

10¢ TWELVE STORIES!  **FEB**

DETECTIVE

12 STORIES **TALES** **10 CENTS**

MURDERED BY REQUEST!

THRILL-PACKED FEATURE NOVEL

by **LESLIE T. WHITE**

DRAMATIC DETECTIVE STORIES BY

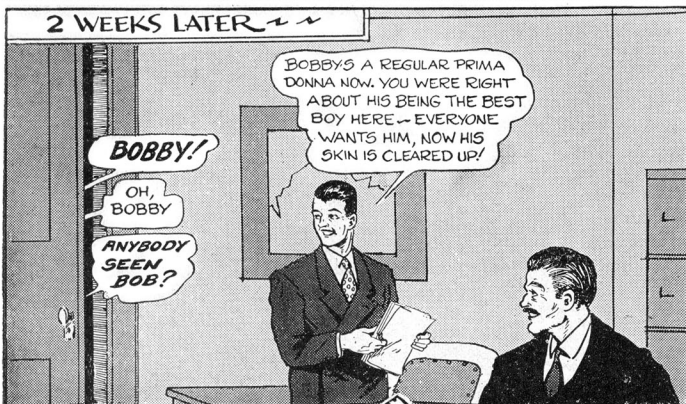
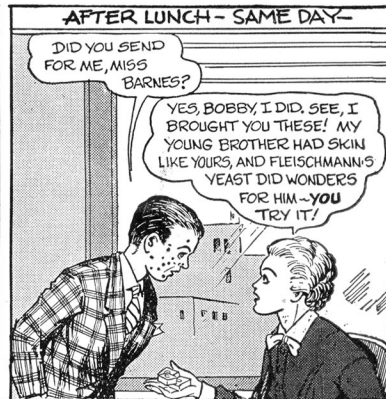
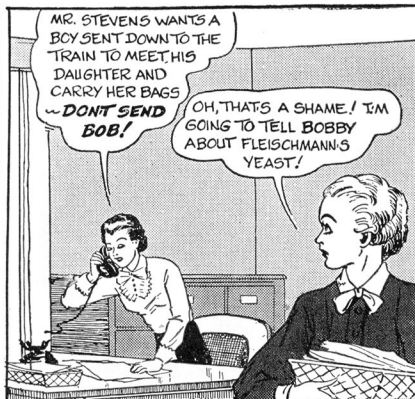
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by clearing skin irritants
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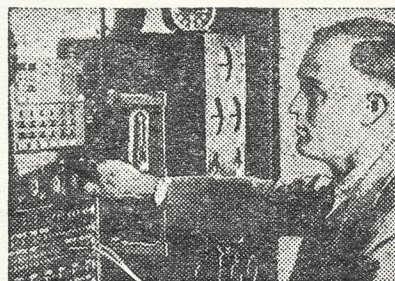
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DETECTIVE TALES



12 STORIES

TEN CENTS

VOLUME TWO

FEBRUARY, 1936

NUMBER THREE

1 Feature-Length Fast-Action Detective Novel 1

MURDER BY REQUEST!.....By Leslie T. White 10

The Black Hawk, keen, experienced detective though he was, deliberately turned his back on the coldest killer of the "Major's" gang of blood-thirsty jackals—and invited him to use his murder gun!

2 Thrill-Packed Detective Novelettes 2

DEATH TO THE WINNER!.....By Emile C. Tepperman 44

There was a gun in her hands, confession on her lips. It was none of Pat Donnelly's business—he could do nothing. But that was before he learned the identity of the dark-eyed, self-confessed killer. . . .

HIS CLIENT—THE KILLER!.....By Paul Ernst 74

If the girl Spring Wasey couldn't forget hadn't stumbled into the shadow of the chair, he might have continued to live in luxury—safe from all contact with killers and sudden death!

9 Human, Dramatic Short Stories of Crime-Fighting 9

WHILE THE BRIDE WAITED.....By George Armin Shaftel 37

He turned thief to steal pearls he knew were phonies—while his bride waited!

DEATH BALANCES THE BUDGET.....By George Bruce 59

A ghastly visitor came at last to see the lonely Miss Mears. . . .

SAFE IN HELL.....By Grendon Alzee 69

He thought none could follow his trail—but a man's fate needs no path to reach him!

HOT LEAD PENSION.....By Arthur Leo Zagat 89

Ken Moore was a cop who would rather help down-and-outers than jail them.

DEAD BEFORE DAWN.....By J. Lane Linklater 95

Death was to come before dawn—unless Felix's plan was successful!

WHILE THE CORPSE COOLS.....By Emerson Graves 103

Death struck while a lawyer and a law-man looked on—and saw nothing!

FUGITIVE LOVERS.....By George Rosenberg 110

Monahan had taken more than Carter's money—he had taken his daughter too!

DANGEROUS TALENT.....By Eric Taylor 115

Dan Moore had his burglar tools—and the love of the police Captain's daughter!

FEMALE IMPERSONATOR.....By Heydorn Schleh 120

She gave him a shield from which he struck at the one she loved.

— And —

HOT MONEY.....The Inspector 6

It's expensive to be honest—sometimes!

THE CRIME CLINIC.....A Department 124

The Readers get in a word.

Cover Painting by Tom Lovell

Story Illustrations by Amos Sewell and David Berger

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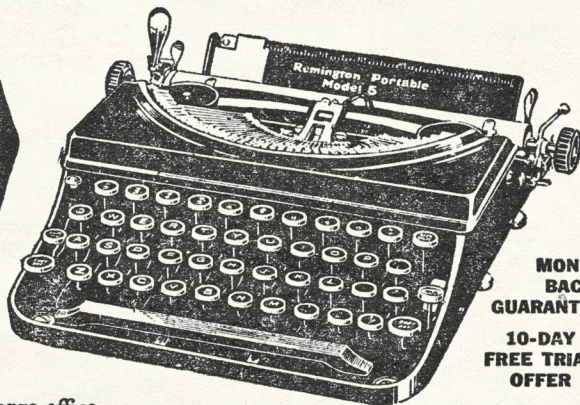
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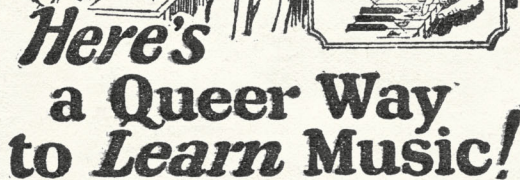
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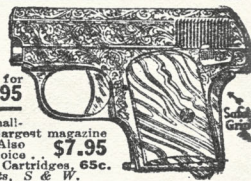
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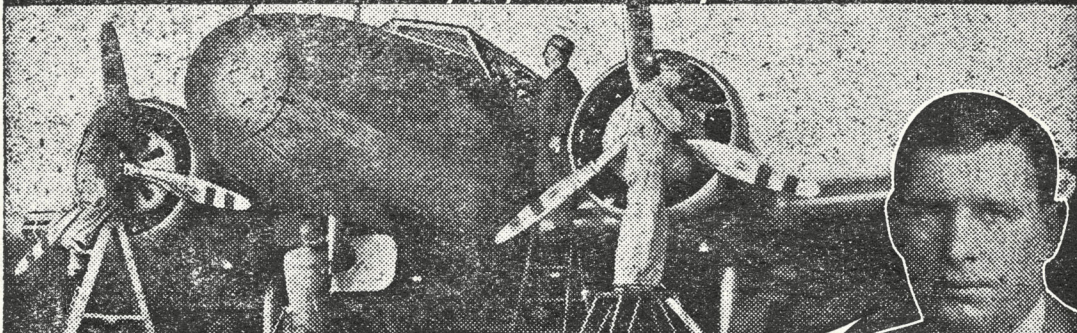
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HOT MONEY

THE packet of banknotes was lying in the gutter near the corner of Walnut and Grand Streets. Detective Matt Nelson pounced upon it, and stowed it away in his pocket. In a near-by phone booth he counted it. There was \$500 in ten-dollar bills, bound together with a strip of paper tape bearing the seal of the Fifth National Bank.

Detective Matt Nelson owned a home out in Urbana Subdivision—that is, he owned it as long as he could keep the mortgagee from foreclosing. His bill at his grocer's was mounting daily. The suit he was wearing was four years old and had patches in the seat. And his wife was going to have a baby. . . .

The next day, at the paying teller's window of the Fifth National Bank, he presented one of the bills and asked for two fives in exchange. He noticed the teller hesitate, and glance up at a list of serial numbers posted on the side of his cage. Then the teller handed out the two fives. Nelson thanked him and left the building.

So the bank hadn't missed the bills. That meant that Detective Nelson had nothing to fear from appropriating the bills to his own use. But it meant something else, too. . . .

Three days later, Matt Nelson called again at the Fifth National Bank and asked to see Mr. Rand, the cashier. Mr. Rand greeted Detective Nelson with cool dignity. Nelson did not return the greeting. He tossed the packet of bills on Mr. Rand's desk and said, "You dropped these from your pocket as you were crossing Walnut Street last Monday, Mr. Rand."

As Rand's eyes focussed on the bills his face turned a deathly white. "You're mistaken," he said. "The bills were never in my possession—and they do not belong to the bank. . . . The—the band, there, means nothing. The banks often get packets of bills from the Clearing House with one-another's bands around them. . . . You—you are quite free to keep the money. . . . We are missing none. . . ."

Detective Nelson straightened and sighed. He had found the money—now it was being given to him. He had excellent reasons for knowing that there were no strings tied to the offer. . . . And his wife was going to have a baby.

"Mr. Rand," said Nelson, "will you call in the President of the bank, Mr. Quigley—or shall I call him?"

Rand sucked in his breath with an audible gasp. Then his hand flashed to the top drawer of his desk, yanked it open. As Nelson dived head-long across the desk a revolver exploded in his face, blinding him, stunning him as the bullet plowed a furrow along side of his head. But he did not lose consciousness, and a few seconds later, after a mob of employees had burst through the door, and Mr. Quigley, himself, was querulously demanding an explanation, he was still able to snap a pair of handcuffs about Rand's wrists and give the desired explanation to Mr. Quigley.

"I found the bills in the street," elucidated Detective Nelson and found later that your bank had none of the bills posted as missing. That could only mean that your records had been falsified. For the past three days I've been checkin' up on a number of you gentlemen. I found that Mr. Rand, here, had been playin' the races pretty heavy—and losin'. I think an audit of his accounts will provide all the evidence you will need, and in the meantime I'll book him on an armed resistance charge. . . ."

The temptations held out to the enforcers of the law are nothing short of multitudinous. It should be a matter of pride that so few instances of bribery occur when opportunities for it are so frequent. DETECTIVE TALES reflects, in many of its best stories, the hard-headed indifference to this form of temptation that is a characteristic of the vast majority of the men in the service of the law.

—The Inspector.

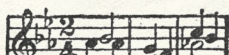
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"I have REDUCED MY WAIST 8 INCHES WITH THE WEIL BELT"

... writes George Bailey



"I suddenly realized that I had become a fat man". The boys kidded me about my big "paunch".

At parties I learned that I had become a "wall flower". Nobody wanted to dance with me.

In a bathing suit... I was immense. The day I heard some children laugh at me I decided to get a Weil Belt.



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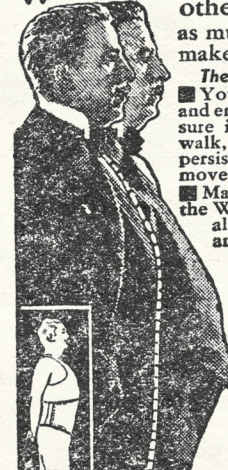
It seemed to support the abdominal walls and keep the digestive organs in place... and best of all, I became acceptable for insurance!

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DETECTIVE TALES COVERS

NUMBERS of readers have written to us complimenting us on the covers which appear on DETECTIVE TALES, and we think that perhaps, for this reason, a word or two about them might be of interest.

For the most part we try to make our covers descriptive of the general type of story appearing in DETECTIVE TALES, rather than illustrative of any one story. We feel that to put a picture on the cover illustrating, let us say, the lead story gives undue prominence to it at the expense of the other yarns. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule, but as a general practice this is the policy we adhere to in this regard.

We feel that Mr. Tom Lovell has done an exceptionally good job on this month's cover. Mr. Lovell has spent a great amount of time in perfecting his peculiarly graphic and realistic style. His colors are uniformly clean, life-like and brilliant. The action portrayed is invariably natural, unstrained and demonstrates graphically Mr. Lovell's knowledge of anatomy and design.

We believe that the cover of a magazine is extremely important. It's character should reflect the character of the stories it prefaces—and we feel that Mr. Lovell, as well as the men who do the black-and-whites that head the stories, has succeeded exceptionally well in doing this. We have gone to considerable pains to acquire the services of a man who could do this job as we felt that it should be done, and we are happy to note that an increasing number of readers have felt deeply enough about the matter to write to us and express their appreciation of DETECTIVE TALES. To them we hereby pledge ourselves to keep up the high standard in this matter that we have held to in the past. A standard, we feel, that is apparent throughout the whole magazine.



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I will pay CASH for OLD COINS, BILLS and STAMPS

Mrs. Dowty of Texas, sold B. Max Mehl one-half dollar for \$400.00.

I PAID \$200.00 to J. D. Martin of Virginia For Just One Copper Cent

"Please accept my thanks for your check for \$200.00 in payment for the copper cent I sent you. I appreciate the interest you have given this transaction. It's a pleasure to do business with a firm that handles matters as you do. I wish to assure you it will be a pleasure to me to tell my friends of your wonderful offer for old coins." Julian D. Martin, Va.

This is but one of the many similar letters I am constantly receiving. Post yourself! It pays! I paid Mr. Manning, New York, \$2,500.00 for a single silver dollar. Mrs. G. F. Adams, Ohio, received \$740.00 for some old coins. I paid W. F. Wilhelm of Pennsylvania \$18,500.00 for his rare coins. I paid J. T. Neville, of North Dakota, \$200.00 for a \$10 bill he picked up in circulation. I paid \$1,000.00 to Mr. Brownlee of Ga., for one old coin. Mr. Brownlee, in his letter to me, says: "Your letter received with the check for \$1,000 enclosed. I like to deal with such men as you and hope you continue buying coins for a long time." In the last thirty-four years I have paid hundreds of others handsome premiums for old bills and coins.

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\$1.00 to \$1,000 paid for certain old cents, nickels, dimes, quarters, etc. Right now I will pay \$50.00 for 1913 Liberty Head nickels (not buffalo); \$100.00 for 1894 dimes; "S" Mint; \$8.00 for 1858 quarters, no arrows; \$10.00 for 1866 quarters, no motto; \$200.00 each for 1834 and 1835 Silver Trade Dollars, etc., etc.

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There are single pennies that sell for \$100.00. There are nickels worth many dollars—dimes, quarters, half dollars and dollars on which big cash premiums are paid. Each year a fortune is offered by collectors for rare coins and stamps for their collections. The prices paid are amazing.

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Knowing about coins pays. Andrew Henry, of Idaho, was paid \$900.00 for a half-dollar, received in change. A valuable old coin may come into your possession or you may have one now and not know it. Post yourself.

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Some old stamps bring big premiums. An old 10c stamp, found in an old basket, was recently sold for \$19,000.00. There may be valuable stamps on some of your old letters. It will pay you to know how to recognize them.

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MURDER BY



A Stirring, Full-Length Novel of a Shrewd, Courageous Crime-Fighter

Much depended on the Black Hawk's living at least a few hours longer: the honor of a pitifully tortured girl, the wiping out of as murderous and foul a gang of crooks as ever terrorized a city, his own good name. But the Black Hawk, keen, experienced detective though he was, deliberately turned his back on the coldest killer of the "Major's" gang of blood-thirsty jackals—and invited him to use his murder gun!

JUDITH ALLWYN poured her whole soul into that letter, punctuated it with tears, and when the pen finally fell from her trembling fingers, she

knew that her heart was already dead. What she did with her beautiful body now could make no difference. Hiding it deep against the warmth of her breasts, she

REQUEST!

by
LESLIE T. WHITE



Judith threw herself forward. . . .

turned and moved quietly to the door.

From her own room she stepped into the half-light of the corridor and tip-toed to the wide staircase that lead below. She paused, listened, but the big house was silent save for the fire crackling in the library fireplace. Paul would be there, reading. She must be sure, though.

With the vision of death in her eyes, Judith found her limbs numbed, awkward. She stumbled on the top step, but regained her balance and walked down until a curve

in the stairs permitted a vista of the panelled library below.

Her husband was sprawled in a chair, slippered feet lounging on a brocaded ottoman. She felt her courage drain before her love for this man, so she whirled soundlessly and crept down the stairs. . . .

THE chill night air stimulated Judith. She blinked her eyes empty of tears. She marched swiftly down the winding path to the sidewalk. With trees forming

an almost solid arch, the sidewalk was dark. Judith did not turn, but half-walked, half-ran to the corner. Thus she did not notice the shadow that slithered along the fringe of trees in her wake.

