

STREET & SMITH'S

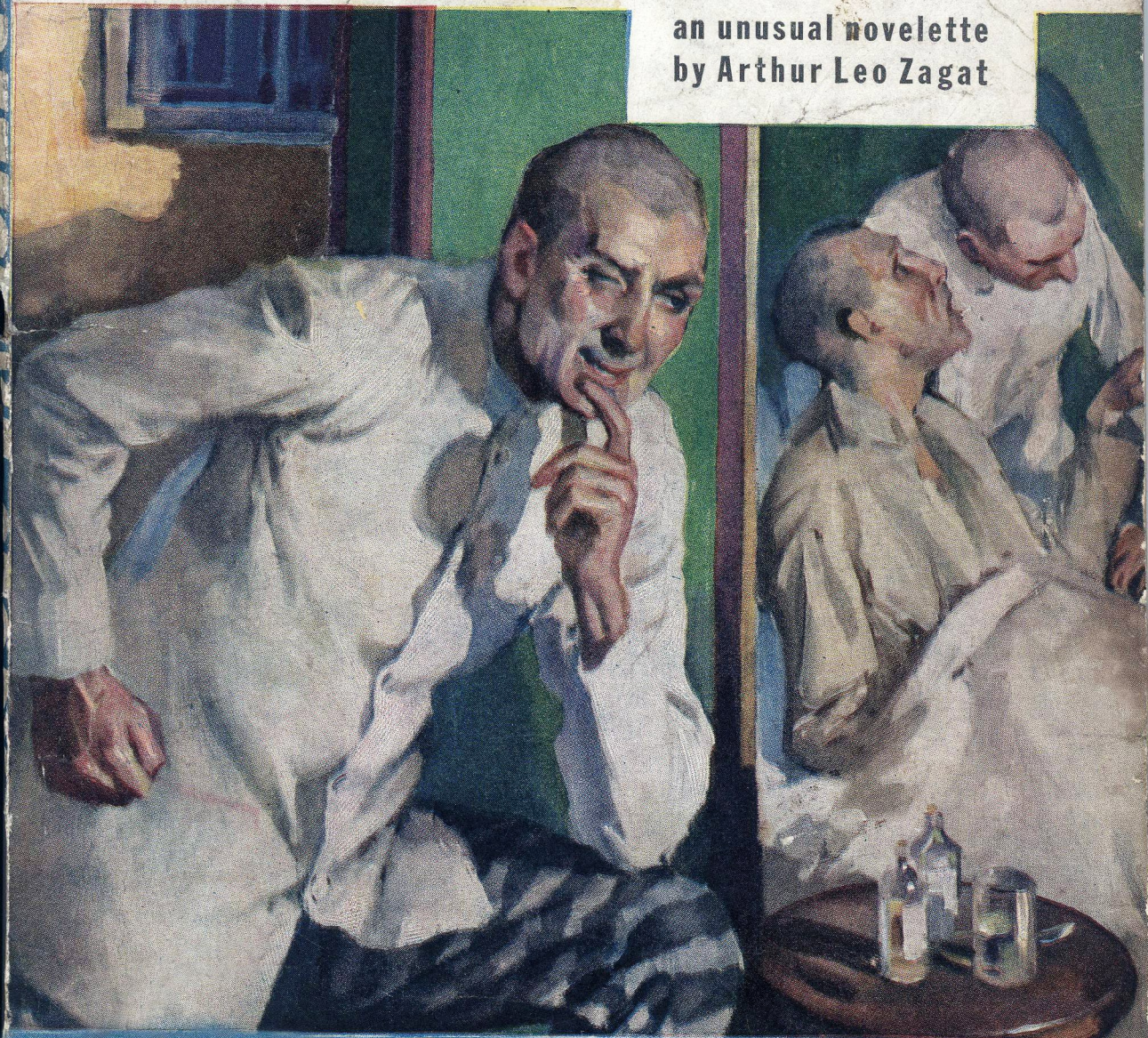
# DETECTIVE

STORY 10¢

MAGAZINE

MAR. 1940

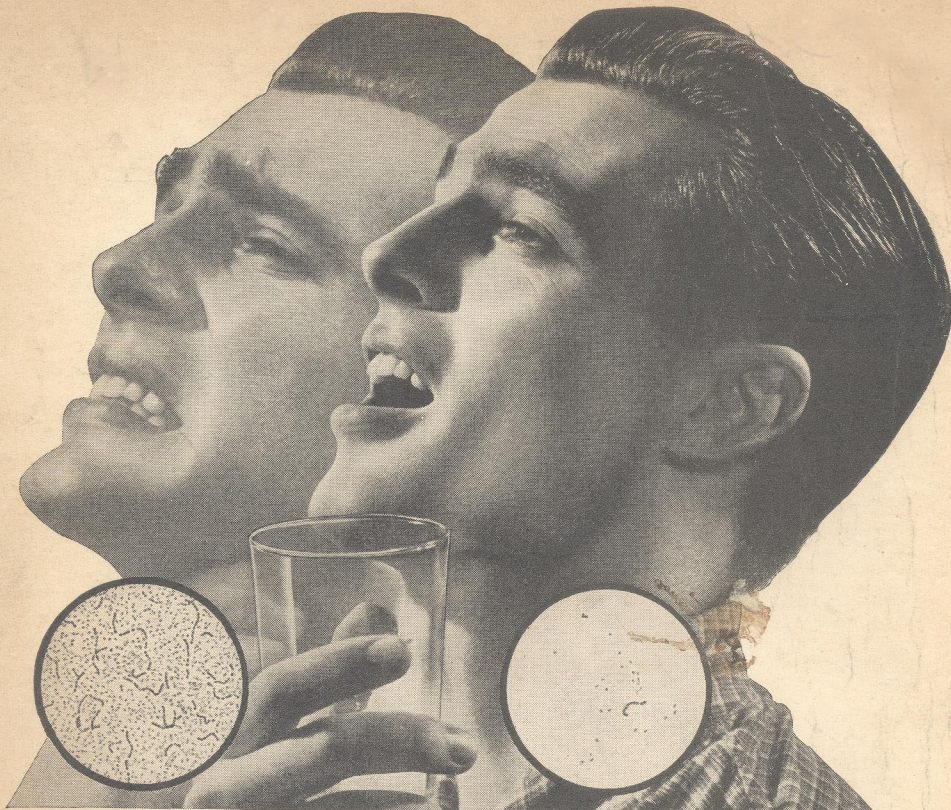
**DEATH  
LISTENS IN**  
an unusual novelette  
by Arthur Leo Zagat



**THE HEAVENLY HELLCAT**

A Complete Mystery Novel by Walter Ripperger





**NOTE HOW LISTERINE REDUCED GERMS:** The two drawings above illustrate height of range in germ reductions on mouth and throat surfaces in test cases before and after gargling Listerine Antiseptic. Fifteen minutes after gargling, germ reductions up to 96.7% were noted; and even one hour after, germs were still reduced as much as 80%.

AT THE FIRST SYMPTOM OF A COLD OR SORE THROAT—

# Listerine quick!



*Listerine Antiseptic reaches way back on the throat surfaces to kill "secondary invaders" . . . the very types of germs that make a cold more troublesome.*

This prompt and frequent use of full strength Listerine Antiseptic may keep a cold from getting serious, or head it off entirely . . . at the same time relieving throat irritation when due to a cold.

This is the experience of countless people and it is backed up by some of the sanest, most impressive research work ever attempted in connection with cold prevention and relief.

*Fewer Colds, Tests Showed*

Actual tests conducted on all types of people in

several industrial plants over 8 years revealed this astonishing truth: That those who gargled Listerine Antiseptic twice daily had fewer colds and milder colds than non-users, and fewer sore throats.

This impressive record is explained by Listerine Antiseptic's germ-killing action . . . its ability to kill threatening "secondary invaders" — the very types of germs that breed in the mouth and throat and are largely responsible, many authorities say, for the bothersome aspects of a cold.

## *Germ Reductions Up to 96.7%*

Even 15 minutes after Listerine Antiseptic gargle, tests have shown bacterial reductions on mouth and throat surfaces ranging to 96.7%. Up to 80% an hour afterward.

In view of this evidence, don't you think it's a sensible precaution against colds to gargle with Listerine Antiseptic systematically twice a day and oftener when you feel a cold getting started?

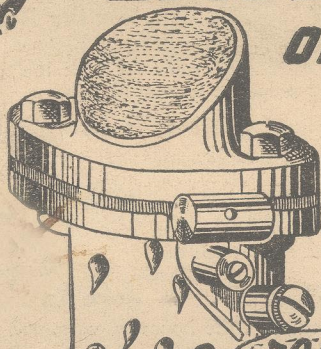
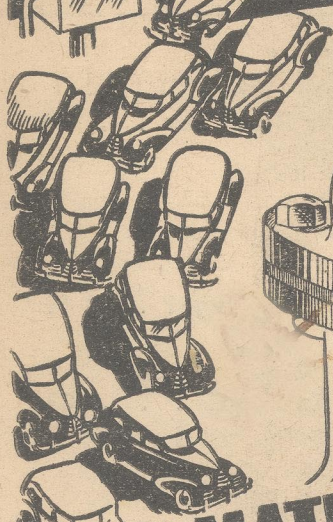
LAMBERT PHARMACAL COMPANY, St. Louis, Mo.





# Calling All Cars!

A  
**MYSTERIOUS DISCOVERY**  
**SAVES UP TO 30%**  
**ON GASOLINE!**  
**OR COSTS NOTHING TO TRY**



**VACU-MATIC**  
**SETS NEW COAST-TO-CHICAGO**

*Scores Again*

Answer this call! Investigate this remarkable discovery that trims dollars off gasoline bills—gives you worthwhile gas savings—more power—greater speed—quicker pickup—faster acceleration. Proven so efficient, it is guaranteed to save up to 30% and give better performance or the trial costs you nothing.

## Automatic Supercharge Principle

Vacu-matic is entirely different! It operates on the supercharge principle by automatically adding a charge of extra oxygen, drawn free from the outer air, into the heart of the gas mixture. It is entirely automatic and allows the motor to "breathe" at the correct time, opening and closing automatically as required to save dollars on gas costs.

## Sworn Proof of Gas Savings

This certifies that I have carefully read 300 original letters received from Vacu-matic users testifying to gas savings up to 30%, many reporting added power, smoother running, and quicker pick-up. These letters are just a small part of the larger file of enthusiastic user letters that I saw at the company offices.



Signed *Marcus J. Planty*  
Notary Public

**BOB MCKENZIE**

TRANS-CONTINENTAL AUTOMOBILE CHAMPION  
READY TO OBTAIN

Vacu-matic Carburetor Co.  
7617 W. State Street  
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

Dear Sir:

Having just completed a new speed record between Los Angeles and Chicago, driving a Chevrolet equipped with a Vacu-matic carburetor for control, I thought you might be interested in knowing some of the facts and the important part Vacu-matic played in the success of the run.

The distance covered was 2322 miles in thirty-nine hours and forty-two minutes, gave us an average speed of 59.7 M.P.H. based on elapsed time and with the Vacu-matic averaged 18-1/2 miles per gallon on gasoline.

Before leaving Los Angeles, we made several test runs both with and without the Vacu-matic, and the tests proved that Vacu-matic increased my gas mileage 3-1/2 miles per gallon at the driving speed of 80 M.P.H. and also very noticeable increase in both acceleration and power.

Yours very truly,

*Bob McKenzie*

In addition to establishing new mileage records on cars in all sections of the country, the Vacu-matic has proven itself on thousands of road tests and on dynamometer tests which duplicate road conditions and record accurate mileage and horse power increases.

You, too, can make a road test with Vacu-matic on your car and prove its worthwhile gas savings to your entire satisfaction.

Learn all about this

remarkable discovery. Get the facts NOW!

**Fits All Cars**

**Easy To Install**

Vacu-matic is constructed of six parts assembled and fused into one unit, adjusted and sealed at the factory. Nothing to regulate. Any motorist can install in ten minutes. The free offer coupon will bring all the facts. Mail it today!

**The Vacu-matic Co.**

**Wauwatosa, Wis.**

DS-1

## AGENTS Get Yours FREE For Introducing

Vacu-matic offers a splendid opportunity for unusual sales and profits. Every car, truck, tractor, and motorcycle owner a prospect. Valuable territories now being assigned. If you help us introduce it to a friend, you can obtain your own free. Check and mail coupon today.

## SEND THIS Free Offer COUPON

THE VACU-MATIC COMPANY

7617-490 W. State St. Wauwatosa, Wis.

Please send full particulars about VACU-MATIC, also how I may obtain one for my own car FREE. This does not obligate me in any way.

Name .....

Address .....

City..... State.....

☐ Check here if interested in Agency Proposition.



STREET & SMITH'S

# DETECTIVE STORY

MAGAZINE

TITLE REGISTERED U. S. PATENT OFFICE

CONTENTS MARCH, 1940

VOL. CLIX NO. 5

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## COVER BY JOHN A. COUGHLIN

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## HEADQUARTERS CHAT



On his twenty-fifth wedding anniversary George Lucas, a grouchy, miserly man whom his business associates called Pinch-penny, did what was for him a most astounding thing. He gave his wife a magnificent four-strand diamond dog collar of blue-white stones, none of which was smaller than two carats.

Although amazed, Irma Lucas, in her happiness at the splendor of the gift, did not question this utterly unnatural generosity on her husband's part. Being an incurable optimist, she accepted it at face value. She did not dream that Pinch-penny meant to be an Indian giver, that he was motivated by plans for profit even in the matter of this supposed gift of sentiment.

Irma, it happened, was never disillusioned. Death prevented that—the sudden and mysterious death of Pinch-penny, who too late learned that the diamonds were dangerous; who lost the precious stones and his life, as well.

The murder of George Lucas and the theft of his bargain-purchased diamonds was only the first of a grim series of such crimes, all over the country. On its heels came the slaying of a millionaire gem collector and the theft of his newly acquired eighty-seven-carat blue-white Wesselton. Then a movie star was killed for her diamond anklets—a rich manufacturer for a diamond sunburst. Wealthy owners of matchless stones were jittery, wondering who would be next. The thing had begun to have international implications when the famous detective, Jigger Masters, began to probe into its fantastic angles.

This strange story of the great diamond panic is told in a complete novel abounding in thrills and suspense:

### **JEWELS OF JEOPARDY, by Anthony Rud**

Another feature in the coming issue will be a sparkling novelette of Contacts, Inc., starring the team of Clark Dale and Petra Ericson:

### **THE LADY FROM KENTUCKY, by Carl Clausen**

This next issue of DSM will be at your newsstand February 23rd.



# MARCH OF CRIME



*Stop-light bandits rob rich women:* At a stop light three thugs slugged a chauffeur driving two wealthy Philadelphia women home from an opera, then drove them to a secluded section and robbed them of ermine coats and jewelry. The younger woman, the widow of a manufacturer, and heiress to twenty-four million dollars, said the men threatened her and her mother-in-law and forced them to kneel on the floor of the car, with their faces on the rear seat.



*Extortionist threatens farmer's daughter:* A seventeen-year-old youth of Taylor, New York, was jailed by Federal agents who found him waiting on a bridge to collect extortion money from a farmer whose daughter, a Syracuse University coed, had been threatened with harm unless he paid "several thousand dollars."



*Timid thief:* With a skeleton key a sneak thief managed to get into the apartment of a Boston woman. When he saw her resting on a davenport, he said: "If you make any noise, madam, I'll scream." Then he fled.



# HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED - THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!



## I Trained These Men



Chief Operator Broadcasting Station

"When I completed 20 lessons, I obtained my Radio Broadcast Operator's license and immediately joined Station WMPC, where I am now Chief Operator."

HOLLIS F. HAYES  
327, Madison St.  
Lapeer, Michigan

### Service Manager for Four Stores

"I was working in a garage when I enrolled with N.R.I. in a few months I made enough to pay for the course three or four times. I am now Radio service manager for the M— Furniture Co. for their four stores."

JAMES E. RYAN  
1543 Slade St.  
Fall River, Mass.



Over \$1,000 Before Graduating  
"Before completing half the N.R.I. Course I was servicing sets, and I made \$1,000 to \$1,200 before graduating. I am doing Radio service work for myself now."

ASHLEY G. ALDRIDGE  
1228 Shepherd St.  
Petersburg, Va.

### \$200 to \$300 a Month in Own Business

"For the last two years I have been in business for myself making between \$200 and \$300 a month. Business has steadily increased. I have N.R.I. to thank for my start in this field."

ARLIE J. PROCHNER  
300 W. Texas Ave.  
Goose Creek, Texas



## I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME in your spare time for a GOOD JOB IN RADIO

Radio is a young, growing field with a future, offering many good pay spare time and full time job opportunities. And you don't have to give up your present job to become a Radio Technician. I train you right at home in your spare time.

### Why Many Radio Technicians Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and servicemen. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, police, aviation, Commercial Radio; loudspeaker systems, electronic devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N.R.I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

### Many Make \$5, \$10 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your Course I send plans and directions which have helped many make \$200 to \$500 a year in spare time while learning. I send

special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL, ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVING INSTRUMENT to help you make money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

Find Out What Radio Offers You Act Today! Mail the coupon for my 64-page Book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my course in Radio and Television; shows many letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a penny postcard—NOW!

J. E. Smith, President  
Dept. OAD, National Radio Institute  
Washington, D. C.



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National Radio Institute  
Established 25 years

## Mail this to get 64 page book FREE

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National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Send me FREE, without obligation, your 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out Radio's opportunities and tells how you train men at home to be Radio Technicians. (Write Plainly.)

NAME .....AGE.....

ADDRESS .....

CITY..... STATE.....

THIS BOOK has shown hundreds how to MAKE MORE MONEY







## **Legend or Villain?**

When the huge construction job on Mt. Rainod becomes the scene of terror and panic; when men used to facing the worst of physical dangers cringe in fear at an unseen menace, will the legend of the Rain God conquer the march of modern progress, or will someone carry on?

It's a situation for Richard Henry Benson, known all over the world as The Avenger, and his crew to battle. They face all odds without fear, and fight to a thrilling finish to conquer legend, fear and fancy, exposing the real criminal behind the plot.

Every issue of The Avenger features a complete novel, short stories, and other features—including a new series of articles on NUMEROLOGY, one of the oldest sciences which is now sweeping the country as a hobby.

All in the February issue, on sale now.

● **The Avenger**  
**10 CENTS—EVERYWHERE**





by **WALTER RIPPERGER**

Mordecai Breen, formerly of the *Daily Leader* and now a private detective, sat in his stuffy little office, waiting for clients. He was getting

to be very adept at waiting for clients. So far, he had had only one and then months had gone by without another. His bank account had



dwindled to nothing. His one assistant who combined the functions of stenographer, secretary, and Operative No. 13, a character whom Mordecai Breen had nicknamed "Slap-happy," came in from the outer office.

Slap-happy was a big roughneck, with a flat battered face, misshapen ears, and serious but sometimes merry eyes. In the prize ring, Slap-happy had been known as One-round Musky, a title bestowed on him by mischievous reporters because Slap-happy seldom lasted more than one round and generally ended up in the laps of the ringside spectators. On one occasion he had landed in Mordecai Breen's lap. Breen had taken a liking to the big, good-natured stumble-bum, and so it came about that when Mordecai Breen had established himself as a private detective and was looking for an assistant, he had engaged One-round Musky and rechristened him Slap-happy.

"I got something to show you, chief," Slap-happy said. He invariably addressed Mordecai Breen as "chief," just as he unfailingly always answered the telephone saying, "Breen Detective Agency, Operative 13 speaking."

Mordecai Breen didn't like the "chief" part, but it was better than being called Mordecai, a name that he cordially detested. Some day he would make it his business to find out why his parents—now deceased—had burdened him with such a name. There must be some valid reason—a rich uncle in Australia, no doubt.

"Dial a number," Slap-happy said. There was a watch in his hand—a stop watch, his most prized possession.

Mordecai Breen glared at him.

"Dial a number, chief; any num-

ber," Slap-happy urged. His barrel chest was bulging with pride.

"Why should I dial a number?"

"Any number, but don't tell me. You don't have to take the telephone off, just work the dial."

Mordecai Breen sighed. He didn't get it. He imagined that it was some childish trick. Still why not humor the big palooka? He really wasn't much more than a kid. Breen dialed, noting that Slap-happy had turned his back to him. When he finished, Slap-happy said triumphantly:

"You dialed 9-4-4-1-3-4-3."

For a time, Mordecai Breen said nothing. Then his eyes narrowed.

"How do you do it?"

"I worked that out by myself, chief. When you let go of the dial with each number, I just time it with the watch to see how long it takes to snap back. I've been practicing so I know how many seconds or part of a second it takes for every number to get back to where it started from, see? You don't have to know the letters. What'd you dial, chief?"

"Whitehall 4-1343," Breen said, grinning.

Slap-happy came over and pointed to the telephone.

"See, the 9 I told you, that's a 'W'; the 4 is the 'H.' Nothing to it. Some sleuthing, huh, chief? Any time I hear a guy dial a number, what do I do? I take out my watch and I can tell the number called and find out who's been talking to him. How's that, chief, huh?"

"It's pretty good," Mordecai Breen conceded. "It's new to me, only I'm afraid it won't work on different telephones. I'm afraid that the dials don't all work at exactly the same rate of speed."

Slap-happy's face fell, but only for an instant. He solved the difficulty immediately.



"If we've got a suspect, chief, we'll tell him to come into our office and use our phone. That'll fix it."

"Sure enough," Mordecai Breen said good-naturedly, then stopped. There was a gentle knock on the door. Mordecai Breen called:

"Come in."

The door opened and a young woman stood there. Mordecai Breen rose. Attractive women were no novelty in his life, but he had never seen one like this. Slap-happy took one look and let out a low whistle. With ludicrous haste, he brought over a chair, placing it beside the chief's desk, then with a none-too-clean handkerchief, he wiped the seat, and indicated the chair with what he considered a courtly bow.

The young woman smiled and came farther into the room. She walked with easy assurance, as though the eyes of men drinking her in were nothing new to her. She wore a black hidalgo hat, with a fringe of black lace around the brim. The lace came almost to the tip of her nose, partially hiding eyes that were already half veiled by the longest lashes that Mordecai Breen had ever seen. Her mouth was small, oval-shaped, and carmine red. Massive antique earrings dangled from small ears. The earrings matched the wide ornate gold necklace about her throat. Her dress was black, smartly tailored. A double silver fox hung down from her shoulders. Through the mesh gloves, Mordecai Breen could see slim hands, tipped with long nails, manicured, and enameled to match the color of her lips.

"Mr. Breen?" she asked.

Mordecai Breen nodded. "Will you have a chair?"

She made no move. Instead, she lifted the lace about her hat onto the brim so that she might get a

better look at him. With cool detachment, as though he were something hanging on a rack and for sale, she sized him up from head to foot.

He was slightly over average height. His shoulders weren't particularly broad nor was he of noticeably athletic build, but he gave the impression nevertheless of having great strength, and carried himself with a sort of careless recklessness, almost with arrogance—an arrogance that was mirrored in his yellow-brown eyes.

Mordecai Breen knew this type: the sort of woman for whom every man is nothing but a push-over, the kind of woman who thought that she could wrap every man around her little finger—and generally could. Mordecai Breen just stood there without saying anything more, his mouth stubborn, his arrogant eyes aloof.

She smiled at him through narrowed lids and in a voice that was low and husky, said: "My name is Hope Arolin. I received one of your circulars."

That meant nothing to him. He had sent out circulars by the thousands, taking names at random from the telephone book, from newspapers, from any place. He had sent circulars to doctors, to dentists, brokers, actors and actresses, in fact, to nearly everyone whose name appeared in print.

She came around the desk and took the chair that Slap-happy had placed for her. Slap-happy beamed until Mordecai Breen waved him outside with a motion of his head.

Hope Arolin looked about the shabby little office, the cheap, flimsy oak desk at which Mordecai Breen now seated himself, the few chairs, the worn secondhand carpet.

"Business not very good?" she asked.



"I'm not complaining," Mordecai Breen said shortly.

Again she studied him with her black eyes, and studying him, she somehow contrived to make him feel that she approved of what she saw.

"How would you like to have a steady income?" she asked.

Mordecai Breen stared at her.

"That depends," he said slowly.

She opened the black suède purse she was carrying, took out a piece of paper and gave it to him. It was a note addressed to her at the Miranda Arms, a smart, midtown apartment hotel. The note was crudely printed, undated and unsigned. Mordecai Breen read:

Would you be interested in buying a couple of dead men—or wouldn't you? You can have them for ten bucks apiece. If you'd rather see them stay alive, suggest an advertisement in the *Daily Leader* reading, "Not interested," signed "Hope." You will hear from us later.

Mordecai Breen put the note down and looked at her.

"What is this, a gag?"

For an instant, those dark unfathomable eyes of hers snapped.

"If it were a gag, I wouldn't be here," she said. There was bitterness in her soft voice.

"Why would you be interested in buying a couple of dead men? Why would anybody want to buy a couple of dead men?" Mordecai Breen demanded with a touch of impatience.

She bent forward, closer to him. The strange penetrating perfume that she used seemed to fill his musty little room.

"When I came here," she said, "I expected to find some large, competently managed agency, but I'm not so sure that this isn't better. An agency of that kind would have charged me too much. They probably would have put half a dozen of

their men to work and it would have cost more than it was worth. It's really a one-man job, a competent man's job." She was giving him the full benefit of her brilliant eyes now.

Mordecai Breen shifted fretfully in his chair. She was getting to him. It wasn't only the obvious lure of her dark beauty. It was something more subtle, a sort of aura of mystery that seemed to envelop her. She began to intrigue him, which wasn't surprising. He was susceptible to women, particularly this type whose very artificiality served as an added attraction.

"Whoever sent me this note," she said, her voice suddenly tight, "knows that I don't want to buy two dead men. He knows that I want to see the two men kept alive. They have to be kept alive."

"Who sent you the note?"

"I don't know. If I did—"

Mordecai Breen poured himself a third of a tumbler of whiskey.

"A drink?"

"No," she said. "I'm only here on business. Some other time perhaps."

Mordecai Breen downed the whiskey, neat. This whole business was screwy. He'd never heard of anything so crazy as this.

"Did you put the ad in the *Daily Leader*?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "I had to, of course, to gain time."

"Then what happened?"

"Nothing, so far. You will help me, won't you?"

Mordecai Breen felt his pulses beating a little faster, but he held on to himself. The moment you let this sort of woman realize that she was making an impression on you, you were lost. His voice deliberately hard, he replied:

"You said something about a



regular income. What does that mean? What am I supposed to do?"

"You're to keep these men alive," she said, "for one thing, and you're to find out who wrote this note."

"That's all, huh? Where does the steady income come in?"

"I'll pay you two hundred dollars a month." Her voice was reluctant. She was greedy, he decided. Still, what the hell difference did that make? You couldn't have everything. "I'll pay you two hundred dollars a month as long as these two men are alive."

Mordecai Breen grinned at her. "How old are they?"

"I see I've come to the right place," she said. "They're around forty."

"Supposing one of them dies?"

She looked startled.

"I hadn't thought of that." Again that almost imperceptible look of green flamed between the long lashes. "Then you get one hundred as long as the other one lives."

Mordecai Breen straightened in his chair.

"Excuse me," he said, and helped himself to another drink. This definitely was some kind of racket, but he couldn't make out what it was. "You mean to say—"

"No," she interrupted him swiftly. "I don't mean to say that that's going to go on forever. It's going to last until you find the man or the men who wrote me that note. When you do that and arrange it so I'll not be troubled any more—how you do it is your business—then I'll pay you two thousand dollars and the monthly income stops."

Mordecai Breen stared at her. "You're not very bright," he said. "I'd be a sucker to find this guy and do myself out of a nice two hundred a month."

Hope Arolin laughed without

mirth. "It's the other way round," she said. "You'll be a sucker if you don't find this man or this gang, because the chances are that the two men I'm hiring you to protect will be killed. Then there'll be no income and no two thousand dollars for you."

Mordecai Breen glared at her silently. She made her eyes provocative, her oval mouth held a smile.

"There might be a bonus in it for you."

"I just work for money," Mordecai Breen said. "I'll have to get two hundred in advance. Of course if I find this guy or this gang that's threatened you, that will be deducted from the two thousand."

She shook her head. "I'll give you a hundred."

"You're not too free with your money," Mordecai Breen said.

She tossed her head and smiled at him.

"Why should I be?"

"All right," Mordecai Breen said. He held out his hand. She fumbled in her bag, counted out some bills, and passed them to him. He stuffed them in his pocket, then:

"Why don't you go to the police?"

"Because I don't want to."

"You realize, of course, the job you're giving me isn't easy. I've got one assistant. How, between the two of us, we can guard two men day and night, is going to take some figuring. You realize, too, don't you, that people sometimes get killed despite all the protection given them?"

"I know that," she said. "You can only do the best you can. Besides they're safe for the present. Nothing is going to happen to them, of course, until I hear how much it's going to cost me, if they are to stay alive, and if I pay the price."



Mordecai Breen nodded. She was right about that. She wasn't dumb and beautiful; she was extremely shrewd and beautiful.

"Who are the two men I've got to look out for?"

She hesitated for a moment, then: "They're brothers," she said.

Mordecai Breen grew restive. She didn't help him much. The whole thing was fantastic, unreal, and yet the hundred dollars she'd given him was real enough. He looked at her guardedly and had a sudden conviction that she was going to get him into trouble. Still she was worth taking a chance for. Mordecai Breen had only two weaknesses; he didn't care for song. He said:

"What's their names?"

"Glacker," she said, "David and Samuel Glacker. They've got a building down on South Street, right near here. They're in the export business."

"Do they know they stand a chance of getting killed?"

She nodded. "I warned them over the telephone."

"What did they say?"

That simple question had a strange effect on her. Her face became flooded with color. Her eyes flashed with fury for seconds, before she managed to regain control of herself, and then she left the question unanswered.

Mordecai Breen said: "You don't help me much. I've got to drag it all out of you."

"I'm not paying you," she said, "to find out about me. I'm paying you to find out who sent that note."

Mordecai Breen reached into his pocket and tossed the bills down on the desk in front of her. She left them untouched. Her eyes became soft, pleading.

"I'm trusting you," she said. "I

imagine I'm going to have to trust you a lot more. Won't you trust me?"

Mordecai Breen scowled at her. He put the money back into his pocket.

"Do these . . . are these Glackers supposed to know that I'm working for you?"

She appeared to consider.

"Not unless you find it necessary to tell them," she said. "They might . . . they might misunderstand."

Mordecai Breen sighed. "This is a devil of a case," he declared. "You must like these two birds a lot. Are they relatives?"

She shook her head.

"I guess they like you all right." Mordecai Breen's voice was grumpy. He was being unreasonable. What difference did it make to him whether or not the Glackers liked her? She was nothing to him.

She was eying him thoughtfully, then smiled a little as though fully aware of his feelings.

"Don't let that worry you," she said softly. "The Glackers don't like me. *They hate me!*"

Mordecai Breen glowered at her. The thing was getting more insane by the minute. She was paying him good money to protect two people who she claimed hated her. The wild notion flashed through his mind that maybe she herself was insane, but he knew better. She was far from crazy.

A minute later she was gone, saying only that he was to let her know the minute he discovered something and that as soon as she received any response to her advertisement, she would get in touch with him.

The door had hardly closed, when Slap-happy came tearing in. Slap-happy had his hat in his hand.

"You want me to tail her, huh, chief?"



Mordecai Breen, absorbed in his own thoughts, didn't quite take in what Slap-happy was saying.

"What are you talking about?" he asked irritably.

"You know, tail her, follow her around, things like that." Slap-happy was all eagerness.

Mordecai Breen, staring at the big chap's misshapen face, his cauliflower ears, wanted to laugh.

"Listen, you big gorilla," he said. "I'm not paying you to chase around after good-looking dames."

Slap-happy's face fell, then brightened. "I'll do it on my own time, chief," he said eagerly.

Mordecai Breen looked at him in disgust. "Go out and practice on your typewriter," he said. "She wouldn't see you with a telescope."

"Some dames go for a guy like me," Slap-happy protested.

"Yeah, with broom handles and watch dogs. You better—" Breen stopped.

The door from the outside office was opening gently. A man came in, a very tall, very thin man. He came in walking softly.

## II.

The thin man had a narrow face, with a leprous complexion. His eyes were deep-set, his cheekbones high. His dark-blue suit hung loosely about his sparse frame. All together he appeared like one who had been dragged out of a grave against his will. In front of the desk he stopped, took in Slap-happy with his sunken eyes, then turned to Mordecai Breen. The man said nothing; he just stood there.

Mordecai Breen asked: "What can I do for you?" He said it sharply. The man got on his nerves.

"What did she want?" the thin man said.

Mordecai Breen had one of the vilest of tempers. It was apt to express itself in various ways. On occasion he would roar and curse; at other times he would be deceptively calm. He was calm now. He pointed to a chair at the opposite side of the desk across from his own.

"Sit down," he said.

The man sat down slowly, with incredible deliberation.

"What did she want?" he asked again. His voice was low, cracked, somehow unpleasant.

Mordecai Breen said: "If you're referring to the young lady who just left, she's a client of mine and my clients' business is confidential."

Without haste the man reached inside his coat and brought forth an enormous fat revolver. He held it loosely and said:

"I want to know what she came here for."

Mordecai Breen licked his lips. Slap-happy looked frightened but determined. He started dancing around, moving his fists, as though he were in the ring.

"Shall I cut him down, chief?"

The thin man, seemingly without moving his eyes, looked at Slap-happy and back again at Mordecai Breen. Breen, gripping the edge of his flimsy little desk with both hands, was facing the thin man squarely. Then something happened. Breen gave the desk a tremendous shove, springing to his feet at the same time. The desk caught the thin man in the stomach, sending him and the chair over backward. Breen hurtled the desk. The gun went off harmlessly just as he landed on top of the thin man. The thin man was strong, but no match for Breen. Breen stuck the gun into his back pocket, rose and straightened up the desk, then he went back to his chair and sat down.





*Breen gave the desk a tremendous shove, springing to his feet at the same instant.*

"Nice work, chief," Slap-happy said, "but you should've let me cut him down." Slap-happy was still dancing on his toes, boxing.

Mordecai Breen grinned. "Didn't you hear the gong?"

Slap-happy stopped dancing and boxing.

The thin man got up. He stood there silently, looking at Mordecai Breen. His deep eyes were filled with cold hate. Breen, affable now, watched him. After a long time, the thin man said:

"Can I use your telephone?" He said it as though nothing had happened.

"Sure," Mordecai Breen said, "that is, if it's still working."

The thin man stooped and picked

the telephone up from the floor where it had fallen when Mordecai Breen had knocked over the desk. He righted the chair, sat down with the telephone in front of him, and shielding the dial with his hat, he started to get his number.

There was a gleam in Mordecai Breen's eyes. He winked at Slap-happy. The latter got out his stop watch.

After a while the thin man said into the telephone:

"This is Lester. Give me Dan." There was a pause, then Lester, the thin man, spoke again. He kept his voice low, because it was naturally low. What he was saying didn't matter because Mordecai Breen already knew it. Lester was telling



Dan where he was, asking for further orders. He didn't mention the fact that Breen had his gun. Lester listened a while, then hung up. For seconds he stared silently at Breen, then he rose and started for the door.

"Wait a minute," Mordecai Breen called. To Slap-happy he said, "Do your stuff."

Slap-happy slipped his watch back into his pocket and reached for the phone. He dialed the number that Lester had dialed. He hadn't expected that this little trick of his would come in handy so soon as this. He was beaming with pride. When he got the number, he passed the phone to Breen. There was a girl on the line.

"This is Mordecai Breen. Give me Dan," Breen said.

Another voice answered a few seconds later, a voice that was harsh.

"Who are you and what do you want?"

"I just told your operator who I am," Mordecai Breen said. "I've got your little boy, Lester, here. I've taken his toy pistol away from him. What do you want me to do with Lester?"

Mordecai Breen, grinning, was eying the thin man. Lester stood very still, but the implacable hate in his eyes mounted. At the other end of the wire there was a long pause, then the man called Dan answered:

"I don't care what you do with him. You can kick his teeth down his throat if you want to." There was cold, savage rage in Dan's voice.

Without covering the mouthpiece, Mordecai Breen said to Lester: "He says I can kick your teeth in if I want to."

Over the wire came Dan's voice again: "Put that dope back on the phone."

Mordecai Breen held the instrument out toward Lester. "He wants to talk to you."

Slowly Lester came and took the telephone.

"This is Lester," he said in his cracked voice, then listened. After a while he hung up. To Mordecai Breen, he said: "Dan wants to see you."

Mordecai Breen had stuck the note that Hope Arolin had brought into his pocket. He took it out now, placed a ruler across the top of it and tore off Hope Arolin's name and address, threw it in the wastebasket and put the rest of the note back into his pocket.

"Let's go," he said.

Lester started for the door without waiting to see if Mordecai Breen was following. Breen didn't ask him where they were going or what Dan's last name was or what his business might be. If the guy wouldn't talk, he wouldn't talk either. Besides he'd find out soon enough. They went down the elevator together in silence. Outside on the sidewalk, Breen said:

"Do we take a cab, the subway, or what?"

"We walk," the thin man said.

It wasn't far, just a few blocks north on Nassau Street. They went into an old-fashioned office building up on the seventh floor. Lester led the way down the hall and came to a stop in front of the door. There was lettering on the door. Mordecai Breen stared at the lettering. It read:

DAN DARGAN DETECTIVE  
AGENCY

Criminal—Civil—Domestic Shadowing  
Armed Guard Service  
Expert Dictograph Service  
Dan Dargan, Pres.



Mordecai Breen wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and followed Lester in. It was a big room. There was a switchboard to the left. Three girls farther away were working at typewriters and a half dozen tough-looking individuals were lounging about. There were cigarette burns on the linoleum that covered the floor.

"Dan alone?" Lester asked the girl at the switchboard.

"You can go in," she said. "He's expecting you." She gave Mordecai Breen an appraising glance.

Lester went through a door at the right marked, "Private." The man who sat at the huge mahogany desk was perhaps fifty. He was a powerful individual with wide shoulders and long arms. His head was massive, his hair was iron-gray. He was busy with some papers in front of him and didn't look up when Mordecai Breen came in with Lester. They stood there for a time and he still didn't look up.

