

STREET & SMITH'S

DETECTIVE

STORY MAGAZINE

OCTOBER

A large, stylized illustration of a knife with a black handle and a silver blade, positioned vertically. The blade is surrounded by several red blood splatters. The background consists of overlapping circles in red, blue, and light blue, with a dashed black line running diagonally across them.

LOVE ME,
SHE'S DEAD!

BY SAMM S. BAKER

THE CORPSE LOVED FLOWERS

BY ROBERT HOGAN

also a

"MISS RACHEL" Story

BY D. B. OLSEN

ALL STORIES COMPLETE

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DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

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All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated either by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

Danny Mason was a good reporter, but when he got caught in a Florida treasure hunt that involved a lost aunt, a slap-happy great Dane dog, a sports' loving Englishman and a red-headed guy who loved flowers, well —

The



corpse loved flowers

By ROBERT J. HOGAN

I.

WHEN the telegram warning of his aunt's disappearance in Florida had arrived on his desk at the *Star-Ledger*, Danny Mason had been dressed in a dark-blue, chalk-striped business suit. For it was cool in Central City.

He had left at once. Now, little more than twenty-four hours later, he was uncomfortably warm walking across the lawn under the crackling coconut palms. It was a hot evening in Florida.

A friend at his aunt's apartment house up the beach had remembered one more place where his aunt might have gone last, before vanishing, and he was investigating.

The blonde in white shorts and halter stopped her plug-casting practice on the lawn and Danny asked, "Is this the residence of Harry Hadley, the sporting goods manufacturer?"

"This is the home of Mr. Harry Hadley," she replied. "I'm Eve Hadley, his niece." She was not overly tall, not within half a foot as tall as Danny. But she had an important manner that made her seem stately. Her cool attitude, as if he had come barging into a place where he was not fit to be, rubbed Danny rough. She was the kind Danny liked to whittle down. He said,

"Tell Mr. Harry Hadley that Wanda Bayler's nephew, Danny Mason, has come to get his lost aunt—I hope." The last he said fervently and under his breath.

The girl hesitated.

"Will you announce me or do I have to scream?" Danny asked.

"Do you try to order people around like this everywhere you go?"

"As much as possible," he said. "I'm a reporter up north. I have to get in some difficult spots." He raised his voice, pretending to shout at the elderly Florida mansion. "Aunt Wanda!"

From inside the house came a low, rumbling sound. A dog roared to the door, barked, then came bursting through the screen.

Danny's confidence fled like a homing pigeon from a strange garret. He half turned to run. But the fawn colored great Dane took the porch in one bound, the steps in another and there was no time to run.

The girl screamed, "Duke! Stop, Duke!" There was panic in her voice.

There was panic in Danny's heart, too. He turned and tried to prepare for battle. But the dog was upon him before he could brace himself or make counter plans.

Duke's front paws hit him on the shoulders. Danny went down with the dog's fangs dripping in his face. Danny lay on his back, scared, trying to avoid that terrible open mouth.

The dog's tongue tickled him and Duke licked Danny's face in giant slurps.

The girl pulled at the dog's collar. She kept saying, "Duke! Stop it, Duke! Come away! Get off him! He's not Uncle Harry!"

Somehow, in the excitement, Danny Mason slid out from under the dog. He stood up and hurried to a safe distance to get his breath. The girl clung to the dog's collar. She said, "I'm terribly sorry. But you brought it on yourself."

Danny managed to smile. He forced courage upon himself and approached girl and dog with his hand offered in peace. "Normally," he said, "I like dogs. Always had one when I was a kid, but never a horse like this one. The size startled me. Nice dogey."

Duke took Danny's hand in his mouth and chewed fondly. He made a comfortable sound, such as an elephant might make if an elephant could purr like a kitten.

The girl said, "He's a man's dog. He's lonely for Uncle Harry and probably just

couldn't stand it any longer without a man around the house. When he saw you—"

"I'm flattered," Danny told her. "How long has Uncle Harry been gone?"

"Four days," she said. "He's on a fishing trip."

"That's cute," Danny said. "My Aunt Wanda's been missing four days, too."

Eve Hadley looked at him coldly. "What do you mean by that?"

"It may be quite a story," Danny said, "and I'm hot and thirsty. I could do a lot better with a tall, cool one in my hand." He was grinning at her.

She almost answered his smile. "Come in and I'll see what I can find to go with ice."

They entered the l.g. white, stucco house through the garage and into the kitchen. She said, "Just what is this about your aunt and my uncle?"

"Aunt Wanda's a very attractive retired business woman," Danny said, "who isn't happy without male companionship. And the men all like her."

"Oh, dear," Eve said from the butler's pantry.

"Is that bad?" Danny tossed his coat on a chair.

"There isn't anything here but empty Scotch bottles," she said. "They weren't here when I left to visit a friend in Jacksonville. I guess I shouldn't have left Uncle Harry alone. He used to have a weakness for liquor when he got lonely." She came into the kitchen with eyes narrowed. "What makes you think your aunt has anything to do with my uncle?"

He told her about the wire and the sudden trip down. "You see, Aunt Wanda does a lot of work for her favorite charity, the orphans. A friend of hers at her apartment just told me she was planning to hit your uncle for a donation. Aunt Wanda had heard your uncle usually gets up early and fishes or walks on the beach. So she figured that would be the best time to touch him. Aunt Wanda likes to hunt for shells early in the morning."

Eve looked frightened. "Do the police know that your aunt was planning to see my uncle?"

"No," Danny said. "It was just the last place this Mrs. Murch thought of when I talked to her an hour or so ago. Seems the police are accustomed to people disappearing to Havana and Nassau and they didn't pay much attention to Aunt Wanda's friends worrying when she didn't send them a post card from wherever she'd gone."

From outside came a strange, whining sound. They looked out of the kitchen window toward the beach. Duke was digging in the sand and barking.

Danny asked, "Is he all right?"

"I think so," she said. "He isn't likely to run away with a man around. He's probably digging a fiddler crab." She turned from the

window. "I wish I knew where Uncle Harry went fishing."

"How do you know he went fishing?"

"When I got back from Jacksonville, there was a note on the kitchen table saying Duke was at the vet's and Uncle Harry had gone fishing."

Danny watched the dog. "Hey," he said. "Do fiddler crabs have arms and hands like a man?"

Eve caught her breath. The next moment, they were running out of the door and down the beach toward the excited dog.

Duke was digging and barking and pulling on a man's arm. Danny glanced about. Because of trees and shrubbery, this spot on the beach was not visible from the other beach homes. He looked down at the partially uncovered corpse, then at Eve. "You'd better go back to the house, hadn't you?"

"I'll be all . . . all right." She shuddered. "Is he—"

"I'd say he's been dead and buried for about four days," Danny told her.

"Four days?" Her eyes grew large. "How . . . how can you tell?"

"I've seen enough in police reporting," Danny said. "How long ago did you say your Uncle Harry left?"

She looked about ready to fold up. "About four days."

"And Aunt Wanda disappeared about the same time," Danny said.

Eve turned toward the house and her voice choked out words. "Uncle Harry never remembered anything he did after he'd been drinking."

Danny suddenly touched her arm and held her firmly. "Try to keep calm. We're being watched."

Eve froze, unable to move.

Danny said, "Relax. We've got to act happy and gay."

"How . . . how can I?"

"Like this." Danny made a cackling sound like a mad sitting hen. He said, "Skip it."

He glanced at the cruiser a half mile offshore. It was about forty feet long with an afterdeck behind a long cabin. Three men stood looking toward shore. The tallest of the men wore a white baseball cap and was watching them through binoculars.

"Act nonchalant," Danny told Eve. "Light a Murad."

"Do you think they saw what Duke dug up?"

"We'll have to hope they didn't and get it covered up again before they decide to come ashore and make an inspection. We'll frisk around and play with Duke in the sand. The object of the game is to throw all the sand we can in the shallow grave without letting them know or suspect what we're doing."

The shallow grave gradually filled as they pretended to play.

Suddenly, Danny's hand touched a small piece of cloth in the sand not a foot from the corpse. He held it and glanced at Eve. She was working with her eyes shut, moving blindly through her ghoulish motions. Danny shook out the small woman's handkerchief, glanced at it quickly and slipped it into his pocket. He said, "It's quitting time," and took Eve's arm and turned her around, headed for the house. "You can open your eyes now."

He felt her trembling as they walked through the gathering darkness.

She pulled down the kitchen shades and there they faced each other. Danny said, "You mentioned the red hair of the corpse. What did that mean to you?"

"Something I saw in the paper after I got home," she told him. "There had been a running fight at sea between a government boat and a very fast cruiser with a redhead alone in it. One government man was sure he winged the redhead, but he got away in his fast boat."

Danny picked the handkerchief out of the pocket of Eve's white slacks. "This your handkerchief?"

"Of course," she said. "Why did you take it?"

"Curiosity," Danny said. "Women use different kinds. You like modern things like cubes and angles and bright colors like this handkerchief has. On the other hand, Aunt Wanda likes lots of flowers on hers. Like this." He took out the handkerchief he had found on the beach.

"Where did you get that one?" Eve asked.

He told her, tossing back her own handkerchief. "About a foot from the body. I found it while we were shoving sand back into the grave. It's Aunt Wanda's handkerchief or one just like she always carried."

Eve took it and looked at it.

"Looks like Aunt Kilroy was there," Danny said. "Also maybe Uncle Kilroy. Where did you keep your shovels?"

"In the garage," she said. "What are you going to do?"

"See if we can find a shovel with sand on it." He stepped into the garage and she followed.

Duke came charging from the other part of the house and rushed into the garage. He sniffed at the crack of the garage door and growled.

Behind a broken lawn chair, Danny found a spade. He held it up. "A spade is generally used for gardening in black dirt. This one's got yellow sand on it."

Eve stared at him. "You think it"—she moved her head slightly toward the beach.

Duke roared at the door. The hair stood up on his back.

"That's my guess. This spade buried the redhead and it looks like my aunt helped your uncle." He turned to Duke. "What is it, boy?"

Duke dug at the door with his front paws. "Somebody's out there," Danny said. "Maybe three somebodies from the boat."

He ran into the kitchen, then to the living room and up the tile stairs to the second floor. He didn't turn on the lights there, but found a window facing the ocean.

Three figures were moving in the dim light. There was a small boat beached just north of the Hadley place. The three men were coming up the beach from the boat.

Danny could hear Duke barking and the bark was now outside and racing around the house toward the three men. Eve cried, "Duke got out again."

Danny piled down the stairs three steps at a time. In the lower hall he told her about the men. "They're the same three that were on the boat watching us," he said. "Have you got a gun?"

"There isn't one in the house," Eve replied. "I looked for Uncle Harry's service automatic when I got back from Jacksonville and realized I was going to be alone."

They ran outside. A shot cracked from the direction of the beach. Duke's furious barking changed to a series of yelps.

Danny yelled, "Who shot that dog?"

Duke was going around and around, in pain, trying to get the thing that had stung him on the hind quarter. Danny caught him by the collar and talked to him. For the moment, he didn't bother with the three men he could see as shadows a little way off on the beach. They were standing there, not moving, just watching Danny and the dog.

When Duke was quiet, Danny called to the three, "I'll take you birds on, one at a time, for this. As soon as I get the dog to the vet. Who the hell do you think you are, shooting a dog?"

The tallest of the three men coming toward Danny spoke. He said, "I'm frightfully sorry about this. My man, Finch, thought the dog was about to do us bodily harm."

A tall, rawboned man with a high powered rifle in his hand said, "I'm mighty sorry, but I sure thought we was goners."

"We had engine trouble on our boat," the tall one said. "I'm Charles Shelly. Perhaps you saw us in our boat offshore." He turned to the third man, a squat hunk of muscle. "Bring over the light, Gurtzen."

They looked at the wound in the fleshy part of Duke's right rear leg. "I suggest that you take him to a good vet," Shelly said. "I want to pay the expenses for this. You can contact us later at the Palmetto Bar."

Eve ran up to the house and brought a blanket. They wrapped Duke, bleeding rather badly, in the blanket and Danny and the man Finch carried him to the garage. They passed the black Lincoln sedan and went on to the De Soto convertible. The

top was down. They lifted Duke into the back seat and Eve got in and started the engine.

She swung up the beach road and then turned toward town.

Dr. Sanders, the vet, was a wiry young man, neat, trim, with the smell of the kennel on him. He helped Danny carry Duke and they gave the dog a shot of anaesthetic.

For a long time, Danny and Eve watched the vet work. Finally, Sanders smiled. "Not as bad as it might have been. When he was hit, his muscles must have been bunched in running so the bullet gave the effect of drilling all the way through. But it was only a deep gash. He'll be fine in a week or so. If you've got any pet rug he sleeps on at home, he'll be happier here on it."

"We'll be back in a few minutes," Eve said.

They turned back toward the Hadley beach home. It began to rain, one of those quick Florida cloudbursts. The top came up and they drove on, half blinded. As they crossed the causeway, they almost had to come to a stop.

Turning in the drive, she caught her breath. They rolled into the garage as she asked, "How many lights did we leave on in the house?"

"Not this many," Danny said. "The house is lit up now like a church on Christmas Eve."

"Somebody has been here," she said.

"Somebody is still here," Danny said. Through the rain and mist covering the windows he could see the kitchen door opening. A large figure yanked open the door on Danny's side. A tall, broad-shouldered, rather handsome young man in a gray uniform stood looking into the car. He had a Police Positive revolver in his hand.

Danny stared into the muzzle of the gun. "That's a good gun you've got there," Danny said, "but how about sticking it in some other direction?"

The young man in uniform looked past Danny at Eve. "Is that you, Eve, honey?"

"Oh, Walter, you frightened me," Eve told him.

Danny said, "Now that two-thirds of us are acquainted, would you park that cannon, deputy?" He could read "Deputy Sheriff" on the badge the young man wore.

"Sure," said the deputy. "Reckon I wouldn't need the gun just for you, noway."

"You'd be surprised," Danny bristled. "I'm sitting down now but I'm pretty big when I stand." He pushed his way out.

The deputy said, "You got long legs is all."

Eve was out and coming around the other side of the wet car. She introduced them. The deputy's name was Kays. She said, "What's going on here, Walter?"

"I was passing on late patrol," he said, "and I noticed all the lights, so I stopped by to have a look around. Somebody's been through your house." He paused and coughed. "Out front on the beach is something mighty unpleasant. There's a corpse out there."

Danny froze inside. Kays was looking at him. He said, "Eve honey, I hope you aren't mixed up with trouble here." Then, Kays nodded at Danny. "Where did your friend here come from?"

"I used to know him up north." Eve told it with a steady voice. "He just came down to see his aunt and ran over to say hello."

Walter Kays studied Danny for a moment. Finally he said, "Maybe we'd better take a look at the corpse. You don't have to go, Eve. It's not pretty."

"But I should," she said with an effort. "Uncle Harry isn't here and I should look after things for him."

"It isn't necessary," Kays said. "You take a look around the house while we're gone."

Kays turned on his flashlight and they walked out onto the beach. He said, "It's a funny thing, you being here just when the body is found, Mason?"

Danny didn't answer him. He looked at the spot of light on the sand and the corpse. The way the corpse lay, with his head twisted sidewise and the red hair a little long and spread in a mop on the sand. The pockets of his white dungarees had been turned inside out and the rolled-up cuffs had been turned down. The breast pocket of his blue shirt was torn and there beside the body on the sand was a crumpled thing like a crushed flower. The corpse wore no shoes and his socks lay on the sand near his bare feet.

Danny said, "It looks as if this man might have been killed at sea and washed up by this high tide."

A car swung up to the Hadley garage. Another followed. Walter Kays glanced at them and back at the corpse. "I don't reckon it's that easy, Mason. This red-headed corpse was buried there in the sand a while ago. You can see where he was dragged out of the shallow grave and laid up a little out of touch of the tide. Somebody's been going through his pockets."

Three men came around the house. Kays called, "Down here, boys. Bring the basket down here."

A heavy-set deputy took a close look at the corpse and said, "This looks like the redhead the government men was after four days ago."

"The one the revenuer, Webster, thought he shot in the shoulder," the tall, thin deputy said. "There's the hole in his shoulder right there."

"And there's the hole that killed him," Walter Kays pointed out. "In the middle of his stomach."

A small, wiry man with glasses made

notes, asked Danny's name, what he was doing there, checked back on the whole story. Danny stuck to the simple friendly call on Eve Hadley.

They loaded the corpse into the wicker basket and carried it to one of the cars. Walter Kays said, "You and Eve be down at the sheriff's office at ten in the morning for questioning, Mason." He stuck his finger at Danny. "And don't you try running out. South Florida is no place you can get out of if we want you."

In the house, Danny found Eve inspecting the damage done.

"This house is ruined," she said, bitterly. "Leather chair cushions slit open. Drawers dumped everywhere. Mattresses cut."

"That's about what I expected," Danny said. "We'll go see the guys that did it. Let's drop in on Messrs. Shelly, Finch and Gurtzen if they're still at the Palmetto."

"I was thinking the same thing," she said. "They must have waited till we were out of sight with Duke, and then broke into the house."

"Check," Danny said. "This is going to be a pleasure if they're there."

She got a jacket and Duke's favorite rug. "We'll stop at the vet's on the way and leave the rug."

They went out to the De Soto and Eve drove again. She swung down Poinciana Street and stopped at the vet's. He talked to them from his bedroom window. He said Duke was O.K. and sleeping heavily. He told them to toss the rug into the hall and he'd get it to Duke in the morning when he woke.

They turned toward the yacht basin and the fishing pier. To reach the Palmetto Bar they had to drive past the boats, tailed into their slips. By the dim dock lights, thick with fluttering moths, Danny read some of the names on the cruisers. He said, "Wait a minute. Do you remember what that boat of Shelly's looked like?"

"It wasn't rigged with outrigger poles for sail fishing," she said. "The paint wasn't good. It looked like an old tub with fast lines."

"Like that one?" Danny pointed to the one named the *Shark*.

"It might be," she said. "But I wouldn't swear to it."

"Nobody seems to be aboard."

"You're not going aboard a strange boat now," she told him. "We're in trouble enough and besides, what's to be gained?"

"Just a hunch," Danny said. He looked sidewise at her as she drove on. "You're pretty sore at those guys for breaking up your house, aren't you?"

"Who wouldn't be?"

"So sore you're forgetting to be afraid."

She nodded.

"Yes," she said. "I guess perhaps you're right."

"Good girl," Danny said. "Let's go."

She ran the car nose against the palmetto thatching on the side. The Palmetto Bar was similar to a Seminole Indian hut but large, with sides and a solid wood floor.

The blast of a juke box came through the screened openings. Tex Bierbaum, the Jersey cowboy, was singing and playing "I'll be Tumblin' Back on a Tumble Weed to Yoo-hoo." A girl guest was trying to sing with the record.

The bar ran the length of the right wall. There were tables. A distinguished-looking man with a close clipped mustache and a highball called, "Hi, Eve. Where's Harry?" She told him her uncle was off fishing and introduced him to Danny. The man's name was Harrison.

They moved toward Shelly and his two men at the end of the bar. Eve said, "The fishing and yachting crowd hang out here informally."

Shelly smiled at them. How was the dog? They must have a drink. The drinks came quickly. Shelly asked the cost of Duke's injury and when Danny told him he handed Eve three twenties.

Danny said, "Now that the polite details are over, we'll talk about another matter. Suppose we three go to another table?"

Shelly excused himself from Finch and Gurtzen and Danny laughed. "You're a riot, Shelly, the way you treat your two cannons like a pair of kings. You're a pretty coy guy, posing as a gentleman."

"What do you mean?" Shelly demanded. "I've paid my bill."

Eve said, "We're talking about the destruction you caused tonight at my uncle's home."

Shelly looked puzzled. "I don't understand."

"I wouldn't mind if you had dumped out a few drawers," Eve said. "But the slitting of leather upholstery and mattresses was too much."

"Damn right," Danny said. "What were you looking for, Shelly?"

"Look here," Shelly said, "Mr. Harry Hadley is a friend of mine. We have the same interests. Guns, boats and fishing."

"So?" Danny said. "That makes you more of a stinker than ever for doing what you did."

Shelly was trying to keep his composure. "You're mistaken," he said. "Hadley and I have met at our club, the Sea Ranch, but I have never been in his house in my life."

Danny said, "You're a cockeyed liar, Shelly."

The place became suddenly still and tense. Danny saw Shelly get up and he rose. Shelly caught Danny by the front of his shirt and struck with his free fist.

Danny tried to cover, tried to duck, but Shelly's fist came too fast. The world and Mr. Shelly exploded and vanished and

Danny felt himself going down into a black void.

But things cleared quickly and he came bouncing back. He was getting to his feet when Shelly rushed him. Danny sidestepped and caught Shelly coming in. He landed a left hook and then pulled the trigger on a right cross that was T.N.T.

Shelly went down. Then the two other men pounced on Danny, and, after a moment, the lights went out for Danny Mason.

Eve was beside him as he regained consciousness. They were in the De Soto and his head was on her shoulder. She was holding a cool, wet cloth on his face, saying, "Wake up, Danny. Wake up."

Danny lifted his head. It hurt. "How did I get here?" He put his head back on her shoulder, but she moved away saying, "You're all right now. Shelly's men and Mr. Harrison carried you out." She started the car. "We've got to go before that wiry little deputy sheriff who was at the Palmetto causes trouble."

"What?" Danny sat up.

"When you and the deputies were on the beach I was watching this smaller deputy. I think he's a special investigator for the sheriff. He kept taking notes. He was there at the Palmetto just now. He came over and began asking questions. Shelly and his men wouldn't say anything and Mr. Harrison said he thought you'd got a little drunk and had insulted Shelly. I said that that was the way it was."

They were passing the yacht basin and Danny was sitting upright and reading the names. "Stop," he said. "I'm going aboard the *Shark* this time. Wait for me."

"Good hunting," she said.

Danny hopped aboard the *Shark* and went into the cabin. There were blankets and some clothing in the lockers. There was fishing gear. There were shoes. Danny was looking for shoes. Water-soaked shoes. He found the pair, stowed in the back of the locker, and he dragged them out. He inspected them in the dock light.

A couple was coming out of the Palmetto Bar. Danny waited until they got into a car. He slipped off the dock and got back in the De Soto. "Merry Christmas!" he said. "Catch!" He tossed the shoes at Eve and she caught them.

"What on earth?"

"Dead man's shoes," Danny said. "Off the redhead."

She dropped them and shuddered. "How do you know?"

Danny picked them up and held them under the instrument light. "Let's go and I'll tell you." As she got the car in motion, he went on, "We know someone is looking for something. They not only tore up the house, but they examined every piece of

clothing the corpse had on. They turned his pockets inside out. They tore the pocket of his shirt. Then even took off his socks. And thinking back, it seems to me that there was the toe of a work shoe sticking through the sand when we found him first on the beach. But there weren't any shoes on the beach tonight, when Kays found him. Just his socks that had been peeled off."

"But why would anyone take his shoes?"

"See how they're torn apart?" Danny said. "One sole gone. Both heels ripped off. Shelly could be looking for hidden gems, for instance."

They drove on in silence. Danny sat back, letting his head rest against her shoulder. He said, "This is nice."

She didn't move away. She said, "I'm worried about that deputy sheriff investigator at the Palmetto. Suppose he makes Shelly talk and suppose Shelly did see us burying the—"

Danny laughed. "Shelly better not talk. But you never can tell. Maybe if he knew we'd found the shoes—"

"Haven't people been killed for knowing less than that?"

"Right," Danny said. "This head isn't so good tonight for thinking."

"I'm going to put you to bed. You might have some head injuries from the beating they gave you."

She turned into the garage and as soon as they were in the upset house, she led him to a guest room overlooking the sea. There, she left him, saying, "Sleep as long as you can in the morning. I'll call you when breakfast is ready."

"Don't forget," he told her. "We've got a date with the sheriff at ten."

"I'll get you up in plenty of time," she promised.

II.

ACROSS the breakfast table, they rehearsed what they would tell the sheriff.

The story they would stick to was a simple one. Danny Mason had come down to visit his aunt and finding her off on a trip he had dropped in for the evening with a girl he had known up north. Eve Hadley. They had spent the evening together, had gone for a ride and dropped Duke at the vet's and had come back to find Walter Kays at the house, the house upside down, and a corpse on the beach.

Sheriff Drake was a short man, past middle age, pot-bellied. He had a walrus mustache and under one end of it he sucked a cigar. The cigar was almost large enough to carry in an election parade. He took one foot off the desk grudgingly and straightened his chair. "You're Miss Hadley?" His voice was like the soft, coaxing of a kindly grandfather.

She told her story straight. She did very well. Danny relaxed a little. He felt Eve

take a deep breath beside him when she had finished.

The sheriff had both feet back on the desk. He rolled his head at Danny and blew smoke. "How about you?"

Danny told the same story. The sheriff had his eyes closed. He lay back for some time without speaking, then without opening his eyes, he asked, "What did you start a fight with Shelly for last night?"

Danny had been wondering when that was coming. He said, "It was a personal matter."

Sheriff Drake raised his voice to a booming howl. "Weller, bring in Shelly."

Charles Shelly was looking very fit this morning.

The sheriff began pumping him. Shelly, it turned out, was a British subject, a resident of Nassau. He and Finch and Gurtzen fished partly for sport and sometimes the two other men sold a good catch. Shelly himself had means, he said. He lived for sports, golf, fishing, yacht racing.

"Shelly," Sheriff Drake said, "you've told your version of last night to Deputy Weller. Now, Mason, I want you to tell yours."

A chill crawled up Danny's spine. He looked at Shelly. He looked at Weller, the wiry little investigator with the glasses.

Shelly smiled abruptly and spoke, "It was quite simple as I explained to the investigator. An accidental shot that hit the dog of the Hadley's caused the argument as to who would pay for—"

"Wait," Sheriff Drake said. "Mason, you tell it."

"If you insist," Danny almost sang. "As Mr. Shelly says, there was an argument over who was going to pay for the treatment of the dog."

Sheriff Drake took out his cigar and looked from Danny to Shelly. He nodded to Weller. That'll be all we'll want Mr. Shelly for now. But don't leave the waters of this country, Shelly. We might want to ask you a few more questions."

"I shall be at the Sea Ranch Club or on my boat, the *Shark*," Shelly said. He bowed, and went out with Weller.

Sheriff Drake asked Danny about his work, where he came from. Where he had been four days ago. He called John Merrick, city editor of the *Star-Ledger* and Merrick duplicated Danny's story. Then he wanted to talk to Danny. He said, "Hurry it up, will you, Danny? We've got local primaries coming up and I need you."

The sheriff said, "Well, Mason, if looks as if you couldn't have been in on the murder, but you do know a lot more than you're telling. Take Miss Hadley out and get some lunch and come back."

Neither Eve nor Danny was hungry. They munched on sandwiches, sipped coffee. Danny said, "That sheriff isn't as dumb as he looks. I believe he's just getting started."

They went back to the office and waited.

It was almost mid-afternoon before the sheriff got around to asking them questions. He asked the same ones as he had asked in the morning. He kept them telling their stories over and over. He lay with his eyes shut, listening.

Men came and went and Danny learned several things from their talks with the sheriff. The name of the dead redhead was Durskin. He had been suspected of being mixed up in smuggling of various kinds, diamond smuggling particularly. The autopsy was being performed later in the afternoon.

A plain-clothes man came in and Sheriff Drake nodded toward the door into the back room. "Your prisoner's in there, Webster. Help yourself. You did some good long range shooting, but not as good as somebody else did at close range."

Webster nodded and his tight mouth seemed to tighten more.

"Revenuer," Sheriff Drake said when he had gone into the back room. "Good rifle shot."

"Mind if I have a look at the corpse?" Danny asked.

"Help yourself. Follow Webster there. Miss Hadley, she better stay here."

Danny found a gaunt man with a ski-jump nose and white hair fringed around a bald spot working over the corpse. The air was not pleasant. Danny said, "How long has he been dead, doctor?"

"Four days, maybe five," the medical examiner said.

Webster, the Federal man, looked at Danny. Walter Kays came over to him and said, "I suppose you're looking for clues, Mason?"

"I'm a newspaper man. Always looking for stories."

"Your Yankee paper wouldn't be interested in this."

"Never can tell."

"Son," Kays said, "you don't know when you're well off."

The M. E. was talking as he worked. "Now this rifle shot of yours, Webster, went through Durskin's shoulder. It came out the back clean. But this one in the stomach feels larger." He probed for a long time after the bullet and finally brought it out. "A .45," he said. "That's the bullet that killed Durskin."

While they talked about the bullet, Danny checked the blue shirt and dungarees and sox that Durskin had worn. There was nothing except a tiny piece of green in the bottom of the torn shirt pocket. It looked like a crumpled, withered piece of green leaf.

Walter Kays and Webster were watching Danny. He took his turn examining the bullet and Kays said, "You'll find that came out of a .45 Colt automatic."

"I'll take your word for it," Danny said. He walked back into the Sheriff's office.

Eve said, "Sheriff Drake says we may go for the rest of the day."

Danny thanked the sheriff and Drake said, "I'll hold you responsible for Mason, Miss Hadley, when we want him again."

"I'll keep track of him," she promised.

Driving away in the De Soto, Eve said, "While I was sitting there I happened to remember a place where our relatives might have gone in the *Manatee*. I think we should find them if we can and tell them what's been going on, to date. Together, we might be able to work out the solution."

"Where do you think they might be?"

"There's the Angler's Club on the west coast, just north of Fort Myers," she said. "Uncle Harry used to go there some when I was little but he hasn't been there in the last few years. I thought perhaps—" She looked up at the sky. "We can cross the Tamiami Trail, find out if the *Manatee* is there and be back this evening."

They drove over the Trail to the club and inspected the boats at the dock. There was no *Manatee* tied up. They inquired at the clubhouse. Mr. Hadley had not been there for a long time, the steward said.

They turned back.

The moon was high by the time they reached the beach house. Danny pointed to the private Hadley dock. He said, "Hey, a boat."

"Why, that's the *Manatee*," Eve said. "Uncle Harry's home."

"In that case Aunt Wanda's home."

"We aren't positive," Eve said.

Danny touched her arm and pointed. "Drive on by. Stop beyond the house and let's see what goes on before we go in."

She slowed, and stopped a hundred yards beyond the house. They walked back and got a closer look at the boat in the darkness. "That's the *Manatee*, all right," she whispered.

They walked through the hedge of oleander and hibiscus and to the house. Danny stopped her by a living room window. "Is that your uncle?"

"Yes," she whispered. "That's Uncle Harry. I don't see any woman."

"Maybe Aunt Wanda is upstairs," he said. "So that's Uncle Harry. Handsome, with complexes. Take that waxed mustache and those sox. That's another sign."

"They're beautiful sox. Green and red plaid with yellow."

"Loud as a fire bell," Danny said. "All those things mean he's got unsatisfied desires. He'd been a devil if he had the nerve."

"That's silly. Uncle Harry is—" She paused. "What's he doing?"

"Just sitting, staring across the room."

"I don't like the way he stares at that open drawer."

"Yeah," Danny said. "Maybe we'd better break it up."

After Danny stabbed the doorbell there was much walking about inside, then, the latch clicked and there stood Uncle Harry. He was medium tall, medium built, medium aged. The waxed ends of his mustache drooped as if he were about to give up. "Eve!" His voice sounded more desperate than enthusiastic.

She kissed him, introduced Danny, told him Duke was at the vet's. She said, "Where on earth have you been?"

"It's quite a story," he said. He looked green.

"I can imagine," Danny murmured.

Harry Hadley coughed. "Sit down, won't you?" And when Eve asked how long he'd been home, he said, "Perhaps an hour."

Danny cleared his throat. "Mr. Hadley—"

Eve shook her head. "We'll come to everything in time."

Hadley passed cigarettes as if it were his last act on earth. Eve said, "You may speak freely with Danny, Uncle Harry. Whatever the difficulty, he's with us."