She turned at the first corner, hurried another block and turned again. There was a small, trim roadster parked before an empty house. Judith stopped, glanced furtively in all directions, then ducked into the seat and wormed under the steering wheel.

Starting the engine, she drove north. Again, in failing to heed pursuit, she was not aware of the dark sedan that picked up her trail before she had traversed a full block.

Save for traffic signals, Judith made no stops until she finally swerved the roadster into a small public garage situated within sight of the Union Station. It was the hour just before the closing of the theaters and the streets were not yet filled with machines.

She switched off the engine and relaxed against the seat as she watched the garage attendant approach. Her hand stole to the gun butt resting in the bosom of her dress beside the letter, and she made certain it would not tumble from her dress when she stepped to the ground. The white-uniformed attendant tore a ticket in half, deftly slipped one portion of the card under the windshield-wiper and, smiling, proffered the remaining stub to Judith.

She handed him a coin and tried to match his grin, but it was a failure. Accepting the receipt stub, Judith said:

"I'm taking a little trip. My husband will probably call for the car in a day or so."

The man grinned again. He didn't look very bright, but his was an honest face. . . .

JUDITH cut across the street towards the railroad station, looked back. The

attendant was following her with his eyes.

She ducked into the pillared entrance of the depot and stopped in front of a mail-box. She plucked the unsealed letter from her dress, dropped the receipt stub for her car into the envelope, sealed it, and thrust it into the postal receptacle.

That was the second last bridge. One more, and then. . . .

Judith stopped thinking. She hurried through the station, came out another exit and entered a cab.

"The East Docks!" she told the driver.

The man frowned, pulled out a large silver watch.

"We'll have to hurry to make the night boat, lady," he said, pessimistically. "If that's the one you want."

"Hurry then," snapped Judith, and fell back against the seat.

In the rocking cab, Judith tried to assure herself that her way was the best. Paul would be hurt, cruelly hurt, but not so much as if he knew the *real truth*.

It was that *real truth* that numbed Judith's senses. It didn't seem possible that she could have done the thing, not really. Her whole being revolted, she felt nauseated. But she had seen the proof, cruel, revealing. No, and her head shook doggedly, this was the way. Paul would get her letter—too late, of course, to interfere—and would probably attempt to trace her from the garage. The trail would lead to the Union Station where a train left every few minutes in some direction or other. It would be a blind, and that would be best.

The cab stopped, breaking up her reverie. The door opened and the driver thrust his head into the tonneau.

"Well, we made it, lady!"

Judith nodded and allowed him to help her out to the sidewalk. She paid him and she ran towards the landing where a number of people were crowded around the gang-plank of the coastal steamer. She

turned the corner of the dock, then swung directly away from the steamer. With the lights of the big vessel behind her, she followed the lengthy shadow of her slender body as it hurried into the deeper darkness of the waterfront.

With that instinctive sensitiveness of raw nerves, Judith abruptly knew she was not alone. The sobs dried up. She whirled, and a new terror engulfed her as she saw the figure of a man running toward her.

Her first thought was of a watchman who, at most, might interfere with her plans. A tremulous hand stole in the butt of her gun and she stopped.

The stranger was big, rather than tall, with powerful shoulders and a domineering stride. He barged right up to her, grabbed one arm, and spoke.

"No you don't, pretty face," he sneered, his face thrust close to hers. "We ain't done with you yet. Back you go to that husband until we're through. Then you can do what you want, if he don't do it for you." He laughed, and his laugh killed something in Judith Allyn.

Automatically she leaped sideways, jerked free. The gorilla swore an obscene oath and swung his hand. A broad, open palm caught Judith on the face, knocking her flat on her back. He regained his balance and made another dive for her. . . .

At that moment the gun that, magically, had come into Judith's hand, exploded!

The man gave a startled bleat of pain and fear. He veered sideways, stumbled and fell heavily. He rolled over on his back and for a moment the moonlight washed his face. It was white, so Judith thought, and the false courage left her. She threw the gun from her hand as though it was hot to her touch, scrambled to her feet and began to run. She didn't look back, but she felt someone was chasing her.

Hurtling through darkness, Judith

thought she heard the cry of a man and a dog's bark—and then she struck the icy water with a crash that knocked the wind from her body. She gasped, and the salt water flooded her mouth, her nose, her ears as she plummeted deeper. Lights pinwheeled in her reeling brain, pain slipped away . . . and with it her senses.

CHAPTER TWO

Meeting of Jackals

THE room was large, spacious and arranged in excellent taste. The furnishings were rich, yet conservative, and only a connoisseur could have chosen and hung the etchings. There were books, but their contents certainly were foreign to three of the male occupants. In the fourth man lay the answer: it was his apartment.

This fourth man was tall and very straight without being stiff. He looked as if he belonged in a military uniform, but at the present moment his attire was considerably less formal. He wore a black lounging robe of heavy brocaded silk, fastened tightly around slim hips by a silken sash. He was known only to a few intimates as the "Major", was a seasoned criminal, a Potentate of Crime.

Of the remaining trio, Monk Kushner towered both mentally and physically above his companions. In contrast to the Major's cultured features, his were large, coarse and threatening. He was a lawyer, clever in the same way a jackal is clever and without enough imagination to know fear. The Major thought up blackmail schemes; Kushner collected and bullied.

A floppish young man just under thirty stood to the left of Kushner, slightly back of the Major's chair—Doggie Ruhl. He was immaculately dressed in evening clothes, correct even to the clove red carnation which he affected in the dull silk

lapel. His face was clear and soft and his dark eyes had a clinging, whimsical look that was part of his stock in trade.

But the hub of interest in the room centered around the spider-like old man that rounded out the quartette. This tubercular old wasp, whose bony, pyro-stained fingers and hacking cough called to mind a medaeval wizard, was gingerly sorting a batch of photographic prints and negatives from various pockets in his untidy clothes. He would take a negative from his pocket, thrust it up to the light and peer over the top of thick-lensed spectacles at it. Then he would hiss something through stained teeth and Ruhl, who was close enough to catch the taint of his breath, would grimace.

Finally he uttered a long, satisfied, "A-a-ah!" and jabbed a small print at the Major. The latter accepted it, calmly readjusted his monocle and moved so that the print in his hand caught more light. Kushner and Ruhl crowded close, peering over his shoulder.

The foppish young man smirked; Kushner looked up from the print and gave him a directly scowling glance.

"Gad, an we give you a take for *that*!" He indicated the print with a jerk of his head.

Ruhl's smirk widened until it assumed the proportions of a leer. He made no remark.

The warped old wizard sidled closer, rubbing both claw-hands and chuckling.

"Good, eh? Even better than the others, eh?"

THE Major continued his study without expression. He might have been examining an etching of a sunset, or a marine, instead of the subject of this photographic print; but the faces of the other three men proved it was no sunset scene they were squinting at.

Nor was it. The subject was of a man

and a woman locked in each others arms; the man was Doggie Ruhl. Their actions were innocent enough, in itself, but the startling and arresting feature of the print was that both the subjects were sans clothing.

The Major nodded slowly.

"Very clever, Manheim. Yes, it is better than the others." His voice was low, casual.

The old man trembled with pleasure. He forked a plate negative from his pocket and offered it.

"See the negative, Major," he whined and followed with a hacking cough. "You can't see where I superimposed the head."

The Major nodded again. "You can't," he admitted.

Kushner swore. "Gad, an' is that the plate you took it on?"

Manheim uttered an impatient hiss, pushed his glasses up into the blue crease made by the nose-piece, and leered.

"Fool! Of course not! Why should I work for nights making negative, then positive, then negative again until I go nearly blind? No, I have a system where they can't detect it's phony!" His squeaking voice was mounting rapidly.

The Major stopped any further argument.

"It is very good, Manheim, you are a true artist. Now if the rest of you have done as well . . .?" He fixed his eyes on the lawyer.

Kushner bobbed his big head.

"I saw the Allwyn dame today, early. I showed her one of those prints again. She really believes, in some way, it's herself. She gave me this. . . ." He hooked a string of pearls from his pocket and dangled them so they caught the full radiance of light.

"I told her it wasn't enough. I was plenty tough. She said she'd try, but that she had given me everything."

The Major tossed the print onto a small table and toyed with his monocle.

"There are limits," he said with museful deliberation, "beyond which a woman can not be pressed. Once over that line, desperation may . . ."

Doggie smirked. "I did what you suggested, Major," he said. His voice had a caressing quality, like silk rubbing together, and each word seemed to linger and melt into the next. "Judith has cooled a lot, but she doesn't suspect me—she thinks I'm also an innocent victim. In fact she gave me a hundred dollars to help when I told her I was being blackmailed too. But I don't think she's good for much more. She pawned most of her jewels and sold out a lot of bonds her mother had given her. She's about cleaned. However, I've already contacted that other woman, this Alice Layhe. Lupo insulted her and I smacked him over and the rest was duck soup. I managed to have tea with her, gave her the foreign legion story and . . ."

Kushner snorted.

"Gad, how they eat your line, Doggie! You, a hell-hound, ha!"

Ruhl flushed, but went on:

"It's making us money anyhow. I've arranged to attend a party late tonight; she'll be there with her husband."

The Major nodded in approbation.

"Good, now if you play your cards the way I tell—" He stopped and swung his eyes to the hall door.

The others swivelled in unison. Stumbling footsteps clumped down the corridor, stopped, and a buzzer rang somewhere in the apartment. The four waited. A giant German appeared from a room beyond, glanced at the Major, then moved towards the door. He vanished to reappear a couple of minutes later assisting another man. As the latter stumbled into the presence of the four, at least three gasped his name.

"Lupo!" It was a chorus of fear.

Lupo the Lynx was in bad shape. As he stood, his back propped against the door jamb, blood dripped from his battered face. At best, Lupo the Lynx was no Appollo, but at the moment he looked as if he had lost an argument with a locomotive. His once-broken nose was now a bulbulous knot, his usually belligerent jaw was strangely awry, and his mouth wide open as though in a frozen yawn. He had fear in his piggy eyes; he seemed afraid of the men before him and even more afraid of something behind. His clothes were torn, especially around the throat, forearms and legs. Chunks of cloth were missing.

The Major broke the heavy silence.

"What is the matter with you?"

Kushner's held-breath exploded.

"Yeah! What in hell happened?"

Where's the dame I . . ." He stopped, swore.

Lupo blinked rapidly, tears welled out of his eyes, and streaked his bloody cheek. He raised a weary hand, pulled at his jaw, which suddenly snapped back into place. At the same time, strange guttural sounds escaped his wide open mouth. Tears came to his eyes as he gingerly fumbled at his aching lower maxillary.

"Say it!" roared Kushner.

Lupo stopped, blinked. He opened his mouth experimentally, tested it, then said:

"The Black Hawk!"

THE Major never changed his expression, but a sucking noise of tongue on teeth warned the initiated that the news was a shock. At length he spoke.

"What blunder did you make, Lupo, that brought the Hawk into the picture?"

Lupo wagged his head.

"S' help me, Chief, none! I follows the dame when she leaves the house. She went to a garage, plants her machine and beats it through the station. She gets a

cab, goes to the docks and I follows. When I seen she was goin' to croak herself, I grabs her. She does this. . . ." He pointed to a bullet hole along his shoulder. "It didn't do much damage, but knocked me off'n my pins. Then she headed for the drink, me after her. I hears a dog, a small sort of rat terrier, I guess. . . ."

"Hawk's Scottie!" Kushner hissed between clenched teeth.

"Anyhow, the dog went for me, an' then this man pussy-foots out of the darkness. I go for my gun, but, cripes, he slugs me with a club an' . . ."

"You don't have to lie!" Kushner cut in. "The Black Hawk never carries anything but his fists."

"Well, I didn't see much," Lupo defended, "nothin' but a lot of stars. My nose went the first crack, then when I got up I run into this." He indicated his jaw.

"And the woman?" the Major demanded.

"I don't know," the unfortunate Lupo admitted. "When I come to, well, there weren't nobody around."

There was a long moment of silence, then Ruhl whispered:

"I guess that ends our racket!"

Kushner swore, growled: "I can't understand him goin' into this. But for once Doggie's right; we'll have to hole up, Major."

The Major adjusted his monocle, surveyed Kushner as though for the first time, and his firm mouth twisted into a frosty smile.

"My dear Monk, that hardly sounds like you!"

Kushner jerked his neck.

"I know, I know, you got lots of nerve, Major, but you're a newcomer to this town, practically speaking; I was raised here. This guy Hawk is no monkey, I'm telling you. A lot of tough guys mixed with him, and if they were lucky they got

off with just dying; the others. . . ." Kushner shook his head and sucked breath through tightened lips.

The Major sat down, removed his monocle and musefully tapped it against a thumb nail. The others waited in a respectful silence.

"I expected that, sooner or later, I would run against this ex-pugilist you call the Black Hawk," he told them. "I'm afraid the city cannot hold us both."

Kushner winced. "Exactly the way Hawk would phrase it, Major."

Manheim, who defied the Major and loathed Kushner, sniffed impatiently.

"Pshaw! What's so tough about this Black Hawk? He's only human, isn't he? Tell me that—isn't he? Eh?" He favored the lawyer with a blast of his potent breath.

For once Kushner showed no resentment; he seemed lost in thought.

"A lot of people don't think he's human," he replied. "He's rich and powerful, although some of the cops hate his guts. He isn't any ordinary slug-nutty palooka—get that idea out of your head. He's brains. He climbed to the championship of the world, then retired with a lot of jack, undefeated. Now he spends his time and money keeping us honest folks from making a living."

"I understood he specialized solely on jewel cases," the Major commented.

"He does," Kushner admitted. "I can't understand how he horned into this affair unless he just happened to be prowling the water-front when the Allywn dame tried to go off the pier. That's probably the story, because he's moody, or something. He's always around where you don't want him."

"Then, in your opinion, Monk, the Hawk has our young matron in his keeping?"

"That's a pretty good guess, Major!"

The Major stood up. He looked more the soldier than ever.

"In that case," he said crisply, "we will kill two birds with one stone."

CHAPTER THREE

The Hawk that Flies Alone

JUDITH ALLWYN recovered consciousness in a strange environment. She found herself half-buried in the dreamy depths of a huge chair, a pillow comfortably placed behind her head and her feet, now encased in dainty mules, propped upon an ottoman before a crackling fire. She blinked, completely bewildered, but when her eyes opened again, the setting was the same.

Judith had the weak sensation that it must be all part of a dream. She looked at her clothing: it too, was strange. Her own sodden garments were hidden beneath a great warm gown which enshrouded her slender body. Everything about the setting was masculine, everything except those dainty mules.

Suddenly she felt eyes watching her, boring into her in calculating appraisal. She jerked erect, and saw the owner of those unsympathetic eyes. They seemed to glow out of the shadows at her feet. A massive tiger rug stretched across the middle of the big room, and on it lay the owner of those beady orbs.

He was small in stature, and at first she wasn't sure what sort of creature he was. His squarish head was a thing of angles: sharp, alert ears, a straight nose and boxed whiskers. His shaggy coat was a grey brindle, pig-rough. As she met the eyes, the diminutive owner lifted his head and she saw a gleaming row of teeth that looked, to her terrified gaze, comparable in size with the fangs of the huge Siberian tiger. Judith shrank back into the chair and her mouth opened for a scream.

But she never gave utterance to it. A man's voice broke the silence.

"Don't be afraid of Sandy, young lady. He won't harm you."

Judith went limp. The voice seemed to come from the depths of a huge chair on the opposite side of the fireplace. As she stared, her eyes distinguished the figure of a man relaxed there.

He was almost lost in a clump of shadow, for the blaze of the logs were reflected on her own features. But now that she was aware of his presence, he seemed to become more visible. He was big, without seeming so, and ruggedly handsome. His skin was tanned so that it all but matched the deep brown upholstery of the chair in which he sat. He moved slightly and Judith glimpsed the sheen of a starched shirt-front under a smoking jacket. Her own eyes must have mirrored the terror that gripped her, for the man smiled.

"Please don't be startled," he suggested quietly. "You're quite all right. Drink that glass of brandy beside you."

Somehow Judith obeyed. The brandy stimulated her and she ran a timid hand over her face. Unexplainably, fear was melting away.

"Who are *you*?" she whispered after a pause. "And where am I?"

"My name is James Hawk," the man told her. "This is my home."

"*Your home!*" Judith gasped. "How did I get here?" At once the memories broke the dyke of oblivion and flooded her mind.

"I was walking along the water-front," the man was saying, "when I saw you running. There was a man following you who apparently did not belong because, well—you shot him."

Judith buried her face in her hands.

"God forgive me!" she sobbed.

"Don't let it worry you," Hawk chuckled. "Your shooting needs improvement."

He wasn't hurt, not then. But he resented my appearance on the scene and we had a slight altercation."

"Oh-oh!" sobbed Judith. "He was a monster! Did you get hurt?"

The man smiled. "Well, no. You see, I've done a bit of that sort of thing, and . . . anyhow, we brought you here. Mind telling me what you meant to do down there?"

