification then?"

He nodded. "Quite. There could be no doubt—"

But the very way he said it told me there was doubt. Or perhaps it was mere nervousness. I tried to analyze the tone. I was certain he believed the identification correct. But there was some other question which troubled him.

A knock at the door of the office. An as-

sistant informed us that Mr. and Mrs. John Emory had arrived.

The father was a stony-faced, tall, gaunt Scotchman, with large features and cold grey eyes. His suit was shiny serge and the white shirt was frayed at the cuffs. But his head was high and defiant. His right arm encircled his wife's shoulder, the bony hand closed on her arm.

The woman wept. Stoutish, full-bosomed, not more than five feet three or four inches. She tried to hide her face on her husband's coat, sobs shaking her body.

He kept whispering: "Don't, Irma."

Brief, perfunctory introductions. The aged couple nodded dumbly. Dr. Joseph led them into the main part of the morgue, over to a small room on one side.

THE body lay on a grey slab.

They had not removed the clothes. The sight was a shock to me. The dress was black satin, so short it did not cover the kneecaps. The mesh stockings on the slim, shapely legs were torn; the black suede shoes worn and soiled. There were spots on the dress. And the bare white arms were adorned with cheap bracelets and trinkets, flashing grotesquely in the yellowish light.

It was the face which puzzled me. The delicate, fragile features, the tiny nostrils, the golden hair, carefully marcelled. Yet the cheeks were smeared with rouge and the lips were a dark blob of crimson paint.

As I looked, I could hardly believe she had been the secretary of Harvey Mason. This was a strumpet, a bar-room B-girl.

Cold—emotionless—passive, the father stared. You would not have guessed it was the body of his daughter. But Mrs. Irma Emory screamed. An agonized cry, a cry in which one heard all the sudden pain.

"Evelyn—"

Something came over the mother then. Her features tightened. She lifted her head slowly, looked at us with accusing eyes.

"What have you done to her?" Each word struck like a blow.

Dr. Joseph looked from the body to the mother. "I'm sorry," he told her gently. "This was—exactly as she was found."

"But it couldn't, she couldn't dress like that," the woman said. "You've put those clothes on her, painted her—"

"She was like that when we found her," the medical examiner repeated.

The mother seemed to regain at least momentary command of herself.

"She never wore makeup like that. She always dressed—always dressed so carefully, so beautifully. Nothing but the very nicest, you know. Clothes like these—"

"Clothes like those," the father repeated, voice metallic. "But don't they fit her? Aren't they what she was like? What the heart was like?"

He moved toward the body. At his action the wife started, threw herself before him. "You mustn't—you mustn't touch her."

Her hands were pushing him back. Once more the face of the man became immobile, mask-like. The woman turned, flung herself forward, clasping the corpse and holding it close to her.

"Baby—baby—"

Dr. Joseph pulled her away. He said very softly, "You'd better come back to my office, Mrs. Emory." He looked at the husband. "I'll call a nurse for her."

The husband led the woman from the room. Dr. Joseph said, "Jim, I'm afraid, with all of this, it might be better—"

"I understand," I told him. "Thanks for letting me stay this long."

"I'll call you later," he said. "There isn't much I can tell you now, anyway. After the autopsy we'll know more."

He hurried away. Bessinger stood beside me. "I seem to recall something about your firm, Mr. Matthews. Wasn't it in connection with the White girl?"

I nodded.

"You know," he said, "she wasn't guilty. She suffered a great injustice. She was railroaded."

"By someone in the concern?"

"Possibly. I don't wish to say now. The time may come—"

"You mean—when you know the truth, Mr. Bessinger?"

"It would be better to say, when I may be able to return a favor for a misused woman."

Before I could investigate further that somewhat cryptic promise, he was off, following the medical examiner back to the cubby-hole office.

V

File White

STRONG AND MATTHEWS

Office Memo

Jim: Almost forgot the Bar Association lunch--they have me down to speak. I'll duck out soon as I can. What about getting hold of West?

Phil

FLORANCE WHITE had not called back. I debated in my mind the propriety of calling West. Lieutenant William West, that is, head of Homicide at Police Headquarters. He'd be in charge of the investigation. Both Strong and I have known him for some years. He'd be suspicious, of course, the moment we showed interest in the murder. On the other hand, he'd like to find out how much we knew—which gave me the bait I needed.

I called, finally, told him I wanted to see him about the Emory case.

He tried not to seem too excited. "Sure, Jim. Any time."

"I'm coming over now."

"Swell. Glad to help—you know that."

He was in his office. The ideal lieutenant, Strong calls him. Over six feet tall, broad and brawny, with flushed Irish face and freckles and a bald head except for the straggling tufts of red hair on the sides. He was smoking a pipe, feet on his desk. He looked calm and completely idle.

The first thing he wanted to know—in the most casual manner—was why we were interested in the case anyway. You would have thought he had never heard of Florence.

"We feel some responsibility about Miss White," I told him. "The D. A. called this morning, said she was wanted. We helped to get her out of prison. Naturally it's our duty to find out about this thing."

"Sit down," West said, indicating a chair. "Tell you what I can. Can't promise I won't be called off in the middle of a sentence."

He had been called to the scene shortly after the body had been found by the officer on the beat.

"You know the district. Forty-second street runs through a tunnel, emerges on First Avenue. The buildings of Tudor City are above the tunnel. At First Avenue, it's a fifty foot drop from the upper part down to the First Avenue sidewalk. There's a stone flight of stairs running down."

I know that spot well. There's a pedestrian walk as well as the road and street car lines through the tunnel—I'd say about a hundred yards long. A place that at night would be lonely and frightening.

"Right at the foot of the stone steps," West went on, "is a slab of grey stone about ten by six. A little raised from the sidewalk. She was on that. Lying on her stomach, hands underneath her. Skirt pulled up around her neck. Say, I don't suppose you've talked with the White girl recently?"

"Not in two years," I said evenly.

He balanced his chair on two legs in spite of his large bulk. "We didn't know it was murder for certain. But it looked like it. And there was the smell of almonds—often present when cyanide has been used."

"Which might be suicide."

"Suicide's out. The arms were beneath her—legs spread apart, skirt pulled up. Matter of fact, it looked like a sex crime. But we found out later that none of the underclothes had been disarranged. Just the skirt. There were other reasons. I'm afraid"—he paused—"I can't talk about them now."

IF THERE were any points to be cleared up, West would get the answers. He belongs to the old-fashioned school of investigators. Leg work and personal interrogation and

common sense. Puts little stock in psychological detection.

"How'd they find out who she was so quickly?"

He got up then, went across the hall to the Detective Room, returned in a moment with a woman's purse under his arm. Black suede, new and expensive looking.

"Her purse. Only decent thing she had with her. Everything taken out, in the main compartment, except a lipstick and a couple of dimes. But see this—"

He pulled back a half-concealed zipper, revealing another compartment in the purse. "We found an envelope in this part, addressed to Evelyn Emory, at her office. The murderer apparently didn't know about this compartment. We called the police, and the telephone operator who comes on early gave us Everett Bessinger's home phone number. So we called him and he went down to the morgue."

"And the White girl—how does she—"

"I'll answer that one when you tell me what brings you into this office. The truth I mean. Not that responsibility stuff. She called you, didn't she?"

"I wish she would call us," I said. "I'd like to talk to her—find what the story is, if she is mixed up in it."

"You're just going to all this trouble for humanitarian reasons? You haven't talked to her at all?"

"I haven't. That's why I'm here—to find out how she got herself into this thing."

"Sorry. That's what I can't give out. Not yet, anyway."

That, unfortunately, was what I had to know most of all.

I tried to smile off the rebuff. "Don't want to step on anyone's toes. Only, if there is anything—"

"I can tell you this much—Florence White went to Mason Aircraft yesterday. Wanted to see Harvey Mason. Miss Emory told her he was out of town. Florence flew off the handle. Called Emory every name in the book. Made such a scene the watchman had to put her out."

"I suppose," I said, "it's construed from that that she threatened—"

"It's the old story. The White girl regarded Emory as her enemy. Hated her, and that hate led to murder. Florence White wanted revenge. When a woman wants revenge, she usually gets it."

"But about the crime itself—?"

"Nope. We've still got a lot of loose pieces to fit into the picture."

The phone rang. He was wanted in the Commissioner's office, to report on the investigation. I thanked him for the help he had given me.

As I started out, he called after me, "Where's Florence, Jim? Never mind—we'll get her."

VI

for White folio

CASE NOTATIONS

in re: Evelyn Emory murder
(by Miss Ring)

Dec. 10
19 41

Dr. Joseph phoned here this afternoon to read medical report on autopsy.

The stomach and brain of dead girl contained sufficient cyanide to kill. Believed to have been administered in crystal form. Apparently taken while she ate a meal of scrambled eggs and toast.

No marks of violence of any kind on body. Evidence she was not a virgin but no indications of violation by force.

Time of death between two and four a.m. Dec. 10, 1941.

Mr. Matthews: Dr. Joseph said that because of the importance of the case, he had performed the autopsy himself. I questioned him on this point as I knew you would want to know.
K.R.

VII

for White folio

Excerpt from N. Y. Sun Dec. 10

"Identification was established by an envelope in the dead woman's purse, evidently overlooked by the killer.

"The envelope was addressed to Evelyn Emory at her office. The return address, it was learned, was Thomas Mason, 67-09 297th St., Forest Hills, L. I., N. Y.

"Thomas Mason, a Long Island jeweler, is a brother of Harvey Mason, head of the firm where the victim worked."

WE WOULD see Florence White arrested and probably indicted for murder.

Yet not a single afternoon paper—Strong bought them all on his way back from lunch—mentioned her by name. Because of the war news, the murder accounts were carried on inside pages and only the above paragraphs from the *Sun* contained information I did not already know.

It struck me that the envelope opened a new avenue for our thoughts.

"It wouldn't surprise me," I told Strong,

"if Collins right this minute is paying a call on Mr. Thomas Mason."

Strong's finger tips came together in a gesture of mock piety. "It's possible. In which case he's wrong again. The envelope itself doesn't prove anything."

ness outside—lights of other offices. I heard the door in the outer office open and close, Miss Ring's gasp. And a woman's voice, incredibly cool: "It's all right. I'm expected."

The door opened and she stood there.

You might not have guessed she was



The pine top of the coffin was bare. Dr. Joseph stepped closer to the grave (Chap. XXVIII)

"Might indicate an affair between Thomas Mason and Emory."

"Think he'd write love letters to the office, for the edification of the office boys who open the mail?"

I still thought the thing had possibilities.

"Could be," he conceded. "It's a speculation. What we really need is Florence."

Little point in arguing on that. Our sole connection with the murder came through Florence. If she had taken flight, we might as well face the fact that she was running from guilt. It is my experience that innocent persons, however much the evidence may be against them, do not run away. Need for justice forces them to stay and face it out, even against better judgment.

But Strong did agree that at least we could look into the matter of the envelope. I was tempted to go to see Mr. Thomas Mason myself. But in the end I accepted Strong's advice and had Miss Ring assign one of our younger lawyers—we have several working in the office as associates—to call on Thomas Mason and find out what he had to say.

I put the newspapers to one side, returned to my office and spent the rest of the afternoon catching up on neglected correspondence and finishing the will for my Westchester client.

It was growing late. Early winter dark-

afraid. Might have taken for haughtiness the rigid lines of her face, the way she stood erect, black hat at an angle, dark coat drawn close. Still holding to pride. Trying to hide the tempest within her.

I stood up, fumbled in my thoughts for words. I said finally, "Miss White. Do sit down."

I recall the words exactly because they sounded out of place, almost absurd.

She came forward. I held out a chair for her.

Still without speaking she sat down, threw back her coat.

Strong had heard me and hurried into the room, his usual easy manner gone. He halted as he saw her.

"Glad you got here, Miss White. We were afraid—"

STRONG said, "You're all right here. And we've already started some investigating."

"The murder?"

"District Attorney Collins called."

"They're looking for me," she said. "They think I did it. They think I killed her."

Strong sat on the edge of the desk, casual and relaxed. "Did you?"

"No. I don't know anything about it. Except—I saw the body."

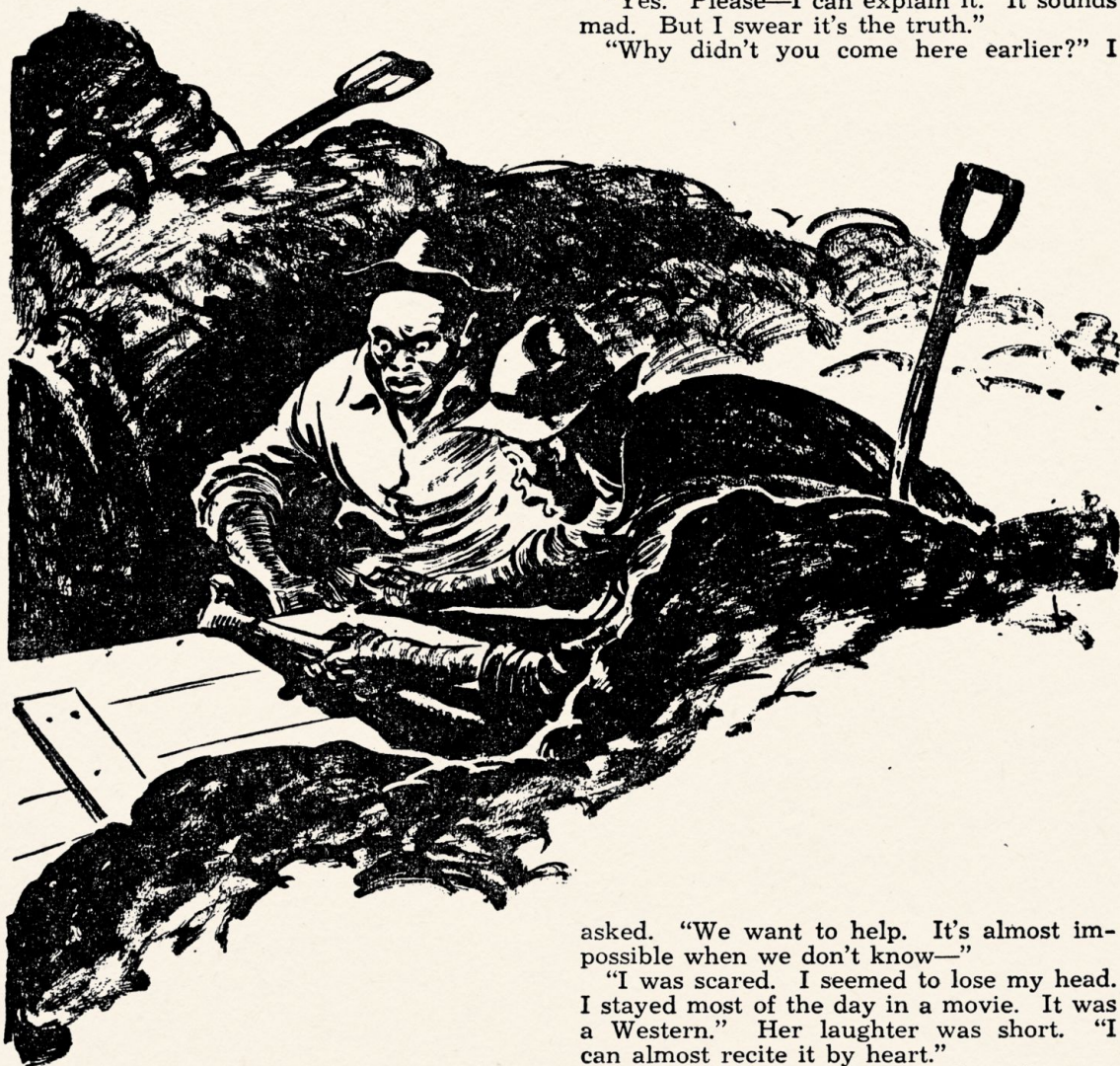
"When?"

"This morning. When I went there—to her house."

"But it wasn't at the house. It was—"

"Yes. Please—I can explain it. It sounds mad. But I swear it's the truth."

"Why didn't you come here earlier?" I



"I'd run away?" She looked first at him and then at me. "Almost did. Only I couldn't. It would be proof—"

The blue-green eyes against the pale skin lent her an exotic appearance.

asked. "We want to help. It's almost impossible when we don't know—"

"I was scared. I seemed to lose my head. I stayed most of the day in a movie. It was a Western." Her laughter was short. "I can almost recite it by heart."

"You figured you'd be safer there?"

"I was afraid to leave, even to call again. But I couldn't stay there forever. I had to see you. I took the subway down."

"Afraid someone might recognize you?" Strong queried.

"I know it was silly. I thought they were all looking at me."

Her sentences were disconnected. I was worried she might break at any moment. I knew Strong agreed with me when he halted this talk abruptly, offered her a cigarette.

He held the match. Then he walked over to the armchair in the far corner by the shelves holding my law books, flung himself down like a tired businessman home after a hard day.

Nervously she drew a small compact out of her purse, fussed with a loose strand of hair.

"I feel such a mess. All day I've been so worried, I haven't even looked at myself—"

I pressed a buzzer and Miss Ring came in. "Miss White would like to do a little primping," I told her. "Do you think—"

After her years with us, Miss Ring, small and pert and pretty, has acquired a sense of partnership, particularly in regard to female clients.

"Why, of course. She can use my little dressing room. Right this way, Miss White, please."

They went out together.

It seemed an interminable time they were gone. When at last they did come back, Florence seemed much refreshed, like a new person.

"Sorry I was long. A woman's face—" She smiled. "I'm ready now."

She folded and unfolded her gloves nervously. I suggested that maybe she'd like to have dinner first but she wanted to talk.

"I've got to tell it. I've got to tell it. I've been thinking and thinking until I feel like I'm going crazy."

Strong called in Miss Ring to take the statement down for our records.

Little Miss Ring was visibly upset when she heard what it was. "If you think it's best," she said crisply.

But the look she gave us said she thought we were beasts to subject Miss White to any such ordeal.

VIII

for White folio
12/10/41
COPY

STATEMENT OF FLORENCE WHITE

I wanted to kill Evelyn Emory.

I have wanted to kill her a long time. All the months I spent in the reformatory, I kept telling myself she should be there, she was the one who did it, she was the one living in luxury on money she stole.

It may seem hard to believe but I did try not to hate her. You can't control things like that. The fact kept coming back. Times when I would lie there in the dark cell, knowing where I was and wondering where she was, what she was doing.

I even planned how I'd kill her. Something happens to you in places like that.

Something you can't understand if you haven't been through it.

Now she's dead, I'm sorry. I wish she were alive. I wish I could tell her I forgive her for what she did. That may sound childish but you'll have to understand it.

You know how it started. About the theft and how I was accused. You know all about—

Mr. Strong: I realize we know it, Miss White. But we'd like the whole story—in your words. Even before the theft.

Miss White: But where do I start? Where—

Mr. Strong: Didn't you come from Bridgeport?

Miss White: It was a long time back—

Mr. Strong: Tell us about that. You lived with your family? You were happy—

Miss White: No—I wasn't. Not happy. That was why I left. You see, we didn't have much money. After Mother died I went to work in an insurance company there and helped support the household. I thought we were going along all right but then I began to notice that Dad and my brothers somehow resented me, resented the fact that I hadn't married. I did have some boy friends but they weren't right. Not for me.

You see, my sister married an inventor who had money and they helped support the household and also gave us what Dick, my kid brother, called "class" and apparently they all thought I ought to get married too but I couldn't understand.

Dad and my brothers were working and I figured they didn't need me so I came to New York. They were angry, said I was ungrateful and all that. I felt it was my life and I had a right to live it. Maybe it would have been wiser—but that doesn't count.

I got the job in New York at Mason Aircraft. They gave me a raise after a month and after a couple of months I was made chief clerk and helped put away important papers so of course I knew the safe combination. Most of the papers were just designs, you know, for engines and airplanes, papers they didn't want to leave around but they wouldn't have had any value for the average person.

One morning Mr. Mason gave me some securities to put in the safe. He was nice about it, pleasant, the way he always was. I didn't know what they were. He watched me put them in.

I did work late that night they were stolen. But when I left it was about six and I'm positive Evelyn had gone home. I didn't see that watchman, Jack Brown. I know he usually came on about five in the evening. But I didn't see him. One of the regular boys was on when I went down in the elevator—but of course, he didn't remember me, because there were others. And I know I didn't have any package with me when I left. That evening—I've been over it so often in my mind—I went up to 42nd Street on the subway. I stopped in

at the Automat for dinner. Thought maybe I'd see a movie. I went to the Paramount finally and when I got out it was around ten thirty or maybe a little later.

I went to my rooming house and the next morning as usual I went down to work. I wouldn't have done that if I'd stolen those securities, would I?

Mr. Matthews: It certainly wouldn't seem so.

Mr. Strong: Never mind—go ahead.

Miss White: The office was all upset and excited. Everyone looked at me. Almost before I knew it I was under arrest, accused of taking them.

At first there were only Mr. Mason and the watchman to testify against me. Mr. Mason never saw me in the afternoon—but he had seen me put the securities away. But the watchman said he had seen me leaving the office about seven. He said I had a package. That was a lie but it was my word against his and he'd been watchman there for ten years.

At the last moment, Evelyn Emory told them that I hadn't left the office until seven or a little later. She said she was standing outside the building and saw me leave and I was carrying a package under my arm. It was funny she hadn't mentioned it before—she was what they called a surprise witness. My lawyer said it made their case stronger, she being Mr. Nichols' secretary even though Mr. Nichols had me do most of his work because he liked me. He was the only one besides Mr. Besinger who stood by me. He told me he was certain of my innocence. But she was his real secretary. She made appointments and all that. And she knew about those securities being in the safe too.

They said I was guilty. Mr. Flacon—the court appointed him to defend me—said there was no use filing an appeal. I told him over and over I wasn't guilty but I knew he thought I was. Then, in the reformatory, I heard about you and I wrote. I can't tell you what your help meant. It was the first—

Mr. Strong: That's what we're here for. To help.

Miss White: I did want revenge. I knew it, even though I tried to keep it down. After I came to see you, you said to forget the past. I did, honestly, try. I worked hard at my job. It was going good. I had a raise to \$22.50 a week and it looked like a real future. Then—about a month ago—everything broke.

A man came in to see me. Said his name was Smith. I never saw him before. He was short and fattish and looked pleasant only there was something about him I didn't like. I asked him what he wanted and he said he was a friend and knew about my troubles and I said what troubles. He said about what happened at Mason Aircraft and he knew a way I could make money—said it was a business matter. But he sort of hinted it was a way I could get

back at them.

He frightened me. I told him all I wanted was to be left alone and please to go. So he said he was sorry and he went out and I thought that was the end of it.

But it wasn't. That afternoon, my boss came to me and asked me who the man was. He said someone had told him the man talked with an accent and acted funny. So I told him the story.

Well, this man, that is the boss, was new there. He'd heard about my record. I always felt he was suspicious of me. Maybe it was natural. Anyway, he said he didn't like things like that happening in the office.

Mr. Strong: You told him exactly what had happened?

Miss White: What I've told you.

Mr. Strong: All right.

Miss White: The next Friday—pay day—I got my notice that I was through. I went and asked why, but he just said they didn't want me there. That was that.

I tried getting another job. Everywhere was the same story. They heard about my record and that was the end of my chances. I tried not telling them but they'd find out and it was even worse.

Two days ago, I made up my mind to do something that may have been wrong—to see Mr. Mason. Personally, I had a feeling—call it a premonition—that he'd understand. That he'd try to help.

I tried to see him at his apartment—up on Park Avenue. Mrs. Mason answered the door. She asked what I wanted and who I was. I guess she hadn't recognized me at first. Then she looked closely and drew in her breath and said, "You're Florence White!" I said yes and she said she was sorry but she couldn't help me and practically slammed the door in my face.

I was almost broke. I still thought Mr. Mason would help me. So I went to the office yesterday. I was told to go in. But I only got as far as Mr. Mason's outer office. She was sitting there. Evelyn.

I hadn't expected it. I'd heard just before the trial she'd been promoted to be Mr. Mason's secretary. But people always said Mr. Mason changed secretaries once a year—it was an office joke. I was certain after all that time, she'd be gone. It was a shock. The last time I'd seen her she was on the witness stand, looking at me. Lying, in that sweet way of hers.

She looked up at me. She must have thought I looked shabby—her expression said so.

"I'm sorry," she told me. "Mr. Mason is out of town. Won't be back for some time. I imagine when he does return he'll be pretty busy. You know—the war—"

She seemed to be saying that was all please and would I leave.

I said she was lying. I said I knew he was there.

"Miss White," she said, "please don't make any scene. I'm sorry. We can't help you."

I was angry. I said she'd helped me

enough. Her lies had sent me to jail. I said I'd get back at her somehow, some day. That she'd have to pay for it. She said, "I'll have to ask you to leave. Now."

I told her I was going to have my say. I told her I'd like to see her dead. I actually told her.

A man came in. He looked like a janitor and he said for me to come along quietly. Everyone in the office was standing up, staring at me when I went out.

I got back to my room in Washington Heights and I was too hysterical to do anything at all. I just lay on the bed and tried to keep from shaking.

Then a strange thing happened. It was about six o'clock last night. Mrs. Bascom—she's the landlady—knocked. I thought she was coming to ask me for the rent again. But instead she had a package. She said a woman had left it. A young woman.

It was from Evelyn. There was a note. She asked me please to forgive her. Said she was sorry, that she just got excited. She said she had something to explain, that she might be able to help. Would I come to her apartment in Manton Towers on East 44th Street the next morning at eight—that was this morning.

The package was a box of bathsalts—sort of a make-up present. The letter sounded sincere enough and I decided she must have meant it. Maybe I'd get the truth about the theft. Maybe she'd have an idea for a job. I convinced myself I should go. I got up very early, made my bed as I always do and went out.

Her apartment is on the sixth floor. It's a self-operating elevator. When I got there I knocked. Then I noticed a note on the door. Typewritten. It said for me to meet her at 42nd Street and First Avenue, soon as possible. It was important.

I was certain she had some job for me. So I hurried along. It would be some business place near there, I was sure.

But when I got there, I saw a lot of people. I was panicky. Something had happened. I pushed through. Saw the body. It was Evelyn. I felt like screaming but I couldn't scream. I only stared at her. I asked someone finally what happened. A man said it was supposed to be murder but he didn't know.

I was afraid. I had that typewritten note in my pocket. I tore it up. I hurried away as quickly as I could. I went into a cafeteria on Second Avenue, drank a cup of coffee, called you in a booth there. That was a little after nine by then. You weren't in and I left the message.

The police would be looking for me. They'd hear about the quarrel in the office. I didn't even dare go to my own room. I found a ten-cent movie house that was open. Up near 45th Street and Second. I stayed there most of the day. Finally I came here.

I didn't kill her. I think I had reason to kill her. But I didn't.

File White

CASH VOUCHER

12/11/41 \$100.00

For White incidentals
Charge White case
Received by J.M.
O.K. Strong

"THREE dry Martinis," Phil said. "We've a young lady for dinner, Squires."

Squires nodded without expression. I have a warm feeling for the man. Buttlings to him is not a job but a career, a life work. His dignity bears out my contention that good butlers are the only true aristocrats, the only people who understand their own position.*

Phil turned on the lamp in the living room. A fire burned in the fireplace and the coals were red. Through the French windows at the far end of the room was the darkness of Central Park, sprinkled with yellow lights. The room was warm, intimate, with its tall cases filled with everything from law books to unexpurgated erotica. There was a restfulness which made our own personal problems—even the murder and police—suddenly remote and almost unreal.

She sat on the sofa, staring into the fire. The light cast shadows on her face. She smoothed the black dress, folded hands on her lap.

Strong stood by the window, watching her. I settled back in the low armchair.

No one spoke. We had, in fact, said little since she finished her statement and we brought her, in a taxi, to Strong's apartment on 59th Street. There was a kind of spell in the silence, with the fire spluttering to itself.

Squires came in with the drinks. He had also a tray of hot tiny sausages on toothpicks. He moved about the room noiselessly, passing out the drinks and hors d'oeuvres, placed the tray finally on the reading table by my chair and left.

When he was gone Florence stood up. "Let's drink a toast."

"To the unchangeable Collins?" Strong suggested.

"To—Evelyn."

I understood that. Even though it was strange, even though there was something frightening in it. This was her way of asking forgiveness. Whatever Evelyn had done, the slate was clean. But I saw Florence was trembling.

*He's a recent acquisition. Strong hired him after the tragedy in the Van Eyck home left him without a position. See *The Trial of Vincent Doon*, Simon and Schuster, 1941—J. M.

We clinked glasses and sipped our drinks. For several moments we stood there. After a time Strong said, "Dinner should be ready soon. I could eat a lion."

But it was roast lamb and French fried potatoes and with it some excellent pre-Second War wine.

She ate hungrily, as if it were the first real food she'd had in some time. Strong was loquacious—the cocktail had revived his spirits—and he regaled us with accounts of the numerous taboos in the Southern Pacific Islands.

It appeared that Phil had at one time in his career unfortunately stepped on the shadow of an island king. The result had been almost disastrous. The natives seized him—

"But what harm could you do to a shadow?" she asked.

"It was taboo. In the shadow was one of the souls of the king. I walked on it."

"A legal code based on superstition," I said.

"Read our own laws," Phil snapped.

We drifted into an argument about philosophy and the categorical imperatives, talking over our heads, but liking it. Besides, Florence seemed to enjoy listening.

By coffee, we were debating the great man theory.

Strong contended that—like it or not—a handful of men have plotted the course of history.

Florence broke into this to disagree. "You're overlooking the women. Their part."

"Which is?"

"They do the real plotting, Mr. Strong. They tell the men what to do. Without letting the men know it."

"You've got something there," I said, "Only, if you had a woman of evil—"

IN RETROSPECT the obvious is frequently apparent. I have sometimes wondered what would have happened had we followed that train of thought in the puzzle before us, if we would have come to the answer sooner.

It was long after dinner before Strong brought up our own problems.

"We've got to find you a place to stay."

"I haven't any money," she said. "A few dollars—"

Strong told her, "We've money for such cases. When it's all over, if you have it, you can repay us."

"But then you think I should go away?"

I knew perfectly Strong's idea on law, his conception of using it, of bending it to his purpose.

But here it seemed we were on dangerous ground.

"We ought to surrender her to the authorities," I said. "We can obtain bail—"

"I'm handling this my way. And I don't want her under arrest now."

I didn't like it. The police were hunting her. The courts were there to protect us. I did not feel it proper to attempt to thwart the police in their work, even for what appeared a justified cause.

"We've got to wait," Strong said. "Whoever killed Evelyn has picked Florence as the fall girl. Just as long as Florence is free, the killer is unsafe. His plans include the arrest of Florence."

"She was supposed to be his victim too?"

"In a roundabout way. We're simply throwing a wrench into the works."

"They'll be looking for me," Florence worried. "They have my picture. My fingerprints."

"You look much different from those police masterpieces. And the papers haven't run your picture yet. Unless you're seen by a detective, you're safe."

"They know the name—"

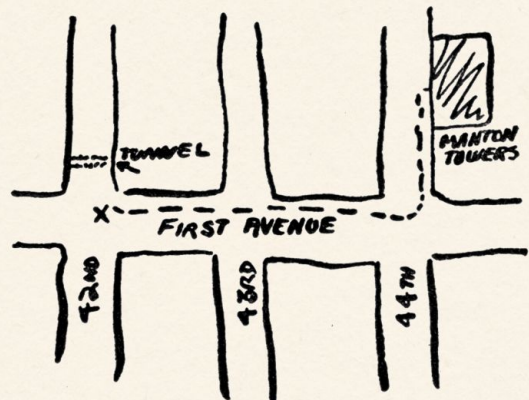
"Listen—" His tone a command. "You'll go to the Hotel Wainscott. We can't go with you—, some busybody might spot us. Register under an assumed name. Make it—Florence—Florence Rivers, Chicago, Illinois. We'll give you a suitcase full of my clothes and some cash. Stop at a drugstore on the way and buy yourself some makeup. Rouge and cream and all that. Pay your rent a week in advance."

"Won't they suspect—"

"The place is too big to suspect every guest. Stay in your room. Have meals sent up. If anyone comes in—the maid or the waiter—stay in the bathroom. If you do appear, have your hair in curlers and your face covered with cold cream."

Strong packed the suitcase himself, as Squires had already retired for the night. He stuffed it full of old shirts, to give it weight and make the porters believe it was filled with Florence's clothes.

I chatted with Florence in the living room.



She was trying to tell me how much she had enjoyed the evening.

"It was like things I've thought about."

I have never understood exactly why I

took her hand at that moment. But I did. I was rather surprised she did not draw it away.

She looked up at me.

The doorbell rang.

Strong called from the next room, "Jim—see who it is, will you?"

I hurried to the front door. It was almost midnight. No time for callers. The door was stuck and I had some difficulty before I got it open.

I was about to apologize for the delay when I recognized the man.

It was District Attorney Collins.

His face was puffed and red and self-important.

"Hello, Matthews." He was hearty. "Thought I'd drop in to visit little Miss White."

It may be difficult for the reader to appreciate my emotions at that moment. I have always, as a lawyer, tried to hold to certain fundamental concepts of law. There is about it something inviolable. No individual has the right to set himself above or beyond the law.

BUT theory and fact are different. I found myself at that moment in a difficult situation. Inside that apartment was a girl. To be sure, she was nothing to me personally. Yet I could not turn her over to the gentleman before me.

A little louder than necessary, I said, "You didn't expect to find her here, did you?"

He stepped inside.

I continued, "Come on in, anyway. Let's have your coat."

I was a little clumsy. It required some seconds before I was able to help him get the coat off. I dropped the hat on the floor. The coat slipped off the hanger as I was placing it in the closet.

Moreover, I got myself into such a position that the District Attorney was unable to get past to the door leading into the living room until I was ready.

I apologized profusely. He regarded me with an amused expression. He seemed to be saying that he'd believe anything of Strong but found it hard to understand my taking part in the game, too.

"Come on, Steve. Forget you're the D. A. and have a drink."

I opened the door of the living room.

Strong was there alone—in the lounging chair, engrossed in a book.

"Goodness!" He jumped up, strode forward, hand extended.

They shook hands in the most cordial manner.

Collins sat on the sofa. He placed his feet flat on the floor, hands on his knees.

"Phil, you and I've had a lot of differences."

"Can't dispute that."

"I'll be honest. You boys always tried to do what you thought was right. I've got to admit that. Even though I have disagreed with you about what *was* right."

"Quite."

Collins, who always seems a little too big and hefty for any room he enters, stroked his thinning hair.

"You know this isn't a kidding matter. We've got evidence to send Florence to the chair."

Strong tilted back his head, blew a puff of cigarette smoke at the ceiling. "You interest me."

"Look here—" Collins slapped his hands together.—"I'm putting my cards on the table. It couldn't be anybody else that did this murder except Florence White. It is literally impossible. Physically impossible."

He was growing a little more flushed but he went on.

"You heard about the fight Florence had yesterday at the office. Lieutenant West told me he'd given that out."

I nodded.

"Yes. West was a big help."

"Now get this—Evelyn was given the poison at her own apartment. While she was eating scrambled eggs and coffee. Evidently it took a few minutes for the poison to work. She was taken out, walked down to the spot where she was found."

"Isn't that a rather extraordinary feat for a girl to perform?"

"Not when she's a big girl and her victim's a thin mite of a thing."

"That's theory," Strong told him. "What's the proof?"

"Knew you'd be interested." Collins was gentle. Trying to convince us we ought to make Florence surrender. "There were no fingerprints in the room—"

"None at all? Not even Evelyn's?"

"A few of hers, most of it wiped clean. But there are fingerprints on the outside door. On the doorbell. And in the elevator. Florence's prints."

"That makes it physically impossible for anyone else to have killed her?"

"I said we didn't find fingerprints in the room. We have something as good—footprints. You know, we have ways of getting footprints out of linoleum. Evelyn's. And those of another woman."

"Florence? You can prove it?"

"We have her measurements. In her record. The foot's rather large, for a woman. She's tall. The measurements match up."

"Any other footprints in the room?"

"Sorry. None."

COLLINS then launched into a dissertation on how Florence walked the girl from the apartment to the spot where she was found. He even drew a map for us. Our argument that Evelyn couldn't have lived

that long after taking the poison was brushed aside.

"Sounds like a good case." Phil stretched his arms. "I wish we were handling the defense."

"What do you mean—wish? What were you doing all day, with your secret investigation about which I am fully aware?"

"We like to stick our necks out. Maybe the girl will come back. Maybe she'll want us to handle it for her."

Collins glared at us.

"I've been trying to be nice. I've laid my cards on the table. You know what the case is against her. Now you're trying to cover up with lies."

"Please, Steve. There isn't a jury around for blocks."

"You're playing with bloody fire if you try to interfere with the due process of the law."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"I mean I know you know where she is. I know you're hiding her."

Strong was grinning. "Have a drink, Steve. Jim—I'll entertain our guest while you mix something up. How about it?"

Collins said, "Make it scotch and soda."

When I returned with the drinks, he was sitting down again and appeared in more amiable mood.

"The trouble with you, Strong," he said, "is that you haven't any regard for the law. You don't care what you do."

He might have included me. I was as much in it as Strong.

"I do respect the law." Strong sipped his highball. "It's a weapon. A weapon of society. I have learned to use it. Properly handled, it's the individual's greatest safeguard—"

Collins said angrily, "I've never been able to understand your goddam theories. All I know is I've got a job to do. To protect society—"

"To do which you hunt down men who you think have committed crimes."

"Men who *have* committed crimes."

"I stick by my statement. Suppose you lived in a community where there were no

laws—"

"Anarchy?"

The way he said it, neither of us could keep from smiling. "Perhaps. A place where, let us say, people lived by the jungle rule of dog eat dog. Anything goes. Who would be the criminals in such a place?"

"That's another of your damn theories. If a man commits a crime, he's guilty."

"But don't you see there must be a law first? No law, no crime. It's murder to shoot a man, isn't it? But it may be heroism to shoot the same individual on the field of battle."

"That's different. That's war."

"In either case one human being has slain another."

"One kills for a good reason. The other—"

"But to the dead men—I wonder what difference there is?"

Collins took a long swallow. "You answer that one. I'm going to have another drink."

I was almost certain Florence had locked herself in the bathroom and I didn't want Collins snooping around the house. I hurried out to fix him the drink myself.

AS THE evening wore on, he grew more mellow and began to lecture us about the law and its purposes.

Strong said he could perfectly well understand how a person without morals could violate any law today.

"Look at the world. The Axis. Plunder and murder on an international basis. For years they've been getting away with it. Think how certain types of mind would react to that."

"I don't get you. All I know is whatever is law is right. It has to be."

"If the international gangsters can do it, why not the individual? If aggression is right for a nation, what's to prevent aggression by you and me?"

"Strong," Collins said, "you're right. I don't like to say it but you are. Dead right."

"I'm happy we're in agreement at last."

[Turn page]

Kidneys Must Remove Excess Acids

Help 15 Miles of Kidney Tubes Flush Out Poisonous Waste

If you have an excess of acids in your blood, your 15 miles of kidney tubes may be overworked. These tiny filters and tubes are working day and night to help Nature rid your system of excess acids and poisonous waste.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, head-

aches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Kidneys may need help the same as bowels, so ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 50 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(Adv.)

"Notwithstanding, you must not overlook the widows and orphans."

"I beg your pardon?"

"We who enforce the law, Strong, get to know the victims and their families and loved ones. Very well to laugh at that as sentimental. Ever see the wife of some cop who's just been killed? Ever look at scrawny kids on the floor—and know that their old man was bumped off?"

"I wasn't thinking of it in a personal way. I was trying to explain my ideas. The law has to be interpreted. The interpretation is human. So it's the human who has to be right."

"But it isn't only the law, Strong. It's evidence. Facts. Incontrovertible, physical facts."

"But the facts require interpretation too. We still have to examine the evidence. Get the evidence to examine itself and then I'll believe human error has been eliminated."

Collins stood up. "It's been a charming evening. I've enjoyed it. The company—the drinks—even your confounded notions." He paused. There was a subtle change in his manner. "Now I want Florence."

"Sorry." Phil was smiling. "Haven't got her."

I was getting Collins' coat and hat. Thinking that after he went it would probably be best for one of us to go along with Florence to make certain she reached the hotel without being followed.

COLLINS had the hat and coat on and a rather supercilious grin.

"As I say, it's been pleasant." He leaned against the front door. "But I came here for a reason."

Strong asked, "How many times do I have to tell you—"

"Now, now," Collins said. "Don't you suppose the police know anything? Think we didn't have men outside your office tonight? Men who followed you and saw the three of you come in here?"

He took a step forward. His whole manner had changed. "I'd like to search the apartment."

"Oh, go ahead," Strong said. "What's a little matter of not having a warrant?"