Hadley's hand shook. He looked at Danny and sighed. He almost smiled.

They watched Hadley sit down heavily. "I'm afraid I'm in a lot of trouble," he said. He rose and began to walk around the room. "A lot of trouble. I'm afraid I murdered a man. Also, I'm afraid I'm going—" He walked the length of the living room and back. He kept glancing at the table drawer. It was closed now.

Danny rose. "This suspense is going to get you, Mr. Hadley. Let's get it over." He pulled out the drawer and looked in. "Eve," Danny said, "I thought there wasn't a gun in the house. Here's a Colt .45 automatic."

She was beside him looking at the gun. "But this service automatic of yours, Uncle Harry, wasn't here when I got home from Jacksonville."

Hadley was suddenly breathless. "You're sure?"

"Positive," she said. "This drawer was the first place I looked."

"Thank God!" he exclaimed. "I was afraid I was going insane. I was sure it wasn't there that . . . that morning I left."

"That's bad," Danny said.

"Bad?" Hadley echoed.

Danny nodded. "This is as neat a murder frame as I ever saw anyone hung in."

Harry Hadley shuddered visibly. He sat down. "Evidently you two have learned some things since I've been away."

"I'll tell you everything," Eve said. She told him in detail with Danny's help. She finished and Hadley said, "Yes, I know Shelly. Britisher from Nassau. Good sportsman. Nice chap."

"Did he know you had a .45 automatic?" Danny asked.

"Perhaps. I've used it in public shoots, just for the fun of it. Not much of a target gun." He studied the sand colored rug. "I

expect now I'd better tell you what happened to me."

A car purred in the garage. He reddened slightly and rose. "Excuse me a moment." He went out and returned in a moment, carrying luggage. A beautiful woman of fitty, neat, alert, smiling, followed him. Her arms were full of clothes on hangers. She dropped them on a chair and beamed at Danny Mason. "Hello, Danny boy," she said, as casually as if she'd known all along that he would be there.

Eve turned. "So this is your niece, Eve, Harry. She's lovely."

Uncle Harry stood rubbing his hands and smiling. He said, "Wanda is coming to live with us, Eve."

Danny snickered. "Just a big, happy family."

Eve looked politely pleased. She also looked puzzled and her face was reddening.

Aunt Wanda looked from the laughing face of Danny to the blushing Eve. She said, "Something's wrong. What are you smirking about, Danny?"

"Just happy to see you back," he told her.

Aunt Wanda frowned. "Harry, you've told them, of course?"

"What? Oh, I don't believe I have."

"For heaven's sake, no wonder," Aunt Wanda said. She drew herself up to full bodomed stateliness. "It's about time we announced our marriage."

Danny and Eve made appropriate sounds of surprise and delight. Aunt Wanda went on to explain:

"I had met Harry once at a party at the club and I was planning to ask him for a donation to our cause. I understood that he was often on the beach in the early morning. I enjoy rising early and hunting sea shells along the shore. On this morning I came upon him just as he was burying"—she shuddered—"a man with red hair. He swore me to secrecy and we talked over the situation. We decided it would be best if he went off fishing for a time until the whole thing blew over. I was sure he hadn't killed the man but Harry couldn't remember things clearly."

"You didn't have to go fishing," Eve said. "You could have gone farther away, faster, by car."

"You don't understand," Aunt Wanda said. "In the parlance of the criminal world, the *Manatee* was a hot boat."

"Hot?" Danny said.

"There's been trouble along the coast with diamond smuggling," Hadley said, "in very fast boats. Mine is very fast. It had been stolen a day or so earlier. Somehow, I was afraid to report the theft. Then, some anonymous friend sent me a couple of bottles of my favorite Scotch. While Eve was gone I grew lonely. All I remember after that was going out in the early

morning, finding my boat at the dock and the red-haired dead man on board. I went back and looked for my gun to see if it had been fired. I couldn't find the gun, but the hole in the man's stomach looked like the work of a .45."

"So," Aunt Wanda said, "he took the body to the beach and we buried it. And after I had seen everything, Harry couldn't leave me."

"You don't know who sent the Scotch?" Danny asked.

"Some friend at the club, I presume," Hadley said. "A coincidence."

"No," Danny said. "The same guy who put your automatic back in the drawer, knew your weakness and sent you the Scotch. What is there about the *Manatee* that makes it so hot?"

"The papers had mentioned a fast cruiser with a blue deck that the injured red-haired man had got away in," Hadley said. "This was after the *Manatee* was stolen. She has a blue cabin deck."

Aunt Wanda added, "We thought we'd wait to come back until everything was settled, but we've landed right in the middle of trouble. Let's do something."

"We'd better get the *Manatee* out of sight until we can paint the deck another color," Danny said. "Got any suggestions?"

"There's some aluminum paint in the garage," Hadley said.

"I think I know a place where we can do it secretly," Eve said. She stopped and looked suddenly frightened.

"You two stay here to answer questions," Danny said. "Eve and I will go fishing for a little while. Let's get the paint."

Hadley and Danny went into the garage. They came back with a can of paint and two brushes.

"How about getting rid of the gun?" Aunt Wanda suggested.

"Definitely," Danny said. "I'll drop it in the ocean."

Danny and Eve walked toward the dock.

A tall shadow stepped from a cluster of palms. His badge glinted in the light. He said, "Good evening, folks," in the manner of a boy shouting, "Surprise!" at a party.

Danny dropped the gun and the paint. He said, "Imagine meeting you here, Deputy Kays. On night patrol?"

"Just keeping an eye on suspected characters," Kays told him. "That gun you just dropped looks like a gun we've been searching for, Mason. It looks like the one that killed Durskin."

"What gun?" Danny said. And when Walter Kays pointed to the grass at his feet, Danny let go. He landed a fast left and a hard right. He tossed in another one and Kays ducked and staggered him.

They stood toe to toe, slugging, then Danny stepped inside a left and brought up

a case of dynamite. Walter Kays folded and collapsed.

Danny grabbed up the paint, brushes and gun and started Eve moving again. "Let's get us and the boat hidden," he said.

They cast off the lines, started the engine. Eve guided the *Manatee* from the dock and picked up speed. She said, "When Walter regains consciousness, he'll remember that you have the gun."

"Sure," Danny said. "But they won't have the gun to actually compare with the ballistics report on the bullet that killed Durskin." He watched the deep, dark water as they roared south. He held the gun over the side, then finally let it go. "Where are we going?" he asked.

"You won't like this," she said, "but it was all I could think of." Danny didn't answer and she said, "It's a fishing camp that Walter Kays owns."

"Great," Danny said sarcastically.

"I never went there with him, although he asked me to several times. He showed me the entrance, covered over with branches and vines."

Danny sat in one of the fishing chairs, facing aft.

"You don't have to believe me," she went on, "but I never did go there with him." A long pause, then, "That's the truth."

"O.K.," Danny said. That was all.

"The place is just ahead, I think. Will you get up on the cabin deck and help guide me in?"

He got up on the deck and they turned toward a place in the west bank of the inland waterway. There were tall trees covered with flowering vines. The searchlight picked out a small space the boat might squeeze through. They turned in and the branches brushed the *Manatee* as she pushed her way.

Inside, the canal widened so that a boat could be turned about. There was a dock along the far shore and, beyond that, a small frame building.

They tied the *Manatee* to the dock and Danny said, "I'll go see if I can get in the shack. You can sleep on the boat where you'll be comfortable." A skeleton key in his case fitted the lock on the shack door. He went in and lighted a candle. There was a main room with a small kitchen behind it. Four bunks were in the main room, one in each corner. Danny took the nearest one, put his shoes under it and blew out the candle.

The sounds outside grew with the age of the night. A swamp bird squawked raucously in the stillness. A mud hen croaked from the bay outside the canal. Off behind the shack an animal screamed and growled at the lowering moon.

Feet came hurrying along the shell walk from the dock. The door opened and Eve

called, "May I come in, Danny? I'm frightened alone in the boat."

"Help yourself," Danny said. "Pick yourself a bunk."

He heard a bunk creak with her weight, then, "Good night."

Danny answered her and there was silence. Suddenly, she said, "I only went out with Walter a few times—because he was good looking and interesting."

"Good night."

"He doesn't mean anything to me."

"That's fine."

"And I really never did come here with him."

"I believe you. Now will you go to sleep? I'm trying to figure something out."

III.

When Danny awoke the next morning, Eve had brought in supplies from the cruiser and was getting breakfast.

He put on his shoes and went into the kitchen. "I was a stinker to you last night, Eve. I'm sorry." He took her in his arms and kissed her as if he'd figured it all out ahead of time. "Forgive me, will you?"

She clung to him. "Will you believe me, about not coming here . . . with—"

"Sure," he said. "I can tell when a girl's lying—sometimes"

They finished breakfast and he mixed the paint while she cleaned up. He said, "If we ever get out of this with whole skins I would have serious words with you on a certain matter."

The painting of the deck went swiftly. The aluminum paint dried almost as fast as they could put it on. When they were finished, not a glint of blue showed through.

Danny said, "Working here in this hide-out has been giving me ideas. Let's get going. I want to ask you some questions on the way."

Piloting the *Manatee* back to trouble, she grew tense again. They moved slowly out of the hidden canal with Danny on the cabin deck guiding and picking flowers. He said, "What are these? They look like morning-glories."

"They are," she said. "Wild morning-glories."

"I've been trying to pick up a missing link that bothered me last night." He stuffed some of the morning-glories into his pocket. "Tell me something else. Before Aunt Wanda came along, were you Harry Hadley's only heir?"

"I guess so." She was straining to see through the beach cut ahead and out into the ocean. "I never thought about it much." A pause and she said, "I think I'll go back by sea and come in at the Delray cut. That way it will look more as if we've actually been out fishing."

Danny studied the crushed flowers in his hand.

Eve took the *Manatee* through the cut and began a wide half circle of several miles' diameter.

There were fishing boats about in the Gulf Stream and the sun was very bright. Eve said, "That boat out there has suddenly increased speed."

Danny looked up and nodded. "We should meet it if we hold our course." He stood staring, then he said, "Notice something strange about her. No outrigger poles. Like Shelly's *Shark*."

The boat was moving faster now.

"We'll outrun him," she said. She headed away from the other boats, out to sea. The *Manatee* flew.

The other craft raced along more than a mile behind.

"I've got a hunch," Danny said, "that they can go a lot faster than they are, but they don't want to show off until they get us out of sight of shore and the other boats."

There was a long moment of silence. Danny watched the other craft gain slowly, then, suddenly, he turned and ducked into the cabin. He called, "Just in case they do come aboard, we'll be ready for them."

"You were right," she called back. "We're getting over the horizon from shore and they're gaining faster."

The two boats were out of sight of land and the pursuer, which was plainly the *Shark*, was closing in.

Danny came out of the cabin looking pleased. "How're we doing?" he asked.

"Two more minutes and they'll be here," the girl said.

Danny watched the sea-worn old boat come. He said, "There's Shelly standing on one side with that high powered rifle he shot Duke with."

Eve said, "I can hear you. You don't have to shout."

"Sorry." Danny grinned. He saw Finch raise his rifle and Danny yelled, "Duck! There's the first shot. Better slow down."

The first bullet whistled over the cabin of the *Manatee*. They stood with hands raised as the *Shark* came along side.

Shelly leaped aboard. "We didn't mean to be rude but we had to stop you. We'd like to look you over."

Finch followed Shelly onto the *Manatee*.

"There doesn't seem to be anything we can do to stop you," Danny said. "We're not armed."

"You're fortunate," Shelly said. "It may save someone from being hurt. We have nothing against you people personally, you know."

"I'm beginning to understand a number of things," Danny said. "I've been wanting to thank you for covering up for me in the sheriff's questioning. The simple angle of

the dog and the argument about it as the cause of the fight at the Palmetto was clever. And, brother, you told me what to say just in time."

Shelly smiled. "I had to do something," he said. "You were standing there with your tongue a bit tied, you know."

"I want to apologize for taking a sock at you at the Palmetto," Danny went on. "I'm convinced now that you weren't the one who entered the Hadley house and tore it apart."

Eve took breath to argue.

Shelly said, "What convinced you?"

"I think I'm getting a lead on the one who did," Danny said.

"Splendid," Shelly said. He studied Danny for a moment. "When you find him, I'll be delighted to know who it is."

"You'll know," Danny said. "I don't think you entered the house, Shelly, but it was you who pulled the corpse out of the grave on the beach and went through his pockets."

"Really?" Shelly lifted his eyebrows. He could look nasty that way. "If you don't think we pilfered the house what makes you believe we touched the body you mention?"

"Because," Danny said, "according to my figuring, the party who wrecked the house had already killed Durskin and gone over him looking for the same thing you're looking for."

Shelly took another hard look at Danny, then turned and went into the cabin. Finch followed him with the rifle and they talked in the cabin and began searching.

Danny and Eve sat down in the fishing chairs to wait. Gurtzen was left on the *Shark*. Danny looked over at him. He yelled, "Anyway, you boys picked a nice day for piracy."

Gurtzen grunted and looked after Shelly and Finch searching the cabin. Presently, the two came out and Shelly said, "I think we'll search you, Mason. Where are those stones?"

Danny held his arms wide. "Help yourself."

Swiftly, expertly, Shelly ran his hands over Danny.

Finch said, "Maybe we shouldn't let them remember what they know."

"I was considering the same idea," Shelly said. "There is such a thing as knowing too much, Mason."

"I agree with you," Danny said. "It might pay you to wait and see how my ideas work out. It might save you from a murder—"

Gurtzen's yell cut Danny short. "Mr. Shelly, there's a couple of fast boats coming in from the sea. Look like Coast Guard cutters."

Shelly spun around. Everybody stared. The boats were spread out from the north and south as if to head off the *Shark*.

Shelly cursed and made a leap for his boat. He shouted, "Full speed. Quickly."

The *Shark* tore out, heading inland, away from the oncoming Coast Guard boats.

Eve Hadley was up and at the controls. "What do we do now?"

Danny grinned. "Sit tight."

She glanced at the racing boats again, then at Danny and she seemed puzzled. "How did those Coast Guard crews know we needed them?"

"Ship-to-shore radio," Danny said. "While you were trying to outrun Shelly, I was in the cabin turning the radio on and asking them to listen to what was said. That's why I was shouting when I talked. So the live mike would pick it up. And, of course, it picked up what Shelly and Finch talked about while they searched the cabin."

She didn't look satisfied. She said, "All right. I've got that straight. But how do you know who tore up Uncle Harry's house?"

Danny grinned. "Remember when we came out of the fishing camp canal a little while ago and I was picking flowers off the—" He stopped suddenly and dived for the cabin. "Get this thing moving," he called behind him, "and keep away from the Coast Guard for a little while. I'll need a little more time than we've got now."

The *Manatee* roared out and began slashing through the water. Eve bent down and looked through the open hatch into the cabin. She called, "What on earth are you doing in there now?" Danny was rustling about in the galley.

"I'm hungry," he said. "I'm getting something to eat. Keep this boat away from the Coast Guard until I come out."

Minutes passed. She swung the *Manatee* to the north and then made a quarter turn, swinging back west, toward shore. At first, the Coast Guard boats were concerning themselves with Shelly and his *Shark*. Danny heard a grunting shot and he turned and called, "Who's the Coast Guard shooting at?"

"They're shooting at the *Shark*," Eve said. "But one boat is chasing us. What are you doing in there?"

"Baking a cake," Danny said.

She looked in again. He had bowls and cans on the counter of the galley. She said, "You can think of the silliest things to do at the craziest times."

Danny called, "You'd be surprised. I'm a pretty good cook, but I think this is going to be my crowning culinary achievement. What kind of frosting do you like. Chocolate?"

"Stop being ridiculous and come out here," she called. "I can't keep away from them much longer."

"Them?"

"Two Coast Guards boats are getting us in a pocket," she said.

Something exploded close by and the

Manatee shuddered and Danny came out of the hatch like a startled ground squirrel.

"Just the Coast Guard shooting at us," Eve said, her face white. "I've got to stop."

Danny took a quick look at the two boats converging on them. "O.K. I've just about got time to finish." He ducked in the cabin again and Eve could hear him banging around, then he came out as the nearest Coast Guard boat pulled along side.

Danny came out of the cabin dusting off his hands. A stocky lieutenant swung aboard the *Manatee*. A tall seaman followed with his automatic out and ready.

The lieutenant cocked his officer's cap a little more rakishly on his head and studied the situation. He said, "We listened to you over your ship-to-shore radio as you requested. But what's the idea of trying to outrun us after we got the other cabin cruiser?"

Danny grinned. "I guess we just felt playful."

The lieutenant glared, and approached Eve at the controls. "We'll take over from here on," he said. "You'll go to the office of the sheriff for questioning."

"Fine," Danny said. "But if you don't mind, I'd like to make one stop on the way."

The lieutenant was guiding the *Manatee* at good speed for the Delray cut. Without turning, he asked, "Where do you want to stop?"

"At the Hadley beach home. Just stop at the dock where this boat belongs."

"I wouldn't try to make a break," the lieutenant told him.

"On the contrary," Danny said. "I'd like to have you go with me as a witness. There's something on the beach that I don't believe was picked up with the body. I want to show it to the sheriff."

They roared toward the mainland for some time before the lieutenant answered. "O.K. We'll stop for a minute if it's important. That stunt of yours of opening the radio so we could pick up the talk by the boarding party was clever enough. I guess I can take a chance of riding along with you on this stop." He glanced at the instruments before him. "This is a mighty fast boat," he said. "I think we've found the fast boat we've been looking for."

"I wouldn't be surprised," Danny grinned.

Eve looked at Danny as if she didn't know what to make of him, but she didn't say anything. The trip was finished in silence.

They tied up at the Hadley pier and stepped ashore. Eve went up to the house to see her uncle and the Coast Guard seaman walked behind her.

Danny and the lieutenant walked around the house to the beach. The depression where the body of Durskin had been was still in the sand.

Danny picked up the crushed blossom

that he had noticed beside the body on the night that the sheriff's men had taken it away. He said, "That's all I wanted, lieutenant. I think the sheriff will be interested."

"I suppose," the lieutenant said sarcastically, "that'll solve the crime."

"It already has," Danny said. He held up the crushed blossom. "The fact that the redhead was smart enough to carry this as a token, did the trick."

"Maybe the redhead just liked flowers," the lieutenant said.

"Want to bet?" Danny grinned.

Eve was coming out of the house. "There's no one home," she said, looking frightened. "I wonder where they are?"

"I think you'll find them at the sheriff's office," the lieutenant said.

"Oh, dear," Eve said.

"That's O.K.," Danny said. He winked at Eve to reassure her and turned to the lieutenant. "One more request. Mind if Miss Hadley drives over to the sheriff's in her convertible?"

The lieutenant nodded to the seaman. "Go with her," he said.

There were a lot of people in the office beside Sheriff Drake. They found that Harry Hadley and his bride had been there since earlier in the day, being questioned. Eve sat beside her uncle in the front row.

Shelly and his men, under the protection of the Coast Guard, came in. Walter Kays was there with several other deputies. Webster, the Federal man, sat at a table to the sheriff's right.

Aunt Wanda turned to Eve and Danny and whispered tensely, "Thank Heaven you two have come. Your Uncle Harry has told everything he knows."

"It was the only way," Hadley said, desperately.

The place was filling with Coast Guard officers from the pursuit boats, and with more deputy sheriffs from the back room.

The sheriff looked over the expectant faces. He said, "Now what's this story about a ship-to-shore radio mike being open and the whole of South Florida listening to condemning conversation?"

The stocky lieutenant who had taken over the *Manatee* got up and nodded at Danny. "He seems to think he has a story to tell," he said. "And since he was clever enough to rig the live mike that caught the information on Shelly, I wouldn't be surprised at anything he may have figured out."

The sheriff leaned back, lighted one of his huge cigars, blew smoke at the ornate old chandelier over his head and nodded. "Go ahead, Mason."

Danny pretended reluctance. "Well, I don't believe I know everything about this. But I have some theories as to what happened."

"Go on," the sheriff said sleepily. "Speak up. You've got the floor."

"I'm going to need some props," Danny said. "Mind if I send out for a few things?"

The sheriff sighed. "All right. But hurry it up."

Danny spoke quietly to Eve and then to the Coast Guard seaman who had been with them. Eve and the seaman went out together.

Danny took some crushed morning-glories out of his pocket and laid them on the sheriff's desk. He moved one from the others. "This," he said, "was in the blue shirt pocket of Durskin when he was killed. These other wilted morning-glories I picked in a perfect hideout."

He talked on about the vines hanging over the boat as it passed in and out and soon Eve and the seaman came back. Eve carried a pair of water-soaked work shoes. Danny took them and put them on the sheriff's desk.

The seaman carried four canisters. Printed on them were "Tea," "Coffee," "Sugar" and so on. Danny put those beside the shoes.

Walter Kays came striding to the desk. He said, "Sheriff, this is ridiculous. I have a warrant for Mason's arrest for striking and hindering an officer in the process of his duty. For—"

"Yes, Walter," Drake said. "Later." He nodded to Danny.

Danny said, "We know there has been diamond smuggling, don't we, Mr. Webster?"

Webster never moved an eyelash.

"Thank you," Danny grinned. "Well, this is what I believe happened." He was facing the sheriff again. "There were four operators in this diamond smuggling. One could have made the fact that he was British give him better contacts in the British controlled islands through which the diamonds were smuggled.

"A fishing boat would go out of the islands and run stones into Florida and close the deal. But the Federal and local authorities were getting tough, setting traps. So a local lawman was contacted who, for a price, would tip off the smugglers about traps that were being set and where.

"A redhead named Durskin was contact man between the island boat and the disposal point in Florida. His adviser as to danger was perhaps also the man who worked between Durskin and the fence to dispose of the stones. He could have been the same. Let's say that in order to get inside information about the Federal and local authorities' plans and movements he could conveniently be one of your deputies, sheriff."

There was a tense ripple and rumble about the room. Sheriff Drake's eyes were narrowed dangerously. He was fully awake and chewing his cigar like a St. Bernard. But he nodded. "Go ahead," he said. "But this better be good."

"I hope so." Danny ran his hand over his damp brow. "We'll assume that this lawman from your office had already made plans for the night that the smuggling and the murder took place. For this night's work he had planned to take over the diamonds and leave the rest of the gang out of it. There would be enough in this haul to set him up for life. Durskin was the only man who knew the identity of the lawman. So with Durskin out of the way, the stones would belong to the deputy and nobody could trace them.

"This man from your office knew an uncle of a friend who had a fast boat, a weakness for Scotch and a Colt automatic. The deputy got the Colt several nights before, while he was making a social call. He arranged to have Durskin steal the express cruiser to do the job. Everything worked beautifully. He even got a break when the Federal man, Mr. Webster here, winged Durskin in the shoulder as he was making a run for it.

"All the lawman had to do was shoot Durskin with the Colt belonging to the uncle, deliver Durskin's body in the stolen boat back to his friend's uncle and later manage to get the Colt, that had done the killing, back in the drawer where it was usually kept. He could toss things around in the house to make it look as if a wild search had been going on there. In fact it had, because although the lawman had worked out a clean bill for the murder he committed, he still didn't have the diamonds.

"Durskin had taken care of that in his own way. He had hidden the stones and then on the way through the cut to the hide-out where he usually met the lawman, he had picked a morning-glory from the vines overhead to remind him where he had hidden the diamonds."

Sheriff Drake growled, "I don't get the connection"

Walter Kays shouted. "This whole thing is an insult to your office, sheriff."

"We'll get even with Mason later, Walter," the sheriff said. "Go on, Mason."

"There isn't much more," Danny said. He wet his lips. "The other men in the smuggling game found out that the diamonds hadn't been delivered and they began wondering what had happened. They learned that the stolen cruiser had been returned to its dock. They watched and saw some activity on the beach before the Hadley house. They came in the night and found their fourth wheel had been buried in the sand, so they dug him up, searched him for stones and took his shoes to search the heels and soles." Danny pointed to the shoes on the desk. "Those shoes there."

"Where did you get the shoes?" Drake asked.

"From the *Shark*, the cruiser that Shelly plays with," Danny said.

Shelly was screaming. "I know my rights. I demand an attorney. I demand to see my consul."

Nobody paid any attention to him, except two of the deputies, who moved in closer.

"That's about all," Danny said, "except maybe you'd like to work on the puzzle of where the diamonds are hidden, sheriff."

Sheriff Drake looked dazed. "You mean those morning-glories?" He saw Danny's finger pointed at the crushed blossoms.

"From the morning-glories," Danny said. "And those canisters from the *Manatee* galley." He sorted the canisters. "See? This one says 'Salt' and that one says, 'Coffee,' and this one—"

Sheriff Drake nodded his head. "Say, that Durskin wasn't so dumb, was he?"

"I don't think he knew a morning-glory from a sun flower," Danny said. "But he knew it was a flower of some kind."

"Flour," Sheriff Drake repeated the word with a different meaning and he read the word on the largest can. "In the can of flour."

Aunt Wanda leaned forward excitedly. "Why, that would be the best place in the world to hide diamonds," she exclaimed. "The stones would sift right to the bottom and—"

There was a commotion at the side of the room and Deputy Sheriff Walter Kays moved in fast. He had his Police Positive out of its holster and was covering the sheriff and Webster, Danny Mason and those in the close proximity of the desk. His back was to the wall. There was a wild look in his narrowed eyes. His trigger finger was tight on the trigger. "Nobody's going to cheat me out of those stones now," he said.

With his free hand, he grabbed the flour canister and backed along the wall toward the door to the back room. "Nobody's going to stop me," he said. He paused at the door. "And you, Mason. I owe you something."

Walter Kays' finger moved on the trigger.

Sheriff Drake clamped down on his huge cigar and his gun came out and spat a stream of flame.

Walter Kays cried out and grabbed his gun arm. His gun fell with a clatter to the floor, the canister with it.

Sheriff Drake said, "You ought to a known better than that, Walter. But then I reckon you didn't know much, getting into this dirty business of diamond smuggling and murder in the first place." He nodded to his other deputies. "Get Walter to the hospital and keep a guard over him. And lock Shelly and the other two with him. You can have your consul, Shelly, and a dozen attorneys, but I think these leads we

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Love me, She's dead!



By SAMM S. BAKER

Mr. Clarke admired nothing more than a good-looking female, but when he found himself in a hearse with the body of one—well, that was a different story

I DIDN'T want to go to that damned game in New Haven in the first place. I could have kicked my teeth in a minute after I told my beautiful wife that I'd turned down the invite. That was three days ago. So here I was, on a freezing November Saturday morning, rocking up the Westside highway in a brokendown cab with my eye-stopping blonde, my equally beautiful and curvey red-headed secretary Betty, big Dan Thomas and my hangover, on my way to the game.

Maybe it's because my wife was slipping on her hip-length gunmetal nylon stockings when she told me there's nothing she'd rather do than go to the Yale-Harvard football game. I was always a sucker for gunmetal nylons. Or maybe just legs.

I went over to get a better look at those legs. In a few minutes, or maybe more, she had me agreeing to go to the game. So here we were shaking and shivering in this taxi. The enthusiastic ticking of the meter was driving coffin-nails into my hangover.

I growled into the top of my overcoat and sucked on a pint of Old Grand-dad tucked into my yellow wool scarf. I figured I was getting away with it when I felt a pressure on my arm. Two pressures. And a warm voice right in my ear.

"How about sharing that bottle of gasoline?" It was my thoughtful secretary leaning her weight on the arm slung over the back of the taxi jump-seat. I looked at her

too long. I was wondering scientifically how those eager curves managed to penetrate the bulk of her beaver coat. "Look, Peachnose," I muttered, "if we all start guzzling this stuff so soon—"

"Don't hold out on dear, sweet *Peachnose*." It was the sarcastic voice of my fine wife. My own fault; when would I get over that nauseating habit of making up pet names for the babes?

Betty helped me out. "Don't mind his calling me 'Peachnose,' Mrs. Clark. I think it's so cute and besides he usually only does it when we're alone in the office, when he's dictating I mean." She was sure doing fine. "And besides, I don't tell anybody but my most intimate friends, about that cute name he has for me. I mean, it just slipped out—" And her voice died away and hung in the air.

"Murder!" I said, not knowing how near the truth I was. I looked over Old Grand-dad to see why I hadn't been kicked by my impulsive wife.

I was stopped by an angry, jealous glare from Dan. This was a new angle. Dan was the art director in my office, and he didn't seem to be liking the attention Betty was paying me.

The cab stopped with a jerk.

"Jwashnon Birge," the cabbie gargled.

We were supposed to be picked up by this egghead, Giles Q. Bassett, at George Washington Bridge. Giles Q. Bastid to me.

I hardly knew the guy. I remembered him as a middle-aged fat man who called at our office every once in a while to sell us advertising space in a couple of medical magazines he represented. Right now, there was no sign of him around. I was pronouncing his name to myself in twelve unprintable ways for inviting us to the game when Helen hissed into my ear, "Pay the man!"

I gave Dan a dirty look that he threw back at me with brass knuckles on. I fumbled a five-dollar bill into the cabby's hand and got back the black smoke of his exhaust for change. I called him a couple of shiny new names and found Betty's soft finger on my lips.

"You're to blame for this," I shot at her, "encouraging this Mr. Bastich to invite me and three friends to the football game and drive up there, because he thought it would be nice if you joined the party."

"Don't you like having me along, honey?" If she pressed any closer, she'd be vulcanized to my ribs.

"Don't 'oo 'ike having me along, sugar-plumps?" said my icy wife on my other side.

"Don't you like having me along, Don John?" frowned Dan Thomas, looming up in front of me.

Peace, it's wonderful. "Where the hell is our chauffeur Bassett?" I asked.

My wife tried on one more wisecrack for size, "Too bad you two couldn't drag along that couch from your office."

Nobody laughed. There was silence while the clouds started spitting into our faces. It was snowing. Not the fat white cornflakes you see in the movies. These big flakes came right out of some celestial waffle-iron. I wasn't happy. I started humming, "I'm dreaming of a nervous breakdown."

That's when the hearse pulled up. It was green and square, high as the bridge tower, a Packard pasted together before Mr. Packard was invented. The doors groaned open and a big round voice sang, "All aboard, folks!"

I hate everything, but most of all I hate being called "folks." I would lovingly hate this Giles, but he wouldn't let me. He was too nice and happy. His pudgy white face beamed. I wanted to stick some raisins in it. He was wearing black rabbit-lined gloves as big as basketballs. He threw one at me and I shook it. It was like shaking a dead moose's tail.

We struggled into the alleged car. Dan was wedged between the two tomatoes in back. I could have used either some blonde or red-headed heating myself, but, no, I was the guest of honor. I had to sit up front with our cheerful host.

A prolonged explosion shook my ears loose. It was the motor sounding off.

"Not much to look at," Bassett roared, "but she's got a sweet little engine."

I tried to smile, but the ice was too thick on my cheeks. "When better cars were built they forgot to throw this one away," I managed. Bassett thought it was funny. The three frosty gnomes in back didn't. I turned around to inspect them. The silence back there was too thick. I didn't like it. I smelled trouble.

Suddenly, Betty's hand whipped up from under her coat and slashed across Dan's cheek, leaving three deep red smears on his skin. Instantly, Dan had both big hands on her throat. I could see the knuckles pushing out through his gloves. The redhead's mouth slid open like the top of a jack-in-the-box, her tongue pushing down against her lower teeth.

I threw myself back over the seat and jabbed my pigskin-covered thumbs deep into Dan's eyes. He screamed, and let go Betty's throat. She slowly moved her hands up to her face. She was all right. Dan had his handkerchief pressed against his eyes. Tears were streaming down over his chin. He'd be all right, too.