Mordecai Breen grew restive. If Dan Dargan thought he was impressing him, he was mistaken.

"I'm in a hurry," Mordecai Breen said, making his voice flat..

Dargan waited another second then looked up. Now Mordecai Breen got a good look at his face. It was a squarish heavily lined face. The mouth was set, the chin hard and strong. Of all his features, Dargan's eyes were the most remarkable. They were china blue with white rings around the pupils. The eyes were fixed as though set in concrete and there was a glassy expression in them that made them look like the eyes in cheap dolls.

Dargan studied Mordecai Breen. The latter indifferently inspected the room. It presented a marked contrast to his own office. It was

large and had four windows. The mahogany furniture was substantial and comfortable. There was a green carpet on the floor.

Dargan, in a surprisingly rasping voice, said: "All right, Lester."

Lester went out. Mordecai Breen took a chair without being asked to do so. He reached into his back pocket, pulled out Lester's gun and dropped it on the desk in front of Dargan.

"Here's your punk's gun."

"He doesn't need a gun," Dargan said. "He needs a nurse. He had no business telling you that he was phoning me."

"He didn't," Mordecai Breen said. "I just heard him say Dan, and I called you back."

"How did you get the number? You didn't hear him say that, did you? You've got a dial phone, haven't you?"

"Yes, I've got a dial phone, but I've got a way of getting a number, too."

Dan Dargan shifted his big form around in his chair so as to get a better look at Mordecai Breen.

"What's Hope Arolin want with you?" he demanded.

"She's a client of mine," Mordecai Breen said.

"No use asking you what she wants, I suppose?" Dargan said. The china blue eyes stayed rigid.

Mordecai Breen said: "Supposing I ask you something now. What do you mean by having a punk like Lester trail her around, walking into my office, waving a cannon around?"

Dargan took out a big black cigar, bit off the end, spat it into the wastebasket, and stuck the cigar into his mouth unlighted. After a while, he said:

"You and I are not going to get anywhere. I can see that."



Mordecai Breen shrugged. He fished Hope Arolin's note out of his pocket, bent over and put it down on the desk in front of Dan Dargan. Dargan read it once, then again. With his glassy eyes, he looked up at Mordecai Breen.

"What is it?"

"I thought maybe you'd know," Mordecai Breen said, his voice flat. He folded the note and put it back into his pocket.

"No, I don't," Dargan said, his voice harsher than ever. "And here's something you don't know. If you get under my feet and gum up what I'm trying to do, you'll wish you hadn't."

The minute the door closed behind Mordecai Breen, Dargan picked up the phone and told the operator to send in Lester. Lester came in. He stood in front of Dargan's desk not saying a word, keeping his sunken eyes on his chief without seeing him. Dargan pushed the fat revolver across the desk.

"Here's your cannon back," he said contemptuously. He waited while Lester stuck the revolver back into the holster inside his coat. "What the hell's got into you?" Dargan barked. "You gone off your nut or have you been drinking?"

Lester, in his broken, whispering voice, said, "No." He made no attempt to defend himself.

"What's the idea of going into a guy's office and tipping off your hand?"

"You told me to follow Hope Arolin to find out what she did," Lester said.

Dargan pounded his desk savagely. The white-rimmed blue eyes looked brittle, as though they might break.

"So you walked into this—this

what's his name—Breen's office, pulled a gun on him just like that." Dargan paused for breath.

Lester said: "I thought I could frighten him. He's just got a little dump. He's of no account. I had to know what Hope Arolin was doing there." He said it all tonelessly, as if he didn't expect it to make any sense to the other man.

"And on top of that," Dargan roared, "you got to call me right from the guy's office, so that he knows we're in on this. That's bright, that is. You've been in this game long enough to know better. It's a wonder you didn't just leave our card and tell Breen we were shadowing Hope and give him the name of our client."

"I wanted to ask you what to do next," Lester said in that same monotonous whisper. Then for the first time he seemed to be interested in what he was saying. "I called you and just said, 'Give me Dan.' That wouldn't mean anything to anybody and he couldn't tell who I was calling. It's a dial phone and I held my hat over the dial while I was working it." The sunken eyes fixed themselves more directly on Dargan, seemed to have Dargan in focus now. "I don't understand," Lester said, "how he could tell right then and there I was phoning you so as to be able to call you right back."

Dargan made an exasperated gesture. "Maybe here's something you'll understand. If we lose a client because of this dopey trick you pulled, you're through. Get it? You're through."

Lester stood there silent. Under the leprous skin the high cheekbones moved. His thin mouth twitched once while he waited to see if Dargan had anything more to say, then he turned and walked away.



## III.

Mordecai Breen went back to his office. Slap-happy was busy laboriously practicing on the battered secondhand typewriter, ticking out words with two fingers. Breen, too preoccupied, walked past him into his own room without a word.

In the beginning, Mordecai Breen had been more interested in the girl than in the case she had brought him. He had been inclined to look upon the case as some sort of gag, or possibly some hysterical idea in Hope's mind. The fact that she was willing to give him a hundred-dollar retainer had left him a little unsure on that point. Since the appearance of Lester and Breen's contact with Dargan, the thing had, however, taken on a more sinister aspect. Just what it all meant he hadn't the faintest notion. The note Hope Arolin had received plainly indicated that unless she paid, and paid well, two men would die—two men that she didn't want to die, and yet she had said the two men hated her. No sense to that.

Mordecai Breen opened the drawer of his desk, pulled out the bottle of rye and a glass. He frowned at the bottle; there wasn't more than a third left. He poured himself a generous drink, gulped it down, and waited for an inspiration. That was bum rye. There wasn't an inspiration in a case of it. He picked up the telephone and called Sergeant Hammerstein at police headquarters. When he got the sergeant, he said:

"This is Mordecai Breen. What do you know about the Dargan Detective Agency?"

There was a moment's pause, then Hammerstein's voice, heavy and sarcastic:

"It must be nice to be a private dick," Hammerstein said. "All

you've got to do is call up police headquarters and ask them to find out things for you."

"What do you know about the Dargan Detective Agency?" Mordecai Breen said again.

"You get tangled up with that outfit," Hammerstein said, "and you'll be sorry. They're good and they're bad."

"What do you mean, 'They're good and they're bad'?" Breen asked dully.

"They're good because they generally got what they set out to get, and they're bad because they don't much care by what means they do it," Hammerstein explained. "You get into Dargan's hair and his boys will see to it that there isn't enough left of you to make the 'd' in detective."

"Thanks," Mordecai Breen said.

"You're welcome," Hammerstein said sweetly. "Any time . . . any time you need us, let us know. We've got twenty thousand cops with nothing to do but work for you, *Detective Breen*." Hammerstein hung up.

Mordecai Breen picked up the telephone book, found the number of the Miranda Arms, and called it. He asked the switchboard operator to connect him with Miss Arolin. A man's voice answered presently.

"What do you wish?" the man said. His voice was strong, vibrant, his accent foreign.

"I want to talk to Miss Arolin," Breen said, scowling at the telephone.

"One minute, please," the foreign voice said in a formal way.

Mordecai Breen shrugged his shoulders irritably. Unreasonably he was annoyed to think of a man being there in her apartment. He was more annoyed when he could



hear the foreign voice faintly calling to Hope Arolin:

"One of what you call your boy friends is on the telephone."

Ten seconds later he heard Hope's voice, soft, musical, saying, "Hello."

"This is Mordecai Breen. Somebody tailed you down to my office—somebody connected with the Dargan Detective Agency. The guy wanted to know what you came to see me about. Does that mean anything to you?"

"I don't think I will be in the market for a new car," Hope said in a brisk, businesslike way, "at least not this year, Mr. Reynolds."

Mordecai Breen looked into the mouthpiece of the telephone.

"I asked you if it meant anything to you," he said gruffly. He still remembered the foreign voice on the phone.

"In fact," Hope said, "I don't know anything of that make of car." Her voice was still brisk, but cautious.

Mordecai Breen got it. The foreigner was there, listening. She didn't want him to know anything.

"This whole business is screwy," Modrecai Breen said, lowering his voice. "I think I better go and have a talk with the Glacker brothers. I think I better put my cards on the table with them. You'll never get anywhere otherwise. I've got a notion you're in a jam, that you haven't told me the half of it."

There was a brief silence, then Hope's voice:

"Whatever you think best. Of course, if you insist on sending a man up with one of your cars to demonstrate it, I will be glad to look at it."

Mordecai Breen said, "All right," and slammed down the phone. Then he said, "Damn." What the hell did she want him to do? She had said

to do whatever he thought best. That, he supposed, meant he could go down and have a talk with the Glacker brothers, tell them about the note, about Hope's visit. Then she had said, if he insisted on sending up a car, she'd be glad to look at it. Was that just thrown in to keep up the fiction for the benefit of the gentleman who was with her that an automobile salesman had telephoned, or was she trying to hint that she would like to see him? Breen didn't know. He had another drink to clear his mind. What else had Hope Arolin said? When he had mentioned the Dargan Detective Agency, she'd said that she didn't know anything of that make of car, meaning of course, that she'd never heard of the Dargan Detective Agency. At least he supposed that that was what she'd meant. Mordecai Breen drank what there was left of the rye, tossed the empty bottle into the wastebasket, and decided to call on the Glacker brothers.

The Glacker brothers had their office in South Street, below Old Slip. They occupied a fusty old building five stories high. The ground floor was given over to the shipping department, the second floor to the offices, and the rest of the building was used for storage. The building reeked with strange odors. There was the fragrant odor of bergamot oil, the smell of sandalwood, the pungent aromatic odor of sassafras, all these and others hung heavily in every nook and cranny of the old building, settled on the creaky stairs, and drifted up and down the hoist.

David and Samuel Glacker shared a private office facing each other across a huge double desk. There was no resemblance whatever between the two men. Samuel was small, entirely bald. His eyes were



wavering, uncertain, and yet not without a certain purpose. It was the purpose of desperation; the look of a timid little animal at bay.

David was almost twice his younger brother's size. He was enormously stout. His face was white and puffy, and under long, gray hair and bushy eyebrows, two fierce gray eyes looked menacingly out at the world. For a man of his size, he had extraordinarily small feet and hands. His hands were white, smooth, womanish. His manner was womanish. He was far more elegantly dressed than Samuel, and thanks to the efforts of a master tailor, that bulging, balloonlike form of his was covered by a suit that actually fitted. He wore a pink shirt with a black tie. There was an enormous ruby in the tie.

David Glacker looked up at the girl who had entered with a card. The card bore the name of Mordecai Breen and gave Breen's business. "What does he want?" David said. His voice was low, astonishingly musical.

"Who is it? Who is it?" Sam squeaked. "Did he ask for me?"

David Glacker turned from the girl and looked at his brother. It seemed to him that there was some unusual note in his brother's voice. "He asked for both of us," David said. "Why?"

"I'll go out and see what he wants," Samuel said, starting to his feet.

The gray eyes in David's face grew more alert. "What is the matter, Sam?" he asked, his voice still soft and musical. Without waiting for an answer, he turned back to the girl.

"Let him come in," he said.

Sam dropped back in his chair.

Mordecai Breen came in. He looked from one to the other of

the two men, and then decided to take the chair that was alongside of David's half of the desk.

"I feel like a fool coming here," Mordecai Breen said after a while. "But then, a client's a client, and you've got to try and help 'em if you can."

A look of polite interest came into David Glacker's fat face, but he said nothing. Mordecai Breen fished the note that Hope had given him out of his pocket and put it down in front of David.

"Miss Arolin is my client," he announced tersely. "She seems to think that you and your brother are the two men referred to in this note. She's retained me to see that nothing happens to either of you and to find out who wrote this note. The whole thing's cockeyed."

David read the note, then passed it across to his brother Samuel.

"Miss Arolin is very fond of us," David said in his musical voice. "She's already notified us concerning this note. She wouldn't want anything to happen to us for the world, would she, Sam?" There was thin sarcasm in his voice.

Sam made a noncommittal noise deep down in his chest.

David fidgeted with the papers on his desk. His womanish hands moving slowly. Mordecai Breen, considering him, thought it was fifty-fifty. You might regard him as a masculine woman or an effeminate man. Either way he was an individual you wouldn't care for.

"Miss Arolin," Mordecai Breen said, "makes a wonderful client. She tells you nothing and expects you to do everything. I came here hoping to find out something a little more concrete, thinking that perhaps you could give me some idea as to who might be interested in putting either of you out of the way."



Crinkly lines formed at the corners of David's gray eyes. "So far as I know," he said, "there isn't anyone in the world who would want to do anything like that. I think Miss Arolin is unnecessarily alarmed. In fact, I am inclined to look on the whole thing as a joke, a silly hoax. Somebody is putting something over on Miss Arolin. Don't you agree with me, Sam?"

"Or else," Sam said, "Miss Arolin is trying to put something—" he broke off abruptly.

Mordecai Breen twisted himself around in his chair so that he could see Samuel. Samuel Glacker looked apprehensive, yet desperately determined. His bald head glistened with sweat. He wasn't looking at Mordecai Breen, but at his brother.

David's white face appeared to swell. The puffy cheeks rose till they made mere slits of his eyes. He kept them fixed on little Samuel.

"Obviously," Mordecai Breen said thoughtfully, "I couldn't keep an eye on you two night and day, and even if I could, there is nothing to prevent somebody from coming by in a car and blasting you off the sidewalk with a machine gun. If I am going to be of any use to you, I've got to have some help. I've got to know what this is all about."

He spied a package of cigarettes on the desk in front of David. He reached over and helped himself.

"I am very sorry," David Glacker said. "I wish I could be of some help to you. As to my own and my brother's safety, don't give it a thought. I can assure you that nothing will happen to either of us."

"Is that on account of that Dargan Detective Agency?" Mordecai Breen asked.

The Dargan Detective Agency appeared to mean nothing to David. Breen swung around sharply again

to study the much smaller man across the desk. Samuel Glacker was looking off into space. Yet his mouth was working; the right hand that had rested on the desk was unsteady.

"What about the Dargan Detective Agency?" Mordecai Breen barked at him.

With an obvious effort, Samuel Glacker brought his eyes around to rest on Breen. "What a . . . what a strange question to ask . . . to ask me," Samuel said unevenly.

"You've never heard of them, I suppose," Mordecai Breen said, his voice filled with disbelief.

Samuel gulped twice, then shook his head.

Breen was about to say something else when David's voice, still musical and low but ponderous now, stopped him.

"We're very busy right now, Mr. Breen," David was saying. He kept his menacing, narrow eyes riveted on his brother. "If anything should transpire that I think would be of interest to you, you may rest assured that I will get in touch with you. I have your card."

Mordecai Breen stood up. He reached over, took Hope Arolin's note, and stuffed it back into his pocket. Then: "All right, but if you get killed, if you're dead, don't bother to phone me, phone the undertaker." Angrily he strolled out.

Alone with his brother, David still kept his eyes fixed on Samuel. Samuel tried to look indifferent, guileless. He picked up a pencil, examined the point critically, then made a few meaningless notes on a sheet of paper. He cleared his throat, started to say something, but couldn't manage it.

David Glacker, placing his small womanish hands on the top of the



desk, slowly heaved his ponderous form out of the chair and bent far forward so that his face was close to Samuel.

"Out with it!" The music was missing from David Glacker's voice. It was nothing but a sibilant hiss.

Samuel shrank back.

"Out with it!" David hissed again. For the moment he suggested a bloated female spider about to devour its mate. The whiteness was gone from his face; it had turned a mottled gray.

"Listen, Dave," Sam pleaded. "You don't understand. She wrote that note herself. I know it. She did it to frighten us. We can't go on like this. We can't."

The gray went out of David's face to be replaced again by that unhealthy whiteness. "So you went . . . so you went to a detective agency." David spoke slowly giving equal emphasis to each syllable. "What did you tell them?"

"Just the . . . just the bare facts," Samuel said pleadingly. "I told them what she was doing to us. Mr. Dargan is a very fine man, very capable. You ought to meet him, Dave. He understood everything perfectly. He said not to worry, that he'd get us out of this jam. He said that it was his business to take care of his clients and he'd do it . . . he'd do it if he had to frame her!"

Slowly, heavily, David sank back into his chair. When he spoke, his voice was low with no trace of the inner rage which shook his huge frame. "You poor fool! I'd like to murder you!"

Out in the street Mordecai Breen looked at his watch. It was a quarter to five. No sense in going back to the office, he thought. He found a drugstore on Wall Street, east of

Front Street, went inside and made his way into a telephone booth. From there he telephoned Slap-happy. There was nothing new at the office. No one had called and Hope Arolin hadn't even telephoned.

"All right," Mordecai Breen said. "I am going uptown to Mingo's for a steak and some French fried and onions. It is not unlikely that I'm going to get plastered. You stop in there around midnight and see if you have to take me home."

#### IV.

A bell kept ringing incessantly.

Mordecai Breen stopped snoring and rolled over on his bed. The room was in darkness. He groped about until he found the lamp above his head and pulled the cord. He stared sleepily about. The alarm clock was on the bureau across the room. With a groan, he bent over the side of the bed until he found a shoe, and hurled it at the alarm clock. He missed; which was fortunate, as it wasn't the alarm clock that was ringing. Nor was it the telephone. Vaguely it came to him that it was the doorbell.

With an oath, Mordecai Breen climbed out of bed, found a bathrobe, slipped it on, walked over to the door and pressed the button which released the front door downstairs. While he waited, he looked again at the alarm clock. It was after two in the morning. Too sleepy to be interested as to who was calling on him at this hour—he just assumed that it was Slap-happy—he opened the door. There was the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs, steps coming slowly, deliberately. A head appeared above the railing of the stairs, then another head. Breen failed to recognize either of the faces, even when





*Slowly, heavily, David sank back into his chair.  
"You poor fool! I'd like to murder you!"*

the men stood right in front of him. Both men had their hands in their pockets.

Mordecai Breen said, "I am not seeing anyone tonight," and started to shut the door, but the front man had his foot in between the door and the jamb and the second man came and put his shoulder against the door. Breen said: "All right, come in."

Silently the two men came in, the second one closing the door softly as he entered. There was a queer stillness about the two men.

The first one said: "Get dressed, pal. You're coming along on a little party with us. We got something

to talk over." A hand shot out and deftly the hand ran over Mordecai Breen's person.

Mordecai Breen's yellow-brown eyes were more yellow than brown now. His mouth turned hard and thin-lipped.

"Take your paws off me."

"Just making sure, pal," the man said. He kept his face blank. There was no expression in the second man's face either.

Mordecai Breen sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Get dressed," the first man said. He was a burly individual. "We're going places."

Mordecai Breen shook his head.



"Too late," he said stubbornly. "I've had a hard night."

"Not yet, you haven't," the second man said. He was short with long arms built like an ape. He brought forth a stubby automatic. "Get dressed."

Mordecai Breen eyed the two men silently. Then: "How about having a drink?"

The first man said again: "Get dressed, buddy, and make it snappy."

Mordecai Breen got up, his own face bleak now. There was a dull glow in the yellow-brown eyes. "Considering the hour, if this is going to be a formal affair, maybe I'd better put on evening clothes?"

Neither of the men said anything. The burly individual's eyes traveled to the chair where Mordecai Breen had thrown his clothes after Slaphappy had brought him home. Breen slipped out of his bathrobe and pajamas while the apelike man searched his clothes for a concealed gun. Breen dressed slowly. The two men watched him in grim silence. When he was ready, the burly man said:

"Let's go."

The second man put his gun back into his pocket, but kept his hand there, too. At the door he turned to Mordecai Breen.

"You make one wrong move, pal," he said, scarcely moving his lips, "and we'll let you have it, and don't think we won't. One wrong move and you'll be picking lead out of your belly."

"I wouldn't like that," Mordecai Breen said. The yellow-brown eyes were far back in his head now and narrow.

They went downstairs with Breen between them. They stopped in the vestibule. Breen could feel the man's gun hard against his side. The burly man opened the front

door and peered out into the street.

"All right, let's go," he said.

There was a sedan parked at the sidewalk. A third man was at the wheel and the motor was running. The two men guided Breen across the sidewalk to the sedan. The driver reached back and opened the door. Breen hesitated a moment, glancing up and down the street. There was no one in sight. He might try to escape, to make a dash, but his chances would be nil. The two men who were beside him were killers and he knew it. The burly man got in and the second man nudged Breen. The two men sat with Breen between them.

The car shot away. They rode on for a time uptown. The man at Breen's right was fumbling in his pocket. Presently he brought forth something that turned out to be a piece of adhesive tape and slapped it smartly across Mordecai Breen's eyes. After that Breen tried to keep track of the number of turns that they made. He gave it up. Besides, it was not necessary. He soon realized that they were on a bridge. He could tell from the feel of the air, the occasional sound of a foghorn on the river, and the steady uninterrupted pace the car was making. The Queensboro Bridge. They were taking him somewhere to Brooklyn, he supposed, or possibly farther than that, out to Long Island.

"Maybe you got the wrong man," Mordecai Breen said after a while.

"Then the right man's gettin' a break," one of his captors said.

"How about a cigarette?" Mordecai Breen said.

Neither of the two men answered. Mordecai Breen lapsed into silence. He was busy thinking. He tried to figure out the significance of this visit. Were the Glacker brothers re-



sponsible for this? Was it the thin man who called himself Lester who was to blame or was it Dargan? Possibly it was none of them.

Mordecai Breen had enemies enough, enemies he had made during the days of his newspaper career. Was he being taken for a "ride," to be killed and dumped into the river perhaps? He didn't think so. The men wouldn't have gone to all the trouble of bringing him out here just for that. At two in the morning they could safely have shot him down in front of the boarding house where he lived. They could have slit his throat right in his room if they wanted to.

But now they were off the bridge, Mordecai Breen surmised. They were making a number of turns. Presently the car came to an abrupt stop. The man on Breen's left got out and then yanked Breen out. The other man got out of the car, too. Breen was seized by the arms and guided forward. They led him up four or five steps. There was the sound of a key turning in a lock, a door being opened. Breen was pushed inside. After a dozen paces or so, the men stopped and let go of Breen. The burly man pulled a cord lighting a drop light hanging overhead. Then one of the men tore the adhesive tape roughly away from Breen's eyes. Part of his eyelashes went with it. The place in which he found himself was dimly lighted, but it was obvious that it was an abandoned factory or an old warehouse. There was no machinery, no furniture of any kind, just a few empty crates scattered about.

Mordecai Breen faced the two men. The second, the shorter of the two had his gun out again. He was holding it level with Breen's stomach. The first and heavier man was taking off his coat and rolling

up his sleeves. Breen stood there, motionless, holding himself loosely when suddenly his fist shot out. It was a terrific lunge aimed for the jaw of the man with the gun. The man was surprisingly agile. He ducked the blow, then stepped back a few feet keeping his gun level. He licked his lips and said:

"Just try that again—just once more, and I'll let you have it, pal. Our orders is not to bump you off unless we have to. You try that again and I'll figure that we did have to." He circled the captive until he stood behind him.

The first man stood in front of Mordecai Breen. There was relish in his brutish face now. His bare arms were muscular, his fists heavy and hard. Without warning he drew back his arm and sent one of those hard fists of his crashing into Breen's mouth. Breen sprang back and then stood still. He could feel the gun of the other man in his back.

The man behind him made a snarling sound.

Mordecai Breen stood rigid. His mouth was askew with something that might have been taken for a grin. There was a sultry look in his yellow-brown eyes. He could feel a drop of blood trickling down his chin. He could feel the gun of the man behind him thrust savagely into the small of his back.

The man in front hit him again using his knuckles to lay open Mordecai Breen's cheek. The blow rocked Breen's head to the left, then a second blow rocked it to the right. The look on Breen's face stayed fixed. He could take it, he told himself. Anyway there was nothing to do but to take it. A half-dozen blows caught him on the chin and then Breen knew that he couldn't take it. To hell with the gun! To hell with everything! He was going



to fight, no matter what happened. He was groggy, half out on his feet and didn't know it. In a blind way he lunged. The man in front brought up his knee sharply and caught Breen low in the stomach, doubling him up, making him gasp desperately for breath. The man moved back, watching him with eyes aglitter. Then he brought a fist down hard on the back of Breen's neck sending him to his knees. Breen got up. The apelike man in back said:

"How about letting me go to work on him for a while, Joe?"

Joe left that unanswered. He devoted himself to Breen. He gathered the lapels of Breen's coat in one of his big hands and straightened him up.

"Maybe you will know enough after this," Joe said, "to keep your nose out of things that don't concern you."

Mordecai Breen looked at him with dull yellow eyes. The man called Joe shook him. Breen spat at him. Joe let out an oath, stepped back a pace, then smashed his fist again squarely into the detective's mouth. Breen went down. The apelike man slipped his gun back into his pocket and kicked Breen in the thigh twice. Breen lay there for seconds, then struggled to his knees, and to his feet. He looked at the two men, his eyes filled with undying hate. The apelike man said:

"He wants more, Joe. It's my turn now."

Mordecai Breen's swollen lips moved. The words were barely understandable. "Dargan . . . send you? If you didn't have a gun . . . I could . . . I could take the two of you."

The apelike man grinned. He held out his hand, palms upward.

"We ain't got no gun, pal. Look."

Mordecai Breen aimed a blow at him. It missed by a foot, and the man laughed.

"Ain't he something, ain't he, Joe?" he said. Then he knocked Mordecai Breen down.

The men waited. Ten seconds went by before Breen got up again, and stood there swaying, trying to focus his clouded yellow, hate-filled eyes on the two men, trying to keep from falling down again, trying to keep from vomiting.

"A couple . . . of heels," Mordecai Breen mumbled. "Two cheap punks." With the back of his hand he wiped the blood off his chin.

Joe took deliberate aim and knocked him down again. Breen fell face down. The apelike man made a leap and squatted on Breen's back. He seized hold of one of Breen's wrists, pulled his arm back and pushed upward. The apelike man looked up at Joe and said:

"He's going to like this."

Mordecai Breen made a feeble effort to throw the man off his back. It was a silly attempt. The torturing grip brought a sound from Breen, a sound that was like a hysterical laugh. The apelike man moved farther up on Breen's back and settled himself more comfortably. He twisted Breen's wrist pushing the arm higher. Joe, standing over them, his face blank, said:

"Maybe that'll learn you—"

Mordecai Breen locked his teeth. The agony was unbearable. He kept turning his head from one side to the other laying first one cheek—a cheek wet with blood and sweat—then the other against the grimy floor. Something snapped—the cracking noise of a bone breaking. Then Breen lay still.

The apelike man got up. "Passed out," he said regretfully.





*Without warning he drew back his arm and sent a hard fist crashing into Breen's mouth.*

# V.

Mordecai Breen opened his eyes and looked around. He was flat on his back in bed. The white room in which he found himself smelled of disinfectant. The white-capped nurse had a trim figure. Her back was for the moment to Breen, but now she turned. Seeing Breen with his eyes open, she said:

"Well, it's about time."

"Time for what?" Breen said.

"Time you came around," she explained. "But don't talk."

"How long have I been here?"

"Since early this morning. You certainly were a mess when they brought you in."

"I still am," Mordecai Breen said without humor. His face muscles

ached. His lips were badly swollen. There was a pain in his side, and his right arm was heavily bandaged clear down to his fingertips. There were boards inside the bandages.

"A policeman found you lying in the street. He thought, at first, you were drunk. What happened to you?"

"Nothing," Mordecai Breen said. "A couple of moths bit me." His yellow-brown eyes stayed solemn, his mouth remained tight-lipped. "How about getting me a drink, sister?"

She went over to a small table, removed a napkin that covered a glass. There was a glass tube in the glass. She brought the glass over to the bed. It contained milk.

Mordecai Breen started to shake



his head, but that hurt. It was easier to talk. "Take it away. I said a drink."

The nurse looked at him with lively eyes. "I see I'm going to have trouble with you. I'll ask the doctor if you can have a drink."

The door opened slowly. A policeman came in. He glanced briefly at the bed where Breen lay, then without comment took a chair, tilted it back against the wall, and sat down.

Mordecai Breen glared at him, then said: "What the hell are you doing here?"

Without moving, the policeman said: "It's a police case, buddy, ain't it? Who gave you the works?"

"I don't want you around," Mordecai Breen growled through his swollen lips. "Nobody gave me the works, at least nobody that I know. It was a case of mistaken identity."

"My orders is to stay," the policeman said truculently. "If you don't like it, you can tell the commissioner."

Mordecai Breen turned away from him. He closed his eyes and dozed off. When he opened them next, it was late in the afternoon. Slap-happy was standing at the foot of his bed, watching him anxiously.

"How are you, chief?" Slap-happy asked. "You all right again now, huh?"

"Yes," Mordecai Breen said. "You go down and see Hammerstein. Tell Hammerstein that a couple of bums, that I never met before and wouldn't recognize if I saw them again, beat me up, but there's no reason why he should have one of his flatfeet sitting here in my room. Tell him to call off his copper, that I'm getting out of here, and he knows where he can find me."

The nurse, who had been listening, said:

"You're crazy. You can't leave here." Her lively eyes filled with alarm. "You've got to stay at least a week, the doctor said."

"What does the doctor know about it?" Mordecai Breen snapped at her. "Go on down and see Hammerstein," he ordered Slap-happy.

"O. K., chief, but maybe you'd better—"

"Shut up," Mordecai Breen said, then he grinned at Slap-happy. "I'm all right. Forget it."

The policeman, sitting with the back of his chair against the wall, said out of the corner of his mouth: "Sure he's all right. There's nothing the matter with him except that he's stupid."

Slap-happy let out a roar and turned on the policeman.

"Listen, you. Another crack like that—"

"Go on," Mordecai Breen ordered.

Slap-happy left. The nurse patted the bedclothes more snugly about Breen.

"Don't do that," he said fretfully.

She smiled. "I'll get you some supper," she said, and went out.

After what seemed like hours to Mordecai Breen, the telephone rang. The policeman answered it. He said, "Yeah, sure. . . . Uh-huh. . . . O. K.," and hung up. He came and looked down at Breen, grinning broadly.

"That was your friend, Hammerstein," he said. "The sergeant said he'd like to find the two guys that beat you up. He wants to pin medals on 'em, and he says you're to stay here and I'm to stay here, see?"

He went back to his chair, unmindful of the string of oaths that Mordecai Breen hurled at him and at Hammerstein.

The sergeant was being spiteful.

*Continued on page 97*





# THE BLACK NARCISSUS

by NEIL MILLER

Doc Walters always had to have his little joke; and nobody'd ever object if it wasn't that he always had to have the same joke. That sort of thing begins to get in a fellow's hair after a while.

"This woman looks kinda dead,"

he pronounced solemnly.

And Grady rubbed his nose with the palm of his hand and took his eyes away from the spot where somebody'd bashed the victim's skull with the well-known blunt instrument.



"You're too conservative," he said to Doc. "I'd say she was definitely dead."

The medical examiner sighed regretfully and nodded. "I guess I will, too. Basal fracture. Somebody hit her an awful wallop. Somebody didn't like her."

Then the guy that'd found the body and notified the police inserted himself suavely into the proceedings. He claimed his name was Nickey Nolan and that he operated a night club called the Casino Habana.

"I think you're getting the wrong angle on this?" he said. "Everybody liked Lola. She didn't have an enemy in the world. Why, that dame was tops in popularity! Since she's been dancing at the Casino Habana, we've been able to double our cover charge—and they fight to get in!"

Grady rotated ponderously, and looked Nickey over. Nickey was something to look at, if a fellow wasn't too particular about what happened to his eyes.

"I don't usually like guys that wear loud clothes," Grady said thoughtfully, "but maybe you'll be an exception. A lot depends on how much you talk, and what you say."

Nickey went through a lot of elegant motions lighting his cigarette. "One of those hard-boiled detectives, eh? Well, if that's the way you want it—"

He shrugged his tailored shoulders and went across the room to drop into one of those silly little chairs like you never see anywhere but in a woman's apartment. He consulted his fingernails.

Grady didn't even bother to look at him, but said: "Do you happen to be around here often at this hour of the morning? Or was this some special occasion?"

Nickey said: "Use your head,

copper. Lola's still wearing the evening gown she had on when she left the Casino Habana last night. That was half past twelve. I can produce a hundred witnesses who'll tell you I was there until after three."

Grady looked down at the dark beauty of Lola Mendoza and said: "She looks like the type that'd have a lot of boy friends."

"I wouldn't know about that," Nickey said sullenly. "Of course a lot of guys tried to date her. Lola was a hot dancer. She did something to 'em. That's why they kept coming. But, if you've got an idea I was one of the inflammable lads, you've got it all wrong. Only way I was interested in Lola was mercenary. She brought 'em in and they spent the dough. And now—well, this is a hell of a pay-off."

"How about this morning?" Grady asked.

"Well, she had a new dance routine. She and Gregory Dumont worked it out between them. Something Gregory called the Black Narcissus. I came around to see about it. The apartment door was unlocked and she didn't answer my knock, so I came in. There she was, on the floor in front of her dressing table, just like you found her. I didn't touch a thing."

Grady unwrapped a cigar slowly and looked at Doc Walters.

"Near as I can make out," Doc said, "it happened about eight-nine hours ago. Say one or two o'clock."

"I was at the Casino Habana until after three," Nickey Nolan said again. His voice seemed to sound relieved. "But say! I can tell you something. Gregory Dumont was one of the boys that seemed to fall heavy for Lola. They left in the same taxi last night."

"We'll see him," Grady promised.



"Where does he hang out?"

Nickey told him; then one of the busy little guys of the homicide squad jerked Grady's sleeve.

"Take a look at this, chief. We found it in her bag on the dressing table." He handed Grady a yellow envelope. Grady grunted and fished out the message, spreading it on the table so we could all see. The telegram had been filed in Wichita at nine o'clock at night and said:

AM COMING OUT TO GET YOU  
AND I MEAN DEFINITELY.

EDDIE CARLISLE.

Grady looked around bleakly as he refolded the sheet and stuck it back in the envelope.

"There's a guy that means business," he said. "Ten words. No more; no less. Who is Eddie Carlisle?"

"If you're asking me," Nickey Nolan said heavily, "I wouldn't know. But look. Am I under arrest or anything? Longer I think about this thing, the more I realize what a hell of a break it is. The overhead at the Casino Havana— What are we going to do without Lola Mendoza to pull 'em in?"

Grady shook his head. "I wouldn't know. Get yourself another dancer. Oh, run on. If we want you, we'll know where to get you."

"Yes." Nickey nodded wearily as he moved toward the door. "You'll know where to find me."

Then one of the guys that had been prowling around the apartment with an assortment of fingerprint powder and a flash camera turned loose a sudden yelp. He laid aside his paraphernalia and raised one of the windows. The same old northwest wind that had been howling for the past three days whooped into the apartment.

"Over this way!" the fingerprint

guy said quickly. "Some guy climbed this fire escape last night! Went down again, too. There's two sets of footprints in the snow, and one overlaps the other."

We took turns looking out the window at the two sets of footprints in the snow; then Grady rubbed his nose and moved toward the door.

"Get pictures and moulages," he grunted. "Those on the fire escape won't be much good. Try in the court."

We went down the flight of creaking steps that led to the main floor.

"Wonder why a dame like Lola Mendoza lived in a dump like this?" Grady muttered, as we reached the street. Then: "Suppose we might's well have a look in the court and alley. Then we'll call on Gregory Dumont."

"What for?" I asked. "This Eddie Carlisle is the boy you want. He wired her he was coming, and he came. He slipped up the fire escape and batted her on the head while she was sitting in front of her dressing table."

Grady's bushy eyebrows drew down in a disapproving frown as he grunted: "You newspaper guys! If it wasn't that you could drive a car and keep your mouth shut most of the time—"

We got around in the court under Lola Mendoza's window and Grady studied the footprints in the snow. They were clear and sharp. The guy that made 'em had a hole the size of a half dollar in the sole of his right shoe.

"Check," Grady said. "He went up, and he came down. Shoes, nine and a half or ten. Heels run over; hole in sole. He wasn't a very prosperous character. Let's go and see Gregory."

Gregory Dumont is a sort of neu-



ter gender that tries to fool the public into believing that he's a hairy chest by using a lot of naughty words. Trouble is, he hasn't got the vocal equipment to make them sound convincing, and his fluttering little mannerisms convey the impression that he was the kind of boy who squatted to play marbles.

Grady didn't tell him what had happened; didn't even mention that he belonged on the police department. He started talking show business and let Gregory bring Lola Mendoza into the conversation.

"She's positively sensational!" said Dumont. "With her flashing dark eyes, her blue-black hair, and her grace. She's so damned seductive, so filled with ungodly allure. There's something provocative in her every movement."

"I've seen her," Grady said coldly. "A fellow was telling me about something new you've cooked up. Something about the Black Narcissus."

"Ah, the Black Narcissus! There, gentlemen, is a creation of which I am genuinely proud! It is a work of art—a masterpiece which will make Lola Mendoza the most famous woman in show business! You have seen Lola Mendoza, you say?"

"Recently," Grady grunted.

I didn't need to shut my eyes to see that crumpled figure on the floor in front of her dressing table. Gregory Dumont lighted a cigarette with a quick, feminine gesture. It was a perfumed cigarette.

"Then picture this," he said. "And remember the whole thing is my cre-

ation; the setting, the lighting effects, the costume, the music. I created the whole thing for Lola Mendoza; she is the only woman in the world who can carry it through the way I vision it."

He jerked his head in a way that looked like a quick little bow and strutted across the room to the keyboard of a grand piano. His delicate fingers wandered over the keys.

"Like this," he breathed. "Picture it. The stage hangings are back-lighted a deep ultramarine which gradually grows lighter, tinted with rose and finally merges into the azure of a summer day. All back-lighting, you understand. And the music—"

His fingers fluttered through a light, rollicking bit of music that seemed to hint of a spring morning. He looked up at Grady with a kind of pathetic eagerness.

"The hangings turn to deep blue again," he said, "and dimmed floods illuminate the stage with a beautiful, eerie light. No less than a dozen baby spotlights glow upon a cluster of greenery in the middle of the stage. In the center of this foliage is a large black bud, opening slowly as the music quickens and takes on an undertone of rhythm—an undulating, sinuous rhythm. Like the throb of deep-voiced tom-toms."

Cellophane crackled loudly as Grady unwrapped a cigar. Gregory Dumont frowned slightly at the sound, then spoke rapidly:

"The petals of the Black Narcissus open slowly, gracefully. As the





diaphanous black veils unfold, we glimpse the stamen of this exotic blossom. Lola Mendoza! The soft whiteness of her lissome body stands out in startling contrast against the velvety blackness of the petals! Can you picture it? And the music—"

"Another nude dancer," Grady grunted.