The last veil of memory lifted and Judith remembered it all. She sagged, limp, defeated.

"I meant to kill myself!"

Hawk rose, crossed to a small cabinet and opened it. He chose one, from a generous variety of bottles, and poured a stiff drink into a glass. Then he moved over to her chair, handed it to her.

"Drink this."

It was a command, not a request, but somehow Judith had no longer the strength to resist. Her hand closed over the glass and her eyes met those of the small dog on the rug. The expression had not changed; he seemed neither to like nor dislike her; he was coldly impersonal . . . She emptied the drink.

THE man returned to his chair, but sat on the arm, watching her. The drink had seared her throat, but she felt strangely different.

"Now see here," he said. "You're in trouble. I happen to know that the man who attacked you is a professional killer known as Lupo the Lynx. Lupo works only on assignments and is not given to chasing women of your ilk for the sport of the thing. I know, too, that Lupo is connected with a master blackmailer and it's a fair guess that you are one of his victims. If you will give me your story, perhaps I can help you."

Judith shook her head frantically.

"No, no, no! You must not interfere! You can't realize what you are doing!"

She stared at her feet in obvious hysteria. "I must go! I must, I tell you!"

The dog bounced to his feet, eyeing her. He gave a low, throaty growl that frightened her back into her chair.

The man shook his head.

"You cannot leave like this, Mrs. Allwyn."

Judith felt suddenly limp.

"Then you know who I . . .?"

Hawk nodded. "You were very careful to remove all marks of identification from your clothing," he told her, "But I recognized you from this." He picked up a rotogravure picture, obviously gleaned from a Sunday supplement. It was a photograph of herself, and was clipped to a carefully typewritten page.

Noting her surprise, he went on:

"I keep a file of all owners of well-known jewelry. You have several splendid gems, Mrs. Allwyn; your necklace of matched pearls is a collector's item. I dislike a scene, and all that sort of thing, but if you persist in leaving, I must call your husband."

"Oh, you wouldn't!"

His mouth tightened. "I can't let you kill yourself."

Judith covered her face. Her head swam dizzily, but in spite of her terror, she felt an inclination to talk. It must be the drink, she told herself. But she couldn't talk to this absolute stranger who called himself. . . .

Abruptly she jerked erect. Her eyes flashed from the man to the dog, and then to the rug the dog was lying upon. His identity exploded in her consciousness and on her lips simultaneously.

"You are the—the *Hawk*—the *Black Hawk*!"

She saw him smile and knew she was right. Her stare remained fixed. So a miracle had happened to her; she had leapt into the dark waters of the harbor and woke up in the home of the strangest

man in the city, the legendary figure known as the Black Hawk! Judith had heard of him, often. Yet somehow, now that she found herself alone in his presence, she expected to see an older and harder character.

"An emerald-cut diamond pendant appeared in the possession of a known fence," the famous detective was saying. "If I'm not greatly mistaken, it was the same stone Botteaux cut for you at the order of your husband."

Judith nodded.

"I sold it!" she groaned. Then the words babbled out of her lips. "Oh, it's ghastly! I hate myself—loathe myself!"

"It can't be as bad as that," Hawk suggested.

"You don't know how bad it really is!" she cried. "I've put myself in an impossible situation. There is only one way out. I tried to take that!"

"It began *how*?"

THE drink was having its effect. Judith found herself talking, without the power to stop. She had the detached sensation of listening to another's story.

"Two months ago, I was accosted on the street by a terrible man. He said some frightful things, and I was too stricken to scream. Then a clean-cut young chap who chanced to be passing came to my assistance. He knocked the other down and helped me into a cab before there was any trouble or publicity. I—well—I never did a thing like it before, but I did go to tea with him at a tiny café he suggested. It was fun and he was so interesting; he had been an officer in the French Foreign Legion.

"We had tea several times after that and . . ." Judith stopped. Tears flooded her eyes and the image of the detective swam unsteadily.

"He compromised you?"

Her head nodded mutely. She shut her eyes, tight, and went on:

"One day we went to a new place for cocktails. I don't remember much myself. I know he looked so nice and romantic, and then . . . perhaps I wasn't used to the drink. Anyway, I woke up hours later in a room above the café. I was alone and . . ." Judith bit back the sob that threatened, ". . . my clothing was dishevelled. The manager came up and told me that I had been having a wild party, that I had been singing and dancing until his other tenants had complained. He said, too, that two men had come and arrested Ellison."

"Who's Ellison?"

"Buddy Ellison; the young man I was with!

"I was mortified and nearly crazy! I went home in a cab, just sick. I had no idea what could have happened until the lawyer called."

"Who's lawyer?"

"Buddy's wife's. I didn't know he was married; it really never came up. We were just friends up until . . ." She faltered again.

"It sounds like a simple variation of the old badger game," Hawk commented dryly. "You should have told the lawyer to go climb a tack."

Judith shook her head.

"You don't understand! He had pictures! Oh, God forgive me, they were terrible! How could I be such a loathesome beast!"

"Whoa!" coaxed the detective with a placating motion of his hand. "Take it easy. What were the pictures? Of you and Ellison in a compromising. . . .?"

She nodded hysterically.

"So can't you understand that there is no way out? No matter what happens, those pictures might be seen. Oh, Mr. Hawk, I couldn't stand it. My family, my baby, my husband!"

"Perhaps the pictures are faked?"

"No, no, no! I saw a print! They are only too real . . . and after what the manager said about me dancing and singing. . . .!"

"Did you ever see Ellison again?"

Judith choked incoherently for a moment, then controlled herself sufficiently to continue:

"Yes. He called the next day. He was most contrite, took all the blame and offered to go to Paul, my husband, and tell him the truth. But don't you see. . . ? And then they started to blackmail *him*, too, and . . . well, I've reached the end of my rope."

Hawk took a slow walk around the room.

"The first thing for you to do," he suggested slowly, "is to return home. Then I'll see. . . ."

She sobbed out the answer to that.

"I can't go home! I've written a letter to my husband!"

The Black Hawk frowned, opened his mouth to speak, when a low, warning growl from the dog stopped him.

A few seconds later the doorbell jangled.

Stark terror flooded the eyes of Judith Allwyn. She swayed to her feet, clutched the back of the chair. The detective nodded toward the tiny alcove, and she stumbled towards it. The instant she was out of sight, the Hawk snapped his fingers once.

The terrier met his eyes, turned quietly and vanished into the shadows behind a chair. After that, Hawk swung around and walked to the front door.

CHAPTER FOUR

Visiting Gorillas

MEN that lived in the shadow-world swore the Black Hawk bore a charmed life. But this, like most super-

stitions, belied a perfectly logical explanation. True, he had escaped the blazing guns and baited traps of the underworld, often by the narrowest margins. Yet the answer was simple: he was clever. Living on the fringe of death and violence, his wits were sharpened to a knife-edge. He always controlled a situation whenever possible, yet on the few occasions when cornered showed a ferocity that threw his enemies into confusion.

And so, now, as he quietly opened his front door with apparent casualness, he contrived to keep his body shielded by the steel-backed panel.

Two men barged through the opening. They might have slain him then, but he knew they wouldn't. Having come this far, he was satisfied they wanted something besides his life.

The Black Hawk recognized the first man as Lupo the Lynx; Lupo carried a gun and looked anxious to use it. It was obvious that subordination to the second man was the only thing that prevented him. And so the detective swung his eyes from Lupo and surveyed the glowering scowl of Monk Kushner.

"Where's the dame, Hawk?" snapped the attorney.

The detective grinned. Lupo spat an oath and raked his knuckles across Hawk's jaw.

"You heard him!" he snarled.

Hawk nodded, ignored the blow. "It didn't make sense, that's all."

Kushner snapped a piece of gum between his teeth. "Inside," he growled, indicating the lighted library with a jerk of his head.

Hawk shrugged, turned and sauntered ahead of his visitors. Without moving his head, he glanced swiftly around the room. Neither the woman nor the terrier was visible. He crossed to the hearth, swung around and leaned against the mantle.

Kushner was disappointed; his scowl showed that. Lupo's expression was one of ill-suppressed hate; he looked like a vicious dog straining on a leash. That leash, Hawk surmised, lay in an unspoken word from Monk Kushner.

"You've got a woman cached someplace. We want her, pronto."

Hawk chose a smoke from a case nearby, taking care to keep his hands in sight all the time. He never looked at Lupo, but out of the corner of his eyes he glimpsed the surly gorilla watching him, hawk-like.

"It's customary," he drawled, "to state your business when you come into a place. Suppose you do that."

Kushner gave his head a quick nod.

"Okay. We want the woman first. Then we're going to make damn sure you learn to keep your nose out of our business."

"Blackmail business?"

Kushner snorted, but made no immediate retort. He twisted his thick neck and spoke to Lupo.

"Frisk the joint! I got a hunch the dame's still here."

THE gorilla bobbed his head. He still showed plenty evidence of his recent thrashing. His nose was swollen into a massive sore and his jaw was blue. He favored his injured shoulder and when he turned to cross the room, he dragged one leg.

The Hawk watched Lupo move towards the alcove. He wondered what the Allwyn woman would say when the gunman dragged her from her place of concealment. He moved his head slightly and saw two shining eyes fixed on his face. It was difficult to suppress a smile at the eager, pleading anticipation he read there.

To his surprise, however, Lupo ram-sacked the little alcove without success.

He limped back into the library holding up a tiny slipper.

But Judith Allwyn had vanished!

For a long moment the three men stared at the slipper, then Kushner swung piggy eyes on the Black Hawk.

"I'll give you just three seconds," he swore, "to turn up that dame. *One. . .*"

"You have me there," grunted Hawk.

"Two. . ."

Hawk realized his position. It was now or never. He had hoped to postpone the encounter as long as possible in the hope of gleaning some pertinent facts behind the case. But the thing was out of his hands. Kushner towered before him like a Nero at an execution; Lupo fingered his gun, eager, hungry to fire.

The detective bunched his muscles with no outer movement; his weight shifted to the balls of his feet. Even a close observer could not have detected the change, would not have granted him a chance. And when Monk Kushner drew his breath to count "three", Hawk snapped his fingers. . . . *twice*.

Lupo the Lynx screamed in pain and terror as tearing fangs crunched about his gun-wrist. His fingers contracted, the weapon exploded a couple of times, then clattered from numbed fingers.

Hawk hesitated the barest fraction of a second to make sure that Sandy had his hold, then he slithered forward and stabbed a rapierish left into the startled features of the big attorney.

The Monk was an athlete of parts, Hawk knew that from the way he instinctively rolled with the blow. Kushner pirouetted, sensed the fact that he would have no time to go for a gun and scooped up a chair. As the detective dove after him, Kushner lashed out with the chair.

Lupo was thrashing on the floor trying to shake off the clamped teeth of the dog. He dragged the big tiger rug from its usual place into the center of the room.

Thus, as Hawk ducked the chair, his foot contacted the stuffed head of the deceased tiger and he sprawled at the very feet of his antagonist, helpless for the moment.

That moment was all Monk Kushner needed. He let go the chair, leapt back a step and clawed out his gun. As the Hawk pulled himself to a half-crouch, he found himself closer to death than he had ever been before. He saw Kushner coolly ratchet back the hammer of the big revolver and braced himself for the leaden impact.

And then a grey streak caromed past his head to land full on the lawyer's chest.

Hawk sighed deeply, not so much in relief as in appreciation. Sandy had never let him down! The game little Scot had missed his flying hold, but no matter. Two slugs churned from the lawyer's gun, but they *zinged* over the Hawk's head. For an instant, Monk Kushner was unbalanced. . . .

The detective started the blow with his leap. Both terminated against the massive frame of the Monk. He toppled sideways like a felled Redwood. The whole house shook as he struck the floor—out cold.

Sandy had leapt to one side to escape the weight of the big man, but almost at once he sprang back again and would have torn Kushner's throat out had the Hawk not prevented him by a quiet command.

Hawk licked his torn knuckle and whirled to see what had happened to Kushner's aide. A low whistle escaped him.

Lupo the Lynx lay spread-eagled on his back. His wide, glazing eyes told a mute story. He was quite dead!

Hawk's first thought was, of course, that Sandy had killed the gorilla, but as he bent over the body, he saw the two bullet holes; one had struck Lupo in the forehead just above the right eye, the

other had pierced his throat. Either, the detective knew, would have caused death. The truth was obvious: when Sandy had tilted Monk Kushner off balance just as the lawyer fired, he had saved his master's life, but condemned the Lynx.

And then the Hawk remembered the woman!

He turned towards the alcove, glancing at Kushner. The lawyer was limp, and looked as though he would remain so for some time.

But Judith Allwyn was not in the tiny space. Acting on a hunch, he examined the window, and thus found the solution to her disappearance. The sash, customarily fastened, was now unlocked. She had made her escape through the window during the fight.

Relocking it, he returned to the big library. . . .

FOR a moment Hawk was undecided.

His duty, of course, was to call the police, but that would involve explanations; and a subsequent investigation, even if it cleared himself, would undoubtedly drag the name of Judith Allwyn into the limelight and the mire of scandal. Hawk shook his head grimly; he couldn't do that.

He picked up the tiny slipper that had fallen from the hairy hands of Lupo. It was trim, clean and almost pathetically dainty. Gently he placed it on the mantle, then he reached down, gripped the corpse of Lupo the Lynx by the shoulders and dragged him out of the room.

When Hawk returned a moment later, there was the grim ghost of a smile hovering on his lips. Not a smile of merriment, but rather a satisfied grin that heralded an idea.

Sandy was still standing guard over the inert figure of the lawyer. The detective crossed to a cabinet, removed a tiny bottle, shook it carefully, and then withdrawing

the stopper, rubbed it against the soles of Kushner's oxfords.

Replacing the bottle, he gave Sandy a warning nod and left the room. He carried a case when he came back, from which he extracted several electric light bulbs. These he changed with the ones at present in the room lamps, and when he had finished, the whole tone of the library was changed. Instead of the soft, mellow light that was customary, the place was alive with brilliance. With only the puzzled eyes of the terrier to follow his movements, the Hawk went ahead with his plan. The stage was barely completed when a low growl from Sandy warned him that the vacationing spirit of attorney Kushner was in the process of reclaiming the limp body.

CHAPTER FIVE

Hawk Snare

THE somewhat hazy vision that greeted the Monk when he experimentally pried open one eye was not reassuring. He found himself sprawled in a corner, his head propped against a hard, unyielding wall. That head was just one big ache. From this position he could distinguish the tall figure of the Hawk towering above him. The gun in the detective's hands he recognized as his own. A rumbling noise at his elbow caught his attention and when he turned his head, he cried out in terror. Inches from his throat crouched the small terrier, long fangs bared. And then the Hawk spoke to him.

"Don't make any sudden moves," he recommended. "But if you care to crawl into this chair, you may find it more comfortable."

Monk Kushner climbed to his feet and staggered over to the chair the detective had indicated. His beady eyes whipped around the big room, but they seemed to be alone. Monk had a hazy

recollection of Lupo's trying to jump the Hawk from behind during their recent battle, but he couldn't be sure. Monk wasn't sure of anything at the moment, except that he was in a bad spot. If half the things he had heard about this ex-pug were true, he'd be lucky to get out of the mess with his life, to say nothing of his freedom.

To his surprise, however, Hawk acted the perfect host. He poured a stiff glass of good Scotch and pushed it in front of the lawyer. Monk drained the container in one gulp, and while he felt considerably improved, he was still bewildered.

The Hawk sank into a chair opposite.

"Now," he suggested blandly, "suppose we discuss this matter sensibly, as man to man. You are a lawyer, I believe? The name is Kushner?"

Monk chewed his lower lip, frowned.

"Sure," he admitted finally, "I'm a lawyer. I'll play it your way, mister."

Hawk beamed, and Kushner's puzzlement increased. Was this grinning ape the guy the whole underworld feared? Was he nuts, or did he have something up his sleeve? He couldn't be sure and it worried him. The bottle of excellent Scotch lay within the reach of his arm and he took another long one. Out of the corner of one eye he watched the detective to see how he was taking it, but the Hawk was gazing dreamily at the ceiling.

Kushner felt his confidence return in direct ratio to the strength of the liquor.

"I guess I was a little hasty," he said, choosing each word with obvious care. "But of course I was only bluffing."

"I thought you were," Hawk admitted. "Now just what is the angle? The woman's husband is reputedly wealthy, so I suppose you had decided on a snatch?"

Kushner frowned at the glass. He wished he knew just how much the Allwyn wench had talked. This Hawk talked and acted like a punk kid, but Monk

couldn't forget all the weird tales he had heard about him. Was Hawk seeking a cut on the take, or was he baiting him on? And where in the hell was Lupo?

"There's an idea in that," Monk agreed. "But the truth of the matter is, I'm working for her husband. The dame's been stepping out—you know what I mean."

Hawk whistled, grinned, then nodded.

"I'm beginning to understand. So that is how it is, eh? Well, she fooled me."

Smart? Monk nearly laughed out loud.