"Why the hell didn't you do something, Florence Nightingale?" I snapped at my gallant wife. She had one of those slick, almost-smiles on her beautiful alabaster face. Like a cat with a bellyful of fresh mouse. She picked a nonexistent tobacco crumb off her smooth pink tongue. "I just came along for the ride," she said. She caressed her gloves tighter on her fingers. Damned if she wouldn't have liked them on the redhead's throat, too.

I switched over to Betty.

"What gives?" I demanded. "Or is that the way you two always neck in the back of old green Packards?"

She gulped twice and managed to squeeze out some words. "He put his hand on my knee. I didn't like it." That was a novelty.

Dan looked at her through his red eyes. "I'm sorry I lost my temper," he said. "I thought you put your knee under my hand. I don't think you should have scratched me. I'm sorry." He didn't look sorry. He looked like he wanted to finish the job on her throat that I'd interrupted. He also looked like he'd enjoy massaging my neck. I climbed into the front seat again.

I looked down at my thumbs. They were wet. Maybe from snow. Maybe not. I needed a drink in the worst way. I took it in the best way, right from the neck of Old Grand-dad. I passed the bottle around in back. I was getting generous. I'd have to appoint a guardian for myself.

The bottle came back, but Old Grand-dad was only about a half-inch of his former self. I pushed the half-inch toward Bassett. I was becoming positively senile; next I'd be lending people my teeth. Bassett endeared himself to me. He refused the drink. I'd have to leave him somebody nice in my

will. Like my gorgeous wife. Or her gun-metal legs.

Bassett explained, "I've got a bad heart. Doctor told me to stop drinking." I drank a drink to his doctor. I opened the window to throw out the empty bottle. The snow almost threw it back.

"I tank we better go home," I said. "They won't play the game in this storm. I can't even see the road. It's murder." I looked in back for approval. All I got for answer were six eyes full of murder.

"Oh, we're bowling along beautifully"—that was happy Bassett, our scout leader. "Let's forget our little differences and sing. Nothing like a song, I always say."

I always say I'll have another drink, and I did. Lucky I'd brought several bottles.

For a while, it almost seemed like fun as we rammed along through the snow. Bassett kept the car full of music. Turned out he had been in the Yale Glee Club when he was at school ten years before. He kept in practice with his church choir, he said. For an hour he boomed at top volume. On the "Yale Drinking Song," I let my lyric baritone ride, "Baa, Baa, Baa!" Maybe that discouraged him. Anyhow, the singing stopped.

It must have been twenty minutes after some o'clock because there's some theory about that's when lulls occur. A solid lull was occurring now. Betty's clear, high voice broke it wide apart.

"I'm sick of this old beaver coat," she chattered. "I'm going to get a mink coat, the color of heavy-cream in strong coffee."

My vicious wife caught me looking at her. I'd have blushed if my blood wasn't frozen solid.

I tried to cover up. "Mink costs more than creamy coffee, P—" I caught myself before I said "Peachnose." "Betty, what would you use to pay for the coat?"

She threw up her chin and smirked. "I'll have the money to buy me plenty of mink, and soon." The car skidded and threw me against the wheel into Bassett's lap. He kept his truck on the road in spite of my tonnage on his arm. I straightened, picked my heart up from the floor and put it back in my throat. Also, a new bottle of Grand-dad. I even passed it around. Giles passed it by again.

Dan leaned forward and breathed some of my liquor back on my neck. "Why don't we stop for something to eat?" he almost shouted. He was scared by that skid and was covering up.

As expected, my hungry wife agreed. She opened her lips long enough to say, "Let's eat." Then she snapped them shut again tight. Something was eating her. Her eyes didn't like me. They didn't like Betty. I didn't like her look.

I shivered and it wasn't only the cold. I turned around. "I'm scared spitless," I said,

loud and angry. "I don't like riding in this storm. I don't like sliding all over the road like a dime on a shuffleboard. I don't like the atmosphere in this damned hearse. I hate myself. Let's get the hell home!"

Betty leaned forward so she could almost rest her chin on mine. "Nothing to get excited about, sweetsie," she murmured. "Do be nice and sweet and—"

Helen's voice crackled, "Where do we eat?"

Dan added his hunk of repartee, "Yeah!" Bassett tried to calm everybody. "We'll all feel better after some hot coffee—"

"The color of my mink," Betty mentioned.

Bassett waited. "I know a little place only a mile or two down a side road soon. Out of the way, but that makes it cozy. No hustling you out. Thick red hamburgers. You'll all like it."

He turned suddenly down a narrow opening in the trees. I couldn't see any tire marks, just virgin white snow in a world of falling white snowflakes, the large economy size.

We all strained to see something, anything, through the snow-flecked windows. It was like driving through a giant roll of hospital cotton. The tension in the car became thick and crushing. I was sweating and the sweat was freezing and I remembered lots of poetry about the icy fingers of death.

Everybody in back was leaning forward a little, not knowing it. Big red polka-dots of rouge stood out on Betty's gray-white skin.

"I'm nervous," she squeaked. "Why don't we stop?" She changed her mind. "No, keep going, don't stop!" What ailed her? A red drop of blood rolled down where her sharp white teeth cut into her lip. She was too scared. I started to ask why.

Helen screamed, "Look out!"

I swiveled my head around to the front. I saw Bassett's body fall forward, his hands slip sideways off the wheel. He pawed at his coat front. He gurgled, "My heart—"

The car charged forward crazily. I grabbed at the wheel, too late. We swung into space. White clouds of snow puffed around us. The car crashed into something, throwing the front wheels up. I grabbed at Bassett's lurching body. We both rolled over the seat and fell into the back of the car.

The five of us were tangled together as the car settled at an angle. I heard an odd sound, sort of a combination hiss and gurgle, and somebody said "No-o-o-o," starting high and ending in nothing. Then there was strange, shocking silence. We started to unravel from each other.

"Anybody hurt?" The weak voice must have been mine because I was saying it. But it sounded like somebody else through the door of a telephone booth. There were

assorted answers, none understandable, but answers, anyhow.

I looked hard all around and up. There was nothing broken, not even windows smashed. The Romans sure built these chariots well I thought. I could even push open the door. I rolled out on my face, up to my seat in snow. The sticky stuff kept coming down into the crack between my scarf and coat. My spine was an icicle with knobs.

Something heavy rolled down on me and pushed my face deeper into the snow. What I said melted everything three feet around. I turned over and the weight lifted. It was Bassett. He was staggering up to his feet. I kept sitting on my cozy wet seat and looked up. "How's your heart?"

He was breathing hard. He'd lost his hat. His black hair was already covered with snow. He stared at me, his eyes dazed. He recognized me at last. He answered by mumbling, "Let's get the others out."

A gunmetal leg was stepping out of the uptilted door. I saw calf and knee and ten inches later came some skirt and black Persian lamb and my proud wife. Even from my wet haunches she looked good. She wasn't excited. She stood there and looked at me.

"A gentleman always gives a lady his seat," I said and I got up clumsily. I rammed my head into Dan who was stepping awkwardly out of the car. He pushed his hand into my face and shoved me back, heels over head, into the snow. It was monotonous, not to mention degrading. I shook my head clear and stumbled to my feet again.

"Why don't you take up knitting or something else to keep your hands busy?" I snapped. No answer. I let it lay.

"One, two three, four Four of us," I counted, jabbing myself last. I looked at the car. The door swung slightly in the air, pushed by the heavy downfall of snow. The inside of the car was black against the white storm. No sign of Betty. I looked at the others. Their faces were blank. I stepped slowly toward the car, lifted myself over the angled running-board, crawled in.

I saw some legs. They were hers, unmistakably. Her beaver coat was spread open around her unnaturally, most of the coat crushed into the corner of the seat where she lay so quietly. Her lime-colored skirt was bunched up around her hips. The tops of her stockings were smooth and straight, as though painted on her slim curved legs. She didn't move. Unconscious, I figured. She must have got a hard crack on her skull against the thick glass of the side window. Her cute little beaver hat was pushed down over one eye. Maybe, I thought, some wet snow on her face would revive her. I didn't get the snow. I was puzzled by the rigid look of her.

My eyes followed her neck down to her sweater. Something was wrong. It was bright yellow all over one side. But the other side was covered by a large dark spot. I never saw a sweater designed in that color effect. Her chest didn't move, not even a little.

It suddenly seemed hot in the freezing interior of the car. My knees pressing hard on the floor started to hurt. The voluptuous figure on the seat was too quiet. Everything was too quiet. I could hear every single snowflake brushing against every other snowflake on the way down. Not a sound from the three people outside the car.

My eyes were still on that dark spot on the sweater. I didn't want to touch Betty, but I had to. I reached out slowly with my stiff cold hand and touched the dark spot. I pulled away my hand and the fingertips were red. I had to get closer. I didn't want to. I pulled up her sweater. She wore nothing underneath. No bra. The skin was harlequin-patterned, her right side white, her left side red, ugly red and damp. The red pattern started from a cut in the skin alongside her left breast. I pulled down her sweater. I pulled down her skirt. I smoothed her skirt. I straightened the beaver coat around her. To keep her warm, I thought. I wondered whether mink was warmer than beaver. It wouldn't matter any more to her, anyway.

I looked up at her face. The red lips were open just enough to show the line of her teeth. One eye was staring up at the roof of the car. I gently pushed over the cute little beaver hat so it covered both eyes. It was less than two hours before that I had last called her "Peachnose" in the taxi. She was no angel, but I'd liked her. Maybe I'd liked her a lot. I had a headache. I was tired. I had to do something about this in addition to taking the drink I needed.

It was about time one of the three outside was looking in to see what went on. It seemed like three days since I'd crawled into the car. My wrist watch said it was less than three minutes. I crawled out of the car backward. The air was icy.

The three of them were grouped close together, as though for warmth, facing the car.

"Is Betty snapping out of it?" Dan asked, showing the first flickering sign of interest.

I laid the words down flat and hard. "She'll never snap out of it." For the first time I realized that one of them had killed her. I began to burn. One of them had made bones and meat and dry hair out of that beautiful, lively girl. One of them was a killer. They were all frowning, seeming not to understand.

"It can't be!" said Helen. "Why don't you save your corny ad-libs for Abbott and Costello? Tell that redhead to pull down

her skirts and come out here." She took a breath, "I'd like to start heading for civilization."

She didn't sound funny. Could that smooth-looking blonde iceberg kill somebody?—I wondered.

Bassett's deep voice interrupted. He seemed to have recovered from his attack. "She's just unconscious, must have hit her head against the door—"

"It wasn't any door," I said softly, "Somebody knifed her."

"You're lying!" Dan's face was full of anger and confusion. His fists bunched up. He looked at each of us menacingly.

"You know something about medicine, don't you, Bassett?" I turned toward him. "You ought to, working for these medical mags."

"Well, yes, a little," he answered. "Guess I'd better take a look, then we can go get a doctor."

He climbed into the car.

"Go get a doctor," I mimicked after him. "I'll knock on the nearest tree and see if a kind squirrel will let me use his phone."

Bassett was stepping out of the car. The white of his face made the snow look pink. He grabbed Dan by the shoulder for support.

"She's dead all right," he managed to say. He gagged, caught his breath. "This isn't good for me," he murmured. "I've got a bad heart. It isn't good for me, seeing her dead like that. I never could stand the sight of blood."

"She couldn't either," I snapped. "If she woke up and saw all that nasty blood on her sweater, she'd be sick to her stomach."

I was too busy talking to see it coming. It had two hundred pounds behind it and four heavy knuckles in front of it and it smashed straight into my mouth. I tasted blood and loose teeth. My own blood. My own teeth. The white ground came up to comfort me. A brown shape bent over me.

I pulled back my legs so my knees hit my chest and I pushed up, throwing my body into an arc and kicking both heels with all my strength into that overcoat in the spot where fig leaves usually grow on statues. The brown shape shrieked and fell on top of me with its hands clutching toward its middle. I rolled the body off me and staggered to my feet, shaking my head to clear the buzzing and pain.

It was Dan on the ground, hunched over and groaning. "The damned killer!" I yelled and pulled back my dropkick leg to cave in the side of his head. Something hooked onto my leg and twisted me over backward. He's up, he's down. Why had I bothered to get up? I had a collar full of snow. I started to curse as I got up, and saw that it was Helen who had thrown me.

"Why didn't you let me kill him?" I yelled

"And get your shoe all bloody?" she asked quietly. "Besides, how do you know he killed her?"

"You saw him attack me," I said, foaming words out of my quivering mouth. "That wild temper of his, I've seen it in action too many times at the office. I've seen him throw a knife at a copy boy for spilling a bottle of India ink on a drawing—"

"Betty didn't spill any ink," my logical wife said calmly.

Dan was getting slowly to his feet, still crouched over, his face still twisted with pain.

I congratulated myself on my marksmanship. I said, "He was burned up because Betty seemed to be making a play for me. He kept scowling at me all through the ride today. He was red-hot jealous. He kept looking murder at her. It was too much for his hair-trigger temper. When we got all tangled up in back of the car, he killed her."

I paused for breath. "Mr. District Attorney, that's me," I thought. It made sense. Dan was straightening up slowly, notch by notch, like a rusty auto jack. I braced my legs, ready to jump him.

He worked his lips. "I was jealous," he said slowly. "I was so jealous I could have killed her. But I didn't. She was a cheap, two-timing chippie. She twitched herself at anything in pants that walked into the office. But I didn't kill her—"

"Word of honor?" I mocked. "You were just winding up an affair with her and you couldn't stand her making googoo eyes at me today, could you? If you couldn't have her, nobody else could, could they? So you knifed her, didn't you? Didn't you?" I was blowing hard. I could hear the jury applauding.

"I didn't knife her," Dan said, spacing out each word. "I might have broken her neck, I might have crushed in her skull, but I wouldn't knife her."

We stood looking at each other. I wished I had a law book so I'd know what to do now. The snowflakes kept tumbling down. Bassett stood limply in his overcoat, watching us with sick eyes. My wife was rubbing her gloved hands slowly together.

Dan Thomas and I faced each other with legs wide apart and arms out at the sides like a couple of stuffed apes from the Museum of Natural History.

"I wonder," Bassett began.

We all turned toward him.

"I wonder," he repeated nervously, "what happened to the knife?"

Why hadn't I thought of that? Even a child would have thought of it. But I wasn't a child. I was a grown-up jerk.

"I guess we'd better search each other," I guessed aloud.

My calm wife was suddenly very angry. Her mouth twisted with uncontrollable rage.

"Nobody searches me," she said. "I'm sick of your fighting and crying over that sleazy she-wolf. I'm sick of standing here freezing in the snow. Let's get out of here."

Dan looked at her with new interest. "What's your objection to being searched?" he asked quietly. "Are you afraid we might find something? Something like a knife? A woman's weapon, the detective stories call it." He took a step toward her.

"Would I hold onto the knife if I'd done it?" she asked, trying hard to control her voice. "Any damned fool could have thrown it away while we were all standing here—"

"Seems to me," Dan interrupted, "we were talking before about jealousy. How about you being jealous? How about you watching Betty drool over your husband on the ride up here? How about that crack you made about the couch in his office?"

"I wouldn't kill her." She was breathing fast. "I'm glad she's dead, but I wouldn't kill her. It's not easy to kill somebody with a knife. Ask any doctor. I was reading about it in Reader's Digest. You have to know just the right spot to put the knife—"

She stopped. She put her red glove against her red mouth. She had said the wrong thing. She had worked in a hospital for three years; Dan knew it.

I looked at her again. Could she have done it? She was soft outside, but so cold inside when she was sore. I started to feel sick again. I licked my lips and tasted some of the dried blood on them. How does it feel to sleep with a murderer, a murderess? I stared at her.

A low growl came from Dan. "You killed her," he yelled and started toward her.

I didn't think. I threw myself at him. My hand slipped down his wet coat, caught on his pocket, ripped it open. Something slid out, made a hole where it fell in the snow. He whirled around. They were all looking at me, crouched at their feet.

I dug into the snow. My fingers found something hard. I picked it up, opened my hand. It held a four-inch pocket knife, with a black bone handle, one big blade folded into it. There was a stain on the knife that might have been rust. Except that we all knew it wasn't rust.

Without a word, we looked from the knife to Dan. He looked scared, then angry, then scared again. I started to get up. He stepped back.

His voice sounded as though a grapefruit was stuck in his throat. "Somebody put that knife in my pocket," he said. He took another slow step back. "I'm going to get to a telephone, get somebody up here with some authority." He turned and ran down the road, fighting the snow until he disappeared.

We stood there half filled with relief that

we had lost a murderer, and half ashamed of letting him go. I dropped the knife into my pocket. Helen looked disgustedly at me and then at Bassett, and chanted cuttingly, "Catch a murderer by the toe, if he hollers let him go!"

Bassett shrugged his round shoulders. I couldn't think of an answer so I shrugged some Old Grand-dad down my throat.

"Let's get out of this icy rathole," snapped my practical wife.

"Wait a minute!" I said stubbornly, asserting my masculinity. "Bassett and I want to examine the body again. Don't we, Bassett?"

"No," he said. "If we stay here," he explained, "Dan Thomas is liable to come back. The man's crazy, no telling what he'll do next, I think we ought to go."

"Don't be silly," I bluffed, feeling pretty silly for staying. Maybe I'm just stubborn. Maybe I didn't like to leave poor Peachnose there all alone. Bassett must have had the same thought.

"Poor Peachnose," he sighed.

My impatient wife spoke up sharply. "Hurry up then so we can get out of here!" She gestured toward the car.

It was too late to back out. I climbed into the car and pulled Bassett in after me. He certainly wasn't anxious. He was looking sick and gray again.

We both stared at the slim cold body. I pulled up her sweater again, pointed at the cut where the dried blood stain began near her breast.

"Not so much blood as I'd figure," I said. "She must have died fast. Guess Dan had to make sure of that. Quick, with a knife through the heart. Like Helen said, I didn't know it was so easy to kill with a knife."

Bassett shook his head abstractedly. "It isn't easy," he said. "Got to hit the right spot. He got her in the aorta, that's quick. She bled internally."

"What's the aorta?" I wanted to know.

"It's the main artery running down the throat, past the breast and through the body," he explained. "If you pierce a ventricle in the heart, it doesn't necessarily mean death. But the aorta—" His voice trailed off. He rubbed his chin nervously. "Let's get out of here."

"In a second." I bent over her to pull down the sweater. "It sure helps to know just where to stick the knife when you're going to use one," I remarked. I stopped, with my hands on the sweater. I thought over those last words. I was quiet, quieter than the redheaded corpse. I could hear Bassett's breathing distinctly.

I went on, "You certainly picked up plenty about anatomy, selling space for those medical magazines." No answer. A thought began to annoy me.

"Did you know Betty well?" I asked.

I tried to picture Bassett's doughy face in back of me.

"No," he answered. "Just saw her occasionally when I called at your office. I"—he cleared his throat—"suggested she come along because I like to be friendly with a customer's secretary." I let him take his time. The silence was like compressed air.

He went on, "I didn't know you'd bring Dan Thomas and that there was trouble between them. You don't know how sorry I am—"

I interrupted. I said carefully, "Outside, a minute ago, you said, 'Poor Peachnose.' Nobody called her that all the way up in the car."

He didn't answer. I continued, "She told me only her most intimate friends knew that nickname."

I let it sink in. I rested my hands on the car seat, one on each side of the body, my knees on the floor. I was looking fixedly at the blood stain on the yellow sweater. No answer. I put on the pressure, "How come you knew her nickname?" No answer. I repeated, "How come you knew her nickname?"

I started to turn around. I felt a hand in my overcoat pocket. Something hard came down on the back of my head. I fell forward and down. I floundered and heaved my body around, but I was pinned down by pressure on my back. A herd of buffalos stampeded through my muddy skull. I managed to get my eyes open.

It was dark. I pushed out with my hands, groped with my fingers, touched cold, smooth legs. I shuddered. I was caught under Betty's coat and skirt. I pushed myself up frantically, got free.

I could see dimly in the dark interior of the car. Bassett had been on top of me and he had rolled over on the floor. He looked dead. There was a dark purple bruise on his temple. I needed air, or else. I pushed his legs aside and fell out of the car into the snow.

My tall, slim, beautiful wife was standing over me. She looked more dead than beautiful. Her eyes were slitted. Her lips were locked together tighter than a French seam. Her right arm was raised slightly. Her hand held the black bone handled knife. I noticed it had stopped snowing. The whole world had stopped. The four-inch blade looked big and mean as a saber.

Her arm started coming down. The blade was less than a foot away. I braced myself to do something.

The knife dropped into the snow in front of my knees. We stared at each other.

"Your friend Bassett," she said, "took the knife out of your pocket and clubbed you with it on the back of your head. Then I took the knife away from him just as he

was going to sink it into your back." She paused, "I wonder why I bothered."

I stared at her, too surprised to talk.

She continued, "To take the knife away from him, I had to hit him on the temple with the heel of my walking shoe."

She added, "You owe me a new pair of shoes. I never knock anybody unconscious with the same pair twice."

"You were listening outside the car." I had my voice back finally. "Why? Did you think he was the one who—"

"Of course," she said. She yawned daintily.

I stood up shakily. "You suspected him after I pointed out his medical knowledge, after I mentioned that blunder of his calling her 'Peachnose.'"

"Not so, stupid," she said. "I thought it over while you were getting into the car, right after he used that childish nickname. Then I started to wonder about his claiming to have a weak heart and yet singing steadily at the top of his voice for over an hour in the car."

She went on complacently, "I remembered he was the one who decided to turn down this obviously abandoned road, and that he was at the wheel when we rammed into the tree so conveniently."

I was bothered. "Why should he kill her?"

"You start kindergarten tomorrow, inspector," she replied. "Remember those remarks she made about getting a mink coat—"

I interrupted in a hurry to get some medals for myself, "And she said she'd soon have plenty of money for mink—"

She tossed in, "That's when the car skidded so hard we almost landed in the ditch. Bassett was driving; that remark bothered him plenty. He probably decided that if we got lost in the snow, he could make something happen to her."

"I get it," I said. "Bassett was playing kneesie and such stuff with Betty and she was shaking him down for mink money—"

I heard a sound from the car. We watched Bassett crawl out slowly through the door. He tried to get up, but couldn't make it. He was on his knees, one hand on the ground, the other tugging his collar open.

He lifted his hand from the ground and raised it slowly like a panhandler begging for a nickel.

"She was going to tell my wife," he said, his deep bass gone, his voice thin as though strained through a coarse sieve. "I didn't want my wife to know."

He seemed to have trouble breathing, but he pushed the words out. "She was bad," he said. "She told me I had until Monday to give her twenty-five hundred dollars, or she'd tell my wife about us. I couldn't get

the money. So I figured if I could spend today with her, I might reason with her—"

"Or find an opportunity to kill her," I interrupted.

He nodded vaguely. He went on, trying desperately to explain.

"The storm looked like a lucky break for me," he said. "When she kept talking about getting money, right in front of all of you, I knew I'd have to kill her to shut her up for good. I decided that if I could smash up the car in some out-of-the-way spot, I might be able to get the party separated while we all tried to find our way back. Then I might be able to get her alone and reason with her—"

"Or kill her," I put in, "with the knife you just happened to have along, the knife you planted later in Dan's overcoat pocket."

He was pleading for understanding, with his eyes. "I don't know," he said. "I didn't have any special plan. But when the car smashed up and we were all thrown together in back, I found myself on top of her. Her coat was pulled back. I saw her sweater stretched tight under my hand. I acted without thinking. It just took a second to get my knife out of my overcoat pocket and," he whispered, "it all happened so fast—"

I bent down to hear his words better. His eyes popped with fright. He stared up at me. What the hell was he so scared of? "No," he tried to yell, "don't—"

He fell over into the snow. He lay still, very still. I started to touch him with my right hand. Then I noticed I was holding the knife blade out. It must have been that way when I bent down. I dropped the knife and touched his skin. It didn't feel alive. He wasn't alive.

I looked up at my surprised wife. "You were wrong," I said "He really did have a bad heart."

She didn't answer. I went back into the

car for the last time. I looked at Betty. Her eyes looked back at me. The little beaver hat had slipped back on her head during the commotion. I said good-by and closed her eyes.

I joined Helen outside the car and we started walking. We walked quite a way without talking. I looked at her, but she didn't look at me.

Something caught my eye. Something was moving rhythmically under her black Persian lamb coat. I looked at her steadily and kept looking and walking.

She saw me looking. Her lips opened a little.

I kept looking. I finally said, "It's not normal. After three years of being married, after all we've been through today, you still give me hot flashes."

"Shut up, you crumb," she said low. She stopped walking. I stopped walking. Her lips began to tremble like a cooch dancer's hips. She grabbed my lapels and her lips touched mine. I felt like a slice of bread being pulled down into a hot toaster. I reached my arms around to get a better grip on things.

She pushed me away so violently that I lost my balance and suddenly everything went white.

I crawled out of the snowdrift on my hands and knees and watched her sleek gunmetals disappear down the road.

I felt a wet pain in my hip. "I've been stabbed in the heart!" I screamed to nobody. I reached back under my coat and pulled out a long piece of glass from my last bottle of Old Grand-dad. I laid down on my face and cried.

A skinny squirrel came over to investigate.

"Love me, she's dead," I explained to him sadly.

He sneered. He shoved his tail into my puss and walked away.

THE CORPSE LOVED FLOWERS

(Continued from page 15)

got on you will work into enough to give you a nice, long Florida vacation."

A deputy sheriff brought the canister back to the desk and Sheriff Drake said, "Walter might almost have got away with the diamonds at that."

"Not in the flour can," said Danny. "While Eve was playing for time by trying to pretend she was outrunning the Coast Guard, I was taking the diamonds out of the flour and putting them in the sugar. I was hoping Kays might try to make a grab for them when we got him cornered."

Sheriff Drake smiled slowly. "That was nice figuring, young man. You'll have a good piece to write up for your paper when you get back." Drake took out his cigar. He

looked over those in the front row, at Harry Hadley and at his new wife and at Eve. He said, "Now you all go over to the vet's and find out how your dog is. A mighty shame, he had to be shot up like that."

"I just called before we came over," Uncle Harry said. "He's limping around nicely, thank you, sheriff. We'll stop by on the way back and see him."

Going out, Eve hugged Danny's arm. She said, "I was so proud of you, darling."

Danny said, "You were really to blame for it, you know."

"I?" she said.

"Sure," Danny said. "You made me so jealous of the big oaf that I kept trying to figure how I could get something on him."

The unlamented corpse

By JOHN K. POLITO

*. . . It was a good gag if they
could have got away with it . . .*

I.

SHE was wearing a tweed skirt and a linen blouse, nylon hose and toeless ankle-strapped sandals. The rough tweed skirt was twisted under her slim body, exposing soft, white flesh above her roll-gartered hose. A little plump of thigh for my taste, but nobody asked me.

She didn't care. Her blouse, which had been laundered many, many times in many, many bathrooms in too many slack-doored rooming houses, was ruined. I felt a twinge of pity about that. She would have worried, because linen blouses are not too plentiful for girls of her type. It was ruined now, beyond repair, just as her frail body was ruined beyond repair.

Her face was peaceful, eyes closed, no lines of worry showing. No worry about the spoiled blouse. No worry about the two holes down a bit from the neat neckline, the two holes a few inches apart, joined by a dark, thick stain which by now had ceased to spread.

Ellen Carey was dead, dead as a youthful dream, dead as last night's moon. She was dead, and finished with hall bedrooms and dirty dressing rooms and the eternal job hunting. I wondered if I should feel sorry for her. But maybe I should feel sorry for the ones who still have the old, weary round to face each day.

Ed Hurley was poking a blunt finger into a plastic purse, his mouth tight in a soundless whistle, his sharp gray eyes half hooded. The Medical Examiner lit a cigarette with a fat round kitchen match, then blew a soft cloud of smoke toward the dead girl.

Ed looked up and lifted one eyebrow at the M. E.

"Anything special, doc?"

"No. Small caliber pistol. One in the heart, one in the right lung. No contact wound. Died right away. Dead maybe an hour, hour and a half. Let you know, the rest tomorrow."

Ed dropped the eyebrow, nodded, and turned to me. He raised the eyebrow again, picked up the black purse, and started for the door. I got up and Ed stopped at the door, saying:

"Forget it, Rick. This room is clean. It was used for only a few minutes. The girl preceded Harry Spanner up here by ten minutes. Ten minutes after he got here, he walks up to the desk downstairs and tells the clerk to call the police 'because a girl was just shot.' He stands there with a gun in his hand until the clerk notices it. I get here and Mr. Spanner says he met the girl at her request for an unknown reason. He says she was facing toward him—"

At my lifted hand, he added quickly, "—and that open window. Suddenly there are two shots, a gun falls through the open window, and the girl falls down."

"But look, Ed"—trying to sound logical instead of just worried and uncertain—"Harry had no motive. She was just a dancer who worked in his club a few times."

Ed drooped the eye again as he answered. "After the autopsy, maybe we'll know something about motives."

"Nuts! Harry is crazy about his wife." At his slight smile, I added quickly, "Sure, I can't see it and you can't see it, but it's still a fact."

Ed shrugged his shoulders with finality and left. I glanced around the room, stuck my head out the window and looked at the

rusty fire escape for the tenth time. It would have to be some fire to get me out there. But for murder? Well, maybe.

When I stepped out of the hotel onto Market Street, the hot click and buzz of the gaudy neon signs was breaking now and then into a sputter. Plate-sized drops of rain scattered around in a hot, dusty wind. Summer in St. Louis. Hot, damp, tropical almost, with always a hint of violence in the brassy-hot days, and the dark finger of danger silently touching the back of your neck in the long hours of the night.

It would be hot down at headquarters, too. Hot, bright light lancing under the tired lids of Harry Spanner's blue eyes, the eyes of a guy who might hang a quick, angry one on your chin but who would never use a gun. I knew that, but Harry was still down there trying to tell the cynical boys of the detective bureau a silly, simple story.

I didn't like the idea of Harry sitting under the bright lights and answering questions, or waiting in a cell until a fresh crew called him out and began the round of monotonous questions.

A flicker of movement in a plate glass window caught my eye. I saw the reflection of a man, moderately tall, thin, with a nut-brown tropical suit, brown shoes and a white Panama. He had dark eyes, with darker patches underlining them, a bone-thin face and a stubborn chin. He looked like a fellow who would do a thing if he made up his mind to. I laughed. I knew better. I was looking at my own reflection.

I walked away from the Carmi Hotel, passing the Homestead Bar and Grill—Dancing Nightly, a glittering penny arcade, and a darkened, iron-barred jeweler's window. His chief business would be making cheap remarks about the watch your wife gave you for your birthday.

I turned on Broadway, got into my old coach, and started for headquarters. Harry would be the first one there if I were in the can.

The acting chief was in his office when I entered. Kyra was there, too. As I walked in the door her impossible high heels and tight skirt made it no one else in St. Louis but Kyra. With her, but standing and facing the acting chief, was a small, very slender man. Almost a boy. Almost, but not quite.

Probably Gerald Markey had never been a boy. Probably he had been born with that look of tired, solitary cynicism in his slate colored eyes. That, and the small touches that made him rate a second glance.

His black oxfords gleamed softly like hand-rubbed wood. His dark-gray suit had been built especially for him. The coat was long enough in back and the sleeves let an exact eighth of an inch of white cuff gleam against his dark, slender hands. The nails had a faint gloss. Buffed, not polished. That was Markey. Nothing there to hold against

a man, yet I didn't like him. Something peered out from those slate-dull eyes now and then before he could hide it.

The something hid in back of Kyra's eyes, too, and sometimes peered out when she was excited or angry. Angry at Harry, usually. At the best husband she would ever have in this or any other world.

The acting chief was talking to Markey, whose eyes watched him unwaveringly, while Kyra's eyes and sharp heels dug holes in the shabby carpet.