Gregory Dumont shook his head violently. "Not another nude dancer. Lola Mendoza! There never was anyone like her; there never will be! Picture the blue-black of her hair, the flash of her dark eyes, the vivid red of her poppy lips—"

"Afraid I can't." Grady's teeth were clamped tight around his cigar. Then, with Gregory Dumont sitting on the piano bench, staring at him in open-mouthed amazement, he let him have it.

"Lola Mendoza is dead. Murdered. Around one o'clock this morning, somebody smacked her over the head with a bottle. Not just once. Several times. And a fellow told me you left the Casino Habana with her about twelve thirty—"

I felt sorry for the little sissy.

"Lola . . . Lola's dead? No, I don't believe it! Who could have wanted to kill her?"

Grady never felt sorry for anybody. "That's what I want to know," he said. "Far as anybody's been able to find out, you're the last one to see her. For all I know, maybe you wanted to kill her."

"Me?" Dumont's weak chin quivered for a moment. "Why would I want to kill her? She was going to pay me a royalty for every performance of the Black Narcissus. I can show you the contract she signed."

"I'll look it over," Grady promised. "First, tell me about last

night. Where did you go when you left the Casino Habana?"

"Why—nowhere. Lola had a headache. I took her home in a taxi and bade her good night in the downstairs hall. She went upstairs and I came here."

"In the taxi?"

"No. I'd dismissed the taxi. I walked. Working out a few final details of the Black Narcissus. Lola was going to put on a dress rehearsal this morning. And now—"

"But, you can't prove you came directly home?"

Dumont looked at Grady and licked his pale lips. "Why— No, I'm afraid I can't. But—"

"Did Miss Mendoza say anything about expecting company?"

"No. Say, there is something you might like to know. When we got to her place, there was a telegram waiting for her. Stuck in the mailbox. She said she'd been expecting it and had asked the caretaker to sign for it."

"What did the telegram say?"

Dumont shrugged his thin shoulders. "She didn't open it while I was with her. Just snatched it up as she was telling me good night. I supposed it was from one of her numerous admirers. Say! I'm a dumb bunny for not thinking of this before! Lola lives in an old-time apartment, pretty much of a dump. There's a fire escape leads up to one of her windows and—"

"We've seen the fire escape," Grady said. "What about it?"

"Just this. Lola was afraid of prowlers. One night last week she thought she saw a man peeking in her window."

Grady said maybe a prowler cracked her on the head with the bottle. "But we'll need a deposition from you. Can you spare the



time for a trip down to headquarters?"

A couple of guys were waiting in Grady's office. One of them was Detective Hadjek; the other was one of the characters which is usually known as "an unidentified transient." Hadjek grinned at Grady and jerked his thumb at the other guy.

"Look what I nabbed at Little Sam Goldberg's pawnshop," he said. "And look what he was trying to hock." He tossed a lady's diamond ring on Grady's desk. "And look what he was carrying around in his pocket." And he laid a metal jewel case beside the ring.

Grady raised the lid and whistled.

"And," said Hadjek, fawning over his words like they had a sweet taste, "have a look at this."

He grabbed the cuff on the right leg of the guy's pants and hoisted his foot off the floor. The shoes were size nine and a half or ten. The heels were run over, and there was a hole the size of a half dollar in the sole.

"And," continued Hadjek with an oily smirk, "listen to the yarn he tells. Says he's been sleeping on top of the coal bunkers in the boiler room back of the apartment house where Miss Mendoza lives. It's nice and warm in there. And last night, the fireman caught him and put the run on him. He was going through the court toward the street when the woman hailed him and invited him up to the room."

"Boloney!" Grady said, and dropped into his creaking chair.

"That's the way he tells it. Says she—"

The bum raised a pair of stricken eyes to Grady's face. "Honest, boss!" he said in a thin, cracked voice. "Listen. Maybe you'll be-

lieve me if I tell it myself. These other dicks just give me the laugh and—"

"Go ahead," said Grady. "What happened?"

"Well, I'm going through the court, see? Shivering in the wind and wondering where I'm gonna sleep, now that the old duck run me out of the boiler room. Then this dame hails me. She says, 'ps-s-s-t' a couple of times, and then she 'yoo-hoos' quietlike. Confidential, see? She don't want nobody to know what's going on. I don't place her at first because everything's dark; but pretty soon I make her leaning out the window where the fire escape is. She tells me to come up—"

"Get it?" Hadjek grinned. "She was an awful naughty girl, inviting guys up to her room."

Grady was looking intently at the bum. He said softly:

"Shut up, Hadjek. Go ahead, fellow. She told you to come up."

"Yeah. Well, I goes up the fire escape and through the open window into a dark room. But there's a light shining through the doorway to the next room—the bedroom, I guess. Anyhow, the dame calls out and says she ain't dressed and can't come out, but there's a metal box on a table to the left of the window. She says for me to take it to the Hotel Corrigan and—"

"Here comes the part I like," put in Hadjek. "This Lola Mendoza calls in a bum—a alley rat—a guy she never saw before. And she hands over a couple grand in jewels. Imagine!"

The bum spread his grimy hands and looked hopelessly at Grady. "Honest, mister! I know it sounds screwy, but—"

Grady was leaning forward, his elbows on the desk, frowning hard at



the bum. "Why didn't you take the box to the Corrigan?"

"I did, honest, mister! But they never heard of the guy I'm supposed to deliver it to. The dame said Eddie Carlisle would slip me some dough for delivering it.

For a long time, the only sound in the room was the noise Grady made peeling the Cellophane from his cigar. Then Hadjek cut loose with that nasty laugh of his.

"Guess that puts it in the bag, eh, chief? Lola Mendoza's sitting in front of her dressing table, putting her jewelry away when this egg climbs the fire escape, crawls through the window, and sneaks up behind her. He bops her and grabs the box. Then, when we nabbed him in the hockshop, he made up the screwy yarn."

Grady gave Hadjek a frosty glance. "Maybe you noticed the name of the guy he was supposed to deliver the box to. He didn't make that up. This Eddie Carlisle—"

Hadjek was ready. "He got it off the telegram! Don't you see? He read the telegram and—"

"And folded it neatly and put it back in the envelope? Him?" Grady snorted disgustedly.

"Well, he must've done it. How else can you figure it?"

"'Nother thing. She was smacked with a bottle. Now, a neat little lady like Lola Mendoza don't have bottles cluttering up her apartment unless she's having a drink with someone."

"That's an easy one. He brought the bottle with him, picked it up in the alley. He knew he needed a weapon—"

Grady lowered his right eyebrow and leered at Hadjek. "How many bottles half full of Scotch have you picked up in a lifetime of alley snooping?"

"Well— Aw, the hell with that, chief! We got a perfect case against this egg. The jury'll convict him without even leaving the courtroom. Just let me work on him a little while; he'll give us a full and complete confession."

Grady frowned at the bum thoughtfully for a moment; then he shook his head.

"He'd just lie to you. And he couldn't tell a *good* lie to save his neck. He's dumb. If he wasn't dumb, he wouldn't have tried to hock that ring. Just dum—"

The bum looked at Grady with eyes like a sick kitten. "Dumb? Sure I'm dumb! But I ain't that dumb, mister. I knew the dame was dead. I went back that way this morning, figuring to return the box. The dump was full of cops; I seen 'em looking at my tracks in the snow. Yeah, I know she was dead. And I knew there was a murder rap hanging over me."

"But you tried to pawn one of the dead woman's rings."

"Yeah. I— Well, cripes, mister! Ain't you ever been hungry?"

Grady grunted and slumped down in his chair. Finally, after he'd looked at the bum a good long time, he shoved his hand into his pocket and dragged out a tattered old billfold.

"Hadjek," he said softly, "take this guy across the street and buy him as much breakfast as he can put away. Then get him a pack of cigarettes or a fistful of cigars, whichever he prefers, and bring him back here. And, Hadjek—"

"Yes, sir?"

"Watch your manners. This gentleman is my guest."

After the apoplectic Hadjek had led the shambling bum outside, I turned admiringly to Grady.



"The good old psychology," I said. "You figure a big meal and a smoke will put him in a mellow, confiding mood and—"

Grady groaned, "You newspaper guys!" and shook his head dolorously. "Always suspicious. Always questioning a guy's motives."

Then the telephone rang. Grady listened a moment, then replaced the receiver, tilted his chair back, and clasped his hands behind his head.

"That was Cullen," he said. "From Lola Mendoza's apartment. They just nabbed a guy wandering around the place. Said he was her husband. They're bringing him in."

"Nice," I said. "But unnecessary. It's an anticlimax. As Hadjek so aptly put it, the case is in the bag, and I'm going back to the office to dash off a couple of paragraphs about the lovely and glamorous Lola Mendoza being slain by a moronic prowler. I had hopes of making a feature of it, but—"

"Maybe I forgot to mention it," Grady drawled. "This guy says his name is Eddie Carlisle. Well, so long. I'll be seeing you."

I went over to a corner and sat down. Grady didn't seem to notice whether I went or stayed. He was busy with a heap of typewritten reports and didn't look up until the door opened and an irritated voice blustered:

"Mr. Grady! I would like to know how much longer you intend to keep me waiting in your damned drafty hall! I have an appointment at—"

Grady could spread it on and make it stick when he was in the mood. He was out of his chair, waddling around his desk and apologizing all over the place.

"Dumont! Oh, I'm sorry I kept you waiting! Tell you the truth, you completely slipped my mind.

You see, we've caught the prowler who—"

Gregory Dumont's anger evaporated immediately. "Already? That's good news. I can quite forgive you for forgetting my presence. Has he confessed the murder?"

"Not yet, but— Well, as long as you've waited this long, I suppose we might as well have a stenographer take down your statement. It'll only take a minute or two, and we'll have it on record. That is, if you can spare the time."

Gregory Dumont positively beamed upon Grady. "Of course I can! All the time you want. Sorry I was so rude. I didn't understand—"

"It's all right," Grady said, patting him on the shoulder. "Help yourself to a chair and I'll ring in a pencil pusher."

But, just as Grady gets back to his desk, Dead Pan Craddock sticks his neck in the door and says the man is here; so Grady nods and a couple of the homicide boys bring in Eddie Carlisle.

He's a pretty boy with the kind of profile that has made some guys rich and famous. Also, he's got little touches of gray at the temples that give him an air of distinction. And he looks like he's been getting a lot of everything but sleep.

He shuffled into the room without seeming to see much of anything until Grady spoke to him; then he looked up. His mouth was trembling.

"They say," he appealed to Grady, "that Lola's dead. I . . . I can't believe it. Tell me. It's just a gag, isn't it? Lola's all right . . . in the next room, maybe? She isn't dead—"

Grady muttered and chewed his cigar savagely, but he took Eddie



Carlisle's topcoat and steered him into a chair.

"Just take it easy," he advised. "When did you get in town?"

"Eh? Oh, this morning. Drove all night because I was so damned crazy to see Lola. It's been a year since we split up—"

"You sent her a wire," Grady said raspingly. "Said you were coming to get her."

"That's right! She was coming back with me again! The dance team of Carlisle and Mendoza! We wowed 'em from coast to coast, and we could do it again! When she wrote me that she was fed up with the night-club racket, I closed my own show in Wichita and came after her, now—"

"Take it easy," Grady said. "Now you—"

The office door banged open and Detective Hadjek swaggered into the room with the bum. They were both smoking cigars.

"Here we are, chief," Hadjek announced. "And he ate a dollar's worth of grub. He still won't talk. Still insists this Mendoza dame invited him up to her room and—"

Eddie Carlisle lurched out of his chair, his hands knotted into fists and tears trickling down each side of his classic nose. He lunged

across the room, making for the bum.

"Is this the man? Did he kill Lola?"

"None of that!" Grady said. He grabbed Carlisle by the arm and led him back to his chair.

"You owe a lot to that guy," he added. "If it wasn't for him, we'd probably have you charged with your wife's murder. You ought to be more careful how you word your telegrams."

Gregory Dumont was cringing in his chair, eating his fingernails and wearing an expression of acute *mal de mer* on his face.

"This is terrible," he expostulated. "Violence always upsets me. I'm sick. Mr. Grady, won't it be all right if I come back—"

"Oh, sit tight," Grady drawled. "It'll only take a minute or two to get your deposition. Save you all the trouble we can, Dumont. It's just a matter of form, helps speed courtroom work."

"But we don't need his statement," said Hadjek. "We got it in the bag. Enough to hang this egg. He crawled through the window and sneaked—"

"Hadjek!" Grady said sharply.

"Yes, chief?"

"Mr. Dumont told me the woman





was afraid of prowlers. That means she prob'ly kept the fire-escape window locked."

"Well— Aw, what's the sense of going into that? We got him dead to rights and I'll get a confession out of him or—"

Grady flopped into his chair after a warning glance at Carlisle.

"Anyhow," he said stubbornly, "she was sitting in front of her dressing table at the time. She could see the window in the mirror."

"Aw, what the hell, chief! Maybe she wasn't looking in the mirror. You're just making mountains out of nothing."

"Still, she was wearing an evening gown—one of those things without much front and no back. And the wind that's been blasting out of the northwest the last three days would chill a malemute."

Hadjek's mouth was open. He shut it and swallowed a couple of times, looking from Grady to the bum and back again.

"I get it, chief," he muttered. "But look! You don't believe the cock-eyed yarn this guy told us? That the dame called him in—"

"Why not? As I said before, he couldn't tell a good lie."

One of the stenogs strutted in, pencil and notebook in hand. He looked superciliously at Grady and at his wrist watch.

Gray said: "Oh, yes! You were going to give us your statement, Dumont. Go right ahead. You left the Casino Habana with Lola Mendoza at about twelve thirty last night. Took a taxi to her place. There was a telegram in her mailbox. Remember?"

Gregory Dumont took his fingers out of his mouth.

"I— Really, Mr. Grady, I'd better wait until some other time. I'm

all confused, I can't seem to collect my wits."

"Doesn't matter. I remember what you told me this morning. You went up and had a drink or two, going over the Black Narcissus—"

"I never said that! I didn't go up, I went home!"

"And Lola Mendoza read the telegram she'd received from her husband. She was going back to him. Remember? That meant you'd lost your Black Narcissus. You argued. Finally, in a frenzy of rage, you grabbed up the bottle— Remember? Then, after it was too late, you returned to your senses. You began to think desperately—to plan how you could escape the chair. You enticed this guy out of the alley—"

Gregory Dumont hurtled suddenly from his chair. With his eyes flashing fire and his dainty hands clenched into trembling, impotent fists, he screamed hysterically at Hadjek's prisoner:

"Damn you! Why didn't you take the jewelry and get out of town like any ordinary alley rat would've done? You're the dumbest—"

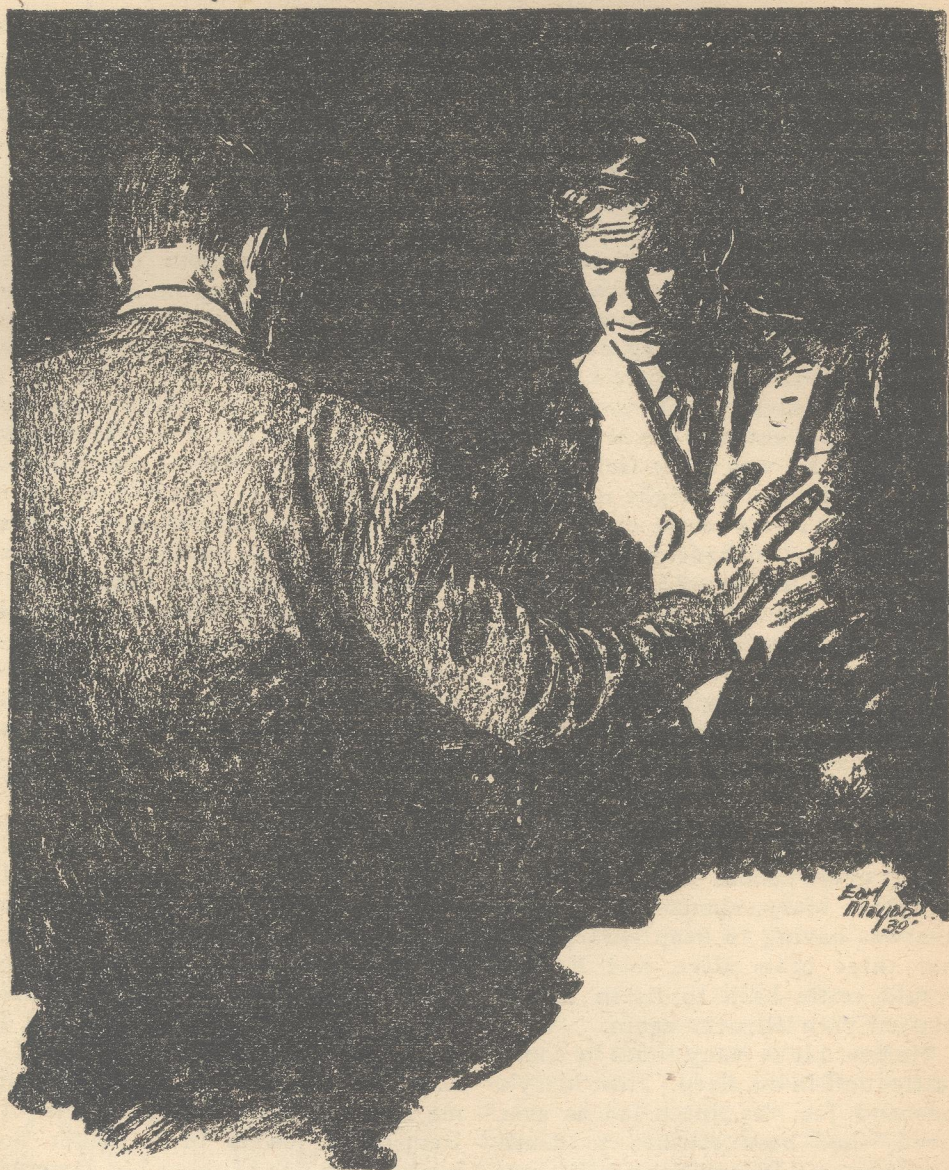
"Not dumb," Grady said gently. "Just happened to be your hard luck to pick on a man out of a thousand—a man who was honest though starving."

So, after it was all over and Gregory Dumont had affixed his signature to a confession, I turned to Grady with my compliments and apologies.

"It was a swell job," I said. "And it'll make a swell feature story. I'll see that you get a lot of credit."

"You newspaper guys," he sighed, wagging his head reprovingly. "Always making out like there's something romantic and glamorous about solving crimes. I don't know what you see in it; honest, I don't."





## DEATH LISTENS IN

by ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

Wolf Fesden had served eight years in Lornmere Penitentiary, and so no one knew better than he that

its reputation as the toughest prison in the State was, if anything, an understatement. Yet he deliberately



contrived to have himself nabbed driving a stolen car down Sea City's principal thoroughfare, deliberately contrived to have himself sentenced to another long stretch at Lornmere.

Fesden was a veteran crook, as hard as armor plate, as shrewd and cunning and elusive as the gray killer for which he was nicknamed. This self-planned sentence was only one step in his great scheme. The next was to manage being placed in Cell 6, Row C, of Lornmere's Northeast Cell Block. This took some doing, but eventually he brought it off. Now he was Evar Galt's cellmate and he started right in worming the old man's secret out of him.

Galt proved a harder nut to crack than Fesden had figured. The weeks dragged into months and the months piled up into years and he was still at it.

Many a night, lights out and the keeper nowhere near, Wolf Fesden's long fingers itched to clamp on Galt's scrawny neck and choke the information out of him. Then the thin, sexless voice would start babbling again about the old fool's daughter Mary, about what a time she was having to keep herself and her three brats alive, and Fesden would settle back to listen to the blasted yarn all over again.

He heard it so many times he could rattle it off in his sleep. How Mary's husband Joe, "as fine a lad as ever lived," had been crushed to death under one of Pierce Ramsdell's limousines. How Mary couldn't get to first base with her suit for damages. "No lawyer would take it," Galt would whine. "She went to a dozen and they all said the same thing. 'It was your husband's fault; there was no negligence on the part of the chauffeur.' But they all lied. The truth of the matter is, they were afraid of going up against Ramsdell.

They were afraid of what he'd do to them, with his money and his power." He knew, Evar Galt did, all about how everyone feared the tycoon, for wasn't he butler in Ramsdell's very own house?

"Look," Fesden said the first time his cellmate got to this point. "Whether the lawyers were right or not, seems to me with all his millions your boss could've done something for her, seeing she was your daughter."

"He didn't know Mary was my daughter. How could he? Her married name was different from mine. And even if it hadn't been, that would have meant nothing. I was only a servant to him, not really a human being but a kind of machine." There was no resentment in the old man's voice; he was simply explaining something that to him was self-evident. "The only time he would have been really aware of me was if I made some mistake in performing my duties, and I never did. I was the perfect servant.

"Yes," Galt went on, "I'd served them more than twenty years and I was the perfect servant. Which was why, morning after opening night at the opera, madame didn't think twice about sending me to put her jewel box back in the bank vault, like I'd done hundreds of times." He chuckled toothlessly. "She handed me half a million dollars' worth of Ramsdell's jewels in a casket no bigger than one of those big cameras the news photographers use and I remembered how my Mary and her little ones were faced with starvation and misery because of what Pierce Ramsdell had done to Joe, so this time I didn't take the jewels to the bank."

The blithering ass was nabbed right off, of course, but before he was caught, he'd managed to cache



the loot. Nothing could get out of him where, not the cops' grilling, not Ramsdell's bullying or daughter Mary's tears. Not even the insurance company's offer not to prosecute if he'd give up the jewels.

The story had been all over the Sea City newspapers. Wolf Fesden had read everything printed about it, his mouth drooling as he studied the pictures of the stuff that was lying hidden somewhere, the secret of where known only to Evar Galt. When Fesden read about Galt's being sentenced to Lornmere, he had remembered how first-termers nearly always spilled their guts to the first con who would listen, and the Great Scheme had started bubbling in his brain.

The old man was anxious enough to talk. Night after night he would blabber his yarn—till it came to telling where he'd cached the jewels. Then a crazy glitter would come into his rheum-rimmed eyes. "When I get out of here," he'd mumble, "I'll go get them. Ten years isn't too long for Mary to wait when there's comfort, luxury, at the end of them."

Just about here he'd have a coughing fit, and when it was over, Wolf Fesden would go to work on him again. He would tell the gasping old man there was no need for Mary and the kids to live in want till he got out. The cunning crook would point out, over and over, that while Galt's letters, his monthly talks with his daughter, were watched for any tip-off to the whereabouts of the jewels, a code message in his, Fesden's communication would never be spotted. Again and again he would tell Galt about his imaginary friend on the outside who would go get the stuff and fence it and give the money to Mary, keeping only a quar-

ter of it for his trouble.

Always the answer was the same. "Maybe. Maybe you're right. Maybe I'll let you arrange it for me. I've got to think about it." And Fesden's fingers would curl to fit Evar Galt's neck.

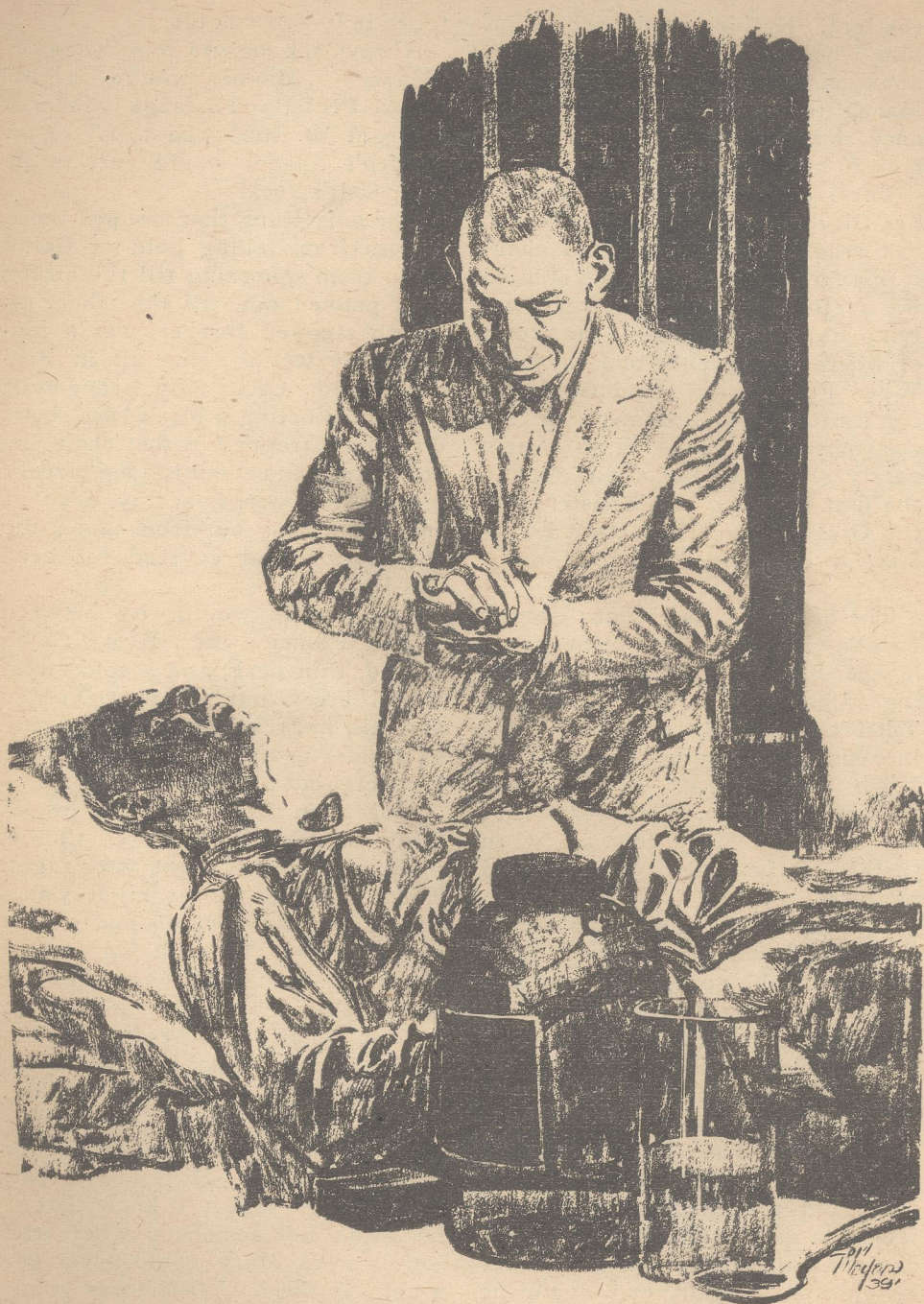
The only thing that stopped those fingers from taking hold of Galt's neck, from squeezing till the bleary eyes popped out, till the wheezing breath stopped forever, was a picture that would come up in Fesden's mind. Of an ugly, heavy-built chair dominating a bleak bare room. Of a man strapped in that chair, his body arched and straining agonizedly against the straps, a tiny wisp of smoke spurting out from under the contraption that covered his head and face.

The picture would rise between Wolf Fesden and Evar Galt's corded, thin neck, and a cold sweat would break out all over Fesden and his fingers would uncurl, and he'd start again trying to wheedle his secret out of Galt.

More than three years that sort of thing went on in Row C, Cell 6, night after night, night after night. Then, one mid-winter night, Galt's coughing spell kept on and on till suddenly the scarlet blood gushed out of his mouth, all over him, and they took him away to the hospital.

That morning Wolf Fesden laughed silently to himself as he swabbed blood from the cell floor. This was the break he'd been waiting for. Galt would never live to leave Lornmere. He'd know that, soon enough, and he'd know that if he didn't tell somebody where the jewels were, Mary would never get a chip of them. Fesden was going to make sure he would be that someone. He started right off pulling wires for assignment to the detail of hospital trustees.





"You're going to die soon, Galt," Fesden whispered. "You can't ever go get the jewels yourself."



It took over a month and when Wolf Fesden got his way at last, he found that another trusty, a convict by the name of Bert Corbett, had gotten the inside track with Galt.

A tight-mouthed, poker-faced fellow was this Corbett, kind of young to be in long enough to be made a trusty. Fesden didn't remember ever having seen him around the yard or the workshops, either this stretch or the one before. But then Lornmere was a big place and no one could know all of the more than two thousand convicts it held, so that didn't mean anything. What bothered Wolf Fesden was the way Corbett hung around Evar Galt's bed, the way he'd give the old man an extra alcohol rub whenever he had the chance, or sneak some extra titbit to him from Doc Lowrey's lunch tray in the kitchen.

If it weren't that Dr. Lowrey made the trusties alternate among the three wards—the surgical, medical, and tuberculosis—for night duty, Fesden would never have had a chance to talk to Galt without Corbett hanging around somewhere within earshot. So when Fesden's turn in the T. B. ward came, he'd get the other patients bedded down and snoozing and then he'd bump the old man's cot or drop something on him, to wake him up.

Galt's eyes would open, down at the bottom of their bluish sockets, and they'd look at Fesden for a minute. Then they'd close again, tiredlike, and no matter how long he sat there whispering, they'd never open.

"You're going to die," Fesden would whisper. "You're going to die soon, Galt. You can't ever go get the jewels yourself. If you don't tell me where they are, they'll stay buried and Mary will never get anything out of them."

The first few months Fesden wasn't any too anxious for Galt to come through, because he needed time to build a new set-up for the next step in his Great Scheme, his break-out.

Lornmere was surrounded by two great walls. The cell blocks and the shops were all within the inner one, a pile of grim, gray granite surmounted by a fence of barbed wire. The outer wall was twenty feet high to the other's fifteen. Between the two there stretched a fifty-yard-wide strip of concrete sun-washed by day and brilliantly flood-lighted by night. The prison hospital, where Fesden and Galt now were, stood in this space and the only other structure that occupied it was the administration building.

Only the barbed wire protected the top of the inner wall, but the outer one was studded by little stone towers that gave it the appearance of some medieval battlement. From within these, armed guards constantly watched every inch of the outer wall and of the space between them.

The guards were changed every four hours of the twenty-four, so as to make certain they would be on the alert. They worked in eight-hour platoons and the patrol of each platoon not on the wall at any one time was held on reserve in the one-story guardhouse that formed one side of the tunnellike main gate, about a quarter of it projecting into the space between the walls. The towers could be reached only from within this guardhouse, by a steel ladder that rose from the roof of this projecting part.

Wolf Fesden got the guards of the four-to-eight-a. m. patrol into the habit of coming over to the hospital kitchen for coffee right before they took their stations on the wall. He



did one other thing during those first few months he was a hospital trusty. From the doses that were intended to bring healing sleep to the prison-crazy patients who composed more than three quarters of those in the medical ward, he stole, grain by grain, enough veronal to fill a discarded pillbox he cached behind the kitchen sink.

After these two matters were accomplished, Fesden had nothing to do but wait till he was alone with Galt in the dim half light of the sleeping T. B. ward, so that he could wake up the old man and whisper to him.

For all the response it made, the head on the pillow might have really been the corpse's skull it kept looking more and more like.

The thing began to get Wolf Fesden.

He couldn't sleep any longer. Whether he was on day shift or night shift, he kept prowling the hall all the time he was off duty, kept prowling into the T. B. ward. But the worst times were when he was night orderly in the medical ward tending the convicts the prison had turned into raving maniacs, because those nights he knew Bert Corbett was in with the lung cases. With Galt.

Evar Galt came to be nothing but a skin bag of bones, more dead than alive except when he started coughing. Wolf Fesden began to get a queer idea that when he gave the old man his morning sponge-off, he could look right through the hot, dry skin, could look right into the big holes in Galt's lungs and see the little bugs that were eating away what was left of the old man's lungs and his life.

And then, one night when he was on duty in the medical ward, he thought he could hear the bugs

swarming inside his own skull for one terrible second.

Fesden got rid of that feeling right away. But he knew what his getting it meant. *He was going stir-crazy!*

He was still all right, but if he didn't get out of here, quick, he wouldn't be all right long. He had to get out! He had to get out of here tonight and leave Galt to die with his secret locked between his thin, blue lips.

Galt wouldn't die with his secret! Fesden had figured that long ago, and he knew he was right. When Galt knew he was about to die, he'd tell someone. He'd tell . . . he'd tell Bert Corbett.

No! No, damn it!

Not after the four years he'd spent trying to worm that out of the old fool. Not after all he'd gone through. If Galt didn't tell Wolf Fesden, he'd tell no one.

Fesden remembered the bottle on the stool by Galt's cot, the bottle of stuff to stop the coughing spell the old man always got around five in the morning. Doc Lowrey had said never to give him more than ten drops in a half glass of water. There was morphine in the colorless mixture, and a little too much would put the old man to sleep permanently.

Fesden knew just what he was going to do! He'd go around there, get talking to the guy on duty in there, watch his chance to kick Collucci's cot, near the door. Collucci always started coughing like mad when he was waked up sudden, so while the trusty was fussing with him, Fesden would have a chance to dump a big gob of the morphine mixture in the water glass that would be waiting ready on Galt's stool.

This done, Fesden decided, he



would go down to the kitchen and start boiling the coffee for the guards. He'd take the little pillbox of veronal from behind the sink and spill it in the coffeepot, and he'd make the coffee extra strong so the guards wouldn't notice the taste of the veronal. And then . . . and then he'd wait till half past four and walk out of Lornmere. As he was going over the wall, the trusty would be putting ten more drops of the morphine mixture in the glass—would be giving Galt the dose that would finish him and his secret together.

Murder? Sure. But he'd be in the clear. If they tumbled, it would be the other trusty would catch hell. Abruptly Fesden's lank jaws opened in a silent, wolfish laugh. He'd just remembered who was on duty in the T. B. ward. *Corbett!* That made it perfect.

He stopped laughing and went out of his ward, and went down the hall to the door of the lung room—and stopped in that doorway, his mouth going dry, his eyes slitting.

A green screen was around the head of Evar Galt's bed! That meant Galt was kicking the bucket! *Tonight!* And not only that, there was a sound of voice from inside the screen. *Bert Corbett was in there, and Galt was talking to him!*

## II.

Wolf Fesden went down the length of the T. B. ward, the thick soles of his prison shoes making no sound on the concrete floor. He reached the screen and went down on one knee, and laid his ear against the green burlap.

"The devil you're dying," he heard Corbett say. "I just put the screen around you to keep the light out of your eyes."

"Don't . . . try to . . . deceive me." Galt's voice was a mere shadow of a voice, as if he were a ghost already. "I'm . . . dying. I'll never . . . leave this place . . . alive."

How could he get Corbett out of there?—Fesden thought frantically. How could he get to the old man, to tell him this was his last chance to talk, his last chance to take care of Mary? If that didn't work, he'd tell him he'd snatch the kids, he'd snatch Mary, he— By Moses! He'd terrify the old fool into spilling—

Wait! What's this Corbett was saying? "—good news today, and I want you to know it. My parole's coming through. I'll be out of here in a week."

"Glad—" That ghostly shadow voice again. "You've been . . . kind . . . eased my last days."

"Tried my best, but it wasn't much. Look, Mr. Galt. If there's anything I can do for you when I get outside, give your daughter a message or anything, I'll be happy to—"

"Message?" the dying man gasped, and Wolf Fesden stopped breathing. "To . . . Mary? Thank Heaven! Bert . . . lift me . . . nearer you."

"Sure." Creak of rusted spring, rasp of harsh cotton sheet on harsh prison nightshirt. "There. That better?"

"Kind . . . so kind—" Galt's voice was now so faint that Fesden, listening finger to chin, had to close his eyes to hear it. "Listen, lad. Tell Mary . . . Mary Lane . . . 230 Morris Street . . . tell her . . . Frog Creek Railroad . . . Bridge . . . west side . . . north abutment . . . dig . . . dig—" That rasping was a long sigh as an old man's last breath left his wasted body. It was the scrape of harsh sheets as skin—



bagged bones settled down into them.

Fesden was on his feet and out of the ward, his clodhopper shoes on the concrete floor as silent as his lank-jawed laugh. Stir nuts, was he? Screwy, was he? But Evar Galt had told him his secret at last, and that Corbett had heard it, too, didn't matter in the least because Corbett wouldn't be out of Lornmere for a week. By that time Wolf Fesden would be a thousand miles away from the railroad bridge over Frog Creek, just outside Sea City, and the jewel case no bigger than a camera would be with him.

Brewing the coffee in the hospital kitchen, pouring the pillbox full of veronal into the pot, Fesden kept silently laughing to himself. Only a second he stopped laughing, when

the thought struck him that if he put in too much of the white powder he might kill the guards instead of just putting them to sleep. Then he remembered that he'd worked it out, experimenting with the stir nuts.

The guards came tramping in, the six of them, and Fesden kidded around with them, and he thought it was very funny that the coffee they were drinking to keep them awake was going to make them fall into a sleep from which they wouldn't wake till morning. He even picked up Jim Carroll's rifle, and squinted through its sights, and knew he could shoot with it as well as he'd shot when he was a sniper in the War.

They tramped out. Fesden started watching the clock over the stove for the half hour to pass that he figured he'd have to wait till the guards were safely asleep in the towers.

It got quiet in the hospital kitchen, so quiet that the clock's ticking was like a fast little hammer, tapping his skull.

There were footfalls walking along the hall outside! Hell! Doc Lowery had come in for a late look-around, like he sometimes did.

The knife drawers were locked, but Fesden snatched up a heavy wooden potato masher. He switched off the kitchen light and opened the kitchen door, soundlessly.

In the dim light from the ward doors he saw a slender figure going toward the front end of the hall. *Not Doc Lowery!* White coat, striped trousers—it was Bert Corbett. What was he—

Corbett stopped at the phone on the wall just inside the door of the hospital, the emergency phone they used to call Doc from his house outside the walls in case he was





needed in a hurry. Fesden grinned with relief. He ought to have known. Corbett was calling the Doc, of course, to tell him that Galt had passed out.

Doc would grunt sleepily, say: "All right. Wash him up and I'll sign him out in the morning." He always—

"Doc?" Corbett said into the phone "Galt's gone, Doc. . . . No. I got the dope out of him, the last moment." Wolf Fesden's skin got tight across his forehead. "Yeah," Corbett said. "Yeah. I'm sure glad this job's over. I'll never let myself in for another one like it."