He was methodical about it. Living room, bedroom, kitchen—he even woke up Squires in his room off the kitchen. Then he started toward the bath.

Strong stepped in front of the door. "If there is a woman in there, Steve, you oughtn't to break in."

"Law's the law."

Phil seemed tense. But he stepped to one side. I looked at him questioningly. His answering nod told me that was where he had hidden her.

But when Collins pushed back the door, the brightly tiled bathroom was empty.

File White

Dec. 11

Jim: You amaze me—are you slipping or what? For an attorney who prides himself on his abject devotion to facts, you've overlooked two important bets -- Evelyn's apartment and Mr. Harvey Mason. I think we ought to check on both as soon as possible. Phil

MISS RING had called to make the appointment. I was surprised that Collins agreed so readily. Collins doesn't often do favors for his opponents—unless he thinks it will be of value to him.

Phil was waiting, hat on, swinging his ebony cane back and forth as he sat on my desk.

"Remarkable girl, Florence. It must have taken plenty of courage to pull a stunt like that."

It had. Much later that night, she called us, from a drugstore in the hotel. She had carried out our orders implicitly—except that she had gone down to the drug store to phone.

"As well she did," Strong said. "Or they'd have had a record of the call at the hotel."

Collins had been apologetic when he saw the empty bathroom. He appeared dumbfounded but Strong and I hid our surprise. Mentally, I was trying to figure it out. The horrible possibility of the window. But it was closed. She couldn't have jumped out and shut it after her.

Later, when we found the kitchen door not completely closed, we realized that she had managed to sneak from the bathroom to the bedroom—on out through the back door.

She'd even managed to take the suitcase and to get her coat which Squires had fortunately hung in the bedroom instead of the hall closet.

It was good it worked out as it did. It put Collins in the wrong and made him a little anxious to be pleasant—at least until he found out what happened.

When he showed up, resplendent in black coat and derby, he warned us there was to be no "funny business."

That amused Strong. "You talk like a Hollywood house detective," he said. "We're grateful to you, Collins, for your kindness in—"

"I know," he said. "I'm doing you a professional favor. Lay off the soap."

Evelyn Emory's apartment was small, tastefully furnished. As we walked into the darkened living room—the police had drawn the shades—we knew, even in those shadows, the femininity of the place, the faint drifting odor of perfume.

Collins switched on a wall lamp. A soft light filled the living room. Orchid drapes at the windows. In one corner of the room was a baby grand piano, painted light green. The furniture was low and modernistic, with odd curving shapes. Unusual and even daring—yet there was something charming about it. Near the window stood a drop-leaf table; two chairs drawn up on either side. Two water glasses, filled with stale, bubble-laden water, were on the table top. There were also several crumpled paper napkins.

Collins guided us about the room. He pointed out the spot in the kitchenette where the footprints were obtained by a new system of taking impressions.

But Collins showed little interest in what was, to my mind, the most revealing part of the apartment—the bedroom closet. Quite a collection of clothes—dresses and coats and hats. A number of pairs of shoes, carefully arranged on upper shelves. Expensive, well-kept, in perfect taste. Evelyn Emory judged life by the silks and satins it could provide her, but nothing was bizarre or extraordinary. Even in her fine feathers, she kept a discreet reserve.

You felt, in that apartment, as if you had known her. Everything—except for that table and the food—was in its proper place. The few magazines neatly stacked on the coffee table, ash trays without ashes, and the secretary desk, with its high glassed-in bookcase, in one corner of the boudoir.

We stayed for some minutes making our inspection, but though the place clearly mirrored the woman's personality, it was lacking in clues which might have helped our case.

As we stepped into the elevator, Strong said, as if speaking to himself, "Wonder how they ever came to be eating together? After that quarrel. What do you think, Collins?"

"We'll answer that," Collins answered, "soon as we get Florence."

WE DIDN'T have lunch. We left the district attorney at the corner and went directly by cab to the offices of the Mason Aircraft Company which occupies the entire sixteenth floor of the Wembke Building.

Harvey Mason—according to newspaper reports—was out of town. I had my doubts. This is the standard formula for getting rid of bothersome reporters. I had spoken about him to Collins on the way to the apartment that morning but the district attorney had looked mysterious—an indication that he hadn't any information on the subject.

The newspapermen had been hounding the office since the finding of the body the previous morning. Several stories had skirted the foreign spy angle, hinting of new secret designs for war planes. None had facts; it

was all guesswork on the part of imaginative writers.

More than twenty reporters and cameramen were lounging in the reception room. Apparently their assignment was to stay there—in case something happened.

As we stepped off the elevator, I heard one journalist call to his photographer, "Strong and Matthews—bang 'em."

In the next instant, we were half blinded by the flashes of light-bulbs. They were climbing on chairs to shoot down at us. The efficient-looking young woman at the reception desk protested vigorously. She regarded us with quite evident displeasure as we pushed toward her.

"They're lawyers for Florence White," one of the reporters said. "They helped get her out of the jug."

Her expression froze. She looked as if convinced we had tails and horns.

"Give us a statement, Mr. Strong," one of them pleaded. "You know where she is. How about giving us the story?"

"So you can try her in the newspapers?"

"We want to give her a break."

"You boys aren't giving breaks to anybody."

"How about the statement?"

"Not a thing."

Ordinarily, Strong believes in playing ball with the reporters. This time he had to turn them down.

"You're here on the White case, aren't you?"

"On a matter of personal business."

"If there is to be any interview," the receptionist interrupted, "it'll have to be held elsewhere. This is a business office."

Strong made himself heard above the reporters. "We're here to see Mr. Mason. If he isn't in we'd like to see—who was that man you met yesterday, Jim?"

"Bessinger."

"That's the one."

"Mr. Mason's out of town. I'll see about Mr. Bessinger. One moment."

She spoke so low I was unable to make out her conversation on the phone. Apparently, however, Mr. Bessinger had consented to see us.

"Third door on the left." She spoke crisply, without looking up.

Bessinger's office was the sort of place you would expect only in the movies. The furniture was luxurious. One entire side of the wall was glass, with a magnificent view of the harbor and the Statue of Liberty. He had his desk—also made of glass—so arranged that his back was to the window and his face was lost in shadow, while the light flooded ours.

HE GREETED us pleasantly, offered cigarettes, drew up comfortable chairs. Strong—coming at once to the point—asked

him if we could arrange an interview with Harvey Mason.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Mason is out of town. On business. You may have heard—there's a war on."

"How soon do you expect him back?"

"Not for some time."

"But he must have heard of the murder," Strong said. "Where is he—Washington?"

Bessinger smiled. "That's where most people go these days. Further off than that. Cuba."

"Havana?"

"Can't say. No one at the office knows where he is, exactly. You understand. The war has increased the danger. There are people who'd like to get our plans. In the past few months, Mr. Mason has travelled incognito whenever he leaves the States."

"Immigration authorities would have his name."

"Possibly he may not have given his real name, even to them. No passports are needed by Americans going to Cuba."

"So at this moment he's in a foreign nation under a *nom de guerre*?"

"I'm afraid that's the picture. It's an important matter—part of the War Department's program."

Strong's glance in my direction was swift. I doubt if Bessinger caught it.

"It puts a new light on the murder," Phil said contemptively. "The possibility of foreign spies—"

"I doubt that exceedingly. I know the papers have mentioned it. I believe it was something personal."

"Doesn't Mason keep in contact with this office?" I suggested.

The handsome Mr. Bessinger looked at me a moment and said, "At intervals he himself determines."

"When did he leave?"

Bessinger pressed a buzzer. His secretary, a slim, pretty thing who spoke so quietly you could hardly hear her, came in with a notebook.

"Yes, sir?"

"Mr. Mason's been gone about six weeks, hasn't he?"

"Just about."

"How long since we'd had word from him?"

She stood there, eyes looking up, trying to remember. "We had a card from him, mailed on the seventeenth—October 17th. Just saying he arrived safely. Signed with his initials. That was the day he—" She halted, looked at us with confusion.

"Flew to Havana?" Strong asked.

She was surprised that he knew, shook her head affirmatively.

"Thanks, child," Bessinger said. "You see, we don't know what name he's using, or what his plans are."

He leaned back, turned to look through

the window at the broad expanse of sunshine and water, the brick skyscrapers of lower Manhattan.

"You gentlemen represent Florence White, don't you?"

"Yes. We thought you might help. After the things you said yesterday—about her being innocent."

Bessinger's fingers stroked his right eyebrow. "I said I thought she was innocent of the original theft."

"Yes. That she was railroaded—"

"Mr. Matthews, this happens to be murder. I'm not—" He stopped. You could see he was tired. Obviously the excitement of the past few days, combined with the tragedy, had worn down his spirit. "I'm not an alarmist. But I have no way of being sure she did not do this murder. Revenge is a woman's way. It could be—"

I COULD see Strong start. Then he was very calm. "We understand perfectly. A crime has been committed and it's not your wish to take any position in the affair."

"You're discerning."

"Even so, you can help us. There's so many questions in our minds. What kind of woman is Mr. Mason's wife? Does she work with him in the business—?"

"No, nothing like that. I'm afraid I'd be speaking out of turn to say anything about anyone else. She's charming and intelligent—perfect for a man like Harvey."

"You've known her a long time?"

"Mary and Harvey and I are old friends. I've watched their daughter Mary grow up from an awkward brat into one of the loveliest—but I'm wasting your time."

"How well did you know Florence White?" Strong snapped the question at him.

He crossed his legs. "I can't discuss anything about her, gentlemen. You know I wish I could. But after that scene she made here the day before yesterday—"

"You saw it?"

"Heard enough about it. I'm theoretically in charge of the office during Harvey's absence. You see, it may be her feelings were so powerful—it isn't difficult to see—"

"If she didn't commit the larceny, Mr. Bessinger," Phil said, "it could only have been done by someone in the office."

"I am aware of the facts concerning the robbery."

"Then you agree—"

He stood up, in a signal that the interview was over.

"I regret my inability to—"

The door of his office opened. Into the room walked a tall, plumpish, elderly man, almost entirely bald. His cheeks sagged and his face had a pinkish glow and he wore a high stiff collar with a tightly tied black cravat.

He did not so much as look at us, address-

ing himself to the silver-haired executive behind the desk.

"Everett. Sorry to intrude. You've no business talking with these men. I understand they're lawyers for that Florence White. Trying to pry into our affairs."

Bessinger's set smile altered only slightly. "Gentlemen, Mr. Nichols, our treasurer. Watch-dog of the company. I'll handle myself, Bill. Don't worry about it."

I wanted to smooth things over. "We really came to see Mr. Mason. Mr. Bessinger kindly consented to give us a brief interview—"

"There's nothing to get hysterical about, Bill," Bessinger told him. "They aren't newspaper men, you know. And I've told them nothing confidential."

The sagging face of Nichols grew pinker. He looked at us for the first time. "The police will furnish you with any information they can. There's no need for doubting the girl's guilt. She's a known thief—"

"How did you know we're interested in Florence?" Strong asked him.

"They informed me outside."

"How do you know she's guilty?"

"I read the papers."

"But isn't it true that neither you nor Mr. Bessinger thought her guilty of that theft—?"

I thought he might have a stroke. His face reddened and his whole body shook.

"Get out!" he whispered. "Get out of here. Get out before I call the police."

He looked as if he were throwing a fit. Bessinger, behind him, made a gesture of helplessness.

Strong stood up and said, "It appears we're treading on too many toes. But it's interesting."

Nichols glowered at us.

I said, "Good day, Mr. Bessinger. And Mr. Nichols. I trust we'll meet under more pleasant circumstances."

Neither man answered.

XI

Dec. 11
for White folio from Miss Ring

CASE MEMORANDUM

Who's Who lists Harvey Mason as being born in Morristown, N. J., 1887. Graduate of Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Married Malvina Devereau. They have one daughter, Mary. Lists several companies which he organized, all connected with aviation. Mason Aircraft founded ten years ago. Member of the Executives' Club. Story in Time, published two months ago, calls him "tall, tireless, taciturn." Apparently he knows something about design and machinery as well as being a good organizer and director. Time says: "Mason gives orders with military dispatch, and hire-

lings rush to carry them out. The polished, iron-haired executive looks as if he'd be at home on the golf course, or behind a glass of whiskey at the Union Club. But men who work for him say he never drinks, never plays, lives only for work and building planes. . . . Time's picture of him attached.

Miss Ring: Thanks for this. Please check now on Harvey Mason's whereabouts. Try New York Police and also call F.B.I. If we can't get anything we may have to call the Washington bureau.
J. M.

* * *

Dec. 11
for White folio per Miss Ring

CASE MEMORANDUM

Young Dave Scullin went out on the matter of the envelope from Thomas Mason, found in Evelyn Emory's purse. Mr. Mason politely refused to discuss the matter with him, beyond stating that it was merely a business letter. He sent it to her instead of to his brother direct as his brother is out of town. Mr. Scullin says Thomas Mason is a pleasant, bluff sort of man, in his forties.

XII

Reasonable rates Ra 6-1099
Rooms and Board

BLUE GABLES
198-97 178th Street

Mrs. Agnes Bascom

DOUBTLESS, at some remote period, the gables had been blue.

But the shingles now were weather-beaten a listless grey and the rambling old house, one of the landmarks of Washington Heights, was gloomy and uninviting.

"Never get in," I said. "Probably a cop in every corner."

"They'll let us in. Just in hope we'll make a mistake."

Apparently, he was correct. Mrs. Bascom, the landlady, a waddling sort of woman, wearing bedroom slippers and a bagging house dress, admitted us readily.

"Friends of Miss White? The names, please?"

Too obviously coached. Putting on an act for our benefit. We told her who we were, explaining we were trying to find evidence which might help Miss White.

"Oh, yes," she said. "Of course. If you'll just excuse me one minute, I'll be right with you."

She flapped up the uncarpeted stairs. Strong watched her, turned to me. "She's going to get advice. There may be a dic-

taphone in the room."

"Like a kid's game."

"Unfortunately, when you're with children—"

She returned a few minutes later, all out of breath but still bubbling over with words.

"Sorry to keep you two gentlemen waiting. Had to get one of my roomers some towels. They do use them up. Never a minute. Well now—you just follow me. 'Spect you want to go to her room? These stairs—"

The kind of room I had expected. Small. Narrow. Only one window. The furniture obviously the property of the house. On the dresser was a small bottle of good perfume, a manicure set and a few odds and ends. In the closet were two dresses, a light spring coat and on the shelf above was a hatbox.

"That lace spread and the picture," Mrs. Bascom remarked, "belong to her. Afraid I'll have to hold them. She hasn't paid her rent for weeks. Poor thing. I really feel sorry for her."

She stood watching us as we looked around the room. Over in one corner was a sink and above that a medicine cabinet.

"I suppose," she said, "you've seen her. Since this awful thing happened."

"How could we?" Strong inquired. "Nobody knows where she is."

She waved her hands in a deprecating gesture.

"Of course. Poor thing."

"The police ought to be able to find her," Phil said. "If they weren't so thick. Or don't you agree, Jim?"

"Absolutely."

"You don't think them police know much, do you?" Her tone indicating now she had something to report.

"Don't know much?" Strong was poking about the medicine cabinet. "They're so dumb sometimes I wonder how they find their way to the station house."

"My! That's quite an idea."

Phil was examining the cabinet carefully. The sink was one of those old-fashioned affairs, most of the enamel cracked off. The cabinet itself contained only the ordinary medicinal and hygienic supplies. On the glass shelf under it we saw a small round box of bath-salts. It was about half used.

"That must be—" I stopped in time.

"Mrs. Bascom, did you see Miss White go out yesterday morning?"

HER FLUNG the question at her suddenly and she started. "Me? No, sir, I didn't see anything."

"You don't know what time she went out?"

"I know her bed was made up at nine o'clock and she wasn't here."

"The bed hadn't been slept in?"

"Didn't look at, that's all I've got to say."

"Mrs. Bascom, we've got a problem. A

young girl who may be accused of murder. You wouldn't want her to be executed if you knew she was innocent."

"Maybe she isn't."

"You're a smart woman, Mrs. Bascom. If you think she's guilty—that means more to us than the opinion of any district attorney or officer. You've got—you're a woman, you understand things."

It was obvious, but effective. Mrs. Bascom actually was blushing.

"If I do say so, I see a lot of things—"

"You do more than that. You observe. Many people see. Only the few observe."

"Well, I do know plenty about this case. From what I've figured out myself."

"You mean—things that happened in the house?"

"I do." She lowered her voice. "That night—the night of the murder—a woman came here. About six o'clock. The cab she came in was waiting outside and there was a man in it. I could just make out his shape and he did seem tall but I couldn't tell much because it was shadowy. Matter of fact, I couldn't get a very good look at her, on account of it was dark in the vestibule. But from the pictures I've seen in the papers, unless I'm very much mistaken—"

The door burst open. The figure of Lieutenant West loomed before us.

There was a moment of shocked silence. Then Strong was grinning.

"The Marines—"

West coughed, a flush spread over his face.

"You—we're keeping watch out here, Strong. You can't try to bulldoze a woman—"

"I'm ashamed," Strong said. "To think—a great detective like you, snooping at key-holes."

"If you fellows go snooping," West continued, "we have to follow suit."

We stood there looking at each other. Poor Mrs. Bascom was embarrassed and hurt. She'd been playing the role of detective and now she had fallen down.

I was almost afraid she would break into tears.

Strong said, "Hope you weren't offended at those remarks about the police."

"Don't be funny, Strong. I knew you were wise."

"What did you wait so long for?"

"Just waited to see. Something might have spilled."

But we all parted friends, with no hard feelings. Once outside, I said, "Anyway, we know there was nothing incriminating in that room."

"No? You saw the bathsalts? The box was half empty. Florence said she only got it the night of the murder."

"Might be some explanation—"

"Might be. Only, they weren't ordinary bathsalts. They contained cyanide crystals. I could tell by the odor."

XIII

File White

Dec. 12

Jim: This White matter is all cluttered up with females -- among them being Mrs. Harvey Mason. Isn't it just possible she knows something about her husband's whereabouts? My idea is we'd better start remembering the old saw -- *cherchez la femme* -- with a vengeance. Phil

MRS. HARVEY MASON sent out word—via the butler—that she was not at home.

It was around eleven in the morning when I arrived at the apartment house—one of those towering abodes of the rich. Luckily, I had obtained the apartment number from Florence. I walked to the elevator and told the man to take me to the twelfth floor. He looked at me questioningly. I said briskly, "They expect me."

I think he had the idea I was a detective. The door slammed shut and we went up.

The butler was a wizened Chinese who kept the door on the chain and peered through. He was about to close it, after telling me Missie wasn't in when I said, "It's about her husband."

That had an effect. He said, "Mister Mason?"

I said, "I may know where he is."

He looked up at me with fear on his face. "You wait."

About two minutes later, he came back. "Missie Mason—she see you."

The foyer was large, pretentious. A tapestry was on one wall and across from it was an oil painting of a Spanish conquistador. From the center of the ceiling hung an antique lamp of rose glass and gilt frame.

The Chinese ushered me into the drawing room, a place of tasseled sofas, brocaded walls and teakwood tables. Persian rugs were scattered on the floors. You could not have termed the room charming. It was all too heavy, too carefully arranged. Yet it was colorful and lavish and impressive.

Mrs. Mason fitted into the pattern exactly.

There was a studied, artificial perfection about her. The groomed raven hair, the powder-white face and shaped crimson lips. Even the stiff sheen of the black hostess gown.

When she swept into the room, brushing aside plush drapes of the double doors, it was a queen's entrance. A nervous, overwrought, jittery queen. Tall and unbelievably thin. You could almost see the bones under her cheeks.

The nails of her fingers were painted black.

She had that half-smile of politeness only. "Won't you sit down?"

She herself sat on the arm of the sofa, as if she anticipated the interview would be brief. "Now"—studying me for a moment—"what is this silly fuss about my husband?"

"I'm relieved to hear it is only a silly fuss. Then you have heard from him?"

She was lighting a cigarette. I rose to strike a match. "No, I've got it. Heard from him? What business is that of yours?"

"A girl's life may depend on it."

"Really! Who is this young woman?"

"Florence White."

"Oh."

She sat there, giving no visible sign of excitement, watching me. "You are a friend of hers?"

"Yes. Also an attorney."

"As an attorney, you know you have no right to break in here—"

"I haven't broken in, madame. I have come to talk with you."

"You intimated to Lang that you knew something of my husband's whereabouts."

"I intimated that I wished to talk with you about him. You have not heard from him?"

"It isn't your business. What possible connection can he have with a murderess?"

"We have no way of knowing that she is a murderess, Mrs. Mason."

"If she didn't do it, why does she run away?"

"Your husband might be able to give certain evidence that could help her."

"My husband could know nothing of it. He is away, out of the country. On business."

"I understand," I said quietly. "Cuba."

That had effect. "How did you know?"

"I also know," I went on, shooting in the dark, "that you have been worried about him."

SHE stood up. There was no show of excitement. But her manner was unnatural, as if she were holding her emotions in check only with great effort. "You have no right in here. You have no authority over me. You can't stand there and—"

"Quite. The police are investigating. They will be here to talk with you—"

"I'll answer anything they wish." Her tone was indifferent. I rose from the chair. She said, "I suppose the investigation will be in the papers?"

"All of it."

"They are thorough, aren't they?"

"Of course."

She turned away. "I don't like such things. Notoriety. Dragging our names through scandal. We shouldn't have such things."

"Did you know Evelyn very well?" I tried to sound disinterested, merely making conversation.

"She was my husband's secretary, often came here for dictation. Strictly business."

"Yes. I won't bother you with questions, Mrs. Mason. It'll all come out in the investigation."

She clenched her hands. "Perhaps there won't be any investigation, Mr. Matthews."

"There has to be. Nothing can stop it. When an innocent girl has been accused, the truth has to be discovered."

"You're accusing my husband of being involved in this?"

Her voice was throaty, melodramatic. I felt she was searching for some way to put me completely in the wrong.

"No. But as far as I can gather, neither you, Mrs. Mason, nor any one in the office has had a word from him for some weeks. And a girl with whom he was closely connected—"

"There was no connection, beyond business."

"Then it should help you and him to get the truth. Public investigations are rather messy. Dirty linen in public. Some way might be found to prevent it. But only if the truth—"

"If Florence White didn't kill her, who do you think did?"

"I don't know."

"Then how can you know she didn't?"

"I can only try to get at the truth. If you—if others connected with the case—tell us the facts, we can piece them together."

"There's nothing I can say."

"You can tell me about Evelyn."

"What?"

"What was she like?"

"Any of a million girls. Young, industrious, worked hard for Harvey. Maybe a little prissy about herself."

"Was she especially smart?"

Mrs. Mason crushed her cigarette in a marble ash-tray. She fingered the stub of it.

"It depends on how you mean it. Evelyn would get the things she went after. She was that kind. She thought of herself first, last and—but she was also generous. I really can't discuss it, Mr. Matthews."

"If Florence White is innocent, you wouldn't want her punished?"

"That's a matter for the courts."

"But in the courts, Mrs. Mason, my task will be to defend her. That's why I need your help. What you can tell us about Evelyn may help to solve—"

Suddenly the careful control which she had held over her emotions appeared to break. Only it wasn't fear I saw but anger.

"What you mean is that you think my husband did it. You think that he came back and killed his secretary. Probably you think she was his mistress. That is the real reason you're here, isn't it? Why don't you tell the truth, Mr. Matthews?"

HER voice was a savage whisper, virulent and full of hate.

"Not exactly," I answered calmly. "But as long as your husband's whereabouts remain indefinite, we have an unknown quantity. Naturally, the matter will be brought out in trial—"

"It isn't an unknown quantity—"

"You haven't heard from him."

"I tell you I have."

I find it difficult in such instances to speak outright, to accuse a woman of being a perjurer. But I summoned the courage. "I happen to know you are lying."

I don't know exactly what reaction I expected. I certainly did not expect the melodramatic about-face. I did not expect the hollow voice: "No, I haven't heard from him. Not for weeks."

SHE turned and faced me and I saw tears smearing her cheeks. She lowered her head and sobbed.

"He didn't do it. Harvey isn't—" Dabbing her eyes with a pink silk handkerchief, she looked at me. "I'm afraid."

There was little need of saying it. Fear permeated her whole being. She had managed—for a few moments—to hide her own feelings. She no longer made pretense.

She walked across the room, lighted another cigarette, stared out of the window. Slowly she came back across the room, sat down on the sofa.

"It's a ghost, a ghost in my mind. Only it grows. There's no reason for it—"

"When did he leave, Mrs. Mason?"

"About six weeks ago. It wasn't unusual. Ever since the defense program started, he's been going away on trips. Often I don't hear from him for weeks. Only this time—"

She stopped. Outside the room I heard a door open and close and the clicking of feminine heels. A young woman came into the room.

"Mother! I didn't know you had—"

She couldn't have been more than twenty, tall and slender and dark like her mother. But also graceful and pretty and smiling.

"My daughter, Mary. This is Mr. Matthews. He's an attorney—he's investigating that unfortunate affair about Miss Emory. He's been inquiring about your father."

I inclined my head. "I'm happy to—"

The girl was suddenly excited. "I'm so glad you've come. We've been so worried—We haven't had the least idea what to do—Did you—did you show him the letter, Mother?"

The woman drew herself up regally. "There's no need to discuss that with outsiders."

"Which letter?" I asked quickly.

"She didn't tell you?" There was antagonism in the daughter's face as she turned to Mrs. Mason. "Why not? We've been practically sick over it. But you don't care enough even to—to find out what to do."

Maybe Mr. Matthews can help us. I'm going to show it to him."

"You shan't."

But the daughter had already run from the room. During the few seconds she was gone, the mother stood stiffly, silent. The tension in the room was high and I was relieved when Mary Mason returned, the envelope in her hand.

"This may not be important. I don't know. Daddy gets silly ideas—then he forgets them. But since we've had this letter we've been—followed. Mother hasn't wanted to go to the police. But somehow I connect the letter and the men who followed us. That's why I'm so glad you've come. We need help—"

I looked from her to Mrs. Mason. The latter gave no hint of affirmation or denial. The girl handed me the letter.

I read it carefully, trying to give no outer sign of the mounting excitement its contents aroused.

AS I read it, I had the sensation—one I think we all experience occasionally—of living through a scene a second time. I stared at that letter a long time, trying to fathom why it seemed familiar to me. But whatever it was that struck me, my subconscious mind refused to yield up the answer.

"This may be far more important than we can even guess at now," I said slowly, but I tried to give them no hint of my own reactions.

I looked at the postmark on the envelope. It was mailed from Havana, October 17th. The same day Mason had sent the postcard to his office.

"You said you've been followed?" I asked. "When?"

Mrs. Mason interrupted. "Mary must have imagined it. I could see a man for a while but then he was gone."

"What did he look like?"

"He didn't come close enough for us to see," the daughter told me. "But he was small, inconspicuous. It happened twice. Once about three weeks ago. And last week—just a day or so before Evelyn Emory—"

I was convinced it put a completely new angle on the case.

"Where had you been?"

"Both times we had been out dining with friends. Both times it was late. We took taxis of course and I was certain another cab was following us. Then when we got out, I could see another cab go by."

"Anyone in it?"

"I couldn't tell."

"You had seen the man following you before you got into the cab?"

"Yes. You see, we walked a couple of blocks before we got the taxi. Mother says I'm wrong about another taxi following us. I'm certain I'm not wrong."

Mrs. Mason's hand was at her forehead, her eyes closed.

Her daughter rushed to her.

"Mother—are you all right?"

"I'm all right. All this is so wearing."

"The letter, Miss Mason," I said. "It may mean so much. Is it possible you have a copy of it?"

"What does it matter now? You've seen it." Mrs. Mason's voice was hollow. "If you wish to—copy it out. Then—then will you go?"

I know shorthand and was able to copy out the letter in a few moments. I thanked them for the help they had been, told them I'd be happy to return when Mrs. Mason was stronger. Mrs. Mason didn't reply. Mary Mason smiled and shook hands and walked with me to the door.

Lang was waiting there with my coat and hat.

XIV

For White folio
(text of Mason letter)

HOTEL PLAZA
Havana

Monday

My dear Malvina --

There is hardly any reason to go on with this farce which we politely describe as marriage. Nor is there reason to discuss the whys and wherefores which you know as well as I.

On the trip down here I have had much time for thinking, for trying to make plans. The future is uncertain not only for us but for everyone. There can be no real security. But there can be good in aloneness, there can be forgetting. There can be an end at last to worry and doubt, and hypocrisy and sham. Perhaps you do not understand me. In that case, may I urge that you study this and think about it?

I have determined my own course, in all events. I shall not return to America. Not now. Not ever, most likely. You will be able to live your own life again. You can go the way you have chosen.

I can hear you say now -- "But I shan't know whether you're alive or dead, Harvey," Quite so. And if I should die think only this of me -- that I have found peace. But I ask this favor -- don't try to find me. Don't have police or detectives trail me over the earth. I assure you, it will be useless.

It is, after all, only a pulse in the eternal mind.

H.

XV

for White folio
Dec. 13

STRONG AND MATTHEWS
Office Memo

To: J. M. From: Miss Ring
Checked on the records at the court-
house. The address of Jack Brown,
the colored watchman, is 998½ W. 128th
St. That should be off Seventh Ave.

"ONE dead and another missing," Strong paused. "What about the third?"

He had heard me through without interruption. Even when I told him about the letter he offered no comment.

For a long time after I finished he sat there. Staring moodily at the Hottentot household god he uses for a paperweight.

"Who do you mean—the third?" I asked. "They were all witnesses against her. Evelyn. Harvey Mason. And a man named Brown. You recall—the negro watchman?"

Brown. The watchman. Another witness against Florence. Another who might know some of the truth—unless he was too scared to speak.

I telephoned Mason Aircraft and inquired for Brown. They informed me he had not been employed there or anywhere else in the building for some time. They had no idea where he was living.

But I sent Miss Ring over to the courthouse and she finally obtained the address, after several hours of argument with officials in the office of the clerk of court.

It was dark when we left our office. Strong hailed a cab, gave the driver the address.

We got out at Seventh Avenue and 128th Street. One hears foolish reports that Harlem after dark isn't safe for whites, and certainly it is like coming into a different and therefore frightening world. We walked up the side street, straining our eyes in the darkness to see the numbers on doors. The pedestrians we passed looked at us with unsmiling faces.

We searched for several minutes before we located No. 998½. A four story tenement, with a short flight of iron-railed steps leading into the darkened doorway. No lights in any of the windows. No lights, in fact, in any of the buildings close by. Yet it was not seven o'clock. A people too poor for light. The nearest street-lamp was far up the street, on the corner. Directly by it was a small grocery store, still open.

"Appears to be us," I said.

We walked up the steps. Strong struck a match in the vestibule and we tried to find names on the door. There were no regular mailboxes with names on them, but there

was a set of bells and over one we saw, scrawled in crayon, the name "Brown."

No answer to our ringing. We tried again. Waited. It seemed ages—though it could not have been more than three or four minutes. At last we heard a female voice yelling down from an upper floor.

"Who is that there?"

The front door was open. Inside was black, and we stumbled forward. I called up the stairs, "This is Mr. Matthews. We'd like to talk with you."

"White men?" Her voice was high pitched.

We started up the steps, iron steps, built in a narrow spiral, more like a fire escape than a flight of stairs. We had to keep one hand on the cold iron banister. I went ahead, Strong following.

The fourth floor. I was somewhat out of breath. I saw the outline of a stoutish woman silhouetted against an oil lamp that gleamed in one room. She stood in the doorway of a rear apartment, dumpy and black and grinning.

"Yessir. What you want?"

"Isn't there any light in this hall?" Strong asked.

"Light in the hall? Well, I swear. This place—you got to walk in the dark."

"Ought to make it easy for you in black-outs. We're looking for Mr. Jack Brown. You know him?"

The round face, half hidden in the shadows, grew serious. The big lower lip jutted out.

"I'm Mrs. Brown. What you want him for?"

"Oh, we aren't the police," Strong said. "This is a matter of business."

"Look like police."

"Lawyers," I informed her. "All we want is a few minutes' chat with Mr. Brown. May be a little something in it for him. If he can help."

SHE looked at us without expression, trying to figure whether or not we had told her the truth.

Then she threw back her head and laughed. It was terrifying laughter, hysterical, like a being possessed of the devil. After a moment she stopped, almost as abruptly as she had begun.

"You was sure on the wrong track. You can't see Jack. Nobody can see him. He's dead."

The first thought in my mind was that he had been murdered. Which would be two murders. Both witnesses against Florence.

"Dead?" Strong's tone was insistent. "How did he die? When?"

All the laughter had gone from her voice.

"Bout three months back. Weren't nobody could help him. He was good, he was."

"It was a natural death?"

"Natural? Sure it was natural. Just went on one of his outin's. Stayed out all night,

drinkin'. Never got in trouble. Gets in and he's got the makin's of a cold. I said he ought to be in bed but that man wouldn't listen to me. Next day, he's sicker'n a dog. So hot you can't touch him."

"He didn't recover?"

"I gets the doctor. Says he got pneumonia. Gives him some kind of stuff—I can't remember the name. Long name. But he just gets sicker and sicker and after awhile he can't see me and then he dies."

We could hear children running about the apartment and she turned to tell them to shush up. She drew the door a little and the hall was darker.

"There was nothing out of the way?" Strong asked. "Nothing to make you think his death might have been premeditated?"

She rolled her eyes. "What you mean?"

"Anybody come to see him any time before his death?"

The whites of her eyes flashed as she looked at him. "You friends of Mister Mason?"

The question came so suddenly I couldn't answer. There was something chicane in her manner, as though she was starting to realize the reason for our visit.

"Of course," Strong said lightly. "We were also friends of your husband."

"You was?"

"There's been trouble. Pretty serious. Your husband's name is involved."

"He never done anything wrong."

"There was that matter of that girl. You remember—Florence White, the girl he testified against in the courtroom?"

"Don't know nothing about that. He never told me. Said it was something he had to do."

"Did he ever say anything about Evelyn Emory? You know—"

"The lady was killed? He know'd her, all right. Miss Evelyn, he called her. Said she was a nice girl. Used to stop and talk to him—"

"She was his friend, you mean?"

"S'pose that's what it was. Too bad she goin' and gettin' all messed up like that."

"When did Mr. Mason come here?"

"When Jack was sick."

"Why?"

"Jack want to see him."

"Jack got Mr. Mason to come up here?"

"Yessir. Calls me in, tells me he wants to talk with Mister Mason. I says he's a very important man, he ain't got time to waste on you, sick or well. He says it's important and it has something to do with bad money and Mr. Mason'll understand. So I goes down to the corner and I calls the number and gets hold of Mr. Mason personal."

"What did you tell him?"

"Like I done told you. I said Jack was sick like to die and wants to see him. He was mighty excited and takes down the address and says he'll come right away."

Strong looked at me. "Harvey Mason interrupted a business day to come out here and see Jack when he was sick?"

HER hand went up with a show of pride.

"A fine looking white man. But he didn't get here soon enough. Time he comes, Jack's in a stupor. Weren't no use."

"When he found Jack unconscious, what did Mr. Mason say? How did he act?"

"Act? He seemed awful worried. Kept asking me why Jack wanted to see him and I kept saying I didn't know 'cause I didn't. He went on talking to himself about how it must have been important. Stayed around half the night, waiting."

"But your husband never recovered consciousness?"

"What's that? No, sir. He died that night."

"It must have been a great sorrow," I said.

"He was no bad man. Never beat me or nothin', even when he was drunk."

"Mason give you any hint that he knew—or suspected—what it was about?"

"No, sir." As the memory of that night came back to her, her thick lips twisted.

"Did Mason come back again?"

"Didn't come back. He wrote me a letter sayin' he was sorry about Jack, how he'd be

[Turn page]

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glad to help. Sent flowers to the funeral too. Big basket full of white roses. It was pretty."

"But after that—"

"Never heard from him again. Nothin'."

"And Jack—did he say anything during his stupor?"

"No. Wait a minute—see, he weren't in his mind. He kept mumbling something 'bout 'I told her—I told her.' But it didn't mean nothin'—"

"You can't tell about that," Strong said.

I saw him jot the words down in his notebook.

"You have no idea what he could have meant?"

"No, sir, I don't. I sure don't."

One of the children inside knocked over something with a resounding crash. The woman turned, saw a broken cup and saucer on the floor. "Why, you little—"

Then she remembered us. "Children—I better be takin' them to bed, or I'll have the police sure's I'm alive."

We told her how grateful we were for her help. "Weren't no help," she said, white teeth flashing. "Can't tell you what I don't know, now, can I?"

She was laughing at this observation as she closed the door. Strong and I trudged down the dark winding stairs.

The fresh cold air was good. We walked along in silence. After a moment, Strong said, "Two witnesses dead."

"Case of pneumonia." I lit a cigarette.

The small tragedy of that household. I was stirred by it—by the thought of that Negro dying before he could lighten his conscience with whatever he had to tell. Nor could I help but realize the contrast of that squalid apartment with what I had seen at Evelyn Emory's and Mrs. Mason's.

The darkness of the district, with its thousands crowded in together. The group of colored boys loafing in the grocery store. The almost unnatural hush of the streets—you heard the echo of your steps.

At the corner we hailed a taxi and drove downtown.

XVI

Miss Ring -- Please put in White file.
J. M.

STRONG AND MATTHEWS
Legal Memorandum

December 15, 1941 from J. M.
In re: White matter. Following require further immediate study:

Item one -- Whereabouts Harvey Mason. Check statement his being in Cuba. F. B. I. and newspapers have nothing on him. Why hasn't he contacted his office?

Item two -- Poison in bathsalts. Evidently left by police in hopes Florence would come back for it. Package given to Florence White preceding night. Did Eve-

lyn Emory bring it? Who was the man in the cab?

Item three -- Jack Brown. Could be murder. Doesn't look like it. Why did he want to see Mason? Why did Mason agree to leave his business to see a watchman who hadn't worked in the concern for some time?

Item four -- Who was gentleman who came to see Florence at her office and who thus unwittingly (?) cost her her job?

Item five -- Florence's footprints in Evelyn's apartment. She said she wasn't in apartment. Appears to be an impasse. Possibility always present Florence may not have told truth.

Item six -- Mrs. Mason and daughter followed? By whom?

Item seven -- Who are Florence White's boy friends? Must have some. Names? Ditto Evelyn.

Item eight -- If F. B. I. men in the case? Still outside chance of foreign agents involved in the murder. In which case, the Federal Bureau of Investigation should come in at once. Could these be men who have been following Mrs. M.?

Item nine -- Thomas Mason. Despite Sculins' negative report on envelope, Thomas Mason relationship with Evelyn might be looked into.

XVII

For White folio

Dec. 15, '41

Reminder to J. M. Check Item 7 -- Florence White's boy friends.

P.S. To J. M. -- Sometimes you men are Mid-Victorian. How about Mrs. M's boy friends? I'll bet she had plenty. Black fingernails, indeed!
K. Ring

"CYANIDE?" Florence repeated the word. "But I never even opened the box."

She was sitting in a chair by the window and the light and shadow played on the texture of her skin. Still pale. Still with that faraway, mysterious look. But those days alone had given her calm. The sense of harassment was gone.

It was I who felt somewhat harassed. The experience was out of the ordinary. Going alone to a young woman's room in a hotel. Although, of course, it was purely business, our immediate and pressing need for facts.

She was anxious for news. I told her about our visit to Harlem, our inability to find Mason. And the cyanide in the bathsalts, which appeared to shock her most.

"No doubt, about its being cyanide. Strong's somewhat of an expert on poisons. He wouldn't make a mistake like that."

"But how could I put it in if I hadn't even opened it?"

"The box was only half filled."

She shook her head uncomprehendingly. "That must have been the way it was when I got it, because I never opened the package."

There are moments when intuition is our only guide. I was certain she was telling the truth, in spite of the improbability of what she said. But that left us with an even greater improbability—that Evelyn had brought or had sent to Florence the poison which caused Evelyn's death.

I was watching Florence. She stood up and faced me.

"You're gambling on my innocence. But you don't have to."

"What do you mean?"

"I won't feel you've run out. Suppose you're wrong? Suppose I am guilty? Why should you take the chance?"

"But you aren't."

"I'm being carried into something nobody can stop."

She didn't say it melodramatically. Quietly. But I regretted her having put the idea into words, giving it power of its own.

"Leave that kind of thing for the voodooists. We wouldn't back out if we could."

"You don't think I did it—even when the poison—"

Her voice had sudden hope. She was smiling again.

"Of course not. The point is—somebody did put it there. Looks like a plant. Only apparently it was Evelyn herself who did the planting."

"You think she intended to kill me—and was killed herself?"

"Might be. But it doesn't make sense—putting poison in bathsalts. You don't eat bathsalts."

"If it had been food or candy or—"

One thing was certain. Florence could throw no light on how the poison got there. Conceivably, someone could have placed it there after the crime, though I couldn't see how, with the police watching the place night and day.