"Sure, that's how it is," he declared with a straight face. "Now I'll have a hell of a time tracing her down again. You see. . . ."

Monk's words trailed and his pulse quickened. He almost blinked, for there was his own gun on the table less than halfway between himself and the detective. Hastily he jerked his eyes back to the other, but apparently Hawk had noticed nothing.

". . . . you see, Hawk, there's a divorce in the wind," he wound up lamely.

The detective grimaced disgustedly.

"Bah! Another night shot to blazes. Well, that's too bad. You won't mind explaining to the police, will you? I'll have to phone them in case some of the neighbor's report the shooting. An attorney of your standing would have no trouble in that connection, of course." He rolled his head to indicate the telephone behind him.

Kushner shook his head.

"Sure, call 'em now. I'll explain."

As the detective rose, Monk bunched his muscles. His button eyes slithered around the room in search of the dog, but Sandy had disappeared. He replaced his glass on the stand nearby and gripped the arms of his chair. Through drooping lids, he saw Hawk casually turn his back and saunter towards the telephone.

Then the Monk acted!

HE eased out of the chair and inched towards the table like a cougar crawling on his belly preparatory to a spring. He made the last two yards in a jump, clawed the gun into his hands and squeezed the trigger before the Hawk had time to turn.

There was one awful moment when Monk wondered if the gun had been unloaded, but an explosive blast reassured him. He saw a startled look flood the eyes of the tall detective. Monk fired again again

The Hawk recoiled with each blast, struck the wall and started sideways. At the third shot, he doubled, one knee buckled and he crashed on his shoulder.

It was not the first time Monk Kushner had killed a man, but somehow a wave of fear crept over him. *The Black Hawk!* He brought up the gun again, took careful aim and fired once more. The body shuddered, then lay still.

The Monk waited no longer. He jammed his gun into its holster, leapt across the room, scooping up his hat as he ran. At the door he paused long enough to switch off the lights. He didn't want any snooping neighbor to peek under the window curtain and report the crime until he had a chance to establish an alibi. He took the precaution to wipe off the door knobs on the way out so as to remove any trace of finger-prints, then he bolted into the night.

As he expected, the car that he and Lupo had come in was no longer parked at the curb. He cursed the Lynx, concluding that that worthy had used the machine in a getaway. The Monk decided to take no chances; there would undoubtedly be an intensive investigation by the police into the Black Hawk's death, and Monk didn't want any taxi driver testifying against him. He took a quick glance in all directions to make sure no one ob-

served him, then he struck off across town at a brisk walk.

IT took Monk the best part of an hour to tramp the four miles to the Major's apartment. He walked rapidly, but he lost time in circling and doubling on his own tracks to make sure that he was not being tailed. Monk Kushner was no fool, he was taking no chances on the "unexpected" witness that might crop up later. Anyway, the Major was very strict about any of the boys leading a shadow to headquarters.

He reached the apartment only to find the Major gone. Lupo had, of course, not shown up. Monk sat down and reviewed the events that had so explosively transpired. He drank a little and tuned into the police broadcast. So far, he noted with pleasure, the cops had not discovered the body. . . .

Two hours later Doggie keyed his way into the apartment and at four o'clock, the Major himself showed up. While Ruhl mixed the drinks, Monk recited his story. It varied from the absolute truth only in minor details: Monk merely neglected to recount the pangs of terror that had engulfed him at the time of the encounter. All fear had left him by this time and he spoke with pride of the Hawk's death.

Doggie Ruhl clanked the ice in the shaker and whistled in awe.

"That's a load off my mind!" he breathed fervently. "I was leery of that guy, Monk."

Monk sniffed, looked at the Major for approbation, and found none.

"If the cops get to that woman, Monk," he remarked, "she will put you in a bad spot. And you too, Doggie."

Ruhl winced. He knew what that meant—that the Major washed his hands of the whole affair if it blew up in their faces.

He glanced at Kushner, and found that worthy scowling.

"That's an angle, Major; we ought to have her."

The Major nodded.

"We should. This intrusion on the part of Hawk may yet be worked out to our advantage—if we can get the girl."

"You have an idea, then?" From Doggie.

"We might carry on as we anticipated," the Major said slowly. "Hold the girl for ransom. Since her husband has no knowledge of the picture angle, he will pay."

Ruhl bit his lip.

"But when she is released, Major, what's to prevent her from squawking then?"

The Major breathed on his monocle absently, and did not answer.

Kushner gave a silent whistle.

"I get it—a natural! Dead gals don't squawk!"

Ruhl winced again.

"Oh!" he grinned. "I get it, too!"

"The thing to do is to locate the woman," the Major pointed out. "You two had better get busy; you have to beat the police to it, you know."

Kushner nodded. "Gad! I wish that damned Lupo would show! You better fan out, Doggie, and see if she's home."

"You better accompany him, Monk," the Major suggested dryly. "Doggie's a gigolo, not a gorilla."

MONK swore, emptied his drink and stood up. Doggie carefully adjusted a white silk scarf, set his hard hat at just the proper angle and picked up his top-coat. The Monk had the hall door open when the telephone rang.

The three exchanged glances.

"That's Lupo, damn him!" Kushner growled.

The Major crossed the room, picked up the receiver and said:

"Yes?" His voice was calm, cool.

His two confederates saw the ghost of frown flit across his forehead. He murmured, "Just a moment, please," and put one hand over the composition mouth-piece.

"It's for you, Doggie," he said.

Ruhl bit his lip, hurried over and picked up the instrument.

"Hello!" then a long pause. Color flooded his cheeks, and his dreamy eyes slitted, became crafty. "Why, yes, yes, by all means wait for me! I'll come right over. Of course . . . of course! Now you wait right there!" He was breathing rapidly when he hung up the receiver and faced the quizzical eyes of the other pair.

"It was her! The Allwyn girl! She's afraid to go home!"

"You are going to meet her?" Kushner demanded.

Doggie bobbed his head. "Yeah! She's waiting for me now."

"How," the Major wanted to know, "did she possess this number?"

Ruhl paled. "Well, I gave it to her in case of an emergency."

"We'll discuss that later," the Major promised. "Get her, and bring her here." When Kushner started to follow Ruhl, the Major stopped him. "You better wait here, Monk."

CHAPTER SIX

Snatch!

WHEN Judith Allwyn heard Lawyer Kushner's voice as that gentleman forced his way into the home of the Black Hawk, her hopes exploded. Insane with fear she had clawed open the window of the tiny alcove and leapt outside. The next two hours was an interlude of hysteria. She had crept from shadow to shadow like a wounded doe, afraid to live, afraid to die. It seemed to her be-

wildered senses that there was no way to turn; even the solace of death was closed to her. She had wanted, tried to die, in the hope that her shame would be concealed from her husband, but they wouldn't let her die. Even the famous detective, the Black Hawk, joined the conspirators to keep her in living torture.

At last, sick and exhausted, Judith crept into the tiny café where Ellison had first taken her. The manager smiled and steered her into a closed booth. If he noticed her dishevelled appearance, he gave no heed; he was a man of the world, by his own admission. When he asked her if was expecting someone, Judith nodded and collapsed in a chair the instant the door closed.

For the first time, she noticed that one of her shoes was gone. Then she remembered! In the frantic flight from the detective's home, she had recovered one of her own slippers, changed it for one of the mules, and then she had glimpsed Lupo the Lynx push into the library. She had fled then, shoes, everything forgotten. She wondered if the manager of the café had noticed the single mule?

In desperation, she thought of Ellison. She just *had* to do something—perhaps, since his plight was only less serious than her own, he could advise her. She looked for her purse, remembered that she had left it at home, and rang the bell near the table. While she waited, she tried to whip up some courage.

The manager came in, grinning. He was a rotund Italian, sly and genial.

"Yes, madame?" he said, and leered at her.

Judith sat very straight.

"I mislaid my purse," she managed primly. "I wonder if you could give me a nickel with which to call a friend?"

"Why certainly!" The big man plunked a coin on the cloth in front of her. "If

this friend he do not come, I myself weel see you someplace."

"You are very kind," Judith murmured through taut lips. "The telephone is . . .?"

"Near the bar," grinned the man, and led the way back to the main dining room, now deserted except for a young couple apparently waiting for a cab.

There was a booth, Judith noted with relief. The manager, fat and hopeful, hovered near the glass door. He busied himself polishing glasses, but his head was cocked to listen.

Strangely, though Judith had never called Ellison, the two numbers he had given her, "just in case," were seared into her memory; she could re-picture the very moment he gave them to her. Suppose he wasn't in? Suppose. . . .

Judith shook her head, tightened her jaw and called the first number. After three minutes of steady ringing, she called the second one. She got the Major that time, but of course, did not know it. When the man she knew as Ellison promised to come, she felt relieved.

"BUDDY!" Judith cried as Ruhl entered.

Ruhl smiled. He crossed the room, both hands outstretched. Judith swayed to her feet, accepted the handclasp, then drew her own hands sharply away. Ruhl's were hot, moist. For a passing instant Judith felt a revulsion, then forgot it in the excitement of her position.

"I thought you'd never get here," she moaned.

Ruhl licked his lips.

"We can't stay here, Judy!" he whispered. "They know about this place!"

"But I must talk to you," she pleaded.

Ruhl nodded, took her arm and gently piloted her towards the door.

"I've got a car outside," he said placatingly. "We can go up to my sister's apart-

ment; she knows about the thing, and will help us. Come, let's get moving."

Judith hesitated. She didn't feel that she could possibly face another woman, not if that woman knew about those terrible pictures. Then, as though he read her mind, Ruhl swept her unspoken objection aside.

"She knows nothing of the frame-up, Judith. She only knows there is trouble."

Too weak to fight longer, Judith allowed herself to be led out of the café. As she passed through the bar-room the manager leered at her, and instinctively she shrank against her companion. Ruhl was quick to sense the movement, for he tightened his possessive grip on her arm.

Once in the machine, with brisk, cold air whipping against her feverish features, Judith felt better. Under Ruhl's skillful probing, she told him everything that had happened from the writing of the letter, her attempt at suicide and the entry of Tiger Trent, to the arrival of Lupo and Kushner.

"Well, the Hawk won't butt in any more," he told her. "He was killed in the fight. You were very fortunate to escape."

"Killed?"

He nodded. "I heard the police broadcast, but of course I never dreamed that you were there. It would have been terrible for both of us if the police found out. You didn't leave anything, did you, anything incriminating, I mean?"

Judith went weak against the seat.

"My shoe!" she murmured. "Oh, God!"

The man didn't speak for a while, and Judith lay limp, scarcely breathing. She felt like a clock run down, but still barely ticking. In a little while, it seemed, her heart must stop.

The roadster stopped first. Judith opened her eyes on a dark apartment house. It looked dingy, unlighted, and then she realized that they were in a

small alley and this was evidently the rear of the building. Her companion corroborated this assumption.

"We had better slip in this way so we won't be seen."

Judith recoiled against the thought of sneaking in a servant's entrance. She must have hesitated, for Ruhl said softly:

"You'll like sis, she's white." He shoved her gently ahead into the building.

The long corridor was deserted. The man pressed a bell, then keyed open a door.

"Go right in, Judy," he urged, and smiled.

That smile repelled Judith, but there was no turning back now. She stepped into a tiny hallway and Ruhl followed. He carefully closed the main door, locked it, and pushed open another door into a darkened room. Judith, hesitantly went in first as Ruhl groped for a light switch. It clicked, flooding the room with light. . . .

JUDITH ALLWYN just stared; numb with terror, she was unable to cry out!

She found herself in a spacious living room. There were etchings and fine books—and *two men*! One she recognized as the bullying lawyer who had called and bled her of her jewels; the other was a stranger. Yet her intuition told her that this tall, military looking man was the most dangerous of the pair.

He, too, was one of them!

"*You*. . . !" she gasped. Her mouth opened to scream.

Ruhl spread the palm of his manicured hand over her face and pushed her into a chair. She went down in a sobbing heap. Kushner started to say something, but the grey-haired man with the monocle motioned him to be still.

"Now, Mrs. Allwyn," he soothed, "you have really nothing to be afraid of. We

have thought out a little scheme by which we may profit—you as well."

Judith lay there, dazed, panting.

"You will call your husband," the man went on, "and suggest that he collect fifty thousand dollars at once. Now listen closely to these directions: He is to take this money, alone and by car, to the Sky-line Boulevard. He will then be given a recognizable signal and be relieved of the money. You will then be released, given the negatives you—er—desire to conceal and not bothered again."

Judith closed her eyes. There must be an end to these tortures, or at least a limit of human endurance. She wondered, vaguely what kept her alive. Her soul was dead, yet she breathed.

"I couldn't!" she managed to sob out.

Ruhl grabbed her by the hair and jerked her head back so that she was forced to face them.

"Come on," he snarled at her. "The play is over, come to life. Get next to yourself. Do what the boss tells you, or so help me, I'll deliver those swell pictures of you to a tabloid!"

The Major gave Ruhl a direct look.

"I didn't know you were so courageous," he said pointedly, and Doggie winced.

"It's the Foreign Legion cropping out," sneered Kushner, and laughed.

The Major spoke to Judith.

"It is your only out, my dear. The kidnap story will remove any suspicions your husband may have. . . ."

"He has no suspicions!" blurted Judith.

Kushner laughed again. "Well, he sure as hell will have once he sees those photographs, baby."

"It will also explain your present absence and you will have the pictures you dread so. It is a small price for your pleasant taste of romance with this. . . ." he eyed Ruhl coldly. . . . "er—fascinating young man."

Judith hung her head, shaking it.

"It wasn't so," she sobbed, "it wasn't so!"

"Well," Kushner reminded her, "maybe not, but you'll have a sweet time explaining why you forked over most of your swell jewelry. Laugh that off, baby!"

"Let her think," suggested the Major blandly. "And here, my dear, is the phone. I know you won't make any—er—mistake during the call because we still have the photographs."

She clutched the instrument and called the number of her home. Vaguely she knew that Kushner was warning her, and when she glanced his way, she saw that he held a gun pointed at her head. Yet before terror numbed her tongue, she heard Paul's voice come on the wire.

"Darling! Where have you been? I've been nearly frantic. . . ."

"Listen, sweet," she cut hurriedly, "You must listen! You must, dear! I've been . . . kidnapped! You must bring some money!"

Paul's voice suddenly became low, controlled.

"I'm listening, Judy."

"It's fifty thousand!" she sobbed out. "Oh, Paul. . . ." Her voice broke, and Kushner pushed the gun muzzle almost in her face.

"Tell him!" he growled.

Paul urged her too.

"Easy, Judy dear, easy now. Tell me the rest and I'll take care of everything!" His tone was reassuring, confident.

Somehow she managed to choke out the directions, prompted by the Major himself.

Kushner pushed his face close to hers.

"Tell him if he goes to the cops. . . !" He bared his teeth significantly.

Judith let her lids veil the repugnant features.

"You won't go to the police, darling,"

she choked. "They will. . . ." She stopped, gagged with terror.

There was only an instant of hesitation, then Paul's promise:

"No, Judy, I won't do a thing that might jeopardize your safety. I only want you back to me safely. Are you all right?" For the first time she detected a break in his voice.

"Oh, yes, dear!"

Kushner leaned over and broke the circuit by depressing the receiver prong with the barrel of his gun.

"Save that stuff till later," he suggested with a leer.

THE sound of her husband's voice stiffened Judith's spine; she felt a new courage course through her veins. She sat back and surveyed the trio. Kushner, a huge, crafty bully. It seemed impossible that he, for all his size, could have conquered a man like the Black Hawk. But then, there had been two against one, and the blackmailers had been armed.

When she glanced at Ruhl, she was aghast. How had she ever been so silly as to be deceived by him? Now he looked like a sleek, oily wharf rat that had just climbed from the water. And to think she had eaten at the same table with him!

"Tell me one thing, please?" she begged. "Those photographs were faked, weren't they?"

Kushner and Doggie howled with laughter, but the Major did not smile.

"What makes you ask that—now? You must have believed them genuine, or why did you pay to keep them hidden?"

Judith's lip curled. Her eyes flashed to Ruhl, filled with contempt, and jerked back to the Major.

"I could never have been so vile, so loathsome!" she half-sobbed. "He's so revolting!"

Ruhl spat an oath and started for her,

but the Major waved him back and permitted himself a faint grin.

"They were clever fakes, my dear," he purred.

Judith sobbed aloud with relief. Now she could return to Paul. Now. . .

"You'll never get a chance to repeat that statement!" Ruhl snarled at her.

Judy sat very straight.

"What do you mean by that?"

Kushner grunted. "You didn't really think we'd turn you loose, did you, baby?"

She sprang to her feet.

"Oh, you. . . !"

Doggie Ruhl stepped over and struck her sharply across the mouth with his open hand, spilling her back into her chair.

"And have you squawk to the bulls, eh?"

Judith sobbed, twisted around and faced the Major. But his paternal pose had fallen away; he looked the most deadly of the three. He sat slumped in a chair, chin on his chest and his slender fingers pyramided before him in such a manner that his forefingers brushed his lips. Thus he contemplated her through slitted eyes.

