

DETECTIVE NOVEL

15¢

AUG.

MAGAZINE

Stalk the Hunter

by
**MITCHELL
WILSON**

Ralph Selsam

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

**A BOOK-LENGTH
INNER SANCTUM
MYSTERY NOVEL
COMPLETE
IN THIS ISSUE**

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DETECTIVE NOVEL MAGAZINE

Vol. XIV, No. 1

AUGUST, 1944

Price 15c



*A Complete Inner Sanctum
Mystery Novel*

STALK THE HUNTER

By MITCHELL WILSON

*Kit Gruenholz fights a lone battle against the
undercover enemies of America—and, driven to
desperation, seeks escape via the path of murder!* 11

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A department where readers and the editor meet

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The BULLETIN BOARD



THE sign beside the highway said: SLOW DOWN! YOU ARE APPROACHING THURSDAY. But Bingo Riggs and Handsome Kusak, co-partners of the International Photo, Motion Picture, and Television Corporation of America—or, to put it bluntly, street photographers—didn't believe in signs.

Their maroon roadster roared through the town of Thursday, Iowa, population one thousand and forty-two, and sped around a bend in the road. Suddenly Handsome leaned on the horn and applied his brakes.

There were confused yells and squawkings. Then something big and dark struck the front of the car as it careened across the pavement to end up in a ditch.

In this unexpected manner Bingo and Handsome killed their first turkey. But it was by no means the last of their adventures in Thursday, locale of the \$2.00 Inner Sanctum mystery book, which is headlined in the next issue—

THE THURSDAY TURKEY MURDERS

By CRAIG RICE

Standing in the road beside the dead turkey, the partners saw disaster approach them in the figure of an irate farmer. Bingo started to bluster about the carelessness of letting turkeys run loose.

The farmer, Gus by name, glanced sharply at Bingo and said flatly: "Ten bucks!"

Ten bucks was high, even for a dead turkey, Bingo thought. But the turkey was a prize bird. In fact, there were five hundred prize birds on the farm, all worth ten dollars apiece.

Gus wanted to leave Thursday to visit his sick mother, but he couldn't abandon the turkeys.

It was really a sad case. Bingo and Handsome felt sorry for Gus. Besides, they liked the turkeys. Which was why they parted with one thousand dollars to become owners of a turkey farm.

Big ideas floated in their minds. They would hang around Thursday several weeks, then sell the turkeys at ten bucks apiece for a profit of four thousand dollars.

The Farm of Mystery

After Gus had gathered his belongings and gone off, the partners moved in to take possession. Bingo's job was to feed the turkeys. An enraged gobbler, struck in the face by a handful of grain, charged after Bingo, who took refuge in the nearest tree. In the midst of the excitement a produce truck rolled up. A red-faced man in overalls got out of the truck.

"Quit scaring my turkeys!" he bellowed. "They're not your turkeys!" Bingo bellowed back. "They're our turkeys."

But Bingo was wrong. The red-faced farmer, Chris Halvorsen, soon proved he was the owner and that Gus only worked for him. In fact, there were only two hundred turkeys, not five hundred! And they were only worth two dollars, not ten dollars apiece!

With corporation finances reduced to a bare minimum, Bingo and Handsome drove into town to lodge a complaint with Sheriff Henry Judson. While they were in Judson's office a telephone call came in from the state prison, stating that five or six men had escaped and were heading toward Thursday.

Excited by this announcement, Judson shooed the partners out of his office after promising to conduct a search for the missing Gus.

They returned to "their farm" for the night. Two surprises awaited them. First, the turkeys had vanished! Then, when they walked inside the shanty they found a strange man sprawled on the floor with a bullet hole in the middle of his forehead!

Prize Suspects

In no time at all Bingo and Handsome became Sheriff Judson's prize suspects in

(Continued on page 8)



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Then remember that you're not *giving* anything. You're simply *lending* money—putting it in the best investment in the world.



Let's Go... for the Knockout Blow!

This space contributed by
THE PUBLISHERS OF THIS MAGAZINE

This is an official U. S. Treasury advertisement—prepared under auspices of Treasury Department and War Advertising Council

THE BULLETIN BOARD *(Continued from page 6)*

Thursday's sensational murder case involving a corpse no one could identify. Yet, more than one person was interested in the victim, as evidenced by the sinister guests who paid secret visits to the farm.

At first, the partners exerted all kinds of pressure to be allowed to leave Thursday. But when they learned that several hundred thousand dollars in bank robbery loot was cached somewhere in the vicinity an earthquake couldn't have dislodged them. And their stay in Thursday involved them with a gang of desperados, two mysterious girls, a flock of disappearing turkeys and a desperate killer who wasn't satisfied with one victim.

THE THURSDAY TURKEY MURDERS is an exciting, swift-moving mystery full of surprises and unusual situations and people. You'll like Bingo Riggs—smart, tricky and resourceful despite the unhappy turkey deal. And you'll like Handsome Kusak, the man with the photographic memory!

Critical Acclaim

There are thrills and chills aplenty in this baffle with never a dull moment. And if our word isn't enough, here's what some of the reviewers thought about **THE THURSDAY TURKEY MURDERS**:

New York Herald Tribune: "This Bingo-Handsome tale should more than satisfy any reasonable customer, whether his search is for comedy of the better sort, tightly contrived puzzlement, hidden treasure or general light entertainment."

Springfield Republican: "Just about the cream of the fall crop of whodunits."

Chicago News: "Another of those deft, intelligent and thoroughly charming jobs which only Craig Rice seems to turn out."

New York World Telegram: "Top comedy entertainment woven into mystery with no end of complications."

These are only a few of the many reviews acclaiming **THE THURSDAY TURKEY MURDERS** as an outstanding mystery novel achievement. So, be prepared for a real reading treat in the next issue of **DETECTIVE NOVEL MAGAZINE**.

In addition to the book-length novel there will be a splendid selection of exciting short stories and features.

Please drop us a line to let us know how you like our new policy and the outstanding, best-selling mystery novels now appearing in this magazine. Please address all communications to The Editor, **DETECTIVE NOVEL MAGAZINE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. All criticisms and comments will be welcomed. Thank you!

—THE EDITOR.

**LOOKS
EASY.....**

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—yet, it's from that famous favorite of the South, "Dixie"



DEN I WISH I WAS IN DIXIE

On the diagram above, the first note on the music is "A." You'll find that "A" is the white key between the second and third of the three black keys just above the middle of the keyboard. From this you can find the other notes. You'll be playing the melody of that famous tune, "Dixie." Now read below how you can learn to play any instrument this quick, simple, low-cost way!

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*J. B. O. Hilel.



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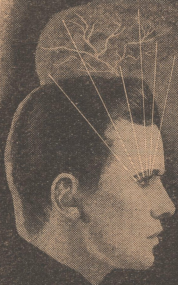
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SAN JOSE

CALIFORNIA

Stalk the Hunter

by
MITCHELL WILSON



PART ONE

THEY made a handsome couple. Paul was holding her arm, and they walked close together, oblivious of the crowd. It was one of Kit's good days: such as all blond women have, when their fairness seems to be a glowing aura of sheer enjoyment of life. Kit was excited: her color was high, and her eyes gleamed blue with reflected lights. Her self consciousness was apparent to

everybody who had come to the Museum to see the exhibition. They glanced at Paul and Kit with covert enjoyment of what seemed to be the beginning of a successful love affair.

"Oh, Paul!" Kit sighed. "Will you look at them? It's a success. The success is yours!"

There was a trace of pride in her voice, as though she shared in his glory. The unanimous opinion was that the exhibition of Primitive Christian painting was another victory for Paul.

A COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH INNER SANCTUM MYSTERY

Kit Gruenholz Fights a Lone Battle

"I hope they know what they're seeing," he said. "There hasn't been a collection like this any place before."

Most of the paintings were new to New York, since Paul had managed to get them out of Vienna, Prague, Warsaw, and Copenhagen a few days, or even a few minutes before these cities were occupied by the Germans.

In every case he had been one jump ahead of them. Paul was reticent about the details, and nobody pressed him; but there was an air of adventure about him.

After all, he was young, in his early thirties; he had a simple open charm and seemed to be completely untouched by the awareness of death and horror that every European of today is forced to display in spite of himself.

KIT was radiant. This was the first time since she had known Paul that she had sensed any possessiveness in the way he held her arm. Up until now, it had merely been a gesture, something extremely impersonal.

"They're wondering who I am," she said. "Who is that wonderful creature with dear Paul! Isn't she generous to allow him to walk with her!"

"I think she looks more like a cow," Paul said, mimicking her.

"You're not very funny!" He pinched her arm. "I take it back, you *are* very funny!"

"Laugh, then."

"I'll smile, but I won't laugh."

"This must be bargain day," he remarked. "However, if they should ask me who is the mess I'm saddled with, I'll tell them at least you have a lovely soul."

The people present knew much less about Kit than about Paul. They could see that she was in her twenties, attractive, and tastefully dressed in simple clothes. They knew in a vague way that on the Museum roster she was listed as an adviser on musical instruments, with past positions at the National Museum at Prague, the Royal Museum in Copenhagen, and the British Museum.

Her accent was vaguely *mitteleuropa* in the sharpness of her consonants, and British in her inflection. In general, she was considered a very talented and personable young lady who happened to be the latest of Paul's conquests, and everybody wished her well.

Paul and Kit walked through the room to the door at the far end which led to his office. He stopped for a moment, as he saw two women examine a small picture that hung right next to the entrance. They laughed, then turned and saw him.

"Oh, Paul," one of them said, the amusement still in her voice. "What is this daub doing here?"

A suggestion of annoyance passed over his face. He clasped his hands behind his back. They were strong, bony, and always had a scrubbed look.

"What's the matter with it?" he asked.

It doesn't belong here," she said. "It's nowhere near as old as the others."

"If you'll read the catalogue," he said coldly, "you will see that it was painted ten years ago by an Austrian peasant, a religious fanatic, who had stumbled on some artist's materials. This picture was the symbol of his devotion. I thought it was interesting."

"The story is," the woman said. "But the picture isn't. You're sentimental, Paul. Shame on you!"

Still laughing, she walked away with her companion. Paul was quite pale as he stared after them.

"What's the matter?" Kit asked. She had never seen him like this before.

"I told you they wouldn't understand," he said. "I knew it!"

"Don't pay any attention to them," Kit told him. "Most people will appreciate it."

He glanced at her mutely for encouragement, and then seemed to recover his aplomb, smiling at several people as he held open the door to his office for Kit.

When the door closed behind him, he took her cool hands in his, and turned her around so that he faced her squarely. He raised her head a little with his large immaculate hand so that he could see her eyes.

Then he slapped her face so hard that she staggered back across the room to the far wall, where she slumped to the floor, still staring at him. Involuntarily, one of her hands strayed to her cheek as though she had to feel whether the numbness was a lie.

Paul stood there in the dying light, watching her with the slightest of smiles in his eyes, as though fascinated by the white imprint of his hand on her flesh. The white receded slowly, and he waited a few silent seconds before he spoke.

Driven to Desperation, a Lovely Young

Against Undercover Enemies of America!

"That was for nothing at all," he said. "It's a hint of what'll happen, though, if you ever try to be clever with me."

For a moment, Paul measured the paralyzed horror in her eyes, then walked across the room, took her listless hand, and yanked her to her feet.

There was still no change in her horrified expression. Her eyes were fixed on him, as

After the years of stress in which the sensation of flight and eternal pursuit had become an everyday affair, when she couldn't tell whether she would live to the sunset, Paul came as something solid.

Two months before it had been the middle of December. The war, for America, was almost two weeks old, and the first uneasiness was wearing off. Central Park was



A small scarenight picked out Kit as she stumbled (PART VI)

though she were hypnotized. They didn't even blink.

Paul looked at her again, and then turned away abruptly to his desk as though to break the spell.

"Take it as a gentle hint, and bear me no ill will, sweetheart," he said. He pointed to the chair next to his desk. "Sit down!"

It was a command.

Two months before had been the first time Kit sat in that room with Paul. Then she had believed in his friendliness, his charm, had relaxed in it.

crowded again with nursemaids and the children. The trees were bare, and the rolling lawns seemed patched with old green.

Automobiles and cabs rolled along the winding roads. Occasionally, a pair of riders would canter along the bridle paths, all motion and sweat. It was a clear day, and the huge apartment houses and hotels that surrounded the park were a shining fragile gray.

"Be careful, Jane, don't get yourself dirty," Kit said to the child walking with her.

Refugee Seeks Escape via the Murder Path!

Kit took her duties as nursemaid very seriously. It was her first job since she arrived in New York, and the fact that this sort of work was entirely foreign to her made no difference. The Hogarths had been rather generous with her, since she could offer no references. It meant seven afternoons a week, and two meals a day. That left her just enough to pay for a tiny room and a little extra.

"No, Jane, we're going this way, to the grounds behind the Museum."

The child skipped along happily, and soon Kit had a seat on one of the benches. Jane was a little way off, teasing another child for a ride on a scooter.

A young man passed in front of Kit, turned hurriedly to look at her, and then stopped.

"Hello!" His voice was surprised.

Kit looked up at him, vaguely annoyed, until she realized that there was something familiar about him.

"You're Kit Gruenholz, aren't you?"

He was smiling; a tall young man with a briefcase under his arm.

"I am," she said slowly.

"Don't you remember me? My name is Shay . . . Dan Shay. The last time I saw you was in Copenhagen in 1936."

HE TOOK off his hat, and brushed back his hair with a nervous gesture. Kit laughed suddenly.

"Of course I remember you now. It was your hat that made you look different. We had beer together in a pleasant little restaurant near the Copenhagen Museum."

He took the seat beside her, grinning his pleasure at her recognition.

"Yes, I haven't forgotten. It was a lovely spring day, almost as nice as we have in New York."

"Really?" She was delighted to see him, to see anyone who knew the kind of people she had once known. "You're the chemist, aren't you?"

"That's right!" He seemed flattered that she should remember. "I worked in the laboratory there under Mikkelson."

"Mikkelson?"

She could hear the altered tone in her voice as she tried to check it. Kit felt tired now, and she was suddenly afraid of this young man.

"Yes," he went on. "I think that he was all I spoke about when we saw each other. He's a wonderful technologist."

A shock of fear went through her as she listened to him.

"You still think so?" she asked.

It was an important question, and she succeeded in making it sound merely conversational.

He laughed. "Of course I do. I think he's one of the best."

She didn't answer, and turned slightly, waiting for him to go. He went right on talking.

"How long have you been here?"

"A few months," she said evasively.

"Where are you working?"

"A private job." She catalogued excuses for escape.

"Really? I'm over here now." He nodded toward the gray building. "I've a lab upstairs in the middle of all the junk, but I've got all the equipment I need. What do you think of our Museum?" he asked.

"I . . . I haven't seen it yet."

"No!"

He couldn't believe it. His tone implied that he couldn't imagine anyone having anything else to do.

Just then Jane came over, ignoring him completely.

"I broke my lace," the child said happily. She held up her foot as though a rare and wonderful accident had happened to her. "Here's the other piece, I saved it."

"That was very good of you," Kit said. She took the child in her lap as she made the knot. "There now, it's all fixed as good as new."

Jane wriggled down and walked away stiff-legged, fascinated by her mended shoe.

The young man was smiling.

"I see," he said. "Is that what keeps you away?"

Kit shrugged. "Partly. I'm with her every day."

"But isn't she your daughter?"

She turned to him in surprise.

"Daughter? Why, no. . ."

There was a puzzled expression in his eyes.

"I don't understand . . . why, you're her governess!" His face was somber as though he had just said something terrible. He seemed so naively upset by her defection that she had a hard time remembering to be on her guard. "Why?" he asked.

"I don't mind the work. And I must do something."

"Don't tell me that!" He waited for a moment. "Haven't you tried the Museum? I know they can use you."

"I haven't tried."

It was exhausting to live this way, erecting defenses against chance acquaintances just on the mere mention of a name. You could trust no one, it seemed. These people had worked their way in everywhere.

"I don't understand," he was saying. Suddenly his voice altered. "Look, did I say anything to offend you?"

"What makes you think that?" she asked indifferently.

"Oh, I don't know. You seem so much cooler than when I spoke to you at first. Whatever it is, I'm sorry."

He was frowning helplessly, as he floun-

dered around for an apology for something he didn't know about. Kit watched intently, waiting for him to make one false gesture, to overact even the slightest.

"I'm sure you're mistaken," Kit said carefully. She examined his face as she said, "Have you heard anything from Mikkelson recently?"

"No," he said. His voice was absent. "Not in years." He shrugged it off. "Look, I don't know why you haven't looked for a job where you belong, and I don't intend to ask. But if you *do* want something, call me tomorrow, and I'll make an appointment for you. There's something open now that's made to order for you."

He sounded a trifle angry as he got up and left.

Kit watched him until he was out of sight, and when walking back across the park with the child she took the longest path possible. When she was positive that she wasn't being followed, Kit felt much happier.

By morning she convinced herself that she had misjudged the situation. The squalor of her bedroom, its darkness, the

"I'm glad," he said. "I'm sorry if I was brusque yesterday. I suppose I must have startled you, falling over you that way. But as long as you're here, I might as well take you up and introduce you to Dr. Lewes, the director."

Kit was about to object, but he had taken her by the arm and led her into a small elevator. The grille door slid closed behind them. She said nothing, but all her defenses were up again.

After the past few years, she grew nervous at sudden gestures like this. She was used to checking up on people beforehand. . . . But it was too late now. There was no graceful escape she could make.

Dr. Lewes was a small dapper man, very assured and to the point. He listened to Dan, his gray eyes noncommittal, and then turned to Kit.

"I think there might be a place, Miss Gruenholz. We have your paper on reed instruments on file here. It's a very competent job."

He spoke quietly, and not once during the interview did he ask her about her status in the country or about her passport, even



thinness of the walls, the complete lack of privacy, made her long for a return to another way of living. It seemed wiser to visit the Museum and look around for herself before she called Dan Shay.

It was good to be back. That was the way she felt as soon as she entered the Museum's main hall. The people were exactly the same as those she had seen in all such places.

The guards in their gray uniforms were also an international type. Kit recognized the odor of the place immediately, the odor of a large building frequented by many people and lived in by none.

A couple of young R.A.F. men walked past, and the sight of their blue uniforms reassured her. Kit walked about slowly, not looking at anything in particular, but just enjoying the sensation of being in a familiar place.

"I thought you were going to call me."

Dan Shay stood behind her, and she started. He looked younger than he had yesterday; tall and a little shaggy in unpressed tweeds.

"I was just taking a peep," Kit said. "It feels good."

He took her arm.

though she had her story well rehearsed.

Within a few minutes, he dispelled all her fears. It was agreed that she was to start at once, and the salary was more than she would have dared to ask.

"Well?" Dan asked later as they had lunch in the museum cafeteria, "how does it feel?"

Kit shook her head helplessly and smiled. She shivered a little as she thought how narrowly she had missed having the job because of excessive suspicion.

She determined to clear up her last doubts at once.

"Tell me," she said casually. "I'm curious about Mikkelson, the man you admire so much. Did it come as a surprise to you to discover that he was a Nazi?"

"Mikkelson?" Dan sounded shocked. He turned to her, frowning. "Who told you that?"

Kit shrugged. "I don't remember. I knew it at the time I was in Copenhagen. Everybody did."

"But that's impossible! He never said anything to me about it. Of course," he went on slowly, "we never did discuss politics . . . but he *seemed* thoroughly decent."

Anger tore through her.

"Decent?" The word was cold and sardonic. "Did you expect him to go around with a whip?"

"No," he admitted. "But he doesn't fit my picture of a Nazi. It's true, though, he seemed to have rather violent prejudices, but they were merely the same prejudices most of the people back here had, only much more marked."

"Your prejudices?"

She looked straight ahead as she asked it.

"I never stopped to think about it much," Dan said simply. "You pick those things up without bothering to examine them very closely."

Kit resolved to say no more about it. If Dan had anything else to say, she decided that he would have to bring the subject up himself. She was willing to believe that he was very naïve politically, but there was no point in having him make a display of himself.

"What are you going to do about that lovely child you were with yesterday?" Dan asked. "Have you called to say that you were through being a governess?"

Kit was a little annoyed at the sudden change in the conversation. Even though it hadn't been going exactly as she had wanted, there was still the hope that he would say the one thing that would remove her lingering suspicions. She looked at him for a moment before answering.

"Yes," she said finally. "I'll have to go over there some day soon and explain in person. They were very nice to me."

"You sound slightly regretful. I should imagine you'd be tickled pink to be back at your old job."

"Well, I'm very grateful to them," Kit said deliberately. "They took me in with a lot of sympathy and without asking any questions. That's a great deal for someone like me."

IT WAS the following day that she met Paul Campbell, and liked him immediately. He poked his head in the doorway to her cubbyhole of an office and introduced himself.

"Dr. Lewes mentioned that you were here, and I was sure that we might have some mutual friends . . . as soon as he added that you were young and attractive."

Kit liked his informality. He had that ingenuous air of an under-graduate of one of the large English universities, without being at all callow or hearty. He was, as the littlest bear said of her porridge, just right.

"I'm more or less of a field man," he explained. "I enjoy getting out and chiselling something good from a collector."

"You don't like collectors?"

Kit enjoyed his way of speaking as though these were private confidences. He was one of those people with whom you

don't have conversations; you merely feed them cues.

"I hate collectors," he said. "There's a private war on between us which I enjoy since I'm winning. See here," he went on, interrupting himself, "I don't think we're going to have time enough to talk this afternoon. I need hours and hours. Suppose we have dinner together tonight? Consider it an initiation dinner."

"Well. . ."

Kit felt as though she were being rushed off her feet, and in this case it wasn't such a bad sensation.

"Remember our mutual friends," he insisted. "You owe it to them to have dinner with me."

"Exactly! Just who are they?"

"That's what we'll talk about," Paul promised. "Our mutual friends. . . I'm very fond of them. What time do you leave here?"

"About six."

"I'll pick you up. There's no need to dress," he said in answer to her unspoken objection. "You'll do exactly as you are."

The afternoon passed swiftly in anticipation. Kit was carried along on a feeling of elation. The grimness and brooding horror that had hung over her for the past few years was dispelled. The fact that she had returned to her former work among the same kind of people she had been used to working with was enough to give her a sense of security.

The evening was one of the most pleasant she had spent in a long time. Even dancing in a public place on the same floor with well-dressed people was an experience she had given up for lost; something belonging to a far distant period of her life never to return.

"Tell me," Kit said, as they were sitting at a table, "what sort of person is Dan Shay?"

Paul looked at her curiously.

"Very competent in his work. Pleasant enough outside, I suppose."

"That's not what I mean," Kit said. "I meant his politics."

She felt no disloyalty asking this question. It was true that Dan had helped her get the job, but there were criteria of greater importance today. While she had received the benefit of his gesture, there might be other motives involved.

"I don't know too much about his politics," Paul said. "I have the feeling that he's completely apolitical; without any particular kind of convictions. Why do you ask?"

Kit looked up at his use of the word "apolitical." It was the sort of word she might have used herself in discussing someone. It was the sort of word that was used by people like her; those who were taking

part in the same conflict as she was. It made an impression on her.

"I asked because the last time I saw him, a few years ago, he was friendly with some highly suspicious people."

"In particular?"

"In particular Mikkelson of Copenhagen."

Paul looked at her closely without speaking for a moment.

"Mikkelson is a Nazi," he said finally. "Is that what you mean?"

"Yes."

He looked at her, reflecting, and then shrugged.

"It's hard to say if there's any connection. Scientists are peculiar people. They don't make important distinctions. To them, a scientist is a scientist first, his politics come next. They never stop to think that a man is what his politics makes him."

"I think that Dan is the sort of person who, when he hears the word politics, thinks of Democrats and Republicans. Other concepts like fascism, nazism, socialism, or what have you, never occur to him."

He stopped, smiling as he took her hand in his.

"I'm afraid that you're worrying too much, Kit. People like you tend to become obsessed with the Gestapo. They're not as all-seeing as you seem to think."

He patted her hand reassuringly.

"Let's dance some more," he urged.

That had been said almost as a plea, but now, two months later in the privacy of his office next to the exhibition, when he said "Sit down!" the command was implicit.

FROM that moment, when she clearly realized what had just happened, that the stunning slap in the face was merely a symbol of her new position, all the security was gone. The short two-month lull in a half decade of eternally mounting terror now appeared to be the daydream of an unhappy child.

During the short time, how many mistakes had she made, how many clues had she given out, how many lives had she endangered? Kit was almost sick with fright as she stood there staring at Paul Campbell, weak with shame and self-disgust at her own stupidity.

"Sit down," he was saying.

He was smiling now as though to reassure her that the worst was over. There was nothing stacy or forced in his charm. His smile was boyishly natural, and contained no memory of terrified women or murdered men.

Slowly, Kit walked across the room and slumped into the chair. She covered her eyes with her hands and rubbed them slowly, trying to clear away her confusion and growing despair.

How would she ever be able to conquer



The blond head moved faster and faster, then downward (PART I)

this wall of persecution that was growing up everywhere, invisible to all but the pursuers and the pursued?

Whatever affection she may have felt for Paul had drained so quickly that she hadn't even the memory of it. His identification was complete. Kit said nothing. She remembered other interviews with other Paul Campbells. Then they had worn uniforms, dandified black and white, and she knew from experience that it was expedient to let them do all the talking.

"What is it you want?" she asked.

Her voice sounded dead, but it was turgid with memories of what she had seen.

"You don't seem very surprised," Paul remarked.

Kit shrugged. "I should have expected something like this."

"Good! Then it makes it easier to get to the point. I have your dossier very clear in my mind. I'll give it to you: Gruenholz, Katherine: born in Philadelphia, U. S. on July 20, 1917. Daughter of Kurt Gruenholz, one of the founders of the Czechoslovakian Republic.

On the foundation of the Czechoslovakian Republic in Philadelphia, Katherine Gruenholz was formally declared a citizen of Czechoslovakia . . . although her mother was born an American. . . ."

"I was the first person to be born into the Czechoslovakian Republic," Kit said faintly. "That is a source of pride for me."

Paul went on as though he hadn't heard her.

" . . . Lived in the United States until 1923 and then went to Prague with her mother to rejoin the father, then Minister of Education. In 1930, went to London. Father at that time attached to Czech Ministry in London. Attended English schools for two years. Entered University of Prague 1934.

"Connected with various museums on the continent. Active anti-Nazi until 1936. Traveled extensively on the continent until February 1938. After that, worked with outlaw bands and other groups subversive to the Occupational Authorities. Crossed borders of Germany three times in 1938, twice in 1939, three times in 1940. Connections in Hamburg and Berlin.

"At present, has a forged German passport. Medium height, slender build. Tiny scar on left cheek. Not known to be married, no information on lovers. Exceptionally resourceful. Political enemy of the first category."

He leaned back and lit a cigarette.

"And that's who you are. Now about your German passport. The German government at the present time will take advantage of your cleverness, and admit . . . let's say . . . insist that it *wasn't* forged. You are a German national, traveling with the consent of the German government. When you came to

this country, you used a forged American passport to get in from Portugal."

He was looking at her with the pleasant expression one uses for commonplace conversation.

"As far as this country is concerned, there are three healthy charges that can be used against you: possession of a false American passport, an unregistered enemy alien, with the unavoidable conclusion that you are an enemy agent. When you add that up, it's good for twenty years. I don't think I've left anything out."

"The other half of the story," Kid answered. "Why can't I turn *you* in?"

Paul spread his hands, and shrugged.

"How can you? What can you say?"

"I can say you're a German agent."

He waved a hand deprecatingly.

"What proof have you got? You have no record of this conversation, and I don't intend to repeat it for witnesses.

"I'm Paul Campbell, British citizen, an art expert. My social connections are the best. I have good friends in the State Department. You yourself have met them in my home. My recommendations are excellent." He paused for a moment. "And those are social recommendations, not political or business. That's what counts. And you? Do you dare go to the police?"

IT WAS so easy to sit still, close her eyes, and pretend that nothing was happening. Kit was feeling no pain, there were no loud voices or threats, yet it was impossible not to understand how she was being bound hand and foot with every word of his. She was frightened, and yet there was no alternative but to try to fight back.

Her mind wasn't obeying. It was too full of pictures. Kit had a vision of falling men: ordinary men in ordinary clothes, each in the process of stumbling, staring foolishly in disbelief, and then crumpling; on the pavement, as in the case of her father; slumping down beside his desk as in the case of the Director of the Prague Museum; on the steps of the University as in the case of her brother.

There were many others whose names she knew and didn't know, demonstrating in streets, in squares, in prison camps, and their last expression as their eyes met hers was incredulity. The various backgrounds were blurred into gray space.

All she remembered as she sat there listening to this pleasant voice were the eyes, and the constantly recurring shock at finding dead men seem so much smaller than when they had been alive.

"There's no need for me to go on this way," Paul said, as though he wanted to spare her. "You're an intelligent girl, and you've seen how we work. I think I've made my point."

"Yes," said Kit quietly. She hadn't changed her expression at all. "The situation is very clear."

"And you have no way out," he repeated.

"I understand that." Her voice was dull.

"What do you want?"

"I want Anna Mahler," he said quietly. "In twenty-four hours."

Fortunately for Kit, she wasn't looking at him when he spoke because, he would have seen the shock of alarm in her eyes.

No more than five people knew that Anna Mahler was in this country as far as Kit could tell. There might be others because Anna had a specific reason connected with the United States Government for being here, but as far as Kit was concerned that wasn't her business.

Nor could it be generally known even in Washington that she was here, because there were respectable forces reactionary enough to have Anna Mahler thrown out of the United States no matter how much information she might have.

Kit had no way of knowing, but she was very sure that any cooperation between Anna and the various United States intelligence organizations had to be done by very devious means. How Paul found out about her presence, it was impossible to tell yet. . . still that was his job.

"And by the way," he went on. "There's one mistake I ought to caution you against; don't think you can be a martyr. I know you people well enough to realize that if I offer you the alternative of giving up Anna Mahler or your own life, you won't hesitate to do anything to save Mahler."

"But it will really do you no good to sit tight and wait for me to do my worst. There's a little more to my position than that. If I can't use you, I'll get someone just like you . . . someone who is here in New York."

She looked up at him, composed by now.

"Who is that?"

"I mean the man you call your uncle," Paul said.

"Busy?" asked a chirping voice.

Kit turned around and saw the bespectacled head of a small bald man, one of Paul's collectors. He beamed at her in a fatherly way.

Paul rose and held out his hand smiling; he looked young and ill at ease as though he had been caught trying to kiss Kit's hand.

"We've already had our say," he murmured blandly.

Then he turned to Kit.

"We'll have dinner together then?"

Paul gave the question a soft inflection, and the sense of it reminded her of a young man whose name she had never known. He had met her through some friends in a Prague café on a warm September evening, and asked her the same question in the

same voice. He had been a very handsome young medical student from Bohemia, and when he asked her on that lovely Prague evening, she wanted to kiss him.

She never spoke to him again because, as she discovered later, he stood with five thousand other men, shouting in the darkness in front of the government buildings, "Give us arms, give us guns to fight with!" The next time she saw him, he was hanging by his neck from a street light as a warning to others. It was a still spring evening when she saw him that last time, and the young man's body spun very slowly because the rope was long. Kit hadn't thought of him in a long time, but Paul had counterfeited the new love in his voice to perfection.

"Whatever you say," Kit replied.

"Meet me at the St. Regis at seven. At the bar. Better make it seven-thirty, since all the servants are out, even Kenton," he added as an afterthought. "I'll want to drive out to the house and dress." He waited for a moment, ignoring the other man, and then smiled, especially for her, "I want it to be something out of the ordinary."

KIT stood at the door, watching him, holding herself up. For a moment, she felt dizzy with the decision that had been made for her these past few minutes. Actually, she had made it herself as soon as he had hit her.

Without being at all aware of it, she had been examining alternatives: either to acquiesce and become one of the stumbling figures herself, or to destroy him first. Paul had drawn the noose tightly about her neck. He had insisted there was no way out simply because the one alternative had never occurred to him, and there was good reason for that: a person like Paul Campbell never considered the possibility of his own death.

He was smiling at her as she lingered in the doorway, and the other man reflected it fatuously in unconscious enjoyment of what he thought he was seeing.

"See you later!" Paul said, waving to her.

Kit closed the door after her and walked through the exhibition. She was completely unaware of the visitors who had filled the room with warmth, perfume and noise. Kit passed among them as though she were going through an exotic mist. They glanced at her, and then exchanged sympathetic, understanding smiles.

It was Thursday, and the only people in the other wings of the museum were those adults who had come to see something.

On Saturdays and Sundays, the place was cluttered with children who roamed through the exhibits in nervous herds, led by watchful teachers.

Instead of going to her own office, Kit

walked as far away from it as possible, and found a telephone booth in the extreme south wing on the second floor. She selected it because she knew that it couldn't possibly be tapped.

Here and there, an earnest student sat intently before some painting, meticulously copying every detail, his canvas resting on the easel which the museum had lent him.

Others strewn at random along the corridors looked at whatever they were seeing, carefully keeping their impressions to themselves. And there was the inevitable brace of women who kept whispering and giggling to each other as though they had stolen into the place and were expecting to be thrown out at any moment as impostors.

Kit closed the door of the booth and called a number. A voice answered almost immediately.

"Advance Music Shop."

"Hello," Kit said quietly. She wanted her voice to be easy and natural so that it could be recognized. "Do you have any nursery rhymes for children?"

"Nursery rhymes?" The girl's voice at the other end hesitated for an interested moment. "Which one in particular did you want?"

"Jack the Giant Killer is the one I want," Kit replied.

This kind of odd conversation with only one or two key words had become so much second nature to her that she had long forgotten that there had ever been a time when it might have seemed unnecessarily melodramatic.

"I'm sorry," said the voice. "We are completely out of that particular number."

"Oh, no!" said Kit. For a moment, she had to allow her real feelings to show. "It's terribly important!"

The man she was trying to get through to was her only contact; the only orders she could take had to come from him.

"Well, it'll just have to wait," Kit was told. "We won't receive another shipment until tomorrow night at the earliest. Try then."

"That's too late for me," Kit said. "But I ought to tell you that there must be something wrong with your shipping facilities. You might try sending your stuff by another route."

"Anything in particular?" The other voice was quiet.

"I don't know yet, but I think some of the other stores know the name of your manager and may try to take him away from you."

"There's nothing I can do here until tomorrow night."

Kit hung up. Conrad, the man Paul referred to as her uncle, was out of town, and there was no way to get to him, otherwise she would have been told. Tomorrow was

too late because Paul had put in his bid for immediate action. Paul wanted Anna Mahler and he meant to get her.

The discipline of an underground organization has to be the most rigid and demanding that can be obtained from human beings: the alternatives are too obvious. But since Kit couldn't get any directive, she would have to use her own initiative. It was imperative to protect Anna Mahler.

SHE left the booth and went down to the main floor. The collection of musical instruments was in the northwest wing, and that was where Kit had her office. It was a tiny cubbyhole with a window looking out on Central Park and the rows of benches where nursemaids sat while the children played. It was where she herself used to sit with Jane.

Kit tried to analyze the choices before her as dispassionately as possible since her own future was involved. There was no point in leaving town. Paul meant to see her that night, and if she didn't arrive, he wouldn't hesitate to turn her in: he knew the number of her license plate, and she didn't have enough money to go any considerable distance by train.

If it were just a question of Anna or herself, as Paul had pointed out, Kit wouldn't hesitate to sacrifice herself for Anna, but that too would be pointless. Paul had hinted very convincingly that he knew enough to blast their entire organization. No, it was time for a positive move on her part.

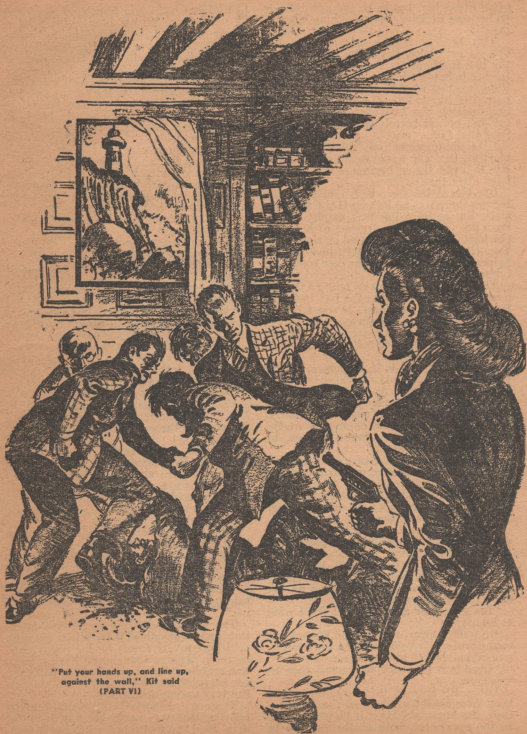
Then she discovered that her decision had already been made for her; she would have to kill Paul. She wanted to kill Paul just as she wanted to kill every Nazi or sympathizer as a matter of instinct.

The more decent a person was, the more cultured, the more sensitive, the more fundamental was the instinct for the destruction of this force. It was the simplest representation of a desire to return to the best in human civilization.

But it wasn't enough to want to kill him, something more had to be gained; Paul's exposure. The finding of his dead body would inevitably be followed by an investigation of his life, and no matter how astute he might be while he was alive, there must be enough clues in his house to give the lead to the police. The F.B.I. could take care of the rest.

For herself, she was willing to take the consequences if necessary, but her objective would be attained: Anna would be safe.

Now that the decision was made, it came with a shattering explosion, obliterating everything else, all sense of time, responsibility and relationships. She was nervous and frightened as she always was before action, and this was the first time that she would take a human life. It had happened



"Put your hands up, and line up,
against the wall," Kit said
(PART VI)

often about her, but to be the agent for it on her own decision was something horrifying.

This kind of killing went against her deepest principles, it violated every reason she had for fighting, and it was necessary for her to balance Paul's life, as an abstract thing, against what he would destroy if she permitted him to live. It was the most ruinous decision she had ever made and she couldn't permit herself to see anything beyond that fact.

Kit could foresee her own life only up until the time that she would destroy Paul. For Kit, that was the entire future. Nothing existed after that.

She closed the door to her office. Even though there was no lock on it she felt safe since the entire wing was empty. Then, from one of the lower drawers of her desk she took out a small, battered clarinet case. Two clasps opened it, but instead of two halves of the instrument, the case contained a black automatic.

The barrel was almost as long as that of a heavy target pistol, but the last inch was the openwork of a silencer. It was a hybrid looking affair; it had been made by an engineer at Skoda in his spare time. The gun fired a clip of twelve .45 bullets contained in the long fat handle.

Kit had acquired it in Hamburg. There was an apartment in the working class district near the shipyards which was used as a station in the underground railroad method of traveling through the country. At that time Kit and the engineer were the only two hiding there. One afternoon, he put the gun in her hand.

"Here," he said, "take care of it, and use it." He was a pale man, rather slight and withdrawn. His voice was tense. "But don't use it foolishly. Make it worth while, and don't let it get into the wrong hands. We have too few of these."

Kit remembered the shock of finding how comforting the gun felt in her palm, cool, smooth and powerful.

"But why give it to me?" she asked stupidly. "Don't you want it any more?"

His glance was impatient, and at the same time compassionate.

"I'm going for a walk, and I don't want to lose it."

He walked away, then put on his hat and coat, turning the collar up. At the door, he paused and looked at her for a moment.

"Good-by," he said quietly, and then he was gone.

Later, Kit learned that he knew he had been recognized and stood no chance of escape. He knew, also, that if he were traced to the apartment, both of them might be caught. It was wiser to be taken alone, a long way from any of his friends, so he went out to be picked up on his own terms.

THE gun had never been used since, and many times Kit had been on the point of giving it away, but the intention had never been completed by action. Here it was now, and for the first time in three years it would be used.

She opened the gun to see if it was clean. To her unpracticed eye, the parts shone like new and the bullets had a greasy feel as she slipped them back. The gun was barely in her handbag when her door was opened from the outside.

Kit turned and saw Dan Shay.

"What is it?" she asked sharply.

She took a step back, in her alarm, because the very sight of his tall figure recalled the whole sequence of events which had placed her in her present position.

"Did I frighten you?" he asked, frowning in bewilderment.

"I wasn't expecting you," she said.

"Do you want me to go?"

Kit refused to accept the puzzled expression.

"Not until you've said what you wanted to say."

"Well . . ." he shrugged, and was on the point of withdrawing. "I merely came down to ask you to have dinner with me."

"Dinner?" she repeated stupidly.

"Yes, you see, I'll be leaving in three weeks, and I thought I'd like to see you a little more often in the meantime."

"Where are you going?"

"The army. I have a commission in the Division of Chemical Warfare, and I asked for another three weeks to finish my work here."

She sat down, trying to collect her thoughts. The conversation that had just taken place was still on the surface of her consciousness, and she wanted a moment to make sense of it.

"Dinner? But I'm having dinner with Paul tonight."

"Oh, Paul . . ." He sounded disappointed, but the inflection he used to mention Paul's name showed that he could understand that. "Well, that was all. And as long as you're going to be fed, I won't worry."

"You needn't worry about me, Dan," Kit said quietly. "You need never worry about me."

The tone of her voice caught his attention, and he examined it for a long moment.

"I have a very funny feeling about you," he said. "It's as though you have a question on your mind about me. Why don't you ask me pointblank? I'd prefer it. This way, I'm very uncomfortable."

There was honesty in his voice, but Kit felt that she was no longer any judge of that. Paul had fooled her, taken her in completely, and she intended never to make that mistake again.

For all she knew, Dan might be working

with Paul. Anything was possible, and since it was, the only thing to do was to play safe.

"You must be mistaken, Dan," Kit said. "It's just that I'm very busy right now."

He shrugged slightly, and his smile was not in his eyes.

"If you say so. I'll be seeing you."

Without looking at her again, he swung the door closed after him and left.

Kit thought about him for a moment, then dismissed him completely. There were other things of far greater importance to straighten out, and she stared out of the window, reflecting.

It was about five o'clock when she left the museum. Paul had left sometime before, and she wanted to give him a good start. Kit kept her small car parked in the wide driveway north of the building. It was a 1936 Willys, and it was Kit's first real extravagance since she had the new job.

She had paid \$65 for it against everybody's warning that such cars were meant only for mechanics who could hop out at a moment's notice and repair an axle or the transmission. Terrible possibilities were dangled before her eyes of the accidents that could happen at any time.

"But what of it?" was Kit's answer to Paul. "For years, ever since I can remember I've wanted a car of my own the way other girls hoped to be a princess. Even if it lasts only a week, I'll be satisfied. At least I'll have known the feeling of driving my own car."

That was two months ago. The car must have been under a spell because nothing had ever happened to it. It never seemed to need gas, oil, or water.

Occasionally, alarming sounds came from beneath the seat, but whatever it was soon healed. It was the only way to say it. Kit had visions of broken gears growing new teeth, and spark plugs cleaning themselves like frantic kittens. The car was phenomenal; and the possession of it fulfilled all of Kit's expectations.

SHE drove east on Eightieth Street to Madison and then down Madison for two blocks, zigzagging this way to make every light. Neither the Queensboro Bridge nor Northern Boulevard were crowded, so that the ride out to Saginaw on the North Shore took thirty-five minutes. Kit knew the way to Paul's without any trouble. She had made the trip several times for various weekends.

"It's called the Hutchins Place," Paul had told her. "So if you have any trouble finding me, just ask for it under that name."

The Hutchins place was what was left from a huge farm built over a hundred years ago, some ten acres which included the original house and gardens, the family cemetery, and rolling lawns. The house had

once been a farmhouse, but as the years passed the Hutchins' grew wealthier generation by generation, and each succeeding one had added something until at present the house was enormous, comfortable, and solid.

The only portion of the place which remained unchanged was the family cemetery in one small corner of the grounds. There were about sixty stones, all very simple down to the most recent, the very last of the family who had died in 1926.

"That was Henry Hutchins," Paul once had said. "Sometime when you want to hear a lurid piece of gossip, I'll tell you of his life and times up to and including his death in the local jail. It becomes a legend in these parts, the kind adolescent boys whisper to one another. Ask Kenton about it some time or other. Kenton knows the whole story."

Kenton had nodded, chuckling to himself like a child who knows a guilty secret. He was a frail little man, a sort of major domo, who took care of Paul as though Paul were one of the lesser gods. He appeared only when Paul sent for him, otherwise he busied himself in his own room with pathetically unimportant tasks.

Kenton floated around the house like a self-effacing wraith, and his long white hair formed a diaphanous cloud that made him look as though he were dissolving into thin air starting with his head.

Paul had never made any attempt to have the name of the house changed. He was content to be the "man who lived in the Hutchins Place."

It was almost dusk when Kit turned through the neat, upper middle-class village with its wide, beautifully-paved streets, broad sidewalks, and fine markets.

A neon sign glowed in the druggist's window. Inside, around the counter, she could glimpse a crowd of high school boys and girls. For that brief moment, the light had the effect of a summer twilight. In a few minutes, it had deepened to night.

Kit drove past the very end of the Hutchins Place and turned off the two-lane macadam road into a small clearing among the young oak trees. Her headlights glowed for a moment, the light being lost in the sparse woods, then she snapped them off. There was no sound but the dead rustle of damp wind. When she stepped out of the car, the door's slam seemed muffled in the huge silence.

She knew her way without any trouble. There was an opening in the wall right behind the cemetery and she walked through it. The ground beneath her feet was still hard, and every so often she stumbled up the gentle slope as a ridge of frozen mud threw her foot off balance.