*He was a lousy dick! A plant!* Fesden went down the hall, his feet making no sound. "Look, Doc. Will you get me a line through to— No. I guess I'd better not risk spilling it over the phone. Tell you what. You phone Mr. Boswell for me. Tell him to get me out of here first thing in the morning." Fesden was right behind him, the potato masher's handle gripped tight in a sweating hand. "Thanks, Doc. Thanks for everything. Night."

Bert Corbett put the receiver back on its hook. Fesden swung the masher against the back of the detective's shaved skull hard. So hard the bone crushed in like papier-mâché.

Wolf Fesden dropped the wooden mallet on the crumpled heap at his feet. His gaunt jaws opened in the noiseless, yellow-fanged laugh that had given him his moniker. Nobody was going to get Corbett out of here in the morning. Nobody was ever going to get him out of here. And he wasn't ever going to tell anyone Evar Galt's secret.

A minute later Fesden was out of the hospital. He walked briskly, but unhurriedly, toward where the

end of the guardhouse jutted out of the outer wall. There were no windows there, but there was a little door and he was watching it. There was a chance, the barest chance, that door might start to open—

His spine prickled with the sensation of eyes on him! He didn't move his head, but his own eyes slid sideways, focused the low bulk of the administration building. A single window was alight in the dark wall, a yellow rectangle black-striped by the cage of bars over it. The light silhouetted the form of a man standing in the window, peering out at him. The deputy warden!

Fesden's throat went dry, but he didn't hurry his pace, didn't change his direction. He still had twenty feet or so to go, and he had to get across those, at least, before things started to pop. There was a good chance he might make it. He had the white coat of a hospital trusty, and only cons with the best of conduct records rated that. If he acted like he had every right to be doing this, the warden might figure that one of the guards on the reserve patrol had phoned for him to bring over some bicarb for indigestion or creosote for a bum tooth.

Fifteen feet more. Ten feet. Fesden's long legs ate up the concrete and still no yell. Nothing. Five feet. Now! He veered into black shadow in the angle the projecting side of the guardhouse made with the wall—bounded to the corner.

His toes found roughness of stone. His back found stone behind it. He was hitching up the wall angle, knees and back as a mountaineer ascends some Alpine "chimney," as he himself had done so many times to reach some second-story window left unlocked because it was "impossible" for a thief to



reach it. His shaven head came above the guardhouse roof, into the light again—

An incoherent yell broke the prison silence. Fesden gained the roof, leaped for the iron ladder, was climbing it with monkeylike swiftness. "Escape!" the warden shouted. Fesden threw a glance over his shoulder, saw him leaning out against the bar cage, saw his arm clawing for a gun.

"Escape!" the warden yelled again. There was rattle of door bolts below Fesden as he reached the wall's top, leaped into Tower 1, at the head of the ladder, snatched a rifle from the hands of the sleeping guard, was out again in the open. The hinges of the guardhouse door creaked as it started to open. The warden's arm flung out through the window bars, pointing out Fesden and aiming his revolver in the single act.

The pound of that revolver, the rifle's sharper crack, were one sound. Fesden heard whistle of futile lead past him, saw the warden slump in the bar cage, heard shouts, thud of running feet beneath him.

The reserve guards! They'd opened the door too late to see the warden point. They'd never think of looking up here. Wasn't the wall covered by the men in the towers?

They were pouring across to surround the administration building, to skirt the hospital, looking for the killer. Fesden put the rifle down on the runway, let himself down over the outer edge of the wall.

He hung by his hands an instant, glancing narrow-eyed down at the next tower, where the wall turned. Tough luck, he thought, that bloke had to look out of the window just at the wrong time, so he'd had to bump him. But it could have been

lots worse. The guy could have been a better shot, or the wall could have been built straight up and down instead of sloping out a little, like this.

Fesden let go. He slid down, keeping hands and face away from the rasping granite. That threw him away from the support of the slight slant, but his free fall was only about eight feet, and he landed in soft grass. He leaped to his feet at once and darted across a wide belt of close-cropped turf to the black mass of bushes and second-growth trees beyond it.

Dew-wet leaves, twigs, slapped his face. Then he'd gone far enough in so that the illumination from the wall no longer made bright spangles in the darkness. He slowed, worked deeper into the thicket, only a slight rustle betraying his movements.

The pale glimmer of three slender birches gave Fesden his direction. The earthy smell of leaf mold was in his nostrils and there were sudden scutterings about him as small woods creatures were disturbed by his passage. A glacial boulder, moss-covered, blocked his way. Instead of going around it, Wolf Fesden dropped to his knees, shoved against it with his hands, muscles straining across his back with effort.

A low moan began, back where he'd come from. It increased in volume, swiftly, till it was the enormous howl of Lornmere's siren. The boulder started to roll, moved more quickly, was stopped by a hummock of earth behind it. Fesden's steady hand felt in a hollow in the ground where the big rock had rested, found the suitcase-sized metal box he had buried here four years ago.



The siren probed the night with its howl, rousing the countryside. Under it lay the roaring chug of the prison's big pursuit cars, filling with armed men. For fifty miles around State troopers were rushing to bar the crossroads and warn late-traveling autoists not to let themselves be stopped between towns on any pretext. Householders were waking to doublelock doors, windows. A radio operator's drone was broadcasting Fesden's description and teletype wires were carrying it to the police of seven States so that they could watch the entrances to their cities for him.

Wolf Fesden knew every mesh of the net that was being thrown around him, but his hands were unhurried as he peeled off the adhesive tape that sealed the box against rot and mildew. He lifted the lid, propped it open on its hinges. In spite of the tape, a musty odor came up out of the box, and the inside of the lid's edge felt sticky with mold.

A pallid searchlight beam scythed the sky, then slanted down to lay its glare on the river. The siren howled, deep-throated, heart-stopping. Fesden calmly stood up, unbuttoned his white coat and shrugged out of it, ripped open the buttons of his striped convict pants. The roar of the pursuit cars rose to a muted thunder that surged away down the road that led from the penitentiary. He sat down on his discarded clothing, noted that the sound of one of the cars stopped moving, backfired to silence. That would be the one that would lurk where the highway curved out of sight of the walls, waiting to shoot him down if he came out on it from the thicket. He unlaced his clodhopper prison shoes, swiftly but deftly.

DS—4

From the direction of the howling siren, bushes started to rustle with the movements of the keepers assigned to comb them. Wolf Fesden reached into the box, took a hairy wig from it. He adjusted this to his shaven poll, recalling how many hours he'd practiced doing this just right in the dark. He found a flannel shirt next, corduroy trousers.

Flashlights flickered like fireflies in the Stygian foliage. Men called to one another hoarsely, something in their voices betraying the fear that was denied by their bluster. The threshing, wide-spaced line came on slowly, relentlessly, to flush Fesden and drive him out into the glare of headlights on the road.

He rose, fully dressed, bent, put his betraying prison garb into the empty tin box, closed it. Straightening, he went around behind the boulder, shouldered it down again over the hole.

The night throbbed with the incessant howling of Lornmere's siren. It filled the air with alarm—and covered whatever small noises Wolf Fesden made as he pushed in between two interlacing bushes and waited.

Trees, bush leaves, abruptly became a black, shimmering pattern against light that struck through into the small clearing around the boulder. Wolf Fesden stiffened. A bluish-barreled revolver pushed a low bough away from in front of a heavy-jowled, wet-streaked face topped by a uniform cap. A keeper shoved through the bushes into the little opening.

He pulled in breath, wiped his forehead with the edge of his left hand, the beam from the flashlight it held darting across the leafy ceiling over him. Fesden's long arm shot



out. The keeper's mouth gaped open, but before the shout could come out, the stone in Fesden's fist crunched against his forehead. The convict caught the flashlight as it fell from numbed fingers, caught the keeper's body in his other arm and let it down gently to the ground.

Instantly, he pushed into the shrubbery, moving noisily in the same direction as, but dropping farther and farther behind, the line indicated by the rustlings and the blinkings of the other torches. After a minute or two, he clicked his own light off, stopped, stood taut, listening.

The noises the cordon of hunters made kept moving on through the thicket. Fesden laughed silently, slipped off to the right, toward the river.

Guards scanning the wide waters with the searchlights, intent on spotting a swimmer or a small boat, never thought to look directly beneath them where a tall, gaunt shadow flitted along the base of Lornmere's towering outer wall. Police at the ferry to Ashley, a mile to the north, saw no reason to stop or question any of the roughly clad, yawning workmen who trooped past them and aboard the morning's first boat.

One of the workmen was tall enough to match the description of the escaped prisoner, but he was hatless. While this Wolf Fesden might have procured some civilian clothes somewhere, he couldn't have grown a thick shock of hair overnight, could he?

### III.

"You're a murderer!"

J. Latham Boswell, looking in pajamas and bathrobe like anything

but the vice president in charge of Claims and Recoveries of the Sea City Burglary Insurance Co., licked fat lips and goggled at the man who'd called him that.

"You killed Bert Harris the day you sent him to Lornmere to pigeon Galt, under the name of Bert Corbett," John Porter went on, low-voiced, gray eyes accusing, knotted small muscles ridging his blunt jaw. "That was no job to hand to a youngster just breaking in." His undersized, deceptively slender frame quivered with rage. "It's a wonder he lasted as long as he did with that gang up there." The only hint about him that he was the singular bright star of the company's private detective force was the puckered bullet scar over his left temple that was not quite covered by hair as black as midnight.

"What could I do?" Boswell excused himself. "When Dr. Lowery telephoned me that Galt had been taken to the prison hospital, you were out on the coast, remember, and Bill Haynes was tied up with that big drug theft. I couldn't pass up a chance to wipe out a five-hundred-thousand-dollar loss for the company, could I?"

"What was the hurry? You could have waited—"

"I thought Galt might be easier to inveigle into talking before he got over the first shock of realizing he was going to die in prison. After Harris was up there, it was inadvisable to replace him with a more experienced operative. But I didn't get you here at six thirty in the morning to discuss my mistakes. We still have our duty to the company, John. To the stockholders. We're not licked yet. If we act shrewdly, we may still be able to recover the Ramsdell jewels. Shrewdly and quickly."



A pulse throbbed in the detective's temple. "You mean—"

"I mean that it is obvious this Fesden overheard Galt reveal the hiding place to Bert Harris, and killed the latter to silence him, since otherwise the murder would be reasonless. Beside our man, the escaped convict has killed two others and so there is no possibility that we could induce the authorities, were he to be apprehended by the police, to consent to an amelioration of his sentence in exchange for restitution of the Ramsdell loot. But we have certain contacts with the underworld, as you know better than I, that might enable us to beat the police to Fesden, and if we can reach him—" He spread his pudgy hands wide.

"We can make a dicker with him," Porter filled in the hiatus, his mouth thin and color-drained. "If he'll turn over the Ramsdell loot, we'll help him get away. Is that what you're getting at?"

"Of course not." Boswell's fat-drowned little eyes were shocked. "I wouldn't dream of making the company accessory after the fact to multiple murders. I simply have in mind that we might persuade Fesden that it is to his best interest to cooperate with us. With fifty thousand dollars, say, at his disposal he would be able to retain an outstanding attorney, employ alienists, perhaps, to substantiate an insanity defense. Now do you understand?"

"I understand," John Porter responded, his voice lower even than before, his tone milder, "that you're so putrid you stink. That swell lad isn't cold yet, up there on a slab in the Lornmere morgue, and you're hot to strike a bargain with the man who caved in his skull. I've put over many a lousy deal for you, but

this one's beyond my limit."

"My dear John," Boswell protested. "How could you do me such an injustice after all the years we've worked so closely together? You are the last man I would have suspected not to comprehend that it is precisely because of my great grief for Bertram Harris that I am so anxious to recover those jewels. He gave his life for them, John, like a soldier on the field of battle. It is incumbent on us, the living, to succeed where he has so nobly failed, to see to it that he has not made the supreme sacrifice in vain. Merely executing Fesden will not atone for Bertram's death. We—"

"You're a buzzard," Porter broke in, "bloated fat on offal a self-respecting rat would stick up his nose at. You don't mean a word of what you're saying. But you happen to be right, damn you. Bert knew he might get a knife in his back, any minute, if he gave himself away, but he stuck to his job. He'd want it finished, and I'm going to finish it for him. Not for you or your blasted company, but for Bert Harris. Not your way, Boswell, but mine."

At about three o'clock that same day, Wolf Fesden was climbing a long green hill, his pulses hammering. A little before noon, he had dropped off the train from Ashley at Millville, had tramped the final seven miles toward Sea City, along back roads, through fields. He was tired, dead beat, and not only because of the long, arduous walk. Even though he had kept telling himself that, disguised as he was and at this distance from Lornmere, no one could possibly suspect him, every yard he had progressed, every inch, had been a matter of taut



nerves, of wary watchfulness.

This was the last hill. When he got to the top of it, he would look down on Frog Creek. On the railroad bridge at the base of whose abutment Evar Galt had cached a fortune four years ago.

He wouldn't be able to dig it up right away, of course. Walking south as he was, the railroad skirted this narrow hill to his left. To his right ran Harding Boulevard, whose bridge, he recalled, crossed Frog Creek less than a hundred feet west of the railroad trestle. Between was flat land, nothing to hide him. He'd have to wait till dark. But he'd at least take a look now. He had to. Hadn't he gone through four years of hell just to find out where to look?

He came to the brow of the hill, pushed aside a bush that obscured his view. Then his breath caught in his throat! A vein swelled in his temple, swelled till it was about to burst.

The yellow of freshly dug earth gashed the green banks below him. A steam shovel hissed and swung its crane like some gargantuan, prehistoric monster. Men, laborers, swarmed on the banks of Frog Creek just below him, their backs rising and falling, their spades and pick-axes flashing in the sun!

*Digging!* A hundred men were digging, down there! They couldn't possibly miss—

Abruptly, Wolf Fesden breathed again. They weren't digging anywhere near the north abutment of the railroad trestle. The nearest of them with a full seventy feet away from it.

He saw, now, a little to the right of where they worked, a temporary wooden structure over which the stream of motor traffic surged. What

was being built there was a new bridge for the highway. The excavation was close, too damned close, to Galt's cache, but it was far enough away for safety.

Wolf Fesden's lean jaws opened in his silent laugh. This was a break, a real break. He started moving again, climbing down to that beehive of activity. He didn't have to skulk around in the bushes now till night. He could go down there, sit calmly on the creek bank overlooking the excavation. The laborers would think him some poor fellow out of work, watching and envying them. The cops patrolling the highway, scanning every car and truck for the prisoner escaped from Lornmere, would figure him, if they noticed him at all, as a sub-engineer or city inspector overseeing the construction.

Dusk lay gray against the big windows of J. Latham Boswell's office, on the nineteenth floor of the Sea-view Building in downtown Sea City. John Porter, bluish pouches under his eyes, his face deeply lined with weariness, dropped the telephone instrument into its cradle, said: "That's that. The police haven't a trace of Fesden."

Boswell spread his pudgy hands wide. "We're through, then. The fellow is five hundred miles away from here and getting farther all the time."

"No." Porter's lips hardly moved as he spoke. "He's somewhere in Sea City, or close by."

"How do you arrive at that conclusion?"

"Very simply." The puckered scar on the detective's brow seemed to pulse with a life of its own. "Galt didn't have time to get very far with the jewels before his ar-



rest, so Fesden had to come back here to get them. Even if he had nerve to come right into town by train, he couldn't have reached here before noon. Say they were in some spot he could get at without waiting for dark, we still have to allow him another hour to collect them. By that time I'd flown up to Lornmere, spotted the dug-in footmarks around that stone in the woods where the keeper was killed, unearthed the tin box under the boulder and discovered the brown wig hairs stuck in the mold on the under side of the box lid."

"And instructions had gone out," Boswell broke in, "over the police teletypes, for the searchers to stop every man of approximately Fesden's height, in cars or truck or on trains within reaching distance of Lornmere, and make certain he isn't wearing a wig. I see what you mean, John. If Fesden is on the move, he would have been picked up by now. He is hiding somewhere in Sea City till the hue and cry dies down."

"And I'm going to find him before the night is over." John Porter wheeled away from his superior's desk, pounded stiff-legged toward the office door. "I'm going to find and bring the Ramsdell jewels back here and cram them down your fat throat, and that's going to cost you fifty thousand dollars, but Fesden doesn't get a cent of it. What Wolf Fesden gets," he flung over his shoulder from the doorway, "my dear boss, is the hot squat."

Dusk settled down into the excavation above which Wolf Fesden sat. The steam shovel emitted a long blast from its whistle and the laborers started to stack their shovels. A muscle twitched in Fesden's cheek, but he didn't stir from the

position he'd assumed three hours ago.

Three interminable hours. Fesden laughed silently, thinking how the whole State had been looking for him and here he'd been all the time, hiding safely right out in the open. Suddenly his jaws closed with a click. What was this? A big bus had stopped on the road, just where the new cut branched off, and was disgorging men in overalls, in flannel shirts and corduroy trousers like his, dozen of men carrying lunch boxes. They were pouring down into the cut, were meeting the stream of laborers coming up out of it. Lights came on, blazing big lights. Strung on poles that he had not noticed before, they laid their brilliance on Frog Creek's greasy surface, sent their brightness all the way to the abutment of the railroad bridge!

What was going on here? He had to know. He had to know right away. He leaped erect, angled across the grass, grabbed the arm of a swarthy, unshaven Italian.

"What's the idea?" Fesden demanded hoarsely. "What are those lights for?"

"Wachyoo t'ink? Disa breedge, she gotta be feenish' quick before get col', concrete freeze. We worka t'ree shift, alla day, alla night."

All night! "How long?" All night it would be bright as day around that abutment. "How long before it's finished?" How long before he could dig up the jewels?

The laborer shrugged. "Maybe wan week, maybe two. I don'ch know." He wrenched away from Fesden.

One week. Maybe two. Not long, after four years. But too long, terribly too long, when you're wanted



by the cops of a whole State, of a whole country!

*When you're wanted for murder!*

The Italian threw a frightened glance over his shoulder at the tall man standing on top of the cut bank, standing motionless and staring after him. "I t'ink," he muttered, "I t'ink dat feller, he got the evil eye."

#### IV.

Wolf Fesden sat on a rickety chair, powerful hands fisted on knees, and stared at a sagging, dirty-sheeted bed, stared at broken-plastered walls that were so close together they choked him.

The room was no bigger than a cell at Lornmere and the smell of it was worse. A black shade was down over the window, day and night. The unshaded bulb that hung from the ceiling on a cord crusted with flyspecks was never out. The door was so thin it didn't stop sounds from the hall, whenever there were any, and its paint was raddled with cracks. It was kept locked always. All color except that of dirt had long ago faded out of the carpet and it was full of holes. It was strewn with newspapers that Fesden had crumpled angrily into balls, and smoothed out, and crumpled again angrily when even a second reading and a third had failed to reward him with the item he had to find.

The item that would tell him the new highway bridge over Frog Creek was finished at last. That the lights were out and the laborers gone.

His name was in a couple of those papers, his rogues'-gallery picture, under it a caption beginning, "Five Thousand Dollars Reward." Fesden's upper lip snarled away from his teeth, thinking of that. If Gimpy

Morgan— But no. Gimpy wouldn't turn him in for five grand, or for a hell of a lot more than that. The underworld has its own ways of handling a hide-out keeper who double-crossed one of his customers even if there wasn't altogether too much money in this business for him to kill it for the sake of any thinkable reward.

Look at what Fesden was paying Gimpy. Twenty-five dollars a day. Just for this lousy room, and the crummy grub the Dummy brought three times a day. He couldn't even get a bottle of liquor. A soused lamster might get noisy, and this house was a place of silence. Of whispers.

"Here's the rules," the one-legged hide-out keeper had told Fesden that first night, "and if you don't do what they say, you get thrown out of here, pronto. You check any heater or shiv you got with me. You stick in your room except when you got to go to the bathroom. When you got to do that, you first knock twice on your door, to make sure there ain't nobody else in the hall, and you knock once when you get back, and you don't go out in the hall if you hear anyone else give the two knocks till you hear the one knock that says all's clear. You don't want nobody to see you and nobody wants you to see them.

"You don't drink and you don't start no rumpus. When you get ready to go, you let me know and I'll get you out a way no cop can pick you up. Meantime, you hand me twenty-five bucks every morning, when I bring your breakfast." He'd only brought Fesden breakfast the first morning, after that the Dummy had started coming. "Anything else," Gimpy Morgan had finished laying down the law of the hide-out, "is extra."



Extra was right. Fifty cents for the *Morning Chronicle*. Fifty cents for the *Evening Star*. Twenty-six dollars a day Fesden had been paying out for eight days now. Good thing he'd put a big enough wad in the tin box he'd buried under the boulder in the thicket outside Lornmere, four years ago. He had enough to stay here a month, if he had to.

*If he had to stay here a month, he'd go nuts.* Cripes! A month in here was worse than a year in Lornmere. You had guys to talk to, up there at Lornmere. You had things to do. You didn't just sit alone in a smelly little room. You didn't hear footfalls outside your door and go to the door and listen to them, listen to the sounds of men you wanted to talk to and didn't dare, knowing that even if you took a chance on it they wouldn't dare talk to you.

Up at Lornmere you scoffed in a big mess hall with two thousand other guys. You didn't eat greasy chow off a rusty tray. You weren't alone all day and all night. You didn't wait all day for the Dummy to bring you your tray, not because you wanted the food on it, but because you would see a human face for a few minutes, even if it was a face with a mouth that hung open, drooling, a dirty face with no sense in it at all, an idiot face with empty gray eyes and dirt-crusted, never-combed black hair that didn't quite hide the puckered scar on its forehead.

Up at Lornmere you didn't snatch the morning paper out of hands with black-edged fingernails and search furiously through it and not find what you're looking for, and then start waiting endlessly for the Dummy to come back with the evening paper. You didn't pace up and down, up and down your cell at

Lornmere, your heels catching in the holes in the carpet, or sit like this on a rickety chair and stare at walls so close they choke you. You didn't listen, hour after hour, for the Dummy's shamle along the hall—

*There it was!*

Fesden jumped up and got to the door in a single long stride. He unlocked it and pulled it open, and the Dummy shuffled in, bent and dirty-skinned and vacuous-eyed, his idiot smile wet with saliva. Fesden slammed the door shut and grabbed the *Star*, his hands trembling as he spread it on the bed and leafed it over, page by page, his eyes burning as they read a headline and jumped to the next one.

The Dummy shambled on across the room, and put the tray on the paintless table against the wall next to the black-shaded window. He made little clucking noises with his useless tongue while he pawed paper napkins off the thick dishes.

Wolf Fesden's mouth was dry, suddenly. He snatched the rustling sheet up so the light would be better on it, and read the item over again, the two short paragraphs at the top of Page 11:

#### BRIDGE FINISHED IN RECORD TIME

Stone & Lambert, contractors for the new bridge that will carry Harding Boulevard over Frog Creek, announced today that the job had been completed six days before the deadline set by the highway commission. All that remains is the installation of the lighting system by the municipal electric department.

Formal opening of the new facility will be delayed till this is completed, but by tonight all of the contractor's equipment will have been removed and the site cleared—

A dish rattled and Fesden looked over the top of the newspaper sheet.



The Dummy was looking at the back of the newspaper and in the instant their eyes met, the gray ones weren't empty!

The veil of vacuity dropped over them at once and they slid away. The Dummy started scuttling toward the door. He seemed to be moving quicker than he ever did before. He seemed to be in an awful hurry.

Of course he was! He'd seen what page of the paper Fesden had been reading. He'd seen where the item was that had got him so excited. He was in a hurry to go point it out, in another paper just like this, to Gimpy Morgan. Gimpy Morgan had figured out why Fesden paid a buck a day for newspapers!

"Here you," Fesden yelled, and started after the Dummy, his long arm reaching for him. The Dummy's toe caught in a hole in the rug and it tripped him, and he squealed like a stepped-on pup as he went down.

He hit the floor and rolled, and Wolf Fesden was atop him, knee in his chest pinning him down.

"What's the hurry?" Fesden demanded, through tight lips. "What's your blasted hurry?" The Dummy made little mewling noises, his dirt-ingrained hands scrabbling to reach

Fesden's knee and to push it away. "What—"

The word caught in Fesden's throat. The Dummy's scraping fingers had torn his shirt and through the rent there was gleam of metal, gleam of a silvery badge pinned to the Dummy's undershirt. "Private Detective," Fesden read, embossed on the metal. And the end of a half circle of embossed letters, "—ance Co."

All of a sudden the room was very still. Fesden stared down at the badge and then his eyes moved to the Dummy's face, and it wasn't an idiot's face any more, and the gray eyes were wide with terror.

"A shamus, eh," Fesden lipiped. "A filthy insurance dick." His fingers curled and started moving, slowly, very slowly, toward the Dummy's straining neck. Slowly, but ready to clamp on any yell for help. "All right, wise guy, say your pray—" His right hand flashed sidewise and grabbed the Dummy's left hand, that was sliding out of a hole in his shirt, under the armpit, clutching a knife.

The Dummy squealed, and his thin body arched up, with unexpected strength, to throw Fesden off. Fesden struck at it with the knife that was somehow in his own

# ROMEOS



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hand, struck at the Dummy's breast and felt the blade slide in, to the hilt.

The meager form slumped, lay still.

"Lift them," a hoarse voice said, above Wolf Fesden. "Lift your mitts quick or you get lead in you!"

## V.

Wolf Fesden's head jerked around to the voice. A revolver, looking as big-muzzled as a cannon, snouted at him from the doorway and behind it was the dark-clothed, ungainly form of Gimpy Morgan. Fesden's hands went up over his head.

Morgan hitched in over the threshold, his artificial leg thumping the floor, pulled the door shut behind him. Between slitted, granular lids his tiny, bloodshot eyes looked down at the Dummy's still form, looked up again at Fesden's face.

"Nice," he grunted through thick, bluish lips. "Very nice. I thought I told you to check your shiv with me. I thought I told you there wasn't to be no rumpus here."

Fesden found his voice. "He was a shamus, Morgan. An insurance company dick, spotting me for some swag I copped before my last stretch. Look at that badge he's got pinned to his shirt."

"A dick," Morgan repeated huskily. "Holy— So he was." Under its three-day stubble of beard, his gross-featured gorilla face was taut-lined. "He sure put it over on me."

"I just tumbled to it," Fesden went on. "So I had to bump him." His elbows bent, starting to let his hands down. "I had to—"

"Keep 'em up!" Morgan ordered, his revolver jabbing forward. Fesden obeyed. "So you had to bump

him," Gimpy went on. "In here. You didn't think maybe you ought to tip *me* off an' let *me* attend to him, did you?"

"I . . . I—"

"You didn't think that his office knows he was in here, an' that when he don't show up they'll be after me wantin' to know what's happened to him. That don't make no difference to you. You're sittin' pretty. You slit a dick's heart and you scam . . . and you leave me holdin' the bag." Gimpy Morgan grinned, showing yellow, rotted tusks, but there was no grin in his little eyes. "So you figure. But me, I figure different."

"What—" Fesden whispered through dry lips. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that it's you is gonna take the rap for this, not me. See? I run a crummy flop house, maybe. Maybe I don't ask no questions from the guys I rent rooms to. But when some kill-crazy screwball slices the heart out of my porter, then I gotta play with the law."

"You . . . you're not going to turn me in," Fesden gasped. "Gimpy, you can't! You'll be marked lousy and—"

"The hell I will," the other snarled. "Nobody's gonna mark me lousy for sliding out from under a murder rap. I'll be plastered with a fine for running an unlicensed rooming house, maybe. Maybe I'll even draw a stretch for harboring guys that's wanted. But for no filthy twenty-five bucks a day am I takin' a chance on a kill rap. No, mister. That rap you take all by yourself. The murder rap. The hot squat."

The hot squat! The ugly, heavy-built chair in a grim bare room! The agonized body straining against straps! The tiny wisp of smoke



sputtering from under the helmet that covered its face!

Wolf Fesden pulled the edge of his hand across his eyes to wipe away the picture, lifted the hand again before Morgan could growl, "Get 'em up."

"Look," Fesden said. "Look, Gimpy. You just said you wouldn't take no chance on getting smeared with a kill rap for twenty-five bucks a day. But how about twenty-five grand? Would you take that chance for that?"

The left corner of Morgan's mouth twitched. "Quit your kid-din'. You ain't got it. You ain't got twenty-five hundred. I—"

"I've got it, Gimpy. I've got a hell of a lot more. Listen to me. I'll come clean. You know why this **pick** was after me? You know why he didn't turn me in for the killings up at Lornmere and be done with it? Because he was after the Ramsdell swag. Five hundred grand in diamonds and pearls and emeralds. I know where it's cached, Gimpy. I can put my mitts on the stuff as soon as it gets dark enough. It's a half a million worth, but it won't bring only about a hundred grand from the fences. Play with me, Gimpy, and I'll split that with you, twenty-five—seventy-five."

Morgan blinked. "The Ramsdell swag . . . I remember. Hey! You're not kidding me, are you?"

"May I be struck dead right here if I am."

"And you'll split— Nope. No twenty-five-seventy-five. Make it fifty-fifty and it's a go."

"Cripes—"

"Fifty-fifty or I turn you in."

"O. K. You take care of ditching this stiff and get me out of here, and after I fence the swag, I'll send you your—"

"Nix," Gimpy growled. "I'll

ditch the stiff all right, but I go along with you to pick up the loot, and we split it right off. I'll do my own fencing."

"Oke," Fesden gave in. "Have it your own way."

"It's a deal," Morgan growled. Then: "Get up and back to that chair and sit down in it."

"What—"

"Sit down there. I'm tyin' you to it till we're ready to get going. I'm not takin' no chances of your takin' a run-out powder on me."

There wasn't any use arguing further. Wolf Fesden sat down in the chair and put his arms around behind its back and Morgan lashed their wrists together with some wire he had in his pocket. Morgan put his gun away and lashed Fesden's ankles to the legs of the chair with some more wire. Then he lumbered over to the body on the floor, picked it up as if it had no more weight than a baby, and slung it over his shoulder.

He rapped twice on the door, waited a half minute, opened it. He turned in the doorway, showed yellow fangs in a meaningful grin, said:

"Ta-ta, feller. I'll be seein' you about midnight."

Gimpy Morgan lumbered out with that limp burden dangling over his shoulder. The door closed behind him. Wolf Fesden's lank jaws opened in a silent, sinister laugh.

The new highway bridge glimmered pallid in the darkness, but between its abutment and the north abutment of the railroad bridge it was so dark that Wolf Fesden could barely make out Gimpy Morgan's black bulk moving beside him. The only way he could be sure they were working their way along the bank of



Frog Creek was by the greasy lapping of its water and the odor of the oil that floated on its surface.

"How far are we going?" Gimpy growled.

"Just to the near leg of the railroad bridge," Fesden whispered. "We don't even have to go under it." He shifted to his other shoulder the coal shovel they'd brought along from the hideaway. "But we may have to do plenty of digging. That damn pier is pretty wide."

"For what's buried there I'd dig plenty," Gimpy answered, and started going faster.

Fesden let him get ahead. High concrete loomed over them, grim against the city's glow in the overcast sky. Wolf Fesden took a good grip on the handle of the shovel, lifted it to bring the cutting edge of the scoop down on the unguarded head bobbing just in front of him—

The shovel handle wrenched out of his grip, thudded to the ground as he whirled. A low voice said:

"Not so fast, Fesden, unless you want a bullet in your belly."

Light of a hand torch flared from behind and laid Wolf Fesden's shadow across the slender body of the man who'd said that. The shadow didn't conceal the glint of the automatic that snouted point-blank at Fesden, and there was no shadow on the man's face.

A blunt grim jaw. Eyes the gray of chilled steel. A puckered scar under black hair. *The Dummy! The dick he'd stabbed to death, not three hours ago!*

"No," John Porter said, "you didn't kill me. That was a stunt knife you twisted out of my hand, as I meant you to. Any pressure on its point and the blade slides back into the hilt."

"You . . . you," Fesden gibbered.

"You—" He couldn't get any more out.

"I knew you'd holed up in one of the regular crook hide-outs," the little detective went on genially. "The cops don't know them, but we insurance dicks do, because we often swing deals to recover stolen property through their keepers. I let word get around of what we were ready to pay for a tip-off to you, which was plenty, but even that wouldn't have gotten Morgan to talk if I hadn't promised him you wouldn't be nabbed in his dump, or anywhere near it. He knew he could trust me, and he worked with me.

"It was easy to figure out that you were watching the papers for something that would let you know it was safe to go after the Ramsdell stuff, so I waited till you would find it. When I saw that you had, tonight, I let you tumble to what I was and tricked you into thinking you'd killed me. Morgan was set to do the rest when he heard me squeal— Oh, Gimpy. That was swell acting."

"Who couldn't act," Morgan said, "when he's getting fifty grand for the job?" Chuckling, he drifted off into the night.

Fesden was manacled to a steel-reinforcing rod that came out of the north abutment of the railroad bridge over Frog Creek. John Porter was digging for the casket Evar Galt had buried there four years ago. But Wolf Fesden was not watching Porter. He was staring at the pale glimmer of the new bridge over which a road ran out of Sea City and ran north, always north, till it came to Lornmere Penitentiary. Till it came to the grim, gray granite walls within which stood a heavy-built chair, a chair wired for death.





# THE SECONDHAND MURDERS

by BEN CONLON

Red Carroll climbed in beside Dan Garrity, who was at the wheel of the police car.

"O. K., Dan. Hit it," Carroll said.

Garrity threw the car in gear, shot it up the street, turned into Seventh Avenue. At Fourteenth Street he

was doing sixty. There was a skim of ice on the pavement, and it would be just like Garrity, the dumb cluck, to pile them up, Carroll decided. Garrity had nothing to worry about, probably would always be in harness, always slipping by the easy



way. A game guy, though, a square guy; maybe a lucky guy, at that.

For Red Carroll was almost wishing that he were back in harness himself. And he *might* be, he thought with a sour little grin, if he didn't break this new one. He had made no progress on the homicide end of the West Side Traders' case; none at all. He had been prowling the Chelsea and Greenwich Village sections for weeks, trying to turn up some clue to the identity of the mob that had stuck up the West Side Traders' Bank, bumped a guard, and vanished with forty thousand dollars—mostly in new thousand-dollar bills.

The serial numbers of the currency were known, and the detectives working on the case occasionally got hold of one of the smaller bills that popped up somewhere in the five boroughs, or in Jersey, but so far there was absolutely no tie-up. Must have been a well-organized, well-led mob to have tackled as big a job as that and—

Carroll's hat blew off as Garrity turned west and hurtled the car into the face of a razor-blade wind tearing in from the North River. Only a quick left-hand stab kept the hat from going into the street. Carroll's peculiar-colored hair, between apricot and butterscotch, writhed like a wind-blown torch.

Brakes squealed as Garrity skidded up to the curb in front of a shabby four-story house.

"This must be the jernt," Garrity said. "One the crowd's in front of, I guess."

Carroll's nimble blue-gray eyes gleamed cynically. "Just probably, Garrity," he conceded. "Just probably."

He got out of the car. His quick glance raked the dingy structure—fire escapes in front, some windows

closed, some open. It was an old railroad-flat tenement converted into a litter of cheap furnished rooms and apartments occupied by a strange and ever-shifting array of tenants. No references, moral or financial, demanded in there; prompt payment of rent was the sole requisite.

Reynolds, homicide chief, had told Carroll that the dead man had been slugged and knifed—probably, Carroll thought, had bought into a drunken fight and been socked by some transient thug who had lammed it at once, some thug who didn't even have a police record here. Just the kind of case Reynolds would expect you to clear up in no time; and just the kind that would be hard to crack. No shooting. No ballistics to help out. No pattern to it. Like playing checkers with Garrity in the station house—you used your brains and maneuvered Garrity into moves he ought to make, then Garrity would pull a dumb, entirely illogical move that threw out your whole game.

Red walked up the crumbling steps, nodded to the officer there. The officer was busy keeping a good-sized crowd away, though the hour was 7 a. m. and the air was decidedly chilly. Red saw Jim Kelsey standing halfway down the ground-floor hallway. At Kelsey's feet was a body. Carroll looked down at it.

The dead man was young, probably in his late twenties. Carroll had seen things like this many times. And yet not like this. For the dead man had no suit on. He had underwear, socks, shoes, a shirt and collar and tie—and a hat; a light-colored fedora snap-brim with a cocky little feather in the band. But no coat; no vest; no trousers.

Kelsey had little to tell. Like Garrity, he was a good-looking young cop who would never get out



of harness and, like Garrity, he would miss a great many headaches as he moped peacefully through life.

"I was on my post about a block away," Kelsey said, "when the old babe that runs this place comes screamin' down the street and tells me she just stumbled over a dead man in the hallway. I came here on the double, found him like she said. He was dead. So I phoned the skipper. The old babe's in that room now"—he pointed—"with the folks that room here. She can give you the dope, I guess."

Kelsey seemed to shift the whole weight over with that information.

"Stay here and guard the body," Carroll ordered. "The skipper and the M. E. and the fingerprint men'll be along right away."

He walked into the room that Kelsey had indicated—a sort of sitting room.

A woman, scrawny, wrinkle-necked, with scraggly gray hair, was sitting on a sofa with two girls, one of them fairly good-looking. A pair of men sat facing them on the bench of an old-fashioned upright piano. Five other men lounged around in chairs. They had been talking, obviously, but they closed up as Carroll entered.

There was no need for telling who he was; folks in this section knew a detective when they saw one.

The gray-haired landlady—a Mrs. Hanely—told the story she had told Kelsey. She occupied a bedroom on the west side of the ground-floor hallway. Her kitchen was on the east side of the hallway. It was just after she had gotten up and put on kimono, dressing gown, and slippers that she started across the hall, tripped over the dead man.

"Who was he?" Carroll asked.

"His name was Valdez," Mrs. Hanely answered. "He'd lived here

for some time past—almost seven months."

Carroll nodded. Seven months was quite a period for anybody to live in a semitransient dump like this.

"And are all the folks who live here assembled in this room now?"

"Well, all but one—a Mr. Adams, that stays out all night once in a while. The policeman wanted me to round everybody up, he said. So I did, except for this Mr. Adams, of course."