Judy recoiled. She knew this was the end. Words clogged her throat. She massaged it with a quivering hand.

Ruhl asked: "Let me finish her now, Major? The cold little. . . !"

The man with the monocle nodded slowly. His long face was expressionless; he looked like a surgeon studying the sufferings of a guinea pig.

For Judith, the room suddenly ceased to whirl; everything became painfully clear; time seemed to slow up. She saw Ruhl start for her; it seemed to take him minutes. There was a blackjack in his hand and his fingers twitched on the thong. She tried to scream, but no sound came. She shrank away, and the very cushions of the chair seemed to push her towards the man.

As from a great distance, the doorbell jangled suddenly!

Judith slumped, limp, but conscious.

The three men jerked to attention, sat silent.

Kushner said: "Where in hell's that servant?"

"He's out," the Major snapped. "Answer it, Doggie. It must be Lupo."

RUHL sighed, licked his lips and glanced at the gun in the lawyer's hand. Reassured, he squared his shoulders, stepped into the tiny hallway and opened the main door. . . .

A strangled sob of terror ripped from his lips!

It was Lupo the Lynx, all right—stone dead! Stiff as a railroad tie-log, the corpse had obviously been propped against the door and now it toppled, like a falling tree, into the presence of the three startled men and the fear-frozen girl. Lupo's unsensitive head banged on the floor; it jarred them like the clash of cymbals. The corpse rolled over on its back, and lay still. Glazed eyes surveyed the ceiling without expression.

The Major was the first to recover.

"Close that door!" he snapped. He jumped to his feet, crossed the room in three strides and jerked the body clear of the door. He dumped it almost at Judith's feet.

"It's Lupo!" Ruhl rasped in a hoarse whisper.

The Major turned on Kushner.

"When did you last see Lupo alive?"

Monk licked his dry lips.

"S'help me, Chief, at Hawk's! He was jumping onto that damned dick just when I went down!"

Ruhl leaned his back against the hall door. He was obviously scared.

"How'd he get here? He's been dead a long time!"

"If one of you brought a tail. . . !" threatened the Major.

"I didn't!" whined Ruhl. "I cut didos with that car that no dick in the world could follow. I watched carefully. . . ."

"So'd I, Major," Kushner vowed. "I walked to avoid even a cabby knowing where I came from or where I was going."

"Did you make sure no one followed you?"

"Sure? Hell, I doubled on myself a dozen times!"

"Somebody dumped Lupo here!" the Major pointed out grimly. "Are you sure. . . ." His eyes narrowed. . . . "*sure the Hawk was dead?*"

Kushner swore. He shook his gun.

"I emptied this into him. I even let him have one after he was dead, to make sure!"

The Major whipped off his gown and climbed into a street coat. He pulled a hat over his head, opened a drawer and fished out a gun.

"Outside you two!" he commanded. "They've traced us somehow, we'll worry about the *how* later. Kill anyone that interferes. I'll take care of this young lady and join you in the car. I've some things to get out of the safe." He strode across the room, pushed aside an etching, exposing a small wall-safe. He started to twirl the dial, then glanced over his shoulder and noticed that the others had not moved.

"Get going!" he snapped.

Kushner jutted out his chin, and after a malicious glance at Judith, crossed to the door. He thrust his gun in front of him and whipped open the door. Judith watched in horror.

The Black Hawk stood framed in the opening!

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Lady and the Hawk

THE four stared, just stared! The famous detective grinned at them with all the supreme confidence of a Fuller Brush man. In each hand he held a large suitcase.

"You might lower that gun, Mr. Kushner," he suggested at last. "At least until you see what I've got here." He hefted one of the bags.

Kushner's face was a sickly purple. He blinked uncertainly, then his nerve came back with a rush and he would surely have killed the detective if the Major had not spoken.

"Bring him in," he commanded, adding, "And make sure he is alone."

Hawk sauntered into the room and prodded the door shut with his heel.

"I'm quite alone, Major."

Kushner disappeared into the corridor. He returned in a few moments, puzzled. "He seems to be alone, Major!"

The Major's poise returned. He removed his hat, but retained his gun. It hung limp in his graceful hand. His voice, too, assumed its customary calm.

"It was nice of you to call. You are quite a celebrated, or should I say, *notorious*, character."

The Black Hawk gave a mocking bow.

"Hardly less so than yourself, my dear Major. I have looked forward to this meeting for some time."

"It was inevitable," murmured the Major.

"I thought he was dead!" Ruhl rasped out.

"He is apparently very much alive," the Major commented dryly, then to Hawk: "I was wondering just what prevents me from killing you, or having you killed."

Judith sobbed aloud, and the detective glanced into her eyes. It was only a passing instant, that glance, but Judith saw

something that quickened her pulse. Their fate seemed obvious, yet. . . .

The Black Hawk was speaking!

"You are too clever, Major, to underestimate an opponent."

It was the Major's turn to take a bow.

"Especially you, sir."

"Thank you. With your permission, I'll supply you with a bit of entertainment which, I'm sure, will interest you all, especially Attorney Kushner."

"By Gad!" snarled Monk. "I'll kill you. . . !"

"Wait!" ordered the Major.

The detective grinned, lifted one of the cases onto the table and raised the lid. The three crooks watched with varied emotions, covering his every move with their guns. But the Hawk went about his work with supreme indifference. He fished a small motion picture projector from the case, a length of electric light cord and a reel of film.

"Knowing your interest in photography, my dear Major," he explained as he set up the apparatus on the table. "I brought over a most amusing film for your edification."

An oath burst from Kushner.

"Listen!" he choked explosively. "This guy has some trick up his sleeve! Let's knock him off and clear out of here!"

Hawk shook his head.

"Tut-tut, Monk! The very worst thing you could do. A copy of this reel has already been mailed to police headquarters where my good friend Sergeant Hughes of the Homicide squad is quite a movie fan. He's just *love* to meet the *actors*." He gave the lawyer a knowing glance. "You know the sergeant, of course."

Kushner nodded, licked his lips. Fear began to filter into his pea-shaped eyes. He started to speak, changed his mind, and waited.

Hawk kept up his patter while he plugged the extension socket into a wall-outlet.

"The sergeant is a charming fellow; a diamond in the rough. Impetuous, Monk, as you've no doubt heard, but while he might man-handle you half to death one day, he'd do anything for you later. Why I've seen him send a basket of fruit to one of his prisoners just before they hung the poor chap."

The Major adjusted his eye-glass.

"Suppose you explain all this hokuspokus," he suggested.

The projector began to purr and Hawk glanced around the room for a screen. A delicate etching with a large white border seemed to satisfy him, for he aimed the lense of the machine in that direction.

"The reel is self-explanatory," Hawk smiled, "But I'll be only too happy to enlarge on any points that may puzzle you. Would you mind darkening the room, Major?"

KUSHNER started an objection, but the Major waved him aside. He walked across the room, took up a position directly behind the detective and pressed the muzzle of his gun against the nape of his neck.

"Now," he told his aides. "Leave on those side-lights but turn off the ceiling fixture." As Kushner obeyed and the room lights dimmed to a more mellow glow, he spoke to his prisoner.

"And now, Black Hawk, **you may proceed with the show!**"

Every eye in the room jerked to the improvised screen where pale figures came to life, superimposed above the faint line of the etching.

Judith, forgotten for the moment, watched from her chair, eyes wide. Somehow it was difficult to tear her eyes away from the bronzed features of the famous investigator, but she, like the others, was consumed with curiosity about the film he seemed so insanely anxious to exhibit. The man acted as though he were mad,

yet the fleeting glimpse she had of his eyes belied the thought: they were not the eyes of a fool. She kept her gaze on the little screen and the focus cleared the figures became recognizable. Judith gasped, and her gasp was only one of three.

She found herself looking at a picture of the Hawk's library. There could be no mistake, the panelled walls, the book niches, and there was Hawk himself. There was another man sprawled in a deep chair. She stifled a cry, for that other man was Lawyer Kushner.

The shadowy figures moved. The image of the detective crossed that visionary room, poured a glass of liquor and pushed it in front of the lawyer. Monk's image gulped the drink and his lips moved inaudibly.

"Sorry I had no sound equipment," Hawk broke in. "Our conversation was taken down by my dictaphone, but I mailed the record to Police headquarters with the original of the film.

"Interesting!" murmured the Major, grimly.

They watched in silence. They saw the image of Monk spot the gun, saw his lips move faster. Then the figure of the detective rose from a chair, turn his back on his guest and cross to the phone. Judith cried an impulsive warning as the tiny replica of Monk reached for the gun. She screamed at the scene where the lawyer emptied his gun at Hawk. The reel ended when, after firing once more into the prostrate figure, Kushner holstered his gun and fled the room. As the film flapped empty in the spool, Hawk clicked off the projector.

"I repeat," he told them, "it is more effective with the sound recording."

The Major nodded to Ruhl to turn on the overhead light, then he circled around so that he faced the detective, his gun still ready.

"I can imagine that," the Major conceded. "What is your purpose in exhibiting that film? You appear very much alive—at the moment." He added the last suggestively.

The smile faded from the face of the detective.

"The only thing that kept me from bringing the police with me," he declared bluntly, "was this woman. In order to protect her, I'll trade with you."

The Major arched his brows.

"Trade *what*?"

Hawk nodded towards the exposed wall safe.

"I understand you have certain photographs, faked, of this girl. I want those, negatives and prints. I also want all the jewels you extorted from her. In return, I'll turn over the original of this movie and the sound record that accompanies it."

"I thought," observed the Major, "that you had already mailed them to the police?"

The Hawk smiled. "They will not be opened if I am present to prevent it."

The Major shook his head.

"I'm disappointed, Hawk. I expected more of you."

Kushner grabbed the Major's arm.

"Listen, Chief!" he growled, "You can't kill him *now*! If the cops get that reel, no matter who croaks him, I'll take the rap!"

The Major freed his arms from the other's grasp.

"That is your misfortune, Monk," he snapped. "With this man dead there is nothing to incriminate *me*, but if he lives. . . ." He shrugged.

Sweat bubbled onto the corrugated forehead of the lawyer.

"You can't do it!" he rasped hoarsely. "I'm not going to put my neck in a noose!"

"It's in already," the Major reminded him.

"There is Lupo to your credit, Monk," Hawk put in.

Ruhl gasped. "He croaked the Lynx!"

"Is that correct?" the Major demanded.

Kushner groaned. "S'help me, it's a lie! He croaked Lupo after I left. . . ."

"That hardly holds water," Hawk pointed out. "A ballisticsian will prove that Lupo was murdered with your gun, Monk. And since the film quite plainly shows you leaving with the weapon, well, the implication is obvious."

The Major's face was expressionless.

"That's too bad, Monk," he said very slowly. "Too bad!"

KUSHNER had other plans. Before any of them realized his intent, he whipped out his gun and covered the others.

"No you don't!" he panted, inching his huge bulk along the wall towards the door. "I'm not taking the rap for you, Major. You always said you would leave us cold if anything went wrong. Well, I'm not taking it."

The Major shrugged.

"As you will," he commented.

Ruhl licked his dry lips.

"Let me go with you, Monk?" he pleaded. "I don't want none of this business. For God's sake don't leave me here like this."

Kushner seemed glad of opportunity to have company.

"Okay, Doggie, get out that door!"

"The stuff," Ruhl gasped. "Why leave all that dough, Monk? And what about these mugs."

"To hell with them!" snarled Kushner. "But you're right about the dough. You cover 'em, Doggie! I'll take our cut out of the safe."

To Judith, watching, it seemed like another film play. Hawk stood coolly

under the menace of the lawyer's gun. The Major, likewise, appeared at his ease. What terrific control, thought Judith! Once her eyes strayed to the log-like corpse on the floor and she had to press back a scream. Then her eyes were drawn back to the two men with guns, drawn by some compelling fascination.

Kushner's heavy features dripped sweat. Ruhl's face was a pasty shade of blue-white.

"Keep 'em covered, Doggie!" Monk repeated.

Ruhl nodded, sidled closer to the lawyer and kept his gun muzzle aimed at the others. Kushner turned his back and stretched his empty hand into the little wall-safe. . . .

Judith was staring straight at Ruhl when she saw him swivel on his heel. She started a scream, but it froze in her throat as Ruhl's gun barrel crashed into the unsuspecting skull of the lawyer.

Kushner died with only a sob.

As though he expected it, the Major swung up his gun and covered the Hawk who had impulsively stepped forward.

"Nice work, Doggie, nice work," the Major drawled. "Now suppose you repeat that dose on our friends here . . . or better still, you might use Monk's own gun. We'll have to hurry to keep our rendezvous with Mr. Allwyn."

Judith sobbed, but found no strength with which to cry out. Horror numbed her vocal cords. She saw Ruhl move towards her, then the Hawk's voice filtered through her slipping consciousness.

"That was a nice second act, Major," the detective was saying. "But again I suggest that you allow me to show you my ace-in-the-hole. Now if I might open my other bag, I can show you reasons why. . . ."

The Major held up his hand for silence.

"Owing to lack of time, Hawk," he said mockingly, "you will pardon us if we

examine this ourselves. Your first performance was startling, I'll admit."

"As you will," Hawk said, shrugging. Judith thought he seemed disappointed.

"Open that other case, Doggie!" the Major commanded.

Ruhl muffled an impatient curse and jerked the case up onto the table. Judith leaned forward to watch. Ruhl threw back the catches—and then things happened too quickly for Judith's mind to record them.

The lid seemed to explode off the big suitcase. Ruhl's scream of terror was lost in the angry snarl of the dog that shot out of the case like a furry jack-in-the-box. She glimpsed the terrier clamped onto Ruhl's squirming throat, then the room was plunged into darkness.

Simultaneously, Judith was jerked bodily out of the chair and hurled to the floor. A gun commenced to chatter and the smell of powder seared her nostrils. Then a heavy body fell across her, crushing the wind from her body. She heard a sickening gurgle and a noise like the tearing of meat. A door slammed, a dog's foot padded over her bare arm . . . and for the second time within the night, Judith Allwyn fainted.

THE banshee wail of a siren brought her back to her senses. With her eyes still sealed, she came to the realization that someone was rubbing her wrists. She blinked her eyes open and looked into the face of the Black Hawk.

"Are you all right?" he asked quickly.

Judith nodded mutely. The siren screamed again, closer now. Her eyes widened as memory came flooding back.

"Where am I?" she managed.

"You are in the Major's bedroom, Mrs. Allwyn," he told her quietly. "The police will be here in a moment, so you must listen carefully."

Judith tried to get up.

"They mustn't find me here!" she choked. "They mustn't."

The detective gently restrained her.

"Easy, easy," he coaxed. "You *want* them to find you here."

"*Want!* You don't understand!"

Hawk smiled and pressed a pearl necklace into her trembling hands.

"Put that around your neck, and listen to me. Ruhl, the man you knew as El-lison, is dead. As you know, Kushner and Lupo are also out of the picture, I'm sorry to admit it, but the Major escaped. Perhaps he expected some trick, for when Ruhl started to open the case—the dog, as you know, was inside—the Major sidled over to the light switch. When he realized he was tricked, he plunged the room into darkness to protect himself and then tried to kill us."

"Then it was *you* who threw me to the floor."

Hawk smiled grimly. "It was a good idea," he admitted. "There were three bullet holes in the chair about two seconds after you vacated it. But although the Major got away, I did recover the complete set of those pictures. They were fakes, of course, but I burned them in the incinerator before I called the police. They are nearly here now."

"But they'll find out!" wailed Judith.

He shook his head.

"You were slugged and kidnapped, Mrs. Allwyn." He stopped as running feet sounded in the corridor outside. Heavy knuckles drummed on the panel.

Hawk turned towards the door, then swung back and whispered: "I'll do the talking—you take your cue from that. Do you think you can recover the letter you wrote your husband?"

At Judith's mute nod, he left the room, to reappear a few moments later with a burly police detective.

"Mrs. Allwyn, Sergeant Hughes," he said introducing them, then added to the

officer: "Mrs. Allwyn just recovered consciousness a couple of minutes before you arrived, Sergeant, so perhaps I can answer any questions that puzzle you."

Hughes scowled, chewed his lower lip and shifted suspicious eyes from the woman to the famous investigator. He was a big man, this Hughes, but he radiated a homely honesty, and Judith felt a little ashamed that she must attempt to deceive him.

"Well," he growled, "you're pretty good at answering questions, but since you broke up a mob that we been tryin' to locate for months, I can't object. I suppose you can alibi those killings as self-defense?"

The Black Hawk nodded.

"Excellent proof, Sergeant. In fact I have a motion picture of Kushner killing me."

Hughes squinted.

"Killing you?"

"Surely. It didn't *take* of course. I was careful to load his gun with blanks while he was taking an enforced nap. But the Monk thought it did, so he lost his head when I told him that I had sent you a copy. You see he intended to try it a second time—with real bullets—but that rather spoiled things."