The hotel room was cluttered with newspapers and a few magazines. I noticed also a number of drawings she had made on the hotel writing paper—sketches of women's hats and dresses. She explained that she'd always had a dream of becoming a fashion designer. Some of the drawings were rather good.

On the bed was a soiled pack of playing cards.

"Solitaire." She laughed.

Outside the window was the noise of the city. Thousands of windows. Girls working and dreaming about dates and dances.

"This won't be long," I assured her. "After it's over, you can return to normal life—friends—there must be some young man—"

"I never went out with young men. After I got out."

"But before that—"

"One or two of the boys who worked in the office. It was only movies—nothing serious or anything. I only went out with them two or three times."

SHE was twisting her handkerchief and seemed unusually nervous.

"Any of the older men?"

"Mr. Nichols took me out once. He tried to make love to me so—"

"But he's a married man."

"I kept trying to remind him. But he told me he was unhappily married and his wife didn't understand him."

"That worn-out routine?"

"It was rather obvious. He kept trying to kiss me, pawing—I was disgusted."

"The old fool!"

"It wasn't too hard to handle, but it did make things strained in the office after that."

When I spoke of Evelyn, she grew more reserved. She seemed at first afraid to speak of the dead girl.

"You've no idea whom she went out with?"

"I don't know what was serious and what wasn't. There was a good deal of gossip. Office talk, you know. About different people. I don't like gossip. Everything gets distorted. But there was talk that Evelyn went out a good deal with Mr. Mason."

"Harvey Mason?"

"No. His brother, Thomas. He used to work in the office. I never did find out just what he did but Mr. Mason paid him a salary. He left before I did. He and his brother didn't get along too well and one day they had a quarrel there in the office and Harvey Mason told his brother to get out."

"Think there was anything serious in Thomas Mason's relations with Evelyn?"

"It was talk that he was crazy about her. That he worshipped her and she was playing him for everything that he was worth, laughing at him behind his back."

"Is he married?"

"He was then. I think he's divorced now. He runs a jewelry store out on Long Island. He wasn't a bad sort—I always got on with him. Always felt sorry for him in a way—it was so obvious he was the, well, the dumb brother."

"Did Evelyn talk to you about him?"

"She'd make remarks." About how he was always after her and she simply couldn't get rid of him. If he'd come over to her desk, she'd tell him please not to bother her, she was busy. But he always came back for more and she'd end up by agreeing to go to a dinner or something with him."

"I should think people would have found that rather an odd way for her to act. Stringing him along—"

"Everybody laughed about it. I think he

really thought she liked him and was just playing hard to get. But the rest of us—we knew. It seemed like her.”

“She treat the others in the office the same way?”

“She was pretty nice to the big officials. Mr. Bessinger got along with her pretty well and whenever she was going out with him for a dinner party we all knew about it. She’d let it out somehow and then pretend to be very upset that anybody knew. I don’t think she went out very often with him—maybe six or seven times.”

“But nobody thought there was any affair between them?”

“Nobody ever talked about it and during office hours they were pretty businesslike.”

Evidently they had covered up well—if they were having a love affair. I changed the subject—asked about Nichols, if he had made any play for Evelyn.

FLORANCE laughed. “The wolf? He made a play for every girl in the office. He took her out a number of times for dinner and parties and sometimes he went to lunch with her. I don’t know what there is about him. He isn’t young or good-looking but he is woman crazy.”

“And he was in love with her too?”

“He could have been. I don’t know. I do remember once—I wasn’t there at the time but I heard about it afterwards—he hadn’t been home the night before and they all said he’d been with Evelyn. Anyway, Mrs. Nichols came into the office and she was furious and she went into his private office without even being announced and gave him a tongue lashing everybody could hear. All about ‘that hussy’—who was breaking up her home and how she wouldn’t stand for it. I came in just as she stamped out of the office and slammed the door behind her and nearly broke the glass.”

“Did Nichols get on well with Mason?”

“Yes and no. There was some feeling there—Mr. Nichols had invented a new kind of plane wing. There’s a company rule that any invention by an official or employee belongs to the company. So Mr. Mason made Mr. Nichols give the design to the company and according to people I talked to Mr. Nichols was put out about it. I guess he was justified, but that’s the way the company worked.”

“So Nichols was sore—I can understand that, even though that sort of thing happens in most companies. Was there any open flare up?”

“No—never.”

“Nichols being hot tempered was angry at Mason. Which probably means they quarreled but—no use guessing. Tell me this—did Mason go out at all with Evelyn?”

I waited for her answer. “Not that I know of,” she answered, after a second or

so. “In the office he was all business. Nobody ever gossiped about him.”

But Florence couldn’t know how Evelyn acted after she became Mason’s secretary. Moreover, from what Florence already had said, Evelyn would be the kind of girl to go after a man, if the spoils seemed sufficient.

“Everybody said Mr. and Mrs. Mason were the most romantic couple,” Florence said. “She was supposed to be wild about him—wouldn’t even look at anybody else. She was always dropping into the office to see him—two or three times a week. Only, a few months before I left, that stopped.”

“Stopped?”

“Yes. She came in one day and I guess Mr. Mason was supposed to be there and wasn’t. She was a little annoyed. She said she’d see Mr. Nichols—several other times when she came to the office she stopped to see Mr. Nichols. But that day he wasn’t there either so she went in to see Mr. Bessinger—I guess to find out where her husband had gone. Then she went out and she never came into the office again—at least while I was there.”

“Possibly she was sick.”

“She wasn’t. She used to meet him downstairs in the car at night. And I saw her there several times after that—perfectly well. The daughter was there too, but they didn’t come upstairs.”

The only plausible explanation was that Mason had asked her not to come to the office any more. It may have been he felt it wasn’t good for office morale to have the boss’s wife popping in and out. In which case, why had it taken so long to make the discovery? Or perhaps Bessinger himself had done or said something which angered her. The whole question was a trifle. But I felt the answer to it might be important.

FROM what Florence had said, it was apparent that Evelyn had had a reputation of being a woman of affairs. She liked to have a dozen men seeking her affection all at once.

The possibility had not before entered my mind. That some boy friend, rather than see her in the arms of some other man, had killed her.

“The papers,” Florence said, “say there may be a possibility of spies—foreigners—”

“The Federal men don’t think so.”

The night previous, Strong had telephoned one of his friends in the Federal Bureau of Investigation, told him about the fellow who had dropped in at Florence’s office. The Federal man wasn’t impressed. “Every time there’s a murder,” he said, “somebody tries to make it a spy case. Thanks for the tip just the same.” Strong had told him to do what he liked with it.

I didn’t see any point in frightening her, even though both Strong and I had doubts

the Federal men were right.

"The papers are just guessing."

She was silent then, and I asked her how she got along with Mason, how she liked him.

"He was probably the best friend I had in the office. Even though he did testify against me. I'm sure he was honest. I can't believe anything else. I don't think he's missing, I think he's probably just away on a trip."

"He would have heard about the murder by now. Even in Cuba they have radios."

"I don't think he's run away. He'll be back. I'm sure of it."

Maybe. The Mason Aircraft people did not regard him as missing. Nor would Mrs. Mason, despite the letter, make any report to police. And we couldn't start the police looking for a man who—according to his business associates and even his wife—was only away on business.

Florence was sorry she hadn't been more help.

"If I'd gone out with them oftener," she said, "maybe I'd be able to tell you more."

I said it didn't matter. But it did. Because the most important thing she told me was that Mason apparently had been happy with his wife and daughter. Then something must have happened. Something that changed his whole life. Something that made him hate her.

It was all linked. The original theft. The murder. The breakup of Mason's home and his disappearance. Perhaps even the death of Jack Brown. All tied together, offshoots of a single, powerful cause.

But what that cause was I had not the least idea.

XVIII

for White folio

December 16

(transcript attached)

CASE NOTATIONS

To J. M.

from Strong

Jim: I've just been over Evelyn Emory's testimony in the original trial. It pretty well reveals what she was like and I'm putting it in the folder on Florence.

As will be seen, the examination by Flacon was by no means complete. The whole thing was perfunctory. Her testimony is full of discrepancies, and the most important question of all, the question which must have been in everyone's mind in regard to Evelyn Emory, the defense attorney did not even bother to ask her.

XIX

from transcript of

PEOPLE OF NEW YORK VS WHITE

Miss Evelyn Emory, of Babylon, Long Island, N. Y., called as a witness in behalf of the People, being first duly sworn, testified as follows:

Direct Examination by Mr. Collins:

Q. Now, Miss Emory, you are employed by the Mason Aircraft Company, on lower Broadway in this city, is that right?

A. That is perfectly right. I've been employed there for some months.

Q. And you are a friend of the defendant, Florence White? A. I knew her. We worked in the same office. She was not what you would call a close friend.

Q. An acquaintance? A. That would be more correct.

Q. Take your time now, Miss Emory, and tell us what you remember about the night of April 17, 1937. A. I'll try, Mr. Collins. It was -- I would say it was around seven o'clock and I was just leaving. I had to wait a few minutes because the regular boys were already off and there was only Jack Brown, the watchman, to run the elevator. He came after a few minutes and took me down. I really --

Q. Yes? A. I don't like to do this but I feel I really ought to. I stood there by the door -- oh, doing something trivial, putting on my gloves, I believe it was. And then -- well, Miss White came by. She had walked down the stairs. I was surprised to see her still there. She had something in her hand. I couldn't say what it was, Mr. Collins. An object of some kind, a package.

Q. Did she speak to you? A. No -- that was what seemed so funny. She looked straight at me and I felt I ought to say something -- I sort of had to. So I said "Hello, Miss White. What are you doing here so late?" Something like that. But she didn't answer me. She stared at me -- I felt like a ghost. And then she hurried on.

Q. Did you have an opportunity to see more closely what she was carrying? A. I was only aware that she had something under her arm. Naturally, I paid little attention to it.

Q. How long have you known the defendant? A. Oh, nearly a year. She was at the office when I joined the staff as secretary. I really hardly know her, except in business --

Q. How big was the package? A. I wouldn't want to tell you wrong and I didn't pay much attention.

Q. Could it have been her pocketbook? A. No, it couldn't. I remember noticing that her pocketbook was in her other hand.

Q. Did Miss White speak to you about the securities in the safe? A. I do

re all something. My desk is near the safe and I saw her put them in and she said to me it was lucky she was honest because they were valuable securities. Then she laughed and said of course she would never touch them.

Q. Do you happen to remember her exact words? A. What she said was, as nearly as I can remember it, "Evelyn, it certainly is a lucky thing I'm honest. Because I just put about twenty thousand dollars worth of securities in the safe. If I wanted them, I could just pick them up, like that. Only I don't."

Q. Speak a little louder, please. That was what she told you, on the day of the theft? A. It was.

Q. But you didn't remember this incident that night when you saw her with the package? A. No, I didn't. I was tired.

Q. You say she stood and stared at you. For how long a time was that? A. It was very short -- about fifteen seconds.

Q. And then she turned and ran out into the night? A. Yes.

Cross-Examination by Mr. Flacon:*

Q. About this package, Miss Emory. Was it wrapped? A. I'm sorry. It was too dark for me to see.

Q. You mean you could not tell whether it was wrapped or not. A. As I told you, it was too dark.

Q. How big was it? A. I couldn't say that, either.

Q. But you must have some idea about this package. You say you saw something in her hand. A. It was just a dark mass.

Q. Couldn't have been her pocketbook? A. As I explained to Mr. Collins, she had her pocketbook in the other hand.

Q. It was bright enough for you to see that, and still you couldn't tell what kind of package she had in her other hand? A. Your Honor, I'm not a criminal. I came here as a witness. Do I have to submit to treatment --

The Court: The witness will please answer the question.

Q. I repeat, if -- A. It just happened I could see the pocketbook, under the other arm.

Q. Which arm? A. The pocketbook was under her left arm.

Q. And on which side of her were you standing? A. I was on her right as she approached.

Q. And the package you think you saw was lost in the shadows? A. That's right.

Q. And you have no idea how big it was, what color it was, or what it contained? A. No.

Q. For all you know, it could have been a package of hamburger for the dog, couldn't it? A. Well --

Mr. Collins: I object. That calls for a guess on the part of the witness --

*George Flacon, prominent lawyer and city politician, was appointed by the Court to defend Miss White, as she had no funds. J. M.

The Court: Sustained. Strike it out.

Q. When she spoke about those securities, did it appear to you she was in a kidding mood? A. Kidding mood? I --

Mr. Collins: Objection. That calls for the witness to form an opinion.

The Court: Sustained.

Q. Did anyone else besides you hear her make those remarks? A. Not to my knowledge.

Q. Isn't it true, Miss Emory, that within the last few days, you've received a promotion --

Mr. Collins: He knows better than to ask that question. I object to it on the grounds that it is immaterial, irrelevant, tending to inflame the minds of the jury --

The Court: Sustained. I must warn counsel for the defense to stay to the subject. We are not here to waste the time or the money of the Court or the taxpayers. Proceed.

Q. Why didn't you come forward earlier with your testimony? Why didn't you tell the police sooner? A. Well, I --

Mr. Collins: I object, Your Honor. What the attorney's purpose is I cannot fathom, but he certainly has no right --

The Court: I have already warned counsel. One more attempt to drag in irrelevant matter, and I will call a halt to these proceedings and have a new attorney appointed.

Mr. Flacon: If your Honor will give me time to show the connection --

The Court: Just what do you intend to show?

Mr. Flacon: I wish to show that she was not going to testify originally. That something made her change her mind.

The Court: What is the "something" you speak of?

Mr. Flacon: I am unable to reveal that at the present time.

The Court: We cannot allow such loose accusations as that. If you have anything on which to base the charge, we will be glad to allow it. Otherwise, the question is ruled out.

Mr. Flacon: Very well. I withdraw it.

Q. Did she ever speak to you at any other time of money in the office? A. By "she" I suppose you mean Miss White. No, she didn't, that I recall.

Q. All you saw was a dark, shadowy substance you took to be a package? A. It was a package. One knows things like that, even when the details aren't sharp.

Q. How can you be sure it wasn't just a trick of the shadows? A. Because I know it wasn't. It was a package.

Q. That's the way you form your judgments?

Mr. Collins: I object. She had only been telling what she saw. He is attempting to distort her meaning.

Mr. Flacon: I withdraw the question. That's all, Miss Emory.

(Witness excused)

XX

File White

TIME TABLE

Long Island Trains

ARRIVE Emmelpport.....	10:07 a.m.
" Babylon.....	10:36 " "
" Hinkney.....	11:12 " "

I TOOK a taxi from the Babylon station to the Emory house, which lies on the outskirts of the town.

A house that had lived too long. In a district of large estates and new, expensive homes, it stood as one of the crumbling relics of the past. Large and dingy and unattractive, sitting back about a hundred feet from the road, with an unpainted picket fence before it. The few splotches of grass were trampled and yellow. On the large porch were four rocking chairs arranged in an orderly row, facing the street.

As my taxi stopped, the husband and wife came to the door. I doubt if many cabs come out that way. They watched me pay the fare, turn and start up the path. They made no move in my direction.

I greeted them as cheerily as I could. For a moment they stood there, looking me over with an unspoken hostility. Then the man said, "I remember you. What is it now?"

The woman appeared less brittle than her husband. I addressed myself to her. "Let me explain right away," I said. "I'm the lawyer representing Miss White."

Slowly the color drained from her face. "The one that killed her!"

I said there was still much doubt on the point and we were all trying to get at the truth. That was why I had come out from New York—

"Truth!" He uttered it as an oath, as if it were a subject about which I could know nothing.

The wife said, "We don't want her punished if she didn't do it. You know we don't, John. But the police say there's no doubt about it at all."

"Sometimes the police will say something like that even when they don't believe it themselves," I told her. "Miss White at least should be given a chance to prove her innocence."

Mr. Emory, tall and gaunt, regarded me with an odd, malevolent expression.

"We aren't interested in the woman. The Lord gives judgment in due time."

I knew the hardness of the man, the indomitable will. A Puritanical strength, a rigidity of ideas, pervaded his personality.

"You don't care," I said, "whether or not

the police find the person who killed your daughter?"

"Oh, we do," the mother replied. "Whoever it is— But the police are so certain—"

There was a canny light in the man's eyes. "How do you happen to defend the woman? They say no one knows where she is."

I explained to him that we had obtained her parole. "We are certain that she's only hiding now from fright. She will come back and face whatever charges they bring."

"Remarkable." The corners of his mouth turned down in a sneer. "In any case, your trip here is waste of time. There is nothing we can tell you."

He seemed about to retire within the house when the mother stopped him.

"John, he's come a long way. I can't see any harm in telling him—whatever we can."

He turned on her with anger. "Go inside where you belong."

She was trembling, but she held her ground. "Evelyn was my child. Our daughter. I want to help get the truth of it—"

"All right!" he shouted. "See him, talk with him. What does it matter?" He stood motionless, head drawn back. "Like her."

The mother turned away from him. In an aching, tired voice, she said, "Come in."

His mouth was open, and he was breathing hard. He stepped back from the door in a gesture of resignation. Another evil added to many, another cross he had to bear.

I walked into the house, felt the stuffiness of the atmosphere, saw the horse-hair chairs, the mirrors with their gilt frames.

THE man dropped into the green-plush Morris chair. His hands clamped over the wooden arms and he stared ahead with vacant eyes. The wife sat on the sofa, nervously fingering the cameo brooch pinned on her dress.

"Please sit down." She waved me toward a rocker on the other side of the room. But I sat instead on the stool in front of the upright piano. The reception was not exactly as I had anticipated. I was not a little unnerved.

"Evelyn—she was your only child?" I asked her.

I already knew the answer but at least it broke the awkward silence.

She nodded affirmatively. "Now she's been taken away from me."

She glanced at Mr. Emory. There was fear on her face. "My husband—he has been terribly upset by it. He loved her so much."

At this remark, Mr. Emory's lips broke into a smile—a smile of contempt. "You shall know them by their fruits."

"We brought her up so carefully," the woman said, hurriedly. "Sacrificed everything for her. Gave up vacations so she could have dancing lessons."

"She appreciated what you did for her?"

"She was always good. The trouble began when the money was stolen."

"That was when she got the raise?"

It was a guess. I knew Evelyn had been promoted shortly after the theft. And promotions usually mean increases in pay.

"How did you know about it?" Mr. Emory asked.

I didn't answer. The woman went on. "That was it. That was when she began to get bigger ideas. Home wasn't good enough for her. Had to live somewhere more exciting. She was young. It wasn't her fault."

"No," Emory said, "none of it was her fault."

I couldn't tell whether he meant it or whether it was sarcasm.

"From what I've heard," I said, "Evelyn had a number of beaux—men who took her out. She was a pretty girl, attractive. It's just possible that some one may have been jealous—"

"Oh," she interrupted me. "They all thought she was so wonderful."

"No man in her life who might have been jealous, angered at the way she treated him?"

"No—no sweetheart. But there was one man—" She looked at me, puzzled. "I don't know whether it means anything or not. It happened some months ago. A man came here to see her. She didn't know him. Hadn't ever seen him before. She'd been sick and was resting up here—one of the few times we got to see her. The man had called the office, learned she was here and had come out. He said his name was Smith."

For a moment it didn't register. I turned the name over in my mind, trying to recall how it fitted into the case. Then I remembered where I had heard it before in connection with Florence—the man who had come to see her at her office.

"Did you see him?"

"I let him in. He was short and stout and he spoke with an accent."

It was the same man.

"What did he want?"

"I didn't hear but she told me afterwards. He was a German. He pretended at first that all he wanted was to see Harvey Mason. He'd come all the way out here, because he hadn't been able to get into the office and he thought maybe if he talked with her about it, away from business, she might be able to help him.

"Evelyn was pretty smart. She pretended to want to help him. She talked with him about Germany where she had visited some time ago. Before she was through, she got his real plan—he wanted her to tell him about the planes they were making. Anything at all, and he'd pay her for it."

"What did she say to this plan?"

"She tried to string him along, kidding with him. Of course, she was going to report him. She told him to stop into the

office in about a week. He wouldn't. He said she had to meet him somewhere. So she left it he would call her and make an appointment, but he didn't, so far as I know."

"What did she do with this information?"

"Well, she told Harvey Mason and he was going to get in touch with the police but I never heard any more about it."

HOW much it meant I couldn't tell any more than she could. Except that now this man named Smith had twice been involved with individuals connected with the case. And Smith was, apparently, a German agent.

"When did Evelyn move to New York?"

"After the trial." The woman was daubing her eyes with her handkerchief. "She wanted New York. The excitement. The clothes."

"Wasting her money," Emory interrupted.

"Wasting it on vanity."

"She only wanted to look pretty. Every girl wants things like that. I don't blame her. I wish we could have been with her oftener. It didn't seem to mean so much then because we always knew she was there. But now she isn't."

"Did you ever have any quarrels?"

"We had little upsets like any family. But she was a good girl."

Emory's face was reddening. He stood up slowly. His whole being seemed to quiver. "She was no good, I tell you—no good!" His voice rose excitedly. "She was my daughter—and she was a filthy—"

"John, don't—"

"The devil himself was in her. Why defend her? Why lie? Her death—what could we expect?"

The thing was unbelievable. He was cursing his daughter, cursing her like some hell-and-brimstone preacher lashing at the pagans.

"Selling her own body, her flesh, for lust." He seemed to forget we were there, to talk to himself. "She was evil, wasn't she? What could she expect to find except destruction?"

His fury turned on me. "What do you know about truth? About who killed her? I know. I know who he is because he slept with her. Only now he's run away. Trying to hide, to get away from retribution. But he won't."

With as much calm as I could muster, I asked, "You mean Mason? Harvey Mason?"

His answer was a horrible smile. "He gave her everything she wanted—including death."

The self-righteousness, the bigotry, gleamed in his expression. As I watched him, an idea came, a notion I had not even considered before.

I crossed the room to the window.

"That night," I asked, "that night she was killed. Were you two at home?"

After a pause, he answered, "She was—"

Irma. But I knew. I knew that something was going to happen. There are intuitions of the future, if only we recognize them."

"You knew—something was going to happen to your daughter?"

"Yes, I did. I went out. I spent much of that night alone, in our church."

"Doing what?" I heard myself ask.

"I was praying. Asking God to save her."

I could hear the ticking of the overgrown grandfather's clock in the hall. Behind me came the woman's voice. "John—you didn't tell me. You only said you were—going out. But they—I didn't know they kept the church unlocked at night."

The fanatical light in his eyes grew more bright and burning.

I forced myself to turn away, looked across the room to the mirror.

The room grew cold. For one impossible moment I saw—reflected in that mirror—the face of Evelyn Emory.

Then I realized it wasn't really Evelyn but her mother. I saw now the closeness of the mother-daughter resemblance. She was staring at her husband and stark terror was in her eyes.

It was as if Evelyn herself looked into the face of her murderer.

Her hands were on her cheeks. Mr. Emory, without speaking, walked from the room.

In a few seconds he returned, bringing my coat and hat, which he handed to me.

I bowed, mumbled regrets. As I started out, Mrs. Emory followed. I reached the porch and was glad for the cold blast of wind.

Mrs. Emory stood in the doorway. Her skin was livid.

"I'm very sorry about this," I said stiffly. "I never intended—"

"It's all right," she said, "perfectly all right. Only—don't come here again. Don't ever come here again."

She closed the door before I could reply.

XXI

for White folio
Dec. 16

CASE NOTATIONS

Att: Mr. Strong

From: Miss Ring

Following your request, I checked this morning with the concern where Florence White was employed and talked with the man who fired her after her interview with the "Mr. Smith."

He said he knew nothing about Mr. Smith at all but he felt it was wrong for any employee to hold conversations during working hours with outsiders not con-

nected with the business of the firm. He said -- rather sourly, I thought -- that the man's accent naturally made him "suspicious" and that several other employees brought the matter to his attention. He said this was especially bad in view of Miss White's criminal record and that he had decided it was best for the interests of the concern that they dispense with her services.

He said he was sorry to hear she was "in trouble" again and that he hoped it would all turn out all right. From his tone, I gathered he is one of those fuss-budgets who play the tyrant in their office and regard even slight infractions of the rules as matters of deep concern. Florence White must have seemed to him a dangerous individual and he was probably looking for an excuse to get rid of her.

XXII

for White Folio
Excerpt from New York Sun
Dec. 17

"The mysterious poison-murder of blonde Evelyn Emory, Wall Street secretary whose body was found near the tunnel at 42nd St. and First Ave., was declared solved today.

"Police made this startling claim with announcement they had arrested Florence White, 24, ex-stenographer formerly employed in the same office with Miss Emory. She had been hiding out in an uptown hotel under an assumed name.

"Praising police for their effective work, District Attorney Collins revealed that the accused woman has a criminal record and was released on parole two years ago after she had served time for grand larceny in connection with the theft."

SO IT had happened. The stupid quagmire of prejudice and hate we had fought to avoid. The public would swallow whole the statements of the learned district attorney—only a few stubborn fools would dare suggest that she might be innocent. Hadn't she already been in prison? Hadn't she been hiding?

Collins called us to gloat over his success. The police had located the hotel hideout after a long search. They had been certain all along she was somewhere in the city. The clerk had given them a description.

We pushed our way through newsmen and photographers who crowded into the District Attorney's office. They were posing Collins with the box of bathsalts in his hand, taking pictures of him smiling and frowning and looking grim. The atmosphere was something like what you might expect

at a country fair.

The reporters were clamoring for an interview with Florence. Collins seemed almost ready to grant the request when we arrived.

Strong—already angry—managed to hide his feelings. Smilingly, he told reporters that Collins would be happy to go on posing all day. As for Florence—there would be no pictures and no interview.

"If she has to be tried for this crime," he told them, "it will be in court. Not in your papers."

"Let's have one picture of the dame anyway," one photographer pleaded. "It'll only take a minute."

"Now, Strong," Collins wheedled, "the boys are only trying to do their jobs. They only want—"

Strong whirled and faced him. The photographers got it and stepped away, cameras ready. Collins backed down quickly. Pictures of the district attorney doing physical battle with the defense would hardly be good publicity.

"Of course, if you object—"

"Where is she?"

"In my own office. Two policewomen on guard."

"We'll see her. Now."

The policewomen were hefty looking ladies with whom I myself would not like to tangle. They stood stiffly at attention as we came in. Collins, behind us, called to them.

"It's all right. These are her attorneys. You wait outside."

The two ladies walked past us without looking in our direction. Their expressions made it clear they had no sympathy for Florence or anyone who would try to defend her.

She was in the chair by the window. Her attempt to smile at us failed. It would have been good if she had allowed herself the luxury of weeping. But she sat instead dry-eyed and cold and unreachable.

"Come on, Florence," Strong told her. "This isn't the worst thing that ever happened."

She looked up. "I told you I bring trouble."

"Forget that part of it. We'll lick them before we're finished."

"You've done a lot. I do appreciate it." She sounded defeated, finished.

Strong began pacing the room. "They can only hold you forty-eight hours. The moment we can arrange bail we'll get you out of here. The rest of it we can see about later."

She seemed confused. "But they told me—the district attorney said you had dropped the case. He said you'd finally come to believe I was guilty."

"He told you that? When?"

"A little while ago. When they were ask-

ing me questions. Telling me I killed her and it would be easier if I confessed. But I didn't. I didn't kill her."

"You answered their questions?"

"It was just what I've told you about it. They said it was all lies."

"You shouldn't have said anything. They were trying to trap you."

"I'm sorry. I—only said what I thought was—"

"Too late now. From now on, don't answer anything. Not a word, unless I give you the say so."

He had his glasses off, rubbing them with his handkerchief.

FOR some time he remained by the window, rubbing those glasses, holding them up and examining them as if they were the only care he had in the world.

He put them on at last, looked at Florence with a quizzical smile. "Seems rotten, doesn't it?"

"It seems like we'll never know the reasons for it," she told him. "The real reasons."

"That's how it looks," he agreed. "The way all murders look—until they're solved. Once you have the key it's all perfectly simple. Like cutting a watermelon—you cut and cut and think you're getting nowhere—and then you get to the other side and the whole thing opens up."

"But you do have to have the key, don't you?"

"It's perfectly obvious, Florence, what the key is in this case. But *where* it is—that's what we have to find out."

"Obvious? But what—"

"Everything about this case—from start to now—circles about Harvey Mason."

"He couldn't have killed Evelyn!" She was excited. "I know he couldn't."

"I'm not saying he did. I'm only saying he's the center of it. In the office when you were there—who was the closest to him? Nichols?"

"Mr. Bessinger, I guess. Mr. Mason stayed pretty much to himself. But Mr. Bessinger was with him more than anyone else. Some people said Mr. Bessinger was a yes-man but most of us thought he looked up to Mr. Mason—made a hero of him."

"If anyone down there knows Mason's private plans, it would be Bessinger?"

"I'm pretty sure."

We stayed about half an hour longer, trying to cheer her up, but Strong didn't ask her any more questions about the case. He was trying to tell her not to worry about the arrest, that it would be all right. It was rather difficult, because there really wasn't much we could tell except that we were going to do everything we could.

Collins broke up the interview by bouncing into the room to inform us our time was up and we'd have to leave. He was genial

but could not miss the frigid manner with which we greeted him.

"You've been asking for it, Collins," Strong said quietly.

"Asking for it? What do you mean?"

"Telling Miss White we'd thrown over her case—"

He raised a protesting hand. "You don't have to get hot under the collar. You know the tricks of the game as well as I."

"Only we use them honestly."

We turned from Collins, had a few more words with Florence, promised we'd arrange bail as soon as possible.

When we reached the corridor Strong said, "All right. Bessinger."

But the aircraft executive wasn't at his office at the Wembke Building, according to the sour young thing at the reception desk. Apparently he'd been under the weather and had stayed at his home.

She wouldn't give us his address but we obtained it in the phone book downstairs in the drugstore. An apartment up on Riverside Drive. We got a cab outside.

It was an attractive, ultra-modern apartment—exactly the sort of place the smooth, modern Bessinger would have. The maid informed us that he was resting but that he would be out shortly and would we mind waiting in the drawing room.

I sat on the bright green sofa. On the glass table before me were piled several books and I fingered through them while we waited. A small volume called *Joyful Wisdom* by Nietzsche and a copy of Plato's *Republic* with decorations by Flourier.

He was tying the cords of his dark dressing robe as he entered. Wan and tired, I thought, but still smiling and apparently glad to see us.

"Don't catch cold, Everett." It was a woman's voice, calling down the hall. "Just when you're getting well—"

"It's all right, dear. Don't worry." His grimace was facetious. "Women will be the death of me yet."

WE WASTED no time in coming to the point. Florence had been arrested. It had upset our plans. We were rushing to prepare our defense. Had he had any word from Mr. Mason?

Mr. Bessinger got up. He walked across the room. He stared at the dark brown rug.

"Not a word. Nothing at all from him since that card. But it doesn't matter, I tell you—"

"You mean, you don't think he's guilty?"

"Guilty? Guilty of what? Of murdering a girl three thousand miles away from him?"

"He might have come back."

"He isn't the kind of man who would murder. I'd stake my life on it."

"You yourself admitted to Matthews that you thought there was something wrong

about the original conviction. Mason was one of the witnesses against her."

"His testimony meant nothing. All he told them was that he had shown her the combination of the safe. And, of course, he had given her those securities to put away. It was the janitor—and Evelyn Emory—who convicted her."

"You went out with Evelyn Emory once or twice yourself, didn't you?" I said.

He seemed flustered—shook his head negatively. I imagine he may have been worried that his wife might hear us. It was possible he had gone out with Evelyn and not told his wife about it.

Strong went back to the main subject. "Before Mr. Mason left, did he discuss with you any personal problems or plans?"

"I don't get you."

"It appears now that he had some quite definite plans for his personal life—plans we have learned of only recently. Did he talk them over with you?"

"You'll have to be more explicit. I don't know what you're talking about."

"But you would know if he had talked over any plans for making a radical change in his life—for, say, leaving his wife and home and not returning to New York?"

"He never said that, never in all his life."

"All right," Strong told him. "I just wanted to be certain."

The idea that we weren't merely fishing but actually had some facts to back this up suddenly struck him. "Just where—where did you get this information?"

"It's something we have under investigation?"

"You can't withhold any information of that kind—if you have any."

"I'm afraid we're going to have to withhold it. At least for the time being. Our only purpose in coming here was to find out if he dropped any hint of such a plan to you before he left."

"I can answer that categorically no. It's insane! If you doubt me ask anyone in the office. Nichols or the others."

"All the more reason why you ought to be more concerned about him now. But that is the odd fact—no one in the office does seem concerned."

"It isn't so odd." Bessinger lighted a cigarette. "Had there been no murder—we wouldn't have thought about Mason at all. We would have figured it was perfectly normal for him to stay away two—maybe three or even four months—with no word from him. That was his way of doing business."

"You mean, it's only because of the murder that you even thought of worrying about him?"

"Yes. And suppose he hasn't heard about the crime? That's very likely. We don't know. All we know is he's away and we haven't heard from him."

"It makes sense, the way you put it," Strong admitted. "But I must tell you—there is other evidence that he doesn't plan to return."

"I demand you tell me what that evidence is."

Strong shook his head.

BESSINGER said, "Then I shall feel free to go to the police and tell them what you've told me. Perhaps they will have a way of making you reveal any information which might be valuable to them."

"Perhaps. I hope at the same time that you make this report you will also explain that Mr. Mason is missing."

"I see what you're trying," Bessinger flared. "You want us to report him missing—so that you can prepare a case against him. This inside information is a ruse."

He looked at us with rising anger. "I can be of no assistance to you."

The woman was calling and we heard her footsteps up the hall. She stood in the door, a small woman with colorless lips and cheeks and long brown hair done up in a bun at the back. She was dressed in a tight brown suit and wore low heels. "Darling," she said, "you mustn't get excited—"

"My wife," Bessinger introduced us. The woman gave us a little smile. She seemed pleasant and shy. Most of all, she was worried about her husband catching more cold.

"There are just a few more questions I'd like to ask," Strong said. "And we'll be going."

Bessinger, standing, regarded him without answering.

"You are quite sure there was no quarrel—no serious quarrel—between Mr. Mason and his wife?"

"I am not going to discuss with you or your partner," Bessinger said, "the personal affairs of my friends or business associates. But whoever says there is any trouble between those two—is saying a lie."

"That's a good enough answer for me," Strong told him.

The wife, during this interchange, was standing and listening. Curious thing about her—she was so quiet you hardly felt she was there at all.

We rose to leave. Bessinger walked with us down the hall. His anger had cooled and he seemed anxious to smooth things over.

"Sorry about the way Nichols acted the other day." He sounded apologetic and desirous of appeasing us. "He gets upset easily."

"He certainly does," I agreed. "Does he always act like that?"

"I'm afraid so—when things don't go exactly right. But he doesn't mean anything by it. Good-natured, under the surface. Everybody knows it down at the office. Crazy about music and poetry—even writes verse himself." He laughed. "Every man to his

own horizon."

"I can understand that," Strong said. Then, abruptly, "Does Nichols live in the city?"

"Out in Larchmont. Nice place, we've been there often. We happen to belong to the same yacht club and go there often for dinner. Nichols is a nice fellow, when you know him."

"Maybe," I said. "A rather typical suburbanite."

"Not quite," Bessinger amended. "He has ideas. Some of them good. He's got himself a small lab out there and putters around. Always about to make some great invention."

"Has he ever?"

"Not that I know of, no. Starts off with all the enthusiasm in the world—but never gets the job done."

The sagging-cheeked Nichols became interesting. Away from his home, he was a Lothario, a lover of music and poetry—an aging gallant. But at home he was a different person—a suburbanite who puttered around in his laboratory—who doubtless lived a sedate, unobtrusive life, with bridge in the evening as a high spot in excitement.

The mousy little wife spoke with Bessinger. I gathered it was something about getting dressed. Bessinger nodded and said, "Yes, I almost forgot. We have guests coming in for dinner and I'll have to get ready. I know you'll understand."

We understood. We understood that Bessinger had had no word from Mason, neither had anyone else at the office. But they weren't going to report Mason as missing. Nor was Mrs. Mason planning any action. And if we went to the police, they'd say we were trying to build up a case against him as an aid in the defense of Florence White.

There was only one answer left. We had to find Mason ourselves.

XXIII

for White Folio

FROM THE DIARY OF JAMES MATTHEWS

DEC. 18 . . . In Miami tonight, after flying down from the City. The trip was bumpy and we were in thick cloud formations much of the way but it was not unpleasant. There was a young hostess and I was chatting with her much of the time. She told me she is learning to fly in her spare hours and hopes eventually to be in the armed forces as a ferry pilot. Good to get my mind off the case for a few minutes and relax.

The problem facing us is serious. Collins will undoubtedly obtain an indictment and has evidence which may get a conviction

against Florence unless we can establish Mason as missing and also connect him with Evelyn's murder. I begin to see that the second part will be the tougher, for unless we can put Mason in the city, we can hardly back up our idea that he killed Evelyn.

On arrival here I went directly to the Golden Palm Hotel, a pleasant resort place on Miami Beach. They know me from way back and I have a good room at rates not too high—although with the way nobody is here right now I think they'd have let me the room for almost nothing.

After dinner, to the offices of the air line. I was aware of the difficulty of my job—these officials are famed for their discretion in regard to information about passengers. But the young man with whom I conversed was pleasant and helpful. I told him I was seeking information concerning the whereabouts of Harvey Mason. He recognized the name naturally enough—what airman wouldn't? I was afraid he might think me a detective or newspaperman so I explained I was an attorney and a friend of the family. Said we hadn't heard from him for weeks and were disturbed, especially Mason's wife who was almost distracted but we didn't want to have to go to the police which would make a scandal and all that. I put just enough seasoning of pathos into the story to make it convincing—I was the worried man, trying to locate my friend. Told him I realized he was not at liberty to reveal much information but perhaps he could at least tell me if Mason did make the flight on October 17, as I had been given to understand by Bessinger.

He consulted some records in the filing cabinet and came back shaking his head. "Against every rule in the company but I'll tell you—Mr. Mason did not fly to Cuba that day."

He said there was only one flight that day, due to a hurricane warning which had cancelled all flights except one late in the afternoon. Ten passengers went on that trip in the plane—but none of them was named Mason. I said it was conceivable Mason was traveling under another name—incognito, I told him. He went through the list again and said it wasn't possible—there were only two names on the list who weren't regular passengers well known to the company. They made the round trip from Miami to Cuba and back frequently on business. Of the two he didn't know, one was a woman from Garden City, New York, and the other a man from San Antonio, Texas. They were not traveling together.

He wasn't going to give me the names of these individuals but having gone so far he wasn't hard to break down, especially as I convinced him he was doing it in a good cause.

The woman is Mrs. David Stewart and the

man's name is James Robinson. Mrs. Stewart returned about a week ago and took the plane from Miami to La Guardia Field in New York. Robinson, according to the records, has not returned, at least not by plane. He had made reservations through the plane company to stop at the Hotel Plaza in Havana.

It was all he could tell me. On my return to my hotel, I put in a long distance call to Mrs. Stewart in Garden City. She is a sweet-voiced lady but she was highly incensed at my call. I explained I was seeking information about Mr. James Robinson and wondered if she knew whether or not he had returned from Cuba. She said she had never heard of the individual, that she was married and the mother of two children, that she thought it was "too, too terrible" for her to be bothered with such calls and if I dared to phone again she would have me arrested. With that she hung up, just as I was trying to thank her for her help.

I feel sure she was telling the truth and has no connection with Robinson but nonetheless I have wired Phil Strong to double check before we call the street closed.

JAMES ROBINSON appears to be a new possibility. It is not impossible this was the name used by Harvey Mason. At any rate, I am flying to Havana tomorrow morning.

Dec. 19 . . . Registered at the Plaza this morning, on arrival at Havana, which I find so foreign it is hard to believe one is still in the Western Hemisphere. The floor of this room is tiled and the walls are high and painted blue, with a border of bright red near the bottom and one of orange near the ceiling. There are two great windows through which I can see the Square and the magnificent Capitol and also hear the squeaky street noises and smell the odor which seems to be peculiar to Latin-American nations—burnt tobacco I think it is. But now it is late and everything is hushed—even the clanging street-cars have stopped.

I had quite a discussion this evening with the hotel clerk—a highly educated Cuban who speaks English with scarcely a flaw. We talked about the war and the refugee problem in Cuba, which he says has been growing. But he says the Nazis in Cuba spread stories to discredit the refugees and thus help to foment more dissension. He said proudly that the Cuban government was doing a remarkable job of weeding out the Fascists posing as anti-Nazis from the real refugees.

As we chatted, I mentioned my plan of contacting two friends—a Harvey Mason and a James Robinson. I wondered if he could check to see if they were registered. Nothing on Mason, he told me. There had been a James Robinson, but he had checked out some weeks before.