Carroll was starting another question when the door opened and Captain Reynolds, homicide chief, came in with Lieutenant Roberts. Reynolds was a thin man, sharp, irritable, seemingly made out of whipcord and rawhide and shrapnel and steel scrapings. He had a clipped, speckled mustache that made his hard mouth look harder, eyes the color of gun metal.

"Well, who killed him, Carroll?" Reynolds snapped.

"I was just getting started on the questions, captain," Red said.

Reynolds shook his head in a mock gesture of hopelessness. A good sign when Reynolds did that. It was a form of flippancy—a sign that he was in fairly good humor, a sign that he regarded this case as just a work-out.

"Don't quite know what I'll do with you, Red," he said.

"You might sue me, captain," Red risked.

Reynolds came near to a smile; then he proceeded to take over the questioning—browbeating, cross-examining like a district attorney. At the end of five minutes, Mrs. Hanely was in tears.

"All I know is what I've told you already," she repeated in a hysterical undertone.

Reynolds swung to a dark-haired



young fellow who sat on the piano bench. "You're a Spaniard, too, ain't you? Just like the man who was murdered?"

"Cuban. Valdez, he also Cuban," the man answered.

Reynolds glared at him. "Well, same thing."

"Eet ees not thee same theeng," the young man insisted. "Spaniard born een Spain. Cuban born een Cuba."

The remark did not endear him to Reynolds. "You knew him, didn't you?" the captain asked accusingly. "Had a fight over a girl with him, didn't you?"

"Why you say that?" the Cuban wanted to know. "Valdez like thee girls, si. Me, I like thee girls, too. But we 'ave thee deeferent girls. We nevair fight. We nevair even—"

"There's Mr. Adams now!" Mrs. Hanely broke in. She pointed out the window. Her voice was excited, strident. "And he's got the same—"

She put her hand to her mouth.

Reynolds glowered at her. "He's got—what?"

The woman did not answer, but the Cuban who had been in a verbal tussle with Reynolds jumped up and ran to the window.

"That suit he wear!" the Cuban exclaimed. "That suit belong to my friend Valdez! Eet ees thee same one—thee blue suit with thee stripe!"

One of the other men in the room nodded emphatically. "No doubt about it!" he agreed. "I seen Valdez goin' out wearin' that suit about nine last night! And by the way," he added, "I never seen this guy Adams in a suit like this before. I've run into him lots o' times in the halls, and he always wore brown. I remember that definitely, and—"

Reynolds was out through the doorway like a college athlete and

as the newcomer entered the hallway had him by the arm. He yanked him into the sitting room.

"Wh-what's this?" Adams demanded.

"You know what it is!" Reynolds shot back. "You just liked the suit Valdez had, so you bumped him and took it, huh?"

"Killed Valdez?" the young fellow gasped. "I heard those folks outside saying someone's been killed, but—"

"But you wouldn't know who it was, huh?" Reynolds cut in. "Just an honest lad that wouldn't harm a soul, that it?"

Adams smiled, a little hopelessly. "Well, as a matter of fact, that's just about it."

While Reynolds browbeat and frisked him, Red Carroll studied the newcomer. Slender, reasonably tall, well groomed, wore clothes well. Might be a good dancer. Crispy, light hair; mild eyes. Didn't look like a killer, which was no sign, these days. They used to look like thugs, now they had slicked-back hair and maybe got mud packs and manicures.

"If I'd killed Valdez, if I'd taken his suit," Adams spoke up, "would I come back here now, and in his suit, too?"

"You might," Reynolds snapped. "Where you been all night?"

"Been in Yonkers," was the reply. "My wife has a job in a bank there, has a little apartment there. I don't want her to live in a . . . a place like this and face that trip every day. But I got a cheap room here, because it's close to my work. I left her place early this morning, wanted to get back here to shave and brush up some before going to the store. I tell you I have an air-tight alibi."

"Have, huh?" Reynolds taunted.



"Couldn't fix an alibi with the wife, sneak back here and kill Valdez, then do a Houdini and come back here now, innocent-looking, could you? What work you talking about? What store?"

"The Grand Outlet Store, over on Sixth Avenue. I sell furniture. And, boss, I wish you'd let me brush up and get to work."

"You won't be going to work," Reynolds said coldly. "If you want to come through now, save me a lot of time, just tell the truth. Maybe it was done in hot blood. A fight, huh? O. K. If you killed him before you thought, if you didn't mean it, you got a good chance. The judge won't even throw the book at you. But if you want to be tough, Adams—well, you'll be plenty tender for that electric skillet up the river. Where you claim you got that suit you're wearing now?"

Amazement, incredulity, fear—all were now blending in the mild eyes of Adams.

"Why, I bought this suit last night. I'd been a little seedy-looking, I'm afraid; wanted to surprise the wife. Bought it at Old Sam's, over on Seventh Avenue. It's a . . . a secondhand suit," Adams added, flushing slightly, "and I paid eight dollars for it."

Reynolds swung back to the Cuban and the man next to him. "And you fellows saw Valdez walking out of here in a suit just like this last night?"

They had, they reassured the captain. They were not certain about the time—it might have been closer to ten o'clock—but they were absolutely sure about the suit.

"You have the landlady take you to Valdéz's room, Carroll," Reynolds ordered. "See if he has a pencil-stripe blue suit there."

Carroll was guided to the ground-

floor rear room, which Mrs. Hanely unlocked for him. In a little clothespress, Carroll saw a topcoat and an overcoat on a form; also a sweater and three suits, but none of the suits was anything like a pencil-stripe. He returned along the hallway, saw through the front door that the reporters and news photogs were arriving.

"No suit like a pencil-stripe, was there, Carroll?" Reynolds yelled.

Red shook his head. "No, captain. He was a hot dresser—had a loud overcoat and a topcoat, and three suits. But no pencil-stripe."

Reynolds nodded affably. "O. K., I guess this tears it, Carroll." He peered out through the window. "Here comes the fingerprint boys and the M. E. and those news hounds. You slip out while the slipping's good. Roberts'll take over here. Take this Adams over to Old Sam's; Garrity'll run you over in the car. Adams won't be able to make his story stick. Then bring him in, and we'll book him on a murder charge."

Red Carroll wasn't nearly so hopeful himself. But as soon as you hinted at an alibi for not breaking a case, or even let on that you thought a job was doubtful or tough, Reynolds tabbed you as a phony. Under Reynolds you just had to swallow disappointment, plug along, take every bad break, make no defense, no argument. Reynolds was hard, had come up the hard way, wanted cases cleared up at once; he was headed for a deputy inspectorship and didn't intend to have any ragged record slow up the expected advancement.

"O. K., captain," Red said.

Snappy suits—"as good as new"—were suspended outside of the open door of Old Sam's, and there was an



array of overcoats and topcoats in the rather dusty windows.

Carroll and Garrity, their prisoner between them, walked into the narrow shop. On either side were open cabinets in which suits of various sizes and patterns were suspended on hangers. A couple of long tables occupied the center of the room, and in the rear there was a curtained doorway.

Red Carroll noticed an atrocity of a suit on one of the hangers—a suit that was a warm terra-cotta tone broken up by small squares of faint yellow. "I'd like that one for off duty. A little conservative, though, eh, Dan?"

Garrity stared. "Consoyvative? That? Why, I'd say it was—"

"Skip it," Red said. "Hi, Sam!"

There was no answer. Red was

about to growl out another peremptory summons when he reached the back of the store, caught a profile glance at the cash register. The drawer was open—and completely empty!

Red's eyes hardened. "Say, take a gander at that damper, will you? Not a penny, and—"

With his Police Positive in his right fist he plowed toward the curtained door at the rear and yanked the drapery aside—and froze on the threshold of the hidden room. He stood there, the muscles of his strong jaws tightening, his left fist clinched. Still warm— Slugged and stabbed—

Garrity and Adams, looking over Red's shoulder, gasped. Adams went very pale.

"Good night!" Garrity said. "An-

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other kill dumped right into our laps! The skipper'll like this!"

"Yeah," Red Carroll said. He picked up the phone, dialed headquarters, addressed Garrity over his shoulder. "Dan, take this Adams over to the precinct station and hold him till I get in touch."

"What'll I book him for?" Garrity wanted to know.

"Oh, piracy," Red growled. "Or barratry, or the Cleveland torso murders, or—" He jiggled the hook furiously. "What the matter with this—"

"Book him on . . . what?" Garrity asked.

"Skip it, Dan. Make it anything. And tell the skipper, incidentally, that when I go back pounding a beat, I'd like to get on some nice goat range in Canarsie, and—Hello! Hello! Headquarters? . . . Carroll speaking. . . . No! Carroll! Carroll! That's three Carrolls!"

He put in the alarm. He knew the skipper would blow his top on this one—and Valdez's murder not solved.

After the cop on the beat took over until the men came from headquarters, Red Carroll slipped out into Seventh Avenue. He had some things to do. Somehow he didn't want to meet Captain Reynolds right now.

He made calls at the stores on either side of Old Sam's. One had just that minute opened up for the day, and the clerk going on duty had seen no one at all enter Old Sam's. The man in the store at the other side of Sam's—also an old-clothes store—had been open since seven thirty, but had seen nothing irregular in the neighborhood. Neither had the hardware man directly across the street, nor had the counter man or any of the breakfast customers in

the nearby drugstore. But a shoe-shine boy a few feet to the north of Old Sam's had seen something that made Red Carroll do some keen thinking.

The shoe-shine boy had taken up his stand there about twenty minutes to eight. Men on the way to offices often stopped and got shoe shines as early as this.

He had seen a man trying the door of Old Sam's about a quarter of eight. No, it wasn't Old Sam; he knew Old Sam. This was a younger guy, and when the guy found the door locked, he went away and came back again in about five minutes and found Old Sam's still not open.

The shoe-shine boy didn't know whether the guy went away this time or not—he caught a customer just then—but he remembered that just as he was finishing the shine he saw the same guy going into the store with Old Sam.

"What kind of a looking guy?" Red asked.

The boy shrugged his shoulders. "I wasn't lookin' at him much. I was lookin' fer cust'mers, an—"

"As big as I am, say?"

"Naw. Not near."

"Light or dark?"

The boy thought for a pair of seconds. "Kind o' d-dark, I guess. Y'see, I wasn't lookin' at him much, I was lookin'—"

"For customers," Red cut in. "You might be a cop some day, kid, but you'll never get out of harness."

He turned back toward the store. He was looking for a man "not near" so big as himself, of a complexion that—the boy guessed—was "kind o' dark." There were thousands of men answering that description in New York City.

Back at the store, Red looked over the cash register with the open drawer again; also looked over the



body of Old Sam again. Three or four pockets of Old Sam were turned inside out.

"Robbery, huh?" the cop on the beat said.

Red nodded, half-heartedly. "Yeah . . . maybe."

And a big maybe, he was thinking. The shoe-shine boy had seen the man try Old Sam's door about a quarter of eight; had seen him go away and try again in five minutes or so. A stick-up? Red Carroll couldn't bring himself to believe it. Why Old Sam's store, particularly? Why try three times to get into Old Sam's store when there was another store a few feet away, *a store that was already open*? Anyhow, no stick-up guy would pull a job on a second-hand clothes store just at opening time. Furthermore, the robbery set-up inside was somehow too obvious, too stagy—the cash-register drawer left open, every last penny taken, Old Sam's pockets turned inside out. A plant. A phony, to cover up something bigger.

Adams? That guy was in a spot. He claimed he had bought his pencil-stripe blue suit at Old Sam's. And now Old Sam, the only man who could back up his claim—was dead—murdered. Yet Adams was not "kind o' dark." And would Adams, if he had even been an accomplice in the bumping of Old Sam, be sap enough to claim Old Sam as an alibi and thus lead the police right to his victim? Yet Red Carroll couldn't clear his mind of the thought that Old Sam's death might be tied up in some way with the Valdez kill.

Why hadn't the killer—if he had really been on a mere stick-up job—held Old Sam in the windowless back room, away from the phone, grabbed the contents of the cash register, and scammed? No necessity for a killing here. Only one

logical reason. Old Sam *knew* the killer, Old Sam's mouth had to be shut for keeps. Why?

Red went into the back room, started to rummage through the battered old desk. Certainly anyone as keen and businesslike as Old Sam would have kept some records of purchases and sales.

He found the book in the right-side lower drawer—a big, heavy ledger with a mottled cover. His sharp glance raked over the final entry, made the previous day:

No. 657. Oct. 16. Blue penc. stripe, 3-piece; Mfr., H. & M.; buying price, \$5; asking price, \$10; selling price, \$3.

Here was something, anyhow—an entry in Sam's own writing that substantiated every word of Adams' claim; his claim that he had bought the blue pencil-stripe suit at Sam's the day before and paid eight dollars for it.

Red continued to leaf through the book, looking over the entries for a period of months. Sort of screwy, he admitted. No names, of course; no addresses. Old-clothes men didn't make such entries, as pawnbrokers and buyers of old gold did; and anyhow, if there had been names and addresses, they'd be phonies in case of any crooked deals.

The entries—suit numbers, dates of purchase, descriptions, manufacturers' names, buying prices, asking prices, and selling prices—were made in a fairly legible hand, with a very hard lead pencil; the writing was difficult to decipher in spots, it was so pale.

The detective emitted a gasp of surprise as he flipped over a page and saw that one of the leaves of the book had been ripped out. The missing entries evidently covered part of the purchases for the month of July, that year. Sam would never have



ripped out that page; Sam had taken pains to have all the records at hand. The killer! Fifty to one, *he* had ripped out that page! That page told something—something the killer didn't want known! The killer had ripped out that telltale leaf rather than carry along a big, heavy, conspicuous ledger.

Red tucked the ledger under his arm. "I'll be scrambling for a while," he told the cop on duty. "I'm not too keen on meeting the skipper right now. Seein' yuh."

He went out, grabbed a cab, rode a few blocks down Seventh Avenue and over to Sixth. He got out, paid the driver, and went into an optical-goods store.

"Hi ya, Irving," he greeted the proprietor. "Just want to borrow one of your strongest magnifying glasses. I'll use it here."

Irving shrugged his shoulders and grinned good-naturedly. "I should make a big profit on guys like you, Red," he said. "Going Sherlock Holmes on me, eh?"

Red grinned back sheepishly. "Yeah. I forgot my drop-stem pipe and the fore-and-aft cap."

He was still grinning as he took the magnifying glass and retired to a bench in the repair room where mechanics did precision work under strong lights. Often he had snickered at screen sleuths who performed wonders with magnifying glasses; all that was specialized police lab work these days. But this instance was an exception.

One glance through the powerful glass told him that his hunch had been correct—that the entries made on the ripped-out leaf of the ledger with a sharp, very hard lead had cut faint impressions in the paper of the next leaf.

It was painstaking, irritating work. But with the aid of the glass

Red finally reproduced the missing record. And three entries, grouped together, stuck out like a wart on the tip of a prominent nose:

No. 419. July 28. Chk. 3-piece; Mfr., Klasskraft; buying price, \$7; asking price, \$12; selling price, \$10.

No. 420. July 28. Chk. 2-piece; Mfr., Klasskraft; buying price, \$5; asking price, \$11; selling price \$8.

No. 421. July 28. Chk. 3-piece; Mfr., Klasskraft; buying price, \$4; asking price, \$11; selling price—

There was no selling-price figure after the third entry.

Obviously, the three suits sold to Sam on the same date had been brought in by the same person—someone who went in for Klasskraft checks in a big way. And No. 421 was not sold as yet; it must still be among Old Sam's stock.

Red Carroll was jubilant. Maybe a good break of some kind at last, after more than his share of bad ones. The entry of three checked suits on the same date, made by the same clothing manufacturer, was the only clue from the ripped-out leaf that might be expected to add up to something. And possibly that unsold checked Klasskraft suit would have a dry cleaner's stencil or tag on the lining, and most certainly it would bear the label of the store where it had been purchased.

With his pulses beating lustily, Red taxied back to Old Sam's. Captain Reynolds, Red was glad to learn, had come and gone; but after Red heard from the fingerprint men what Reynolds had said, he wondered why the air in the store didn't still have a bluish tinge to it. Ordinarily a clean-spoken man, Reynolds could swear picturesquely and expressively when he was good and sore.



"The skipper wanted to know," one of the fingerprint men told Red, "where . . . well, where the hell you were, is the way he expressed it. And he'll blow his top when we make the report; no prints worth a damn, except those of Old Sam himself. Tough baby, this case."

"Tough is right," Red agreed.

He went to work, pawing over dozens of suits, finally located the gaudy checked suit marked No. 421. Though the original "asking price" had been \$11.00, Old Sam had later marked it down to \$6.00, and finally to \$4.00—the price he had actually paid for it. And Red Carroll, who knew clothes, realized why Sam had been stuck with it: the suit was of a type in style two, perhaps as much three, years before; a vogue that had been "hot" with certain snappy dressers for a brief period and had then gone out abruptly. It had what was known as a bellow back—it had a strip of cloth running diagonally from each shoulder to the edge of the pinchback belt. It also had side vents, which had not been worn for well over a year, and other tricky gewgaws such as would be out of place on anything but the loudest sport coats. And the vest and trousers were shirred and pleated.

And Old Sam, ironically enough, had stymied the very man who might solve his murder. For a new strip of lining—obviously replacing an old strip with a dry cleaner's stencil mark on it—had been sewed into the back of the coat; and although Old Sam's entry had shown that the manufacturer was Klasskraft, the canny clothes dealer had replaced this label—and the name of the store where the suit had actually been bought—with the label of a high-class tailor.

"Dead end!" the detective rasped. Klasskraft Clothes were for sale at

numberless clothing and haberdashery shops throughout the country.

It was a bitter, disappointed Red Carroll who took the suit over to the better lighted space near the window. But then his heart started to trip-hammer wildly.

For this loud checked suit that was at least two years old—which had been that age, in fact, before the seller stuck Old Sam with it, according to the purchase date entered in the ledger—was practically brand-new! *That is, it could not have been worn within a couple of years!* The special parts where suits began to show wear—the earliest—the seams, the buttonholes, the pockets, and particularly the handkerchief pocket—were in perfect condition. The lining, except for the deftly sewed-in strip, was new and clean. The sleeve edges and trousers cuffs showed no wear at all. Why?

The answer fairly hurtled through Red Carroll's brain. "Why, the little rat always went in for loud checks!" he muttered. "But he couldn't wear this one while he was in stir; and when he came out of stir, he was broke and had to sell 'em and get some dough. And he lived near here—Old Sam's 'u'd be the logical place to sell 'em. But, damn it, I thought he was still in stir."

He tossed the suit back, ran out the doorway, crossed to the drug-store across the street and dialed a number in a telephone booth.

"Hello? Probation officer's? . . . This is Detective Carroll, headquarters. Let me talk to Mr. Kelly. . . . Put him on the wire. . . . Hello? Larry? . . . Larry, this is Red Carroll. You recall that little heel—Punk Harter—that I sent up for a cigar-store heist two years ago? He got a minimum of two years, didn't he? And—"



"Was in to report to me about a week ago," the answer came back. "Must have a drag somewhere. Paroled last July."

"Where's he living?" Red asked. He could hear his own heart thumping above the pulsing of the telephone wire.

He jotted down the address—rooming house on Bank Street—but when he went there, wasn't a bit surprised to learn that Punk Harder had given up his room there days before.

Red Carroll walked over to McQuade's Place on Eighth Avenue. McQuade himself had taken the early trick that morning, and was behind the bar, polishing glasses.

"A touch o' the Burke's, Mac," Red said.

He kindled up a fag while McQuade poured out the Irish whiskey. McQuade took a little trickle for himself. It wasn't very often that his old friend Red Carroll dropped in these days.

"On a job?" McQuade asked.

"Oh, sort of," Red answered. "Say, Mac," he said casually, "seen anything lately of Tom Devery's kid—Katie, wasn't it?—that Punk Harter used to bang around with?"

McQuade grimaced. "I've seen as much as I want to see av the likes av her," he answered. He had hit the bottle again, and his slight brogue broadened. "I tooled her an' Harter out av here not more than this day week. It's a good thing her father, ol' Tim, ain't livin', to be havin' the heart av him broke."

"Yep, I guess it is," Red agreed. Old Tim Devery, who had pounded a West Side beat for years, had been shot dead while breaking up a heist in an Eighth Avenue bar.

Red let McQuade do the talking—and McQuade did. The café proprietor sniffed intolerantly. "Huh!

A manicure she says she is. A manicure!" The way he said it indicated that she might be a combination of a hammer murderess, an incendiary, and the worst woman in Paris. "Dyed the hair av her to the color av that." He pointed a spatulate finger at the glass of yellow whiskey. "And now she's changed her name to . . . to Greta de Vere!" McQuade put a hand on his broad hip. "Greta de Vere! She's turned out a phony all the way through. An' she from wan av the best families on the West Side. Huh! She's got a little place around the corner—"

"I wanted to see her a minute," Red cut in.

He got the address of the apartment house the girl lived in, scrunched out his cigarette, left McQuade to his indignation. The heat was on for Punk Harder, and he might possibly get some unconscious tip-off from the girl friend.

He found the place, smiled a bit oddly at the name plate—Greta de Vere—rang the bell, and waited. There was no response. He rang again, holding the button down for a full half minute. But the buzzer failed to click. Yet the hour was early for Greta de Vere—nee Katie Devery—to be up.

A peremptory ring on another bell brought the janitor out, and a glance at Carroll's badge roweled him into action.

The janitor got the apartment door open. "That's all," Carroll told him, and with drawn gun swung in the door. After one glance at the inside of the disordered room he slipped into it and closed the door softly behind him. Even the eyes of Carroll reflected horror at the sight of the girl who lay crumpled on the soiled sheets of the studio bed.

The girl's face was badly disfigured. Her body, from which most



of the clothes had been torn, was a mass of livid bruises.

"I'll say it's a good thing," Carroll muttered, "that her old man's not alive!"

Rather tenderly, he picked up a blackened arm and felt for a pulse. No throb within that body. Dead.

Red Carroll's eyes quested about the room, noted the cheap overturned furniture, the squalidness that lay beneath a thin and rather smart-Aleck bohemian veneer, and then fastened on something that had been tossed carelessly into one corner of the room. With an almost hawklike speed he swooped down on the remains of a blue suit with white pencil stripes—a suit that had been cut into many pieces.

There was a telephone on a little stand—a taboret that somehow had remained upright during the fury of the battle that had taken place in the room. Carroll pounced on it, got headquarters. He felt almost silly reporting the third death. He was glad Captain Reynolds was not back yet, and finished up with: "Don't let Adams—the guy with the pencil-stripe suit—get away. We'll need him. But we've just got to get Harter."

"You've got Harter right now, wise guy," the voice behind him said, as Carroll cradled the phone. "So what? What you doin' with him? What? Huh?"

Carroll stood still. It was the best thing—the only thing—to do; against the back of his neck he felt the cold muzzle of a gun. Inwardly he cursed himself for ever turning his back to that outside door.

A hand wrenched his Police Positive from his holster. "Turn around, copper, and see what you're goin' to get," Punk Harter ordered. "You're goin' to get what any cop gets that tries to take me in."

Carroll turned around. With a fair simulation of placid concern, he regarded the swarthy little heel who was holding a gun on him.

"Hi ya, Punk," he said.

Punk Harter laughed acidly. "Yeah. 'Hi ya, Punk.' You don't like me any more'n I like you—which ain't any. Gettin' to be friendly, or somethin'? Goin' yella on me?"

"No," Carroll said. "You had your nerve to come here, Punk. Didn't you figure that anyone would connect you with the girl?"

Punk Harter seemed to feel pretty good. "Sure I figured it. So what? I didn't give a damn, anyhow; I was lammin' it. I came to say good-by to her, if you want to know. I didn't know she was . . . dead. I beat her up . . . sure. I ain't makin' any apologies to you . . . but I didn't mean to . . . kill her."

"You just meant to rebuke her gently. That it, Punk?" Red Carroll said. "You always did have nice ways with women."

"She had it comin'—plenty," Harter rasped. "You've always thought I was just a heel, Carroll, but you don't know that I—"

"I still think you're a heel," Carroll cut it. "If you weren't a cheap little screwball, you'd know damned well you couldn't get away with—"

The doorbell rang. Carroll had been ready to make his bid anyhow. The unexpected summons gave him a slight break. Harter tensed. In that brittle instant, Carroll dived—low. Somewhere above him a gun thundered.

Carroll rolled sideways, tossed Harter away from him, put the small-time gangster on his back. Harter's gun came up again. Carroll's hand reached for a vase; in one single, follow-through movement he had brought it down on



Harter. There was a roar in the little room, and Carroll felt himself violently spun around. He lashed out with his foot, got Harter in the chin. The next shot missed him, for the gun was loose in Harter's hand when the shoe caught him in the face.

Harter groped for the gun, almost had it when Red Carroll brought a chair down on his head. Harter went cold, collapsed in a motionless heap.

The doorbell rang again, but before Carroll looked for the buzzer, he snapped handcuffs on Harter. Then he picked up Harter's gun and his own, pocketed both of them. He felt a wound throbbing in his shoulder, but since it wasn't throwing him, he walked over to the buzzer and pressed it.

Light footsteps pattered up the stairs, and just outside the door a girlish voice called:

"Still sleeping, Greta? I thought I heard—"

Carroll opened the door, saw the janitor and several tenants on landings. But he let the girl in and closed the door.

The girl was not much more than a child. Maybe sixteen. Possibly seventeen or a young-looking eighteen. The girl's eyes widened as she saw the handcuffed form of Punk Harter; then her right hand flew to her mouth as she looked toward the bed.

"Now, listen," Carroll said. He showed his badge. "Don't get too excited. You can go in a minute or so. All I want to know is this: You seem to have been a friend of Greta's." He picked up the remnants of the suit and showed them to the girl. "Did you ever see this suit before?"

The girl was still scary-eyed. She seemed afraid of the thing on the

bed, but was also afraid of the law. "Why, yes. It was, I think, one of Punk Harter's . . . that he kept here . . . with Greta," she said unevenly. "But Greta . . . she wanted some money . . . for gin . . . yesterday morning . . . Punk hadn't been here for days . . . and she took it out and sold it—"

"To Old Sam?" Carroll helped out.

"Yes, that secondhand store over on Seventh—"

"That's all I want to know, sister," Carroll cut in softly. "Now, I don't even want to know your name, but I want to advise you to go and keep away from things . . . like this. Go ahead, and—"

A uniformed policeman shoved his way in. Red Carroll felt wobbly.

"Hello, Mike," he said, swaying. "Call up Captain Reynolds—phone's right over there—and tell him to hold that fellow Adams. Then take this little heel, Punk Harter, in and book him for murder. Then call a doctor for me—"

It was about an hour and twenty minutes before Red Carroll, his shoulder wound properly dressed, was back at headquarters with Captain Reynolds and had Adams brought up to him.

Adams was defiant now. "You have no reason to hold me," he said heatedly. "I had nothing to do with Valdez's death. I have no money for a lawyer, but I tell you I bought this pencil-stripe blue suit at Old Sam's, and paid eight bucks for it, and—"

"And you bought a bargain, too, boy," Red Carroll told him. "But you didn't even know it."

He got up, slipped Adams out of his coat. With a razor blade he made a slit in the lining, near the cuff. He was following the pattern of the slashes made in the pencil-



stripe blue suit he had seen at Greta de Vere's. From the sleeve he pulled a carefully folded thousand-dollar bill. From the other sleeve he pulled another.

"Well, that starts it, captain," he said to Reynolds. "The coat'll be loaded with these little keepsakes. So will the vest be, and probably the waistband and the cuffs of the trousers. You know, captain—the West Side Traders' dough. We never figured on a cheap little heel like Punk Harter heading in on a job like that, did we? But here's the answer."

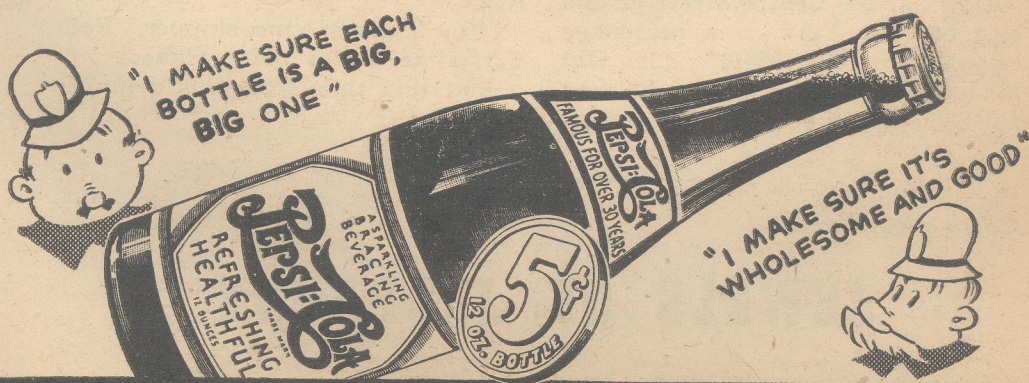
Captain Reynolds—quite as flabbergasted as young Adams—swore eloquently. "But I still can't see just how—"

"Listen, captain," Carroll said. "It's simple as hell. Punk Harter and some other heels had a big idea and they got up their nerve and cracked the West Side Traders'. Who the other guys are—well, we'll know as soon as we sweat Harter. He'd squawk against his own brother. So the West Side Traders' case is cracked."

"Small-timers like those guys wouldn't know what to do with a take of big hot bills like these," he went on. "But Punk, being a wise guy, gets some crooked tailor to sew

most of his in a lining of an old suit, figuring that'd be the last place anybody'd look for it. He was right, too. He kept his suit in his dame's closet—without telling her what was in it, of course. He changed to another suit—always was a neat little rat—and went away three or four days, probably with some hot bill to pass in a night spot in Philly, or maybe even Chi, or discount for smaller bills with some mob he knew out of town. The dame runs short of money and gin at the same time. So what does she do? Why, she picks out an old suit of Punk's—this blue pencil-stripe—and takes it over to Old Sam's and sells it.

"Punk gets home that evening—last night—and finds out about it and raises hell and goes over to Old Sam's to get it back. This Adams guy has bought it and taken it home in the meantime. Old Sam knows where Adams lives—you recall Adams saying he'd bought suits there before—and describes Adams as a well-set-up young fellow, probably tells Punk he don't know why an old suit should be so important, and suggests Punk go and get it for himself if he wants it that bad. Punk does just that, hangs around and sees another pencil-stripe blue suit going in the rooming-house door late that





night, slugs the wearer, steals the suit, knifes Valdez to shut his mouth, and lams it.

"He gets home early in the morning, cuts it open expecting to see the grands roll out, but there's no grands there, for it's another pencil-stripe blue suit. First thing he does is beat up that poor dame. Then he figures that Old Sam double-crossed him somehow—maybe took the dough and sewed up the seams again—or anyhow, that Sam, since he knows the set-up now, has to be silenced for good. So he goes to see Sam first thing Sam opens up, and kills him. Then, not knowing the dame died from the beating, he—"

"He walks into your arms, and you were man enough to take him, Red!" Reynolds said jubilantly. "It means we've cracked every angle of this—"

The switchboard operator came running in. It meant someone special on the phone for Reynolds. Usually when Reynolds answered a phone, he never even said, "Hello." He always knew who was calling, it seemed, and started out with "You pick up that guy, Carroll?" or something like that. But now his attitude was different. So different. Carroll had heard that breathless whisper as to who was on the wire: "The Old Man."

*"The Old Man!"*

Down at 240 Centre Street, in the city of New York, is a personage called "The Old Man." The Old Man may really be old, or he may not be so old at all, but he is always

The Old Man. He may not have the most important job in the United States and its island possessions, but try to tell that to any one of New York City's eighteen thousand five hundred and fourteen cops.

Reynolds was eager, a little fidgety. "Yes, commissioner. . . . Yes, sir. Captain Reynolds. . . . Yes, sir, I realize things happened pretty fast, commissioner. But we've cracked the whole business, I'm glad to report. We have the murderer of Valdez, and of the secondhand-clothes man, and that Devery—that De Vere—girl. And we've cracked the West Side Traders' case, too. Have some of the money now, and we'll have the rest within hours. . . . Sir? . . . Why, investigation by Detective William Carroll. . . . Well, third-class, sir. . . . What's that, commissioner? . . . Yes, sir. Two thirty, sir."

Captain Reynolds replaced the receiver and wiped a little trickle of perspiration from his forehead. He didn't slam up the receiver as he usually did, he hung it up.

"He wants the pair of us down at 240, Red!" he gasped. "Half past two this afternoon. Now, get out of here and get a shave. You look like hell. Scram! Want to be a third-class dick all your life? I don't know what I'll do with you, Red!"

"You might sue me, skipper," Red Carroll told him. He grinned.

And this time Reynolds grinned back.

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Coming Next Month—

## JEWELS OF JEOPARDY

A Mystery Novel by Anthony Rud





## ONLY HUMAN

by H. G. MERZ

Patrolman Dan Walden impatiently tapped his feet upon the cobblestones at the mouth of the long, narrow alley. This was his post; he had been ordered not to move from the spot unless—or until—Lippy Layden came into sight.

Dan looked at his watch and his heavy shoulders tensed expectantly. In just a few more minutes the raiding squad would pile into the tenement at the other end. That is, they

would enter by the front, depending upon the men who had been posted strategically to prevent escape either via the roof or through the alley at the rear.

Dan's eyes, gray and wide-awake, had already examined the possible avenues of flight which converged upon him. There were the windows, from any one of which Lippy might drop—barring of course those whose height would make such an attempt



suicidal—and there was that small locked door—Dan had already tried it—which opened directly, beside two garbage cans, onto the cobblestoned alley itself.

A young woman, one flight up, opened a window and looked out. She was blond and cheaply pretty and Dan eyed her interestedly so that he might ascertain by her manner, if he could, whether or not she was gauging a possible road of escape.

At the distance, she fitted a description of a certain Eve Porter, who had been trailed to that house and who was known to be Lippy Layden's girl friend. But her glance was casual—if she had been alarmed by the sight of police in the front and was seeking an unguarded way out, she gave no sign—and, after a moment, she withdrew, leaving the window open.

As the moments passed, Dan became more expectant and his jaw tightened grimly. Stopping Lippy would be no cinch. He was wanted for murder—not for one killing, but for three—and, as the evidence was conclusive, he was facing the chair. If Lippy tried to escape—and he undoubtedly would—it would be with a gun in his hand and with the animal desperation of the beast who has nothing to lose because death is inevitable.

As Dan noted that the raid would start in exactly one minute, the small door opened—apparently it had been locked inside—and a girl, carrying a bucket, stepped out. She was as blond as the girl in the window had been, pretty in the same cheap way, and, if anything, slightly younger. She emptied the bucket into a garbage can, re-entered the doorway and had half closed the small door behind her—when she screamed!

Dan raced to the door, gun drawn. In his mind was the fear that Lippy, alarmed and about to shoot his way out, had seized the girl to use her as a shield. Dan rushed through the half-closed door and halted as if snapped shut behind him, leaving him in a sudden dark. Then he felt a pair of soft, young arms—the girl's arms—as they were flung about his neck. He heard her scream again.

He sought to free himself gently, but she clung tightly.

"I'm afraid! I'm afraid!" she shrieked aloud, almost in his ear.

Dan was not fooled. He knew it was a trick, he realized that the scream had been a ruse to get him out of the alley. With the girl clinging to his neck, he tried to back out through the door. But the lock had snapped, compelling him to make an awkward turn to open it while the girl still fought to detain him.

He halted momentarily, instinctively starting a short hook to her jaw, but he remembered that she was a woman, and, after that, the blow was impossible, Dan just not being built that way.

The girl was Eve Porter, her identity being self-evident for, gripped by the madness of an unworthy love, she was struggling to save her sweetheart with a courage worthy of a better cause.

Seeking to break her restraining embrace, on impulse Dan dropped his fingers to her ribs. She shrieked, then laughed, and, laughing, flung her arms wide, escaping his fingers and permitting him, too, to escape.

Dan swiftly stepped from the door and gave himself room enough to open it. As he emerged, he saw a man—Lippy Layden—flee out of the alley.

At top speed he pursued, rounding the alley corner just in time to see Lippy turn the corner at the end



of the block. When he reached that second corner, the fugitive had made good his escape, being no longer in sight. In the distance there were several rapidly moving cars and it was not hard to guess that Lippy had gone off in one of them.

Inspector Corbett was not inclined to listen when Dan attempted to explain. Lippy Layden had escaped, the murderous killer was still at large, and that was a fact which all the explanations in the world could not eliminate. And, to make matters worse, the girl had also escaped, fleeing while Dan had been engaged in his vain pursuit.

"When the girl screamed, inspector," Dan tried again, "I thought perhaps Layden had seized her in that hallway and so I ran to protect her."

"You thought!" the inspector said bitterly. "Who told you to think? Your orders were to cover that alley and, if you had obeyed your orders, Layden would now be dead or in a cell. You've admitted noticing a blond girl look out of a window—Eve Taylor's older sister, as we know now—but you failed to put one and one together, when even a blind man would have seen they were up to some trick."

"But, inspector—" Dan protested.

"I know, I know!" Corbett interrupted. "It was a girl—and she screamed—and you ran to protect her—and—well, I suppose it was the human thing to do. But I do wish you hadn't let her get away."

Dan also wished that he hadn't let her get away. But he knew, as well, that idle wishes were more than futile. Meanwhile, he was greatly concerned with his own fate and the tone of the inspector's voice had given him reason to hope.

"Then . . . then I'm not suspended?" he asked.

Inspector Corbett shook his head. "How can I suspend you, man?" he demanded. "According to regulations, you were absolutely wrong, of course, but according to every code of decency, you were equally right. I can't suspend you for what I might have done myself in a similar situation."

Dan was grateful. He had hoped for leniency, but complete exoneration exceeded his every expectation. And put him, he felt, under a solemn obligation. He prayed with silent fervor for an opportunity—a quick opportunity—to atone for his mistake.

But, he reasoned, only a fool would sit behind a door and wait for opportunity's knock. The wise man, the man deserving of success, would take steps to meet it.

Dan tried to put himself in Lippy's place. He tried to figure what he would have done, had he been Lippy and had he known the house was being surrounded, as Lippy must have known when he schemed for his escape.

If I were Lippy, Dan thought, after plotting my escape, I would have arranged to meet my sweetheart—if she also escaped—elsewhere. I would have told her of some trusted friend through whom she could communicate her whereabouts. I would have told her to rent another hide-out—she could do that more easily than I—and I would have promised to join her there just as soon as I possibly could.