"What in hell are you talking about?" Hughes growled. "You never sent me no film!"

"Of course not," Hawk admitted blandly, "But I had to—well—twist the truth slightly."

"Oh, sure," mocked Hughes. "I can understand that." He looked earnestly at Hawk.

"I can get the details later, but one thing I'd like to know: How in blue blazes did you ever find this spot?"

In answer, the investigator whistled softly, and Sandy, the terrier, jumped onto the bed where the woman lay.

"Kushner visited me," Wolfe explained. "I took the liberty of putting a prepared trapping-scent on his shoes."

Hughes bobbed his head.

"You don't need to say anymore. I get it all. This mutt did the leg work. Well, I can't say I'm sorry he did his act." Hughes turned his analytical gaze on the woman. "I thought the Major's racket was solely blackmail. He usually worked it so his victims couldn't squawk." A slow grin widened his mouth as he saw the flush stealing over Judith's features.

"But a lot of these guys change their racket," he went on, and Judith could have sworn his right eye dropped in a perceptible wink. "We'll just check off this case to a straight kidnap affair that failed. If you don't mind, Champ, we won't say nothin' to the newspapers about this guy they call 'The Major'?"

The Black Hawk nodded.

THE END

*You're bucking
the odds*



WHEN YOU BUY THE *unknown*

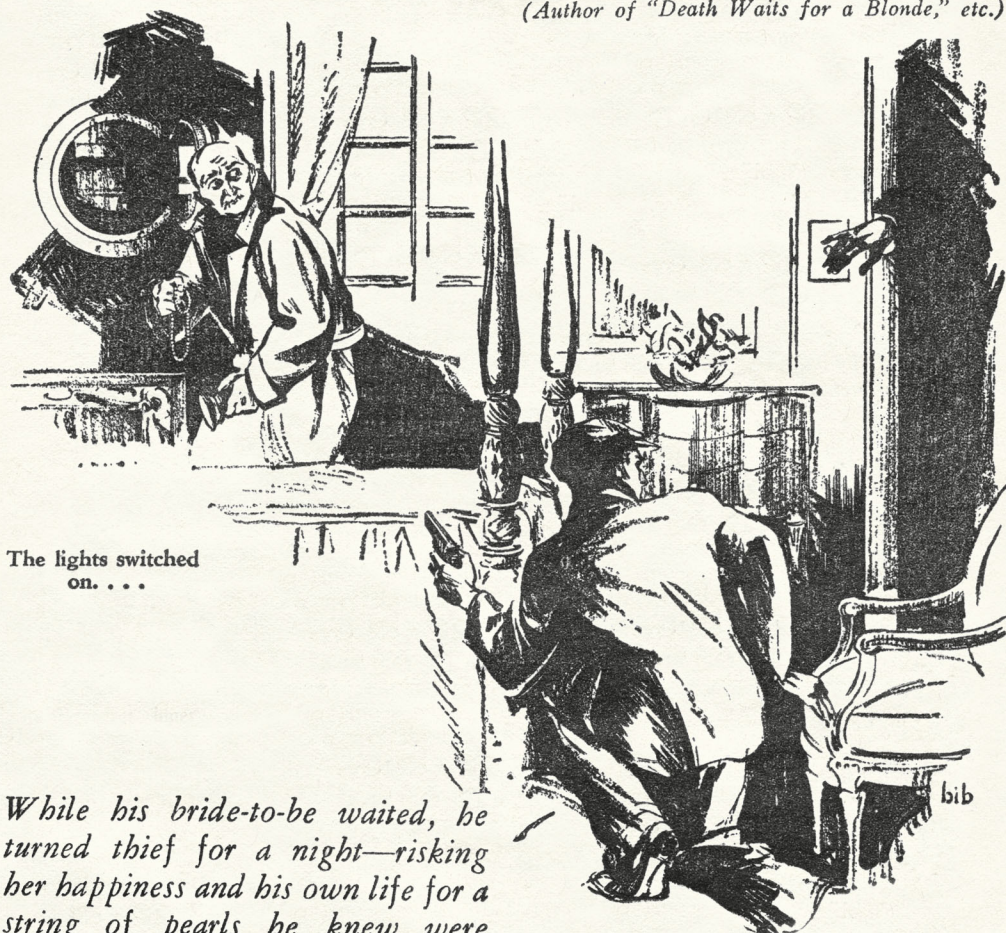
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PROBAK JUNIOR

WHILE THE BRIDE WAITED

by **GEORGE ARMIN SHAFTEL**

(Author of "Death Waits for a Blonde," etc.)



The lights switched
on. . . .

While his bride-to-be waited, he turned thief for a night—risking her happiness and his own life for a string of pearls he knew were phonies!

I WAS sitting on top of the world that morning—even though a private detective is not supposed to be a ray of sunshine. He rubs up against so much of human orneriness that the milk of human kindness is likely to be soured in him. I'm really a quiet cuss with a somewhat attitude toward life. But this particular morning I was riding high!

Parking my car, I stormed into my uncle Job Latham's swank jewelry shop. I stuck a four-bit cigar into the doorman's mouth and a sawbuck into the jan-

itor's mitt, and I hugged old Miss Lacey, the stenog, till she blushed.

"Congratulate me!" I shouted. "To-day I—"

"Get out!"

It was my uncle Job. He'd popped from around the big safe like a grave robber from behind a monument. He was sizzling mad. His Adam's apple bobbed between his wing collar and his shovel chin, and his pale eyes glinted daggers.

"Uncle Job, you got me wrong—" I started.

"Get out! I want no riots in here!" he raged. "I got no bad debts for you to collect, and I *won't* give you a loan, so get—"

"But I didn't come for anything like that!" I whooped. "What I want is the *best wedding ring in the house!* And money's no object!"

I pulled out a roll of bills so big that Uncle Job's hair fairly stood on end.

"You rob a bank?" he demanded hoarsely.

"No, sir!" I said. "Now let's see if you got a wedding ring fine enough to suit me!"

Real polite, he set a tray of wedding rings before me.

I picked the finest. Uncle Job named a terrific price.

But I laid the money into his *clawed* hands instantler.

"John, w-where did you get this money?" he quavered.

Slowly, deliberately, I counted my wad, thumbing hundred-dollar notes, five-hundred-dollar bills, and *thousand* dollar banknotes. Uncle Job nearly passed out.

"Where'd you get it?" he almost shrieked.

"—and one grand more, makes twenty grand in all," I summed up casually. And, shoving the wad into my pocket, flashing Uncle Job a grin that ought to've turned the vinegar in his veins to sugar, I said, "See you in the funny paper!" and started out without explaining my sudden wealth.

He spluttered, choked; but I left the store.

IN front of the Title Abstract Company I waited until a girl came out—a slim, lovely young girl in a tweed suit.

I fell into step beside her. "You're wanted," I said.

"Oh!" She exclaimed startled. "Silly!"

"It says so right on the front page," I

said, taking a newspaper from my pocket. "Listen . . . 'It is expected that the subject will put up resistance. Description: Eyes like purple diamonds. Hair of spun gold. Features of cameo perfection and a skin that it's a crime not to touch. Teeth like pearls, and soft red lips that are so kissable there ought to be a law against them. A dimple that's a peril to traffic.'"

"And what is the sentence of the court?" she gibed.

"Life sentence," I said. "Will you marry me?"

She stopped short. Her slim fingers clenched tight on my arm. Paling, sudden tears in her lovely eyes, her voice low and furious and anguished, she said, "John, don't tease me so! You nearly tear the heart right out of me—"

I showed her my twenty grand, cash.

She gasped. Her lovely eyes danced with joy. And then—she went pale as death. "John, *what have you done?*"

You see, Mary Allan and I had been engaged for two years. We hadn't been able to marry because we lacked money. She has an invalid mother to support. We'd put off getting married until we would have enough cash to buy a place with a garden cottage where we could install Mary's mother and a trained nurse to care for her.

"Honey," I explained, "you know that bad debt case I took on a contingency basis? For half of all I could collect? Well, that ham actor acquired a contract and a conscience, all at once, and *paid up!* Also, I got my fees for working on that Band kidnapping case, and a fat bonus. Nine grand—"

"Thank God!" Mary breathed, color coming back into her sweet face, and tears into her lovely eyes, joyous tears.

"And I sold my apartment house!" I whooped.

"Not that *condemned* building?" she asked, startled.

"Yes! But to the city! It's on the site of the new Union Depot. For eleven grand, Mary!"

"Mister," she said, "when do we get married?"

"Tonight," I said. "We'll go to Yuma! . . ."

I RUSHED home early. I lived with my young cousin, Toby Latham; we had a bungalow out in West Los Angeles.

A dame was ringing the doorbell as I parked at the curb.

"When Toby Latham comes home," she told me, leaving, "tell him to call Cleo, tonight, or he'll get what I promised!"

I swore under my breath as I unlocked the door. This dame, Cleo, had squeezed two grand out of young Toby, last year. Was she putting on the pressure for more hush-money? She'd already extorted all his savings. Toby worked for his dad, my miserly old Uncle Job, as a salesman. You can imagine what kind of a salary he got!

Inside, I hung up my coat. I sniffed. Gas?

"Good God! Toby! Toby!" I yelled.

I reached the kitchen door in a jump. It was locked. I backed up, ran, and hit that door with every pound of drive in my big body behind the charge—and the door went clean off its hinges. I sprawled onto the kitchen floor. Choking for breath, I scrambled up, grabbed up a chair and threw it through a window, shattering the glass.

I saw Toby, then—stretched out on the floor, his head in the oven of the gas stove!

I grabbed him up, quick; carried him out onto the front lawn.

"Toby! You blamed fool! Talk up!"

I poured some whisky down his throat,

and presently—since he hadn't been in the kitchen long—he stirred and looked up at me. Lord, but he was sick!

"I couldn't face Dad," he mumbled finally. "John, you shouldn't have hauled me out of that kitchen. I'll go to jail, now. Dad will rave and swear at me. I'm no good—"

"You're all right!" I said. "Honest, kid, you've done nothing so bad you've got to go turn on the gas."

"John," Toby said, "you know that pearl necklace Dad gave me to show to Sarnov, the director out at FKO?"

"So you lost it," I said soothingly. "What the hell! It'll be found. A twenty-five grand necklace—"

"But I didn't lose it. . . . I replaced it with a fake string of pearls. And I—Cleo Jones has been threatening me. So—so I sent her the necklace."

"Good God!" It burst out of me before I could check it.

Toby began to sob. "When the f-fake necklace is found, the insurance company protecting the real pearls will jail me! Dad'll let 'em do it. He's sore at me for ever getting mixed up with Cleo. He won't help me, he'll kick me out. Damn you, John, why did you come home just now!" he raved, getting wild. "I want to die!"

I took him inside, and called a doctor. Toby took some medicine, and fell asleep. Me, I paced the floor.

I was sick to the stomach from this mess. I realized that Toby's whole life hinged on how this mix-up was handled.

I could take my twenty grand, I realized, and buy a pearl necklace to replace the fake string Toby had put in his father's wall safe. "But if you do that," I raved at myself, "you can't get married! And right now Mary is packing up for your trip to Yuma tonight. You want to break her heart?"

There was just one other thing I could do. And that was to break into my miserly old Uncle Job's house. Open the wall safe in which Toby had put the fake pearls, and *steal* that imitation string! So that Uncle Job would believe that the genuine pearls had been stolen!

"But suppose you got caught!" I warned myself. "Uncle Job would send you to the penitentiary!"

Yeah, this was my lucky day. . . .

A THICK, high hedge bordered the drive way. Keeping in the shadow, so the street light wouldn't show me to anybody passing, I cat-footed to the side porch of Uncle Job's house. A trellis covered with *bougainvillea* served as a ladder to help me onto the porch roof.

Carefully I opened the window of Uncle Job's room.

My flashlight helped me across the dark bedroom to the far wall, where one of those old saloon paintings of "Custer's Last Stand" hung. Uncle Job thought it was great art.

A moment I stood there in the dark, listening. Neither my uncle nor his wife were home; but several servants were, new servants whom he had just hired. If they caught me here, they'd send for the cops. . . . From the sounds I heard, I judged they were downstairs.

I lifted down the painting. Working fast, my hands clammy from suspense, I worked the combination of the wall safe—young Toby had given me the numbers.

I got the door open. I reached in to find the fake string of pearls—and then I heard somebody out on the porch roof.

I doused my light. I swung the painting over the safe, and dodged out of the room, into the dark hall . . . more sounds!

Some one carefully opened a window. Against the star-dotted sky, I saw a man's dark figure. Stealthily he climbed into

the room. A tiny flashlight beam guiding his feet, he tiptoed across the room. A moment he played the light beam around. At last he focused it on "Custer's Last Stand."

Then, so help me, he reached up and took down the picture!

"A thief, by God! *Another* thief!" I realized.

His flashlight lighting up the inside of the wall safe, that mug started taking things out. I was so tickled, I hugged myself. Now I wouldn't have to steal that fake necklace! This thief would take it. I feel so kindly toward him, it made me sad to think that the poor mug would find his rich swag a phoney when he tried to sell it to a fence!

There, he had the necklace! He was turning it round and round in the beam of his flashlight and—

Click! And the hall light, over my head, flashed on like a crack of doom! Petrified I stood, glancing over my shoulder straight into the popping eyes of a butler!

"*Thief!*" he bawled—but at the same instant, I yelled, "Just in time! Come on!"

And I darted into the bedroom just as that other thief gasped in surprise, whirled, and lunged toward the window. But I collared him, and I swung him around into the arms of the butler just as he switched on the overhead lights.

"There's the thief!" I snapped. "Look, his fists are full of loot! I've been trailing him all over the neighborhood. I'm Detective Carson," I said, and flashed my credentials in the butler's face.

"Good work, sir!" the butler said respectfully. "I'll phone the police."

"Blast it, le'go of me!" the thief yelped, squirming in the big man-servant's grip. "*You're* the thief!" he bawled, pointing at me. "I found the wall safe already

open! Le' me go!" he screeched, kicking the butler's shins.

The butler fetched him a clout alongside the ear that rattled the thief's joints clear down to his ankles. And, dragging the squirmy little mug, the butler stalked over toward the phone in the hall, near the bedroom door.

"*Don't phone the police!*" the thief screamed.

He yanked his hat off, twisted back the high collar of his ulster—and I nearly dropped in my tracks.

The old hellion had shaved his head and taken out his false teeth and used some make-up; but I recognized my miserly old Uncle Job. Yeah, so help me, it was him! Robbing his own safe! "For the insurance!" I realized. That damned pearl necklace had failed to sell. Needing money, the old gouger had planned to gyp the insurance company! He had hired new servants, and disguised himself some, so that if he was seen while robbing his own house, he wouldn't be recognized!

"**B**LAST it, I'm your boss!" Uncle Job squawked at the butler. "I hired you! And by the living God, I'll fire you if you don't le' go of me and grab that thief standing there! *Put that phone down, damn you!*"

The butler put down the phone, worried, hesitating. My uncle's voice held so doggone much authority!

Two other servants came up the stairs, gawking.

"Recognize this man?" I asked them sternly. And I demanded of the butler: "Has Mr. Job Latham a bald head and a squunched-up face like this thief has?"

"No, he hasn't, sir!" the butler said stoutly.

"We never saw this man before," the chauffeur seconded.

"But I hired you three fools from the Barton agency, just yesterday!" my uncle

bawled, so much heart-felt conviction in his tone, so much of his usual querulous, rasping bad humor in his voice that even to these three comparative strangers he rang true. The butler let go of him hastily.

"Grab that thief!" my uncle raged, pointing at me. "He's not a real detective—he's a private detective who's got no authority to come breaking into a man's house! I found my safe open. He was trying to rob it!"

Hesitantly, those servants looked at me, then at my uncle, unable to decide *which of us was the thief!*

Then we nearly jumped out of our shoes as the telephone rang.

The fleshy butler snatched up the receiver. We all listened, so tense and quiet we could hear the talker on the other end of the wire.

"Morton," said the voice at the other end, "this is Mrs. Latham." My aunt, Uncle Job's wife talking! "Mr. Latham and I have decided to remain overnight here in Pasadena. Now, wait, Mr. Latham has some orders for you."

And then, so help me, *my uncle Job's own voice came over the phone, curt and clear!*

"Morton, I'm bringing some guests home tomorrow. We're going fishing in the San Gabriels, so pack the trailer with the camping outfit. Get my rods and fishing gear all ready. Clean my boots. And pack some grub for us."

"Yes, sir; very good, sir," said Morton.

"That's all," said the voice; the phone hung up.

The butler set down the phone and turned on my uncle with lightning in his eyes. Morton was English, and righteous as all get out. Uncle Job was sputtering, but Morton roared him down with a thundering, "You lying thief! You—you brazen impostor! You're going to jail!"

"But, *I am* Job Latham!" my uncle

screached. "I'm no thief! There's the thief!" And he shook his fist at me.

This butler, Morton, was calm and deliberate as a judge.

He picked up the phone, he called a number. "May I speak to Mrs. Latham again, please," he said.