"Not tonight. I'm truly sorry, Mr. Markey, and you, Mrs. Spanner, but we have too many things to do. You know that, Markey." His voice sharpened. "You can't get a writ tonight. If you could get one I would disregard it. Tomorrow you can see the prisoner if you wish. If there is anything else—" He let his voice die away.

Markey's Panama was turning into a pulpy mess in his hands. Kyra glanced coldly at me as she rose. She was careless in the way she uncrossed her legs. Or maybe not. She half turned to join Markey, then checked and turned to face the acting chief. In a smooth voice that came off the top of her throat she asked:

"I wonder if we could have permission to see the girl, her body, I mean."

She only half faced me, but I could see the moist line of her lower lip as she stood there. I hardly heard her request as I watched the little finger of her right hand curl tightly against her palm, and then slowly, as though with great difficulty, straighten out again.

The old man blinked his surprise, cleared his throat, looked from Kyra to Markey, then shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"The body is at the morgue. The morgue is public property. You need no permission from me." He dropped his eyes to the desk.

I tried to see a significant exchange of glances between Markey and Kyra as she turned away with a soft "Thank you." I wasn't sure. They both gave me a cool, indifferent nod and left.

The acting chief ran a heavy hand through his gray hair. He smiled and asked:

"What unreasonable request is eating you tonight, Rick?"

I looked toward the door through which Kyra and Markey had gone, looked back at the patient old man, and shrugged my shoulders. The very small smile vanished. I stood up, running a handkerchief over my forehead and then around the leather band in my hat. I chose my words carefully.

"Friendship is a funny thing, chief. You can't force it and it dies easily. Now and then it makes you take it out and look at it. Like now."

The old man just looked.

I continued, "Just to say hello, chief. Just a nod, so he knows the world is still out here. And friends."

I held my breath. Finally, he breathed deeply and I knew he was thinking of the one man, or two if he were very lucky, that he had called "friend" in a cold and lonely world. He stood up.

"Five minutes. Tell the turnkey I authorize it. Five minutes."

The cell block had the damp concrete look of animal cages at the zoo. The smell was about the same, too.

As the key twisted in the lock of Harry's cell, he looked up quickly with the half-alive hope in his eyes that caged men always seem to have. The turnkey said, "Five minutes, Rick," very impersonally, and looked me in the cell. I tried to be gay and nonchalant as I held out my hand.

"Well, what's new, Harry?"

I could have choked on that one, but Harry took my hand calmly and just shook his head. He was a big man, an easy twenty, but he looked beaten down now. Even his hair seemed a little more gray. We sat down on the blanket-covered slab.

"I've just got five minutes tonight, Harry. I know you can't tell me much, but give me anything that's important or unusual and we can fill in the background stuff tomorrow."

He shook his head again and rubbed the left side of his jaw.

"I don't know what the score is at all, Rickey. This Ellen called me at the club. She said she had to see me. I asked her to come on down, though I could hardly remember who she was."

"Why wouldn't she come to the club?"

"She claimed that she didn't want anyone to see us together. That what she had to tell me was important. So I said O.K."

I prodded: "Anything at the hotel look queer?"

"No. I went right up to the room, 250, like she told me. I walked in when she answered my knock. She was sitting in a chair near the bed facing the window. I had to walk around to get in front of her. She stood up, started to say something, then her eyes, well—"

"Yeah?"

"She, well, she just looked scared. Then the two shots. I just stood there for a minute. Then I went to her, but she was dead."

He stopped, staring at his hands for a moment, then added, with irritation: "What a hell of a place to shoot a girl."

"The hotel?"

He looked embarrassed then, as though he just realized what he had said. "No, no, I mean, well, through both well, you know."

I stared blankly, then decided to skip it for the moment.

"Then you noticed the gun on the floor, picked it up, and went downstairs to tell the clerk."

"Yes. Sounds like hell, doesn't it?"

Then he smiled. Just a small, rather used-up smile, but I knew he'd be all right.

"You didn't go to the window and look out?"

He shook his head. "I know they always do in the movies, but I was in a fog, I couldn't think."

"Do you think Ellen had something important to tell you?"

He stood up, shaking his head. "So help me, Rick, I can't think of a thing in the world she could have to say that would be important to me or anyone else."

"Kyra?"

The single word hit like a right to the jaw.

"Rick, you know better—"

The turnkey rattled the door and I broke it off with a wave of my hand for apology.

I turned away from the granite-and-limestone piles of the city buildings around Twelfth Street. Back in my office in the St. Louis badlands, perhaps I could make some sense out of this mess.

I parked my coach on Pine Street. As I got out a shabby, stiff-kneed figure bumbled his way along the sidewalk, hitting doorways in succession, like a clumsy insect. I could almost smell the sugary reek of cheap wine as he hovered around a nearby entry. He fell into it, as a body might fall into space and be suddenly lost in the outer blackness. As Ellen Carey might be faltering and feeling her way around in the Great Darkness.

My office was a couple of shabby rooms high up in the Gainer Building. It was too far south of Market Street, on Sixth, to be fashionable any longer, or profitable. That's why I could afford it.

I had been operating from there for several months. I had made a nickel now and then. I had concluded when I left the army that a buck is a buck, and people don't really consult private investigators on Mayan ceramics, wedding protocol, or chess gambits. As I say, I made, now and then, a little money. Sometimes I even had a little fun. Occasionally, I got a slap in the face.

The night elevator boy came to half-consciousness as I stepped into the ancient, open-work cage. With a social "ah-ah-duh" he started up the water-wheel, or whatever makes the thing run.

In my office the atmosphere seemed composed of equal parts of decaying wood fumes and gluey steam. I threw open the two windows which look to the east and the Mississippi. It was just about midnight and a lonesome barge wailed its way past the levee, its lights making pale-yellow splotches on the muddy roil of the water. Lights twinkled and danced on the Illinois shore.

I called Kyra at the Playhouse, Spanners' night club, to get Ellen Carey's address, and the names of some of the girls who knew her.

Kyra was not much help. She finally gave me the old girl who worked over the costumes for the Playhouse chorus. She gave

me a name, Petty Carroll, which certainly came out of a movie magazine, and an address which came out of a beaten-up end of the city, uptown, west end. Fifty-hundred Delmar. I cradled the phone and stared for a second at the grit-covered top of my venerable desk.

I was thinking of taking a drink from the bottle of Dutch gin in my desk when I heard a slight noise outside my door. I stared at the door for a second, decided that the noise was probably a hungry rat. I remembered that they had eaten them in France, then decided that maybe I'd make a buck in a day or two, so take it easy.

I looked out the window. No rain in sight, just pale flickers of uneasy light along the horizon. I walked to the door, and with my hand on the light switch remembered the gin. The drink made me feel a little more certain of myself and a lot hotter. This time I flicked the switch and closed the door behind me.

The corridor was a dim tunnel. As I walked to the elevator, a clammy finger trailed a quick line down my spine. I shuddered and, full of manliness, blocked an urge to look over my shoulder.

I don't think I heard the blackjack swish down on my head, except in retrospect. I was down on my knees, feeling sick and old, staring into my damp Panama which was still rocking gently. I put out a hand to steady it and fell flat on my face. It hurt my nose and I tried to push the floor away from it. A hard kick at the base of my spine straightened me out. A voice that must have tripped over broken teeth hit me full in the face. That and the sharp, nauseous odor of cheap wine. The sound was vague and balloonlike:

"Forget the Carey dame, pal. This is for nothin'."

I didn't hear the second bang on the head at all. The last thing I remembered was a picture of a dim figure bumping from doorway to doorway on Pine Street when I had parked my car. And the reek of bad wine.

I opened my eyes experimentally, with fear knotting my stomach and pain splitting my head. A hangover like this must have come from a fine, brave night, I thought fuzzily. Then a muffled voice beat through the haze around me, and, as I tried to rub my eyes clear, I heard:

"Ya can't lay here in the hall, Mr. Dollard, honest the boss ain't gonna like it—"

I was sitting on burlap-ribbed strip of rug near my office door. A sick, saffron dawn was peering in a window at the end of the corridor. It barely outlined the crouching figure of the elevator boy. With his help, I crawled slowly up the peeling wall; bracing my back gingerly, I stared stupidly at my feet. I started to shake my head and stopped,

to keep it from falling off. The boy burst into speech again:

"Ah-duh, duh, the boss, he's—"

I waved a hand.

"Thanks, but I'm not canned up, I'm just sick. Go on back to work, I'll make it O.K."

He looked at me cynically and said over his shoulder:

"Yeah, I know, I been sick, too." He laughed.

I made it back into my office and propped myself against the lavatory stand. There was a mirror above it, but I wasn't ready for that yet.

Memory crept fearfully back—the double sapping, the kick in the back. I could stand straight now, with some effort. My head was cut high on the right side and puffed out over my left temple. A little more moxie and my lease would have been broken.

After some more mopping up and a gloomy breakfast at Thompson's on Broadway, I picked up my coach on Pine and headed for Petty Carroll's address. Stubborn, I guess. If somebody waves a hundred bucks under my nose I probably deal, at least some of the time. But when they try to despoil my manly figure, ah, comes revenge and the searing hatred of a Dollard aroused to fury. Ha-ha, I almost jumped the curb at the cadaverous creature who sneered back at me. By the middle of the next block I realized it was me.

It took me ten minutes and five dollars to find out that Petty Carroll and Ellen Carey had roomed together. The snaggle-toothed slattern who ran the place said that Ellen had gone out early and Carroll somewhat later. She showed me a note addressed to Ellen by Carroll. Carroll, it said, had a job and would give Ellen her things later. Don't bother, I said to myself.

I went home, a couple of rooms in a small building overlooking Forest Park. It felt very good to me, with a slight tree-scented breeze slatting the Venetian blinds. After attending to certain matters that never trouble movie detectives, I stretched out on my bed in my shorts, with a bottle of beer, a cigarette, and no leads, no nothing.

I tried to look at what I had. An easy job. Ellen dead, Harry in the can for it, Ellen's friend Petty on the lam, and a wine-soaked bum or two trying to warn me off.

Petty's runout was easy, if she had killed her girl friend. But the whole setup was against that. On timing, I had been banged on the head after Petty had gone. Also, she would have no way of knowing of my interest until I had called the Playhouse. Again, too late, she was gone even then. No Petty was out, at least for the murder itself. But what would make her run out? If she shared the information Ellen had, she would be as much of a threat to the killer as Ellen. That answer was easy. Find Petty.

Sure, *cherchez la femme*. But people who

really want to hide out in a big city like St. Louis usually make the grade if they try. I had a feeling Petty was trying.

The heat was picking up then, and I felt noon-hour pangs awakening in my stomach. Moths still fluttered a little, but I decided in favor of chow, anyway. Chow reminded me of Harry stuck in that stinking cage at headquarters, then I thought that by now Markey should have him out. Dodging the windows, I walked to the phone and called the Playhouse. Kyra was in the office to judge from the quick reply, and I asked to speak to Harry. Her answer stopped me cold:

"Why, he's not out yet, Rick." No surprise, no undue strain.

"What do you mean? Hasn't Markey been down there?"

"Well, Gerry feels it would make a better impression if we let it cool off for a few days."

I almost snapped the fuse shouting back at her:

"What's wrong with you? Are you nuts? You know damn well Harry didn't kill that girl, why does he have to impress someone?"

Her voice was cool, light, careful:

"He is charged with murder, you know. That isn't a misdemeanor."

I banged the phone on the desk and started for the door. I remembered about dressing and checked.

Twenty minutes later I was striding as fast as I could go up to the acting chief's office. He was out, but the chief was in. He looked like he should be selling real estate for his father. All the modern dicks look like that, it seems. In about ten seconds he had me cooling off, fast.

"Dollard, you're a licensed private investigator. Your license is in good shape. I wish I could say as much for your judgment."

I wanted to break in, but his level look stopped me.

"You can't practice law with that license. To get bail for a prisoner you must be a practicing lawyer admitted to the bar in the state of Missouri, or a professional bondsman. To obtain any kind of writ of release, a lawyer. Unless you have suddenly become one, let's just smoke a cigarette and talk it over."

He smiled and held out a white-metal case. I took one, leaned back and tried to slow up my breathing. After a couple of drags he leaned forward.

"Now, I'm familiar with this case. Spanner hasn't changed his story. We haven't a thing that changes our mind. What do you have?"

Nothing. I said so. They had checked the rooming house on Delmar a little later than I had. Information from the same source. He was not annoyed at my failure to report my presence there. He was sure I would surrender anything I had. He didn't

say it, but I knew why he was sure. Once they lift your license in Missouri, brother, it's gone, period.

I decided to talk to Harry again. They had allowed him to get cleaned up, and Kyra had sent—sent, get that!—some clean clothes, so he looked a little better. We talked a few minutes, then he asked me the big one.

"Rick, when am I going to get out of here? I can scrape up enough dough to go bail—"

"I guess there's some technicality, but Markey can't seem to arrange things, yet." At the lost look on his face, I tried to clean it up a little. "Oh, he'll probably have you out tomorrow, maybe even tonight."

He looked his unbelief, the first time he seemed to lose faith.

"Rick, something funny is going on. I've been wondering if Markey is really trying."

My laugh didn't sound convincing even to me.

After a minute Harry went on: "Rick, if something happens to me"—I tried to stop him, but he shook his head—"if something happens, look out for Kyra, will you? Markey has my power of attorney for the club, and I know he'll see to all the legal angles, but she's not so good at business, and—" He seemed to get no further with his thinking.

I started to give the usual reassurances, when an idea hit me. With my sore head it was almost too much. I asked as casually as I could:

"You say Markey has your power of attorney for the club? How come?"

Harry looked surprised for a second, then smiled.

"Oh, well, you know, back in prohibition days, hardly anyone ever held title to his own night spots. Feds, local shake-downs, you know." I nodded. "Well, I guess I just sort of couldn't get used to the idea of operating legitimately. You notice it comes in handy," he finished bitterly.

I gave out with a little more small talk and left. I had something, but I didn't know just what to do with it. Maybe Markey could tell me what it was.

I tried to imagine what I would do with a power of attorney, if the actual owner of a prosperous night club was temporarily—or permanently—out of the way. And if I were not too honest. It was common knowledge around and about that Markey, in spite of the elegant front, never seemed to be really in the money. Maybe he had expensive pastimes. Maybe that odd look he sometimes had in his slate-colored eyes—I headed for the Playhouse.

The Playhouse, in the half light of a blistering evening, was a stately building of reaching columns and wide, tapestry-blinded windows. Inside, the dance floor resembled an old-fashioned ballroom. It looked ex-

pensive, and was. The business end, kitchens, offices and dressing rooms, were in the rear.

Harry's office was a big, comfortable place with none of the brash shine of the newer styled joints. Overstuffed chairs were scattered comfortably around, and a wall safe, a big metal desk, and a few old green filing cabinets took up the rest of the space.

Markey was sitting in back of the desk, somewhat lost in Harry's big chair. Kyra was stretched out on a couch. She was wearing her eternal tight skirt and spiked shoes, with a basque blouse revealing a little more of her person. She swung her long legs around to sit upright, exposing some flank, and stared open-eyed at me as she moved. Markey hitched forward on his chair and gave me a greeting as warm as yesterday's gravy. I flung a hip on the desk edge and waved a soupy current of air past my face with the Panama. I opened with:

"How come Harry is still in the can?"

Looking very legal, Markey answered:

"I'm doing everything necessary to protect Spanner's interests."

"Oh, sure. But the guy is still on ice. No bail? No writs?"

Markey's smile looked like a strand of barbed wire.

"I am capable of such technicalities as we can properly employ, Dollard, something a bit beyond, ah, private investigators, shall we say?"

"No," I snarled, "let's don't say it." I turned to Kyra. "I don't get this. Are you satisfied to let Harry sit down there without doing anything?"

"Dollard, we are doing a number of things. It just takes a little time."

She leaned forward to pick up a cigarette from a low table. The neck of her blouse was loose. She smiled, and one eyebrow lifted a trifle.

"Don't be so impetuous, Dollard. Nobody likes men who are in a hurry."

Some gals seem to think they can get anything with a routine like that. Some gals can. Markey cut in.

"I'm not sure I quite understand your position, Dollard. Has Spanner retained you?"

I started to snap at that, but he held up one delicate finger and added: "Because I hold his power of attorney and I'm making whatever contracts are being made." With a delicate sniff of satisfaction, he let the finger fall.

"Look, Harry Spanner is a friend of mine. Get that. Friend. Something you wouldn't understand. I don't need a contract. I don't need to be retained."

I stopped before the fuse let go. Markey got his feet suddenly and for once looked a little flustered. He gibbered for a second, his lips pulled back in that barbed-wire look.

"Keep out of this thing. You're not

wanted. Kyra and I can manage without any skid-row peepers."

I started over the desk top at him. Kyra blocked it simply by leaning across the desk and pressing me back with her body. I backed off as Markey started to fumble at the desk drawer.

Kyra snapped: "Gerald!" Just that, once. Hands still shaking, Markey straightened up slowly.

I had my breath back then and managed to say: "O.K. I can take you, Markey, any day and twice on Sunday With a gun or without. Remember that."

With all the satisfaction of a small boy sticking out his tongue at teacher, I walked out to my car and kicked the motor over. I was pulling out past the club entrance when Markey came running down the drive. I stopped to hear him. He was blowing as he came up to the door.

"Dollard, I want to apologize. I was a little on edge, I'm . . . uh . . . worried about Kyra. And," he added quickly, "Harry, of course, and I was a little hasty. Why not come over to my apartment and have a drink?"

"I don't need a drink and we can talk easily here."

"And, now, Dollard, let's not keep on this basis. Harry may need all we can both do. How about it?"

So we went over to Markey's apartment. It was on Union, near the park. Big, respectable, expensive, as only those parkside apartments can be. As we swung up to Markey's floor as gently as the sweet chariot, I tried to angle Markey's invitation. Lots of dicks seem to grab wonderful theories by adding two and two. Maybe I should invent a new school of thought, say, the dunce-around method of detecting.

We entered the apartment together. A big living room, doors that led to more big rooms. Large windows looked out to the park and the big, Muny Opera Bowl. The soaring skeleton of the giant roller coaster at the Highlands supported a garland of dancing lights in the southern sky.

I looked around as Markey went out to mix a drink. The floor astonished me. It was white. Long-tufted, pigeon-breast-soft carpeting of some sort new to me. I had visions of pink-skinned blondes rolling happily around on it. Me and my visions!

The walls held a lot of bookcases and a lot of pictures. A few were a trifle odd. One especially puzzled me. It was a soft-focus job of a tall, beautiful woman wearing a web-thin flowing robe, open down the front. She wore a small mask over her eyes, chains around her wrists and a large chain around her ankles. The caption said simply "Love."

I tried the books next. Krafft-Ebing and Stekel and Moll.

As Markey came back into the room, I made one final mental note, the photos on

the wall were all of big women. And Kyra was a good five inches taller than Markey.

The glasses were a foot tall and fragile as a baby's smile. I sipped the Scotch lovingly. This is the only way I ever get to drink that kind of Scotch, being strictly a gin-income operator myself. Markey switched on a low console radio-phonograph and asked:

"Moussorgsky all right with you?"

I nodded. Nice situation. Scotch, Moussorgsky, a guy who would make a museum piece for any psychiatrist, and an unattached murder floating in around the edges.

I had Markey tagged now, and I could begin to see the hook-up with Kyra, the tight skirts and spiky heels.

As Markey turned from the radio, I threw a quick glance at the bookshelves again. The word "corset" stood out on two different shelves. I had their personalities tagged all right, and I didn't care for it. I remembered the bang on the head I got in the dark corridor. That had been a break. Tangling with this type of twisted psycho promised a few variations that I was quite sure I wouldn't like. Like the look in Markey's eyes when he fought back his speechless rage at the Playhouse.

He said: "This is the way to talk these things out, Dollard. Not around places like the Playhouse."

"The place makes money, a lot of money."

"It could make a lot more if it were made a little different than most clubs."

I looked deliberately at the picture of "Love."

"Like that?" I asked.

If I expected him to jump at that I had figured Markey wrong. He laughed.

"Merely an interest in the unusual. My tastes are cultivated, but not unrealistic."

He slid deeper into his chair.

"There are a lot of very common people who frequent the Playhouse, and they could be crowded out for a more select clientele."

"Why don't you tell that to Harry?"

"Him? His idea of elegance is completely expressed in that shabby pseudo-colonial stuff at the club."

"Look, if he's such a trial and tribulation to you—"

"No, Dollard, no, no. Nothing personal, just an academic discussion. Shall we get down to business?"

"Right."

"All right. Now Harry is badly placed for this murder charge. You know what the evidence is. If we can get someone to believe his story long enough to get bail for him, what would we gain?"

"Gain? Harry would be out of that stinking clink."

"But would he stay around?"

"Look, I'm trying to be patient, but you're pushing it."

"Suppose you were released temporarily

on a charge like that. All the evidence is against you. Would you wait for a jury to tag you with murder, or would you try to buy some mileage?"

"Harry Spanner never ran out on a jam in his life and he won't do it now. Besides, it's his bail money, so what are you beefing about?"

Markey shrugged. "Then what do you propose?"

"Get him out. Then find out what kind of information this Ellen dame had. Work it out from there."

Markey rubbed his fingers over the yellow brocade of his chair. Just the tips, gently. He whispered:

"Do you believe there was any information?"

"If not, why was she murdered, and why has Ellen Carey's roommate disappeared?"

"I don't think this roommate is going to be found."

He kept his eyes hooded when he said that, but there was a note in his voice that I didn't like. I decided to play his way. The silence piled up between us, then I asked, trying to sound casual:

"By the way, was Kyra at the club the night Harry got the call?"

Markey studied me for a moment and the dull slate of his eyes was just as warm as a tombstone.

"No. Kyra was here." He paused for a moment. "Looking over costumes for the chorus, in some old prints I have. We were both here all evening, until we got the call relayed from the club. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. Well, what do you suggest we do next?"

He smiled, as friendly as a fish hook. "Why not let me handle it for a few days? I have some connections around town."

I thought of the wine-toting boy who had knocked me out. He continued:

"Maybe I can find a lead to this Carroll girl. Maybe I can find some way to have Harry released, and still—"

I got up, brushed a few fine, white strands from the Panama and started for the door.

"You won't have another drink, Dollard?" I shook my head. "Well, let me see what I can do for a few days. You know Harry's interests are my interests."

"Yeah," I said softly.

On my way home I thought back to the beginning of the mess, to Ellen Carey's body lying there, dead and cold, on that hotel room floor. The two shots. Something Harry said came back to me: "What a hell of a place to shoot a girl—" The widely spaced shots, the two blots on the white blouse. It began to make sense. I could imagine the kind of man who would aim that deliberately at a woman. Unnecessarily. Unless some kinds of twisted minds demand strange necessities.

Sure, I could begin to put it together

now, but what did that get me? Theories that no one would listen to. A guy who killed a gal or had a gal killed to put another man on the spot. For what? Why not kill the other man?

There had to be a way to do this. Dunce around, that's me. Well, why not? I'm expected to be stupid, so I tried to dope out the proper kind of stupidity. It should be a cinch for me.

The next day I stopped in on a friend of mine who books small acts into night clubs. From a bunch of pictures, I picked out a girl named Alice Fayette. Original, these dames. She was just about the same size and coloring as Petty Carroll's pictures indicated. I got her number and address and went out and had a talk with her. She balked at first, but when I said fifty dollars we made a deal.

Then I drove downtown and had a long talk with Ed Hurley, the homicide man who had handled the Carey killing. He didn't like my idea. I finally sold him, though, and my next stop was the Carmi Hotel. In a run-down trap like that five bucks will buy almost anything. It bought what I wanted, just a hotel room. A hotel room on the floor above the room where Ellen Carey was murdered. A room on the same fire escape and a connecting room.

About nine that evening I met Alice Fayette in the Carmi lobby. She was very nice, tall, dark and cool-looking. Blue eyes. It gave me a bad moment or two when I thought of the night's possibilities, but Harry Spanner was still in the can.

The clerk rolled a nasty eye at me as we crossed to the elevator. Upstairs in room 350, just above the room Ellen had lived in for ten minutes, I installed Alice Fayette, with instructions. As I was finishing, a rap sounded on the door. I opened it to Ed Hurley. He nodded to the girl:

"She know who I am?"

"No, I'll introduce you. Alice—"

Ed stopped me. "I'm just Ed, Rick. I got a job, and this is no way to hold it."

"O.K.," I agreed. I turned to Alice. "He's a pal, honey, and a good guy in a tight spot."

She was worrying, though there was practically no risk, I hoped.

The room was hot as we sat around and talked, planning. The window gave off onto an alley. Across was one of the older buildings, blind-windowed, its dark bulk cutting off any chance of a breeze.

I picked up the house phone and had the operator get me an outside line. In a few seconds Markey answered: "Yes?"

I tried to sound anxious. It wasn't hard. "Look, Markey, I finally got a line on this Carroll girl."

His voice was controlled, but I could hear it tighten just a little: "Is she with you?"

"No, no. I'm going to see her in about an hour. I'm at home and can't leave for a while."

He liked that. "Do you know where she is?"

"Sure. Room 350 at the Carmi Hotel." There was a dead silence for a minute, then Markey's voice came back, very cool.

"I was lighting a cigarette. 350 at the Carmi. Suppose I meet you there in about an hour?"

"O.K."

He had the bait. Now to see if he'd take the hook. I hung up and wiped the perspiration from around my eyes. If I had it figured right, Markey should be here in about thirty minutes. We timed it, and twenty-five minutes later Ed and I moved into the adjoining room, leaving Alice to do her act alone. We put out all lights in both rooms except for a small bed lamp in 350.

Alice began her act. Just as though it was any other night in the world, she began preparing for bed. She had a quite decent strip-tease costume under her street clothes, but someone looking in, say, from a fire-escape, would take it for the McCoy. In fact, I even found myself getting interested. A nudge from Ed stopped that, and we moved to the window.

By crouching against the wall we could keep the thin silhouette of the fire escape in view. Ed drew his police positive and held it loosely on the window sill. I drew my small, flat .32 and held it free, just in case. The minutes ticked away and the silence began to get to me, and the heat. The only noise was a faint mutter from the street end of the alley; the only air the superheated, second-hand stuff seeping in through the small window.

Ed whispered, "I think you picked a loser, pal."

He had just finished, and Alice was just turning from the window, when there were two flat spats out somewhere in the alley, glass shattered in the next room, and Alice stood very still for a moment and then sagged to the floor. Ed fired three times out the window as I started for Alice.

"On the roof next door!" he shouted as he made for the door.

I yelled, "Wait a minute, the girl—"

He was out in the corridor and moving fast with his next remark. "Your baby, pal."

I looked Alice over carefully, fear grabbing at my stomach. She was stretched out in almost the same position Ellen had been. I could almost see the blots spreading on her negligee. Almost, but not quite. She fluttered her eyes, opened them wide and grabbed for me.

"O.K., baby, I don't think you got anything but a dizzy spell."

She was sobbing in my arms and I wasn't objecting too much when Ed entered the room and stood in the door watching silently. I helped Alice to her feet and she quite modestly grabbed for some clothing. I lit a cigarette.

"O.K., I muffed it." I glanced at Alice, thinking what a close one that little oversight had been. "I thought he'd climb the fire escape; the roof next door never dawned on me. He got away?"

Ed smiled and threw a light rifle I had never seen before on the floor.

"No, I didn't hit him. But he evidently got rattled, and running across the roof he dropped through a skylight."

"Markey?"

"Yep."

"Where is he?"

"Waiting for the meat wagon. The skylight was over a stairway. He must have hit about every fifth one on the way down. Broke his neck."

I was beginning to feel alive again. The case wasn't perfect, but I had given Ed enough of the story in advance to clear Harry. And he had heard me make the call to Markey. And the fingerprints on the rifle. It was good enough.

I dropped Alice Fayette off on my way out to the Playhouse. Ed would take care of the details, and getting Harry out of that cell. I would have liked to take care of that myself, but I still had a little business to attend to.

I walked into the office, and Kyra's wide open eyes told me she had been expecting someone else. I gave it to her fast.

"Your boy friend is finished. Dead."

"Gerald? How—"

"Trying another smart one. Trying to kill the girl he thought was Petty Carroll, the only one who could tip his connection with the murder. You see, I knew someone had to call Ellen Carey to rig the phony appointment with Harry. Markey. He very neatly removed the only witness who could testify against him, and he framed Harry for a murder rap, all in one stroke. But the way Petty Carroll faded out, it began to look as though Ellen might have told her about the deal, and she was scared. So when he thought he had the chance, he tried to rub her out, too. If Petty Carroll ever turns up again we may find out all the answers to that.

"Now here's where you come in. I don't know the details about you and your little playmate, but I can guess. I've read a little about dominant dames like you, and spike heels, and little guys like Markey who enjoy being pushed around."

Kyra was beginning to edge toward Harry's desk. I moved in faster and she

tried to sink her teeth into my hand. I shoved her, just once, and she hit the couch and stayed there, her eyes glistening. I put my hat back on.

"I couldn't figure out how the girl was killed instead of Harry. Until it occurred to me that Harry just had to be out of the way, and in prison would be good enough, since Markey held power of attorney and could take over. And while you or Markey could be suspects if Harry were killed, you wouldn't be if it were just an unknown chorus girl who got killed, and if it looked like Harry killed her. It left you nice and clean."

I leaned back and wiped my head. I lit a cigarette. Kyra stared at me, her mouth partly open, her lips wet. I picked it up again.

"I dunced around and played it stupid for Markey, and like all guys who have that much ego, he fell for it. Now here's the deal. I don't know for sure if you were in on the murder setup. The police don't know. Markey's dead, so there isn't a chance of proving anything. I do know that you were in Markey's apartment the night Ellen was murdered. The police don't know that. I think probably Markey slipped out while you were maybe sniffing a little laudanum. I am willing to forget about it I'm willing to forget you were ever up there, I'm willing to forget about the cute games you and Markey must have played up there. On one condition: Harry will be back here in about an hour. You won't be here. You'll leave a nice note telling Harry that you loved someone else and ran away. He won't believe that, but you'll be gone, and eventually he'll forget about you. Maybe someday I can tell him a few little things that will help him forget once and for all. And he won't have to sleep with a gun at his side for the rest of his life."

She began to come to life at that. I finished up:

"I can't tell him now, not for a long time, what kind of twisted rat you are. Or that you had a finger, if only a little one, in this plot to get rid of him. He's stood enough right now to last him for a while. So beat it, quick, with just what you've got on you, and don't come back."

There wasn't any argument left in her. There never is when they know the big number is up. I watched her write the note and I watched her walk out the broad doors of the Playhouse. Out in the parking lot, a car pulled into the drive. The driver, a lone man, did a double take and I could see his lips tighten in a whistle. Kyra turned her head and watched him coolly. He swung his car around and she got in. I watched the tail-light fade away down Page boulevard.

I stood on the broad steps, waiting for Harry.

I.

THE grave-diggers hardly had thrown the first spadeful of gray clay over Jake Turner's lifeless face before Lew Starr's thinking led him away from the accident angle. It had to be that way. The squat detective was certain that a murderer was loose in Baltimore and getting him was Lew's prime concern at the moment.

The two men had been more like brothers than friends. Jake had been considered one of the best insurance dicks in the business, while Lew was just another run-of-the-mill shamus who hoped for enough good cases in a year to keep him watching the nags chasing themselves around the loops at Bowie, Havre de Grace and Pimlico. Not quite a pair. Still, they had been useful to each other and worked successfully together on several cases.

Then came two a.m. Monday morning and the blaze at the Taylor garment factory on Hanover Street. The place had been reduced to a smouldering ruin inside an hour. Jake Turner, being what he was, had been on the spot almost before the first engines arrived. His company stood to pay through the nose on the claim.

He had prowled through the ruins all Monday morning and part of the afternoon. By three o'clock, he was in his office dictating his preliminary report. It was then that he had called the detective.