How long had he been registered? Mr. Romera, the clerk, checked again. Exactly one day. He did not remember much about him. Nor had this Robinson left any forwarding address.

"Did he get any mail?" I asked.

Romera looked at me curiously. My questions seemed to be arousing his suspicions. I was more than merely a friend. "You see, I dropped him a line to Florida and I wondered if it had been forwarded."

"Oh!" He seemed relieved to hear my reason. "He did get one letter. But it was mailed direct from New York. Got here the day before Robinson arrived. That's why I remember it because Robinson didn't have an advance reservation and the letter wasn't marked to hold. I was trying to figure where to send it because there wasn't any return address—just the New York post mark. I decided to hold it for a few days."

"Then your problem was solved when Robinson showed up the next day?"

Romera nodded slowly.

I was deeply disappointed at having missed my friend. Romera obligingly agreed to ask the head porter if he had any record of where Mr. Robinson had gone. The porter likewise had no memory of him, but his records were enlightening. Robinson had ordered passage on the Plida, the steamship which goes the route between Havana and Miami—it's an overnight run. That was on Oct. 18. Apparently, Robinson had flown over on the 17th, stayed overnight, completed his business the following day and departed in the evening on the steamer.

The porter's records also showed that the man had ordered a car and a guide to serve him during the day. The porter said he obtained all guides for the hotel guests through one of the best tour managers in Havana, a gentleman named Batista Murphy. His mother, it appears, was a beautiful Cuban girl and his father was an Irish sailor on board a tramp freighter which put into the harbor. Batista runs a fleet of tourist cars which take visitors on sight-seeing trips.

If he or his guides remember anything about this Robinson, I may be able to determine tomorrow if I am on the right track. Dec. 20 . . . Batista is a handsome, blue-eyed Cuban who looks as if he might have stepped out of a motion picture. His office is around the corner from Sloppy Joe's—we went to that bar in fact to discuss our business. Few tourists in the city now and the bartender told me he thought they might have to close up. I asked Batista about Robinson. After some little meditation he snapped his fingers and exclaimed—his entire face lighted up with his enthusiasm—"I remember! The tall American—big like a stick."

I showed him the picture then—the one Miss Ring had clipped from *Time*. I had al-

ready shown it to the men in the hotel, but they declared they had no memory of what the man looked like.

Batista stared at that picture a long time. He tilted his head and looked at it sideways. He held it close to him and far away. At last he shook his head sorrowfully.

"It is not he."

He was trying to make his voice sound positive—but the doubt in it was undeniable.

"You mean—you aren't sure? You really think it might be the same man?"

"It—it looks something like. But Mr. Robinson had no hair on his head. He was like one of those German generals. Yes." He settled back in the chair, sipped his beer. "That is the difference."

I PUT the picture on the table, facing him. I placed my fingers so that they covered the top of the head in the photograph, leaving only the face itself exposed. "Now?"

Batista uttered an exclamation in Cuban. He looked at the picture again, this time as if he were seeing a ghost. Then he looked up at me, something close to fear in his eyes. "This—this maybe could be—the man."

Was it close, I asked him, and he said yes. But again he let forth a stream of Cuban words. "It is the same but it isn't."

"Are they alike enough to be brothers?"

"Yes. That might be, maybe."

He went into some detail about the man then, now that he was reasonably sure the men were the same or in some way related.

"He is not in Havana." He said it with an air—if the man were in Havana, Batista would know it. "One of my guides drive him around. I remember when this Robinson came in to pay his bill. After he was gone, the guide told me it was crazy. He say all Americans are crazy. I shrug. But it is funny business."

Apparently, it was. According to the guide's story, he drove Robinson around the city, pointing out the sights. Robinson wasn't interested. He didn't even listen to the guide and finally he told the guide all he wanted to do was to drive and be quiet so the guide said fine, that suited him—and they went for a long drive out into the country and through the district of the great palms and the pineapple plantations but none of this had the slightest effect on our Mr. Robinson who sat there "like a sleepy stone," as Batista put it.

"After about an hour or two, my man turned around and started back. But this gentleman asks what time is it. My driver say around nine o'clock. He say then to take him to the Melecon near the Punta fortress. So the driver says okay. They go over there and the man he says to halt. He gets out from the car and presto—there is another man standing there. This other man is big fellow, dress good—but my man don't see him close. Don't know who he is—

what he look like. They talk. This friend of yours gives this man an envelope. They bow to each other and—it is all. This man—your friend—he gets back into the car. He says that's all—we go back now."

That is the substance of what Batista said. Although he was dubious about the identification, the mere fact that the men looked so much alike is important. I cabled Strong informing him I had made progress and was on the return lap. Afraid to say more as cables are censored.

Dec. 20 . . . Checked with the steamship line in Havana today before leaving by plane for Miami. They could tell me only that a man named Robinson had booked passage on the 18th back to Miami. I said there was some question of his identity and they stated that he apparently had papers convincing enough that officials in both Havana and Miami allowed him through. However, the ease with which fake birth certificates can be obtained in the States is known—it is a serious problem. Where he went after arrival in Miami, they had no notion.

My plane landed in Miami about four this afternoon and I immediately began a check at this end, calling railroads and steamships but no one had any record of a gentleman by that name making a trip north. On a wild gamble, I called police in San Antonio and found there was only one James Robinson listed in the city directory. They gave me his address and I telephoned to him. He is a rancher, never has been East in his life, never out of the country except once when he crossed over into Mexico for a short visit. He was pleased to be called such a long distance and wondered why I was so interested in his namesake. There was, he said, another branch of the family back in Ohio—several James Robinsons among them, he reckoned. He had a decided Texas drawl and I am perfectly sure this is not *our* Mr. Robinson. I checked once more with my friend at the airlines, told him of my progress and asked if he had any suggestions. He said he thought I ought to go to the police but I said no, the company didn't want that, nor did his wife. He suggested I try the various hotels in Miami, on the chance the man might be staying in this city. Miami being a city of hotels, this was not a simple task. However, I hired a hotel stenographer to work with me and we checked all the large hotels in the city and most of the small ones. It required several hours—a very tiring job. No success. It is a frequently found name yet there is not a one registered in this city tonight, nor apparently has there been one for some time. By ten o'clock we gave up. The poor stenographer—a rather pretty little blonde—was as worn out as I. She was full of questions about this man and who he was. I told her he was just a friend. We have reached what looks like the end of

this trail, and I will fly back to New York tomorrow. The relationship of Mr. Mason and Mr. Robinson is the heart of the problem. Maybe we will find the answer in the city.

XXIV

for White folder
Dec. 17

CASE NOTATIONS

COPY
in re: White case

from: Strong

At preliminary hearing today, the court, with Judge Whitlow presiding, found probable cause for holding Florence White on a charge of murder. Bail was set at \$50,000 after District Attorney Collins argued the accused had previously attempted to "avoid justice." For our records, after bail was arranged, I took Miss White to the Hotel Scott, on West 84th Street, where she is registered as Mary Wright.

No information of any kind regarding this case or Miss White is to be given to newsmen or any other outsiders without express authorization from myself or Mr. Matthews.

* * *

for White folder
Dec. 22

CASE NOTATIONS

in re: White case
(search for James Robinson)

From: Miss Ring

* * *

The Cole Detective Agency has been on the Robinson thing for two days and have turned up little. They have checked through hotels and rooming houses and run into a number of James Robinsons but none appears to be the right one. Mr. Cole called this afternoon to say he was washing his hands of it. The agency is like that -- they are known for their old conservatism and if something looks too difficult they just give up. One rooming house on Third Avenue near 53rd St. did admit having had a gentleman named James Robinson but he checked out some weeks ago, before the Emory murder, walked out one night, bag and baggage -- left the rent on the dresser. She said he and a friend had stayed in the room, drinking heavily. No forwarding address, of course.

Cole showed her the picture of Mason (without revealing Mason's name) and the landlady at once said it was not the same. She said her Mr. Robinson was partially bald. Cole showed her the lower half of the face, with the upper half covered by his hand. She was a little less positive

but still did not believe it was the same individual. The Agency says they have now done all they could -- a complete two-day investigation with no results -- and they think it is hopeless.

Cole said he was sorry he couldn't be more help but he will send his bill along in a week or so. From what he told me, they did turn their whole staff loose on it and did the city and some of the suburbs rather thoroughly.

XXV

*Miss R: You'll want me
for the White folio. jmc*

Newtowne Apts.
Telephone Message.

Mr. Matthews:

Mr. Philip Strong phoned. Asked you please to come to his apartment if you get in before midnight.

I CALLED for Florence that evening and we went out to dinner together. Strong and I had spent most of the day—that was Monday, the 22nd—going over the case and trying to sort out the clues and getting nowhere. I was tired and anxious for relaxation.

Florence I found much rested. This was her first real party since she had been released on bail. I saw no reason for hiding out so we went downtown to the Marlboro Club on 48th Street where most of the upper-crust, so-called, likes to go to mingle with Broadway. Broadway at that time of the year is usually full of the Christmas spirit, but there was little that night, the war had dampened the gaiety. We had an excellent dinner, the cocktails were good and the music soothing.

Of course we talked about the case. I told her about my investigations and the various clues we had picked up.

"This Robinson," she said. "You think he and Mr. Mason are the same?"

This was a sore point with me, as it had been my idea to go to Cuba personally and the idea appeared to have come a cropper.

Yet there did remain a possibility that we were right—as Strong had admitted that afternoon.

"We have," I told her, "three descriptions. One of Harvey Mason. The other two are of men named James Robinson. And the fact remains that all three descriptions are alike in many features. Only the hair is different in each case."

She looked at me with a faraway, half smile. She was especially charming that night, with the careful makeup and the touch

of rouge and the solemn eyes. Several men at the other tables turned to regard her with admiring glances, although she appeared not to notice it.

"If it were a woman," she said, "I might understand. A change of hair-do can almost make a new person. But with a man—"

But it could have been possible, as I told her, that Mason had clipped off his hair. It could have been possible that he had let it start to grow again, clipping the top only, so that he had another appearance when he returned to New York.

"That isn't like him," she protested. "Why should he do such a thing?"

"But it does explain it," I told her. "It's the only way the thing can be explained—the descriptions of the men."

"Then, where is he now?"

She was worried, frightened, and trying hard to hide it. We agreed then to forget the case and we danced and talked about music and art and similar subjects in which I found she had quite an interest—and about ourselves. For some reason, I got started talking about my own past—my days in college and my experiences on the boxing team at Harvard. I fought in the 150-pound class and did not lose a fight while in college. She seemed to have quite an interest in boxing too, and in hearing about the various bouts I had been in.

We were sipping our coffee and I was telling her of my valiant but futile efforts to win the intercollegiate championship when a startled expression came over her face and she leaned forward and put her hand on my arm. "Behind you," she whispered.

I turned quickly. About twenty feet away, standing near the bar, immaculate in his dinner jacket, was Everett Bessinger. At the moment he was deeply engrossed in conversation with a slim young woman in a low-cut evening gown.

"Mary Mason!" Florence said softly. "I never knew—he went out with her."

He must have felt our eyes on him, for he looked up, saw us, and waved to us. I returned his greeting and then he turned away. It was rather apparent he was not too pleased we had seen him, for he did not come over to our table, and shortly afterwards they left, without even looking again in our direction.

Florence and I discussed this new angle for some moments. I warned her against placing too much importance on so slight an episode.

"After all, he's a friend of the family, he's known them for years. He's probably just trying to be nice, trying to cheer her up."

But I did find myself wondering about it.

AFTER the dinner, we went down to the Paramount, as it was too late for a regular show. There was a rather bad pic-

ture about a girl who gets accused of a robbery and has to stand trial. Fate would have it that this was the kind of movie we would see. About half-way through I looked at her and whispered, "We've been framed!" She said yes, she'd like to forget courtrooms, so we left. I took her home in a cab. At the door of the hotel she said good night, sort of tilted her head and kissed me. She turned around and went on inside and I watched her get into the elevator.

I was surprised about that kiss. It was still warm on my lips when I started back to my own apartment.

It was around eleven when I reached my place and I found the note from Strong asking me to come over.

When I reached his apartment I got a real shock. Mrs. Mason was seated on the sofa in the living room, sobbing her eyes out.

Phil is adroit at handling humans, but Mrs. Mason had proved difficult. She had appeared, I learned, at his apartment at ten-thirty, eyes red and swollen and her makeup smeared and tears trickling down her cheeks. She had brushed past the startled Squires and confronted Phil in the drawing room.

For half an hour he had been trying to get from her a coherent story and had succeeded only in learning that Mrs. Mason had been alone in the house and brooding.

Phil carefully explained that Mary Mason was out for the evening. I said yes, I knew about it, and I told them of how we had seen her with Everett Bessinger at the Marlboro.

Mrs. Mason stopped sobbing as I said that and looked up and what I saw on her face was close to hatred.

"Yes," she said finally, her voice heavy and full of tears, "Everett—has been kind."

She dried her eyes and settled back on the sofa with a heavy sigh as though now she had wept enough and would try to make sense—which we both hoped for fervently.

"This—this is ghastly, isn't it?" It was a weak attempt to be the grand lady.

"Mrs. Mason—why don't you tell us what it is?" Strong sounded like a doctor talking to a troublesome patient.

"There's nothing," she said. "Nothing I can put my hands on. Nothing I know. I was alone tonight—Mary is out. I began thinking, and I realized, all of the sudden. It came to me. I knew it was the answer."

"What answer?"

She stared at us. "I don't know what to do. What to say."

"What answer?" Strong repeated.

She turned toward me. "You went South, didn't you?"

That was surprising—that she knew. I asked her how she had found out.

"District Attorney Collins had you followed—to Miami."

I should have known. The D. A.'s office would naturally have been watching us ev-

ery second. Yet I had set out without the slightest suspicion. I saw the wry smile on Strong's face. It did have a touch of irony.

"He knows why I went?"

"They told me—some men from his office—they thought you were trying to locate my husband. You went to Cuba. But you didn't find him. The district attorney's men said they had reports from operatives in Havana."

Of all the fools, I seemed to have been the greatest. I'd allowed them to follow me, to watch every action—and I never even thought about the fact that they might be trailing me. "Never mind, Jim," Phil said. "Your main business is being an attorney at the bar. Not a flatfoot."

I don't know whether that was intended to soothe me or not, but it didn't. However, there was no point in crying over spilt information. "Then you know everything I can tell you," I said. "We didn't find him—not a trace."

"Who was the Robinson you were trying to find?" she asked.

So they had learned about that too. I said we didn't know exactly, that there was the barest chance Robinson might be Mason. Strong cut in to point out the resemblance which Robinson apparently bore to Mason. He mentioned the fact that the two Robinsons—the one in New York as well as the one in Havana—both looked like Mason.

She was shocked at hearing that we had located a James Robinson in New York. That appeared to be one part of the story the District Attorney had missed. Which added nothing to my glory as that part of the investigation had been conducted by the Cole Detective Agency. Strong told her what we had done, the hiring of the agency and the results.

WHEN we finished she was sobbing again, even more violently than before, and it required several moments before she was calm enough to continue.

Very quietly she sat there, after the hysteria had passed. A strong woman, who temporarily had lost control. A woman of deep-rooted passions.

"He did it," she said. "I know he did it. All of a sudden—tonight—sitting there alone and thinking, I realized he had done it. He killed her. My husband."

"Yes?" Strong's voice was curious but cool. "What reason would he have?"

"I don't know. But after I heard what the district attorney's men told me today, about your trip, I began to realize. I don't want to believe it—but there's no other way of explaining."

I could see what had happened. The district attorney's office had become worried about the whereabouts of Mr. Mason and—with the information they had about my trip—had gone to her with it that day. Brood-

ing alone in the apartment, she had become convinced he had committed the crime.

"Suppose it's true?" Strong suggested. "Suppose he did do it? Why do you come to us? What good can we do?"

"Because I want you to handle his case."

She was plainly terrified. She firmly believed her husband was a killer. The man she had lived with during these years. The man she presumably loved.

"You've come here to enlist our help?" Strong asked coolly. "You realize that we are already working in behalf of Miss White?"

"Yes. But you must see—my husband has a great deal of money. He can pay you well. Anyway, you can work for both of them."

"My interest in the case," Strong said, "arises from my belief that Florence White is innocent. If I thought her guilty, I would not attempt to fight the district attorney. At most, I might try to make some kind of bargain for a lighter sentence."

"But you wouldn't do that for my husband?"

"Mrs. Mason," Strong said, "you aren't telling us the truth. You're holding back information."

"How could I be holding back anything?" she asked angrily. "I came here to tell you whatever I could."

"You know something we don't know. Something you haven't told us—the real reason you believe your husband is a murderer."

She seemed, for a moment, stunned. Then she said very slowly, "Yes. You're right. I happen to know that my husband was having an affair, a love affair, with Evelyn Emory."

"So that's it," Strong said, new excitement in his voice. "All right. Let's assume for the time being that it's true. Why should he want to kill her? If he's in love with her, or thinks he is—"

"Because he's jealous," she said. "Jealous and suspicious. Why he—he actually believed I was having an affair with Bill Nichols. And once he even accused me of having something to do with those stolen securities. He thought maybe I and Nichols together had something to do with it. Knowing him the way I do—"

"Granted he might have had reason to be jealous of Evelyn," I said. "That he might have found out she was cheating. What makes you so sure he was having an affair with her? Have you got proof?"

"Proof enough for me. Proof that he gave her a job at a salary ten times what she was worth, that she had a fine apartment and clothes she couldn't afford, that people told me of having seen them together."

"You didn't tell me that when I saw you before," I said.

"No, I—I didn't want to drag it out into the open."

"You said that letter came out of a clear sky, that you had no notion anything was wrong."

"That was true. He hadn't said anything about breaking up our marriage. Nothing like that."

"Did you show that letter to the District Attorney?"

SHE shook her head. "I was afraid. Afraid it might look much worse, if they knew about that. I didn't tell them anything, really."

Strong got up and went to a steel strong box he keeps by his desk. In a moment he returned with our copy of the letter. He sat some minutes studying it. Then he asked, "Do you know what he meant by this line, Mrs. Mason? This last line—'It is, after all, only a pulse in the eternal mind.'"

"I don't know," she said, "it doesn't seem to mean anything—to make sense. But he—he's always quoting odd things—"

I found myself wondering again about that letter. An exasperating sensation—I knew there was in it something which had special meaning for me. Yet I had not the least notion what it could be.

Squires came in with coffee and sandwiches. Strong, sipping the coffee, asked Mrs. Mason about Mary.

"Does she share your suspicion?"

Mrs. Mason said no. "She doesn't have any idea. She's worried—worried sick as to where her father may be. But she doesn't think, doesn't imagine he is mixed up in it."

Mrs. Mason wanted our help. She was sure he would be found—found by the police, eventually. She was sure he would be charged with the murder. Strong pointed out to her that we could take up that problem when we reached it, that so far the district attorney had taken no action to have Mr. Mason apprehended.

"But he will," she said. "They said today—they thought he might be arrested."

"But they can't hold both Miss White and your husband, for the same offense," I said. "They think the two of them—did it together."

That was a shock. So far, I had no information that would link Mason and Florence, and could conceive no way in which the police could have any such information.

"They said they had some kind of story—they wouldn't say what—from Mr. Emory. Evelyn's father."

She seemed to have more control of herself now. More calm. I do not think she realized our interest in that statement about Emory. Strong coughed, looked at me, smiled.

"We talked with Mr. Emory, too," he said. "I wouldn't worry about that part. The po-

lice may be investigating him before we're through."

He wouldn't tell her more. And it seemed there was little more she could tell us. Actually, going over what we had learned from her, I decided she had just been anxious to pour out the story to someone—almost anyone—who might help. She was beginning to feel herself on the wrong side of the fence, opposed to the law. She came to us because she placed us in the same category.

After we finished our repast, she stood up and said she had to be going home and she hoped we would forgive her and help her because she needed help, she was all alone. Strong said she had a daughter who seemed like a pretty fine girl.

"I'm afraid," she said, "Mary doesn't understand. She couldn't believe anything bad about her father."

Strong said, "Well, it may not be bad. It just may turn out that your husband is entirely in the clear. He may be off somewhere in Cuba where he wouldn't hear about this—"

She told him he was wrong. "I knew it was he—as soon as they told me about this Robinson. You see—" she drew herself up dramatically—"James Robinson—that was his grandfather's name."

AFTER she was gone we went back to the living room. For a long time we sat watching the red ashes in the fireplace.

"She told us a lot," Strong said, "That business about Evelyn and Mason. His suspicions about her and Nichols. The tie-up with James Robinson."

"It links up perfectly," I said, "with his running up to see Jack Brown. He must have had a pretty good notion the police didn't know all there was to be known about the securities."

"Sounds very plausible. We already know—from Florence—that Nichols resented the way Mason had treated him regarding the invention. He might very well have stolen those securities with the idea that he was only taking what was due him in the first place."

"But even so—it doesn't give any hint as to why Mason picked this particular time to vanish—or why he should have then returned to murder the girl he is having an affair with."

"Or why he felt it necessary to write that letter."

"That letter," I said. "It puzzles me. There's something familiar about it—only I can't remember what. It's almost as if I had read it before."

"Funny," Strong said. "Wonder—"

His own file on the case lay on his desk and he went to it and took out his copy of the letter. He stood there, holding it in his hand, began to read it. You might have

thought, from that smooth, persuasive tone, that he was standing before a jury in the courtroom. Trial lawyers, you know, are fifty per cent actors; it's difficult to suppress them, especially in their own homes.

But as he went on, I sat there and listened, trying to catch whatever it was that had seemed so familiar. Then he came to one line and as he spoke the words they struck like a chord in my mind.

"If I should die, think only this of me—"

My thoughts leaped back to that day at the morgue—Dr. Joseph sitting there under the light, reading us that torn page of poetry they had found on the derelict. And the verse that had been underlined had been, "If I should die, think only this of me."

"Phil," I said. "Phil—I have it."

I told him about the scene at the morgue—Dr. Joseph's story of the tramp and the page of poetry. The episode had seemed so unimportant at the time, I'd failed to include it in my report.

We stood there looking at each other, each knowing the wild surmise in our minds.

"If only you had told me before, Jim, about that episode at the morgue. It might have saved us so much—"

"It seemed so unimportant, Phil. It had nothing to do with the murder I went there to investigate. I—just forgot to mention it."

Strong was walking up and down the room. "And, of course, the line in the letter meant nothing to me. I knew nothing about the page of poetry you'd seen. Had no way of knowing."

He turned to the poetry section of his bookcase and took out an anthology of modern verse. After a few moments' search he found the poem, "The Soldier" by Rupert Brooke. Both of us had read it before—it is one of the most famous modern sonnets.

It was not only the opening line—the one that had been underlined—which interested us. Further in the poem we found another phrase: "A pulse in the eternal mind."

Those were also the closing words of Harvey Mason's letter.

XXVI

File White
Dec. 24

Miss Ring: Please ask the Cole Agency to recheck in the rooming house where they located one James Robinson. See if they can obtain date of his departure. J. M.

IT MAY be a false trail," Strong said thoughtfully. "But I can't believe it. The thing fits too nicely. We've got to look into it right away."

The following morning—the day before

Christmas—Strong telephoned to Dr. Joseph at the morgue.

The good doctor was glad to hear from us, anxious to know how we were progressing.

"We're going around in circles," Strong told him. "We're back to you again."

He outlined our latest findings in regard to the poem. Dr. Joseph listened without comment until he was finished.

"Phil—it must be some kind of coincidence. You can't convince me that your Mr. Mason was an alcoholic."

"Definitely not," Strong admitted. "But are you sure this man was?"

"We could be wrong. He drank a lot, I can tell you that, before he died. Must have been in a stupor for a week or so before death."

"We'd like to talk with you about it. You going to be in?"

"Sure. Come along."

He was there in the little office. A Christmas wreath hung on his window, and a pile of gifts in pretty wrappings on his desk—presents for his assistants in the office.

"The wife does them up for me," he explained a bit sheepishly. "The wrapping's pretty, isn't it?"

Strong outlined the case as it seemed to us.

Pointed out that Mason was definitely missing. That the finding of the tramp's body was very close to the time when Mason disappeared. That Mason had actually quoted in his letter the verse underlined on that page of poetry.

Dr. Joseph listened and nodded his head and from time to time made curious unintelligible sounds which might have been affirmation or dissent.

"Suppose it happened like this," Strong said. "Mason, for some reason we don't know, wants to disappear. He goes away, changes his name, alters his appearance, comes back. Then someone spots him—and kills him. And leaves him to be picked up as an alcoholic tramp."

"But wait a minute," the medical examiner protested. "This man died of alcoholism."

"You're absolutely certain?"

Dr. Joseph's eyebrows came together in a frown. "Just a minute."

He pressed a buzzer on his desk. An assistant came in. "Is Burns outside?" Dr. Joseph asked. "Tell him to step in for a minute."

Burns—Dr. George Burns—was a tall young fellow, only two years out of medical school. Quiet mannered and polite, a typical young physician with the ink not yet dry on his sheepskin. He was working under Dr. Joseph in the hope of someday becoming an expert in the new field known as "criminal medicine."

To the medical examiner's question, he replied that he had performed an autopsy on the stomach of the dead man and his find-

ings had indicated alcoholism.

"You examined the brain?" Dr. Joseph snapped.

The young man said, "Well, no, I didn't. I didn't see any reason."

The medical examiner stood up. He drew a deep breath, regarded Burns fixedly.

"You know your orders," he said. "You know I have told you always to examine the brain in any suspected case. Why didn't you do it?"

Dr. Burns was stammering, trying to explain. I felt sorry for him—it was so obviously a case of sheer lack of experience. He had accepted the first evidence that the autopsy had indicated.

"Bring me the card on him," Dr. Joseph ordered. When Burns had gone, he sat down slowly. "Sorry," he said. "This wouldn't have happened in a thousand cases."

"Could the man have been poisoned without there being any indication in the stomach?" I asked.

"Yes—considering the fact that he had been dead at least forty-eight hours when he was found, in an out of the way back alley. If cyanide were used—"

DR. BURNS came back with the card. It was brief and uninformative. "Unidentified tramp—brown eyes and little hair. No unusual marks on body. Cause of death—alcoholic poisoning." With that were attached the man's fingerprints. And two photographs, one profile and one front face.

Men look different in death. But from those pictures, I saw a resemblance to the picture of Mason, in my pocket. I drew it out and the three of us compared them. That the likeness was close could not be doubted. That it was close enough was another matter. I do not believe I could have stated, under oath, that I was positive they were the same.

"We have only one course of action open to us."

I looked at the doctor, not understanding. He smiled at my puzzlement. "Mrs. Mason," he said calmly, "will recognize her husband."

Strong didn't like it. He explained to Dr. Joseph that it might be better not to inform her about this possibility until we were sure. "There's one way to be sure until we have someone capable of making the identification," Dr. Joseph answered.

Phil gazed out of the window that faced on the hospital courtyard. There was a tree in the center, with lights on it. The spirit of Christmas—but it was far from us at that moment.

Dr. Joseph was putting on his hat and coat. "I'm afraid I'm due out on another investigation, gentlemen. But I'm going to look into this thing—it must be gone into thoroughly. If I find Burns has slipped up. I'll—"

"Just what do you plan to do?" Strong

asked. "Call in Mrs. Mason? Anyone else?"

"We'll see."

"When?" I asked.

He apparently was engrossed in trying to figure out just what he would do. But at my question he looked up with a pleasant expression in his eyes.

"You stick to your muttons, don't you? Well, come on back this afternoon. Around two thirty. May be something interesting."

We returned to the morgue after lunch. As we neared the door of Dr. Joseph's office, I heard a low rumble of conversation beyond the door. We pushed it open, looked around us with surprise.

Five persons were there, in addition to the medical examiner—Mrs. Mason and her daughter, the unctuous Mr. Emory and his frightened, tight-lipped wife, and another man whom I did not recognize, rather large and beefy, with greying hair.

"I've felt it necessary," Dr. Joseph explained to us, "to call in these members of the family. I couldn't act without their knowledge. Mr. and Mrs. Emory are vital in this case too."

Strong nodded without answering. I knew he was disturbed by this development but, on the other hand, could not deny the propriety of the medical examiner's position.

It was an unfriendly group, the atmosphere was charged with animosity. The frigid, blank stare of Mrs. Mason, the nervous embarrassment of Mary, the profound contempt on the face of Emory.

"I think you know everyone," Dr. Joseph began.

"I'm afraid—" Strong started, and Dr. Joseph said, "Oh, yes, you haven't met Mr. Mason. Harvey Mason's brother."

I looked at the man closely. Florence had been right. There was a definite weakness about him, in spite of the heavy-set features, the deeply lined face, the big eyes. The face was full of frustration.

"We have good reason to believe," Dr. Joseph told them, "that Harvey Mason may not be in Cuba as was first believed."

He paused to allow this to sink in. They gave no indication that this statement surprised any of them.

"He may not be alive."

That was different. There was a startled gasp from Mary, and I saw her face had blanched. Thomas Mason was grim and determined, like a man about to go into battle. Only Emory seemed completely unexcited.

Thomas Mason stood up. "What is the evidence?"

"We have no real evidence at all. We have—some indications."

Briefly then he went over the story, as we had uncovered it. At the finish, he laid the two photographs on the table—the one of Mason and the other of the tramp.

"I would like you to identify the man from

these pictures."

They gathered around, each straining to see the photographs. All agreed the two faces were similar.

MRS. MASON I watched particularly. At first she seemed afraid to look, afraid she would recognize him. Then, as the others appeared dubious, she stepped nearer. She glanced once and drew away.

"No. You are wrong."

Thomas Mason was not so positive. It might be Harvey—but again, it might not.

It was Mary Mason who stepped back from the photographs, her face white and her eyes wide. She looked squarely at her mother.

"It's my father," she said. Her tone was leaden. "Why didn't you say so, Mother? Why don't you tell them? You know—you know it's he—"

The eyes of everyone in the room were on her. Mrs. Mason took a step toward her.

"Mary, you must—you're excited. You couldn't be sure. None of us could be sure. You must be calm—"

"I love my father," the daughter said. "Now he's—dead. It doesn't seem possible but it's true. No use denying it. He's dead and somebody killed him."

"You don't know what you're saying, Mary."

Without answering, the daughter picked up the telephone and dialed a number. A few seconds later we heard her ask for Everett Bessinger.

She told him to come to the morgue at once. We could hear his clipped, "All right, Mary. I'll be there in ten minutes."

He was grim-faced when he arrived. Tersely, Dr. Joseph explained the situation. Bessinger stared at the two photographs. When finally he turned away his lips were twisted.

"It's Harvey." He looked at Malvina Mason. "I'm sorry. We might as well face the truth."

"Everett, I don't believe it. I don't believe it's him, I know it isn't."

But Bessinger and Mary Mason were sure.

Bessinger looked around at the group. "Is Nichols here—Bill Nichols?"

Dr. Joseph said, "No. I only called those persons most closely connected with the case. I didn't think he—was particularly involved."

"The whole thing is so—vague," Thomas Mason said slowly. "We can't be sure and—the body can't be recovered."

"How do you know that?" Dr. Joseph asked him.

"I know how you bury unidentified victims. I used to be a newspaperman on Long Island. You bury them all together, don't you, with quicklime. After a week, you couldn't identify one of them."

"No," Dr. Joseph confessed, "we couldn't."

"It's unfortunate," Mason added. "I don't

see how—"

But Mrs. Mason interrupted him. "I'm sure they're wrong. It couldn't be my husband. You said there were no marks on him. But there was one on Harvey."

We were all looking at her. I had that cold, enervating sensation that the whole case we had been building was about to fall apart.

"When he was a boy," she said, "he played with a group of boys on the street. They used to duel with sticks the way boys do and he was cut on the finger by a nail in the end of one of the sticks. It was a deep cut, and it left a scar."

"How long was the mark?" the medical examiner asked.

"Only—only about a quarter of an inch. It might be that—that it was missed."

"Where was it?" he persisted. "Show me."

She held up her right hand, pointed to the groove between the index and the middle finger. "Here."

A place where Dr. Burns, who apparently had not paid too much attention to the dead man, might have missed.

Emory had said nothing. His silence now appeared to interest Strong who turned to him suddenly. "Have you any suggestions about it, Mr. Emory?"

"I never saw the man."

"I only wondered if you might have some idea how the identification might be completed."

"Why should I? I'm not a detective."

STRONG addressed the group. "There may be a possibility of obtaining fingerprints. From his books—his office—"

Mrs. Mason said no. "They have thoroughly cleaned up in the house, Mr. Strong. And as for his office, well, I don't know for sure, but I imagine the same thing will hold true."

"Didn't he ever have his fingerprints taken?"

"Not that I know of, ever."

It was a slight possibility. After all, with months gone by, there wouldn't be much likelihood of getting any good prints, particularly if the persons who cleaned the apartment or the office did an even halfway job.

"A wound that left a scar like that on the man," Dr. Joseph was saying, "must have gone clean through to the bone. There would be some indication of it."

"But that would require that we recover the body," Thomas Mason objected.

"Yes—it would. Will you excuse me now for a few moments. Something I want to look up."

He left the room. Strong and I stood by the wall, not talking, watching the others. Mary Mason and her mother spoke in hushed voices and so did the Emorys. What surprised me was the studied way Thomas

Mason avoided his sister-in-law, avoided even so much as looking in her direction.

He sat by himself, his back turned to both the mother and daughter, his eyes fixed on the radiator pipes beyond the doctor's conglomerated desk. It was difficult to judge whether or not he was worried or nervous; he was the kind of man who always seemed a little on the worried side, who wouldn't be content if he didn't have some trouble to brood over.

This was the family. The people we had been studying, into whose lives we had been prying. We knew something of their sins, something of their fears. I could not help but realize that while in the light of murder these little things took on importance, none was terribly evil. That Mrs. Mason was proud, afraid to admit her husband had left her. That Emory was a religious blowhard, Thomas Mason a failure.

Dr. Joseph returned. He had a card in his hand and he was smiling.

"I think I have the answer."

He no longer seemed dejected—a fact which caused mingled reactions. Thomas Mason and Mrs. Mason looked at each other for the first time. Mary Mason leaned forward eagerly. Emory glanced at the doctor with a disinterested curiosity. His wife took some knitting from her large purse. Bessinger leaned against the desk. His eyes were cold and yet you could see the pain in them.

"Sometimes," Dr. Joseph said, "we run up against cases which are not quite ordinary. They don't fit into any definite pattern and yet—there is no real justification for making an exception of them."

"Certain bodies we find don't fit the average picture. Some tiny thing sets them apart. As in the case of the man with the line of verse in his pocket."

"All right, Doctor, all right," Mason interjected. "What's this leading to?"

"Because of the fact that we cannot keep each body indefinitely, I make certain exceptions to the rule. Exceptions which I make entirely on my own."

"Exceptions?" Mary Mason's voice was dry.

"Some of the bodies, Miss Mason, I have ordered placed in marked graves, out on the island where Potter's Field is located. Where bodies remain for a period of time until we are sure no one will step forward with an identification."

"You mean—you have—you have buried what may be my brother—in one of these marked graves?"

Thomas Mason's face was crimson. Dr. Joseph waited until he had sat down again. "That is right. I wasn't positive until I read over the complete records—we have so many cases. Down here at the bottom you see—No. 4. That is the grave number—"

He looked around him, looked at the oddly assorted group who hung on to his words. "We will be able to recover the body. We will, I think, be able to find the scar if it is there."

The father of Evelyn Emory stood up. "Though he flee to the ends of the world, still vengeance finds him and destroys him—" Across from him there was a thud, the clattering of a falling chair.

Mrs. Harvey Mason was unconscious on the floor.

XXVII

for White folio
Dec. 26

from Miss Ring

CASE NOTATIONS

In re: White case

Mrs. Mason's condition is reported by her butler as "good."

Her doctor's statement agrees with that of Dr. Joseph that her fainting spell was induced by the shocking news that her husband may be dead.

Lang, the butler, with whom I conversed over the phone this morning, said she had suffered no repetition of the fainting spell. She has, however, remained in her bed.

I asked Lang if there was anything we might do for her. He said no -- she was fine.

The Cole Agency called. They said the landlady has no accurate record of the date James Robinson left the rooming house on Third Avenue. It was about October 24th.

XXVIII

GOLGOTHA ON THE SOUND*

GOD knows what quixotic impulse made me tell Jim I'd go along to Planker's Island with Dr. Joseph. Usually I leave the leg work to my methodical partner; he's bet-

* This account of the visit to Planker's Island has been written for this book by Philip Strong. J. M.

ter at it than I am, cooler, doesn't jump at a conclusion with both eyes shut by preconceived hunches. That sounds good, doesn't it—but it's really not the reason. Let's face it, my laziness is bone deep.

So, whatever the impulse, I began to regret it as early as seven-thirty the morning of our little jaunt. Squires, that conscientious servant, woke me to say that the medical examiner had phoned. Unfortunately, I had warned him about the call the evening before. Otherwise, the combined brass hats of New York's law enforcement bureaus couldn't have cajoled him into disturbing me at that ghastly hour. At any rate, I impartially cursed both Squires and Dr. Joseph, without making a dent in either my butler's impeccable exterior or his indulgent activities. He got me up. I began to take a less somber view of life in general as I bathed and shaved, and actually felt a gleam of interest in the day's excursion while I ate the oatmeal that Squires had shrewdly provided for my breakfast. (He knows my indecent lust for this particular dish and keeps it in reserve for occasions when he thinks I need softening up.) By the time I had finished my second cup of coffee and lit the first cigarette, I had recaptured the mood which originally made me offer to take this job off Jim's hands.

According to ancient records, Planker's Island originally belonged to a certain E. Van Dyrk Planker, a Dutchman and a rich one. Rich enough to include a number of eccentric clauses in his will. One of these was the bequest of Planker's Island to the city. There was a string to it, of course—it had to be used as a dumping ground for "refuse and trashe." The City Fathers have been almost overzealous in faithfully fulfilling the singular stipulation. Once a flat marshland, the island is now a place of shapeless, rancid hills, monstrous rubbish heaps, ashes and waste. Buried in those hills is another kind of "trashe," which perhaps the good Mr. Planker did not have in mind. It is human trash, the bodies buried there, the skulls and bones of a lost legion of

[Turn page]



"There's a Stranger in My House—and He's Dead"

THAT was the amazing discovery made by Leonidas Witherall, the scholarly sleuth, and it put Leonidas in one terrific spot, the result of which, for the reader, is a perfectly wonderful crime and a perfectly wonderful time—in DEAD ERNEST, the brilliant crime mystery novel by Alice Tilton. Follow the little man with the beard as he darts after clues, dodges police, innocent bystanders and several assorted villains to achieve an outstanding triumph in detec-

tion! DEAD ERNEST will keep you guessing from start to finish in the January issue of our companion publication, DETECTIVE NOVEL MAGAZINE—now on sale, only 15c at all stands!

men and women.

Little grass and a few trees grow there. The whole dreary scene is decorated, appropriately enough, by a grey-stone prison, built at one end of the island and practically surrounded by a high grey-stone wall. From out those walls, every day, come the grey-clad men, the convicts, to perform the work of the island. It is incredible that the city government should maintain such an institution. Can they conceivably believe that these outcasts will be better citizens, more likely to go straight, more susceptible to social rehabilitation, after months of work in this aromatic hell?

Such is the burying ground for the unclaimed dead of New York—the last anonymous resting place of the derelicts and prostitutes and beggars. The somber details pile up. Even the island's steam-shovel is known as the "Black Finger," an excellent grave digger. Great holes are scooped out in the hills into which are thrown the bodies, along with quicklime to complete the disintegration. The places are filled in and forgotten—forgotten in death just as these dispossessed were forgotten in life. Only the few buried in marked graves set aside by Dr. Joseph have their brief recognition and may ever again be found or identified.

A fulsome tribute to the progress of civilization, this Gehenna of Long Island Sound. I wish to God I had never seen the cursed spot.

BUT that morning, as I smoked and waited for Dr. Joseph, no premonition warned me to keep away. My mood was a mixture of mildly eager curiosity, a light-hearted feeling of truancy, and a pleasant appreciation of my own unselfish energy.

Dr. Joseph arrived in his official limousine. He was in the best of spirits and kept up a continual talk about the war and the Nazis, about which he managed to be mysteriously cheerful. It was very early, traffic was obligingly light, and we rolled along at a steady clip to the municipal ferry slip at East Sixty-Fourth Street.

The weather put an immediate damper to my pleasant mood. It was grey, murky, and cold. As the ferry slithered out into the main current, the wind rose sharply. I shivered and looked around at the handful of other passengers, several gloomy-looking workmen with lunch-boxes, also apparently bound for the island.

Emil and I stood near the bow, watching the ferry plough its way through choppy waters. There were few boats on the river. One tanker went by us, painted a mute, wartime grey. Sometimes the wind lashed the spray into our faces, but I had no sense of exhilaration.