Paul's Packard roadster stood shining in

the light of the porte cochère. Above it, a few windows were lit. The entire back of the house was dark. It was Thursday, and all the servants were off. Paul had mentioned that even Kenton was away. That meant Paul was all alone.

Kit walked carefully, clutching her bag to her. She kept off the stone drive so that her footsteps would not be heard. As she had expected, the front door was unlocked. Kit slipped into the dark foyer, and immediately stiffened into immobility. Her pulse beat within her like a drum. The house was quiet and dark; nothing moved.

With her nervousness, she was aware of a growing tense elation that was dangerously close to hysteria. A house is usually filled with the undercurrent of sound which gives it a feeling of life. Here, there was nothing.

The darkness gradually dissolved into a mass of black and gray shapes which had space relationships. Kit could make out doorways and halls that seemed to lead nowhere. The broad stairway to the upper floor looked dimly like a pile of shallow boxes that mounted out of sight.

KIT tiptoed slowly across a thick rug to the arch which led to a living room. With each step she had to check herself because she felt she was running. Suddenly the rug came to an end, and she could hear her heels click on the bare slippery floor. In another minute, she was on a rug again, but it slid gently.

Then she remembered that it wasn't a rug, but a bearskin. The idea of the staring dead glass eye in the stuffed head was horrifying. She wondered if there were other eyes, somewhere in this large room, somebody passively seated in one of the big arm-chairs, just watching her, and ready to burst into loud sardonic laughter. She stopped again, trying to remember the location of every chair and table.

For a moment, she considered going around the room and feeling every piece of furniture to see if some tormentor were there, but the idea of finding her hand in contact with warm living flesh where there should be no one was too much; she would chance it this way.

Gradually, as her eyes became more and more accustomed to the lack of light, she made out a thin red crack that ran straight down one of the walls. There was a light in the library and the door was ajar. Very slowly, as though the motion of her hand through air might cause some noise, she felt into her bag for the gun. The palms of her hands were wet as she grasped the barrel, and then fumbled for the large fat handle. Still keeping the gun in the bag to muffle the sound, she released the catch. It made a gentle click.

"Squeeze the trigger, don't pull," she told herself over and over, repeating a lesson like a good little girl. "Don't take too long to aim. It's like pointing a finger at someone." Kit went over to the door, and stood there, listening above the background of her own pounding pulse.

In the next room, a fire crackled and that was all. She pushed the door a trifle, holding her breath as she did so. The door gave without a sound as long as she pushed, but then it stopped. It was open to about three inches now, and Kit could see in.

The red glow came from the fire, but between the door and the fireplace there was a couch. Kit saw the head of a man who sat there, his light hair looking like an aura in the dancing light. Beside him stood an end table with a half filled highball glass, and a newly opened whiskey bottle.

It was exactly the way she had expected to find him, taking one last drink before he went out for the evening. The radio was on very quietly, and above the raucous whispering of the fire, Kit could hear the announcer giving out the news of the fighting on the Russian front.

The whole thing took less than five seconds from time she opened the door. The announcer didn't have an opportunity to finish his sentence, and Paul didn't have a chance to move his head.

Her throat was dry as Kit raised the pistol with a straight arm. Slowly, the two sights met in a red V at the nape of his neck, and without hesitation, she squeezed the trigger.

The only sound was a slight cough, and her arm was jerked up as though a string had yanked on her wrist. The blond head hadn't moved at all, then slowly, it leaned forward. Paul looked as though he were going to stand up, but the head moved faster and faster, then downward, and the whole body disappeared. In another moment there was a dull thud that could barely be heard above the fire.

Kit stood there, and then sudden panic, like an enveloping flame, shot up within her. She turned and ran into a blank that lasted until she reached the car. The mechanical business of opening the door brought her back.

What had happened between the time she had turned from the library door and the present was gone forever, she never recalled it. The gun was still in her hand, and she slid it back into her purse as though it were fragile and might break.

The motor was cold and the generator had a yammering whine as she stepped on the starter. For a moment she feared that it wouldn't start at all; that now, at last, all the threatened catastrophies would crowd up and trap her. But her luck still held. The motor finally caught.

Kit glanced up at the house to see whether anything had happened. The same lights were on, and the long roadster still gleamed in front of the door. It was as though nothing at all had taken place in the last few minutes. The wind from the Sound continued to nag at the trees, and the trees moaned on with the same plaintive annoyance.

SHE backed out without switching on the lights, and crawled past the long wall fronting the farm in darkness. Then she shifted into high, and sped away into the yellow cone her feeble headlights made. For the next few minutes, she divided her attention between the road ahead and the mirror above the windshield. Nobody was following her.

It wasn't until the drug store and the main street of Saginaw had been left behind that she realized her knees hurt. She touched them with a finger, and found them raw and scraped. Her stockings were torn. Somewhere between the house and the car she had fallen, but there was absolutely no record of it in her mind.

It was curious, the sudden sensation of lightness, freedom, and happiness she felt now. Before this, the period which was to follow Paul's death had been a blank. Now it had arrived. There were no plans made for it, and Kit felt no need for plans.

She would be happy enough if she could go on as she had before in exactly the same life, the same routine, but with the important exception that Paul was gone from it. That was all that had stood in the way of happiness.

The terrific lift in her spirits carried her through the traffic as though she were racing home to some stupendous event filled with gaiety and laughter which would never stop.

The little car squirmed in and out of traffic, it seemed to Kit, with an impudent flirt to its tail. She was the merry little girl in an animated cartoon; she was free, she sang to herself. She was free!

Kit parked the car in front of her renovated brownstone where she had a small apartment. On her way upstairs, she called in to the landlady:

"Any calls for me?"

A voice drifted back to her, friendly and with the amused tolerance of the aged for the young:

"Nothing. Did you expect one?"

The harmless sound, full of good will, pinned Kit to the stairs. She had heard her landlady's voice before many times, and it was the very simplicity, the usualness of it that stopped her. The elation fell away, like the deep pause after an orchestra crescendo, and left her empty.

She had killed a man!

The voice was the first contact with people since Kit had left Paul's house, and it was immediately clear to Kit that her hysterical exuberance was based on the assumption that she was the only person in the world. Until this voice, she had had no contact with humanity. There had been the darkness of night, and figures she had seen on the way back were seen through glass. They had been impersonal moving objects in a still life.

The world came back to Kit. She had killed a man!

Depression batted down on her. There was no sense of remorse, because Paul had ceased to exist for her as a person as soon as he had revealed himself that afternoon.

The idea of sudden death was no novelty to Kit. She had seen it happen too often to friends she loved; senseless, brutal murders ordered by people like Paul. She had even stood alongside of a sniper's rifle as it went off from behind a drawn shade in a barricaded street.

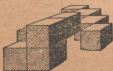
If she had taken a rifle then, and shot it, the transition from an observer to a participant would have been so gradual and natural that she wouldn't have known it was happening. This was different; it had been performed on her own initiative.

She hadn't shot Paul in battle where such

[Turn page]

BRAIN TEASER THIRST PLEASER

How many cubes in this figure?



ANSWER.

There are ten cubes in the figure.



things are the order of the day. The shooting had taken place under the most complicated circumstances. Superficially, Paul was a law abiding person, and thereby entitled to the full protection of the law. In the same sense, Kit was a fugitive from justice subject to all the legal penalties. Her mind began to function again.

She must go to the St. Regis that evening as though to meet Paul, because there were other people who knew the arrangement had been made earlier in the day.

Going upstairs, it became clear that she would have to organize herself. Her reactions were undisciplined, and Kit's experience in underground work had made it plain that discipline, organizational as well as personal, was what kept people like her alive. She sought relief for her shattered nerves in the prosaic business of dressing.

Kit decided to make it as formal and thorough a job as possible; it would act as a sedative. The bath was prolonged with salts, and adjusted to exactly the correct temperature.

When she powdered her body, she used a new puff, examining its imprint as critically as though it were of the utmost importance. She allowed the details of her clothes to absorb all her attention; the stockings, lingerie, the white dress with the black lace, the black suede . . . no, the patent leather pumps.

Kit worried over every trifle, and finally when she straightened up, ready to leave, she found that she had outdone herself. It came as a slight shock of surprise to find that she had never looked better in her life.

IT WAS twenty to eight when she entered the bar, completely under control. The room was crowded with people, noise and a variety of odors, all of them pungently pleasing. Bursts of conversation and laughter swirled lazily and seemed a diaphanous reality like mist.

The waiter caught her eye and smiled enquiringly.

"Two," Kit said, "I'm expecting a gentleman."

The man shrugged.

"I'm sorry," he told her. "I have no tables yet. Perhaps in a minute or two. . . ." He pointed to the bar, lined four deep. "If you would care to wait for a moment. . . ."

His voice ended in a bow, and he withdrew. She turned, and the sight of all the backs, well-groomed or half bare, the heads all averted, reminded her sharply of the scene in Paul's house. It was as though she were seeing it reenacted in a room with a thousand mirrors.

A profound sense of remembered terror threatened her superficial calm, and as she walked toward them, the murmurs and half-heard exchanges were lost in the crackling

of a red fireplace. She dreaded the first contact with their massed bodies, and yearned for it at the same time to reassure herself of their living warmth.

Forcibly, she elbowed her way into the throng, actually seeking the initial impact. As they made way for her, she relaxed again in security. The momentary fear was gone. She was jostled slightly, but it was followed at once by a murmured "Excuse me."

A tall man stood between Kit and the bar, and didn't move since he couldn't see her. Kit repeated the formula. A touch on the shoulder, a polite "Pardon," and the man stood aside for her.

Kit edged past him.

"Sherry," she said aloud to the barman and took out a cigarette.

She fumbled in her bag for a match, but there in front of her, a small flaming lighter was held.

Kit frowned in annoyance at the man's temerity, but then dismissed it as a sign of her own weakness to misinterpret a routine politeness. She leaned forward to accept the flame from the large, clean scrubbed hand.

It lit a spark of real terror, deep-seated animal fear, and she pivoted to see the man's face. At sight of the pleasant smiling features, her body seemed to be dissolving internally. Something so primeval devoured her that she felt her skin tingle, her heart stop with screaming horror.

"Hello!" Paul said. He was smiling, completely unruffled. Kit couldn't remember seeing a man so assuredly impeccable. His freshly shaven face had a pink gleam, and there wasn't a hair out of place on his head. "You're ten minutes late!"

PART TWO



HE ordinary human noises about her had died; the floating bubbles of conversation and laughter had drifted away, leaving only a stunned silence. To Kit, Paul's voice had a disembodied sound as though it came from a great distance away, a distance measured not in miles, but in time it takes to die.

"I said seven-thirty." The purling sounds lapped at her reason like the tireless waves at the base of a rock. They mocked and taunted her with the proffered release of superstition: in a minute the ghost would fade. "I stood here for ten minutes, positive that you were going to stand me up."

His cold hand touched her arm, and his fingers closed about it. The contact pitched

her terror to a still higher key, and she tried to draw away; but he held her, smiling his quiet insistence.

For a moment, Kit was unable to speak. Her mind was a turmoil of questions which churned and boiled so incoherently that it was impossible to transmute them into sound.

In spite of herself, she dreaded the moment when he would turn around for fear that she would see the neat round hole in the back of his head. It *must* be there; a peculiar little scar this dead man would wear for the rest of his life.

The sounds of the room came roaring back, as though Kit had just turned on a radio. Paul leaned still closer, his face only a few inches from hers, but all his features seemed dissolved and concentrated in an enormous charming smile.

"However, I forgive you," Paul went on. "Suppose we bully a table out of the head-waiter?"

Involuntarily, she allowed him to take a step in advance of her, so that she could see the back of his head. His wavy hair ended smoothly in an even line, without the slightest sign of a bandage or even a tiny cut.

"Your sherry," a waiter said, hurrying up with a glass on a tray. "This is the sherry you ordered."

"We'll take it at that table over there," Paul said. He set it down in front of Kit and the waiter withdrew.

"Perhaps you'd like something stronger?" Paul asked. "You look strained."

Kit glanced at him searching for allusions. It suddenly occurred to her that she hadn't doubted the fact that Paul was the man in the library. She knew she couldn't have missed at that distance.

Besides she had seen the man crumple. Slowly, the whole problem came into focus; she *had* killed a man, and he was now lying on the floor in front of the crackling fire. Who was he? What if he were totally unconnected with Paul—then it would really be murder.

"No," she found herself saying, "this will do."

Kit lowered her head, so that her trembling hand would have to carry the glass as small a distance as possible. The drink was tepid and utterly unrefreshing. She was aware of Paul's silence. It seemed almost sympathetic, as though he forebore to break into her reverie; but there was no time when Paul would ever be sympathetic. There was a point to it, as if he were waiting.

Kit looked up quickly, with a sharp little gasp, as one more possibility appeared. *Paul knew what she had done.* During that agonized time, he had been sitting in the dark living room, seeing every move she made. She watched his gray eyes, and wondered if

they had watched her as she raised the gun and fired.

For a moment, she could see him sitting deeply withdrawn in one of the large arm-chairs, smiling to himself as she tiptoed past, almost touching him. She remembered the sudden feeling at the time that someone else was in the room.

Kit shook off the thought. If that were so, Paul would surely say something.

"I'm sorry you left so early," he said finally.

The chattering voices swirled around them like steam from a simmering pot. Kit waited quietly for his next words, as though they were to be a sentence pronounced on her, but he said nothing more. His silence hung there, teasing her for an answer.

"Left where?"

Her voice picked its way carefully over the hazards, tight and wary.

He smiled again, very suddenly as though he were really amused, and then he called a waiter.

"Would you like another sherry?" Paul asked, "I'm having a Scotch and water."

"Sherry will do," Kit replied. The murmur of talk rose and fell around the room. The woman behind her was laughing, and Kit could feel her chair vibrating. "Left where?" Kit repeated, and this time she was unable to hide the urgency in her voice.

HE LIT a cigarette, making a lengthy business of it.

"The exhibition, of course," Paul said. His glance could have been a question asking her what other place she had in mind, but she ignored the invitation to confusion. There was a mimic strut in his voice as he went on. "It became even more gushing after you left. I'm sorry you missed my great success."

A sudden inspiration dissolved the small conversation as though it were a morning mist.

"Where did you park your car?" Kit asked, quietly.

"My car?" Paul glanced at her in surprise, and hesitated for a moment, exploring the possibilities of the question. "Why, I left it at home. I hate New York traffic at night."

He was frowning slightly as he spoke, watching her for some other cue to the odd question. He must have seen the relief in her eyes, as she welcomed the possibility that Paul had left the house *before* she arrived.

That meant that he didn't know; that she was safe, and as a matter of fact, Paul would be forced to supply an explanation and a solution for the dead body. Paul must have seen the relief, because he went on talking, hoping for a cue to what would destroy it.

"Yes," Paul was saying, "I intended to take it around to the garage myself before I left."

"Before you left?" Kit asked, caught off her guard in dismay.

"Yes," Paul said, without changing his expression. "But now that you mention it," he went on, "I don't remember whether I did or not. It's the darnedest thing the way you can forget whether you did such and such a thing."

Kit said nothing. Her little ambush had failed, if anything she had lost by it. Paul's last remark left her hanging between two uncertainties, the ultimate in mental torture. His face was absolutely bland, and everything he said took on the appearance of small talk. She looked up at him; his attention had wandered.

"At least I'll get a good press tomorrow. A number of interviews with magazines and papers were arranged. By and large, I've got a real success." He paused and smiled at her affectionately. "Aren't you proud of me?"

A shiver of revulsion destroyed the thin film of composure which lay over her anxiety.

"Please don't be charming for me," Kit said, and her voice was quiet with intensity. "I'm here because I have to, and if you order me to make an appearance, then I have to do it. But between the two of us, let's speak honestly!"

He answered her in kind. There wasn't the slightest change in his face, but his voice dropped slightly into a vicious monotone, as he answered.

"I prefer it this way."

Their glances met, and finally Kit looked down.

"Suppose we have dinner now, and talk," Paul said, rising from the table. There was a brittle overtone to his manner. "If this conversation bores you, we'll get to the point at once."

He signaled to the waiter, and paid the bill. In silence, they left and took a cab. Paul's face was placid and unsmiling.

Nothing was said until they were seated in the restaurant, and Paul had given the order without consulting her. When the waiter left, he looked up suddenly.

"I'll tell you exactly what I want from you," he said. "How well do you know Anna Mahler?"

"I don't know her at all," Kit answered at once; a trifle too quickly, she feared.

Paul's expression hadn't changed, but he was watching her carefully. She had the feeling that he was taking her pulse, and noting each change.

"But you've heard of her," he insisted.

"No, I've never heard of her," said Kit.

She wanted to moisten her lips, to look away to avert the steady stare, but she

couldn't risk the smallest gesture. Anna was too important, and no matter what became of Kit, she swore to herself nothing would touch Anna.

"Then I'll tell you who she is," Paul went on. His eyes had taken on a hard birdlike quality. Kit saw that he was doing more than just giving her information, he was dissecting her mind. "Anna Mahler is a Czech agent; an extremely clever operative, and one of the outside contacts for the bandit gangs who are ransacking the country."

"You mean the underground patriots," Kit managed to say.

"You mean the underground patriots," Paul corrected her in his turn with that cold flat voice. The soft lines of his face dissolved. "Such people as this Mahler are the scum, the garbage. Society has to be run by the better class of people. And the first step toward getting rid of the trouble-makers is to cut off their contacts, like the legs of an octopus, one by one, and then take care of the helpless trunk at your leisure."

NEVER for a moment did Kit lower her gaze or move a facial muscle, yet the sound of his voice made her feel as though she were turning to warm water inside. The cold brutality of his phrasing was more than just a literary simile to her. Kit had lived it with her own life and those of her friends.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked.

"I want you to get to know her, even casually, then point her out to me, that's all."

"And then?"

He looked at her curiously for a moment to see whether she might be joking.

"And then . . . she'll be taken care of, one way or another."

Kit remembered a story of a man in Geneva being killed with an icepick. She was told that it took less than a minute for him to be surrounded, silenced, stabbed, and then taken away.

The whole thing was done as the Nazis were laughing uproariously to cover up any convulsive protest and since it happened in a café it was passed off as a drunken party.

"What does this Anna Mahler look like?"

"We don't know. We have no description of her, nothing. None of us have ever seen her. All we know is that she's here in New York."

"Really? How long has she been operating?"

"Three or four years, I suppose. Why?"

Kit managed a smile. It felt like no more than a grimace.

"How does it happen, then, that you've

never been able to get anything more on her than her name? I thought you people were omniscient."

He smiled. "Well, we *do* have more now. We have *you* to get her for us!"

Kit lowered her eyes, as the gibe exploded in her face.

"But if I don't know her," she protested. "How can I meet her, or even ask to meet her, without exciting suspicion? I just can't go up and knock on her door. Nor can I ask to be taken there without giving a good reason. If I do anything against them, they'll be sure to discover it, and from then on they'll treat me as a Nazi, just as I'd deserve."

"Better not let that happen. We need you as a Czech, not a Nazi. If you can't be a Czech, you'd be more good to us dead. You have a fairly wide acquaintance among Czech circles, I know you do."

"They're the only people I know for the most part. I've never come across her."

"That's because you weren't looking. Use your friends, and use your brains. I'll give you twenty-four hours to get to her. That's the outside."

"Twenty-four hours?"

"You won't need any more than that," he replied quietly, "now that you have a stimulus."

"And is that all you want from me?"

She pulled her coat up about her. Paul watched her, but made no effort to help.

"That's all for the present." He raised his eyebrows in a question. "Are you chilly?"

"No." Kit was standing now and had her bag in her arm. "But since that's all you want to tell me, there's no reason for me to stay. I'd prefer to go."

"The dinner hasn't arrived yet, and I've ordered a very good one," he objected. He wasn't smiling now.

"And I prefer not to stay any longer than necessary."

His face grew red very slowly, and there was a trace of grossness about him. But almost immediately after, the silent fury abated, and he shrugged.

"Very well, then, good-night." She nodded coldly, and turned, but his voice turned her around again. "Wait, I'll drive you home."

"You'll *drive* me?" she asked slowly. "But I thought you said . . ."

Paul shook his head regretfully, and his friendly eyes apologized.

"That's right, I *did* tell you I didn't have the car." He spread his hands in an expansive dismissal. "Good-night. See you tomorrow!"

Kit stood there uncertainly for a moment, dangling on the hook of his remark.

"I said 'good-night,'" he repeated. "You may go now."

Her lips wouldn't obey her. She moved them, but there was no sound. Mechanically, she turned and left.

It was a night of fitful sleep. When she got home, she realized that the evening had ended anticlimactically. As soon as she had recovered from the shock of seeing Paul, the thing she desired most was some sign of her status.

If Paul had said "I didn't see you do the shooting," she actually would have felt a moment of relief. Now the thing to do was to wait. There would be no peace in her mind until she received a call from Paul saying that he had found a dead man in his library, and would she please come out.

ILLLOGICALLY enough, she was convinced that Paul would call her as soon as he got home. The possibility that he *had* seen her and had disposed of the body as soon as she left didn't enter into it at all. Nor did she consider the equal possibility that if Paul didn't know, then the very last thing he would do when he found it would be to call her.

She now realized the sense of the phrase, "Return to the scene of the crime."

The desire to go back and see what would take place was something so real, so physically a compulsion that she couldn't rest. She paced up and down in her room, watching the clock's hands turn slowly to eleven, to twelve, to one.

The telephone never rang at all. She played with the possibility of calling Paul just to see what he would say, and then rejected it when she realized that things would be hardest from now on. The first act had taken only a few minutes. The next phase would last for her lifetime.

Finally, she undressed and went to bed, sleeping only between nightmares.

In the morning, her anxiety took up where it had left off the night before. The first thing she did was to buy a paper when she went out to breakfast. Kit went through it column by column, item by item. There was no mention of the thing she wanted to see; no dead men had been found anywhere on Long Island.

She was sitting in a drug store, and her coffee was ice cold by the time she got around to it. She took two sips, and walked out leaving the paper behind her. The tormenting question was still unanswered—whom had she killed?

Just before she got on the bus, it suddenly dawned on her that perhaps that particular paper hadn't thought the matter worth mentioning. Maybe some other paper. . . .

She bought three others, and read them page by page as soon as she got into her office, entirely neglecting her work. There was nothing, not a line.

By sheer force of will, Kit managed to get through the morning, but the only tasks she completed were those that were thoroughly routine.

At eleven, she walked over to Madison Avenue for the early midday editions. Back at her office she went through them methodically, but with the same lack of success. It slowly began to dawn on Kit that the news was being withheld on purpose. The question was: whose purpose?

The sound of voices was muffled by her closed door, and the shuffle of footsteps on marble told her that the museum staff was going to lunch downstairs. She had no appetite at all, but the idea of being alone depressed her.

Suddenly, the high narrow walls of her office hemmed her in. Things were going on around her; things which affected her vitally, and these walls cut her off. The muted sibilant sounds seemed like accusing conspiring whispers.

Kit threw the newspapers to the floor, and tore the door open. The corridor was empty.

The rows of display cases stretched along the walls, and their glass doors reflected the light from the windows in so many frozen winks.

Kit stepped back into her office and collected herself. She knew that all this was rapidly demoralizing her to such an extent that when she would be suddenly confronted with her predicament in terms of action, a decision to be made, she would be useless.

And that is how it would come. All the uncertainty, the waiting, would crystallize and appear full formed as a casually spoken inference, a question, even a direct accusation. It would come when she least expected it. There would be no second chance.

The cafeteria was crowded, and noisy. Most of the people were visitors, the majority of them women. Scattered here and there like leavening were the subordinate members of the staff, and those superiors who were too busy to go elsewhere.

Kit strolled nervously between the tables, hoping and at the same time fearing to see Paul. Today he would certainly have something to say about her visit to his home, even if it were only a passing hint in the presence of others.

Kit nodded to a few people she knew, and paused for a moment by Dan Shay's table. He greeted her rather coolly, Kit thought, as a result of yesterday's rebuff when he had asked her to dinner. The very fact that Kit suspected him for his past connections made her stop, wondering if he might give her the sign she was waiting for.

"Hello," he said, his long angular face brightening a bit as she stood there with her tray. "Did you have a nice time last night?"

Kit lowered her tray to the table, and slid into the seat opposite.

"Last night?" Kit repeated slowly, "what about last night?"

Dan watched her constrained motions, and heard her brittle voice with a growing frown.

"Did I say something wrong again?" he asked. He waited for a moment and then shrugged. "We used the same words, all right, but it always seems to add up to the wrong language. I simply asked you if you enjoyed yourself with Paul last night?"

"I had a wonderful time," Kit replied mechanically. She kept her eyes down as she ate. "I enjoyed myself very much."

"And I am very glad to hear it," Dan said, mimicking her preciseness. "I had dinner by myself, went to a movie by myself, went home by myself, slept by myself, and dreamt only of me. These are the monotonous joys of bachelorhood."

Kit didn't reply. A parade of questions marched in circles through her mind. Who would be willing to help her? More than that, who was capable? Names, features, familiar voices appeared as possible choices, and along with these, the multitude of reasons against them.

"Well?" Dan was asking.

Kit became aware of his voice suddenly. "Well, what?" said Kit, helpless and bewildered.

"I asked you why you sat down here with me at this table? I'm really curious. And I know that if you told me the truth, I wouldn't find it flattering."

With that oddly whimsical expression on his face, Kit thought objectively, he was rather good-looking. All homely faces have at least one expression that makes them suddenly attractive, and the effect is like having the sun break, for a moment, through a layer of clouds.

"I sat down here," Kit said, shrugging, "because I wanted to talk to you."

"Really? What did you want to say?"

"Well," Kit floundered a bit. "Didn't I say it?"

"You've said absolutely nothing, and you looked at me the way you always look at me, as though you're trying to see the fellow who's standing right behind me. You didn't do that the first time we met."

"That was six years ago. Do you know how many times a person dies in six years?"

His brown eyes contracted slightly, as though for the first time something had been brought into sharp focus. His lips snapped shut decisively in a gesture that showed he had just changed his mind.

"Do you become a different person each time you're reborn?" he asked.

"Yes," Kit said very slowly. "Each time you change a little." Her voice was low, and

it was as though she were speaking to herself. "Until, finally, there's nothing soft left. Each time you die, you learn a lesson you always thought you knew. Perhaps that's the reason." Kit looked up at him. "I always look at you and try to see what's behind you that might surprise me."

Dan put his cigarette out in the tiny glass tray.

"There's nothing behind me," he said and got up. "I've been by myself for years and I ought to know. Watch me as I go out. I'm just one person."

She watched him go with stubborn resentment. It was impossible for her to trust anybody but those she knew were absolutely reliable. Whatever impulse she might feel to turn to Dan for help had to be rejected as another trap.

A few minutes later, Paul came in. He looked very fresh and young in a dark brown sport jacket and gray flannels with a tan sweater.

He paused at the door, looking about, obviously searching for someone. Kit's heart pounded as his glance caught hers and he smiled. Paul waved to her and came over, standing by her chair.

"Hello," he said, "did you get home all right?"

Here it is, she thought. This is it at last!

"Of course," she said almost in a sigh. She raised her eyes to his. "And you?"

"I went home as soon I finished dinner. You missed it, you should have been there." His smile didn't change at all.

"Really?" She hated him for the stupid chatiness. "What happened?"

"The oysters were perfect, and the soup, too."

"The oysters?" Kit asked, wondering what oysters could have to do with a dead man.

"Why, yes, I ordered oysters and onion soup. Didn't you hear me give the order?" He raised his eyebrows and laughed. "Is that the reason you ran away before dinner? I ordered everything you liked." He shrugged helplessly. "Well, I had to eat two portions of every course and so I slept like a bear stuffed up for the winter. But I needed the rest."

H E TURNED and walked away to another table where Dr. Lewes, the director, was sitting. Kit took a long breath and closed her eyes. She was exhausted. All her strength had been held for the moment when she would have to speak to Paul after he had found the body. Now the moment was over, and her reserves were gone. And still nothing had happened.

Kit went upstairs slowly, but she didn't stop at her office. Instead she went past the music wing and continued on to another

part of the building. Her mind was made up. Since there was no help forthcoming from the music shop, she had to be more direct and get in touch with the one person most vitally concerned.

She went to a telephone booth in the American section, one she hadn't ever used before. Kit was careful not to use the same booth twice in succession. The voice that answered this time was that of a tired old man.

"The Roxy Restaurant."

He said it with a mechanical singsong that was patterned after the standard telephone operator in the movies.

"Hello," Kit said. There was no prearranged conversation this time. She would have to keep talking until her voice was recognized "Do you still serve that delicious pastry?"

The answer was puzzled, but guarded.

"Yes, we still do. What kind do you want?"

"I mean the Viennese stuff. I don't remember the name of it, but it's a small and round . . ."

She went on, barely connecting one sentence with another, until the man interrupted her. She had been recognized.

"What is it?"

Kit glanced around. There was no one closer than a hundred feet, yet she whispered into the mouthpiece.

"I have to see her. It's very important!"

There was a long pause.

"When?"

"As soon as possible. Make the arrangements, and call me back."

"At your office?"

"Yes, I'll be there in a few minutes. Just tell me when and where. It'll be all right."

She hung up and went downstairs. The number of people in the corridors hadn't changed substantially. As far as Kit could tell, they might have been the same ones who came every day.

A small man stood staring absently at the collection of drums in front of her office, playing with a hearing aid that dangled from his lapel like a government decoration. He glanced at her with mild blue eyes, a little guiltily as though he had been on the point of testing the drums himself.

Kit made a mental note that the drums ought to be placed in a case. The temptation to take one and thump on it was too much for the children, and every Saturday the guards went frantic chasing the darting little culture lovers from drum to drum, always one resounding BOOM behind.

She closed the door to her office, and sat waiting by the telephone. It oughtn't to take long. The restaurant was in the same building as Anna's apartment. Anna's place had been selected for that very reason, and so she never had to speak on a telephone.

The restaurant owner was devoted, but he had no idea who Anna was except that she was somebody important. He asked no questions, did what was required and was a perfect blind. Kit knew that he had done fine work of the same kind in 1917. It would take just as long as it would take for him to leave his cash register and go upstairs for a few minutes.

Within a quarter of an hour the telephone rang. She picked it up at once.

"Hello?" She tried to keep the tension out of her voice.

"Hello." It was the man again. "What are you doing this evening?"

"Nothing much. Why?"

"Why don't you go to a movie? Did you see Ginger Rogers' new picture?"

"No, where is it playing?"

"At the Luxor Theater two blocks from here. It's rather a stuffy little place, but you can smoke in the last row. Make it at six."

"All right," Kit said, "I'll be there."

After a polite good-by he hung up, and Kit followed. The relief that spread over her was sedative. Her problem was in the hands of someone who could begin to cope with it.

Kit rested her head in the palms of her hands. It was as though she had just completed an arduous roundabout journey home, and finally could shift her pack to somebody else. It was clear for the first time how exhausted and frightened she had been, now that the worst was behind her. The worst was over, because Kit had no doubts at all that Anna would get her out of it.

WITH a deep new sense of freedom, Kit leaned back in her swivel chair, and swung it slowly around until she came face to face with the little gray man with the hearing aid she had seen outside. He was standing just inside the door to her office, an expression of resigned patience on his small features.

It took Kit a moment to catch her breath over the sudden panic that had exploded in her throat.

"Excuse me, Miss," he said, apologetically, "I wanted to talk to you about a trombone."

"How long have you been standing there?" Kit managed to ask.

There was a dull heavy sensation in her head as though it had been drained of blood.

The man's eyes widened a bit with perplexity.

"The valve trombone, I mean," he went on. "The one in the case facing the window."

He made an incomplete gesture that conveyed nothing.

"How long have you been standing

there?" Kit insisted, in the same voice she had used before.

She held the man's eyes with her own. Shrugging a bit, he turned a little dial on the case he wore at his lapel.

"What?" he asked. He shook his head again, and turned the dial. "What?" This time he said it louder, as though testing his hearing aid. He still wasn't satisfied, and gave out a series of *whats* each one louder than the preceding one until he was shouting. "I need a new battery, wait a minute."

A flirting gesture in his coat pocket brought out a small cell which he inserted like a cartridge. Then he turned the dial back.

"What did you say, now?" he asked Kit in a normal tone. "I didn't hear you before." His expression was cherubic.

"I asked how long you had been standing there," Kit repeated, feeling like a fool.

Her suspicions simmered slowly, refusing to be satisfied, waiting for the smallest stimulus to roar up again into terror.

"Only a minute or two," he told her, as though he were willing to humor her in these stupid questions. "I saw the trombone there, and then I decided to ask you the question, so I came in here. The door was open, so I walked right in."

"The door was closed," Kit said sharply. "I closed it myself!"

He shook his head, smiling patiently.

"Open," he insisted. "I saw it open as soon as you closed it." He looked at her for a moment, and then as though it might make her happier, added, "Only a little bit." His fingers demonstrated how little. "But it was open just the same. The trombone I mean has three valves on the side."

"But you saw that I was busy when you came in," Kit refused to leave the subject.

"You were just sitting there, that's all." Some impatience was in his tone. "Just looking at your hand, and when I came in you turned around."

"Is that what happened?"

"Of course!" he snapped. His impatience had grown to indignation. "What do you think I am? Look, I came here for some information."

"What is it?" Kit sighed.

The sudden reversal in rôles was dizzying, and she tried to check it. But the deaf man was satisfied.

"I'm standing there, thinking how nice a place this is where you can ask all the questions about all the things you see, and first thing you know, they're asking me the questions! What difference does it make where I stand or how long I stand?"

"The trombone," Kit said, dangling the concept in front of him. "The valve trombone."

He looked at her angrily, and was finally willing to compromise.

"It is harder to play than the slide kind?" Then, with a little belligerence, he added: "That's my question."

"Is that all you wanted to ask me?" Kit countered very quietly.

"What's the matter?" he snapped. "Isn't that hard enough? Do you have to stump the experts to be able to ask a question around here? Is it harder or isn't it harder to play the valve kind?"

"It doesn't make the slightest bit of difference," Kit told him. She turned away. "If you'll excuse me, I'm busy. . . ."

He backed away, shaking with fury at the slight.

"It's a fine thing! A customer asks a question, and they don't answer it! How do you like that! You don't have time to explain to a customer, but you have time to go to the movies, all right! Remember, I paid to get in here, I paid twenty-five cents. I didn't come here on a free day, because I figured you give more attention to the paying customers! It's a racket, that's what it is."

THE door closed on his tirade, and then Kit heard the frantic steps of the guard approaching to quiet him. She resumed the work she had left that morning with one eye on the lagging clock. The dogged tick-tock remained the same as ever, but it looked as though the clock's face was covered with some thick viscous fluid which retarded the hands.

Finally, it was five, and Kit decided to leave. It would take an hour to get to the place where she was to meet Anna. But when she had gathered her hat and coat, Dan met her at the door, smiling, his hand outstretched.

"I'm glad we can be friends," he said. "I didn't know what in the world was on your mind, but as long as it's been straightened out, I'm satisfied."

Kit looked at him impatiently and without the slightest idea of what all this meant. Then her gaze dropped to his hand, and out of sheer politeness, she took it.

"I suppose I was sort of silly," Dan went on happily. "But it never occurred to me what you were thinking."

The look of pleasure on his face was diluted slightly as he noticed her annoyed bewilderment. The clock, which had dragged along so tortuously before, seemed to be racing now.

You were never late with Anna; when she said six, it was six exactly. Anna was too busy to be kept waiting.

"Of course we can be friends," Kit said, all impatience. Dan was standing between her and the doorway, blocking the way out. There was the suggestion of something ominous in his sudden presence, and his expression of glad relief could be a perfect

camouflage. The steady mechanical click of passing time beat against her brittle façade of politeness. "We always were friends, Dan."

"But I mean something more," he said. He paused in embarrassment, and his angular face grew red. "I have so little time left, and there are so many things. . . ."

The slowness of his speech, the hesitancy of each selected word was measured against the clock.

She was wasting time.

"Suppose we talk about it later, Dan," Kit said hurriedly. "I'm in a rush now."

Her tone was a surprise to him and his face showed it.

Dan's eyes grew narrower.

"But I thought. . . ." he said unsteadily, and then stopped. He shook his head. "I've done it again, haven't I?" His smile was a downward curve to his lips and he laughed a little. "Forget it, Kit," he went on. "We just got our signals mixed."

There was a moment of uncomfortable silence; suspicion on one side, disappointment on the other, and they faced each other awkwardly as the small clock ticked off seconds.

Kit finally lowered her eyes, and pushed past him.

"I've got to hurry, Dan. Please let me go."

At the hint of restraint, he stepped back as though he had been slapped.

"Of course," he said hastily.

Kit walked down the corridor fighting against the temptation to look back and ask why Dan should have picked just this time to delay her.

It was difficult to doubt the sincerity of his protestations. But the timing of his visits coupled with his past associations cast a very different light on him. He was a puzzle to Kit with absolutely no hints as to the answer.

SHE hurried to the subway with a slow mounting excitement. The early relief she had felt on speaking to Anna was gone entirely.

Too many things had happened too suddenly since then, leaving disturbing aftertastes which added up to a sense of impending trouble.

A sense of urgency drove her on, in a feverish desire to get where she was going before some nameless and barely foreseen thing happened.

The subway train rocked unsteadily through the blackened tube, yet the click of wheels on the tracks seemed no faster than the steady beat of the clock on her desk. At each station, the mixing throngs took their time, and whenever a latecomer dashed from the turnstile to catch the closing door, Kit grew irritable at the momentary delay.

She left her seat two stations before her own, because she couldn't bear the last few minutes.

The clock above the change booth showed three minutes to six, and Kit knew that at best she'd be ten minutes late. Outside, there was no trolley in sight, nor was there a cab.

IT WAS an old section of the Bronx, each side of the street lined with grayish apartment houses six stories high, each one crenellated and decorated with granite wreaths and gargoyles.

A flight of pigeons circled overhead. The red light of a neon sign showed a delicatessen, and some children played a noisy sidewalk game in front of a small candy store. Men and women moved along the streets with evening newspapers under their arms, still unread on the subway ride home from business.

Kit had to walk the eight blocks through the quiet streets, and as she rounded the corner, she saw the modernistic canopy of the movie picked out in three different colored lights.

As she walked up to the ticket booth in front, she could hear the metallic voices from within.

A uniformed usher stood by the doorman who took her ticket. She hurried into the whispering darkness past their conversation.

"Fine thing to happen," one of them was saying. "You think if she was sick, she'd know enough to stay home."

"You're right," was the answer. "It has a bad effect on the other customers."

The voice died, and merged into a woman's laugh from the crackling sound track. Kit's eyes were blinded by the transition, only the lighted screen was visible.

Whether the theater was filled or not, she couldn't tell, but there were people in the last row, and Kit moved in.

No woman sat there, and Kit was relieved as she realized that she was early. When she came to a series of empty seats, she sat down in the center, relaxing in the relief she hadn't expected to find.

A man moved from a seat farther along the row, and sat down next to her. Before her annoyance could even come into being, he whispered something to her, chuckling at the same time.

Kit stared at the man who had just whispered to her, and she could see his face. It took a moment to realize all the implications. As she did so, a cold hand closed around her heart and wrenched it. Kit could scarcely breathe, and when she did, it came in a terrified racking sob.

"We got her, thanks," was all that had been said; and the smiling man was Paul.

PART THREE



ALL the people in the audience were laughing. The sound was thin and desolate. Kit heard the laughter as she looked at Paul, but it was simply an idiotic noise to her. Paul's words remained in her mind like the aftertones of a bell, and in each succeeding second, her despair plummeted to still another depth. There was

no bottom, it seemed.

The true perspective of her predicament didn't dawn on her all at once as an explosion, it was too grim to be bearable. It took time, as though she were seeing deep into the earth through an earthquake fissure that widened gradually beneath her feet.

She could see Paul's face very clearly in the half-light. He looked under twenty, very crisp and clean. The expression of amusement on his face had increased. He winked at her, patting her wrist. Involuntarily she withdrew from the contact. It was too full of suggestion.

"Nice work, Kit! Keep it up," he was saying. "I'll see you tomorrow about the next assignment."

"Next?"

Kit heard her voice, stupid and mechanical. It was no more than a gasp as she struggled for breath.

"Of course!" Paul said, gathering up his trench coat. "This is only the beginning. I've got you slated for big things. You're going places, my dear. I'll talk to you tomorrow. So long!"

He rose and walked away along the row of seats. Kit could hear his murmured "Excuse me!" when he passed a few people on the way.

The laughter about her rose to a meager crescendo, and died away as the voices of the actors boomed out again. The dialogue was gay and brittle in a swift exchange. Kit found herself smiling mechanically, but she shivered in an icy fright as she realized that this was the greatest defeat so far.

Whatever work she had contributed to her people was more than canceled by this. She twisted about in the seat as though trying to escape the present, to awaken herself from a nightmare, but the cold fact pinned her in place.

For a moment she felt penned in by this perfect, remorseless machine that was slowly contracting about her, until when she would no longer have room to move, the last little motion would stifle her.

Her perspective widened once again, and it brought a new, a still more stunning realization. This was her fault! They were

supermen, they only waited patiently until a mistake was made, and then pounced on it. Kit saw that the mistake was hers; she should never have called Anna. She remembered the little man with the hearing aid who had been loitering about her door all afternoon until she made her telephone call.

She remembered every word he said, and one sentence "You have time to go to the movies!" repeated itself endlessly like the insane chatter of a cracked record. How did he know she was talking about a movie? Kit hadn't mentioned the word. Only the voice over the wire had said it. Then the man wasn't deaf!

There is something repugnant and frightening about a person who affects a physical disability; the blind man who is peering at you from behind his black spectacles, the helpless cripple who can spring to his feet to run after you, the deaf man who hears every word you say. Kit's hands were cold and wet and she wrung them in her despair.

The hearing aid he had worn was simply a small sound amplifier which allowed him to hear the voice over the wire. It was a perfect piece of camouflage because it was so simple. But that was no excuse, Kit kept telling herself, this was her own fault. She had to insist on the fact because in her shock, the first impulse was to run and hide. But hide from what?

It was no longer a question of Paul or his brilliant efficiency. It was Kit who had made the mistake. That meant that it would do no good to run from Paul. She herself carried within her the seeds of her own destruction. She had made the mistake in her own panic, and therefore it was her own panic that she must escape.

SHE had been warned not to call Anna, and the warning had been very precise. *Under no conditions*, they had said. The reasons for this were sound. Since Kit was not a full-time operative any longer for the Czech underground, there was no way for her to know the day to day changes in relationships. If there was anything she wanted to know or to say, she was to go to only one person. He was her contact.

But she had given away to panic; and the one thing everybody feared, the one thing all the safeguards had been erected to prevent, had happened. Even though her head was whirling as though in a fever, Kit knew exactly what she had done, and also the penalty. Such things had occurred before. Kit knew the opinion people held of a bungler. She knew because she had shared it when the gruesome mistake had been made by somebody else.

She looked about her wondering what to do. The few people about her were staring at the screen, all smiling in sly anticipation. Then a woman on the screen said some-

thing, and the smile exploded into a laugh. They paid no attention to her. They didn't care. A tremendous feeling of loneliness and nostalgia pressed down on her. She fought back through it to the present and sought for a sign that would give her a directive.

Kit remembered suddenly the conversation between the usher and the doorman when she had come in. It made sense to her now, it told her exactly what had happened. She put on her coat and hurried out to the lobby. They were still standing there.

"Did you notice the lady who left before? The sick one?"

"Do you mean the one whose sons took her home?" asked the usher.

"Sons?"

"It's funny," the doorman remarked, "How did they know exactly what was going to happen?"

The usher was philosophic about it.

"I suppose when a thing happens like that all the time, you pretty well get to know."

The doorman shook his head. "Yeah, but they had it to a minute," he said. "That's close, pal!"

"What happened?" Kit broke in impatiently. "What sons?"

"Well. . . ." The usher stopped to take a ticket and hold the door for a customer. "About ten minutes ago, this old dame comes in. . . ."

"She didn't look sick at all," said the doorman. He was tall and thin. The observations were made in the gloomy speculative tone. "It's hard to tell about heart trouble, I guess."

"You can *never* tell!" the usher agreed. His blond head came to the doorman's epaulettes. "I had an uncle, a cop in Albany, big and healthy as a horse! Then one fine day. . . ."

"But about the woman," Kit insisted.

The usher left his uncle with some regrets.

"Well, as I said, she came in here about ten—fifteen minutes ago, and right after her, two guys. . . ."

"There was three," the doorman insisted. "The two big guys, and the one in the trench coat."

"The guy in the trench coat was by himself. You saw him walk out just now by himself, didn't you?"

"Yeah, but. . . ." The doorman was puzzled. "Why should he do that? He just came in."

The usher rolled his eyes and tapped his forehead impatiently.

"Why do you bother me with *why*? All the time *why* this, *why* that! How should I know why a guy comes, sits down, and then goes out?" His face was getting red. "Why? I'll tell you why! The guy can't stand the crummy picture, that's why! The lady

wants information. Are you going to let me tell her, or are you going to horn in all the time?"

"Then tell her, you dope," said the doorman. "And don't be talking about your uncle, the Albany cop."

"For your information, my uncle dropped dead on State Street!"

He said each word precisely as though it were a devastating insult.

The doorman shrugged it off.

"I only hope he had insurance!" he said, and walked away.

The usher glared after him, and turned finally to Kit. He stared at her belligerently as though he were daring her to say something.

"Look, lady." He was talking to an idiot and everything had to be very simple. "She comes in, like I said. Right? Then come the two guys. Got it? They say to me where is their old lady she shouldn't be out of bed. I say I don't know. Okay, they say, they'll find her themselves."