"Listen, Lew," he had said, "I've got to see you right away. Say about four o'clock. I've come up with something hot. Something that makes this business look deliberate."

Lew said, "Sure, Jake." He remembered now how agitated the other had sounded.

"I picked up a little gadget in the ruins," Jake had added. "A toy we used to tinker with when we were kids, I think. That's where you come in."

"How?"

"I don't remember how the damned thing works!" he said flatly. "I'll give you all the dope when you get here. In the meantime, I'm going to take another quick look around the factory. Remember, four o'clock sharp!" He had hung up hurriedly.

Lew had remembered, but Jake hadn't. Jake couldn't very well. At four o'clock, he was lying under a huge, charred beam, his skull crushed. It had been decided that the beam, weakened from the fire, had come loose and caught Jake off guard. Lew didn't think so. Jake had investigated a great many fires and was too methodical a man to let a thing like a loose beam escape his notice.

Now, Lew thought, the trail would be colder than a left-over piece of bacon without the lingering after-smell. He stirred out of his chair, reached for his hat and, jamming it on his head, stepped out of his office. Jake's office would be as good a place to start as any, he figured glumly. All he knew

Model T murders

By LUTHER A. WERT

*A whiff of perfume, a strange clue,
but it convicted one of the town's
most respected citizens of murder*

of his friend's investigation was what he had been told over the phone. And that hinged on what Jake called a "gadget."

There was a cute redhead sitting at the receptionist's desk outside the World Indemnity offices. She looked him over carefully, then made up her mind.

"Mr. Davis is extremely busy this morning," she said. "I'm afraid you'll have to wait."

"Where can I find Jake Turner's secretary?" Lew asked, disregarding her abrupt greeting.

The redhead looked at him through veiled eyes that plainly said she didn't care for the secretary's taste. She jerked her curls over her shoulder. "Down the hall. Third office on the right. Miss Ross."

"Thanks, Red," Lew said, watching the crimson rush to her cheeks. He'd never met a redhead yet who could take that remark in stride.

Miss Ross was equally frosty, at first. "I'm sorry, sir," she began, after hearing his request. "Mr. Turner's reports are of a confidential nature and opened to no one."

"Listen, sister," Lew snapped peevishly. "I happen to have been Jake Turner's best friend. Furthermore, I think he was murdered. I haven't got a thing to go on but that report. Do I see it?"

Miss Ross wilted and her hazel eyes lost some of their coldness. "You're Mr. Starr, aren't you?" she asked softly.

Lew nodded. He watched the girl struggling to keep tears from her eyes. She lit a cigarette hurriedly and took a deep pull at it. Then she looked back at him and smiled faintly.

"I couldn't believe it was an accident either, Mr. Starr," she said huskily. "Use Mr. Turner's desk. I'll get the file."

Lew suddenly liked Miss Ross. And she must have liked Jake Turner a great deal, too, he thought. She put a slim folder in front of him, then took a seat at the other side of the desk.

Lew frowned as he leafed through the pages. "This all?" he asked.

She nodded. "Mr. Turner was going to finish it when he returned Monday afternoon," she choked, turning her head away.

Lew lowered his own eyes quickly, realizing that there must have been more than a mere secretary-employer relationship between Jake and the girl. He buried himself in the report and tried to forget she was there.

Jake had gone into detail all right, but not enough to give the detective any hint of a lead. It appeared that the factory was owned by two brothers, J. B. Taylor, the older one and president; and William, the secretary-treasurer of the outfit. Jake had already determined that J. B. had been in New York at the time of the fire and hadn't returned until Monday afternoon, after learning the news. William was missing, having dropped completely out of sight after he'd left his office Saturday noon. But Jake had dug up the fact that William was heavily in debt to one Nick Barton who ran a gambling joint in Highlandtown. Lew remembered Nick Barton and his methods and wasn't at all surprised to learn, from Jake's report, that a couple of Nick's hunkies had already caught up with William once and given him a going-over, just as an indication of what would be coming his way if he didn't ante up.

Then, there was the watchman, George Brannon, who had been extremely nervous when questioned. He had overheard a heated argument between the two brothers Saturday morning. He didn't know the details, except that J. B. had threatened his brother with arrest.

There was the maintenance man, John Peters, an electrician, whom no one had seen leave the building and who must have been the last person around before the fire.

Lew sighed wearily and pushed the report to one side. It wasn't a great deal, but it would give him a start. He looked over at Miss Ross.

"Jake mentioned something about a gadget he'd found," he said. "Know anything about it?"

She pointed to the upper left-hand drawer of the desk. She was getting hold of herself admirably now. "I haven't the faintest notion what it is, or what it's good for," she said.

The "gadget" turned out to be an old Model T Ford spark coil, fire-blackened and barely recognizable. A faint memory stirred briefly in the back of Lew's mind. He knew now what Jake had meant when he said he couldn't remember how they used to play with these things when they were kids. He

couldn't remember either. He tried hard, but he didn't get far. The girl interrupted his thoughts abruptly.

"You will catch the man responsible for Jake's . . . Mr. Turner's death, won't you?" she asked huskily, her eyes shooting little pinpoints of fire.

The detective nodded and reached for his hat. "Yeah," he said flatly. "I'll get him." He went through the door and was halfway down the long corridor when her voice stopped him.

"Be very careful, Mr. Starr," she called after him softly.

Lew looked at her for a long moment, then turned and continued out of the building. His purpose seemed two-fold now. What he wanted most was to come up against the man who had killed his friend and beat the hell out of him. Jake would have wanted it that way, he thought.

George Brannon lived in a crumbling shack down by the Pennsy tracks, but he wasn't hard to find. A lot of people in the neighborhood knew of his whereabouts and weren't conscience-stricken about giving information to a stranger, particularly if that stranger waved folding money about. In this section of town, a buck could go a long way toward helping a man forget his troubles for a while.

Brannon looked the detective over suspiciously through a crack in the door. "Whatcha want?" he muttered sullenly.

"In," Lew countered, pushing his way into the dingy room.

"If you're a cop, I ain't got nuthin' to say, see?" the other spluttered. "I don't want no trouble with cops."

"I can believe that, Mike," Lew said softly.

The man stopped dead in the center of the room and turned slowly toward the detective, his face showing white through a two-day growth of beard. "What'd you call me?" he asked nervously.

"Mike," Lew repeated. "Mike Quentin. When did you get sprung, pal?"

It hadn't been too hard to recognize him. Mike Quentin had been a good hood and had got his picture in a lot of papers in his day.

"You a cop?" Mike wanted to know.

"Nope. But I want some answers."

"I ain't got nuthin' to say, shamus."

Lew felt dirty about it, but he had no other choice. "Supposing the cops found out that the night watchman at the Taylor factory and Mike Quentin were one and the same person?" he asked dryly. "Think they'd get ideas?"

"You lousy jerk!" Mike yelled. "I'm goin' straight. I don't want no trouble. Can I help it if I happened to be around?"

"Be smart, Mike," Lew chided him softly. "Don't you think Inspector Fogle would like to get his hands on a fall guy? If you're

innocent and play square with me, you won't have any trouble."

"I'll lose my job, that's all!" Mike burst out.

"Yeah!"

"Yeah. I—" Mike stopped and flicked his tongue over puffy, dry lips. "I overheard a argument between the old man and his brother. When the old man come storming out of his office, he saw me and threatens to fire me if I mention anything to anybody about it."

"What was the argument all about?" Lew asked.

"That's just it," Mike groaned, flopping into a moth-eaten chair. "I don't know. I didn't hear nuthin'. I don't know nuthin', except the old man threatens to have young Bill run in the can."

"Uh-huh." Lew was thinking that they could have been arguing about William's gambling debts. "What time did you leave the factory, Sunday, Mike?" he asked suddenly.

"Midnight, like always," Mike returned. "I come on at four in the afternoon."

"Saturday, too?"

Mike nodded. "I come on just as old J. B. is givin' Bill hell."

"How about John Peters, the electrician?" Lew went on. "When did you see him last?"

"Sunday afternoon. He came in to look over the wirin'. He musta still been there when I left at twelve. He gets paid for overtime. Not me."

"Couldn't he have slipped past you during the night?"

"No," the other said flatly. "I was at the front door all night and that's the only way he could get out."

"Where can I get in touch with Peters?" Lew asked.

Mike shrugged. "Not around the factory, that's sure. He ain't been around since the fire. Try the gin mills around Harrison Street. He lives somewhere around there, I think."

Lew reached for his hat and got out fast. The trail didn't seem so cold any more. It stacked up. The electrician. Wiring. Fire!

The telephone directory said 1210, and the front door of 1210 Harrison Street was heavily fortified by an immense, slightly-under-the-weather woman in a dirty housecoat when Lew got there. Over her beefy shoulders, Lew could see a messy front parlor, a battered coffee table and two half-empty bottles of some oddly-named gin. What wasn't in the bottles came from the woman in a neatly-timed burp of greeting.

"John Peters?" Lew asked tentatively.

The woman's face suddenly became the color of asphalt and she had a difficult time holding herself erect as the first tremors of rage surged through her heavy frame. She

whirled into the parlor and, seizing one bottle, took a strong tug at its fiery contents. Lew shuddered for her.

Then she whirled on the detective, dwarfing him. "I ain't seen the two-bit bum in three days," she wheezed. "When I do, I'll break every bone in his body. Imagine! Leavin' a helpless woman alone like this! And without givin' me a penny of the wad he was carryin' all the sudden!"

"I know just what you mean, sweetheart," Lew said flatly, wondering about his next move.

The woman softened into peanut butter and it ran over at the edges. "I knew you would, too," she gurgled, moving closer. "You're kinda cute!"

Lew backed toward the door swiftly. "I'll be back another time," he called over his shoulder. "When dear John comes home, don't be too rough on him. I want to talk to him while he's still alive!"

He headed for what remained of the Taylor garment factory, hoping to have a look around. He didn't know what he'd be looking for, or what he might find, but it seemed like the natural thing to do until he could have that chat with Peters. He figured that there was a guy who might easily have a lot of explaining to do.

He didn't get the chance to do any prying, however. When he got to the factory, he spotted two patrol cars drawn up in front of it and cops swarming in and out of the front entrance. The meat wagon was there, too, and two white-clad orderlies were working their way through the debris, bearing a heavy weight on a stretcher between them.

A bellowed order sounded like a clarion call somewhere near Lew's ear and he ducked instinctively as the hot air whistled past him. He didn't have to turn around to see who it was. That wind was stirred up every time Inspector Fogle, homicide, opened his yap. Lew spotted him a short distance away and picked his way through the curious crowd to his side.

Fogle turned slightly and glanced at him and then executed a beautiful double-take as it dawned on him that his visitor was his pet hate.

"You!" he bellowed. "What the hell are you doing here?"

"Investigating a murder, chum," Lew replied. "And you?"

Fogle purpled. "Finding a body, shamus," he fairly screamed. "I've got my murderer. And you?"

Lew stopped kidding. "You mean you know who killed Jake Turner?" he asked incredulously.

Fogle looked puzzled for a brief moment. "Turner?" he queried blankly. Then his face took on a more calculating look. "Oh, so you're investigating Turner's murder, are you?" His laugh was a coarse bellow and

most unkind, Lew thought. But Fogle grabbed the detective's lapels in his huge fists, his mouth a tight hard line. "Look, bum," he breathed hoarsely, "Turner's death was an accident, see? This time we've got a corpse with his head bashed in that wasn't caused by any loose beam, see? He was found under one of the desks in there half covered with debris and burned almost to a cinder. Whaddaya think o' that, huh?"

"Nothing," Lew retaliated weakly. "He could have been trapped by the fire."

Fogle looked like he wanted to burp and couldn't. He sucked in a huge gulp of air and started all over. "Trapped by the fire, eh?" he rasped. "Then how was his skull crushed? He was *under* the desk. Did a beam go looking for him, crawl under that desk and conk him?"

"O.K.," Lew conceded. "So somebody slugged him and tossed him under the desk. So what? Who did it?"

Fogle smiled and his chest came out a trifle further than his stomach. "William Taylor, wise guy," he chortled. "John Peters was found under William Taylor's desk!"

II.

THEY were in a prowler car and headed downtown. "And you're certain that man was John Peters?" Lew asked the inspector.

"Of course I'm certain," Fogle beamed. "His dentist identified his bridgework."

Lew couldn't refute that very well. Not that he wanted to. He was thinking that a certain gin-soaked character on Harrison Street was not going to get her accustomed exercise any more.

"Why do you think William Taylor sapped him, Fogle?" he asked seriously. "Just because Peters was found in his office?"

Fogle's smile was self-assured. "Because the department has discovered that William Taylor was heavily in debt to Nick Barton. And the auditors have discovered that the guy had forced the company's books to cover his embezzlement of over two hundred thousand dollars of company funds!"

"So?" Lew asked. He knew what was coming, but just for the record he wanted Fogle to say it.

"So he set the fire to collect the insurance, naturally," Fogle explained.

"Oh, fine!" Lew exploded suddenly. "So he sets fire to the factory and leaves the books behind in a safe place just so the auditors can look them over! Furthermore, how is he going to get his hands on the insurance money to pay off Nick Barton? Don't look now, Fogle, but your slip is showing!"

"You're real smart, Starr," Fogle sneered back. "So he can't get his hands on the

insurance money. But he can destroy the evidence of his theft."

"By leaving the books unburned? Don't be silly!"

"So he made a mistake," Fogle roared. "They all do."

Lew smiled nastily. "According to you, his chief purpose in starting the fire was to destroy all evidence leading to his guilt. Would a criminal forget his chief purpose while committing a crime?"

Inspector Fogle snorted his displeasure and promptly told the detective where to head in. By the time he had finished this scathing denunciation, they had reached headquarters and stamped angrily inside. They went directly to the cell-blocks.

William Taylor was laying flat on his back reading last week's funny strips. He seemed to be enjoying himself hugely. The man talking to him through the bars thought the situation anything but amusing.

"How could you, Bill?" he was saying in a hurt tone. "We had everything tied up in that plant."

"Don't overdo it, brother dear," the man on the cot drawled easily. "It doesn't matter who started the fire, you'll get your investment back."

"I ought to let you rot in here, you . . . youn scoundrel!" the older man snapped waspishly.

"Please do, J. B.," Bill said. "At least, this way, Nick Barton will have to get one of his thugs thrown into the same cell with me to give me another going-over. And I doubt that that will happen."

J. B. Taylor whirled away, thoroughly outraged. He stepped on Lew Starr's corn and the detective let go with an anguished howl of pain. He caught the odor of a masculine, horsy-flavored cologne and a hasty glimpse of the light-colored tweeds that the handsome old man sported.

He cut short the man's hasty apologies with a quick question. "What were you and your brother arguing about Saturday afternoon, Mr. Taylor?" he snapped, nursing his corn. "Something Fogle ought to know?"

J. B. Taylor straightened and glared angrily at the detective. "I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about, young man," he said haughtily.

"Sure you do," Lew prodded. "You threatened to have William thrown in jail. How come?"

"You're mad, sir!" the old man protested. "Oh, come, now, J. B.," William Taylor said, rising from the cot. "He's not at all mad. He probably knows that I stole from the company!" He glanced slyly at Lew and smiled suddenly. "You look like a good sport, mister," he said. He pointed an accusing finger at Fogle. "This man had his monkeys take all my money when they brought me in. Do me a favor. There's a

filly running at Bowie tomorrow, name of—"

"Bill!" the man in the heavy tweeds cried sharply. "Haven't you had enough?" He whirled suddenly on the inspector. "You won't be too hard on him, will you, Foglè?" he asked. "I can't believe Bill had anything to do with this thing, regardless of appearances."

Fogle sniffed mightily and strode with J. B. Taylor out of the cell-blocks. The faint smell of perfume drifted back to Lew Starr's nostrils as he watched them go. The heavy figure of the man in the light tweeds held itself erect and proud, and Lew had the distinct impression that the man was carrying off his brother's shame admirably.

He turned back to the cell and the young man who was watching him so closely. "Brother," he whispered hoarsely, "if you killed Jake Turner and John Peters, you're the most brazen murderer I've ever met. And if I can prove it, those bars won't be nearly enough protection for you. Because I'm going to beat the hell out of you!"

William Taylor leered at him through the bars, a cynical smile playing over his lips. "That just goes to prove you can't trust first impressions," he said wearily. "And I thought you were a right guy!"

Lew resisted the impulse to plant his fist in the other mug's face and stamped outside. He would have felt a lot better if he could have been certain that William Taylor was going to remain behind those bars. But he knew better. Taylor's lawyers would have him sprung inside an hour.

The detective went straight to his office and slumped wearily behind his desk. Finally, he reached for his phone and put in a call to the hotel in New York where J. B. Taylor had spent Sunday night. The connection made, he asked for the manager.

A felt-encased voice whispered at him from the other end. "Detective-sergeant Kendricks, Baltimore City Police," Lew lied boldly. "We're checking to make absolutely certain J. B. Taylor stayed there last Sunday night."

A weary sigh greeted this and the felt voice took on a supercilious edge. "Yes!" it said. "I've told you men before that Mr. Taylor was here all night."

"You're sure it couldn't have been someone impersonating him or using his name?" Lew persisted.

"Quite sure. Mr. Taylor is a regular visitor here. I know him on sight."

"What about that call he made?"

"I've explained all that," the manager groaned. "Mr. Taylor put in a call to Baltimore about two o'clock Monday morning. Lexington 0200."

Lew thanked him and hung up. He consulted the phone book briefly and let a low whistle escape him. Then he put in another call.

A harsh, tired voice snapped at him angrily. "Yes?"

"J. B.?" Lew snapped back. "How come you called your office at two o'clock Monday morning? Expecting someone to be there?"

A muffled cry of rage beat on his eardrums from the other end. "Now you listen to me, you young snoop!" J. B. yelled. "I've got enough trouble without you. I told the police I was calling the night watchman!"

Lew snorted derisively. "You know as well as I do that your watchman left the factory at midnight."

"Go to hell!" There followed a sharp crash as the old man slammed his instrument back in its cradle.

It was only then that Lew saw the shadow on the door of his office. He reached behind him quickly and threw the wall switch for the overhead lights. A little man with a big gun stood in the doorway watching the detective calmly. His lean face was cold and hard, the line of his thin lips immobile.

Lew decided he didn't like him. "Yeah?" he asked.

The thin lips moved a trifle. The wary little eyes shifted to the gun, then back at Lew. The gun went into his pocket, but he kept his fingers locked around it.

"I'm giving you an even break, shamus," he whispered, gravel-throated. "Lay off the Taylor case and live longer."

"That sounds like a threat," Lew told him.

"You're real smart," said the little man.

Lew bristled. He never liked being threatened. "Scram, bum!" he snarled.

"You're brave, too," the other breathed. His expression didn't change. "Of course, I could let you have it right now," he grated. "But I don't think I will. Maybe you'll come to your senses and killing you would be a waste, wouldn't it?"

"Scram!" Lew repeated, rising.

The little guy basked through the door. "I'm going, pal," he said soothingly. "Not far, though. Better lay off."

He drifted through the door and, turning, melted into the darkness of the hallway. Lew heard his footsteps going leisurely down the stairs.

He reached into the lower drawer of his desk and extracted the army service .45. The heavy weight felt comfortable in his shoulder holster. Someone, he was thinking, was getting scared. That trigger-happy gunsel was proof enough of that. Someone, apparently, thought he was prowling too much.

He decided to prowl some more. Pocketing a small flashlight, he headed for the Taylor garment factory. He had meant to take a look around earlier, but the discovery of John Peters' body had prevented that. There wasn't a thing preventing him taking a look now, however.

Only Mike Quentin. The watchman was standing in the fire-blackened doorway and

tried to block Lew's entrance. "You again!" he snarled. "You can't come in here. I've got strict orders—"

Lew cut him short by brushing past him roughly. Then he had another thought and whirled back on the indignant man suddenly. "Mike," he snapped, "you're on a hot spot. Why didn't you tell me about that call you received here two o'clock Monday morning? Did someone want to know if the fire was burning merrily?"

Mike Quentin was staggered by the question. "I don't know what you're talkin' about," he said. "I left at midnight. I don't know nuthin' about no phone call."

Lew pretended he didn't hear him. "John Peters was still in the building, by your own admission, Mike," he continued. "Was he still in the building because he couldn't leave? Because he caught you while you were setting the fire?"

"You're crazy!" Mike yelled, suddenly panicky. "I didn't set no fire!"

"And then when Jake Turner started to poke around you slugged him, too, didn't you?" Lew went on, pressing his advantage. "You were afraid of what he might find, weren't you? Just like you're afraid now that I might find something. That's why you didn't want me in here, isn't it? Who paid you off, Mike?"

"Nobody paid me off," Mike screamed. "I mean, I wasn't even around when Turner was killed. I got the day off because there wasn't no point in hangin' around."

"But you came back, didn't you?" Lew persisted.

"No!" Mike shouted emphatically. "Damn you! You guys are all alike. You think just because I done a stretch that I'm your boy. Well, I ain't, see?"

Lew let it go. He picked his way through the rubble to the heavy beam that was still lying where it had fallen on top of Jake. He turned his flash on it, examining closely the dark, smeared stain near its foot. He felt a sudden twinge of anger as he realized that the stain had once been a part, a life-giving part, of his friend. Then, out of the corner of his eye, he caught sight of something higher on the piece of timber. He stooped to examine it more closely.

Caught in several of the ragged splinters were small, almost indistinct, tufts of light-colored hair. Or something resembling hair. A faint recollection stirred briefly in the back of the detective's mind, then was gone. He struggled to bring the thought back into line, but no amount of concentration turned the trick.

He snorted his disgust and went over to what remained of a large desk. It was under this desk, he supposed, that the body of John Peters had been found. The toe of his foot probed tentatively in the blackened rubble and stirred up something that made the detective suck in his breath sharply. He stooped

quickly to examine the thing. There was no doubt about it. Even though it was burned almost beyond recognition, he recognized it as the remains of a dry-cell battery. Once more, that blinding thought occurred to him. Once more, his mind drew a complete blank.

He found another cell beneath a maze of melted wiring. Still another next to the remains of the telephone, and further away a single spark plug. His head was spinning in the effort to remember something connected with this new discovery. He found himself wishing he were twenty years younger. Then he remembered the spark coil. He also remembered one of the last things Jake Turner had said to him.

"I can't remember how the damned thing worked!"

Lew straightened up so suddenly, he lost his footing. His heel caught in a piece of debris and he spun backward. He broke his fall with the fist that was clutching the flashlight. That was when he saw the piece of two-by-four, centered directly in the small yellow spot of the flash.

He saw first the splinters of wood, then the small, light-colored tufts clinging to them. Then he saw the dark stain near one end of the wood. And for the first time since he started on the case, Lew realized that here he had real proof that Jake Turner had not been killed by a falling beam. For he was definitely certain that the stain on the two-by-four would match the one on that beam and that lab tests would prove it to be Jake's blood!

He was on the point of rising when he heard the hoarse cry and the hollow thud behind him. He whirled, his hand ducking toward the shoulder holster, the sense of imminent danger overwhelming him. A little shadow stood in the doorway behind him and there was a blinding flash and a stabbing pain in Lew's shoulder. The impact of the slug knocked him backward. A second flash and a second slug nicked his ear just as his own .45 kicked violently in his fist.

The shadow uttered a hoarse cry of pain and pitched forward, the gun spitting flame wildly. Then Lew's second slug slammed into the middle of the apparition and kicked it backward. The shadow fell into the debris and became part of the blackened wood.

Lew was conscious of a dull, aching pain as he crawled toward the huddled figure. Kneeling over it, he threw the light of the flash in the man's face. It was the gungsel who had visited him earlier. The light reflected a pair of feet a short distance away that were pointed skyward. They belonged to Mike Quentin. He had been slugged, a heavy bruise standing out behind his left ear.

The detective turned his flash back upon his victim. He saw then that his second slug hadn't been necessary. His first had been a

little more to the left and a definite step in the right direction. The gungsel's reflexes had made his finger twitch on the trigger after that.

Lew's hand trembled violently as he reached for the telltale bulge in the man's inside coat pocket. He felt weak and a little sick. His head was spinning and shooting off red and blue rockets.

The bulge was a white envelope and inside it was a wad of hundred dollar bills. It smelled vaguely of something familiar. Like a stable, almost. He pocketed the envelope and straightened up. Too suddenly. A wave of nausea hit him and the blackness began to settle down in earnest. And that's when he knew. In the blackness before the dawn. The man who had killed Jake Turner and John Peters was as good as fired.

He awoke with white walls staring him in the face and the man's name still echoing in his throbbing head. Even before he heard the bullish growl somewhere near his ear, he realized he was in the police infirmary downtown. He turned to gaze into the anxious face of Fogle.

"Hi, Jack!" he greeted the other amicably.

"Don't 'Hi!' me, you slap-happy jerk!" Fogle bellowed, his face reddening, even while the relief registered in it was plain. "Didn't you know who that gunman was who was tailing you?"

"Sure, Jack," Lew replied weakly. "Just some character who didn't care for the shape of my head."

"He was Snake Henderson, you idiot!" Fogle yelled. "The Chi cops have been tearing themselves bald trying to locate him. You can relax for a year on the reward you'll collect."

"Hired killer?"

Fogle nodded. That part fit, anyhow, Lew thought. Aloud, he said, "I've another killer for you, Jack."

"I've got one already, thanks," Fogle returned.

"Did they spring him?" Lew asked mildly.

The other man colored. "Yeah," he snorted. "But that don't mean anything."

"It means you don't have a suspect," Lew reminded him.

"Nuts!" Fogle stormed, getting up and pacing the floor nervously. "It just means I didn't have enough proof to hold him. That's all."

"Don't worry about it, chum," Lew said, struggling erect in bed. "I've got all the proof you need."

Fogle stopped dead in the middle of the room. "Yeah?" he snorted.

Lew beckoned toward a nurse who was fussing about on the other side of the room. "Listen, Red," he said, watching the girl's face flush the color of her hair. "When can I get out of here?"

The girl pouted prettily. "The doctor says if you feel all right you can leave this afternoon. And"—very emphatically—"don't call me 'Red'!"

Lew glanced quickly out of the window through which bright sunlight was pouring. "You mean I've been here all night?" he asked incredulously.

The redhead nodded. "You lost a lot of blood before that night watchman came to and called in," she said.

Lew bit his lip thoughtfully. "Bring me a pencil and a piece of paper," he ordered suddenly. "I don't trust Fogle's memory." He watched her swaying hips move invitingly out of the room, then turned to Fogle. "Put out a call for the two Taylor boys and that night watchman, Jack," he said, his trembling fingers struggling with his pajama top.

Fogle reddened, but stepped to the door and gave a few terse orders to the cop standing outside. Then he turned back into the room. "This better be good, shamus," he barked.

"Depend on it, pal," Lew said, struggling to his feet. He sat back quickly. The first dizziness was a little too much. "Get my clothes, will ya?"

By the time the nurse came back with the pencil and paper, he was almost dressed and shaky from his exertions. "Thanks, Red," he said, grinning at her. He started to get up, but she pushed him back onto the bed.

She went down on her knees. "You haven't tied your shoelaces," she remarked casually. "You're liable to trip and hurt yourself."

Lew smiled down at her lowered head and resisted the urge to caress her flaming hair. He scribbled a few items on the paper and handed it to Fogle. "Have one of your boys pick up these things somewhere," he said.

Fogle glanced briefly at the paper and frowned. Then he moved toward the door. "So help me, Starr," he yelled over his shoulder, "if you've beat me at my own game again, I'll—"

"No, you won't," Lew retaliated quickly. "I promised you a murderer and I'll deliver him. Just you have those three men at my office by"—he glanced at his watch—"three o'clock. And bring that stuff with you," he concluded, indicating the slip of paper in the other's hand.

Fogle stormed out of the door. Lew got clumsily to his feet, swaying dizzily. The redhead grabbed his arm and let him lean against her.

Lew grinned down at her. "I like you, Red," he said. "Mind if I lean on you until I get to the door?"

She shook her scarlet head quickly and seemed to have forgotten that he had given her a nickname. He stopped once before

taking the turn at the corridor and glanced back. She smiled. He waved, then made straight for his office.

III.

FOGLE was right on the ball. He got to the detective's office about a quarter to three. The cop following him was carrying a cardboard carton and dropped it in the middle of the floor. The cop then stepped out of the room and stationed himself outside the door. Lew Starr dropped to his knees and examined the contents of the carton.

"Get the lid of the telephone box off," he ordered Fogle brusquely. "We don't have much time."

The inspector grudgingly complied with the request, then sat back watching the squat detective carefully.

Lew pulled out four dry-cell batteries, a length of wire and an old Model T Ford spark coil. Then, a single spark plug. "Your boys did a good job, Jack," he said. "Where'd they find the spark coil?"

"A mechanic down on lower Charles Street," Fogle replied. "He helped us break up a stolen car racket some time back. Mike Quentin's old outfit."

Lew stiffened. Fogle smiled.

"I'm not that dumb, Starr," he rasped. "Do you think you're the only one who remembers faces?"

Lew felt a trifle silly. Naturally, Fogle must have recognized Mike Quentin, alias George Brannon. He was a fool not to have realized it before.

He busied himself over his preparations. He completed the wiring in a complete cycle, connecting the positive and negative poles of the dry-cells, wiring them to the control box and from there to the coil and spark plug. The wires themselves were grounded to the radiator pipes. The spark plug was partially hidden by the swath of oiled rags he had prepared earlier.

He leaned back finally, then drew himself into his desk chair and slumped wearily into it. He regarded the inspector carefully. Jack Fogle regarded him more carefully.

"Jack," Lew said, "I want you to duck downstairs and give me a call from the drugstore a few minutes after you see your boys bring in the two Taylors and Mike Quentin."

Fogle snorted. "I hope you're enjoying yourself, pal," he said, stamping out of the office.

Lew smiled at the other's retreating bulk and leaned back in his chair. There was nothing to do now but wait, and he welcomed the brief respite. His shoulder was a continuous, dull ache and his head spun dizzily. He took a bottle from a lower drawer and indulged in his favorite tonic. He figured he needed it, considering the immensity of the bluff he was about to pull.

And if the rumpus he heard outside his door now was what he thought it was, he knew the time had come to start manipulating the strings. He only hoped that Fogle would time that call properly.

J. B. Taylor's heavy cologne preceded him by ten feet into the room. The old man was decked out in a new tweed suit, but he still clung to his light-tan colors. It was a pity that the suit couldn't match his face which was, at the moment, almost purple with rage.

"You!" he croaked, spying Lew. "I might have known!"

He slumped into the nearest chair and looked as though he'd blow a gasket when he caught sight of his brother ambling leisurely through the door. The latter still carried that self-assured air about him, but he scowled darkly when he saw the detective. Then he brightened quickly.

"You should have taken that tip I gave you yesterday, old man," he cracked amiably. "That filly ran like she had a bee under her tail. She won it."

Lew ignored him completely as his third visitor stumbled awkwardly into the room. Mike Quentin was plainly nervous, but his eyes shot little darts of hate at the detective. There was a crude, dirty bandage hanging limply under his left ear.

"You lousy jerk!" he snarled for the ninetieth time.

The cop who had brought him in shoved him unceremoniously onto the leather divan next to the smirking William Taylor.

"I demand to know what this is all about," J. B. cried finally, no longer able to restrain himself. "I'll have my lawyers call upon you for this outrage, sir!"

Lew motioned him silent and addressed himself to all three men. "I had you brought here because I have a very personal interest in apprehending a murderer," he said calmly. He paused and a heavy silence clamped down over the room, the eyes of the three men before him riveted firmly to his face. He waved an arm toward his telephone and the simple mechanism attached to it. Three pairs of eyes moved as one toward the instrument.

"When I was a kid," he continued slowly, "a certain friend and I used to play with gadgets similar to this."

