

STREET & SMITH'S

DETECTIVE

STORY MAGAZINE



JULY



Thirteen O'clock A COMPLETE NOVEL
BY KNIGHT RHOADES

**"I'll PROVE in
only 7-Days
that I can make
YOU a NEW MAN!"**

*Charles
Atlas*

Winner of the
Title "The
World's Most
Perfectly
Developed
Man."

Just let me PROVE in only 7 DAYS that I can turn you, too, into a man of might and muscle.

Once I was a scrawny, under-sized weakling, weighing only 7 stone, only "half-alive" always ailing, never getting my share of the good times and the good things of life. Then I developed my system of "DYNAMIC-TENSION" that won me fame and the title of "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

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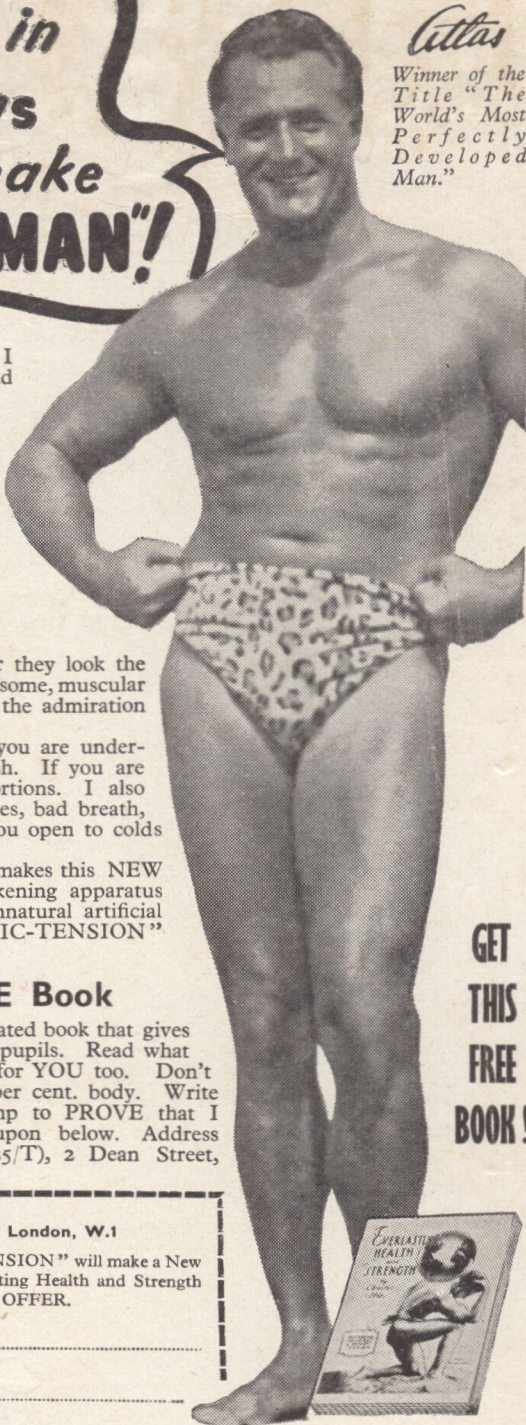
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STREET & SMITH'S

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

Vol. VII, No. 12. (British Edition)

July 1951

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DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER 1951

WILL BE ON SALE MONDAY, 20th AUGUST

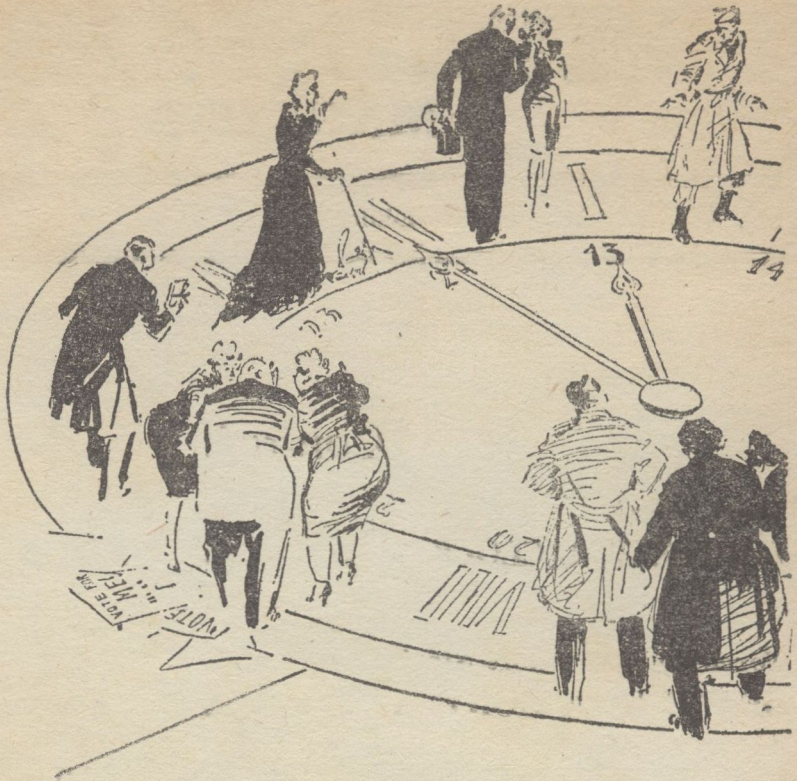
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Published every other month by ATLAS PUBLISHING & DISTRIBUTING CO. LTD., 18 Bride Lane, London, E.C.4, by arrangement with Street & Smith Publications Inc., 122 East 42nd Street, New York 17, New York, U.S.A. Copyright, 1949, in U.S.A. and Great Britain by Street & Smith Publications Inc. Annual Subscription 6s. 9d. post free. *Sole Trade Distributors:* THE MAGAZINE COMPANY, 18 Bride Lane, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4. *Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand:* GORDON & GOTCH (AUSTRALASIA) LTD



THIRTEEN O'CLOCK

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

Paul Prentiss, important only because of the rôle he played in the life of *Julie Jardemane*, who was accused of the murders;

Derrick Farr, Julie's fiancé;

Christopher Ames, who took pictures;

Toby Blair, whose mother was a Jardemane

Lieutenant Price, who solved the murder; *Grandmother Amaziah Jardemane*, head of the clan;

Alethea Jardemane, who lived at Jardemane House;

Arabella Jardemane Farraday, who wanted money;

Peter Farraday, who was in politics;

Patric, the butler;

Mrs. Rogers, the cook;

Gwen, the parlor maid;
and

Mystery, the white kitten who played an important part in the unraveling of the mystery!

I.

SOMEWHERE in the depths of the dark, old house a telephone rang, thinly.

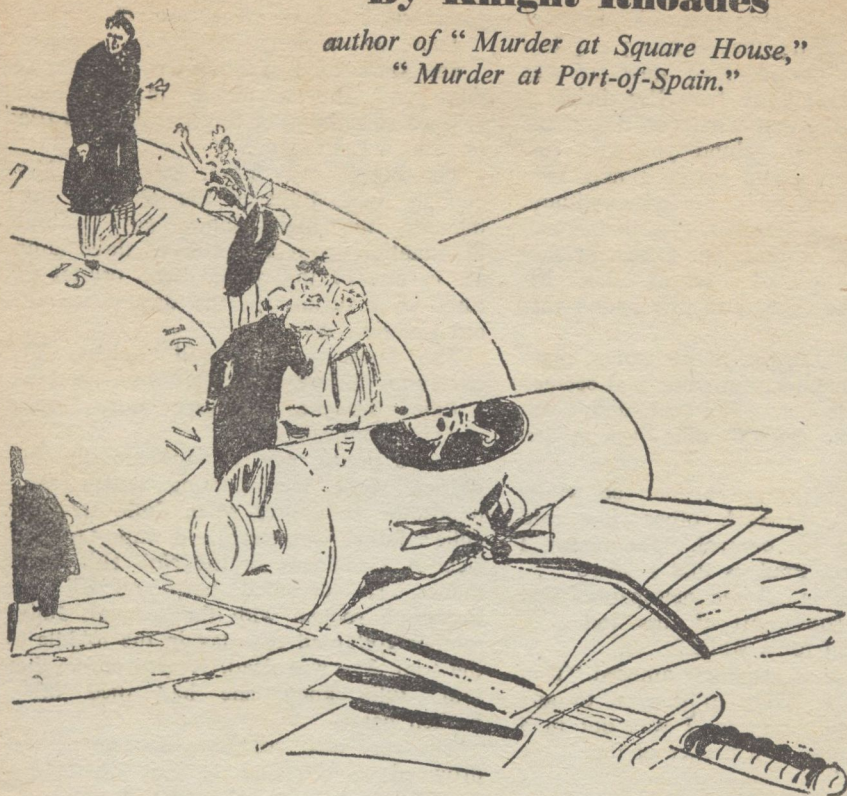
The sound startled Julie Jardemane, trying on her wedding outfit in her second-floor room. It couldn't be Derrick. He wouldn't get in from Los Angeles till eleven. If his train were on time! Who else, though, would telephone a bride, on the night before her wedding?

The telephone went on ringing, monotonously.

A New Novel

By Knight Rhoades

author of "Murder at Square House,"
"Murder at Port-of-Spain."



or How the Bride Met Murder

Julie made a little face at the hunters' green suit which Aunt Alethea had given her. It was like Aunt Alethea to select green, instead of the pearl-gray or beige Julie would have liked.

She hastened into the dimly lighted upper hall, only to remember that the upstairs extension was out of order. She would have to go downstairs to answer.

She was sure, as she went racing down the gracefully curving stairway, that the phone would stop its clamor a second or so before she answered, in the annoying manner of telephones the world over.

Afterward, she was to wish she had fallen and broken her ankle. Or even her neck. Anything to stop her from answering the insistent summons of that ringing telephone. But nothing did stop her.

"Hello," she gasped breathlessly.

And, then, it happened. "Hello, sweet," said Paul's voice casually. "Surprised to hear from me?"

She did not hang up. Sheer horror chained her.

Paul's voice went on, "Remember me, darling? Paul Prentiss, the man you almost married. The man you ran away with when you were seventeen. Or was it eighteen? Time does fly so! You do remember, don't you?"

Surprisingly, Julie heard her own voice saying, "How could I forget?" Her calmness was assumed. Utter chaos shook her.

She fumbled for the spindle-legged Early American chair and sank down on it, feeling like a collapsed parachute. Her eyes sought the carved dog in the newel

post for comfort. Ever since she'd come first to Jardemane House, a thin, solemn-eyed child of eleven, that grinning dog had been her best friend. And now he was laughing mockingly at her. For being a fool. For figuring that what you did in the past could be put behind you and forgotten. That you could marry a man who demanded perfection in his wife, without telling about Paul Prentiss. Not that it had been so awful, at that. She'd been a fool about a man. So had a lot of other girls before her. The thing was, she hadn't told Derrick.

Paul was talking on, in his *sauve*, man-of-the-world manner that once had seemed so marvelous to her: "My dear, didn't you know that some day I'd come back to San Francisco?"

Julie's thoughts raced around so wildly they bumped into each other. She said slowly, fighting for control, "The reason I sound surprised, Paul, is that I heard . . . that is, it was in all the newspapers that you were in some sort of fuss and . . . and went to jail for a while."

He laughed as if genuinely amused. "That sort of thing is likely to happen to any man. Just a silly mix-up. I was out in a couple of months, as a matter of fact. Case was appealed."

There was a horrible pause. Julie said slowly, "I'm . . . I'm being married tomorrow, Paul. Won't you wish me happiness?"

He said lazily, "Sure, I know you're getting married tomorrow. I saw it in a New York newspaper. That's why I grabbed the first plane and came West. I'm at the Mandarin, Julie. Our pet spot. Meet me in ten minutes. The Mandarin Lantern!"

"I can't meet you. I don't want to see you! I never want to see you again, so long as I live, Paul!"

He paid no attention to her. "Yes. I suppose that is true. But, my dear, I want to see you. So you had better meet me. Because I have some letters of yours! I think you had better get them back before you marry Derrick Farr, don't you?"

"I thought— You said you burned them! I asked you to!" Her voice was a shade too shrill.

"Human nature is such a funny thing!" mused Paul. "Over and over again, year after year, generation after generation, people write silly letters they would give the world to get back. Afterward. But then

it is too late. In ten minutes, Julie. The Mandarin Lantern. Usual table."

There was a sharp click.

She knew he had hung up, but she sat there with the telephone in her hand, gripped so tightly her fingers hurt, and tried to think what to do.

The big hallway never seemed to have enough light. Built in the old-time lofty manner, the high ceiling got its only illumination from a cluster of three lamps set in one of the ornate drop crystal fixtures so luxurious in the days when this old mansion was new.

The house was so still tonight! The cavernous hallways so filled with shadows.

Julie thought, "History does repeat itself!" frantically.

Julie's pretty, gay, romantic mother had written some incriminating letters to a handsome scoundrel when Julie was ten. Julie's father was stern and important and rich. A Jardemane of the Nob Hill Jardemanes. He divorced her, and all San Francisco rocked with the scandal. Julie's mother collapsed one day in the middle of the trial. She was dead. Heart-trouble, they said. Julie knew she had died of a broken heart.

The very next year, Mr. Jardemane was drowned in the undertow at Carmel-by-the-Sea. And Julie had come to live with her grandmother, Amaziah, old enough and stern enough to be her great-grandmother, in the tall, narrow old house in Sacramento Street.

"He'll want money," thought Julie desperately, putting the telephone back in its cradle with a soft click which seemed echoed somewhere in the dark shadows lurking in the musty grandeur of the big hallway. "Where can I get money? From Toby maybe?"

She swung about nervously. "Who's there?" she demanded sharply.

There was no answer, but it seemed to her that a faint breeze fanned her hot face. The same tiny gust of wind which came when the dining room door, far down at the end of the hall, was opened. The shadows were darkest there.

Julie thought frantically, "Did I mention Paul's name?" She couldn't remember. Her mind was still jumbled. The suddenness of the blow had downed her by its very stillness.

Then she remembered that no one was at home. Toby had gone to play bridge at Mrs. Bartlett's house down the block. This

was Patric's night out. Mrs Rogers, the cook, had gone to visit her sister in Sausalito. Gwen, the parlor maid, had gone to the movies. Aunt Alethea was at a Red Cross meeting.

So who could have been standing there in the dim shadows by the dining room door, listening to her conversation with her past?

She must have imagined the sound, she told herself stoutly. But it had sounded to her frightened ears like the clink of the wooden rings on the thick portierres hung across the dining room door to keep out drafts. The whisper of those wooden rings sliding stealthily along the smooth mahogany pole had terrified her in her childhood. It was such a furtive sound. Like the clink of glasses in some macabre toast.

It seemed a long way back to her room. Her mind kept whirling, frightenedly. "I've got to go," she thought. "I've got to meet Paul and get those letters. If only I hadn't lied to Derrick about Paul! Why didn't I tell him about Paul in the first place? It wasn't so bad, after all."

She knew the answer to that. Derrick had put her on a high pedestal. He adored her and she loved that. It wouldn't have done to admit the truth. That a man had jilted Julie almost at the very altar. Because he found out she didn't have any money. She wasn't going to tell Derrick ever! She set her soft lips firmly.

She'd get those letters back. She'd threaten to tell Uncle Peter if Paul didn't return the letters to her. Paul had been afraid of Uncle Peter always. Uncle Peter was married to Aunt Arabella. He was a State senator and a banker, beside having important social connections.

Paul had said ten minutes. There wasn't time to change. Without thinking, she crammed the small green hat on her red-gold hair, forgetting that the sequins on it would glint dazzlingly at night. She took a quick glance into the mirror. She didn't look as if she'd had a mortal blow. Her huge gray eyes were a trifle darker, perhaps, and her pale, even-featured face was colorless, save for the brave crimson of her lips. She looked at the slimness of her ankles and the beauty of her slim hands. If it hadn't been for them, she would have missed meeting Paul and there would be nothing for her to fear. She almost hated them.

Snapping off her light, she hurried out

of her room, drawing on her suede gloves in nervous jerks as she went.

It was silly to tiptoe. Grandmother Amaziah's bedroom was on the top floor in the cupola room which topped the tall house. Old Amaziah's eighty-year-old ears weren't as keen as they had been when Julie had come first to live in gloomy Jardemane House. Amaziah was fast asleep. Of course she was!

When Julie came out of the house and went quickly down the steep flight of stairs which led to the slanting hill pavement, she found spirals of fog drifting in from the sea. She thought, "I've got to find a taxi and do this in a hurry. Nobody must know I've been out of the house the night before my wedding."

In all the ten years Julie had lived on her grandmother's charity in her grandmother's gloomy house, Amaziah Jardemane had been waiting for her to disgrace the Family, the way Julie's mother had done. Because Julie was the image of her beautiful mother. Everyone said so.

"This is Amaziah's big chance," Julie thought grimly. "I hope she muffs it!"

Julie felt very close to that long-dead mother, as she scrambled gratefully into a taxi at the bottom of the hill, and settled back against the cushions with closed eyes, after she had given the address of the Mandarin Lantern.

Julie had wanted money desperately, when she was seventeen. So she had answered a newspaper advertisement for a photographer's model with beautiful hands. Of course, none of the Jardemanes ever knew. Julie posed in the late afternoons, after Miss Devlin's School for Young Gentlewomen had dismissed classes. It was easy to keep the secret. Julie's hands were photographed over and over, to advertise wedding rings and hand lotions and nail polish. Julie's trim ankles and small arched feet were in magazines from coast to coast. But her face was never in any advertisement, nor was she a cover girl.

She explained how important and strait-laced her family was, to Paul Prentiss who hired her. He was sweet and understanding and he kept her secret. He paid her what she thought was a fabulous amount. Although Julie was dressed sumptuously, and was sent to the best schools, and given every extravagant luxury, her grandmother did not believe in an allowance for girls. So Julie got nothing to speak of, to put

in her expensive purse. Hence the posing job.

Paul didn't know. She was too proud to tell him. She didn't let him know either that her grandmother hated her, because of her mother. That none of the Jardemane millions was to go to Julie in Amaziah's will. If she had told him these things, everything would have been different.

But she didn't. And so Paul, experienced, charming thirty to Julie's seventeen, an expert in love, won her heart. She wrote to him every time he went away.

On her eighteenth birthday, they eloped to Nevada. That is, they started out. On the way, Julie happened to mention the fact that she was left out of her grandmother's will. She thought now, remembering back, that Paul adroitly had led the conversation to the subject of money. To be certain. At any rate, he found out. And then—

Even after four years, waves of humiliation swept over Julie at the memory of her disillusionment. He hadn't softened the blow. He was disappointed and bitter. He told her pointblank, he was interested only in her money. Not in her. He let her get out of the car, to make her way back to San Francisco as best she could.

Luck had been with Julie. She got back to the tall, old San Francisco house just as dawn was breaking. She crept up the stairs and gathered up the notes of farewell she had left for her aunt and grandmother. Hurt and humiliated, she had put love out of her life.

Until Derrick Farr came along.

She met him at an officers' dance at the St. Francis. He was everything Paul had not been. Old, sedate San Francisco family. Rich, young, sincere, ardent.

So Julie had dared to fall in love again.

And tomorrow was to have been her wedding day!

She put it that way, because she was afraid, suddenly.

The streets were slippery with fog, so the cab crawled along cautiously. She wanted to scream at the driver to go faster. So she could get this over and go back home.

After what seemed ages, she was out of the taxi and into the warmth and light of the tiny café on the fringe of Chinatown.

She saw Paul, clear across the room.

The lights seemed to black out, momentarily, leaving just his face, wavering before her eyes. She glanced at the mirror where patrons of the café adjusted hats and inspected make-up. What she saw

reassured her. She looked very much the daughter of a thousand earls. She was sleek and smooth and arrogant. She wasn't the kid with dreams in her eyes, who had worshipped Paul Prentiss four years before.

"Hello!" chuckled a voice so close she started nervously, and spun around. Christopher Ames stood there, bronzed and tawny-haired and blue-eyed, grinning at her.

"Chris!" she gasped. And couldn't add anything more.

Because Christopher Ames, ace photographer with the Colossal Movie News, was the last person she wanted to see just then.

Chris and she had become good friends four years ago, when Paul had introduced them. He wasn't much older than she was, but he'd made a name for himself as a dare-devil cameraman who dared to photograph anything, anywhere. He was just back from Italy. She had read that in the newspapers.

They chatted for a while, and she wondered how under heaven she was going to get rid of him. She was wild to get her business with Paul over with, and be on her way back to the house, and safety.

Chris saved her the trouble of brushing him off. "Be seeing you later. There's my date!" he said, lazily, and sauntered over to greet a girl with very black hair and a tall, curving figure. The girl looked familiar, in a vague sort of way, but Julie didn't bother trying to place her. She went straight to Paul's table.

He jumped to his feet, turning on his charm as if he'd pressed a button. "Julie! How grand to see you again." He sounded as if he really meant that!

Julie said quietly, "Have you turned into a blackmailer, Paul? Do you want me to pay for my letters?"

By the red which stained his cheeks, she knew the shaft had told, but his laughter sounded quite unforced. "You've grown into a tiger-cat, Julie. As well as a darn beautiful woman!" he added. He drew out a chair and fussed over her, asking if she wouldn't take off her coat.

Julie shook him away and sat down. Because it seemed as if her knees had gone off somewhere, independent of her legs. She hadn't known fury would flood over her in such intensity, when she saw Paul.

He went on, being charming and at ease. "If I'd known you were going to turn out this beautiful, darling, I'd never have let you go! How are your charming family? So quaint of them all to be named with

an A. Amaziah, Alethea, Arabella. Isn't that the way it goes? And Toby Blair? I always thought, somehow, that you'd marry Toby. But then, he's a cousin, isn't he? And some people have a prejudice against marrying cousins."

Julie said steadily, "I came to get my letters, Paul. There is nothing you and I can say to each other, that would matter at all." She looked straight at him and wondered how she could have been such a fool as to ever think she was in love with him.

He seemed to find that humorous.

"Darling, don't be so melodramatic about all this! I admit I shouldn't have used pressure to get you to meet me. But I knew you were being married tomorrow, so this was my last chance. I had to have some sort of club to hold over your head." He paused.

She followed the line of his gaze. Christopher Ames and the tall, dark girl being seated at a table not far from them. She bit her lip. It was a good thing Christopher didn't go around with people she knew. She didn't think there was any chance of his gossiping about seeing her out with another man, the night before her wedding. But she didn't like it, just the same.

The little Chinese girl, Ah Sing, who always had waited on them in the past, came up smilingly with their favorite cocktails. Paul drained his on the moment. She left her drink untouched. "My letters?" she reminded him levelly.

"You asked me a while ago if I were a blackmailer. Well, perhaps I am. Of sorts. I've combed this town for a model for my Victory Poster I've been commissioned to do. Nobody seemed to suit. Till I saw that picture of you in the New York paper. Then I knew."

Out of the chaos of her mind, Julie thought, "He didn't arrive in San Francisco tonight. He's been here for quite a while. There was no picture of me in the New York papers. And he said he had been combing this town for a model."

Aloud she said, "I can give you half an hour, right now, for your photographs. But I want my letters, first!" She was afraid of some sort of trick. She thought, "Grandmother Amaziah and the rest can't object to my being photographed for a victory poster. They are all very patriotic. Even Derrick can't object. I can say the picture was taken a long time ago."

He said, "Splendid! We'll go to the old studio. It will take less than half an hour."

She was conscious of Chris Ames watching her narrowly as she left the restaurant with Paul. Her feet were so reluctant, they seemed to stick to the floor with every step she took.

It wasn't far to Paul's studio.

The building was so old it could remember when water from the bay seeped up to its very steps. The place was still beloved of artists and writers, though age made the floors snap and creak and the windows rattle in their frames.

Looking around curiously, Julie saw the studio looked much the same. Except that the room seemed to have shrunk, and dust lay thick over everything. But there was something eerie about the place which hadn't been there, before. Something frightening. Something which crept into the very marrow of Julie's bones and made her shiver. She tried to identify her fear. She decided it must be lack of light.

There was only one globe in a dusty lamp. It did little to dispel the shadows, and reminded her unpleasantly of the dark hallway at Jardemane House. She said jerkily, "Can't you turn on any more lights? You can't take pictures without the floodlights," and her voice was suspicious.

Paul seemed in excellent spirits. "To be sure," he said. "The high wattage lamps are in the other room. Wait here, Julie. I won't be long." He disappeared into the other room, closing the door behind him.

Julie stared at the cobwebbed face of the clock. It had stopped exactly at one. She thought, "That could be one o'clock or thirteen o'clock by Continental time. I wonder which it was, when that clock stopped?"

A photograph of herself faced her from the north wall. The picture face was dusty, but nothing could dim the eagerness of those shining eyes. It seemed to Julie that her naked heart looked out at her, indecently.

She had written, "With all my love, Julie," and the date, across the bottom of the photograph.

She thought, "I must take that picture, along with my letters," and felt suddenly afraid.

Something rustled in the far corner of the room, by the dingy rose damask curtains, back of the modeling stand. A mouse perhaps. Or a paper stirred by the breeze from

the hall door, which Paul had left open. But her terror mounted.

Something about all this didn't ring true.

She couldn't explain, even to herself, what was wrong, but she felt it, strongly. She went to the inner door and flung it open.

Paul wasn't hunting for any other lights. He had been talking, in a furtive, low-pitched tone over the telephone. He replaced the phone as Julie entered. He whirled about angrily, and said something she didn't catch, because of the roaring in her ears.

She said steadily, "I think this little comedy, whatever it is, has gone far enough. Either you give me my letters, or I'll go to Uncle Peter with this whole story!"

To her surprise, Paul didn't quibble. He put his hand in his inside coat pocket and slowly took out a thin packet of letters, tied with a blue ribbon.

Julie remembered fixing them like that. She writhed, mentally.

"Please believe that I—" began Paul. Then he stopped. A surprised look came over his face. Then horror. He stared at something or somebody behind Julie.

"No!" he cried out so suddenly and sharply that she started nervously.

Something whirred past Julie, so close she could feel the small rush of air engendered by its passage. There was a twanging sound like that of a giant tuning fork. Before her horrified eyes, Paul slumped to his knees. All at once, his clothes looked too big for him. He pitched forward on his face.

The telephone began to ring abruptly, and the sound made her scream. Almost in the same breath, she called Paul's name. She stumbled forward, to kneel beside the fallen man.

He gasped, "Take—" and feebly tried to push the packet of letters toward her. She took them, hardly conscious of what she was doing.

"Paul! What's the matter? Paul, what happened?" she cried.

Then she saw that the letters she held were smeared crimson. There was a knife in Paul's chest. He was trying to raise himself off the floor. A thin line of red dripped on the floor. His face was convulsed. "Damn doublecrosser!" he said loudly and clearly. "Don't let—" He fell forward on the knife. He gave a sigh. All at once, his clothes looked more than ever too big for him.

Hardly knowing what she did, she stumbled over to the monotonously ringing

telephone and jerked it up. She gasped, not waiting for the person on the other end to speak first: "Paul Prentiss has been murdered. Send the police!" She banged down the telephone and went back to Paul.

She tried to feel his pulse. Her tan suede glove impeded her and she tried to take it off, but her fingers shook so badly, she had to give it up. All the time, she knew anything she did, was futile. Paul was dead. Someone had sent a long, sharp knife winging through the air straight into his very heart.

All of a sudden, she began to be afraid, for herself.

In the studio outside, a murderer had stood, emerging out of those shadows which had made her so nervous such a short time ago. Suppose the murderer was still there! Maybe he was just waiting his chance to strike again.

She was too terrified to scream. She had to leave through the big studio room where Paul had taken his photographs. There was no other way out. She went racing through the room, with her breath whistling in her throat and her body stiff with horror.

She gained the hallway, expecting at any moment to have a sharp knife put an end to her life.

It was then she saw there was blood on her tan suede glove. She scrubbed away at it with her handkerchief and fought down nausea.