"Go on," said Kit.

THE usher took a deep breath, glanced malevolently at the doorman across the lobby and went on in the same bitter tone.

"A few minutes later, they come out with the old dame between them. She's sick. She can hardly stand. Like this." He hunched over, hugging his stomach, and made a face of terrible agony, and Kit's panic flared again. "The guys are saying if I told you once I told you a million times to stay in bed and don't look for trouble. Then they went out that door, got into a car, and that's the end."

"Which way did they go?" Kit asked, fighting for a level voice.

He shrugged with an elaborate show of patience.

"I don't know. They went north on University Avenue. If they kept going that way, they'll land at the North Pole. And if they keep going after that, they'll be back here, but the old dame'll be dead!"

She felt a hot wave of disgust at his stupid levity, and it must have reached her eyes because the usher's expression suddenly changed to one of uncertainty.

"What did these men look like?" she asked.

"Look like?" some of his bravado was gone, but he draped himself in the remaining shreds. "Why, how should I know?"

"Tell me," she insisted.

He wet his lips nervously, and glanced about him for support, but the doorman was staring elsewhere.

"They were pretty big, sort of heavy-set. They looked like cops off-duty, I guess."

Kit thought of Anna in their hands, and a fit of cold trembling flicked over her back lightly on caterpillar's legs. She turned

away from him without a word. When she was alone now, the brittleness of her self-control was apparent. A million fissures appeared in it, and she had gone no more than a few steps when it was completely disintegrated.

The streets were deserted now, but all the windows were lit up lending an air of life. Kit could see figures moving about in the various apartments.

Four street cars, one right behind the other, clanged along, making up for their lack of schedule with a show of impatience. Kit reflected with some bitterness that if she had been able to catch one when she needed it, then nothing would have happened.

But that self-deception didn't work at all. She knew that she had made the deadliest mistake in calling Anna. All of the trolleys in the world couldn't have saved her, because Paul's people still would have been able to identify her at some other time, even if Kit had been successful in warning her. No, the fault was all hers, and there were no mitigating circumstances.

Kit looked behind her, but could see no one who looked as though he might be following her. Down the street, a man with paper bags in his arms stood in front of a bakery, staring into the window. Across the street, a woman read the headlines on a newspaper stand. But this time Kit resolved to take no chances. She had to laugh at her own stupid caution with Dan, while she had committed the greatest indiscretion of all.

Kit walked mechanically back to the subway, got on the first uptown train that came along, and rode out to the last stop. The crowds had thinned out considerably, and only about ten or fifteen people got off with her.

Out here, the train had become an elevated. As Kit stood on the station platform some twenty feet above the ground, the lights of the park on one side, and in the houses on the other stood out like yellow motes in the bluish spring dusk. It was a lovely evening, and suddenly quite warm. The background of common city noises was thickened by the steady murmur of radios from opened windows.

It had a sibilant quality, like surreptitious whispering. It heightened her tension, and made the threat to her seem diffuse. The attack could come from any place. Kit waited nervously until the few people who had left the train with her went away from the station.

She suddenly realized that she was acting on the basis of reflex actions, the result of long training. From one minute to the next, she didn't know what she was going to do, but deep underneath her emotional turmoil, an animal experience guided her actions.

FOR a few minutes she was absolutely alone on the long, exposed platform. Then one by one, others came along. Kit recognized none of the faces. By the time the train was ready to leave, some ten passengers were on board, but Kit examined them suspiciously since it was entirely possible that she *had* been followed on the way up, and in the meantime had been handed over to somebody else for the trip down.

It was possible but not too probable because no one knew beforehand that she'd come up here, and so there would be no one up here prepared to meet her.

The train was made up of a dozen cars, and Kit found herself entering the last one, sitting near the center door. A conductor walked through, picking up newspapers. Other passengers got on, walking forward through the aisles.

An extremely fat woman, however, got on and sat down directly opposite Kit, and the woman shook her head dolefully, as her eyes slowly took on a questioning cast.

"What's the matter, dearie?" she asked. "You feel sick?"

Kit looked up sharply at the sound of her voice.

"I feel very well," she said, without expression. "Why?"

The woman shook her head in sympathy.

"You don't look good to me. Your head hurt?"

The woman gathered herself together,

waddled across the aisle, and sat down next to Kit, squeezing her against the edge of the seat. She laid a fat hand on Kit's wrist, and Kit bore the contact, hypersensitive to any increase in pressure.

She sat there passively, ready to take flight at the first sign of animosity. If she were as asthmatic as she seemed, Kit thought, it ought not to be hard to lose her.

A sudden rumble set all the cars into vibration as the power was turned on. It throbbed beneath the seats. Kit edged a little closer to the door.

"Your pulse is racing like a firehorse," said the woman. "You sure are sick!"

"I'm very well, I tell you!" Kit insisted.

The conductor walked back through the train again, and took up a position between the last two cars. He stepped up on a little platform and leaned far out for a signal. The tempo of the vibration was stepped up sharply, and after a minute or two, the conductor pulled the cord. The doors began to close very slowly.

Once again, Kit's reflexes took charge. Without being aware of it, she freed herself from the woman just as the doors were about to close, and then stepped suddenly off the train onto the station.

Nobody followed her off, and she was alone once more as the train left. The fat woman stared at Kit through the window, but there was no real change in her expression.

[Turn page]

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Getting off a train like that was standard technique to shake a follower, and it came as naturally to Kit as a simple gesture with her arm to ward off a blow.

Once more she tried to get her nerves under control. She sat down on a bench, smoked a cigarette, and felt her hysteria subside. She was satisfied that she wasn't being followed.

She took the next train all the way downtown to Fourteenth Street and changed for a local. The evening rush had just passed its peak, and while the subway platforms were crowded, they had lost the milling note of pushing crowds. Kit walked a few blocks, until she came to a radio and phonograph shop.

It was a neatly-kept little place. The posters issued by the record companies were cheerful. Bright colored record albums lined up the shelves which ran from the floor up to the ceiling. In the back of the store were small, sound-proof cubicles where a customer might listen to any of the records that seemed promising.

The woman behind the counter greeted Kit as she stepped into the store, and smiled.

"May I help you?" she asked. Her eyes were very discreet.

"Good evening," Kit said. "Do you have Nursery Rhymes for children?"

"Oh, yes," said the clerk. "We have quite a collection." She picked up several albums and handed them to Kit. "You can take them into the last booth and select those which you like."

The booths had no windows, but they were air conditioned. In them, there were two small armchairs side by side with a smoking stand and a record player between them. Kit lit a cigarette, and selected some records at random, then stacked them up on the changer.

There was a moment of silence after the record began to spin, then a pleasant masculine voice spoke.

"And now children, come a little closer, and I'll sing you your favorite songs." A piano faded in, and the voice began to sing "Baa Baa, Black Sheep."

SUDDENLY, the far wall of the cubicle moved and swung open on hinges. It was a door, and a tall, grave-looking man in a shiny black suit stood there. He was smoking a well-chewed cigar. He smiled at Kit and spoke to her in her own language. "Hello!" He held out his hands. "It's a surprise to see you!"

"Hello, Conrad," Kit said. It was impossible to respond to his affability until she had told him. "Something terrible has happened. Anna Mahler was taken by Nazi agents."

The man's round face went absolutely

white. His eyes seemed glazed, as though he had been struck. He took the seat next to Kit, and clutched her arm.

"My God!" he said, "how did that happen?"

"It was my fault," said Kit. It was necessary to convey the fact first and then fill in the details. If they turned out to be extenuating circumstances, all well and good; if not, then there was no help for it. "I led them to her without realizing it."

He looked at her as though she were crazy.

"What the devil are you talking about?"

"Did you ever hear of a man called Paul Campbell?"

He shrugged. "I saw his name in the papers. He's somebody in the art world, isn't he?"

"Yes, and a little more than that. He works for the Gestapo."

Conrad's eyes hardened.

"And still another one?" he asked with wry humor. "You know, there are more Nazi agents in this country right now than there were in France in 1940? They have everybody who was in France and then some. That's not even counting the domestic variety. Go ahead, tell me what happened."

As she did, his mouth grew very straight and small. Anger and then mistrust grew in his eyes, until when she was through talking, he sat in frigid silence. A woman's voice, high and unbearably sweet, was singing, "Little Boy Blue."

"In that case," Conrad said finally, "what are you doing here? Do you want us to get picked off?"

"I wasn't followed here," Kit protested. "I know that."

The lines in his face deepened. Then as though he could no longer contain himself, he plunged a fist into his palm.

"How could you be so stupid! Don't you realize our position here today? He leaned forward restlessly. "We have absolutely no standing diplomatically. The Nazis have done a better job in this country than almost any place else. Why, I could walk through the streets of Washington and point out a hundred German agents, all extremely well placed, socially and politically. Yet there's nothing at all we can do. It's imperative that we exercise the utmost caution and tact. Then you have to go and shoot a man! Do you know who he was?"

She shivered and shook her head.

"No, that's the worst part!"

Kit sat in helpless silence as he went on. "This isn't Europe! Gunplay is still not on the order of the day!"

"What should I have done?" she asked.

"You should have left New York at once. Leave the country if necessary. We could have managed something."

"Well, do something now."

He sat back in his chair, and his voice was cold.

"No," he said. "It's too late. You're marked. More than that, you showed a complete lack of discipline in calling Anna. Complete and unpardonable. You're through with us!"

Kit's throat felt thick with fears. She had known Conrad Kreutzer almost all her life. When she was a child, he had been Uncle Conrad, a noisy gay man with a booming voice and the smell of cigars always about him.

There had always been something elegant about Uncle Conrad, the handsome suits, gleaming starched linen, and the shining black hair. No matter how much Uncle Conrad laughed, or how many tricks he played, he was always perfection. Kit remembered his huge strong hands, and the shining manicured nails.

"These are engineer's hands," he used to say. "They build bridges, roads and tunnels for little girls like you."

And for a long time, Kit had a vision of Uncle Conrad with a big cigar in his mouth, striding along, all dressed up, going through the country side with a flushed face and a happy smile, bending steel bars into the shape of bridges, tossing them carelessly across rivers and streams; then coming to a huge mountain where, without a moment's hesitation, he plowed a tunnel and came out the other side, all the time followed by a laughing group of little girls in beautiful Sunday dresses.

WHEN Kit was older, she had the same magically childish regard for him. He never seemed to change. She used to meet him for lunch when she was still at the university, she would find him waiting, impeccably dressed in a dark suit, gloves, stick and cigar in his right hand like a bouquet of flowers.

Uncle Conrad never took any interest in politics. In the beginning he pooch-pooched Hitler because he had been assured by some of his most influential German colleagues that Hitler was just talking for effect, that's all he was being paid for.

As late as 1938, Conrad gave Kit's father his solemn promise that it would all blow over. Munich stunned him. It just couldn't be! It didn't make sense. Why, everybody had told him . . . !

When the Nazis marched into Prague on a winter morning, Conrad Kreutzer discovered that two of his assistants had been arrested for having harbored a refugee German engineer. Conrad Kreutzer put on his black Homburg, his fur-lined, fur-colored coat, took his cane, marched down to Gestapo headquarters, and with incredible naivete said:

"I protest!"

"What do you protest?"

"I protest the unwarranted arrest of my colleagues. What they did was entirely legal. Who do you think you are?"

The official was an extremely busy and harassed man.

"I'm the man who ordered their arrest," he said. "Just as I'm the man who's ordering yours. Take him away!"

The next time Kit saw Conrad Kreutzer, she hardly recognized the man. He was sitting with a dozen other escaped prisoners in the rear of a farmer's barn being given instructions on how to live on the land without coming into contact with the occupiers. He was listening very attentively to a twenty-one year old student.

As Kit watched him, she saw that he would never again look quite so spruce, no matter what he wore, because the gloss had been removed. For the first time, he looked his age.

Six months after that, they passed each other on a street in Vienna, neither one admitting the slightest recognition of the other. This time Kreutzer was wearing a battered felt hat and a worn gray suit. A bedraggled cigar was clenched in his teeth. She could tell that he had become a very busy man.

She met her Uncle Conrad again in a Paris suburb just before the war. He wore a black cap and a muffler around his neck. He rarely smiled now, and his eyes seemed to have become drier and harder. He looked desiccated, refined to bone, muscle and nerve.

The same hands that had so joyfully built bridges and dug tunnels were now employed in tearing them down. The same knowledge of stresses and strains that could calculate the position and size of a supporting strut also was able to locate the precise position where the minimum amount of dynamite would have the maximum effect.

"You look tired," she told him.

"Perhaps," he said. "But in another way, I'm completely happy. I feel, finally, as though I'm alive. If I ever worked for my country before in building things for her, I'm working doubly hard to keep these things from the Nazis. By the time we get through, we won't leave them a stick of wood, a blade of grass. It's no loss to us, we can always build again." His voice grew very tight. "We'll build twice as much, twice as high, twice as deep, and a million times as strong!"

Now this man she loved, this man who loved her, was sitting a few inches away from her, and saying for the entire Czech underground:

"You're through with us!"

"But what am I to do?" Kit asked.

"You're to leave us alone. You're never

to get in touch with any of us. I was your contact. That's over. You know there's a picnic next week. We expect about two thousand people: Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Serbs for an Anti-Nazi rally. You are not to appear at that, or at any other function connected with any anti-Nazi movement. You're blacklisted!"

"Conrad!"

For a moment, his hardness wavered.

"Kit . . . Kit, my dearest child . . . there's no help for it. You're under deep suspicion." Then his voice resumed its dispassionate tone. "We have every right to suspect you. This disintegration we have seen too many times before."

"Disintegration?" Kit accented the word indignantly.

HE LOOKED at her with clouded eyes, but his voice was firm.

"Yes, Kit, that's the word I used. It's not too harsh. Sometimes our people get tired and make mistakes. But that's not mere chance, you know. The human mind works in a very devious way. It sometimes does the thing it most fears because deep down it really wants to."

Kit felt her face getting hot.

"You don't think that I . . .!" she protested.

"I have no way of knowing," Conrad answered in a tight forced voice. "And I can take no chances! We are forced to play it this way because we can take no chances with weak elements."

"But Conrad, you can't really suspect me! You know me too well. I acted stupidly, I admit, but no more than that."

"No more?" Kreutzer's voice was politely enquiring. "No more than the loss of Anna Mahler? Do you think stupidity is any excuse? The fact that you called her shows a deplorable lack of inner discipline. In whatever we do, we have to realize that we are working with millions of others."

Listening to him, and watching his tortured strong face, Kit saw that she no longer knew Conrad Kreutzer. He had developed into another personality entirely. All this time, she realized she had still been thinking of him as the easy going, dapper industrialist; a sophisticated, successful engineer who moved naturally in the upper circles of industrial control, now temporarily in unusual circumstances.

She had thought of him in the same terms as she had when she had been a child. This was an altogether different man. This new hardness, this cold self-discipline, this selfless concern for the fate of his country was not merely another side of his character; it was his character now.

They were speaking to each other in the present circumstances, but reacting with the emotions of their old characters. This,

Kit saw, was a concession on Conrad's part. A sense of deep respect and fear came over her. What Conrad was saying, she deserved. No matter how he might state the case now, he would be implacable in action, far more implacable than Paul ever could be.

" . . . There are many times," he was saying "when each of us individually may be able to do something to save our own necks, but it will always, directly or indirectly, be at the cost of many others. And that's inexcusable." He broke off with a sudden gesture. "Why should I go through this with you? You know it all, you've even explained it to others."

His voice stopped for a moment. A new record plopped onto the turntable in a hissing silence, and then a merry trio began to sing in jazz style "Three Blind Mice." The music tumbled through the little room, filling it with a falsetto joyousness.

Kit buried her face in her hands. This was no time to break down. Her nerves were in shreds, but it would only damage her case to go to pieces. Tears of repentance would never move Conrad now. He would sympathize only with tears of pain endured in action.

When she raised her head, her eyes were dry, and the hard lump in her throat was dissolving.

"Listen to me," she said, and she was whispering. "Conrad, please . . ."

He watched her heavily, not moving a muscle.

"There's no appeal," he said at last. He shook his head. "You knew better, and yet you did it. You're through, and that's all!" He got up with unexpected lightness and left.

He didn't look back. Kit could see that it was an effort from the awkward movements he made to avoid the necessity. The heavy door closed behind him, but the sound was absorbed in the music.

The chattering song insinuated itself in her mind. She couldn't think connectedly because a phrase would fit the rhythm of the tune, get caught in the vortex, and repeat itself endlessly.

Now, finally she had cut the last thread that tied her to the underground, and the work in the underground was the only thing that tied her to her homeland, her former life. No matter how varied a person's existence, there is a continuity, if only in memory, that gives it a meaning. Without it a person lives only in patches.

There can be no nostalgia for a happy time past because there is no chance of it ever recurring. There can be no sanctuary in the memory of good jobs well done, or anticipation of the future.

This was to be Kit's life, and the bleak sentence had been passed. It meant an

intellectual exile far more bitter than any geographic isolation. She was completely crushed, beyond tears, beyond hope.

She suddenly remembered Paul's threat. "If you can't be a Czech, you'd be more use to us dead!" Kit realized exactly what would happen to her if Paul ever found that she had been blacklisted by her own people.

With a sudden gesture she snapped off the phonograph. The silence was abrupt and complete in the soundproof room. The noise made when she flicked out her cigarette seemed flat, and then she heard the sound of her breath as she exhaled smoke. The scent of the cigar remained with the memory of Conrad's presence. The room was too small for her.

Kit rose and left. The girl at the counter was waiting for her with a smile which faded almost immediately, then she avoided Kit's gaze.

"This is discipline," Kit thought.

She had known this girl for well over three years, but something in Kit's expression told the girl that now there was to be a new relationship. Although she was probably dying of curiosity, no questions were asked. She would wait until she was told.

"Discipline," Kit thought. "It's exactly what I would do in her place. It's what I've done before."

Kit walked out without a word. The streets now were dark and deserted. Huge loft buildings stood like cliff walls along a narrow pass. From somewhere, she heard the nervous bark of a horn, and then there was quiet.

Thousands of people walked this street during the day, living the greater part of their lives here, but they left no imprint that would outlast dusk. They were gone, and the street was as dead as though it had been deserted a thousand years ago.

Kit returned to the museum to finish her work, she told herself. Actually, there was no place else to go. The solitude of her own room was unbearable now. She couldn't think clearly. She wouldn't begin to think for a day or so when the enormity of her position would add up to reality.

She was like a man who has a limb amputated. It takes a while for him to realize what it means, even after he knows the fact. That was her case now; a whole section of her life, a host of memories and friends, had been lopped off.

The museum was the best place. Work was an anodyne. The huge building seemed almost empty except for an occasional guard. The long corridors were dimly lit by a few lamps throwing everything out of perspective. The suits of armor looked ten times larger, and their rigid positions became furtive men trying to shrink out of sight by fading into the shadows. Her

heels clicked on the marble floor like the clattering of bones, and the small sound was nothing in the domed gloomy vastness.

An arm upraised to crush her skull was a horse's leg on an equestrian statue. Kit stopped for a moment and gazed up at the figure of the charging knight. The huge helm with visor down gleamed darkly, and the narrow eyeslits stared fixedly into the centuries back. The battle lance, still couched for the long lost battle, extended over her head like a pointing arm. Kit knew the figure very well.

The inscription on the pedestal said "Reproduction of battle armor of King John of Bohemia, last of his line. Died at Crecy. There is a legend which says that his house crest and motto were adopted by the victor, Edward the Black Prince of Wales." And in accordance with that legend, there were three ostrich feathers emblazoned on the Czech king's shield above the words ICH DIEN.

Anger and desperation were imprisoned in the mounted figure, the same which existed now, half a millenium later. But it was no longer a fight of king against king, or noble against noble. Now it was a war between peoples; the descendants of the serfs and peasants who had watched their feudal lords ride off to fight their private vendettas.

The clank of steel, the groan of leather and throb of hoofbeats had given away to the pound of 155 mm. guns, the screaming whine of Diesel engined tanks, the 20-cylinder whine of a diving plane, and the dead stealthy silence on the streets of an occupied city seething with sabotage.

This was the war today with no fronts that were not rears, a war fought on every street and valley pass, in every room, every thought and every motion. This was the war out of which Kit had just been mustered with a dishonorable discharge. And there is no discharge in the war which is not a sentence of death.

KIT walked on to her office and snapped on the light. It was too high overhead to do any more than illuminate the ceiling. The desk lamp was better. She worked a few minutes, and in her hypersensitivity found the room too close. She opened the door to the exhibit and the window, but the warm air was still. There was another door beside her desk which opened on a back staircase. A slow draft from somewhere moved the air sluggishly, and that was all.

She went back to her work, but the soft sound of leisurely footsteps walked into her consciousness. It was a man, and he was coming towards her room. Kit leaned back in her swivel chair, glad for the spring's squeal. She didn't want to be surprised, and

she didn't want to surprise anyone else.

The footsteps came still closer, and then Dan Shay was in the doorway. He had a tapcoat over his arm, a soft felt hat in his hand.

"I saw you come in," he said, looking at her steadily. "And I decided I'd drop in on my way out."

"That was nice."

"Yes!" He mimicked her politeness with the grave inflection of his voice. "I wanted to talk to you about what I said earlier this evening . . . when you were on your way out just before dinner."

He stood awkwardly in the doorway, staring at the ribbon of his hat and fingering the bow.

"Perhaps I misunderstood Paul, that's all." Dan shoved his hat behind him with a sudden gesture, and then met her eyes. His face was dark in the shadowed light. "I hate the idea of pushing in on you," he said with terrible vehemence. "I don't want to do it, but I just can't understand your attitude, that's all. We used to be friends, and now . . ."

His voice trailed off, and there was a tight moment of silence.

"You said that perhaps you had misunderstood Paul."

"Well, obviously I did. I suppose I was looking for something that just wasn't there."

"But what did Paul say?" Kit insisted.

The tone of suppressed urgency caught and puzzled him, but he hesitated.

"I don't know exactly. It might sound silly since I didn't get it straight."

"What did you think he said?"

"Well, . . ." He was playing with his hat again. "He told me that you were upset by my attitude towards you, you were hurt by it. You weren't sure what was on my mind, but that if I were to come down and see you right then and there, we could straighten out everything."

"Paul said that?"

"Yes." He frowned. "You sound as though it were something you'd never heard before."

Kit rose and walked a step towards him.

"Tell me," she said. "When did he say this?"

"Just before I came down. It must have been around five. Why?"

She began to laugh helplessly, but it was more of a sob. Kit went back to her chair, almost falling into it, and hid her face in her hands, sobbing and laughing.

"I'm so stupid!" she sighed, and went off into racking sobs that shook her like a fit of coughing.

Dan stood immobile with helpless alarm. He made short, random gestures, but finished none of them.

"Kit!" he said. "Kit, listen to me!"

Finally, she controlled herself, and motioned for him to sit down. Then she watched his bewilderment in silence.

"Dan, what would you think if someone said he suspected you of being a Nazi?"

Dan's face puckered incredulously.

"Me? Someone suspected me?"

Kit nodded.

"But why? I'm an American," he said as though that explained everything. "How could I be a Nazi?"

"There are Americans who are Nazis," she pointed out.

He dismissed them impatiently.

"Of course there are. Crackpots. I met some myself. But . . ."

"But what?"

"But you said *me*! Isn't that too stupid?"

She nodded slowly. "I said that myself."

"But who'd you say it to? Who thought I was a Nazi?"

"I did," Kit replied drily.

HE SAT opposite her with his mouth open. He tried to say something but couldn't.

"Because of Mikkelson," Kit explained.

"You worked so closely with him in Copenhagen and admired him. You said so yourself."

"Well, I do! I think he's a fine chemist. But what has one thing got to do with another?"

"But it does. Mikkelson's being a Nazi, one of the most important in Denmark, is much more important than his being a chemist."

Dan shook his head.

"He may be a more talented traitor than he is a chemist, but he's still a good chemist," he insisted stubbornly, and then he grinned. "That makes him a whale of a Nazi, doesn't it?"

His entire expression was lighter now.

"Is that what Paul meant before?" he asked.

"No!" Kit said. "Paul didn't mean anything like that. I didn't even speak to Paul about anything like that. Paul had his own little plans."

"I thought you liked him," Dan said slowly. "As a matter of fact, I thought you were very fond of him."

"What makes you think I'm not?" Kit asked.

He looked up in surprise.

"Your tone of voice."

"What did you think was the reason you found me being a nursemaid instead of doing what I'm trained to do?" she asked quietly.

His eyes were sharp.

"At first I thought it rather odd, but then after I left you, it dawned on me that you might be hiding from something. I never asked you any questions because if it were

important for me to know you would have told me."

Kit glanced at him suddenly. This, too, was discipline, she thought. The strength not to ask questions out of idle curiosity when the answers might be more important than appeared superficially.

"Getting back to Paul," Kit said. "Do you know anything about his politics?"

"His politics?" Dan shrugged. "He's English, and I can't tell one English party from another."

"Paul's a Nazi, Dan," Kit said simply. "He's more than a mere sympathizer. He's an active worker for the Gestapo."

Dan's eyes had an odd expression. Kit saw shock, incredulity, and mistrust.

"The way I was supposed to be?" he asked.

"No," Kit said. "Not that way. This is the way he *says* he is."

"He told you?"

Kit nodded. He looked away for a moment, and then turned back.

"But isn't that odd. To *tell* you."

"Well, it wasn't gratuitous information. He knows something about me and he wanted to use it so that I would have to do something for him. But in the process he was forced to expose himself."

Dan listened and said nothing. Kit admired his cannyness. He obviously didn't believe all she had said, but on the other hand, his affection for her tended to convince him. So that he wouldn't commit himself either way, he kept quiet and waited for something else to be said to resolve his doubts.

It was an awkward moment. For Kit to say much more would reveal everything to him. And to do that before she had his sympathy and assistance would be the height of stupidity.

The telephone rang sharply in the balancing silence. Kit answered it.

"Hello."

"This is Paul. I'm up in my office and I saw the light down there. I wanted to know if it were you or the cleaning lady."

"Why?" she asked.

He laughed. "Then I won't have to make a special trip in tomorrow to talk to you. We can settle it tonight. It's silly to let your talents go to waste. I'll be down in a minute."

His receiver clicked in her ear, and she felt a little sick. She turned to Dan.

"You don't believe me, do you?"

"It sounds fantastic. You must admit that."

"I don't know. It would have at one time, but these things have come to seem almost a matter of course."

"Oh, I've heard of such things," he admitted slowly. "But Paul? It's laying it on a bit thick."

"Then I'll convince you," Kit replied. "Paul just called me, and he's on his way down here. I want you to stand behind that door in the stairwell so you can listen. I can promise you that you'll be convinced."

DAN glanced at the doorway, his displeasure very marked on his face. He had the usual inhibitions about eavesdropping, and he seemed to resent the position.

"Well, if it comes to that . . . !"

"Dan, listen to me," she said swiftly.

"You said before you wanted to be friends with me. I need a friend now more than I need anything in the world. I'm completely alone, and helpless. I don't know where to turn. Please do it for me."

He stood up, and his long face was extremely grave and mature.

"Okay, Kit."

He touched her arm in reassurance, and stepped outside, closing the door after him without a sound.

Kit went back to her desk and arranged her papers to look busy. In the distance, she could hear Paul's quick footsteps, and he was whistling "Finlandia."

In a few minutes, he marched into the room without pausing, and tossed his trench coat down on the window sill.

"What a night!" he said. He leaned out of the window and stared up at the sky. "Beautiful! You know it's odd, but I don't know of any painter who's succeeded in catching the beauty of the night sky. The third dimension *has* to be there, and the painter has no reference points to trick the eye as he can do in a landscape by making the trees which are supposed to be far away so much smaller than those close by. It's a nasty problem," he said chattily, and then he turned to her. "Well, Kit, suppose we get down to business."

"Suppose we do," said Kit.

She leaned against the edge of her desk so that the door was between them.

"You seem very docile this evening," he remarked. "Have you got something up your sleeve?"

"You were about to say . . ." Kit ignored the gambit.

"I was about to say that your next assignment is for the coming weekend. Some of the Slavic national groups are having a joint picnic at Staten Island. Most of the money being collected is going abroad. You and I are going to see that it doesn't happen."

"The picnic?"

Conrad's words went through her mind, and involuntarily she repeated them.

"You know about it, of course?"

His quick glance reflected her tone.

"I heard something about it."

"You probably made arrangements to go then."

"No," Kit was evasive. "As a matter of fact, I already told some people that I couldn't go because I planned to be out of town. It might look odd if I turned up."

"Might it?" he asked. "Well, it's quite simple. Tomorrow, you'll call up these people and say you've changed your plans. You'll be there."

"But I can't!" she protested.

"Why not?"

"I can't tell you!"

"Listen to me, my child. The last time we discussed this, I threatened you with a prison sentence as a Nazi spy. Apparently it hasn't convinced you. Very well, let's give the screw one more turn. Last night you shot and killed a man. I saw you do it."

"You walked so close to me, we might have been dancing, and when you fired the shot, I was right behind you!" He laughed. "The temptation to tap you on the shoulders and say 'boo!' was almost too great to resist, but I managed to keep myself in hand or you'd have dropped dead with fright!"

"No!" The terror she would have felt had it happened, leaped at her now and held her, clawing like a tiger. "No!"

"I'm afraid it's 'yes.' You then dragged the body out of my house and hid it very cleverly."

"I hid it?" he asked vacantly. "Who was he?"

He glanced at her guardedly.

"I don't know who he was, or where he is so I'm not an accomplice in a conspiracy to silence. You've got to produce the body to get a conviction, but I'm warning you, I'm liable to stumble on it at any moment. And I wouldn't be the least bit surprised if it were to turn up sometime when you're being particularly stupid!"

Kit glanced at the silent door. For the moment, she had forgotten about Dan. Along with exposing Paul, he was exposing her. She had acted as though Dan were in her fullest confidence.

Here was something Kit hadn't told him. His suspicions of her would be revived. The whole thing was going very badly for her.

PAUL watched her silently for a moment, and then went on.

"Now, as I was saying, the money to be collected at the picnic will be brought back to New York in one of their automobiles. You are to ride back in that car."

"But how?"

Kit's voice kept breaking away from her.

"You'll find a way. You're to ride in the car and on the way back you'll pass a gas station called Shorty's. You are to have the car stopped on some pretext or other. Don't ask me. I'll leave that to you. Have the car pulled into the station and, take my advice, keep clear of it. There's going to be an accident."

"What?"

He shrugged. "How do I know? But whatever it is, it'll do the trick."

"Nazis prefer it bloody."

"National Socialists prefer results," he corrected her. He frowned suddenly, and then rose from his chair, quickly looking about him. "We seem very free tonight with names, don't we? What's on your mind, Kit?" he asked abruptly. "It better be good!"

The restlessness disappeared in a moment, and then he grinned.

"Oh, I see!"

He walked over to the door behind which Dan was standing. Then, without moving his head, he glanced from Kit to the door and then back again. He put his fingers gently on the knob, and turned it very slowly without making a sound.

Kit watched him, transfixed, not daring to think what would happen. She wondered whether she ought to warn Dan, but her throat was paralyzed. She could scarcely breathe. Paul shifted his position a bit, as though he were an athlete preparing for the word "go."

"You're very nervous!" Kit said quietly. It sounded like a whisper in the heavy stillness. She was standing behind him, and his head turned slightly as he heard her. Kit swallowed hard to keep her voice under control. "When you're through looking for bogey men, give me a light, please."

His large hands still held the door, but he continued to hesitate. Kit knew that she was playing the most childish trick in the world, but if there was any childish pettiness in him at all, he would respond.

"For goodness sake," Kit went on. "Open the door and then give me a light. If you're so frightened, relieve yourself. Open it. I wouldn't miss the expression on your face for words!"

His hand relaxed, and the knob rotated back to its normal position with a click. When he turned, he was smiling again, but not sheepishly as she expected. His eyes seemed hooded and patient.

"Perhaps it's not my surprise, after all," he said. "In the long run, I think, it'll be yours!"

He picked up his coat, and left. Kit could hear his footsteps resounding down the corridor, light and crisp, almost as though he were keeping time to some gay tune he hummed to himself.

Kit leaned wearily against the desk.

"You can come out now, Dan," she said.

Whatever Paul had in mind, at least she had proved her point to Dan. He couldn't have helped overhearing everything that had been said. And no matter how badly she had been implicated, there was no doubt that Paul was exposed.

The door hadn't opened.

"Come out." Kit's voice was sharp.

A terrible doubt dawned on her, and she grabbed the knob, swinging the door open wide.

There was nobody there. Kit was alone.

PART FOUR



IT called Dan again, frantically, her voice echoing remotely from the narrow stairwell. She stood there staring up into the gloom, hoping to see what her ears couldn't detect. Nothing answered her. A whole world of hints, fears, and doubts stood there, in each shadow, looking back at her, waiting to be recognized.

Like the figures of gargoyles on an old cathedral, the weird shapes hung on the walls, crouched on the landings, peered over the railings. They all watched her in silence, each one suggesting another fate.

"Dan!"

Her voice broke into a scream of despair and frustration. The sound racketed about from wall to wall, spiralling up, and then spiralling down, distorted in a million ways into something that was no longer a human sound, and then it died away into a whisper. None of the shadows moved. They stood there, immobile, patient.

"Dan!" She called again, almost as soon as the previous sound had died away because she was afraid of the dead, waiting silence.

She ran up the first quarter flight of stairs. As she did so the shadows took on a slightly different aspect, as though of one accord, they had moved to one side to keep her in sight. The sound of her footsteps clattered away after her voice. She could hear them resounding on the iron stairs a few floors above her head.

It sounded as though there were many people running about at random, one after the other, with diminishing intensity, until finally it became a swift furtive escape on tiptoe.

There was no one up here. Nothing could be heard, except the distant sounds of traffic on Fifth Avenue, and that sound had no relation to reality. In sudden panic, she raced down the steps, into her office, slamming the door closed behind her. She stood that way for just a second or two, and then whirled about to lock it. She kept her hand on the key, and leaned against the door as though the thing she feared could walk through locks, doors, and walls.

But it wasn't enough. Directly opposite her was the other door. It stood open, stretching into the darkness of the exhibit.

She could see the corners of the long cases, and beyond that more shadows.

She shivered as though she were bitter cold, and she rubbed her hands together to relieve the prickly sensation that crawled over her skin. Kit took a few quick steps across the room, and closed the door. Then, riding the same impulse, she pulled the window down.

Her small gestures for isolation were in vain. She stood in the center of the small office and tried to shut herself off from what was happening to her, but there was no way to shut out the fears which spun in her mind.

What had happened to Dan? Had he gone away in disgust when he heard her exposed? Murderer, Paul had called her. Could Dan ever understand the forces that trapped her into such loathsome crime?

Suddenly, another, more frightening possibility came into Kit's mind. It explained Paul's neglect to open the door. Perhaps Paul had known there was no one there all the time because he himself had seen to his removal! It meant that the same thing had happened to Dan that had happened to Anna. It meant that Kit was responsible for still another life. It meant that one after another, anyone from whom Kit sought aid would be picked off in this quiet, stealthy way.

The last suspicion was almost too dark to bear. Her first fears were correct. Dan was in league with Paul. To face it sent any hopes for release skittering away like a dried leaf in the winter wind.

But Kit could sort them out this way for only a moment. After that they merged into one another, and the chaos was more terrifying. It made it impossible to remain where she was; just as it made it impossible to contemplate leaving the museum through the dark corridors.

The darkness was alive for her now. It stood poised to close in around her like a vast smothering blanket. She tried to collect herself. This was too close to disintegration. Her hands covered her face, and the manual pressure helped give her the illusion of strength.

IN a moment, the shattering spasm of animal terror was over. Very methodically, Kit put on her hat, took her bag, and turned out the light. Darkness closed in on her like a swooping bird of prey, but she managed to fight off the resurgent hysteria. She opened the door and walked into the exhibition rooms with a firm step.

She turned the corner into the main corridor, and small square light at the other end of the building was the street light on Fifth Avenue illuminating the glass pane in the main door. She kept her eyes fixed on it, holding her head rigid so that her

gaze wouldn't lose itself in the crouching shadows.

In the main hall, the square of light, just before the doors, was suddenly obliterated as a man stepped out of the gloom, and took Kit's arm. It was Dan.

Only the ridges and hollows of his face were visible, and the shadow that was his mouth was a straight line. The shock was so sudden that Kit could say nothing. She was without strength. Her hand covered his, and they stood that way, stunned and silent.

"Come outside," he said quietly.

"Did you see . . . ?" Kit asked, glancing about.

"He left a few minutes ago," Dan told her in reassurance. "I waited until I saw him go out the front entrance."

Kit shook her head.

"It's not enough!" she said. "He may be standing across the street, waiting to see. He had a good reason for not opening that door. It wasn't that I managed to talk him out of it. A man like Paul wouldn't take a chance."

Dan didn't answer. He waited with his own thoughts, and then he led her back along the main hall.

"We can get out through the basement. There's a guard on duty down there. He'll let us out."

The shadows had lost their terror for Kit. As they walked back a few feet to the staircase past some small bronzes standing on a long shelf, she felt ashamed at the thought that this had ever seemed anything else but a quiet familiar place.

The guard was sitting beneath a pale bulb, reading a magazine. When they walked toward him, he glanced up and recognized Dan.

"Not using the front door tonight?" he asked.

"This is an easier way to get into the park," Dan told him.

His voice was low and confiding. The guard hunched his shoulders in a childish gesture of silent laughter. He unbolted the door, then winked as he held it open.

"A beautiful night for the park," he remarked. "Wish I were out there myself with someone."

"Plenty of beautiful ladies upstairs," Dan said. "Some of the most beautiful who ever lived."

"Yes, poor dears!" the guard sighed, "but most of them dead a million years." He shook his head in speculation, then shrugged philosophically, and closed the door.

The unexpected balminess had filled the streets with strollers glad to taste something different from the long bitterly depressing winter, a winter of defeats and turmoil. This was the sort of night that re-

mindened one of years back when even adults were children, and lived in a fine make-believe world where there were no foreign names whose fates would decide their own. It was like old times and reminded one of old-fashioned songs. The huge double-deck buses rolled along, fleeing in and out of the scudding shadows cast by the street lamp-posts.

Dan and Kit walked along a curving path that opened onto Fifth Avenue a block below the museum. If someone had been waiting at the main entrance, he could not have seen them come out. They were free to talk in conversational tones, because the drifting couples were engrossed in their own business.

"Where did you disappear to?" Kit asked.

"I went up the stairs as soon as I heard his voice change tone. But the doors were locked all the way up to the fourth floor, so I had to keep going before I could get out and come around."

"Do you think he heard you going up?"

"He might have," Dan admitted. "I was as quiet as I could be, but once you start to run away from something, you become far more intent on just getting away than on how you're doing it. At least," he turned to look at her, "that's the way it is the first time, and this was the first time for me."

"Are you convinced now?" Kit asked.

"He said a lot of things," Dan told her. There was an edge to his voice.

"Most of them are true."

"You admit you shot a man?"

HE WAS trying desperately to keep his voice non-committal, but shocked incredulity burst through. Kit glanced up at him, but he was staring ahead.

"Yes," Kit said quietly. "I don't know who he is. I was shooting at Paul."

He stopped under a light, staring at her.

"You tried to kill Paul?"

"Yes."

"This was last night?"

She nodded.

"Is that the reason you refused to have dinner with me when I asked you? You were planning it then?"

"Yes, Dan," Kit replied very soberly.

He was watching her as she spoke, then shook his head slowly as though he were trying to understand.

"I don't get it," Dan admitted. "I can understand killing a man in battle, yes, that's what wars are. But this, in cold blood. . . !"

"I'm not a murderess in the sense you mean," Kit protested. "You know my background, the sort of people I've studied and worked with. Am I a criminal? Would I do the sort of work I do if I were an adventurer?" She took his arm. "Can you say that I'd take a life out of cruelty? Do you

remember the people you knew so well, and liked so much abroad? Do you know what's become of them, those who are not Nazis?"

She stopped for breath, and for still another reason. She was saying too much without convincing. It was on the tip of her tongue to go into details, but she knew from experience that the more harrowing the story the less it was felt.

He might believe them, but it was utterly beyond his comprehension to realize what they meant. And it would remain this way until he himself had felt the first degradation; because the human mind works from experience as the first postulate. Without that, horror is simply incredible.

Kit caught herself, but her indignation absorbed his gaze.

"Yes," she went on. "I tried to kill Paul Campbell because this is war, and the only way to fight is to fight on every front at every minute. I don't care about myself. I'm interested in only one thing, that is, a woman whose name I may tell you sometime or other. It's because Paul wanted to get at her that I went out there.

"If it's a matter of Paul or this woman, there's really no question. It's not important what happens to me as long as I can help her in some way. And I've failed her. Instead of being of help, I actually led Paul to her. Now she's gone, and I've accomplished nothing at all!"

He was making no sense of it. Her indignation had outrun his understanding, and emotionally he was left far behind, staring at her, wondering what bridge could reach her.

"You'll have to start all over again from the very beginning," he said. "I don't see the implications. It's all jagged edges."

"Let's go into the park and sit down," Kit replied. "It'll take time."

The yellow lamplights gave the park a theatrical quality. Winding paths, empty benches, the profusion of trees and broad lawns, lay like a shadowed sea with occasional islands of light. Under each lamp there was a circular patch of yellow in which everything was thrown into sharp focus which made it seem a little unreal. There were no boundaries to these circles; only a gradual transition from darkness through lamplight to darkness again.

It looked like the backdrop for a musical comedy because none of the imperfections were visible, and everything was static. The moon rode high in a cloudless sky, and the lights in the apartment houses which skirted the park were unblinking. Especially the softness of the night added to the illusion. It came as a slight shock that there was no bite to the air.

They selected a bench near the bridle path. No one was near them. Through the bare branches of the trees they could see

the night sky and the few stars which showed through the haze which hangs over the city.

"Cigarette?" Dan started on a quiet note. Kit took one, and he lit it for her. The flame glowed on his face and cupped hands, and then went out. "Go on," he said.

"In the first place, I'm in this country on a false passport." She glanced at him to emphasize the point. "A forged passport. It was the only way I could get out of the occupied countries. I was born in the United States, but I was declared a Czech citizen. Then there was no longer a Czechoslovakia. I had to do it!"

"It's a very serious offense," he said in a neutral tone.

Kit shrugged. "Yes, I know, but it's not death. That's what would have happened had I remained where I was. I worked in various parts of the Reich, but finally, there was no place where I wasn't known."

"Worked?" he asked, looking at her. "What kind of work?"

SHE hesitated a moment before answering, but then realized that the time was past for holding back if she wanted his trust.

"I worked with the Czech underground," she said. "Our work consisted of organizing resistance to the Nazis, keeping up morale in the face of continued internal defeats, aiding prisoners to escape from concentration camps. I worked under a variety of aliases and disguises, but the Gestapo was always rather close behind me.

"I got into Portugal by sailing in a fishing boat from the French coast without papers. But they had two gunmen there waiting for me. The only way was a small boat going to Rio de Janeiro. I got passage with ten minutes to spare simply because another refugee, a Pole, was willing to give up his passage for me.

"As I got aboard, I was given the passport. From Rio I went to Mexico where I was able to cross the Border by bus. After a short time in New York, I met you."

She went on to explain her position, and he listened, smoking silently. Only occasionally did he ask a question to clear up some minor point in her relationship to Paul. Even when Kit stopped talking, he said nothing for a long time.

"Well." He spoke at last, slowly and tentatively. "It's not completely hopeless, you know. I'm an Army officer."

There was a stubborn quality to his voice that didn't reassure her.

"Exactly what do you mean?"

He looked at her gravely. "I have a duty to report what information I receive. I'll try to present your case as favorably as possible."

Kit stared at him.

"You mean you're going to report me?"

"I don't see any alternative."

"But then I'm the one to suffer by it," she said swiftly. "In the meantime Paul will be free. Anna will be . . ." Her voice dropped in despair. "God knows where!"

She'd been a fool to trust him. Conrad was right. She was going to pieces fast. One mistake after another; each one an additional rope around her neck.

Why should she expect Dan to implicate himself in this mess? She should have been sitting tight, waiting for developments before she adopted any course of action, and here she was running around like a chicken without a head, exposing herself in the stupidest fashion. Yes, she had to admit the justice of Conrad's decision. She was a danger to everybody.

The silence that hung between them was active. Every second they remained that way, they drifted a little farther apart. Desperately, Kit tried to stop it.

"I don't mind what happens to me," she said. "I told you that before. It's Anna I'm worried about. Anna, and Paul. Get him first, and then anything that's waiting for me is all right."

He didn't turn. She could see that he was holding her off.

"You'll tell your story to the proper authorities, and then they'll take proceedings."

"But what can I say?" she insisted. "I have no actual proof. It's my word against his. What chance will I stand? I'm here illegally, a confessed murderess! And Paul's social record is absolutely perfect. He can deny everything. A man like Dr. Lewes, as innocent as a child, will vouch for him. That's the rub; I know, but I can't prove anything."

"Nevertheless, we'll have to leave such an investigation to the F.B.I. or the Army Intelligence."

She had her hand on his arm, as though the physical contact might break through to him.

"If that happens, Paul will be sure to find out," she said. But where she wanted her voice to be calm and reasonable, all that came through was a frightened urgency. "Then he'll do as he threatened. I haven't any doubts at all that he can plant sufficient evidence to make me look like a Nazi agent. He'll have time to clear himself. And that still doesn't help Anna."