Checking on the call! We listened, holding our breath.

"Mrs. Latham," the butler said, "just to verify my orders—is Mr. Latham there in Pasadena with you?"

"Why, of course!" came the amazed answer. "You just talked to him, you dolt!"

Flushing, the butler hung up and swung toward Uncle Job.

"You're going to jail! Now shut up, or I'll gag you!"

Uncle Job sort of slumped—and the next instant, having put the chauffeur off guard, he swung his knee into the chauffeur's stomach, jerked loose, knocked the butler reeling back against me, and lunged for the window.

I rushed past the butler and made a flying tackle. With one hand I caught Uncle Job's ankle, and he crashed to the floor. I lunged for him, but he rolled over, bounced to his feet. I had him blocked from the window. He darted to the corner of the room where his quail gun stood. He snatched up the 12 gauge shotgun, leveled it, squeezed the trigger.

Boom-crash! My .38 pistol barked a split-second sooner; and the bird shot tore into the rug, for my bullet had smashed into the stock of his scattergun. It fell from his hands. Before he could move, the chauffeur grabbed him.

"Now you've added murderous assault onto robbery!" I told him. "You'll go to jail for twenty years!"

Uncle Job stood there, breathing hard, glaring hate at me.

The butler bent down and gathered up the loot where the necklace and stuff had

fallen onto the floor from his hands when Uncle Job hit him. Uncle Job looked down at him.

"*Good God!*" That yelp came from Uncle Bob—and it came from the heart. I stared. What was wrong now? Then I saw that Uncle Job was staring at the necklace which the butler was holding to the light to see if it had been tromped on in the rush. And I realized that my uncle's gimlet eye had recognized the pearls for fakes! And from the way this fact was staggering him, it was plain that he had let his son replace the string in the safe without examining the pearls closely himself.

UNCLE Job's wizened face had gone deathly pale. He teetered on his heels like he was going to faint. He looked at me, his eyes burning like a maniac's. His lips moved, and no words came for a space; then, "*I've been robbed!*" he screamed. "John Carson, you stole my pearls! You took my pearls and left a fake in their place!"

"I've robbed you of nothing," I said.

The chauffeur caught my eye, and tapped his forehead significantly and then tightened his hold on Uncle Job. While the butler picked up the phone and asked for the police department.

"Grab that man!" Uncle Job yawned at them. "I tell you I'm Job Latham, your boss!"

"Oh, dry up!" said the chauffeur. "You ain't Job Latham. You don't even look like Job Latham."

"Besides," said the butler, "Mr. Latham is in Pasadena. . . . Police headquarters? Send men to—"

"And furthermore," I said to Uncle Job, "if you did happen to be Mr. Latham, you wouldn't dare admit it. If you really were Mr. Latham, and had come here to rob your own safe—after arranging a clever alibi—you'd hide that fact. Be-

cause then it would look as if you came here to *rob your own safe of a valuable necklace that's insured*. Man, you'd go to the penitentiary for conspiracy to defraud the insurance company."

"Tommyrot!" he squawked. "Hog-wash!"

"I'm sure glad you're not Job Latham," I said, shaking my head. "Because, if you were, you'd have to explain that 'phone call from Pasadena. I'm telling you, that 'phone call would look like a pre-arranged alibi. It would look as if you had schemed with your wife for her to ring this number and to set a phonograph record of your voice to playing into the telephone. It would look as if you wanted to prove that you were in Pasadena at the time of the robbery—though we've actually caught you here robbing this safe. Man, if you *were* Job Latham, that alibi would convict you like a signed confession! . . . So quit pretending you're Latham. And don't take it so hard, mug," I finished. "I'm positive that Mr. Latham will be lenient about pressing charges against you."

Uncle Job—well, he swallowed hard, his Adam's apple bobbing between his collar button and his shovel chin; and his head sank onto his chest.

When the police came, he told them that his name was—*John Smith!*

I raced across town, to Mary Allan's house.

She was on her knees, unpacking her suitcase, and tears were rolling down her sweet face, when I busted in.

"Don't unpack!" I whooped. "We still got time to catch the late plane to Yuma! We're getting married!"

She wiped her eyes, real quick, ashamed that I caught her blubbering; and stood up, puzzled, and indignant.

"But how can we? We're broke again."

From my pocket I took a necklace, and

held it to the light. The carefully matched pearls shone with a living, gorgeous lustre that no imitation can ever equal, as if they had absorbed life from a lovely woman's bosom.

"We're not broke!" I yelled. "We can sell this for twenty-two grand!"

Mary gasped. "The necklace! You did get it from that woman young Toby gave it to? Did she return it willingly—"

"I paid her twenty grand, cash, for it!" I said.

Mary thought an instant, and then came toward me with her little fists clenched tight, her lovely eyes snapping.

"John Carson, we agreed at supper tonight that you'd buy back that necklace and go to your uncle's house and take Toby's fake necklace from the safe, and put the real one back in its place. Why haven't you done that?"

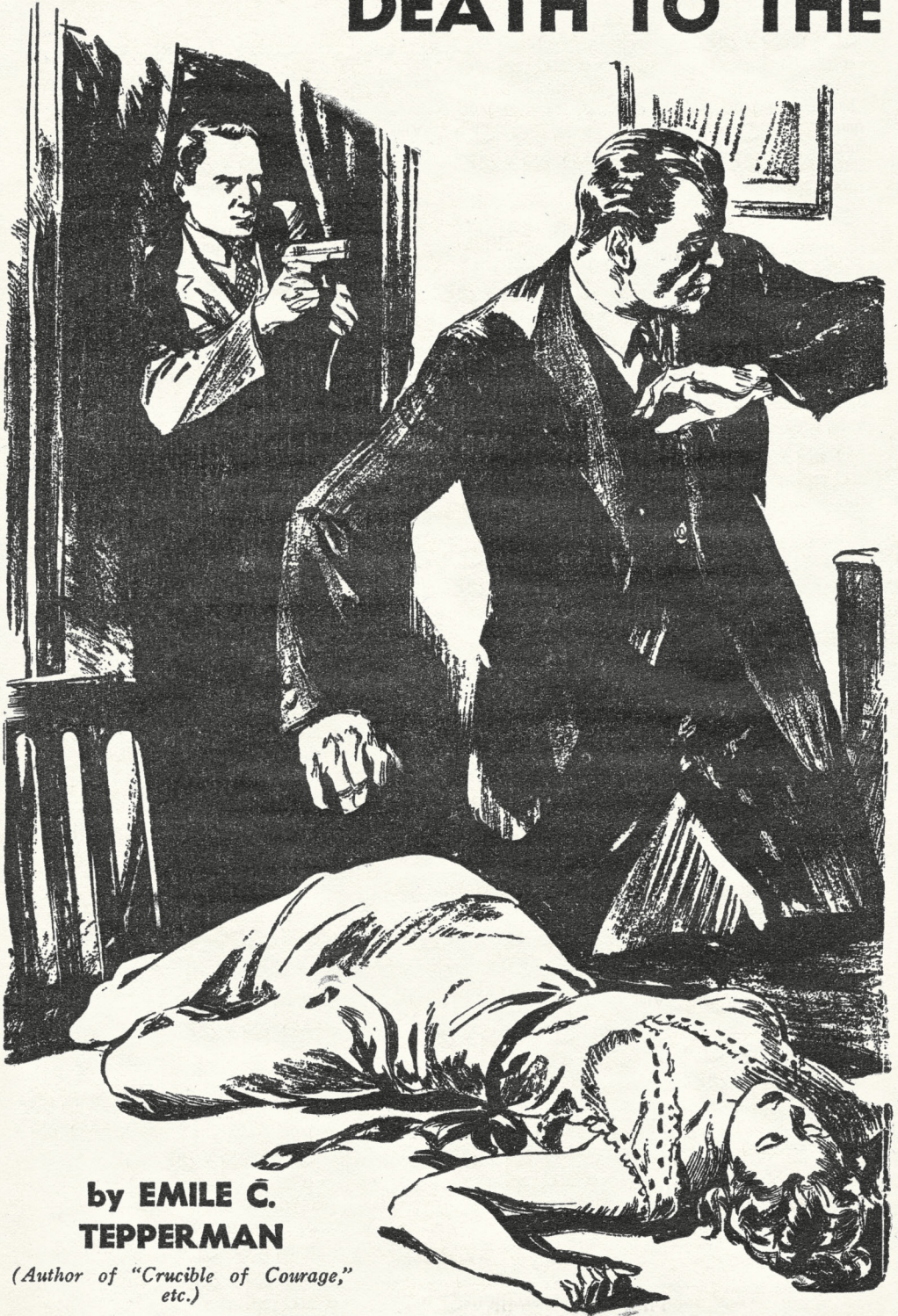
"But, Mary, I did steal into the house—"

"Only you got tempted at the last minute!" She was hammering my chest with her little fists. But she couldn't hate me, even for a minute. Tears came. "Oh, John, how *could* you fail Toby like this? I know what misery young Toby is in. I was a sensitive kid with a domineering father and a weak mother, too! John, I tell you, Toby is simply *crushed*! I *know* the hell he's in. If his dad let's him be sent to prison, Toby's heart'll just break. Help him, John! We're still young, we can wait—"

I kissed her; and my eyes were misted.

"But, kid, everything is fixed up swell!" I butted in; and I told her the whole story. "So, you see," I wound up, "Uncle Job has to swallow the loss of his necklace without beefing, because he knows that I can send him to jail for conspiracy to defraud the insurance company. Also, I'm going to warn him to be decent to young Toby. Now grab your hat, kid. We got a date with a preacher!"

DEATH TO THE

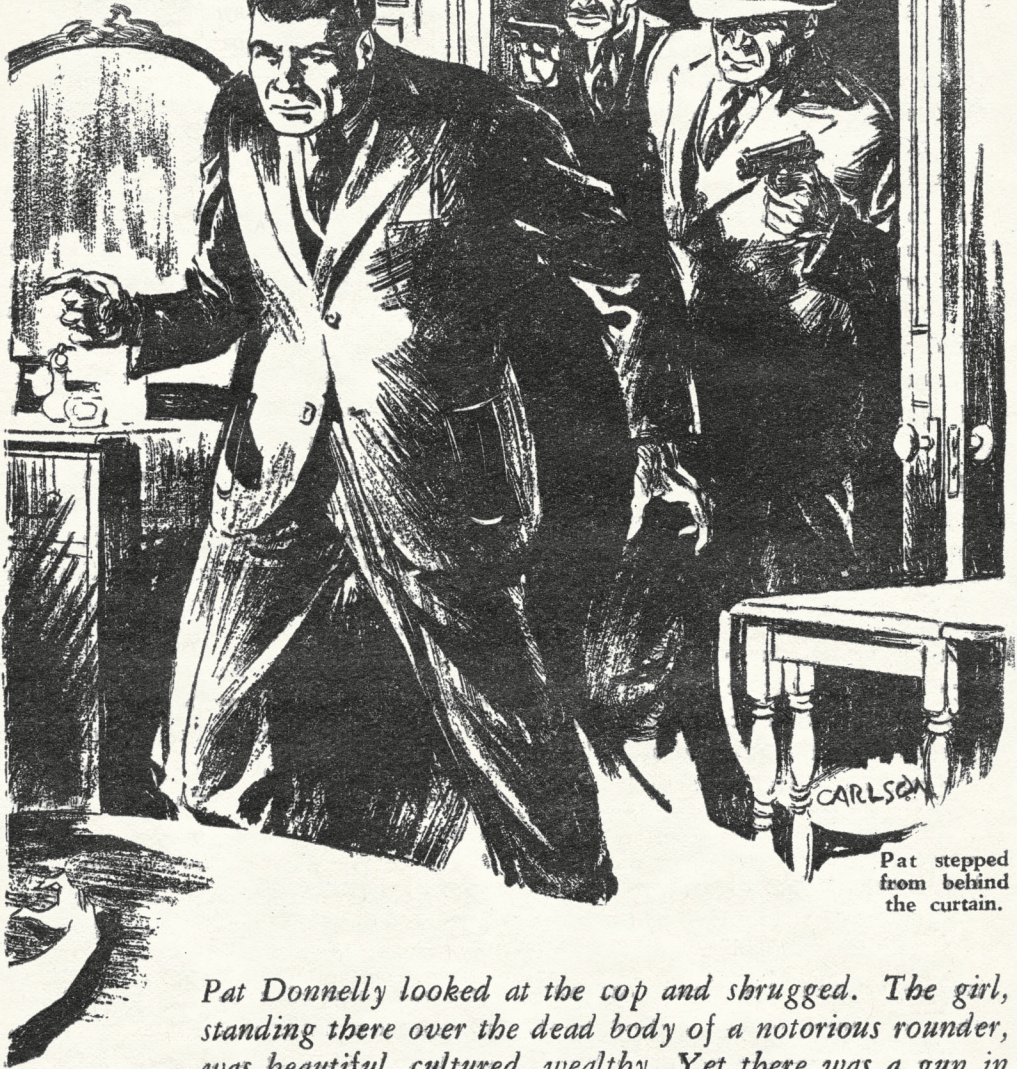


by **EMILE C.
TEPPERMAN**

*(Author of "Crucible of Courage,"
etc.)*

WINNER!

*A Gripping Nov-
elette of Cool
Daring*



Pat stepped
from behind
the curtain.

Pat Donnelly looked at the cop and shrugged. The girl, standing there over the dead body of a notorious rounder, was beautiful, cultured, wealthy. Yet there was a gun in her hands—confession on her lips. It was none of Pat's business, and there was nothing he could do—but that was before he learned the identity of the dark-eyed, self-confessed killer. . . .

IT was a quarter to four in the morning when "Lucky" Pat Donnelly walked out of Barney's Place with thirty-two thousand in cash that he had run up from five hundred dollars on an

astounding series of six naturals in a row.

Barney paid off with a grimace. "I ought to bar you, Pat," he said sourly. "Every time I see you walk in here, I get a pain in the neck. I don't mind you

winning; but all those palookas rode along with you. Those six naturals cost me a cool hundred grand in side bets!"

Pat Donnelly grinned, stuffed the wad of thousand dollar bills carelessly in his trousers pocket.

"You can afford it, Barney. Think of all the snake-eyes that have turned up on those tables of yours. It's about time you paid a dividend."

He nodded a casual good-by to the two strong-arm boys who were always present wherever Barney was, and stepped out of the lavishly furnished office. Barney walked with him down the corridor to the head of the stairs.

He put a hand on Pat Donnelly's arm, said:

"Look, Pat. If I was you, I'd be a little careful. Sassoon's back in New York!" Pat's eyes narrowed. "When did you hear that, Barney?"

"Today. Nobody knows where he's hanging out, but some of the boys have whispered to me that he's supposed to be the one that's backing Steve Kline in the Movieland Cabaret. You want to be on the watch, Pat. Sassoon ain't licked by a long shot, and he's a guy that never forgets."

Pat smiled. "Thanks for the tip. But how about you? Sassoon probably has you on his list too—"

Barney jerked his head backward toward the door of his private office, where his two bodyguards stood, watchful, their hands ever in their jacket pockets.

"I got Vic and Smoky on the job. You travel around by yourself. Like now—going out alone at four in the morning. A bullet in the back—"

Pat laughed, his long lean face softening for a moment as he glanced down at the earnest, stocky little gambling house proprietor.

"I'll manage, Barney. Don't lose any sleep over me."

He started down the stairs, but Barney gripped his sleeve again.

"It's not that so much, Pat. I've been thinking of something else. My girl, Wanda. Sassoon's a snake. He might be afraid to go after either of us. But it'd be just like him to work some kind of hell on my daughter. And Wanda runs around the town like nobody's business. I tried to get her to let Vic or Smoky tail along with her, but she just laughed at me. I've been waiting for you to get back to town to meet that girl, Pat. She's been in a convent, but she's got fire, and courage. Like her mother used to be. She's just letting off steam now, running around town, but she'll settle down all right—if Sassoon don't get his claws into her—"

Pat Donnelly's voice interrupted him harshly. "What makes you thing Sassoon might make a play against your kid, Barney?"

"Because that's the way his mind works. He knows I got bodyguards. He knows you're hell with a gun, and got nine lives like a cat. So he'd just naturally figure out a stunt to get at me through her."

Pat Donnelly's lips were a thin, grim line. "If he ever did anything like that, Barney, I'd kill him if I went to the chair for it!" Pat knew that Barney's whole life was wrapped up in that girl of his, though he'd never met her. He started down the stairs once more. "Find out everything you can about what Sassoon's plans are; you've got a lot of wires out. I'll look into it too. And you talk to that Wanda. See if you can get her to go on a trip to Europe for a while."

"That's a damn good idea," Barney said. "A world cruise wouldn't hurt her—if I could get her to go."

"Hell!" Pat exclaimed. "You're her father, aren't you?"

Barney smiled wryly. "You don't know that girl, Pat. Wait'll you meet her. She's got a mind of her own!"