Getting out of the building was a sort of nightmare of horror. She couldn't think nor plan. Her mind seemed to have stopped, like the hands of a clock, caught on the immovable fact that Paul Prentiss was dead. Murdered.

She began to realize things again, when she was outside in the fog, with the damp crystals stinging against her cheeks and blinding her eyes.

She blessed the fog.

It made everything dim and indistinct. She faded into it in her green suit with the tan fur, and became just a blur, along with other blurs which must be people, walking briskly along. She was surprised to find she had her purse in her hand. She might have left it. At the thought, she shivered. She tried to concentrate on what she had done while she was in Paul's studio? Had she left any tangible clue? She thought not. Of course, there was that photograph on the wall. But that had a date four years old. And she wasn't going back. Nothing could make her go back to that awful place!

As she walked along, she fought against running. Her feet bent at the ankles. She was on the point of collapse. Yet she did not dare hail a taxi. Taxi drivers remembered you, if you were young and beautiful and terrified beyond measure.

No. There was only one way for her to get home. The cable car.

She stumbled along as fast as she dared in the friendly white mist and began to revive a little.

Until she got the impression someone was following her.

She battled panic. She kept looking back, in a terrified fashion, but her eyes were so blurred by fear, she could make out nothing. So great was her mental chaos, she had to fight against the absurd notion that it was Paul's ghost that pursued her!

She reached the correct corner. Soon the green-painted cable car with its white-painted front, would come clanging up the hill, reassuringly. She heard someone nearby, drawing gasping, frightened breaths. She spun about nervously, pivoting on her high heels so sharply she almost fell. Only to discover she had been listening to her own terrified breathing.

The reassuring jangle of the Sacramento Street car came out of the fog. She scrambled on, thankfully. The car was divided into two sections. The inside, brightly lighted and warm, and the front section by the gripman which was mercifully, dark. She sat huddled at the end of the long bench, feeling her leg muscles twitch with fatigue as though she had been running for hours. The fog blew softly against her face and, gradually, the faintness went out of her.

If only she could stop seeing Paul's face as he fumbled her letters to her. After all, Paul had redeemed himself, in death. He had given her the letters. What was it he had tried to tell her about a doublecross?

She became aware, with a start, that the conductor was saying over and over, "Fares, please," in a sort of monotonous chant.

In frantic haste she dug around in her purse and found a dime. Her fingers felt the packet of letters. She had been afraid to investigate for fear they wouldn't be there. When she handed the coin to the conductor, he wiped it off, as though it were sticky, before he put the dime in his change register and handed her the pennies.

She wondered frantically if she hadn't rubbed that hideous crimson stain from her suede glove.

She took out her handkerchief and

scrubbed away at her gloves, one after the other. When she had finished, she was shaking so that the handkerchief fell from her nerveless hand and fluttered into the foggy street.

At first she was terrified, then she comforted herself with the thought that it was not an initialed handkerchief and it had been washed by Mrs. Rogers at home so there would be no way to trace it. Maybe this was the better way, to rid herself of something so incriminating.

There was a man sitting in the other corner of the long bench. He was just a blur in the fog so far as she was concerned. She couldn't make out his features or anything. She merely had been aware that a man sat there. Afterward, she couldn't remember whether or not he had been there when she got on the car.

A second after she lost her handkerchief, the man swung off the car while it was still in motion, descending in the middle of the block.

The fog had prevented her from seeing him clearly, even as he got off. But she had a moment of panic lest that flutter of white in the fog had caught his attention, and he meant to play gallant and swing back onto the car to return it to her. The cable cars crawled, going up the steep hill. It would be a simple matter for an athletic man to race after the car and board it again.

She waited with bated breath, straining her eyes into the mist.

The man didn't get back on the cable car, however.

Finally, she reached her own street and stumbled off the car. She ran up that steep flight of steps at top speed. It seemed to her that she had been through all this before and she wondered if her mind were playing her tricks. Then she remembered. Of course. She had known this same, blind panic when Paul had jilted her and she had to return to the house she hated so much. Her only thought then was to get back home safely, just as now blind haste motivated her.

She fumbled for the key with fingers gone numb through fear, when she reached the doorway at last. She felt the crinkle of the letters and sobbed a little in her relief. Everything had assumed so much the character of a nightmare that she had wondered if the letters were gone. Perhaps she had dropped them somewhere or they had fallen out of her purse in the darkness. But, no. There they were. Safe and sound.

The key turned in the lock. The door opened. She stepped into the dim hallway of Jardemane House, closed the door behind her, and stood there, panting, feeling safe for the first time since she had left the house.

And then—

"Hello, Julie! Been out?" It was Toby Blair, her cousin, coming down the stairs.

She knew a moment of utter chaos. When had Toby come back? Quite a while ago, evidently. He had on the long crimson brocade dressing gown, turned high about his neck and belted securely around his middle with the long braided cord. Tan lounging slippers were on his feet. His hair was tousled.

She became aware at last that he was waiting for her to make some explanation. Out of the confusion of her mind, she selected something. "I got the last-minute, just-before-the-marriage jitters, Toby," she said, trying to laugh. "I simply had to get out of the house. So I . . . I went for a walk."

Toby had very dark, dancing black eyes and thick hair which waved sleekly, as a usual thing. Now with his hair tousled, he looked very handsome and boyish in the crimson robe, standing on the stairway.

Toby hurried down to stand beside her. "Good thing you got back. Grandmother Amaziah is awake, no less, and in the mood for a family conference." His eyes looked at her inquisitively. "Isn't that the festive suit, darling? The bride's war-time attire?"

Julie felt her cheeks going crimson. She was conscious of the fog crystals on the rich fur of her coat and the smell of damp fur and perfume mingled, which was so alluring.

She gasped, "Oh, my gosh! Don't tell her I wore the bridal rig-out the night before the wedding! I was trying it on, when I got the sudden impulse to go out and walk in the fog for a while to calm my jumpy nerves." Then she added, because she simply had to know: "When did you get back from the Bartletts, Toby?"

He grinned at her. "About half an hour ago. Mrs. Bartlett got taken faint or something, so they called off the game." He made a little face. "I was just beginning to win. I wonder if that had anything to do with the setup. Darling, you wouldn't have an extra twenty tucked away in your camisole, would you?"

Julie was fighting faintness again. She said, "I don't wear camisoles, silly. And I'm the poor relation. Remember?" She started

up the stairs, passing Toby as she went. She had to work fast, if she were to face Grandmother Amaziah in a few moments.

Toby said bitterly, "No. I'm the poor relation around here. I'm not a Jardemane! I made the mistake of having a Jardemane mother and an outsider for a father. You're sitting pretty, Julie. You're a Jardemane!"

Julie tried to smile at him reassuringly. She was used to these outbursts. Toby had been her pal and companion all her life. He lived in a bachelor apartment in Sutter Street, with his father, who never seemed able to make any money. His mother had died, years before. He spent more time at Jardemane House, however, than he did at the apartment which was his normal home. Toby had tried to sign up at the outbreak of war, but a trick wrist kept him out of the armed services, so he was working at a chemical plant in Richmond. He made a good salary, but his tastes were too expensive for his earnings.

Toby went on down into the library. Julie tried to hurry going upstairs, but she seemed to be numb all over. How could she face her grandmother's keen old eyes?

Clinging to the polished mahogany of the wide banister, she went up the stairs to her room. It seemed an endless climb. She made it, at last, and, opening the door to her own bedroom, snapped on the light and shut and locked the door. Then she just stood there, sobbing a little under her breath, though she realized the need for haste. Somehow, she could not make herself stir. If only she could rest for hours or maybe days. But she had minutes to make plans which might mean her future happiness or even her life.

She flung off her hat. As she did so, something caught her glance. A trailing thread with green sequins dangling. One of the round, sequin ornaments had been broken. There wasn't any time to worry about that, however. She put the hat in the wardrobe on the shelf and took off the suede gloves, shuddering as she did so. She had to take time out to wash her hands thoroughly over and over, after that. Then off came the suit. She shook the damp fog from the fur collar as best she could. She folded the skirt neatly and put it across the bar of the hanger as her grandmother always insisted she do instead of hanging the skirt by the tabs. Her grandmother bought men's suit hangers for that very purpose.

She got into her pajamas and heavy corded silk robe. Both pajamas and robe were a

beautiful shade of her favorite turquoise-blue.

She wished she could throw away the suede gloves. But they had been a gift from Derrick. She didn't want to do anything which would lead to questions later. She put the gloves in her bureau drawer. They didn't seem to be stained so far as she could see.

She surveyed the room.

Everything was as it would have been, if she'd stayed at home. If only she *had* remained at home!

The letters! How could she dispose of them?

She thought of telling Derrick everything. No. Men never believed women they loved. And it looked bad. Going to Paul's studio the night before her wedding. No. She must not tell Derrick. Or anybody. Ever.

On the wall in front of her a green light flashed and stayed brilliant. Grandmother Amaziah's method of summoning her household to a conference! She was a little deaf so she didn't like talking over telephones. She disliked climbing the stairs more than once a day when she came from making dinner a formal and ponderous affair. So she had installed a round green light in every room. When that light went on, Grandmother Amaziah was issuing a royal command.

Julie raced to the dresser and put on lipstick, rather smearily, for the lipstick would not remain steady in her shaking hand. She put a film of powder over the red on her cheeks and then saw them go white as the fog outside. But there was no time for a careful application of rouge.

What to do with the letters?

Her mind simply would not work. She finally crammed them inside her galoshes in the back of her wardrobe. The green light on the wall was winking now. That meant Grandmother Amaziah was growing impatient.

Julie tried to stop breathing fast. She wiped off the rouge from her mouth. No use trying to put more on. Her hand would not stop shaking. She went out of her room and up the stairs which led to Grandmother Amaziah's cupola domain.

It was a much larger room than one would have imagined from the location. But the room seemed small now. Because of the people. Julie's eyes went first of all to the huge grandfather clock that predicted weather changes and told about the moon as well as chiming time on

quarter hours. It was chiming now. Eleven o'clock. Julie was horrified. She had left the house at a little before nine. How could two full hours have elapsed?

Patric was there. Patric, who had been a Jardemane butler for fifty years. Mrs. Rogers, the plump, sour-faced cook. Gwen, the parlor maid, whose intelligence wasn't up to working in a defense plant or doing anything really useful, but who looked rather pretty in a fluffy, flossy way with her platinum, flyaway hair and her big blue eyes. Toby, still in the crimson bathrobe, but looking a trifle different, somehow. Julie didn't stop to analyze that difference. Aunt Alethea, fifty years old and looking thirty-five. Sleek, *saue*, well-groomed, slim, with a purple rinse on her white hair and her face carefully made up. She wore her Red Cross uniform.

Only Aunt Arabella and Uncle Peter Farraday were missing. And it seemed they were to arrive. Grandmother Amaziah was telling Aunt Alethea that in her high-pitched, forthright voice so strong for someone past eighty.

Julie said, "You wanted me, grandmother?" and she was astounded to find that her voice sounded natural.

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ACNE TREATMENT

Grandmother Amaziah, wearing a frivolous pink quilted bedjacket, with a tiny lace cap perched on her tiny white-curled head, was staring at them all with her bird-like black eyes.

She said, "I told all these other people I wanted to see them and I told them to keep still about it. I told Derrick to come straight here once he arrived and I instructed Patric to leave the door on latch. Did you do that, Patric?"

Patric nodded.

Julie had a moment of panic. She had shut that door! But Toby's dark dancing eyes met hers reassuringly and he winked the least bit. So she relaxed for a moment, only to begin to worry again. She would have to face Derrick tonight. Now.

Yes. It was, literally, now.

She could hear the flurry of voices and footsteps and even a low-pitched laugh. Aunt Arabella, fat and forty-five, rich and silly. Uncle Peter, severe and important, but awfully nice. Derrick, tall and wonderful in his coast guard captain's uniform. And—

The cupola room became a cabin of a ship pitching and tossing on a heavy sea.

With Derrick was Chris Ames! Chris, whom she had seen at the Mandarin Lantern. Chris, who knew about Paul and had seen her with Paul!

She gave up.

There was a chair nearby. She sank down into it. Aunt Arabella was chattering in her silly way about how foolish it was of Grandmother Amaziah to hold this conference at such a late hour when she could have had it at noon the next day just as well, since the wedding wasn't till one.

Derrick came over and kissed Julie briefly.

Derrick was just someone she had known once. He wasn't her dear love any longer. She thought frantically, "Chris has told him!"

Derrick was explaining that he'd run into his old friend, Chris, whom he'd met in North Africa, at the station. Chris had always wanted to meet Mrs. Amaziah Jardemane, so he'd brought him along.

Grandmother Amaziah deigned to be gracious about that. She was very fond of Derrick. Julie thought sometimes that she preferred him to all her own relatives.

Derrick sat down beside Julie, and held her cold left hand reassuringly in his. So maybe Chris hadn't told. She looked at Chris. Derrick had introduced Chris to

everybody else it seemed. He was introducing Chris to Julie. Chris was pretending he'd never seen her before in his life! Julie almost cried with relief.

Grandmother Amaziah tapped with the cane by her bedside and everybody stopped talking on the moment and looked at her. She said, "I've called you all here to tell you about my will. You have been very anxious to know about it for a long time. Each of you has a good reason for being interested. Toby is always out of funds. Peter needs a huge sum of money to float a big project he has in mind. Arabella wants a new house. Alethea wishes to endow a hospital and so be remembered always for her good works. Julie—" She stopped.

Everyone looked red-faced and angry, but no one said anything.

Grandmother Amaziah fumbled around and brought up a legal-looking document. "This is my will," she announced. "Only one of you has seen this, previously. I will not say which one that is," she added casually. "Neither do I intend to read the will. But I will tell you all what is in it. The servants all receive substantial amounts. Including Gwen. That it, if she is still in my employ when I die."

Gwen gasped, "Oh, yes, I will be!" Then, when Grandmother Amaziah frowned, was still.

The old lady went on, "None of the rest of you get a thing." There was a little angry rustle, but no one spoke, though she waited a moment. "Except Julie." They all turned to look at her. Amaziah went on, "Julie inherits my whole fortune. *Providing* she is married tomorrow. If the marriage does not take place, then she will not get the money. It will be divided equally among the rest of you."

She put down the will and looked around at them all intently. "I have been waiting for Julie's bad blood to assert itself. But it seems that she is all Jardemane." Her voice rang with pride. "So, I shall be happy to make her my heir!"

Derrick looked down at Julie and smiled. She saw his face through a blur of horror. Derrick, tall and handsome and dear. Why was it he didn't seem real any more?

Grandmother Amaziah was dismissing them all in her imperious fashion. Obediently, they all got up to go. Anger stalked the room. Amaziah told Julie to remain. Derrick kissed her and murmured, "I won't wait, darling. You don't want a bridegroom with bags under his eyes, do you?"

She shook her head and he kissed her again, but she didn't feel his kisses at all. He went. They had all gone. Including Chris.

Julie and the old lady looked at each other.

Ever since she had come to Jardemane House, Julie had been afraid of Grandmother Amaziah and disliked her. Now, all at once, unaccountably, she wasn't afraid. Julie said quietly, "Thank you, grandmother. But the relatives needn't have felt so angry. Because they are the ones who will benefit, after all."

"Why?" The old lady snapped the one word at her crisply.

Julie folded and unfolded her hands in her lap. It was her only sign of agitation. "Because I don't think Derrick will marry me," she said in a small careful voice, marveling at herself as she spoke. Her grandmother was the last person on earth she had meant to tell.

But Julie told her grandmother everything. She went back to her elopement with Paul Prentiss when she was eighteen. She told about Paul's murder in his studio, and her frantic rush from the scene.

"Christopher Ames saw me with Paul. When they find out about Paul's murder, he will tell. Derrick won't marry me. I know he won't." She sighed and added in a sudden burst of knowledge she hadn't known she possessed. "You see, Derrick is in love with an ideal. Not a woman. And I was in love with being an ideal to a man. Because of mother, and the way everybody has expected me to turn out . . . wrong, too. Now, just now, I've found out I'm not in love with Derrick the man, but Derrick who idealized me. And if that feeling of his for me disappears, I don't want to marry him. Not even to get your millions, grandmother!" she finished steadily.

Amaziah looked at her with those bird-like black eyes which were so clever and knowing. She said, "I think I like you for the first time, Julie Jardemane. You have acted like a true Jardemane in being honest and telling me all this. I shall change my will tomorrow. I—"

Someone was in the doorway. Gwen, the fluffy parlor maid. She said, "Mr. Toby wanted me to bring you this, please." She had a note on a silver tray.

Amaziah took it impatiently and told the girl to go. She left, closing the door behind her firmly.

Old Amaziah went on talking. "Tomorrow, I shall change my will. I shall leave a little something to each relative so there will not be any hard feelings. The rest will go to you, Julie, without any strings or conditions."

She beckoned the girl to her. Amaziah said gruffly, "I'm sorry we haven't been better friends, Julie. I find now that I love you. Will you kiss me?" Julie bent and kissed her withered lips.

"Go now. I'll think up how to get you out of this mess. Don't tell the police anything. Let them find out for themselves. That's what they're paid for. Good night, my dear."

At the door, just as Julie was going out, she called, "Don't forget to call the lawyer in the morning so I can make a new will."

Julie promised and went to her room, feeling more cheerful than she would have thought possible, a little while before. The bed looked wonderful. She threw off her robe and kicked off her slippers and got between the linen sheets which smelled faintly of lavender and fell fast asleep on the moment.

She slept for two hours. Which was the last restful sleep she was to have for some time to come.

II.

SHE awoke, with every nerve a-quiver. Something had wakened her. But what? Why was her heart jumping and her hands clammy cold?

She sat up in bed and snapped on the bedside lamp. Nothing. No sound at all but the creaking and furtive rustling always found in old houses. As if former inhabitants leave something of themselves behind them, which only come out in the depths of night.

All of a sudden she knew what was wrong.

Grandmother's green light was flickering strangely, flashing on and off erratically.

She snatched on her robe and went racing, barefoot, up the stairs to the cupola room.

The door was open. The room was dark. A wisp of fog drifted in through the window and was swallowed up in the dark depths of the room.

"Grandmother!" cried Julie, her voice shrill with fear. "Grandmother!" She felt for the light switch and found it, flooding

the room with a reassuring glow. Reassuring for only a moment, however.

Old Amaziah wasn't in her great comfortable bed. She lay on the floor, huddled in a heap of silken nightclothes. In her back was a sharp, steel knife.

It couldn't be true! This was some fantastic nightmare. Julie stood there in the doorway, shivering. Some small movement caught her eye.

The green lights which were in each bedroom, connected with a flat, portable switch which lay on Amaziah's bed. By simply pressing a button, the light flashed on in the particular bedroom marked.

Mystery, the little white ball of a kitten, so named because his eyes were unfathomable, was playing with a bit of silken string. The string was across the portable switch. Every time the small paw tapped the bit of silk, the light flashed on in Julie's room!

Julie stumbled across to her grandmother. She stooped beside her, weeping a little and breathing fast. The old lady's hand was still warm.

As if that fact released some pent-up dam within her, Julie screamed repeatedly over and over. And people came crowding into the room.

Everybody who had been there earlier that night. For it seemed the old lady had asked them all to stay. All except Derrick. Surprisingly, Chris Ames was among the lot of hysterical, gasping, crying people who hurried to old Amaziah when it was too late.

Chris, with his blue eyes very bright and his mouth set in a thin line. He, of all the rest, wasn't undressed.

He swore when he saw the little old lady on the floor. He said angrily, "I'll get the police!" Then, somehow, he got Julie out of that room with him. As he hurried her down the stairs with him, he said swiftly and urgently:

"Shut up about being at Paul's studio tonight. I'll do the same. That would be enough to hang you."

She didn't comprehend. Her mind seemed to have closed up. She shook her head. "It doesn't matter now. I told grandmother." Then she realized that Amaziah was dead and there was no one to help her. And how had Chris known about Paul's studio?

They were on the second flight of steps now, leading to that dim lower hall. Chris had snapped on the light from the top of the stairs. He seemed to know his way about the old house. He saw Julie's look

of surprise and said, "I used to live in an old place almost the twin of this. Only ours was over on California Street. Did you ever make friends with the carved lion on the newel post?"

That steadied Julie as perhaps he had known it would. "Ours is a grinning dog," she explained.

Chris said swiftly, "We haven't much time. I'm on your side, Julie. Get that. You're going to need a friend, I'm afraid, before this mess is over."

She asked the question nagging at her mind. "How did you happen to be here?"

He didn't answer that directly.

"A cameraman gets to have a second-sight or something about things due to break. He deals in violence. Battle and murder, sudden death and fires, explosions and runaways and crashes. I got one of my famous hunches tonight. So I asked Derrick if he wasn't going to stay the night here at Jardemane House. He was shocked at the very idea, though he said he had a room at his disposal. So I asked him if I could use it, since I just blew into town and it's harder to get a room in San Francisco than to creep into the mint and lug out a gold bar. That was perfectly true, by the way. So Derrick said to use his room for tonight."

Julie said, "I'm glad you're here, Chris." And she meant it.

Chris took up the telephone and dialed the police. He asked for Lieutenant Price of the homicide squad. They must have switched him to Price's home for there was a delay.

Chris put his hand over the mouthpiece. "If we can keep you out of this Paul Prentiss thing, I think everything will be all right for you. You're the one person who wouldn't want your grandmother bumped off while that will was in force. If she lived, there was always the chance she might change it."

There was something the matter with that reasoning, but Julie couldn't think straight enough to find it. A band of pain was pressing around her head and her eyes ached and burned.

Someone answered. Chris said, "Hello, Price, sorry to dig you out of your downy, but something big has broken. Old Mrs. Anthony Jardemane got bumped off a few minutes ago. . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . That's right. Yep. I'll take charge till you get here. 'By.'"

He replaced the phone and turned to

Julie. "You get back to your room," he said. "Get dressed. Have a drink if you keep the stuff around. Just one. No more. You've got to keep a clear head!"

He bent close to her, so his whisper was so low no one could have overheard, possibly. "And get rid of those letters!" he whispered. "Burn them and flush the ashes down the drain! Move fast now. I've got to get back upstairs and take charge till Price arrives."

It was only when she was in her own room, frantically flinging on her clothes, that she was struck with an astounding thought.

How could Christopher Ames possibly have known about those letters? Unless he, Chris, had been in the studio. Which might mean that Chris himself was the murderer!

She had put on the first thing which came to hand in the wardrobe. It was a soft white wool with gay peasant embroidery on the skirt. It wasn't the correct thing for a house of death.

She went to the wardrobe again to get the letters. She burrowed in the galoshes. First one, then the other. No letters. She looked on the floor and under the rest of the neat row of shoes, tumbling them in every direction. No letters. They had disappeared.

She knew then the calmness of utter despair.

As she sat back on her heels, flushed and disheveled from her efforts to find the letters, she heard the chime of the front door and the sound of many feet tramping up the stairs.

She flew to the wash basin and cleaned her hands, smoothed back her hair with a comb and shook out her skirt. Even in the best run of houses, dust does accumulate in the far corners of a clothes closet. Cleaning the upstairs bedroom was Gwen's job. She hated dusting. She said dusting hurt her wrist and spoiled her hands. On Julie's dress was a smear of black where she had sat back on her heels after her unsuccessful search for the letters. She could not get the smear off and there was no time to change.

Someone was knocking at the door and asking her to come upstairs. Immediately.

She went out, feeling as if her knees had disappeared. A policeman in uniform had come to escort her it seemed. All the paraphernalia of sudden death in a big city had been set into motion by Chris' phone call. There was the smell of photographic flash bulbs in the air. Fingerprint

men had smeared everything with some sort of powder searching for prints. Grandmother Amaziah's body was gone, but there was a chalk mark showing where it had been and there was a dull stain which horrified Julie so she could hardly stop looking at it. The medical examiner had gone along with the body of the little old autocrat who could no longer order the lives of those under her domination.

Price, the homicide chief, was a dapper, well-dressed, dark-haired man. His eyes reminded Julie of Amaziah's, they were so knowing and smart for all they were a deep ebony in color. He was tall, but he didn't seem so because he was so slim. He talked very softly and sometimes he sighed.

He sighed as he looked at Julie. "So, another beautiful dame, eh? Can't you gorgeous girls keep out of murders?"

One of the policemen was holding Mystery, the small white kitten. The animal didn't like being held. It struggled and then bit the big policeman with a small, frightened mouth. The policeman let out a bellow and hit the small furry creature such a blow that it went halfway across the room.

Instantly, Price stooped and picked up the kitten. He said, "I'll break you for that, Hannigan. You are relieved from duty as of now. Send Murphy in."

The policeman gasped, "But the cat bit me!"

Price looked at him. "Send Murphy!" was all he said.

He gave the cat to Julie. It burrowed in her arms frightenedly. "Now then," he said sadly to her, "why did you kill your grandmother?"

Gwen, the maid, spoke hysterically, before Julie could open her mouth, "Because Mrs. Jardemane was going to change the will, and cut Miss Julie out. Tomorrow morning she was going to. I know. Because I heard Mrs. Jardemane say just that when I went up to take the old lady Mr. Toby's letter!"

Julie stared at Gwen's weak, vindictive face, and was appalled by the hatred she saw in those hazel eyes. "Why, Gwen! It wasn't that way at all! Grandmother—"

She got no further. The hatred of the whole family flooded over her, overwhelmed her, inundated her. Incredibly, she heard Aunt Arabella's malicious voice: "It simply proves what I've always said! Bad blood will tell! Julie schemed and plotted

to get my mother's fortune. When my mother told her she was being cut out of the will, Julie killed her!"

Aunt Alethea's level tones took up the fearful litany of hate. "Yes. I know mother. It was like her to make us all furious by saying she meant to leave us nothing. When all the time it was just a joke on her part, and she fully intended making a new will, dividing everything between us. So Julie killed her, before she could put pen to paper!"

Uncle Peter's pompous voice boomed. "The girl was always a schemer, Lieutenant Price. There is no doubt of her guilt!"

Julie was stunned. Had this naked hatred against her been rife in this house, always? No wonder she had felt alone and desolate! Her heart rocked. Wouldn't anyone stand up for her?

Someone did.

Her cousin, Toby. He came over and took her cold, shaking hand in his. "All this is utter rot!" he said, in his cheerful way. "Julie wouldn't hurt a fly!"

Mystery, the ball of white fluff, which had been cowering in Julie's arms, suddenly, in illogical cat fashion, wriggled out of Julie's grasp and jumped to the floor.

Daintily, he sniffed at the ominous jagged chalk outline, which marked the place where an old lady had died by violence. His fur fluffed up. He spat, showing white teeth, flanked by a very pink mouth. He fled headlong from the room.

Price watched, with alert, ebony eyes, which noticed everything. He saw Julie's involuntary start of horror as something met her gaze. He said softly, "What is it, Miss Jardemane?"

Julie was staring at the huge grandfather clock. The one which had come from France, long, long ago. "It's stopped!" she whispered thinly. "It's stopped at thirteen o'clock!"

She was remembering that other clock in Paul's studio, which had pointed to one. Which always translated to thirteen—and bad luck, to her.

Price went on, being elaborately casual, "Mind coming with me, Miss Jardemane?" just as if Julie had any choice in the matter.

With an effort, she tore her gaze from that clock and asked, "To jail?"

Price shook his head. "Not yet. Just to some place where we can talk. Alone!" he emphasized, looking around the room.

Chris said abruptly, "You ought to get a

lawyer, before you answer any questions, Julie!"

Price murmured, "Suppose you come along, Chris, to see she gets fair play. No coaching from the sidelines, however," he added reflectively. "And no pictures, till I give the word."

Chris snapped, "I'm off duty. I'm on a vacation for a month, till I go on active duty at the front again somewhere."

Price shrugged, "Once a cameraman, always a cameraman." He went toward the door.

Julie caught sight of herself in the round, antique mirror, with the eagle atop the gold leaf frame. The mirror took in everything. Herself, slim, white-faced, terrified. Price, implacable, wiry, dangerous. Chris, big, tall, blond and somehow dependable. And the relatives and staff of Jardemane House banded together in a background for the three of them. A background exuding hatred of Julie.