"Anna?" Dan said. He turned to her, and for the first time his voice was personal. "I'm more worried about you than I am about Anna."

"If you are, then having me convicted as an enemy agent isn't going to relieve your mind." She stopped as she saw his face. "You're in love with me, aren't you, Dan?"

He looked up somberly, but there was a wry smile on his lips that didn't touch his eyes.

"Not that it's any of your business," he said. "But I guess that I am. Does that make any difference to you?"

IF SHE could lean closer to him, with a soft smile, she would have him. There'd be no question at all then. It wouldn't be hard. He was waiting for her answer. She could see the hope in his eyes. His mouth looked very strong. She wouldn't even have to say anything, merely raise her face to his. It was so easy!

"I'm not in love with you, Dan, if that's what you mean."

It wasn't easy at all, it was impossible. He tossed away his cigarette. It spun like a small glowing wheel, falling in a long shallow arc.

"That's exactly what I mean," he said quietly. "But I live in hope. However, that's something else again. Getting back to where we were; I'd like to do what I can for you, but I don't know where to begin. That is," he said, looking at her very sharply, "if this whole thing is on the level."

It took a moment or so for her to realize exactly what he said.

"What do you mean 'on the level'?" Kit gasped. Her voice rose. "Do you think this is all a joke?"

"I don't know!" There was a note of tortured desperation which placed his answer on the same high-pitched emotional level as hers. "It could be! That little scene between you and Paul could have been faked."

"You mistrust me because I'm a forger?"

"No!"

"I think that's it," she insisted quietly. "I have a slight accent when I talk, I come from a background you don't know, and so instinctively you set me and people like me apart."

"Perhaps!" He admitted it doggedly, not too convinced.

Kit watched him, and gave a short helpless laugh.

"I never saw anyone so suspicious," she said. "I want to apologize for ever thinking you might be fooled by fascism as a way of life."

"That's something else again," he pointed out. "As far as Americans go, it depends on how it's presented. If it's fixed up to look like a slight variation of something we are familiar with in our own lives, we might fall for it. All scientists are radicals within the framework of their science, but outside of it, I suppose I'm conservative."

"I'm suspicious of anything new and different. I may want to know what makes it tick, but I'm not sure I'm going to like it."

That makes me pure Yankee. That's why I'm suspicious of all this business. It's never happened to me before. It's never happened to anyone I know."

"It's happened to people you knew abroad!"

"I suppose it has," he conceded. "But I can't visualize it. I can't see them sitting in concentration camps. I can say it, yes. But to *know* it and *feel* it. . . ." He shook his head. "That's beyond me!"

"But you said you were in love with me," she reminded him. "That ought to make you give me the benefit of the doubt."

"It does just the opposite! I'm in love with you, and you're not in love with me. That means you can use me if you want. Yes, I'm in love with you, but I don't know anything about you. I'm not a kid. I've been in love before and I know that being in love with a person and liking her are two different things."

"Then your first impulse is to hand me over to the police?"

He laughed. "No. My first impulse is to offer to lay down my life for you. But I'm old enough now to wait for the second impulse before I act on the first. It's my second impulse to turn you in."

"It's not as clear cut as you try to make it seem," Kit said. She had herself under control now. "You talk of turning me in, which means you believe me. In the next breath you accuse me of plotting with Paul to hoax you. That means you *don't* believe me. Which is it?"

HE DIDN'T answer, staring directly in front of him at something in the back of his mind. Occasionally the muscles in his cheeks flexed. He might have been sitting there by himself for all the notice he took of her.

"You've fooled me," Kit went on, mistrusting any prolonged silence.

She knew that when someone's mind was in a state of flux, a chance word might tip the balance one way or another without the speaker being aware of it until the decision had already been made. But since she had no idea at all of what he might be thinking, it was worth the risk to press home her point, risking his estrangement as well as his assistance. Since everything appeared to be lost anyhow, there wasn't much else to do.

"Or rather, I've fooled myself. You kept telling me how badly you wanted to be considered a friend, and I thought that when I took you into my confidence, you'd actually be glad of the chance to help. I've put myself into your hands completely. That was proof of my friendship. I was hoping you'd repay in kind."

He gestured impatiently, his mouth a thin, taut line.

"Really, Kit, what do you expect? All this is beyond me. My country is at war." He laughed wryly, and shook his head. "It's much easier for me to say that I'm in love with you than it is to say that . . . well . . . I'm patriotic, that I love my country! You just don't say those things! But there it is. I don't want to take any chances."

"More than that, I admit that I can't cope with this situation. I don't know how to deal with people like Paul. Suppose I got into a fight, I'd be a dead pigeon! I've never struck a man in my life, and no one has ever struck me."

"You're not afraid. I'm sure of that."

"It's not a question of being afraid of being hurt. I've been hurt before. I've fallen on my face, I've dropped things on my feet, and flasks have exploded in my hands. No, I know what pain is, and that ninety-nine times out of a hundred it passes away in time. It's just that here's a new technique that's called for, and I don't know it."

"In that case," Kit said. "You can suit yourself. All I ask of you is to wait before reporting all this until I can get some evidence against Paul. The one thing I'm afraid of is that if he's reported before there's some concrete proof he'll be able to cover up."

"Perhaps!"

"Very well, then! Suppose you get in touch with your superiors just before the picnic. Have them send some people to catch the whole thing at the gas station. That's concrete enough."

He considered it in silence for a moment, and Kit went on.

"But don't notify them until the day before, because if you do he'll get wind of it one way or another."

"You'll still be implicated," he said finally.

"I told you I wasn't really worried about myself. And anyhow it won't be as a German agent. There's the passport thing, of course. . . ."

"And the dead man," he reminded her.

"We'll face those things when we come to them."

"Of course," Dan said, and now his voice was different from before. He was speaking speculatively about an approach to a common problem. "We can always try to get a line on the way he gets his money. He can't support that house on what he gets from the museum."

"That's true!" Kit let him talk on without too many interruptions. She could see him outlining a plan of action and being committed to it. "How would we go about it?"

"Well, I was thinking that if we drove down there and stopped off in one of the real-estate offices, they could tell us some-

thing about the house—who owns it, what the rent is. We ought to be able to get some information."

"There you are! You see, you *do* have ideas. You *do* have an approach!"

He turned to her smiling.

"I didn't say I didn't have ideas. Ideas are a dime a dozen. The question is: are they the right ideas?" The smile deepened. "You knew all along I'd fall in with you, didn't you?"

Kit laughed outright.

"That suspicious mind again! No, as a matter of fact, I didn't. Up until a few seconds ago, I was quite sure you wouldn't, and I was wondering whether or not to make a break for it and run."

He shook his head and opened a fresh pack of cigarettes.

"You couldn't have," he said quietly. "I had my legs all ready to trip you up if you tried it." His voice was very pleasant when he spoke, but he wasn't joking.

The following day was Saturday, and the warm weather continued. The air was very balmy, almost enervating. It penetrated the museum, giving a new current of life to the entire place. The children were noisier than ever as a result. Even the adults seemed less restrained. An air of suppressed jollity, laughter on the point of breaking out at any moment, was everywhere.

Kit noticed it in her office, but couldn't be sure everyone else shared it. For her it was mixed with anticipation. It held the hint of positive action. She had arranged with Dan to leave the museum around twelve and drive toward Saginaw.

For the time being, the seriousness of her predicament was pushed back and in its place was the feeling that this was some sort of holiday. It was more than one day's freedom from routine work. It was the promise of an end to harrowing pursuit. The prey was turning to stalk the hunter.

IT WAS just short of noon when Dan came in. Something of her own feeling played on his face. The somber suspicion of the previous evening was nowhere to be seen. He was carrying a trench coat over his arm, and twirled a battered felt hat about his fingers.

"It's a beautiful day," he remarked. "It feels like the beginning of a long weekend."

"Everybody seems to feel that way," Kit said.

"It's the sap rising. Are you all set?"

"In a second," Kit told him. "I just want to put these photographs in order."

She made her voice as light and conversational as possible for the benefit of anyone who might be passing outside. She closed the door so that he had to come into

the room. Then she drew out the clarinet case which held the gun.

"Do you want to carry it?" she asked, purposely not looking at him. She was very casual about it.

He took it from her hands rather gingerly, and inspected it.

"I've never handled one like that in my life," he confessed. "All I know are the regulation Army weapons."

Kit snapped it open and explained the mechanism. He took it back and examined the moving parts to see their relationships. He nodded his head.

"Beautiful!" he murmured. "Beautiful machine work! These surfaces might even be optically flat!"

Kit watched him become engrossed in the details of the construction. He seemed to have forgotten all about her.

"When you put it all together," she remarked with some acerbity, "it becomes a gun!"

He looked up at her sharply, as though he had just caught himself, and then smiled.

"That's right, it does! I was more interested in the parts than in the function."

"Do you think you can handle it or shall I?"

He looked at her steadily with a small smile.

"I don't think we'll need it."

"You can't tell!"

He put it back into the case and closed it.

"We *won't* need it. Suppose we make a point of not getting into a position where we might!"

She turned impatiently.

"If you still think we have a choice, you have a lot to learn."

He refused to be moved.

"I learn easily," he said.

"Suppose we let it go at that."

It was wiser not to argue, and so she replaced the gun in the case. The correct tactic was to let him find his own depth. He was not going to be rushed.

"My car is in the parking space just outside. We can go out through the side door." As she picked up her coat, she had her back to him, and swiftly thrust the gun into her bag.

"I'm very curious to see that car of yours," he replied. "There are some fabulous stories about it."

But when he actually saw the car, dismay caught him unaware.

"Really, Kit, this thing belongs inside if ever I saw a genuine relic!"

"It goes," Kit said laconically. "Get in."

He sat down gingerly beside her in the old sedan. She started the motor almost with a gesture of defiance, and then swung the car about.

"It's incredible!" he remarked, staring at the instruments on the dashboard. "Your

speedometer doesn't work, your oil gauge doesn't work, there's no gas in your tank if you can believe the meter, and it looks as though the batteries aren't being charged. How the devil do you know what's happening, or do you rely on magic?"

"I'm not interested in gadgets," Kit said. "As long as the car goes forward when it's supposed to, and stops when I want it to, I'm satisfied. All the rest of that stuff about armatures, pistons, carburetors and cylinders is all furbelows. I've always suspected it, and since I've been running this car, I'm convinced of it. Worrying about the inside of a car is a form of hypochondria."

"It's a healthy attitude," he said drily, and not at all convinced. "If you live long enough to enjoy it!"

They drove for a while in silence, and after seeing how it behaved in traffic Dan began to accept the car with all of its idiosyncrasies. They stopped for lunch at a small restaurant on the other side of the bridge.

As they sat opposite each other for the first time any place outside the museum, there was an air of constraint between them. Except for the discussion on the previous evening, all their encounters had the museum stamp.

Now they were moving their relationship from the conventional point of origin. Kit had the feeling that from here on they were completely on their own.

DAN was playing self-consciously with the salt and pepper shakers, and Kit decided to bring the mood back to business.

"How long have you known Paul?" she asked.

"For about two years, ever since he's been with the museum," Dan said. "He arrived here from Denmark just after it had been occupied. He was supposed to have left the day before the Germans entered."

"Had you ever heard of him before?"

He considered for a moment, and then shook his head.

"No, I don't think any of us did. As I remember, he went to Lewis with a letter from some institute for which he had been acting as European agent."

"What institute?"

"Some philanthropic outfit called the Franco-American Arts Foundation. It was never very active in this country, but apparently it supported many American artists abroad."

"Apparently?"

"Well, that's the story. There are thousands of such organizations, you know, and one more or less doesn't make a lot of difference. At any rate, he showed up with a number of very good things he had bought for the institute, and so the museum bought them from the institute."

"Paul arranged that?"

"Yes. Lewes took a great liking to him, and so he's acted for Lewes a number of times. In the two years Paul has been here, he's proven his ability."

"Have you ever been out to his place?"

"About a dozen times," Dan said, after a moment's reflection. "That is, in all the time I know him. You know the crowds of people he has every weekend. That's another thing. The way he entertains is very expensive. The money for that must come from somewhere, too. But getting back to the question, I had a swell time whenever I went. How many times were you there, Kit?"

"About six times in two months. I was becoming a fixture. People began to speak of 'Kits' room' and 'Kit's chair'."

"Then you must know the place better than I do," said Dan.

"I know the house, and I know the butler. I don't know any of the other servants. Actually there are several people in the house besides Paul. But whenever he has guests everything is so hectic and crowded that you don't notice anyone in particular. All I did was meet a lot of people very casually, people I don't ever see, and to whom I didn't say much. As for a definite political cast, I can't say that there was anything. All shades of all opinions."

"Yes, I have the same impression," Dan admitted. "I was made exceedingly comfortable, and I spent a lot of time laughing."

"Well, we didn't expect to find anything particularly sinister," Kit remarked. "As a matter of fact, the only odd note about the place is the mass of mediocre paintings Paul insists on hanging about the house. You'd think with Paul's taste, he'd know better. I'm no critic, but even I can see that most of them aren't up to professional standards."

"That's his famous blind spot," Dan explained. "It even crops up sometimes in the exhibits he arranges. He's always discovering these pictures by talented young painters no one else has ever heard of. They're never anything at all remarkable, and so you never hear of them again." He dismissed the whole thing with an expanding gesture of his hand. "It's only an idiosyncrasy because the man really *knows* good painting. His articles are authoritative. There's no question about that because I've heard him talk extemporaneously with other men of excellent reputation, and he makes sense. They listen to him with great respect."

"But nevertheless you didn't hear of him until he arrived here!"

Dan refused to accept it as incriminating.

"I didn't hear of a lot of people until they arrived here."

After lunch, they got back on the highway and continued east. In less than forty minutes, the car reached Saginaw. In the sunlight, the clean broad concrete main street stretched before them like a promenade. The curbstones were lined with shoppers' automobiles parked at a forty-five degree angle. At least half of them were station wagons.

Genteel prosperity was everywhere, even the gaudy five and ten looked slick and smart. People moved along the sidewalk with the quiet confidence of those who are where they know they belong.

Kit and Dan drove slowly, looking for a parking space.

"So far, I've seen only one real estate place," Dan said. "Nobody seems to be anxious to sell property around here."

THEY had to drive the length of the entire street before they found a vacant spot.

"I don't particularly care for this," Kit confessed. "We'll have to walk through the whole village for everyone to see."

"The chances are that Paul won't be around. He's probably got a house full of people. And nobody else here knows you, do they?"

"No, not that I know of."

"Then stop worrying, and let's go!" He got out and held the door for her, adding casually, "You needn't lock the car. In comparison with these others, your jalopy makes the street look as though the beggars have come to town."

"I'll match mine against any one of theirs at any time you say for dependability and affection."

"Affection?"

"Of course, affection. No car would ever behave the way that one does if it didn't really care!"

They walked back along the crowded sidewalk until, just past the two-story white bank, they found the small store with the front window discreetly frosted. In gilt letters, a sign said:

H. SEAGRAM • REAL ESTATE

The door stood open and they walked in. A large buxom woman of forty-five greeted them. She wore a black and white flower print dress, and her hair was done up in tight little curls that seemed plastered to her skull.

"Hello," she said pleasantly. "I'm Mrs. Crane. What can I do for you?"

In the rear of a store, a gray-haired man sat with his back to them at an old-fashioned roll-top desk. He was bending over a mass of papers that covered his desk like a summer morning mist. He was so engrossed, he didn't even turn around. A low

picket fence across the store separated them from him. On the desk there was a sign enameled in blue and white reading:

H. SEAGRAM, Prop.

"We were driving through the town," Kit said hesitantly. "And we passed a most interesting looking place on a road just outside."

The woman's cheery blue eyes were smiling pleasantly as though she were on the point of receiving a compliment. Her head arched slightly in anticipation.

"It's a huge old white house which must have been a farmhouse at one time," Kit went on.

"Yes!" The woman completed the nod she had been withholding. "That's the Hutchins place."

Kit was relieved to find that the question had been taken so matter-of-factly. Mr. Seagram hadn't even moved his head at the mention of the name "Hutchins." His busy pencil went scurrying through the papers like a rabbit burrowing a hole.

"It's a genuine Block Island house," Mrs. Crane said. "As a matter of fact, it was the first house built here. You see, just about the time the British occupied Block Island around 1812, there was a terrible hurricane of the sort we had out here just a few years ago. The Hutchins lived on Block Island, and their house was swept away in the storm."

"The remnants floated ashore here and since he was a stubborn man, Mr. Hutchins made the family move after it. They put the house on rollers and pulled it up the slope to where it stands now. You'll find the whole story in newspaper clippings in our library a few doors down."

"You see, John Hutchins brought suit against the government for the cost. As the case drew out he refused to pay any taxes since he said he was taking it out in what the government owed him. He got to be famous for shooting tax collectors, so the government finally paid him. It was in all the papers."

She smiled fondly as though this had all happened one morning in her own childhood. Kit could see that she was the typical antiquarian. Mrs. Crane turned to Kit.

"Are you interested in houses?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," Kit replied. "Very interested!"

"When you go up to the library . . . if you do go," she added apologetically, "you'll be able to read the entire history of the house in newspaper clippings from the first day it was put up here until that terrible business a few years ago when that simply awful Henry Hutchins was charged with murder. You must remember that!"

"No," Kit said. "I don't. Do you?" she asked Dan.

Dan shook his head.

Mrs. Crane shrugged philosophically.

"It took place around the same time as the Hall-Mills murder," she explained. "And so it didn't get quite as much publicity as it should have. However, I always say, if it had gone to trial, it would have been given even more space."

"Well, what happened?" Kit asked.

MRS. CRANE smoothed out her dress, and glanced at Mr. Seagram to see whether he had any objections to her passing the time of day like this, but the little man was busy on the telephone.

They couldn't hear what he was saying, but his head nodded vigorously as he spoke. It looked as though what Mrs. Crane cared to do with her time was the last thing on his mind.

"You'll find it all in the library. It's odd, just alongside the same papers that say how different Hutchinses were generals, and admirals and big businessmen is this story of Henry. I remember him myself. He was about fifteen years older than I, but I never liked him.

"None of the girls around here ever did. He was much too fast. He was a bachelor, you see, and there was always a big party going on up there with a steady parade of chorus girls and bootleggers to and fro. None of the decent people around here would have anything to do with him. His friends were all gangsters and Broadway people; night-club entertainers, horse-race gamblers."

It was a little odd to hear such casual references to these purple personalities from this matronly person. She tossed them off with an air of having known them all and rejected what they had to offer. In the short silence, Mr. Seagram clicked his receiver back on the hook, and the hissing of the riffled sheets merged once again with the warm street sounds outside.

"He was always getting into all kinds of trouble, you know. But out here nobody bothered him. Even when his friends got arrested for speeding and fighting and what not, he fixed it all up. He was one of the richest men in the county, and you know how politicians are when they smell money. But that last thing. . . ."

She thought about it with deep relish.

"That was one thing he couldn't fix. You see, everybody knew he was alone in the house with her. And he was so drunk, he even called up the police and told them he had a dead girl on his hands, and would they please dispose of her at the usual rates. So of course, they had to arrest him for murder. He told them all about it, but it seems that you can't plead guilty to first

degree murder, so he had to sober up and wait for trial.

"That's when the newspapers got started," Mrs. Crane went on. "Pictures and stories and pictures! Everybody here in town was interviewed and we all got our names in the papers. You'll see what they said about me when you read it," she added.

"Did they convict him?" Dan asked.

"Oh, no! After he was in jail about two weeks he got quite sick and so the trial had to be postponed. I'm not at all surprised he got sick. He drank so much bootleg hooch that he probably didn't have any insides left. At any rate, he got worse and worse. They say he began to feel sorry for the way he had wasted his life, so he called in his lawyer and made out a will leaving everything to charity.

"Just a few days after he died, and they buried him there in the family graveyard. You can see it when you go past the house, the stone nearest the lawn. Plain as all the rest of the stones."

"I suppose his relatives must have got the house after that," said Kit.

"No. He was the very last of the family. The house went to one of the charities. You should have seen the list of them in the will, you'd think the man was a saint: The Red Cross, the Quakers, Lighthouse for the Blind, Fresh Air Funds, Tuberculosis Funds, schools, universities, research foundations. The list was so long you couldn't remember half of them."

"Which one got the house then?" Dan asked.

"One I can't recall the name of. The house and all the property were left to this foundation. The head of it was a certain Mr. Duncan Thorne who lived in Paris, and had something to do with artists." She turned around and called to Mr. Seagram. "Oh, Mr. Seagram, do you remember the name of that foundation that runs the Hutchins place? That's the one Duncan Thorne is the head of."

Mr. Seagram stopped writing and then slowly turned around. For the first time, they saw his face. Kit recognized him immediately. He was the little gray man with the hearing aid who had listened the day before to her conversation on the telephone. He gave no sign of recognition.

"It's the Franco-American Arts Foundation," he said quietly. Kit saw Dan look up suddenly at the mention of the name they had been discussing only a short time before. Mr. Seagram paused a moment as he cleared his spectacles. "But Mr. Thorne died two years ago in Paris."

Kit took a step backward and touched Dan's arm. The door behind them opened. They turned to see who had come in from the street. It was Paul, dressed in a tweed jacket and flannel slacks.

"Oh, hello! I'm terribly sorry but I'd forgotten that I'd asked you down for the weekend. As soon as Seagram called me a few minutes ago and told me you were here, I tore down to apologize in person." He held the door open for them. "Suppose we go. Everybody's waiting for us!"

PART FIVE



THE heavy silence was broken by Mrs. Crane. Kit turned and saw the woman's surprise. Mrs. Crane had no idea what was taking place.

"What a coincidence!" she said. "Imagine, the house you were so interested in is where you were going all the time for the weekend!" She laughed and shook her head. "I

just can't get over it!"

Dan looked puzzled, but he seemed to Kit to be more amused than anything else. He had no way of knowing that Mr. Seagram was one of Paul's agents, Kit reflected. And the fact that all this was taking place in broad daylight with scores of people passing a few feet away couldn't help but make the whole thing seem trivial to him.

Kit realized once again that the Nazis' success was no miracle of special creative genius, but resulted from an organization widespread and well-trained enough to take immediate advantage of their enemy's mistakes. It made them doubly dangerous.

"Look, Paul," Dan was saying pleasantly. "Kit and I were just out for a drive. I wouldn't dream of imposing on you this way."

Kit wondered whether it was presence of mind to maintain such a front or just naïveté. He couldn't possibly realize with whom he was dealing.

"No imposition at all," Paul said. He looked the embarrassed host. "I'd feel terrible if you didn't come. No, I insist on it." He turned to Kit without changing his expression. "You want to come, don't you?"

There was no implied menace in his voice, no threat. Even his eyes were bland and friendly, but menace was implicit in their relationship. Every suggestion he made had to be a command.

For the first time she met Dan's eyes, but she could see no recognition of her plea.

"I don't know," Kit said hesitantly, turning back to Paul. "You see we have to get back to town. . . ."

"Dinner date?" Paul asked.

His tone showed that he understood and sympathized with social involvements.

"Yes," said Kit quickly. "I can't possibly break it."

"Then don't," Paul told her. "You've got the entire afternoon. It'll take less than an hour to get back, so you have no excuse at all."

Kit looked at Dan again, but Mr. Seagram had come between them. He was standing, his back to Dan, staring at her. The short man had his hands by his sides. He came just above her shoulder, but Kit could see the concentrated menace in the silent man.

One had to know the ruthlessness of his European counterpart to recognize it in him. The muscles in his cheeks flexed rapidly as he waited. He was a murderous spring under tension.

"I think we might drop in for a while," Dan said finally. "It'll kill a few hours."

"At the very least," Paul said, and Mr. Seagram was the only one who appreciated his humor. The rippling cheeks dissolved into a bleak smile.

Paul turned to Seagram.

"I'll ride up with them in their car. Would you mind bringing my car over later?" He stood aside to allow Kit to pass. He had one last gesture for Mrs. Crane. "By the way, how's your boy?"

"Pestering the life out of me for a catcher's mitt," she said, laughing good-naturedly. "And I have to pretend that I don't get as much pleasure out of giving it to him as he'll get out of playing with it. If I didn't he'd wheedle me out of house and home."

"He's a fine kid," Paul remarked. "I like him a lot!"

Mrs. Crane glowed with gratitude. She looked as though she had just had her back stroked, and there was no doubt in her mind that Mr. Campbell was the sweetest man she had ever met. She stood and watched the three of them leave, her hands clasped placidly in front of her.

As they walked along the pavement, Kit saw a sheepish little grin at the corners of Dan's lips. He looked like a boy who had been caught cheating in a game, and was waiting to have it pointed out.

"Now, look here, Paul," he said confidentially. "This isn't at all necessary."

But Paul had grasped his mood. He immediately dropped the pose of mocking geniality and became all professional seriousness.

"As a matter of fact I really want to talk to you, Dan. There are several things on my mind and I've been meaning to drop in on you, but I never got around to it. This is as good a time as any. I'm really glad you dropped in. That is," he added quickly, "if you don't mind giving me a few minutes."

Dan looked relieved and grateful to Paul for taking him out of a false position.

"Of course not. What's on your mind?"

"It can wait a few minutes," Paul said generously. "I don't intend to sweep you off your feet. Come up, have a drink and make yourself comfortable."

KIT wondered whether Dan was taken in by him. She averted her gaze so Dan couldn't see the nervousness in her eyes. From this point on, she would have to let Paul's actions make up Dan's mind.

They crowded into the front seat and Kit turned the car about. When they came to the drug store she turned right. The dead brown of the trees had undergone a subtle change. The branches seemed to be covered with a clean new bark and the buds were on the point of opening. They could smell the earth, as the hot sun evaporated the thawed dampness. Delicate patches of light green lay on the turf where new grass was beginning to come up.

"Another spring!" said Paul, and then laughed. "When you're a kid you say 'it's spring,' but when you get older, a little more used to life, you say 'another spring.' But I like fall the best . . . I suppose because the autumn is sinister."

Dan turned to him. It was some time before he answered.

"Fall sinister?" He repeated the remark without seeming to understand it. "Back home in New Hampshire where I come from, spring is the best time because our winters are hell on wheels. Fall?" He shook his head in dubious contemplation. "In the autumn you get the first sharp taste in the air after all the blandness of summer. It's stimulating, those first few days when you get the smell of burning leaves and hear the rustle of drying branches. But it's certainly not sinister."

"That's because you don't know what sinister means," Paul told him. "It's the threat of force, not the actuality. Take a cat's paw. You feel the soft toes and gentle pads, but you know that if you squeeze just a little tighter you'll find the claws like needles. That's sinister, because all the time you stroke the cat you know that the claws are there. That's the point. You know there's force under a soft exterior." Paul was silent for a moment and then resumed. "That's why the fall is sinister. The sharpened air gives the slightest of edges to a hot day, but you know it means winter."

Apparently Dan wasn't following him. It worried Kit, because she had told Dan enough about Paul to make him understand that this odd topic was more than just casual observation.

Paul was saying something very clearly, and either Dan was playing some game of his own which Kit couldn't see immediately, or he still refused to take what he had overheard last night very seriously.

"I don't get it," Dan was saying. He

sounded stolid and matter-of-fact. "I'm like everybody else, I suppose. I prefer spring."

Kit glanced up at the mirror above the windshield in the hope that Dan could give her some reassurance, any signal at all that he knew what he was doing. But his head was turned the other way, and all Kit saw was his unperturbed profile. A few minutes later, however, she looked up again and saw him grinning at her. He winked very deliberately.

She smiled back, but only faintly because this was just as bad, if not worse. He was too cocksure. The most fatal mistake he could make was to underestimate Paul. She was impatient for a chance to speak to Dan alone, and so she pressed the gas pedal a little harder.

Kit turned into the driveway of the grounds. She could see across the broad sloping lawn to the small graveyard and the clump of oaks immediately beyond where she had parked her car just two nights back.

It seemed much more than forty-eight hours ago. But she knew that she was in one of those cataclysmic periods of her life where events crowded down on her at an ever accelerating pace. An explosion of some sort was coming, the culmination of weeks of casual incidents, small contacts, and minor conversations.

Only now, when the climax was in sight, did the pattern come clear. All the loose ends had suddenly come together, and the avalanche of motion got under way on the simple stimulus of Paul's confronting her suddenly with a positive demand.

He had bided his time, allowing her to become slowly involved. When it seemed propitious to him, he was willing to let the whirlwind start, confident that he could ride it out leaving her at his mercy. Her only salvation lay in reversing the rôles.

She pulled the car into the graveled bay just before the porte-cochère, and they all got out. The doors slammed shut, leaving no echo.

"Everybody seems to be inside," Paul remarked. "I imagine they're resting up for their bout with the sun and open spaces this afternoon." He smiled understandingly. "That's the kind of people they are, I'm afraid hot-house flowers."

HE LED Kit and Dan through the cool foyer and a small sitting room onto the sun porch where his guests were; several men and women. They were all people Kit had never met, and as they entered the room, all conversation died. Kit and Dan had become the center of interest. She could actually feel the pressure of the measuring gazes.

To Kit, it was a most disturbing sensa-

tion. It was as though she had slipped backwards in life some five years, because these people were distinctly European. They belonged to a group she knew very well and feared with good reason. They were, in a sense, classless, being the dregs of every section of society.

For the most part they came from the aristocracy. But among them were many from the middle and lower sections of social divisions who got by on their wit. They were the people one saw in the hotel bars and cafés in the larger cities, without obvious means of support, but each an agent for somebody. And within the past few years the number of parties hiring agents had narrowed down to a colossal One: the Third Reich.

There were seven of them, three women and four men. They were dressed in smart sport clothes, and as they sat there gauging Kit in their turn the wise tired eyes in all the faces looked the same. She could see them closing ranks without even moving.

In the polite silence, sides were being drawn, with Dan the outsider. Kit shivered under the scrutiny. There was something very cold and inhuman in their detachment.

Paul was in no hurry to break the silence; he seemed to be enjoying the quiet identification. He glanced from one group to the other, a small smile playing in his eyes. He was allowing it all to soak in so that there would be absolutely no question at all.

Kit saw that Dan didn't sense the atmosphere. He was merely embarrassed at not being introduced. Finally he looked at Paul with a desperate appeal.

Paul accepted the plea and crossed the room to put out his cigarette.

"These are my guests," Paul said to those who were seated. "The two people I told you about a little while ago. I think I mentioned Kit Gruenholz to you before."

A current of amusement ran over their faces, and the perception of it heightened Kit's tension. Paul had casually set the tone for the afternoon, because Kit knew the only reason Paul could have to talk about her in such a way as to amuse these people was to boast of the way she had been used.

"I didn't know who'd come with her," Paul went on. "But I was quite sure she wouldn't be alone."

The tension tightened again. Kit glanced quickly at Dan to see whether he realized that he was being identified in his turn, and that he was in great danger. His expression hadn't changed.

Paul spoke to one of the seated women. "Baroness," he said. "Allow me to introduce Miss Gruenholz and Dr. Shay."

"Mr. Shay." Dan corrected him mechanically and nodded to the woman.

She was in her early forties, with a thin

intense face. Her gray eyes were enormous and beautiful.

"How do you do?" she said.

Her voice had no trace of foreign accent. If anything, it had a slight southern softness.

"The baroness was born in this country," Paul turned to her. "Charleston, wasn't it, Lucy?"

"Yes," said the Baroness very simply. "But it was a mistake." Her gray eyes enjoyed Dan's discomfort. "I don't have the temperament to be an American."

"Come, Lucy!" said the young man beside her. He was very slight and obviously Spanish. He looked as though he never had to shave. "That's not a pleasant thing to say! You'll offend them."

The Baroness didn't even bother to look at him.

"Be quiet, Manolo! I was born here," she said. "And that gives me the right to say what I please about it." She paused, then asked Kit, "Are you a communist?"

"I'm a Czech," said Kit very quietly.

The Baroness held her with her eyes for a silent moment, and then shrugged. The young man next to her bowed to Kit.

"How do you do?" he said. "I'm Manolo. Manuel de la Blancamp y Herrera."

"Especially y Herrara," murmured the Baroness.

Manolo looked at her and grinned like a faun.

"Some day I'll cut another mouth for you to smile in your throat." Then he turned to Kit. "Pay no attention to her. You see, I don't mind if you're a Czech. I like Czechs. I once knew one in Spain. He was fighting for Negrin and the communists and we captured him. He was very brave, a lion! When we shot him, he cursed us beautifully and shouted his stupid slogans. He was like a prize bull."

SUDDENLY Kit knew. These people had no intention of allowing Dan to leave the house alive, otherwise they would never be so outspoken. It was quite obvious now. They didn't care what Dan overheard because they considered that talking to him was like talking to a dead man.

What Kit's position in all this was, still remained obscure. If Paul thought he could go on using her, she'd be all right. If not, she was worse than useless. She was dangerous to Dan; even more dangerous than Paul. Then this is where she had led him.

It was her responsibility to get Dan out of here somehow, because he was sure to make some mistake. He simply was unaware of the danger he faced.

The conversation had been running on. Manolo was talking to Paul.

"Where is this fabulous new picture you're going to show us?"

"Be quiet," Paul said. "If the world waited fifty thousand years for it to be painted, you can wait a few hours more. Let me finish presenting my guests. This is Major Tolnysi."

Paul pointed to an extremely fat little man. He had sparse short gray hair, and one cheek was a mass of scar tissue from a burn. He was wearing a white silk sport shirt, and his massive paunch looked like the top of an enormous peach. He bowed to Kit and clicked his heels, but he was shaking with laughter at Manolo.

"And Madam Tolnysi."

The very thin woman had an old lined face and neck above a figure that was luxuriously youthful. She wore her clothes a little too tight to show it off. Her hair was white, and her face looked as though she were over seventy.

The other two men were obviously twins, very thin and concave. They both had toothbrush mustaches and crooked teeth. The last woman looked exactly like them, even to the teeth. A faint down on her upper lip made at least a gesture of acknowledgment toward her brothers' mustaches.

"Beverly, Vivian and Leslie Garrity." Paul finished them off en masse. "That takes care of everybody, I suppose. How about some drinks?"

"The picture first," insisted the Spaniard.

"Not yet." Paul was unperturbed. "You'll see it when I'm good and ready."

"How anxious are you to see this masterpiece?" Manolo asked Kit.

"What masterpiece?" she asked. "I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about."

"Another new discovery of Paul's," said Madam Tolnysi.

Her accent was as bad as her husband's, and her voice was almost as deep. Her incredibly beautiful body kept insinuating itself into one's mind, and Kit expected at any moment to see the woman remove her hag's mask from a young face.

"Paul greeted us this morning with news

of his latest find, and we're all on edge. Perhaps finally, one of them may be good!"

"It's probably one of the worst," said the Garrity woman. "Paul was in that state of subdued hysteria that simply can't wait for confirmation of praise. He's not torturing us by making us wait, he's actually torturing himself in the most delicious way he knows. But it is his very intensity that tells me it's not going to be any good."

"All of them are good!" Paul said with unusual sharpness. "You just don't know what you're seeing!"

"Temper, temper!" Manolo said, admonishing him. "Remember to control yourself!"

The Hungarian major went off into another silent spasm. Dan looked at the people about him with polite interest. Kit was sure that he'd never seen anything like them before.

They were a rare foreign breed, indigenous to political gansterism of the most open sort. There was nothing approaching them in this country yet, Kit was sure of that. It was a sign of political health, but the appearance of the imported variety had important implications.

Dan looked on them as a variety of freak. They had nothing in common with the academic European Dan had worked with. He was frankly curious about them and he stared from one to the other without any pretenses.

"You seem rather puzzled," the Garrity woman said to Dan. "I'm Leslie. I suppose that's what's on your mind."

"I was sure you were from the beginning," Dan replied politely.

Then the conversation died again to a sodden silence and Madam Tolnysi moved restlessly about in the large armchair.

"You said something about drinks, Paul," she remarked. Her voice was pettish. She glanced about the room. "It's so beastly dull here!"

Paul pressed a bell in the archway. In

[Turn page]

Many Never Suspect Cause of Backaches

This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

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

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(Adv.)

a few seconds the butler appeared with a tray of bottles and glasses.

"I know what's missing!" said one of the Garritys very loudly. He sounded as though he hadn't spoken since he got out of bed that morning. "Where the devil is Kenton? That's why you're so restless, Paul. You miss your shadow."

The butler dropped a glass on the rug and everybody held his breath, but the glass didn't break.

"Kenton is upstairs, very ill," Paul said. "And you can't see him. He's got a nurse taking care of him. And he's not my shadow—we're just very good friends."

"Kenton ill?" Garrity was astounded. "I never thought he'd have the strength to be sick. He's such a bag of bones, I was sure he'd pass out at the first puff!"

"Kenton has unexpected powers of resistance," Paul said drily. "He's a perpetual source of astonishment to me, too."

"Give him my regards when you go up next," Dan said. "We became very good friends the last time I was here."

Everyone in the room stared at him in surprise except Paul who was preoccupied with his glass.

"You know Kenton?" the Baroness demanded.

"Why, yes . . . slightly," said Dan, taken aback.

Kit was puzzled at the interest which had been aroused. She knew Kenton, as did everyone else who visited the house. He was a man close to sixty, very wasted and tired. She had received the vague impression that he was an indigent relative of Paul's.

Tom Kenton reminded one of a scrawny exhausted cat after a hard winter in the alleys. He smiled easily and eagerly as though he were grateful for the notice one took of him. He pattered around the place, always a few steps behind Paul, picking up after him, trying to anticipate his wishes. There was no doubt that he was an American, and since he couldn't help but know Paul's real business, it meant that it just didn't matter to him.

But why should they all be so surprised that Dan spoke of Kenton? She had never seen any sign that Kenton was under constraint. He had the freedom of the entire estate. One thing she had noticed, Kenton never went into Saginaw. And if he went to New York, it was always in Paul's car. On the other hand, it could mean plain laziness.

"Why shouldn't he know Kenton?" Paul asked casually, getting up to replenish his drink. "Everyone does. As a matter of fact, I think it does the old boy good to see people."

"Good old Kenton!" said Garrity, shaking his head. "He has such a heroic sound-

ing name, you expect him to come galloping in on a white charger. Thomas Duncan Thorne Kenton at your service!"

Duncan Thorne? Duncan Thorne was the secretary of the Franco-American Association, Kit thought with excitement. Seagram had just told her that he had died two years ago. She raised her eyes to see whether Dan had caught it. He had. At least they were closer to the explanation of Paul's possession of the house.

"Suppose we go outside and sit in the sun," Paul said, ignoring Garrity completely. "I think I'd like that."

The Baroness went out through the French doors and one by one the others followed. Kit hung back hoping for the chance to look about the house while they were all outside; and Dan, in his turn, waited for her. Paul stood by the door watching them both.

"Aren't you coming?" he asked Kit.

"I'm a little tired," she said slowly.

She intended to draw it out as long as possible to see what he would do. Very casually, she went over to the sofa and stretched out on it.

"You can rest outside," Paul told her.

His voice had an edge to it and he seemed rather nervous.

"But I'd like to lie down for a moment."

"There are deck chairs out there, and you'll be more comfortable."

"It's rather warm."

"The chairs have shades."

"Come on, Kit," Dan said with reluctance. "Let's do as he says."

Paul didn't even bother with a triumphant gleam. He merely seemed annoyed.

When they got outside, they found Manolo and the major setting up croquet wickets. The Garritys were rummaging among a set of battered mallets and balls.

"Oh really, you don't intend to play with that junk! It means you'll be running all over the place," said Paul.

"Don't fuss so, Paul!" the major said.

"But you'll ruin the new grass that's just springing up," he objected.

"Don't be silly," said Manolo, pounding on the wicket. "We're not going to stand in one place very long at a time. Besides, there's plenty of grass."

THERE weren't enough mallets to go around, so the Baroness and Madam Tolnysi sat out. Dan, Kit and the two Garrity twins made up one team against the others.

From the outset, Manolo was the clown of the game. He cheated brazenly and expertly.

"You can cheat, too, if you want," he said to his opponents. "But if I catch you, you'll have to put it back."

The Garrity twins took advantage of the

fact they were indistinguishable to everybody but their sister. One of them was a very good player and frequently took over his brother's turns at the game. The only two incompetents were Kit and Dan. They neither cheated nor played well, and tagged along in the rear of the others.

"Why did you give in to Paul," Kit asked Dan in a very low voice when no one was looking. "We had a perfect chance to look over the house and now we've lost it."

"Don't be silly. We couldn't have done a thing," Dan said. "Paul would have pushed us into a scene so uncomfortable that we would have been forced to go anyhow."

The next time her chance came up Kit deliberately fouled her ball so badly on the pretext of knocking the major's away from a wicket that it rolled away out of bounds towards the rear of the house. She started after it slowly, giving the ball a chance to gain enough momentum to roll out of sight.

"I'll get it for you," Paul said, trying to head her off.

"You can't," the major said. "You're next. You can't hold up the game."

Paul hesitated and then shrugged. Kit went on her way. The noise and laughter from behind told her that play had been resumed. Her ball had rolled over the crest of a rise and then down a slope towards the kitchen porch where the other players wouldn't be able to see her.

She reached the ball and glanced quickly over her shoulder. There was no one in sight. She ran up the stairs and quietly opened the kitchen door.

The room was full of men staring at her. There must have been at least a dozen there. Three of them she recognized as servants about the house, but the others obviously were not. They were either in shirt sleeves or vests, sitting in tilted chairs. The butler was arranging a tray with some sandwiches and a glass of milk. He was the only one who went on about his business.

Kit was on the point of leaving as abruptly as she had entered, but controlled herself. These gunmen went hand in hand with the people outside.

Actually, the croquet players were brokers, whose business it was to see that these men carried out the orders for the people who gave them. They were an absolutely necessary part of the organization because the ultimate sense of any of the orders was violence.

"I'd like a glass of water, please," Kit said in German. "Where is the tap?"

Instinctively, all eyes turned to the sink. One of them even pointed before he caught himself.

"Thank you," said Kit, and walked swiftly across the room to help herself.

She could feel the heavy silence press

down on her like the large damp hands of a blind stranger groping for her neck.

Not a word was said. One man moved in his seat and the chair squeaked under his weight. Kit finished half the water and walked out. It took all her self-discipline to keep from running, but her heart pounded heavily.

Even when the door slammed behind her, it was an effort to walk down the stairs with any semblance of dignity. By the time she arrived at the crest of the lawn, she was in sight of the players again.

No one appeared to have missed her. Manolo was in a violent argument with Leslie Garrity who was defending her brothers. Even Dan was laughing with them. Kit went up to him and stood with her back to the others.

"Dan," she said very softly. "What do you think of these people?"

He glanced down at her, the laughter slowly dying.

"They're weird. Do they frighten you?"

"Yes, they're the worst kind. Completely degenerate. I was just in Paul's kitchen." She paused to moisten her lips. "The room is crowded with gunmen."

"Gunmen?" It seemed too strong a word for him. He glanced up over her head to see if they were being noticed, and then he looked back at her. "Are you sure?"

"I know the type," she insisted. "Dan, I want to get away from here at once. It's not safe! Not only for me, but for you. Especially you!"

HE WALKED away, suddenly smiling, and swinging his mallet.

"My turn," he said.

He made an uninspired shot that rolled slowly out of bounds and then down the slope towards the road.

"Good night!" he groaned. "Right into the graveyard!"

Kit was annoyed at his inept ruse. She had just done the same thing, and it would be immediately obvious what was going on. But Paul showed no exceptional interest.

"Too bad, there's no caddy," he remarked. "Go and fetch."

Dan threw down his mallet and started to trudge off. As he passed Kit, he said to her almost in a whisper.

"Wait until I start up on the way back. Then come down and meet me in front of the house by the car."

But as he left her, Kit turned and saw Paul watching them intently. He came over and stood next to her while they stared after Dan. They could see him pick his way among the tombstones, stopping here and there to read the inscriptions.

From the top of the hill, Kit watched him curiously. Dan had paused at one of the graves, examining the ground. She

heard a small thud and looked down. Paul had dropped his mallet, and he stood there, rubbing his hands together nervously. In another moment, Dan had started uphill.

Kit took a few steps forward as though to meet him, but Paul stopped her.

"You wait here," he said. His voice was the most vicious she had ever heard. "Do you hear me?" He turned to the others. "See that she stays here and doesn't leave. I'm going down to meet him myself."

He strode off, leaving her the center of their suddenly alert glances. They didn't seem startled, merely called to attention.

"You'll have to learn to come to heel, you know!" the Baroness laughed.

Kit said nothing, and the game went on. She walked to the crest of the hill and watched the two men. Paul met Dan halfway.

They stood there in conversation, but it was impossible to form any idea of what was going on since they were too far away to see their expressions. Dan glanced up at her several times while Paul was talking, and finally the two men came up.

Apparently Paul was in a wonderful mood. When the two men approached the top of the hill Kit could see good humor bubbling in his eyes. Dan's face was stony. She could get nothing from him. He even avoided meeting her eyes.

"Forget the silly game," Paul said impulsively. "Come on in the house and I'll show you the picture. We'll have a drink first and then you can have a look. I just got it last night and I want to know what you think."

"Oh Paul!" said the Baroness. "Do we have to?"

But even that slight didn't annoy him. He took her hands and pulled her out of the chair.

"Come on, Lucy, this one is different. You'll see! And if you're very good, I may even make you a present of it."

"No, thanks," said the Baroness drily. "I'll do very well without the picture."

Kit couldn't fathom his hilarious mood. It was all due to what Dan had said to him, and she couldn't imagine what it could be. Dan was standing with his back towards her, and the others were much too close for her to be able to speak to him.