If I were Eve Porter, Dan thought next, I would do just as Lippy had ordered. And I would have confided in my older sister whom I would trust because she had sheltered me before. I would tell her where I was going, expecting her to visit me. I would do this, perhaps, because I disliked or dreaded being alone



while waiting for Lippy to join me, or because I might want to borrow some money.

His reasoning proved sound for, that night, Dan, off duty and in civilian clothes, found himself in a cheap hotel in a disreputable section of the city. He had traced Eve Porter's sister to the hotel and he had located Eve Porter's room. Immediately after, he had managed to change his own room—which he had rented to gain unquestioned access—to another almost directly opposite.

However, an all-night vigil, seated with his eye to the crack of his partly open door, gave no success. After Eve Porter's sister had gone, no one else called, and no one had either entered or left the room but Eve Porter, herself, upon—and after—an excursion to the bath at the end of the corridor.

Then, through a long difficult day on duty, Dan debated the advisability of notifying his superiors of the girl's whereabouts. They would, he knew, assure themselves of Lippy Layden's capture by setting a twenty-four-hour watch upon the hotel, taking the matter entirely out of Dan's hands.

And that was what he did not want. The desire to redeem himself was too strong, and he felt he could be vindicated by nothing less than

the single-handed capture of the killer. For that reason, he remained silent, stubbornly fighting off his weariness—he had not slept—when he returned, again in civilian clothes, to the rented room that night.

Once more, he set himself before the thin slit of the partly open door. Again, he set his eyes vigilantly upon the door across the hall. When Lippy came, he would undoubtedly come at night and that was why Dan dared not sleep; he wanted to be there to greet him.

Nor would the capture be difficult; Dan had it all planned out. When Lippy rapped for admission, Dan would simply step out, gun in hand, and the killer would have to surrender. Yes, it would be done just as simply as that.

Already, he thought, he could see the smile on the inspector's face when that official heard of Lippy's arrest. It seemed to Dan that he could even hear the happiness in the inspector's voice when he complimented—

With a start, Dan woke up! He realized instantly that he had been dreaming and he saw by his watch that it was midnight, and four precious hours had passed. Even while he was wondering if Lippy had already come, Dan was condemning himself for his weakness, for his in-

## "I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, drive a lovely car, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You, too, may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you, too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 9, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use, too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 9, Moscow, Idaho. Advf. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.



excusable betrayal of the trust he had put in himself.

He tiptoed across the hall and listened at the door. He heard a small voice—Eve Porter's. Then he heard a heavier voice—a consciously subdued voice—and instinctively he knew that was Lippy's.

Dan returned to his room. Because of his lapse, the capture, which should have been so simple, had been made difficult. With a gun in his hand, and a chance to shoot from behind a locked door, Lippy wouldn't surrender at a command. He would fight as long as his bullets lasted—and that might mean death to one or more of his would-be captors.

Dan could only blame himself. Because of his egotistical selfishness, one, or more, of his fellow officers might have to die. And it was for that reason that he now dared not notify headquarters of Lippy's whereabouts. Come what might, this was a situation he had to handle himself.

It would be difficult, perhaps impossible. Nevertheless, he had to try. At worst, he would stop some of Lippy's bullets and, Dan berated himself, that was just about what he deserved.

He tensed, reached for his gun, as Eve Porter's door opened cautiously. He watched, as she closed it carefully; heard Lippy turn the key in the lock from inside as she scurried, in a kimono and slippers and with a towel over her shoulder, along the corridor to the bath.

Lippy Layden, his dark face haggard and unshaven, sat behind drawn blinds and glowered at the locked door like a hunted animal. He hated this shabby room, he hated the dingy hotel, he hated the cops, he hated everyone!

While he hated the world, Lippy felt sorry for himself. He felt sorry for himself because he was a hunted thing—because he knew, sooner or later, he would have to die. He told himself in resentful self-pity that he had no friends left at all, no friends but his guns—the two .45s which lay, ready for use, upon the table before him.

His irately brooding eyes softened as he thought of Eve Porter. She was everything to him now; in the blackness of his despair, he realized that she was the one thing in the world of which he could think without snapping his long-strained last thread of sanity.

What was keeping her so long? She had gone to the bath more than half an hour before, promising to make a quick return. In that time, he told himself, he could have taken a dozen baths.

Impatiently he prowled about the room. Like a caged creature, he strode furiously up and down. There was something wrong. Where was she?—he demanded with insane anxiety.

He picked up a gun. He listened at the door. He turned the key—softly, he hoped. He would take a quick look along the corridor. The bathroom door would be locked, and that would reassure him; he would know that she was still in there.

He looked, then shut the door swiftly. The bathroom door had been wide open—but Eve had not been in sight. She had left the bathroom—she had not returned—she had gone somewhere!

*Where had she gone?*

He had to know. He had to find her. He had to call her, do anything, to bring her to his side. He couldn't stand it! He had to—to do something! Again, swiftly, he opened the door. He listened.



Something was happening—something was happening so very quietly that it was suspicious. Something was going on—somewhere! Something was going on that he was not supposed to hear.

A giggle! A girl's soft laugh! A familiar tone! And it was coming through that partly open door on the other side of the hall.

It was Eve—in that room across the hallway! She was laughing, giggling, protesting. There was no mistake about it for he remembered how she had laughed and giggled and protested in the days when he had first made love to her.

She was laughing and giggling that way now, he thought, as he moved stealthily across the hallway; she was laughing, giggling, and protesting girlishly—subduedly—at the love-making of some other man. She had lost no time! He had not yet been captured, he had not yet stopped cop lead—and already she had picked another lover. Upon the pretext of taking a bath, she had hurried to another's arms.

Lippy glared his hatred through the thin crack. It was dark inside—pitch black—but his eyes were not needed, his ears told enough. And it was the subdued, tightly restrained tone of the girl's voice which revealed the most. She was trying to smother the giggles, not wanting them overheard.

Lippy kicked the door wide and leaped inside. As he entered, there was a scream—and he whirled toward that sound. And then his swiftly moving legs struck something, and he fell headlong!

The lights snapped on.

On the bed lay Eve—bound, with torn bedsheets, hand and foot. Almost upon him, high above him, weapon in hand, stood a heavy, broad-shouldered giant who had

“cop” written all over him. And, on the floor, where he had landed after tripping over a deliberately-placed chair, Lippy Layden found himself, helplessly, at least six feet from the weapon which his fall had driven from his hands.

The cop picked up the dropped gun, then snapped handcuffs on Lippy's wrists.

From the bed, Eve sobbed:

“Lippy, I tried not to let you hear—I was afraid you would come—but he tickled me so much, I couldn't help it.”

Inspector Corbett chuckled.

“That must have been a ticklish situation,” he quipped, “but I can't understand why, after you had put your hand over her mouth and dragged her into the room, she didn't yell to warn him when you left her mouth free after tying her up.”

“Ironically,” Dan explained, “she tried to keep him from doing the same foolish thing she made me do when her screams brought me running to her help just before that raid. She knew I was armed and knew I would be ready for him if he came rushing through the door. I would have had the advantage; that's why she tried to keep quiet.”

“And that probably fooled Lippy most.” The inspector nodded understandingly. “He must have thought she was trying to restrain herself because she was two-timing.”

“Not knowing what the set-up was,” Dan guessed, “she wanted him to stay where he was—behind a locked door; she didn't know he'd be so worried about her that he would just have to come out.”

“Yes,” said the inspector, “he was worried about her so he had to come out. Just as in your case, it was the human thing for him to do.”





## TROUBLE ON TWO LEGS

by JOHN EARL DAVIS

Naturally the first thing she noticed about him was that he was young, good-looking, and affable. One of those carefully careless dressers—light flannel shirt, custom-made jacket and slacks; all of them expensive. No woman passes up details like that, even when the meeting is strictly business.

But Ann Wylie was used to re-

ceiving people who had trouble; she noticed, too, the deep worry in his eyes, the tension that showed in his face. Pushing a box of cigarettes across the desk toward him she said: "Sit down; light up; tell me."

He seemed grateful, but evasive. "Thanks, Miss Wylie. I'm Fritz Brinker, hypothetical end of a great line. The lady out there probably



has me in a card file by now. Surprising place, this. Pretty secretary, beautiful boss. I like it."

She acknowledged that with a very brief smile, but spared only one word: "Business!"

As a matter of fact, "beautiful" wasn't exactly the right word for Ann Wylie. She was a compellingly handsome woman—perfectly proportioned, clear-eyed, poised.

Fritz Brinker grinned admiringly; drew a hundred-dollar bill out of his pocket and dropped it on the desk. "Retainer," he said carelessly.

She glanced at the money without any particular interest. "What for?"

The look on his face suddenly altered; became set and menacing. He bent forward, clamping his fingers tight over the edge of the desk, and spoke slowly—just loud enough for her to hear. "To prevent murder, Miss Wylie. Either you help me, or I'll have to kill a woman. And I'll push my thumbs into her throat until her eyes pop out of the sockets. Believe me, I will!"

He fished for a cigarette and lighted it from the tip of the one he was already smoking; his hand was unsteady.

"Look here, Miss Wylie. Something nasty has come into my home, and is threatening father. I can't define this thing or understand it, but I know—"

"The story," she suggested quietly.

He breathed deeply before answering. "All right. August Brinker adopted me when I was only a kid. He's the last of a mighty proud old family; the estate is . . . well, big enough to be interesting."

He paused, apparently a little embarrassed at having said that. Ann Wylie nodded for him to go on.

Bitterness crept back into his voice. "It's this woman, this Lucia

Teale. She turned up a couple of weeks ago, when he hired her as his secretary; and he doesn't need a secretary any more than I need a third foot. She's got father frightened out of his wits, and he won't tell me why. It's as if a fuse were burning, and we were all sitting over it waiting for the explosion."

Ann said: "You mentioned the estate. What about that?"

"Pretty equally divided between me and the housekeeper; she's earned her share by faithful service, I guess. Nobody else in the family. No, Lucia Teale is out to get all she can before father dies, by some vicious form of blackmail. Whatever it is, I've got to stop it."

Ann gazed at him searchingly, wondering whether his concern was really for his father, or for himself. She said, "What about his past?"

"Flawless, so far as I know. Except . . . well, something unpleasant happened when he was in college. He never said what; but he's often told me that he'd hate to have me make a mess out of my life, the way he has of his. It sounds pretty silly, when you know him."

Brinker hesitated a second and then went on, his voice urgent. "You're the only one who can help me in this, Miss Wylie. Posing as my personal friend, you can meet father and this . . . this woman; learn what she's up to; maybe persuade her to leave. The ordinary run-of-the-mill detective would be worthless to me."

Ann lowered her eyelids demurely. "An interesting assignment. As your personal friend, Mr. Brinker, am I seeing you tonight? Say, at eight o'clock?"

"Right!" Fritz Brinker's smile showed genuine relief. "I'll call for you and take you home first; then we



can go out supper dancing, or anything you like."

When he had gone, Ann picked up the hundred-dollar note, folded it thoughtfully, and pressed a button at the corner of her desk. Molly Train came in from the front office. Brinker had been right about her; she was pretty—saucy nose; golden hair in a swirl; small, trim figure—in all ways a happy contrast to Ann Wylie's darker, quieter charm.

Molly Train said: "I made the usual check-up while he was in here. He spends a lot of his time around the night spots; probably costs his foster father plenty."

Ann looked interested. "How? Anything special?"

Molly's grin was slightly malicious. "He's paying off at least two young women around town—breach-of-promise stuff. I think, Madame Boss, that we're dealing with the remunerative, or sucker type of client."

"Maybe," Ann said. "Unless I'm supposed to be the sucker. Put this hundred in an envelope and hold it until I decide whether I want the case. And, meanwhile, see what you can find on one Lucia Teale."

"Such as—"

"Such as whether she has benefited by any of Fritz Brinker's unwilling handouts. And hold the office down for the afternoon. I'm putting on the dog tonight—with a man who seems eager for homicide!"

She chose a long black dinner dress, with a half-sleeved jacket—simple in line, halfway between formal and informal. It was a perfect setting for the finely molded lines of her body, the dignity and grace of her bearing.

Fritz arrived in dinner jacket, and stared at her for a moment with frank admiration.

"Gosh, lady. I thought you were

beautiful today in office tweeds; but now you're no less than gorgeous. I'm positively at your feet."

"Throwing yourself at a lady's feet is often costly," Ann observed.

He colored, and changed the subject.

"We're riding behind a chauffeur. Fellow named Prall; father hired him last week. Why, I wouldn't know. Father's been sick, and doesn't need a chauffeur any more than he needs a secretary." Brinker frowned, and his face turned hard. "That's something else I'd like to find out about."

Ann had a quick look at Prall as they got into the car. He didn't have any of the earmarks of the experienced domestic servant. There was something ferretlike about him: a sharp face that indicated shrewdness rather than intelligence. She had seen faces like that before—in police courts. He drove silently, but she noticed that he watched them in the mirror.

The Brinker home was a three-story brownstone—old, dignified, a little forbidding. Prall opened the car door for them; and as he bent to go back in the driver's seat, Ann spotted a noticeable bulge beneath the flare of his coat. She reflected that a gun is hardly standard equipment for a family chauffeur.

Either Fritz hadn't brought his key along, or he didn't care to use it. He rang; and presently they were admitted by a rather dumpy-looking woman of about fifty-five. She was dressed, not cheaply, but without any regard to taste; her graying hair was caught up in a knot at the back of her neck. Everything about her seemed dull, but her eyes; they fixed on Ann for a second of keen appraisal.

Fritz said: "Miss Wylie, this is Mrs. Brixton, father's housekeeper.



She watches over us like a gurdian angel."

The guardian angel nodded. "Glad to know you, I'm sure. Let's take them things of yours, Miss Wylie. The mister is expecting you two in his room."

Ann's smile was gracious, without a trace of the puzzlement she felt. Strange contrast this, between the house with its somber but elegant furnishings, its evidences of culture and breeding—and the housekeeper. Fritz must have guessed at her reaction. He led her into a small reception room off the hall and closed the door behind them.

"I want to straighten up a couple of things, Ann, before we see father. Incidentally, I'm going to call you Ann, and you might as well call me Fritz. I've told father a lot about you, and—"

"All right," she agreed. "Anything else?"

He grinned at that. "Get to the point, eh? Well, about Mrs. Brixton: she's ignorant and all that, but father has kept her on ever since I can remember. I think she'd had some misfortune, and father was sorry for her."

"Widow?" Ann asked.

Fritz shrugged. "I suppose so. I was never interested enough to find out. She stays pretty much to herself in her rooms on the third floor; Lucia Teale lives up there, too, but in the back room. I don't think there's any love lost between 'em. Well, let's go."

The wide stairway opened into a second-floor hall, and there was a narrower stairway going up at the extreme end, toward the back of the house. "Leads to Mrs. Brixton's domain," Fritz remarked, gesturing in that direction. "That last door to the left is my room. This first door here is father's study, and be-

yond that is his bedroom." He paused, frowning uncertainly and then knocked.

There were sharp little steps across the room—a woman's tread. The lines between Fritz's eyes deepened, and he muttered something under his breath. Then the door opened.

"Trouble on two legs," Ann thought. "And what legs!"

The woman standing there was in her late twenties or early thirties, with a softness of body and a hardness of eye that combine to spell Poison. Her mouth was full, pouting; its bright-red coating glistened, as if constantly moist. She wore a tight-bodied, high-waisted dress, just about knee-length; and the details thus brought into prominence were not unworthy of notice. It seemed a little incongruous that she was holding a book, her index finger inserted between the pages. Her glance was sultry, and held an unpleasant challenge.

"Miss Wylie, Miss Teale," Fritz said curtly. "We've come to see father."

A tired voice from inside the room said, "Then come on in."

Miss Teale stepped aside without a word, but her eyes clung to Fritz. He noticed that and brushed hurriedly by, his face pale.

"Father—"

August Brinker was sitting in an easy-chair, his thin, sensitive hands curled nervously about the arms. He was unmistakably an aristocrat: a slender man, not very tall, with delicate features and alert, penetrating blue eyes. Ann had a sudden feeling that he was very fragile, very much alone in this house.

Fritz said: "Father, this is Miss Ann Wylie. I've been wanting her to meet you."

The old man nodded courteously.



"Excuse me for not getting up, but the doctor—" He smiled and waved a hand expressively. Then, his lips tightening, he glanced impatiently toward the door where Lucia Teale was still standing, book in hand. "That will be all now, Lucia." His voice took on a sharper note, and Ann noted the merest suggestion of a frown.

The girl's face suddenly became as hard as her eyes; her lips curled into a kind of snarl. Then she laughed unpleasantly. "All right, daddy, I'll go. See you later."

There was a moment of intense silence in the room after she had left. The old man looked as if he had been struck. Fritz started for the door, his fist raised threateningly, and stopped only when Ann put a warning hand on his arm.

"It's intolerable!" he flared. "I won't stand this cheap effrontery."

"Quiet, son." August Brinker's voice was shaken; the smile he gave Ann held a note of apology. "She reads to me now and then," he said, as if in explanation. "Seems to think I can't read for myself. And she can't even pronounce the words right. Have to put up with her, I suppose."

"Why, father?" Fritz's question was angry, insistent.

"Because she's my secretary," the old man snapped. "If I keep her on, that is my own affair." For all the asperity in his voice, his face seemed bitter, discouraged.

But he had recovered his smile. "Forgive me, Miss Wylie. I'm an old man and a little jumpy. Do you like my personal retreat?"

Ann did like it. In the center of the long side wall was an old-fashioned fireplace—clean, but apparently still used. Brass fire irons on one side, Cape Cod lighter on the other. Flanking the mantel were

bookcases the length of the room, reaching almost to the ceiling, stacked tight with volumes of history, philosophy, the drama, and a few dozen works of recent fiction. Mr. Brinker waved toward these. "Novels for my advancing age," he said lightly. "Some of the authors have been kind enough to bring those for me, when they were guests here."

Ann nodded and glanced back from the books. Fritz had wandered over to a table near the old man's chair and was examining a gun that lay there—an antique pistol with heavy metal butt, ingeniously carved. August Brinker said:

"I've been meaning to give you that gun, Fritz. It's an old family heirloom, and I never did like guns. Take it and keep it."

"Why, thanks, father." Fritz picked up the gun and turned to Ann. "If you'll excuse me for a few minutes, I think I'll take this to my room right now and put it in a place of honor."

As he went out, his eyes glowed—whether with satisfaction or with some quick decision, Ann wasn't quite sure. She felt uneasy, had an urge to follow him; but before she could move, the old man was talking to her.

"It's good to have you here, Miss Wylie. Fritz almost never brings his . . . friends to the house; and as for me . . . well, my existence is pretty monastic. The place has always needed feminine charm." He paused and smiled wanly. "I hope you like Fritz. I've had great hopes for him; took him in when he was a child, as a compensation for an otherwise warped life."

"Warped life, Mr. Brinker?" Ann kept her voice very gentle.

The old man bit his lip nervously; looked as if he regretted what he



had said. Then with a rather shaky smile he waved his hand toward the stacks of books. "I mean that a life spent entirely with these becomes warped, out of focus. I had enough money not to work, and so I missed a great deal. You can see that?"

He spoke pleadingly, as if begging her to believe.

"Yes," Ann said, "I—"

She stopped, as a shrill scream tore through the hall outside the open door to Brinker's study. The scream was repeated, with cries of "Help!" Sound of running feet echoed through the house.

The last bit of color had drained out of Brinker's face as he started up, horrified. Ann pushed him gently back into his chair; clipped, "Wait; I'll see," and dashed into the hall.

The screams had subsided now to whimpers, and the noise was coming from the last door—Fritz's room. She went there, almost colliding with Mrs. Brixton as she came down the back stairs. Glancing back hastily at heavy steps behind her, she saw Prall running toward the sound.

The door was open. Fritz was back against the chest of drawers near it; and Ann saw, in one flashing glance, that the antique pistol lay on top of the chest. Fritz was ghastly white, trembling, trying unsuccessfully to speak. His eyes, burning with hatred and dread, were focused on the other side of the room.

Lucia Teale half stood, half leaned against the head of the bed. She was breathing hard, clutching about her the shreds of the light dress she had been wearing. It had been torn from the shoulders down across the bosom, and her efforts to cover herself seemed pitifully futile. When

Ann and the others came into the room, she began to sob.

Nobody seemed able to do anything. Ann shot a glance around, picked out a door which should have been a closet—and was; found a bathrobe of Fritz's, and tossed it to the girl.

"Well," Ann snapped, "what happened?"

Lucia sobbed: "I . . . I came down to see if Mr. August wanted anything, and as I passed this door, he called me in and then . . . then—Oh, the beast!"

Ann felt Prall's breath on her neck. "You dirty louse," he said. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. With all your money, you could have gone after somebody besides your father's secretary."

Ann was watching Fritz. The cords in his neck swelled; he doubled his fists, and looked menacingly at Prall. But it was to her that he appealed. "It's a lie, Ann—all of it." His voice was hoarse, and the words ran together thickly. "She came in of her own accord and . . . and— Never mind. When I asked her to get out, she tore her own dress and began screaming. I swear that's what happened."

Mrs. Brixton, tight-lipped and outraged, glanced from one of them to the other, as if doubtful whom to believe.

Lucia had dropped the bathrobe and did not bother to pick it up; her hands slipped little by little from what they were trying to hide. "Do you think," she blazed, "that these people will believe you? You've been in messes before, Fritz Brinker; everybody knows that. I should never have trusted you." She began to sob again.

Fritz lighted a cigarette, and seemed to gain steadiness from it. His voice went hard, and his words



were clipped, deliberate. "The best thing for you would be to pack your things and get out of this house before my father—"

The girl began to laugh, almost hysterically. "Your father's house? Your father? That's good."

Ann went to her and took her by the arm, shook her. "I think," she said quietly, "that August Brinker is the best judge of what constitutes parenthood. Perhaps it's time to explain what you're doing in this house."

"Doing?" The girl's voice rose to a shriek. "I'm August Brinker's daughter; that's what I'm doing here!"

For a moment Ann felt disassociated from the whole scene: Fritz, his muscles limp, his mouth open; Prall, with suddenly expressionless face; Mrs. Brixton, raising a hand as if to strike Lucia down for blasphemy; Lucia herself, facing them all defiantly. The strange thing about this, she thought, was that she wasn't really surprised; it was almost as if she had known it would happen.

Brixton was the first to speak, and her voice was deadly. "You little . . . little hussy. Go on up to your room."

Lucia didn't move. She was suddenly staring wall-eyed at the door. Ann followed her glance, and felt weak. Old August Brinker had come in quietly; so quietly that no one had noticed. He was bent a little, but his arms were straight at his sides, the fists clenched. The color was high on his cheeks now; feverish, Ann thought. His words were like slow drops of cold rain.

"Be quiet, all of you. You see, boy, that I have strength enough to find you here, disgracing my home. And I have strength enough to cast you out of here. You may stay tonight

if you must, but tomorrow you leave for good. I've had enough of you and your nastiness."

He turned, and walked back to his room, leaving behind him a silence more unbearable than thunders. Fritz looked straight ahead of him, unblinking, his face taut.

"I'm sorry, Ann," he said. "I guess you'd better go."

There was nothing else to do. She went downstairs, found her wraps, and took a cab home. One thing, however, was clear in her mind: that hundred-dollar retainer would be banked tomorrow. This was a case, and Ann Wylie was on it.

## II.

"Looks like you didn't make good last night, boss." Molly Train chuckled as she dropped a pile of mail on her desk and pointed to the top letter. The envelope was attached, showing a postmark of 11 p. m. It was in longhand, and seemed hastily written:

Dear Miss Wylie:

My sincere apologies for getting you into this domestic situation of mine. Naturally I shan't ask you to go on with it, or to see me again. I am going to tell father, quite frankly, just who you are and why I brought you here.

Please send me a bill for your services tonight, and I'll send you a check.

Sincerely,

Fritz Brinker.

Ann read it quickly and chucked it back on the desk.

"Get anything on Lucia Teale, Molly?"

Molly shook her head. "Nobody ever heard of her, in connection with the Brinkers or any other way. Who is she?"

"She might be a secretary," Ann



said. "She claims to be August Brinker's daughter, insulted by his adopted son. My own opinion is that she's out to take both Brinkers for a jolly sleigh ride; and I'm going to see. Meanwhile—"

"Yes?" Molly's eyes flashed with new interest. She had been hoping for a piece of this.

"Meanwhile," Ann went on, "look up the office and get over where you can watch Brinker's place. This girl is about five-four in spike heels; maybe thirty, but tries to look twenty; taffy hair, bobbed shoulder length. Imagine yourself a man hanging around a pool hall, and you'll spot her."

"In that neighborhood," Molly said, "I've got her already. Then what?"

"If she comes out of the place, tag her. Get her located, then hustle back to the office. I'll either be here or phone in."

Molly pouted. "Shucks, boss. No work for Betsy?"

"No work for Betsy," Ann said firmly. "Keep that little trouble maker out of this. Now run along."

Molly sniffed, tucked her bag very carefully under her arm, and departed.

Ann didn't stop to read the rest of the mail. She went down to police headquarters and found one Sergeant Timothy Murphy in the identification division. They had exchanged favors before—all in the line of business.

Murphy beamed when she walked in. "Hi, Ann Wylie. Sit down; have a smoke; take down your hair."

"Some other time, perhaps." Ann grinned and shook hands with him. "Some day you can buy me that steak you promised me; but this time you get off easy. I want to see pretty pictures."

Murphy groaned. "I knew it, I knew it. What now?"

"Shake-down ladies. Badger-game stuff. The name is Lucia Teale, but I don't think you'll find it."

He didn't. Ann began to go through pictures, passing rapidly over some, scanning others pretty carefully. At last she held one up. "Tillie Luce," she said. "Alias this, that, and the other. Tell me about her."

"Friend of yours?" Murphy grunted and handed her a file. "Small-town girl makes good in big city. We never got anything on her that would stick in court, and we haven't heard of her for some time. Back at the old stand?"

"I shouldn't be surprised," Ann said. "Thanks a lot, Tim; I'll do as much for you sometime."

Murphy grinned widely. "All I want is a picture of you for my own personal files. And that I never get. Come in again sometime."

Her first stop was a phone booth. The office didn't answer, and she headed back there to wait. About eleven thirty the phone rang, and it was Molly.

"Look, boss. I thought I'd call for orders before heading back. Your cute little friend left the house about an hour ago, just after I got there. She was carrying a bag, and didn't look a bit happy."

Ann said, "Ah! Where to?"

Molly gave an address, in a block of shoddy apartment houses. "I'm watching the place from a cocktail bar across the street."

"Stay there until she comes out," Ann directed. "I'm going to have a conference with these Brinkers. It looks as if we could exchange information—profitably."

On the way over to the house she tried to figure what it was best to do. By that time, Fritz might already



have left; but she wanted to talk to his father alone anyway. With Lucia gone, it would be easier. She decided to stick to her usual method: watch for reactions, and take her openings as she found them.

Prall answered the door. Ann said, "Mr. August Brinker?"

Prall shrugged. "Probably in his study, where he always is. Go on up if you want to. I think Fritz went up there a few minutes ago."

So he hadn't left. It only went to show you couldn't plan things too closely in advance. She went on upstairs, and was a little surprised to find the door ajar. She knocked and the door swung open—not far, but far enough to show what lay in that room. It was death.

### III.

Huddled on the floor, his hands stretched out as if to ward off a blow, lay what was left of August Brinker. His last gesture had been too weak: the blow had fallen, and caved in the top of his head.

The figure crouching beside him straightened and whirled as Ann came in. It was Fritz Brinker. He stood rigid; looked from her, amazedly; back at the thing in his hand—an antique pistol with heavy metal butt. The one his father had given him the night before. He was grasping it by the barrel; the butt was covered with blood.

Ann had never seen a man look so trapped; so wild-eyed. His voice scarcely got above a whisper as he said:

"Ann! Look . . . look here! I . . . I—"

"You murdered him, Brinker!" The steps in the hall had been too quiet to notice; but Prall was there, pushing his way past Ann, pointing accusingly at Fritz. "He told you

to get out, and you murdered him, didn't you?"

Ann looked at Prall stonily. "Just how," she asked, "do you happen to be right on the spot whenever anything happens?"

His answering smile held no humor at all. "Simple, Miss Wylie. I came up to see whether you had found the old man in. As it happens, you did. Now I guess you'd better call the police, while I watch this guy!"

"I don't need watching!" Fritz protested. "I'll stay. But I didn't kill him. I—" He dropped the gun, put his face in his hand, and groaned.

"Sit down," Ann said crisply. "Don't talk now; pull yourself together first." She called homicide, reported tersely, and then went over to look at the body.

A quick glance at the skull told her enough, and made her a little sick. It had been hammered in unmercifully. But during the second that she bent there, she had an amazing impression. The smell of kerosene. She turned to the gun, on the floor where Fritz had dropped it; made as close an examination as she could without touching it. The smell of kerosene was there, too; but very, very faint. She frowned and turned to Fritz.

"Your gun?"

He nodded bitterly. "The one you saw last night."

Prall said: "Why didn't you shoot him, Brinker, instead of socking him that way? The walls of this room are sound-proofed anyhow."

"You couldn't shoot that gun," Fritz snapped. "It hasn't been cleaned for years." He stopped short then and gasped, realizing what he'd said. "I didn't kill him, I tell you! I didn't!"



"All right," Ann said. "Suppose you tell us what did happen?"

As Fritz started to talk, there was a siren in the street outside; and in another minute Lieutenant Bowen of homicide was upstairs. Ann knew him slightly; in a few words as possible she gave him the set-up. He turned to Fritz.

"So what's your story?"

"Father was alive at ten this morning," Fritz said, "when I left the house. I came back about fifteen minutes ago, hung up my things, and came on up here. The door was closed, and I knocked as usual. When there wasn't any answer, I . . . well, I was worried and came on in. This is what I found. Miss Wylie came in almost immediately after that."

"Where was the gun? Where'd it come from?"

"It was on the floor beside father. Somebody had taken it from my room."

Prall coughed softly. "He had it in his hand when we came in, lieutenant. Of course, he *might* have *picked* it up off the floor, so he could be discovered holding it."

Bowen looked at Ann; she nodded curtly. Fritz said:

"I did pick it up. Shouldn't have, of course, but I . . . I was shocked and confused. Didn't stop to think."

Bowen said, "Who else is in the house?"

A sergeant came in then. "The cook's downstairs. Says she hasn't been out of the kitchen all morning, and this guy Prall has been loafing there most of the time. The housekeeper's lying down in her room with a headache—woman by the name of Brixton. She tells me there was a secretary named Lucia Teale, but Brinker fired her and she left about half past ten—destination unknown. I guess that's the crop."

Fritz said: "I was going to tell you about that, Ann. Father sent her away this morning. I went down to your office, but it was locked."

"Uh-huh." Ann walked absently to the fireplace, stared at it for a moment. A new fire was laid, ready to be lighted.

"Lieutenant," she said, "if you don't need me any longer, I've got some errands to run. Call me if you want me."

Fritz started, looked hurt. Evidently he had hoped she would stand by him. She left without a word to him; but at the door she stopped for a moment before going downstairs.

"Whoever killed August Brinker," she said, "didn't do it with that gun. Think it over." She didn't bother to wait for the lieutenant's answer.

She found Molly Train in the cocktail bar.

"Such a place," Molly snorted, "for a lady. I've already turned down several offers, none of them any good. Hanging out in a dive like this is going to make me tough. Well, your bird is still in her cage. Apartment 15."

"Swell," Ann said. "How'd you find that out?"

"Followed her in; said I was looking for a guy on the next floor. Easy when you know how. But, gosh, boss, I wouldn't trust that babe with an empty glass of water."

Ann said: "I'm going up to see her. You might as well hike back to the office."

Molly didn't budge. "As soon as I finish this drink. I have to take 'em slow and easy."

Ann went across the street, rang a top-floor apartment, and walked up to No. 15. She knocked. Pretty soon a key scraped in the lock, and Lucia Teale peered through a crack in the door, holding it almost shut.



"Oh," she said. "It's you. Well, I don't want any."

One reason you'd never call Ann Wylie exactly beautiful was that there was nothing delicate about her. She had a pleasing build, but a sturdy one; and there was strength behind it. Before the door could slam, she had her shoulder against it, giving it amazingly quick force. The girl stumbled back, and Ann followed her in.

"Be nice," she advised; "or anyway, be sensible. Just what did you have on August Brinker?"

"I was his secretary, wise girl, and what's it to you? Now scram, before you're thrown out."

Ann sighed. "I hate to do this, Tillie Luce; it's most unladylike, but I'm going to make you talk. Only don't raise your voice too much, because this party is strictly private."

The girl backed against a dresser, picked up an ash tray, and hurled it. She'd evidently had plenty of practice, and was a good shot; but Ann had practice, too—dodging things. She ducked just in time and caught the girl as she started for the door. It was like trying to hold a wild cat. The girl scratched and bit; her spike heel was making nasty digs into Ann's ankle. Thinking bitterly of silk hose at two dollars a pair, Ann caught one of the girl's hands and bent it backward. Quite simple, but quite effective. The girl flinched, and with fast work Ann was able to get her by both wrists.

She twisted—hard. Tillie Luce wasn't delicate either; she bit her lips and held back the scream that wanted to come.

"Easy," she hissed. "Easy, you cat. You'll break 'em."

Ann let up ever so slightly on the pressure. "Talk pretty," she said, "or I will break 'em, and no fooling. August Brinker was killed this

morning and you could have done it. You—"

The girl turned white; then suddenly spit in Ann's face, and started to laugh. A voice from the door said:

"Drop her! You hear me?"

Ann turned slowly as the door closed. The gun was an impressively large automatic. The man holding it was Prall. He came forward a few steps, watching her, not bothering to lock the door.

"Nice seeing you here," Ann murmured. "I take it the police were satisfied with your story."

Prall frowned, kept the gun pointed at her. "They're plenty satisfied that your boy friend did it," he said. "Especially after I told them about the fight he had with his old man. Only they would like to see my little pal here, so I think we better leave, just in case."

Ann said: "That wouldn't be polite, when you have a guest."

Prall's frown deepened, and the barrel of his automatic dropped to a line with her ankles. "Babe," he said, "tear up a sheet or something and tie this dame up. Hands first, then ankles, then a gag. She's too nosy to be in circulation until we've got out of here."

"And you, lady"—he waved the gun a little, from right to left—"get this. I didn't kill anybody. I don't want to kill you. But if you so much as budge or holler, I'll spray your feet with this thing. Eight slugs, and only one pull on the trigger. After that you don't walk any more."

Tillie Luce moved over to the bed and began tearing up a sheet. Ann stood exactly where she was. Quite steadily she said:

"I'm glad you showed up here, Prall; it makes a lot of things clearer."



"Yeah?"

"Uh-humm. A shake-down artist like Tillie needs somebody to work with—a witness, shall we say? So when rich men get in trouble, they can be persuaded to pay up. You were Johnny-on-the-spot last night; only today there isn't anybody to collect from. The old man dead, the son accused of his murder. Tough, isn't it? You shouldn't have killed him, Tillie. Your own father, too! Tchh, tchh. Bad for business."

Tillie snapped, "Shut up!" and came behind her with a strip of cotton sheeting. "Stick your hands back of you."

Ann, looking at the door, hesitated only a second, then did as she was told. Tillie got busy behind her, rather clumsily. Prall was still keeping her ankles covered. And the doorknob was turning noiselessly; fascinating thing to watch.

Tillie was working viciously on the first knot. It took concentration.

When the door swung open, Prall whirled—just a trifle late. Under normal circumstances, Molly Train was enough to take any man's breath away. And the circumstances here were—well, just a touch abnormal. Molly was smiling very sweetly; but the small nickel-plated revolver she held was focused with the utmost steadiness at Prall's head.

Molly giggled just a little. "This thing I've got," she said, "is Betsy, our silent partner. Only she hates to be silent, and she loves to spit at ugly heads like yours."

Ann smiled. The fool girl had gone and disobeyed orders again; that would probably call for another raise.

Tillie had stopped tying knots, and had manifested herself only by one loud intake of breath. Prall appeared to be puzzled and unhappy.

Molly said: "Now, mister, please take the muzzle of your gun carefully between thumb and first finger of your left hand, and offer it that way to the lady there. Otherwise I just don't think I can keep Betsy in place."

Her manner was pleasant but very, very persuasive. Ann twisted against the cloth around her wrists; found the first knot only half done; got her hands out of it and reached. Prall, looking as if he had tried to eat boiled owl, did exactly as Molly had directed.

Molly said: "I told you this bar-room life would make me tough, boss. When I saw this lad come in, he looked very much like a mug who poked his nose out of Brinker's house while I was waiting there. So, not liking his looks very much, I came up to join the party. What do we do now?"

Ann covered Tillie Luce. "We are going to take a nice cab ride," she said. "Just the four of us."

So they had a cab ride—Ann and Molly on the drop seats, facing the other two. They held the guns in their laps, handylike.

Ann said: "Now, Tillie Luce, if you're Brinker's daughter, I'm the crown prince of Kokomo. How did you make him believe it, and who gave you the idea?"

Tillie curled her lip, said nothing. Everything considered, it was not a particularly chummy ride.

There were still a couple of police cars in front of the Brinker house. The cop at the door said, "Hey!"

"Lieutenant Bowen wants to see us," Ann clipped.

They went on up, as they were. Brinker's study was crowded: cops, photographers, the medical examiner; the cook, looking sullen; Mrs. Brixton, sitting in the big chair with a palm to her forehead.



Ann said, "Lieutenant Bowen?"

The sergeant nodded toward the bedroom. "In there, still working on young Brinker. I think he's about ready to crack."

"Get 'em. Get 'em now, or I'll go in there myself, if I have to break the door down."

The sergeant thought she might do it at that. He went to the door and poked his nose through.

"Sorry, lieutenant, but that woman is here again. She's got two prisoners, and an arsenal."

Bowen came out, leading Brinker. Fritz was haggard; his collar was open, his hair mussed; and he was still talking.

"I tell you, lieutenant, I explained everything to father last night, and he believed me. We didn't quarrel. He said he was going to send Miss Teale away; he realized she was an impostor. He—"

For the first time Fritz appeared to focus on the study. He pointed excitedly at Tillie Luce. "There she is now, there's the woman you want!"