She was glad to quit that awful room where Amaziah had died by violence, and a small white kitten had summoned help. The very walls seemed secretive, holding some evil knowledge of death.

Price led the way. He went back to the clock. "Why did you say the clock pointed to thirteen o'clock, Miss Jardemane? Old clocks are supposed to stop when their owners die, aren't they? Isn't that a popular superstition? Your grandmother died at one in the morning. One o'clock starts the twenty-four hours of the day, Miss Jardemane. Surely you know that!" He looked at her almost angrily.

Julie sighed a little. "I was always afraid of thirteen o'clock. Ever since I was a little girl," she said unwillingly, her voice thin and far-away sounding. "That clock, with the twelve numerals around the outside and the others numbering up to twenty-four, in the inner circle, always frightened me." She forced herself to stumble on with the explanation. "You see, the hour hand was a little short. So it never seemed to point to the outer one, but always to the inner, thirteen. And to me, that was ominous."

Price said sharply, "Did anyone know about this extraordinary phobia of yours, Miss Jardemane?"

She shook her head drearily. "No. No one. I was ashamed that I couldn't conquer this foolish fear of one o'clock. Which always translated itself into thirteen in my mind. No. I never admitted it to anyone. Though I think Grandmother Amaziah

guessed. She used to make me go up to her room, when I was little, and tell the time when it was one in the afternoon. When I came back and said one, she corrected me always, and said: 'In this house, we use the Continental method of telling time. It is thirteen o'clock.'"

Unconsciously, Julie had mimicked the cracked, didactic voice of the old woman who had been murdered that night.

Chris said, "You poor kid!"

Price said nothing at all. Nothing seemed to surprise him. Seemingly, he had taken possession of Jardemane House and everyone in it. He went to the library and entered. Odd that he should have chosen the room where Julie had been punished for small, childish sins in the past. She felt the old terror of wrongdoing found out returning a hundredfold, as she came into the room which smelled of old books and the well-seasoned leather of big easy chairs.

As was the custom in old San Francisco houses, Jardemane House hadn't been centered on the ample lot. Instead, it had been crowded over to one side, to stand cheek by jowl with the house next door. All the windows on that side were dummy affairs, giving no outside light.

The Jardemanes, characteristically, had placed a stained-glass window in the library. It abounded in yellows and reds and had an electric light outside which shone through it, giving the effect of bright sunshine. If the subject of the window had been more cheerful, the idea would have been charming. But it wasn't cheerful. It depicted Lucifer, falling from heaven. Underneath in Old English letters, was the legend: "The Wages Of Sin Is Death."

They sat down. Suddenly, Price made his handkerchief disappear. One minute it was in his hand, in a limp ball, the next it was gone. Julie blinked and looked at Price with suspicion. He said softly, "Where did you get that dirt on your dress, Miss Jardemane?"

She flushed guiltily. "I . . . I don't know." Her tongue stumbled over the lie. "I . . . I wasn't noticing what I put on. Why does it matter, anyhow, that my dress is dusty?" That last word slipped out, betraying her.

He pounced on it. Almost sadly, he said, "Ah! Then it is dust on your frock, Miss Jardemane? Indeed! And what was it you were looking for so earnestly, in those few minutes before the police came?"

Julie shook her head, wordlessly.

He did not press the question, instead he

asked, "What is your version of the sentence the maid, Gwen, heard as she entered Mrs. Jardemane's room with that letter?"

She told him. She didn't make a very good job of the telling for Price was playing with objects on Grandmother Amaziah's desk. He did amazing things. The pen became a pencil when he picked it up. A small red box of stamps changed into the round blue box containing paper clips. She couldn't help watching him, and it took her mind off what she was saying.

Chris sat forward abruptly. "Stop it!" he bellowed so loudly the very books on the shelves seemed startled. "Stop deviling her so she can't think straight!"

He turned to Julie. "He used to be a magician. He can't forget it. He put himself through U. C. doing those stunts. Now, it comes in handy, to put witnesses off what they're saying. It's a damn dirty trick!" He glared at Price. Price paid no attention.

There was a knock at the door. A policeman said something. Price asked sharply, "Are you sure?" Then he came back and asked Julie suddenly, "Have you an alibi for ten o'clock tonight?"

She couldn't take in what he meant. "Alibi?" she stuttered, a frightened pulse throbbing in her throat.

"A-l-i-b-i!" spelled Price very softly indeed, which made him seem all the more dangerous. "An alibi for ten o'clock. Because, Miss Jardemane, I've just had word that about ten, Mrs. Jardemane took poison administered in a neat little gelatin capsule which delayed action for about three hours. We're not sure of the exact time, because, just as the poison was beginning to take effect, the murderer stole into that poor old lady's room and stabbed her in the back, as she staggered across the floor, seeking surcease from the burning horror of the pain which was twisting her frail body, and—"

Julie cried out in horror for him to stop.

Price switched a coin from one hand to the other. In the left hand, it was a big silver dollar. In the right hand, it became a small silver quarter. "For my money, this wasn't such a pretty setup. I don't like people who go around giving old women poison and then stabbing them in the back," he said softly. "I don't like them at all."

He was as menacing as a delayed action bomb about to go off. Julie knew all the menace was directed at her. He thought her guilty of this monstrous crime!

She found that she was icy cold. Yet

perspiration broke out on the palms of her lovely hands, and she seemed to burn with fever.

Price was waiting for an answer to his question. She fought to drag her full attention back to what she must say. Her mind was all jumbled and ideas were bumping into each other in a confused, horrible way, which left her at loss for words.

Suddenly, it hit her with the full force of a body blow.

She had been at Paul's studio at ten! She knew utter panic then and she drew an audible, sobbing breath.

Through the drumming of blood in her ears, she heard Chris saying casually, "Look, Price. Be a good sport and keep this under your hat, won't you? Julie was out with me at ten o'clock. I'm her alibi."

He looked a very stalwart alibi, too.

She almost cried in her relief. But Price got that alert, excited look in her eyes, and her terror returned, doublefold.

"So you and Chris are old friends, Miss Jardemane! How interesting. I should have said he was rather out of your orbit. Not that he isn't as much social news as you if he wanted to play at it. But, no. He's shunned the society stuff and, consequently, doesn't rate with your nitwit set. So how come you know Chris Ames so well?"

Before Chris could speak and save her, Julie, used to telling the truth, had answered, "I met Chris at Paul's studio—" Then she stopped, appalled by what she had said. She left the sentence unfinished. It seemed to vibrate against the old books and the stained-glass window, with its terrifying picture and warning inscription, which used to frighten her so very much when she was a child.

Price said, as if he spoke to himself, "Ah, yes! The studio. Naturally." He tossed up his handkerchief again and when it came down it was a little packet of paper. He opened that packet as if in surprise and Julie saw a few glittering green sequins. Sequins which could have come from a green hat. She gave up hope.

"Well, I think that will be all tonight, Miss Jardemane. Don't try to go anywhere till I give you permission. Chris, come along with me, if you please."

So Julie was left to climb the long stairway again. Alone. She wondered why Price hadn't asked her more about Paul's studio. Or the sequins from her hat. But her mind was too weary to wonder much and the

stairs were almost more than her legs could manage.

It seemed to her as if she could *smell* hatred in the very air she breathed in this old house. Suddenly she was afraid. Because she knew she hadn't killed Paul Prentiss nor her grandmother. But she was certain that both murders in some way tied in together and were inexorably joined. And the murderer might strike again! She made her weary legs hasten and she reached the top of the stairs, and stood motionless, trembling.

The telephone rang again, just as it had done earlier in the evening. A blue-coated shadowy figure answered. With one small part of her mind, she thought, "The police got that upstairs extension fixed right away. Or was it put out of order in some manner, as part of this plan for murder?"

The policeman was saying, "It's for you, miss."

"At this hour!" She knew it was stupid to be so conventional about time, when murder stalked. But it did seem odd.

Derrick's voice came to her. It was very familiar, like the echo of a once-loved melody, now not important at all. He had just heard the news, it seemed. "Darling, we're going to have the wedding as scheduled. Your grandmother would have wanted it that way. After all, we are only going to have a very simple ceremony in the wartime manner, so this should make no difference."

That should have made Julie rapturous with happiness. But it didn't. It left her cold. She said faintly, "We'll talk about that in the morning, Derrick. Come over early. We can discuss everything then."

She knew she ought to say something more. She looked at the big, old-fashioned engagement ring on her finger. The flashing stone had belonged to Derrick's mother and he hadn't wanted her to change the setting, though the ring was too heavy for her slim, well-formed hand. She forced herself to add, "Thank you, Derrick. For everything." Then she replaced the phone quickly, and sat there shivering.

A small sound in the dark hall startled her, and she was reminded of that sound she had heard the other time as she finished speaking to Paul.

Someone appeared before her abruptly, and she screamed in a choked, terrified sort of way, before she realized it was Price, materializing out of thin air like one of his own magic tricks. He said, without any

apology at all, "Better think it over, Miss Jardemane. It's not nice to be married for money. It never works out." He added, when he saw she didn't understand, "I was listening in on your chat with Derrick Farr. We'll always be in on the wire from now on, till this case is cracked." He added that, as if in warning.

Still she didn't speak.

He took some papers from his inside pocket. "We've got a nice organization, despite war-time conditions. Everything works slick as grease. Take these, for instance."

He tapped the thin packet of papers with a slim forefinger. Illogically, she expected it to turn into a mouse or something.

"In this packet of papers, we've got the dope on all the Jardemanes. You all need money. Your Uncle Peter wants more campaign funds. He'd like to be governor. That takes in your Aunt Arabella, too, of course. Your Aunt Alethea has promised to endow a hospital wing. If she doesn't get her inheritance, she'll have to veto that pet project of hers. Your Cousin Toby is head over heels in debt."

He selected one sheet of paper out of the lot. "This is your own case history, Miss Jardemane. Complete even to the fact that you did a lot of posing for the late Paul Prentiss and even went so far as to almost elope with him once."

Julie's eyes blurred with terror. He had said, "The late Paul Prentiss." So he knew. She gave up hope. She might as well go straight to the gas chamber and wait for death.

Price had something more to say.

"Derrick Farr is a fine chap," he said. "His slate is clean as a whistle. Except for one thing. He needs money, too. Like the very dickens. His prominent family hit the financial skids some time ago. It was up to him to marry money. I figure he's the one who knew about your grandmother's will leaving everything to you. Your butler, Patric, claims Derrick Farr is the one your grandmother told about the will."

Julie felt as if she were standing in quicksand. "I don't believe that!" she cried. She thought of something else. "The will was made six months ago. We only set the date for our wedding a month back! Yet the will mentions tomorrow as my wedding day. How do you explain that?"

Price sighed, "Your cook, Mrs. Rogers, says she overheard your grandmother tell Derrick Farr exactly what day she wanted

you two to be married. The interview took place a month ago, according to Mrs. Rogers." He added, "Don't marry a man who only wants you for the money you'll bring him. Not even to get a fortune, don't marry such a man, Miss Jardemane. It isn't worth the price."

He went off abruptly, leaving her standing there, looking after him with a white face and utter desolation in her heart.

III.

It was eight when Julie got up. She hadn't been able to sleep. She had dozed fitfully, only to wake with a start, living over again the awful moment when Paul had died, and the horror of finding her grandmother murdered.

She thought dully, "This is my wedding day," and had to clench her hands tightly at her sides, to keep from beginning to shiver convulsively again.

Mrs. Rogers came in with her breakfast tray. She looked at Julie as if she feared her. Her eyes were red-rimmed with weeping. She put the tray down on the bedside table and said, "The light is on. I'd best turn it off."

With a soft click, the light Julie had kept burning all night to drive away the horrors, was gone.

It was gloomy and dark in the big, high-ceilinged room without the light. The day was foggy. This time, the fog wasn't charming and friendly. It dripped damply from the eaves, and misted the window-panes and crept into the very house itself, like misery personified.

Julie gasped, "I didn't kill my grandmother, Mrs. Rogers. Why should you think such a thing of me? After all these years!"

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The fat woman sniffled. She said harshly, "Why were you out with that man, the very night before your wedding to that nice Mr. Derrick Farr, if you weren't up to no good?"

Julie's head began to ache as if something were tied around her forehead too tightly. "What do you mean?" she whispered thinly.

Mrs. Rogers went on, "I went to the Mandarin Lantern with my friend, Miss Casey, since it was her birthday we were celebrating. I seen you, as plain as I see you now!"

Julie said wearily, "What are you going to do about it, Mrs. Rogers? Go to the police?"

The woman shook her head vigorously. "I don't hold with policemen. The Lord will punish you in His own way, if you are guilty of this horrible thing. Oh, my poor mistress, a-lying there, with her poor blood all over her—" She fled sobbing.

Gravely, Julie went into the shower, and as the warm water lashed against her body, she thought about her grandmother and she was glad that at the very last, they two had understood each other, a little.

Gwen came in to make the bed and do up the room, while Julie was dressing. She, too, seemed terrified of Julie and she scuttled about nervously, with her head down, doing everything fast, in order to get out.

Julie put on a black wool dress with a crescent of black sequins on the shoulder, the only ornament. Seeing the sequins, made her remember the small shining discs which had fallen from her green hat somewhere. She looked up on the shelf in the box where the green hat was kept. The box was empty. Quickly, her hands went along the row of dresses neatly suspended on the hanger. The white dress with the dust on it was gone, too. And the green suit had been gone over. The skirt hung now by the cloth tabs, instead of being folded across the bar of the hanger as her grandmother had taught her to do.

There was a small square mirror on the back of the closet. Looking into that by accident, she saw that Gwen had stopped her rather futile dabs with the carpet sweeper across the thick gray pile of the carpet. She was watching Julie and in her stupid, pretty face was a reflection of the same malevolence which had been there the night before.

Julie swung around. "You know about my clothes having been gone over?" she

asked crisply, fighting to keep the surging anger out of her voice. "Did you help the police?"

Gwen began running the carpet sweeper at a great rate, trying to pretend she had not heard the question.

Julie snapped, "Gwen, stop that! Answer me!"

Gwen turned. "Sure, I helped the police!" she told Julie. "I was glad to do it. While you was down, bein' grilled by the big shot, I helped them go over your clothes closet with a fine-tooth comb. They took samples of the dust. They found out your wedding suit had been wore in the fog. They took your hat away and your suede gloves, your white wool dress and your galoshes. Because they said something had been hidden in them. There was a little scrap of paper tore off, like off a letter. And there was a stain that was maybe blood!"

Out of the welter of utter helplessness, Julie asked, "But why should you hate me so much, Gwen? I've always been nice to you. Why were you so nasty to the police last night about me?"

Gwen cried, "Why shouldn't I hate you? You, with your stuck-up airs and not any prettier than me, and yet you got plenty of dough and swell clothes to wear and men crazy about you. Sure, I hate you!"

Julie suddenly couldn't stand breathing the same air with the girl. "Get out!" she snapped. Her eyes fell on the tray of breakfast, now cold. She hadn't wanted anything to eat, in the first place. Now the sight of congealing coffee and cold toast nauseated her. "And take that tray with you!" she added.

Gwen said, "Wait on yourself if you want anything done you . . . you killer!" She went racing out of the bedroom with her carpet sweeper, dust cloths and mops.

Julie became aware that the door was open and the policeman stationed in the upper hall was laboriously taking down everything in a little black book. She thought, "Well, who cares?" and shut the door with a bang.

Then she sat down abruptly, because her legs were trembling so. She thought, "I wish that coffee were hot! I'd drink some and maybe I wouldn't feel so groggy." She decided she would take a couple of sips of the chilled coffee, anyhow, when someone knocked at the door and came in immediately.

It was Derrick. But a Derrick she never

had seen before. He looked as if he'd been up all night. His uniform, usually so pressed and perfect, looked wrinkled and, somehow, degraded. He needed a shave. His eyes were bloodshot.

He said, "I had to break through a cordon of reporters and press photographers. Even Chris Ames was out there, taking a shot of the outside of the house." He acted as if it were all her fault.

She felt a little more forsaken, if that could be possible. So Chris had joined the wolves ravenous for details of a hideous, exciting crime in an old important, rich family. Even Chris.

Now she was completely alone. Because she had lost Derrick. She knew that as thoroughly as she knew Grandmother Amaziah was dead.

Derrick had closed the door behind him. He came over and stood in front of Julie. "I loved you. I paid you homage I would have given a saint in a niche. God help me, I thought you were a saint!" His mouth twisted as though in pain.

Julie knew there was more he had come to say, but he could not find the words. Instead, he fumbled in the deep side pocket of his thick greatcoat and brought out a packet of letters stained a hideous crimson and tied incongruously with a blue ribbon.

She gave a little gasp of horror.

The letters she had written Paul! The letters she had hidden in her galoshes deep in the recesses of her clothes closet.

He dropped them into her lap. She hadn't strength to push them off. They lay there, mocking them both.

"Where did you get these, Derrick?" she whispered.

He shook his head. "I don't know. They arrived by special delivery a couple of hours ago. They were mailed from this zone."

He looked at her and there was agony in his young face. "I'd have trusted you with my life, Julie. I'd have given you my heart to step on. I'll never get over this. Never. I can't be hypocrite enough to go through the mockery of a wedding ceremony with you. Now I know you are a murderess! Oh, Julie, why did you do it?" His husky, bereaved voice vibrated against her eardrums so violently she almost fell.

She said, "I didn't kill Paul nor my grandmother, Derrick," but she knew he couldn't hear her. He had made up his mind. She was condemned.

Oddly enough, that didn't seem to

matter. Perhaps because she had accepted it in her own mind that they would not be married. Perhaps because suddenly, for no reason save that she had been through hell, Derrick had become an outsider. Someone who did not matter.

She was sorry for his suffering. She took off the old-fashioned ring and gave it to him and her hand felt lighter and, somehow, happier because the ring was gone.

There was something she had to find out, though. She stopped him as he was almost at the door. "Were you marrying me for the inheritance you knew I was to get from grandmother, Derrick?"

He stopped. He looked at her across the huge chasm stretching between them. He said slowly, "Yes. I was in love with you, though, Julie, for what I thought you were. But the knowledge that you were going to inherit a lot of money helped. Your grandmother told me, the first time I talked with her. Later it was she who set our wedding day." He seemed to have trouble going on. His eyes looked tortured. He burst out, "But I'm not a fortune-hunter, Julie. You must believe that. Otherwise, I'd be marrying you today, anyhow."

He went out, closing the door quietly behind him.

So Price had been right.

She looked down at the letters with the horrible, brownish stain across them. She hated to touch them. But now they had come back into her possession, she must obey Chris' orders and destroy them. She didn't think Derrick would tell the police about them.

Only there wasn't time.

She heard Price's voice outside in the hall. Hastily, she slid the packet of letters under the cushion of the slipper chair in which she sat. She was just in time.

The door opened. Price came in, followed by Christopher Ames, with a flash-box slung across his shoulders. Once a cameraman, always a cameraman, Price had said. Again he had been right.

She looked at Chris coldly. Plying his trade, was he?

In the old days, at Paul's studio, Chris had been her friend. He was always doing small services for her. Smoothing her pathway. Making her laugh.

Looking back now, with wiser eyes, she realized that he had tried to keep her from falling in love. He had tried to save her from Paul.

She realized, all of a sudden, that Chris

was very good-looking. Especially, with his blue eyes dark with emotion. Usually, they looked out of place in his tanned face. As if they'd strayed out of some Norseman's blond face, and were surprised to find themselves in such bronzed company. Now they looked dark enough to belong.

Price said meaningly, "Chris is on vacation from movie news, but he got himself a job on the *Evening Standard* as cameraman to cover this case. So he's here officially, Miss Jardemane. All reporters and cameramen have been barred by the Jardemane family, but you're in technical possession as head of the house. You can throw Chris out or give him permission to stay." He added deliberately, "He needs money badly for some purpose, he informs me. This job will net him a neat sum."

Chris' mobile lips tightened angrily, but he said nothing. His eyes looked at hers meaningly. She thought, "I hate Chris for this. But he's the only one I have left, to turn to."

Aloud, she said quietly, "I'll give you permission to take any pictures you choose in this house, Chris."

Price looked surprised, and, she thought, a little chagrined.

Chris, on the contrary, was delighted. His eyes danced and some of the tautness went out of his long body. "We'll start with a couple of shots of you, Julie, if you don't mind," he said briskly.

She did mind. Horribly. But she had let herself in for this. She merely nodded, and kept her gaze on Price.

As Chris fussed around the room, getting the right picture angle, Price said suavely, "A few more questions, Miss Jardemane," and she tensed with terror. Was he going to arrest her now? He went on in that casual manner, "If it isn't too much to ask of you."

She couldn't decide whether he was polite naturally, or whether the way he said things conveyed his contempt. She nodded again and waited, tense in every nerve.

"Let's go back to the very beginning, Miss Jardemane," said Price, taking out a quarter and tossing it into the air. It didn't come down again. Instead, he stooped and picked it up off the rug near the chair leg.

Determinedly, she put her attention on Chris taking a picture. She jumped nervously when the flash bulb blazed in her eyes, and was terrified lest the brown-stained packet of letters slide out of her chair.

Price murmured, "Nobody seems to have an alibi for ten o'clock last night but you, Miss Jardemane. Of course, you were with Chris." He waited for her to say something, but she didn't open her lips.

He went on, "Your Aunt Alethea left the Red Cross rooms well before ten. Your Aunt Alethea was on her way home from a party which she had left abruptly because her tooth started to ache. Your Uncle Pete was alone in his room. None of the servants in the house saw him during the period from nine to quarter to eleven, when he and your aunt joined forces and left in their car for Jardemane House, summoned, we know now, by Madame Jardemane. Your cousin, Toby Blair, left the bridge game at a neighboring house when his hostess got faint and wished to terminate the game. Mainly, he thinks, because he was beginning to win at the time. Your butler, Patric, was at the movies. Or so he says. Mrs. Rogers was out somewhere. Gwen, the maid, was in Sausalito visiting a girl friend from eight until ten, or so she says." He shrugged. "So you were the only one in this house at say, nine o'clock, weren't you, Miss Jardemane? That is, excepting Madame Jardemane, of course."

She said before she thought, "But I heard someone, just as I was replacing the telephone. Someone was here in this house. Lieutenant Price. I heard the small clatter the mahogany rings make when the portiere is pulled over or touched in any way"

Price almost purred. "Ah. So you were at the telephone at nine o'clock, Miss Jardemane. How interesting. You didn't tell me that last night. Who called you, Miss Jardemane?"

Chris took another shot of Julie and the police officer and the room, as he said casually, tossing the used bulb into the dainty wastebasket, "Oh, that was yours truly, Price, making the date to see Julie."

She looked at him gratefully.

Price said in an annoyed tone, "Didn't I tell you to keep quiet if I let you come along, Chris?"

Chris shrugged. "Who's saying anything?"

Price dug around about why Chris wanted to see Julie. Chris cut in with the answer to that one, casually. "I was in love with the kid. Always have been. I wanted one more crack at making her change her mind and marry me, before she took the final step with Derrick Farr. You see, I'd met Derrick in North Africa. He's a swell

chap and all that, but I didn't think he was the right one for Julie. I didn't think she was in love with him. I figured she was just marrying him because he'd given her a big rush and she didn't know the difference between love and being flattered because somebody was dippy about her."

Julie gasped. Price heard. He said, "He came pretty close to your real reason for getting married, didn't he, Miss Jardemane? So you could cash in all that dough of your grandmother's. Providing you got married today." His eyes bored into hers.

Julie cried frantically, "It wasn't like that at all! I thought I was in love with Derrick!"

"Ah! So now you aren't in love with him. Is that it?" pounced Price.

Julie's voice was even. "The wedding is off, Lieutenant Price. Which is my business, not yours."

"Everything connected with a murder is my business!" said Price silkily. "So he brushed you off when he found out you'd been out with another man the night before your wedding day? Is that it?"

Julie gasped. "I—"

Chris put in warningly, "Me, Julie. He's talking about me."

Price's eyes glinted, but he abandoned the subject with a swiftness which was frightening. "How was it you happened to come to your grandmother's room at the dead of night?" Ever so slightly, he accented the word, happened.

Julie explained again, wearily, about the lights which flashed on in my bedroom when Mrs. Jardemane pressed the button on the moveable switch.

"So a kitten, playing with a bit of silk string, caused your light to flicker on and off, waking you?" cried Julie wildly.

"It's the truth!" cried Julie wildly.

Again, he made one of those swift subject changes which were almost as bewildering as his legerdemain tricks. "Why should the grandfather clock stop at one, in your grandmother's room? Any reason you can think of?"

Julie shook her head. "I don't know why it should have stopped. It kept wonderful time. I never have known anything to be wrong with that clock since I came to live at Jardemane House." She decided to tell the whole truth, so she continued, "I think perhaps someone stopped the clock at thirteen to terrify me." She pleated a fold of her skirt with shaking fingers. She was thinking of that clock in Paul's studio. And

her terror. But she couldn't tell Price that. Instead, she went on, stumbingly, "On account of my fear of thirteen, you know, the . . . the murderer must have stopped the clock to . . . to unnerve me and make me seem guilty."

It sounded thin, even in her own ears. Truth often does.

Price said, "Ah! But you said no one knew of your fear of thirteen, Miss Jardemane!"

Chris took another picture, making rather too much noise about it. So she knew she'd put another strand in the noose around her neck. Only, they didn't hang criminals any longer, in California. They put them in a little room, and gassed them to death, like small, unwanted kittens.

Price said, "I've set the inquest at four today. Everyone concerned will have to attend. Unless I crack the case before then."

He got up to go. The inquisition was over for a while. He hadn't arrested her. He wasn't sure. Though Julie thought he was convinced she was the killer.

He looked at something on the breakfast tray. Abruptly, he said, "Mind if I drink this orange juice, Miss Jardemane? I'm thirsty."

She nodded, dully, and he picked up the glass and raised it to his lips.

Instead of drinking it, however, he set it down so quickly some of the liquid slopped over on the highly polished surface of the mahogany table and seared the finish. His face looked bleak, as he whirled on Chris and Julie; "Was that a trick? Did you figure on me going for that stuff?"

He saw by their startled faces that they didn't know what on earth was the matter. He answered his own question. "No. Of course not. It wasn't meant for me. It was a present for you, Miss Jardemane!"

Julie asked, in a stifled voice, "What was for me?"

"Potassium cyanide!" he snapped back at her.

She felt as if she were on a sky-rocket hurtling through space. "Someone . . . tried to . . . poison me?" she whispered. Chris was swearing. Price was at the door, shouting orders.

In seemingly no time, the room was filled with people. Fingerprint men. Lab men. Cameramen. Price let Chris take the first picture of the breakfast tray, with Julie standing beside it, looking numb with terror. Chris strolled out in the midst of the general excitement and did not come back.

When everything had been done, Price summoned everyone in the house to Julie's room. He began a grilling which was merciless. Uncle Peter had begun a tirade against an important man like himself being detained in the house. But when Price snapped at him that murder might strike any one of the Jardemanes, Peter subsided.

Toby came over and took both Julie's hands in his. "I'd have been in before to see you, sweet, but the police have kept us all apart and under a most polite system of surveillance. How are you? All right? You must make Price let you out in time to be married. You've got to claim your inheritance."

Julie's eyes filled with tears at the kindness of his voice. "No wedding, Toby," she said huskily. "Just one of those things."

He looked concerned. "Did Derrick let you down? The dirty dog!"

She shook her head. "It wasn't like that at all. Truly it wasn't."

Toby said, "I'll look out for you, Julie. Don't worry about losing the inheritance. Part of what's mine will be yours, kitten!"

Price snapped, "Quiet! Do you mind!" Everybody was still on the instant.