The change in atmosphere was grotesque. Paul stood aside to let them pass. For Kit he had a particularly joyous smile. As she walked in, she knew he was following her with his eyes.

She was isolated. Nobody paid any attention to her. The talk and laughter flowed past her and through her as though she didn't exist. Dan had joined in the banter. It was as though Paul had put a stigma on her. She leaned against the table with her drink untasted.

IT WAS the conversation between Dan and Paul which appeared to have neutralized Dan. Yet she couldn't imagine that Dan could be fooled by anything Paul might say. She was sure that Paul could neither frighten nor buy him off. It all started, she remembered, when Dan was examining the grave stones.

The only thing Paul could have done was to explain his remarks on the previous evening in such a way as to place Kit in the wrong. But that, too, was impossible. It didn't make sense. Yet, Dan was across the room, talking to the major, standing in such a way that she was unable to see his face.

"Come on inside, everybody," Paul called. "It's time now."

They walked through the living room where Kit had tiptoed a few nights ago. It seemed very cheerful and sunny now, but a shiver of remembered terror made her hands feel moist. She saw the chair in which Paul had sat, watching her. He had been no more than two inches away from her. She looked up to meet his smiling eyes.

"It's in the library," he said, pushing open the door.

Kit waited for the others to go in, and held back. Above the sound of the voices, she imagined that she heard the crackling of a fire. At any moment, the voices would die into shocked silence as they. . . .

Kit shook her head. There was no dead body in the room. There was nothing wrong at all except the malicious expression in Paul's face. Kit went into the room.

On the wall opposite the long windows, a picture was covered with a piece of white cheesecloth held to the frame with thumb-tacks that were barely stuck in the narrow wooden frame.

"This is really too absurd!" Manolo exclaimed. "Corny is the word. I love that word," he murmured, and repeated it as though for the taste. "Corny!"

Paul exposed his annoyance for only a moment, and then stood by the picture facing his audience with his hands behind his back.

"This was done," he said, "by a young fisherman I discovered at Montauk. It's a water color, as you'll see. This fellow, his name is Glynn, never had a formal lesson. But his work shows a tremendous feeling for the power of the elements, the inhuman force of the placid sea, the staggering inconceivable depth of the night sky."

He ripped off the cheesecloth so that they might see the picture themselves.

Kit saw the painted night scene. The artist had been standing among enormous boulders on the beach immediately below a towering cliff. At the top of the cliff there was a lighthouse that pointed straight up like a finger.

To the right, the sea boiled up the beach

and foamed about the rocks. The angle of the cliffs and the lighthouse made it look as though one were standing in a very deep pit, looking straight up. The color of the sky receded from a luminous blue at sea level to jet black at the top of the picture.

"Notice," Paul went on, "how cleverly the artist has used the height of the cliff and the lighthouse beyond to give the feeling of perspective which is carried over the sky. This really is a painting of the night sky, and everything else in it is merely to give you the proper perspective. As a matter of fact, it's the only work I've ever seen where the beauty and depth of the night sky has been caught."

The phrase rang in Kit's ear. It had an odd, familiar sound, and yet she couldn't place it. She glanced at Dan and was surprised to see a peculiar gleam in his eyes as though he'd stumbled on something.

"That's very interesting," Dan said.

"It stinks!" Manolo insisted.

He was a little drunk. Paul stood rigidly by the picture, his hands pressed together behind him so tightly that his shoulders looked strained.

"No," Dan repeated. "It's really interesting. That last remark, I mean."

"Just what do you mean?" Paul asked.

He sounded as though there were no one else in the room but the two of them.

"I mean," Dan went on in the same quiet tone, "that just last night you were bemoaning the fact that you'd never seen a decent painting of the night sky, and suddenly here it is."

PAUL said nothing. His face was very white, and he was breathing deeply. Dan went up to the picture and examined it with a small folding magnifying glass he carried in his vest pocket.

"When did you get this picture?" Dan asked.

"Last night," Paul answered. His voice was urgent.

Dan looked up at him.

"Last night? Was it painted here?"

"Of course not!"

"That's very odd," Dan said quietly. He was smiling. "That picture was done in the last twelve to eighteen hours." He turned to Paul and asked gently, "Are *you* this Glynn, Paul? Did you paint this picture?"

Paul gasped as though he'd been slapped. His mouth sagged.

"You must be," Dan went on in his gentle, speculative way. "It explains a lot of things about you. You've painted all these pictures here in this house. You've painted all the pictures you've discovered. Haven't you, Paul? I must say, you're the first undiscovered artist who is constantly discovering himself."

"You're your own famous blind spot. I imagine that you're the only painter whose work has been hung in the best galleries and exhibitions and never twice under the same name!"

"This is wonderful!" sighed Manolo. "You mean, Paul, that you're the untaught Norwegian farmer who painted the fjords? That stinker in the dining room?"

"But remember the Austrian peasant who did the Christian primitive," the Baroness insisted. "Remember how you raved about it in the catalogue?"

She shook with laughter.

"No, no!" roared Major Tolnysi. "The best one, the very best one, is the self-portrait of the French cocotte."

Kit looked about her with profound astonishment. Paul was their friend, and yet they tore into him like a pack of cannibals. He was really suffering, and they enjoyed it. Paul stood there in a horrible glassy silence, slowly wetting his lips.

Like a man walking in his sleep, he moved a bit and grabbed Manolo around the throat with one hand, and repeatedly jabbed the outstretched fingers of his other hand into the Spaniard's face. Manolo screamed with pain.

"Shut up!" Paul hissed. He didn't know what he was saying or doing. "Shut up, all of you!" He caught his breath and went on. "They're fine pictures, I tell you! They show a profound talent, you stupid dogs! Now, be quiet!"

Manolo wrenched himself free and slumped onto the sofa, sobbing. Paul's face was wet with sweat. He wiped it slowly with a handkerchief and tried to collect himself. After a moment, he turned back to Dan.

"How do you know what I said last night?"

"I heard you." Dan's voice was calm.

"You were standing behind that door?"

"Yes," said Dan. "I was."

Kit closed her eyes for a moment. Dan was standing by the picture, so assured, so certain he was controlling the situation, and still so ignorant of what he was up against.

She heard a thud, a deep gasp of agony and her eyes flew open. Dan was lying on the floor, twisting in pain with Paul over him.

She made a move to help him, but the Baroness grabbed her arm.

"Can't you take a hint?" the Baroness said wearily.

Kit saw the men gather in a small circle about Dan. They had a peculiar, fixed expression. Even Manolo had stopped crying, and he leaned forward with pleasurable anticipation. The Garrity woman sat back, smoking; but seeing the preparations, Madam Tolnysi rose hurriedly.

"I'll be up in my room resting," she said. "You must excuse me, but these things always make me a little ill. I'd rather not watch."

PART SIX



RINGING back against the wall, Kit felt the Baroness' grip on her arm relax. She could see nothing because the men's backs were crowded together. Nothing, that is, except swift furtive movements as a foot would jerk forward in a kick, or an arm swing back for a punch.

But as each blow struck home, Kit could tell by a painful gasp or a moan. The men said nothing, they worked in panting silence.

Kit discovered that she had been acting entirely on instinct the past few minutes, and had moved free of the Baroness, backing slowly towards the door. Her mind had ceased to function as anything but a sounding board which caught Dan's half-stifled groans and transmitted them into stabs of pain which she shared with him. When she was a foot or two from the doorway, she turned and ran to the foyer where she had left her bag.

Behind her there was no sound to indicate that she had been missed. She walked swiftly, afraid to appear in too much of a hurry in case she should be intercepted by one of the servants.

The bag was lying on the table, and she snatched it open. Her gun was inside, and as she took it up, she made sure the catch was off. In another few seconds she was back in the doorway. When she entered the room, Kit slammed the door shut behind her.

The sound snapped flatly through the room, and everybody looked up. One by one, their eyes wandered to the gun in her hand.

"Put your hands up, and line up against the wall," she said.

Nobody moved. The grin hadn't even faded from Manolo's red, sweating face. That stupid leer was the first thing she was really conscious of, and an avalanche of blood seemed to flow to her brain, blinding her for a moment.

The gun in her hand jerked as it went off, and the Spaniard's grin snapped into a startled frown, while he grabbed his arm. It took a fraction of a second for her to realize that she had shot him. She remembered the coughing sound.

"There are ten bullets left in this gun," said Kit. "One for each of you, then some.

It was made by a Czech," she added to Manolo. "Perhaps the brother of the man you shot. Now, line up!"

They obeyed her in absolute silence. She could see Dan now, huddled on the floor. He was trying to sit up.

"Dan!"

He shook his head slowly from side to side. His face was terribly bruised and blood trickled from his nose and lips in crooked streams. Slowly, he screwed up his face as though he were trying to see in the dark.

"Dan!"

"Kit?"

It was a gasp without articulation.

"I'm over here, Dan, with a gun."

"Gun?" The word had a puffy sound as though the inside of his mouth were terribly bruised. "What gun?"

"I decided to take it along in spite of what you said." She glanced at the others lined up against the wall. "Can you see me?"

He nodded slowly and started to crawl toward her, his painful progress making a shocking picture. Halfway across the room, he stopped and managed to raise himself to one knee.

"Can you get up?" she asked.

Dan nodded his head slowly, and reached out for a chair to help himself to his feet. But he wasn't too sure of his balance, and when he let go of the chair he wavered from side to side, then lurched to the wall and leaned against it.

"I'm all right now," he said slowly. He looked as though he needed sleep.

"Wipe the blood off your face, then go out and start Paul's Packard," Kit said. "The key's in the lock. Get the car started, and have it in front of the door in gear. Is that clear?"

He nodded in a mechanical fashion.

"I'm all right," he insisted.

He took out a handkerchief and dabbed gingerly at his face, wincing every so often as he touched an exceptionally tender spot.

"How do I look?" he asked.

Kit kept her eyes fixed steadily on the people lined up before her.

"Wonderful," she said shortly. "Now go ahead. Blow the horn when you're ready."

SHE backed up to the door and held it open for him. Then, as soon as he had slipped through, she closed it again. Now she was alone with her prisoners who would remain prisoners only as long as she didn't move from the room.

In the sense that she couldn't move, she was their prisoner. Unless she shot them all, this was only a temporary victory that would give her and Dan the advantage of the few seconds it would take for them to leave the room after her.

Their eyes were watchful, cautious. Paul's face, set rigidly, had the alert expression of an animal, momentarily trapped but not yet willing to concede defeat. The only sound came from Manolo who seemed to be sobbing through his clenched teeth.

"When I go," Kit told them, "I'm going to walk backward to the front door, and if anyone steps out of this room before I get there, he'll get shot. You're to stay here until you hear the car start."

A motor roared into action. The sound died as the car was put into gear, and then merged into the long bray of the horn.

It was time for her to go. She stepped out of the room, slammed the door; and then as quietly as possible, ran across the living room into the foyer and out the front entrance. Dan had left the car door open for her, and as soon as she got on the running-board, he let the clutch out.

The gravel spurted as the car shot off. She was almost thrown out as they rounded the path toward the gate, but as they turned out into the highway the centrifugal force threw her back in and closed the door. No one had yet appeared through the entrance of the house.

"Where should I go?" Dan asked.

"Just keep on going until I tell you to turn!"

It was a straight two-lane macadam road with a few gentle rises and falls. When they had gone about four miles, Kit saw a turning glint of light behind as another car twisted out of the driveway to follow them. It was a big car, but she couldn't tell what kind. The Packard went into a hollow, and the pursuing car disappeared from view.

"Keep on here until we run into one of the big parkways," Kit said. "We'll try to lose them by getting off somewhere."

He nodded in silence, but his face was rapidly puffing up.

"Pull over to the side quickly," Kit ordered. "You can't drive at all. You need sleep."

"I couldn't sleep!"

"You'll be surprised how easily you can! Now jam on the brakes so we don't lose any time."

It took him almost a minute to make up his mind. "Okay," he said heavily and pushed his foot down hard.

They were both thrown forward with the same acceleration as though they were falling through space. The tires screamed and the car rocked from side to side, but Kit jumped out even before it stopped and ran around the back. It took less than half a minute for her to get behind the wheel, and put the engine into gear.

"I'm all right," Dan murmured. But when the reaction to the car's acceleration threw him back into the seat, he remained there with his head resting against the

cushion, facing the top. Kit reached over and found his pulse. It was steady.

The blood on his face was dried by this time, so that with the exception of possible internal injuries he seemed to be all right. Paul's people hadn't had more than a few minutes to work on him.

The road came to an end suddenly as it fed into a large six-lane concrete parkway. Kit turned to her right, going south. There were only a few cars on the road, and she pushed the Packard up to eighty-five. It was the fastest she had ever gone in her life, yet there was no terrible sensation of speed.

She stepped a little harder on the gas pedal and the speedometer needle crept to ninety-two. It was the objective knowledge of motion and not any physical reaction that made her tense.

To keep herself aware of her speed, she had to convert miles into kilometers. When she found that she was driving about one hundred and fifty kilometers an hour, a cool sweat broke out on her body. One doesn't make sharp turns at that speed with any confidence of staying on the road. Nevertheless, there was no choice. Kit held the needle at that point.

A small wooden police booth flashed past, but it was empty. It suddenly occurred to Kit that Paul might telephone in a complaint that his car had been stolen. That meant she might have to contend with the police as well.

She was sure that he wouldn't though, because Paul wasn't safe until he had disposed of Dan before Dan had a chance to speak. There was nothing Paul could hold over Dan's head.

Dan was an American citizen, an Army reserve officer; and there would be absolutely no question from the authorities if Dan made the report. No, Paul would have to play it on their terms now, and that meant his only way out was to kill Dan.

KIT decided then that it was to her advantage to find a policeman, even to be arrested for speeding, if that would enable them to be taken into custody where Dan could safely tell his story.

Every police booth they passed, though, was empty. It was too early in the season to have roads patrolled. She would have to keep going, doing her best to keep ahead of her pursuers until they found an officer.

The car roared on along the level highway, but Kit felt that she didn't have sufficient margin of safety. In the time it would take her to slow down to a halt and bring Dan to his senses, they could be overtaken, and Dan shot before he could make any kind of coherent statement. It was essential to lose the pursuing car completely.

Kit continued to search for side roads,

but they all seemed to be on the other side of the highway. It was impossible to get to them because a concrete guard about a foot high separated the north and the south bound traffic.

A few miles ahead, she saw a small bridge crossing the highway. Kit suddenly made up her mind that if it were an overpass she'd get off the south-bound side, cross the overpass to the north lane, and take the first side road that came along on the chance that she'd reach it before the other car came along.

She was lucky. A narrow road led off the highway at a gentle angle. It was necessary to slow down to fifty miles an hour to turn onto the bridge, but there was no traffic to hinder her.

She felt as though she were barely moving, but Dan's head rolled sluggishly about on the back of the seat from the deep swerve of the car. Nothing seemed to awaken him, and he settled down in his last position to continue his sleep.

In another moment, she was heading north at seventy-five, and hugging the left side of the road so that she would have some leeway to turn for the first offshoot. It was farther away than she had anticipated and just as she swerved off, skidding around the bend, the other car passed going south. It was a big new Cadillac, and in the split second of passing, Kit saw only the Garrity twins and the Major. She wasn't at all sure that Paul was there.

That worried her. If Paul stayed behind, it meant that he had something more important to do than chase Dan. But there was nothing more important to him right now than getting Dan out of the way. The answer was clear. He must have another way!

She had taken a road across sand flats, as level as a table. One could see miles in any direction. They raced forward into their own shadows cast by the late afternoon sun. Behind them, at the same speed, came the other car.

The two cars were all alone beneath the enormous cloudless sky, and there was no way to hide any movement from the other; not a tree for cover, not even a clump of houses. In the distance, a waving mass of marsh grass leaned flatly before the wind, twisting and glinting like a low-lying shimmering green mist.

Dan hadn't moved since they left the bridge. His bruised mouth was opened slightly, but Kit could find no opportunity to examine him. At ninety-five miles an hour there is no spare time. The road was narrow and even a slight twist or curve called for full concentration. Her one great fear was that she might come to a dead end.

They rounded a curve along a deep bay and the road sheered away from the water.

However, a small pitted road ran off to a clump of weather-beaten shacks clustered around a pier. But if she took it, she would reach the fork, and so she'd be seen. There was no choice but to keep going on the same road. It was absolutely straight ahead of her for five miles; a frozen ribbon that narrowed far away into a string and then dissolved into the bright sunlit sand.

It was impossible to tell what was coming at the end, and she slowed down to fifty again. There was a sudden sharp S-twist that sent the car over on two shrieking wheels, then back on the other two, delivering them unexpectedly once more on a four-lane highway.

A white sign was passed so swiftly, it seemed a blur, but as she reconstructed the impression in her mind, she remembered that it said "South Shore: Hamptons and Montauk."

The road condensed to two lanes, and sparse woods sprang up along the sides. The trees were stunted and twisted into weird shapes. Many had fallen at odd angles as though strewn around by the eddies of some gigantic wind. It was no longer possible to see any more than a little distance ahead at any one time. A glance at the gasoline gauge showed that the tank was only about a quarter full.

The needle had been dropping at an imperceptible rate all the time, and the trip meter showed that they had covered more than sixty miles. She had to smile as she remembered how flippantly such matters had been dismissed that morning.

"Gadgets," she had said.

IN ANOTHER twenty minutes, they ran into the east-west highway on the south shore. A sign pointed right to Easthampton, another to the left to Amagansett and Montauk. The easiest and most obvious thing would be to go west toward the Hamptons, doubling back to New York. Kit turned left, continuing out to the tip of Long Island.

Here, the road was two lanes and ran parallel to the beach, being almost always within sight of the ocean. Huge sand dunes, sometimes thirty feet high, topped with the inevitable coarse grass flowed past like gigantic waves. The road twisted, dropped, rose and turned like a moving snake. The town of Amagansett was no more than a crossroad which led back of the dunes, but a slowly-moving truck coming out kept her from making the turn.

Now there wasn't a house in sight, and the dunes rose even higher than before. She decided she must lose her pursuers somewhere between here and Montauk.

Kit slowed down again to sixty and got well into the middle of the road, taking her chances that someone would not be coming

from the opposite direction. In a fairly short distance, she found exactly what she was looking for: a space where two dunes flowed down gently to the road, covered with grass to give it some firmness. She yanked her wheel to the left and ran off the road.

The car hit the sand with a terrible banging jounce. But, since the slope was upward, the tendency of the nose of the motor to bury itself in the sand only sent the automobile slithering up one of the dunes.

If there had been no grass at all, they would have turned end over end, but the tough, rugged growth gave the sand sufficient cohesion to support the automobile's weight. It took all of Kit's strength to keep the wheels turned, so that they climbed the back of the dune and reached the very top, some twenty-five feet above the highway and completely out of sight.

The crater of the dune was soft sand and the car bounced to a halt, covered up beyond the hubcaps in sand.

Kit jumped out, and yanked off her shoes because the high heels were an interference. Then she slid down the dune into the tracks the wheels had made and frantically tracked them out where the car had left the road.

The roar of an approaching car came to her above the sound of the breakers. Kit took cover behind the dune just as the big Cadillac roared past. She climbed to the top just in time to see it disappear with unabated speed off toward Montauk.

Her stockings were ripped by the pieces of shell and dried wood that lay half-buried in the sand, but she put her shoes back on and started the car.

The motor turned over immediately, but when she put the gear into reverse the wheels spun around in sterile motion. She let the motor idle and tried it again with just a little gas, but there was still no traction. The car was stuck.

For the first time she had a chance to look at Dan. All the jarring and bumping hadn't awakened him. His pulse was steady and his breathing normal; he was all right then. The next thing to do was to find some planks, put them under the rear wheels so that she could get the car rolling down the dune again, because if once she got the rear wheels well over the crest, gravity would take care of the remainder of the job.

The simple noise made by the slammed door as she got out awakened Dan. He stirred and moaned some unintelligible words. Kit stood, watching him, and in a second more his eyes opened. They were glazed, and he stared at her through a mist. Slowly, Kit saw them take on a focus. His lips moved uncertainly.

"What happened?" Dan asked. He raised his head, staring about him at the dunes

which rolled on all sides. In front of them, far across the highway out of sight beneath them, the ocean broke along the shore in a curving white fringe. His frown deepened, and without waiting for her to answer he asked, "Where are we?"

"We're stuck in the sand," Kit replied in a very matter-of-fact tone. His eyes widened in alarm, and she went on. "But we've lost them for the time being. They chased us all over Long Island for more than an hour. Now we're somewhere between Amagansett and Montauk. I drove up a dune and they kept on going."

"Over an hour?" Dan repeated. His voice was vague. "Was I out that long?"

"That's all," Kit said. She purposely underplayed it. "They didn't have much of a chance to work on you. In the concentration camp sometimes you sleep for two days after a beating."

"What happened?"

"Don't you remember?"

HE SHOOK his head slowly. His eyes were glazed and slightly perplexed.

"Not too much. It's all sort of confused. I was talking to Paul, when suddenly they began kicking me, and there was nothing I could do about it." He turned to her and asked like a child, "Do you know what it feels like to be kicked continually?"

It was a rhetorical question, as though he were describing the ultimate outrage to human dignity.

"Nobody ever hit me before in my life! But I lay there and I couldn't even raise a hand to protect myself. I remember thinking how I wanted to get them, to pull them to pieces. But after a while I didn't even think about that. All I wanted to do was to be able to crawl away some place where they couldn't get at me. Then suddenly . . . it stopped!" His eyes invited her to appraise the miracle. "Then I heard you talking to me. . . . I remember starting a car, this one, and I hardly knew what I was doing all the while."

"You did very well," Kit said.

Dan made no reply. He faced the sea again, and his eyes had no particular focus.

"You brought the gun along after all?"

"Yes," Kit said.

"Do you still have it?" he asked.

"Yes."

He turned his head slightly.

"Show me how to use it!" His sick eyes gleamed.

"Why?"

"Because I'm going back to that house," he said very quietly. "And I'm going to blast every one of them. I'm going to kill them!"

He sat up straight and made frantic little motions as though it might hurry him back.

Kit stood a few feet away from the car,

alled with compassion, wondering at the uniformity of men's reactions to physical force. This was the way all the men she knew had reacted to their first beating, and she had seen it many times.

To peaceful men, free men, it is inconceivable that any one has the right to strike another. One can hurl all the verbal insults to enforce an argument without necessarily violating a sort of inner personal privacy.

But a kick or a blow aimed at a helpless victim, not in anger but with calculation, is maddening in the most literal sense of the word. Kit had seen quiet men, the most un-militant people, walk up and down, screaming for vengeance like savages. And the more unused to violence they were, the more bitter the reaction.

It would be impossible to reason with him for a while; she knew that from experience. But it was necessary to keep talking, because a calm outside voice always reaches the back of the mind and acts as a minor but persistent rein. She slipped the ignition key out of the lock when he wasn't looking and kept it in the palm of her hand.

"You can't go back," Kit said. "They're not there any more."

"Where are they?"

He was fingering his battered face very lightly, exploring the new ridges and sores. His swollen lips were widening in a speculative smile.

"I told you they were following us and we lost them. Didn't you hear me?"

"I heard you. Where did we lose them?"

"Just down the road. They went past us toward Montauk. They're looking for us out there perhaps."

"Then come on, let's go out there and find them. I don't care *where* I can get at them."

He turned to her irritably.

"Come on, start the car!"

"We're stuck in the sand," Kit explained, temporizing without being definite. "I'll have to get some planks to put under the wheels."

"I'll go with you," he said, and swung open the door, but when he tried to straighten his body, he groaned and cursed.

"Better get back," said Kit. "I can do it alone."

"No!"

He was standing with his back to her so she wouldn't see his face, but the effort it took to stand upright was easily measured by the way the muscles bulged and strained in his neck. In a few seconds, he walked around the back of the car to meet her.

"Let's go," he said.

THEY trudged off, down the slope, their feet sinking into the soft sand. It was after five o'clock and their shadows extended a considerable distance.

"There's a piece of driftwood," Kit said, pointing to something a hundred feet away.

She started for it, with Dan stumbling along after her.

"That's no good," he pointed out when they reached it. "It's a log."

"You're right," she confessed, and searched about for another piece that wouldn't do.

If she could keep him walking around back here until he cooled down, they'd be all right. In this condition, if they caught him, his rage would make him utterly defenseless.

They searched the dunes for planks while the sun went lower and lower into the evening chill. The sky in the west was a magnificent red glow when Kit finally crumpled into one of the craters.

"What's the matter?" Dan asked in alarm.

"It's my ankle," she told him. "I twisted it."

He scrambled down beside her, looking completely helpless.

"It's not that bad," Kit assured him.

"I'll be all right in ten or fifteen minutes."

"Have you got a cigarette?" Dan asked, and took her package.

It was less chilly down here with the high sand ridges about them cutting off the new wind. They leaned against the slope, and smoked in silence.

Under the pretense of massaging her ankle, Kit watched Dan covertly. The loose rage in his eyes had abated in the routine process of looking for wood. It wasn't that his anger was gone. It was being tempered, transformed into a much more dangerous cast.

"How do you feel now?" she asked.

"Oh, I'm all right," he said shortly . . . too shortly. "Think you can go on?"

"No," Kit answered, leaning back. He still wasn't ready. "Not for a short while yet."

He settled back once more. Soon his head began to nod. He was dozing again, and Kit was satisfied. When he awoke this time, she was sure he'd be more tractable. It was a quarter of six when he opened his eyes. They seemed far clearer than before.

Kit decided that it was time to bring him back to a sane course. She handed him a cigarette before speaking.

"I don't think your original plan is a very good one," she said very quietly. "If you go back there with a gun, either you'll be killed or you'll end up with a murder charge against you. Then you'll be in the same position as I am."

He was on the point of objecting, but she didn't give him a chance to speak.

"Even if they are Nazi agents, you have no legal right to kill them. There is a definite procedure to be taken in these cases.

If you'll remember when I first spoke to you about them, I didn't ask for vengeance. What I wanted was to find out about Anna Mahler and try to arrange a situation where they'd be caught red-handed. . . ."

"About Anna Mahler," Dan interrupted. "I'm afraid I have a pretty good idea where she might be."

"What do you mean?"

"When I went down among the Hutchins graves to get that croquet ball, I had a chance to look around."

Kit said nothing, but waited, remembering that queer conversation which must have taken place between Paul and Dan.

"The grave of Henry Hutchins," Dan went on, "has been opened within the past few days."

"How do you know?" she demanded.

"Well, the topsoil was recently removed and then replaced again. It was removed in squares, as though it could be put back without looking disturbed. But two of the squares were put back upside-down."

"Well, in that case," Kit said quickly, "whoever did it couldn't have been so terribly worried."

Dan shook his head.

"That's not it at all. Whoever removed it felt the grave *had* to look untouched. Otherwise, the ground would have been well turned, manured and seeded for fresh grass. No, this was done in secret. The only way the mistake could have been made was if it had been done at night without the aid of a flashlight."

"Since the sections of sod aren't very thick, there wouldn't have been too much difference between the feel to the hand of stiff dead grass or the grass roots. As a matter of fact, it would have *looked* all right, except that the sudden heat started the new grass growing."

"You mean the patches were bare?" Kit asked.

"No, not bare. That wouldn't be sufficient. What happened was that the roots were growing *up*. It happens, you know. The roots grow upward for a while, and then turn toward the soil and grow downward again. I'm sure the grave was opened very recently for the purpose of putting somebody in there. It has to be Anna Mahler."

KIT lowered her head in despair. It was really worse than she thought. There had always been the hope that Anna was being held somewhere, that Kit could help her get away. It had been the main reason for going on. Now she could see that she had been fooling herself the way a child does when it wants to avoid the seriousness of some stupid act by pretending that at the last moment something would crop up to avert punishment.

"But wait," she said suddenly. "It doesn't have to be Anna. Why can't it be the man who was shot the other night?"

Dan disagreed with her.

"It wouldn't fit with what Paul said last night in the museum. He's holding this body over your head, and threatened to report it to the police. In that case, he certainly wouldn't hide it on his property. To fit with what he said, it would have to be hidden some place else where it could be found without implicating him as the one who hid it."

"Suppose he's lying, though, about reporting the body?"

"Suppose he is! He still wouldn't do you the favor of hiding it in a grave. It's a wonderful hiding place; the best in the world. It seems to me that the only bodies Paul would hide are the ones he's responsible for himself, or else one that wouldn't arouse suspicion if it were dug up. I'm afraid, that it points to Anna being buried there."

There was nothing for Kit to say. She was utterly defeated.

"I'm sorry," Dan went on. "I'm beginning to understand what you feel about these people. It was almost incomprehensible to me before."

She looked up at him dully, trying to understand what he was talking about.

"As for going back to Paul's," he said, "I suppose that *would* be stupid. The wisest thing would be for me to hand over whatever I know and whatever you'll tell me to my superiors, and let them handle it."

Kit nodded, and was silent for a few moments. She was trying to find a new orientation now that there seemed to be no purpose in keeping on after Anna.

"I suppose so. There's nothing we can do."

"You know what it means for you?"

"Yes," said Kit. "I know."

"You can leave whenever you want to," Dan told her in a tight quiet voice. The words seemed to have torn past a barrier, coming out with a deep turbulence boiling within them. "I'll give you all the money you need, and you can go some place else and lay low. Perhaps . . ." he added, "when it's all over, I can come and see you."

Kit rose to her feet, and brushed off the sand.

"No," she told him. "I'm willing to take my chances this way. I wouldn't be able to get very far. I'm ready."

He stood up stiffly, and then took her arm.

"Lean on me," Dan said. "It'll take the weight off your ankle."

"My ankle?" She stared at him.

"Doesn't it hurt?"

"Oh, that!" she said, smiling. "That was just a way to get you to rest and calm down."

But as soon as they climbed the crest of the dune, Kit stared at the empty, barren hills about her with a sudden burst of panic.

She grabbed Dan's arm and pulled him down so forcibly that they both slid down to the bottom again. Her heart was pounding and she felt a little sick with fear.

"What's the matter?" Dan asked.

"The car! It's not there! It's gone!"

The soft rustling of the grass in the wind had a new quality now. It sounded as though it were the whispering of men waiting on the crest above them.

Footsteps in sand are always silent, and unless one saw the enemy first there was no way of detecting his approach. The gust of wind died and took with it the sound of the grasses. Except for the distant rumble of the surf, there was silence all about them.

"Are you sure you can see the car from here?" Dan asked.

"I had to keep it in sight all the time," she said. "There are miles and miles of deserted sand dunes out here, and it was the only way we could have found our way back. I remember looking at it just before we came down here."

"Where are the keys?"

She showed them to him.

"But they could open the ignition; they had time. We couldn't have heard it either because the wind is wrong."

He looked about the small hollow they were in, then his eyes met hers.

"I don't see your bag," he said. "Was the gun in it?"

Kit nodded. "And the bag was in the car. That's why I think they must be looking for us somewhere. They know we're unarmed."

Her voice had sunk to a whisper as though it would interfere with hearing anyone come.

THEY were sitting in a hollow about ten feet deep and some fifteen feet across. At the rim of the crater above them the grass was permanently curved by the winds and pivoted about the stem for any wind which blew.

"Well, I'm going to take a look," Dan whispered. "They should be somewhere between us and the shore."

Kit nodded. "But be careful," she said. "Pick a spot where there's a clump of grass for cover."

He made his way up slowly, making sure of his footing at each step. Kit waited, stiff with impatience, and watched his face for any change in expression.

"I don't see a soul," he said after a few minutes. "Do you think they're gone?"

There was a flat crack which seemed very distant, and almost simultaneously the grass about Dan's head whipped viciously. The curved stalks did a crazy dance all by

themselves, and then the motion was absorbed as a new gust of wind swept all the grass up in one languorous wave.

Dan slid down a bit so that his head was several inches below the crater rim.

"That's the answer," he said.

"Did you see them?"

"No." He sounded disturbed. "They must be hidden in a crater the way we are."

"But they know where we are now," Kit said. "And they know they've got our only gun."

Then they heard another shot from the same direction, but this time the bullet came nowhere near them. Kit and Dan looked at each other.

"They couldn't have seen me that time," Dan insisted. "But it was the same gun!"

There was still another shot, even more distant than before. Dan peered very cautiously through the grass and Kit saw a small smile on his face.

"I see them now. They're walking away from us."

Kit crawled up alongside of him. Perhaps a quarter of a mile away, she saw three figures, widely separated, but converging toward one dune. There was something feral in the half-crouch they assumed as though they were about to close in on a prey.

"They didn't see you then," Kit reasoned. "They must have been shooting at anything that looked suspicious."

Every so often one or the other of the three would disappear from sight as he went behind a dune, and as long as the little figure was hidden, Kit felt a small tightening in her throat. She could be satisfied that she was comparatively safe only as long as she knew what every one of them was doing. Now they were almost together.

Watching the stealth with which they climbed the last obstacle, she was as terrified as though she were in the crater over there. She could see them wave one another on, and then, at a signal, all three jumped to their feet at the crest.

As they did so, three faint shots just missed being simultaneous. Then the figures froze in their attitudes, and Kit could see the heads turn to one another. Their arms made little angry gestures and one of the men pointed away to the north.

"It'll be dark in fifteen minutes," Dan murmured. He stared at them, transfixed, and his whispering voice showed the respect he had for their intentions. "If they don't spot us by then, we'll be all right."

"Be careful," Kit warned him. "You don't know where the women are. Remember, there'll be a moon tonight."

"But not until fairly late."

The three men broke up again. One went east directly away from them. One north, away from the shore, and the third started

west in their general direction, but on a line between them and the shore.

The grass about their heads rippled and twisted in the wind, but it was part of the general wave of bowing grass all about them. Dusk was settling in very fast now. Dan seemed about to move away, but she detained him.

"Don't, Dan," she said. "I'd rather have you close to me."

"You didn't say that last night," he reminded her. "You were rather cold-blooded about my being in love with you."

"I suppose I was," she admitted. "Tonight it's different. We're much closer somehow." She thought again of the Czech medical student whose name she never learned. "It's as though you're one of us now. You know what I'm talking about, and I saw you learning."

"I learned," he agreed bitterly. "I learned a beautiful lesson."

"And when I saw them beating you," Kit went on. "What I was feeling was, well, it was different than anything I've felt before."

KIT shifted her position slightly and looked at him. She put an arm about his neck, and pressed her face against his. It was impossible for her to be coy or shy, waiting for his advances. There was no time to waste. "I'm in love with you, Dan, I suppose. I must love you very much."

He raised his head in surprise, in almost heartbreaking incredulity. His lips moved as though he were on the point of speaking, then he kissed her.

All the loneliness of years, the terror, fright and exhaustion, disappeared for her. To be with him, pressed against him, was relief so intensely beyond expectation, she was stunned.

She felt him wince as she touched a tender spot on his mouth, but it was impossible to release him. This one oasis of happiness would have to be remembered too long to let it slip without reluctance.

She rested her forehead against his cheek and held him very tightly.

"Kit," he whispered. "Why can't we go away? Nobody'll find us. We can't go back now. Who knows what they'll do to you!"

She moved away from him slowly. The idea of freedom was tantalizing and wonderful. But there was something unreal about it, and the unreality was in the fact that this wouldn't be what she knew was freedom. There was no freedom in two people being by themselves away from the world.

To be free meant that one was able to live with the world. Kit had been taught the real meaning of the word by the Anna Mahlers, the Conrad Kreutzers, the Czech students.

"It would mean surrender, wouldn't it? Surrender to Paul and his crowd. They'd go free. Could you see yourself doing that?"

"No," Dan admitted quietly. "I might have been able to do it yesterday, but not today. No, not even yesterday. You couldn't either, could you?"

"No," Kit said slowly. "I couldn't."

They sat in the silent dusk. Overhead, the clouds were dark blue against a sky that was scarcely lighter. A few stars had already come out. The rustling and moaning of the grass dissolved all other sounds. Dan crawled away, and peered over the crest of the dune again for several minutes without moving.

"Do you see anything?" Kit asked.

"No. It's so dark now that it's hard to see more than a little distance." Dan waited until Kit came up alongside of him. The whole face of the empty dunes had changed. The rolling expanse of white sand now seemed a flat gray that merged into darkness with the horizon only a few yards away. "Let's get going," Dan said. "If we keep low, we stand a good chance of making it. I haven't seen one of them since I've been up here."

"It doesn't seem wise," Kit answered slowly. "Shouldn't we wait until we're sure they've gone?"

Dan shook his head.

"All they have to do is to spot us and we're cooked. We don't have a gun to defend ourselves. If we can get out of this section while we have a chance, I might be able to get to a telephone and report. Did you notice how far away the nearest town is?"

"It's Amagansett, a few miles back along the highway."

He thought for a moment.

"There must be houses scattered somewhere in these dunes! There are several out past Montauk, and I'm willing to take a chance that there are some around here."

"But I didn't see any!"

"You can't until you're right on top of them," he told her. "After all, some of these dunes are as high as three-story houses. I know this country. I used to spend summers out here."

Away from the shore side, the crest was about three feet lower than anywhere else, making a very shallow pass. Dan wriggled through it and waited just outside the dune for her to come along, lying flat on the sloping side of the dune. Kit followed him with some misgivings.

In the short time they had been hiding there, the little hollow had taken on all the aspects of home. They knew all its weaknesses: where the sand was softer, where the grass grew for better protection. There were even corners which were by now associated with emotion. It was like leaving a

house where one had lived the history of all the furniture, where family members had grown up and died.

THE breeze was quite strong now as she reached the little pass. It blew across the darkness with a thousand hints of sound, each one a suggestion of stealthy motion. Dan was well outside, letting himself down very slowly.

As she rose to her knees, she suddenly saw her crouching shadow before her as a shapeless mass in a broad yellow swath of light that came from the direction of the highway.

"Get down!" Dan called, and dragged her down beside him, head first.

Kit turned over, and saw above her head a cone of light passing just across the crest she had left.

"They turned on the headlights of one of the cars," Dan told her. "They must have been just about to leave. You were right. We should have waited."

"Did they see me?"

"I don't know," he replied. "We'll soon find out."

They heard the distant sound of a metal door slamming, and in a lull of the breeze, the voices of men. Then there was silence all around them. Another beam of light, very much stronger than the first, passed a few feet above them.

"That must be the searchlight on the running-board of the Packard," Kit said. "I remember it now. They saw me, all right!"

"Now we've got to be moving," said Dan. "They'll probably leave those lights on and come up after us on either side of it, where we won't be able to see them."

He slid all the way down to the bottom of the dune, pulling Kit with him. They were hidden from the light which cut through the darkness some thirty feet above their heads. Dan turned to the left, running at right angles to the beam. Kit stumbled after him as well as she could, but her shoes kept filling with sand while the high heels spiked down and caught.

Although Dan was only a few yards ahead of her, he was almost lost against the sand. When they were a few hundred yards from the dune they had left, a small searchlight picked out Kit as she stumbled. It passed right over her as though it were being carried in the hand of a running man. She heard a shout. In the moment of darkness, she was able to get around the corner of another rise.

A gun cracked, and sand spurted where she had just been lying. In the same second, the big spotlight swung around. At this distance it was rather faint, but it was still possible to throw a moving figure into relief.

A man's shout came from the south, and it was answered by one much nearer. She felt Dan lift her up again.

"If we keep running straight in this direction," he whispered, "we'll always be in the shadow of this dune. The big searchlight will never get us, and we won't be exposed until we're out of its range."

Kit tried running without her shoes. It made travel easier, but her feet were continually being cut by bits of shell.

For a few minutes they made good time, and the occasional flash of the searchlights showed the men were off on a wrong scent. Then the ground beneath them changed. To Kit, it felt much firmer; instead of shells, there were stones.

"We must be off the dunes," she said to Dan. "Which way have we been going?"

The moving shadow ahead of her stopped and took on a definite shape as she came closer.

She couldn't make out Dan's face until they were six feet apart.

"Away from the ocean, I'm sure of that," he said. "But we're not off the dunes. Every so often out here, you'll find ridges of dried clay and gravel."

Kit put her shoes on again to ease the soles of her feet. From the angle at which she had to carry her body, she knew she was going uphill. Suddenly she collided with Dan who had come to an immediate halt in front of her.

"Look down there!" he said.

Three lights shone almost directly beneath them, about fifty feet below. It was a house at the bottom of the ridge.

"We're safe," Dan said. "Perhaps there's a telephone there."

"How can we get down? It looks as though it were a straight drop."

"It can't be straight with this kind of soil," he told her. "The slope wouldn't support itself. It's steep, all right, but we ought to be able to scramble down. I'll go first."

She sat down gingerly with her legs dangling down in the darkness. Dan turned around and eased himself over the ledge seeking a footing.

She could see him lower himself a few inches at a time.

At each step, gravel gave way, and she could hear it rolling with a harsh sound as it traveled an interminable distance. When Dan was about ten feet below her, he motioned for her to follow him.

"Did you find a path?" she asked, peering down.

"No, it's not so bad. There's always some kind of foothold."

JUST as she was about to lower her head beneath the edge of the ridge, one of the searchlights caught her. From the low

intensity of the beam, she could tell that they were quite a distance away. Dan saw her face lit up and swore quietly.

"Hurry!" he said.

But Kit was in too much of a hurry. Instead of going one step at a time, she let both feet slide, and her momentum was enough to erase any foothold there might have been.

She felt Dan reach out for her as she went past, but all he did was to scrape her arm against a rock.

The rough ground slid beneath her, and she couldn't even see to grab at a bush or a stone. The whole world seemed to be on the move, thrusting her away. There wasn't even time to hold herself against the shock she was sure was coming. Her feet hit something hard, and she was stopped momentarily, but then she began to roll sideways.

She turned over a hundred times before she came to a stop, and the black earth alternated with the starlit sky in an ever-increasing confusion until finally they seemed to merge. Before she could pick herself up, the avalanche of stones and dirt she had created caught up with her, banging her mercilessly.

"Kit!" Dan's voice came from the sky, but she was unable to answer. "Kit!"

Finally, she caught her breath. But Dan hadn't waited. She heard him scrambling down, and then the rocks he loosened hit her. She pulled herself slowly to her feet in order to avoid them, but every move she made was an agony.

To her surprise, the house was only a few feet away. It was square and white, the kind one sees in all real estate prospectuses as the ideal buy for seven thousand dollars. Kit heard a frightened pattern of running feet inside coming closer. Then a door was thrown open, letting out a long rectangle of light. A woman stood there in silhouette.

"Who's that?" she asked in a terrified voice.

"Shut that door!" Dan said as he came running into the light.

His clothes were torn, his face was cut and the blood on it made a crazy zigzag pattern over the clinging clay.

He put an arm about Kit and led her into the house, brushing aside the stupefied woman who stared at them in horror. They were standing in the kitchen. It was small, very neat and modern.

"Now close that door and turn out all your lights!" Dan snapped. Kit could see the impression his wild appearance made on the woman. She wondered what sort of monster she herself resembled. "Turn them out," Dan repeated. "Or you'll get us all killed." He turned to Kit for the first time. "Any bones broken?"

"It feels as though every one of them were smashed into a million pieces!"

"Then you're all right." He turned to the woman impatiently. "Will you do as I say?"

She was a frail washed-out person in her late forties.

The faded housedress she wore made her look even more colorless. Her eyes were enormous with fear.

"We're not going to hurt you," Dan said. "We're being followed, and if they see your lights they'll know where to look for us. If you turn them off, we'll stand a chance."

THE woman clasped her hands together, as through the familiar sensation would help recall reality.

"Who are you?" she asked.

Dan made a sound of disgust, and walked to the wall where the light switch was. He flicked it, leaving Kit and the woman facing each other in darkness. They waited silently, as though it had been agreed that they could speak only to Dan, while he strode through an arch into the next room and turned out a lamp.

"Any other lights on?" he called.

"No, that's all."

Dan's footsteps marched back again, and he was standing very close. When he spoke, he tried to make his voice calm and reassuring, but it wasn't very much of a success. Tenseness and excitement seeped through.

"I'm Dan Shay. . . . Captain Shay of the United States Army," he said. "There are Nazi agents outside who want to kill me before I can telephone in a report."

"Nazis?"

In his very attempt to make it sound plausible, Dan had made matters only worse.

"Yes, Nazis," he repeated. "Now, where's the telephone?"

The woman swallowed.

"I don't want any trouble," she said.

"It's not up to you," Dan told her. "It's here whether you want it or not. They want to kill me, and whoever else makes any attempt or even a gesture to help me. Now where's the phone?"

The woman was silent for a moment, and then she found her voice again.

"There are two telephones. There's one in here, and an extension in the front of the house. The one in this room is over there, next to the refrigerator."

Dan and the woman walked away from Kit.

"Do you have a car?" Kit asked.

The woman didn't answer at once. She stopped as though something peculiar had caught her attention.

"What?" she asked.

Kit repeated the question.

"Yes," the woman said slowly. "It's in the garage next to the house. My husband is away."

DAN picked up the telephone and asked for a number.

"Where's the road around here?" he asked while the operator made the connections. "I thought you were off in the middle of nowhere."

"There is a road. It leads out into the shore highway between Amagansett and Montauk."

"How far from Amagansett?" Kit asked.

She didn't remember passing any road.

"Three and a half miles."

"I see," said Kit. They had been running away from the shore but also away from Amagansett. She had driven into the dunes about a mile and a half from the town. "Is it a good road?"

There was no answer. The woman had gone. Before Kit could wonder what had happened, her attention was held by Dan's voice.

"Captain Shay calling. Let me speak to Colonel Simon, please. I said *Shay* . . . Captain Shay!"

There was a long silence. It extended through the house, and even beyond. At any moment, Kit expected to hear the voices from the ridge above, and the clatter of rocks as the men scrambled down to trap them.