There was a heavy mist over the water and at first the island was only a vague in-

distinguishable shadow in the distance. As the boat drew nearer, the place began to take form. Looming before us, I saw the mass of a jagged hill, light-greyish in color, with streaks of orange and deep green and blue running through it. At the same time, the wind brought to us the sharp, unpleasant smell of burning waste.

As we bumped our way into the slip, the ferry whistle blew a raucous shrieking blast, and we heard a loud clanking of chains as the gangplank was lowered into place. Dr. Joseph told me the bodies from the morgue were brought over on this same boat and I realized why the sense of doom had been so strong upon me. It was Charon and the River Styx—modern style.

We were greeted on the rather small dock by two Negroes, carrying shovels and spades, who explained they were to help us. Even they seemed depressed by the atmosphere of the place. There was none of the usual gaiety and light-heartedness so characteristic of their race, and they followed us silently after we showed our permits and got official sanction to proceed.

I had an almost unconquerable desire to go back, abandon the whole venture, leave this dead island. Like a fool I resisted it, told myself not to be a cowardly ostrich, and pretended to be as matter-of-fact as the doctor walking along by my side.

It is an experience I will never forget. The picture springs out at me at unpredictable moments—while I shave, during a dinner party, half-way through the first act of a play. That path we set out on, the silent Negroes following, the desolate earth and the desolate sky.

Before us was a rolling desert of refuse, and the rancid odor was sickening. The gravel path we followed was narrow, winding through the hills. There were no houses, no people, no signs of life.

Once we passed a place where a bonfire had been started. No one was watching it. There was no way for it to get out of control, nothing for it to destroy. The fire burned close to the greyish, ash earth, and it seemed as if the flames came through licking some invisible fissure. White smoke hung on the parched air.

ONLY a few miles off—the great city of New York, a place of skyscrapers, blaring radios and lively movies, busy bustling people, a citadel of life and comfort. It was difficult to believe, difficult even to remember that this was our own planet, that we were not lost on some awful timeless plain, doomed to an eternal and hopeless search.

It seemed a long time we walked through the hills, but at last, sharply turning to our right, we found ourselves at the water's edge. I felt an hysterical sense of relief. Long Island Sound, the doctor explained prosa-

ically. The breath of salt air was good, and we followed the path along the shore for about a hundred yards until we reached a breakwater that stretched out into the sea. Here we turned left and trudged through sodden ash, down a small grade, up a rather steep incline. Near the top we reached a level patch of ground—earth, good brown earth.

We had arrived. Dr. Joseph told me that this was one of the few places on the island which had been filled in with real soil. I saw the unpainted picket fence which enclosed it and the four wooden crosses evenly spaced off on the inside. The sun was trying to break through the mist. It gleamed on the crosses, fiery silhouettes against the sodden sky, and suddenly I saw that each was numbered.

Dr. Joseph pointed to the one marked "4." He said to the Negroes, "This is the one. You can start now."

They were cold-blooded, those Negroes. The tall one leaned unconcernedly on his shovel while the other removed an outer sweater. They had a professional air; I knew it would be a competent job of digging.

The shorter one leaned over and rubbed his hands in the ashes at his feet. "Gimme mo' purchase," he said. Those were the first words he had said.

Emil and I watched in silence as the pair set to work. The only sound was the rhythmic thud and scrape of the shovels. The hole grew deeper as their shovels worked and the excavated earth began to pile up at the side. The fitful sun disappeared and a pale light outlined the crosses, the fresh earth, and the two silent diggers sinking deeper and deeper into the ground. Even though it was cold, sweat began to glisten on their black skins and their breath came quicker.

Suddenly, startlingly, there was a harsh-grating sound as the shovel struck something solid.

Sweating Negroes, digging for a dead man in an isolated bit of hell. Florence White and Evelyn Emory and Mrs. Mason and the others jumbled in my mind as I watched the digging. All of this group mingled in trouble, centering at this moment on the pine box which the shovel had found.

The Negroes, incongruously, scrambled down into the hole they had dug, scraped away the earth from the top of the coffin with bare, blistered hands.

The pine top of the coffin was bare. Dr. Joseph stepped closer to the grave, peered over it and said, "It's nailed. You'll have to pry it off with your hammers."

The tall Negro answered indifferently, "Yessir."

They set to work with their hammers to get the top off. We could hear the boards give, the rusty squeaking wrench as they were pulled back.

Instinctively both the doctor and I moved closer, irresistibly drawn by the promise of revelation. The boards fell back with a chatter against the ground.

Dr. Joseph stared. His face was white. I had the horrid conviction that he had seen a phantom. I looked quickly at the Negroes; their eyes were bulging with fear.

I came forward a step and peered into the grave.

The coffin was empty.

XXIX

For White folio

To Mr. Strong:

Dec. 27

The District Attorney called. He wanted an appointment, and I told him to come over about ten this morning as you said you would be in around then. He said it was "very urgent."

Miss R.

THE incredible story which Strong told me blew the case open.

It was no longer a simple matter of poisoning for revenge. The ramifications were so numerous that it was inconceivable the thing could be the work of one young woman.

Collins arrived shortly after ten. He had heard of the disinterment from Dr. Joseph, and his entire staff had been thrown into the investigation of the missing body.

"You realize, Collins, what this does to your case?"

"You mean against Florence?"

"Who else?"

"Don't be stupid, Strong. We have no proof this missing body is that of Mason. It's only an hypothesis. Mason might walk in here this minute."

"You still consider the evidence against Florence is sufficient—"

"Not to quash the indictment."

I will at least give him credit for realizing that the missing body might be important. He had sent half a dozen men out to Planter's Island to talk with every workman on the place.

"Didn't get a thing from them. Nobody knows anything—nobody saw or heard anything."

But he said not to worry. He would prosecute the matter until he got to the bottom of it, let the chips fall where they might.

The three of us went over what we knew of the missing body. It was that of a man, dressed in tatters, worn shoes, torn shirt. Found in the upper Fifties, near the East River, in an out of the way alley. It had apparently been there about two days. The date of finding was October 26th, 1941. It had been held at the morgue about a month,

then taken to the island and buried in Grave No. 4. No workman had at any time seen anyone tampering with the grave.

I have never been a believer in supernatural forces. But this thing had the earmarks of the supernatural—I could almost believe some malignant force, some poltergeist, was at work.

"I admit it looks crazy," Collins said. "But if it is Mason, well—it can only mean that Florence White has committed two murders instead of one. In both cases her motive—her need for revenge—is clear."

"Pretty good job," Strong said. "A girl like her getting rid of that body so cleverly."

"I admit she may have had an accomplice. Matter of fact, if you could get her to turn state's evidence, tell who the accomplice is—I might be able to get her off with a much lighter sentence."

"Damn swell of you, Collins. Everything fits so snug, you don't even have to prove your case. You just state your suspicions—"

"I've got more than suspicions. I've got a real case—new evidence—and it isn't something I pulled out of a hat."

"What?"

"A secret design for an airplane wing"—he lowered his voice dramatically—"has been stolen from the Mason Aircraft Company."

Strong only smiled. "Florence stole it?"

"She engineered it. She couldn't have stolen it. She had to have an accomplice—inside."

"How long ago was this?"

"Bessinger reported it missing only a few days ago. It was a design—a design worked out some time ago by Bill Nichols for a new type of plane wing. The F. B. I. are in the case, but that's confidential, you understand. The trouble is—Bessinger said the design was not to be used for some time, and blueprints were hardly ever looked at. Left in the safe."

"No one knows when they were taken?"

"It might have been weeks—or months."

Strong leaned back and laughed. "How in all Hades, Collins, can you build a case against Florence on evidence like *that*? Good Lord, have you no idea—"

COLLINS said, "When I find the man who worked with Florence, I'll have all the answers to everything. That's why I'm over here now. I want you to help me find him."

"Why?"

"I can get that murder charge reduced to being an accessory. She'd get off a lot easier. And remember, the evidence against her in the murder case is overwhelming."

"The only thing is, the murder is inexplicable."

"She had motive."

"All right," Strong said, "that's the case you have to prove. You go ahead and try to prove it. We'll work on our own."

"You won't try to help me find her accomplice?"

"I don't think she could have one without being as guilty as the accomplice. Therefore I think it's bunk to look for one. I do believe someone else is in the case. But that person is the real murderer—a two-time murderer."

Collins rose. "From here on out, it's on your own head."

"It always has been."

The irreconcilable Collins! Always trying to fit the impossible into the improbable. As he stormed out of the office, Strong and I could not help smiling. I honestly have a warm spot in my heart for him.

Strong worked alone in his office the rest of the morning, refusing to let anyone in. I gathered from Miss Gurlitz, our telephone operator, that he had been making innumerable calls to strange, out of the way places, including a large chemical concern over on Tenth Avenue where he insisted on speaking to the president.

At noon, as I was about to go out for a bit of lunch, Strong appeared at the door. His grin was broad—you would have thought he had not a problem in the world.

"So what goes on?"

"I've made a discovery."

"About the murder?"

"We've been going at it wrong. We've been looking for psychological clues and finding them all over but they don't prove anything. This time I was looking for another kind of clue—a physical clue."

"What physical clue?"

"Chemicals. Specifically, cyanide. I've talked with officials in every big chemical firm in the city and I've learned a most important fact about cyanide. One that may be the lead we need."

He came into the room, picked a cigarette out of my ivory box.

"Who do you suppose uses cyanide in their regular line of work?"

"Bathsalt manufacturers?"

"Closer than that. Jewelers. And who is the jeweler involved in this matter? It's a gentleman named Thomas Mason, jeweler, of Forest Hills, New York."

"You mean, a man running a jewelry shop uses cyanide in his regular work? What for—customers who don't pay up?"

"Repair work. The man told me practically no jeweler in the country wouldn't have a supply of cyanide on hand. What's more, when an ordinary citizen purchases cyanide, it has to be registered in a book, with the purchaser's name and address. So it wouldn't be likely Florence would just go into a drugstore and buy a supply."

"You don't think Florence worked with Thomas Mason?"

Strong shook his head sadly. "You're letting the district attorney's theories control

your thinking."

He turned and looked at me. "Why don't you drop out there—to the jewelry store? Might pick up something interesting. I'd go myself, but the trip yesterday, and the work piled up here—"

"It has," I said, "possibilities."

BUT Mr. Thomas Mason was not pleased to see me.

When I arrived, two hours later, at the little store in Forest Hills, he pretended to be extremely busy, glanced up with a grunt, returned to some papers he was studying behind the counter.

I had no wish to hurry him. I stood there waiting with utmost patience. It was finally impossible for him to study his papers any longer and he tossed them to one side with an exasperated gesture.

"What is it now?" The tone was peremptory, with the unspoken implication to get my business over with quickly and be on my way.

"I want to talk with you about—cyanide," I said and his face went pale.

"Cyanide?" he repeated, as if he had never before heard of the stuff. "Why should I have anything to do with cyanide?"

"You're a jeweler, aren't you?"

"What difference does that make?"

"I know you use cyanide here, for repair work on settings."

He was scared. The lines of his beefy face grew deeper, more heavily shadowed, the weak blue eyes blinked as if trying to rid themselves of their fear. His hands rested on the small velvet mat on the counter, used for displaying gems. The hands were broad and the fingers short and the veins stood out prominently.

"What is the purpose of all this?" he asked. "What do you want?"

"I'm trying to keep you from being arrested."

No answer. The man's weakness was seen in his indecision—he couldn't make up his mind whether to throw me out of his shop—or throw himself on my mercy.

"Arrested?" he said at last, after an interminable moment. "Why, that's funny. You're defending the murderess and you—you come in here to threaten me with arrest. I ought to call the police."

But that was shallow bluff and I made no move. I looked around me at the store. It was cramped, only about twenty feet deep and ten feet wide. Filled with novelty items, gadgets and cigarette lighters and fountain pens, with one small case devoted to better type jewelry. The effect was one of disorder. At the far end of the counter was an archway, leading into a room in the back. This was shut off from the front of the store by a dark curtain.

"That where you do repair work?"

He glanced toward the curtain. Then he turned back. "What did you mean before—when you said about being arrested?"

"I meant it seriously," I said. "You failed to tell the police that you possess cyanide here in the store. That might be important—in all events, they should have been told. Cyanide was used in the murder of Evelyn Emory. You were her friend."

"Are you daring to accuse me?"

"Why should I?"

"I didn't do it." His voice was guttural. "I tell you honestly, I know nothing about it. I don't know who did it."

"But you do have cyanide?"

"I do—have some—for my business." He paused. "But I've never even used it," he added belligerently. "Never, the bottles haven't been opened. I can prove it."

The word that was in my mind was yellow. That described him.

"How large is your supply?"

He made a sweeping gesture with his arm. "In a place of this size, would I be likely to need a large supply? You see how busy my store is."

His smile was ingenuous. He wanted me to believe that the only reason he had not mentioned his possession of cyanide was that he didn't want to get involved. Not that he might have anything to hide.

"Just wait one moment."

He went down to the end of the counter, through the curtain. In a second he returned. In his hand he held two small bottles. They were approximately the size of drugstore bottles for eye drops. Each was sealed on top with a fresh-looking pleated white paper cap.

"You can see for yourself," he said, "they have not been opened."

I took them in my hand. The paper tops, held tight with a piece of red string, had apparently not been removed. I held the bottles to the light. There were crystals inside.

I did not at first believe my senses. Then I looked more closely and I was sure. One bottle contained less than the other.

"I suppose these are packed in the factory." I tried to sound calm. "Their contents would be uniform?"

"I presume so."

"You wouldn't object if I took these to the district attorney? Just to keep the record straight?"

HE WAS the picture of indignation. "I certainly would. I can't give out bottles of poison to everyone who drops into my store, sir."

"You know who I am. You know I'm in close touch with the police. I'm sure you have nothing to hide."

The blank, frightened look again.

I said, "It doesn't matter to me. I just

hoped to clear up the problem for you."

"The police will come to examine those bottles?"

"I'll have to tell them. It would be to your advantage, Mr. Mason, to let me help you. If there's nothing wrong with the bottles, you can't have anything to fear. If you force the officers to come here, it may seriously injure your business."

"Those bottles are mine." Anger rode in his voice. "This is a free country—a man's business is his own."

I was still studying the bottles and I observed another small but interesting fact—the red string on the one with the larger supply was tied with about four knots, while the other was tied with only two.

"Aren't these made up according to regulations?"

"I have already told you that."

But suppose, I was thinking, suppose one of the bottles had been opened, a portion removed, and then closed again and made to look as if the bottle were fresh from the factory?

I placed the two of them on the counter.

"Do you know Mrs. Mason—your brother's wife—very well?"

"What am I supposed to answer to that? Of course, I know her well. She is a remarkable woman—I was—I am fond of her."

"You've been good friends?"

"The best. I can answer you on that. In fact, if Harvey hadn't married her, well I—"

"Why were you so disinterested in her at Dr. Joseph's office?"

"Trying to trap me?"

"You haven't answered my question."

"I don't intend to."

"But you still think she is a wonderful woman?"

His eyes looked away. I tried to guess what he was thinking—what emotions he felt—at that moment. For the expression was sentimental. It was the pose of a disappointed lover, thinking back.

And I realized that Mr. Thomas Mason was actor enough to strike a pose like that, to tell me without saying it of his unrequited passion. Ham actor enough to want to wear his emotions in plain sight, even when it was against his own security to do so.

"You are very fond of her, aren't you?"

He nodded morosely. "It's no secret—she's always known it, so has Harvey. Perhaps she told you. Before—before she married him, I too had—aspirations. Harvey had more to offer. Any idea that she and I quarreled is preposterous."

He reached out for the bottles, but I grabbed them away.

"What's the idea?" he demanded.

"Why didn't you tell me you had opened one of these bottles?"

"That's a lie."

"You know it's the truth."

A flush spread over his face.

"All right—take them. You think I lie. You think I used them to kill poor, helpless Evelyn Emory who never harmed anyone?"

He started to laugh, a low, repressed laugh; he was enjoying his own private joke.

"Tell them I gave them to you with my blessings," he muttered. "Poison! Do you think I would leave any of it around if I'd used it for what you think?"

He was talking very fast. I listened to him politely, letting him run on. After a few moments he was finished and I thanked him for his cooperation.

The color was returning to his face but he kept rubbing his hands together and the worry was still in his eyes.

"They'll be returned to you when the police have examined them."

I stared out of the store. As I neared the door, he called to me, "Mr. Matthews—have you been to see Mr. Bessinger yet?"

I stopped. "Why?"

"Nothing. But if you're looking for someone who might have access to poison—he's the one."

"Why should he have any means of—"

"Have you heard about his laboratory? In his apartment? Very interesting place—I've been told."

Mr. Thomas Mason smiled at me in triumph. The next instant, he had vanished to the back of the store, behind that purple curtain.

I had not known of Bessinger's laboratory. There was no motive for the man to commit murder, that we could see on the surface. But it would have been possible—

I shoved the two bottles into my coat pocket and started for the subway.

XXX

for White folio
COPY

STRONG AND MASTERS
Attorneys-at-law

December 27
19 41

Dear Mr. Collins:

Our messenger will deliver this to you along with the two bottles about which I spoke on the phone a short while ago. You will observe that the contents of one bottle is less than the other. I suggest an examination of this bottle and a comparison with standard contents might disclose that it has been opened and partially used.

Trusting this will be of value in the Evelyn Emory case, I remain,

Truthfully yours,
James Matthews

Hon. Stephen P. Collins
146 Criminal Courts Building
New York City, N. Y.

JM/KR

XXXI

for White folder
Dec. 29

STRONG AND MATTHEWS
Office Memo

To Mr. Matthews

From Miss Ring re: White

District Attorney Collins is sending back the two bottles. He said on the phone that the one you thought had been opened was examined in the police laboratory. Tests showed it hadn't been opened and the contents were as specified on the label.

IT WAS about the dumbest bit of investigating work I have heard of in my whole legal career. I called Collins and told him he ought to resign. I patiently went over the facts with him, pointed out that no matter how you added it up, the contents of the two bottles differed. If the one with less contents was standard, couldn't he see there had to be something wrong with the other bottle?

After much fuming, he agreed there might be truth in what I said.

"Don't get excited, Matthews. The bottles haven't been sent out yet and I'll catch them and have the other one looked into. May be something in what you say. I admit I—might have checked up on it."

I didn't try to rub it in. I said we knew he wanted to cooperate. He said that I must appreciate that a man in his position has many calls on his time, and he'd been terribly overworked and rushed during the past few days.

I was sure by then that the second bottle would provide interesting information. I had no idea what it could be.

I had a lengthy discussion with Strong concerning my interview with Mason.

Strong was of the opinion that we ought to see Bessinger at once. "Something wrong there, Jim. The fact that he didn't tell us about the laboratory. Unless Thomas Mason is lying."

But Mason wasn't lying.

We reached Bessinger's apartment at five-thirty. He was grim as he greeted us, crossing the room and shaking hands, his shoulders drawn back and his lips unsmiling.

"I've heard about it, gentlemen."

We both looked at him quizzically. He said, "Mary Mason's called—she told me Dr. Joseph's office had called her mother—told her. I imagined he notified Tom Mason too after he told his wife. That's why you've come, of course."

"No, it isn't," Strong said. "But I must say there are times when the doctor's devotion to his ideas of duty is a little disturbing. I would rather that information had not been disclosed."

"That's quite understandable," Bessinger said. "But if that wasn't the reason—perhaps you could enlighten me as to the purpose of your call?"

He spoke with difficulty. Every word seemed an effort. I had the feeling his politeness was forced.

"We're interested in a laboratory. Your laboratory, Bessinger."

For a moment Bessinger looked at him coldly. Then he smiled.

"You mean my workshop," he said softly. "You mean—perhaps I keep poison there?"

"You never mentioned the workshop to us before," I remarked.

"I never thought it had importance," Bessinger said. "Perhaps I should have realized. However, you are at liberty, if you wish to examine it. Will you—will you follow me?"

"It would be helpful if we could see it," Strong said.

We followed him up the narrow, unlighted hall. At the end of it, there were three doors and Bessinger opened the one to the left, switched on a light.

Rooms have personalities, even workshops and laboratories. This was a workshop of style, stream-lined and modern and efficient. The white walls and the indirect lighting, the shiny mechanisms, miniature motors and dynamos seemed to me to reflect the cold, impersonal viewpoint of science. It might have been an operating room in some ultra-modern hospital. On one side was a long porcelain shelf on which were a number of bottles, standing neatly in a row. On the table beneath them were two wooden racks, each holding a number of test tubes, polished and glistening.

Strong went immediately to the bottles and spent some time examining them.

"I'm afraid," Bessinger laughed, "you won't find any cyanide."

It was true. The bottles contained only acids and certain types of oils I presume he used on the delicate machines on which he worked.

"We have a number of people offering us suggestions all the time," Bessinger said glibly. "Many of their ideas I test out here. On models, of course."

"You don't use cyanide?"

"I won't say I haven't had some in the past. I may have indeed, Mr. Strong, although I can't remember now ever having used any here. But it just happens I have a job to do—and this is part of it. I trust you will understand that."

WE SPENT a little longer in the laboratory, while Strong fussed around, look-

ing at the various instruments and asking vague questions about them. Nothing was out of the ordinary—and nowhere did we find any trace of cyanide. Bessinger cooperated with us, even to the extent of showing us his notes on a new type of exhaust pipe. But he made little attempt to hide his annoyance.

"Are you quite through?" he asked finally. "Are you quite certain you have not overlooked any detail?"

"We are indeed," Strong said coldly. "Thank you for your help."

He followed him down the hall, back to that extravagant yet attractive drawing room. Bessinger looked at us oddly.

"I'm sorry if I've seemed—distracted. You must realize—the news has been a shock. I mean about the missing body."

"You believe it was Harvey Mason?"

"I can't see any other answer. Frankly, I don't believe Florence White killed him. I don't believe now she killed Evelyn Emory."

"You did believe it at first?"

"I didn't know. That's the honest truth. The evidence against her was strong. I had no way of knowing. Besides, I could have done nothing to help her, even had I been convinced she was innocent."

"But now," Strong said harshly, "you've changed your mind, now that the death of Harvey Mason has been discovered?"

"That is correct, Mr. Strong. Now I want to get the man or the woman who did it. Now I want to see him or her suffer for it."

Florence, I recalled, had mentioned his hero worship for Mason. Perhaps that, I reasoned, was behind the emotion which choked his voice. The belief that Mason was dead—

"How can you help us?" Strong inquired. "Have you any information—"

"You may be angry or annoyed that I did not tell you before. But—well, I hardly considered it important, then. I felt the police could handle the thing more than adequately. I seem to have been wrong."

"It doesn't matter. If we get the truth now."

"I knew Evelyn Emory very well indeed. We often went out together—sometimes to a theatre or just to talk. I didn't tell you. My wife—" He smiled bitterly. "I'm no better or worse than most men."

"And Evelyn was pretty."

"I was fond of her. There is something she once told me."

He paused, looked at us a moment, rubbed his eyes. "I can't tell you the man's name. She never told me that. But I have an idea."

"What man's name?"

"A man who loved her. I can't tell you any more than that from what she said. My own idea is merely a guess. It was a night we were out together—we had gone to Larchmont, out for a sail on my boat. It's

easiest that way, getting away from—people. You're men of the world, you can understand that."

"Don't worry about that part," I told him.

"It was about a month before she—died. She asked me if it were possible for a person to love you and hate you at the same time. I said that was the way many men felt about many women. She said there was one who was very close to her. She wouldn't say his name. She said he wasn't a sweetheart but she was always close to him until he began to upbraid her for the things she did. She said she was only doing what she wanted to do and what she felt she had a perfect right to do. I had no idea what she meant by it, you see, until she mentioned Harvey."

"In connection with this mysterious friend?"

"I haven't spoken of this before—I suppose I must. After she became his secretary, Evelyn went out often with Harvey. I never understood it because he and his wife were supposed to get on so well together. There was talk about it in the office. At any rate, Evelyn told me that this man who loved her hated Mason—hated him because he believed she was his—mistress. She said it wasn't so."

"Whoever this man was she referred to," Strong said, "he was extremely jealous?"

"She said so."

"Did she refer to him again?"

"Several times. She told me there had been scenes. And she said he had cursed her."

STRONG was looking at Bessinger carefully. "You have an idea who it is?"

"I hate to say it, to put it into words. But I believe I know. His brother—Thomas."

The long sigh was audible. He seemed relieved to have disclosed the name, to have gotten it out of his system.

Strong asked, "Do you have proof of that? Physical proof?"

Bessinger said no. "I can tell you this—Tom Mason was in love with Evelyn. Of course, that didn't matter so much—he fell for almost every woman he met. The only woman I think he didn't fancy himself in love with was his wife—and she divorced him a long time ago."

"The Romeo type?"

"I don't know. Women didn't fall for him, unfortunately. It was common knowledge that he was wildly in love with Malvina, wanted to marry her—that's before she married Harvey. And he fell hard for Evelyn—acted like a grovelling slave when they were together in the office. I also understand he used to see her even after he left the office. I know he has a violently jealous nature."

"Could have been jealous of her—and his brother as well?"

"It's the possibility—it keeps coming to my

mind. I've thought of it before, but I couldn't believe it. Not until this—on the island."

Phil had been taking in Bessinger's story. Now he seemed dubious.

"Even supposing Thomas Mason had the motive, even the opportunity, I wonder about his character—"

"Character?"

"He has a colossal inferiority complex. He's weak, flabby. Murder itself requires no strength—but the period afterwards, when you must keep up the pretense—"

Bessinger said there was another fact which we probably did not know—Thomas Mason's first wife divorced him because of cruelty.

"Being a lawyer, you know how most of the charges in a divorce suit are faked up. These weren't. He did beat her—once almost to death. She came to the office one day—black and blue marks all over her arms and her face. It was ghastly."

The true picture of Thomas Mason was indeed curious. His sense of inferiority, born in his own failure and his brother's success, led him to play the role of the quiet-living individual who wanted nothing better than a house by the side of the road. But all the while, inside, he seethed with hate and envy—which could easily be the cause of brutality to those weaker than himself.

Bessinger stared at the carpet.

"Thomas Mason is a fool. But he may be a deadly fool."

I WONDERED if he knew or even guessed at the possibility that the man Evelyn Emory referred to was not Mason, but her own father.

"Did Evelyn," I asked him, "ever speak to you about her family?"

He seemed surprised. "She didn't get on well with them, from what I gathered. I imagine they were old-fashioned parents who didn't like her taking an apartment alone in the city."

"She paid for that apartment herself?" Strong inquired.

"I suppose so," he said. "I never asked her about it. She made a pretty good salary from Harvey. About seventy-five."

"Did she ever talk with you about her father?" Strong persisted.

His hand was at his mouth, the knuckle running across his lips. "Her father? Her father—why should—"

The lines of the face were heavy, the furrows between his eyebrows deepened. "You mean could he—could he have been—I can't believe it."

"It's interesting you should say that," Strong said.

"But he's her father. It's hardly possible he could want to injure his daughter— Did he—did he know about her and Harvey?"

"Yes."

BESSINGER asked, "But why? Supposing he did know? That wouldn't be any reason for him to—murder them. It's all so mixed up. There's still a chance Harvey may be alive. It's pretty—pretty slight now."

"In other words"—Strong was pacing the floor—"we are left with possibilities. That it could have been done by one of two men—Thomas Mason or John Emory. Both of whom had motives for getting rid of Evelyn and Harvey Mason."

"There's one point we've overlooked," Bessinger said. "Let's assume it was—Harvey's body on the island. Someone had to go out there and remove it. Why? And where did they take it?"

"Collins," I said, "is trying to get the answer to those questions now."

"There is another answer," Strong said quietly. "Perhaps I should say another possibility." He looked at Bessinger closely. "You have a boat, haven't you?"

"I've already told you—"

"What was to have prevented you from going out there—taking that body—"

"Nothing, Mr. Strong. Nothing except—except that I didn't. It just so happens that my boat hasn't been out since—that time with Evelyn."

"You must realize, Mr. Bessinger, that we have to consider every possibility. There's nothing personal about it."

"I appreciate that. But really—merely because I happen to own a boat—why, you might as well accuse Nichols."

"He has one too?"

"I thought you realized that. We both belong to the same yacht club, out in Larchmont. Not that I'm accusing him—"

He sat down in the lounging chair, his expression dejected, as though he were just realizing the tragedy of these crimes and what they meant to himself and his own circle of friends and associates.

"So Nichols had a boat, too? How is he—a good yachtsman?"

"One of the best. He was president of the club for a couple of years."

"He wasn't at the meeting, though," Strong said. "It hardly seems likely he could have known—where to go."

"Unless he found out from someone. Or unless Thomas Mason told him. Mason's been trying to see me for several days. Just happened he's missed me whenever he's called."

"You mean that Thomas Mason might have told Nichols?"

"It's possible. Tom never can keep his mouth shut. That's one reason he never got ahead in the world. Talks too damn much."

"Yes," I said, "especially about his love affairs. That reminds me—do you go out often with Mary Mason, Mr. Bessinger?"

He laughed. "That night you saw me? No, not often. But she's a nice girl, you know, and she's been terribly upset about her father and his murder. I wanted to cheer her a bit. I'd hardly call it serious."

"That's a lie and you know it."

It came from behind us—the high-pitched voice of a woman. We all turned. Mrs. Bessinger, small and mousy and hueless as ever, stood there in the doorway, head tilted back and the eyes cold and piercing.

"Darling," her husband said, "you really mustn't—"

"Don't tell me what I mustn't. Why don't you tell them the truth? They'd like to hear it." She focused her attention on us. "Sure, he goes out with Mary Mason. And other women, too. He doesn't care what happens to me, his wife. I'm just baggage."

"Please!" Bessinger's voice rose suddenly, and he glared at his wife. After a moment, he relaxed. "Sorry, gentlemen. It's true I've been out with Mary several times. Also with other women. If that makes me a murderer, you can hang me."

"You see, he brags about it. His conquests!" Mrs. Bessinger's tone was withering. "But he always comes back—comes back to me."

The unpleasantness of this family quarrel sickened both Strong and me. I couldn't look at the woman. Bessinger rose and came toward us.

"I regret this exceedingly," he said. "I trust you—you will try to understand."

I nodded. One knows about jealous women, jealous wives, mousy, neurotic creatures with terrible tempers.

His hand was on my elbow, edging me toward the door. In the hall, he got us our coats and hats.

"All right, all right," Strong said, as the door closed behind us.

"All right—what? Where do we go from here?"

"Next stop—we'll have to make it tomorrow—the little man with the other boat."

XXXII

For White folder

To Mr. Strong:

The address of William Nichols is 27 Crestdale Road, Larchmont. Trains run from Grand Central frequently.

Miss R.

STRONG and I walked up the deserted main street of Larchmont early that Sunday morning, December 28th. It was sunny and crisp and pleasant, the quiet, uneventful,

smug security of suburbania. I wondered if I were wrong. Perhaps the pace of our own life, the night-and-day struggle for the accused, the endless scheming and counter-scheming of the criminal courts, had warped our view. More than likely, I thought, this was the better way. The peace of the town, the very absence of excitement—that, itself, might be exciting.

Crestdale Road can be found in a thousand suburbs in America. A well-dressed, contented, better-class street, lined with respectable oaks. The houses were large and well kept. Even now, in the heart of winter, I observed one man out on the lawn, raking off leaves, another washing a car.

The family of William Nichols was as typical of Westchester life as the street on which they lived. The two girls, ages ten and twelve, were charming children, though somewhat precocious. Mrs. Nichols was stoutish and wore a flowered dress. You knew she was a leader in club life and social functions and church work.

She greeted us, when we told her who we were, with a startled little gasp.

I think she was secretly pleased at being—in a perfectly respectable way—part of a murder case. Had she ever guessed how deeply her own husband might be involved, this would not have been the case.

"You're lawyers for that girl, aren't you? That Florence White? I've read about you in the papers."

"There has been some unfortunate publicity," Strong said in a suave tone. "The newspapers, you know—"

"Aren't they terrible? The way they exaggerate and all that."

"Yes. They make it hard for us to get the facts. That's why we've come, frankly. We'd like to talk to your husband."

"Well, Mr. Strong," she said, "I hate to say it but I do mean it—I'm certain that girl did it. We had a long discussion about this very case at our club luncheon yesterday and practically everybody out here is convinced she's the one."

She ushered us to the living room. It was pleasant enough. A large grey plush sofa faced a red-brick fireplace which apparently they did not use. The young girls scampered in to see the "company" and Mrs. Nichols introduced them to us and after a few moments of idle chatter they left. Mrs. Nichols said she'd get her husband.

"It's the maid's day off and I've just been tidying up—the children make such a mess. So if you'll just forgive the room—just take a seat. Bill'll be right down."

We waited several minutes. Finally Nichols appeared, his hair mussed and his face knitted in a scowl.

"Understand you gentlemen want to see me? I haven't much time—Sunday's the only day I have to get away from business.

What do you want?"

He was haggard. He looked at us with aggressive displeasure. The quicker our business was done, the better.

"You may have heard, Mr. Nichols," Strong said slowly, "that Mr. Mason is missing."

"I've heard something about it. But I've no information that would help, I'm afraid."

I was remembering then the airplane wing this man had designed—and his anger at Mason for the way the design was taken over by the firm, that same design which was later stolen.

"You don't like Mason, do you?" I asked.

"My likes and dislikes are not your concern."

"But you knew him as a hard man?"

Nichols did not reply. Mrs. Nichols had returned and was standing in the doorway, listening. He waved to her to go, but instead she asked him, with that high intonation of the shrew, "Why don't you tell him? Why not? Mr. Mason was a thief. He stole my husband's inventions. I wouldn't put anything past him."

"Please, Alice." Mr. Nichols sat on the arm of the wing-back chair. "He didn't steal it. It's the rule of the company that they own all rights on inventions made by officials or employees of the company. The company made some money out of what I did—actually, Mason took the credit for the invention and it was mine. Alice felt—well, so did I—that I deserved more out of it. But that's business."

I believe he was concealing his real feelings, trying to pass over something that rankled deep within him.

Strong said, "Naturally, we're investigating every angle of the case. We want to know everything you can tell us. We understand—"

NICHOLS stiffened. "What do you understand? I don't like your tone."

"We're trying to get the truth," Strong told him with deliberation. "We've certain information we want to find out about—information you can give us—which may prevent a grave injustice from being done."

"I am willing to help you if I can."

"You made a design for the wing of a plane. That design was taken over by Mason Aircraft. Shortly afterwards, certain securities were found to be missing—"

"Are you daring to insinuate that I took them?"

"Florence White was found guilty of the theft. But even after the conviction, Mason wasn't certain. He had some suspicions, Mr. Nichols. He even thought—you might have taken those securities."

If this information shocked Mr. Nichols, he gave not the least indication of it.

"We talked about that," he said. "He was

—to be frank, he was always suspicious. Always snooping around, trying to find out something. Why, he even talked with me about the possibility that his wife might have taken them. Imagine—suspecting his own wife."

"What did you say, Mr. Nichols, when he voiced his suspicions to you?"

"I told him he was crazy as a coot. Why should I take them?"

"You didn't share his opinion that his wife might have had something to do with those securities?"

"Mrs. Mason? I should say not. She was a very misused woman, Mr. Strong. Very much misjudged by her husband."

"You know, then, of his other suspicions about her? I don't like to bring this up, but I do know that Mason believed you and she were—to put it bluntly, having a clandestine romance—"

His face slowly reddened at this and I was sure his anger would break loose. But whatever he was going to reply was prevented by the entrance of Mrs. Nichols with a tray of drinks which she had gone out to the kitchen to mix.

She wore her most gracious smile as she passed out the drinks. There was that extra sweetness which made me wonder if she had begun to realize that her husband might be involved—and was trying to win our good graces.

Strong said to her husband, "You know about the body on the island?"

"Planker's Island, you mean? Yes, I know."

"How did you know?"

Nichols went blank. His expression was grotesque—like a schoolboy caught cheating. "Why—why Tom Mason told me."

"Mason? When did you see him?"

"It was last Friday. He came into the office. He was upset and nervous. Wanted to see Bessinger—Bessinger was out so he talked with me. Told me about the island and the missing body and sounded scared to death. He's positive it was his brother."

"Did he tell you about my visit to him?" I asked.

Nichols thought a moment. "No, he didn't say anything about that."

"Did he tell you what he came there for?"

"No—he wouldn't. Not exactly, that is—the man wasn't coherent. It was something about cyanide. He said Mr. Mason had wanted some—and then he didn't want some. It didn't make sense because—"

"Because why?"

"Harvey would never have any use for cyanide. All the technical work is done in the factory. He doesn't handle any of it."

"Did he wait to see Bessinger?"

"No. He stayed a while—and then he went out. I couldn't make head nor tail of what the whole thing was about. Except that he was sure his brother was dead—believes

Harvey has been murdered."

"You share his opinion?"

"Not at all. I believe Mason is still alive. I don't believe that was his body. And I don't see how any body could be removed from that grave."

"Why should it be so difficult?"

"Whoever tried it would be seen. They might get out there all right. But they couldn't get away. Somebody would see them."

"Suppose they had a boat—and came out there at night?"

"You mean—dug up the grave, removed the body, and brought it back to the boat?"

"And threw it overboard—weighted down."

"I see what you mean. I have a boat."

"I'm not implying or suggesting that it was your boat," Strong insisted. "Please don't think that. I'm merely trying to show you how it could be done."

"I'm still of the opinion that a man trying to remove a body would find it hard to get the body on board and dump it overboard—without being seen. They keep a close watch on the Sound these days."

"But if one were to go out in the early evening—there are still some pleasure craft out, isn't that so?"

"A few. But I'd hate to see one try to get rid of a body. I'd hate to try it, I know that."

"In that case—how do you account for the empty grave?"

H E COUGHED. "In science, Mr. Strong, there is a maxim that you should take the simplest way and the simplest explanation. In this case, the simplest explanation is the fact that there was no body there at all. That there was some kind of mixup in the records."

"You mean—in the records at the morgue?"

"I do. Dr. Joseph's assistants have been notoriously lax. This, I understand, was borne out by the rather careless method of handling that unknown body—the one they think might be Mason. I hear they didn't even complete autopsy. It would be easy for them to slip up—probably the body they thought they put in the coffin was buried

with the others."

"No, it's impossible," Strong said. "Dr. Joseph has double checked his records and they are correct."

As we were leaving, Strong brought up the subject of poetry. "I understand," he said, "you write some yourself?"

Nichols seemed embarrassed. "I wouldn't call it poetry. Jingles."

I said, "I suppose your real hobby is making inventions—like that wing of the plane. It must make you pretty sick to think it's been stolen."

"It does indeed. Unfortunately, all my other copies of the design—it's revolutionary, you know—have been destroyed. I didn't want any of them lying around, and I was so sure that would be safe."

"Quite," Strong agreed. "Have you any idea who could have taken it?"

But Mr. Nichols merely looked at him and shook his head.

They stood in the door, smiling at us as we started up the cement path. As we reached the street, I turned, caught my last glimpse of Mrs. Nichols as she buried her head against her husband's shoulder.

Strong and I walked back through the main street of the town to the railroad station. I was discouraged—it seemed to me we had gained little in our interview. But Phil disagreed.

"That part about the boat—" he began.

I admitted that was puzzling. "He did work awfully hard to convince us you couldn't dispose of the body that way. But if he weighed down the body by hardening a couple hunks of cement around the feet—"

"It wasn't that. It was another idea. Suppose—you didn't want to take the risk of actually removing the body. Suppose you wanted to hide it right there on the island. What would you do?"

"I'd bury it right there—in some other place."

"But there would then be signs of fresh digging."

"That's right. You might have to—"

I looked at him. There was something telepathic in the way I got his idea. It was the perfectly natural, the plausible, answer. You could bury the body in the same place. Down deeper—or perhaps to one side. Then you would fill the grave up. The grave was used enough, opened enough, so that no one would be able to tell if it had been opened yesterday, or the day before—or even a month past.

That would remove all the danger of carrying the body away from the scene. It was a simple, single operation—one man could do it. The thought of one man, working there alone, in the darkness—

And Mr. Nichols had tried to tell us you couldn't get rid of the body—that it must be a clerical error at the morgue!



COMING
NEXT ISSUE

THE SAINT SEES IT THROUGH

A Simon Templar Novel
By LESLIE CHARTERIS

XXXIII

XXXV

for White folio
received Dec. 29th -- by messenger

Copy

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
155 Lenard Street
New York, N. Y.

December 29th, 1941

Mr. James Matthews
75 Wall Street,
New York,
N. Y.

Dear Mr. Matthews:

All right, I was wrong. I owe you an apology and here it is. The analysis of the second bottle has been completed, as no doubt my secretary informed you on the phone this morning. The results, as you can well imagine, were surprising.

I had anticipated that the bottle might have been opened, but I had no expectation of anything like this.