He began to talk. Julie didn't listen. She looked at the Jardemanes and thought they seemed to have shrunk, somehow, during the night. For the first time, Alethea looked old. And Arabella's foolish, fragile prettiness was a caricature of itself in the morning light. Uncle Peter seemed to have aged years, and even Toby looked grayish around the mouth.

She thought, "One of us is a two-times murderer! One of the people in this room killed Paul and then Grandmother Amaziah. And tried to kill me." Some of the terror which had held her bound in a sort of vise of horror, seeped away leaving her suddenly very angry.

One of those people, the Jardemanes, or the three servants, or Derrick Farr or even Chris Ames, had killed twice and tried to make it a cycle of three.

Price was doing some of his abominable sleight-of-hand tricks as he talked. A coin disappeared only to appear out of his well-polished shoe or on the point of his elbow. While he did these things as if he practiced to keep his hands cunning and clever, he said:

"This is a case where two murders are to be considered together. Because they belong together."

A little rustle went over the room. A stir of interest. Or was it fear?

Julie thought, "How long can I stay in this chair without attracting notice? I've stuck here like a burr this long. But when will things come about so I have to get up? How long will it be before my letters to Paul are discovered?"

Price went on doing his magic tricks and talking. "A photographer named Paul Prentiss who had offices in the old Montgomery Building, was murdered last night. At least two of you people in this room know Paul Prentiss. I'm going to call the roll on that, then I'll tell you how he died and how it all ties up with the killing of Madame Jardemane. Because, of course, if it hadn't been for you Jardemanes, Paul Prentiss would be alive today."

He whirled on Uncle Peter. "Did you know Paul Prentiss?"

He got a frosty shake of the head from him and from Arabella, his wife, and from Toby. To Julie's surprise Alethea said slowly, "Yes. I knew him. He did some photographs of me about ten years ago. I believe they won a prize for him. I haven't seen him in years however."

Price nodded as if that confirmed something he had found out already.

At last, it was Julie's turn. "How about you, Miss Jardemane? You knew him, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Julie. "I posed for him four years ago. Just my hands and feet and ankles. Because I needed money. My grandmother didn't give me much spending money."

To Julie's intense surprise, Price didn't question her further. Instead, he turned to the staff. Patric said he'd never heard of Paul Prentiss. So did Mrs. Rogers. Gwen looked frightened. She said she wasn't sure, but she thought he was the gentleman Miss Julie used to meet on the sly.

Julie thought furiously, "How she lies! That girl would love to see me die. And I've always been so nice to her!"

Price went on doing his magic tricks. Now he was flipping his handkerchief into all sorts of colors. At one time it was a blue handkerchief, at another time red, and then it went back to white again.

Aunt Arabella cried hysterically, "Stop that! Stop it, I say. You're driving me crazy with those silly tricks."

Price apologized, but even as he did so, he got a coin mysteriously out of the handkerchief and the coin landed in a chair next

to Julie. She could feel it. Price was over like a flash, picking up the coin before Julie could touch it.

Price said gravely, looking around the circle of faces again, "Two people have died. Another life has been threatened. You must all be very careful. You are at liberty to go where you like, but do not leave town, and you will all be expected to attend the inquest this afternoon at four."

They filed out. Price sighed and looked sad. "You could have tried to pull the wool over my eyes by poisoning that orange juice yourself, you know. You're not in the clear." Then he drifted out.

Julie waited till she was sure he was gone. She raced over to the door, closed and locked it. Then she looked under the cushion of the chair for the incriminating letters. They weren't there! For the second time, they had disappeared!

She knew, of course, that Price had taken the letters.

She sat numbed with horror, feeling at any moment it would be all over and she would be arrested.

Chris came later. She was still sitting there.

He'd picked up a lot of news it seemed, but first he wanted to know if she resented him making money out of her tragedy.

She said carefully, in a prim voice, "Why, of course not, Chris!"

He took her by the shoulders and shook her, hard. "Snap out of it!" he said roughly. "Use your head for something besides a place to park your hat! I'd have been barred from this house if I hadn't pulled the job gag. Price figured you'd be so sore you'd fire me out on my ear. That's why he let me get away with it. Otherwise, I'd be cooling my heels outside, with the rest of the monkeys," he added, "Besides, I needed some coin. When this fuss is all over, I want to step you around some. And that takes dough!"

She felt happy all at once. "Forget it, Chris!" she said.

He told the news. Everything on her tray had been poisoned! "Someone sure was gunning for you. They've had Rogers down at headquarters on the grill and she's swearing to high heavens she had nothing to do with poisoning the stuff. Gwen is more hard-boiled, but she is shouting plenty she's in the clear. Ditto Patric, the butler, and all your relatives."

"Where did they get the stuff?" she asked, shivering a little.

"From Paul's studio, I guess," he said slowly. He added, "I was there, Julie. I might have been the one to lift the cyanide."

"You!" she gasped. "You were at Paul's studio?" She felt like dying. It couldn't be Chris. It just couldn't!

Chris understood and gave her a disgusted glance. "I was trailing you, sap!" he said. "I was with one of Paul's models at the Mandarin Lantern." So that was why the girl looked familiar, thought Julie, with one small part of her mind. "I ditched the girl and followed you. I got the idea something was up, when I almost collided with you, as you raced out of the building as if a dozen ghosts were chasing you. I went up to see what gave and saw Paul dead on the floor."

He took a crumpled bit of stained sheer linen out of his coat pocket and showed it to her. "I trailed you again. I was the guy who jumped off the cable car and picked up your handkerchief. About then, I decided I'd better contact Derrick. So I'd have an excuse for being around if you needed me." He put the handkerchief back into his pocket, carefully.

"How did you know Derrick would be at the station?" asked Julie.

"I'd had a letter from him, saying he was in L.A. on a detail. I had taken some stills of him in North Africa. He wanted some prints of those right away. That gave me a swell excuse to be at the station. By the way, his train was plenty late," he added. "Which probably signed Paul Prentiss' death warrant."

Julie had to ask something. "Did you see the murderer, Chris? Do you know who did it?"

Chris looked very bright-eyed. "Technically, nobody murdered Paul Prentiss," he

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told her. "Although, I suppose, the intent to kill constitutes murder."

"What do you mean?" gasped Julie. "I was there." She shuddered. "I saw that sharp little knife wing its way through the air . . . and kill him!" She twisted her hands together in horror at the memory.

Chris shrugged. "Which wouldn't have killed him. Not by a jugful. Because that little knife didn't go in far enough! The person responsible for these killings is a weakling without much strength. Paul had so weakened his heart by taking a drug, to avoid serving his country, that he died of heart failure when he got nicked by a knife that drew a little claret."

He walked up and down as he talked.

Julie got a mental picture of the Jarde-manes. Arabella, silly, frivolous Arabella might be the one, then. Or Alethea, who wasn't so strong for all she boasted about the number of things she accomplished in a day. Or hateful Gwen. Or old Patric, the butler. But not Uncle Peter or Toby. They were both strong.

Chris was talking on. "Somebody in this outfit of wolves knew about the will. They figured on a swell doublecross."

Julie interrupted, "That . . . that was what Paul said, as he died. He cried out loudly something about a doublecross."

Chris frowned and snapped his fingers aimlessly. "Yes. I can figure that, too. Here's the way it must have been. Paul was on the rocks financially and was in the market for dough, no matter how dirty. Someone who knew him knew this and also knew about your little escapade with him. So they contacted him and planned this piece of dirty work. Paul was to get in touch with you and, somehow, get you to go to the studio with him. Then Derrick was to show, find you with Paul, learn of your 'past' and it would look plenty bad for you. Your family must have known that Derrick was the sort of guy whose women had to stay on a pedestal. Or else no wedding. And no wedding meant no chance for you to inherit a couple of million bucks. And that meant that the relatives would inherit instead of you. Yeah, it all clicks!"

Julie said, "It isn't that much money."

Chris grinned at her in an absent-minded sort of way. "Well, say one million then. It seems all your relatives could have done with some ready cash just now. Only something went wrong with the scheme. Somewhere along the line, the scheme backfired

Derrick didn't show up. Evidently, Paul was to get paid, after the blow-up. He got worried, phoned your house and talked to the guy who arranged things. Probably said he couldn't hold you at the studio much longer or something like that. So the person he talked to came and bumped Paul off."

Julie interposed, "No. Paul put down the telephone as I came into the room. It wasn't more than a couple of minutes later that the knife was thrown."

Chris nodded as if that confirmed something. "Two of 'em, Julie. One, the actual killer. The other, a willing helper. One to do the dirty; the other to answer the telephone."

Julie whispered, "But why kill Paul?"

Chris' eyes went dark. "They couldn't leave him alive to go blabbing the story. And maybe collecting more from you than they would have been ready to give. No. From the moment the scheme backfired, Paul's number was up."

Julie said slowly, "I like knowing what must have happened. It's so much better than wandering around in blackness, stumbling against murder without reason, with no pattern or form!"

Chris patted her shoulder. "Steady, Julie!"

She looked at him. "All at once, Chris, I find I'm angry," she said gravely. "My grandmother *wanted* me to have that inheritance. But one or maybe two of my relatives have committed murder to defeat my grandmother's wish. I'm not going to let them get away with it." Her eyes blazed. Her cheeks were very red. "I'll beat them yet. With your help, Chris!"

He looked surprised and wary. "Me?" he asked.

"I want you to marry me, Chris. Today. So I can inherit grandmother's money under her will. It didn't have to be Derrick I was to marry. Just somebody grandmother would have approved of. I won't presume on this marriage, Chris. It will just be a matter of form. And if I turn out to be guilty, which, I assure you, I am not, I know enough law to be sure they won't let me have any of the money. So you won't be committing any crime." She added, "You happen to be the only one I can ask."

Chris didn't say anything for a moment. When he did speak, he surprised her. "I don't go for corny stuff like marriage-in-name-only. Not me. Sure. I'll do you a

favor and marry you so you can collect a million or so in cold cash. But it'll be a real marriage. Get that?" His face was stern.

She looked into his level grave eyes, and knew suddenly that things could never be the same with her again. In the future, she would not belong just to Julie Jardemane. In that moment, she surrendered her heart to Chris Ames. This time, she wasn't figuring on a marriage because she was being put on a pedestal in a niche. This time, it was going to be real. She had fallen in love with a man who was almost a stranger to her. A man who hadn't so much as kissed her, ever. It was very frightening.

She said aloud, "Third time lucky!"

He looked surprised. "Come again?"

She didn't explain. Instead, she just looked at him with her heart in her eyes, and waited.

His kiss showed her she hadn't made any mistake.

IV.

THEY were married at thirteen o'clock!

That was the only thing wrong with the wedding. Even with as much pull as Chris had, it took some time to cut red tape and go through the formalities. At exactly thirteen o'clock, Julie was standing by Chris' side in a tiny church. He had firmly vetoed a City Hall wedding. Julie was wearing a big corsage of orchids and she had a shining platinum wedding ring on her finger.

And Chris was kissing her long, ardently, and most satisfactorily. Astoundingly, Price was on hand, throwing rice and rose petals!

Just then, a clock struck. Not once, but thirteen times.

The clergyman explained that it was a French clock and struck up to twenty-four chimes. He seemed proud of his clock. But even Price and one of his men, who had acted as witnesses, seemed a little startled, and, Julie decided, almost shaken.

She was shaken, too, when Price took away her orchids and her platinum ring and told her she must go back to Jardemane House alone. He brushed off the rice, carefully, too.

"I told you I'd consent to let you go through this ceremony on one condition," he said firmly. "This is it. If you and Chris go back to the house together, everybody will know the truth on the moment. You

might as well hang signs on your backs reading 'JUST MARRIED.' No, Miss Jardemane. I ought to arrest you for Paul Prentiss' murder. I have plenty of evidence to do just that." She shuddered. "But in my heart I don't think you are guilty. So I'm playing a hunch. I'm giving us a little more time to find the person who really did these killings and meant to hang them on you. There will be plenty of policemen to guard you. You needn't be afraid."

But that was before they knew about the fog. That thick white spindrift which had threatened to lift around noon and even let a few rays of sunshine through for Julie's marriage, and then closed down again and this time, made an excellent job of it. The white mist was so thick that objects loomed dark and ominous when you were almost upon them and it was impossible to see more than a couple of feet ahead.

Once every ten years or so, such a fog enshrouds the City by the Golden Gate, and when it does, business is suspended and every person exists for a while in an isolated white-wrapped world of his own.

Julie thought it was a little like being a ghost, and she shivered a trifle as the thought slid across her mind.

She came to Jardemane House just as the fog was thickening in real earnest and she hardly could see the edge of the steps as she went up slowly, and reluctantly.

In front of her was Jardemane House. Tall, gaunt, old, menacing. Death had struck there. It seemed to her that Death had not yet gone. That it lingered, waiting, waiting—

She shook off her fear and put her key in the lock and came into the house bringing some of the fog with her. It drifted along the dimly lighted hallway in front of her like a cold spirit of some departed soul.

She thought of Chris and felt warm and safe, on the moment. She was Christopher Ames' wife! How wonderful that was. With a sudden flash of intuition, she knew that she had not been grown up enough to appreciate Chris when she had known him four years ago. Chris would demand an adult love, not a silly, girlish fascination.

She went into the drawing room and walked over to the fire, drawing off her gloves as she did so. The fire wasn't blazing cheerfully as it did usually. Perhaps the fog was drifting down the chimney. She took off her coat, wishing she had been married in something else save black, and

shook it, and the fog crickled as it met the flames.

"Hello, Julie!" said a voice behind her.

She started and whirled about, nervously, trying to remember whether there had been any uniformed policeman lounging in the hallway. She rather thought there hadn't been.

It was Toby Blair, she saw with relief. "Oh, Toby, how you frightened me!" She laughed.

"Been out? How did you swing that?" Toby sounded aggrieved. "Price told us all we could go, but when any of us so much as stuck our noses out, he'd pounce. Finally, Uncle Peter got furious and rang up the Commissioner or somebody, so they all went off in a huff. Aunt Arabella and Aunt Alethea and Uncle Peter."

Julie said, "Price wanted to ask me some questions at headquarters." That was the story Price had told her to tell.

"So long as they think you're out of the running and can't inherit, you'll be safe enough," Price had said. "But once they find out about this wedding, you've signed your death warrant!"

She thought of that now, as she took off her hat, and tossed the hat and coat on to one of the stiff chairs with the petit-point seats.

Toby said, "You poor kid! They've given you a bad time, haven't they?" He pulled a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket and gave her one. They lighted up and smoked in silence for a while, sitting in front of the fire, with the white fog blurring the windows and the fire sputtering as dampness came down the chimney.

The house seemed quiet. As still as it had been last night.

Last night? It seemed a million years ago!

Toby said, "Have they found out anything new? The police, I mean?"

She shook her head. "I don't think so. It was so awful, stabbing grandmother, after— Why kill her twice?" There was a sob in her voice. Just thinking about it, and remembering, was too horrible. It wiped out the warm glow she had felt during the marriage ceremony. The glow which had lasted till the clock struck thirteen.

"Don't, sweet!" said Toby gently, putting his arm around her. His arm shook a little, Julie thought.

She smiled up at him through tear-dimmed eyes. "Toby, you are a dear!" she

said. He stooped and kissed her lightly in answer.

There was an angry gasp from the doorway.

They both whirled nervously. No one was in the doorway now, but Julie was sure she hadn't imagined that sharp intake of breath. Even when Toby said she must have done so, after he'd looked in the hall and reported no one around. She wondered if he were lying.

She went back to talking about why her grandmother had been poisoned and then stabbed. Toby didn't want to discuss it and said so, but Julie said soberly, "It would be easier to forgive the person, if he had struck grandmother in the heat of anger. But this—"

By some trick of the firelight Toby's face seemed gray instead of rosy from the glow. "It must have been because someone had no alibi for ten o'clock and a good alibi for one in the morning," he said huskily.

Something nagged at the back of her mind. Stopping the clock at one must have had some significance. The murderer took precious moments to open the door with the ponderous key hung on a chain by the side of the clock, and then more moments to do something to the mechanism so the clock would stop at one. Just to terrify Julie! To frighten her so much, she would seem guilty, because of her very fear. Guilty of murder!

A climbing rose grew outside the long French windows. In the white mist, it looked like a hangman's knot, swaying there menacingly. She jerked her gaze away.

Her thoughts went on, "One of the Jarde-manes must have known of that fear of mine for the numeral thirteen on Grandmother Amaziah's clock. One of them must know how deeply ingrained was that childish fear! Which one of them used the stopping of the clock as a signature to crime? Which one?"

Toby said, "Why the ferocious frown, darling?"

"Nothing." Abruptly, she added, "I wonder if the fingerprint man tested the inside face of grandmother's clock for fingerprints? I know they dusted the outside glass and the hands. But what about the face of the clock itself?"

Toby said, "The person probably wore gloves, Julie. All the best criminals do these days." He was staring deep into the fire.

Julie shook her head stubbornly. "No. I tried to stop that clock once, when I was a child. I had on gloves. I couldn't manage it till I took them off. You have to get your fingers underneath and there isn't room enough with gloves on. The clock hands are difficult to stop."

Toby got up abruptly and offered her a drink. Julie almost accepted, then she remembered Price's warning about not eating or drinking anything in that house till he gave the word. So she refused.

Toby seemed a little miffed, then his customary good humor returned. "Since I can't cheer you up, darling, guess I'll blow. That is, unless one of the gendarmes stops me! Don't think they can see me, though, in this fog. It's one of the best shows San Francisco's ever staged. I'll bet even the news-hounds have taken a powder!"

Julie looked at him with real affection. She wanted to tell him about her wedding, and have him congratulate her, but some small measure of caution restrained her. She merely smiled, and went back to contemplating the leaping flames.

She heard the big front door bang behind him.

Suddenly, the house was very still. Frighteningly quiet.

Early afternoon, yet the old house was dark as night. Little creakings sounded. The same sort of whisperings which stirred an old house after nightfall. They sounded very loud in Julie's ears, after the small silence which had held the quality of waiting in its depths.

"Miss Julie!"

She started violently, her nerves twanging.

Gwen stood in the doorway. Gwen, pretty, not very bright, sullen. Gwen, with the kitten, Mystery, clutched in her arms. "I found the kitten shut up in the broom closet, half starved, Miss Julie," she said. "Heaven knows I hate cats, but I'm sorry for the creature. Them policemen have taken everything out of the icebox. Mrs. Rogers has some milk in her room, though. Can I give the cat that?" She added irrelevantly, "Mrs. Rogers won't speak to me, so I can't ask her."

Julie answered at random. "Give me the kitten. I'll see he's fed."

Her mind wasn't on what she was saying. All at once, in the tricky way minds have, when you're not working at remembering, she had recalled who knew about that fear of thirteen o'clock of hers.

She felt cold, all over. The coldness came from her head and went to her feet, slowly

enveloping her in ice. The ice of sheer terror.

Toby. Toby Blair, her cousin. Toby was the one. In a burst of childish confidence one time, she had told Toby. She remembered clearly now.

Dimly, out of a haze of horror, she reached for the kitten. Mystery wriggled out of her grasp and started upstairs on the double, seemingly following a distinct trail, with his small, pink nose.

Gwen cried, "Follow him, Miss Julie. Get the cat. Mrs. Rogers thinks he's possessed of the devil. She'll kill him!"

Julie heard her through the chill fog of fright, thicker than the white mist outside. Toby. He was the one. And she almost had told him of her marriage. Had been on the verge of signing her own death warrant.

Toby had gone. Of course, he had gone. With her own ears, she had heard the bang of the front door. That might have been a trick. He might be hiding out in that dimly lighted hall, with the fog creeping in, waiting for her to come out, so he could kill her!

She gave herself a mental shake. Price and Chris would be along any minute now. She was perfectly safe. She would tell Price everything and he would arrest Toby and that would be that— What was Gwen saying? Oh, something about the kitten.

Gwen always had hated Mystery. Why was she so concerned now? But she must get the kitten. Julie began running up the stairs after it. Gwen faded away into the shadows.

With the perversity of cats, Mystery went conveniently deaf, as Julie called his name. His fluffy plume of a tail held high, he bounded up the stairs joyously, with Julie in hot pursuit.

Afterward, she couldn't tell when it was she heard the sharp explosions outside in the fog which sounded like shooting. She thought them simply backfire from a car sliding in the fog.

The kitten did not stop at the second floor. He went bounding up the third flight of steps, still with his nose down, sniffing.

Julie hesitated. The cupola room was at the top of the stairs. Grandmother Amaziah's room, with the chalk mark on the floor and the clock stopped at thirteen.

Mrs. Rogers had her room on the third floor, too. Gwen had said Mrs. Rogers might harm the kitten. Julie couldn't abandon the small cat callously, because of her own fear. Fearfully, cautiously, she began to climb the third flight of stairs. She was glad the light was on. It wasn't much of a light, set so high

in the ceiling, but it did make some sort of beacon.

It was only when she was halfway up, that Julie realized there didn't seem to be any policemen around. No solid, comforting figures denoting law and order.

Long after, she was to know that the policemen were all out in the rear garden, colliding with each other in the thick mist, groping fruitlessly, swearing helplessly. The murderer had taken those spent flash bulbs of Chris' from the wastebasket and tossed them out the rear window one after the other. When they hit on the pavement below, sharply, like shots, all the policemen abandoned their posts, leaving the stage set again for murder.

Julie reached the top floor just in time to see Mystery's fluff of a tail disappear into Grandmother Amaziah's cupola room through the partly opened door.

Shutting her trembling lips firmly together, Julie made herself go to the door and push it wide.

Illogically, she was thinking, "I know now why Toby looked differently when I first came home from Paul's studio. Under that handsome lounging robe of his, he was fully dressed. Later, he took off his clothes, and then the robe fitted him better. What a fool I was, not to have remembered that earlier."

The light was on in Grandmother Amaziah's room.

That was reassuring, somehow. She couldn't have stepped into blackness.

Mystery was at the far corner of the room, by the grandfather clock, rolling in an abandonment of delight on a clump of fresh catmint leaves.

Suddenly, Julie knew such terror that all the other fright she had experienced was a mere curtain-raiser.

Someone had left a trail of catnip on the two flights of stairs. So Mystery would come to this room and lure Julie there!

Here, at the top of the house, the deep-throated baying of the foghorns was very distinct. The sound boomed mournfully against Julie's ears, like the tolling of funeral bells.

The grandfather clock began to strike.

That startled Julie so she cried out in a forlorn sort of fashion. Someone had been up here, wiping off telltale fingerprints and had started the mechanism of the clock. It was striking twelve or something. Julie couldn't be sure what. Her terrified ears were deafened by the sound.

It seemed to merge into the memory of

the ringing of the telephone. The ringing which had started a trail of murder.

The door closed, just as the light went out, plunging the room in darkness.

A voice whispered out of that darkness: "You thought I was pretty dumb, didn't you, Julie Jardemane? But I've shown you all how smart I am! I've got what I wanted. Money. Lots of money. You can't get anywhere without money, and now I've got it. You're the only one left in my way. And you are next!"

Julie couldn't tell, for the roaring in her ears, whether the whispering voice belonged to a man or a woman. It was just a voice. The voice of death!

It went on, in a horrible gloating fashion: "I planned it first so you'd lose the money when your high-hat Derrick Farr found out you were no better than you should be and caught you with your lover, Paul Prentiss, at his studio—the night before the wedding. But Derrick Farr's train was late and he didn't get my message. So Paul had to die. To shut him up. I've got a bum wrist so my knife didn't do the trick. But Paul died, anyhow, and I found it was fun to kill!"

So it was Toby, thought Julie dully, remembering Toby's trick wrist which had kept him out of the army.

She had to keep him talking. "Why did you kill Grandmother Amaziah twice?"

The whispering voice answered that promptly. "Why, to make them think you did it, of course! I'd already given the old lady the poison in the gelatin capsule. I told her it was a new sort of vitamin pill. I couldn't take any chance on her not dying. Something might go wrong and I wouldn't get a chance to stab her, later. But if I could stab her, after fixing it so that kitten would light the green light in your room, so much to the good! Somebody had to be guilty of the old lady's murder and I've always hated you and I had to fix it so there wasn't any way for you to get our money! It was lucky I did look out for everything, too. I know you got married to somebody, to try to cheat us out of our money."

"How?" Julie forced the one word out of her hoarse throat.

"I saw that kernel of rice on your coat when you shook it in front of the fire. I knew then, you had married somebody. Anybody. Just to cheat me out of my inheritance! But you're not as smart as I am. You won't cheat me! Because I'm going to kill you. Now."

Julie stood motionless, with the chimes of the clock striking thirteen echoing in her

head, and the horror of the darkness pressing in upon her, and the fear of death like alum in her mouth.

Somewhere in the darkness, death was rushing to meet her. Unknown death. She did not know who it was or how the person meant to kill her. The horror of the unknown gripped her in a vise from which she could not free herself.

And then something ran across her feet, lightly.

She was alive again. She was no longer gripped by such horror that she was numbed. She went racing across the room, so familiar to her that she knew where things were, even in the pitch-blackness. She found the portable switch with the buttons which turned on the green lights in every bedroom. She pressed them with frantic fingers one after the other. And then she dropped to the floor and rolled under Grandmother Jardemane's bed.

She could hear the murderer looking for her, softly, furtively, making small snuffling sounds like some hideous animal deprived momentarily of its prey. Julie locked her fingers tightly together and began to pray, her eyes closed.

She must have lost consciousness for a moment.

When she came back to being aware of things, light burned against her eyeballs and there was a scuffling and excitement in the room. Above everything, she heard Chris frantically calling her name.

She crawled out from under the bed, feeling rather silly, now that there wasn't any more horror.

Price was swearing steadily and fluently at his men for having abandoned their posts. Chris jerked her up bodily into his arms and held her close, crying her name over and over in a distracted sort of way.

Julie gasped, "But . . . but all the time I thought it was Toby!"

Chris' arms tightened around her. "So did the lieutenant! We shadowed him. That's what we were doing. But Toby hadn't anything to do with this. Except that he had married her! In a foolish moment of infatuation he's been regretting ever since. That's why he was home, with his bathrobe on,

when you came into the house, after Paul Prentiss' death. He'd been in her room, waiting for her to come home. But he didn't dream she'd been bent on murder. He thought she'd been visiting someone, somewhere."

Chris went on: "I know you are fond of Toby, dear. He didn't know a thing. He's in the clear. It was he Paul Prentiss talked to on the telephone, but Toby didn't understand the message at all. That's what gave Paul the idea he'd been doublecrossed."

Julie clung to Chris. She looked around the room, slowly, fearfully. At the kitten, Mystery, busily playing with the catnip. At the clock which was ticking away merrily, away off the correct time. At Price, absent-mindedly making his handkerchief disappear as he kept on steadily bawling out his men. At the policemen who were holding a snarling, spitting human being with a revolver in her hand and a look of fury in her hazel eyes.

She screamed. "I almost won! I almost killed you! I can see in the dark. I was watching you. My wrist is weak so I had to take careful aim. And then that damn cat ran across your foot and you began to run. Damn, damn, damn!"

Gwen! The fluffy-haired, silly parlor maid, who had married Toby in order to inherit a fortune. Gwen, who had committed two murders to get the money she coveted so much. Gwen, who had plotted and schemed, with death always by her side.

Julie said, "Chris, please take me out of here. I want to go on my honeymoon."

Gwen spat at her, as Chris carried her out of the cupola room.

Price sighed a little as he began, "Gwendolyn Blair, I arrest you for the murder of Mrs. Amaziah Jardemane and I warn you that—"

The grandfather clock was all mixed up. The hands had been turned backward by Gwen when she rushed up to set her booby trap and wipe off her fingerprints from the clock face.

The clock began to strike again, melodiously, sonorously. It sounded like tolling. A deathknell. For Gwen.



DEATH in a DORY

By EDWARD RONNS

*Hidden treasure and lost ships, romance and murder—
a story of the sea in all its mad fury.*

THE yellow dory slid easily over the huge ground swells that rolled out of the gray North Atlantic. There was a low overcast and the sun was a vague patch of brightness behind the clouds. The wind, which had died at noon, was cold and biting again, spitting spray regularly over the two men in the boat.