"Pipe down!" Bowen snapped. "Put up that gun, Miss Wylie; you, too, girlie. What've you got here?"

Ann said: "Tillie Luce, alias Lucia Teale, and friend. He goes by the name of Prall; but I think you've met before. Incidentally, lieutenant, did you find out how Brinker was killed and how that kerosene got on his head?"

"Sure! He was killed by being socked over the head plenty times with that gun. About the kerosene I don't know. Maybe somebody wanted to set him on fire."

"There," Ann commented, "is an idea. Who makes the fires here? In the fireplace, I mean. Did you take care of that, Tillie?"

"Never touched the thing," Tillie snarled. "Brixton always did it; she's housekeeper. So what?"

Bowen said, "Yeah. So what?"

"I'd like to know," Ann said slowly, "what Tillie was doing before she left the house. Mrs. Brixton, was she in here when you laid the fire this morning? Think clearly, now; you have no reason to shield her."

Mrs. Brixton looked up and frowned. "No, I don't want to shield nobody. But she wasn't in here then. I was up in my room after that, and I don't know whether she stopped in here or not."

Ann said: "You're quite sure of that, Mrs. Brinker?"

"Yes, I'm su— Say, *what did you call me?*"

"Mrs. Brinker," Ann replied sweetly. "And you answered to it, didn't you, in spite of all these years you haven't been called that. All these years in which your husband believed that he had a daughter, hidden away somewhere. Mrs. Brinker, couldn't you have done better than Tillie Luce? She wasn't satisfied with what you paid, and tried to blackmail Fritz on the side. That licked you."

The woman's flabby face turned crimson; she tried to outstare Ann, to make some rebuttal; then her eyelids dropped wearily. "It's true," she said. "I met August Brinker when he was in college. It was a . . . a mistake, I guess. He married me and sent me away to have the baby, then later took me in here as his housekeeper. It was a secret, because I ain't his class, wouldn't want to mix with his highbrow friends anyhow."

"And the baby?"

"Died. Only I didn't want the old man to know it, and I got this



here girl to cheer his last days."

"Which she didn't do very well," Ann said dryly. She came closer to the woman's chair, and gave her voice an edge. "Mrs. Brinker, you never had a baby. You used that story as an excuse to get money out of him; and when he demanded to see the child at last, you had to find one."

The woman stirred uneasily. "It's a lie; but even if it was true, what of it?"

Ann said: "August Brinker came to his senses last night. He called you in this morning, after sending Tillie away, and accused you of taking him for a sucker. He threatened to expose you, annul the marriage, throw you out without a dime. And you killed him."

"No!"

"You bashed his head in, then got Fritz's gun and messed up the job with that. With Fritz a murderer, the estate would be yours."

Bowen moved impatiently. "So what did she kill him with, then?"

Ann walked over to the fireplace, bent down and dropped her handkerchief over the handle of the Cape Cod lighter. Holding it carefully, she pulled it out of the can. The heavy rounded stone end dripped kerosene.

"Gentlemen, the murder weapon. Wielded by the only person here who would think of using it—the lady who makes the fires."

"No! It's a lie!" Mrs. Brixton's voice rose to a screech.

"Your fingerprints will be found on it, and identified," Ann said evenly.

"They won't; I wiped it. I wiped it clean! I— *Let me have that thing!*"

She came out of the chair straight

at Ann, clawing her, reaching for the lighter; Bowen caught her and threw her back; and she collapsed in the chair, sobbing. "He would have thrown me out, he would have—"

Ann turned to Bowen. "I think she'll talk now, lieutenant. Molly and I ought to get back to the office."

"Wait a minute." Bowen took her to one side, lowered his voice. "Who told you all that?"

Ann shrugged. "Everybody I talked to; everything I saw. A wealthy man who never entertained women in his home. Not because he didn't like them: he liked me, when Fritz brought me. A warped life; he told me about that himself. Something unfortunate in his college days; Fritz told me that. A phony daughter. An ignorant housekeeper—and no other women—in a house where cultivated people were guests. But above all, the phony daughter. She had to have a mother, didn't she? Fill in the gaps with hunches, and there you are."

"Huh!" Bowen grunted. "Woman's intuition, I suppose." And he went back to his work.

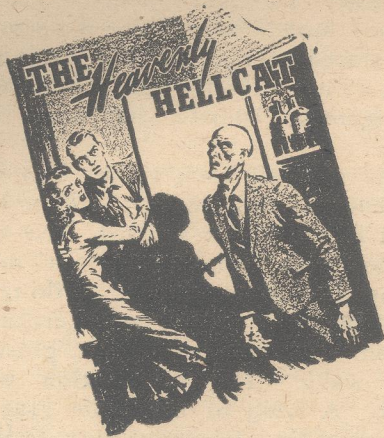
At five minutes to five Molly Train barged into Ann's office. "Do you know, boss, that we haven't eaten since morning?"

"Uh-huh," said Ann. "Guess I'll let Sergeant Tim Murphy buy me that steak tonight."

Molly sniffed. "Small pickin's, Miss Wylie. Me, I'm having dinner with Fritz Brinker. He says he liked me the minute he saw me. So you didn't make good, after all."

Ann curled up her nose scornfully. She unfolded a piece of paper—a check for five thousand dollars—and laid it face up on the desk. "When I go out with the idle rich," she said, "I get paid for it!"





*Continued from page 30*

It was his idea of a good joke, Breen supposed. Breen climbed out of bed, stood for a second on his feet, then fell down. He tried to get up and couldn't quite make it. The truculent policeman helped him back into bed, saying:

"I said you were a dope."

During the next two days, Mordecai Breen exhibited reasonable patience. He fumed and fretted a good deal, swore to the doctor that he was all right, but the doctor only shook his head. The policeman didn't show up on the third day. Presumably Hammerstein considered that the joke had gone far enough.

Slap-happy, making his daily evening visit, arriving on the third day, said:

"Miss Arolin was in yesterday afternoon. She says she's got to see you right away. I wouldn't tell her where you were. The nurse here told me at the beginning you wasn't to be disturbed."

"What did she want to see me about?"

"She was excited and scared," Slap-happy explained.

The nurse came in just as Mordecai Breen was trying to sit up.

"Lie still," the nurse said.

"Go climb a tree," Breen told her. He turned back to Slap-happy. "What was the matter with Miss Arolin?"

"Somebody stole her pocketbook," Slap-happy said. "She was mad and scared."

Mordecai Breen stared pensively up at the ceiling.

"Losing her pocketbook," he said half to himself, "would make her mad. She likes to hold on to her money. But it wouldn't make her scared." He fell silent for a minute, then said to the nurse: "Go find me a doctor. I'm getting out of here whether you like it or not."

The nurse looked frightened. She could see that Breen was determined. She hurried out.

Slap-happy said: "I brought you something, chief." He reached into his hip pocket and took out a flat bottle of whiskey.

Mordecai Breen's yellow-brown eyes gleamed. "Pour some," he mumbled. His lips were still swollen, but not so badly as they had been.

Slap-happy poured half a tumbler full of whiskey and Breen drank it greedily. He sank back onto the pillow with a sigh of contentment, a feeling that didn't last long. Where was that damn doctor? He, Breen, had to get out of here. Something was wrong with his client, Miss Arolin.

When the nurse came back with the doctor, Breen raised such a fuss that the doctor decided it was better to let him go than to keep him. Breen looked old enough to know what he was doing, the doctor thought, but he wasn't so sure when Breen, in order to demonstrate how well he was, climbed out of bed and did a sort of jig. He managed not to betray himself by clenching his



teeth. His legs were wobbly and felt as if made of straw. Little fish-hooks were tearing at the muscles of his body. The back of his head ached. His face felt tight and yet as if it were falling apart. The bandaged right arm felt numb.

Breen stopped his demonstration and said, "There," to the doctor.

The doctor shrugged and said, "All right."

When he had gone, Breen chased the nurse out. He could get dressed without her. Besides, Slap-happy was there. When he was dressed, Breen rang for the nurse. She came in. It was difficult to tell whether the expression in her face indicated disappointment or disapproval at Breen's leaving.

"What do we do now?" Breen said. He wished his legs didn't feel so damnably weak.

The nurse told him. The formalities didn't take long after that, and eventually Slap-happy was helping Mordecai Breen into a taxicab. He started to climb in, too, assuming that he was going with Breen, but the latter waved him away with his bandaged arm.

"Go on home. I'll see you tomorrow."

At the Miranda Arms the little blonde at the switchboard asked Mordecai Breen his name saying that she would announce him, but Mordecai Breen said not to bother, that Miss Arolin was expecting him. He smiled at the blonde. Ordinarily, that smile of his was rather pleasant and ingratiating, but with his bruised face it turned out to be nothing except a horrible grimace. The girl eyed him doubtfully. She looked into his tense eyes and said: "All right."

He took the elevator to the sixth floor, rang the bell of No. 607, and

presently the door opened. Hope herself stood there. For a second she stared at him without recognition. Then: "Hell's bells," she said inelegantly, "what's happened to you?"

She stepped back to let him in. He entered and closed the door behind him without a word. On the settee near the window, a man lounged. He was a tall, strikingly handsome individual, younger than Breen. His hair was black, glossy, and wavy. His complexion was dark. A wisp of mustache graced his upper lip. His mouth was supercilious, sardonic. Hope stared at Mordecai Breen and said again:

"My dear man, what's happened to you? You look as if a building had fallen on you."

Mordecai Breen shrugged. He kept looking at the man resentfully.

"This is Mr. Terramini, Mr. Breen," Hope introduced. "I told you about Mr. Breen, Philip."

Terramini nodded indifferently. He didn't move. He made no offer to shake hands. "Sit down," Hope said to Breen.

Breen, his knees threatening to give way, dropped into the settee, grateful for its support. He shouldn't have left the hospital. It was a fool thing to do.

"I'll see you tomorrow, Philip," Hope said.

Terramini rose. His movements were as graceful as a dancer's.

He said: "Yes, of course."

Now Breen recognized the voice. It was the same foreign voice he had heard when he had telephoned Hope a few days ago. Hope, holding onto his arm, looking up at his face, went as far as the door with Terramini. There he paused, reached into his pocket, took out a small bundle of papers held together by a rubber band and gave them to her. He bent



down and whispered something. She nodded and went over to where Breen sat.

"Have you got any of that money left I gave you the other day? Let me have fifty and I'll pay you back tomorrow. Somebody stole my purse."

"It's all gone," Breen said.

He glanced at Terramini, his yellow-brown eyes mocking. Terramini stood nonchalantly leaning against the door smiling, assured, and indifferent. Hope went to the secretary and stood to the right of the door, took out a checkbook and wrote a check. She left the papers that Terramini had given her on the secretary and gave him the check. Terramini, without looking at it, folded it and slipped it into his vest pocket. He nodded to Breen and said good night to Hope. Mordecai Breen thought for a moment that he was going to kiss her, but he didn't. Hope came and took a chair facing Breen.

"Now, tell me what happened." Her tone was anxious but soft and caressing.

Mordecai Breen eyed her scowlingly. She wasn't on the level, he thought. She wouldn't be making much of a fuss over him if Terramini were still here.

"I'll tell you what happened," he said harshly. "A couple of punks held me up with a gun, then beat the daylight out of me and threw me into the street—all on account of you."

"On account of me?" Her eyes widened. The long lashes curled upward.

"I came here to have a show-down," Breen said. "I have got to know what this is all about if I am going on. What is Dargan doing in this?"

"I don't know," she said. "I have

never heard of Dargan. Who is Dargan, anyway?"

Mordecai Breen decided that she was telling the truth. "Listen," he said. "Is there anything to drink in this place?"

"Yes. My maid is out, but I'll get you one. What do you want?"

"Anything, as long as it's strong."

When she'd left the room, Mordecai Breen got up and went over to the desk. Calmly he picked up the papers that Terramini had left with her and leafed through them. He didn't have to take the rubber band off. It was nothing but a bundle of bills, bills made out to Philip Terramini. A garage bill, a bill for a couple of two-hundred-dollar suits, a bill for a dozen seven-fifty shirts, a bill for a cigarette case. Some of the bills said, "Please remit." Breen, his mouth aslant, tossed them back on the secretary. Unabashed, he opened her check book, and glanced at the balance. He let out a soft whistle. The balance was more than thirty thousand dollars. She could probably afford a half dozen Terraminis if she wanted to.

By the time Hope returned, Breen was back in his chair. She put the tray holding glasses, ice, soda, and a partly filled bottle of Scotch on a small table next to his chair.

"Help yourself," she invited.

Breen mixed himself a drink. He drank it and made himself another. His eyes hot and aloof, he sat there making clicking noises with his fingernail against the glass. She watched him. Her own eyes were unsure.

"I got another note the day before yesterday," she said after a while.

"Let's see it."

"I haven't got it. It was in my purse. I was taking it down to your office to show it to you when my



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purse was stolen." She stopped and waited.

"When was it stolen? Who took it?" Mordecai Breen inquired impatiently.

"I suppose it was stolen in the subway," she said. "There was an awful crowd. I had to stand up. There were so many people I could hardly move. I was holding it by the strap and then when I got out on the platform, I had nothing but the strap in my hand. There was more than thirty dollars in it," she said bitterly.

"Thirty dollars won't hurt you," Breen said, thinking of her check book. "The point is: Why was it your purse that was stolen, and not somebody else's? You don't look easy."

A surprised expression came into her eyes.

"You don't suppose . . . you don't think it was somebody who wanted to get hold of that note?"

Breen shrugged, then wished he hadn't. "What did the note say?" he asked.

"It said I could have the Glacker brothers dead for ten dollars apiece or alive for twenty-five thousand dollars apiece. It's outrageous. I was to put another advertisement in the *Leader* saying 'I agree,' and sign it 'Hope.'"

"Did you?" Mordecai Breen eyed her curiously knowing full well what the answer would be.

She stamped her foot. "Of course not!" she said. Her soft eyes flamed with anger. "I wouldn't give anybody fifty thousand dollars if they threatened to kill me."

Mordecai Breen studied her grimly. "What are you going to do?"

She bent forward so that she was closer to him, bringing to bear on him all of her overwhelming physical appeal.



"I am going to depend on you. I know I can trust you. I know I can count on you; that somehow or other you'll manage to straighten this thing out."

Mordecai Breen made an impatient motion with his head. "What is back of it all?" His voice was harsh again. "I've got to know. I am not a crystal gazer. I am a detective. I've got to have something to work with."

She gazed at him wistfully. Her dark eyes grew misty. The carmine oval that was her mouth trembled. "Can't you . . . can't you just do what I ask you to without prying into my affairs?" she whispered.

Mordecai Breen cursed under his breath. "I am through," he said, getting up. "You better go to the police or else get this Terramini guy to help you out. You're not paying my rent and you're not buying me any two-hundred-dollar suits or cigarette cases. Why should I play the sap for you? Get myself punched—"

He got no further. She sprang to her feet, her slim body tense, her eyes furious. She slapped him across the cheek. Mordecai Breen's face went white except for the bruises and the scar left by one of the thugs' knuckles when he had laid his cheek open. And Hope Arolin's face went white, too. For seconds she stood facing him shaken, her lips slightly parted.

"I didn't mean that," she said. "I'm sorry. You've got to forgive me. I didn't mean it."

Suddenly she flung her arms around him and then standing with her body flat against his, she kissed him. She kissed the cheek where she had struck him, then on the lips. Now she stepped away from him looking like a small child, forlorn, homesick.

"I suppose you are through with me now," she said.

Mordecai Breen went back to his chair and sat down. He stared at his empty glass and then at the bottle which was empty, too.

"Any more liquor in the house?" His tone was unemotional.

Hope brightened. "That's all there was in the pantry, but I'll get a fresh bottle from the closet. Wait a minute."

She went lightly to the closet across the room, Breen following her with his eyes. She pulled back the closet door. Something weird happened. Her body seemed to freeze, then she let out an ear-splitting scream. Mordecai Breen was on his feet looking over her shoulder. A man was standing in the closet. A small man and for a split second he stood so motionless he suggested a figure of wax. Hope screamed again and sprang back. The man was starting to lean toward her. Without bending at the hips or the knees, the figure plunged forward onto its face. Breen had his good arm around Hope's shoulder steadying her. He stared down at the body on the floor. He had recognized the man and so undoubtedly had Hope.

It was Samuel Glacker and he was dead. There was a knife in his back, a long knife with a smooth thin silver handle, a sort of stiletto. The knife had not only been used to kill Glacker, but it had served to pin a note to his back.

Hope turned in Mordecai Breen's arm so that she was facing him with her head on his shoulder.

"Steady," he said. "Steady, now." He made his tone purposely hard. "We've got to keep our wits about us." He let go of her and stepped away. Some of the color was coming back into her chalk-white face.



"That's better," he said. "I've got to see what this is all about."

He knelt down beside the dead man without touching him. He looked at the note. It was printed just as that first note that Hope Arolin had received had been printed. He read:

You don't want to buy any dead men and you don't want to buy any live ones. Just to help you make up your mind, have a dead man on the house.

Hope had come and knelt down beside Mordecai Breen. She, too, was reading the note and now she looked at Breen.

"What will we do?" she whispered.

"What is there to do?" Mordecai Breen said. The brown had gone out of his eyes. They were pure yellow now like a jungle cat's eyes. "We've got to notify the police."

Deep lines formed on his forehead. He stared down again at the dagger in Samuel Glacker's back, then coming to a sudden decision, he took hold of the note by one corner and lifted it up over the handle of the dagger and stuffed the paper into his inside pocket.

Now he rose, helping Hope. He gazed at her as if from a great distance.

"Where is the phone?" he said. "I'll call the police myself."

"The knife," she whispered hoarsely. "Take out the knife."

"Don't be a fool," he said sharply. "The knife mustn't be touched. The knife's got to stay there for the police. There are probably fingerprints on the handle."

She made a strangling sound far down in her throat.

"That's why," she whispered pleading. "That . . . that knife belongs to me."

Mordecai Breen stood rooted to

the spot. His whole body tightened so that momentarily the weakness went out of his legs.

"Did you kill him?" he said softly.

"No, of course not. Why would I want to kill him? I wanted him to stay alive." She fell silent, then: "You've got to help me. You've got to see me through this. You've got to find some way to take care of . . . to take care of everything."

Mordecai Breen still stood immobile, his yellow-brown eyes gleamed savagely. Slowly he walked over to the secretary and picked up the bundle of bills that Terramini had left behind. He turned and faced her holding the bills in his left fist.

"All right," he said, his voice hard. "It's me or the gigolo; make up your mind."

A soft whimpering sound came from between her lips.

"Make up your mind," Breen snarled. His legs were beginning to feel wobbly again.

She said nothing, but after endless minutes she nodded hopelessly.

Mordecai Breen's bandaged right arm and hand were useless, so he clamped the bills with his foot to the seat of a chair and tore them in half with his good hand. He tossed the pieces into the wastebasket.

## VI.

"When the police come," Mordecai Breen said, "don't say anything. Just give them the bare facts and let me do all the talking." His manner was gentle now. There was warmth and sympathy in his eyes as he sat beside her on the settee. "Women are so damn silly," he went on good-naturedly. "A girl like you can get herself into the darnedest mess. If you would only open up, I could probably straighten this



whole business out in no time."

He stopped and waited. For a moment it looked as though Hope Arolin were going to confide in him, but she didn't. Instead:

"Do you think they'll arrest me?"

"Not unless Hammerstein is dumber than I think he is," Breen soothed her. "It wouldn't make sense for you to kill a man in your own apartment and even if you had killed him, you wouldn't open the closet door where the dead man was and show him to me just like that. Besides, if worse comes to worst, you've got a good reason for wanting this guy to stay alive and you can give it to the police. That should clear you."

She shrank a little away from him as though his words had struck terror into her soul. "I can't," she whispered. "That's just what I can't do. I can't tell the police why I wanted him to stay alive."

Mordecai Breen let out an oath. "Where did you get the dagger?" he demanded.

"Philip—Terramini gave it to me. It's a family heirloom. I've had it for years. It's been on my desk. I use it to open letters."

Mordecai Breen swore again. He let loose a diatribe on the shortcomings of Terramini.

By the time he had finished, the police led by Sergeant Hammerstein arrived. Besides the sergeant there were a half dozen others. Fingerprint men, cameramen, and a fussy little assistant medical examiner who kept up an incessant stream of unintelligible mutterings while he busied himself with the body.

Sergeant Hammerstein, a short, stocky individual with aggressive eyes, glowered at Mordecai Breen. "What's all this? What's all this?" he rasped. "Every time you get a client, there's a murder."

"He wasn't my client," Mordecai Breen said, motioning toward the dead man on the floor. "Miss Arolin is my client."

"Well, let's have the story," Hammerstein growled. "Don't clam up on me." He glanced briefly at Hope, who had recovered her self-possession. She stood there, alluring, appealing, with just the right amount of apprehension in her expression. Hammerstein turned back to Breen.

Mordecai Breen told him what had happened, making no mention, however, of the note that had been pinned to Samuel Glacker's back.

"The dagger belongs to Miss Arolin," Mordecai Breen said. "She kept it on her desk. But obviously she didn't kill Glacker. To begin with, Glacker wasn't stabbed in the closet—"

"No, he was stabbed in the back," Hammerstein interrupted.

Breen ignored the feeble joke. "The closet's too shallow. You can see that. In fact it's so shallow that the dead man couldn't even fall down after he had been put into the closet. Somebody must have stabbed him here in this room or maybe in the bedroom and then carried him into the closet. I don't know where it happened. There's no blood around. There's nothing strange in that because that sort of wound bleeds internally."

"If she didn't do it," Hammerstein demanded gruffly, "then who did?"

"How do I know?" Mordecai Breen said fretfully. "It's your job to find out."

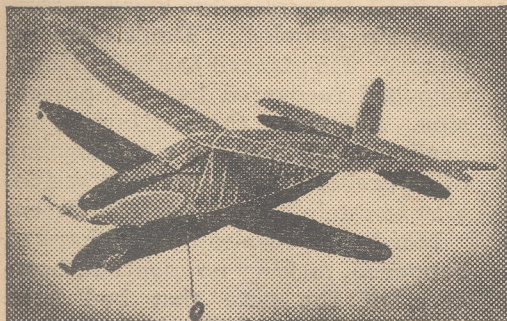
"What's Miss Arolin retaining you for?" the sergeant wanted to know.

"Be yourself," Mordecai Breen said. "You know better than to ask a thing like that. Anyhow it's got nothing to do with what happened here."



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"We'll see about that," Hammerstein said ominously.

The fussy little medical examiner straightened up. He snapped his bag shut, and came over to Hammerstein. "He's been dead about four hours," he said. "Send for the wagon. I'll give you an autopsy as soon as I can." He stalked out.

Hammerstein eyed Hope Arolin, then asked an age-old question. "You heard what the doctor said. That means that he was stabbed about three o'clock. Where were you at three o'clock, Miss Arolin?"

Hope gave Mordecai Breen a swift glance. She seemed more frightened now.

"I was out," she said. "I was taking a walk in the park. I often do that."

"Did you meet anybody while you were out?"

"I don't know," she said. "I don't think I met anybody. The girl at the switchboard downstairs might have seen me coming and going, but I don't know."

Hammerstein grunted.

"Here's something you ought to know, Hammerstein," Breen said. "Yesterday Miss Arolin's purse was stolen."

"That's terrible," Hammerstein said sarcastically. "It certainly makes this little affair here seem unimportant."

"I guess it doesn't take much brains," Mordecai Breen said, "to be a sergeant. The reason her purse was stolen was because somebody thought she carried her key in it, somebody who wanted to get into this apartment. If I were a policeman, I'd go downstairs and find out from the switchboard operator if anybody came up here. I'd find out from the help if they saw anybody come into this apartment, and get a description of whoever it was." He paused.

"Go on," Hammerstein said; "tell



me some more how to handle my business."

Breen shrugged and walked away. He stepped across the body of the dead man, elbowing a couple of plain-clothes men aside, and rummaged around in the closet. Hammerstein watched him truculently, only to discover that all Mordecai Breen wanted was a bottle of Scotch, which he found on the top shelf.

"You haven't told me everything," Hammerstein said belligerently to Breen. "There is more to this than you let on."

Mordecai Breen grinned at him while he busied himself with the tin-foil on the cork of the Scotch; it wasn't easy because of his bandaged arm.

"I wish the guys who beat you up," Hammerstein said, "had done a better job of it." He turned away in disgust, then went out.

Mordecai Breen sat down on the settee and drank from the bottle. He had taken a second swig when David Glacker came in. Breen had telephoned Glacker after he had notified the police, and he had telephoned Dan Dargan, too. Hope hadn't understood his reason for telephoning Dargan. Breen wasn't sure himself as to why he'd wanted Dargan there. It was just one of those things. He hoped something might develop.

David Glacker came into the room with short, mincing steps. His face was pasty. The fierce gray eyes were alert yet veiled now. He glanced to where the body of his brother lay, and shuddered. Then he went up to Hope.

"This is terrible," he said, his soft, musical voice tight. "This is very terrible." Tiny beads of perspiration were forming on his forehead.

"Of course it's terrible," Hope

said. There was an unnatural bitterness in her voice.

"I never thought," David said, kneading his womanish hands, "that that note—"

"Shut up," Mordecai Breen interrupted him sharply.

A couple of plain-clothes men were watching and listening.

"I can't understand," David Glacker said, "who could have done a thing like that." He was staring fixedly at Hope.

She looked back at him, her dark, luminous eyes filled with disdain. "You don't think I did it, do you?"

"No, my dear. I am quite sure you didn't do it."

The tension between the two was marked and obvious.

Mordecai Breen swung his legs up onto the settee, deposited the bottle on the floor beside him, and said: "I am all in." He closed his eyes.

One of the plain-clothes men came over to David Glacker and wanted to know who he was and what he was doing here. David told him. Just then Sergeant Hammerstein came back into the room. He brought the blond switchboard operator with him. Mordecai Breen opened one eye, saw Hammerstein, let his legs slip off the settee and sat up.

Hammerstein showed the blonde Samuel Glacker's body. She let out a horror-stricken "Oh," then said she didn't remember having seen him. Lots of visitors came to the Miranda Arms, she explained, without her seeing them. The switchboard was so placed that she had no clear view of the lobby or the elevators unless some one came directly to the switchboard to speak to her. Had she seen *anyone* who had come up to Miss Arolin's apartment?

"Only that gentleman there," she said, indicating Mordecai Breen. He had stopped at her desk somewhere



around seven to get Miss Arolin's room number. "Then there was—" She stopped and looked at Hope.

"Talk," Hammerstein commanded tersely.

"Well, earlier in the day," the blonde conceded reluctantly, "there was a tall, handsome young man with a small mustache who used to come to see Miss Arolin frequently." He had stopped at her desk for a few words. "He often did that," the blonde admitted, blushing. "He was really a very nice young man." She couldn't quite remember when he had come; it was around half past three or four, she imagined.

"A guy named Philip Terramini," Mordecai Breen said to Hammerstein. He looked mockingly at Hope.

"How did he get in," Hammerstein asked Hope, "if you were out? Who let him in, the maid?"

Hope shook her head. She glanced at Breen and tilted her chin defiantly.

"I only have a part-time maid," she informed Hammerstein. "She just comes in the morning. Mr. Terramini is a sculptor. He is very poor. His quarters aren't very . . . well, they are pretty shabby. The surroundings irritate him, get on his nerves, so when he is not working, he comes here to rest. I am interested in his work. I gave him a key to my apartment so that he could use it when I was out."

"Did he know Glacker?"

"No, he didn't," Hope said. "If you think that Philip—that Terramini had anything to do with this, you are wrong, officer."

"He's always wrong," Mordecai Breen said, making his voice pleasant.

"Shut up!" Hammerstein barked.

He was watching David Glacker. David was walking to and fro, his

manner agitated, uncertain. Once he stopped and looked at the dead man on the floor as if he couldn't believe what he saw. Hammerstein told the blond telephone operator that she could go back to her job.

As she went out, two men came in. One of them was Dargan; the other, the tall, thin operative called Lester. Dargan had a black cigar clamped between his teeth. He threw a swift glance to where Samuel Glacker lay, and then stared at Hammerstein. Dargan's white-rimmed blue eyes were frosty.

"What's the idea of bringing me in on this?" he shot at Hammerstein.

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about," Hammerstein said.

Mordecai Breen bent over and picked up the bottle of Scotch. He took a drink and then got to his feet. He felt as weak as a rag, but his mind was working.

"I phoned you," he said to Dargan. "I wanted to ask you something."

The muscles of Dargan's face tightened. He didn't say anything.

"A few days ago," Breen went on easily, "a couple of punks took me over to some place in Brooklyn and beat me up. One of them was named Joe. I got a hunch that those birds are working for you."

"You say his name was Joe," Dargan asked heavily. "The name sounds familiar. I've got about twenty-five operatives working for me regularly and when there's a strike or something like that, I take on one or two hundred more. There should be one Joe among that bunch."

An angry flush came into Mordecai Breen's face. If only he weren't so weak. If only his right arm weren't disabled, he would have planted a fist in Dargan's face.



"All right, Dargan," he said, "now tell the sergeant what you are doing in this. Tell him why that skinny guy there, Lester, has been tailing Miss Arolin. You knew Glacker, didn't you? Maybe you don't know both the Glackers, but you knew the one that's dead. I got a hunch that Samuel Glacker hired you to do something. It was after I went to see you that those two gorillas—your gorillas, my bet is—beat hell out of me, telling me after this to mind my own business." Mordecai Breen broke off.

Dargan kept his face blank. He caressed his pugnacious jaw while his white-rimmed eyes stayed fixed on Breen. Then he started to say something when David Glacker intervened.

David's white pulpy face was working. His bushy eyebrows were

drawn together in a sort of fierce intensity.

"There's some mistake here," David said. "I never saw Mr. Dargan in my life before. I am sure that my brother had nothing to do with Mr. Dargan. I don't think he would have retained Mr. Dargan for any purpose whatsoever without consulting me. Samuel never did anything without first talking the matter over with me."

Hammerstein kept shifting his eyes from one to the other. He had a feeling that he was being given a run-around and he didn't like it. Two private dicks somehow mixed up in some business connected with a murder; the dead man's brother; the girl in whose apartment the murder had taken place, and all four of them as secretive as a closed grave.

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of you up," Hammerstein growled, "including you," he added, thrusting a thick forefinger in Mordecai Breen's chest. "How do I know you didn't do it? Miss Arolin's your client. You came here to see her and then this Glacker comes or he's here already and there's an argument and you grab a knife and stick it into him, seeing as you only got one hand and can't choke him or throw him out the window."

Mordecai Breen was staring beyond the sergeant. He wasn't even listening; he was thinking of something else. It was a simple enough proposition now that he came to analyze it. Hope Arolin wanted the Glackers to stay alive. It certainly wasn't for love of the Glackers. Then it must be for money. Somebody else had threatened to kill them—had in fact killed one just to show her that he meant business—and that person wanted money. That person knew the Glackers alive meant money to Hope, and that she'd pay if she thought the Glackers would die. Was there a legacy involved? Did Hope receive an income from some estate as long as the Glackers lived? It was possible; easily possible. But who was it that was trying to extort money from her? Terramini? Terramini had been there that afternoon a little after three o'clock. Samuel Glacker had been killed around that time. It might have been a little before or

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a little after. The medical examiner certainly couldn't tell to the minute. And Terramini had a key to the apartment. Of course, there was that mater of Hope's stolen purse, but that might have been a mere coincidence. But why in the world had Glacker retained Dargan's agency to have Hope shadowed? He certainly couldn't have been afraid of Hope. The whole thing didn't make sense. It was—

The thread of Breen's thoughts was broken by Hammerstein's voice.

"Where does this guy, Terramini, hang out?" Hammerstein was bellying at Hope. "He's the guy I want to talk to. This Samuel Glacker came here on his two feet. Somebody must have let him in, and you said you were out, miss, and there was no maid, and the guy who had a key and who was here this afternoon around the time he was murdered, was Terramini. That adds up, don't it?"

Mordecai Breen's lips felt moist. He wiped them with his bandaged arm. What the sergeant was saying did add up, especially considering something that the sergeant didn't know—the sort of man that Terramini was; that he had been getting money from Hope right along. Hope was greedy. Perhaps she hadn't been giving Terramini all the money he had wanted.

"I don't suppose . . . I don't suppose," David Glacker asked, "that it could have been an accident?"

Hammerstein glowered at him in disgust. Breen eyed him sharply, then weakly wandered over to the settee where the bottle stood on the floor. He sat down and took a long drink out of the bottle. Glacker was trying to shield her, trying to protect her, trying to have everything hushed up. Why? Why? She had said the Glackers hated her. And

then suddenly it came to Mordecai Breen! It left him dizzy, angry, bitter, vindictive. He took another drink. He laughed mirthlessly, half aloud, while Hope gave Hammerstein Terramini's address.

"I'm going down to see Terramini," Hammerstein said, "but before I go—" He suddenly whirled on Lester who all this time had been standing there, tall, thin, incredibly loose and still. "What were you tailing Miss Arolin for?"

Lester shut his thin lips tight and looked at his chief. Dargan said:

"We've got nothing to hide. Samuel Glacker, the man who is dead, retained us to keep an eye on Miss Arolin. Shadowing is part of our business."

"What did he want you to do that for?" Hammerstein snapped.

Dargan shrugged. "We don't pry into our clients' private affairs. If they engage us to tail somebody and report on their movements, we tail them and report."

"I cannot imagine," David Glacker broke in hastily, "why my brother would want to do such a thing, but of course we have known Miss Arolin a long time. We've been the best of friends. It couldn't be"—a cunning look came into David's eyes—"it couldn't be that Samuel was jealous of her, although—"

Mordecai Breen, from the settee, heard, and looked at Hope. He saw her lips part, a bewildered look in her eyes, and he laughed again without humor. That expression in her face lasted only an instant. Hammerstein missed it. When he looked at her, her expression was demure. She almost managed to look as though she were blushing coyly.

Lester said to Dargan: "Will you need me any more today?"

Dargan, his mouth hard, his white-



rimmed china-blue eyes savage, said:

"No, I won't need you any more today. I won't need you any more at any time. You're fired. I got no use for operatives that let our clients get killed."

The tall, thin man stood there, mute, for endless seconds. His narrow head, pivoting on his scrawny neck, took in Breen, took in Hope, with hate-filled eyes. Then he turned and in his cracked, unpleasant voice, said to Dargan:

"What do you expect me to do? I can't keep track of two people at once, can I?" The skin drawn tight over his high cheekbones glistened, his sunken eyes dulled, then he turned and walked out.

## VII.

When Lester had gone, Mordecai Breen beckoned to Hope. She came and sat down beside him.

"I like to have you near me, darling." His battered face was twisted into a smile, but his voice was a soft snarl. He reached over and put his hand over the folded hands in her lap. "I like to hold your hands," he went on in the same tone, the snarl so soft that it was inaudible to anyone else but her. "I feel safer when I hold your hands."

She looked at him in a confused, troubled way. Then under the long lashes, her eyes grew soft, the carmine oval mouth appealing.

"You *do* love me, don't you?" she whispered. "I don't understand what you're saying. You're teasing me, but you love me—love me so much that you were jealous when you saw Terramini here. Well, I promised you I'd give him up . . . for you. You don't know what a comfort it is to me to know that I have you to take care of me."

Mordecai Breen, watching her,

nodded several times. His yellow-brown eyes glittered.

"You're wonderful," he said. "What's that perfume you use?" He stopped, listened for a moment to Hammerstein instructing his men to wait there until the wagon had come to take away the body.

"As for you," Hammerstein said, taking in David Glacker, Hope, and Breen, "I trust none of you are planning to leave town. I got my own ideas as to how this thing happened, but just the same I may be wrong, and in case I am wrong, you three and me are going to have some more talks."

Hammerstein went out, slamming the door behind him.

David went over to take another look at the body of his dead brother. David's face was a sickly green. He came over to where Hope and Breen were sitting.

"When can I see you?" he asked Hope. "I've got to see you alone soon. There are some things we have to arrange—"

Mordecai Breen answered for her.

"There's no rush, Glacker," he said. "You're safe. Nothing's going to happen to you. Take my word for it."

Hope gave Breen a grateful smile. She rested her hand caressingly for a moment on his knee. She was wonderful, Breen thought. She was very good indeed.

Glacker said he would telephone her tomorrow. When he had gone, Mordecai Breen said:

"Let's go into the other room where we can talk without these flat-foot listening in."

She rose and led the way to the bedroom. Mordecai Breen picked up the Scotch and followed her. He closed the door carefully behind him, stood with his back against it, gazing at her with sultry eyes. She



came and put her arms around him, pulled his head down and, standing on tiptoes, kissed him.

"You're doing all right," Mordecai Breen said.

His tone made her draw back. She looked confused again, uncertain, slightly troubled.

"What is the matter?" she said, her voice trembling.

Mordecai Breen grinned at her savagely. "Nothing much, only you've been playing me for a sap. You've got something on these Glackers. You've been getting money out of them, only not so much as you wanted to, so you and Terramini cook up this scheme—"

"Terramini!" she broke in, her eyes wide.

"Shut up!" Mordecai Breen snapped. "You cook up this scheme and send yourself notes—"

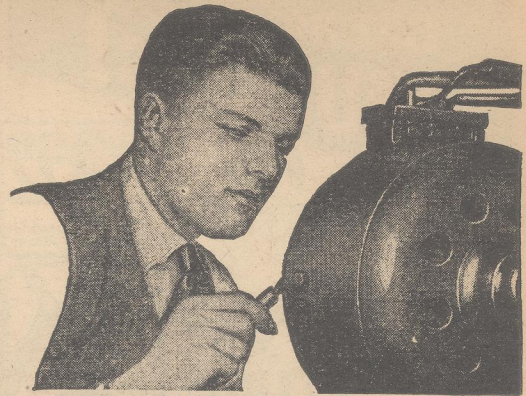
"No, no, no!" she protested. "You're mad!"

"And it's a swell idea, too," Breen went on inexorably, "because the Glackers naturally wouldn't suspect you of threatening to kill them. They're your meal ticket. The notes say that unless you pay twenty-five thousand dollars for each of the Glackers to some mythical guy, the Glackers are going to die. The idea is that the Glackers, frightened, will give you twenty-five thousand dollars apiece to save themselves so that you can turn it over to the guy who's supposed to be writing you the threatening notes. There is no such guy, so you and Terramini are in a nice piece of change."