I enclose herewith the stenographic copy of the report of the police chemist. Naturally, the investigation of this matter is being pushed forward with all possible dispatch.

Yours very truly,
STEPHEN P. COLLINS
District Attorney

SPC/RB

XXXIV

COPY

for White folder

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
CONFIDENTIAL REPORT

Following is true copy of report received from Sergeant Harry Sheney: Examination of bottle given to this office by District Attorney Collins.

Contents of this bottle had been previously removed. The white top had been taken off and stopper pulled out. This fact indicated by the way the top was replaced. Although folded in imitation of the original way the top had been folded, certain minute new creases in the paper show the paper cap had been removed. Also the string tied around it had been retied with four instead of two knots, two being standard according to Chemex, the manufacturers.

There were some evidence of cyanide crystals on the inside glass of the bottle. But the contents themselves consisted of harmless matter -- ordinary bathsalts, purchasable in any drug store. Complete chemical content of these bathsalts is now being determined, which will enable us to discover the name of the particular brand.

(signed) Sergeant Harry Sheney
Chemical Laboratories
Police Headquarters
New York City

Dec. 29, 1941

put in White folder

CASE NOTATIONS

in re: White case December 29, 1941
by J.M.

I am writing this tonight in order that our records may be kept up to the minute as developments are now taking place rapidly.

Dr. Emil Joseph, the medical examiner, Mr. Strong, Mr. Collins and myself went to Planker's Island this afternoon. It is a shocking place, horrible as any I have ever seen. We were met by two colored youths who were to do the digging, and proceeded at once through the "dump dunes" as they call them to the place where the graves are located.

Here, the Negroes set to work to complete the job of digging which had been begun on Strong's previous visit. The coffin was removed, after District Attorney Collins issued a warning to all of us to touch nothing except what had to be touched, as there might be reclaimable fingerprints.

On removal of the coffin, an examination was made. It appeared the earth underneath the coffin had been dug up. Uncertain whether or not this scuffed-up appearance had been caused by the removal of the coffin, Dr. Joseph nevertheless ordered the youths to dig.

For some time the Negroes dug in silence. One of their spades came against a solid object and the short Negro let out a cry. He said it was a body, that he could tell because of the way it "gave" against the pressure of the spade.

Both diggers seemed to wish to give up the job then. Dr. Joseph prevailed upon them to go on with it. They went back to the work while we came closer. The body began to come to view. During the last moments, Dr. Joseph, Strong and I finished the work with our hands. As photographs of the body have been taken, there is no need of a description of it here.

I might note, however, that the hands had been bound together with a piece of string -- apparently to facilitate handling by whoever moved the body. Four knots had been tied in the piece of string to make it fast.

Dr. Joseph ordered the men to lift it out. Collins agreed to stand guard over it, with the Negroes. The rest of us returned to the dock where Dr. Joseph gave an order for the body to be picked up by a police boat and brought immediately to the morgue.

At nine-thirty this evening, Dr. Joseph called me from Bellevue. The autopsy had been completed. Enough cyanide was found in the brain to kill several persons.

Identification also is complete. Definite indication of heavy scar tissue, plus scar marks on the bone itself,

was found between the index and middle finger of the right hand. The dead man is Harvey Mason.

Mrs. Mason, Dr. Joseph reported, is in a state of collapse.

XXXVI

for White file
Dec. 30

STRONG AND MATTHEWS
Office Memo

To All Members of Staff

From Philip Strong

In view of developments in Florence White case, no statements on any subject are to be given to the press by anyone in this office. This is absolutely vital and must be strictly obeyed.

WAS at the office by nine o'clock the next morning. But I wasn't early enough. Reporters and cameramen had somehow got wind that something "hot" was about to break in the White case and crowded into the outer office.

Miss Ring said she had told them the tip was a dud and please to go but they hadn't taken her at her word.

I told them I knew nothing of interest and said I would have to have them forcibly ejected if they did not leave at once.

This caused grumbling, which, by and large, I suppose was justified, but they finally went.

Ten minutes after I was at my desk, Collins came in.

He didn't knock—burst into the office like an angry bull.

"Okay, Matthews. You and your partner blew the thing up. Now how do we get it together again?"

"By keeping our shirts on."

It was Strong, standing in the door, still with his grey coat on. Rested and well-groomed and smiling.

"Sure. Easy for you to say. I'll have every paper in town on my neck if we don't get the answer soon."

"But they haven't heard about Mason's death yet?" I asked.

"They'll find out soon enough. All it means is that I've got two murders to pin on Florence instead of one."

But even this bravado could not hide the fact that Collins was worried. From his manner, he apparently held us personally responsible for the death of Mason.

Miss Ring informed me that Thomas Mason was outside and wanted to see us.

"Don't tell him I'm here," Collins mut-

tered. "We'll give him a going over. Just let him come in and find me."

Strong threw his coat and hat over a chair in the corner, came over and sat down on the desk.

There was a knock at the door and I said come in.

Thomas Mason was a frightened man. He had heard about the finding of the body, of course—the district attorney had notified the family. All the weakness of him was apparent in his face now. He looked as if he needed sleep.

He said in a flat voice, "My brother's dead."

"It must be a great sorrow," Collins sympathized.

"That's why I've come here. I have something to tell you."

Collins leaned forward.

"What is it?"

His tone said he was expecting Mason to confess.

Mason's eyes narrowed. "You remember those bottles of cyanide I gave you? Whatever happened to them? Did you find out anything about them?"

Collins said, "You were going to tell us."

"What I wanted to say—I loaned those bottles to—somebody."

"You gave them to somebody else?"

"It was a long time ago. I had forgotten."

"Who?"

"Evelyn Emory. She called up. She said my brother wanted some cyanide in a hurry for an experiment and couldn't get any from his regular supply stock. So I brought the cyanide in—both bottles. He kept it for a day or so and then she sent it back and said he didn't need it after all. The bottles hadn't been opened so I put them back on the shelf. When Mr. Matthews came to see me, I didn't even remember that, honest to God, I didn't."

The district attorney looked skeptical. "Pretty, Mason. That story would sound better if both your witnesses weren't dead."

"Don't jump at conclusions, Collins," Strong said. "We can check the story easily enough."

"You can?" Mason sounded startled. "How?"

Strong reached over and picked up a telephone. "Get me Mr. Bessinger. He's probably at Mason Aircraft. It's urgent and we must talk with him personally."

Strong repeated to Bessinger the story Thomas Mason had just told us. I could hear Bessinger's wrath through the phone. "Why that God-damned lousy—"

"You mean," Strong asked, "it isn't so?"

BESSINGER was speaking so loud his voice could be heard clearly in the room. "... anyway, we wouldn't have to go to him for cyanide when we have a dozen supply houses we can get it from in five minutes.

It's so crazy it makes me begin to wonder—has he—"

"Never mind," Strong cut him short. "I just wanted to be sure. You don't think it's possible—"

"It sounds perfectly insane, that's what I have to say. I never heard about it and he never worked on any experiment in the office."

"All right, Bessinger—thanks a lot."

"Wait a minute," we heard him say, "I talked with Harvey's wife—last night. Heard about what happened yesterday out at Planker's Island. I haven't been able to do a lick of work. I know you've got your worries. But if you could let me know—"

Strong said, "We'll let you know the minute there's a break."

After he hung up, there was silence in the room.

Mason stood in the center, the three of us watching him.

"No," he said, gulping. "No—I didn't do it. I didn't kill my brother. God help me, I didn't!"

Collins said, "It might have been easy for you and Florence— It remains to be seen."

For two hours the District Attorney questioned Mr. Thomas Mason. I should have thought a man like Mason would break under interrogation, but he didn't, even though at times sweat appeared on his forehead and he looked tired and beaten. I could see the great difficulty Collins faced. He had evidence against Mason but it was not enough to convict a man of murder.

The weakness of Mason's case was also its strength: the only persons who could disprove it were Harvey Mason and Evelyn Emory. Both of whom were dead.

We weren't getting anywhere. Collins knew it and finally—his face pink with anger—he told Mason he could go.

As soon as the man was out of the office, Collins called headquarters and got hold of Lieutenant West of Homicide.

"Have somebody tail Thomas Mason. The brother. You got his address—it's out in Forest Hills. Keep a watch on twenty-four hours a day. Yeah—what?" Excitement in his voice. You don't mean it? That's wonderful. The best break we've had—"

He was smiling as he hung up. "Things begin to clear. Like the lifting fog."

"What's happened now?" I asked him.

I was beginning to feel the wear of the past few days, and particularly that morning with its long period of questioning.

"The bathsalts," Collins said. "They've identified the brand. Wouldn't you know—it was the same make as the bathsalts we found in Florence White's apartment?"

I'd expected that. And still it came as another fact, another problem.

"You can't blame Florence for that," I said. "The bathsalts were sent to her."

"Uh-huh. I wonder now if maybe our Mr. Thomas Mason could have sent them to her? Maybe he was the guy Mrs. Bascom saw in the taxi."

"You mean to say," Strong asked him, "you're still trying to convict Florence White for the murders?"

"You bet your sweet life."

"You never learn, do you?"

"I'm going to learn a lot in a little while. After I leave you."

"Yes?"

"I had my men bring in Florence this morning. She's over at my office now. I'm going to talk with her."

Strong said softly, "You won't find out a thing. Not one single, solitary thing."

"What makes you so positive?"

"I've instructed her to say nothing—to answer no questions, unless I'm there."

"You can come along if you like."

"I don't think so."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I'm going to do it my way now, Collins. You had a try at solving this thing and you failed. Now you'll go along with me, or else—I'll go alone."

Collins looked grim. "I—I've got to solve it, Strong. You know how the opposition starts yelling if you muff one or two. I've got to get the thing solved. I'm trying, Strong. That's why I'm asking you to help."

"Then get it out of your head that Florence White is guilty."

"Everything points to her. I don't see how you can get away from it."

YOU couldn't deny that Collins was sincere. Nor could you deny his honesty as a public official in that moment. He stuck to his opinion, erroneous though it seemed to us, even though he knew, as Strong also pointed out to him, that if he were wrong the opposition would nail him to a cross.

Strong was putting on his hat. Collins looked mystified. "Where are you going now?"

"To see Florence," Strong answered. "Come on, Jim. We'll all go. I've changed my mind, Collins, Florence may be able to help us. But not in the way you think."

She was looking prettier than ever. Very smart. She smiled at Strong and me when we came in and even at Collins. He grunted.

Collins started right in, questioning her about the bathsalts, but Strong stopped him.

Then, deliberately, he told her the whole story. As she listened, her face grew pale and her smile vanished. I understood why she had seemed so gay when we came in. I remembered I had called her some time before the island trip, to tell her that something was going to develop that would be "good." She thought this was it—that we'd brought her down to tell her the indictment was quashed.

Now she realized she was in it deeper than ever.

I felt terribly sorry. She pushed back a lock of dark hair. She looked from one to the other of us.

"I don't understand," she said. "I don't see—can't imagine what could have happened."

"Don't understand?" Collins put in. "Or don't *want* to understand?"

Tersely, he told her of the finding of Mason's body.

She sat erect as he spoke—the way she was that day she came to our office.

"I—I don't know anything about it, Mr. Collins," she spoke slowly. "I tried to see Mr. Mason at his home, only a week before Evelyn—was found. I was trying to see him that day at the office."

"That could have been just a pretense. You could have gone there, tried to see him—even though you knew he was dead. You're not being very helpful, Miss White."

"But I want to help. I wish I could—if I only knew something that could help you."

"Collins," Strong said, "is forgetting. How was Miss White to know when Mr. Mason was returning—from Cuba? Or what name he was travelling under?"

The district attorney was sunk. His elbows were on his desk and his hands were against his face. "You and your dodges," he muttered. "Evelyn and Mason. Who had a reason to kill them? Who else could it be except Florence White? She hated them—"

Florence walked over to him. She had a gentle—almost motherly—smile.

"Why don't you just pretend I'm telling the truth?"

He looked up with blank astonishment. "What?"

"I mean it, Mr. Collins. You've gone along trying to solve this case on the idea I've been lying. You've always believed that, you've never opened your mind to the possibility I might be telling the truth. But if you did, it might change everything."

Mr. District Attorney Collins was a surprised man.

For the first time since I'd known him, he was speechless.

Strong laughed and said, "You ought to be a lawyer, Florence. That's special pleading—but it seems to have hit the mark."

Collins reddened, but his voice was quieter when he spoke again.

"The trouble is, Miss White—the trouble is that there's strong evidence against you. Your footprints in the room. Your fingerprints on the doorknob. I know we have your statement that you didn't go into the apartment. Then how did your footprints get there?"

Strong said, "If she didn't go in, Collins, she couldn't know how her prints got there.

But suppose—suppose they were put there by somebody else? Someone who wanted to pin suspicion on Florence? Could be done, couldn't it?"

"It might," he admitted. "Still—"

"You see," she said, "won't you try to believe me?"

Collins said, "I'd try anything at this point. But I don't see where it's going to get us."

Step by step, Strong and Collins and I went back with Florence over her story of the murder.

It varied in no important way from the original statement.

WHEN she finished talking, Strong flung what appeared to me to be a strange question.

"I want to know," he said, "something about the character of Mr. Nichols. Was he a generous man—the kind who gave money away to needy people, that sort of thing?"

"You were never in his office, I guess," Florence said. "Up on the wall he had a placard which said 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be.' He used to say that Shakespeare had written that and if it was good enough for Shakespeare it was good enough for us. He wasn't generous. Whatever belonged to him was his—even down to trifles like pencils."

"You'd say he was the kind of man who would put a property right above a human right?"

"I think he would, Mr. Strong. Oh, he wasn't a miser. But he was always talking about the pride of ownership, of having a bank account. Money and wealth—they meant a lot."

Strong listened to her attentively. Neither Collins nor I had any notion what was in his mind, and Collins broke in to ask if he were intimating that William Nichols was connected with the murders.

Strong said he wasn't intimating anything at the moment, but that he thought he had at least part of the answer.

The afternoon was growing long. We were all beginning to show the strain of the last few days.

Collins looked at Strong with a weary expression.

"What part of the answer?"

Then the phone rang.

It was Mrs. Mason. A nervous, excited, almost hysterical Mrs. Mason. We could hear her high-pitched voice clearly, though we could not make out what she was saying. Collins kept saying, "Yes, Mrs. Mason," and then, "All right, I'll send somebody up right away."

He hung up. Without explaining to us, he picked up the phone again and called the police, gave them some orders in a voice so low we couldn't hear.

When he was done, Strong looked at him

questioningly. Asked him what the phone call was all about.

"We'll know in a very few minutes now."

We waited about fifteen minutes, smoking and saying very little. Collins tried to busy himself with papers on his desk but wasn't too successful in hiding his own anxiety.

His secretary came in finally with the announcement that Harry Tarby and two policemen were outside. The policemen had orders to bring Mr. Tarby directly to the district attorney.

Collins said, "Yes. Show him in. Right away."

Harry Tarby. Strong and I looked at each other. Tarby is one of the top operatives of the Ace Detective Agency. His reputation in private detective work ranks with the best in the nation.

Flanked by two tall and husky members of New York's Finest, Mr. Tarby was visibly and vocally expressing his annoyance. His curly red hair was curlier and redder and his face was covered with a scarlet flush and his blue eyes were blazing.

The little detective—he stands only about five feet five—is best known for his ability to "tail" a person for days without being observed. In spite of his red hair, he has the knack of losing himself in a crowd or in the shadows and never being seen. I have heard reports that he has earned as much as ten thousand dollars for his work in bringing in evidence in divorce cases.

But now Mr. Tarby was angry. He jerked away from the grip of one bluecoat and faced Collins and demanded to know what was the meaning of this "Gestapo treatment." He had been quietly performing his duties—

Collins said, "Who ordered you to watch Mrs. Mason?"

"I wasn't watching her."

"She just called me. You've been out there in front of her house for two days."

Strong said, "You're not the man you were, Harry, being that obvious."

HARRY TARBY glared at us. "All right, so I was on a job. Suppose I was—that's no crime. I've got my license as a private detective."

"Who ordered you to follow her?" Collins insisted.

"It'll cost me my job to tell you."

"It'll cost you your freedom if you don't. I warn you, Tarby. This isn't a kidding business."

The red-haired young man seemed to be thinking about it. "I don't want any trouble with you, Mr. Collins. But this is confidential."

"You know how we work," Collins said. "You fellows are supposed to hand over any information to us which may be used in detecting criminals. You know that as well as I."

"Sure—that's the theory."

"This time it had better be the fact."

It took some pressure, but Tarby knew he couldn't hold out long. At last he said, "If I tell you who had me do it, you'll let me go? There won't be no arrest or anything?"

"Not for the time being."

"All right. It was Mason. Harvey Mason."

"Harvey Mason!" Strong exclaimed. "You don't mean his brother, do you—Thomas Mason?"

"I know who I mean. It's Harvey. The guy that runs the airplane company. He came into the office two or three months ago and ordered us to put a tail on his wife. He says it's a strictly confidential job. He pays us five hundred smackers for a start."

"Where did you take him his reports?"

"Where? I don't know where. Oh, yes—that was another thing. He said he'd pick up the reports at our office. Only he never showed up. We called up the office once to find out—talked to his secretary—the dame that was bumped off—remember? She didn't give us no satisfaction. We got a flock of reports about Mrs. Mason's activities—"

"What were you supposed to look for?" I asked him.

"Men. He thought she was going out with somebody. But if she was—we never found it. Nights, mostly, she stayed right in her apartment. And nobody came calling. The daughter went out a lot—"

"Harvey Mason thought his wife was cheating. And hired an agency to get the proof!" Strong said, "At last!" He came over to the thin little detective. "I'm afraid Harvey Mason won't be around to pick up your reports on Mrs. Mason's extra-marital activities."

Tarby looked startled. "What's up? Has he been canned?"

Collins said, "For good. He's dead."

The color drained from the detective's face.

"Dead? When? How did he die?"

"He was murdered—poisoned, Tarby." Collins was bellicose.

Tarby grew limp. "I didn't know. How could I know? Here we was watching his wife and he was—dead."

"Maybe you know more about it than you pretend," Collins told him.

Strong said, "No, he doesn't. It's all right, Tarby. You aren't mixed up in it. Matter of fact, just what you've told us—may actually be the one thing that solves the case."

Tarby's expression brightened. "Yeah? I'd be glad—"

"That's all right. But lay off the investigation of the lady."

"You bet." Tarby laughed nervously. "There ain't much point working for a dead man."

When he was gone, Strong flung himself down in the chair. "I think we all need a rest. Florence, you're going home—Matthews

will take you. Why don't you come on up to the apartment tonight, Collins? We've got plenty to go over."

Collins said he was all for it. I knew he had made the final admission of defeat when he let Strong dismiss Tarby so peremptorily. I helped Florence on with her coat.

"See you at eight, Jim."

It was dark when Florence and I reached the street. Dark and cold and there were no stars.

XXXVII

for White folio
Dec. 30

CASE NOTATIONS

in re: White case
from Miss Ring

Received today from New York branch FBI telephone report re Mr. Strong's interrogations. Following is verbatim, taken in shorthand:

"Harvey Mason's trip to Cuba had nothing to do with the stolen plane wing design. The FBI is still investigating this theft but have not made any progress so far.

"Mason went to Cuba expressly at the wishes of the War Department, to deliver to an official there certain secret designs for planes which are to be built in Cuba. Mr. Mason refused to entrust the delivery of these designs to anyone but himself. However, the FBI allowed him to make his own plans for the trip and to take whatever precautions he wished against discovery. It was felt that more suspicion would attach to him if foreign agents discovered the FBI was watching him or giving him any kind of protection. If these foreign agents became suspicious, it might mean trouble.

"The only information the FBI has about the trip is that the plans were delivered, the delivery having taken place at a specified spot in Havana.

"They know nothing of any disguise Mr. Mason may have seen fit to assume, but admit that he might have tried to hide his identity for his own protection."



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File White

STRONG AND MATTHEWS
Telephone Message

for: Mr. Strong
from: Mrs. Harvey Mason
taken by: Miss Gurlitz
at: 5:03 p.m. Dec. 30

MESSAGE

Mrs. Mason is anxious to talk to you.
Would give no idea what it is about.

MRS. MASON had finished her supper and was alone in the drawing room when we arrived. She was dressed entirely in black and wore no jewels or makeup. She was an older and more tired woman than she had seemed before.

"Come in," she said. "Come in. Sit down. There are cigarettes in the box."

"We got your message," Strong said. "I presume you are aware of the recent developments in the case?"

"All of them. That was why I called."

"Yes?"

We waited expectantly. She cleared her throat.

"I'm a widow now." She spoke slowly. "A lonely woman. Mary has friends, many friends. I have urged her to go out, to try to forget. But I'm lonely, tired. I have few—outside contacts."

"You wish us to tell you what the police have discovered?"

"It isn't that. I don't care what they learn. It doesn't matter to me, Mr. Strong, one way or the other. Harvey's dead. I loved him—far more than he ever knew. But he's dead. So is Evelyn. And now—I know one thing I didn't know before."

"About them, you mean?"

"Yes. You may remember—I told you I knew he was having an affair with Evelyn?"

"That night at our apartment you said that, yes."

"I was wrong. Completely wrong. Oh, I know how it will look. What the papers will say—between the lines. The insinuations—the big executive and his office wife. It wasn't so. He didn't love her—didn't have any affair with her."

"You say that very positively," Strong remarked. He rose from his chair, crossed the room, stood by the high mantelpiece. "On what, Mrs. Mason, do you base this new opinion?"

"I'm sorry. I cannot reveal that at this time. Maybe never."

"Then what was the purpose of telling us all this in the first place?"

Mrs. Mason didn't notice the change in his voice, but I did. From the casual, personal tone he uses in ordinary life, he had changed to the deeper, searching quality he uses in the courtroom.

She said, "I wanted to clear his name. I know what they'll say. And it isn't true."

"But weren't you yourself the first to bring up this hypothesis of a love affair between Evelyn and your husband?"

"It was before I knew he was dead."

"The curious thing, Mrs. Mason, is that it doesn't matter. We happen to know why you're telling us this."

Whether or not she was upset at this statement, I couldn't tell, for at that instant she turned to one side and reached for a cigarette. Strong brought out his lighter and held the flame for her.

She took in a long puff. As she exhaled the smoke, she said, "You know? Really? That's extraordinary."

"Isn't it true," Strong demanded suddenly, "that the real reason you are so sure is that you have discovered she was really having an affair with someone else?"

Mrs. Mason was definitely taken aback by this question. After a moment she said, "No, no, that isn't it. Nothing like."

But it sounded so unconvincing that she herself could not have imagined we believed her.

Strong said, "We came here to get the truth, Mrs. Mason."

"I've told you what I had intended to tell you. It is my belief. I—I haven't talked to anyone about it. It's something I've figured out in my mind. I want his reputation cleared. I want the name of Harvey Mason to be blazoned over the country. He was great—greater than the rest of us."

"And you feel remorse?" Strong asked her.

"Remorse—for what?"

"For the way you treated him."

"I never treated him badly. Never."

"His letter to you might indicate otherwise. The truth is—you were having an affair yourself."

"How dare you say that?"

"I dare because it's true and you can't deny it. You know you can't."

"What evidence is there for such an assertion?"

"The letter. What else could he mean when he said, 'You can't go the way you have chosen?' What way is that?"

"It proves nothing. He was suspicious—suspicious of everyone."

"He must have had some evidence. Enough to make him hire detectives to spy on you."

"Did they find anything? Anything at all? You think you know so much, Mr. Strong."

"They found nothing. But the truth remains—that he had some foundation for his

belief. What was it?"

"How can I tell you when there was nothing—I'm telling you the truth."

"In that case—how did you figure out that your husband and Evelyn were not having an affair?"

"How? Why—"

SHE looked about her nervously. "I can't tell you," she said lamely.

"Very well, Mrs. Mason. There is one person who can probably supply us with most of the answers."

She was suddenly rigid. "Who?"

"Your daughter."

Her gasp was audible. "No," she said. "No. You mustn't speak with her. She's so upset now. I won't have her bothered."

"We shan't bother her. Just a few questions. Nothing serious."

"What—what will you ask her? What do you want to know from her?"

"Only the name of the man with whom her mother was having an affair."

"You can't—you can't do it. She isn't home now. And when she comes home, I shall tell her—not to talk to you."

"Maybe she'll prefer to talk with the police and Mr. Collins."

"She won't talk to anyone."

"All right. Then she'll listen. Maybe that will be almost as bad—"

"Don't!"

She flung herself on the sofa, twisted away from us. "You're trying to torture me."

"Nonsense," he said. "I'm trying to make you do what you've been pretending to do—speak the truth."

"You want to make my daughter hate me."

"You mean you're afraid your daughter will hate you if she knows the truth, knows how you treated her father."

"You're guessing. You have no proof."

"I have enough. Enough that when Mary pieces it together with what she knows, we'll have the whole story."

"You think I killed my husband."

"You were unfaithful to him. You were bored, Mrs. Mason. Bored with your money, your fine clothes, everything in your life, including your husband. So you met someone else who gave you—excitement. Stop me if I'm wrong, Mrs. Mason. And that was fine until the day came when this man turned you off—for somebody else. He was—I think they call him these days—a wolf."

"You're fantastic."

"But he started to spend his time with someone else. Started to give her love and affection and all that—"

"Stop—"

"And you hated him. You hated him because he was giving himself to somebody else. Hated him because you had felt he belonged to you, was your property, to do as you liked—"

"Stop it—stop it!" She screamed the words, her voice breaking. "Please—"

"You see we know. We've figured it out clearly from the facts. Why try to pretend it isn't so? That doesn't help any. It only makes it more difficult—"

SHE leaned her head against the back of the chair. When at last she spoke, it was in a hushed voice. "You mustn't—you mustn't tell Mary. She doesn't know. Doesn't suspect."

"I promise you we won't tell her. Provided—you tell us the truth."

"There—there was a man," she said. "A man I—I thought had spirit, had a love of finer things. I was wrong. He was sordid. He was no good. It started a long time ago—before these crimes—before the theft."

"He was a friend of your husband?"

"In a way he was. Once I—I went to the office. I really wanted to see him. Later he—he told me—told me never to come there again. He said someone might guess."

"Then he stopped seeing you?"

"It was all of a sudden. I knew there was someone else. I was jealous. I told him he'd have to stop it. But he wouldn't. He wasn't the kind. I didn't know who she was. I never knew. I never thought it was—Evelyn. I thought—thought my husband was seeing Evelyn. After—after they found—Harvey—I knew it couldn't be. I knew—"

"You knew that the man you loved had killed them both."

"If that's true," I said, "it would indicate that Harvey and Evelyn were having an affair—"

"No," she said. "You see, all those fine clothes she wore, all of that—made me sure it was my husband. But now I realize, now that he's gone and it isn't so close to me and I can see more clearly—Harvey wasn't that kind."

"In other words," Strong said, "you saw her working for your husband, and getting a big salary, and wearing fine clothes, and you put two and two together, like any woman, and came to the conclusion she was his mistress."

"Yes. And I was angry, hurt—"

"Even though you yourself had been cheating?"

"Even though I'd been cheating too. I should have known, when he told me about going up to see that Negro, Jack Brown. He was trying to get the truth about the theft. Brown didn't tell him anything but—"

"You mean, you think the man you loved was also responsible for the theft."

"I didn't love him. He wasn't the kind of man you could love. He was exciting, interesting to me—flattered my vanity. That's what it was. I do think now he knew about the theft, or even committed it. Because I think that's how Evelyn got a hold on him.

Harvey wouldn't have tried to find out about the theft if—if he and Evelyn were having an affair. That's what I should have realized. Evelyn would have told him, he would have known—"

She paused, pressing together her long slender hands with those black-lacquer fingernails. She was distraught, helpless—as if she were realizing for the first time the ghastly wreckage her life had become.

"Mrs. Mason," Strong asked, "how much stock do you own in the Mason Aircraft Company?"

Mrs. Mason stood up. Her face was suddenly so pale I wondered if she were again going to faint. She looked at Strong as if he were the apparition of her dead husband.

"I—I—"

Abruptly, she sat down again. "Why—why do you want to know?"

"It should be obvious."

"I don't understand."

"Yes, you do. Your sweetheart wanted some of that stock. He wanted you to give it to him—or perhaps he even offered to buy it. Isn't that so, Mrs. Mason?"

She closed her eyes. "I—please, leave me alone."

Her fright, her terror, at the question, was so terribly plain. Strangely, though, Strong did not pursue that line of questioning further. Instead his tone softened and he said, "It doesn't make a great deal of difference, Mrs. Mason. Now I wonder if you'd do me a favor. I'd like to look at the shoes in your closet. Also in Mary's."

"You—what?"

"I said I'd like to examine your shoes. And Mary's. Every pair you own. It happens there's a point in this case connected with shoes and I'm anxious to check it. Of course, you don't have to. But in that case, the police—"

She lifted one shoulder with an air of indifference. "What does it matter?" she asked in a tired voice. "If you wish—follow me."

I stayed in the living room. They were gone a short time. When they came back, Strong said, "I appreciate your cooperation, Mrs. Mason. I'm sorry I had to be so troublesome. Now there's only one thing you haven't told us. The name of that man—this lover of yours."

Her eyes went wide. "I can't tell you. I may be wrong, I'm going to wait—wait until I see what happens."

"But you've got to. This man must have some connection with the crime."

She stood quivering.

"There's a girl," Strong said softly, "who has been accused of this crime. She's innocent. Don't you think you owe something to her?"

"I've told you the truth. I've told you everything I can for now. If you will—please

—tomorrow—give me time—”

“There isn’t any more time, Mrs. Mason. We know who the man is.”

She brushed her fingers across her forehead. “You do? You—but who is he, Mr. Strong? If you know—what’s his name? Do tell me—”

But her insouciance was grotesque affectation, and Strong, putting on his coat, said quietly, “We both know, don’t we?”

On the way back to his apartment, I asked him about the shoes. He smiled. “It’s an idea that hit me. Matter of fact, I told Collins about it—had him get the police to check every pair of shoes owned by every woman connected with the case.”

“Every pair of shoes?”

“It’s just a notion. I think—but let’s wait and see what the cops turn up. Sometimes they stumble on interesting items. Especially when you show them the way.”

XXXIX

for White folio

WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM

Copy for White folio
Day Letter received Dec. 30

Philip Strong
St. Louis Apts., W. 59th St.
New York, N. Y.

REPLYING YOUR WIRE. MAN ANSWERING DESCRIPTION YOU GAVE PICKED UP THREE WEEKS AGO ON ESPIONAGE CHARGES. GOES BY NAME M. R. SMITH. HAS MADE FULL CONFESSION BUT SAYS HAD NO SUCCESS EMORY OR WHITE. SAYS HE DID NOT TAKE PLANS FOR PLANE WING KNOWS NOTHING ABOUT THAT. FBI BELIEVE HIS STORY STRAIGHT AS HE SPILLED PLENTY ON OTHER MATTERS. BUT FBI HAS PROOF WING DESIGN SOLD TO GERMANS BY UNKNOWN INDIVIDUAL THROUGH NEW YORK GERMAN CONSULATE. ALL THIS OFF THE RECORD AS STORY NOT YET READY TO BREAK. REGARDS CULVER WASHINGTON AP

BUT if she had nothing to do with the murders, Strong”—Collins was morose —“we’re stymied. Nothing adds up to anything. We can pick up our blocks and go home.”

“Pick up your blockheads, you mean.” Strong grinned. “Nothing does add up—until you accept the postulate that Florence is innocent. Then things fall into place.”

The district attorney sniffed. “What things? I need facts—implacable facts. Not dreamed up notions.”

“We’ve got facts. Plenty.”

“If it isn’t asking your majesty too much—”

“To cite a few? Certainly—all of them. Only first—what about the shoes?”

We lounged in the chairs in Strong’s living room, sipping the highballs Squires had mixed. Collins had arrived about nine, and we’d spent some minutes listening to Beethoven’s Fifth, in an endeavor to quiet our nerves.

Collins had a pained expression. “Thought you’d come up with that. Got the report before I left the office. They checked all of them—Mrs. Nichols, Mrs. Bessinger, Mrs. Emory—Evelyn. You said you’d checked Mrs. Mason and Mary.”

“Find anything?”

I caught the eagerness in his tone.

Collins grunted. “I suppose it’ll be the summa cum something or other to you. To me, it’s one more crazy item. They found a pair of shoes in Evelyn’s closet. New. Never been worn, except maybe once. They—they were larger than Evelyn’s size.”

“You mean—” Phil was smiling—“they were the size worn by Florence White?”

“Yes. Now make something of that.”

“You bet I will.” Behind the rimless glasses was a sudden sparkle of excitement. “It’s the last answer we need.”

It was a strange moment. Phil sat in the chair by the fire, across from Collins. The two men were looking at each other.

“But we haven’t answers,” the district attorney persisted glumly. “All we have are some more of your damn theories.”

“You’re missing the lawn for the grass,” Strong told him. “Consider what we’ve got—what we know. We know first that there were two thefts, not one, at Mason Aircraft. The wing plane design was also stolen. We know that design was taken after Florence was out of Mason Aircraft. We know that all three witnesses against Florence are now dead. That although he testified against Florence, Harvey Mason believed it possible his wife and William Nichols might have been the real culprits. That Mason believed his wife was having an affair with some man, and hired a detective agency to shadow her. That Mason was correct in this assumption—which we know from Mrs. Mason’s own admission. That Mason went to Harlem to see his dying watchman because he hoped to get some truth about the original robbery. That this watchman had something on his conscience he wanted desperately to tell Mason. That after he hired the detectives to watch his wife, Mason left ostensibly on a business trip, wrote his wife a letter saying he wasn’t coming back and then *did* come back. That after he got back he was killed. We know that he changed his appearance and took the name of James Robinson—and that some of his friends were fully aware of this and of his plans.”

“Someone knew?” Collins looked puzzled. “How do we know that?”

"The clerk in the hotel in Havana told Jim that James Robinson received a letter from New York. James Robinson was Harvey Mason. Somebody in New York knew who Mason was, about what day he would get there, and what name he was using. Somebody completely in Mason's confidence."

"That couldn't have been Florence," I said. "She wasn't in his confidence, certainly."

"But we know a lot more. Evelyn Emory was a surprise witness at Florence's trial. After the trial, Evelyn got a promotion and a jump in pay to a very high salary. We know from Harry Tarby that the detective agency Harvey hired called Evelyn on the phone, trying to find out Mason's whereabouts. So Evelyn knew Mason was having his wife watched—and also that Mason was missing. We know from Mrs. Mason tonight that she now believes her lover was also having an affair with Evelyn."

COLLINS took a deep gulp of his drink. "Grant all that, Strong. What does it get us? The thing that really counts is the matter of the murders themselves. Not the people—"

"We know something about the killer, too, for that matter. We know he thought up brilliant schemes, and that he was careless. In each case, he left his characteristic mark on the bodies—he tried to conceal identification, dressing the body in old clothes, smearing rouge over the face, putting on cheap trinkets. In each case, a careless oversight made identification possible. With Mason, he overlooked that page of verse that had slipped into the inner lining. With Evelyn, he forgot the letter in the zipper compartment. And we know that the killer is close enough to the little circle of friends and enemies to have learned about Dr. Joseph's plan to go to the island—and was able to get out there first and hide the body."

"None of which tells us who the killer is," Collins complained. "I admit those are facts and that somewhere in them there is probably the truth—"

"Not just somewhere." Strong leisurely poured himself a fresh drink. "It's the whole thing. And it begins way back—even before the first theft."

I was sitting on the sofa, sipping my drink. Although I would not have admitted it then, I can say now that for once I agreed with Collins—nothing seemed to add up. But Strong's tone was confident.

"What was the first act in the crimes, Collins?" he asked. "Where does it begin?"

Collins looked blank. "First act? It—what do you mean?"

"It was when a man named Nichols designed a plane wing. Harvey Mason said the design belonged to Mason Aircraft, under a rule that inventions of workers and officers in Mason Aircraft belong to the company."

"So that makes Nichols sore. So what?"

"About the same time, Mrs. Harvey Mason takes herself a lover. She admits this, but won't tell his name. What does this affair mean—to us? We know the lover is a friend of both Mrs. Mason and Evelyn. But the only other link between Mrs. Mason and Evelyn is Harvey Mason and the aircraft firm. Mason is wrapped up in his business. Therefore, this lover must have some connection with Mason Aircraft. And he is a ladies' man. Would he have an affair with the big boss's wife, a middle-aged, difficult, neurotic creature, for the sheer romance of it? The answer is inescapable—he had an ulterior motive."

"Money?" I asked.

"And power. The queen could help him checkmate the king. She should inform him of Harvey's plans, keep him a jump ahead. Also Mrs. Mason owned some company stock. He meant to have it. Mrs. Mason's terror tonight when I asked her about the stock was the giveaway—although how much she sold or gave him, we can only surmise—"

"But that might also explain the theft of the securities," I said.

"Does explain it. We've been considering that robbery as an isolated crime. Now consider it in relation to the other crimes and facts we know. We know a man connected with Mason Aircraft was having an affair with Mrs. Mason, with money and power as his object. We know that through his position and also his contact with Mrs. Mason and Evelyn, he could know everything going on in the office. He could know—or easily find out—the combination of the safe. He could know about the securities, negotiable securities that could easily be sold for money with which to purchase more stock in Mason Aircraft."

"But Evelyn swore she saw Florence come out of the office that night with a package," Collins objected.

"Evelyn was lying," Strong said flatly.

"That reminds me, Phil," I said. "In that testimony—you said Florence's lawyer hadn't asked Evelyn the most interesting question. What was that question?"

"That was obvious. What was Evelyn Emory herself doing there at that hour?"

Plain as a donkey's ears but I'd missed it. I grinned. "What was she doing there?"

"That's easy, too. She wasn't there at all."

"Now, Strong—" Collins began.

PHIL continued unperturbed. "No matter what Evelyn said, her testimony proved her a liar. Let's stick to cold logic. Jack Brown was the only one we know was in the building that night. He was supposed to be there, that was his job. He testified he saw Florence. Florence says she wasn't there. One or the other lied. Evelyn's story and Brown's fit exactly. Evelyn also

says Florence was there. But if Evelyn told the truth, then she was working for two hours after closing time, alone in the office with Florence, without realizing Florence was there. Nor could Florence have taken those securities until Evelyn left, because we know the safe was near Evelyn's desk. But here's the real kicker. Evelyn, so she said, went down in the elevator, stood a couple of minutes putting on her gloves. In that time, according to her story, Florence not only committed the theft, but in addition *walked down* sixteen flights of stairs. If she averaged twenty seconds to a flight, it would still take her over five minutes, just to come down."

Involuntarily, I gasped. All the time, that obvious impossibility had lain there in the folio, and I hadn't seen it.

"So Evelyn lied. And since her story and Brown's match exactly, Brown lied too."

"Then—Evelyn took the securities?"

"If Evelyn had twenty thousand dollars in her dainty hands, she'd have given up being a secretary pronto. Instead of which, she got a promotion and a raise. What's the only conclusion?"

"Blackmail. She knew who took them," I said.

"She did—and so did Brown. Brown was the one who saw it—he was there when the real thief sneaked out. What would Brown do the next day, when the theft is discovered? He went to his friend in the office—Evelyn Emory—and told her. Remember how he kept repeating in his delirium 'I told her—I told her.' But Brown and Evelyn didn't go to the police. Brown could use money—Evelyn wants fine clothes and comfort. They went to the criminal and made a deal. They agreed to shut up, even to help frame a case against an innocent victim, provided they got their cut. Florence has the weakest alibi in the office, had known the securities were there, had placed them in the safe herself. No one remembers having seen her leave the office. So they frame her with perjured evidence."

Collins made an odd sound in his throat, drew his chair closer to the fire. I wondered if he were thinking of the girl he had put behind bars—the girl he now was beginning to realize was innocent.

"Florence goes to jail. Evelyn gets promoted. That was of course the payoff. Brown got his in cash. On the surface, everything looks smooth. Except that Harvey Mason isn't sure Florence was the thief. He's puzzled about Nichols. He knows Nichols was sore about the wing design. He thinks Nichols and Mrs. Mason are having an affair. It's conceivable to his mind that Nichols, feeling the firm owed him money, stole the securities. Maybe Mrs. Mason plotted the crime with him. He confronts his wife with these suspicions and gets an indignant de-

nial. But he's still suspicious. What other reason could make him obey the summons of an unimportant employee?"

Strong began to walk up and down the room slowly. Collins said, "But this is all ancient history, Strong. How does it tie in with the murders?"

"All of it is part of those murders, Collins. Mason is suspicious of his wife. He is more than ever convinced something was wrong in Florence's conviction. And an opportunity comes to him. Certain secret plans have to be delivered to Cuba. Mason probably hasn't met the now-you-see-him-now-you-don't Mr. Smith, but he knows Nazi agents have been sniffing around the company. He decides to deliver the plans himself—we know this from the government report I received today."