The dark man in the bow wore a red flannel shirt and stained corduroy trousers. He spoke softly over the gurgle of the dory's wake.

"Don't make me mad, Luke. I don't want to be mad with you. The sea killed him and the sea has kept him."

There was an empty hip boot among the blue lobster buoys in the stern of the dory, and when Luke Galway stared at it he thought he would be sick. He was angry about that. He was tall and blond, and he pulled at the oars with a rhythmic, powerful stroke. Joao Minoa sat behind him, and for the first time Luke was afraid of him. He could feel the Portugee's stare, and he thought hard about the fish knife strapped to Joao's thigh. He was surprised that he could imagine Joao plunging the blade into his helpless back.

"The old man was proud of those boots," he said. He felt a thickness in his throat. "He wouldn't be careless with them. He wouldn't lose them in the lobster pot lines."

Joao's voice came from behind him. "A lot of fishermen get lost at sea. You and me, we know that. Dad Frazier isn't any different. You and me, we'll end like this, too. But maybe he drifted south; maybe he's back now."

Luke said savagely: "You know he won't be back."

"Maybe not," the Portugee said, very softly. "Better stop it now, Luke."

"Jessie said you were with him last."

"Sure. Last night."

From the corner of his eye, Luke saw black rock slide by, and he pulled harder,

guiding the dory into the shelter of India Cove. "Last night," he said, "he was talking about that Cuban schooner."

"He was always talking about her."

"Not like last night."

Luke could have recited Dad Frazier's story of the *Estralita* word for word. It had happened fifty years before, when the skipper was in the old Life Saving Service. The stranded schooner had spilled cargo and crew high and wide along the North Shore. Twenty survivors at the Craven Chasm Station were snowbound with the crew for four days. Before help came three of the Cubans were dead, murdered. The others were manacled and separated. Although the station crew knew no Spanish, Dad Frazier questioned the ship's agent and wrung from him a garbled story of gold bullion destined for one of South America's inevitable revolutions. From there the yarn turned into a treasure-hunt legend. Six expeditions delved in Craven Chasm, but no trace of gold was ever found. It was Dad Frazier's favorite story, this oft-recited tale of bloody murder. No treasure was uncovered, however, and Luke was sure none ever had existed.

He took a deep breath as the dory grounded on the beach. He shipped oars and followed Joao's thick figure, dragging the heavy boat to safety above the high water mark. Luke Galway was a head taller than Joao, his yellow hair pasted on his forehead by the spray. Joao Minoa was short and chunky, and his black eyes met Luke's with a bitter stare. Joao's long arms twitched as they measured each other on the darkening sand.

The Portugee wiped his mouth.

"Sure, the old man's dead," he said suddenly. "And I was with him when he talked about the treasure last night. He was talking wild, yes. He said he found it. He said the storm did something to the chasm. You were there, with Jessie and Spruelle. I helped him shove off in the dory, too. I

told him not to go. So what? So the sea killed him."

Luke said: "You had a fight with him over Jessie, didn't you? He told you not to expect to marry her?"

"He said she is for you. You think I drowned him for that?"

"Not for that, no."

"Then for what?"

Luke said tightly: "You always believed that crazy story about the *Estralita* treasure."

Darkness gathered on the spray-swept beach. Joao's eyes suddenly glowed. He made a queer sound in his thick throat, then, without warning, he lunged at Luke's tall figure.

The Portugee's attack was like an animal's. His heavier weight drove Luke back across the sand while his thick fists sledged into Luke's stomach. The pain doubled him up and he clinched, hearing Joao's breath whistle in his ear. He brought up his arm to counter a sudden vicious swing at his head, then swung hard at Joao's contorted face. There was a little spurt of stinging sand, and Joao's weight was off him.

Luke scrambled to his feet. A hard-shod foot kicked at his ribs. Anger swept him, and he drove at the Portugee's squat figure. The soft sand slid away under their swirling feet and they both toppled again, rolling over and over down the long dune. Sea grass cut painfully at Luke's face.

Then Joao's knife flashed. The Portugee was insane with rage now. Luke grabbed wildly for his wrist. The Portugee wriggled like a snake, obtained leverage, and the knife began to descend—

Jessie's voice, high with terror, came over the gasps of the struggling men.

"Joao! Luke! Stop it! Stop!"

For a moment the two men still grappled, then sprang tensely apart. They stared at each other, breathing heavily, then Luke looked at Jessie Frazier.

She was tall, and the wind tossed her hair high in a golden stream from her small patrician head. She wore a brown cardigan sweater and a plaid skirt, with a rippling white silk scarf tossed around her throat. Her cheeks were red with the cold and the salt spray.

The man with her, Herbert Spruelle, was as tall as Luke, but wider and thicker, with a round face and eyes that were always secretly amused. His hand rested possessively on Jessie's shoulder. It was a soft, white hand, with a heavy ruby ring on the

middle finger. Luke knew very little about Spruelle except that he had come as a summer visitor and had stayed at the Crow's Nest, lingering into the early winter.

Spruelle spoke with a Beacon Street accent. "This is no time for you fellows to tangle like that. Did you find anything on the skipper?"

Luke said flatly: "We found his boot."

Jessie's face whitened. "Just his boot?"

"That's all. I'm sorry."

The girl spoke quietly. "The marshal called and found dad's dory. It was badly smashed, near the chasm. Dad must have gone there."

"That damned treasure yarn," Luke said. "He was still looking."

"Yes." Jessie glanced from Luke to Joao. "What were you two fighting about?"

Joao spoke thickly: "We decided dad's lost for good, Jessie."

"Why fight over that?" Spruelle said.

Joao said: "Luke thinks I killed him."

The girl's eyes were wide on Luke Galway's brown face.

"Did you say that?"

"No. But I think dad was killed. He was too smart to get caught in a dory around the chasm. I think somebody killed him because of the way he talked about finding that treasure."

"Maybe he did find something," Spruelle suggested.

"That's foolish," Luke snapped.

"Well, Joao believed it."

Joao made a sound, a thick word, and Jessie moved quickly between the two men. Her voice was tired under the quick agitation.

"We're all upset. You two go on up to the Nest and get some supper. The marshal wants to see you later, Luke, at his office. Herbert and I are going to search down to Gull Cove. We'll be back soon."

Joao said abruptly: "To hell with all this."

He strode off without anyone stopping him. Jessie stared, then looked at Luke. She started to speak, but said nothing. Luke glanced angrily at Spruelle, then kicked at the sand and walked off, leaving the couple standing there, hidden by the dusk.

The Crow's Nest was shaking in the wind that swept the hill as Luke climbed the shell path and pushed open the front door. A brass ship's bell tinkled softly through the darkness of the house. He snapped on the lights as he went in, pulling down the black-out blinds on the seaward side. It was a fine

house, he thought. It was home, from its rugged granite base to the widow's walk that crowned the gabled roof.

He shivered queerly and wiped his face, surprised to find blood on his cheek. Joao's knife had nicked him a little. He went up the curving white stairs to the skipper's room, fitted out like a ship's bridge with its bay window commanding the sea. The brass fittings of the *Estralita's* wheel glistened through the darkened doorway.

No one was at home. He washed blood and sand away and changed his salt-soaked clothes for a blue suit and white shirt. He wore no tie, liking the freedom of an open throat. In the kitchen he made coffee, drinking two cups with his somber eyes fixed on the doorway. No one came in.

For twenty years, the house had been home and the skipper a father to him. To Joao, too, ever since Dad Frazier fished Joao and Luke from the sea off Fippennies Ledge the night their fathers were lost in the foundering of the dragger *Elsie D.* No one else had been rescued. On the pretext of saving red tape, Dad Frazier had taken the two seven-year-old boys into his house to fill the aching void left when Mary Frazier died. Now the old man was gone, lost somewhere. Murdered somewhere.

Luke shook his head and pushed aside the coffee pot. Shrugging into a trenchcoat, he left the house, bending into the dark, spray-drenched wind. At the float he looked for the *Two Pals*, the lobster boat he and Joao owned jointly. The white mooring buoy bobbed free. Luke shrugged, wondering where Joao had taken the power boat, then trudged up the road to town.

Marshal Weems was a man of gentle voice and manner, with sad sun-washed eyes and a smooth, pink face. His back was to the windows of the dingy police office, and he shuffled papers off the desk with clean strong hands when Luke came in. The gusty wind made the glass panes rattle behind the blackout curtain. His pale eyes never left Luke's brown face.

"Seems odd," the marshal said. "All you found was the boot, tangled with his lobster line. Was Joao with you then?"

"We searched Kettle Island together."

"Did Jessie tell you we found dad's dory?"

Luke nodded. The marshal rubbed his pink, clean-shaven jaw and sighed. "Smarten up, Luke. Who nicked you with the knife? Was it Joao?"

"Nobody nicked me, marshal. You think Dad Frazier was murdered; so do I. Dad was too smart a sailor to get lost last night. If he'd gone overboard, the tide would have washed him ashore. So something else happened to him. But I don't know who killed him."

"Don't you think Joao did it?"

Luke was angry. "Why pick on Joao? Why not me?"

"Because of the way Dad Frazier talked around town last night. You know that old treasure yarn of his. He said everybody who laughed at him all these years would learn he'd been telling the truth. Nobody ever believed his story. Nobody, that is, except Joao."

Luke nodded, kneading his fists together. His knuckles shone white under the brown skin. "Joao believed everything dad said, as if it were gospel. If he had anything to do with it, I'll find out. And I'll settle it in my own way, marshal."

The marshal's mouth was tight. "We're a law-abiding people."

"Sometimes a man has to settle things himself."

The marshal abruptly softened, smiled. "I hear you and Jessie plan to be married. It's a lucky man who gets her. She's not only a pretty girl, but rich. The Fraziers have been trading on the seas for generations, Luke. She makes quite a catch for an ambitious fellow."

Luke said with soft anger: "You're looking for trouble, talking like that, marshal."

Weems spread his hands placatingly. "Dad Frazier was worth almost a million. If he's dead, Jessie gets it all. How about this Spruelle fellow? Where does he cut in?"

"Nowhere," Luke told him. "This isn't the time to think about those things, anyway." He stood up and eyed the white-haired cop. "Is there anything else you wanted, besides accusing Joao of murder?"

"Just be careful, Luke. That's all."

"I can take care of myself," Luke told him.

The courtyard to the street was filled with a darkness that tasted of the sea. The wind blew in cold, uneven gusts. Luke pulled his hat down and walked toward the street. Halfway there he saw Joao Minoa.

The Portugee was obviously waiting for him. He leaned easily against the wall, hands jammed deep into his pockets. Then his face was a swiftly moving patch of gray in the dark courtyard as he lurched into

Luke's path. His chunky figure swayed uncertainly.

"Wait a minute, Luke."

The hair prickled on the back of Luke's neck.

"You're drunk, Joao."

"Just a little, sure. I want to see you."

"What for?"

"I'm not mad at you any more."

"That's fine," Luke said.

The Portugee's hand kneaded his forearm. "Luke, I didn't kill the old man. You know I couldn't do a thing like that. Does the marshal think I did it?"

"No," Luke said. He wondered how long Joao had been waiting here.

"What did he say, Luke?"

"Nothing."

Joao drew back sullenly. "All right, don't tell me nothing. But I'll tell you something, Luke. Jessie's mad as hell at us for fighting instead of looking for the skipper."

"You saw her again?" Luke asked sharply.

The Portugee's eyes were liquid white in the dark. Rain suddenly trickled from his hat in a little stream, and Luke realized the man had been out in the weather for a long time. He wondered just how drunk Joao was. He kept his eyes on Joao's hands and tried to guess where the knife was.

Joao was nodding wisely. "I followed her and Spruelle up the beach." He giggled. "Guess we both lose out, huh? You 'n' me, both crazy-mad about the girl and she goes for Herbert."

"You're lying," Luke rapped. His voice shook.

"I'm drunk," Joao said abruptly. He strained, tossed a bunch of keys at Luke. "Too drunk to take the boat back. You take her."

Luke was silent a moment, then shrugged. "Come along, then. We'll both go home."

"Nope. Just remember I ain't mad at you any more, Luke; no matter what you think."

"Sure," Luke said. He watched Joao turn down the street and walk to the nearby taproom. It seemed to Luke that Joao walked quite soberly.

The *Two Pals* rocked gently in the shelter of her mooring at the town landing. Small craft warnings were bright at the Island Station, but the wind smelled warm, and the real weather wouldn't make up for an hour yet. It was only a twenty-minute run across the harbor and around the point to the Crow's Nest.

The motor started with a gratifying roar, quickly muffled by Luke's quick touch on the throttle. He cast off and nosed the forty-foot craft expertly among the scarred seiners and druggers moored at the fish company docks.

Once out of the inner sanctuary of wharves and piers, the swell increased abruptly, and choppy waves tossed spray high above the plunging bow of the lobster boat. Past the fort the wind blew fresh and wet from the eastward, and Luke pointed a few degrees closer to the wind to compensate for the drift. Harbor lights faded over the black water behind him. Can buoy 5 slide by, bobbing grotesquely in a smother of whitecaps, and then, after a ten-minute run, he heard the roar of the surf in the rocky hell's mouth of Craven Chasm.

The boat heaved with the crash of the riptide. Luke kept his knees loose, aware of foamy water awash on the floor of the cockpit. Easing the wheel to port, he sheered off from the black rock ahead and strained his eyes to get a bearing on the revolving beacon at Eastern Point.

The winking white light was not where it should have been.

For a moment, he was only puzzled. The harbor light should have been directly abeam by now. Instead, it was far astern.

He was heading straight for the mouth of the chasm!

With a muttered oath, he pulled at the wheel. Instantly the bellow and pressure of the wind and the sucking strength of the riptide became a thousand times more acute. The wheel stuck for a moment under his desperate grip, then suddenly went spinning with a clatter of loose bearings, spinning helplessly and without pull on the rudder cables!

Luke went suddenly white, and a sick horror congealed in the pit of his stomach. He could instantly feel the helpless boat respond to the power of wind and tide. Darker than the darkness of the land was the rock-toothed mouth of the chasm, dead ahead. His complete helplessness froze him.

Cursing, he suddenly spun around and dropped to his knees to feel along the rudder cables. His wet hands slid expertly along the wire, tugging lightly. Four feet from the stern he came to the jagged end. There was a sharp cut through half the cable and then the frayed metal ends where the drive of the sea finally had snapped it. He shivered, braced against the lurching of the boat, and thought:

"It was cut deliberately, so I'd go on the rocks."

The surf was thunderous, drowning the whip-cry of the wind. In the dim light he could see the explosions of white foam as the sea battered through the narrow cleft in the rocks. Anger boiled within him.

"Joao," he whispered. "Damn you, Joao!"

If he remained in the boat he was surely lost. There was just one thing to do. He stood up on the transom stern and dived overboard.

It was shockingly cold. He felt the strong tug of the tide instantly, sweeping him away from the boat. When his head cleared there was white water all around, boiling up through his clothes in great bubbles. He spun like a leaf, and the boat shot by within inches of his head. He heard a tortured crash, and as the *Two Pals* hit rock it was instantly disintegrated, splintered in two.

Then he was through the mouth of the chasm, carried by a racing wall of tide-water. He grazed a rock at hurtling speed. His ribs were battered, his lungs shrieked for air. At the ebb he rallied and struck out toward the massed black rock. Long ago he had been swept in here, as a kid. There was a little beach of coarse sand in a little cup of rock near the chasm's inlet. If he could make it—

It took a long time. Later he remembered the endless sweep, back and forth, within the black, roaring walls of the chasm, fighting surf and rock and the endless surge of the tide. Each time he was swept in, he fought closer to the eddy he knew would be there, until at last his knee bruised hard against the bottom. He lost footing, struggled frantically, and was finally tossed hard upon the beach, as if rejected in disgust by the sea.

It was a long time before he moved. He ached in every tiny muscle, and his breathing made a harsh, unnatural sound in his throat. Yet it was better when he moved. At first he crawled on hands and knees, until he splashed dangerously in water, and then he stood up, swaying. The tumult of the surf in the chasm seemed to numb his thoughts. These rocks, for instance. He couldn't remember their being there. He felt them, puzzled, and their roughness had moist sod clinging to the ridges. He rubbed some of the earth wonderingly between his fingers.

Moss and seaweed and sand, yes. But

wet sod belonged to the rocks above, on the lip of the crevice—

He tried to see through the gloom. The rocks were heaped against the cliff wall, and where the saplings had been that once gave him handholds to escape, there was now a yawning hole. Last night's storm had washed away the entrance to a hidden cavern.

Quite suddenly, Luke's heart raced fast and hard.

He stood up straight. A number of questions that tortured him seemed about to be answered. Climbing slowly, he mounted the boulders and from the top-most rock entered the cave.

He had no light and moved by sliding his feet cautiously ahead. The threshold was rough, but the floor smoothed within a few paces. Six steps inside, and he found the first answer.

He found Dad Frazier.

Luke couldn't see him, the darkness was too deep, but he knew it was the old man. His hands moved lightly over a dry oilskin, touched a cold and gnarled hand. He knew the skipper was dead, but the touch did not repel him. His breath made a deep, sighing sound in the darkness.

There was one moist spot on the front of the oilskin, and the outer edges felt crusty. Luke needed no light to know it was blood.

He stood up slowly, wrapped in darkness.

"It's all right," he whispered. "You're not lost any more, skipper."

He searched deeper in the cavern.

Luke went in through the kitchen of the Crow's Nest. A light shone in the living room down the hall, and there was the crackle and scent of a hearth fire. He heard a clink of ice in a glass and then Herbert Spruelle's voice: "That you, Luke?"

"Yes."

"Is Joao with you?"

"I left him in town," Luke said. He went up the back stairs, and in the skipper's nautical bedroom headed for the "bridge" where the *Estralita's* wheel stood in the bay window. He needed no light to find what he wanted. The heavy Army Colt .45 was in a mahogany box under the window ledge. The blue barrel looked clean and shining and deadly. He went down the curving white stairway with the gun in his hand.

The fire in the red brick hearth made warm tongues of light dance on the ivory

woodwork. Herbert Spruelle slouched in a deep chair, a glass of rye in one long-fingered white hand. His ruby ring winked fitfully, then jerked as he stood up, staring at the gun.

His voice tried to be casual and failed.

"What's that for, Luke?"

Luke asked: "Where is Jessie?"

"She went to town to find you and Joao. She was afraid you two might be fighting again." Spruelle's words came fast. Against the firelight his blond hair looked tousled and damp. His blue eyes were fixed on the Colt. He said again: "What's the gun for?"

"Joao tried to kill me. He might go after Jessie next."

Spruelle looked frightened. "Is he completely crazy?"

"Like a fox. Let's go look for Jessie."

"Can't we call the marshall?"

"No. Snap into it."

Luke waited while Spruelle reached for a topcoat and a battered porkpie hat. The blond man eyed Luke's figure curiously.

"What happened to you? Are you sure you're all right?"

"I'm fine." Luke unconsciously gestured with the gun. "Let's get started."

A fine rain was falling as they picked their way down the shell path that skirted the pier. Water lapped against the pilings, and the last remaining dory bumped eagerly against the pier fenders.

Luke paused. "We'll use her to get to town."

Spruelle's face twisted with surprise. "In this weather?"

"Get in the boat," Luke said. "You row."

Spruelle said angrily: "Thanks, I'll walk."

The gun in Luke's hand moved a bit. Dim light slid along the blue barrel like a moving finger.

"Get in."

Spruelle shrugged in helpless bewilderment and got in. Luke sat in the stern, facing the blond man. The dory was light, and under Spruelle's powerful strokes slid with ease over the comparatively calm water of the cove. Luke hunched forward, elbows on knees, the gun dangling from his fingers.

The dory pitched heavily in the chop of the harbor swells. His eyes grown accustomed to the dark, Luke watched Spruelle's taut face as he fought the tug of the tide. He made no move to help. For across the harbor was the shelter of the inner anchorage and the fish wharves. Luke glanced at them from time to time without moving.

After a moment Spruelle gasped: "Let's go back. It's too rough."

Luke said quietly. "We can't. The tide would beach us."

Spruelle stared in sudden fright at Luke Galway's passive figure.

"I think you're mad," he snapped. "I'm turning back."

Luke said nothing. Spruelle bent powerfully to the oars and the dory swung around. Water suddenly poured in an icy torrent over the gunwale, and the bucking of the dory increased. Spruelle's oars were helpless, and the dory spun with the tide. Luke braced his legs against the thwarts, but, otherwise, made no move to assist. His face was thin and amused.

"We'll be caught in the chasm!" Spruelle gasped.

The harbor lights were farther away than ever, and the wind-swept waste of water was all around except dead ahead, where the menacing rocks loomed blacker than the night. Spruelle suddenly stopped rowing.

"Are you pointing that gun at me?"

Luke said quietly: "I was wondering when you would notice it. Aren't you going to row any more?"

Spruelle suddenly screamed above the wind. "What's the matter with you? Are you trying to kill us both?"

"Maybe. Unless you talk, we'll hit those rocks in five minutes. I can take the dory safely away; if we hit, I can swim out. You know that the *Two Pals* went aground earlier tonight. By all accounts I should be dead. But I got away. I can get away again, but you couldn't. You haven't sailed and worked these waters all your life, as I have."

Spruelle let the oars sag. "I don't know what you're talking about! I didn't cut the cables!"

Luke said softly: "I didn't say they had been cut. Only you and I knew that—and you know it because *you* cut them. *You* tried to kill me. I don't know if you've done anything to Jessie, but I'll find out. You'll tell me, or we go on the rocks. You killed Dad Frazier, didn't you?"

A battering comber suddenly caught the dory, lifted it high, and sent it scudding forward at express speed toward the rocks. For an instant it seemed to be the end; then the dory slid off behind the crest, lost in a spinning welter of foam.

The sudden jolt threw Luke forward on his hands and knees in the cold water awash

in the boat's bottom. The gun skittered from his hand.

The other man cursed and dived with savage force, his knee crashing into Luke's head. Dizzy lights danced in front of him. He grabbed for Spruelle's leg and the man toppled back with a wild scream. Luke clawed desperately for the gun. He reached it, held it as Spruelle drove piling blows at his face. The dory lurched, and white water poured over the gunwales. Luke swung the gun hard at Spruelle's head, felt the dull shock as he connected. The other's grip relaxed and the man wrenched himself back. Blood was black on his white, pasty face.

"Luke, I haven't seen Jessie. Stop it. You'll swamp us."

The boat, heavily waterlogged, had lost some of its lurching motion. Luke sat up and secured the oars with one hand, never taking his eyes from the blond man.

"Dad told you that last night's storm had washed away the entrance to the cave," he said slowly. "He thought that was where the treasure would be found. You followed and caught up to him there in the cave during the storm, and you killed him in there. You see, when I was washed ashore just before I was swept into the chasm, I found the cave. And I found the old man, just as you left him."

Spruelle was holding tight to the dory's thole pins. His eyes roved wildly, watching the inexorable approach of the foam-covered rock.

Luke added flatly: "I also found proof that you killed dad. I found a footprint in the soft sand in the back of the cave. It will match your shoe."

Water slopped over the dory's gunwale. Spruelle licked his lips. His eyes were sudden cruel white crescents in the gloom.

"I didn't mean to kill the old goat," he snapped suddenly. "He made me do it. I went down to tell him I was going to marry Jessie. Yeah, chump, she was willing to elope with me. The old man went crazy, said I was only after his dough, which wasn't far wrong. I found out he's worth quite a pot of cash. Anyway, he went nuts when I said he could either pay me off to leave Jessie alone or I'd take her away with me. The old fool jumped me and I had to plug him."

The man's suave veneer was gone, stripped to the inner ugly bone of brutal viciousness. Luke spoke loud above the boom of the surf.

"You tried to drown me because I already suspected dad wasn't lost at sea, but murdered. I never believed it was Joao, and when you admitted having been in town, giving you an opportunity to queer the boat, I was convinced." He was white, shaking with inner rage.

Spruelle said harshly: "Well, now you know. Sure, I did it. So what? The old man wasn't the first to get in my way and get what was coming to him. But you'll never live to tell of it," he snarled suddenly. "You'll never live, you hear."

He lunged once more at Luke. The dory lurched, tilted far to one side. Hidden in the water awash in the bottom, the oars tripped the big man and he hurtled sidewise.

Luke never had a chance to move.

The oar splintered, and he caught a glimpse of Spruelle's fear-contorted face as the big man stumbled past him. He was overboard in an instant.

There was one wild shriek, and a glimpse of the murderer's white face, before he was swallowed by the white water that burst around the rocks. The lightened dory slowly righted itself. A heavy boulder loomed up ahead, bumped the side, and splintered the gunwale. Luke sat stiff and motionless in the stern, not moving.

The dory raced with reckless speed among the foam-spewed rocks, along a swift channel of darker water that suddenly swirled in a long, sweeping eddy that Luke knew was always formed by the tide at this time.

He made no attempt to maneuver the boat. For a moment he doubted, and thought of what the sea was doing to Spruelle's body. Then the dory was whipped around in a swift current of dark, bubbling water and flung far away from the rocks, just as he had expected it to be.

In a moment the sea was moving the boat away from the chasm.

Luke sat quietly for a few more moments, shivering. When the eddy had carried the boat almost back to the mouth of India Cove he picked up the remaining oar and slowly started back.

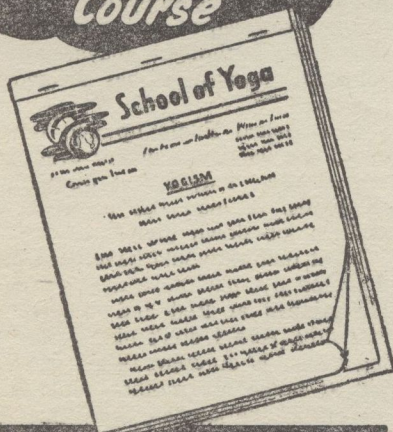
Joao and Jessie were waiting at the dock for him when he came in. Jessie stood a little nearer. Looking at her, swallowing a lump of relief in his throat, he knew there would be a new understanding between them.

Beyond the girl, as she stood waiting for him, he could see the shell path that wound its way up to the house on the hill.

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I'LL BE KILLING YOU

By PHILIP KETCHUM

It was a gangster's promise and he was not a man who made idle boasts.

It was a long time before I could figure Eddie Morgan. That kid bothered me like no one I've ever known. I remember the first night he ever came into the diner. It was pretty late, or early, depending on how you figure the hours after midnight. The after-theater crowd had thinned out and I was beginning to think about closing up. Red was out in the kitchen shoving things into the refrigerator and piling dirty dishes in the sink to soak until morning. There was a lovey-dovey couple at the counter, but no one in the place and I was heading for the door, meaning to lock it, when Eddie Morgan came in.

He was a big, wide-shouldered fellow in his early twenties. His face had a clean-cut look about it. He had wide, blue eyes and a lazy smile, and his skin was deeply tanned as though he had spent a lot of time in the open.

I said, "Closing time, son. Sorry."

Eddie Morgan shook his head. "Just a cup of coffee, pop. I can drink it while you're putting out the cat."

Well, there was plenty of coffee left so I went back of the counter and poured a cup. "You might as well have something to go with it," I grumbled.

Eddie chuckled. "Sure I will. A job."

I thought he was kidding. "Me and Red can handle all the customers we can crowd in here," I answered. "Why not try the shipyards?"

Red came in just then. Red is maybe twenty and her hair isn't exactly red. It's got sort of a burnished copper look. Red's real name is Myra Daniels, but I don't suppose one out of a thousand customers who have eaten in the diner know it. Everyone calls her "Red." She doesn't seem to mind it and that's about as far as the familiarity goes. Red has a quick tongue and a way of handling would-be mashers. She has a way of freezing off those who might get serious about her, too, and a good many young men have tried to get serious with Red. That's easily understood. She's nicely proportioned and easy on the

eyes. Sometimes when I look at Red, I wish I had married a red-haired woman just so I could have had a daughter like this girl who was working for me.