Mike Quentin was looking blankly at the thing, chewing nervously on his fingernails. William Taylor's face registered nothing but anger as he glared first at the telephone, then at the detective. Old J. B. sat as though transfixed and his face had paled a full shade.

"Cut the comedy, Starr!" the younger Taylor snarled finally. "Get to the point!"

"O.K.," Lew acceded grimly. He got up and walked around to the front of his desk. The ringing of the phone cut through the silence like a knife through melted butter.

Even as he dove, headlong, for the wastebasket, Lew blessed Fogle for being so timely. The first ring was accompanied simultaneously with a slight crackling sound and all eyes in the room saw the short spurt of flame which leaped from the spark plug into the greasy pile of rags. The rags smoldered briefly, then burst into flame. Then over the sound of startled cries came the rushing of heavy footsteps.

"Watch the door, sergeant!" Lew yelled at the cop on the other side of the room. He slammed the open end of the wastepaper basket over the pile of blazing rags, smothering the flames. The telephone was still ringing fitfully and he kicked the spitting spark plug out of harm's way and raised a window to air the place out. Then he jerked the connecting wires of his gadget loose from the telephone box and lifted the receiver to his ear.

"That was great, Fogle!" he exclaimed into the mouthpiece. "You can come up now."

He cradled the phone and glanced at the two men on the divan. They were both plainly distressed. Then he saw the sergeant herding old J. B. back from the door.

"You crazy young fool!" the old man screamed. "You tried to burn us up!"

"You ought to know, J. B.," Lew returned calmly.

J. B. colored hotly and tried desperately to control his trembling fingers. "What do you mean by that?" he asked sharply.

"That you knew exactly what that mechanism attached to the phone would do," Lew said. "That's why you headed for the door when the phone rang. You had the same sort of attachment rigged to your brother's office phone when you left for New York last Saturday. You called your factory at two o'clock Monday morning, knowing that no one would be there to answer the phone at that hour. And the same thing happened there that happened here just now."

J. B. sat down heavily in a convenient chair. "That's absurd," he said wearily. "I wouldn't understand the first thing about how an instrument like that works, much less set it up."

At that moment, Fogle came plowing through the door. "Shades of Satan!" he yelled, his nose twitching from the lingering smoke. "What's going on in here?"

"Your call was neatly timed, Jack," Lew greeted him. "The first ring of the phone closed its circuit and caused a spark to jump into our pile of rags. That's how the Taylor garment factory was destroyed."

Fogle grunted. Then the idea hit him. "That call from New York!" he exclaimed incredulously. He glanced quickly at old J. B.

"That's right," Lew agreed. "But J. B. claims he didn't rig the phone."

"Then who did?" Fogle asked.

"The plant electrician. John Peters."

Fogle scowled darkly. Lew hurried on, addressing J. B. directly, "You bribed Peters to work out a method whereby you could destroy your plant and still not be implicated," he said. "Peters must have demanded some cash in advance, however, because his wife tells me he was carrying a wad of dough before he disappeared. So much dough that he couldn't possibly have earned it at the factory in one week. And Saturday afternoon, after Peters had your brother's phone rigged, you got to thinking that it was unwise to have this fellow running around loose, the only man who knew your secret. So you sapped him, shoved him under William's desk, knowing that the biggest part of the fire would be concentrated in that area, and hoped that he'd be burned beyond recognition."

"That's a lie!" J. B. shouted, leaping to his feet. "Why would I want to burn my own factory and kill in the bargain?"

"Because William's embezzling habits had ruined you," Lew replied. "You hoped to regain some of your losses through the insurance. And you planned the whole thing so that it would look as though William were the natural suspect. Where you made the biggest mistake was in leaving the company's books in a fireproof place. You wanted to make sure that the books were examined carefully and William's guilt insured."

William Taylor snorted derisively and glared at his older brother. Fogle shut him up quickly.

"You can't prove I killed that man," J. B. declared finally.

Fogle jumped at that one. "So you admit you set fire to the factory?"

"I'm admitting nothing until I see my lawyer," J. B. muttered.

Lew Starr walked over and stood directly in front of the older man. "You're right about Peters," he said quietly. "I can't prove you killed him. But I *can* prove that you killed Jake Turner and also had an attempt made on my life. No jury in the world could fail to see the connection."

J. B. Taylor said nothing. He sat in the chair, clasping his trembling fingers, and rocking back and forth.

"You followed Jake Turner to your factory Monday afternoon," Lew went on mercilessly. "You were afraid he'd find something incriminating. You weren't afraid of being seen, because you had sent Mike Quentin home for the obvious reason that there was nothing left to watch at the factory. Jake Turner *did* find something incriminating. That old Model T spark coil. He confronted you with his suspicions and you got panicky. When his back was turned, you crushed his skull with a piece of two-by-four."

Still J. B. said nothing. His feverish rock-

ing back and forth merely increased in tempo.

"You tugged at that heavy beam until you had it over Jake's body," Lew continued. "You wanted to make it look like an accident."

"That's a lie!" J. B. repeated.

Lew ignored him and rushed on. "Later, you became alarmed at my poking around. You hired a gunman to see to it that I didn't get too warm. I took this off his body," Lew said, tossing the white envelope filled with money to Fogle. "You left one or two calling cards with that," he continued. "The money and the envelope reek with that horsey perfume you use."

Fogle sniffed at the envelope and raised his eyebrows toward the huddled figure in the chair. He turned to Lew. "What was the other calling card you mentioned?" he asked.

Lew didn't take his eyes off the old man, speaking to his lowered head. This was his trump. "There were fine light-colored threads caught in the splinters of the two-by-four and the beam," he said. "Lab tests have proved that those threads came from a heavy garment. Like tweed, for instance. The same tests have proved that the blood on the two-by-four and on the beam are the same."

A sob escaped the figure in the chair. The rocking had ceased. The old man buried his face in his hands and his body shook convulsively. "All right, all right!" he sobbed. "I did it. Now leave me alone!"

Fogle nodded to the sergeant at the door and the cop came forward and led the old man out. Then he jerked the other two men

toward the door. Mike Quentin and William Taylor had started outside when Fogle called young Taylor back.

"Look out for Nick Barton, kid," he snapped peevishly.

William Taylor reddened and ducked outside. Fogle turned back to the detective and started forward quickly as he saw how the other was slumped forward in his chair.

"You all right, Starr?" he asked, concerned.

Lew nodded and took a long pull at his tonic bottle. Then he proffered the bottle to the inspector.

Fogle shook his head decisively. "What's with this lab test business?" he asked. "You didn't tell me about that."

"Because it never came off," Lew replied, smiling. "That was just a bluff. A test will prove I'm right, though. Anyway, J. B.'ll sign a confession without it. Now get the hell out of here. I'm all in."

Fogle grumbled something deep in his throat and turned for the door. Then he wheeled back, frowning darkly. "I hate to have to say this, shamus," he grumbled, "but, well, thanks."

Lew waved him out and, leaning back in his chair, closed his eyes. He hoped that somewhere, somehow, Jake Turner knew that everything was all right now. This thought hatched another one. He reached for the phone and dialed a number.

That Ross girl would like to know that everything was all right, too, he figured. She might even want to go out and celebrate tonight.

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Murder walks a strange path

By D. B. OLSEN

He was a man who loved soft, fluffy things; Miss Rachel was sure he'd never stoop to murder his own child. . . .

THE man took the long slim package from his coat pocket, put it on the table and unwrapped it with hands that shook. He was a big man and there was something peculiarly childish about his fear. He was like a little boy afraid of the dark. "This came today—the second inside a week. You can see where the chocolates have been tampered with. The other box had strychnine in it."

Miss Rachel Murdock lifted one from its paper nest and examined the under side. There had been a picked-out hole refilled unskillfully with a chocolate mixture, unlike the coating put on by the candy maker. More like cake frosting, she thought.

"This wasn't addressed to you?"

"No. To my wife and her little girl, my stepdaughter." He took out a white handkerchief and mopped his forehead. "It was quite by accident that I noticed the tampering in the first box and kept Jenny from sampling one of them. She loves candy and we've spoiled her with it. My wife wasn't inclined to be afraid, but I had the filling tested just to be safe. All the candy was poisoned."

Miss Rachel pulled her lacy shawl closer as if she were suddenly cold. Her cat, a big black fluffy cat with amazingly green eyes, had been sleeping in her lap and, feeling the shiver, looked up. Miss Rachel said, "You went to the police, of course?"

"Oh, yes. Right away." He hesitated, staring at the open box. "I know I have to be completely frank if you're to help us. My wife didn't want me to go to the police and she absolutely forbade me to mention the man we suspect of sending the candy. She's sure that she can handle him. She doesn't know I've come to you. It was getting this second box, the inhuman boldness of it, that woke me up, that brought me here."

"This man you suspect—is it the child's father?"

He looked up, startled. "How did you know?"

"I just guessed," she admitted. "You'd better tell me about him."

They were seated in Miss Rachel's tiny parlor. Several unfinished bits of knitting lay about. Miss Jennifer, the elder and more sensible in her own opinion, had decided that it might settle Miss Rachel's nerves to be taught to knit; and Miss Rachel was realizing with relief that all she had needed had been some mystery to meddle with. Like this one, unpleasant as it was.

The big man with the childish fear in his eyes spoke slowly as if thinking out what he must say. "My wife married a man about whom she knew almost nothing. They met at a resort, Arrowhead, and because she was young and inexperienced she was impressed

by his looks and his money. He had plenty of money. He was a counterfeiter."

The cat had gone back to sleep. The room was quiet, full of afternoon sunlight and the clean smell of the new wool Miss Rachel was supposed to be knitting on.

"When the law caught up with him a few months after their marriage, and he was sent to prison, she almost went insane. She bore their child alone, on charity. I would have helped, of course, but she didn't let me know. She worked, trained herself for a secretary, and came to me for a job. I'd been a friend of the family—I'm a lot older than she is, of course—but when we realized we were in love I helped her get a divorce and we were married. We've been very happy for nearly five years. You see, he's been where he couldn't hurt us, behind prison bars."

"And he's out now? Recently?"

"Two weeks, and already he's at work." His glance toward the open box of candy was savage and afraid.

She shook her head at the simplicity of his problem. "The police won't have any trouble tracing his purchase of the poison, or his mailing the package."

An expression of defeat settled about his mouth. "I'm hamstrung. She grows hysterical at the idea of setting the police after him."

"She still cares for him, then. Or pities him," Miss Rachel murmured thoughtfully.

"No one could love a crook like that. It's pity, of course."

Miss Rachel, from the advantage of her seventy years, reflected that he had a good deal to learn about women. Women *could* love the most awful crooks. Her own Aunt Lily, the one who had been a chorus girl in the '90's, had loved a confidence man who had, at the desperate end, run away on the money he got from hocking Aunt Lily's clothes, including her tights. Miss Rachel asked carefully, "Does anyone else know the truth?"

He hesitated a second. "My sister Dorothy. She lives with us. She's devoted to the child. Her terror over the poisoned candy is even greater than mine."

"Just what is it you wish me to do?"

"Try to convince my wife that she must, for the child's sake, turn this man in to the police. I suggest that you come for a day or two, this week end, perhaps. In addition to convincing my wife of Jenny's danger, you may intercept some new attempt, something that we might not catch until it was too late." He clenched his hands together; the veins in his wrists stood out. "This man is an infernally clever criminal. He was a counterfeiter of the utmost skill and shrewdness. Only the slip of a subordinate finally gave him away."

"How strange, then," Miss Rachel pointed out, "that he works this attempted murder so openly, so clumsily."

He checked what he had been about to say. Some new thought, a strange fear, seemed to show for an instant in his eyes. Then he shook his head. "He's all the more dangerous. Like a mad animal. Will you come?"

"Oh, yes, I'll come."

He started to wrap up the package.

"Leave the chocolates, will you, please?"

His hand stumbled over their handling of the box. The contents spilled out suddenly into a heap upon the rug. In a seeming attempt to back away, his foot came down and crushed the candy into one lump of chocolate. He stood looking down at it blankly. "Damn it, I've spoiled them all."

Miss Rachel was looking at him calmly. "It's all right. We'll clean the rug." Her cat jumped to the floor and went to the crushed chocolates and sniffed with a delicate disdain. "I knew you were nosy," Miss Rachel scolded, pulling Samantha away, "but not downright stupid."

He was at the door, mopping perspiration again with the white handkerchief. "When will you come? Soon?"

"I'll be at your house tonight for dinner."

"Good. I'll see that the guest room is ready. I'm . . . I'm sorry about your rug."

"Don't worry about it."

Through the curtains, at the window, she watched him walk down the steps, across the sidewalk and get into the long gray car at the curb. The air of nervousness seemed to have passed into dejection. The final glance he gave the house hadn't much hope in it.

He had come just after lunch, given his name as Thackley and his business with Miss Rachel as private. Miss Jennifer had been dressed to go out—it was the day for the Ladies' Aid meeting—and she had cautioned Miss Rachel before leaving that there must not be any more horrors.

Miss Rachel had peeped into the hall where Mr. Thackley waited. "He doesn't look like such a horror, Jennifer."

"You know what I mean," said Jennifer darkly. "Don't get off the subject."

The interview had started by Mr. Thackley saying that he needed help and didn't quite know how to get it. At first mention of the attempted poisoning, Miss Rachel had suggested a private guard. Mr. Thackley had explained, "It's not violence I fear. I can take care of anything like that. I need someone with an acute, wary intelligence." Miss Rachel had nodded graciously at the compliment. Then he had brought out the chocolates.

Miss Rachel called her housekeeper. "We've had an accident on the carpet. Will you get the most of it into a clean box and take it downtown to the police laboratories with a note?"

Miss Rachel had an old friend in the laboratory. She sat down and wrote briefly.

Then she packed a small suitcase, called a cab, and picked up her cat. The cat looked eagerly at the door; she liked to travel.

"When my sister comes, tell her I'll be away for a day or two. Tell her I had a chance to . . . ah . . . go to the Wisteria Festival."

The housekeeper shook her head. No one was going to believe that story, least of all Miss Jennifer, who would get hopping mad at the idea of Rachel being involved in a new "horror."

The Thackley home was high on a bluff above the shore near Malibu. The cab pulled up through a long drive bordered with pink asters and blue lantana, to a massive door in a stark white wall. Miss Rachel stood on dark-red tiles and rang the bell. Below was the panorama of the sea, the headlands which fell away toward Santa Monica, the far blue smudge of Catalina Island. The air held a smell of roses and blossoming sage and the wet tang of the Pacific. The door opened silently. A woman looked out at her.

She was a tall woman, well over forty, with tight graying hair, sharp cheekbones, eyes of a peculiar metallic greenish-blue. The color, Miss Rachel recalled, of Mr. Thackley's eyes also. This must be his sister Dorothy. There seemed to be a starved look to her, somehow; something denied, taken away, snatched from her grasp. Not food. Love, perhaps. Miss Rachel smiled into the grim eyes. "I'm Miss Murdock. Your brother asked me to come."

The woman opened the door and showed a long sunny hall. "Come in, won't you? I'm Miss Thackley; guess you saw the resemblance. People do. May I take your cat?"

Miss Rachel decided to experiment. She tried to put Samantha into Dorothy's arms. The cat let fuzz grow up along her back; she put claws into Miss Rachel's bosom and clung, stubborn and unfriendly. "She'll take a little while to get used to you."

Dorothy Thackley took the rebuff indifferently. "I'm not much for cats, anyway. Here, let me take your bag. I'll show you your room."

On the stairs, Miss Rachel asked, "How much of my coming did your brother explain?"

"All of it," said Dorothy flatly. "I wanted him to go to the police with the truth at once—no reflection on your ability, of course—but we pay taxes and we might as well get some return for them. The police know how to handle fiends like *him*." Her heavy sensible shoes made a loud thumping on the polished stairs. "Our little Jenny—she's all we have. We can't be too careful." The starved, lonely quality was in her voice now. There was a yearning note when she mentioned the child's name.

She took Miss Rachel into a large simple bedroom. "We're very plain here, for all the

size of the place," she explained. "We do all our own housekeeping. We got used to it during the war." She stopped in the act of opening the closet. "Here's our little Jenny now. Such a tease, she hid in here to see you."

Jenny came out of the closet. She was about six, a small girl with bright brown pigtails, merry eyes, a blue pinafore and white barefoot sandals. The effect she gave was of someone small and warm-hearted and very dearly loved. She came close and put a gently inquisitive hand on Samantha's head and said shyly, "Does he mind if I pet him? He's so soft. Like feathers."

"Her name is Samantha and she seems to like you very much," said Miss Rachel. She managed without seeming to, to get a look at Dorothy while the child made a fuss over the cat. The woman's angular face seemed wistful, the greenish eyes more lonely than before.

Jenny put her ear against Samantha's and crooned softly.

It occurred to Miss Rachel that Jenny would be easy to love; and that sometimes love is a jealous emotion.

"May I take her to my room?" Jenny begged. "I'll give her my mouse to play with."

But Dorothy came forward firmly. "No, no, Jenny. Leave Miss Murdock's cat be. We have to wash for dinner now."

The child went, but regretfully. Fixing herself for dinner, Miss Rachel was thoughtful.

The dinner table had been set in a corner of the open patio, where bougainvillea on a trellis made a shade. A young woman who had been putting yellow plates out upon the redwood surface turned as Miss Rachel came out of the house. She was very slender; her hair was the lively shining brown of Jenny's pigtails, curling softly to her shoulders; but her eyes were not merry and friendly as Jenny's were. They settled on Miss Rachel, examined her with displeasure and reserve. Evidently little old ladies were not one of her enthusiasms. She put out a hand as if with effort. "I'm Mrs. Thackley."

"How do you do?" said Miss Rachel, finding the hand cool and unresponsive.

Mrs. Thackley's voice went on stiffly, "I hadn't been informed of my husband's visit to you, and your coming here, until a few minutes ago. As the wife, and supposed hostess of this home, you'd think I might know a bit more of who is invited here, wouldn't you?"

She was very young to be Mr. Thackley's wife, probably not more than twenty-three or four. Her air of importance, of anger, gave her the look of a little girl who is playing at keeping house. Only the harsh

displeasure in her eyes was adult and real, and made Miss Rachel acutely uncomfortable.

"I'm sorry if my coming has upset you," Miss Rachel murmured quietly. She waited courteously to be told to go away.

The girl's face turned pink. "I don't mean to seem rude. I . . . I guess you came because of Jenny."

"Yes, that's why I came. I can't imagine anyone vicious enough to try to poison a child."

"It happened," said Mrs. Thackley quickly. "I mean, it was true. The candy came by mail and it had been opened and poison put in it."

"For you alone, perhaps?"

She shook her head. "I don't care for candy. Jenny loves it."

"The handwriting on the package—"

"Had been disguised," Mrs. Thackley broke in bitterly. "He'd know so well how to do that. He had a thousand different ways of writing his own name."

"He was clever," Miss Rachel suggested.

"As the devil from hell."

The garden was quiet. There was a single blue jay in the bougainvillæa vine. He had his eye on the basket of crackers in the center of the table. At Miss Rachel's feet, Samantha had opened her green eyes very wide. She had never been able to catch a jay, but this one might be different.

"You had word from him when he was released from prison?"

Mrs. Thackley moved a plate nervously. "He wasn't in prison, not during the last year. He was in an honor camp in the mountains. He didn't write to me, but to Jenny. He sent a short note that he wanted to see her and that he had a surprise for her. Then the candy came, the first box that Ray had analyzed." She moved to the other side of the table, covering what may have been a shudder.

"You didn't feel that you should tell the whole story to the police?"

The hands touching a yellow plate grew very still. "No, I . . . I feel that he'll straighten out. It's a kind of insanity. He's been shut up all these years, concentrating upon Jenny, upon me. His letters, the few he wrote that I opened, ignored my second marriage. But this blindness to the truth, his refusal to acknowledge that he has lost me, will pass. I want him to have the chance to get back to reality."

Jenny ran out into the patio. She wore a clean pinafore and her face and hands were shining. She scurried toward the cat. At this moment, feeling Samantha's attention off him, the jay swooped for the table. The cat leaped from under Jenny's hands. There was a wild flutter of blue. Then Samantha was standing alone, looking foolish and embarrassed, and the jay was in the vine with a cracker. A single big blue

feather lay beside the table. Jenny pounced on it, held it by the quill and rubbed the downy part against her cheek. Her eyes laughed at Miss Rachel. "Feathers feel so good!" she chirped.

Her mother seized the feather tore it apart as though something about it enraged her. "Nasty! Off that dirty bird! And just before dinner! Go wash your hands again."

Jenny went in soberly and Miss Rachel saw that Dorothy Thackley met her in the hall.

The meal went off quietly, under an air of restraint. When the dishes had been cleared, Mr. and Mrs. Thackley went into the living room to read. Dorothy Thackley and Jenny put on aprons and hurried to the kitchen. Miss Rachel tried to get interested in a book. She thought Mr. Thackley might wish to talk things over in the presence of his wife. When nothing happened, she decided that the kitchen might be livelier.

Jenny was on a stool, washing dishes at the sink. Dorothy was drying. There was laughter and splashing, and, on Dorothy's part, a wistful air of hoping the closeness, the fun, might never end.

"Jenny likes fuzzy soft things," Miss Rachel remarked, stroking her cat. She was in a kitchen chair, Samantha on her lap. "I remember how Samantha was as a kitten. Like a ball of wool."

Jenny smiled, turning from the sink. But Dorothy's face had stiffened, grown a little pale.

"I have a fuzzy ball," said Jenny. "When I'm through with the dishes I'll bring it for your cat."

The three of them went out into the patio when the dishes were done. The fuzzy ball was blue. In the pale twilight Jenny rolled the ball to and fro among the flowers and shrubbery and the cat ran after it, a little lazily, for Samantha had not been a kitten for a long time. Miss Rachel and Dorothy sat on one of the redwood benches beside the table. The fading light shone in Dorothy's anxious eyes as they followed the child.

Love can be like a cage, Miss Rachel thought. It can be too close, too possessive, suffocating. She was conscious that the evening air was growing chill, that the wind off the sea felt damp and salty. She had hoped that the woman beside her might talk about the problem which had brought her here, but Dorothy's attention seemed absorbed. She suddenly stood up, tense. The little girl had run out of sight behind a white brick wall. "Jenny, don't go far!"

There was an instant of utter blank silence during which Miss Rachel realized that it was almost dark. The light had faded, stars were out, and Jenny had disappeared behind a wall and now there was nothing. She rose, as Dorothy had, with sudden fear.

There came a scream, thin and terrified and childish.

Dorothy ran with a pounding hurry, Miss Rachel with the lightness of a wraith. They reached the garage at the same moment and found Jenny at its side door, staring in, shaking with fright. "There's a man inside!" Jenny shrieked. "He's on a rope!"

They stood as if rooted while inside in the deep gloom the body of the hanged man swung slowly around and around at the end of a rope tied to the rafters. Dorothy, though she was the bigger and sturdier of the two, clung to the door, her face gone sick. Miss Rachel had turned pale, but remained composed. She went in and had a look.

"Come out! Don't touch him! Oh, it's terrible!" cried Dorothy's voice.

Jenny said wonderingly, "She's very brave, isn't she?"

Miss Rachel touched the man's hand softly. "He's quite cold. There's nothing we can do for him." She looked into the dead man's face, not shudderingly but with quiet composure, and then at the dropped stuff about his feet. From among other things, little odd-colored stones and pressed fluffy flowers and bunches of downy leaves, she drew forth a small toy-man made of round knots of wood, on his head a crude mounting of feathers. The painted features on the knot forming the head had a look of humor, of wanting to be friendly. As she studied the toy a sudden expression of anger came into Miss Rachel's usually mild features. "I never believed it," she said half-aloud.

Dorothy Thackley had turned from the door, shielding the child from sight of the hanging figure. "What did you say?"

"I want you to get the police on the telephone at once," said Miss Rachel firmly. "I'll stay here until they arrive."

"But . . . but a lady shouldn't—" Dorothy's bulging greenish eyes seemed to take in for the first time the smallness, the frailness of Miss Rachel's figure. "You're so tiny, so helpless."

"I've got guts, though," Miss Rachel declared. She could practically hear Jennifer swoon, even at this distance.

As if spurred by this unusual declaration, Dorothy hurried away. Miss Rachel spent the next few minutes switching on the garage lights, taking one more painful look at the man who hung from the rafters, and picking up odds and ends from the floor. The dead man had been extremely handsome; even the sort of death he had endured had not erased the dark good looks, the even features, the exciting pirate daredevilry. The stuff upon the floor had the look of little treasures gathered for a child.

"It's what they are, of course," said Rachel to her cat, who followed her about with an air of walking softly so as not to be heard. Since her embarrassing failure

with the jay, Samantha had been very quiet. Miss Rachel studied a leaf whose underside was golden and downy. "These were things he had picked up at the honor camp for his child. Bird feathers and bright stones, a toyman he made of oak galls. A little Indian man for Jenny." The anger returned to burn deep in her eyes. "And so, of course, he didn't send the candy. I never believed he had."

She looked up suddenly toward the door, realizing the appearance there of Mr. Thackley.

He had the gasping, horrified look of someone who comes up from under a wave which has almost drowned him. "This is . . . is frightful! I didn't dream when I asked you here that there'd be anything like this."

"Probably not," Miss Rachel agreed coolly. "But he's here, though. Can your wife identify him?"

Mrs. Thackley glided forward from the darkness outside. She had put on a black coat, buttoned it high at the neck as if she were chilled. "It's Ted, Jenny's father. I couldn't ever forget how he looked, that clever inhuman slyness." She turned and clung to Mr. Thackley's coat, burying her face against his shoulder. "Did he come to kill Jenny and me? Did he lose his nerve at the last and commit suicide?"

Mr. Thackley's gaze avoided Miss Rachel's searching one. He put his arms about his wife clumsily, uncertainly. "It seems as if he had. At the end, perhaps, he woke up and saw what a monstrous thing he had planned. He couldn't face the knowledge of his own evil. Perhaps we should be glad. Jenny will be safe now. He won't send any more packages."

Miss Rachel had found a small crushed box from which the feathers and leaves had fallen. She straightened the cardboard, put in carefully all the things Jenny's father had brought with him. To Mr. Thackley she said quietly, "You might prepare yourself for other possibilities. The man may not be a suicide."

"Eh?" He peered at her from above his wife's bent shining head. "Not killed himself? Nonsense!"

"The police will decide, of course. My own theory is that he may have been knocked out or drugged, then hanged here to give the impression of suicide. Perhaps the real sender of that poisoned candy feared to be exposed."

Mrs. Thackley twisted away from her husband, raised her head starkly to look into his eyes. "You told me over and over that he must have sent it."

Mr. Thackley's mouth worked; an aching fright blazed in his face. "I . . . I thought he must have. Why would anyone else?"

Miss Rachel had put the lid on the small box. "Several reasons have occurred to me.

Shall we go into the house? I hear the police siren; they'll want this place to themselves."

While they waited for the police investigation to be completed, Miss Rachel made a telephone call. Her friend at the police laboratory told her that the mass of crushed candy had contained an unnecessarily large amount of strychnine. The strychnine had been used in an easily available form, a household rat poison. The small openings in the bottoms of the chocolates had been refilled, he believed, by an uncooked mixture of powdered sugar and cocoa. Was that what she wished to know?

Miss Rachel asked him a couple of questions about oak galls. She listened carefully to what he said.

The telephone was in an alcove in the hall. Miss Rachel did not re-enter the living room, where Mrs. Thackley stared at her husband in stony-eyed suspicion, where Mr. Thackley pretended to read a book and where Dorothy watched over Jenny with the anxiety of a mother hen. She went on quietly into the kitchen, snapped on lights, and explored the cupboards. She found several half-used boxes of powdered sugar, a large tin of cocoa and a tube of commercial rat poison. She searched further and came up with a tiny squeeze-gun pastry decorator. She was experimenting with a sugar-and-cocoa mixture, dampened to the proper consistency with cold coffee, and was squeezing out dots of the stuff upon the tiled sink when she heard a step behind her. She turned swiftly. Dorothy Thackley had come in quietly and now stood not three feet away. The lonely, lost expression tightened her mouth, made her eyes bitter. "What are you doing here?" she demanded.

"I wanted to make sure just how the candy had been filled with the poisoned mixture," Miss Rachel explained.

"It wasn't done here."

"Oh, yes, I think so. I never thought it was something a clever criminal would do; amateur, obviously, and needing the sort of tools you'd find only in a kitchen."

Dorothy's lean hands twitched. Her eyes searched over the sink, the drawers, the little box Miss Rachel had brought with her. "I won't let you torment my brother with this insanity. He's had all the worry, the strain, that he can stand."

"There won't be any happiness, any safety, until the truth comes out. By the way, have the police reported anything about the death of Jenny's father?"

Dorothy's jaw set itself. "One of them came in a moment ago and said that the man had been murdered. I don't believe it." Her voice shook. "Why would anyone kill him?"

"For jealousy? Because Jenny might have loved him?" Miss Rachel's glance had

settled on the broken cardboard box into which she had put the feathers, the stones, and the little man made of oak galls. "You see, the truth was much different from what you three believed, or pretended to believe. Jenny's father had no wish to harm her. I think actually he loved her very much."

Dorothy began to back away. The pinched loneliness in her face gave it the baldness of a skull. She felt behind her for the door. "I won't stay and listen to you."

Miss Rachel opened the little box and held it toward her. "See what he brought, soft feathers, downy leaves, smooth little stones. Things with texture and softness which he knew Jenny would love because he loved them. You saw how she was with the jay's feather—"

A spasm of defeat crossed Dorothy's face before she turned and fled. When Miss Rachel went back to the living room, she found the woman lying on a couch, her eyes shut, her bleak face turned toward the wall. Mr. and Mrs. Thackley were listening to Lieutenant Davis.

Davis was a big, intelligent-looking cop. He was explaining the murder. "The man was tapped at the rear of the skull with some blunt tool, not a hard blow nor one which required much strength. Then he was strung up and allowed to strangle."

Mr. Thackley had his handkerchief out, wiping at his forehead. Mrs. Thackley said slowly, "The pulling up of that limp body would have taken strength, though. A lot of it."

"I think the rope was tied to a car. As the car backed, the body was raised toward the rafters. You're right about the job taking strength. Even a man might have trouble." His eyes were on Mr. Thackley, who flinched. "Who used the car around three o'clock today?"

"I . . . I did," Mr. Thackley stammered. "I'd been to see Miss Murdock in the city."

"The car isn't in the garage now. It's in the courtyard," Davis pointed out. "Where did you leave it?"

"Uh . . . I'm not sure. I usually put it away." His eyes went everywhere but toward his wife's accusing, suspicious stare. "I didn't kill the man. I swear it."

"This story about the candy now." Davis pursed his lips. "You came in a week ago to report the first box, but you declared you had no idea who would send such a thing."

"I was wrong, of course." Mr. Thackley looked down at his handkerchief as though he wished to weep into it. "Quite wrong. My wife thought the man would come out of it, come to his senses."

"I don't think that he ever lost them," Miss Rachel put in. The three turned toward her abruptly. Jenny, playing with the cat in a corner removed from earshot, looked up at the change in attention. "I think he came here, not to do any harm,

but to see his child because he loved her. He brought her these little treasures. Whoever killed him scattered and trampled them in the garage." She held out the open box; a couple of downy leaves floated to the floor. Jenny left the cat, crossed the room curiously.

"He loved fuzzy, fluffy things," Mrs. Thackley said dully. "It's a quality Jenny has. I can't break her of it."

"You shouldn't try," said Miss Rachel. "Let her be as she is. And let her remember that her father brought her something, though he didn't live to deliver it." She lifted the toyman with his Indian crest, and Jenny smiled and reached for it.

"What's that?" asked Davis.