"That would account for his disguise," I said. "He was afraid some enemy agent would spot him."

"Then why did he come back to New York and stay in hiding after the mission was done?" Collins demanded.

THE district attorney shook his head as though this was an unanswerable point.

"Don't forget the detective agency he hired. He saw a golden chance to do some spying of his own, on his wife and her lover. He would hire detectives, come back to New York, remain out of sight and get the truth."

"Which is what Tarby told us tonight," I said.

"He assumes his disguise—simply shaves off all his hair. Takes the name of James Robinson. Goes to Cuba, delivers the plans on the Malecon, as Matthews learned from the guide. Writes a letter telling his wife he is never returning. And then—comes back to New York, takes a room on the East Side, and prepares to spy on his wife. His hair now is growing out a little, once more changing his appearance."

"Now you're forgetting something," the district attorney challenged. "If Mason was so secretive, the murderer couldn't have found out any more than the rest of us."

"He didn't find out," Strong answered softly. "He already knew."

Collins sat up straight. "I don't see it."

"James Robinson got a letter in Havana. Whoever wrote it knew all about Mason's disguise—because actually there was no such person as James Robinson."

"Mason told someone," I said, "and signed his own death warrant."

"Exactly. Our criminal knows he's in trouble. He knows Mason has hired detectives to spy on Mrs. Mason, to delve into the past. Which means it will be proved he is Mrs. Mason's lover. Worse—the detectives are likely to discover the truth about the original theft. And the truth means destruction. All his plans for becoming a

power in industry finished—unless he can find a way out. He sees the one way. Mason has presented him with the perfect setup for murder."

"In other words," Collins said, "nobody knows about Mason's disguise except the murderer. If he can hide the body, find a way of getting rid of it—"

"No one will ask questions, until a long time after the crime. Mason, James Robinson, comes back and takes the room on Third Avenue. Only one visitor comes to see him—the murderer. He probably suggests that Mason put on old clothes, let his nails grow long, take on the appearance of a bum, so that no friend would recognize him. Or maybe that's Mason's own idea. Anyway, the murderer spends a couple of nights drinking with Mason. Gets him practically out. Then—puts cyanide in his last drink. He believes no one will recognize Mason in those old clothes. But he has overlooked one thing—the page of poetry that slipped down into the inner lining of the old coat.

"Late at night, while the house is asleep, the murderer carries the body out, takes it in his car to an out-of-the-way alley and dumps it. Nobody sees this—but even if they had, what would they have thought? Another drunk. New York is full of them."

Collins grunted. "But why kill the girl?"

"Evelyn must have found out," I said. "She must have learned."

"Sure, she learned. When the agency Mason hired got tired of not hearing from him and called up to find out what had happened. Tarby told us they talked to Evelyn, told her how they'd been hired and asked her where Mason was. Little Evelyn doesn't miss a trick. Mason is having his wife watched. Mason is missing. We know Evelyn had blackmailed Mrs. Mason's boy friend—the man who stole the securities. Like the murderer, Evelyn figures out what the consequences would be if the detectives make any discoveries. She doesn't go to the police. She goes to the man. That's her move—to find out what's what. She asks questions. The biggest one being, where is Mason? His answers, by necessity, are evasive. She doesn't like them. She begins to smell blood. Evelyn will know how to use whatever dirt she turns up. Days drag on—still no word from Mason. She knows something is definitely wrong. The truth begins to dawn on her. Mason isn't coming back. And her mind would jump to the next idea—he isn't coming back because he can't because he's dead. She goes to the murderer and tells him she believes something has happened to Mason."

"Which he would simply deny," Collins said.

"Yes. Only he can't produce Mason. And Evelyn has found out too much. She knows about the first theft. She knows about the

affair with Mrs. Mason. She knows, moreover, something about the cyanide."

"Cyanide? How does she know? Unless—"

"She knows because the murderer got her to call Thomas Mason and have him send the poison in."

"You mean he induced her to send for the poison which later killed her?"

"How else did the killer get hold of it, assuming Thomas Mason told us the truth about those bottles? And if Thomas Mason didn't tell the truth, well—why didn't he throw those bottles away long ago?"

I THOUGHT of Tom Mason—of his theatrical gestures. I wondered if he was clever enough for such a double bluff.

"The killer empties one of the bottles into some other container," Strong went on. "He fills up this bottle with bathsalts, makes it look as if it hadn't been opened, gives the bottles back to Evelyn and says he didn't have any use for them after all. Evelyn sends the stuff back, thinks nothing of it. But afterwards, she'd remember.

"The murderer is aware Evelyn knows these facts. She, meanwhile, grows more insistent daily that he produce Mason, or she will go to the police. There is, of course, another possibility—that he can surrender forever his soul and his purse to her gentle care. He can become her slave. Again his whole career faces ruin. Again he sees only one way out—elimination of the obstacle. He will get rid of Evelyn too. Being the imaginative schemer he is, he begins to plan."

"So he agrees to pay her blackmail?"

"Makes a pretense that they would get together on it. To her, that's swell. She doesn't honestly give a damn what has happened to Mason, so long as she is taken care of. He promises and waits for the right moment.

"Then Florence shows up and has her quarrel with Evelyn. His brilliant mind sees a chance that mustn't be missed. In his desk he has the rest of the cyanide and the bathsalts he used. He dumps the poison he has left into this box of bathsalts, except for one pinch he keeps out—for Evelyn. He wraps up the bathsalts neatly. He induces Evelyn to make up with Florence, to write the note—obviously, she wasn't the kind to write such a note on her own.

"He went with Evelyn when she delivered that package and the note. He waited outside in the taxi."

"That's right," Collins said. "Mrs. Bascom did say there was a man waiting out in the taxi—and she did identify the girl as Evelyn Emory."

"The man in the cab was Evelyn's murderer. He had with him that fatal pinch of cyanide, a package of old clothes—and a pair of shoes."

"Almost equally fatal," I said grimly, "to Florence. Pretty simple for him to look up her measurements in the police records."

I glared at Collins, and Strong went on quickly.

"He drives Evelyn home. Maybe they do a little love making. Then have a bite to eat. Evelyn does the cooking—he doesn't want to walk around that kitchen yet. They have scrambled eggs. Hers are seasoned with cyanide. Think of the man! With her dead body lying there, he put on those high-heeled shoes and methodically clumped around the kitchen. Afterwards, one of his strokes of simple genius. He puts them with Evelyn's shoes in the closet, where they *weren't* noticed. Now he takes off Evelyn's clothes and hangs them up in the closet. He dresses her in the torn, wornout clothes and cheap trinkets, smears the rouge on the dead face. Again, his plan is to delay identifica-

"And the design of the plane wing—"

"That also," Strong said, "was his brilliant notion. It wasn't being used. No one would notice it had vanished. He could sell it to the Nazis for a good price. He knew Mason wouldn't agree to any such idea, so he stole it himself—just as he had lifted the securities. It was the second time he had robbed that safe. It was almost getting to be a habit."

"Funny," Collins said, "how they get into ruts."

"But he wouldn't deal with any cheap agent. He went direct to the German consul—made his arrangements there."

"And all the time he was committing these crimes," I said, "he was having an affair with Mrs. Mason, the widow of the man he killed."

"No," Strong corrected. "Evelyn Emory wasn't the kind to let him go on with Mrs. Mason, showering attention and gifts on her instead of Evelyn. After the theft, she put

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tion as long as possible. Late that night—just as with Mason—he takes her out, puts her in his car, dumps her body in a dark spot where she won't be found for some hours. As he is leaving the apartment, he realizes he has forgotten to buy one important item—the purse. Every woman has a purse. If it is going to look like suicide on the street, she'll need that with her. So he takes her own purse. He empties it, as he believes, of everything. But he forgot the zipper compartment—and that had the letter in it. Here again is the brilliant plan—the same carelessness of execution."

THEN I said, "He wanted it to look dubious. It might be suicide, might be murder. Maybe he expected they'd identify her—"

"Eventually, yes. But every delay would be a help. Would give him time to establish his alibi, if he were ever questioned in the case."

"It didn't look much like suicide," Collins said. "The way the dress was up—"

"He didn't plan it that way. But he must have thought he heard someone coming, before he had time to adjust her position properly. He had to get out of there fast. The rest—"

"You don't have to tell us," Collins interrupted. "I can see that guy for what he is—and he thinks he's smart. He finds out Mason's body is buried in a marked grave. He thinks he can beat it by hiding the body. Goes out there, digs up the grave, buries the body beneath the coffin. Damned clever—"

"Brilliant—like all his plans."

"Sure," I agreed. "And Dr. Joseph gave out the number of the grave, at that meeting in the morgue."

up a kick about it. Mrs. Mason protested against Evelyn. Whereupon our astute killer sells Mrs. Mason the idea that Evelyn wasn't having an affair with him but with Harvey."

"The fact is," Collins commented, "the guy was caught between two women, neither of them his wife."

"Yes. He had to keep on seeing Mrs. Mason from time to time, make excuses for not seeing her more often. But his seeming neglect, caused by Evelyn's demand that he halt the affair, infuriated her. That is the chief reason she seemed so nervous, even before she knew of the death of her husband. When she called us tonight, she was just beginning to see the truth. Only she wasn't quite ready to accuse him of murder. That's why she wanted time—to think—"

"The funny thing," I said, "is that the detectives Mason hired didn't discover any love affair."

"Not current. But if they had talked to servants and dug into the past, they would have turned up the truth of the early affairs. You never can keep anything like that absolutely secret. Somebody knows, somebody tells, you piece things together—"

The phone was ringing. I picked it up. It was for Collins, somebody calling from his office.

The district attorney grabbed the instrument from me. "Yes? What is it?" He listened a minute. "Good God! Yes—well—keep him there. Yeah—without bail. Hold him on suspicion. Let him cool for a few hours. He'll be willing to talk by morning—"

He hung up and looked at us.

"Thomas Mason just tried to leave New York on a passenger plane bound for Mexico. My men just picked him up."

XL

HOLLAND'S HARDWARE CO.			
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Sales slip		E 980 P	
1	Alarm clock		.99
Miss Ring: Please put in White folder — this solved the case practically single-handed.			
J.M.			

STRONG called me early the next morning, asked me please to come right over to his apartment.

I grabbed a cup of coffee at the drugstore on the corner and taxied over.

Collins was already there.

So also, to my surprise, was Lieutenant West.

"We haven't time for this hide and seek, Strong," Collins said petulantly. "What in hell goes on?"

"You want the truth, don't you?"

"I thought it was all settled. Thomas Mason's being held—"

"Get your coats and hats. We're all here—and ready."

Outside, we hailed a taxi. Collins wanted to know where we were bound and Strong said, "We'll pick up Bessinger—he wanted to be in on the kill. But first we stop at the hardware store."

Collins and Strong were in back and West and I made ourselves as comfortable as possible on the pull-ups. The smoke of the District Attorney's cigar filled the cab with its pungent flavor. There was little conversation, beyond the taximan's running analysis of the war.

At Lincoln Square, we stopped in front of the hardware store and Strong climbed out.

He was gone for several minutes and returned with a neatly tied up package in his hands.

"Is what?" I asked.

"Is an alarm clock."

"What for?" Collins demanded.

"It's a new kind of trap. The subconscious mind can be a wonderful help."

"I don't get it," Lieutenant West complained.

That ended the talk until we reached Bessinger's apartment on Riverside Drive. Strong said, "We'll all go in. We may have to wait."

We rang the doorbell of the apartment, stood there waiting. We had almost decided there was no one at home when we heard padded steps within, and a moment later the door opened. Bessinger stood there in his dressing robe, a long cigarette holder in his mouth. His hair was sleeked down.

But this was not the same man we had known. The evidences of sleeplessness, of nerve-strain were on his face—the buoyancy was gone. It was an old man, worn out. But he still managed to greet us with a cheery, "Gentlemen, come in."

His accompanying gesture was expansive. We walked into the apartment.

"We stopped by on our way to an important meeting," Strong said when we reached the living room.

"Really? What sort of meeting?"

"With a killer. The murderer we've been seeking."

Bessinger's eyebrows lifted. "You know who he is?"

Strong nodded slowly. "You wanted to be in on the capture. We thought you might like to come along."

"You see, Mr. Bessinger," Collins explained, "they got him when he tried to run away—"

"Tom!" Bessinger snapped his fingers. "Yes. They picked him up last night—when he was trying to make a getaway. Heard it on the radio. Tom knew that safe combination. He needed money. And he loved Evelyn Emory—"

"What we hoped," Strong said, "would be that you could come along with us. With your knowledge of the concern—"

"I'd like nothing better. But I've been awake half the night. Couldn't get to sleep. If you don't mind, I'll beg off for the present. Later, I'll be glad to help in any way I can."

"Certainly." Phil was smiling. "I think that package there on the table"—he pointed to the alarm clock—"is going to trap him so completely, we'll have him anyway."

Bessinger glanced at the package. "What's in it?"

"Don't you hear it ticking?" Strong asked. "It's an alarm clock."

Bessinger laughed. "Still playing the part, Strong."

"Not exactly. Playing a killer."

After a few moments of idle talk, Strong said that we had to be going, since Bessinger wouldn't come along. As he reached to pick up the package containing the alarm clock, he clumsily slipped, fell heavily against Bessinger, landed in a rather ungainly position beside the desk.

BESSINGER seemed startled for a moment but quickly recovered and helped Phil to his feet.

"Stupid of me," Strong said. "I'm awfully sorry. Lost my balance. Hope you'll forgive my—"

"Of course. Happens to all of us."

Phil reached down and picked up the alarm clock which had dropped to the floor. The string had broken. As he started to retie it, he gave an exclamation of pain.

"Didn't realize," he grumbled. "Must have hurt my hand when I slipped." He looked at Bessinger. "Would you mind tying this thing for me. I don't seem able—"

Bessinger said, "Why, certainly."

He took the package, started to tie the broken string. He was half smiling to himself.

The meaning of the whole business began to be clear. Bessinger didn't realize it but the rest of us did. Almost as if hypnotized, we watched him do up the package.

Tying it up tightly. With exactly four knots.

Strong said, "It's an odd thing, Bessinger. A bottle of cyanide we picked up—one that had been used—was tied with four knots. And the hands of the body of Harvey Mason—they were tied with four knots. Curious—the habits of the subconscious."

He spoke lightly. Bessinger looked straight into his eyes. There was an electrifying tension in the room. No one wanted to make any sudden move.

It was Bessinger who broke the spell. He stepped back a little, a smile hovering on his lips.

"I didn't realize you were such a student of psychology."

Bessinger, who had seemed so anxious to help us. Who had a boat and who was perhaps the closest in the office to Mason. With a shrinking horror, I realized this smiling man before us had committed two cold-blooded murders.

"You really believe you have a case you can take into court?" Bessinger's tone was mocking.

"It will be interesting," Strong answered, matching Bessinger's calm, "when we put Mrs. Mason on the stand. Especially after what she told us last night—about her affair with you."

That was a lie, of course. But for a second Bessinger lost his composure and his eyes had a glinty hardness. He said, "Women do talk too much, don't they? But a love affair hardly proves murder."

"It is often the starting point," Strong replied.

"Clever. Though you must realize, Mr. Strong, any evidence against me—any evidence—fits Mr. Nichols perhaps even better. He too had a boat, you know—"

"Sorry, Bessinger. The whole case hinged

on that one point. The murderer had to be someone Mason trusted. It couldn't be his wife—he was having her watched. It couldn't be Thomas Mason because Harvey had no respect for his brother. It couldn't be Nichols either because he suspected Nichols and knew he was angry about the invention. It had to be someone who knew how to fool that suspicious nature. Who always had fooled it. Only one person, Mr. Bessinger. You."

THE last word exploded in the room. Bessinger's face was expressionless. No anger. No rising emotion on the surface. Only a cold fury you felt rather than saw.

"You've been very smart, Strong. I would never have dreamed a common lawyer would have such incredible wit—"

"And you've been stupid." Strong pointed to the copy of Nietzsche's writings on the table. "You read and believed Nietzsche, who dreamed up the superman idea. The philosophy on which Nazism is founded. You saw yourself as a superman—everyone else a slave. You wanted power. Instead, you found yourself in the power of others. Of Harvey Mason and Evelyn—and you killed them. You were in the power of Mrs. Mason, and a Negro named Brown who—fortunately for you—died. You were in the power of your own burning ambition and finally, of your own crimes. You were the slave, Mr. Bessinger—"

Bessinger took a quick step backwards, toward the door. He was still smiling. His hand went to the pocket of his dressing robe. For a moment he fumbled in the pocket, then in the other pocket, desperately searching. His smile grew empty and terror came into his face and the lines of his lips twisted savagely. In that instant of frustration all his suave manner vanished. All the cool politeness, the studied bravado, was stripped away. His eyes went from one to the other of us. His face was blanched and horrible.

Strong, from his own coat pocket, drew a dark gleaming object. A blue steel automatic.

"I presume this is what you're looking for?"

Bessinger stared at it. "How—"

"When I fell against you, I'm afraid I—the phrase is, frisked you. I don't like gun play. I try to avoid it, if I can."

The room was very quiet. Lieutenant West stepped forward. He grabbed Bessinger's hands, slipped handcuffs over his wrists. We heard the harsh, metallic sound as they snapped tight.

He stood there sullenly, head lowered, eyes closed. Many times, I've seen thieves and holdup men and cutthroats—the dregs—brought in by the police. Curious how much like them, in spite of his silken dressing robe, the suave, smooth-spoken Mr. Bessinger now appeared.

"Nice work, West," I began. Then I heard commotion behind us and I turned. Collins had hold of a woman, was bringing her into the living room.

"So you were trying to get away!" Collins said excitedly. "Trying to escape—"

The mousy, inoffensive Mrs. Bessinger. She had a suitcase in her hand.

"Guess she was afraid of being tried as an accessory," Collins said. The woman didn't speak.

"I don't think that's it, Collins," Strong commented. "She was being loyal—blindly loyal—to her rotten husband. Trying to remove some of the evidence."

"Evidence?" Collins looked at Strong inquiringly.

Strong pointed to the suitcase. "Open that."

A man's suitcase. They put it on the floor. There were a number of labels on it, hotels in Europe and South America. The one I noticed especially was the label of the Hotel Plaza in Havana, Cuba.

Collins bent over and undid the straps and lifted back the lid.

Men's clothes inside. Crumpled. But still we could see they were expensive. The sort a wealthy man would wear. Collins, with an exclamation, bent closer.

Inside, on the lid, written in indelible ink, were four words:

"Property of Harvey Mason."

"Mason's suitcase, in your own home," Phil said. "The last careless mistake. And your wife tried to sneak out with that bit of evidence before we found it."

Bessinger looked up. His face was livid, his eyes blazing with hate.

"She didn't know about any crime." It seemed hard for him to speak. "She was in the other room—listening. She only—remembered the suitcase I brought in and stuffed in the closet. She must have suspected—"

I looked at Strong. There was no triumph, no victory, in his expression. Rather, a kind of pity.

"You should have known you couldn't win," Collins was saying. "Even professional gangsters know we'll get them, sooner or later. And an amateur—an amateur in murder—"

"Never mind, Collins." Strong said, "Let's take him out of here—"

Collins said:

"Guess you're right. We'd better get the wagon."

He went to the phone to call police.

EPILOGUE

FLORANCE was in our offices. The shock of Bessinger's arrest, of her own release, with the profuse apologies of Mr. District Attorney Collins, had left their mark. But

some of the relief, some of the joy of her freedom, was coming to her.

Collins had called. Bessinger had made a full confession, hoping for the mercy of the court—a futile hope, we all believed. His confession had borne out all of Strong's deductions. In addition it explained the one point that still had puzzled me. Why had he reported the theft of the wing design? His reason was typical of the man's cocksure brilliance. He knew he was safe and the gratuitous information had at the same time confused the issues and demonstrated his own good will and honesty. The wife, after lengthy questioning, was found to have had no part in the actual crimes, and was allowed to go free. Thomas Mason also had been released. His panic, caused by his realization of the extent to which he was under suspicion, had subsided. He was now, according to Collins, ready to talk to any and all about his adventures in the double murder—and, indeed, to explain how he had actually been the one who had figured out the truth in advance.

Collins had still been a little puzzled about the package and the string trick. "I don't know if we can use it in court, you know."

Strong had laughed. "It was a psychological trick. You won't need it. You've got that damning suitcase. I used the string trick only for myself. Only because I wanted to be absolutely positive with a double check. It was my way of—tying up the case."

It was almost dark outside. I looked at Florence.

"It's New Year's Eve," I said. "A night we can celebrate."

"That would be swell," Strong chimed in. "We can all go somewhere—"

I looked at him with what I hoped was a wry expression. "Phil," I said, "you must be about done in. It wouldn't be fair to ask you to wear yourself out tonight. Florence and I—"

"But I'm not tired," he said. "I'd like to—"

Then I guess he got the point. "Maybe—maybe you're right," he said resignedly. "A good night's sleep—perhaps it's not a bad idea."

As I was helping Florence on with her coat, he was calling Collins on the phone.

"Sure," we heard him say, "come on up tonight. We can grouse over the murders. Yes . . . Yes . . . No, you're wrong. You see, he was the only one who fitted all the qualifications of the killer—"

We waved to him and started out. As I closed the office door, I could still hear him discussing some point in the case. But I didn't much care. I looked at Florence and she looked at me, and her eyes were bright and her lips smiling and she was very lovely. Thefts and murders and all of that, to be candid, were the farthest things in the world from my thoughts.



The killer drew an automatic and fired at close range

NEW YEAR'S DUTY

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

Deputy Sheriff Retland is ready to retire—but not before walking into the gunfire of two killers in the line of duty!

MORE cars whizzed past on the highway, which had been free of snow for several days. The night sky was clear and star-studded. The temperature had moderated. Taken altogether, it was as pleasant a New Year's Eve as Deputy Sheriff Lew Retland ever had experienced, and he had lived through sixty of them.

Now he stood in the doorway of the sher-

iff's substation on Riverdale Road and watched the traffic. It was about nine. Most of the cars, he knew, were headed for the somewhat notorious Britelite Tavern, less than a mile away in a grove of trees on the bank of the frozen river.

It took money to celebrate New Year's Eve at the Britelite Tavern. Wine would flow, and prices would be high. The floor show would not be conducted with even its

usual modicum of decorum. By midnight, it would be a wild party.

Three raids by a sheriff's squad had convinced John Miller, the tavern's operator, that it would be cheaper to close his gambling layouts, so he had done it. But he would make up a part of the difference, everybody knew, by padding checks, short-changing customers, and slapping extra tariff on everything that could bear the weight.

Retland knew all about the clientele of the Britelite. He dropped in often in the line of duty. Big business men, socialites who thought they were slumming, sportsmen, beautiful women with warm smiles and cold hearts out for what they could get—they all passed through the doors of the Britelite Tavern at some time.

Stepping back into the substation, Deputy Sheriff Lew Retland closed the door and went to his desk. He was alone tonight. Because he was a widower with no children, and only a middle-aged niece to keep house for him, he was generally selected for holiday assignments. New Year's Eve was only another evening to him—usually.

But it was a bit different tonight. This was the last New Year's Eve he would be on duty. He was coming up for retirement in February, after forty years of service.

As he filled and lit his pipe and made himself comfortable at his desk, with his feet upon a corner of it, his mind flashed back over those forty years. There had been tense moments in the early years of service—wild chases and a few gun battles that did not amount to much except to make life a bit interesting.

THEN he had been given desk work at the sheriff's office in the big city. In time, he had charge of the telephone work to the substations scattered around the big county outside corporate limits, most of them along highways leading in and out of the population center. Those sub-stations formed a net when the sheriff's office wanted to stop somebody making a getaway.

The years passed with Retland giving satisfactory service but never doing anything spectacular to get his name into the newspaper headlines. Sam White, who had been sheriff for many years, thanks to a strong political machine and good work, gave medals for especially meritorious conduct and bravery. Retland never had gone to the Head Office to have a medal pinned on him while newspaper photogs flashed their bulbs at him.

Yet he was content. He owned a little

home free from debt. He would have a retirement pension. And he could raise chickens and rabbits, and drop in at the substation evenings to smoke his pipe and gossip. However, he wished he had done something during the forty years that would have impressed the people of the city with the fact that at least he was alive.

His middle-aged niece, a spinster who had soured on life in her teens when a love affair had gone wrong, went around humming hymns and thought a meeting of the Ladies' Aid Society was the high spot of the month. She ruled Lew Retland with a hand of iron, and had a sharp tongue. But she was a good housekeeper and an excellent cook, so Retland tolerated her. He merely closed his ears to her complaints and grunted in reply to her queries.

However, she had said something a few days before that had startled him.

"You'll be retiring in February, Uncle Lew," she had said. "Forty years on one job! A steady, dependable man. I'd think Sheriff Sam White would do something handsome for you."

"The retirement fund will do that," Retland had answered.

"I mean something special. Like a medal for faithful service—"

"Them things are for heroes only," he broke in. "I'm no hero. Been an inside office man most of the time. Anyhow, I'm alive and ain't got any bullet holes in me, and some heroes can't say that. I ain't complainin'."

Now, as he sat in the little office on New Year's Eve, he realized that his passing from active service would cause no sensation in the daily public life. He wasn't even important enough to rate an item in the big city papers. Just a good public servant quitting the job because of age. There was a keen satisfaction in that, however. His record had been an honorable one, and he would quit with it that way.

More cars roared past on the highway outside.

"Big night for the Britelite Tavern," he muttered to himself. "John Miller will gouge 'em plenty. 'Bout time for Joe Adams to be comin' along."

Joe Adams was the highway motorcycle cop on the night shift in the Riverdale district. He stopped at the sheriff's sub-station every night a couple of times to check the teletype for orders and chat with Retland.

Retland hated the teletype. Telephones had been good enough, he thought. He had handled everything by telephone when he

had been at the Head Office in charge of communications with sub-stations, before Head Office decided he was growing old and slowing up.

But now a pretty girl sat at a teletype machine and punched keys and sent the message to all sub-stations at once. Instead of remaining comfortable at his desk, reaching out to take the phone when its bell sounded and attending to official business without getting out of his chair, now he had to get up and go to the teletype receiving machine in the corner of the office and read what the thing had written!

The spitting of a motorcycle coming along the highway at top speed interrupted Lew Retland's reverie. Joe Adams was coming. The highway cop would perhaps have a bad night—drunken drivers, auto mishaps, fights and all that. For an instant, Retland was glad he would have nothing worse than a teletype to contend with.

JOE ADAMS parked his motor in front and barged through the door, his manner breezy. Retland liked Joe Adams. He was only twenty-eight, good-looking, tall and strong, and knew how to handle belligerent men speedily and to advantage.

Adams had been married two years and had a son about one year old. He was paying for a little bungalow-type house. He was a splendid officer, looking as an officer should look in his uniform. Retland long ago had decided that Joe Adams would climb high in the service.

"Evenin', Lew!" the motorcycle cop greeted now. "Lucky you, to have your job tonight. I'll probably have to handle a dozen fights at the Britelite, make reports on a score of auto accidents, and pinch a bunch of drunk drivers weaving their cars all over the highway. What's on the teletype?"

"The cussed thing hasn't clattered for an hour," Retland replied. "Hope it keeps quiet."

But it began chattering at that instant. Joe Adams went over to it, and Retland got up from the desk and followed him. The message came in swiftly:

TO: ADAMS, MOTOR 631.

FROM HEAD OFFICE:

SEND AMBULANCE CALLS IF ANY TO WEST SUB-STATION. REPORT ACCIDENTAL DEATHS TO SAME. URGE KEEP EYE ON BRITELITE TAVERN. REPORT IS THAT NORT SANDERS HAS RESERVATION THERE FOR LARGE PARTY. IF HE IS THERE OBSERVE WITH WHOM HE COMMUNICATES AND REPORT SAME. IF GAMBLING ROOM OPENS TONIGHT CALL AT ONCE.—BRYAN, COMMUNICATIONS.

"Nort Sanders, huh?" Retland said, as the machine became silent. "What's he up to now?"

"I wouldn't know," Joe Adams replied. "Head Office seems worried about his associates. I've heard rumors."

"Open up," Retland begged.

"You know Nort Sanders' girl, that cute model, Clarissa Dayle?"

"Not personally," Retland replied, grinning. "I can't buy the things she likes."

"Nort Sanders has been buying 'em for a year. His gambling house in town and his rackets have dressed that cold-blooded baby in mink and decked her with jewels, as the saying is."

"That's ordinary for such people," Retland suggested. "No law against a man makin' a fool of himself over a woman. If there was, half the men would be in the jailhouse. Good for the merchants, too."

"And bad for the homicide squad if things go wrong," Joe Adams added. "Nort Sanders is generally in the chips and a couple of mink coats wouldn't wreck him. But you take Duke Parney, now. He could make it three ermine coats and a matched pearl necklace, and still have breakfast money left."

"You mean Duke Parney is tryin' to steal Nort Sanders' girl friend?"

"I'd say he's stolen her already, Lew. It's the principal topic of conversation in our café society, as a man might say. She's been giving Nort Sanders the brush off. And what else would you expect of a girl like her? Sanders is a free-spending guy dancing around on the fringe of crime. Bootlegger when he was a kid, mixing in all the rackets, owns a gambling house in town that the city cops can't seem to be able to find. It's out of the sheriff's jurisdiction, or we'd find it."

"Yeah, I know all that."

"And Duke Parney—distinguished gent with gray hair at his temples. Comes from an old family. Has an inherited fortune which he makes grow despite his huge spending. Likes to dabble around with the horse-poker-baseball-café crowd. You think a girl like Clarissa Dayle would hesitate if she had a chance to drop Sanders and cling to Duke Parney?"

"Reckon not," Retland said. "A model, eh?"

ADAMS uttered a scornful laugh. "She's a model, my eye! Was once. Heard an artist say she was the greatest model ever for hands. Bet she hasn't worked at it six days the last year. She's a model gold-digger. But she's a beauty, and she has brains—I'll

say that much for her. Heard her on the witness stand a year ago in a manslaughter case—innocent bystander who just happened to see and hear, to listen to her tell it. And she outsmarted the D. A. and all his hired help."

"And you think there may be trouble about it?"

"It's only a question of where, when and what. Somebody once said, 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.' I can match that. Hell hath no fury like a cheap tinhorn gambler and minor racketeer who sees his moll sneering at him as she walks away on the arm of a rich, aristocratic playboy. Somebody'll be picking up the pieces before the New Year is very old! That reminds me! Happy New Year, Lew, and many more of them!"

"Thanks, Joe. Same to you. I won't be on the job much longer. Going up for retirement in February."

"I'll miss our nightly chats, Lew," Adams said, sincerely. "Better get a hustle on me now. I'll look in on you later, Lew."

Joe Adams hurried from the office, and a moment later Retland heard his motorcycle roar into life as he dashed along the highway toward the Britelite Tavern.

The teletype began chattering again. Retland hurried to it and read the message as it came in:

RETLAND, RIVERDALE ROAD SUB-STATION:

TELEPHONE HEAD OFFICE IMMEDIATELY.

BRYAN, COMMUNICATIONS.

Retland hurried across the office to the telephone. He had a moment of glee. The teletype could make sounds and print a message, but it was a one-way affair. When they really wanted something, they had to call him to the phone. Then, human voices did the work.

He telephoned the Head Office and gave his name and code word.

"Adams been there?" Head Office asked.

"Left not two minutes ago."

"Which way did he travel?"

"North, toward Britelite Tavern."

"Trouble there, Retland. Adams may have gone on past. Leave message for him and hit for the Tavern in your car. It's a homicide. The homicide squad is busy in the city now. It'll be some time before our men can get there. Help Adams if he gets there. Take charge until he does get there if he is late. We'll try to catch him at the next station."

Retland felt a thrill go through him as he replied:

"Orders understood!"

"Make it quick, Retland! We had a phone tip that Duke Parney has been shot and killed."

Retland's heart was pounding as he scribbled a note for Adams and left it on the teletype. Sometimes, Adams circled on another highway and came back. But Retland supposed he had stopped at the Tavern.

He locked the office door and rushed to his old car, and a moment later was driving down the highway with what speed the old rattletrap could make.

Duke Parney! They had just been talking about him and Nort Sanders and Sanders' girl. Duke Parney, the millionaire playboy who wasted money and at the same time supported a children's hospital and built playgrounds for the kids! His death from natural causes would have been a front page story, but if he had been murdered, over a gold-digger, it would be a sensation greater than any other during the year now dying.

As he neared the lane that ran out to the highway from the Tavern, he saw cars turning out and speeding away in both directions. Some passed him on the way to the city. Retland guessed that shocked and fearful guests were escaping from the place of tragedy, reluctant to be interrogated and held as witnesses.

HE TURNED into the lane and sent his car slowly to the front of the sprawling building, parking off to one side and getting out to hurry to the wide verandah in front. He took his service pistol out of its holster and checked to see that it was loaded and ready. Regulations made him wear that pistol. He had not used it for years except at the police pistol range, where he revealed himself an excellent marksman.

Inside the Tavern, women were screeching and men were shouting at one another hoarsely. Retland straightened his bent shoulders, thrust some people aside, and got into the place. His arm was grasped, and he turned his head to see John Miller, the proprietor, beside him.

"Into the office, Retland—quick!" Miller said.

The office was only a step away. Miller closed the door when they were inside.

"Listen, Retland!" John Miller begged. "This will ruin me unless it's handled just right. How could I help it? A decent man reserves a table and starts a celebration with his friends. And another man comes in, walks up to the table, and shoots him. For some trouble outside the Tavern. No quarrel in here. Remember that, Retland."

"Facts—quick!" Retland said.

"Duke Parney had the party. Nort Sanders had a reservation, too, but phoned and canceled it two hours ago. I thought I knew why when I saw that Clarissa Dayle was one of Duke Parney's guests."

"I know all that dope—get down to the killin'!" Retland ordered.

"Sanders walks in with his pal, Walt Henson, behind him, and goes right to the table. Duke started to get out of his chair, and Henson slapped him back into it. 'Steal my girl, will you?' Sanders hollered at Duke. 'It's the last girl you'll steal!' I was less than twenty feet away and heard every word. Half the people in the place heard, cause Sanders was yelling, and it was quiet between orchestra numbers."

"Hurry it up!" Retland ordered.

"Sanders drew an automatic and fired five shots into Duke Parney at close range. Bet the front of his dress shirt has powder burns on it. Walt Henson threatened the crowd with a gun, and he and Sanders backed toward the front door, watching everybody. Women screamed and fainted and men bumped into one another as they began rushing around crazy like."

"How about Duke's guests?"

"Two big city men and their gals, and Clarissa Dayle. They about went crazy. I've got 'em in a private room. The three women are screeching their heads off. Plenty of other witnesses, too. Some paid their checks and hurried away, and some forgot their checks. No mystery here for a homicide squad to solve. All the cops have to do is catch Nort Sanders and his pal, Walt Henson."

"I'll talk to Duke's guests," Retland answered. "I'm just holdin' the fort until the squad can get out from town. They're busy there on another case. Joe Adams will be here soon as he gets word, to take over."

"A second, Retland, before you go talk to those people. I want this thing smoothed as much as possible, see? Want it made plain in all reports that the trouble didn't start here. This thing has ruined my New Year's Eve take. It'll blast business for a long time for me, except a few curious folks will drop in maybe tomorrow or next day. A thing like this—"

"What can I do?" Retland asked. "Tell it to the newspaper boys. You can bet they'll come stormin' out here when they hear of Duke Parney's murder. They're probably on their way now."

"You talk to the newspaper boys like I said. Make it official."

"And why should I do a favor for you—a man who's runnin' gamblin' tables on the sly half the time, who's caused the Head Office a lot of trouble?"

"Listen, Retland! I've heard you're to be retired next month on a measly little pension. Kicked out after forty years' work. You could use an extra few thousand—"

THE deputy sheriff shook his head. "So you'd hand me a fistful of century notes, maybe?" Retland asked. "Just for sayin' in my reports, and tellin' the news-hounds, that the quarrel didn't start in here?"

"Protect me all along the line."

"What line, Miller?" Retland asked. "Seems to me I've heard that Nort Sanders and some of his boys were your pardners in your gamblin' room here."

"Old stuff, Retland. I've closed my gambling rooms, and you sheriff's men know it. You can come smelling around any time you like."

"Offerin' me heavy sugar for nothin'?" Retland asked. "Not like you, Miller. The thing is putrid."

"Have it your own way. Facts are facts. The trouble didn't start here."

"But Nort Sanders and his boys have been your friends and business associates," Retland reminded him. "How do I know but what you knew what was comin' off? Maybe you made it easy for Sanders and Walt Henson, like passin' word where Parney and his party had their table and all that. Let's get to those witnesses."

Miller shrugged his shoulders and opened the door. Retland followed him out, through the lobby and into the scene of confusion. Guests were wild. They stormed the check rooms for wraps and hurried out to get their cars.

The head waiter hurried up to Miller. "More than half are dodging their checks, sir."

"Let 'em go!" Miller told him. "Get everybody out except those in the private room. Make a speech and tell them to leave quietly, that we deplore what happened but it wasn't our fault, that the men didn't quarrel in here."

Miller led Retland on toward the private room, dodging those who were charging toward the door in delayed panic. Somebody had shouted that the authorities would hold them all without bail as material witnesses.

The orchestra platform was deserted. The stage was filled with costumed chorus girls who had been preparing to put on the floor show, who were screeching inquiries at one

another. Miller shouted to them to shut up, dress and go home, and they scurried from the stage.

At the door of the private room, Miller stopped and turned to Retland.

"Make it as easy as possible for the two men," he whispered. "Both prominent and married and all that. I confess that's one of the things I was, and still am, willing to pay you for. Plenty of witnesses without them."

"You're crazy!" Retland told him. "Scores of persons must have seen them at Duke Parney's table. By the way—the body?"

"Where he fell beside the table. I had waiters cover the body with tablecloths. It hasn't been touched."

"You've got a little sense anyhow," Retland acknowledged, grudgingly. "I didn't notice anything as we came through the big room."

"You're not used to this sort of work, Retland. You're an office cop, and an old one. Why not wait until Joe Adams gets here?"

"Say! Why have you been delayin' me?" Retland snapped. "There's somethin' behind this. Open that door and let me talk to these people, get their names and all."

He glanced back at the big room with its lavish furnishings. Almost everyone was gone. Tables and chairs had been overturned. Waiters stood around white-faced. On the floor was something covered with white tablecloths.

Miller was pretending to give his head waiter further orders by shouting. Retland brushed him aside suddenly and jerked open the door of the private room.

"Get him!" he heard Miller shout to somebody as he stepped into the room. "Better stop his mouth!"

Retland was behind an ornamental screen that shrouded the door inside. He heard voices. He whirled as Miller rushed at him, grasped the small tavern owner and clapped a hand over his mouth and threw an arm around his throat and squeezed. Miller could do no more than gurgles.

RETLAND heard voices: "So, Beautiful, you thought I'd plug Duke and let you continue to run around, did you? Little Nort doesn't play that way. He settles the score all the way around. I hate to ruin the mink coat I bought you—"

"Don't shoot me, Nort! Don't kill me!" a hysterical woman begged. "I was only working him for a fool. I'd have fixed things so you could have taken him for thousands."

"In that case, Beautiful, why didn't you let me in on the game? You lyin' wren! You've

done your last chirpin'."

"Please, Nort! I'm crazy about you! Get away, Nort, and send for me—"

"Get ready to die, Beautiful."

"They'll get you, Nort!"

Retland heard the man laugh. "My get-away's all planned. Miller hid me and Henson upstairs and got rid of the others so I could walk in on you."

"He—he promised to get me away and hide me so I wouldn't have to go to court."

"I'll let you live a couple of minutes longer, Beautiful, because it amuses me to hear your wild talk. We can't get away for a little longer anyhow. The sheriff's squad can't get here for some time yet."

Retland realized the situation completely. He whirled Miller back through the door and into the big room. He smashed his service pistol against Miller's head. The tavern owner dropped, unconscious.

"Tend to you later," Retland said.

He turned toward the door of the private room again, his face white, expecting this move would mean his death, but determined to try to save the life of Clarissa Dayle and take Nort Sanders dead or alive.

"Lew!" somebody shouted.

Retland glanced back to see Joe Adams rushing toward him, gun held ready.

"Come on!" Retland shouted. "The killer's in here!"

A man rushed from one of the other rooms. The gun he held blazed and cracked. Retland saw Joe Adams stop abruptly, drop his gun, lurch forward and sprawl. Over his body sprang Walt Henson, Sanders' pal. He tossed a shot at Retland and almost got him. Retland darted behind a huge potted palm and opened fire. He missed, and Henson dashed through the lobby and outdoors.

Retland's first flashing thought was to go to Joe Adams' side, but he sensed that Joe Adams was dead, and there was a girl's life to be saved, regardless of her worth.