"Isn't he there?" Kit asked.

She was answered by a peremptory "Sh!"

"What's the matter?" she demanded.

Dan gestured impatiently, then spoke into the telephone.

"Yes, Lieutenant Price. But, why?" There was another pause. "Very well, then!" Dan said sharply, and hung up.

The click of the telephone falling into its cradle sounded final and ominous.

"What is it?" Kit asked again.

She ran across the dark room to Dan.

"My commission is being temporarily withdrawn," he told her as though he didn't understand what he was saying. "They're acting on a confidential report just received that I'm mixed up with subversive activity. Paul must have got there first!"

"But who told you all that?" she asked.

She placed her hand on his arm to reassure herself.

"Nobody told me. I overheard it. The colonel's not there, but as soon as the person who answered got my name straight, he got all excited and I could hear him telling some lieutenant standing near him who I was. I heard only a little bit, because evidently somebody had sense enough to cover up the mouthpiece."

"And then?"

"Then the lieutenant got on and told me that I was to appear for an interview to-

morrow. I asked him what the purpose was, and he was very evasive . . . said it was merely routine. Probably an Intelligence officer." He snorted. "And I thought I was being so clever!"

"What do you mean?"

"Look, Kit, I tried to pull a fast one on you this morning. Just before I left the museum with you, I called up Headquarters and tried to get in touch with Colonel Simon. Simon's an old friend of mine. At least, I thought he was!"

"You were going to turn me in?"

"No, not that! I just wasn't sure what was going on, that's all. You don't think I'm fool enough to run out on what sounded like a wild-geese chase without any preparation? On the off chance that something might turn up, I felt that it was my duty to make some kind of preliminary report."

"Go on."

"Well, Simon wasn't there, so I dictated a message to be left for him marked IMPORTANT giving him only an outline of what you told me without mentioning your name. I told him that if I didn't report by telephone to him by four o'clock this afternoon he was to get in touch with Paul Campbell and I gave his address."

Kit waited in the dark without seeing his face.

"So just to make everything easy for Paul," Dan went on sarcastically. "I had to arrange for Simon to march out to Paul's just as we took it on the run so Paul could fill him with a beautiful version of the facts! And let me tell you, that skunk must have told him a mighty convincing story because Simon knows me very well. Why, we used to go hunting together every year!"

Kit turned away wearily.

"Now what?" she asked.

He walked over to her and she put her hand on his arm. She could feel him shrug. They were standing near the window. Suddenly, looking out, they saw that a light had been turned on upstairs. The square of light illuminated a large patch of lawn outside.

"What the devil is that?" Dan demanded.

Another light went on, and then still another on the opposite side of the house. They could hear the woman's footsteps above them rushing from one room to another.

In the half-light, Dan's face was very clear, hard and set. He pulled away from Kit and ran to the front of the house. His feet sounded on the staircase, and then Kit heard the woman scream.

"You're the Nazis!" She was shouting. "I heard it all on the telephone. I suspected it the minute I heard that girl's accent! You're running away from the police. I don't care what you do to me, you're not going to get away!"

PART SEVEN



IN THE bright glare of light shining down from upstairs, Kit saw Dan standing at the first landing with the woman blocking his way. Dan's angry face twitched as though he were trying to say something which would satisfy the woman, but then he gave it up as a bad job. There just wasn't time to convince

anyone.

The woman obviously expected to be killed, but she wasn't giving any ground. Her eyes were wide and hard, lit by a tremendous fear that was half-anticipation.

"We're not going to hurt you," Kit said, more out of pity for the woman's suffering than from any idea of making her change her mind.

She hated to be responsible for that kind of fear. She had felt it too often herself. But the woman stared down at them, not believing and refusing to hear.

"Come on!" Dan said, running down the stairs. "It's too late now. There's nothing we can do but make another run for it."

They stepped from the darkness of the house to the darkness of the early night which was complete except for the glaring lights of the upper floor. Dan paused for a moment to get his bearings. The garage was twenty feet to the left of the house, and he ran for it, avoiding the lighted patches of ground.

"Let's hope the key is in the car," he said. "We could use a little good luck for a change. Hold that door open for me."

He disappeared inside. Kit caught a gleam of glass as he opened the car's door. Above her, a window slammed open, and the woman leaned out.

"You won't get five miles from here before the police catch you!"

Then she withdrew, leaving chintz curtains billowing in the draught through the house.

The headlights flared on deep inside the garage, and they made two brilliant lozenges of light on the back inside wall. By the reflected light, she could make out a small sedan that barely fitted into the compact garage. A faint glow was the dashboard, feeble but encouraging.

"Any luck?" Kit asked.

She glanced up at the dark looming ridge above them for any sign of their pursuers. There were a few more stars out now. The temperature was dropping and once again it was winter.

In answer to her question, the motor roared and the car immediately lurched

backward. Kit stepped out of the way, and then hopped on the running-board as it went past.

The automobile had a stuffy smell, as though it had not been used for a long time. They reached the end of the space for turning, and Dan jammed on the brakes in preparation for going forward. The moment of silence before he slipped into low gear was broken by shouts above them.

There was a dim crack and one of the headlights went out as though a man had suddenly closed one eye. The sound of the second shot was lost in the clash of gears, so that Kit thought the windshield was spontaneously disintegrating.

There was a tiny hole in the exact center with long streamers flaring away from it in all directions to reach the frame. Kit glanced sideways and saw no change in Dan's expression. They were both all right. To see anything in front of her, Kit had to peer through glass a few inches wide.

Neither of them said anything as the car lurched forward. The one remaining headlight picked out the winding road for them. Dan's foot was pressed down to the floor, and the speedometer needle climbed steadily. The maximum safe speed for the car was about fifty-five or sixty. Above that it would weave in a tight curve, ready at the first lack of balance to swing out of control. At seventy, on an unknown road, it was like a cunning animal waiting for a chance to escape.

"Keep your hands away from the glass," were Dan's first words. "It's liable to go at any minute."

"Are you all right?" Kit finally managed the question that had been nagging at her ever since they got started.

"Sure," Dan said.

He rode with his head as close as possible to the open window so that occasionally he could glance out around the shattered windshield.

ARUT in the road bounced the car so that the springs almost collapsed. When the rear wheels hit it, the car swung sideways a bit and Dan had to yank the steering wheel around to keep it on the road.

"There's no need to go so fast," Kit said, trying to keep her voice calm. "There's no way they can follow us. Besides, we don't want to outrun the police."

"Outrun the police?"

"Certainly. The woman has probably called them by this time and reported us as well as the license plate number."

"We'll have to keep out of their way, that's all!"

"But, Dan, it's the best thing that can happen to us as long as we meet them before Paul's people get us."

Dan paused before he spoke. He shook his head as though he were confused.

"Now *you're* the one who hasn't realized what position we're in. Didn't you hear me tell you that my commission is being withheld? That I'm under investigation for subversive activities?"

"But that can be cleared up. Your record is clean."

"Suppose it is. It'll take some time to establish it, and in the meantime Paul will be able to cover up."

"Then what do *you* suggest?" she asked drily.

"I say that we ought to go back to Paul's!"

She turned and stared at him by the light from the dashboard. His face was still filthy from the scramble down the ridge, and the dried blood made it look as though shadows had been cast by features that didn't really exist. Even beneath the grime, there was a puffiness due to the beating he had received earlier in the day. All in all, he looked like a very tough character, and his eyes now fitted the picture perfectly.

"Go back to Paul's? Now?"

"It's the best time. We can get back there before these people ever find their way back to the highway. Paul's all alone."

"What about those men I told you about . . . the ones I saw in the kitchen?"

There was a faint smile somewhere in his eyes. His face was too stiff to show any expression.

"We'll just have to be careful, that's all."

"You're talking like an idiot! We don't even have a gun."

"We'll get one. Your gun is in the car, wherever they took it—probably down on the highway."

"But that's just where they must have left their own car. And they can't have gone off without leaving a guard."

He took the sedan around a blind bend in a skid before he said, "I can take care of him."

She remembered the way he had felt when he had first come to himself after the beating. For a while then she had been sure that he had collected himself. Now she realized that although he was as sane and calculating as he ever would be, he was a changed person. He was a man of war!

"You can't go off half-cocked this way," Kit insisted. "You'll succeed only in getting yourself killed. Tomorrow, you'll see the colonel as you've been told to do. . . ."

"Say, what's the matter with you?" he demanded. "This morning you were the one who kept insisting on action and I stalled. Now that I realize you were right, you've adopted *my* position!"

"My point was and still is that you're no good dead. You've got to stay alive to accomplish anything."

"I'm still alive, and there are a few things I can still accomplish. Something's very screwy about Paul's place, and I'm going to put my finger on it tonight!"

"Dan, please!" she said wearily. "You're not going about this in the right way. You need an organization. That's the first thing you have to learn. It's impossible to work alone."

He had no answer to that, and Kit decided not to follow it up as long as he kept silent. She hoped desperately for a policeman. Arrest now was his best chance to stay alive. Nothing else seemed important.

The road ran into the main highway between two tall dunes, and Dan turned right toward Amagansett and New York without any hesitation.

"From what you told me," he said. "We must have gone off the highway about a mile or so from here."

"Yes. And as long as we keep on going at a decent speed, anyone left behind to guard the cars oughtn't to recognize us. We're perfectly safe."

The highway was deserted. Out this far on the island, there was no traffic at all until late spring, and even then it was very light. Anyone watching them come along would see a perfectly normal, slightly nondescript car, probably belonging to a fisherman going about his business. Only the police, seeing the number on the license plate, would bother to check up if they had been warned.

THEY came around a dune into full sight of the ocean, and the highway was straight before them for at least a mile. In the distance, the headlight picked out two parked cars, pulled off the road. A man strode up and down alongside of them, trying to keep warm. The tension in Kit's throat tightened as she recognized the Packard.

"So they did take it down from the dune," Dan said. "Can you see who's watching them?"

"No, it's too far."

Dan kept the speed down to thirty-five, and remained in his lane as they drew closer.

"It's the Spaniard," said Kit. "He's not even looking at us."

She put her hand up to cover her face, and then switched off the dashboard so that he couldn't possibly see them.

Manolo took a brief glance at the approaching car, then turned around, stamping his feet to keep them warm against the damp sand. He looked up again at the car, stared curiously at the shattered windshield and turned his back to them. Kit found she had been holding her breath.

When they were abreast of him, Dan jerked the wheel around sharply and aimed

straight at Manolo. Kit was so surprised she couldn't say anything.

The Spaniard turned around with a questioning expression, and seemed paralyzed by the headlight. He stood that way with his head turned for more than a second when the car hit him.

Kit felt no impact. It looked as though Manolo had decided to jump into the air as high as he could and then fall in an awkward heap several feet away.

Dan brought the car to a halt and sprang out before Kit even moved. She watched him through the cracked windshield, and the splintered segments in turn gave the scene an unarticulated character, as though she were looking at a photograph which had been torn and then mended badly.

"Switch that headlight off!" Dan called.

His voice was sharp. Suddenly he was entirely in command. She obeyed him and got out.

"Is he alive?" she asked.

"He's only stunned." Dan sounded more than dispassionate; he was disappointed.

Dan whipped off the Spaniard's tie and trussed him up, then dragged him back to the sedan where he dumped him into the rear. Dan slammed the door shut and turned to Kit.

"Give me your lipstick," he said.

"My lipstick?"

"Yes, and hurry. It must be in your bag."

He left her without any explanation and disappeared around the back of the car.

"But, Dan . . . !"

His face came into view again. He was bending down to unscrew the cap of the fuel tank.

"I'm going to drop it into the gasoline," he explained impatiently. "It'll dissolve and leave the gasoline useless. If they want to use the car, they'll have to drain the tank . . . that is, when they finally get around to locating the trouble."

"Then what'll we use?"

"We're going to take the other cars. There's a lot of things to be done yet."

"Now, look, Dan! I told you before . . ."

He had no time to discuss it.

"Get the lipstick!"

Kit walked forward to the Packard. Her bag was on the seat just where she had left it. She found everything intact except that her gun was gone.

Dan took the lipstick, threw away the cap, and then screwed up the entire stick until as much as possible was exposed. He dropped it into the tank and replaced the tank cover.

"Let's go," he said.

"But we don't have a gun," she said. "We can't afford to take any chances when we're unarmed."

"It's not in your bag?"

"No."

He didn't answer, but opened the door of the small sedan again. His head and shoulders disappeared inside as he went through Manolo's pockets. In another minute, he stepped back, breathing heavily from the exertion of moving the man about in the confined space.

"He had it. Here, take it." She noticed that he slipped another one into his pocket. "It's Manolo's," he explained. "It's a Colt Automatic. I'm more familiar with it than I am with your pocket anti-tank gun."

DAN took her arm and led her toward the two big cars.

"I'm going to drive the Packard. You follow me in the Cadillac."

"But, Dan, why? The police know we've taken the small sedan. We have every chance to get to them first."

"But we spoke about that before!"

"Yes." It suddenly dawned on her that the argument had ceased before, not because she had convinced him, but because he had grown tired of it. "Dan, I insist that we go to the police at once." She placed her hand on his arm. "Dan, dearest, they'll kill you, and for nothing!"

He patted her hand and walked on.

"I'll do exactly as you want, but I've got to get to New York first."

"Why New York?"

"Well, I'm going to speak to the colonel myself, and he'll tell me what to do. If I can't convince him that what I'm saying is the truth, then it's just too bad!"

"Call him on the telephone."

"I tried that. Besides, the situation is too complicated now for the telephone." He paused and kissed her lightly. "Be a good girl, and come along."

He opened the driver's door for her, but she was staring through one of the rear windows.

"Dan, look! They've got shovels!"

"Yes." His voice was low and toneless.

"They planned to double as gravediggers . . . our gravediggers!"

She raised her eyes to see his expression, but it was too dark. His hand was icy when she covered it with her own.

"Dan," she said swiftly. "Nothing foolish, now. You promised!"

"I promised," he agreed and walked away.

He started the big roadster without turning on the lights, then pulled slowly out to the empty highway. His car went into second and he held it there until he was doing forty-five, then he shot into high and snapped on his lights. His tail light gleamed faintly in the distance by the time she even got onto the pavement.

Riding alone in this big car, so full of memories of the men she hated and feared,

she was frightened in a cold disembodied way. She could still see the blades of the shovels and the universal fear of entombment settled over her like a shroud, simply because there were shreds of dirt clinging to the blades.

In every shadow she passed on the road there were white smiling faces, waiting to jump on the running board to reach in and throttle her. People crouched just behind her, biding their time to take her unawares.

Kit opened the window to let the sharp night air blow through the automobile in an effort to exorcise the wraiths. It didn't help. It made her feel more accessible to danger.

The road was unfamiliar in the night, and it seemed to Kit that Dan might have gone off the highway someplace. There was no way she could tell because she was not driving by the road, or by any of the usual signs and warnings the night driver finds himself using. Dan's headlights picked out the road for a hundred yards beyond where her own faded into the outer darkness. The ordinary tenseness was gone. No curves came at her unawares. Dan found them for her, as he did every rise and fall in the road.

She simply kept her eyes on his tail light, and did what he did a few minutes later. It was almost as though she were riding on a train, without any control at all over the direction in which she traveled.

Glancing at the speedometer, she saw that Dan was maintaining an average well over eighty miles an hour. The night was now very dark, and the road absolutely deserted.

Occasionally, there would come a hurried *whoosh* as she passed under an arch of trees, or a short staccato clatter as a small bridge would appear and then dissolve under her wheels.

A long stretch of sand flats extended away from her on either side with pinpoint lights flickering in the distance just above the horizon. It was an unreal sensation, as though she were riding along on a narrow ribbon bridge miles above a valley that yawned far beneath her. Then the black shadows of trees closed in on her again and she seemed to be going through a short tunnel.

Where she was going, she had no idea, but Dan very definitely did. He slowed down only for crossroads or when coming into a new highway. Her sense of direction was completely lost. For all she knew, they might have been going around in a huge circle.

NOW they were on a large concrete highway, and reassurance came back to her. The road to New York was along a highway such as this. The back roads Dan

had been traveling before must have been a short cut of some kind. But there was no indication of whether she was going west or north . . . all concrete four lane highways look alike.

After several minutes of the highway, Dan turned off again, along a two-lane macadam road that passed a comparatively well populated section. There were lights in houses, and once in a while a dog would bark. Then they turned into another highway.

She kept searching ahead of her for the glow that hung over New York, but it seemed to be somewhere over on her left. That would mean she was going north instead of west.

Ahead of her, Dan signaled once again and turned off the highway. They sped along another macadam road around a bend, and then Dan slowed down to thirty miles an hour. She thought that perhaps he had lost his way and tried to draw up beside him, but there was no room. Dan was in the middle of the road.

Suddenly he switched off his lights, and Kit followed suit without knowing the reason. The moon was out now and they could see just well enough to make fifteen miles an hour. In the pale, shadowy light there was something vaguely familiar about the landscape.

As she searched her mind for clues, Dan turned off. She peered after him and saw that he wasn't following any road at all, but had gone into a clearing surrounded by young trees. The damp wind whistled through the branches, and Kit felt as though the hair along her neck was rising. She knew now where she was. They were at Paul's house and Dan had put the roadster in almost exactly the same place she had hidden her own car two nights before.

Dan had lied to her. He had promised he was going straight to New York and instead he had done the very thing she wanted to avoid. He was risking almost certain death. She was sodden with despair as she pulled off the road behind him. He was already out of the roadster, waiting for her.

"Well, here we are!" he said.

"Dan, you gave me your word . . . !"

He smiled faintly in the moonlight.

"I had my fingers crossed. There's no use in trying to talk me out of it, Kit. I intend to have a look around."

"What do you hope to find?"

"Hand me one of those shovels and I'll show you."

"Shovels?"

"Yes, shovels! I'm going to find out who or what is hidden in that grave!"

"Dan, you can't!"

"Perhaps I don't have a permit, but neither did the person who did the digging the other night."

He opened the door behind her. There was a muffled, metallic clank as he picked up the spade, and then he closed the door again. It made no sound at all.

"Wait for me," she said. "I'm not going to stay here alone."

Off to their right somewhere, a twig cracked sharply.

"Did you hear that?" she whispered.

He nodded and stood very still.

Minutes passed. Low rifts of cloud scudded west across the moon, obscuring it for a few seconds at a time. Finally, Dan took a deep breath.

"It's nothing," he assured her. "Probably the branches scraping against one another."

Kit wet her lips, and her heart continued to pound. It was too late to do anything now; Dan had moved away towards the graveyard. There was only one thing on Kit's mind. If she were going to be caught, she didn't want to be alone when it happened. Being with Dan would help. There was a quiet competence about him that was reassuring.

It's impossible to tell in advance who is going to make a good soldier. One of the continual surprises of underground work is the men who become the leaders. They come with no marks of superiority; in the majority of cases, without experience. It's only when they are in action that one can distinguish. For all of his academic life and sedentary background, Dan had the one quality that was important; in times of physical danger, one was glad for his presence.

SHE caught up with him when he was climbing over the low stone wall. He did it without a sound, testing each stone with his hand before stepping on it to see whether or not it was loose. Then he pointed out to her exactly where to put her feet.

"It's the last grave on the right," he said. "I want you to sit in the shadow of the wall and keep your gun handy in order to cover me. Get down right here and move along parallel to me. If someone should come, they'll see only one of us. You're my ace in the hole."

She was about twelve feet away from him when he began to dig. The headstone was between them, and he stood with his face in his own shadow. The blade made a muffled sound as it was shoved into the ground. Dan was right about the turf. He was able to pick it up in rectangular blocks without any trouble.

They had been out so recently, the soil hadn't had time to bind. Beneath the surface, the earth was loose. Kit could tell from the ease with which Dan scooped it up, and a mounting sense of excitement warmed her.

At the end of several minutes, Dan had dug a trench almost two feet deep. She could hear his breath grow short from the exertion. He was a steady, rhythmically moving shadow. At every stroke, she wanted to call out to him to be a little easier. At any moment they might find something.

Each time the blade went down, she held her breath in anticipation expecting to see Dan withdraw in shocked surprise. But each time he would follow through with the stroke, lifting out a mass of loose dirt, and discovery was postponed for still another few seconds.

Once again she heard the sound of a cracking twig. This time it came from the trees behind her. Instinctively, she crouched still deeper into the shadows, pressing against the rocks at her back. Dan didn't hear it this time, or if he did, he paid no attention.

Kit felt she had to warn him. But if there were someone there, it would be stupid to show herself. It was what Dan had told her not to do. The sound wasn't repeated, and she felt easier.

The moment she had been hoping for and fearing came when Dan was up to his thighs in the grave. He rose up slowly, just as she knew he would, and called to her in a whisper.

"I've got it. I'm standing on a box!"

"How do you know it isn't the original casket?"

"It's only three feet down and the top is loose. Just stay where you are."

"Did you hear that sound before?" she asked.

He nodded. "Don't worry about it," he told her, and then went on digging, loosening the earth around the edge of the box.

He bent down to lift it. It seemed an eternity to Kit before he rose again, this time carrying two long planks, each one more than a foot wide.

"There is no box," he said. "Just these boards over the body."

"It is Anna!" she thought growing sick at the memory.

Dan had bent down again. She heard him strike a match. A reddish glow lit the walls of the pit he had dug. There was a sharp exclamation, and the light went out. Slowly, he stood up again.

"It's not Anna at all," he said, as if stunned. "It's not a woman. It's a man! It's Kenton!"

"Kenton?" she repeated dully. "But Kenton is sick! I remember seeing the butler prepare a tray. . . ."

"Kenton is dead."

"Then I killed Kenton?"

"I don't know," he said slowly. "You said his back was toward you?"

"He was facing the fire."

"Well, this man's throat's been cut!"

"My goodness!"

"I feel the same way. But this is all I wanted to know. I was sure there was something fishy here all the time, and we still don't know what Duncan Thorne, head of the Franco-American Art Institute, is doing here under the name of Kenton, or even why he's in this grave with his throat cut. Paul has a nice lot of explaining to do no matter what happens to either of us!"

This time there was no sound of twigs snapping. This time it was Paul's voice, as calm and friendly as usual.

"What would you like to know?" he asked.

HE WAS standing on top of the stone wall, a few feet from Kit's head. She could see him clearly in the moonlight. A gun glinted in his hand. He glanced down in her direction, and she remained immobile on the chance that he couldn't see her in the shadows. Dan's surprise was not apparent. He climbed slowly out of the pit. "As long as you're here," Dan remarked as he straightened up, "you might as well. . . ."

"Before I do anything," Paul said, interrupting him, "Kit had better throw her gun out where I can see it." He waited until she obeyed him. "And she might as well get off the ground. She's always doing something stupid." Then he turned back to Dan. "And now perhaps *you'll* explain to me what you're doing burying people on my property!"

He gave the words a wry inflection as though he were trying to remain good-natured in spite of an annoying imposition.

"Burying?" Dan said, really startled.

"Of course. You're not going to tell me that you were digging it up, are you?"

"That's exactly what I'm going to do.

What are you trying to pull, Campbell?" Paul waited until Kit got to her feet. She felt stiff from the bruises she had sustained in the fall from the ridge, and it was a painful effort to hobble across the short stretch of ground to where Dan stood. More than that, she was so exhausted that only the fear of Paul's gun kept her upright.

"I'm not trying to pull anything, Shay." Paul's voice was sharper. "I saw you and Kit drag Kenton's body from the woods and hide it in the grave."

Dan didn't answer.

"And that's the man Kit murdered. She cut his throat in my house the day before yesterday. Then she dragged the body out and hid it in the woods. At that time, of course, I knew nothing about it because I thought that Kenton was away on a short trip."

"You're crazy," Dan said. "Only this

afternoon, you said Kenton was ill upstairs."

"You must be mistaken," Paul said gently. "I never said anything like that. If necessary, I can produce witnesses."

"The Baron and Manolo, and the rest of your scout troop?"

"They're very respectable people."

"I'm sort of respectable myself," Dan reminded him.

"You used to be. As a matter of fact, your commanding officer, Colonel Simon, just left me. I'm surprised and pleased that you didn't meet him as you came in."

"Simon? What was he doing here?"

"I had some information for him concerning you."

"Yes?" Dan said tautly.

"Yes! Well, I convinced him, that's all. I convinced him and he left. So you see, you're no longer so respectable."

"You're really good, Paul!" Dan said, almost laughing.

"It's taken you a long time to realize it. I didn't expect you two back at all, and the fact that you did return proves you underestimate me."

"But get back to this marvelous pipe-dream of yours about us burying Kenton. I assume that this is going to be your version of the story to the police?"

"Of course."

"Can you tell me why we were supposed to have picked on this particular grave?"

"That's where you were very clever."

"Were we?"

"Yes," Paul said. "Very. You discovered who Kenton really was."

"Did we?" Dan asked slowly. "Who did we discover he was?"

"You discovered that he was really Henry Hutchins, the man who used to own this place, the man who was supposed to have died in prison in 1926, and been buried here. You discovered that Kenton—I mean Hutchins—never died at all, but was spirited out of jail on an arrangement with the medical examiner and his own lawyer after he had made his will leaving an appreciable amount of money and this property to a non-existent Franco-American Art Institute."

"An empty box was buried for the sake of the funeral, and Hutchins went to Europe, had his face changed and became Duncan Thorne, the head of the Franco-American Institute, in full charge of all its funds."

DAN'S face was haggard beneath the swollen purplish bruises. His voice was unsteady.

"We discovered an awful lot, didn't we!"

"Kit did most of it when she was in Paris," Paul replied. "She blackmailed him, and then when he had nothing left, she

killed him. You helped her get rid of the body. I'm not implicated at all. I just happened to be passing by at the time and overheard everything."

"And that's your story?"

"What's wrong with it? I think it's pretty good. This business about Kenton being really Hutchins would come out sooner or later. A man may change his face, but his fingerprints and dental records remain the same. I think it best to bring it out myself before it's dug up for me."

"Suppose you tell us the real story."

"Wouldn't that be silly of me?"

"Well, you'll have to explain Anna Mahler."

"Oh, she's lying up in a room in the house and she'll continue to do so until we get all the information out of her that we need. But after that, no more Anna Mahler... not even a trace of her body!"

"Then it was Anna who is being taken care of upstairs, and not Kenton?"

"That ought to be obvious. As long as she's useful, she'll live. The same went for Kenton. When I picked him up in Paris, the poor slob was drinking himself to death and I found out who he was. He was very useful to me, and I even had him straightened out a bit. But I'm established here now, and since you never could tell what that idiot might say, he had become a liability. Therefore, no more Kenton!"

"And so you killed him!" Dan insisted.

For a moment, Paul said nothing, but his mouth twisted into a smile of irrepressible mirth which broke out into mischievous laughter.

He shook his head helplessly as he tried to catch his breath.

"I will never forget Kit tiptoeing into the room!" He went off again into a soundless spasm. "She almost collided with me, and if she had...!" He shook his head once more, and it was a while before he could speak. "I had just finished with Kenton when I heard her come in, so I had to get her out of the way. I tell you, the temptation to say something to her at that moment..."

Suddenly his voice stopped and a bewildered expression spread over his face as he stood above them on the wall. For a moment, he seemed to be concentrating on something profound, and then he crumpled very slowly, falling to the ground.

Immediately behind him stood the figure of a man in uniform. The moonlight gleamed on military insignia. Kit had never seen him before.

"Colonel Simon!" Dan said. "The marines have finally landed!"

The colonel stepped up on the wall. He was carrying a cane by its shaft.

"This man," he said quietly, "is probably the worst dog I have ever come across."

Then he stared at the handle of his cane as though seeing it for the first time. "But he's got a very soft skull. One tap did the trick!"

He stepped down again and took the gun from Paul's outstretched hand. To Kit, it seemed as though the perspectives had suddenly changed. Everybody was so much taller. Things about her were so much higher. Then she found she wasn't standing any longer; she had slumped down to the earth.

"Listen," Dan said, his voice full of heavy sarcasm. "I knew it had to be you! I never saw a man who could find more twigs to stamp on in my life! I swore two years ago that I'd never go hunting with you again, and tonight you nearly fixed it! Little Goody Two Shoes. Couldn't you be more quiet?"

"He didn't hear me," Simon said. "Nobody knows better than I that I'm no boy for woodcraft. I froze into place."

"You froze!" Dan mimicked him furiously. "What the devil are you doing here after you turned in that charming report about my being a subversive element?"

"Keep your shirt on," Simon said. "That wasn't my report. Major Riley did that little job."

"Who in blazes is Major Riley?"

THE colonel made a queer noise, then smiled faintly.

"A man with a head of solid brass. He thinks that the Army-Navy game is what people mean when they speak of starting a second front!"

"Where does he fit in?"

"He was the one who got the message you left for me. Since I wasn't around he opened it and came out here on his own. This punk here," he pointed to Paul's body, "filled the good major with five single-spaced pages of hog-wash, and since Riley didn't know you, he submitted it. He was all set to be made a lieutenant-colonel when I picked it up."

"I told him he was crazy and came out here myself to check up. I got the same story as Riley did. I just couldn't see what was up until you got him to tell the whole world how smart he was just now. I left him just a few minutes ago, and when I started down the driveway I saw two cars pull up the road without lights."

"That struck me as being odd, so I just let my own car roll off the road and came back to wait in the woods and watch. I was trying to get closer to you. But every time I did, I stepped on a branch and both of you jumped a foot off the ground. That told me I wasn't being very good at stalking so I just stood still."

"We'd better get Paul out of here," Dan said. "The house is full of people who be-

long to him, and there are some others on the way."

"You're right. We'll take one of those cars and get some state troopers so that we can come back for the Mahler woman upstairs. G-Two is looking for her!"

"G-Two? What's she got to do with Army Intelligence?"

"She's working with them, that's all. Come on, give me a hand with him. He's heavy."

Neither of them took any notice of Kit, but she was too weak and exhausted to get up, or even to run after them. The two men disappeared over the wall, carrying Paul between them. She sat there all alone, too tired to feel anything but quiet satisfaction that she needn't ever move again.

Dan was safe, Anna would be safe in just a few minutes, and she didn't care what happened to herself as long as she needn't exert any effort. It was quiet and peaceful all about her. Dan and Colonel Simon had gone, there was no sound from them.

She probably would have gone to sleep, but Dan came running back in alarm.

"What happened to you?" he demanded, lifting her to her feet.

"I'm too tired to know, and too tired to care."

He put an arm about her waist to keep

her from stumbling as they went toward the wall.

"I think we're going to Canada," he said. "I was talking to Simon, and he thinks your status can be fixed up. After all, you committed no crime against Canada by entering this country illegally, and Simon is sure that the United States won't prosecute you after this. Your government in London ought to be able to arrange it."

"When do I have to go?"

He carried her over the wall before he answered.

"We'll go just as soon as this is cleared up."

"We?" She looked at him as he helped her down the stones.

"Of course! I have some time yet before I'm to take up my commission. We can have a two-week honeymoon."

She shook her head slowly.

"Now that it's almost all over, Dan, do you think it's wise for us to get married? You have the Army, and I have my own work to do. There's a war to be won yet."

"Can't married people win a war? What do you think this war's all about? It's your duty as an anti-Nazi to marry me."

She smiled into the darkness.

"That's the kind of talk I understand," she said, and they got into the automobile.

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Methodical George Devine has his own system for dealing with crooks!



Mart swung that big right fist and hit Devine in the face

Schedule Delayed

By BENTON BRADEN

GEORGE DEVINE came through the doors that led from the Sterne Corporation and turned to his left. In his right hand he held a black case about twenty inches long and five inches wide. The case looked as though it were covered with imitation leather. Devine walked about twenty feet, then turned and glanced back.

He glanced briefly at the heavy slabs of stone framing the entrance. The chiseled lettering above read, "Sterne Corporation, Securities and Investments."

It was a familiar picture to Devine. There hadn't been a working day in the past ten years that he had not passed through those doors and spent eight hours

or more in the service of the Sterne Corporation. Devine was a systematic man who paid great attention to details. He had been a man on an almost unvariable schedule.

Now that schedule was due for a change. When the doors of the Sterne Corporation opened in the morning George Devine would not pass through them and go to his desk in the big cage where hundreds of thousands of dollars were handled daily. From this moment on George was on another schedule, a schedule that he had carefully worked out for himself.

In his methodical mind he had mapped out every move he would make for the next twenty-four hours. That was as far ahead

as he could plan. After that he would have to take things as they came.

There was no regret in his eyes as he took that last look. Rather, his eyes were grim as he turned away and hurried on down the street. He walked seven blocks, then reached Central Station. He had walked this street at least twice daily for the past ten years, yet he hadn't been in Central Station more than three times during that period.

Now he went in. He stepped briskly across the big rotunda, turned to his right, and on to the smaller room at the end of the station. The parcel room was there. Without a word he checked the black case, put the check in his pocket, then turned and retraced his steps to the street.

Methodically he resumed the course he followed each evening. He always ate dinner at Rowlin's Restaurant and he proposed to follow his schedule on this last night. He went on three blocks and entered the restaurant, made his way to the table at which he always sat.

He ate his dinner in stony silence. This was the last stop on that old schedule. When he left Rowlin's he'd be on a new one. He'd go back to Central Station, get the case, and be on the train that pulled out of the station at seven minutes to eight. When the doors of the Sterne Corporation swung open in the morning he'd be hundreds of miles away.

He ate slowly and deliberately but kept an eye on his watch. His schedule called for him to leave the restaurant at exactly seven o'clock. In these days of crowded travel he had to be in the station in plenty of time. If he missed that train the consequences might be disastrous. He might find himself behind cold steel bars.

But George Devine felt no apprehension, no fear, as he paid his check and prepared to leave the restaurant. He saw that it was now dark outside. He had ample time to get the black case and board the train. He was right on schedule.

He left the restaurant and began to stroll back to Central Station. He had taken just twenty steps when that schedule of his was rudely and a bit roughly interrupted. The first thing that George Devine felt was something jabbing hard into his back.

"Take it easy, Devine!" a harsh voice commanded. "Keep your mouth shut and do exactly as you're told or I'll squeeze the trigger of this gat and blow a nice big hole in your back."

"What—what—?" Devine gasped.

"I'll tell you what, Devine! Keep right on walkin'. See that sedan at the curb right ahead? You march right over there and get in the back seat. I'll get in right behind you. Them's your orders. Make it snappy!"

George Devine swallowed hard. The muzzle of that gun jabbed a little harder into his back, and convinced him that it would be extremely unwise to protest at this moment. He saw the sedan, marched over to it. The gun didn't leave his back until he was settling himself in the back seat of the car. The man who had prodded him with the gun sank back on the cushions with him.

THERE was another man at the wheel of the car and the motor was already turning over. The car immediately began to move out.

"What's the idea of this?" George Devine finally burst out.

"Just sit tight and you'll see."

"I've only got a few dollars on me—if this is a stick-up. My wallet is in my—"

"We ain't interested in your wallet, Devine."

"But you've got to let me go," Devine almost wailed. "I've got to—I have an important engagement that I've got to keep and—"

"You ain't got no engagement half as important as the one you're going to keep with us," the man beside him said dryly.

"You must have made a mistake," Devine argued frantically. He was thinking of that train he would miss if he stayed him more than a few minutes. "There is nothing you could want of me—if you don't want what's in my wallet. You must have me mixed up with somebody else."

"There's no mix-up, Devine. You work for the Sterne Corporation, don't you? You've worked for them for years. You finally got to be some sort of a cashier for 'em, didn't you? You don't need to answer. We know."

"But can't you tell me what you want of me now—and let me go?" he begged. "I've just got to go—be at a certain place by—"

"You're goin' to be at a certain place all right, Devine. You're goin' to be there quite a while too. But it ain't just where you think, maybe. Now shut up! I ain't goin' to tell you anything else till we get where we're goin' so you might as well save your breath."

Devine leaned back against the cushions, his face creased in worried lines. The sedan rolled along smoothly, made several turns during the next fifteen minutes. Finally it turned in to the curb on a dark street. Again Devine got brief instructions. He got out of the car and was hurried across a sidewalk and down steps. A door was opened and he was shoved into a barely furnished room in a basement apartment.

There was a third man there waiting for them. He grinned when he saw George Devine.

"Nice work, Joey," he said. "I guess he didn't put up any argument about it, did he?"

"Only a little, Mart," Joey replied. "He thought he had an important engagement that he had to keep, probably with some dame. But he changed his mind."

"I didn't change my mind," George Devine said heatedly. "I came along because you threatened to shoot me. Now I want to know what this is all about. What on earth could you possibly want of me to bring me out here by force?"

The driver of the car came in as Devine spoke. The man Joey had called Mart sat down in a chair. He was a big man with a brutal red face. He pointed at a chair.

"Sit down now, Devine," he said, "and we'll tell you why we brought you here."

Devine sat down. Joey, a slender man with a long, sharp face, took a chair too. The man who had driven the car remained standing. He was short, stocky, didn't look too smart. Mart was obviously the leader of the trio.

"It's easy, Devine," Mart said. "All we want you to do is to sign your name for us."

Devine stared a bit stupidly. Then he glanced at his watch. He could still make that train by an eyelash if he got a break.

"Whatever it is you want me to do, make it quick," he begged. "I've got to leave here in five minutes at the latest. I've got to—"

"You haven't got to do anything but what we tell you to do," Mart interrupted heavily. "Get next to yourself, Devine. You don't think we went to the trouble and risk of snatching you just for the exercise, do you? I told you the truth. All you've got to do is sign your name. But you can't leave here right away. You're gonna camp right here in this place till some time tomorrow morning."

"You can't hold me here! You've got to let me go. I've got to—"

"Shut up!" Mart roared. "What do you think this is? Some kind of a tea party you can put off till you get in the right mood? Well, it ain't, Devine. We been plannin' this job for a long time. We planned it right. It's gonna come off just the way we planned it."

"Now you are some kind of a cashier down at the Sterne Corporation, Devine. You got authority to sign checks for that corporation. Checks in any amount. Well, we've got a check we want you to sign for us."

"My signature wouldn't be worth a dime," Devine said quickly. "If this is some kind of scheme to defraud the Sterne Corporation by making me sign a check, you won't get anywhere. Any check I sign as a cashier has to be countersigned by one of the vice-presidents before it becomes valid."

"You think we don't know that?" Mart jeered. "You must think we're dumb. I tell you we've doped out all the angles. Joey, there, has been doin' a little business with the Sterne Corporation. Just small stuff, turning the same dough over and over with them."

"He'd sell them a bond and take a check for it. That way we got a good chance to look over the checks. You sign 'em, Devine. With that crazy signature of yours that's hard to forge. Then generally a vice-president by the name of Henry L. Strong countersigns them. We photographed some of those checks so we could take our time and practise on Strong's signature."

"Joey, there, is pat on that. He's had plenty of experience signin' other folks' names. And Joey knew a printing place where he could get the checks fixed up. You can't tell 'em from the Sterne checks. Now we're set to go."

YOU couldn't get a check cashed for any worthwhile amount," George Devine said.

"Oh, yes we can, Devine. Now you cash your own checks at the Midland National Bank. Joey has made a practise of cashin' his Sterne checks at the same bank—at the same window, with the same teller. So when Joey goes up to that teller in the morning with a check for twenty grand it'll be cashed. Because you're goin' to be right with Joey, Devine. And that teller will figure the check is okay when he sees you. I'll be covering you and I'll let you have it if you try any tricks."

There was something like horror in George Devine's eyes.

"You expect me—to—" He began to shake all over.

Mart frowned. "You'll go through with it, Devine," he said threateningly. "You'll march right into that bank with Joey and back him up."

"I—I couldn't do that." Devine was almost sobbing. "I haven't got the nerve. I'd go to pieces. I've got a bad heart. I might even faint. I'd give it away before you got the check cashed. That teller knows me well. He'd take one look at my face and he'd know there was something wrong. He'd press a button, and detectives would..."

Devine was shaking all over, looked as though he were about to cave in. Big Mart scowled as he stared at him. Joey rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"A weak sister, Mart," Joey said after a minute.

"Yeah," Mart grunted. "We wouldn't dare risk him. But I got another idea that's almost as good. We'll make Devine write a note to that teller. A note that will explain the transaction. We'll make

him say that you, Joey, have just cashed in some bonds with the Sterne Corporation and that you want that twenty grand in cash to put up as a bond on a government contract you're gettin'. That'll sound pretty good, won't it?"

"Good enough," Joey agreed. "It'll be a lot better than takin' a chance of havin' this lily fall flat on his face in front of that teller."

"Then we'll have him write the note—and sign the check," Mart said. "Get the stuff out on the table there."

Two minutes later they made George Devine sit down at the table. He looked at the check he was to sign. It was a perfect reproduction of a Sterne Corporation check. The signature of Henry L. Strong looked authentic. The check was made out to Joe Morgan.

If Joey had cashed checks with that teller at the Midland National before it would probably be accepted without question. If the teller raised an eyebrow at the amount to be cashed, the note explaining it would probably remove suspicion. A lot of contractors put up cash bonds to avoid argument.

"Start writin', Devine!" Mart ordered. "And don't try any tricks on your signature. We got photographs of other checks and we'll compare 'em with a microscope."

"I'm nervous," Devine objected, his lips twitching. "I don't know whether I can write or sign my name without—"

"Get him a snort, Joey," Mart said. "A couple of stiff drinks will fix him up and steady his hand."

Joey went into another room and came back with a bottle. He poured Devine a stiff drink, then another. After about fifteen minutes Devine went to work. He wrote the note as Mart dictated it. Then he signed the check for twenty thousand dollars. Mart and Joey looked his signature over carefully, compared it with the pictures of the other checks.

"Okay, Devine," Mart said at last. "That let's you out. Now we hold you here till we get that dough. After we get the dough we'll turn you loose and we don't care how loud you squawk because we'll be on our way. We got cots in the other room. You can go in and go to sleep when you get ready. But one of us will be on guard all night so don't get any ideas about making a break."

George Devine took advantage of that invitation at any early hour. He lay down on a cot in the back room. He lay there in the dim light for hours before he went to sleep. That train on which he had been so confident he would be riding, had left Central Station hours ago. The schedule that he had so carefully arranged for himself was completely out of gear.

But the three men who had him in custody were adhering strictly to their schedule and plans. At eight-thirty the next morning they bound Devine hand and foot and placed a gag in his mouth.

"It won't be for long, Devine," Mart assured him. "We got to leave you this way because Lefty and I have to back Joey up when he goes to the window to cash that check. We'll be ready to shoot the place up if that teller gets any ideas. And we'll be back here to work on you if you've tried to pull any stunt on that note or your signature. We aim to get at that window in about thirty minutes after the bank opens. Take it easy until we get back."

But George Devine had no idea of taking it easy until they got back. The minute he heard the front door close he began to look around for an out. He reasoned that he ought to be able to get himself loose from the cords that held him. He had read a lot of stories that made it look easy. He was lying on a cot but he could easily get himself to the floor and roll about the room.

He did that. His fist objective was a small bit of glass or a piece of sharp metal with which he could saw the cords apart. He soon discovered that Mart and Joey and Lefty had been careful to remove any such objects from the room. He finally got to his feet. There was a window in the room but, being a basement window, it was so high that he couldn't reach it, even by trying to butt it with the top of his head.

FOR an hour he tried to work his hands and feet so that he could slip one of the cords off. He finally had to admit he was making no headway at all. He didn't have a chance to get loose. He hopped back over to the cot and sat down. Then he got the idea. He cursed himself because he hadn't thought of it before.

He got to his feet again, started to turn around, then lost his balance and fell down. Before he could get up the door opened.

Big Mart came in and closed the door. He was alone and his brutal red face was blazing with rage.

"You rat!" he spat at Devine. "You doublecrossing rat! You pulled a trick on us. That teller tumbled that something was wrong the minute he looked at that check. He didn't say a word. But he stalled, fumbled with some currency as though he were going to count it out and hand it over."

"Yeah, he stalled—while he pressed a button somewhere. And by the time we sensed that something was wrong the dicks were there. They got Joey and Lefty. I was covering from the rear and all I could do was run for it and save my own hide."

Mart moved across the room and tore the gag from Devine's mouth.

"Talk, Devine! How did you manage to tip that teller that the check was a phony?"

"I—I didn't tip him," Devine gasped. "I didn't—"

"Don't try to lie to me!" Mart cut him off. He raised a big fist. "You tell me the truth or I'll knock your teeth down your throat. How did you tip that teller?"

"It was the Sterne Corporation that must have tipped him," Devine said, racing his words as he shrank from the fist. "The Sterne Corporation must have phoned the bank that I—I was—"

"—was what?"

"Missing. The Sterne Corporation must have found out early this morning and phoned the bank. They must have checked fast."

"Checked what, Devine?"

"Checked the cash—and found out I was short. Short thirty thousand dollars. I—I took the money yesterday afternoon. I was going to run for it. I was on my way to catch a train when Joey put the gun on me."

"You telling me that you stole thirty grand from the Sterne Corporation?"

"Sure. That's why I was so upset when Joey grabbed me. I had everything planned

me. I'll go to the station with you and get that case. I'll split that thirty grand with you—fifteen grand for each of us. That's more than you'd have got if you cashed that check with Joey and Lefty, isn't it? That'll make a swell deal for you, won't it?"

"Sure it will," Max said.

He swung that big right fist and hit Devine in the face. Devine fell to the floor with a thud. Big Mart knelt and swiftly began to search Devine's clothes. In less than half a minute he got to his feet and stared at the check in his hand.

"Well, blow me down," he said grinning. "You were tellin' the truth about that, weren't you? You did check that case at Central Station. The time stamp shows that it was just before you ate dinner at Rowlin's. Now this is—just elegant."