"A toy he made of oak galls. An Indian man." She lifted the little figure suddenly from her palm, stared into her hand critically. "I'd forgotten. Oak galls are a strong source of tannic dye, a kind of natural ink." She raised her glance to Davis while all sound died in the room. "The person who murdered Jenny's father trampled all these little things he brought her. In jealousy, in rage. Why don't you just have a look at these three people's shoes for traces of tannic stain?"

The explosive moment lengthened; its breathless quiet hurt her ears. If she had done right, done it quickly enough and surprisingly enough, one of the three would break. She thought she knew which one it would be; someone whose jealous love had not contained itself, had crossed into madness.

Dorothy Thackley turned on the couch and writhed upright. Her face was set like stone. Only her eyes were alive.

"I don't mean jealousy over the love of Jenny," Miss Rachel explained.

Mrs. Thackley rose from her chair and stumbled toward the hall. She seemed blinded, feeling her way with outstretched hands. "Stop her!" cried Mr. Thackley. "Make her come back here and face it!"

For, of course, Miss Rachel thought, his air of being a little boy afraid of the dark stemmed from his unwilling belief that his own wife had made and sent the poisoned chocolates.

At the door, she flung around. Davis had risen to follow her. He said stolidly, "It won't work. My men are all over the grounds. You'll never get away."

She threw back the lovely shining hair, tugged the black coat higher. "I have a way out. You'll never stop me now."

"Let me see your shoes!" commanded Davis.

She laughed in his face. "Why should I? Of course, they're covered with the dye, or whatever it is came out of the oak galls. I wish I could have broken the thing into a thousand pieces!"

She was tense as a strung wire, her slim body turned, whiplike, against the jamb of the door.

"Wait a minute!" cried Miss Rachel. "There are things that only you can tell us. For Jenny's sake, tell us the truth about the candy. Wasn't it to throw your husband off any suspicion he may have had that you wanted to go back to Jenny's father?"

She laughed again, too high-pitched, too harshly. "He'd never dream that I was counting the minutes until Ted came. Not if I seemed to believe that Ted was sending us poisoned candy."

"Mr. Thackley wanted desperately to believe you," Miss Rachel agreed. "He wanted me to prove your innocence. But, you see, he wouldn't have had me come if he meant to do murder. And Dorothy had been warned. Only you, you see, *didn't know I was coming.*"

She put up a hand to rub her temple. "It wouldn't have made any difference. I went crazy when he told me."

"When he told you what?" begged Mr. Thackley.

"When she knew that it was Jenny he came for, and not her. Her jealous love for him turned into madness," Miss Rachel said quietly.

Dorothy crept over to Jenny and put her arms about the child and covered the small ears with her hands.

The girl at the door snapped about at the sound of steps. Then she ran with an animal-like fear and swiftness. A door slammed; there were fading steps on the tile path of the patio. Mr. Thackley stood up, braced himself against his chair, looked at Miss Rachel wearily. "Where is she going? There's no escape that way."

"Keep the child's ears covered," Miss Rachel told Dorothy. She met Mr. Thackley's frantic stare. "The sea cliff," she said softly.

His lips moved for a moment before he got words out of them. "It's a horrible drop. More than a hundred feet. She wouldn't try to—"

The scream came, then. Everyone in the room flinched except Davis, who was running in the hall. Mr. Thackley shut his eyes and Dorothy made a muffled, horrified sound against Jenny's hair.

Miss Rachel sat down, shivering as if with a chill.

Mr. Thackley said stiffly, then, "She never did love me. It was all a hoax. A way to get a home for Jenny." He put out a big hand timidly and Jenny, who had been about to cry, clutched it and tried to smile. "I don't mind once I get used to the idea. Jenny'll always have a home with us."

"I'm sure she will."

The starved look, the tension, was leaving

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Waikiki widow

By WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT

For a private op who spent most of his time on a golf course with a Hawaiian backdrop or mixing tall, cool drinks for lucious-looking gals, Sandy McKane found that he was doing all right for himself as far as his old friend, the bankroll, was concerned.

I.

LINDA still hasn't forgiven me for taking that case. She's my wife, and has been for six months; for her I would move mountains. But a man has to eat. And maybe I'd better begin at the beginning.

It was a fairly warm afternoon for Honolulu, and I was sitting in my second floor office on Hotel Street, watching the traffic below and wondering if I shouldn't close up and run out to the Waiialae golf course for a quick eighteen. There, at least, I'd be getting some exercise. There I could pick up a few dollars if my game was on, and have a few drinks and pleasant companionship, and—

Below, a big Chrysler convertible pulled out of the traffic stream and slid into the vacant place at the curb right in front of my office. The top was down and I could see the girl behind the wheel. A bright-red ribbon was in her hair. She was wearing a bare midriff dress. I thought I recognized her, and I searched my mind. I'd seen her before, I knew.

As she got out of the car, I could see that her legs were tanned. She stood for awhile, looking up my way, and then disappeared through the doorway below, the one that led to my stairs.

My stairs and Dr. Ray Nakamura's stairs; there were just the two offices up here. Dr. Ray was a dentist, and she might be coming to see him, but I straightened my tie, just the same, and sat up in my chair.

When she appeared in the doorway a few moments later, I was busily going through some papers. She coughed, and I looked up in surprise. Then I rose, with my customer's smile.

"Saunders McKane?" she asked.

"Right, Miss—"

"Mrs..." she corrected me. "Mrs. Janice Darbo."

Darbo, Darbo, Darbo—Then I remembered. Eric Darbo, who'd died a month ago, had been a sports promoter, and a successful

one. What else he'd been never got beyond the rumor stage. He was a careful man.

I said, "Mr. Eric's—"

"Widow," she supplied. "Aren't you going to ask me to sit down?"

I hastened to pull over my customer's chair, and she sat down. She pulled a cigarette out of a gold case, and I held a light for her. Then her eyes traveled my frame from toes to head. "Eric often talked about you," she said. "He seemed to have a lot of respect for you. That's why I'm here."

Her eyes, I saw, were deep-blue. Her mouth was well shaped, full and mobile. She was smiling, now.

"Trouble?" I asked.

"Annoyance," she replied. "There seems to be some mystery about poor Eric's death. It's holding up the inheritance."

"Oh," I said, and studied my nails. They seemed to be clean.

"Oh, what? Do you think you're Philo Vance, or something? Ask me some leading questions."

"Well," I said, "there's some mystery about his death, and you think it might be holding up the inheritance. I suppose you mean that the mystery concerns you directly. That's the reason for the delay?"

"Doesn't that seem logical, to you? Those lawyers of his give me a song-and-dance about unavoidable delay in probate work and smile at me, but you know and I know, Sandy McKane, that if they didn't have a sneaking notion I bumped him, they wouldn't hold out for a minute. Right?"

"That's a long question," I said. "Wasn't Eric married before?"

"He was. To a local girl. He divorced her after he met me, if you'll pardon the frankness. He settled plenty on her, and it's certain he didn't intend to give her a dime more, alive or dead."

"I see," I murmured.

"I suppose you do," she said bitterly. "You're a local man, too, and married to one of the local social lights. I suppose I'll get the same runaround from you I've been getting from those shysters."

"Why should you get a runaround?"

"Because I'm an outsider. Because I come from the states, from L.A. to be exact, and anyone with half an eye can see I'm a fast, fast woman."

"You look all right to me, Mrs. Darbo," I said. "I was just thinking of mixing a Tom Collins. Won't you join me?"

She studied me suspiciously, and then she smiled. "All right, though I don't usually go for gin. I guess Eric was right about you, at that, Sandy McKane."

I went over to my mechanical ice chest and mixed a cool tall pair, one of which I handed her.

I said, "What you want from me is a clean bill of health, more or less. What you want is for me to prove you had nothing to do with your husband's death, if you'll pardon the frankness, this time."

"That's what I want," she agreed. "I knew you'd get it, sooner or later. Can do?"

"For thirty dollars a day and expenses,"

I said, "I can work on it. I can search for the truth, if that's what you want. I can't guarantee anything."

"The truth is good enough for me, and I'll hold still for the rates." She studied her drink. "Say, this is good. Gin, too, huh?"

"Good gin," I explained. "Makes all the difference in the world. Who was that girl Eric was married to, before?"

"Mary Neilson," she said. "A very good friend of your wife's, right?"

"I guess she was, at one time," I admitted. "Though I haven't seen her around since we've been married."

"After Eric left her," Janice explained, "Mary sort of went into a shell. Took the starch right out of her, I hear. I'd feel sorry for her, only I can't work up the proper amount of pity for a quitter. And that's what she is, and was."

"Quitter?" I said.

"That's right. I'd like to see some gal take Eric away from me without a struggle. You may think I'm heartless, talking about him the way I do, but I guarantee you, Sandy McKane, I sailed for him, plenty. And I kept him happy." She sniffed, now. Then, "Oh, if there's anything I hate, it's a sniffing female—" Now the tears were rolling down her cheeks.

I waited, saying nothing, until she had gained control of herself once more. Then I said, "You've had a tough time, I take it, with our Hawaiian hospitality. Tourists frequently find it a little warmer than those who come to live. Before Eric turned sports promoter, he moved in rather aristocratic circles, but he left that crowd behind when he began to promote sports."

She nodded. "I know. He told me the same thing about you."

"I found out how the other seven-eighths lives when I was twenty years old," I told her.

She smiled. "And your wife?"

"My wife's father died practically penniless."

"All right," she said, "so we're all from the wrong side of the tracks. And you're going to work for me."

"That's right. I'm going to do what I can."

She was repairing her make-up, now. She was the same poised and breezy gal she had been when she came in. She rose, when she'd finished, and looked at me evenly for some moments.

"Anything else you want from me?"

"Not right now. I can get most of it from the police reports. I'd rather work objectively, at first. As I need information, I'll ask for it."

"You do that," she said. "Anything you want, just ask for it."

I tried not to read anything questionable into that remark. I'd only been married six months. I never would have got this business, I reflected, if I'd gone out to play golf this noon. It was a good thing I hadn't.

I watched from my window while she got into the Chrysler again, while she eased it competently out into the traffic flow, and went up Hotel Street. She was quite a character; she was all right.

I finished my drink, and then took both glasses over to the sink and washed them. From the office across the hall, I heard the whirring drill of Dr. Ray Nakamura, dentist, painless. Below, customers were thronging into the bookstore directly beneath my office. There was a new book in, fresh from a Boston banning.

Well, I'd go and see Dan Arliss. Dan's our homicide man, and a friend of mine, despite his constant insults.

Down the steps, and into my convertible, parked at the curb. Down across from the docks, the police station is, and it was quiet there this warm afternoon, with a breeze from the harbor.

Dan was in his office, smoking one of those cigarette-sized cigars. Or maybe it's a cigar-type cigarette. In any event, the office was filled with a foul smoke. Dan looked at peace with the world—until he saw me.

Faded blue eyes in a thin face, a high forehead under an upstanding thatch of white hair, a thin, medium-sized man. "What a wonderful day it's been," he said. "How quiet and nice, until you came."

"I don't like to take up your time," I said, "because I know how busy you always are, but I'm checking for a client."

"Hm-m," he said, and yawned. "At your usual exorbitant rates, of course. Who's the client?"

"State-side client," I said. "I'm checking on Eric Darbo, recently deceased."

I thought Dan straightened in his chair. "Oh," he said. "You wouldn't be working for

the widow, would you? She was from the States."

"Don't be so nosy, Dan," I protested. "What's the story on this Darbo?"

"You could ask Doc McGuire," he said.

If Doc McGuire had been called in, it hadn't been a straight death. I said, "All right, if that's the way you feel about it." I started for the door.

"O.K.," he said, "come back and sit down. There happens to be a lull, right now, and I've a little time."

I came back and sat down, looking expectant.

Dan stared at me, then at the big window to his right. "Could have been suicide," he said, "only there didn't seem to be any reason for that. You know what conine is?"

"It comes from the spotted hemlock," I said. "Soluble in alcohol, isn't it?"

He sighed. "All I wanted was a straight answer, not a parade of your education. Anyway, it's a poison, a fast poison, and it's what killed Eric Darbo. He'd been drinking, at home. He was found, at home, by his widow. She'd been out, making the rounds, and got home about two a.m. That's when she called us. We haven't told her about the conine, in the hope that she'll slip up one of these days. We told her that it was heart failure, which is no lie. Nobody dies until their heart fails."

"She's under suspicion, huh?"

"What do you think? Who'd have a better chance to slip some conine into Darbo's drink?"

"But if she was out that night—"

"Sure, sure. I'm assuming premeditation, because of the time and difficulty in getting the poison. If I assume premeditation, I assume an alibi, pre-arranged."

"She wasn't making the rounds alone?"

"Have you ever seen her?"

"I think so. A sort of ripe and luscious brunette?"

"That's the babe. Now ask me if she was making the rounds alone."

"All right, then, did she say she was alone?"

"No, no, no. What kind of an alibi would that be? She was out with one of Eric's buddies, a guy named Tony Salvador. I guess you've heard of him?"

I nodded. "Middleweight pug, wasn't he? Then he ran the crap game over at the Crossroads Cavern."

"That's the boy. Handsome as hell, and tougher than mahogany. In the bucks, now."

"Probably took over Eric's various interests," I said. "Might take over that widow, too, huh?"

"Sure. So you can see it looks very simple. It's almost too pat. The only trouble is we can't prove a thing. So far. You can go back and tell your client that." He was smiling at me, a sour smile.

"I'll write him," I said quietly.

"Write him!" Dan made a face. "The Waikiki widow's your client, I'll bet. And you're going to save her virtue. Well, you get paid either way, don't you?"

I nodded. "Just like you." I rose. "At least I move around a little for my money. You're going to take root in that chair, if you're not careful."

On which pleasant note, I left him.

Up Bethel to King and out King to Kalakaua, out toward Waikiki, where I live. On Seaside, near the canal, on Seaside within view of the beautiful Royal Hawaiian Hotel, is my little cottage.

Linda was out in front, watering the pikaki. Wearing a sky-blue linen dress and platform sandals, wearing a ribbon in her smooth black hair, and greeting me with a kiss, my Linda.

"Business today," I told her. "We eat steak, we live high. A client, today."

She looked up at me doubtfully. "Nice, clean business, Sandy? Something dignified?"

"Well—" I began.

"Who's the client, Sandy?"

"A girl," I said. "Girl named Janice Darbo, Mrs. Janice Darbo."

Linda seemed to freeze right there. "No," she said. "Saunders McKane, you are not going to get mixed up in that mess. You know Mary Neilson Darbo is one of my dearest friends, and I won't have—"

"Easy, kid," I broke in. "This is business, honey. You haven't seen Mary for months; you don't know anything about this deal."

She stared at me. "I don't know anything about that sordid business? It's been the sole topic of conversation at our bridge club for the past month, and I don't know anything about—" She shook her head. "Sandy, you give that woman her money back. You can explain to her that you simply can't—"

"No," I said. "I didn't get a retainer, so there's no money to give back. And in my business, you take what clients you can get, so long as they don't ask for illegal services."

For the first time since I'd known her, Linda went into one of those silences. She'd talk, of course, I mean she'd say, "Pass the salt, please," and "Are you through with the paper?" but beyond that, she would say very little. If you're married, you'll know what I mean.

It lasted through dinner, and through the evening that followed. It was still in effect the next morning, when I left for the office.

At the office I called Janice, and asked her if she'd have some free time this morning. She would have, she said. She'd be in about ten.

Then I called my captain, the leader of my barefoot boys. I caught him at the pool-room where he picks up a few dollars now

and then from strange sailors. As close to pure Hawaiian as you'll find, this captain of my stalwarts, my barefoot hawkshaws.

He said he'd be over in five minutes, and he was. His name is Liholia. He's tall and broad and brown, with the erect proud carriage of a Kamehamaha descendant. "Much money?" he asked.

I ignored that. It's his standard opening gambit. I gave him some names and addresses and told him I wanted a steady check of the people's actions.

The nice feature about this gang, they're all over town, anyway, and, therefore, share the anonymity of the familiar. Hoodlums, the police call them, and the sailors have harsher names. But I love them.

He accepted the slip gravely, smiled, and then his bare feet were padding down the hall.

I sat by the window, after he'd left, watching for the Chrysler. Below, on the sidewalk, Hawaiians went by, and Chinese, Portuguese, Filipinos, Japanese, Spaniards, Koreans and all the possible combinations of these and other mixtures. All getting along together. When we get to be the forty-ninth state, perhaps we could teach the other forty-eight something about democracy.

A little later the big convertible pulled in. Janice was wearing white today, in some material I couldn't name, but it didn't hide anything that shouldn't be hid. She had a big, floppy white hat on. I pulled back from the window as she looked up. I didn't want her to think I was spying.

When she appeared in the doorway, a few moments later, I mentally compared her with Linda and Linda won. Linda's hair was even blacker, and Linda's eyes bluer. Linda was slimmer, but not in any place that hurt.

"Aloha," Janice said. "Does that sound natural? Am I getting the touch?"

I nodded, and rose to pull up a chair for her.

"I learned something else, too," she said. "I'm a *haole*. That sounds horrid. Is it?"

I shook my head. "It means you're a foreigner, or maybe just a white person. *Hapa-haole* means half white. Lot of *hapas* on this island."

"There's about anything a person could want, on this island," she said. "Any kind of person could want."

"Hm-m-m," I said "You've been getting around. What I wanted this morning was some more information."

She had a cigarette out, and I lighted it for her. She looked up at me through the smoke. "What kind of information?"

"About Eric's business. About his enemies, if any."

She was just lifting the cigarette to her mouth, and her hand paused in mid-air. "You've learned something. Eric was—" Her blue eyes were wide in fright.

"I've learned nothing," I lied. "But I mean to try. There's always the possibility, of course, that his death wasn't natural."

"Natural?" she said. "It was his drinking, wasn't it? He always drank too much. He was a regular sponge."

"The drinking probably helped," I admitted. I didn't mention it was drinking conine. "His heart stopped."

"Your heart stops when you get shot, too," she said. "You've learned something, Sandy McKane."

"I'm trying to," I said, "if you'll co-operate."

She puffed the cigarette. She said, "Eric promoted sports. That would involve some gambling, and he handled a lot of that. He might have been crooked, and he might not. He won the big bets, I know that, so maybe some of the fights were fixed, and some of the games."

"Could be," I said. "This Tony Salvador taking over the business, now?"

She looked at me levelly. "He's handling it for me. Don't worry about Tony. I trust him. He thinks quite a lot of me."

"Can't blame him for that," I said. "Well, then, how about competitors? This is a gambling town, and it's a big business. Anybody you know like to take over Eric's trade?"

"You know them better than I do," she replied. "Ah Chong Young, Vic Malis, Red Sullivan, and the rest of them—"

"Not Vic," I said. "He's walking the line, these days. And Ah Chong is a peaceable, placid gentleman. But Red Sullivan—Where'd you learn about him?"

"Tony tells me everything," she smiled. "Even the things I don't want to hear."

"If you'll pardon my cynicism," I said, "Tony tells you everything, probably that he wants you to hear."

She shook her head. "You think I don't know men? You think I haven't made a lifetime study of them?"

"You don't know men like Tony Salvador, not when they're on the make. He isn't something you're likely to have met before. He's a smooth, smooth gent and the law has never been able to nail him with even a parking ticket. You be careful with that lad, Janice Darbo."

"If I didn't know you," she said smilingly, "I'd think you were jealous. And if I hadn't seen your lovely wife."

I don't know whether I blushed or not, but I felt warm. I said "Let's hear some more of the things Tony told you."

She looked at me quietly. "I don't want him to get into any trouble. He's my alibi, if something happened that night, if Eric's death wasn't natural."

"And you're his." She nodded. "I suppose. I never thought of it that way. Tell me, Sandy, what you've learned."

"Nothing. You don't want to tell me any more about Eric's business?"

She looked at the end of her cigarette, and back at me. "Check that Red Sullivan. He's a violent man, I hear."

"He's being checked right now," I said, "and so is Ah Chong, just to be on the safe side. There's nothing more?"

She shook her head. "Nothing more." She looked doubtful. "Not now, anyway. Keep in touch with me, won't you?"

I promised I would. I thought she looked frightened, when she left. In any event, she wasn't the breezy gal she'd been the day before. She didn't have the same confidence.

She was getting into her car, down below, when my phone rang. It was Linda. She said, "Mary Neilson called me this morning, Sandy. I told her you were working on that business."

"You shouldn't have done that," I said. "You know better than that, honey."

"I know. But, Sandy, she's coming down to see you. If Eric Darbo was killed by that mainland woman, she wouldn't get the inheritance, would she?"

"Probably not."

"Would Mary get it, then? She's not wealthy, you know, Sandy, and—"

"That isn't the way I heard it," I said. "I understand Eric settled a considerable sum on her, when he divorced her."

"Don't believe everything you hear," my sweetheart said acidly. "And particularly what you hear from that woman."

"Yes, dear," I answered. "And don't believe everything you hear, either. And particularly from that bridge club."

The line went dead.

A warm breeze blew through the open window. It was a Kona wind, a hot wind from the Kona coast.

Mary Neilson Darbo came in about a half hour later. She was a fairly tall, fairly slim woman with an excellent figure and a quiet taste in clothes. Her hair was auburn, put up in two braids that circled the top of her head. Her voice was pleasant and cultured.

She said, "Linda tells me there's been some mystery about Eric's death, Sandy."

"Linda was guessing," I answered.

"She was probably guessing right, though, wasn't she?"

"Not so far as I know."

"Don't lie to me, Sandy. I'm not interested in Eric's money. Janice can have that. But if Eric was—well, I want the police to know about it. He left me, but I had a deep affection for him, nevertheless. If there's anything mysterious about what happened, I want to know about it."

"You could ask the police," I said. "It isn't my intention to be rude, Mrs. Darbo, but there isn't anything I can tell you that you don't already guess, probably. Why don't you go down and see Dan Arliss?"

He's head of the detectives. If anybody knows anything, he does."

"I've already talked to him," she said quietly. "He's about as co-operative as you are." She looked down at her hands, in her lap, and then up again to meet my gaze. "I'd like to hire you to find out if there was anything mysterious about it."

"I'm sorry," I told her, "but I can't take it. My time's going to be taken up with another client."

"With Mrs. Janice Darbo?"

"Maybe. Look. I don't want you to get the wrong idea about me. I'm not working against the law; I'm working with them, all the time. I'm not looking for anything that isn't true, nor trying to clear anyone who's guilty. I do the same work the police department does, only I sell privacy. You can understand it's all I have to sell. Linda violated a confidence, or you wouldn't be here. Don't ask me to make the same mistake."

Her smile was forgiving. "All right, Sandy. I should realize I could trust a *kamaanina*." She rose. "That woman had such a miraculous attraction for poor Eric, I seem to have an obsession about her. I forget she might not have the same lure for other men."

"She's got it," I said. "Don't worry. It's just that I'm such a highly moral guy."

Which ended my discussion with the former grass, now sod, Widow Darbo No. 1.

I continued to think about her figure after she left, and wondered what was the matter with me. For a man with only a few months of marriage behind me, I seemed to be predominantly goat.

It was still a Kona wind.

Red Sullivan! There was a girl I used to know, a Portuguese girl, who spent a lot of time with Red Sullivan. But I had enough women in the business, already. I decided to go over and see Dan Arliss again.

Dan wasn't in. But his muscleman, Gus Lemke, was. Lemke said, "We've been getting complaints, peeper. Some of those hoodlums of yours have been hanging around that dance hall of Ah Chong Young's. One of them was caught snooping in his office."

"You're not sure they're my boys, are you?"

"We know the one in the office was. He won't admit it, but we've had complaints on him before."

"I see. What does Ah Chong say about it? He put in the complaint on the boy?"

"Originally. He's not pressing any charges, he says, until he sees you. Maybe you'd better hightail it over there. I'm getting fed up with those hooligans."

"Nice boys," I said, "all of them. I'll go over to see Ah Chong about it."

"Now?"

"Now. I'll let Dan know what it's all about."

Lemke colored, and his bulky shoulders

seemed to hunch up. "One of these days, peeper," he told me, "you're going to open your mouth a little too much."

"Yes, sir," I said, "yes, sir." I looked at him contemptuously. "Tell Dan I was in."

I turned my back on his glare, and went out to the convertible.

II.

AH CHONG ran a taxi dance hall on Beretania near the river. This was where his office was. This was the source of probably half his income. The other half came from lotteries and whatever other form of bets needed covering.

It was called the Palace, and it was an exceptionally well-run spot, attracting a big percentage of the Filipino zoot-suit trade.

His office was up on the balcony and he was in, this morning.

He smiled when he saw me, but it was the automatic smile of greeting and not to be confused with a smile of good will. He came over to the door to shake my hand, and closed the door quietly behind us.

He was a man of medium height and medium build. He had a grave, unlined face, and eyes of a particularly pale blue. He was wearing seersucker this morning, also the faint semblance of a frown, which is unusual for a Chinese gentleman of his placidity.

He said, "I never thought we'd have any trouble, Sandy." He said it sadly.

"Are we?" I asked. "Lemke says that boy was one of mine?"

"I don't remember if he did or not. Is he?"

I hesitated, then nodded.

"He was checking on me, Sandy?"

"He shouldn't have been in your office. He had no right there."

"You haven't answered my question."

"He was checking your place. Look, Ah Chong, I'm sorry. But I'm on a case, and I'm not overlooking anything."

"I'm in this case?"

"I don't know."

He paused, then, studying me, looking me over gravely and quietly without apparent resentment. But I knew him too well to think his face would show what he was feeling. Finally, "Why don't you tell me about the case, and then I can tell you if I'm concerned in it or not?"

I didn't say anything for seconds. He waited, his hands folded on his desk, his blue eyes untroubled.

"I was wondering," I said, "who was getting the Darbo business, now that he's dead."

"The gambling part of his business?"

I nodded.

"Tony Salvador and the widow. They have lost none of the business, I hear. She is no fool, that widow. Nor is Tony."

"I guess they aren't," I said.

His eyes were still holding mine. "Eric Darbo was murdered?"

"Some rumors floating around like that."

He nodded. "I heard them. And now Tony is going with the widow, and you're checking me. You're working for the widow, aren't you, Sandy? And that boy was working for you."

"That boy went too far, Ah Chong," I said. "You've got to understand that I work for my clients, but with the law. That almost automatically puts me against anyone concerned who's outside the law. There's nothing personal in that, but there's also nothing that's going to scare me off the trail."

"I wasn't trying to scare you," he said mildly. "I was trying to find out just how nasty this business was in which you think I might be involved. It's murder, isn't it?"

"Nobody knows," I replied. "Gambling was a big part of Eric's racket. All the gamblers will be checked, one way or another, including Vic Malis and Red Sullivan. That's routine, in a death of this kind. It's a sure thing they can't all be guilty, but they're all suspects."

"And Tony Salvador will be checked. And that mainland *malihini*?"

"You mean the widow?"

He nodded. "The woman for whom you're working. Don't deny that; I have it on good authority."

"I've said all I'm going to say, Ah Chong."

He shrugged. "All right. I will decide later about the boy."

I rose, as someone knocked on the door. Ah Chong said, "Come in," and the door opened.

There was a big man standing in the doorway, a broad man with flaming-red hair and a sun-reddened face. He was wearing a lurid sports shirt, a pair of gabardine slacks, white buck shoes and a scowl. At sight of me, the scowl deepened. It was Red Sullivan.

"Well, well," he said, "it's the nose himself. He giving you any trouble, Ah Chong?"

Ah Chong shook his head.

"That's good," Red said. "Because I wouldn't want to get any blood on this fine rug you have here."

"Your blood?" I asked.

He smiled. He seemed to be mentally flexing his muscles. "Run along, monkey" he said.

It wasn't his fault I was in a bad mood, of course. He didn't know I'd had a spat with Linda. I said, "You tough guys give me a pain. If I didn't think you were a friend of Ah Chong's, I'd rip your spine out."

He muttered something, and I pushed him to one side. He slammed into the wall. He started a right hand, the moment his back touched the wall.

My own right was faster, and a button shot. His head slammed into the wall, and

he sagged. I put a knee where I thought it might do some good, and he folded.

Ah Chong hadn't moved from his desk. He was watching us quietly, a faint smile on his smooth face. "You made a mistake," I told him, "when you tied up with a muscle-bound moron like Red. It's the kind of mistake a man in your business can't afford to make."

His smile didn't leave. He nodded, and said, "Aloha, Sandy."

I went out without returning the farewell. I drove back to the office in a bad, bad mood.

Dr. Ray's drill was going; I could hear the whir of it through his open doorway. My office was fairly cool, and the ice chest beckoned. But I didn't mix a drink. I sat there, nursing my grouch.

Around noon, the phone rang, and it was Linda. "Are you coming home for lunch?" she asked in one of those civil voices.

"I don't think so," I said. "I'm pretty busy."

A silence. Then, "Well, don't forget we're going to the Rooks' tonight for a *luau*."

"I won't," I promised.

"Mary will be there," she went on. "I can trust you not to say anything that might be embarrassing, I suppose."

"I suppose," I said. "I've already talked to Mary this morning."

Another silence. I could almost hear the curiosity gnawing at her. Finally, "What'd she have to say?" The casual tone.

"Nothing I can tell you, dear," I said. "Ask your bridge club."

For the second time that morning, the line went dead.

I went over to the Alexander Young Hotel for lunch. I was halfway through a medium steak when Janice walked in. She wasn't alone. Tony Salvador was with her.

He's a good-looking boy, this Salvador, and he's made a lifetime study of how to please women. He does it very well. He's also a big boy, and nobody to toy with.

They saw me, and came over, Janice said, "I know you'll be thrilled to have us join you."

"A pleasure," I agreed, and shook the hand Tony extended. The waiter was bringing a chair.

They ordered a drink, and then Janice said, "I understand the first Mrs. Darbo was in to see you this morning."

They were both watching my reaction to that.

"I did not know it was a matter of public knowledge," I told her.

"All right," she said. "I just happened to be driving by."

"Maybe she was up to see the dentist," I said.

Janice looked at me evenly. "You working for me, Sandy?"

"Any kicks?"

Janice was frowning now. Tony said quickly, "Don't heckle him, honey. You just hired him. You didn't buy him."

She shrugged and smiled. "All right. I'll be good."

"In that case," I said, "I'll tell you something you might not know. Ah Chong and Red Sullivan seem to be working together." I went on to tell them about the incident in Ah Chong's office. I didn't tell them about Ah Chong's suspicions.

"That's nice," Janice said. "That's just dandy. I don't know why I hang around this garden spot of the Pacific. Maybe it's because everybody goes out of their way to make me feel welcome."

Tony said placatingly, "If they get together, maybe we can make a deal, honey. There's enough business for all of us."

"Sure," I agreed. "As far as gambling goes, it's more or less a sideline with Ah Chong, anyway, isn't it?"

Tony shrugged. "I don't know what his take is. But it's no sideline with Sullivan."

That I knew. I said to Janice, "Mary wanted me to work on the same case you're paying me for. What do you think of that?"

"I think it's cute. What did you tell her?"

"I told her I was too busy."

"You didn't—"

"I did. She took it like a lady, too."

"She would," Janice said. "Nothing personal in that remark, by any chance?"

"Nothing personal," I assured her.

She smiled. "I know I'm not one, of course, but I don't like to be reminded of it."

I left, soon after that, and went down to the station once more. Dan was in. He was looking owly. I asked him about my boy.

"We released him over an hour ago," Dan said. "Ah Chong called and said there'd been a misunderstanding but everything was straightened out, now." He paused to light one of those small cigars. "You on *that* side of the fence, now, Sandy?"

"You know I'm not." I went over to stand near the window. "This thing is beginning to shape up into a gang war of some kind, Dan." I turned to face him. "What have you got on Red Sullivan?"

"A file." His eyes met mine, then moved away, watching the smoke of his cigar.

"Nothing new?"

His eyes came back. "Sure, he's working for Ah Chong now. Is that what you wanted me to say?"

"He brought his specialty along, probably, don't you think? With Ah Chong's organization, he can absorb all the gambling Red covers."