Red must have heard my remark to Eddie for she nodded her head and spoke up. "Sure, try the shipyards."

Eddie scowled at his coffee. "I don't like shipyards. I thought maybe you needed someone to wash dishes around a place like this."

Red looked Eddie up and down and I could see the scorn in her eyes. "No," she said slowly, "maybe you wouldn't like the shipyards. A man has to work when he takes a job down there."

Most fellows would have been pretty well flattened by that remark, but Eddie wasn't. He grinned at Red and nodded his head. "Exactly. And I don't like work, but washing dishes is different. Why, when I was a kid at home my mother could hardly get me out of the kitchen. Sometimes I washed the supper dishes twice, just to see if I couldn't get a higher polish on the plates the second time."

"I'll bet you cook, too," Red snapped.

"Sure," Eddie answered. "With gas. How about the job?"

Red said, "Come here," and walked to the kitchen door. Eddie followed her.

"See those," Red went on, pointing to the sink. "Do you want to tackle them?"

Eddie looked around at me, still grinning. "Oh, boy. Here I go!" And pulled off his coat. In another minute he was whistling and really going after the pile of dishes.

I got rid of the lovey-dovey couple and leaned against the counter. Red joined me. She was frowning. "I didn't really think he meant it, pop," she told me. "I didn't mean to hire him. Who is he, anyhow? Why isn't he in the army?"

I shook my head to both questions. "Suppose we let him finish up. I'll pay him a dollar. We'll probably never see him again."

Red shrugged her shoulders and headed for the door. She looked around once to-

ward the kitchen. The frown hadn't left her face.

I paid Eddie off that night, like I had said I would, but he was back the next evening about seven, just when we needed a lift in the kitchen. I was up front and didn't see him when he came in, but Sam Russo, the cook, apparently accepted whatever explanation Eddie gave and let him go to work on the dishes and in straightening up. Red told me he was there soon after he arrived, but I didn't do anything about it. Usually, at about seven, I had to go out and give a hand in the kitchen myself. Having Eddie there made it unnecessary.

For about an hour Red didn't say anything more to me, but I noticed that her quips with the customers were a little sharper than usual and I wasn't much surprised when she cornered me up front.

"What are you going to do, pop?" she demanded.

"Do?" I asked. "About what?"

"About that big loafer in the kitchen."

"What do you want me to do, Red? You hired him."

Red's lips tightened. "All right, then. I can fire him, too. There's a war going on. A kitchen is no place for a man in times like these."

As she said that she swung around and started for the kitchen. I followed to watch the fireworks. When I got to the door, Red was facing Eddie, her arms akimbo. She was telling him plenty. She was telling him what a man's job was in times like these. Red feels pretty strongly about the war. She lost a brother in North Africa. Days, she works at an army hospital as a nurses' aide. Nights, she works for me to earn the money to live on.

Eddie's face got plenty flushed as he listened to her and then gradually a stubborn look settled around his jaws.

"Restaurants," he said when he got a chance, "are an essential industry."

"Not this one," Red snapped.

Eddie said, "Look here, miss. If I can get an availability slip from the War Manpower Commission, assigning me here as dishwasher, can I stay? Surely if they wanted me any place else they wouldn't give me one."

"You couldn't get such a slip," Red declared. "Not while there are shortages in really essential plants."

"But if I could?"

Red nodded her head. "All right. Try it."

A sudden grin crossed Eddie's face. He dried his hands, turned to where he had hung his coat and reached into the pocket. He brought out a slip of paper which he showed to Red. I saw it later. It was an availability slip certifying that one Eddie Morgan could work as a dishwasher in a place known as "Pop's Diner."

Red took one look at it, then jerked away and went past me as though I wasn't there. I walked up to Eddie and shook my head. "Slip or no slip, you can't work here, son," I told him. "You and Red would never get along. Sorry."

Eddie scowled. "But I've got to work here."

I asked why.

Eddie shook his head. "Look here, pop. Red strikes me as a good sport. Let's just let things ride for a few days, then, if Red can't stand me around, I'll go. How about it?"

I don't know why I said "yes." Maybe I'll never know. Maybe it was because the instinctive liking I had for Eddie was just then a little stronger than the feeling I had about him that something was wrong. Anyhow, I let him stay.

I didn't think it would work. For three nights I was sure it would never work, because for three nights Red never once spoke to Eddie. When she went to the kitchen, she didn't look at him. When Eddie came up front with clean silver or dishes, she would act as though he wasn't there. Then on the fourth night I was out in the kitchen when Red came back with a plate in her hand. She shoved it right in front of Eddie's face.

"Did you wash this?" she demanded.

Eddie blinked, then managed a grin. "I must have skipped over that one."

"And you," said Red, "are the champion dishwasher of the world."

"Ex-champion," Eddie grinned.

"Next time I find a plate like that," Red declared, "I'll break it over your head."

She turned and went back up front. Eddie chuckled, then looked over at me and winked. I went to find Red. "How about it, Red?" I asked bluntly. "Is the feud over?"

"You mean with Eddie Morgan?"

"Yes."

Red frowned. "Pop, maybe I'm losing my mind. Eddie looks big and husky. He looks like he ought to be in the army, but he looked a little pale when he came in tonight and before he got to work he

leaned against the tub as though he was all in. Maybe he has a bad heart or something. Until we know, I think maybe we ought to . . . to just let things ride."

I patted Red's shoulder and nodded. "You're all right, Red."

A faint smile showed on Red's lips, "Sure pop. But if I'm wrong, just watch me go to work on one Eddie Morgan."

For about a week everything went fine. Red and Eddie didn't get pally, but they got along. They had a few spats but a couple times I came across them chinning away like old friends. I made a couple of efforts to get Eddie to talk about himself but it was no soap. I even brought up the matter of a doctor who could look him over but Eddie only laughed at me. "All that's wrong with me is that I'm too healthy, pop," he insisted.

"And lazy," I added bluntly. "Dishwashing is no job for a man."

Eddie's face colored up, but he still managed to grin. "Sure, I'm lazy, too."

That's what I'm getting at. You couldn't figure Eddie. He was cheerful, attractive, always ready with a joke, but in spite of all he said, he wasn't a dishwasher. Red was right. He should have been in the army or in some sort of war work, but he wasn't. There was something about him which wasn't on the level.

Maybe Eddie and Red would have developed quite a friendship for each other if it hadn't been for what happened late one Friday night. It was along toward closing time when a young chap comes in and takes a seat at the counter. He had had a lot to drink, but he could still navigate and he probably had enough sense left to know that he needed several cups of black coffee.

This chap plants himself at the counter, shouts for Red and orders his coffee and after a couple sips of it starts looking Red over. Like I've said, Red is worth looking over, and I'm not much surprised when a gleam builds up in this chap's eyes. He finishes his coffee and orders another cup and when Red brings it he makes a grab at her wrists.

"Just a minute, baby," he says thickly. "You and me could go places. How about getting out of here?"

Red pulls away. She says, "Sonny boy, come back when you've learned to shave. There's a law in this State against baby-snatching and I don't like it in jail."

That was a pretty quick one. This lad does have nice, pink cheeks.

Red moved down the counter a ways and had her back turned when this chap gets up and starts after her. He was quick on his feet and before I can shout a word of warning, he has leaned over the counter and grabbed Red in his arms.

But Red was quick, too. She jerked away and her hand came up in a sharp slap. It caught pink cheeks right across the face and was sharp enough to have sobered him. Only it didn't. Pink cheeks let out a roar of anger and started right across the counter after Red.

It was just then that Eddie came in from the kitchen with a stack of plates in his arms. I saw him and Red saw him and there wasn't any question but that Eddie saw what was happening. But he didn't do a thing. While Red was jerking away from the drunk, Eddie set the dishes under the counter and went back to the kitchen. He even seemed in a hurry.

I was moving in back of the guy at about that time and when I got the chance I let him have it. I may be close to eighty, but I still know how to use my fists. A good solid blow back of the ear and he lost all interest in Red and in everything else for a while. He dropped flat back of the counter and a few minutes later, Delaney, the cop, came in. Delaney took charge of him and we didn't see him any more.

Ordinarily, I would have forgotten a thing like that as soon as it was over, but this was one incident I couldn't forget. Of course, it wasn't the drunk who kept me remembering. Or Red. It was Eddie and the way Eddie had come into the front of the restaurant and then hurried out, just as though he were afraid. Human beings are full of a lot of imperfections, and some imperfections a man has to make allowances for. This is even a cowardice which may be justified, but not the kind of a cowardice which Eddie showed that night. A man can be afraid in battle, or afraid of something he can't see or understand, or afraid of something against which he is powerless. But to be afraid of another man or to be afraid to take the part of a girl like Red against a drunken bum is something hard to swallow.

I didn't ever want to see Eddie again. I had a notion I wouldn't. I had a notion Eddie would leave, but I was wrong. He stuck around that night and was there the next day, just as though nothing had happened.

Something had happened, though, and we all knew it. The growing friendship between Red and Eddie came to a sudden end. My own friendship with Eddie, cautious as it had been, was over. And even Sam Russo, who had liked Eddie from the beginning, started finding fault with him.

I couldn't figure out why Eddie stayed around. You would have thought we were back in the days of the depression and that this was the only job in town and that his wife and three children would have starved without it. In the days which followed there certainly couldn't have been anything pleasant in the job for Eddie Morgan. A couple of times I caught him watching Red when she wasn't looking. His heart was right there in his eyes. Eddie was in love with her and she wouldn't even speak to him any more. Wouldn't even notice him, in fact.

Red wasn't happy, either. She didn't smile quite as much and wasn't so quick with her answers when customers kidded her. I talked to her one night about Eddie. I said, "Red, I'm going to let him go."

Red shook her head. "Why, pop? He's a good dishwasher, isn't he?"

"Sure, but—"

"And good dishwashers are hard to get for what you can pay and you need one, don't you?"

"Sure, Red. But I don't like him. He's beginning to get on my nerves."

"No, he's not, pop," Red argued. "You're thinking about me. If you fire him on my account, I'll quit."

"Honey," I insisted, "he's a coward. He's no good."

"Did you ever look at his hands, pop?" Red asked. "Maybe they're red and soft, now, from the dish-washing, but all the callouses haven't washed off them. And look at his eyes, sometime, and notice the way his lips can tighten up. Pop, let him stay for a while. Let him stay until we're sure."

"Sure about what?" I asked, but Red didn't answer me. She just looked at me kind of funny and turned away.

It was several nights later that these three fellows came in. It was early, the time when things were slack, after the dinner crowd had gone and before the theater trade started showing up. There were just a couple others at the counter, young kids who should have been home in bed instead of at my place drinking cokes.

Red was in the kitchen and I was alone

in front. I was studying a racing form, not that it ever does me any good to study one, but I've had the habit, somehow or other, for a long time.

I don't think I looked up at first, but as soon as I did I knew that three pretty tough customers had happened to drop into Pop Allen's Diner. I don't mean they were dressed rough. As a matter of fact, they were dressed pretty well. But it wasn't their clothes I was looking at. It was at their faces and in their eyes. We've served a good many pretty hard characters in my place during the past dozen years and without much trouble. So I don't know why I thought what I did but the minute I looked at these three men I told myself, "Steady, pop. Steady. Steady and easy."

I got off my stool and walked back to where the three men were seated and asked, "What'll it be, gentlemen?" and got the best grin I could manage on my face.

The grin didn't do any good. The man in the middle, a big, wide-shouldered fellow with a thick neck, puffy features and narrow, deep-set dark eyes, looked at me and barked, "Coffee!" The other two just nodded. One of them was as big as the man in the middle, though maybe a little older. He had a sharp nose and thin, colorless lips. The third man was small and hunched, with a ratlike face and a sniffy nose.

I drew three cups of coffee and set them in front of the three men. I hoped that Red would stay out in the kitchen until they left. I don't know why. Maybe it was a hunch. And I hoped that the two young kids at the other end of the counter would finish their cokes and leave. I took a look at them. They were both staring at the three men I had just served and they looked as startled as a kid would look if he suddenly bumped up against Superman. That should have warned me.

"Anything else, gentlemen?" I asked.

The man in the middle pushed back his hat. He said, "Red Daniels works here, doesn't she? When does she come on?"

I stared at him, not wanting to make any answer. I said, "Yeah, Red works here sometimes," then I turned around and headed for the cash register. The two kids had finished their cokes and were up there. They both looked a little excited. They kept jerking glances at the three men at the counter while I made change.

"Hey, pop! When does Red come on?" called the man who had been asking the questions.

I gave the two kids their change and saw them out the door, glad they were gone, then cupped my ear and looked at the three men down the counter. I can hear as good as the next man, but I didn't want to answer them. And all the time I was scared to death that Red would come in from the kitchen. Scared of what? I don't know.

"I said, when does Red come to work?" shouted the man.

That did it. I started for the kitchen, but I didn't get there. Red must have heard that demand. She pushed open the swinging door and came out front while I was still several steps away. She looked at the three men and started to say something, but didn't ever make it. Her whole body stiffened and every bit of color went out of her face. She swayed forward a little, caught the edge of the counter and leaned against it. If it hadn't been for that counter to lean against she would have keeled over, I know.

"Think I'd forgotten you, Red?" asked the man. "Get your hat and coat. We're leaving here."

Red didn't move. She just stared at the man. I looked at her and then at him. There was a tight grin on the man's face. His fingers were drumming on the counter. He hadn't touched his coffee and neither had the other two. One of them, the little fellow, was glancing anxiously over his shoulder toward the door.

I started along the counter toward the front, but the big man next to the one who was doing all the talking, stopped me. He said, "Stay right where you are, pop." His voice sounded like he meant it.

"Get your coat, Red," the man in the middle ordered again.

Red looked at me and then around toward the kitchen. She shrugged her shoulders and there was something hopeless, something defeated in the gesture. She moved past me toward the rack behind the counter in the front of the diner where her hat and coat were hanging. The three men stood up and the little one muttered something about starting the car. He headed for the door, opened it and hurried outside. It looked like he tripped on something for he fell flat across the walk. Someone outside stooped over him.

"Speed it up, Red," ordered the man who was running things. "Do you think I've got all night?"

Red was putting on her coat. She was facing the window and suddenly she

stiffened and lifted both hands to her throat. A man was moving up to the door and opening it. I stared at him and couldn't believe what I saw, for here, coming in from the outside, was Eddie Morgan who should have been in the kitchen. And there was a gun in his hand.

Eddie closed the door behind him as he stepped into the diner. He was holding the gun pretty low, but holding it as though handling a gun wasn't anything new to him. And he didn't look at all excited. His face was a little drawn, perhaps, but even so there was a smile on his lips. Sort of a grim smile.

"Hello, Hennessy," he said quietly. "It's been a long time, hasn't it?"

Hennessy was the man who had ordered Red to get her hat and coat. I heard him suck in his breath. His body looked tense. The other man edged away a step and moistened his lips. One hand was up fumbling with his tie.

"Don't try it, Durango," Eddie ordered. "Get both hands up and clasp them behind your neck. You, too, Hennessy. Stand steady while pop makes a telephone call."

I headed for the telephone, while those two names Eddie had called kept running through my head. Hennessy and Durango. Hennessy and Durango. I had heard them somewhere I knew.

"I said get those hands up, Durango," Eddie called again.

I stared at the two men while I was waiting for the operator to connect me with the police. Hennessy's hands were up but the other man's right hand still hovered close to his tie and suddenly it jerked under his coat. I screamed a warning at Eddie but it wasn't necessary. As Durango's gun came out Eddie fired and I heard Durango scream and saw him twist half around and start to fall. Then all at once Hennessy was behind him, holding him up and firing past his body toward the door.

Eddie tried two shots, then lunged forward. Durango's body slipped out of Hennessy's arms and Hennessy's gun went off almost in Eddie's face. Someone else was screaming now, Red, I suppose, but I was only vaguely aware of it. I saw Eddie clutch at Hennessy and saw both of them go to the floor. A gun went off again. I couldn't see whose gun, but I knew it was all over for Eddie Morgan. I knew Hennessy couldn't have missed with every shot.

Some way or other I got over the counter and up to where they were. But I wasn't

needed. When I got there I just stood open-mouthed and stared down at them. Eddie was on top. He had dropped his gun and had caught Hennessy by both ears and was banging his head against the floor, again and again. Hennessy was out cold.

Two cops came rushing into the diner and pulled Eddie off and, then, Eddie collapsed. The front of his shirt was red. And in less than a minute the front of Red's dress was bloody, too, for she was on the floor holding Eddie in her arms and crying over him.

There was a lot of excitement for a while. I heard about how the cops had picked up the little man out front and how they had been called by the two boys who had been in my place and had recognized Durango, Hennessy and the other fellow, Spud Walters, from pictures in a detective magazine. I remembered, then, about how these three had escaped from the State prison a couple of months before. And I figured out that Walters didn't trip when he stepped out the door but that he met Eddie Morgan and Eddie knocked him over and took his gun.

But I had to wait for the rest of the story until Red got back from the hospital where they had taken Eddie. It was long after midnight when she came in and I could tell that everything was all right by the way her eyes were shining.

"Think of it, pop," she whispered. "He was at Guadalcanal. He's got two medals. Pop, you read about him in the paper. You must have. The story was there."

"You mean Eddie?"

"Of course, pop. He wasn't afraid of that man the other night. He knew him. That was all. He knew that man and he didn't want to risk being discovered here until Dave Hennessy showed up. He even let us think he was a coward, pop. It takes a brave man to do that."

I nodded. "But why did he do it?"

"Dave Hennessy married his sister, pop, and then left her. It's a pretty ugly story. I don't know all the details, but I knew Dave. He was—"

Red broke off. She shuddered. "I met Dave Hennessy three years ago," she went on. "I didn't ever fall for him but he followed me around a lot. I was with him when he was arrested. He blamed me for being arrested and said he would kill me when he got out. I . . . I guess I ran away. I came here. Soon after Eddie got his discharge from the marines he learned the true story of what had happened to his sister and about that time Dave Hennessy escaped from prison. In the papers Eddie heard of what Hennessy had threatened to do to me. Eddie found me first and then waited. That's all."

I looked at Red. "So that's all, is it? So that's the end."

Red laughed, happylike. She shook her head. "No, this is not the end. Eddie isn't badly hurt, pop. He won't be in the hospital very long. We've got plans. That is—" Her face got all flushed.

I chuckled, then scowled and turned away, wondering where I would get another counter girl and dishwasher.

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ASK FOR A COPY TO-DAY: JULY ISSUES NOW ON SALE

MURDER in the HILLS

By RICHARD HILL WILKINSON

It was a quiet New England village and its folk were law-abiding citizens, but—

I.

ON the night of March 27th, Noah Temple, a resident of Shapleigh, New Hampshire, was returning from a meeting of his lodge. It was after midnight and pitch black. He carried no light because the way was as familiar as his own backyard. He turned off the main highway below his farm and started up the lane that led past his own gate, and then wound up through the hills to more isolated farms.

He glimpsed a light in the kitchen, and quickened his pace. It was a cold, raw night and thoughts of the snug, friendly room and the glass of warm milk that would be waiting for him on the back of the stove was pleasant.

The kitchen light disappeared as he moved in under the thick arch of maple trees that bordered the lane. The naked branches of the maples rattled dismally in the wind.

Noah was almost out into the open again when he saw the red light. It was no more than a pinpoint hovering about five feet above the ground. It glowed brightly, then dull. It bobbed and moved and jumped around as though someone high up in one of the maple trees were dangling it from the end of a string.

Noah stopped short and scowled. He wasn't a superstitious man, nor was he timid. He had lived fifty years without ever having a thought beyond the everyday, simple things of life.

This dancing red light was something totally beyond the scope of his ordinary reasoning. It did not once occur to him that the light was anything but man-made.

And so, before common sense told him that no honest man would be abroad in the lane at this time of night, Noah called out, "Hello, who's there?"

Silence rewarded him. The only effect his words had was that the red light ceased to dance and bob. It steadied itself, glowing dully, like the fiery eye of some fantastic demon.

Overhead, the wind moaned. The naked branches of the maple trees rattled and squeaked. Off toward Merkel, a train whistle hooted.

In spite of himself, Noah felt a prickling sensation at the base of his skull. He moistened his lips and took a step forward. Then he stopped. There had reached his ears a curious sort of scratching sound. This was followed by a most blood-curdling, ear-splitting wail.

For seconds, Noah stood rooted to the spot, unable to move. And in that brief span of time, the red light disappeared. It vanished as quickly and as quietly as it had appeared. Indeed, in the warm and friendly atmosphere of his kitchen, which he reached in record time and by a circuitous course, Noah found himself actually wondering if he had seen a red light at all.

Breathing heavily, he sat down at the kitchen table, forgetting the warm milk on the back of the stove, forgetting even to remove his mackinaw and cap. With slow and characteristic thoroughness, he began at the beginning and went over every detail of the evening.

It had been installation night at the lodge, an occasion for unusual celebration among the members. Thus, eventually, Noah's thinking came to that point in the evening when Ray Lombard had nudged him and one or two others and led them into the cloak room. Here Ray had unlimbered a whiskey bottle and with a sly wink had passed it around.

Noah knit his brows. How many times had he tipped the bottle? Twice. Three at the most. Three small drinks. Certainly not enough to give him hallucinations. He shook his head. And yet Anne, his daughter, would assuredly accuse him of coming home drunk if he told her any such cock-and-bull story about seeing a red light and hearing an unearthly scream.

Noah sighed deeply. No, it certainly wouldn't be wise to mention the matter to Anne.

So he went to bed. The next day he rose at five o'clock as usual, fed the chickens, milked the cows and filled the kitchen woodbox. At breakfast he told Anne about the lodge meeting. He did not mention Ray Lombard's whiskey.

The morning passed uneventfully. Once

or twice he heard automobiles passing to and fro in the lane, and wondered vaguely at the unusual amount of traffic, but since he could not see the lane because the house and barnyard were shielded from it by a stand of white pine, he soon lost interest.

About one thirty, a car came around the white pine stand and approached the house. Noah was in the barn mending harness. He watched with idle interest as a man stepped from the car and knocked on the kitchen door.

Anne opened the door, and for a few minutes she and the stranger talked. Once the stranger glanced over his shoulder toward the barn. A moment later Anne went into the house, to reappear with her coat on. She and the stranger started for the barn.

Noah had a premonition. He couldn't explain it. He felt almost guilty. And to prove he had nothing to hide, he spoke in an unusually loud voice when Anne introduced the stranger.

"Dad, this is Mr. Jeff Wheeler from the State police. He wants to ask you a few questions."

"Ask me a few questions?" Noah laughed loudly. "What in tunket does he want to ask me questions about?"

"Just routine, Mr. Temple," Jeff Wheeler said. He looked apologetic. "Sorry to bother you. There's been a murder and—"

"Murder?" Noah bellowed the word. His mouth fell open and his eyes bulged and there were suddenly beads of cold perspiration on his face. "What of it? What do I care? Why are you bothering me with talk of murder? I got work to do. I'm a busy man, Mr. Wheeler."

"I thought you might be interested. The man who was murdered was Henry Reynolds."

"Henry Reynolds! That old skinflint. By gum, I'm glad to hear it. Never had no use for the man. Good thing he's dead. Been times I could have killed him myself."

Jeff Wheeler glanced at Anne. The girl was staring at her father with a look of horror. "Dad!" she cried. "Stop talking like that. Mr. Wheeler knows all about your quarrel with Henry. He knows also that you were coming along the lane last night at about the time the murder was committed. He knows that you and Henry met at the post office yesterday and had words, and that you threatened to shoot Henry's cows if they got into our corn-

field again." Anne hesitated. "Dad, did you threaten to shoot Henry, too?"

"Darn right I did! Told him I'd shoot him an' his cows both unless he mended the hole in his fence. His cows made the hole. It's up to him to fix it."

Noah's glance darted from his daughter to Jeff Wheeler. He was mad now. What was happening was plain. This young squirt of a cop had been sent up here to apprehend Henry Reynolds' murderer, had learned that Noah was abroad the night before, and figured that by pinning the crime on him he would save himself a lot of trouble.

Noah glared at Jeff Wheeler.

"Anything else you want to know, sonny? If you think I got anything to hide, you're crazy. If you think you're going to trap me into telling a pack of lies, you're likewise crazy."

"It isn't my intention to trap you into anything, Mr. Temple." Jeff Wheeler smiled disarmingly. "I'm sorry to have to trouble you like this, but murder is a pretty serious business. Did you notice anything out of the ordinary on your way home last night?"

"Such as what?"

"Anything at all. A strange sound? Did you see, possibly, a light moving around that you couldn't explain?"

Noah had been glaring at the detective, but now, in spite of himself, he found it impossible to meet the other's eyes. He dropped his glance, fumbling in his pocket for his pipe. The thought crossed his mind that if he told the story of the vanishing red light it would sound pretty fantastic. It might even sound as though he were trying to hide something, and that would be bad.

So instead of making a direct answer, mumbled something about nothing unusual ever happening around here and he guessed he would have noticed if it had.

Young Jeff Wheeler did not press the subject. He thanked Noah, apologized again for bothering him, and walked back to the house with Anne. They stood near the kitchen door talking a few minutes, then Jeff drove away.

Noah breathed a sigh of relief. He hoped he'd seen the last of that young man.

Anne, his daughter, was thinking just the opposite. She went into the house and upstairs to her bedroom. She sat down on the edge of the bed to think.

Her feelings were a mixture of vague

fear and pleasant excitement. Anne was twenty-one, blonde, blue-eyed and pretty. She had attended school in Boston and was only home until early summer, when she would begin her duties as secretary in the States house at Concord.

Jeff Wheeler had impressed her. This might have been because he was the exact opposite of what she had always imagined a detective to be like. He was neither blustering nor bullying. On the contrary his manners were perfect. And not once had he so much as insinuated that he believed her father had had anything to do with the terrible crime which had brought him to Shapleigh.

A small frown appeared on her forehead. She was remembering that when she came downstairs to get her father's breakfast that morning she had found the glass of warm milk still on the back of the stove. It did not occur to her at the time that this had any particular significance. She had poured the milk into a bowl for the cat and washed the glass. But now she was thinking that never, since she could remember, had her father failed to drink a glass of warm milk before retiring.

The frown deepened. Why had her father, usually a mild-mannered man, shouted and blustered when Jeff Wheeler had questioned him? She shook her head and laughed. How ridiculous to think for a single second that her father was capable of committing murder. Even when the victim was that horrid old man, Henry Reynolds.

Anne got up and proceeded to make the bed and tidy her room. What an imagination she had, to allow a glass of milk to upset her so. There was no earthly reason why her father couldn't retire without drinking his warm milk if he wanted to. And now that she was sure she need have nothing to fear if Jeff Wheeler came back again, she most certainly hoped that he would.

He did. He came that night, looking grave and unhappy. He arrested Noah Temple and took him away, charging him with the murder of Henry Reynolds.

Word of Henry Reynolds' murder had reached Police Inspector Dan Sheppard at Concord headquarters at eight fifteen that morning. By eight thirty Sheppard had succeeded in locating Jeff Wheeler, and by eight forty-five Jeff was in his chief's office.

Jeff took one look into the old man's gray eyes and shook his head.

"No!" he stated emphatically. "I'm not going to take it, Dan, no matter how important. In exactly two hours I'm boarding a train for Manchester where I'm signing up for officers' candidate school. You know that. You kept me here a year longer than I wanted to stay with a lot of hooey about protecting the home front. This time I'm not even listening to your sales talk. Good-by."

"Good-by, Jeff." Dan Sheppard blinked his eyes solemnly. "Have a nice time in Manchester. You'll find there's a train leaves for here around five o'clock."

At the door Jeff Wheeler paused. He gave his chief one long, piercing look. He retraced his steps slowly, placed his knuckles on Sheppard's desk and leaned forward.

"Dan, did you—"

"I did." Sheppard nodded. "Talked to the military ten minutes ago. Your application will be denied."