A glance at Miller revealed that he was still unconscious from the quick but thorough pistol-whipping Retland had given him. Retland darted into the private room, and this time went around the screen.

"Can't wait any more, Beautiful," he heard Sanders saying. "That shootin' outside—"

"Hands up, Sanders!" Retland shouted. "Drop that gun! You're under arrest."

An astounded man whirled and began firing. Retland felt a bullet burn across his left arm and a second strike him in the left shoulder and send him reeling back against the wall. He opened fire. But Nort Sanders dashed through another door and into an-

other room, slammed the door behind him, was gone. To get away was Sanders' first idea; he thought the squad had arrived.

Retland got into the other room to find it empty. A door was open, and an empty hall was beyond. Sanders had darted away. Retland rushed back in time to see Miller trying to get up off the floor, two waiters helping him.

"Against the wall, you two!" Retland ordered. "Take your napkins and tie his wrists behind his back, and make it a good job!" To himself, he was muttering, "Wish the

... force of shock kicked you off balance probably."

"Joe . . . Joe?" Retland questioned.

"Killed instantly," the medical man said.

The captain came rushing up. "Get to your sub-station, Retland, and wait there till your relief comes," he ordered. "Able to drive your car?"

"I can make it."

"We'll handle everything now."

"Henson killed Adams. Miller was in it—helped plan and hid them."

"We'll get it all, Retland. Get to the sub-

LOOKIE, LOOKIE—HERE COMES COOKIE!



THAT slang phrase had a sinister ring for Simon Templar, the Twentieth Century Buccaneer known as the Saint—for it was in Cookie's Cellar, a garish night spot, that he first sought to unearth the hidden alliance between a suave psychiatrist, a bizarre poetess, a surrealist artist, the ugly, gargantuan Cookie herself, and beautiful chanteuse Avalon Dexter! And it was the Saint's meeting with Avalon that precipitated an amazing chain of violence and death!

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squad would get here. Can't do everything myself."

HE RAN to Joe Adams. Joe was dead. Fine, splendid Joe, with a young wife and a baby a year old. Retland almost sobbed. He'd get Sanders and Henson, or have a share in getting them, he swore to himself.

Voices, rushing feet jerked him around. The squad had come. A captain gripped his arm and demanded quick facts. Retland gave them. The captain began shouting orders and squad men began rushing about. Handcuffs snapped on the wrists of Miller and some of his waiters. A sobbing Clarissa Dayle was promptly seized.

"He'd have killed me—killed me—if that deputy hadn't driven him off!" she was saying repeatedly.

To Retland, everything seemed a daze. The doctor with the squad was examining his wounded left arm.

"Bad bullet burn . . . only a flesh wound

station. Got to have a man there."

In the old car, Retland made the best speed he could. He skidded to a stop at the sub-station and felt in his pocket for his keys. His arm burned from the wound and the medicine the doctor had used to dress it. His head was spinning.

"Had enough action for a whole career," he muttered to himself as he started to unlock the door. "Poor Joe! I'd like to blast the man who killed him!"

It occurred to him that something was wrong, but he couldn't quite make it out. He shook his head, but his brain refused to clear. He did not realize that the shade had been pulled down at the front window of the little sub-station.

He opened the door and walked into the well-lighted office. And one man seized his wounded arm and jabbed a gun into his ribs, and another closed the door quickly and shot the bolt. Nort Sanders and Walt Henson were there beside him.

"You—you—" Retland muttered.

"Yeah!" Nort Sanders snarled. "We walked right into your little sub-station with its cell in the little rear room. Only you won't put us into the cell. You kept me from killin' that double-crossin' beautiful doll by blastin' in the way you did. Ruined our getaway plans, too. And now you'll help us get goin' again."

"My arm hurts!" Retland sank into the desk chair. He looked at the desperate men before him. They were sneering at him. An old man, an old office cop, out of his element in a scene of violence. They despised him for a weakling. Sanders was mad at him for shooting in the tavern and making him think the squad was there.

Sanders was small and dapper and mean. Walt Henson—tall and sneaking-looking and mean. He had killed Joe Adams, shot him down to keep him from going after Sanders—

"We've got to work quick!" Sanders was saying.

"What—what?" Retland mouthed. "Must look—at teletype!"

"How do you communicate with the Head Office?" Sanders demanded, shaking him and hurting his sore arm again.

"Phone."

"Get to it, then. Listen! You tell the Head Office, in plain language and no tricks, that just as you got back here we drove past in a green coupe. You shot at the car and missed. We turned into the cross highway and went east. You tell 'em that and nothin' more, understand? If you don't, I'll blast you!"

"I'm—all in," Retland complained. "Let me—get drink of water. If my voice—doesn't sound natural."

"Hurry it up! Water cooler in the corner."

FOR Retland, it was an act. His mind was racing. He had guessed that they would shoot him down before they made their escape. They did not intend to drive east, of course. Probably west to some temporary hideout. Men like they were, they'd have more than one getaway planned.

They did not fear him. They hadn't even taken his gun. Unfired shells were still in it. What chance would he have against the pair of them? Sanders held a gun ready. Henson had returned his to its shoulder holster, but could draw it quickly enough.

They had killed Joe!

Red rage flamed in front of Retland's eyes as he lurched toward the water cooler. He made his hands shake as he filled a paper cup with water, spilling some of it, acting as

though he were weak and about to collapse from the excitement and his arm wound. He held the water cup in his left hand and turned the tap with his right.

"Hurry it up!" Sanders told him. "When you give Head Office a phone report, do you use any signature or code word?"

"Sure!" Retland replied. "We say 'finis'. That means 'the end' in some foreign language. If we don't say that—"

"You be sure to say it, then."

If he hadn't been thinking of Joe Adams, Retland might have smiled. They had swallowed it. To give the word "finis" at the end of a message merely meant that the message was being sent under duress, and Head Office would know something was wrong and send men to investigate. So, if they killed him, others would soon be on their trail.

He lifted the spilling paper cup and carried it to his lips with his left hand. He took a little gulp.

"Hurry it up!" Sanders hissed at him.

And suddenly Retland made his move. He straightened, and hurled the cup of water into Sanders' face. His right hand dived to his holster as he lurched to one side and heard Sanders' bullet scream past his ear.

Then his gun was blasting, first at Sanders, and then at Walt Henson, who was trying frantically to get out his own weapon. Again it blasted at Sanders, and again at Henson. Both men dropped their weapons and started to totter.

And Lew Retland was upon them like a maniac.

"You killed Joe—killed Joe!" he was yelling at them, as tears streamed down his old cheeks. He slashed and smashed with the gun, pistol-whipping men already unconscious.

Reeling against the wall, he shook his head and gathered his wits. He ran to the door and opened it and left it open. He got handcuffs and put them on the wrists of the unconscious men behind their backs. Then he lurched to the telephone and got Head Office.

"Retland—Riverdale," he said, when his call was acknowledged. "I've got Sanders and Henson—the two killers—here. Shot—and handcuffed 'em. Better send—help—"

The phone receiver dropped from his hand and he collapsed in the desk chair. He looked at the two victims on the floor. A mist was before his eyes.

A moment later, he heard the teletype chattering. "Must read message," he muttered. He got up and lurched across the office, brushed a hand over his eyes and blinked and read:

EMERGENCY! ALL SUBSTATIONS, CAR PATROLS AND MOTORCYCLE OFFICERS! PASS WORD! GET TO RIVERDALE SUBSTATION QUICK. TROUBLE! CAUTION!

BRYAN, COMMUNICATIONS

Retland lurched back to the chair. "Fool teletype!" he grumbled. He opened a drawer and got out a pint of whisky somebody had given him for a New Year's present, and drew the cork. He surely needed a drink for a bracer, he told himself. He took a deep one, then his head dropped forward and his arms spread on the desk.

Screeching sirens, squealing brakes, men's excited voices made him alert again. Sheriff's men stormed into the room. They volleyed questions at him, and Lew Retland answered them like a man half asleep.

"They killed Joe!" he said.

A MEDICAL examiner went over him quickly and decided the worst of his condition was due to shock and exhaustion. Retland heard one of the men giving Head Office a full report over the telephone. He understood dimly that an order had come in reply for a man to take over the substation until relieved, and that Retland was to be taken to his home in a squad car.

"Both these hounds will live to go to the chair or gas chamber," he heard the medical

examiner reporting. "How did you ever do it, Retland?"

"They—killed Joe." He seemed to think that was explanation enough.

They stood him up and started to lead him toward the door, to put him into a squad car and take him home. The teletype was chattering again.

"Fool teletype," he mumbled.

"Hey, wait! Here's a personal message for you, Retland!" one of the men called.

He went to the teletype and blinked and read:

TO: RETLAND, RIVERDALE.

FROM: HEAD OFFICE.

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR COURAGEOUS ACTION. YOUNGER MEMBERS OF THE FORCE WILL BE INSPIRED BY YOUR EXAMPLE. AT THE TIME OF YOUR RETIREMENT NEXT MONTH, I SHALL HAVE THE HONOR AND PLEASURE OF AWARDING YOU PERSONALLY MEDAL FOR VALOR. UNTIL THAT TIME YOU HAVE LEAVE OF ABSENCE WITH FULL PAY. HAPPY NEW YEAR!

SAM WHITE, SHERIFF.

Retland's eyes were misty again as they led him away. "Teletype—not so bad," he muttered. And as he got into the squad car he was thinking that this might sweeten to at least a small extent the sour disposition of his spinster niece.

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The man touched a button, and the blade snapped out with a sinister click

STRANGE GUARDIAN

By CARTER CRITZ

Year after year, the mysterious man dogged her footsteps for some reason of his own—and Betty couldn't shake him!

BETTY TALBOT saw him approaching, and instantly some instinct warned her he meant trouble. He was an unsavory looking character in a droopy hat and droopier pants. His shoes were run down and the shoulder lining of his coat showed through a big rip. She looked around, hoping that Peter might appear, though it was still ten minutes before he was due, and

Peter was always right on time. She wished she'd selected a busier and brighter corner for the rendezvous.

The man walked directly up to her. He had one hand in his pocket and there was a malicious grin on his face. "Lady," he said in a whiskey tenor, "you got two bits for a hungry man?"

She opened her purse, thinking she was

going to get out of this easier than she expected. The moment her purse was open, the man pulled his hand out of his pocket, and it held a knife. He touched a button and the blade sprang out with a shudderingly sinister click.

"Lady," he whispered, "you just give me the bag and then keep your trap shut. You squawk and I'll sink the shiv—"

Where the burly man materialized from Betty didn't know, but he was there, standing directly behind the bum with the knife and his big hand came down on the bum's shoulder with a bone crushing slap.

The bum swung around, very fast. The knife darted out, but that big hand caught his wrist and gave it an expert twist. The bum screamed as bone cracked. The knife hit the sidewalk and the big man kicked it into the gutter. Then he pulled back a fist and made the bum's face more lopsided than nature had intended. Finally he booted him, hard, and sent him whimpering down the dismal street.

The big man came back to where Betty stood. He removed his hat. "I'd pick better spots than this to meet the boy friend," he said softly. "And, incidentally, here he comes now, only he's about two minutes too late."

The big man started to turn away, but the girl seized his arm. "No—wait," she said. "I want an answer to all this. I know who you are, but I want to know why you've followed me for three long years—why you've never been more than a block away from me at any time."

The big man smiled. It was a nice smile, Betty decided and, at close range, he wasn't bad looking. About thirty-five, she judged, though a furrowed forehead and haunted eyes made him look a bit older.

He said, "Well, it seemed like a good idea. Especially tonight—or don't you agree?"

Peter came hurrying up then. The girl went to him. She quickly explained what had happened. "This gentleman," she pointed to the burly man, "really saved my life, or my sanity at any rate. Peter—this is John Algar."

Peter Lindsay whistled sharply. "John Algar, the ex-cop who killed—"

"Yes, he killed my father," Betty admitted. "Some day I'll tell you about it. Well, Mr. Algar, I hope my fiance meets with your approval. You seem to think it necessary to approve everything I do."

"He's a nice lad," Algar said softly. "And don't think I didn't check on him. Good night, Miss Talbot. Night, Peter Lindsay."

HE TURNED and walked slowly away, but at the corner he stopped, lit a cigarette and leaned against a store window. Betty gave an exasperated sigh, took Peter's arm and they walked off.

Algar straightened up and began following them.

"What in the world," Peter asked, "is this all about? Do you mean to say that man has followed you—us—every time we've been out together?"

"Depend upon it, darling. Mostly I never see him, but he's always there. A year ago he snatched me out of the path of a drunken driver. Before that I worked in a small office where the boss thought his hired help—female—ought to work overtime. I steered clear of him until one night when I simply couldn't. Algar broke down the door and nearly killed the man."

"But why?" Peter asked.

"It's quite a story," she said. "Three years ago John Algar was a detective sergeant. He worked with my father who was a lieutenant of detectives. Algar hated my father though I've never known why. One night they had a showdown. It was in a vacant building. They found Algar wounded and badly beaten. The bullet in him matched those fired by my father's service pistol.

"My father was found in our home. It was only two doors away from the vacant building. Dad was dead. He'd apparently been shot in the vacant building and managed to stagger home where he thought there'd be help or at least a telephone. The bullet in him came from Algar's gun."

Peter shook his head. "Ghastly! Now, I suppose, this Algar is trying to make amends for what he did. Don't tell me he's still a cop?"

"No; they fired him off the force and arrested him, but he told a story of meeting Dad in that building on some case Dad was handling. Algar said he was hit over the head the moment he entered and that's all he ever knew. Obviously, it was a lie, but the burden of proof was upon the police and they had nothing to counter Algar's story."

"They had the matching bullet from Algar's gun," Peter grunted.

She nodded. "Yes, I thought of that, but I suppose policemen protect one another even when something as bad as this happened. Right after Algar got out of the hospital and was fired, he began watching me. And he's never stopped."

"I can stop him," Peter offered, none too hopefully. He recalled that Algar was a powerful looking man and Peter was just average

in build and none too handy with his fists.

She shook her head. "I'd rather you didn't."

"But he killed your father—murdered him."

"Perhaps. Peter, so many things have happened since then and all the good ones were John Algar's doings. Naturally I quit my job after he beat up the boss. Algar found me another, the one I have now with Greg Shelton and his import-export business. I don't know how Algar arranged it, but he did. And there are so many other things."

Peter lit a cigarette and took her elbow when they reached a curb. "Darn funny way to go about things though. And did you hear him say I was all right? Do you suppose he actually checked on me?"

"I know he did. Once, two years ago, there was a boy I liked very much. Algar told me he wasn't very good and why he thought so. The boy persisted in trying to see me until one night when he met Algar. I—never saw him again."

Peter exhaled and then submitted to a grin. "I guess it's a darn good thing I'm pure, otherwise Algar would probably wrap me around the nearest lamp post. Well, let's forget your strange guardian and have dinner."

THEY went to a movie later and when they emerged at eleven o'clock, they both had a glimpse of the strange guardian—only a glimpse though because he seemed to have a knack for fading out of sight like some reluctant wraith. Peter led Betty to a small public park and they sat down in the shadow of a statue.

"Ordinarily," Peter said, "I wouldn't like invading a park at this hour, but I'll bet your watchdog is on duty. It does give you a feeling of security at that. Anyway, I've things to talk about, Betty. Serious things. By straining your imagination can you guess what I mean?"

She smiled and moved a little closer to him, snuggling into the protection of his arm. "I've been wondering when you'd get around to talking over our wedding, Peter. I'm all ears and impatience."

He kissed her on the tip of the nose and felt a little funny about it, knowing that a pair of quiet, somber gray eyes were watching every move they made.

"Betty, I saved it as a surprise. I'm being promoted next week to assistant manager with a nice hike in pay—enough to support an apartment and a wife. We could be married in about a month or two."

She sighed contentedly. "I've been saving

a surprise too. My boss, Mr. Shelton, told me only last week that he would present us with a nice little home on Long Island, furnished down to toothpicks in the pantry. In exchange he wants the old house where I live now. The firm is going to tear it down and build a new office structure. He'll also give me a certain amount of cash besides the new house. Does that make you as happy as your promotion has made me?"

"We're a couple of lucky people," Peter said. "Very lucky. Most of all because we found one another. Now it seems everybody is trying to help us out. Okay, so we'll take advantage of all the offers. When will it be, Betty?"

"Next month. On my birthday so you won't have to buy but one present for both anniversaries. I do think of you, Peter."

"What a girl," he chuckled. "Practical as all get out too."

"But the present," she teased, "will have to be twice as good. I'm so darn happy. And so glad to be moving out of that dismal old house where I've lived since I was a little girl. It was all Dad left me, but it's been a roof over my head, at least. Oh, I forgot to tell you, John Algar used to actually sneak into the house right after Dad died and put ten dollar bills around so I'd find them. He's the most amazing man."

They arose shortly afterward and walked slowly out to the avenue. They both heard the crackle of brush as a heavy person followed them at a distance and well off the path. They walked East until they reached Betty's neighborhood, a district rapidly turning into a slum area. She pointed out the spot where her father had been shot. It was now a wholesale fruit market.

The house was old fashioned with a brick front, concrete steps to the door with iron railings as protection. Peter Lindsay kissed her good night but stayed close by until she had unlocked the door, stepped inside and locked it again with a bolt. Then he ambled casually away, looking rather curiously for signs of John Algar. He saw none because John Algar chose that he not be seen.

Peter was much too far away to hear Betty's scream, muted by the doors and windows of her home. John Algar heard it and a .9 millimeter Mauser appeared in his hand. He crossed the street in a dozen long leaps, raced up the steps and was pounding at the door within one minute after Betty's first scream was heard.

She opened the door and gave a startled gasp. Her face looked waxen, her eyes were too wide and she showed even white teeth

in a grimace of terror.

"What is it? What happened?" Algar demanded and elbowed past her as she spoke.

"It's—in the back room—Dad's room," she said hoarsely. "A—a dead man is in there. I know he's dead. It's awful."

"Stay right beside me," Algar cautioned. "Close the door and bolt it. The place has been looted, hasn't it?"

"Yes. Yes. You don't think I'm so careless a housekeeper as to let my home go like—like this." She attempted a smile. It didn't come off at all.

ALGAR peered into a dimly lighted living room. Everything was wrecked. Chair covers were slashed, the rug torn up, pictures removed from the walls and smashed. The other rooms had been similarly gutted. At the end of the corridor there were bright lights coming from an open door. Algar had a question in his eyes when he looked at Betty and she nodded mutely.

"You don't have to go in," he said. "But if you hear anyone moving about—yell your head off."

The gun still in his hand, Algar entered the room. The man who lay huddled against one wall, with his face turned toward it, was a small person, not more than five-feet-four or five. His clothes were shabby, his eerily twisted foot showed a shoe sole with a hole almost through. His hands were grubby, and the nails peeled down by nervous teeth. His face showed ratlike, when Algar turned him over. Even his teeth were ratlike, with the front ones protruding slightly. He'd been stabbed. A single upward thrust directly below the heart. Whoever used that knife knew just where to plant it.

Algar searched him and the only significant thing he discovered was the fact that the man had been searched before. Algar walked out into the hallway where Betty was waiting. He took her arm and led her into the dining room straight toward a linen closet there. He opened the linen closet door, gave her a shove and slammed the door in her face. She heard the key turn in the outside of the lock.

For a moment Betty was too stunned to react. Then she screamed and kicked the door. She pounded it with her small fists. In between all this racket she heard Algar swiftly mount the stairs to the second floor. In five minutes he was back and had the door open.

"I don't know what you're up to, Mr. Al-

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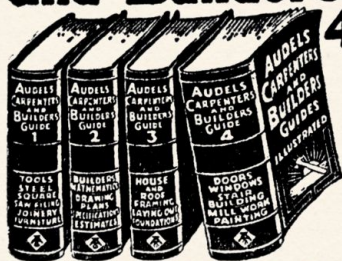
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gar," she said with righteous anger, "but it's bad enough when my house is looted and a dead man is found here without having you lock me in the closet and snoop around yourself."

Algar smiled at her. She was rather amazed to notice that he didn't look very old at all. In fact he was young and he had a pleasant smile.

"I'm sorry, Miss Talbot. And despite the fact that I've probably made you very angry, I want you to promise not to tell the police I was here. I assure you this is for your own good."

She glanced with scary eyes toward the room at the end of the hall. "I—I don't suppose it makes much difference whether you were here or not. But what happened? What in the world is this all about?"

He shrugged and reached for a cigarette. She rejected his offer of one. He said, "Looks to me like a couple of plain punks broke into your house and started to loot it. They had a fight over something and one of them got himself knocked off. It's done every day in the polite society we call the underworld. That's all there is to it, Miss Talbot."

"Then—I'd better phone the police."

"Naturally, unless you like spending the night in a house with a dead man. I'll stay here until we hear the radio cars coming. Go ahead, get on the phone."

Neither of them spoke again. A siren howled three minutes after she had completed the phone call to Headquarters. Algar went out and walked rapidly across the street. She saw him under a street lamp, and then he vanished completely.

Betty didn't sleep that night, though a police guard was left downstairs to allay her terrors. She kept thinking of John Algar, of the fact that he was supposed to have murdered her father and for the first time she wondered how a man like Algar could kill anyone.

But he'd been booted off the force for it and police boards don't become that drastic unless there is sufficient evidence to back up the suspicions—perhaps not enough to convict a man in court, but enough for the Board to act upon.

She knew it would be impossible for her to spend another night in this house alone. Those men, the victim and the murderer, had been after something. She didn't know what it was. Not a single thing was missing so far as she could determine.

The police gave the whole affair a polite brushoff as just another killing due to a quarrel between burglars. They hauled away the corpse, spread fingerprint powder all around, took a lot of pictures and that was all. Nobody commented much; nobody was especially interested.

NEXT morning Betty dressed and hastily applied makeup. Peter probably would know nothing about this, but she usually met him and they walked to work together. They worked in the same block. The sleepy policeman was glad to go off this detail. Betty walked rapidly toward the corner where she usually met Peter, and he was waiting. He seemed like a strong haven to her.

They ate breakfast together and she told him the whole story. Peter was shocked. "Betty—do you think Algar did it?"

"Algar?" she cried in reproach. "Oh, Peter, you know very well he never does anything, but follow me around. And he did save me from a serious predicament last night."

"I do mean Algar," he insisted. "We never saw him after that. We thought we heard him in the park, but we could have been mistaken. I don't know how he is involved, maybe not at all, but he must have some very important reason for scarcely letting you out of his sight, for locking you in the linen closet. And he was in the neighborhood last night. He heard you scream."

"He is always nearby, Peter. And why would he have ransacked my home and killed that man? No, I'd swear he was as surprised as I when I first saw the dead man."

Peter sighed. "Oh, I'm sorry. Guess I'm a little jealous of him. If he'd wanted to sack your house, he could have done so a hundred times. But one thing I'm certain of, you don't spend another night in that house."

"Where will I go? I've looked and looked, Peter. I can get a little room somewhere, but that isn't living."

"Greg Shelton promised you a brand new house—promised it to us, though I've never met the man. It's quite likely all ready for you. Betty, I don't intend to be a firm or domineering husband after we are married, but I must insist that we see Shelton today, this morning, and find out if you can take possession at once."

"I wouldn't mind that." She attempted a smile. "Peter, I've hardly known a moment's

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peace since Dad was killed. I've always had a feeling that—that things weren't right. And then Mr. Algar, following me all around. Oh, I don't know what to think."

"Algar will stop shadowing you after we're married," Peter swore. "From then on it will be my job, and he'll like it or get himself into a mess of trouble. Come on, let's go see Mr. Shelton right away. I've been wanting to meet him."

Greg Shelton was a big man without being enormously fat. With six-feet-two of frame to carry around two hundred and twenty odd pounds, he managed it very well. His cheeks were smooth and pink. He shook hands with Peter.

"You're getting a prize," he chuckled. "In fact, you wouldn't be getting Betty at all if I were twenty years younger and not married. I read a small item in the newspaper about the dead man you found in your house, Betty. It's a rather horrible thing to encounter. The house—well, after two violent deaths in it—won't be a comfortable home."

"That's what we came about," Peter said. "Betty tells me you want to buy the property and in its place give her a new honeymoon bungalow. I think it's a grand offer, Mr. Shelton. I've been trying to persuade Betty that she ought to take you up on it at once. That is, if the place is ready."

"It's been ready for about a week," Shelton said. "Complete to silverware and linen. You won't have to take a thing out of the old house except your personal belongings, Betty. I thought you might like to start off with a clean slate, but now, after what happened last night, I'm certain you want nothing which will associate itself with that house."

SHELTON had the papers drawn up. Betty signed them blindly, through tears of happiness. She was given a crisp new document stating that she owned, in its entirety, one new dwelling. There was also a substantial check that made her blink away a few tears.

That noon she didn't feel like eating. Too many things had occurred. She wanted nothing more than a walk in the sunlight, perhaps a few minutes in the park where she could sit and dream.

John Algar appeared out of nowhere and sat down beside her on the bench. Here, in the strong sunlight, she had her best look at him to date and she rather liked what she

saw. He smiled a little and kept rotating his gray hat around one finger.

"A lot has happened since last night," he commented.

"Almost too much," she told him. "Mr. Shelton bought the old place and gave me a brand new one. It's fully equipped, and I don't have to move a thing. I'm a very lucky girl, and humble enough to know it."

"You're a very nice girl. As for your luck, I pray it will hold out. Betty, I want you to do something rather strange and ask no questions as to why or wherefore. I want you to tell Shelton that you won't be out of the old house for another week and that there are certain articles of your father's you wish to take with you."

"But there are no such articles."

"You can pretend there are. Say there is a secretary, a big desk, some cartons of books stored in the attic. If he presses you, agree to leave the house tomorrow, but insist on taking these things with you and on spending the night there. Will you do this—for me? And for yourself?"

"I—don't think I should," she protested, knowing very well she'd obey him. "Mr. Shelton has been so kind and Peter—well, he naturally wants me out of that old house."

"Mr. Shelton is perhaps the kindest man on the face of the earth and no better lad than Peter lives and breathes. But, everyone isn't kind and good and considerate. There are people with evil intent, and I've got to get rid of them for good. Otherwise, your life will always be in danger. And Betty—I won't be able to tag you around until I'm old and feeble."

"Is that why you've followed me? To protect me?"

"Yes, and I've never been very certain from what. Now I think I know. If you let me down, the three years I've spent near you will have been wasted. You've got to believe me."

She arose. "I—must go back. I don't know what I'll do, Mr. Algar. You're such a strange man with such hidden motives."

"Just tell Shelton you are going to spend one more night in the house and get together some of your father's things. That's all I ask."

"I—guess it's all right," she agreed hesitantly. "I really don't know why I should be doing this for you. I ought to hate the sight of you. You did kill my father. Your gun

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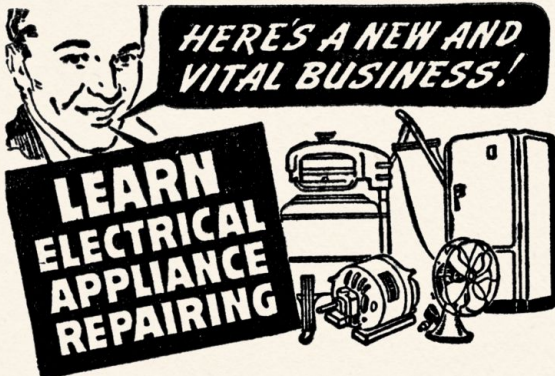
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shot him."

"My gun shot him," Algar declared slowly. "Other than that I admit nothing, and I shall depend upon you, Betty. I know you'll do it. A man can't follow a girl around for three long years without learning something of her nature and character. You trust me because you feel I am to be trusted, no matter what my history has been."

He walked rapidly away from her. She returned to the office and saw Shelton when he returned from lunch. He didn't like the idea, but finally consented.

"After all," he argued, "you signed over the house and its contents. It's a rather horrible place at best and I intend to tear it down. Betty, you may have your way but, because I now own the house and everything in it, I must insist that I be present tonight when you select those things of your father's which you wish to take with you."

Betty told Peter about it when they met for dinner. He was amazed at Algar's commands and even more astonished at Shelton's insistence on being at the house tonight.

"I'm going to be there too," he said. "After all, we're as good as married. There might be something I can do to protect your interests though, frankly, you pretty much signed them away today. Let's hurry dinner and get over to the house."

SHELTON arrived at eight. He was alone and he scowled at Peter, but made no comments on his presence. Betty showed Shelton a small secretary and a medium sized desk which she wanted to take. And there were some pictures of her father in police uniform, a few citations and the sealed cartons of books in the attic.

"I shall have to examine the books and the contents of the desk and secretary," Shelton said. "It's merely a matter of form. Peter, you might as well be of some help. Go to the attic and lug those boxes down here."

Peter trotted up the stairs. Shelton hurried to the front door and slid the bolt home. Then he returned to the living room and advanced on Betty.

He said, "Betty, I think you're suspicious I'm up to something. What, exactly do you think? Talk fast. I don't favor having Peter here as a witness. What do you know?"

"Why—why . . . nothing. I—I . . ."

He slapped her very hard, without the slightest warning. She stumbled a few feet, struck a chair and sat down heavily into it.

Shelton came toward her again, his fists doubled this time.

"Talk," he said menacingly, "or, by heavens, I'll beat that pretty face of yours into something even that goofy-eyed Peter will abhor. What do you know?"

"Please, Mr. Shelton." She held her hands up before her face. "Please, I don't know what you're talking about. Please don't hit me. Please!"

He swept her covering hands away and slapped her again, harder than the first time. Then, his hand was back for another blow and froze there.

A very quiet voice said, "That'll do, Shelton. That's quite enough. Turn around and keep your hands away from your pockets. That bulge is a shoulder clip. Go for it if you like, but you'll be dead before your hands touch the gun butt."

Shelton straightened up, turned very slowly and faced John Algar. The ex-detective said, "I've been in the house for some time. I knew very well you'd hardly permit Miss Talbot to move out with anything in which the rocks could be hidden.

"I know a great deal, Mr. Shelton. I know that you have been an international jewel smuggler for years. I know you brought a neat load of stuff over three years ago, right after the war ended. But it slipped out of your hands. I know it's here, in this house and that you have been aware of that fact for some time.

"I suspect you were here last night, searching the place with that poor fool who burglarized the house and whom you later on murdered for no more reason than to frighten Miss Talbot into leaving."

Shelton smiled confidently. "You know a great deal, Algar. For a killer you're a very wise guy, but I'll bet you don't know there's a gun trained on your back at this very moment."

Algar bit his lip. He glanced at Betty, who was looking behind him. "How about that, Betty?" he asked.

She moved her lips, but no words came. She tried again and got a single word out. "Peter!"

"I thought so." Algar let go of his gun. It hit the floor with a thump and Shelton hastily scooped it up. He poked it deep into Algar's stomach and forced him into a chair beside Betty.

Peter Lindsay didn't look quite so inno-

[Turn page]



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cent now. His eyes were narrowed in hatred and there was an obvious sneer on his handsome face. He lined up beside Shelton.

Peter said, "Everything is under control, Mr. Shelton. I had an idea Algar was behind all this. He's been wise to you right along, but without enough evidence to take any action on. That's why I sort of lingered in the hallway. The poor fool was hiding in the basement."

SHELTON nodded. He spoke directly to Algar. "Now listen, copper, I'm going to ask you a question. If you refuse to answer or give me an evasive reply, I'll slug Betty hard enough to break her beautiful jaw. And every time you go mum, I'll slug her again. Where is the stuff Lieutenant Talbot got that day?"

Algar spoke tightly. "If you lay a hand on her, Shelton, I'll kill you. If I knew where the stuff was, I'd have gotten it long ago. Do I look like an idiot?"

Shelton poised his fist. Peter blocked the blow that started toward Betty's face. "Save it, Shelton. Have your fun afterwards. Betty hasn't the faintest idea as to what this is all about, but Algar knows exactly where the stuff is hidden. Last night, when Betty found that man dead and Algar came into the house, he locked her in a closet and ran upstairs. That's where it's hidden. He went to make certain."

Shelton smiled a cold, furious smile. "So. Then our job is quite simple. Watch him, Peter. Shoot him if he makes a move. I'm going to break Betty's arm for a starter."

Algar sighed. "What's the use. A man who doesn't know when he's beaten is crazy. Yes, the stuff is upstairs. For three years I've followed Betty around and watched this house. Waiting for the killer to try and find the stuff."

"You held off a long time. So long that I suspect you weren't sure, until recently, that Lieutenant Talbot ever got his hands on the rocks. Talbot got the stuff. He found it that night in the vacant building next door. It's hidden upstairs."

"Watch Betty," Shelton said. "Algar, walk ahead of me and show me where it's hidden. If you're co-operative, nothing will happen to you or Betty. Take care now, Pete. She may be more dangerous than you think."

"Her?" Peter laughed. "She's a plain jane who'd fall for any line. Any old line. Take him upstairs and get the stuff. I don't

even care if you bring him down again."

Poked by the gun, Algar left the room, walked up the stairs and down a corridor to the last room. He entered, turned on the lights and went directly to a large, silent clock on the mantelpiece of an old fireplace. He opened the glass over the face, turned the hands and there was a click. A cleverly concealed drawer slid out of the bottom.

Algar said, "I knew it was here. Lieutenant Talbot took this clock from a dope peddler long ago. The peddler used it to hide his supply of stuff, and I reasoned that Talbot would use it for the same purpose. Tell me something, Shelton. Was Talbot a crook? Was he working for you and pulling a double cross?"

Shelton laughed. "No—he was tipped off by a stool pigeon who was taken good care of later on. Hurry up and get that stuff out of there."

Algar sighed. "Thanks. For a long time I thought Talbot was trying to get rich fast, but he was apparently playing it solo. The night it happened I trailed him and got rapped on the head by you and your men. Then you shot Talbot with my gun, knowing we were not exactly friends. But Talbot didn't die right away. He got clear with the smuggled gems you were after, stumbled to this house of his right next door and managed to hide the gems before he died."

"Very interesting," Shelton grumbled. "You're stalling. Get busy!"

Algar dug a hand into the clock. Fingers closed around a gun hidden there. He said, "I can feel the sack of gems. They're stuck."

Shelton pressed closer, looking over Algar's shoulder.

[Turn page]

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DOWNSTAIRS, Betty heard two quick shots and then the sound of a body hitting the floor. The victim clawed at the boards and took his time about dying or passing out. Peter laughed harshly.

"That's the finish of your shadow. Which means Shelton got the stuff. I'm sorry and all that, Betty. You wouldn't have been a bad wife."

There were deliberate steps descending the staircase and a hoarse laugh.

Then Algar walked into the room and there was a gun in his fist. He said, "Peter, you're covered. Shelton isn't dead. I didn't want him to die. I'm not so fussy about you. Will you drop the gun or take a bullet through the back? I'm very obliging."

Peter drew himself erect. "I should have known better than to trust Shelton. You'd never have got my gun away from me."

"Shelton is still hanging onto his gun. Last night I put mine in the hiding place because I figured something like this might happen. It's a Mauser, Peter. It makes a very big hole in a man."

Peter spun around. There were two shots. He fired neither one of them. He stood there, swaying a little, his gun slanted toward the floor. He was trying to bring it up. Trying with all his strength, but there wasn't much left in him. He went down slowly, and the gun hit the floor. He was dead when he finally lay huddled at Betty's feet.

Algar used the phone after that. He took Betty into another room. Police came, in droves this time. Algar talked long and earnestly to an Inspector. Shelton talked too, in between groans.

Algar walked into the room where Betty sat, silent and terrified. He opened his hand, and showed her a gold badge. "I got it back, Betty—a little rusty, but some polish will shine her up nice and proper. You see, I didn't kill your father. We just had a grudge against one another and those crooks made it pay off. Your father was on the trail of some smuggled stones and found them, but the crooks got there too fast. I played it wrong. Your father died, and I made up my mind to stick close until those killers figured it was safe to start hunting the stuff."

She bowed her head. "I can hardly believe it. Peter and all."

Algar sat down beside her. "I knew he was a crook. I really checked on him after you two met. I traced him back for three years, but not an inch further. He might

as well have been born then for all his record showed. I thought he might be one means of getting you out of this house. Shelton gained your trust, made a nice deal so he'd come into possession of the place and could tear it down if he liked."

"And you got me a job with Shelton so it would be easier for him to operate?"

"He was afraid to make a move," Algar explained. "And he wasn't too certain about things. I got tired of waiting so I wrangled a job for you so he'd have a made-to-order opportunity to take a chance. I had to make him show his hand—to clear myself."

She leaned back and her eyes were dry now. "I don't know what to do, John. Everything is so upset."

He said, "Why Betty, it's quite simple. Shelton deeded a new house to you. It's yours. I'm going to miss trailing you. A fellow can't help but get to like a girl he has been following for three years."

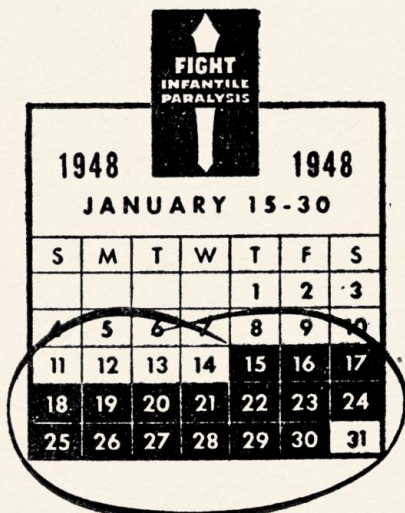
"I don't want you to follow me again," she said severely. "Not ever again, John Algar."

He turned away slowly. "That's your privilege, Miss Talbot. Well, I'm a cop again. I never stopped being a cop."

She said, "I want you to walk beside me from now on, John. Always beside me. A girl can't have a fellow tagging after her for three long years without—well—getting to like him a little. And need him a lot."

Algar turned around swiftly.

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THE LINE-UP

(Continued from page 10)

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FROM OUR READERS

WE'VE had a rush of mail during the last month or so and all of it concerns two of our recent novel selections: "To Wake the Dead" by John Dickson Carr and "The Criminal C.O.D." by Phoebe Atwood Taylor. We can't remember receiving such enthusiastic reports from readers as have flooded our office regarding these two books. We have selected just two typical letters for reprinting in this department. The first is from Eddie Conlan of Washington, D. C.

Dear Editor: I've always held to the opinion that British detective story writers were inclined to turn out dull stories. At least, I've read many that impressed me that way. But there is one important exception—John Dickson Carr. He's simply terrific and you'll look a long time, on both sides of The Big Pond, to find anyone to match him.

I enjoyed reading "To Wake the Dead" in your summer issue as I never enjoyed anything before. Dr. Fell, as a fiction character, stands head and shoulders above his colleagues and from the moment Christopher Kent stepped into that hotel room on which a sign hung from the door: "Do not Disturb. Dead Woman," the story just never lets up in its tense, dramatic interest. An excellent yarn and in my estimation every one of your readers owes you a vote of thanks for making it available.

Eddie, you've actually got us blushing like a school boy. Such unstinted praise is, of course, entirely welcome. And, honestly, we, too, think Carr is just about tops in the field and "To Wake the Dead" one of the best yarns he has ever written.

Ellis Archer of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, has equally high praise for Phoebe Atwood Taylor's Asey Mayo mystery, "The Criminal C.O.D.," which appeared in our Fall issue.

Dear Editor: Good old Asey Mayo! What would we readers do without him? Asey and Cousin Jennie and all the rest of the Cape Cod folk who run around in his stories are as fine a group as you'll find in any detective story. And I'm by no means a Cape Codder. Never been near the place, in fact. But that doesn't stop me from liking the region and from liking Asey. And "The Criminal C.O.D." certainly put Asey and Doc Cummings through the mill and me with them. It's high-tension stuff, typical of all the books you have been running in DETECTIVE MYSTERY NOVEL MAGAZINE.

Thanks, Ellis, for the slap on the back. We have already informed the author how many of our readers have liked "The Criminal C.O.D." and she is as happy as we are about the whole business. And our business is to publish the kind of detective novels you people enjoy.

We're keeping the mailbag open for the next issue so if you have time, drop us a line. We read every letter that comes in and we're sorry that we don't have space to print them all. Kindly send all communications to The Editor, DETECTIVE MYSTERY NOVEL MAGAZINE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. See you in next issue's LINE-UP, everybody, and many thanks to you all!

THE EDITOR.

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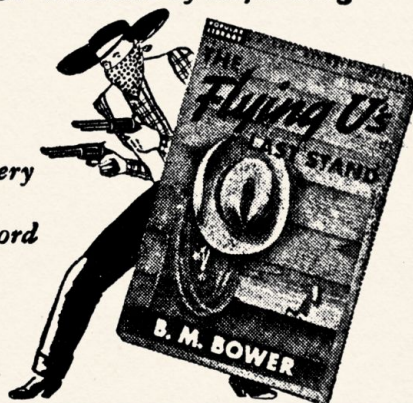


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