"Probably. So—"

"So they'd be competing with Eric Darbo. So Darbo died. I don't like to think Ah Chong would go in for that."

Dan said nothing, waiting, watching me. "But if Red's tied up with him, he's going to be bucking Tony Salvador, and those two play for keeps."

"That's right," Dan said. "Well, I'll tell you something. My first choice was Salvador, but he's got the alibi, and so has the widow. They've got each other. Plus some others I dug up." He got up, to come over and stand near the window with me. "Sullivan got a working-over from Lemke. Ah Chong I talked to for three hours. Both their alibis for the time are a bit shaky, but not so shaky I don't half believe them. What can we do but wait for something more to develop?"

There wasn't, I admitted, much he could do. Lemke came in as I was preparing to leave. He had no words for me, but he had a scowl that made him even uglier than usual. He was obviously waiting until I left to deliver whatever message he had for Dan.

I left.

I kept thinking about that girl of Red's. I'd helped her out of a rather nasty mess at one time, and she'd been grateful—at the time. She lived out beyond the Academy of Arts, on Beretania, and it would be right on the way home.

It was a large, frame home, now converted to small apartments. The girl, Rosa Ramirez, was out in front in a deck chair. She was wearing shorts and a halter and a fine coat of tan. She was reading a confession magazine.

She's a short girl, exquisitely formed, from her curly black hair to her gaudily painted toenails. She smiled at me as I came up the walk.

"My friend Sandy," she said. "You come to arrest me?"

"Just to pass the time of day," I corrected her. "How're you getting along, Rosa?"

"O.K. I work for Ah Chong, now, at the Palace." She chuckled, and sang, "Ten cents a dance, that's what they pay me—"

I took a seat on the grass near her chair. "I figured you'd be married by now, Rosa."

"No, no"—she shook her curly head—"not Rosa. How you say it, lots of times a bridesmaid, but no bride?"

"I'll bet you've had your chances," I said. "I'll bet enough of them have asked you."

She nodded vigorously. "Plenty. But always Filipinos. At the Palace, millions of them. Good spenders, good sweethearts, but damned bad husbands, Filipinos. Trouble, trouble, all the time trouble. Jealous."

"How about Red Sullivan?" I asked.

She seemed to shrink. She stared at me steadily. "Sandy, you come to see about him?"

"No," I lied. "I was just wondering if you still sailed for him."

"You're lying, Sandy. Red's been a bad boy?"

"No worse than usual, I guess. Don't you know?"

"I no talk about Red," she said firmly. "You no ask."

"All right," I said. "We'll talk about you." She shook her head.

I said, "You were in trouble once before, Rosa. You can't stay out of trouble, can you? Red'll never do you any good."

"I'm a good girl, Sandy," she answered. "You know I'm a good girl."

"All right," I said, and rose. "You're a good girl, Rosa. I hope you're good enough to stay out of jail."

I walked down to the car without turning round. I drove down Beretania to Kalakaua and down that main Waikiki drag to Seaside.

Linda was out in front, again, trimming the hibiscus hedge.

"Are you a good girl?" I asked her.

She looked at me queerly for a second, then smiled. "Good enough for you, you stubborn animal."

"Kiss me, then," I said, and she did.

"Oh, Sandy" she murmured, "why did I ever get tied up with a mug like you?"

"Love," I said. "Let's take the board and go over to the beach. We've got a couple of hours to kill, yet, before we go to the Rooks'."

"Something's troubling you," she said. "This case has you down."

"A little," I admitted. "Are we going to the beach or not?"

"We're going, master," she said. "I'll be ready before you are."

"Fifty cents you won't," I said.

"Taken," she cried, and we were racing for the house.

I won, by a full fifteen seconds.

We took the board over to the beach near the Moana Hotel where the Wahine Surf runs. This is strictly for beginners, this surf, but that, I'm ashamed to admit, is what Linda is, a beginner. The Castle Surf, up in front of the Elks' Club, is more my speed.

Linda is a girl of exceptional balance, and she was learning very rapidly. She was almost ready for the Queen's surf, up near Diamond Head. And I must admit she made a much more interesting figure on the board than I did.

It was a pleasant two hours. I almost forgot Ah Chong and Red Sullivan and the Salvador gent. I almost forgot Lemke.

At home, again, we had a drink, but nothing to eat. The Rooks took a great pride in their food, and we intended to give it the proper attention.

All the time we were showering and dressing, while I was shaving, Linda didn't mention the Darbo business. When we were ready, she turned slowly, and asked, "How do I look?"

Very simple, the white linen she wore. Very artful, the orchid in her hair. Very lovely, my Linda, and I told her so.

"And you'll be a good boy?" she said. "You won't make cutting remarks if the Rooks say something snobbish? You won't give one of your soap-box lectures on democracy?"

"I'll be a model husband," I promised. "I'll even make a play for the hostess."

That, Linda informed me coolly, wouldn't be necessary.

The Rooks lived up beyond the Elks' Club, off the Diamond Head Road. They were very big people in the Islands, not quite up to the Big Five, but right in there, pitching. They're nice people, I must admit, though their inborn snobbishness annoys me at times. I couldn't figure them inviting Mary Neilson Darbo, even though Mary's background was as haughty as their own. Mary had fallen from grace when she married Eric.

It was a big house, the front of it *makai* (toward the sea), the rear *mauka* (toward the mountains). There was a big, house-wide, open *lanai* in the rear and a back yard large enough for a nine-hole golf course.

The *luau* would be in the back yard. The pig would be cooked there, wrapped in *ti* leaves and burlap, buried with the hot stones until the meat was ready to fall apart. There would be *poi*, which some scorners insist is only paper-hanger's paste, but which I love, and which is eaten by dipping the fingers into the bowl and then licking the fingers.

There would be *laulau* and *lomi-lomi*, and the *luau*, itself, a sort of spinach.

There would be drinks and entertainment and pleasant dialogue, and I could forget for the evening that I was no longer Saunders McKane, of an old and wealthy family, but just Sandy McKane, shamus. And maybe Linda could forget she shared my doubtful fortunes.

The front door was open, when we arrived, and Rod Rook met us there. "It's been a long time, Sandy," he said, "since you've been in this house."

It had been seven years. I said, "I've never forgotten it. We had a lot of fun here, didn't we, Rod?"

I could sense rather than see Linda's approving glance at this pleasantry. Then Helen Rook was there, and Mary Neilson Darbo, the Van Albrechts, and the Dickinsons. It was like Old Home Week.

Only it wasn't the same, you understand. There'd been a war and a depression since we were kids. There'd been some deaths and some marriages and a divorce or two, and I wasn't part of the pattern any more, nostalgic though it was, and pleasant.

The food was great, and we ate it out in the back yard, on mats. It was a beautiful rear lawn, fragrant with flowers, and the moon was undimmed Minsky.

Linda sat on one side of me, Mary Darbo on the other. Mary said, "Helen tells me this

is my party. Helen's been very loyal through it all."

"Helen's a thoroughbred," Linda put in.

That was it, welcoming Mary back to the fold. Eric was dead, now; Eric could be something in the past that wasn't mentioned.

Mary looked serene and in perfect command of herself, but I thought there was some irony in her smile. "You've been away, too, Sandy, haven't you?" she asked quietly.

I thought of something cute to say, and quelled the impulse. I nodded smiling my enigmatic smile No. 6. Linda reached over to pat my arm. "They'll kill me with their kindness yet," I thought.

The dancers came on after a while, one I'd seen before and two I hadn't. Only one of the stories they told was a new one to me, and it was performed by the dancer I'd seen before. She was Kaalea, and every subtle, graceful gesture had its meaning. There was no mood, no action she couldn't describe as accurately as with words.

Mary was crying when Kaalea had finished and so was Linda. I passed my handkerchief to them, one at a time.

Then the very efficient servants were coming from the house, bearing drinks of all kinds and in all desired quantities. A party like this, I reflected, shouldn't cost much more than I made in six months.

I said to Mary, "I feel like a country cousin. I feel like I just came in from the cane fields after a hard day."

Her gray-green eyes met mine smilingly, and she said, "It's your own choice, this profession of yours, Sandy. I know about all the offers your friends have made you."

"You sound like Linda's bridge club," I told her.

That brought Linda into the dialogue. "What's wrong with my bridge club?" she wanted to know.

"Nothing, dear," I replied. "I love them all, especially you."

Somebody handed me a Tom Collins at that moment, somebody with a good memory. It was Tommy Van Albrecht. "It's good to see you again, Sandy," he said genially. "And even better to see Linda. I don't suppose you'd mind just one dance, would you?"

There was music up on the *lanai* now, and some couples were dancing. I said I could manage to leave her for one dance, and they went up the steps.

Mary said, "It must have been a trying period for Linda, after her father died."

"Especially after he died broke," I thought. That's probably what Mary had meant, too, I said. "If you don't mind the 1934 version of a fox-trot, maybe we could go up there and give it a whirl, huh?"

We went up and gave it a whirl. This Mary was a lot softer to the touch than I'd imagined. Not sloppy-soft, but intriguing-soft, and not at all soft where she shouldn't

be. I said, "This is where you belong, Mary. You'll be coming back to this, won't you?"

"I'm not so sure," she said. "Helen will do what she can, I know, and they're all nice people. But after those years with Eric—" She broke off.

I didn't pursue the topic. I could imagine that after those years with Eric, this gang might look tame. But it probably wasn't what she meant.

"You're still working for my . . . my successor?" she asked, after a few moments.

I shook my head, which was a wordless lie, but she had no right to ask, in the first place.

"I've heard," Mary persisted, "that she's taking over some of . . . of Eric's former interests."

"Could be," I murmured.

Mary sighed. "She certainly seems capable of it."

Linda danced with some other of the old gang, after that, and so did I. Somebody always seemed ready to hand me another Tom Collins, and I was never rude enough to turn it down. Things began to take on that haze.

Before we left, Rod said he'd like to see me alone for a moment, in his study. Linda said she'd wait in the front, with Helen.

The gin was in command by that time, but I remember Rod offering me a job, and I remember it was a good job, and it wouldn't be charity. I turned it down, as I had the others.

Linda probably looked at me questioningly as I came out to join her, but I don't remember, now.

We drove home in silence, the silence that usually follows a spat, though we hadn't had one. I dropped her in front, and drove back to the garage. I was back there, closing the garage doors, when I heard her scream.

It was shrill and hysterical, that scream, and then it dropped off to nothing. I was on the porch, and through the front door, into the lighted living room, before the echo died away.

Linda stood right inside the doorway, obviously in shock, her eyes wide and staring, her face an ivory mask. Then she fainted.

My eyes went swiftly to my favorite chair, to the man sitting there, his blank eyes staring at the door. It was Red Sullivan, and there was the carved, ebony handle of a knife protruding from his throat.

III.

Dan said, "Doc's out there with Linda, now, Sandy. She'll be all right."

It was half an hour later, and we were in the living room. Lemke was there, and a scribe or two and doc's boys and a

uniformed man. Red had been removed, thank God.

Lemke said, "You and this Red had a little trouble this morning, I hear."

I ignored him. I asked Dan, "Who told you that?"

"Girl named Ramirez, Rosa Ramirez," Dan said. "Ever hear of her?"

I nodded. "She volunteered that?"

It was Dan's turn to nod. "We sent a man over to see Ah Chong, as soon as we got your call. This Rosa was there, and must have overheard their conversation. She went crazy, practically. She's out for you, boy."

"All right," I said. "Red must have told her. I had some trouble with him this morning, all right. He was talking when he should have been listening. I smacked him. I kneed him, too."

My stomach was still touchy, though there was very little left in it. My head felt like an over-sized toothache.

Lemke said to Dan, "Run him in?"

I said some words no gentleman would use. I said, "Why don't you send this clown back to the circus you got him from, Dan? Do I have to listen to that kind of stuff tonight?"

Lemke growled something, and took a half step nearer. Dan raised a hand, stopping him. Then he said to me, "Anybody else we would run in. You know that, don't you, Sandy?"

I said nothing.

"You're in the middle of this whole mess," Dan went on, "and the chances are you're on the side of the angels. But you could be on either side, or on the fence. Just remember that the department demands a reasonable amount of respect for all its men, and kind of watch your tongue."

"O.K.," I said. "What else do you want to know?"

"Where you were tonight, and who was there."

I gave it to him straight and detailed, and I could see Lemke's eyes take on a new respect when I called off the guest list. He didn't have another word to say.

They left after a while, though a uniformed man was stationed outside. They hadn't held Rosa Ramirez, and if she was on the prowl for me, they wanted to be prepared.

I went into the bedroom, and Linda was asleep. Doc had given her an opiate of some kind. I sat by the bed a long time, watching her, smoking and thinking, wondering if I hadn't been unfair to her, turning down that job tonight.

After a while, I took a shower, and turned in, myself. But it was some time before sleep came.

It was the phone that wakened me in the morning. It was Dan. When he sleeps, I don't know. He said, "Drop in this morning before you go to the office, will you?"

I said that I would, and went back into the bedroom. Linda was awake, staring at me. I asked, "How do you feel now, honey?"

She didn't say anything. She closed her eyes again.

When I was ready for breakfast, she was still in bed. I squeezed some orange juice and made coffee. I prepared her cereal and took it all on a tray.

Her eyes were open again.

I said, "You'd better eat. I know you probably don't feel like it, but you should."

She climbed out of bed, and went in to brush her teeth. When she came back, she said, "I'll eat at the table. I'm not that sick."

There wasn't much dialogue, at first, over the table. Then Linda said, "Why don't you quit it? You don't imagine these job offers are charity, do you? You know you're worth every dime any one of them would pay you, don't you?"

"Probably," I replied. "They're all business men. I keep wondering where they were back when I was working for the department, in '34 and '35 and those years. I keep remembering that I made my own way then, fresh from the same padded background. This business isn't much, honey, but it's my own, it's self-created. I wouldn't feel like a man, taking one of those jobs."

She was silent. She studied the toast she was buttering.

"But I love you so damned much," I went on, "that I'll take Rook's offer. First, I want to do what I can on this case."

She looked up from the toast. "Oh, Sandy," she said, and she was crying.

I went over to kiss the top of her head. "Baby," I said, "it's going to be all right. Don't worry."

"Damn you, damn you!" she said. "You know, Saunders McKane, that I wouldn't let you take Rod's offer now. You certainly have learned how to get around me in six months."

"That's unfair, honey," I said. "I'm going to take Rod's offer."

"You are not going to take Rod's offer, either now or later, Saunders McKane, and that's the last word I have to say on the subject."

"O.K., kid," I said, "you're the boss."

That's when she threw the toast at me. That's when I knew she was back to normal.

As I was leaving, she asked, "Who was that man, honey?"

"A guy named Red Sullivan," I explained. "A former competitor of Eric's. Somebody's probably warning me to lay off."

We were walking toward the door. She looked out to see the police officer still there. She asked, "What's he doing there?"

"Protecting me from a wild woman," I said. "It's a sort of a compliment, don't you think, to have police protection from women?"

She looked at me, and shook her head.

"You wait for me. I'm going downtown with you. There's a sale at Liberty House."

I dropped her off at the Liberty House and went on down to the station. Dan was in his office, making smoke. He said, "We had to pick that Rosa Ramirez up again, early this morning."

"Trouble?" I asked.

"Drunk and disorderly. She was on her way out to get you." Dan's tired face looked even more tired than usual, and the washed-out blue eyes were bleak as the Dakota hills. "She got into a fight with the cabbie who was taking her out, and he told us about the threats."

"You don't have to hold her on my account," I said. "I guess I can protect myself from a woman."

"You haven't been married very long, have you?" Dan commented. "I'll have her brought in." He pressed a button on his desk, and a uniformed man appeared in the doorway. Dan told him what he wanted.

Rosa had spent a bad night; her dress was torn in two places, and her white shoes were scuffed and soiled. Her make-up was mostly gone, but her looks nothing could dim. She glared at me when she entered, and the policeman's grip tightened on her arm.

I said, "I hear you're out for me, Rosa." Her dark head nodded quickly. "Never mind. I get you, all right." She looked at Dan. "Red tell me about him."

"What else did Red tell you?" I asked her. "He tell me he's going to see you, he's going to your house."

They were all looking at me, now, Rosa, Dan and the uniformed man. "I wasn't home," I told her. "I wasn't home all evening. When did you last see Red, Rosa?"

"Right after you leave me, yesterday afternoon."

"He was alone?"

She set her lips firmly, and continued to glare at me.

"O.K., Rosa," I said "play it dumb. You've forgotten who your friend was, last time you were in trouble. You know I wouldn't kill Red. You know he has lots of enemies in his business. But play it dumb, if you want, and wind up in jail."

She said something in a language that could have been Portuguese and could have been Greek, for all I knew. I would bet it wasn't complimentary.

Dan said, "Well, Sandy—"

"I've no complaint to enter," I said. "If she wants to fight the man who's looking for Red's murderer, that's her foolishness."

Some doubt on her beautiful face, now. "You look for him, Sandy?"

"I'll be looking for him. I think I'll go over and see our friend, Ah Chong, first."

Rosa studied me for some seconds, and then looked at Dan. "I go along?"

Dan looked at me, questioningly, and I

shrugged. He asked Rosa, "You going to be a good girl?"

She nodded. "Good enough. I go along?"

Dan appeared to be giving it some thought.

I said, "I think it'll be all right. You can release her in my custody, and I'll bring her back if you want her for that drunk-and-disorderly rap."

"O.K.," he said. He told the officer, "Wait with her, outside."

When they'd left, he said, "Well, what do you know that I don't?"

"Nothing," I told him truthfully.

He sighed, and shook his head. "Those hoodlums of yours out around town?"

I nodded.

"Maybe they'll pick up something?" There was hope in his voice, the first time I'd ever heard that when he talked about my boys.

"I hope so," I said. "It's a cinch Ah Chong won't tell us anything he doesn't want to, but I'm going to do what I can."

Rosa was quiet when I joined her in the hall. We went out, and down the walk to my convertible. We got in, and I headed for Beretania, for the Filipino's dreamland, the Palace.

Rosa said, "Maybe I make mistake, Sandy."

"You've made enough in your time," I told her. "When are you going to grow up?"

Her lower lip covered her upper, and she sniffed. Then, "That Red was plenty man, Sandy. I miss him like anything."

Ah Chong was in his balcony office this morning. Wearing a silk gabardine suit in a beautiful blue, wearing the greeter's smile on his smooth, round face.

"Trouble again, Sandy?" he asked softly.

"Murder," I answered. "Try not to be so smooth, Ah Chong. The law is going to tear this town wide open, if this keeps up. Lots of things will see the light of day, if that happens. You can get hurt as much as anybody by that. They've been very easy on you, Ah Chong."

"They have nothing on me," he murmured.

"Quit it," I said impatiently. "You can overdo that Oriental calm characterization. Red's been killed and Red was working for you. Eric Darbo was killed, and he was a competitor of yours, more or less. You think, if the law wants to crack down all the way, they can't get a thousand stooges to implicate you? You're no boy; you know what a stool pigeon is and what he'll swear to, for a price."

He considered me gravely. Finally he asked, "What you you want from me?"

"Just a few pertinent facts. Just a ray of light here and there, so I don't have to stumble so often. Just a little truth."

He looked at Rosa doubtfully, then at

me. He said quietly, "I think Red meant to double-cross me. I think he was working for Tony Salvador or with him, and that he meant to get rid of me. These are not facts; these are what I think."

Rosa had risen from her chair, and was glaring at Ah Chong. "You lying, double-crossing—"

"Shut up, Rosa," I interrupted her. "Shut up—now!"

She turned to glare at me. I said, "I'll do all the talking, and all the thinking. Remember last time."

She sat down in her chair again, muttering in that language.

Ah Chong said, "That *wahine* from the mainland, that widow of Eric's, that *haole* client of yours—She's working with Tony. Why don't you ask her for a ray of light? I've got a good, honest business right here. I don't need the . . . the other. But Red said there was money in this other, that I should expand. Red had my list of customers in this other."

"This other was gambling, Ah Chong?"

He nodded, and I believed him.

"Filipino customers?"

Again, he nodded. "Some and Chinese. Red had the big part of the Japanese trade, and the *haole*."

"And Eric?"

Ah Chong shrugged. "I do not know. You could ask your client or her boy friend."

"When did you see Red last?"

"Yesterday, when you hit him, here in my office. He left, right after that, and did not come back."

It all seemed truthful to me, for some reason. I said, "If Tony is out for your customers, he's likely to be out for you, too."

"The customers he can have," Ah Chong said. "I have a clean, good business here. For the other, I can protect myself. Do not worry about me."

"I'll try not to," I said, and rose.

Rosa Ramirez said, "I think of something."

We waited, Ah Chong and I, watching her.

"I remember Red tell me, 'That Tony one smart, tough guy. We go far, with Tony.' I forget this until just now."

Until she realized she might need that job with Ah Chong, I thought. I asked, "What else did he tell you about Tony?"

She appeared to be thinking. "He say 'Tony and I run this town, some day.' He tell me Tony is his friend, but I should say nothing."

Ah Chong looked at me. "As I suspected," he said, "but I wasn't sure, and I thought it best to play along."

We left him, and went out to the car. I drove straight up Beretania, to the converted home where she lived. I told her, "Stay here, because the law might want

you, later. Give me your word you won't get into trouble, Rosa."

She nodded gravely. "I promise."

It was probably a breach of faith to leave her like that after Dan had put her in my custody, but she looked dog-tired, and the chances were she'd hit the hay.

I drove back to the office and phoned Janice Darbo. She was home. I said, "I want to see you, and right away. Should I come out there, or do you want to come down?"

"I'll be right down," she said. "I have to do some shopping, anyway."

The better stores had branches out at Waikiki, so she wouldn't really have to come down here to shop. But then, Linda had come downtown, too, so maybe it was feminine perversity.

She entered my office about thirty minutes later, which was good for a woman. "It's about Red Sullivan," she said.

"Among other things." I watched her take the chair across from me. "And about Tony Salvador, and about you."

She said nothing.

I said, "I hate to be played for a sucker. You knew about Tony and Red working together, didn't you?"

Some shock in her face, now. "You're . . . that's not true—"

"You know it is. You know Red was working for Ah Chong, just so he could double-cross him. Only Tony was working a triple-cross. Tony bumped him, didn't he?"

The shock was still in her face, but there was something else there, too, now. It was determination, and something a little more vicious. "You know this is true, Sandy? You're not just making sound?"

"I know Red and Tony were working together. Ah Chong suspected it, and someone very close to Red confirmed it this morning."

"But Eric," she said. "Tony couldn't have killed Eric."

"You're sure of that? Now would be a good time to start talking, if you're innocent."

"Tony was with me that evening. For dinner and for six hours after that. Eric was alive when I left. I found him . . . like that when I came home."

I felt certain she was telling the truth. I asked, "How about last night? Was Tony with you, then?"

"No. As a matter-of-fact, he stood me up. We had a date for dinner, and he phoned to tell me he couldn't make it. I didn't see him all evening."

Feet coming up the stairs, now. I said, "Maybe you'd better not go home again, right away. Tony will want to see you, and if you should let something slip—"

"But where would I go?" she asked.

Linda was standing in the doorway, now.

She had a box under her arm and a smile on her face. The smile faded a bit when she saw Janice.

I said, "Honey, Janice is going to stay with us for a while." I introduced them.

She took it with grace. She said, "Of course, Sandy. Is there some trouble?"

"There's some trouble," I agreed, and then a thought hit me, and almost knocked me over. It isn't often a thought hits me. I said, "I'm going to make the rounds of the gang, kid. I'm going to see the Rooks, the Van Albrechts and the Dickinsons. At least the husbands, I might be late for lunch."

"You're quitting, Sandy?" she said. "You've had enough of this sordid business?"

"I'll tell you more about it, later," I promised. "You two can go home in Janice's car."

I went down to the street with them. I watched them climb into the big convertible, and drive off. They made a grand-looking pair in that Chrysler.

Then I went out to make the rounds. Rod Rook, Tommy Van Albrecht and Mike Dickinson and some others. Coy, they were, but I got a fact here and there, and the thing began to shape up in my mind, though my mind kept throwing it out again. I got home about one-fifteen. Linda and Janice were yak-yaking like a couple of sorority sisters when I came in. Women, I will never understand.

Linda looked up hopefully, and said "Well, Honey?"

"Well enough," I said. "Let's eat."

During the meal, I gave them the enigmatic sleuth characterization, saying little and looking profound. Linda, I could tell, was burning with curiosity.

I phoned headquarters, after lunch, and Dan was in. I told him what I wanted. Then I phoned the poolroom and left orders for my barefoot aide to bring in the reports. If *they* confirmed what I suspected—

When I was leaving, Janice said, "I really ought to go home for some clothes, Sandy."

"You can wait a while," I said. "If what I think is true, it shouldn't take long."

Liholia was waiting for me at the office. His mahogany face was split in an ivory grin. He looked like a man holding a royal flush. He held up his scraps of paper, the reports of his gang on the goings and comings of all interested parties.

"How much?" he asked.

"Oh, twenty, ten. It depends on what's there, of course."

"The man who put the dead man in your house, he's here. How much?"

"Don't lie to me, Liholia," I said. "Information like that you'd take to the police."

He shook his head. "For Sandy McKane I work, not the police. How much?"

I said, "I already know who put the dead man in my house. It was Tony Salvador, though he might have had help."

He looked like a man whose royal had turned into a full house. "You no buy?" he said.

"Sure, but don't try to hold me up. Thirty bucks, and the police will kick through a buck or two, for witness fees. But I want the thirty split among the gang. None of this holding out, Liholia." I took three tens out.

"O.K.," he said, and handed me the slips. He took the three tens, and went padding out, like a man whose bluff had been called.

Tony—sure. But nothing I could convict his partner on, nothing I could take into court. Maybe, if I let Lemke into it, Lemke and his rubber nose. But, no. I made a phone call, and another.

Then I went down and climbed into the convertible. I headed it toward Waikiki.

It was a nice home, within walking distance of the beach, a fairly large home set in a beautiful background of palms and flowering shrubs.

Mary herself came to the door to greet me. "You've decided to work for me, Sandy?" she asked.

"No," I said, "it's not that." We went into a large living room, low-ceilinged, furnished in soft colors and some splashy wall paper. The furniture was moderne, and looked new.

I sat in a huge chair across from a davenport. She sat on the davenport, and I thought she was on edge. "I'm looking for Tony Salvador," I said. "He here?"

Simulated surprise in her controlled face. "Why would you expect to find him here, Sandy?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"He's your boy friend, isn't he?" I said. "He's your partner."

"What a ridiculous assumption," she said. "You're not intoxicated, are you, Sandy?" The face showing nothing, at the moment, unless just a hint of fear.

"No," I said, "I'm not. It's like this, Mary. I know Eric had the carriage trade. I know the big bets were his, in this town, the socialite bets. You knew that, too, didn't you?"

"I suspected it."

"Tony Salvador knew it, because Tony worked with Eric. When Eric decided to get himself a new wife, Tony and you decided to get Eric *and* his business. How long had you two been playing house? And is that why Eric left you? Did he know?"

She rose, now, to put on her indignation pose. "Of all the ridiculous, humiliating—" she started, but I raised a hand.

"Save it," I said. "I know you've been seeing Tony right along. I've got proof of that. And I know Tony killed Red Sullivan and dumped him in my favorite chair. I've proof of that, too."

She sat down again, staring at me.

I went on, "How many people in this case knew I was going to be at the Rooks for a long time, last night? How many knew my house would be vacant all that time? Just you. And you told Tony. Sure, Tony took Janice out to make the rounds the night Eric was killed. That wasn't to give *her* an alibi; that was to give *him* one. And leave Eric alone at the house, so that you could come up with some phony message, so you could slip the poison in his whisky. Eric must have still carried the torch, a little." I shook my head. "How did you do it, Mary?"

She opened her mouth, and closed it again, taking in a gulp of air in the process. She was pale, now, pale as death.

I said, "The only party I'm interested in nailing is Tony Salvador. We can work up a story for you, Mary. I'm not interested in seeing you suffer any more than you already have, kid." Two could play this theatrical game.

She put her head down into her hands, and her shoulders shook. "Oh, Sandy," she said, "it's almost true, the things you said. But I wasn't to blame. Tony did kill Red Sullivan, but I didn't—"

From the hallway, somebody said, "You didn't *what*, kitten?"

It was Tony Salvador. Wearing a light, expensive sports shirt and a pair of fawn colored gabardine slacks. Wearing a nasty look and holding in his right hand one hell of a gun.

He came slowly into the room, the gun waist high. "Go ahead, kitten, tell him you didn't kill Eric. Tell him all the lies you can think of, and throw me to the wolves. Start talking."

She didn't seem to have any vocal cords for a moment. Then her eyes left the gun he was holding, and sought mine. "You believe me, don't you, Sandy?"

"Red and Ah Chong was the double-cross," I thought, "and Red and Tony the triple, and she's coming through with the quadruple, right now. Maybe she had it in mind all along. And maybe he did, too."

I said calmly, "I don't know who to believe. But it doesn't much matter. I'm a *private* detective."

They were both staring at me. The gun was staring at me, too.

"Save it, peeper," Tony said.

"Why can't we make a deal all around?" I asked.

"You won't be in any shape to make a deal," Tony said. "Private eyes don't make deals with a double killing, not in this town. Just keep your mouth shut, McKane." Then he turned to Mary. "It's never going to do you any good trying to buck me, kitten. I took precautions when you killed Eric. When Janice went to phone, I picked up the other glass, as I said I would. But I didn't get rid of it; I kept it for a situation like this. It's got your prints on it, kitten, and it would

nail you if I turned it over to the police. Now, what are we going to do with *him*?"

The gun was pointing my way, and the hand holding it looked tense and trigger-happy.

"You'd be smart to make a deal," I said. "There are others in the know who have to be paid off, too. It had better be a good deal."

Tony looked uncertain for a moment. He started to say something, but from the archway, Dan Arliss said, "Drop it, Tony!" And from the *lanai* Lemke said, "You're covered, Salvador."

Which made it my cross, or the quintuple.

Janice and Linda were out in front, admiring Linda's flowers, when I drove up. Both of them looked at me wonderingly.

"All cleaned up," I said. "Let's make a drink and sit on the *lanai* and I'll tell you all about it."

Linda made the drink, and when we were settled, I told them all about it.

Linda looked shaken, when I'd finished. "Mary!" she said. "Who would have thought Mary would—"

"Your fine friends kept Eric's business humming," I said, "if you'll pardon my frankness. The only thing was, Eric usually knew who was going to win, or what team, and they didn't. He wasn't so good on the honest pugs, or teams. There's going to be

Tony's kind of people just as long as our kind of people support them. That, my darling wife, is one of the more obvious facts of life."

"And what about me, chasing around with that killer?" Janice asked. "What kind of people would you call me?"

"You look all right to me, from here," I offered.

Linda sighed and said, "You certainly do, Janice. However do you get your hair in such a lovely wave?"

MURDER WALKS A STRANGE PATH

(Continued from page 49)

Dorothy's face. She wouldn't have to worry about Jenny's ever leaving.

Miss Rachel bent over the little girl and offered her the tiny box. Jenny accepted gravely. The cat came forward to sniff interestedly at the headdress on the toyman. There was in the room a sudden feeling of peace, of evil fading away, of hatred and passion burned out and gone.

Jenny giggled. "Your cat likes feathers, too."

"It's as close as she'll ever get to a jay," Miss Rachel explained.



Visitors

The Old One walks among the ancient trees,
Whose crooked branches clutch the sky,
And twist the pallid moonlight into knots
Where bitter shrunken apples lie.

She will not rest in peace
In that small room beneath the mossy stone,
That will not have this night its occupant,
Yea, not one brittle foot or finger bone.

And none will know the Old One visited
Among the tortured trees tonight
Except the grizzled carrion bird—
A waiting shadow in the haunted light.

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