"Of all the dirty, rotten—"

"Go ahead, Jefferson, pour it on. Get it out of your system. Call me all the names in the book. The denial of your application will still stand."

Jeff Wheeler's jaw snapped shut. "Dan, you're a fool. This time you've pulled a lemon instead of a rabbit out of the hat. There's nothing in military regulations that says I have to go back to being a cop." He smiled thinly. "No army, no cop. How do you like that?"

"It suits me fine." Dan Sheppard's eyes twinkled. "Here it is, Jeff. Take it or leave it. Either you work for me, or you're drafted as a buck private. And no officers' training for at least six months, if ever." The inspector paused. "Do this one job for me, and there's a commission waiting for you in army intelligence."

Jeff stood erect and walked over to a window. He stood there, while bitter thoughts ran through him, and then his mind went ahead and he almost grinned. Whatever else you could say about hard-boiled Dan Sheppard, he didn't lie. The foxy old codger probably had that army intelligence commission in his desk all the time.

Jeff swung around. "What's so hell-fired important about this job?"

Sheppard's leathery face was suddenly wreathed in smiles. "Jeff, remember last November the Interstate Oil Co. reported to us that its oil line running up into Canada was being tapped. Not to any great

extent. A hundred gallons a week. It was the consequence of the Interstate's investigation that made the matter serious."

Jeff remembered it all right. Interstate had sent a man named Purcell up to investigate. He had worked as far north as Shapleigh. There a farmer named Ira Randall had found him in an open field with a bullet through his head.

Interstate had contacted the State constabulary, and the State constabulary had contacted the local police of Riverdale County. Two days later the story had been given out that Purcell had shot himself accidentally while hunting.

Residents of Riverdale County had accepted the story at its face value. It wasn't unusual. There was hardly a year passed but what one or more hunters were accidentally shot during the hunting season.

What the residents of Shapleigh didn't know was that Purcell had been shot with a .32 caliber rifle, and the gun he had been carrying was a .30 .30 carbine.

Jeff Wheeler had been intensely interested in the case. Johnny Purcell had been his closest friend. He had demanded an explanation of Dan Sheppard and got it.

The oil leakage had stopped the day that Purcell was shot. That could only mean one thing: Purcell had unearthed some evidence that would lead to the identity of the oil thief. Since no one knew Purcell's purpose in being in the north country, Sheppard figured that the accidental shooting story would satisfy the murderer as well as anyone else who might be interested. He figured that if he played a waiting game the oil thief would become bold and start tapping the line again.

For once, foxy Dan seemed to have missed the boat. The winter passed, and Interstate failed to report that their gauges showed any shortage.

Jeff Wheeler said now, his eyes suddenly hard: "So the murdering oil thief has been at it again?"

"Interstate reported a shortage three days ago."

"Then why didn't you get a man up there at once?"

Dan Sheppard spread his hands. "I'd be a sucker to do that, Jeff. You've got to give a guy some rope in order to let him hang himself."

"So you've been paying out rope," Jeff Wheeler said sarcastically, "and caught an innocent victim by the neck. Who was knocked off this time?"

"A farmer named Henry Reynolds, a miser who is wholeheartedly despised by his neighbors. Apparently, Reynolds stumbled onto something and had visions of a reward. He got it with a .32 bullet between his eyes." Sheppard leaned forward. "This time we can't hand out any fancy stories of an accidental shooting. The folks up there will demand an investigation. I want you to go up to Shapleigh and collect that murderer. I'm certain you'll also be taking in the oil thief."

"A sweet assignment. Now that the story's out, the killer will knock me off the first chance he gets."

"If you give him that chance."

"Where do I begin?"

"It's pretty conclusive that Henry Reynolds' murderer is one of his neighbors. He was found in a lane that leads off the main road and goes up into the hills. There are only five farms served by this lane. Henry Reynolds owns one of them. That leaves four suspects. It should be easy."

Too easy, Jeff Wheeler reflected as he drove away from Noah Temple's farm that cold March day. If ever a man acted guilty, it had been Temple.

Jeff turned his coupe into the lane, drove to the spot where the body of Henry Reynolds had been found, stopped and settled himself comfortably against the cushions. A few minutes later there was a crackling in the bushes off to the left. A man stepped into the lane. He saw the coupe and came toward it.

"How are you, chief?"

Jeff nodded. The man who stood outside the car was Gabriel Schools, an immense individual with a bulletlike head, a barrel chest and hands the size of hams. He had worked with Jeff before on cases, and Jeff asked for him when Sheppard had told the younger man to name an assistant.

"Hello, Gabby. Find anything?"

"Plenty. That guy Temple never come all the way along this lane last night. He left it right here and cut through the woods and reached his house that way. I found his footprints in a swamp back in the woods."

"You sure it was Temple?"

"Sure, I'm sure. Mud stuck to his boots and I followed him right up to his own back door." The big man eyed Jeff soberly. "You was standing there talking to that blonde dame, so I kept out of sight."

"Smart." Jeff pondered this latest development. There could only be one reason why Temple would cut through a swamp to

reach his own back door. Either he had shot Henry Reynolds himself or had been present when it happened and was trying to escape being shot himself.

Jeff got out of the car. He stood still and listened. There wasn't a sound or a breath of air stirring. Over the tops of the naked branches of trees he could see the red roof of Noah Temple's barn where it rested on the knoll. To the left, across the lane from Temple's and several hundred yards farther away, was another farmhouse. It was owned by a man named Emerson Page.

Jeff turned to his assistant. "Gabby, you got your gun?"

"Sure." The big man produced a .45 from a shoulder holster.

"Good. Fire it into the air."

"Huh?"

"Go on, fire it. You'll find out why soon enough."

Gabby shook his head resignedly and pointed the gun upward. The shot echoed and re-echoed through the woods.

"Get in," said Jeff. "We're going up and have a talk with Page."

II.

EMERSON PAGE was mending the fence to his pig sty when Jeff swung the coupe into the barnyard. He didn't glance up at the sound of the car. Jeff and Gabby got out, walked up behind the man and Jeff said: "Mr. Page?"

Emerson Page neither turned nor lifted his head. Jeff stepped around in front of him. His shadow fell across the fence, and the farmer looked up with a violent start.

"Consarn! Who be you?"

"Wheeler's my name. Jeff Wheel—"

"Hey?" Emerson Page cupped a hand behind his ear. "Can't hear yuh."

The kitchen door of the house opened and a woman came out. She was wearing an apron, the bottom of which she had caught up and was holding against her throat. A dog came scurrying past her feet and ran toward the two policemen, barking furiously.

Emerson Page said sharply: "Mike!" The dog stopped short and sidled up beside its master.

The woman approached the three men. "I'm Mrs. Page. Emmie's as deaf as a haddock. What was it you wanted?"

"We're from police headquarters, ma'am.

Investigating the murder of Henry Reynolds. I wanted to ask your husband a few questions."

"Save your breath. Even if you succeeded in getting Emmie to hear, he'd pretend he didn't soon's he learned you were hunting Henry Reynolds' murderer."

"Mr. Reynolds wasn't very popular."

"Hated by everybody. There wasn't a meaner man ever lived."

Jeff glanced toward Emerson Page. The deaf man had lost interest in them and had turned back to his fence repairing.

"Did you hear a shot a few minutes ago, Mrs. Page?"

"Sure did. It come from down near the maple grove."

"Did you hear a shot last night?"

"Can't say I did."

"If there had been a shot within hearing distance would it have wakened you?"

"Likely. Shots in the night ain't common around here."

"I see. Were either you or your husband abroad last night?"

"Why?"

"You might have seen or heard something that would be helpful."

"I've already told you we don't want to be helpful. Still, I always say it's best to tell the truth. Emmie was out."

"At what time?"

"Around midnight. About the time the murder was committed, from all I hear."

"Where did he go?"

"For a walk down the lane with Mike. Mike's been ailing lately. Last night he acted up, and Emmie figured some fresh air would do him good."

"Mrs. Page, that doesn't sound reasonable, a farmer getting out of his warm bed on a cold night to take his dog for a walk."

"Don't care how it sounds."

"Did Mr. Page say he met anyone?"

"Nope."

"Did he say anything about his walk?"

"Said it was mighty cold. Mike's better."

Jeff didn't know whether to laugh or to sternly continue with his cross examination. The information he had gleaned so far had served to complicate matters. A farmer's life, he told himself sardonically, was quite different from what he always had believed. He had thought they went to bed with the chickens and got up before dawn.

Yet Noah Temple had been out to a meeting of his lodge. Emerson Page had taken his dog for a midnight stroll. Henry

Reynolds had certainly been abroad, and so had his murderer.

Going on the supposition that one of the five farmers who lived along the lane was the murderer of Reynolds, there remained only one who had not admitted to being awake and outside his house at midnight the night before.

Jeff turned abruptly and got into the coupe. Gabby followed him.

"Where we going, chief?"

"To call on Eli Stewart. He's the only one I haven't talked to. Horace Upton, the fifth farmer who lives on this lane besides Reynolds, discovered the body. I talked to him this morning." Jeff drove out of the yard. "After that we're going to arrest Noah Temple and charge him with the murder."

The Eli Stewart farm was located two miles from the Page place. Like the others, the building consisted of a rambling farmhouse, a huge barn, several outbuildings, and a windmill. The blades of the windmill were turning lazily as Jeff swung his coupe into the barnyard.

Eli Stewart himself answered their knock. He was a tall, pleasant-faced man, dressed in overalls, flannel shirt and felt boots.

"Come in," he invited cordially when Jeff identified himself and Gabby. "Frankly, I haven't any hankering to help apprehend the murderer of Henry Reynolds, but I suppose I'm duty bound to answer questions." He smiled wryly. "Little enough I can tell you, I guess. I was at home and in bed when the murder took place."

"Can you prove that?"

"Prove what?" asked Eli Stewart, looking surprised.

"That you were home and in bed when the murder took place."

"I don't know. What proof do you need? My wife was in bed beside me. I reckon she would have known if I'd got up."

"Is your wife here?"

"She will be pretty soon. Went in town this morning for groceries."

"How do you know when the murder took place?"

"Did I say I did?"

"You said you were in bed when it happened."

Eli Stewart chuckled. "Consarn! That's smart! Always heard a detective could trip a man up." He slapped his knee. "Sorry to disappoint you, young feller, but I reckon there ain't a body in Shapleigh don't know when the murder took place. Try me again."

Jeff rose. Eli Stewart accompanied him to the door. They stood outside in the cold still air.

"Sure you ain't got some more questions to ask? It ain't often we get any excitement around here."

Jeff shook his head. "Sorry I had to—" He broke off. His eyes, which had been wandering idly about the yard, had come to rest on a small duck pond located fifty yards below the barn. Ice had formed on the surface of the pond during the night, but the morning sun had burned away all but a border skim. The center of the pond was as smooth as glass.

Jeff jerked his glance around and met the placid expression of Eli.

"Anything wrong, Mr. Wheeler?"

"No. No, everything's fine, Mr. Stewart. Come on, Gabby."

Once out of sight of the Stewart farm, Jeff stopped the coupe.

"Gabby, things are beginning to add up. I want you to cut back through the woods behind the Stewart place and find out where this lane goes."

"It don't go no place. Stewart's is the last house. We were told that this morning."

"We were also told that no one had been up through the lane for months, not since they put the new highway through that connects with the main road to Canada." Jeff paused. "I've a hunch you'll be able to cut down to the Canada road without retracing your way."

"What are you going to be doing all this time?"

"Arresting Noah Temple. I'll see you at the hotel."

Anne Temple opened the door to Jeff's knock. He knew a rush of feeling at the way her face lighted up.

"Come in. We were just sitting down to supper. Won't you join us?"

"Thanks. I'm meeting my assistant at the hotel. We've ordered dinner there."

He stood just inside the door, feeling suddenly awkward and unhappy. In the mellow lamplight, Anne Temple looked even more beautiful.

At the table, Noah Temple said: "Sonny, if you've got any more questions to ask me, you'll have to wait till I've et. There's nothing more I can tell you, anyway."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Temple. My purpose this time is more serious."

"Eh?" Noah looked up, a forkful of food halfway to his mouth.

Jeff gave Anne one quick, hopeless look.

He straightened a little and looked squarely at the man at the table.

"Noah Temple, you're under arrest for the murder of Henry Reynolds. Anything you say will be used against you."

He heard Anne gasp, but did not take his eyes from the old man.

"Tarnation!" Noah Temple was on his feet, his eyes dark with anger. "Boy, that's going too far. There's just so much a man will stand. Now you get out of here and stop botherin' us. Hear me?"

"You have two choices, Mr. Temple. You can either come quietly, or I can handcuff you."

"Dad!" Anne Temple was suddenly at her father's side. Her face was void of color. She thrust herself in front of Noah as though to shield him.

"At first I liked you," she stormed at Jeff Wheeler. "I thought you were courteous and understanding." She laughed scornfully. "What a fool I was to think that! You're brutal and stupid. Accusing my father of murder is the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. My father never harmed anyone. He couldn't even bring himself to put our Nelly cow out of the way when she was sick. Oh, I despise you!"

Jeff's eyes were bleak and cold.

"If you're quite through, Miss Temple, your father and I will be going along."

For a moment Anne Temple held her ground, as though by sheer strength of will she would protect her father. Then suddenly she turned toward the older man and her voice rang proudly.

"Very well. Go with him, dad. He'll regret this. Innocent men aren't convicted of crimes they don't commit. Not in this country. When Mr. Wheeler discovers what a fool he's been, then we'll have our revenge." She turned her blazing eyes once more on Jeff Wheeler. "We'll make him regret this night if it's the last thing any of us ever do."

By eight o'clock word of Noah Temple's arrest was on the tongue of every resident of Shapleigh and many surrounding communities. Party lines all over the county were busy. The seven-thirty news broadcast from the tiny radio station at Merkel carried the story.

At eight-fifteen Jeff and Gabby were finishing their dinner.

"You ain't popular in this town, chief. Not a soul believes Temple's guilty."

"He isn't." Jeff finished his second cup of coffee and reached for a cigarette. "But for reasons I haven't time to go into right

now, we've got to make everyone think that we know Temple is guilty. Our evidence is pretty conclusive."

"Evidence?"

"The fact that Temple was known to be abroad last night. The fact that he hated Henry Reynolds. The fact that he was at the scene of the murder and left it in a hurry. With those facts established we could give the old man the works—if we didn't know he was innocent."

Gabby chewed on a toothpick. "Yeah. It even convinces me. Why are you so all-fired sure Temple isn't guilty?"

"What you discovered at the end of the lane for one thing. You're sure it's been used recently?"

Gabby shrugged. "I ain't no Daniel Boone, chief, but there's sure enough automobile tracks cutting down through a field where the lane most likely petered out. The tracks join onto the main road to Canada about six miles north of town."

"Good. Now listen: Some time between midnight and one o'clock, one of the farmers who live on the lane is going to drive a truck load of gasoline down across the back field to the Canada road. He's going to be met there by another truck, probably from across the border. The gasoline will be transferred, money will change hands, and our farmer, who, incidentally, is the murderer of Henry Reynolds, will return home. Or so he thinks. We're going to be on hand with other ideas."

Gabby's face, which had brightened at the prospect of action, fell.

"Chief, look, maybe I'm dumb, but—"

"Maybe you are," Jeff grinned. "In order to dispel any doubts that you may at the moment be entertaining, I offer the following:

"The murderer was carrying Henry Reynolds' body along the lane last night with the idea of depositing it some place far from his own residence. He was smart enough to know that he couldn't permanently dispose of the body. Reynolds was too well known. Sooner or later the corpse would be found. So our murderer planned probably to drop him somewhere along the main road, in which case a greater number of people would be suspected.

"He had almost reached the highway when he heard someone approaching. Likely he remembered that it was Noah Temple's lodge night, and that this was Noah returning home. But he couldn't be sure. At any rate, he dropped the body where he was and lit out.

"In doing so, luck played into his hands. A few minutes later Noah, startled by something, took a roundabout course home. This, coupled with the fact that Noah hated Henry and had publicly threatened to kill him, plus the fact that every member of his lodge knew at what time he started home, made it look as though he were guilty.

"Now, the real murderer, who is also the gasoline thief, had planned to make a shipment of oil tonight. He suspected that I had come across some evidence that might point to his guilt, but knowing that I would want to catch him redhanded, he realized that all he had to do was sit tight and not deliver the gasoline.

"That's why I arrested Noah Temple. The whole town, including the murderer, is, I hope, convinced that I think Noah is guilty."

"Which means," Gabby said, his eyes gleaming, "that the killer will think he's safe in making his shipment of gas tonight."

"Exactly. All we have to do is make an unobtrusive exit from town and be on the spot when the murderer attempts to transfer his stolen gasoline to his accomplice."

They left the coupe beside the road about a mile south of the spot where the lane emerged onto the highway. Gabby, having scouted the region earlier, led the way along a faintly outlined path to a thick clump of bushes.

Here they stopped. Gabby put his mouth close to Jeff's ear and whispered: "The clearing is just beyond. I think there's someone there."

They crouched, rigid and tense, straining their eyes into the blackness. The wind was a cold, raw, living thing, cutting into their faces, penetrating their clothing. Overhead the tree branches swayed and tossed.

Suddenly, away to the north, they heard a truck approaching. Minutes later headlights flickered at them through the trees. For several tense moments Jeff thought he had guessed wrong. The truck was going by. It was nothing more than a motor transport—

And then abruptly the headlights went out. The truck's motor slackened. They could hear the faint clanking of empty barrels.

It was directly opposite now. It had turned and was coming in through the bushes toward the clearing.

Jeff gripped his flashlight in one hand, his service pistol in the other. He half rose. Gabby stood beside him.

The truck's motor died abruptly. A car

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door banged. A shaft of light appeared. In its beam a man moved forward. They heard voices.

Jeff said softly: "Now!" And rose, pressing the button of his flashlight. He could hear Gabby scurrying away to the right.

Jeff had counted on the element of surprise working to his advantage. He had counted wrong. The very instant that the powerful beam of his light shot toward the clearing, the men standing there ran for shelter. The light which was held by one of the men vanished. There was a muttered curse, the flash and explosion of a gun. A bullet whined past close to Jeff's ear.

He pressed the trigger of his own gun once, then forced the light into the fork of a low shrub and leaped to one side. The beam of the light cocked slightly upward, only faintly illuminated the clearing.

Jeff called: "All right. Drop those guns and come out with your hands up! You're surrounded."

Two quick shots was his answer. The second shot made a bull's eye on the flashlight lens, shattering it into a million pieces.

Darkness settled, but only for an instant. On the opposite side of the clearing a second shaft of light stabbed into the night. Jeff saw a movement near one of the trucks. He shot quickly and heard a groan, followed by the impact of a heavy body hitting the ground.

Inside the circle of light there was a sudden wild shout. It was obvious that these men were desperate. Several shots came from the shadows toward the rear of the truck. A moment later a figure rose up and plunged for the protective shelter of darkness and woods.

He came swiftly, his gun spitting flame and smoke, straight toward the darkness halfway between where Gabby's flashlight still shot its unwinking beam into the clearing, and the spot where Jeff was crouching.

Jeff stood erect, took deliberate aim and fired. The man fell, stumbled to his feet, ran on, reached the brush and vanished. Jeff started in that direction, swearing softly. He heard a thrashing in the brush, heavy breathing, muttered cursing.

Then there was silence, and Gabby's voice cried out: "O.K., chief. I've got him!"

Jeff made his way to where Gabby was sitting astride the body of a man. Gabby thrust the beam of his light into the man's face and swore.

The man was Eli Stewart.

In the kitchen of Noah Temple's house, with Anne sitting close to Jeff and staring at him with eyes filled with wonder and apology, Jeff explained:

"It wasn't as difficult as you might think to identify Eli Stewart as the old thief. All you farmers around here have windmills. Stewart's pipe line cuts through his back lot near the spring from which he draws water by his windmill. It was a simple matter for him to plug into the line and let the mill draw oil instead of water. If he had installed any other kind of pump he would have attracted some attention and the sound would have given him away.

"So he hooked up the small gasoline motor that runs his saw and milking machine, and the noise made by the operation of the windmill pump drowned out the low whine of the motor."

Anne Temple said: "I still don't see how you figured it out."

"Easy." Jeff laughed. "Yesterday there wasn't a breath of air stirring. The duck pond at Eli's was as smooth as glass, yet the blades of the windmill were turning." He smiled again. "It's a detective's business to be observing."

Noah Temple blinked his eyes. "By golly, that's smart. Reckon there wasn't another soul even noticed." Suddenly his eyes grew wide. "But that don't explain the red light—" He checked his words, darting a guilty look from Jeff to his daughter.

"So that's what it was that scared you? I figured it was something of the sort." Jeff grinned broadly. "Mr. Temple, that whiskey you nipped at the lodge meeting must have been powerful stuff. The red light you saw was nothing more than Emerson Page's cigar butt."

"What!"

"Emmie's wife doesn't allow him to smoke in the house. The sick dog gave him an excuse to get out and enjoy a cigar. He walked down the lane and the dog sniffed out Henry Reynold's body.

"That's when you must have come along, Mr. Temple. You probably called out and Emmie didn't answer. That's because he's deaf. He didn't even know you were standing ten feet away. Also, it's quite likely that the dog, smelling death, let out a wail, which probably gave you a start."

Jeff stopped smiling and solemnly winked his left eye. "What kind of whiskey was it, Mr. Temple?"

A BOOK IS LOST

By A. BOYD CORRELL

*The story of a timid, little man
in a world of important people.*

I.

TIMOTHY ADAMS was a mild little man. It was my first contact with him, though I knew who he was and where he worked. He was in charge of the studio's research department library. He wore pince-nez glasses, had wispy hair and his forehead bulged slightly. Over his washed-out blue eyes were heavy worry lines like those you see on a Newfoundland dog.

As chief of the studio police for Perfection Films, I hardly expected to find such a colorless employee, in such a colorless job, seeking my services. I waved him to a chair and raised my eyebrows questioningly.

Adams' lips were set in a prim, tight line. He settled carefully into the chair. I waited.

He glanced around the room, then leaned toward me confidentially. "Mr. Carter, someone has stolen the poison book!" He leaned back, clasping his hands like an old woman, and waited for my reaction.

I registered polite interest. "The poison book?" I didn't know what in blazes he was talking about.

Adams nodded. His nostrils dilated and he took a long, indignant breath. "Yes! And it cost five hundred dollars to have it compiled by a doctor at Johns Hopkins'. For five years I've worked for Perfection Films and never lost a book. Every volume is properly signed for before it goes out."

I began to understand. Our library was quite complete. Every major studio in Hollywood has one, usually larger than the average small-town public library. They are maintained for writers, directors, and workers in the research departments to check their facts. Apparently, a book had been lifted from under the watchful eyes of Timothy Adams.

"Maybe someone borrowed it while you were away from your desk and will return it when he's through," I suggested.

Adams' chin went up two inches. "Mr. Carter, my job is to be responsible for the

library. I assure you I never leave the desk unattended. I take my position seriously, though I'm paid little enough, and no one gets a book without signing for it."

I pulled a pad toward me. "O.K. Describe it and I'll have the cleaners check all the rooms when they clean tonight."

The librarian's prim little mouth formed a shocked O. "Do you mean you are not going to investigate personally? Do you realize this book is an original typewritten script containing a description of all the known poisons, their antidotes and reactions, and that it cost the studio five hundred—"

I smacked my desk. "Listen, Mr. Adams. You run your library and I'll run my police force. I'll find your book if it's on the lot."

The ringing of my phone interrupted. I picked it up. "Tom Carter's office," I said.

"Listen, Tom"—I recognized the voice of Dr. Everts, of the studio hospital—"I'm in Bill Malone's office in the Writers' Building. You'd better get over here at once." He sounded worried.

"O.K., doc," I said. "I'll be right over. What's bothering you?"

Everts hesitated a moment, then lowered his voice, "Bill's dead."

"Good God!" I'd just seen Malone that morning. He was one of Perfection's ace writers. He drank a lot, but as long as he turned out his top-notch scripts, the studio didn't care if he bathed in alcohol three times a day. "What was it, doc? Heart?"

The note of worry was definitely in the doctor's voice now. "No, Tom. That's why I want you. It was cyanide. Bill was poisoned."

I cradled the receiver and stared at little Timothy Adams. Suddenly, I grabbed my hat in one hand, his arm in the other, and dragged him protesting through the door. His simple case of a stolen book had suddenly grown into monstrous proportions.

The Writers' Building was a circular affair, much like a giant-size covered merry-go-round. It was one-storied, and the

center was the reference library. A hall circled that, and, branching from the hall like spokes in a wheel, were the writers' offices.

Malone's room was the second from the entrance, and I went in, still dragging the now frightened librarian. The writer's body was sprawled across his desk, his head cocked up at an awkward angle, his chin resting on his typewriter. His face was unpleasant to look at, with its features distorted and his swollen tongue slightly protruding. He was hard to recognize as the hearty, bluff, ever-grinning script writer whose booming voice used to be heard from one end of the lot to the other. I gave it a look, and turned to Dr. Everts, who stood at a window.

The doctor came over slowly, pointing at an open drawer in the desk. "There's a half quart of bourbon there. Judging by the smell, it's spiked with potassium cyanide. That glass"—he nodded toward an overturned tumbler on the desk—"also smells of it. Apparently, Bill came in, took a quick drink, and keeled over."

I looked at the glass and the bottle. If Malone had committed suicide, he would hardly have poisoned the whole bottle of whiskey; he would merely have poisoned the liquor in the glass. "When did you find him?" I asked.

"Just before I called you. Billy O'Flynn really found him," Everts explained. "He phoned me at the hospital and I came right over. O'Flynn said the sight of Malone made him ill, and he was going back to his apartment in the prop house."

I was careful not to touch anything except the phone. I dialed the Hollywood division of the Los Angeles police. They said a squad would be right over. Studio cops are deputized by the county sheriff. They can handle misdemeanors, petty thievery, disorderly conduct, and toss out trespassers, but murder belongs to the L.A. homicide crew. Timothy Adams had turned an unhealthy white when he saw the body. He sat limply in a chair against the wall and kept rubbing his mouth as though he was about to be ill. After phoning Max Cody, the producer at the head of Malone's unit, I sat down beside the little librarian. Los Angeles homicide detectives don't appreciate guys fooling with fresh found corpses until they have had a look. I started thinking about Billy O'Flynn who had discovered the body.

Back in the days of silent pictures, Billy

was the idol of an adoring public. His sad, wistful face, his gangling, slim body, his slap-stick comedy had convulsed the world a generation ago. He had made a fortune, but his reckless generosity soon dwindled that. His enormous popularity was the foundation of the huge success of Perfection Films. Then came the death of pie-slancing comedy, and with it died Billy's box-office appeal. For a year or so he survived as an extra, a forlorn face lost in a mob of hundreds milling before a camera. As he grew older, even that had gone.

In spite of Hollywood's reputation for forgetting the has-been, Perfection did not forget their debt to Billy. A job was made for him, which he accepted. He was put in charge of a warehouse on the lot where "dead" property was stored.

Among big flats of composition board, on which were painted fronts of Wild West saloons, twelfth century castles, French chateaus, and boom-town stores, a place was found to build a complete apartment where Billy lived and kept "office." There he was happy in the thought that he was still in pictures. He was given free run of the lot, and was liked by everyone, even the kids in stock who were born long after his sun had set.

The entrance of Max Cody interrupted my thoughts. His eyes, popped by an over-active thyroid, seemed about to jump from their sockets. His left hand, lifted in his famous gesture which always preceded a tirade of excitable, incomprehensible shouts, was still raised as the door, which he had slammed shut, pushed open again and Homicide Detective-Lieutenant Lew Millar came in.

Millar was almost as wide as he was tall. He looked like a big, squat fireplug, and was about as pretentious. However, I knew him, and knew that he knew Hollywood, as far back as the days of John Bunny and Flora Finch. He flipped me a "hello," and glanced at the body of Malone. He noted the bottle and glass, but didn't touch them.