Mart's grin broadened. He knelt again and replaced the gag in Devine's mouth.

"Yeah, it's just swell, Devine. For me. You don't think I'd be sucker enough to split that thirty grand with you, do you? Or fool enough to walk into Central Station with you when every cop in town will have an eye out for you? Now they won't be lookin' for me. It ought to be a cinch for me to walk in and get that black case."

Next Issue: THE THURSDAY TURKEY MURDERS

for a quick getaway. I figured I'd be so far away by the time they found out about my shortage that they'd never catch up with me."

"And you let us go to the bank when you knew—"

"I didn't know they'd catch the shortage so quickly," Devine denied feverishly. "But I guess they did, and phoned the bank to watch every transaction I had anything to do with. So when Grissom, the teller, saw the check for twenty grand, and read the note, he knew that it—"

"You're lying, Devine. You haven't got any thirty grand on you!"

"I had it in a black case, Mart. I had the dough in that case when I walked out of the Sterne Corporation last night. I got away with it easy—just as I had planned. I checked that case at Central Station. I knew they wouldn't catch my shortage till this morning so I wasn't worried. I went on to eat my dinner. I was going back to get the case and take a train that left at seven minutes to eight."

"You never got a chance to go back to that station, Devine," Mart said softly. "So if you're tellin' the truth you must have the check for that black case on you. If you're lyin' that will sink you."

"I'm not lying! I've got the check on

He went to the door.

"So long, Devine," Mart jeered. "This time I don't think I'll come back. So far as I'm concerned you can lie there till you rot!"

He went out and Devine heard the lock click as the door closed.

George Devine got to his knees. That idea he had just before Mart returned . . . He'd see now if it would work. He got to his feet, hopped to the head of the cot and began to inch it slowly across the room. He had to push the steel frame with his knees, then hop to catch up with it.

Finally he got the foot of the cot right where he wanted it, just beneath that basement window. He laboriously worked his way up to a standing position with his feet on the mattress. His eyes gleamed. It looked as if he'd make it.

He steadied himself, then rose on his toes a little, and butted forward and upward with his head. His head met the pane. The crash of glass was like sweet music to his ears. He used his shoulders to push himself back and look up. A big piece of the pane was out. Devine tried to yell but the gag smothered the sound to a gurgle. Then the face of a boy appeared in front of him. The boy's eyes bulged.

"Hey!" the kid yelled. "Somebody get a

cop. There's a guy in here all tied up and gagged!"

BIG Mart made his way to the parcel room in Central Station. He casually placed the check on the counter and waited until an attendant picked it up and went to a rack in the rear. His eyes glinted when he saw the black case that the attendant was bringing back to the counter. Mart took the case, turned around and began walking toward the side entrance at the east.

He had taken about forty steps when a detaining hand stopped him. There was a big cop on each side of Mart.

"That case belong to you?" one of them asked.

"No," Mart lied glibly. "I just came in to get it for a guy."

"What guy?"

"I don't know his name. He gave me a dollar to get the case for him."

"Was his name Devine? George Devine?"

"I wouldn't know."

"Where are you going to deliver the case to him?"

"He said he'd be waiting for me about three blocks down the street."

"Describe him."

"A little guy. Five feet, three, maybe. He had on a brown suit."

"That's Devine, all right. But we happen to know that Devine isn't waiting for you down the street. You've got Devine tied up somewhere. That check business at the Midland National is proof enough of that. Where is he? Do you talk or do we have to take you to a station and beat it out of you?"

"I don't know nothin'," Mart whined. "I never saw this guy before. I was standin' on a corner when he come up and offered me a dollar to—"

Mart stopped. George Devine was coming through that east entrance. George grinned when he saw Mart standing between the two dicks. But he spoke to the

tall gray-haired man who was standing at one side.

"Hello, Mr. Strong," he said. "I managed to get away from them. I was going to try to head him off here. I see you beat me to it."

"I recalled that you told me you had planned things, George," Henry L. Strong of the Sterne Corporation said. "You said you were going to check your case at the station, then eat dinner, and come back and get to your train in plenty of time."

"So as soon as I heard about the trouble at the Midland National I got some detectives and came over to see if that case was in the check room. It was—and this man came in to get it just as we had spotted it."

"I knew what would happen when Grissom saw that check," Devine said. "We notified the bank three days ago that Malcolm would sign as cashier from then on. I knew Grissom would go for an alarm bell. I thought I could get away while they were at the bank but I couldn't make it."

"When Mart, here, came back I had to do some quick thinking. I told him I had stolen some money from the corporation and was lamming when they took me. When he found the check on me he believed it."

"Well, we've got all three of them now. They won't have an out with you to identify them and tell your story."

George Devine suddenly looked very worried.

"I'm in a bad fix," he said darkly. "I was deferred twice. Now I haven't got a chance to report at that camp in Texas on time. They'll probably throw me in the guard-house, charge me with desertion, and give me ten years."

"The Army is tough," Strong chuckled. "But not that tough. You can catch the next train out and we'll wire a complete explanation ahead that will fix things for you."

"I hope so," George Devine said. "I don't mind going in the Army. But I'd hate to have to serve all my time in a guard-house!"

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Benson's hand clamped on the wrist before the man could fire again

DETECTIVE IN THE WOODS

By A. B. NAFZIGER

Can a killer be in two places at the same time? That's the problem Deputy Sheriff Ole Benson must solve!

IT WAS almost five o'clock when the telephone rang in the sheriff's office in Selmason, county seat of Moro County. The huge frame of young Ole Benson, newest deputy sheriff, moved slowly out of its slouching position as he reached for the instrument. A faint flicker of hope showed in his bland blue eyes. Maybe, after three uneventful months, something had happened. Maybe he could arrest somebody.

An excited voice asked for the sheriff. "He ain't here yet," answered the deputy. "This is Ole Benson."

"Ole, you come on up to the camp fast as you can, and leave word for the sheriff to follow!" shrieked the voice. "Ray Kreber's been murdered!"

"Okay," said Benson calmly, but his heart was going so fast he could feel it. He jiggled the receiver to get the operator. "Say,

Jane! When Sheriff Yates comes in, tell him to come up to the lumber camp quick!"

"Oh, Ole!" Jane Frane's voice was choked. "This is awful. They'll say Nick did it!"

Ole Benson shifted his big-boned body uneasily. "But, Jane, what makes you think your brother would kill Kreber?"

"Everybody knows!" cried Jane wildly. "He even said he would! They had a fight about a month ago over Dolly, just before she and Nick got married."

"Yah, I remember." Ole Benson noisily moved his heavy number twelve shoes from under the desk. "That Nick, he sure has a hot temper."

"But he wouldn't kill anybody," sobbed Nick Frane's sister. "Ole, he's all I've got. He's the only one I ever had. Ole, this is no time to fool around with your ideas! You do what the sheriff tells you!"

She excitedly snapped off the connection and Ole Benson turned from the phone heavily. Jane Frane didn't think he was a good detective. Jane didn't even think he was smart. If only he could find who killed Kreber, she'd have to change her mind. Maybe then she'd listen to him. Maybe she'd marry him. Benson felt perspiration dampen his forehead at the thought.

The trouble was so many men could have killed Kreber. If he wasn't having a fight with the men over their pay-checks—he was time-keeper for the Branch Lumber Company—he was hanging around somebody else's girl.

Scowling with thought, Ole Benson loped out of the office and climbed into his battered car. It was a ten-minute ride up the dirt road to the Branch Lumber Company camp. He sped past the mill, slowing down as he neared the railroad crossing where the men parked their cars to get into the motor-driven vehicles which took them up into the woods. A crowd of loggers, sweat-begrimed after their day in the woods, stood waiting, plaid mackinaws and blue work trousers rolled up wide to mid-leg.

OLE BENSON hoisted himself out of his car, and his long arms hung out of his too-short gray sleeves. He was greeted with silence instead of the good-natured bantering the loggers usually handed the young Swede deputy. A way was made for him to the smallest of the parked speeders.

It was Ray Kreber, all right, though his head was battered almost beyond recognition. Ole Benson felt his stomach turn over, but he managed to gulp out a question.

"Who found him?" he asked.

Everybody started to answer at once. The thundering voice of the largest man there boomed out. "Pipe down, you lugs!" he said. "Who do you think's boss around here?"

It was Gus Mortenson, head rigger. He wore a greasy red hunting cap and carried his lunch bucket slung over his right shoulder by a leather strap.

"We found him just like this on his speeder, coming down from work tonight," went on Mortenson. "You know the old road above the camp?"

Ole Benson nodded.

"You know how the grade comes down sharp all the way from Scatter Creek until about half a mile above here, where she flattens out? I was just going to give the big speeder the gun when someone yelled that Kreber's speeder was stalled ahead. So we rolled up to her, and there he was. I sees he was dead, so I let Clay"—nodding to the tall red-headed surveyor nearby—"use the big wagon, and I took Jeff with me and brung in Kreber. We ain't touched a thing except to drive her in."

"You and who else?" asked Ole Benson, blinking. By gum, Jane Frane's brother Nick was not here.

"Me and Jeff!" shouted Gus Mortenson.

"By golly, you big Swede, how long does it take you to catch on? Me and Jeff, I said!"

Benson's bland face did not change. His sea-blue eyes rested a moment on Sam Marsden, husband of Maisie, the prettiest little flirt in the camp. Marsden was a little man, colorless eyes set close together in a pinched face. He had always been shoved aside, as unimportant—in the world of big brawny lumberjacks—as the pale wisps of hair that were scarcely distinguishable on his narrow head.

"Oh, you and Jeff," repeated Ole Benson blankly.

"Aw, where's the sheriff!" roared Gus.

"By the time we pound it through your thick head the murderer'll be dead of old age!"

Benson bent over to inspect the body. Kreber's head had evidently been crushed by several blows of a hard instrument. Benson straightened up at the sound of a car.

It was the mortuary wagon with the sheriff and local undertaker, who was also coroner. While they examined the body and Gus Mortenson repeated his story, Ole Benson moved out of the way. Nick Frane should be here. Ole Benson's scalp prickled, remembering Jane's words.

It was decided to call a coroner's inquest on the spot.

"Here comes the doc," said the sheriff, as a small car came swiftly up the road to draw to a stop. Dr. Watson stepped out.

"Well, Doc, what's your opinion there?" asked the sheriff, indicating the body on the speeder.

"Hm—" said the doctor, after inspecting the dead man. "Been dead about two hours, and the cause is multiple compound comminuted fracture of the skull." After an

impressive pause, he went on. "Don't need an autopsy—plenty right here to cause death. But when you get him down to the mortuary, I'll make a more careful examination." He frowned. "Well, he wasn't much good, but it seems like a pretty awful way to go just the same." He hurried off.

It was only a short walk to the cook-house where the sheriff decided to hold the inquest. Over the frantic protestations of the second cook, the loggers marched in with caulked shoes disrupting the dining room, set for supper. Hungry as the men were, they were more interested in the inquest.

"We want men who couldn't possibly have committed the murder for this jury," said the coroner, blinking nervously.

"You can take all the riggers then," said Gus Mortenson, "because I been working with them every minute of the day, and we are furthest up in the woods."

When the jury was chosen, the sheriff ran his hand under his Stetson.

"By law it ain't necessary for this jury to name a man for arrest," he declared in the deep tones Ole Benson frequently practiced in his room. "But let's hope we can, and get this over with quick. You boys are hungry. Ole, you keep notes of everything that's said."

Ten minutes' questioning revealed that the time-keeper had arrived in the woods about eleven in the morning on the private speeder which proved to be his death car. He had remained in the woods checking the personnel of the workers, as his regular duty, until three in the afternoon, when the loaders of the logging crew had seen him leave—the last, it seemed, to see him alive. Ole Benson drew a big breath.

"Well?" demanded the sheriff. "Did you say something?"

"He started to ask a question half an hour ago," muttered Gus Mortenson, "and it's just coming out now."

THE loggers roared and Ole Benson watched them mildly. By the time they'd quit laughing he'd had time to think up a question so he wouldn't have to tell the sheriff he'd been wondering about Nick.

"Shouldn't we look at the axes? Looks to me like Kreber was killed with an axe."

The sheriff grunted. "Sam Marsden's the only one carrying an axe. Go ahead and look at it if you want to."

The little man handed over his axe. It was the kind carried by most surveyors in the forests, single-bitted, with a small handle, but long enough to be swung with both hands. Its smallness was invaluable in brushing out a trail of young trees and vines because it could be easily managed with one hand, the other holding the object to be cut.

Ole Benson studied the axe, running the palm of his big hand over it.

"Looks clean," he said, handing it back. The coroner squinched up his nose and snapped at Clay, the good-looking red-headed engineer of the survey crew.

"Where were you at three o'clock?"

"Sam and I were working on location of the new bridge, near the old Scatter Creek one," Clay answered. Ole Benson remembered that Clay never spoke to Kreber—never had since a poker game several weeks before, when he strode out of the room in the middle of the game, without a word of explanation. Jane Frane thought Clay was the best-looking man in the lumber camp. But, she'd sighed, he had a girl—a real college girl—down in Frisco.

The coroner, tiny eyes screwed up, was still questioning Clay. "Did you see Kreber go by?"

"You can't see the old bridge from where we were, but I heard the speeder," answered the engineer.

"And you, Sam?" he barked at Marsden.

The little man with the pinched face lifted his head. "Heard the speeder go over the old bridge about three-fifteen."

From the bridge on down to the camp, it was two miles, all but the last half being the usual logging grade. It was on the last half the speeder with its gruesome burden had been found.

Sheriff Yates' shrewd gaze was searching the group. Ole Benson felt the prickles go up in his hair. He could guess what the next question would be.

"Anybody missing?" asked Yates.

"Where's Nick Frane?" asked Gus Mortenson. "Come to think of it, he wasn't at work and I ain't seen him all day."

"He's been mad at Kreber a long time," volunteered a logger. "They had a fight over Nick's wife."

"Bring him in, Gus," ordered the sheriff. Ole Benson shifted his big feet, and the sheriff swung around sharply. "Well? Something on your mind, Ole?"

A logger chuckled. "That was his feet, Sheriff."

Ole Benson felt his Adam's-apple jerk. "Maybe Kreber was having trouble with some other fellows, too," he suggested eagerly.

"How about Sam Marsden?" yelled somebody.

"Sam is my helper, and a good man," spoke up Clay.

"Yeah, but his wife Maisie and Kreber—there's been talk," insisted the logger who'd brought up Sam Marsden's name. Everybody turned to look at the little man with the pinched face. His small eyes were fixed on Clay, something in the way an accused dog would appeal to his master.

"Sam didn't kill Kreber," asserted Clay.

"At the exact time Kreber went by on his speeder, Sam was giving me a sight across Scatter Creek gully."

Silence followed this statement. The little man shifted his axe from his left hand to his right. Ole Benson drew a careful breath. The sheriff glared.

"Well, Ole? What is it? Are we too fast for you?"

"I was just thinking, Sheriff." Ole Benson's mild blue eyes went to Clay. "Did you see Sam when you was taking that sight?"

"How could he?" demanded the sheriff impatiently. "Sam was giving Clay the sight across the gully. You know how that's done, don't you?"

"Sure," said Benson. "Clay looks through the instrument, and when he sees it's right on the plumb-bob which Sam is holding on the other side of the gully, Clay hollers okay, and Sam lets the bob fly."

"You see," put in Clay, "we were running the preliminary on the new bridge through that grown-up land that was cut over ten years ago, and hadn't brushed out a very good trail. All we wanted was to get a sight through. When I yelled okay, Sam pulled the bob up. I saw it. I couldn't be mistaken about that. You guys will have to look for somebody else. My helper didn't do it."

"Sounds like a corking good alibi," agreed the coroner, with a nod.

The sheriff spoke to Clay. "Just one thing, though. You say you heard the speeder cross the bridge, but you couldn't see it. How could you know where it was?"

"It makes a sort of hollow sound going over the bridge. That's how I knew when it hit the bridge."

SLOWLY Ole Benson scratched his solid square jaw. "Seems to me there's a switch-back just the other side of the bridge, ain't there? Where was you in relation to the switch-back when Clay was taking the sight, Sam?"

Little Sam Marsden wet his lips, raising expressionless eyes to Ole Benson. "About a hundred feet from the end of the bridge." "Which means about two hundred from the switch-back," said the sheriff. He gave Benson a sharp look. "What'd you ask that for?"

Ole Benson smiled blandly. "Oh, nothing. I was just remembering a couple summers ago when I was playing around in the woods on the survey crew. Sam here used to say I was a purty smart stake-artist."

"Well, you're a big boy now," boomed the sheriff angrily, "and you're not playing in the woods."

The loggers roared. Ole Benson shifted from one huge foot to the other and got red around the ears. Just then the door opened and the head-rigger came in with Nick Frane.

Frane was a tall, broad-shouldered logger, with brown eyes that looked straight ahead, like Jane's. Ole Benson's throat squeezed shut. Nick and Jane, orphaned when they were kids, had stuck together with a kind of devotion that wasn't very common.

"Why weren't you at work today?" asked the sheriff.

"Sick," came the tight-lipped answer.

"Yeah?" scoffed Sheriff Yates. "You look pretty healthy now."

"I guess it wasn't much." Nick Frane's handsome face flushed. "Just when I went to catch the speeder this morning I got a nosebleed."

The loggers chuckled and the coroner's eyes screwed up. "Anybody see the nose-bleed?"

"Sure. My wife."

"Hmm. Nosebleed. That keep you home all day?"

Ole Benson felt the perspiration seep out of the palms of his hands as Nick plainly hesitated.

"I had some beer for lunch," he finally admitted. "And I got sleepy. I fell asleep and didn't wake up."

"Oh. To sleep," commented the sheriff. "I suppose your wife was home taking care of you?"

Nick Frane's glance shifted to Ole Benson, away again. "No. She was off sewing and gabbing with some women."

"Aw, tell us how you did it so we can eat," blurted a raw-boned Irishman. "I'm hungry."

Nick Frane glared. His huge fist struck out, and the Irishman toppled backward, his hand to his jaw. Instantly the room was bedlam. Chairs flew. Brawny lumberjack bodies tangled, legs and arms twisting, winding and shooting out. Ole Benson waded in. He got Frane and stood him against the wall.

"By golly, that hot temper will get you in trouble some day," he predicted mildly.

The confusion subsided as quickly as it had begun. The sheriff pushed back his Stetson. "If the coroner ain't got any more questions, we'll let the jury make their decision so you boys can eat."

A few minutes later Gus Mortenson reported.

"Kreber got killed a few minutes after three o'clock by getting his head smashed in by a hard instrument," he said. "But we don't know who done it."

"I got a blamed good idea who," the Irishman muttered as the hungry loggers turned with relief to supper. The sheriff's hand came to rest on Nick Frane's shoulder.

"Afraid I'll have to hold you, Nick. Unless you can prove that stain on your overalls is really from a nosebleed, and that you was home sleeping all afternoon."

The noisy room had become instantly quiet again. Ole Benson could hear the hard breathing of the men.

"I didn't kill him!" said Frane, a little wildly. "I never knew he was dead till Gus told me."

"Steady, Nick. Everybody knows you and Kreber been having trouble."

Nick Frane said no more as the sheriff led him outside.

"I'd rather it was anybody but Nick," observed Clay, standing beside Benson and watching the coroner and the sheriff lift the body of Kreber into the wicker basket and deposit it in the back of the mortuary car. "He's a swell kid, but it looks bad for him."

"He didn't do it," stated Ole Benson tranquilly.

Clay scowled. "Hope not, but you'll have to work fast. The noose is getting tighter around his neck every minute. As for Sam Marsden, his alibi is good as my word." He gave a whistle. "Or do you figure I'm lying to protect my helper? Is that it?"

At first Ole Benson didn't seem to hear. "Huh?" he said with a start. "By golly, no, Clay. You said you saw the bob come up. That's what I'm thinking."

"Don't think too hard," advised Clay, grinning and giving Benson a friendly slap on the shoulder. "How's Jane taking it?"

"She's worried," admitted Benson. "She thinks a lot of her brother."

"Yeah?" said Clay. "Well, maybe she does—of her brother. But for anybody else girls don't have much feeling." Clay walked off with a rapid stride, and Ole Benson looked after him, frowning. That was no way for a man to feel about girls.

AT six-thirty, as usual, Ole Benson slid his roadster to a careful stop, sparing his tires, outside the small brick building that housed the telephone exchange of Selma. In a few minutes Jane Frane came out slowly and got in the car beside him. Benson looked down at her white set face and felt his heart swell into his throat.

"I thought—maybe you'd gone home," he said, hesitating.

"There was no one to take my place." The stiffly starched voice broke. "He didn't do it," she whispered, staring straight ahead. "He didn't do it. It's just—they got to pick on somebody."

Ole Benson started the car.

"They'll pin it on him," went on Jane Frane in a choked voice. "After what Kreber said about Dolly—oh, everybody knows how Nick hated Kreber! And he had reason to hate Kreber."

"Lots of people had reason to," Benson pointed out.

"Nick's been drinking a little lately. Not much. But just because he'd had a beer, they'll say he was drunk."

"Yah, people talk," agreed Benson. "People talk too much. Now I take you right home, Jane. I want to go up in the woods again before it gets too dark."

"Oh, Ole, let the sheriff do it," he was hoping she would say, with something of her old spirit. "Why don't you get a job in the lumber company?" But she didn't. Even when Ole Benson, with unprecedented boldness, put out his arm and drew the rigid little figure to him, bringing her head to his shoulder, she said nothing. The smell of her hair was clean and sweet. Benson began to tremble.

The instant the car stopped, she jumped out. Her cheeks were wet as she turned to him.

"Ole, don't let them pin it on Nick!" she pleaded.

Ole Benson's Adam's-apple was about to choke him.

"By golly," he swore, the blood pumping wildly through his veins, "I already know who done it! You quit worrying, Jane!"

"Ole!" she screamed. But the little roadster was spitting and sputtering down the dirt road, clouds of dust swirling around it.

With the early morning sun making the dewy green mountainsides sparkle, the loggers as usual parked their cars near the railroad crossing where the motor-driven vehicles which took them up into the woods waited.

"Now who do they want?" demanded Gus Mortenson, staring at the bulky figure of Ole Benson getting out of his car while the sheriff was following. "Maybe Ole had a dream about who did it; watch out, you lugs, or you'll get arrested."

The sheriff headed for the crossing to one of the speeders where, scowling heavily, he waited for Ole Benson who had stopped to say good-morning to the loggers.

"Good-morning," returned Gus Mortenson, affecting a squeaky voice. "Any more murders today, Mr. Detective?"

Ole Benson stood his ground, grinning. "I hope not. We got to finish this one first. I'm going to show the sheriff something now. Sam and Clay, you two, we want you to come."

The men roared with mirth.

"I told you he had a dream!" shouted Martenson. "Come on, you guys, let's watch this!"

Sheriff Yates' face was a mottled red as Ole Benson hoisted his big body on the speeder after him. They rode the two miles to the bridge, followed by the loggers, left the speeder on its downside and cut off on a newly-cut trail through underbrush and regrowth. As they proceeded, Clay, the surveyor, came alongside the sheriff and explained the previous day's activities.

"We were doing the preliminary work for the new bridge, like I said, so I was busy

running around to scout the geological and topographical formations. The idea is for the new bridge to get over the far slope without a switch-back, which slows down traffic too much." They passed several of the usual surveyors' stakes, and finally stopped at one on the edge of the gully.

"Here is where I was set up when Kreber's speeder went down. I was sighting there." Clay indicated the opposite side, a few hundred feet above where the present bridge touched. It was almost hidden from view by the copious growth of young trees and underbrush.

Ole Benson, Sheriff Yates, and the loggers followed the surveyor into the creek bed and up the opposite bank until they again encountered a cleared trail. Near the top of the slope, Clay stopped.

"This was Sam's position," he explained.

Ole Benson looked around with slow deliberation. The loggers nudged one another and winked while the sheriff waited, his eyes almost hidden by his scowl.

"Watch out, Ole, that skull of yours will crack if you put too much weight on the inside," warned one of the men, slapping Sam Marsden on the back so hard the little man staggered. "That right, Sam?"

OLE BENSON was standing over the stake from which Sam Marsden had given a sight, stretching out his long arms. The right one touched a small sapling which, to the suddenly intent sheriff's surprise, he pulled over to him. The officer stared still harder as Benson pointed out that its upper branches had been denuded.

"Got any string?" Benson asked Clay.

Clay complied with a stout cord which the deputy tied to the top of the sapling. Ole Benson pulled it over until the bare top was several feet over the stake. Then he searched the ground for a place to secure the cord. A small snag of root answered perfectly, and he slipped the noose over it with the tree held in this bent-over position.

"How about a plumb-bob?" asked Benson. Clay handed over his. Ole Benson tied the string of the plumb-bob to the bare top of the tree and the bob came to rest almost directly over the stake. The contrivance looked like an ordinary trapper's snare.

Across Ole Benson's face ran a small ripple of excitement.

"Would you call those tack holes on the trunk, Clay?" He pointed to the part of the tree from which the bob hung. Both the sheriff and the surveyor stared closely and the loggers pressed forward with interest.

"Sure," replied Clay. "Looks like they were made by those long survey tacks we use. Looks like they were made while someone was trying to adjust the bob exactly over the stake." His voice suddenly shook, and he wiped dampness from his forehead.

"But—but—he had to be here to haul up the bob, didn't he?"

"Nope." Ole Benson's peaceful eyes were fixed on him, and there was a stir, like a slight breath, from the listening men. The sheriff's glance sped to the man who had hauled up the bob—Sam Marsden. His eyes, which looked lidless because he had no lashes, were blank as ice and his lips were white.

"You see," went on Ole Benson, "if he had a long string or tape attached to the loop down here on the ground, couldn't a pull have released the noose and let the tree spring back to position while the bob flies up, just as if he had been right here?"

"Why, sure." Clay wiped his forehead again. "And he could be down there killing Kreber, while I thought he was here, hauling up the bob!"

The sheriff took three long steps to face Sam Marsden.

"Well?" he thundered. "What you got to say to that?"

"What I said before," said the little man, his lidless stare unblinking. "I was working here by the bridge when Kreber went by, dead."

Sheriff Yates snorted.

"You forgot one thing, Sam Marsden!" he roared. "You forgot to chop down that tree with its telltale tack marks and throw it off line!"

"But I couldn't—" began Sam Marsden. Then his lips snapped shut. The color washed from his face, and his body began to shake. "Okay, I was going to kill him, yes. I had a right to. Nobody thought I knew, but I heard Clay telling some of the boys a week ago about how smart my Maisie was, all the time smiling sweet at me while she was meeting Kreber."

"Go on, keep going," ordered the sheriff.

"So I decided to kill Kreber when Clay told me we'd be working on the new bridge. I knew I'd be alone a lot because Clay is like a bird-dog on this kind of job, running off here and there, looking at everything."

"Yah." Ole Benson, who had moved up beside the sheriff, nodded. "So you fastened your bob up while Clay was out on one of his side trips, and then fastened the tape to the noose so in case Clay yelled before you got back, you could let the bob fly, and he'd think you was there."

The little man swallowed. He looked wilted as a dead branch, his face gray and hollow-eyed.

"Kreber came a little earlier than usual, so I wasn't quite ready," he said. "But I knew he'd have to stop to throw the switch and reverse the speeder. I planned to jump on behind, ride down with him, then when he wasn't looking, knock him out and kill him with a wrench from his box. Then I would run quick, pull the tape and let the

bob jump, like I was right on the job all the time."

"Yah," Ole Benson nodded again. "You showed me how to hang a plumb-bob so you didn't have to hold it up, that summer I was playing here in the woods." He flushed, remembering the loggers' laughter. But no one laughed now. There was not a sound among the loggers.

"I knew when you said that you had it figured out," said Marsden. "I knew it was no use saying anything." Terror had altered the little man's face until it was almost unrecognizable, and sweat stood on his forehead. "I knew I couldn't prove I didn't kill him."

"You still say you never killed Kreber?" shouted the sheriff.

"When I got to the speeder, he was already dead, the speeder going slow with the brakes half-set," said Marsden. "I was scared, like I'd really done it. I ran back quick, pulled the tape and let the bob jump so it would look to Clay like I was right on the job."

NODDING with comprehension, Ole Benson encouraged him to continue. "And you heard Clay yell, 'Okay', like he does when he's ready?" asked Benson, in a gentle voice.

"I was scared," said Sam Marsden hoarsely. "I don't know."

"Too scared to chop down the tree," asked Ole Benson softly, "before you left? If you had, we'd never found it."

Sam Marsden's lidless gaze shifted. "I'd left my axe on the other side."

"You mean where Clay was?"

"Yes," said Sam Marsden. "Where Clay was."

"The handle was damp when I felt it yesterday," said Ole Benson. "You found it and washed it in the creek, just before coming down?"

"There was blood on it," said the little man simply. "It was my axe, and I tried to wash it off."

Ole Benson turned his bland gaze on the red-headed surveyor. "You could have washed the blood off, Clay. It is bad enough to kill a man, but to put the blame on Sam here to boot—"

He never finished his sentence. Clay had backed out of the group. Some ten feet behind the loggers he stopped, crouched, a gun in his hand.

"The first one moves I get," he snarled, backing into the heavy growth of trees and underbrush.

Nobody moved. The next instant Clay had disappeared in the trees. Ole Benson gave a low growl, deep in his throat. His huge arms pushed the loggers aside like toothpicks as he strode straight for the place where Clay had vanished.

"Stop!" ordered the sheriff. "He'll shoot, Ole!" But Ole Benson went on, his long legs scissoring rapidly. He made his way through the brush like a log hurtling downstream, his bland face expressionless, unchanging even when branches slapped his forehead, scratched the skin from his cheeks. Brush cracked ahead of him where the surveyor was making what speed he could over the rough ground. It seemed to Benson he could hear the gasping breaths of the fleeing man. Ole Benson's eyes brightened, and he moved even faster.

Then he reached the clearing on the other side of the gully, and he saw Clay. Crouched behind a boulder, the sun gleamed on his red head and on the barrel of the revolver resting on the rock.

"Stay where you are, you snoopy Swede!" came Clay's voice, hoarsely.

"It do you no good to kill me, too, Clay," protested Benson. He measured the distance to the boulder with his eyes. "Just because you kill Kreber, it do you no good to kill me, too."

While he spoke he edged forward. One leap of his long legs would make it to the top of the rock, from which he could fall with all the force of his big body upon the man crouched there.

But before he gathered his muscles for the leap, he ducked sharply to the right. The bullet he had expected came, but, intended for his heart, it sped past harmlessly. Before Clay could realize what had happened, Ole Benson leaped. He was atop the boulder. Clay's gun sent orange fire blazing as the deputy crashed down on him. Benson's huge fingers clamped on the gun, twisted it out of the surveyor's hold.

"By gum," said Benson, wiping his high forehead with a hand that spurted blood and sitting on the surveyor calmly while the sheriff, followed by the loggers, came scrambling through the brush and over the gully, "you one big fool, Clay."

"But, Ole!" Jane Franc cried, as he went over the story for her. "What ever made you think it was Clay in the first place?"

"After I left you last night, I went up there to investigate. It was just a hunch," explained Ole Benson apologetically, "because Sam Marsden's axe was damp. When I found what I did, I figured it was Sam all right, but I thought Clay was in it, too. I knew Clay's girl quit writing to him just about the time he walked out of that poker game with Kreber, and I knew Kreber had been winning a lot of money from him." Benson knit his sandy brows and shook his head sadly. "Clay told the sheriff how he'd lost so much money to Kreber he couldn't send for his girl, and she got mad and married somebody else. Then when he found out Kreber had been cheating to boot, it

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Rayborn found a
man on the floor,
face down

THE KNIFE WAS LARGE

By J. LANE LINKLATER

Suspended for officiousness during a murder investigation, veteran policeman George Rayborn tackles the toughest job of his career!

POLICEMAN GEORGE RAYBORN was patrolling his beat, which was below the tracks. Below the tracks, in El Semunda, was "Little Mexico." Rayborn's superiors had given him this beat as a gesture of contempt, and Rayborn knew it. They thought he was too old, and they also thought he was a blow-hard, always talking about the old days of long ago when he had been a deputy sheriff over in Arizona.

But El Semunda's police force had been depleted by the Army, and they had to get

someone—most anyone—even old George Rayborn. So George had been on the job a month now.

It was past midnight, a warm sultry night. There was no moon. Black night hung over the shacks of Little Mexico like a gloomy shroud over the mouldering dead.

George Rayborn was turning a corner when he saw a shadowy figure dart out of a gateway and run swiftly away. Almost before Rayborn could open his mouth the figure had vanished around the corner beyond.

There was no time to note much, except that the man was carrying something.

Rayborn moved fast. He was nearly seventy, but it was his claim that he could move as fast as a man of thirty. It was no idle boast. He was short and stocky, with sturdy legs.

He turned into the gateway. It was a typical Mexican yard. The ground swept clean, a small cultivated patch for corn, and several clumps of tall cactus.

Off to his right, a shack was vaguely outlined. George Rayborn started toward it, hesitated, stopped.

Off to his left, he had heard noises.

Policeman Rayborn hurried toward the noises. He brought up against a rickety fence. He stood against the fence and peered over it into the darkness of the adjoining yard.

Abruptly, the noises came to him again, from right under his nose, against the other side of the fence. He squinted down. A human form squirmed on the ground, struggled with itself, reared upward, and swayed on tottering legs.

Rayborn glowered at an ancient but happy Mexican. He spoke with great disgust.

"Arturo, you're drunk again!" he said.

Arturo grinned at him, swung about with determination, and then propelled himself precariously toward his own shack.

Frowning, Rayborn turned back to the right corner of the lot. The shack on this lot looked as if it had been put together with orange crates, and probably had. No light showed. Rayborn turned his light on the door. It was open. George Rayborn hesitated again. After all, there might be nothing wrong.

He rapped on the door.

"Anyone home?" he asked.

Rayborn didn't expect an answer. He got none. Uncertainly, Rayborn pushed in. His flash swept the dingy interior.

The man was on the floor, face down. His back was a bloody mess.

POLICEMAN RAYBORN felt ill. He had always claimed to be tough, but this got him. He had seen plenty shooting, in the old days, but he never could get used to a knife thrust.

And this was certainly a knifing.

He moved his flash about but could see no knife. Not much to see. Just a few scattered orange lugs. On one of the lugs was a scrap of paper. Rayborn picked it up. It told him nothing; a half a sheet from a recent issue of the *Los Angeles Times*.

He knelt by the body again. This man was no Mexican. George gently turned the head so he could see the face, and stared hard.

He whistled softly. Harry Lamon! One

of El Semunda's leading citizens. He was a small man, well dressed in a light tan suit. But what in the dickens was Lamon doing here in a shack in Little Mexico? At midnight, too!

Patrolman George Rayborn got up and hurried to the nearest telephone, three blocks away.

Chief of Police Walker and a couple of his men got to the shack in a hurry. When he was through looking at the corpse, he scowled at George Rayborn.

"This is going to raise plenty of trouble," he said, as if it were all Rayborn's fault. He was a bulky man with a dark heavy-jowled face. "It's the first murder we've had in over a year," he went on, "and it had to be on your beat! You say you saw the killer run away?"

"I saw someone run away," Rayborn corrected Walker. "I don't know if he was the killer."

"What did he look like?"

Rayborn wagged his head. "It was too dark. I couldn't see."

The chief groaned. "Did you see anything else?"

Rayborn remembered about that. Maybe it was just stubbornness.

"Only that the guy was carrying something in his hand," he said. "Maybe a paper bag. I don't know for sure just what."

The chief waved his hand. "You know who this place belongs to?"

"No," said Rayborn. "But I know who was living here. The Trujillos. They were living here for years. Raised a family. Kids are all grown up now. Tony Trujillo moved down to the Coast just a few days ago, so he could get a job in a shipyard."

"This is a Mexican killing," muttered the chief. "Knifing!"

"Maybe not," objected George Rayborn.

He didn't like to have his Mexican friends picked on. A Mexican had saved his life once. That Mexican's name was Trujillo, too.

Besides, three of Tony's boys were in the Army now, and two in the Navy.

So George Rayborn was prejudiced. He was pretty stubborn about his prejudices. To his mind, no one named Trujillo could be a murderer, regardless of the evidence.

"Anything more you know about it?" demanded the chief.

"No."

"Okay. You can go on out and patrol your beat."

"But I want to help."

"We don't need you."

George Rayborn went out and patrolled Little Mexico, aimlessly, all through the night. They thought he wasn't bright enough to work on a murder case. Cuss 'em!

Rayborn was home for breakfast at eight in the morning. His wife, Clara, had the

table set. She could see something was the matter with him as soon as he came in, but she knew her husband, so she waited until he was finishing his coffee.

"All right, George," she said, then. "Get it off your chest!"

George Rayborn grinned sheepishly. "You been reading my mind for forty years, Clara." His grin faded. "There was a murder on my beat last night."

"Murder! Who was it?"

"Harry Lamon. You know about him—one of our snottiest businessmen. Nervous little runt. Something queer about him, I guess. The chief seems to think it was all my fault. Good thing Tony was out of town or they'd have grabbed him for it."

"Tony? You mean Tony Trujillo?"

"Yes. I found Lamon dead in Tony's shack."

"I wouldn't worry," Clara soothed. "It ain't your fault there was a murder."

GEORGE silently lighted his pipe. He knew there was something to worry about. Chief Walker wanted to get rid of him. The chief had had to take him on only because there had been no one else at the time. But now, another man, an old crony of the chief's who had been working on another job, would be free to take George's post.

But George said nothing about that to Clara. Nobody in town knew it, but he and Clara had about used up their life's savings. He could go on a pension, maybe, but it was a thought that George fiercely resented.

George wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and got up. He put on his hat.

"Now, George," protested Clara, "you need your rest. You should be going to bed."

"You're as bad as the others," George said disgustedly. "Anyone would think I was too old to walk a few extra blocks. Chief Walker told me to lay off this murder, but I ain't a-going to do it—even if it makes the chief as mad as all hemlock! The murder was done right under my nose. It belongs to me!"

He kissed Clara and stamped out.

Before his death, Harry Lamon had lived in one of El Semunda's swankiest houses. George Rayborn rang the bell. The door was opened by Nick Stone, a small middle-aged man with an ingrowing nose and bulging eyes. Stone had been Lamon's servant for years. Lamon, a bachelor, had no woman servants. Nick Stone did practically everything.

Stone saw who it was and scowled. "Come in," he said reluctantly.

Rayborn went in and found two other men in the living room.

One of them was a tall, slim horse-faced man, refined in appearance. This was Roger Tangley, a local capitalist.

The other was Hank North, an old-timer in El Semunda, a short squat man with a rugged face and a square bushy head.

Tangley, a fastidious sort of man, looked at Rayborn with unconcealed distaste.

"What are you doing here, Rayborn?" he asked.

Now was the time, Clara would have said, to be careful. Both of these men had a strong drag with the city administration, especially North. It would be smart to cater to them.

But Rayborn was not a tactful man. "I could ask the same of you two gents," he said grumpily.

"That would be presumptuous," snapped Tangley.

Hank North chuckled. "Might as well tell George. Langley was interested in business deals with Lamon. So was I. We both knew that Lamon toted business papers around in his pocket, so we thought we ought to rush over here."

"Carried his office around with him, huh?" cut in Rayborn. He thought maybe that was important. "But I don't see why that should make you call here this morning."

"He didn't have all the papers on him when he was killed," North said. "We had an idea we might find something around the house. Besides," he added, "Tangley, being a gentleman, is upset by Lamon's death."

"How about you?" asked Rayborn.

"Bosh!" answered North, "I'm no gentleman."

Rayborn pondered that. Come to think of it, no one would grieve over Lamon. He was well known, but not well liked. He had been a cold calculating fellow, mostly interested in money.

"I want to find out what Lamon did last evening before he went down to Little Mexico," Rayborn said gloomily.

"Ask Nick," suggested North. He raised his voice: "Hi, Nick!"

Nick Stone popped into the room in a few seconds. The sullen look had disappeared from his face, and his grin was almost idiotic.

Rayborn asked him the question.

"Mr. Lamon was home all evening," Stone said. "Just reading and listening to the radio. When I went to bed at ten o'clock, he was still up. That's all I know."

"Did he have any phone calls?" Rayborn asked.

Stone hesitated. "No," he said slyly. "No phone calls."

"Okay. Beat it," said Rayborn.

Nick Stone vanished.

"I think," muttered Rayborn, "Nick lied about the phone calls. Another thing, he got himself doped up in the last few minutes. Took a drag on something."

"Sure, he did," agreed North. "But, if

you're suspicious of Nick, I'd say *marijuana* makes 'em happy, not murderous. I've seen plenty of it. Lots of *marijuanas* grown around this part of the country. It's dope, all right, but it don't make 'em vicious, usually."

AT THIS moment George Rayborn was standing against a table, idly rubbing his fingers against a leather briefcase. Yes, he thought he agreed with North about *marijuana*. Nick, of course, was addicted to the stuff. He remembered that Lamón had sometimes acted a bit queer, too. He caught a glimpse of something across the room and began to stare.

"Yes, that's my briefcase, Rayborn," Tanglely snapped in a sarcastic voice. "If you're suspicious, you can look inside it."

Rayborn grinned. He had noticed a spot on the leather that felt a bit like a tooth brush. But he opened the case. It was empty. He closed it again.

"I doubt if Chief Walker would want you bungling around here," Tanglely added bitingly.

Tanglely was right about that. George Rayborn mumbled something and backed out.

Rayborn went down to Headquarters. The chief was out, and Rayborn talked to Buck Sloan, who was on duty at the desk.

"What's new on that murder?" Rayborn asked.

Sloan was a big man with over-sized teeth. "Not much, George," he said good-naturedly. "Lamón was slashed in the back three times. It had to be a large knife."

"A large knife, huh?" That seemed to stir something in Rayborn's mind. "A large knife, huh?"

"A large knife," repeated Buck Sloan. "But they ain't found any knife. Also, Lamón had some cactus needles in the back of one hand, like maybe he had brushed his hand against a clump of cactus as he passed it. You know how that stuff is. The needles come right off and stick into you."

"I know how it is," agreed Rayborn morosely. "But I don't see how Lamón got them needles in him."

Chief Walker and another officer came in from the street. Between them was a small man with a wrinkled face and worried black eyes.

George Rayborn stared at the little man. "Tony!" he said. "What the dickens! I thought you was down at the Coast!"

Tony Trujillo's face lighted as he saw George Rayborn. He started to speak, but the chief cut him short. "That was just a stall," Walker said. "Tony was in town here all last night. We're booking him for murder!"

"I don't believe he done it," Rayborn growled. "How about it, Tony?"

"Murder, I don't do," said Tony Trujillo, with a puzzled frown.

"We got a good case," the chief said. "That shack you lived in—the one Lamón was killed in—belonged to Lamón. I found out he owned it, along with other property down in Little Mexico. He had to have some reason for being down there—he was probably trying to collect back rent from you."

"Except for last three months, I pay my rent to Meester Lamón," Trujillo said stolidly. "My wife, she was sick long time, so I had no money left. I tell Meester Lamón I will make money in shipyard and send him rent."

"The way I figure it, you had a fight with Lamón over the rent, and knifed him."

Tony Trujillo looked pained rather than angry. "Never in my life," he said wearily, "I knife any man. I do not like that business with knife."

The chief laughed harshly. "You're supposed to be down on the Coast, yet you were here in El Semunda all last night. How about that?"

Trujillo frowned. "Me and my wife, we stay with friends, down on Coast. They have telephone. Yesterday came telephone call for me. A man say for me to come back to El Semunda. He say man needed for work in orange groves just as much as shipyards. He say Meester North want me."

"Hank North?" queried George Rayborn.

"St. Man say Meester North ask for me and will pay special wages. He say job will be good for long time. He say me and my wife will be cared for all our lives."

"Where did you go after you got back to El Semunda?"

"The man say I am to be at house on Meester North's grove at eleven o'clock and if he is not there I am to wait. I go there. The house is locked up. I wait, long time. Meester North don't come."

"Then what?"

"I walk to home of friend in El Semunda. I tell him, and I sleep in his house. This morning I get from bed and walk up town. Policeman see me and grab. That is all."

CHIEF WALKER showed impatience. "You came back to El Semunda to kill Lamón," he said. "That yarn about someone phoning you is just crazy. You've got no alibi."

"Somebody," put in Rayborn angrily, "tried to fix it so that Tony wouldn't have one. Hank North is up at Lamón's house right now. I'll phone him."

The chief glared, but Rayborn reached for the phone on Buck Sloan's desk and put in a call for Lamón's house. Nick Stone answered, and he called North. When North came to the phone, Rayborn told him Tony's story.

"It's all news to me," Hank North said.

Rayborn hung up and turned glumly to Tony Trujillo. "Mr. North don't know anything about that phone call, Tony. I guess someone was fooling you."

"No one was fooling him," barked the chief. "He just made that up. Why would North want him to go to the house on the grove, anyway? Why, North don't even use that house! He lives in town. The grove house is locked up!"

Tony Trujillo gaped helplessly. "I just do what Meester North want. Meester North is fine man! If he say he want me, I go."

"You're lying!" roared the chief.

"Tony is telling the truth," Rayborn said indignantly. "He ain't no killer. In the old days, I knew plenty killers. I can tell a killer when I see one."

"Shut up!" shouted the chief. "You and your old days! You're suspended! I gave you orders to lay off this case. You disregarded orders. I'll get your dismissal put through at the next meeting of the City Council!"