Hope made little fists of her hands and beat the air.

"How can you say things like that? How can you?"

"But the Glackers either haven't got the dough or they think it's a phony, that somebody's playing a joke on you, so you hire me for atmosphere. You know darn well I'll go down to the Glackers and that'll



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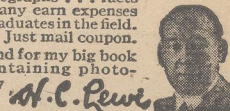
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make it look real. The Glackers hear that you hired a detective to protect them, and maybe think that you really did get those notes, that you really believe that they're in danger. But the Glackers still don't come through, and something's got to be done. So you get Terramini up here—"

She stamped her foot.

"Terramini doesn't know anything about this!" she protested vehemently. "You must have realized when I spoke to you the other day over the telephone, when I pretended that you were an automobile salesman, that there was someone in the room—someone to whom I didn't want to disclose your identity. That was Terramini."

"Yeah," Mordecai Breen said. It was amazing how much disbelief he could put into that one small word. "Only when I came in tonight, you said to Terramini, 'I told you about Mr. Breen.'"

For a moment Hope stared at him helplessly.

"Terramini didn't believe that phony telephone conversation I had with you. He was angry. He wanted to know who had really called, so I told him your name. I told him a small brooch had been stolen, that I had hired you to recover it. That's all I meant when I said to Terramini that I had told him about you."

"You know all the answers, don't you?" Mordecai Breen sneered. "Now let me finish the rest of my story. The Glackers still don't come through and pay you any fifty thousand dollars. In fact, Samuel has got a pretty good hunch of what you're doing. He has you watched by the Dargan people and when I appear on the scene, he tells Dargan about it. I don't know how much Dargan knows, but he doesn't want me butting in and maybe doing him out of a good client. So I get



hell beaten out of me. Then what happens?"

"Please, please, don't say any more. You frighten me, you can't be serious. You . . . you've had too much to drink."

"Not enough," Mordecai Breen said, "to stomach this business." He tilted the bottle to his mouth and drank. Then: "You and Terramini make up your minds to teach the Glackers a lesson. You get Terramini up here and telephone Samuel Glacker. While Terramini is waiting here for Glacker, you go out. You're not very bright or you'd have fixed yourself a good alibi by talking to different people who'd remember seeing you."

Mordecai Breen paused and looked pensive. "No, that's not it," he said after a time. "You didn't think you'd need an alibi. It's Terramini who isn't very bright. Guys who live off women, guys who sell their good looks, aren't apt to be bright. So he did something that you never counted on. He killed Samuel Glacker right here in your apartment, never stopping to think how he'd get rid of the body, or what the consequences of this business might be to you. Then he gets panicky and sticks Glacker in the closet. You come back and before he's got a chance to tell you what he's done, and to talk things over, I'm on the scene. He probably figured on hanging around downstairs in the lobby until I was gone, but the police came and he skipped." Mordecai Breen stopped, then added triumphantly, "I guess that covers everything."

She stared at him with parted lips, terror in her eyes, her slim body taut.

"You can't," she said at long last, "you can't believe that." With swift steps she came close to him, again

kissing him, while he stood unresponsive, the half-empty bottle dangling at his side. She stepped away, a baffled look in her face. "Do you really think," she asked in a whisper, "that I would kill, or want to have a man killed?"

Breen eyed her doubtfully, then shrugged. He was sorry he'd shrugged. It sent a sharp pain down his bandaged arm. That didn't help his temper any.

"Maybe the murder was Terramini's idea, but the blackmail was yours! You've got something on the Glackers and they've been paying you. Whatever you've got on them, it's so bad that David Glacker right here tried to cover you whenever Hammerstein wanted to know something." Then suddenly sullen anger came into Breen's voice. "You've tried to make a sap out of me. I get knocked around until I'm in a hospital on account of you, and for all you know—or care—I might get mixed up in a murder. Well, let me tell you something. I'll clear up the killing if Hammerstein doesn't. And as for you, even if you weren't . . . if you weren't mixed up in the murder, you were in the blackmail, and they send little girls, even good-looking little girls like you, to the hoosegow just like that."

Her hand flew to her mouth as if to smother a cry.

"You . . . you're going to the police . . . you're going to tell them—"

"Uh-huh." Mordecai Breen slowly nodded. "I'm going to the police just as soon as I know a little more."

He tossed the bottle onto the bed, turned his back on her, and walked out.

Hope Arolin waited five minutes after Mordecai Breen had gone.



During that time, her expression was a picture of kaleidoscopic changes. The soft loveliness went out of her face, pale fear taking its place. Then came utter helplessness, bewilderment, and finally, hot fury. From a closet she took down a hat and her silver-fox scarf, and put them on. She went out into the other room.

One of the detectives said: "Where are you going, miss?"

"Out," she said, her voice sharp.

The policeman shrugged. He had no orders to stop her. Hope paused to look down at the body of Samuel Glacker. The fury in her eyes mounted.

"Stupid oaf!" she said inaudibly, and made for the door. She had to make a telephone call—a call which she didn't want to make from her apartment, a call she didn't want to go through the switchboard for fear it might be overheard.

David Glacker found Dan Dargan waiting for him downstairs in the lobby of the Miranda Arms. Dargan walked beside David out into the street.

"What I wanted to ask you," Dargan said, "is, do you want me to have my office keep on shadowing the Arolin girl?"

"Why did my brother ask you to do that?" David asked.

"I don't know," Dargan said. His hard face was frank. "You heard what I told the sergeant. That covers it. Your brother wanted us to shadow her. I put Lester on the job. He's a good man, but he's getting old; a little soft in the head, I think. Besides, he's sick. I ought to have put somebody else on the case. Not that it would have made any difference. We didn't have much to report to your brother that was of interest, except that she went

to see that cheap private detective, Mordecai Breen. Do you want us to keep on?"

"I don't know," David said. His ordinarily fierce eyes were distraught, uncertain now.

"My guess is," Dargan said, "that the Arolin girl had something to do with your brother's being snuffed out. The same thing might happen to you—maybe."

David Glacker's fat, puffy face twitched nervously.

"I'll see," he said; "I'll let you know. Right now, I've got something to do." He hailed a passing taxi and jumped inside.

Dargan, his white-rimmed, glassy eyes suddenly thoughtful, watched him drive away. Glacker gave the driver an address farther uptown. It was an apartment house on East Fiftieth Street.

There, David took the elevator and got out on the fourth floor. He rang the bell of Apartment 4B. The name over the bell read, "Simon Menzel." Menzel was the attorney for the Glacker brothers. A maid showed David into the living room and asked him to wait. Menzel came in a few minutes later.

"I hope you're not busy," David Glacker said, "but I've got to see you right away."

Menzel was a small man, dark-complexioned, with a hooked nose and brown, inquisitive eyes.

"That's all right," he said, "perfectly all right." He made his voice soothing, while he studied his visitor sharply.

"We don't want you to apply for a receiver in bankruptcy tomorrow morning. We won't want one. Glacker Bros. isn't going bankrupt." David rubbed the palms of his soft, womanish hands together.

Menzel's eyes narrowed. "What's happened?" he said. "This morn-



ing you and your brother were busted higher than a kite, absolutely *machola*, and now you're all right. So now maybe you struck oil, huh?"

David said: "My brother's dead. He was murdered this afternoon."

Menzel let out a low whistle. For interminable seconds he stared with veiled eyes at David Glacker.

"You and your brother carried insurance," he said. "Only the other day you were telling me, a hundred thousand dollars each, so if something should happen to either of you, the firm, it wouldn't go broke."

David nodded. "With the insurance money," he said, his voice softer, more musical than ever, "Glacker Bros, can carry on."

"You're lucky," Menzel said, a queer inflection in his voice. "How did it happen? Maybe you wouldn't want to talk about it tonight."

"That's right," David Glacker said, "not tonight. I'm . . . I'm too upset."

It was nine o'clock that evening when Sergeant Hammerstein arrived at the place where Philip Terramini had his studio in an old private house, altered into apartments. The top one had a skylight. Hammerstein punched the bell under Terramini's name and waited. The door lock didn't click. He tried again with the same result. Then he rang the bell marked "Superintendent."

A slatternly old woman came to the door and asked what Hammerstein wanted. Hammerstein told her who he was.

"If you're from the police looking for Terramini," the woman said, "I'm not surprised."

"What do you mean by that?" Hammerstein asked.

"I always said to my husband," the woman said, "that there was something queer about that young man.

His clothes are too fine; he has a swell car and he gives himself airs. If he has so much money, why should he be living in a place like this? Not that it isn't a respectable house. It's not exactly cheap, but—"

"All right, all right," Hammerstein cut her off. "Take me up to Terramini's apartment. I want to talk to him."

It appeared then that Terramini wasn't in. Someone had telephoned him about a half hour before the sergeant had arrived. The old woman knew this, because Terramini had no telephone in his room. He used the telephone downstairs in the hall and she had answered the call and had summoned Terramini.

"Was it a man or a woman who called?" Hammerstein asked.

"I don't know," the woman said. "It could have been one and it could have been the other."

Hammerstein frowned at her. Then she told him that ten minutes later she had seen Terramini coming down the stairs in a hurry, carrying a small suitcase and dashing out.

Hammerstein swore under his breath.

"Take me up anyhow," he said. "I'll have a look around."

It was nearly midnight when Lester came home to the little flat on the East Side where he lived with his wife. His wife was short and chunky. She was much younger than Lester, with nice pleasant eyes. She was waiting for her husband when he came in, but not worrying. The nature of Lester's work was such that he was liable to be out all hours of the night.

Lester said, "Hello, Mary," and nothing else. He reached inside his coat, took out that fat revolver of his and placed it on the mantelpiece.



He removed his coat and vest and put them on the back of a chair. After that he sat down at a table and held his head in his hands.

"You're tired," his wife said. "I've got some food on the stove and some hot coffee."

Lester nodded, without taking his head out of his hands.

A worried expression came into Mary's eyes. "Nothing wrong, is there?"

Lester dropped his hands and turned his head to look up at her. His lips moved, but no words came.

"You've been to the doctor," Mary said. "What did he say?"

"He told me the truth this time," Lester said. His eyes seemed to sink farther and farther back into his head. "I've got a couple of months more," he went on. "maybe six at the most."

His wife let out an anguished little cry. She bent down, threw an arm across his narrow shoulders.

"No!" she said. "No, no!"

"I knew it all the time," Lester said tonelessly; he stared straight ahead at the table in front of him. "It doesn't make any difference, Mary. You'll be all right. We've got a little money saved up and—"

She began to cry. Her sobs drowned out his voice. She scarcely heard him say:

"Dargan fired me today."

Lester leaned away from the table, pulled open a drawer, and took out some newspaper clippings. The clippings were years old. He fingered them listlessly and looked at them without seeing them. He didn't have to see them. He had read and studied them so many times before.

### VIII.

When Mordecai Breen awoke in his own bed the next morning, it was

eleven o'clock. He didn't remember much of what had happened the night before, after he had left Hope, only that he had gone out of the Miranda Arms, signaled a waiting taxi, had given the driver his address, and then he had collapsed on the sidewalk. The taxi driver must have brought him home and perhaps between the driver and the landlady they had put him to bed. Mordecai Breen lay still, his eyes half closed, thinking of what had happened.

Hope Arolin knew something about the Glackers that enabled her to blackmail them. That's why she was so anxious to keep them alive. Terramini was in on the racket and Terramini and Hope had concocted that scheme of getting a large sum out of the Glackers. If it had been someone else who had written those notes—someone who knew the secret that enabled Hope to blackmail the Glackers—whoever it was would not have gone about it in that round-about way. He'd have gone directly to the Glackers and blackmailed them instead of trying to get money from Hope. There could be no other explanation. And that, too, explained why Hope couldn't go to the police about those notes. She couldn't possibly tell the police why she wanted the Glackers kept alive. And the game was perfectly safe as far as the Glackers were concerned. They couldn't go to the police either without disclosing the hold that Hope Arolin had over them. As soon as he got some of his strength back, he'd have to dig into that angle of it. And yet why had Terramini and Hope actually killed Samuel Glacker? He was one of the two geese that laid the golden eggs. Perhaps—

Mordecai Breen braced himself with his elbow as he sat up. A new idea! There was the possibility that



David Glacker somehow had gotten into Hope's apartment with his brother and had killed Samuel. Breen could visualize a situation wherein Hope was blackmailing the Glacker brothers because of something that she had on Samuel only. With Samuel dead, her hold would cease on David. Then, too, there was always the possibility that Hope might be accused of the murder. With Samuel dead in her apartment, the whole situation would then be changed. David Glacker would have nothing to fear. It might be the very opposite. Hope might be the one who'd be terrified. There definitely was the possibility that David had killed Samuel.

Mordecai Breen groaned. He was in no shape to grapple with the matter further just then. There was

a knock on the door. It opened. Breen's landlady stood there, bearing a tray, and behind her was Slap-happy.

"I brought you some breakfast, Mr. Breen." The landlady put the tray on his lap, fixed his pillows, and said: "There. You eat those eggs and drink that coffee and you'll feel better."

Mordecai Breen said, "Thanks," and looked at the breakfast with jaundiced eyes, then glanced at Slap-happy.

Slap-happy said: "How's everything, chief? You all right?"

"Sure, sure," Breen said.

He sipped at the orange juice, toyed with the scrambled eggs, and greedily drank the hot coffee. He looked at the landlady and said, "Thanks," again. She rightly inter-

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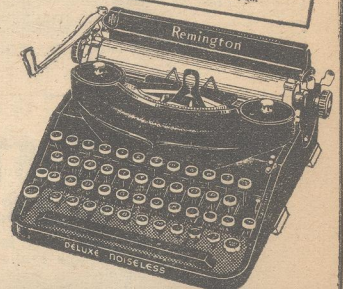


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pretended this to mean that she was dismissed, and went out.

When she was gone and Breen had finished his coffee, he said to Slap-happy:

"Take this damn tray away and give me that phone."

Slap-happy, grinning, said. "You want to call that dame, huh, that good number that was down our office?"

"Yeah," Mordecai Breen said, "I want to call her. I want to call her names."

He took the phone from Slap-happy and called headquarters, asking for Hammerstein. He got the sergeant after a while.

"This is Breen, Hammerstein. I'm laid up in bed. I overtaxed my strength last night. I passed out trying to get into a taxi."

"That's too bad," Hammerstein said sarcastically. "What do you want me to do, send you some fruit?"

"No, I want to hear how you made out with Terramini. Did you find him?"

"No, I didn't find him," Hammerstein barked. He was in a bad temper. "But somebody else did. A guy that works on a barge anchored in the East River. He fished Terramini's body out of the river this morning. He was shot through the back. If there's anything else you want to be entertained with, turn on the radio and listen to a bedtime story." Hammerstein hung up.

Mordecai Breen replaced the phone. He looked blankly at Slap-happy.

"I got some news for you, chief," Slap-happy said. "There was a moider at the hotel where our client lives. It was in her apartment. It's right here in the paper."

Slap-happy took the copy of the *Leader* he held folded under his arm and spread it in front of Mordecai Breen. The account was on the



front page. Breen scarcely glanced at it. His mind was on what he'd heard from Hammerstein just then.

"I know," he said to Slap-happy. "I was there."

"Gee, chief," Slap-happy said in an awed tone. To his simple mind the fact that Mordecai Breen had been there was nothing but evidence of his chief's astuteness.

"You know about the ad, too, then, huh, chief?"

"What ad?" Mordecai Breen said.

Slap-happy stuck out his barrel chest.

"If you want to be a good detective," he said, "you've got to read the papers and know what's going on. That's what I figure. You're too busy to do all that yourself, chief. That's what you got me for." He picked up the paper and rustled the pages as he turned them over. Then with one of his stubby fingers, he pointed to a few lines in the personal column. Mordecai Breen read:

I'll pay as soon as I am rid of Breen.  
Hope.

Mordecai Breen glared at it in grim silence. The yellow-brown eyes snapped. His face darkened. The veins on his forehead began to swell. His head buzzed with uncontrollable rage.

Slap-happy watched Breen with undisguised admiration. He always enjoyed it when Mordecai Breen flew into a rage. Breen could get madder than anyone Slap-happy had ever known. And now Breen was more angry than Slap-happy had ever seen him.

"That's the way I figured it, too, chief," Slap-happy declared with satisfaction. "She's two-timing you, that's what she's doing. She's a swell looker, chief, but she's a dope.

She couldn't get anybody better than you."

"The hellcat! *The damned hellcat!*" Breen roared.

Slap-happy, sensing that his own interpretation was incorrect, now asked anxiously:

"What's wrong, chief? What's happened?"

"Nothing," Breen said, "nothing, only I want a gun. You go out and buy me a gun, Slap-happy."

"A gun? Gee, chief, you ain't gonna bump her—"

"Stop talking so much," Mordecai Breen fretted. The furrows had left his forehead. The fury had gone out of his face. The yellow-brown eyes were suddenly pensive.

"Sure, chief, that's what you need, a great big gun. I know just what you want," Slap-happy soothed in the tone of one humoring a wilful child.

"You don't," Mordecai Breen said tersely. He pointed to a pile of magazines on a chair beside the bureau. "There's a catalogue with pictures of guns in it. Get it for me."

Slap-happy found the catalogue.

Mordecai Breen turned the pages slowly with his good hand. When he found the place, he held the catalogue open with his bandaged arm and pointed to a pistol.

"That's the one I want, Slap-happy."

Slap-happy looked and his mouth fell open.

"You're not . . . you're not kidding me, chief?"

"Why would I want to do that?" Mordecai Breen asked fretfully. "You go and buy that gun. Have you got any money?"

"Sure, I got your dough you gave me at the hospital."

"O. K.," Mordecai Breen barked. "You go out and buy that gun. And



another thing, my arm needs re-bandaging. This bandage is slipping. Bring me some fresh bandages. When all that's done, you're going back to the office. If anybody wants to know—*anybody*—where they can reach me, tell them I'm here, that I'm sick in bed, too weak to move an eyelash."

Slap-happy scratched his head. There was something behind all this, but it was too much for him.

### IX.

Mordecai Breen's room was in complete darkness. He lay flat on his back, his eyes open, listening. He didn't know what time it was. It must be well after midnight. He felt drowsy and yet he had to keep awake. The advertisement that Hope had inserted in the paper must lead to something. His notion that someone would try to do away with him immediately was based on the swiftness with which Terramini had been killed.

Why Terramini had been killed, Breen didn't know, but he could guess. Terramini had gone up to see Hope yesterday afternoon and he had seen someone come out of Hope's apartment—the killer. The murder had been quickly discovered, so Terramini had to be disposed of immediately, before he could give the police a description of the man he'd seen coming out of Hope's apartment, and the killer hadn't hesitated. That was simple and logical enough. Something of the sort must have occurred to Hope when she had placed the advertisement in the *Leader*. She couldn't have known that Terramini was dead when she had inserted the advertisement, but she must have reasoned that the same man who had killed Samuel Glacker would kill him,

Breen, if he felt that Breen stood between him and his chance to get any money from her.

One thing was plain now. It couldn't have been Terramini who had killed Samuel Glacker. And it was equally clear that Hope didn't know who had done the killing or she would have communicated directly with the murderer instead of inserting the ad in the *Leader*. That left—

Something happened that broke sharply into Mordecai Breen's thoughts. There was a faint sound at the door, the metallic sound of someone trying a key. Breen, lying absolutely still, making no move, waited for seconds. His pulses were throbbing, his heart was pounding. Softly he called:

"Come in. The door isn't locked." He waited.

The sound at the door stopped abruptly. The heavy stillness that followed was almost unbearable. Mordecai Breen, turning his head to the left, kept his eyes fixed on the spot where he knew the door to be. Suddenly there was a narrow slit of dim light from the hall outside.

Breen, keeping his voice low, said: "If you reach in with your hand, you'll find the switch right next to the door."

The narrow slit of light wavered, as if the intruder couldn't make up his mind whether or not to withdraw. Then it steadied. Mordecai Breen could make out the shadowy outlines of a hand coming through the crack of light. His ears, attuned to the slightest sound, caught the noise of a fumbling, groping hand against the wall. Then a click and the room was flooded with light. No one came in. The door stayed the way it was—open a few inches. The hand that had found the switch was



withdrawn, then reappeared, holding a gun.

Mordecai Breen, his voice harsh but level, said: "Come on in, Glacker. I've been expecting you."

He sensed rather than actually saw an eye peering at him through the crack. Then the door opened and a man came in. Mordecai Breen's eyes widened. He sucked in his breath sharply. It wasn't David Glacker at all! The man advanced a few steps, his gun pointing at the bed. Without taking his glance away from Breen, he reached back, shut the door, and locked it. Then he came over to the bed.

Mordecai Breen, his yellow-brown eyes glittering, said: "This is a surprise. How are you, Lester?"

The tall, thin man said nothing. There was no hate in his sunken eyes now. They were dull but purposeful. After a long time he stepped close to the bed and without a word pulled back the covers, keeping that fat revolver of his steadily on Breen. He felt under the pillows and found no weapon. He patted Breen's pajamas, then said, "Roll over." Mordecai Breen rolled over. Lester looked. There was no gun there and now he was satisfied.

Breen rolled onto his back again. His face wooden, he stared up at Lester.

"What's the idea?"

Lester, his cracked voice flat, unemotional, said: "There are different ways of dying. You let out a yell and I'll let you have it where it hurts. Nobody can get here in time to save you, so it won't do you any good to holler for help. And don't think I won't shoot. I don't care what happens to me. I told you there were different ways of dying. I'm going to die the hard way. The doctor's given me three months—maybe six."

Mordecai Breen lay motionless, si-

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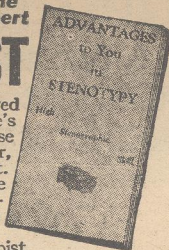
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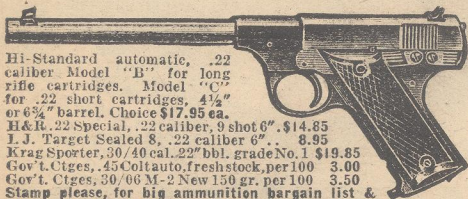
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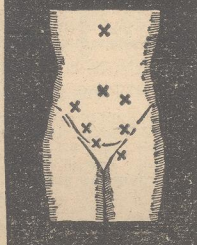
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lent, then: "What difference does it make to you whether I live or die?"

Lester, without taking his eyes off Breen, hooked a chair over with his foot to the side of the bed and sat down. With his left hand, he took from his pocket a cone-topped tin can and a sponge; he placed them carefully on the table beside Breen's bed. Mordecai Breen read the label on the can. It said, "Ether."

With his left hand Breen plucked restively at the lapel of his pajama coat.

"I asked you," he said, "what difference it made to you whether I was dead or alive?"

"I don't mind telling you," Lester said slowly, in his cracked, whispering voice. "In fact I better tell you, so that you can see that you've got to die and won't make any fuss about it. I work pretty fast; I've got to, seeing how short a time there's left to me. Terramini could tell you how fast I work if he were alive, but he's dead."

"A half hour more or less won't make any difference," Breen said.

"A month ago Samuel Glacker came to Dargan," Lester went on. "He was desperate. He wanted this Arolin girl shadowed. He wanted to see if we couldn't get something on her, and if we couldn't—he wanted us to frame her. Dan Dargan is not squeamish. He took on the job and assigned me to the case. He had a special reason for picking me. He knew that I didn't care what happened to me, that I was going to die anyway. You know why Samuel Glacker wanted me to frame her. She was blackmailing the Glackers. The Arolin girl told me this afternoon when I went to see her that you knew. I went to see her because I figured it was time to put all the cards on the table. I told her that I'd killed Samuel Glacker. That killing was easy. A couple of days ago I stole her purse. That's where



women carry their keys almost always. If you shadow somebody day in and day out, you soon get on to their habits. So when I saw her go out of the Miranda Arms, I knew she'd gone for her regular walk and I'd have enough time. I phoned Samuel Glacker to come right up, that I had the goods on Hope. He came right away. I met him in front of the Miranda Arms. We took the elevator to the fifth floor, then we walked up one flight. Nobody saw us when we went into her apartment. I was going to beat him to death with my gun. It's heavy enough as you know, and he was such a little fellow. But in the apartment I saw that dagger on the desk. I picked it up, careless sort of, and pointed to some papers on the desk and told Glacker to read. Glacker bent over to read and I stuck the dagger into his back. He didn't even have time to cry out." There was something horrible about the indifferent, lethargic way in which Lester described that murder.

"You're not very bright," Breen said through his teeth. "Your fingerprints must be on the handle of the dagger. The police will get you sooner or later."

"I'm brighter than you think," Lester said tonelessly. "I wasn't taking any chances with fingerprints on doorknobs or anywhere else. I was wearing gloves. I picked Samuel Glacker up. I'm a dying man, but I'm still strong enough for that. The thing that's killing me isn't sapping my strength so much as you'd think; it's . . . it's eating me away inside. I picked Glacker up and put him in the closet after punching another note to the Arolin girl over the handle of the dagger. Then I went out." Lester paused. He eyed Mordecai Breen darkly. "I'm wasting time," Lester said. "I didn't

come here to chat with you. I came here to kill you."

"What happened when you went out?" Breen was amazed at the steadiness of his own voice.

"Just as I was closing the door, a man came along the hall. I didn't think much about it at the time. I didn't realize that he was going into Hope Arolin's apartment, so I just went on down the stairs back to the fifth floor where I took the elevator. It was only afterwards when Dargan and I went back, when I was listening to Hammerstein that I realized that the man had gone into the Arolin girl's apartment after I had left and that his name was Terramini. I had to move fast then, because the minute the police got to him and told him there had been a murder, he'd remember about me, and I'm easy to describe."

"So you went downstairs," Mordecai Breen said, "called up Terramini and told him that there'd been a murder in Hope Arolin's apartment and that he was to meet you somewhere and that you would take him to Hope Arolin; that he, Terramini, and Hope had to get out of town for a few days."

"That's about right," Lester said without surprise. "I had a little trouble getting his telephone number. He hasn't got a phone of his own, but Information gave me the number of the house where he lives. I met him a few blocks away. He lives over on the East Side, not far from the river. He was a little surprised to see me. He couldn't quite place me, but thought he'd met me somewhere. I told him that I was a friend of Hope Arolin's, that I had a speedboat docked right at the foot of his street and that Hope was there and that I was going to take them both up to Stamford where they could get a train for Boston. I said



that Hope was afraid that the police might be watching the Grand Central and the Pennsylvania stations. He was a dumb guy. I told him about the dagger and about his fingerprints being on it, and the Arolin girl's, too, and that seemed reasonable enough, and when we got to the deserted pier where I said my boat was moored, I let him go on a little ahead of me. In the darkness he couldn't see the boat; there was no boat. I told him to look again and as he leaned forward, I stuck my gun in his back, hard, and pulled the trigger. The sound of the shot was partly muffled by his back. He toppled over in the water. When you're like me, you take all sorts of chances. But apparently nobody heard. I just walked away and went home."

"Two killings in a day," Mordecai Breen said, "just like that."

"And a third one coming," Lester said. For the fraction of a second his eye drifted toward the can and the sponge on the table beside Mordecai Breen's bed.

"You're crazy," Mordecai Breen said. "I suppose Hope Arolin promised you some money for this. After you saw the ad in the paper this morning, you went straight to her, told her you killed Glacker and Terramini figuring she couldn't give you away without spoiling her own game, but you're a fool. If you kill me, she'll never pay you. She'll double-cross you."

A thin mirthless smile came to Lester's lips.

"You always forget the advantage I've got. I'm going to die anyway. I'll be dead long before they send me to the chair. I made that clear to the Arolin girl and I made it plain that if I didn't get some money, the next guy to go would be David Glacker."

"You're crazy! You're mad!"

The dead smile stayed on Lester's bluish lips.

"I don't think so, but I wouldn't be surprised. Years of unbearable pain getting worse and worse—"

The hand that held the gun shook a little, then steadied.

"I got a check for twenty thousand dollars out of the Arolin girl. That's to pay me for not killing David Glacker and to pay me for killing you."

"And after you've killed me," Mordecai Breen interrupted him contemptuously, "she'll stop payment on the check."

Lester shook his head. "She can't," he said, "because she knows that if she did that, I'd go to the police and tell what I know. After I did that, even if they didn't lock her up as an accessory to a murder—not Samuel Glacker's murder, but another murder that happened over two years ago—her income from David Glacker would stop. She can't double-cross me and I can't double-cross her. I can't cash that check without killing you, because you'd spoil everything. You'd go to the police. So"—Lester shrugged his narrow, thin shoulders expressively—"so you see you've got to die. I hope you'll make it easy instead of making it messy. I'll admit you might get me into a jam by making me shoot you, making me pump lead into your belly until you fall apart, and I'd probably get caught, but it wouldn't do you any good. I already explained all that."

"I'd have the satisfaction," Mordecai Breen said, his voice savage, "of knowing that you'd be in jail, that you wouldn't be able to cash that twenty-thousand-dollar check."

"You wouldn't," Lester contradicted. "The check's made out to my wife. She's got it now in a



sealed envelope with a statement of the facts of the blackmail racket that the Arolin girl worked. The Arolin girl won't stop payment and my wife will get the money, and it's for her I did it."

Mordecai Breen wiped his mouth with his bandaged arm. There was a brittle look in his face, but he said nothing.

"There's ether in that can," Lester said. "I'll soak the sponge, put it over your nose and mouth, and you'll never know what happened." His cracked voice became more and more leaden. There was something about it that made Mordecai Breen shiver despite himself. Lester picked up the can and held it out to Mordecai Breen. "You'll have to help me unscrew the top," he said. "You see, we each only have one hand. You, because your arm is busted and me, because I've got to keep you covered with my gun. So while I hold the can, you unscrew the top."

Mordecai Breen said: "How did you hit upon that idea of sending those notes to Hope Arolin? If you knew what she was doing, if you knew what she was holding over the Glackers, why didn't you go and try to blackmail them directly instead of blackmailing Hope Arolin? It would have been so much simpler."

"What difference does it make?"

"I'd like to know," Mordecai

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Breen said, "so that when I meet you in hell we can talk it over some more."

Lester glanced at the alarm clock on the bureau, then said:

"All right, there's time. When Samuel Glacker first came to the Dargan agency, I talked to him about the whole business. He was pretty cagy about it, pretended it was just a case of some love letters that he'd written to the Arolin girl, that she was threatening to make public. He said he was planning to get married and wanted to avoid any scandal. He didn't fool me because I remembered something. There were two reasons why I didn't try to blackmail the Glackers. First, I didn't have the goods on them really; I only suspected. And the second reason was that the Glackers were broke. There was no more money to be gotten out of them, not any real money. Samuel told me; that's what made Samuel Glacker so desperate. She'd drained them for two years. They didn't tell Hope Arolin they were broke. They had enough to keep up the monthly payments they were making her for a few months more. Two thousand dollars a month! Think of it! That's nice money. So I tried to hold her up for fifty thousand by writing her those notes. I didn't think she'd pay that much, but I thought that if I asked for a lot, I'd get more than if I asked for just a little, and I was right. I got twenty grand. Now let's get through with this business."

Again he held out the can of ether toward Mordecai Breen.

"You said something about a murder that Hope knew about," Mordecai Breen said. "How did that affect the Glackers?" The light in his yellow-brown eyes was like wicked little flames.

Lester frowned impatiently, then said:

"Hope Arolin was on the stage a couple of years ago. The Glackers



were making money then, lots of money. It seems hard to believe that she'd ever take an interest in a little, middle-aged dried-up cuss like Samuel Glacker. I'm pretty sure that she wasn't in love with him; just played him for what she could get out of him. She had somebody else on the string, a young guy named Smathers. Samuel Glacker was frightfully jealous. There's no bigger dopes than middle-aged men gone on young women. When they go crazy, they go really crazy. Samuel Glacker, believe it or not, was driven into a frenzy over Smathers. He threatened to kill him if he didn't stay away from her. He even went so far as to write the fellow a letter telling him that he'd do it.

"One night— Oh, what's the use of going into all that? Samuel Glacker shot the guy in the presence of his brother, David. There was an investigation, but no one could pin anything on the Glackers except Hope Arolin. She'd seen something and she had the gun and the letter Samuel had written Smathers, but she kept her mouth shut. She worked it nicely. She didn't threaten them directly. She just told them about the letter and the gun. She said she needed some money to get away. She was afraid the police might connect her with the affair. So they gave her some money and they gave her more after that, and then it got to be more and more, and with each payment they were only piling up evidence against themselves. Listen here. If you figure on stalling me along, hoping that somebody will come, you're wasting your time. If the police arrived right now and broke in that door, I'd pump you full of lead just the same."

"How'd you find out all this?" Breen asked.

"I remembered the investigation



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at the time of the murder and when Samuel Glacker came to Dargan, I put two and two together. I looked through the old newspaper files that had to do with the Smathers case, but I didn't discover the details, not until I got them out of the Arolin girl this afternoon."

Mordecai Breen made a rasping sound deep down in his throat.

A dreamy, distant expression came into Lester's face as he looked at Mordecai Breen.

"If those two guys that Dargan sent to beat you up for butting into our business had done a better job, they would have saved me a lot of trouble." Suddenly Lester's cracked voice became sharp. "Come on! Help me open this can." His sunken, ordinary dull eyes glowed, his narrow face became incredibly menacing. "You can die one way or you can die another."

Mordecai Breen, with his bandaged arm, pushed the can of ether that Lester was holding out to him away.

"Don't be a damn fool," he snarled. "Do you think I'm going to help kill myself?"

Lester stood up, his long thin body shook as he glared down at Mordecai Breen. He tossed the ether to one side. Deliberately, without haste, he reversed his huge revolver and held it by the barrel. To Breen, it assumed the propor-

tions of a sledge hammer. Then without an instant's warning, Lester's arm shot up to bring the butt crashing down on Mordecai Breen's head. Breen raised his bandaged arm. In that fraction of a second, it must have struck Lester that he was going to try to ward off the blow, but Mordecai Breen didn't. There was a flash, a roar that seemed to shake the walls of Breen's room. One shot, then a second. Lester's gun fell from his hand. He pressed both hands to his stomach, groaned, reeled crazily, then went crashing to the floor.

Mordecai Breen, his yellow-brown eyes hot, tense, got out of bed. He went over to the bureau, took out a bottle of bourbon, and gulped down a man-sized drink. He found a memorandum book in his coat, that contained Sergeant Hammerstein's home telephone number. Breen had had occasion once before to telephone the sergeant in the middle of the night. Now he had another drink. Then he picked up the phone and dialed Hammerstein's number.

Hammerstein said: "This is a fine time of night to get a man out of bed just because you bumped off a guy. I suppose I got to believe the story you told me."

"With what I've told you," Breen said fretfully, "you oughtn't to have any trouble getting the truth out of the Arolin girl, and that in turn will

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*In next month's issue—*

## THE LADY FROM KENTUCKY

*A Contacts, Inc., Novelette by Carl Clausen.*



enable you to put the finger on David Glacker."

Hammerstein nodded. "Where the hell are those cops I phoned for?" he said grumpily, staring down at the inert body of Lester on the floor. He stooped and picked up Lester's fat revolver. "Is this what you plugged him with?" he asked Mordecai Breen.

Breen shook his head and held up his bandaged arm.

"I shot him with this," he said.

The sergeant glared at him. Slap-happy had done a clumsy job of bandaging, but apparently a thorough one. He had bandaged Breen's arm from the elbow clear down, so that not even Breen's fingertips were showing.

"You'll do me a favor," Breen said, "if you'd unbandage my arm. Go easy. It's not healed yet, but I'm getting a cramp in my right hand, holding it like a fist with my finger on a trigger."

Hammerstein glared. He had a notion that he was being kidded. Nevertheless he cut the knot that held the bandage and started to undo it. When he had completed the job, he said:

"Well, I'll be damned!"

Breen was holding a tiny pistol, a double-barreled affair.

"You're not trying to tell me you shot him with that?" Hammerstein barked.

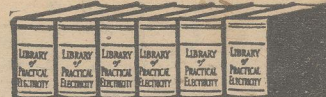
Mordecai Breen nodded. "It's a double derringer," he said, "only good for two shots, but they're pretty husky shots—.41 caliber. It'll do the trick every time."

Hammerstein looked at Breen for a time wonderingly.

"I had a notion," he said, "that you were kind of sweet on that Aro-lin dame. I'm surprised you didn't tip her off—or did you?"

"Stop annoying me," Mordecai Breen snapped, "and put that bandage back on. I hate women."

THE END.



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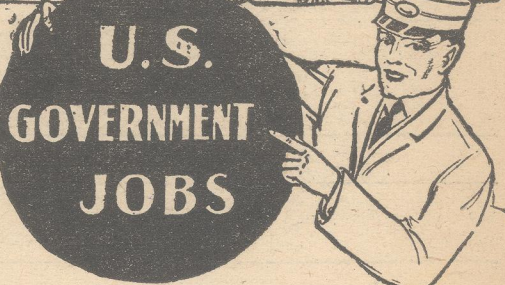
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# THE WITNESS STAND

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As an old reader of Street & Smith publications, may I take the liberty of suggesting that we have more Contacts, Inc., stories by my favorite author, Mr. Carl Clausen.

Respectfully yours,

Edwin F. Rodrigues.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

Dear Sir:

It is so seldom that I have the opportunity of really sitting down and enjoying a good story, that I am wondering why I haven't been able to read more of Carl Clausen's Contacts, Inc., stories about Clark Dale and Petra Ericson.

I have enjoyed them immensely and would appreciate more stories of this caliber.

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Paul Weinzwieg.

Bronx, N. Y.

Dear Editor:

Just a few lines to tell you that I really enjoy reading Detective Story Magazine.

The only fault I find is that you do not give us enough stories like the Contacts, Inc., series by Carl Clausen.

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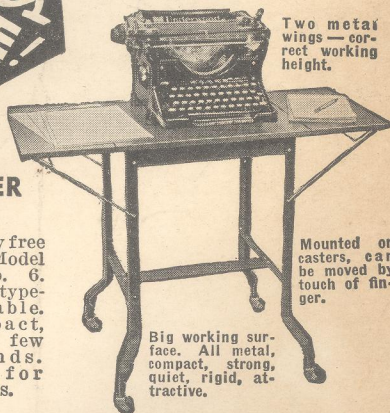
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