Dr. Everts sidled over. "Both the glass and the whiskey contained cyanide. The odor is unmistakable."

Millar jerked his gaze toward Everts. "You've handled them?"

The doctor looked startled and nodded. "Damn it!" Millar turned to Max Cody. "You know any reason why he might commit suicide?"

The producer spread his pudgy hands.

"Two weeks ago I bought a 'Joan the Wad' and to-day I have won £232 10s. Please send two more."
B.C., Tredegar, S. Wales.

—Extract from "Everybody's Fortune Book," 1931

SEND
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JOAN THE WAD is Queen of the Lucky Cornish Piskeys. Thousands of persons all over the world claim that Joan the Wad has brought them Wonderful Luck in the way of Health, Wealth and Happiness.

HISTORY FREE FOR A STAMP.

If you will send me your name and address, a 1/- stamp and a stamped addressed envelope for reply, I will send you a history of the Cornish Piskey folk, and the marvellous miracles they accomplish. JOAN THE WAD is the QUEEN of the Lucky Cornish Piskeys, and with whom good luck and good health always attend.

AS LUCK BRINGER.

Another writes: "Since the War my wife and I have been dogged by persistent ill-luck, and we seemed to be sinking lower and lower. One day someone sent us a Joan the Wad. We have never found out who it was, but coincidence if you like, within a week I got a much better job and my wife had some money left her. Since then we have never looked back and, needless to say, swear by 'Queen Joan.'"

AS PRIZEWINNER.

A young man wrote us only last week: "For two years I entered competitions without luck, but since getting Joan the Wad I have frequently been successful although I have not won a big prize, but I know that—, who won £2,000 in a competition, has one because I gave it to him. When he won his £2,000, he gave me £100 for myself, so you see I have cause to bless 'Queen Joan.'"

AS HEALER.

One Lady writes: "My sister suffered very badly for years, but since I gave her a Joan the Wad to keep near her she is much easier. Do you think this is due to Joan or the Water from the lucky Well?"

AS MATCHMAKER.

A young girl wrote and informed me that she had had scores of boy friends, but it was not until she had visited Cornwall and taken Joan back with her that she met the boy of her dreams, and as they got better acquainted she discovered he also has Joan the Wad.

AS SPECULATOR.

A man writes: "I had some shares that for several years I couldn't give away. They were 1/- shares and all of a sudden they went up in the market to 7/9. I happened to be staring at Joan the Wad. Pure imagination, you may say, but I thought I saw her wink approvingly. I sold out, reinvested the money at greater profit and have prospered ever since."

JOAN THE WAD'S achievements are unique. Never before was such a record placed before the Public. Ask yourself if you have ever heard of anything so stupendous. You have not. Results are what count, and these few Extracts from actual letters are typical of the many hundreds that are received, and from which we shall publish selections from time to time. We unreservedly GUARANTEE that these letters were absolutely spontaneous, and the originals are open to inspection at JOAN'S COTTAGE. Send at once for full information about this PROVED Luck Bringer. You, too, may benefit in Health, Wealth and Happiness to an amazing extent.

"SUNDAY GRAPHIC" PICTURE PUZZLE.

No. 175.—"Dear Joan the Wad, I received this week cheque for £71 8s. 7d. My share of the £1,000 Prize of the 'Sunday Graphic' Picture Puzzle. I have been near winning before, but you have brought me just the extra luck I wanted."—F. T. Salisbury.

WON £153 17s., THEN £46 10s. 3d.

No. 191.—"Genuine account of Luck... since receiving Joan the Wad... I was successful in winning £153 17s. in the 'People' Xword No. 178 and also the 'News of the World' Xword No. 260, £45 10s. 3d., also £1 on a football coupon, which is amazing in itself, as all the luck came in one week."—A. B., Leamington Spa.

WINNERS OF £6 11s. 1d.

No. 195.—"My father, myself and my sister had the pleasure of winning a Crossword Puzzle in the 'Sunday Pictorial,' which came to £6 11s. 1d., which we put down to JOAN THE WAD, and we thank her very much."—L. B., Exning.

WON PRIZE OF £13 13s.

No. 214.—"Arrival of your charm followed the very next day by the notification that I had won a prize of £13 13s. in a Literary Competition."—F. H. R., Wallington.

"DAILY HERALD" PICTURE CONTEST.

No. 216.—"Since having received JOAN THE WAD I received cheque, part share in the 'Daily Herald' Picture Contest £3 1s."—M. E., Notting Hill.

£30,000 WINNER.

No. 222.—"Mrs. A. . . . of Lewisham, has just won £30,000 and says she has a JOAN THE WAD, so please send one to me."—Mrs. V., Bromley.

FIRST PRIZE "NUGGETS."

No. 238.—"I have had some good luck since receiving JOAN THE WAD. I have won First Prize in 'ANSWERS' 'Nuggets.' I had JOAN THE WAD in February, and I have been lucky ever since."—Mrs. N. W., Wolverhampton.

WON "DAILY MIRROR" HAMPER.

No. 245.—"I have just had my first win since having JOAN THE WAD, which was a 'DAILY MIRROR' HAMPER."—E. M. F., Brentwood.

WON "NUGGETS" £300.

No. 257.—"My husband is a keen Competitor in 'Bullets' and 'Nuggets.' He had not any luck until I gave him JOAN THE WAD, when the first week he secured a credit note in 'Nuggets' and last week FIRST Prize in 'Nuggets' £300.—Mrs. A. B., Salford.

CAN ANYONE BEAT THIS?

No. 286.—"Immediately after receiving my JOAN THE WAD I won a 3rd Prize in a local Derby Sweep, then I was given employment after seven months of idleness and finally had a correct forecast in Picture Puzzle 'Glasgow Sunday Mail,' which entitles me to a share of the Prize Money." W. M., Glasgow, C.4.

All you have to do is to send a 1/- stamp (Savings Stamps accepted) and a stamped addressed envelope for the history to

38, JOAN'S COTTAGE, LANIVET, BODMIN, CORNWALL

"With the money he made every week? And single? Not unless he went crazy."

"Any enemies?"

Cody shrugged and kept his shoulders up. "Who ain't in this business? He's got rivals. He can do a story that don't call for rewrites. Other writers in my unit sweat blood over three, four, five changes."

Millar grunted. "Hardly a motive."

"There's Billy O'Flynn," Cody began, but stopped abruptly.

"Go on," said Millar.

Cody looked like he was sorry he had spoken. "You know Billy?"

"I know everybody that's anybody in Hollywood, or ever was." Millar wasn't boasting, but simply stating the fact. "What about Billy O'Flynn?"

Cody looked around helplessly. Everts spoke up. "O'Flynn discovered the body."

The lieutenant's eyes squinted. "Listen! I know damned well O'Flynn discovered the body. Tom Carter said so over the phone. Now, what the hell was there between Billy O'Flynn and Malone?"

Cody's shoulders were shrugged up around his ears. His hands stayed spread before him. He rocked slowly from side to side. "Well, Billy and Malone had a disagreement about a pic we're shooting. Malone did the script and Billy says it makes him out what he ain't—"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Millar. "Is O'Flynn in the picture?"

The producer shook his head. "Oh, no. Billy's through with acting. This story Malone wrote—it's a sort of cavalcade of movies, starting way back before Pearl White began making serials, and going on up to the present day. The part Billy played in pictures was in it, but, of course, Billy couldn't play it himself. He's too old. A young actor plays his part. Anyway, Billy didn't like the way he was characterized, and he got in a fuss with Malone."

Millar rubbed the back of his neck. "I think that as soon as the M.E. and my print man get here, I'll have a talk with O'Flynn."

For the first time, Timothy Adams spoke up. "What about my poison book?"

Millar turned to the little librarian. "What about your poison book?"

Adams started bouncing his fingertips together again. "It's gone." He repeated what he had told me a short time ago.

Millar's eyes lighted with interest. "You say this book lists all the known poisons?"

Adams nodded, pleased at holding the limelight. "All poisons known to science."

He started enumerating the book's contents, rattling off Latin names which meant nothing to me, and apparently nothing to Millar. The lieutenant held up his hand.

"Wait a minute. I'm a cop, not a toxicologist. Do you recall who borrowed the book during the last few weeks?"

Adams was indignant. "Of course! That's my job. Dr. Everts borrowed it; Bill Malone borrowed it; three different research men came in to check some information but didn't take it out—" Adams' mouth again formed an O. "Bless my soul!" he stuttered. "Billy O'Flynn asked for it yesterday!"

Millar grunted, as though pleased. "Did he take it with him?"

Adams shook his head. "No. Just glanced at it a moment, then left."

The door opened and two men came in. One was the medical examiner and the other a print man on Millar's squad. The lieutenant put them to work, then spoke to Everts. "Adams said you borrowed that poison book, doctor. Mind telling me just what you wanted with it?"

Everts said, "Not in the least. I'm collaborating—or I should say, I had been collaborating—with Malone on a script. It's based on the lives of the Borgias, who, as you know, were the most famous poisoners of history. With my medical background, Malone thought I could be of help in writing the script. As a doctor, I naturally have some toxicological books, but there were some points they didn't cover, so I borrowed that typewritten work, which is very complete."

Millar turned to Cody. "What's Everts doing writing scripts? I thought he was a doctor."

Cody said, "He's freelancing on his own time."

The lieutenant blinked at the vague explanation. "You mean he was freelancing while collaborating with one of Perfection's ace writers? That don't make sense."

The producer sighed. "Look," he said. "Malone was between pictures, which means he had finished one and was waiting for another to be assigned to him. During this time he's not paid, though he's guaranteed a certain number of weeks' work each year. That's his contract. Anyway, between pictures he can write whatever he wants, so long as Perfection gets first look at it. If we buy something he writes in between, we pay him extra."

Millar nodded. "So he decided to do a story about the Borgias. And, not knowing

poisons, asked Everts to collaborate with him."

"Exactly," said Cody. "Malone was purely commercial. He's bought ideas from hack writers, newspapermen, unknowns, and turned them into smash hits for Perfection. If he thinks he can use someone, or their ideas, he buys them off on his own. If he needs their collaboration, he arranges it so that they come on the lot and work with him."

Millar fumbled a cigarette from a pack and hooked it into the side of his mouth. "Any idea how Malone happened on the idea of doing a picture about the Borgias?"

Cody shrugged again. "He said he picked the idea up from some correspondent. About three weeks ago he came to me with an outline and I told him to go ahead. If I liked it we'd film it."

Millar struck a match. "And how much was he to receive, provided you liked the story?"

"Ten grand," said Cody.

Millar forgot to light his cigarette. He turned to the doctor. "How much were you to get for your part of the work?"

"Fifty percent," Everts replied.

Cody interrupted hastily. "Provided I liked it."

Millar ignored the producer's remark. "Five thousand bucks! Are you planning to finish the story?"

Everts looked blank a moment. "We had made notes and discussed the plot. I see no reason why I shouldn't continue."

Millar's eyebrows shot up. "Hey, wait a minute! None of the story's actually been written?"

"No," said Everts. "The main work was the research. The plot is simple."

"So," Millar went on, "if you write the story, you get the ten grand?"

Everts looked toward Cody, and nodded. "Yes, I suppose so." His face suddenly changed. Red flushed up from his neck, over his collar and into his cheeks. "Are you suggesting that I killed Malone for his part of the money?"

Millar shook his head, his face expressionless. "I'm not suggesting anything yet; I'm merely trying to get facts." He jerked his head toward me. "Come on, Tom, I want to talk to Billy O'Flynn."

I followed him to the door. Before going out, he turned once more to Everts. "By the way, doctor, how much do you make a week?"

Everts stared at Millar a full ten seconds before answering. "Fifty dollars."

Millar closed the door behind us. On the way across the lot he said, "Ten thousand dollars represents four years' work at fifty bucks per week."

The property warehouse where Billy O'Flynn lived was a good three city blocks from the Writers' Building. We were in front of the studio laboratory when Millar spoke again. "Any place on the lot where cyanide is used?"

I said, "Yes," and pointed to the laboratory where the films were developed. "Cyanide is used in toning prints they develop there."

Millar grunted. We walked on toward Billy O'Flynn's.

The warehouse smelled like an attic that hadn't been opened for years. Cobwebs floated down from the rafters, and our footsteps sent up dust that patterned the chinks of sunlight which squeezed in through the high, dirt-encrusted windows. A labyrinth of pathways, two feet wide, ran helter-skelter between stored scenery. I led Millar through the maze to a corner of the building which was walled off from the vast storeroom, and knocked on the door.

Billy answered my knock. We had to look up slightly to see his eyes, he was that tall. He was the same Billy of twenty-five years ago, except that he had aged. And age had drawn that line which divides the comical from the pathetic. Billy was now of the latter. His ludicrous face, naturally woebegone, was even more so with a bandage covering his left cheek. I introduced him to the lieutenant and we took chairs in the living room.

Millar stared at the ex-comedian's bandaged face a moment, then looked down at his own big red hands. "I'd like to know, O'Flynn, why you wanted to see the poison book in the studio library."

Billy started. "Was Malone poisoned?"

Millar nodded. "Yes. What about the book?"

Billy got up slowly and went to a window. He pushed back a curtain and motioned the lieutenant to come over. I followed and peered through the window.

A tiny plot of ground between the warehouse and a fence was thickly covered with rose bushes. They were meticulously set out, each bush supported by a green painted bamboo stick. The whole plot was no more than eight feet square.

"I've always liked roses," said Billy,

"ever since I lived as a kid in the tenement district of New York." He dropped the curtain and returned to a chair. "When I was a star, I lived in the old Hollywood Hotel and had roses in my room every day, but there was no place to grow them. I swore I'd have a rose garden some day. That day never seemd to come around, what with my schedule at the studio and social affairs. When I hit the skids"—there was no bid for sympathy in his voice, just a simple statement—"I didn't have the money for a garden. Now that I've been out here, I've found a place for my roses."

Millar shot me a quizzical glance, as though questioning O'Flynn's sanity. Then he said, "If you'll just tell me why you wanted to see the poison book—"

"Yes, of course," said Billy. "A blight hit my roses and I wanted to know what poison to spray them with."

Millar turned to the window again. "Your roses look unusually healthy."

Billy's hand reached up and touched his bandaged cheek. "You don't know roses," he said simply.

Millar shrugged. "Maybe not. Now about your fuss with Malone."

The old-time comedian waved a deprecating hand. "That was all a mistake. I'd rather not discuss it."

Millar walked from the window and stood in front of O'Flynn. "I'm afraid you'll have to discuss it. I'm investigating a murder. Frankly, you're a suspect. I want the whole story of your trouble with Malone."

The expression on Billy's face would have convulsed an audience a quarter of a century ago, but now it was pathetic. His mouth hung open and his watery eyes spread wide. "You mean," he said hoarsely, "you think I might have poisoned him?"

Millar nodded.

Billy's hand trembled as it once more touched his bandaged cheek. "Yesterday," he began, "I was over at the laboratory to see some rushes of a film that Malone wrote the story for. It's a story of the movies, and I was in it—that is, the part I played in movie history was portrayed by a character actor. In the early days I made my reputation on clean pictures. My stuff was slapstick, I'll admit, but it was clean. There's not a foot of film I ever made that you could object to."

The old actor's voice rose in indignation. A light seemed to glow back of his eyes. He leaned forward and pounded his chair arm. "That film I saw yesterday made me

out as a senile, girl-chasing, low comedian who couldn't get a billing in a Main Street burlesque honkatonk!"

He paused for breath. Millar said, "I remember your pictures. That was hardly your type."

Billy gave him a grateful look. "I was so burned up that I came straight from the projection room to this apartment. I intended to pack and leave. However, I thought it over and decided I was being foolish. Malone was the one responsible, and I would have it out with him.

"I went to his office, but he was out. I came back here, and this morning went over again. He was still out, but I waited. He came in around ten o'clock, and as soon as he stepped inside his room I took a swing at him."

I saw Millar's eyes crinkle at the corners and a ghost of a smile flicked across his lips. He was visualizing the scene I saw—Billy, thin, old, gangling, awkward, swinging at big, husky Malone. The idea itself was ridiculous.

"And what happened?" asked Millar.

"I missed him," Billy said simply, "and my feet got tangled up. I fell against his desk and cut my cheek."

Millar was looking at his hands again. "Go on."

"Well, Malone helped me up and offered me a drink."

The lieutenant's head jerked up. "Did you take it?"

"No. I told him to go to the devil. He knew what I was sore about, because he started to explain. I slammed out, and went into the hospital, which is just across the street from the Writers' Building. Dr. Everts fixed up my face and asked me how I hurt it."

I found myself sitting on the edge of my chair. Unconsciously, Billy was getting deeper and deeper into damning circumstantial evidence. His trip to the laboratory where cyanide was available; his wait in Malone's office, time enough to poison the whiskey, which he had refused to drink—

Billy was talking again. "I told Everts what I thought about Malone writing me in as a bawdy, almost obscene character, and that's where I found out my mistake."

"From Dr. Everts?" Millar asked.

Billy nodded. "Everts was working with Malone on another script, and he told me that my characterization was ordered by Cody, the producer. Cody claimed that it would make the story more entertaining

than if it were shown in what he termed 'outdated juvenile slap-stick.'

"And then," the lieutenant said, his voice very soft, "you rushed back to Malone's office?"

"Yes," said Billy. "I wanted to apologize."

Millar rose from his chair. His head was slowly shaking from side to side. "No," he said. "You went back to tell him not to drink that liquor. You had poisoned it while waiting for him."

Billy's mouth dropped open. He whispered, "I only wanted to apologize!"

The lieutenant turned to me. "You watch him, Tom. I'm taking a look around his apartment." He started a systematic search of the sitting room.

Billy got shakily from his chair and moved to the window. He pushed back the curtains and stared at his roses. I found it hard to look at him.

Millar had gone into the bedroom. Shortly he came out, holding a thick, bound manuscript. I could see the large, simple title "POISONS" hand-lettered across the front of its thin leather cover. He walked to the man by the window and held it before him.

Billy stared unemotionally at the book, then at the detective. "You found that here?"

"Yes," Millar told him. "Along with this bottle that is labeled cyanide. They were at the bottom of your clothes basket. Were you spraying your roses with cyanide?"

Billy seemed dazed, and missed the sarcasm in the officer's voice. "No," he said. "I hadn't bought anything yet. The book suggested arsenic."

Millar smiled grimly. "The favorite poison of the Borgias. Come along, O'Flynn. I'm arresting you for the murder of Bill Malone."

II.

At the Writers' Building, Millar turned Billy over to a plain-clothes man of his squad. Then the lieutenant and I took the poison book to Timothy Adams in the library.

Adams' furrowed brow relaxed when we handed it to him.

"Thank goodness, you found it," he said. "It cost the studio five hundred dollars. It would be hard to replace. I'll keep my eye on it from now on."

Millar reached over and took the book

from him. "No, I'll keep my eye on it. I merely want you to identify it."

Adams looked blank for a moment and blinked. "Oh, I see. Yes, of course I'll identify it. It's a studio library book, and it was stolen. But before you take it away, may I have it a moment? Dr. Everts called and said if it were found and brought in, I was to look up a reference for him."

Millar handed the librarian the book. Adams quickly turned to a chapter headed "Arsenic." He flipped over two pages and his finger traced a sentence near the bottom. He handed it back. "Thanks. Just a date about the Borgias. I'll call Everts now."

Millar took the book and we headed back toward Malone's room. The arrest of Billy didn't set so well with me. Regardless of the circumstances, I wasn't convinced he was a killer.

"Don't you think it's queer," I asked, "that a person who goes to the trouble of stealing a book to hunt up some unusual poison would decide on such a well-known one as cyanide?"

Millar shrugged. "You can't figure the mind of a murderer?"

"But I can't believe Billy is a murderer. Good Lord! Everyone on the lot loves him. He used to go around putting roses on the desks of new stenogs and office girls, just to make 'em feel at home. He'd give the shirt off his back to anyone who needed it."

Millar stared at me and sighed. "Look, Tom. Studio cops don't run into psychopathic killers as we homicide dicks do. Just a month ago a sweet old dame, dressed in a lace cap, and with a face like an angel's, bashed a woman's head in with a statue of Venus de Milo. And you know why?"

I shook my head.

"Simply because the woman told this old granny that her ring, which she'd proudly shown to her friends for twenty year, was a phony and not a diamond. Granny's husband had died twenty years ago. This was their engagement ring, big as a marble. Everybody knew it was glass but granny. She believed it was real. It symbolized the great love her husband had for her, giving her a piece of ice like that. When the woman thoughtlessly told granny the truth, it brought the world down around her old ears and lace cap. The woman had robbed her of something that was her whole world, so she blew her top and bashed the dame's head in." We had arrived at the murdered writer's door, and Millar pushed in. "Come to think of it, Billy's case parallels granny's

pretty closely. Malone robbed him of his pleasant memories and substituted something rotten."

Cody was still in Malone's room. The plain-clothes dick had left with Bill. The print man came over. "Only two sets of prints on the bottle and glass, chief," he said to Millar. "Those of the corpse and Dr. Everts."

"O.K.," said the lieutenant. "The doc admitted handling them. You can pack up if you're through. I'll have a confession out of O'Flynn before tomorrow morning."

I felt a little sick at the thought of Billy being third-degreed down at headquarters. I went back to my office, thinking about Millar's sweet old lady conking the tactless dame with Venus de Milo. A psychopathic killer, he called her.

I parked my feet on the desk, closed my eyes, and started reviewing the whole mess. Hollywood studios are full of psychopaths. Men and women, nuts for money, stepping on anyone's face to reach a higher rung of the ladder of success. Professional jealousy, one man in the limelight exploiting an unknown's genius. Malone was a good example of this, using Dr. Evert's knowledge of medicine.

My feet hit the floor with a bang. Cody had said Malone got the idea from a correspondent. If I could find out who it was—

I grabbed my phone and told the inner-office operator to get me Doris Galligan. Doris had been Malone's private secretary, taking care of his correspondence and trying. When she answered, there were tears in her voice, but I was too excited to comment.

"Listen, Doris. I'm trying to track down the real murderer of Malone. I don't think Billy did it. Do you recall any correspondence about three weeks ago from an outsider who suggested the Borgia plot?"

Doris sniffled. "Yes," she said. "He sent a long-winded script covering the history of the poisoners and a thin plot woven in. It was an impossible thing, except for the idea."

I held my breath. "And what did Malone do about it?"

"He sent it back," said Doris. "However, he enclosed a check for a hundred dollars, telling the writer that all the material was public property, inasmuch as the Borgia history was well known. The hundred was for the idea."

I asked her for the man's name and

address. It was Alan Chesterton, an obvious pen-name, and the address was merely a post office box in Denver. I thanked Doris and hung up. My hopes dwindled. If the murderer's motive was what I thought, he had to live in Hollywood.

I decided to check one step further, and placed a long-distance call in for the post office in Denver. An assistant postmaster answered and I identified myself. When I told him I was investigating murder he gave me the information I wanted. I thanked him and turned to my files. My office contained the addresses of all the personnel of the studio. I checked through them and found my hunch was right. Billy was innocent and I knew who was the murderer. And another person was in danger of being murdered at that very moment!

I headed for the studio hospital. It was getting dusk by then, but a light shone through the window of Dr. Everts' office. The entrance was deserted. I pounded on the doctor's door. There was no response.

I found it unlocked and walked in. On the floor was Dr. Everts, one side of his head a ghastly mess. An iron doorstep lay alongside him, splattered with blood. I stopped only long enough to feel his pulse and determine that he was dead.

As I backed out, I glanced at my watch and saw it was a little after six. I still had time to check my remaining clues with Timothy Adams. He usually stayed in the library until six-thirty.

The little librarian was hunched over his desk when I came in. No one else was in the room.

"Look, Adams," I said confidentially. "How long has Dr. Everts been working on the Borgia script?"

Adams took off his pince-nez, massaged the two dimples they had left in the sides of his nose, and started polishing his glasses.

"About three weeks," he replied.

"Was that when he first borrowed the poison book?"

Adams nodded.

I looked around the library. There was a typewriter on a table nearby. I went over to it and spent fifteen minutes typing out a letter, which I folded and put on Adams' desk.

"Do me a favor. Address an envelope to Lieutenant Millar of the Los Angeles police and mail this for me when you go home tonight."

The librarian's brow puckered questioningly, but he nodded as I went out.

I was back in my office at six-thirty. At seven I knew I was right. I pulled the phone toward me and got Lieutenant Millar. "Listen," I said, "bring Billy back here and I'll trade you the real murderer for him, signed, sealed, and I think dead."

Billy's face was chalky when Millar brought him back. I convinced the detective I would be responsible for him, and he was allowed to return to his apartment in the prop house.

Millar and I headed for the Writers' Building. I stopped before the closed door of the library, fitted my passkey into the lock, and entered. Millar snapped on the lights.

On the desk, neatly cleared of the day's work, lay a letter. I handed it to Millar. He read aloud:

"I confess to the murders of Bill Malone and Dr. Everts. I poisoned Malone's whiskey bottle from which I knew he drank each morning.

"Under the pseudonym of Alan Chesterton, I submitted a manuscript to Malone, based on the lives of the Borgias. My reason for using an assumed name is obvious. A thirty-five-dollar-a-week clerk is not supposed to write stories. I should know, for I have worked here long enough. But I did know that Malone bought scripts from outsiders.

"My script was returned, with an insulting check of one hundred dollars for the idea. Being in a position to hear most of the gossip among the writers, I found out that Malone was going to use my story and cheat me out of five thousand dollars. He would rewrite in a few weeks, with the help of Dr. Everts, what had taken me months. So I killed him. Dr. Everts threatened to carry on with my own story, so I smashed his head in. They were stealing from me. Stealing!

"I tried to throw suspicion on Billy O'Flynn by planting the poison book and a bottle of cyanide in his apartment. I knew he had had an argument with Malone and would be a likely suspect.

"But I have been discovered by Chief Carter. I mentioned, in front of him, that Malone and Everts were working on the script. Only an insider would have that information. Carter also noticed my familiarity with the poison book, especially the pages devoted to the Borgias which I had studied, and to which I turned without referring to the index. And now he has

discovered that 'Alan Chesterton' of Denver is really a forwarding address to the undersigned."

Lieutenant Millar whistled. "For the love of all the saints!" he said. "It's signed, 'Timothy Adams.'"

I nodded. I felt like an executioner who had just pulled the switch. I pointed down an aisle where a huddled figure lay. It was the little librarian. His pince-nez were still on his sharp nose, but his prim mouth was twisted in agony, for he had died a violent death by potassium cyanide, self-administered.

Millar bent over the body. "I can't understand why he wrote that confession. After all, it was only thin circumstantial evidence."

"Yeah," I said. "But having his vengeance exposed in black and white before his eyes—"

Millar looked at me sharply. "What do you mean, 'black and white'?"

I covered up quickly. "Just a figure of speech. He knew I was checking him and he knew I would discover that he was 'Alan Chesterton.'"

I wasn't going to tell Millar I had typed that confession and handed it to Adams to mail, knowing he would read it, realize he was found out, and take the easiest way. It wasn't hard to see him as that kind of man. Homicide dicks are not the only ones who can figure out psychopathic killers. Adams' inflated idea of the value of his long-winded script about the Borgias swayed him beyond all reason.

Nor would I mention the fact that the lieutenant had previously overlooked the obvious motive, the alleged theft of the story idea. The librarian was the only one who could have written the original Borgia script and yet been in a position to know all the details of its development in the studio. His twisted mind had placed an unwarranted value on material which was really available to any script writer who wanted to do a story about the poisoners. No, I was not going to tell Millar. I would claim to know nothing. It was much simpler the way it stood—Adams a suicide and a confessed murderer. That wrote *finis* to the case.

I left the lieutenant calling headquarters, and returned to my office. On my desk was a fresh bunch of roses. Millar had called Billy psychopathic. Nuts! Regardless of what he said about studio cops not meeting queer people as the homicide squad did, we know the difference between a swell egg like Billy O'Flynn and a killer.

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