George Rayborn walked home slowly. Well, he was through, but he couldn't tell Clara. Not yet. He knew she'd been hoping and praying he'd have sense enough to just do as he was told and keep his mouth shut. Instead, he'd barged around until he'd got himself suspended. And he'd be fired for good in a few days.

"What's the matter?" Clara asked as soon as she saw him.

George tried to grin. "Nothing," he said.

She didn't believe him, but she didn't argue.

"Well, you'd better get to bed," she said.

So he went to bed, but he didn't sleep much. He got up early in the evening, ate some dinner, and sat glumly around the house. His shift had been from ten in the evening until seven in the morning. Clara, not knowing he had been suspended, would expect him to leave about nine-thirty.

So he left at nine-thirty, in the usual way. But he did not go near the police station. He walked across the tracks, and angled down into the heart of Little Mexico.

Yes, he thought, the heart of this problem was in the heart of Little Mexico. *Marijuana*! Nick Stone used *marijuana*, and so, he strongly suspected, had the murdered man, Lamon.

Presently he turned into a shadowless yard and approached a small house.

He tapped on the door. It was opened by a small dark little woman whose age only seemed to make her black eyes the more brilliant.

"Good evening, Mrs. Garcia," said Rayborn.

"Come in, please," she said softly.

Rayborn went in and sat down in the barely-furnished room as if he were quite

at home. "How about some tortillas for a tired old man?" he said, smiling wearily.

"I just made some fresh," said Mrs. Garcia. "For Joe."

Rayborn frowned. "Where is Joe now?" he asked.

"Oh, he is out. He is out much at night."

"Sure." Rayborn munched on tortillas and sipped some wine. Then he went on slowly: "I am a policeman. You know that." He wasn't, not any more, but Mrs. Garcia wouldn't know it. "You understand I mean no harm to Joe."

"I trust you, George." She always called him George. She smiled a little sadly. "I know Joe is not always good, but he is very good to me, his mother."

Rayborn nodded. "There is much *marijuana* grown in Little Mexico. It is between rows of corn. And I know that Joe buys the *marijuana*, dries it, and then sells it. I do not like that, but it is not my business—not now."

MRS. GARCIA folded her hands. "What is it you want, George?"

"You have a telephone here," Rayborn said. "Most houses in Little Mexico do not have one. Does Joe ever telephone to the house of a man named Lamon?"

"Yes."

"Did he telephone here last evening?"

"No."

George Rayborn leaned forward, a rolled tortilla clutched in his fingers. "Did anyone telephone from the Lamon house to Joe here?"

Mrs. Garcia's eyes clouded. "Yes," she said.

"Do you know what was said?"

"No. But Joe—he looks funny."

"You mean, kind of puzzled?"

"Yes."

Rayborn pushed the tortilla end-wise into his mouth, munched on it thoughtfully. Joe Garcia, dealing in *marijuana*, had expected a phone call, and he had got one, but it hadn't been what he had expected.

Too many phone calls, Rayborn thought, in this case. Tony Trujillo had got one, too, but that was obviously a fake phone call.

Rayborn finished his tortilla and cooled his mouth with some wine.

"Thank you, Mrs. Garcia," he said.

He turned toward the door as it opened.

"Hello, Joe," Rayborn said. "I was going to look for you."

Joe Garcia grinned. Mrs. Garcia's boy was at least forty, short and powerful. His broad face held the cheerful impudence of a Francisco Villa.

"Good evening, my friend," Joe said politely. "I can do something for you?"

"Perhaps you can, Joe," George Rayborn said quietly.

"As a policeman," Joe said, "you are

nothing to me, but as a friend, whatever you ask, it is yours."

"Okay. But you'll show up as a dealer in *marijuana*!"

Joe Garcia shrugged. "Everybody knows that, even the police." He grinned widely. "Anyhow, for a friend I will take a chance."

"Sure." Rayborn thought hard for a minute. "It's a long chance, Joe. First, we've got two phone calls to make. You'll make one and I'll make the other. I'll call the witness—and you call the killer!"

It was past midnight when George Rayborn walked through the gate into the yard of Tony Trujillo's shack. With him was Joe Garcia and another man as short and stocky as Joe. The darkness blurred them into unrecognizable blobs, moving silently.

Rayborn led the others to the shack.

"Should be a padlock on that door," grumbled the third man.

Rayborn said nothing. Neither did Joe Garcia. Rayborn pushed the door open and they walked in. George Rayborn's flash swept the interior with light. Only the empty orange lugs littered the floor.

"We'll do it like this," Rayborn said. "You, Joe, sit on a lug in the middle here, facing the door." Rayborn turned to the third man. "You get against the wall on one side of the door and I'll stand against the wall on the other side. We'll have to keep mighty still."

They took their positions.

In the blackness it was impossible for George Rayborn to see Joe Garcia, sitting not more than three yards away. He reflected, gloomily, that he had certainly put Joe Garcia on the spot. When the killer came in—if it was the killer—he might start blazing away at Joe the moment he located him.

And Rayborn was not at all sure that he had figured the thing right. If it turned out wrong, nothing could save him from black and permanent disgrace.

There was a slight slurring noise, and Rayborn grew tense. But it was only Joe Garcia, making himself more comfortable on his lug.

Rayborn checked over his reasoning in his mind. He recalled that when he had seen the killer dashing out of the gate, he had appeared to be carrying something. What was it?

And why had he been in such a mad rush? Perhaps he had heard that wine-happy Mexican, Arturo, in the adjoining yard, and had not known who it might be, and had rushed away to avoid being seen!

Perhaps he had thought it might be Joe Garcia!

Suddenly, George Rayborn's ears picked up a faint sound outside the shack. He pressed his shoulders hard against the wall. They were all quite still, George Rayborn

and Joe Garcia and the man on the other side of the doorway.

The door had been left open.

RAYBORN could not see, but he sensed, the presence of someone in the doorway, standing there, motionless.

But Joe Garcia could see whoever it was from where he sat.

"Better stay right there," Garcia said.

"You do not make a move, or I nail you!"

The man was silent a moment.

"Don't threaten me, Joe," he said. "You want to make a deal with me. First, tell me what you know."

"I know you killed Lamon!"

"Don't be childish." The man's voice was impatient. "What do you know *definitely*?"

"I tell you what you did," Joe Garcia said.

"You want to kill Lamon—I don't know why. So, first, you phone to poor old Tony Trujillo so he comes back to El Semunda last night. You do it so Tony will have no alibi, and also so Tony will not be at this shack. This is to make sure there will be someone for the police to suspect."

"Then you phone me, and pretend to be Lamon, and say you will not be able to meet me at the usual place. You know Lamon buys *marijuana* from me. Lamon needs more, as he has used up his supply."

"Then you phone Lamon, and pretend to be me, and you say to him that I will meet him here, in Tony's shack, at midnight. That way you make sure to get him alone. And you know that Lamon will go to a shack in Little Mexico—or to the Devil himself—to get more *marijuana*."

Joe Garcia's husky voice stopped for a moment. The man in the doorway was silent. George Rayborn suppressed a sigh. Joe Garcia was certainly doing a good job of repeating what George had told him to say.

"So you met Lamon here," Garcia went on. "You stabbed him with a big knife. You could not leave the knife. You had to take it away, maybe bury it. But you could not run down the street with a big bloody knife in your hand, so you had something to carry it in. First, you wrapped it in newspaper, so the blood would not stain your clothes."

"Never mind the details," the man snapped. "You say you saw me?"

"Sure, I see you," Joe Garcia lied serenely. "After you phoned Lamon, pretending to be me, he phoned me back. He did not understand what was back of it, so he thought he would come here anyway, and a little later I would come, too. Of course, he did not expect to be killed."

"So you want to be paid off!" the man said contemptuously.

"That is right," said Garcia.

There was silence for a little while. Rayborn was uneasy. Now, he thought, he

should interfere. The man, by his presence, had confessed his guilt. There was nothing more he was likely to say.

So Rayborn stirred.

But he was late. The man in the doorway had fired. Flame streaked toward Joe Garcia.

And something else flashed with brief brilliance, going the other way, toward the door. No gun-fire. A knife!

There was a yelp of agony. And the sound of a gun plopping on the floor.

Rayborn was moving fast now. He lurched sideways and his hands clutched at the squirming figure of a man.

The man was hurt, and did not resist. Joe Garcia was on his feet by this time. He came forward.

Joe Garcia chuckled. "He had a gun in his pocket," Garcia said. "I was watching him very close. I threw my knife just before he fired."

Rayborn released the man, turned on his flash. The man's face was twisted in pain, and a stream of blood was gushing from his arm.

Suddenly, the man became belligerent. "A trap, eh?" he gasped. "Well, it won't do you any good. I can easily supply a reason for being here. No one will believe the dealer in *marijuana*, Joe Garcia. Neither will anyone," he added scornfully, "believe an old fool like George Rayborn!"

"I kind of figured that way myself," Rayborn admitted mildly. "They wouldn't believe us. Not without a darn good witness!"

"Ah! If you only had a good witness!"

"There is a witness!" The gruff voice came from the third man, and he stepped forward. Part of the light from George Rayborn's flash caught the grim smile on Hank North's seamed face. He grunted. "Well, Tangley, poor old George Rayborn sure tagged you with this murder!"

They took Roger Tangley to the station and he was put in a cell. Chief Walker was not pleased. He already had a prisoner, Tony Trujillo, and it seemed to embarrass him to have another one thrust on him.

Especially when George Rayborn was doing the thrusting.

He scowled at Rayborn.

"I suspended you, Rayborn!" he blustered. "You were exceeding your authority, you old fool!"

"No one is exceeding his authority," George said stoutly, "in arresting a killer."

"But are you sure it's not all a mistake?"

"Of course, he's sure," cut in Hank North impatiently. "I was there and heard the whole thing. It was a fine piece of work." He grinned at Rayborn. "How did you pick on Tangley, anyway?"

"The man I saw running was carrying something," Rayborn said. "I couldn't see

what it was, but I thought about that. Now, the knife that killed Lamon was large. The killer couldn't leave it in the shack because it might be traced to him. But neither could he tote it through the streets. So he had to put it in something before he left the shack."

"Put it in what?" growled the chief.

"Well, it had to be something that would not make anyone curious if he was seen with it," Rayborn explained with a grin. "So I thought it might be a briefcase!"

"Sure enough!" said North.

"Yes, sir," Rayborn said. "Tangley would look natural enough, walking down the street, even at midnight. He could say he had been some place on business. Well, Tangley had his briefcase at Lamon's this morning. I ran my hand over the leather." Rayborn chuckled. "I could just feel the ends of cactus needles that had stuck in there! Little Mexico is a great place for cactus needles. He wouldn't be likely to pick 'em up any other place."

CHIEF WALKER moved restlessly. "I still don't see why Tangley would kill Lamon," he grumbled.

"I have an idea about that," put in Hank North. "Tangley was in on different deals with Lamon, same as I was. I think Lamon advanced Tangley several thousand dollars on his personal note. The note was about due. Tangley couldn't pay it. He was afraid Lamon would squeeze him into bankruptcy. And Tangley knew Lamon made a practice of carrying business papers on his person. He was after that note. I don't think he got it, though. Anyhow, you can check on that."

The door opened and an officer came in with Tony Trujillo. Tony's face was one big smile. "Thank you, Meester George," he said. "Policeman, he tell me I no more under the arrest."

"You get out of here!" snapped the chief, irritably.

Tony Trujillo shrugged, and turned to go, but North called him back.

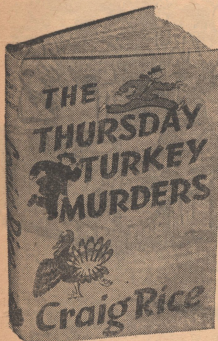
"About that phone call, Tony," North said. "I had nothing to do with it, but it's a darned good idea. We need men badly in the grove. It's essential work, too. The pay would be good, and the work steady." He put a hand on Tony Trujillo's shoulder. "You and your wife belong here in this old town. You'd better come back."

Tony's grin almost chopped his ears off. "Sure, Meester North. We stay here, work for you, till we die!"

Chief Walker was still sore. He turned to George Rayborn. "You have luck on this thing, Rayborn, but I still think you're a blow-hard. And you don't take orders like you should. So you're still under suspension."

(Concluded on page 113)

"I Didn't Want to Have to Kill You— but You Know Too Much!"



BINGO STARED dismally at the gleam of light on the barrel of the rifle the murderer held. The weapon was aimed directly at Bingo's forehead. It didn't make him feel any better that he knew the identity of the killer—because in just another second, when the gun exploded, he'd be out of the picture.

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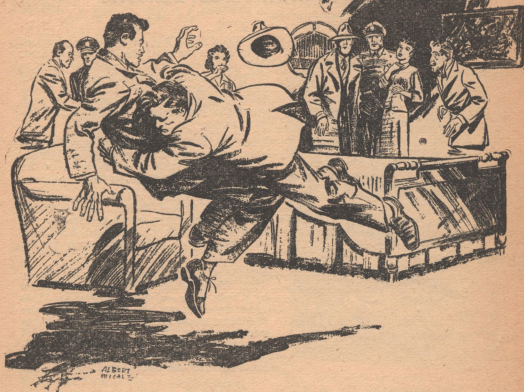
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—Springfield Union.

Coming in the Next Issue—WATCH FOR IT!

Galloping John had dived ten feet
across the floor



RIGHT AFTER THE DOCTOR

By ROY DE S. HORN

A canary, a parrot, and medicated candles are the only clues in a baffling death puzzle—until Detectives Ben Kerry and Galloping John Royal get on the job!

DETECTIVE BEN KERRY slowed for the light at the corner, then eased in the gas again as the signal shifted through yellow, toward green.

"A quiet night, and nothing on the ball," he muttered. "Monday night is always quiet."

"I could stand a lot of Monday nights,

then," said "Galloping John" Royal, yawning beside him in the precinct car. "I got a lotta sleep to catch up."

"That's the way with you bachelors," growled Kerry. "Stay out all Sunday night and then wonder why you're sleepy Mondays. Why don't you get married—Hey, what the devil!"

He slammed on the brakes, jerked at the

wheel just as something big and dark loomed out of the night at their left. With a crash their left fender crumpled, sailed into the air, and the precinct car bounced and skidded toward the curb. But the racing car which had ripped across their front fenders shot on, and with a roar vanished down the street.

"Why the blasted son-of-a-cook!" Kerry yelled as he manhandled the car back onto the avenue and gave it the gun. "No dirty hit-and-run can get away with that!"

The precinct car was fenderless on her front left wheel and there was a banging that told of a loosened bumper. But her engine was all right, and she leaped to speed as Kerry bore down to the floorboards.

"Monday nights is always quiet," mocked Galloping John in his drawling voice.

"You go to blazes! Which way did the buzzard turn? To the right—he musta turned to the right! Keep an eye open, John—a dark blue or black coupé! Buick, maybe."

On two wheels Kerry swung around the first intersection to the right and gunned her again. Almost immediately he had to swerve and kick for the brake. Directly ahead of them, a dark coupé was skidding with squealing brakes up to the curb.

Even as it stopped, the door slammed open and shut, and a man leaped out, running. With a rush he was up the steps of the house opposite and jabbing at the doorbell.

With an almost equal burst of speed Detective Ben Kerry was out of the precinct car, Galloping John at his heels. Before the man on the stoop could even look around, Kerry had him by the collar.

"Whadda ya mean, running us down and not stopping to see?" rasped the detective, shaking him ruthlessly. "That'll cost you plenty, bo! Running through a changing light—sideswiping a police car—and not stopping after a crash!"

"You left out 'Parking in front of a fire-plug,'" reminded Galloping John softly.

"Yeah—and parking in front of a fire-plug!" amended Kerry viciously. "Whadda you think you are, fella? A fireman?"

"No, I'm not a fireman," the prisoner snapped indignantly. "I am a doctor! And I'm answering a life-and-death call! Every second you delay me will be on your own responsibility!"

"Doctor, huh?" snarled Kerry. "That's a hot one!"

"Shh-h-hh," whispered Galloping John in his ear. "Look at his bag!"

KERRY looked, but continued to hang onto his prisoner.

"Doctor, huh? Well you *better* be a doctor! Even so, no doctor's got a right to go around running red-lights and sideswiping cars without—"

Suddenly the door in front of them jerked open. A girl's face, white and terrified, became visible.

"Oh, doctor! Hurry, hurry! I called you, but I'm afraid it's too—"

But already the prisoner, bag and all, had jerked out of Kerry's loosening fingers and made for the carpeted stairs, the girl following closely.

"Looks like maybe he was speaking truth," observed Galloping John mildly.

"Yeah?" Kerry was still peeved. "Well, we'll just tag along and make sure! It won't be the first time somebody's pulled a fast one!"

He shoved into the hall, Galloping John at his heels.

It was an ordinary brownstone house on the outside, one of the old kind, and the hall was in keeping. But one glance around and through the door leading into the big living-room at the right, and Ben Kerry stopped.

"Sweet Christmas! Is it a house, or is this the mint!"

Everywhere gleamed the soft light of metal objets d'art. Massive, hand-beaten silver pieces were on every hand. A gold clock ticked stolidly in the hall. Ebony tables and stair-bannisters, copper vases, thick rugs of mellowed Oriental designs, bewildered the roving eye. Even the ancient umbrella stand had a gold band around its top.

Detective Ben Kerry heaved a deep sigh, then strode for the stairs. No amount of gold or silver was going to keep him from his duty.

Ascending the thick carpeted stairs, they entered into an upper hall where electric lights in old-fashioned chandeliers glowed dimly. They could hear voices talking excitedly. Kerry and Galloping John made for the open door toward the front of the hall.

It was a spacious room, brilliantly lighted by an overhead chandelier. But the amazing thing was the lighted candle burning on a table beside the bed. On the bed lay a man, undoubtedly dead. They knew that from his still figure and sunken face, even without the words of the doctor who had dropped his medical case unheeded to the floor and was holding the dead man's limp wrist.

"Heart stopped—I can't feel a pulse! My stethoscope—in the bag there—"

The white-faced girl with deft fingers pulled out the tube and disk and handed it to the doctor. He clamped it to the chest of the lifeless man and closed his eyes, listening.

"Looks like he was wasting words when he said it was a 'life and death' call," murmured Galloping John. "He could have just said 'death' call."

Shaking his head, the doctor laid down the stethoscope.

"Gone, all right. Not a beat." Then for the first time he seemed aware of the two men standing at the door, and his eyes scowled. "I suppose you'll have to admit now that I am a doctor on an emergency call," he said ironically.

Kerry wet his lips, shuffled his feet.

"This is one time it's on me, I reckon, Doc. I'll tear up the ticket. But next time you wanna be more careful how you treat them stop-lights.

The doctor seemed a little less angry.

"That one minute might have made all the difference. You can't be particular when a man is choking to death. As it happens, it wouldn't have mattered after all. If you want my name and address, though, here is my card."

Kerry took the engraved card, spelled out the name.

"Dr. Ambrose Brewster. Hotel Tremaine." His tone became respectful. "Say, are you the big bones that did that operation on the mayor's son?"

"I'm Dr. Brewster—and I did perform a tonsillectomy on James Heyward, Junior, if that's what you're asking," returned the medical man crisply. "If that is all, I have medical duties to perform."

"S'all right, Doc. Well tear up the ticket. Sorry to have bothered you." Kerry turned toward the door, and then paused. "Who's the gent on the bed, Doc?"

It was the girl who answered.

"Captain Anson Munroe."

"Captain Anson Munroe!"

Kerry whistled. Munroe was one of the ten richest men in Manhattan. Shipping, export, manufacturing—he had piled up many millions on top of the first few he had made in the hey-day of World War shipping.

"What'd he die of, Doc?"

"Well, he had a bad case of chronic asthma the last time I saw him alive," retorted the doctor sarcastically. "That, combined with a weak heart and general old age, will do until I can make a post mortem diagnosis."

"Asthma, huh?" Kerry was sympathetic. "I had an uncle had asthma once—only he never died of it. A train killed him. Died of asthma, huh?"

"Well, when a seventy-five-year-old man has chronic asthma and dies from choking to death, that's generally the diagnosis," declared the medical man with obvious irritation.

Galloping John, who had been standing just inside the door studying the dead man's face and the room in general, spoke for the first time.

"The canary in the corner—did he die of asthma, too, Doctor?"

In amazed silence, all eyes swiveled in the direction of Galloping John's gaze.

At the bottom of the cage suspended from

the ceiling lay what had once been a chirping canary. Now it was lifeless, a pathetic tuft of yellow, its toes thrust half through the cage bars.

Suddenly, from the opposite corner, an unexpected, raucous voice rent the bewildered silence. Instinctively Ben Kerry whirled about, his hand snapping toward his holstered revolver.

"Quarr-r-rk! Quarrk!" squawked the voice. "All hands and the cook! The cook—the cook—to blazes with the cook. Quarr-r-rk!"

Kerry let his hand drop, a disgusted look on his face.

"A parrot!" he yelled. "What the devil is this, anyway—a crazy bird-house?"

A HUGE green and yellow bird, the parrot was clinging to the side of the cage, his head cocked impertinently to one side, his beady eyes glittering.

"I thought I told you to take those infernal birds out of here!" flared the doctor, addressing the girl.

"I did, Doctor," she replied almost tearfully. "Truly, I did. But he ordered me to bring them back! Said he preferred honest pets to selfish humans! You know how he gets—how he got—when anyone crossed him."

"Hard-headed!" The doctor shot a quick glance toward the bed. "Wouldn't follow treatment, wouldn't go to the hospital—wouldn't even let me send a nurse! Deliver me from another mule-headed sea-captain! Did he find out that you were a nurse—that I had sent you anyway?"

The girl shook her head. Kerry noted that the simple house-dress of blue which she wore did not disguise her evident beauty.

"Mrs. Murphy told him that I was the new second-maid," the girl explained. "He believed it—at least he never said he didn't. But he wouldn't let me stay in the room with him."

Galloping John had gone over to the canary's cage and opened the little door. He took the dead inmate out, held it in his hand. Again his speculative eyes turned toward the doctor.

"I asked if you thought this died of the asthma, too."

Dr. Ambrose Brewster's eyes snapped with anger.

"I'm a doctor—a throat specialist! Not a veterinary or ornithologist! And I haven't any time to answer fool questions! I've got me my death certificate to fill out, and to notify the family, and other things. If you—"

Ben Kerry tilted his nose in air, and sniffed curiously.

"What's that I smell?"

The doctor laughed shortly.

"That medicated candle, I suppose. It's

an asthma candle—an ordinary candle impregnated with potassium nitrate to give relief to asthma patients. The fumes soothe the membranes and prevent the patient from choking. You can look that up, if you don't believe it. There are three more like it in the drawer there."

Swiftly, Galloping John crossed to the furniture designated, a heavy mahogany bureau in the corner, and jerked open the top drawer.

"These the ones, Doctor?" he added as he drew out a couple of long greenish candles, similar to the one on the table.

The doctor nodded, and Kerry suddenly gave an understanding grunt.

"Heck! You mean it's one of them medical vaporizers, like them new electric things they got to make pinoleum vapor for kids with colds, huh?"

"More like them sulphur candles they used to burn up home, to sweeten wine kegs. That it, Doctor?" said Galloping John.

"Yes, you're both right," the doctor confirmed impatiently. "Now will you leave and let me attend to my professional duties?"

Kerry wagged his head affirmatively, looked at Galloping John.

"Guess everything's Okay, Doc. But you understand how it is. We got the routine report to make out, and we had to know."

"Go ahead, fill it out," replied the medical man with acerbity. "And I'll send you a full copy of the death certificate. But for heaven's sake, leave!"

Grunting, Detective Kerry led the way downstairs. At the lower hall he paused to take one last look at the rich collection of old silver and carved ebony.

"Thirty millions—and he ain't got no more use for it now than that canary!"

"What you going to report?" inquired Galloping John.

"Just the routine. It was asthma, all right. That doctor's a big shot, he ought to know."

"Thirty millions," mused Galloping John. "Was he actually worth thirty millions?"

"Yeah, that's the figure—if it wasn't forty or fifty," retorted Kerry. "More'n any one man oughta have, anyway."

Galloping John lapsed into digestive silence.

"Funny about the canary dying, too," he eventually volunteered.

"What of it? Maybe he caught the old man's asthma and died, too," countered Kerry sarcastically.

"But the parrot was in the room, too. Why didn't—"

"For the love of Mike, stop it! If you wanna know so bad, go down to the zoo and ask 'em there what all canaries die of."

said Kerry. "I don't know—don't care!"

At the precinct station the next morning, Detective Ben Kerry briskly entered the squad room, then came to an abrupt halt, his eyes popping in amazement.

Galloping John was seated at a little table in the far corner—a table lighted by two candles. And he seemed to be giving several cockroaches the third-degree! Holding them alternately to the two candles, just clear of the smoking wicks, he watched their wriggling struggles with keen interest. Beside him on the table was an open preserve jar.

"For Christmas' sake, you gone nutty?" demanded Kerry.

Galloping John shook his head, looked up, and grinned shamefacedly.

"No. Just trying to work out a puzzle."

"A puzzle! What sort of puzzle? A cockroach puzzle?" snorted Kerry.

"No. A parrot and canary puzzle. But it won't work."

Galloping John turned away to frown at the candles.

Detective Kerry's eyes widened. One of the candles was short and stubby, little more than the butt of the candle. The other was tall, almost unburnt. Both were greenish.

"You took them candles outa that room last night!" he blared accusingly.

Galloping John chose to ignore the charge. With a disappointed shake of his head he dropped the cockroaches back into the jar, screwed down the perforated top, and blew out the candles.

"I reckon the Doc was speaking the truth, all right."

"You mean Doctor Brewster?" Kerry stormed. "If you got any funny ideas about that guy, you better put 'em away with the cockroaches. I checked on him. He's a big-shot medicine man and then some! Two thousand berries he gets for a single job, like on the Mayor's son!"

"Yeah, I know," said Galloping John gloomily. "I checked on these candles too. Sent from the Adler pharmacy, and they identified 'em. Regular stock asthma candles, old-fashioned sort. They use vaporizers now, but they said Captain Munroe wouldn't ever have anything but the kind like they once used on ships."

SERGEANT CASSIDY, entering the squad room to hang up his coat, dropped the morning paper on the table, then sniffed the air suspiciously.

"Who the devil's been burning old rags in here?"

"Correction, please. Them's cockroach legs," answered Kerry, grinning. "Galloping John here is going in for to be a big animal trainer—"

Detective Kerry's attention suddenly switched to the newspaper lying directly before him.

"For Pete's sake!" he exclaimed. "Take a look at this?"

Galloping John looked up. Across the top corner in a spot-news box, with a photograph, were the big headlines:

CAPTAIN ANSON MUNROE DIES

ACUTE ASTHMA KILLS INDUSTRIAL AND SHIPPING
MAGNATE IN 75TH YEAR

Thirty-million Fortune to Be Divided Equally
Between Niece and National Throat Clinic

"What's wrong now?" demanded Cassidy peevishly. "You kickin' because he didn't leave you fifteen of them millions?"

Kerry, eyes still staring, pointed to the end of the headline.

"No. But he left 'em to the National Throat Clinic!"

"What of it? Ain't it reasonable for an old man, dying of a disease, to leave his money to a place so other people maybe can be cured?"

Kerry made gurgling noises in his throat.

"There's something funny here. The head of the National Throat Clinic, the fellow that gets that money to spend—is named Ambrose Brewster, M.D. The very doc that was treating that rich guy when he died!"

Cassidy's eyes bulged.

"You mean he had somethin' to do with the old guy kickin' off? You mean he—"

"I mean," said Detective Ben Kerry firmly, "I'm looking into this case further! A guy worth thirty million bucks kicks off with asthma. Asthma never killed my uncle, and he was seventy-five, too. And the sawbones treating this guy gets a fifteen-million cut outa that cash!"

"I thought you said you'd looked up this Dr. Brewster and he was in the clear," observed Galloping John mildly.

"Nobody's in the clear that's getting fifteen million bucks out of a guy he mighta croaked," snapped Kerry. "Come on, Royal—we're ridin'!"

Jamming on his hat, Galloping John paused long enough to exchange a few words with Sergeant Cassidy.

"The laboratory, Sarge—did Charlie give you that report I asked for?"

"Naw," Cassidy chuckled shortly. "He says what the blazes you think he is, a zoo expert? He says next time you got dead canaries to be analyzed, you can do your own autopsy!"

The remains of Captain Anson Munroe had already been sent to the undertaker, Detectives Kerry and Royal discovered, as they reached the late millionaire's brownstone mansion. From the upstairs hall, a

dark-faced, dudish young man with a small waxed mustache, and an attractive girl of about twenty, dressed in deep mourning, stepped forward to meet them.

"May I ask what is the reason for this intrusion?" the dark-faced man demanded brusquely, his eyes sharp and inquiring. There was a small arm-band of black on his coat-sleeve.

"No intrusion, buddy, just a visit." Detective Kerry flashed his badge.

"Just wanna ask a few questions. Who are you?"

"I'm Welton Munroe, Captain Munroe's nephew," he replied arrogantly.

"And the young lady?"

"Harriet Munroe," the young woman supplied.

"Oh—the Captain's niece, huh?"

Kerry gave her an approving glance. For a person who had just inherited fifteen million she was pleasantly unassuming.

"Dr. Brewster—he isn't here?"

"He's not here, and I don't know where he is," snapped the young man tartly. "Furthermore, may I remind you that this is a house of mourning. We're in no mood to answer idle questions."

Detective Kerry gave him a scowl.

"Easy, laddie, easy. This badge ain't idle, but it is curious. I got questions to ask, and I generally get answers. We're going to take a look at that bedroom, now. No objection to that, is there?"

"Why, of course," the girl interpolated, "there is no objection to—"

"Let 'em stay out," the mustached man cut in shortly. "Of course it's your house, but if it were mine—"

"Why, Welton!" The girl gave a little distressed cry. "You know that anything Uncle left me is half yours. I don't care what the will says! You're as close kin as I am."

"So the will cut you out completely, huh?"

Detective Kerry could not suppress the smug satisfaction in his voice. The mustached man's arrogance was getting on his nerves.

"Well, get hold of that housekeeper and that nurse," Kerry ordered.

"Nurse?" the girl repeated more incredulously. "There isn't any nurse! Uncle Anson hated them—wouldn't ever have a nurse in the house."

"That's all you know about it," said Kerry triumphantly. "Get hold of that new second-maid, and send her up scotching."

Minutes later they were entering the late shipping magnate's bedroom, Harriet Munroe and her cousin accompanying the detective.

The room was as it had been the night before, except that the bed was now empty and newly made. It was evident that the place had been thoroughly ventilated, for

there was no trace of the odor of medicated candle. Instead the air was fresh and sweet with the fragrance of a large bouquet of white roses on the table.

After a moment, a red-faced, middle-aged woman, unmistakably Irish, appeared in the door, behind her the pretty girl in the blue house-dress the detectives had seen the night before.

"I'm Mrs. Murphy, the housekeeper," announced the red-faced woman. "What is it ye would be wanting to know?"

"Just a coupla questions, ma'am," said Kerry. "Now, how long have you been with Captain Munroe?"

"Twenty years—God rest his soul!"

"Long time, eh? And how about the nurse here—the maid?"

THE housekeeper looked uncomfortable. "I knew no good would come of trying to desave a sick man," she said grimly. "Miss Fenner—she's been here four weeks, come next Tuesday."

"Ah, Miss Fenner." Kerry turned to the wide-eyed young lady. "You're a trained nurse, then. Who sent you on this case?"

"Dr. Ambrose," the girl replied crisply. "It is generally the doctor who sends a nurse to a case, unless the patient has one he particularly prefers."

"Dr. Brewster sent you here." Kerry stressed the name significantly.

"Now, Miss Fenner, when did you first find out your patient was dead?"

"At—at midnight, when I came in as usual to look. I couldn't detect any pulse, so I called Dr. Brewster right away."

"When you came in to look! Don't nurses

[Turn page]

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generally stay in the room with a desperately sick patient?"

"He wasn't desperately sick," she protested. "At least he didn't seem to be. He had difficulty with his asthma—but no worse than usual. And he wouldn't allow anyone in the room with him. Only his pets—the birds. Captain Munroe was very—set in his ways."

"Humph!" Kerry's eyes narrowed. "And when had you been in his room last, before that? Before you found him dead?"

"When I gave him his supper and fixed him for the night," Miss Fenner replied without hesitation. "That was just about seven-thirty. He always had supper at seven, and he always went to sleep at seven-thirty. I fixed him for the night, and lighted the asthma candle. He wouldn't use the new vaporizers—only the old-fashioned smudges."

"Oh, so you lighted the candle. And what did you do then?"

"Had my own supper, with Mrs. Murphy. It only took fifteen minutes. After that I always came and sat in my room next door, where I could hear Captain Munroe or his bell. He had a little call bell by his bed to ring if he waked and needed anything."

"But you didn't come back in and look?"

"No, not in the early part of the night. He was a light sleeper—even the door opening woke him. It was Dr. Brewster's orders that he should not be disturbed, so that he got as much of the early night sleep as possible. But I always looked in at midnight and three A.M. and six. Then Mrs. Murphy watched while I had breakfast and a nap."

"So you were eating supper with Mrs. Murphy right after seven-thirty. Was there anybody else in the house?" Detective Kerry pressed.

"Only the servants, and Mr. Welton Munroe—Captain Munroe's nephew. He often dropped in for a few minutes to ask how his uncle was."

"But Dr. Brewster wasn't here?"

"No."

"You absolutely sure?"

"Why of course I'm sure." Her eyes widened. "He was here at four, and he hadn't planned to come back until—"

Suddenly there was a commotion and a loud squawk of *Quarrk! Quarrk!* Then a string of salty, sea-going oaths, followed by another squawk.

"*Quarr-r-rrk!* Fire! Fire! All hands to the boat! To blazes with the cook! *Quarrk!*"

Detective Kerry turned with a snarl.

Puffing a fat cigar, Galloping John Royal was blowing the smoke in the general direction of the parrot's cage, while the bird inside clucked and squawked and scrambled on his perch.

"Royal!" Kerry snapped an angry order. "Quit that foolishness and let that bird alone! Haven't you got any sense? With a murder in the house and—"

"Murder!"

BOTH the nurse and the housekeeper cried out at the word, and the cry was echoed from the doorway where the black-mustached Mr. Welton Munroe stood.

"What is this ridiculous nonsense about a murder?" he demanded, his sharp eyes lancing Kerry. "Dr. Brewster said my uncle died of an acute attack of asthma."

"Yeah. I heard him," retorted Kerry scornfully. "But I don't believe everything I hear. And we'll know more about that any minute now."

As if to substantiate the detective's assertion, from somewhere in the depths below came a *ting-aling-aling* of the old-fashioned doorbell. They could hear the sound of the door opening, then the heavy trample of feet upon the stairs.

It was Dr. Ambrose Brewster who was pushed into the room, red-faced and angry, by two policemen. Behind them another civilian, elderly and bearded, was entering under escort of Iron Joe Meeghan, captain in charge of the precinct station.

Iron Joe's manner bristled with authority as he shoved into the room, looked around. He nodded approvingly to Royal and Kerry.

"Good work, Kerry. The minute I got word you left, we chased the medical inspector right over to the undertaker's. When we got his report we picked up Dr. Brewster and the lawyer right away. You were right. The medical inspector says Munroe had enough cyanide in him to kill a cow!"

"Cyanide!" the doctor gasped, starting forward.

"You're darned right—cyanide!" said Kerry grimly. "You ought to know. You gave it to him! That fifteen million was big enough for even you to shoot at, huh?"

In obvious bewilderment the throat specialist stared, unseeing into Kerry's eyes.

The detective switched his attention to the bearded man.

"You the lawyer in charge of the Munroe affairs? Well, did you bring the Munroe will along with you, like I asked the desk to have you bring?"

The bearded man looked dazed, nodded, and drew out a legal-looking paper. Kerry grabbed it, then grunted with satisfaction as his eye scanned the contents.

"Uh-huh—fifteen million to Miss Harriet Munroe—and fifteen million to the National Throat Clinic. That means *you*, Doctor! Only you'll never get a chance to spend it! Ain't much a man can do with money in the death house."

(Turn to page 110)

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"Death house!" Dr. Ambrose Brewster exclaimed, coming out of his stupor. "But I don't know a thing about it! He died of asthma—of asthma, I tell you!"

"Maybe he had asthma—but what he died of was cyanide!" Kerry spat out the words viciously. "The medical inspector don't make mistakes. No, Doc, it was a tricky stunt, but it didn't work this time! Stick out your hands, Doc, while I put on the darbies."

GALLOPING JOHN, who had drifted over and glanced casually at the legal paper, interrupted unexpectedly.

"Just made out last week, I see, huh?"

The lawyer nodded.

"Captain Munroe thought he might not get over his illness, so he sent for me. Miss Fenner, here, witnessed it."

"And Miss Fenner was sent here by Dr. Brewster! A perfect hook-up," asserted Kerry smugly. "No wonder Munroe thought he might not get well! Come on, Doc, get the old hands out!"

The doctor, his eyes wide and staring, had backed into the corner, holding his hands behind him.

Suddenly, Galloping John spoke again, his voice lazy, casual.

"Miss Fenner, how long has this air-conditioning plant been in the house?"

"Air-conditioning plant?" She stared.

"But—how did you know?"

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"Uh-huh, I thought so." Galloping John abruptly turned to the bearded man. "Listen—what did that *other* will have in it?"

The lawyer never had time to answer. For suddenly across the room, there was a snarling curse, the scrambling of feet. Then a heavy, leaden smack, the grappling rush of bodies falling to the floor.

Galloping John had dived ten feet across the room to bring down his man.

But it was not the doctor who now struggled so futilely in the detective's steel-like grasp. It was the sleek, mustached nephew of the late Captain Anson Munroe!

"There's your man," announced Galloping John, rising with a satisfying click of the cuffs. "But he almost got me off the track—what with that blasted canary and parrot!"

A dazed silence filled the room, as the others in stunned amazement stood about the bed. Quickly Galloping John took charge of the questioning. Casting off his lethargic casualness, he was shooting questions at the lawyer with machine-gun rapidity.

"That other will—what about it?"

"How—how did you know there was another one?" the lawyer faltered.

"No man worth millions is going to crowd seventy without making a will. That other will left the nephew plenty, didn't it? Why did he make this new one, cutting him out?"

"Yes, you're quite correct," the lawyer admitted. "Some weeks ago Welton Munroe got mixed up in a nasty chorus-girl and gambling escapade, and Captain Munroe had to pay a hundred thousand dollars to

[Turn page]



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get it hushed up. The captain was furious about the affair and sent for me to make this new will."

"I knew it!" Galloping John whirled on the belligerent prisoner. "You were afraid he was going to do it! And you hoped you could bump him off before he did. Only he pulled a fast one on you, and you didn't know a thing about it!"

The desperate, contorted face of Welton Munroe was enough of a confirmation, but Galloping John stood over him, driving in the facts with a relentless finger.

"There were only two candles in that drawer because you had taken the third one, didn't you? Took it and scraped part of the tallow out toward the top, mixed it with some sort of cyanide preparation, and molded it back again so it wouldn't be noticed. Then you changed it for the one that was already lit, while Miss Fenner was down at supper!"

"Candles burn almost like a clock for time. You knew it would burn down to the cyanide and kill off the old man—it wouldn't take much for a man with asthma! Then it would burn *past* the cyanide, and all the deadly gas fumes would be gone long before twelve o'clock. The Apex people guarantee a complete change of air every thirty minutes. But it had already got the canary—"

Iron Joe Meeghan, precinct captain was gaping. Ben Kerry looked like he had swallowed a lemon and didn't like the taste.

"Hold on!" Kerry suddenly yelled. "Wait a minute! If cyanide fumes was in the room—enough to kill the old man and the canary—why didn't they kill the parrot too?"

"That was what bothered me. Look!" Galloping John crossed the room, puffed vigorously, and blew a huge cloud of smoke directly toward the parrot's cage. For an instant, it sped straight forward then banked up almost like a wall. Then, as if pushed by some invisible force, it fell back, swept across the room and over the bed, and then in smoky tendrils, made its way along the wall and past the canary's cage.

"The parrot—his cage is right in front of the air-conditioner louver," stated Galloping John tersely. "He got fresh air—all new air. But the canary was right where the air sucked out, and he got the whole dose of the fumes, poor devil!"

"But the doctor—he could have done it, too!" Kerry ventured.

"The doctor!" Galloping John gave a snort. "When he would have been the first one under suspicion?"

Dr. Ambrose Brewster, throat specialist, took his hands from behind his back, and sighed deeply.

"I never thought—I didn't have the slightest idea. Cyanide—when a man's got asthma! But what gave you the idea about the candles?"

Galloping John grinned.

"There was two sorts of candles we used to use upstate, when I was a kid. One was plain sulphur candles, to sweeten wine kegs. But the other was some sort of poison dope. We used to burn 'em in the barn and the cellar when the rats and cockroaches got too frequent. Why, I bet we buried hundreds and thousands of 'em sometimes, after one of them candles, when the vermin was particularly bad!"

THE KNIFE WAS LARGE

(Concluded from page 100)

"Aw, cut out that fool stuff," broke in North. "George did a great job. A good man like George don't need bossing all the time. And I don't think the Council is going to like it if you keep picking on him."

"Thanks," Rayborn said.

He was feeling very happy. With old Hank North back of him, he was set for life.

"If it's all the same to you, sir," he said to North, "I'd like my suspension to stand for the rest of the night. You see, I kind of deceived Clara last night, and I think she knew it—she usually does. So I'd like to go home and make things right with her."

DETECTIVE IN THE WOODS

(Concluded from page 93)

was too much. He kept brooding about it until he killed him."

"And almost killed you," said Jane shuddering, touching his bandaged hand gently.

"Just scraped the skin," said Benson disdainfully. He put his arm around her and drew her gently to him. "Anyway it wasn't Nick," he added, in comforting tones.

"No," she whispered. Then "Oh, Ole! You are a wonderful detective!"

Ole Benson's arms tightened about her, and his cheeks flushed a happy brick-red. At last he was a detective.

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Make no mistake, this new Victory Necktie must not be confused with any ordinary novelty tie, for by day you'll be vastly proud of its fine material, its smartness—a high-class, distinctive tie in every way. Wrinkleproof! Ties up perfectly! It's a rich dark blue, and in a splendor of red and white, is the Victory Code that glows in the dark. You would expect this wonderful tie to be very expensive, but it won't cost you \$5 nor even \$2, for under this special limited offer, it is yours for only 98¢. Nor is that all. You send no money. You merely pay postman 98¢ plus postage. Then examine. See how beautiful. And if you're not eager to wear it, if you are not fully satisfied in every way, all you need to do is return it under the manufacturer's positive assurance of money refunded. That's fair, isn't it? Don't wait. Send for your Victory Necktie that glows in the dark NOW.

ONLY 98¢ MAIL THIS COUPON!

GLOW IN THE DARK NECKTIE CO.

215 N. Michigan Ave., Dept. 864, Chicago 1, Ill.

Rush me my Victory Necktie that glows in the dark. I will pay postman 98¢ plus postage with your positive assurance I will be delighted or return tie for full refund.

If you want us to send you 3 Glowing Neckties for \$2.79 check here ☐

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Everywhere you go, by day or night, your Victory (also called Blackout) Necktie will attract attention, envy, and admiration. Imagine its beauty by day—the fighting man's . . . — "V" for Victory, in striking colors! And at night the Victory Code in flaming beauty! Wear this tie with pride—it's smart, wrinkle-proof—and holds its shape perfectly. A superb bargain in quality, with the added sensational magic of glowing in the dark. Send for yours now!



Solitaire DIAMOND RING

or Matching Design Wedding Ring in

Get-acquainted offer—Diamonds are precious. As you know, the war has greatly limited the supply of genuine Diamonds and prices have gone up and up and up—so this offer of a genuine Diamond ring for only \$5.95 or the matched bridal pair (both the engagement ring and the wedding ring) for only \$9.95 is all the more amazing.

The beautiful, sentimental, Solitaire ring has a lustrous, guaranteed genuine diamond, center stone in latest rose cut for fire and sparkle, set in a rich 10 K. Yellow Gold ring of classic design. The 3 chip Diamonds in the matching Wedding Ring are a symphony in mysterious beauty. It also is Real, 10 K. Yellow Gold.

\$5.95
OR BOTH RINGS

\$9.95



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Your choice Genuine Diamond rings sent in lovely gift box immediately and you pay postman only \$5.95 (\$9.95 for both rings) plus a few cents mailing cost and tax on arrival. Wear on 10 days' money back guarantee.



EMPIRE DIAMOND CO.

Dept. 850-DS, Jefferson, Iowa

FOR YOUR RING SIZE Use this handy ring measure. Tie string around finger, cut and mark off size on scale below.

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EMPIRE DIAMOND CO., Dept. 850-DS, Jefferson, Iowa
Send the ☐ Genuine Diamond Solitaire Ring and the ☐ Wedding Ring in lovely gift box. (Check rings wanted). I understand I can return the rings within 10 days for any reason and you will refund promptly.

Ring Size

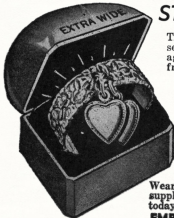
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To stand unshaken in a nation
free and strong,
And his the gladly given dollars,
his the Bonds
To win, and hold, and shape that
bright Tomorrow!
He knows that out of Bonds

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Come the very means of life and sustenance
For those who face the enemy on
distant shores.
He buys until the limit of his purse —
and more!
Because he knows that out of Bonds —
comes Victory!

He is a Clear-Headed American!

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Calvert Distillers Corporation publishes this message
in the interest of the home front war effort