PAT DONNELLY stopped in at Zeilen's all-night restaurant for a cup of coffee, and read the morning papers. Then he walked down the semi-deserted canyon of Broadway. The clock on the Paramount Building showed four-twenty. His long, loping stride ate up the short distance to the Croydon, on Forty-first, where he always stayed. He didn't bother with a cab, and he walked with an apparent carelessness of being followed that was deceitful.

Swell pickings, anyone not in the know might have thought; but those *in* the know could have told them about the Webley automatic with the specially built wide hand-grip in the aluminum clip under his coat.

They could tell about the time Pat Donnelly had bucked "Monk" Sassoon, the crooked gambling baron, just for the hell of it—or maybe with a deeper motive; and how Sassoon had backed down, saying. "Hell, Donnelly, I don't want to tangle with you—you got the devil's luck on your side!"

That story had an end to it, too. They always told the end: Sassoon's backing down had cost him prestige, had undermined the morale of his wide-spread organization. A month later the name of Sassoon no longer served to scare off competition in the Big Town. And Barney Rayman, who ran a square gambling house on the east side, had stepped in, taken over Sassoon's interests, and opened the palatial "Barney's Place."

"Of course," they would finish up with a wink, "it had nothing to do with it that Barney once staked Pat Donnelly to ten grand the time when Pat came back from *Agua Caliente* without a dime in his pocket. Oh, no!"

Pat's footsteps echoed hollowly on the pavement of the deserted thoroughfare. At Forty-fifth, a drunk was weaving his way erratically into the Astor. A milk wagon rattled across Forty-sixth, making its way eastward. Beyond that there was no life on Broadway.

Pat walked with a lithe watchfulness, his eyes searching each darkened doorway before he passed it. At Forty-fourth, just before reaching the corner, he heard the roar of a car speeding toward Broadway. He stopped, several feet from the crossing, his body taut, his hand straying toward his shoulder clip. There was always the possibility that Sassoon had had spies at Barney's Place, who could tip him off when Pat left. Since everybody knew that Pat lived at the Croydon, it would be possible to plant a car with a sub-machine gun in it at a spot where they knew he would pass. The possibility was remote, but "Lucky" Pat Donnelly owed his continued good health to the fact that he seldom overlooked possibilities.

He moved swiftly over into the doorway of the shoe store just above the corner of Broadway and Forty-fourth, and his automatic was halfway out of the clip as the car swung around the corner on two wheels.

But the occupants of the car were not looking for Pat. There were three men in that sedan—one in the driver's seat, and two in the rear. They were staring ahead of them tensely, looking neither to the right nor left.

And Pat Donnelly recognized one of them.

There was no mistaking the big heavy shoulders, the broad flat face of "Monk" Sassoon. It was more than a year since Pat had seen Sassoon, but he would never forget that heavy, basilisk face that never smiled and never scowled. Sassoon wore no hat, and his hair, close-cropped, stood

up in a short pompadour from his wide forehead.

Just a flash Pat got, and then the car had swung left into Broadway and was racing north. The tail light was out, but Pat caught the license number under the street lamp. Barney had said that no one knew where Sassoon was staying now; this might be a good way to trace him, and Pat took out pencil and a slip of paper, jotted it down.

The car had already disappeared up Broadway. Pat stepped out from the doorway, glanced around, and headed south again, crossing the street.

And it was then that he saw the girl.

She was just coming out of the Movieland cabaret, down in the middle of the block, on Broadway. The Movieland was, of course, closed and dark. The girl stepped quickly out of the lobby of the cabaret, stood on the sidewalk in apparent hesitation.

She started across toward a small black coupé parked at the curb, but stopped halfway to it, wavered in indecision. A street light illumined the soft, smooth whiteness of her face. She wore a green evening dress under a mink coat, and her black hair, which was not bobbed, was done up in a knot at the nape of her neck. Pat judged that she was no more than twenty, at the most.

As he approached her his eyes traveled appreciatively over her trim figure, exposed to his view by the open fur coat.

She had stopped short at the sound of his footsteps, and swiveled toward him. Her eyes remained on him, and as he got closer he thought he detected a sort of panic in them.

She suddenly stretched a hand out to him appealingly, and said in a voice which, though soft and cultured, carried through the empty stillness of the night:

"Excuse me. Would—would you—come in there with me?"

Pat frowned. "What do you want to go in there, for? The place is closed—"

She had already started back toward the half-open door. She threw back over her shoulder:

"I—I think there's a dead man in there!"

PAT swore under his breath, followed her into the darkness of the Movieland, hunching his left arm forward a bit, so as to bring the clip with the Web-ley within easier reach.

Just inside the door he made out her dark form, standing still. He could hear her breath coming fast as she bent over a huddled form on the floor at her feet.

He scraped a match lit, held it low. It illumined the body of a man, lying on his back. The arms were flung out. The head, with blood spreading from a vicious bullet wound in the left temple, was twisted to one side so that it rested on the right ear. The eyes were wide open, glazed.

Pat Donnelly heard a startled gasp from the girl as the match flared and went out.

In the blackness she exclaimed: "Kline! It's Steve Kline! I knew it! I—"

Pat's thoughts raced. Kline was the supposed owner of the Movieland. He was lying dead here, and only a few moments ago Pat had seen Sassoon, who was supposed to be backing this place, drive away at a furious pace.

His eyes traveled to a small, gun-metal automatic lying on the floor a foot or two away. The girl saw it, too, just as the second match went out.

In the short space of time that it took him to light the next match, Pat heard the soft rustle of the girl's dress as she moved, and then the light flared up to show her stooping, *picking up the automatic!*

Pat shouted:

"Hey! Don't touch that!"

But she already had it in her hand. She faced Pat, holding the automatic loosely at her side.

"Why shouldn't I?" she asked, coolly.

Pat groaned. "Drop it, quick! There might be prints on it. The killer's prints!"

Her face was white, drawn. She said, very low:

"They were my prints. I—killed Steve Kline!"

PAT'S jaw fell open in amazement.

A shadow filled the partly open door, cutting off the little light that came from the street lamp outside. A flashlight now speared into the darkness, settled on the girl. A heavy voice demanded:

"What's goin' on here?"

Pat recognized the voice of Joe Brophy, the cop who covered the beat. He said drily:

"Come in, Joe. It looks like a party."

Brophy swung the light to Pat's face for a moment, exclaimed:

"Hello, Mister Donnelly. What—"

He had been fingering along the wall for the electric switch, and now he found it, clicked it on. Light flooded the lobby. And Brophy saw the dead body.

"Holy Mother!" he exclaimed. "It's Steve Kline! Shot through the head!"

His gaze traveled from Pat Donnelly to the girl.

"Who killed him?"

"I did, officer!" The girl spoke clearly, firmly. "I shot him with this gun!"

She held out the automatic, butt first. "You'll find my fingerprints on it!"

As in a daze, Brophy took the gun by the barrel. He glanced inquiringly at Pat, who shrugged. He was sure the girl hadn't done it. But there was nothing he could do about it. The girl admitted the killing—even claimed it, so to speak. She seemed to be in her right mind; it was her own funeral. . . .

Brophy cleared his throat. He said:

"Well, miss, I guess I'll have to take you in. Better come outside. I'll hail the prowler car; it's due to come by here in a minute or two."

He took her by the arm, led her out, calling to Pat:

"Come on out, Mister Donnelly. I guess you'll have to wait around here, too."

Pat said: "Okay, Joe."

He waited till they were both out, then stooped swiftly and picked up a small brass object that he had spied on the floor, just beside the head of Steve Kline. It was smeared with blood, and he wiped it on the dead man's shirt, holding it gingerly by the one edge that was clean. It was a round brass check about the size of a Canadian penny, and on it were the words: "CLUB PARADISE," followed by the numeral 19.

Pat stuck the check in his vest pocket, came outside in time to hear the girl saying in a listless voice to Brophy:

"That's my coupé. I came here to see Steve Kline. I—I had a quarrel with him, and shot him. That's all there is to it."

Brophy was staring at her half unbelievably.

Pat came up close behind her, asked:

"How did you know Kline was going to be here at this late hour?"

She turned to him, bit her lip, and her eyes avoided Pat's. "I—I—he called me, told me to meet him here. I—"

She stopped as a green police coupé cruising up Broadway swung in toward the curb, pulled up at Brophy's signal. Brophy said to the bluecoat who got out:

"Phone in to the House, Ned. It's a murder. Steve Kline. This girl here, confessed. I got the gun—" He turned to the girl. "What's your name, miss?"

And Pat Donnelly got the shock of his life. For the girl said:

"My name is Wanda May Rayman!"

Pat's face went white. Brophy whistled. "Any relation of Barney Rayman?"

She nodded. "I'm Barney Rayman's daughter!"

CHAPTER TWO

Fifty-to-One!

IT was twenty minutes before Detective Sergeant Breitwell, of homicide, got there. The man from the medical examiner's office had beat him to it, and was waiting impatiently.

When Breitwell came out of the lobby, he was scowling. Pat Donnelly, who had known him since he was a second-grade detective, took him to one side.

"How does it check, Leo?"

Breitwell was a thin man, a head and a half shorter than Pat. He was extremely nervous, high-strung at all times; but an excellent policeman in spite of that.

He looked up now, at Pat, then threw a side-glance at Wanda Rayman, who was sitting in the headquarters car with another plainclothesman. He shook his head.

"It checks all right, Pat," he said slowly. "The M. E. got the slug out of Kline. It's a twenty-two. Same as the gun the girl turned in—"

"You mean," Pat interrupted, "that it's the same as the gun the girl *picked up*. Don't forget, I saw her pick it up."

Breitwell threw him a queer glance. "Look, Pat," he said earnestly. "I know you're a friend of Barney's, and this hits you pretty close. Everybody knows you'd go to the front for Barney every time, but you're up against a stone wall this trip. It's open and shut. The girl's confession—"

"Means nothing, and you know it," Pat told him coldly. "Murder's the one charge where you can't convict a defendant on a confession alone. You've got to have evidence—"

"That's true, Pat. But this won't be a murder charge. She's a pretty girl, and the D. A. will know it's tough to get a jury to give a pretty girl the chair. So what'll he do? He'll take her plea to first degree manslaughter—twenty years, in this state. And there won't be any question on that. Everybody in town except Barney himself, knows that Barney's daughter has been running around for the past six months with Steve Kline. The story's there, plain. He two-timed her or something, and she meets him and has a scrap, and lets him have it. Then she drops the gun, scared, and runs out. She figures they'd pick her up anyway, so she waits till some one comes along instead of trying to cop a sneak—"

Pat grunted. "That's the way it looks to a dumb cop, Leo. But I'll lay fifty to one that she didn't kill Kline!"

Breitwell's eyes sparkled. "I'll take a hundred bucks worth of that, Pat!"

Pat Donnelly glared at him. "Done, Leo!" he said softly. "And I'll win that bet if I have to confess to killing Kline myself!"

Breitwell's bright eyes studied him a moment. "Damned if I don't think you would!" he said under his breath.

PAT left him, walked over to the headquarters car where Wanda was sitting, and bent close to her. "Tell me, kid," he asked. "Were you at the Club Paradise tonight?"

He could see that she was under a great strain. She sat stiffly, with her hands clasped tight in her lap. Her clear blue eyes met his.

"No," she said. "I wasn't."

He leaned even closer, put a big hand on her two small ones. "Why do you claim you killed Kline?" he demanded. "You know damned well you didn't. Whom are you trying to cover up for?"

Her lower lip trembled. "Please! Let me alone. I tell you I killed him. I killed him! Don't you understand?"

Pat scowled. "You did, like hell. There's something fishy—"

He stopped as an agonized cry sounded behind him.

"Wanda! Wanda darling! What's this about you killing Kline? Wanda—"

Pat swung about, put both hands on the shoulders of little Barney Rayman, who had just got out of a taxicab. Barney's face was flushed, there were beads of sweat on his forehead and on the backs of his hands. Behind Barney stood Vic, one of his two bodyguards.

Pat Donnelly said huskily:

"Take it easy, Barney. Wanda didn't do it, though she says she did. I promise you I'll clear her, and turn up the real murderer inside of twenty-four hours."

Barney looked up hopefully at the stern, set features of Pat Donnelly. Suddenly he sighed. "If you say so, Pat—"

But the girl's voice interrupted. She was clutching at Pat's sleeve, and when he turned to her he saw that her eyes were snapping. "Please stay out of this!" she exclaimed. "Can't you leave us alone? You'll do no good by meddling!"

Barney said in an agonized voice: "But Wanda, dear! Don't you understand? They'll send you to jail. They may even—" his voice broke. He turned away and buried his head in his arms.

The girl looked at her father strangely, as if she were seeing him for the first time in her life. She said softly:

"It's all right, Dad. Don't worry—"

Pat turned away, went over to Breitwell, took his arm and led him aside. He took out the brass check. "I found this next to the body, Leo," he said. "The girl didn't kill Kline. Whoever shot him, must have pulled this check out with the gun, and dropped it on the floor. Find out who checked a hat and coat at the

Club Paradise on this check, and you've got your man. And I can give a good guess who it is. I saw Sassoon driving away from around the corner, two minutes before I met the girl. Catch on?"

Breitwell took the check, grunted. "You had a hell of a nerve picking it up, Pat. What was the idea?"

Pat grinned. "I thought maybe it belonged to the girl. Frankly, I didn't want to leave too much evidence against her lying around. I didn't believe her guilty even before I knew she was Barney's daughter."

"You're not making this up, now, Pat—about the check, I mean? You know this is murder. You shouldn't fool around with murder."

"I'm not making it up, Leo. What do you think of our bet now?"

Breitwell grunted. "Let's go to the Club Paradise," he said.

CHAPTER THREE

Strapped to the Chair!

IT was five-twenty A. M. The Club Paradise, on West Fifty-sixth Street, was closed, of course. But Pat Donnelly hammered on the door until old Mike Sligo, the night watchman, came out to them, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. Mike was over sixty, and fat. He opened the door with one hand, while he pulled the suspenders up over his shoulders with the other.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "If it ain't 'Lucky' Pat Donnelly. And Detective Sergeant Breitwell!"

Pat took Mike Sligo by the arm, propelled him inside, with Breitwell following. Almost tacitly, the detective sergeant had given the lead in this matter to the tall, slim gambler.

Pat said to Sligo: "What time did you come to work this morning, Mike?"

Sligo looked at him queerly, grumbled:

"Is that what ye woke me up to find out? This is a hell of a note!" Then, noticing the taut expression in Pat's face, he answered sullenly: "I come on at four A. M.—oven an hour ago. But why—"

"Did you see Monk Sassoon here? Now think carefully, Mike. A lot depends on that."

Breitwell added: "And don't be afraid to tell the truth, Mike. We'll protect you—"

Sligo flared up. "Since when did Mike Sligo need protecting by whippersnappers like you? O' course I'll tell the truth." He swung his old eyes to Pat.

"No, Pat. I didn't see Sassoon here at all, at all. Not since I came on. The club closed less'n a hour ago, an' I see everybody who came out. There wasn't no Sassoon—bad cess to that crook!"

Pat's shoulders sagged as he turned a hopeless glance at Breitwell. The detective sergeant shook his head commiseratingly. "You see, Pat, a clue isn't always a clue. This check might have come from Kline's pocket as well as from Sassoon's. But if it did, Mike here wouldn't know about it. Kline would have been here before Mike came on duty."

Pat said suddenly: "Take us into the coat room, Mike!"

Sligo looked from one to the other, shrugged, and turned, led the way through the lobby into the little foyer where the cloak room was. Pat pulled open the Dutch door, snapped on the lights, and grabbed at a hat that hung on a peg under number nineteen. It was the only piece of clothing in the cloak room, and Pat's eyes glittered as he examined the hat, with Breitwell.

He turned it over in his hand, and suddenly he felt his blood freeze. An empty feeling came into the pit of his stomach, and he gazed blankly at Breitwell.

There were initials in the hatband. And those initials were—"B. R!"

Pat could see Breitwell's shrewd bright eyes sparkling as his nimble mind leaped from one conclusion to another. His lips moved and formed the name that those initials stood for.

"B. R.—Barney Rayman!" he said under his breath. "Now I get it. That's why the girl was so eager to confess. She's covering up for Barney. She knows he killed Kline, and she figures that as a girl she could get a better break from a jury than her father!"

PAT'S mind was numb for a moment, refusing to accept the situation.

"Damn it, Leo," he said, "Barney *couldn't* have killed Kline. I only left him—"

"Yes?" Breitwell asked triumphantly. "You left him—when?"

"At a quarter to four."

Breitwell nodded. "There's a half hour's difference. You must have gone in Zeilen's, like you usually do. Barney had plenty of time to come here, after closing up his own place. Maybe while he was here he learned something about the way Kline was running around with Wanda. He got hot under the collar, and went off the handle—"

Pat snorted. "Hell, Leo. All you do is start a new theory every time you see a clue. You forget that I saw Sassoon driving away from there. How do you fit that in with your theory? What about Sassoon?"

Breitwell regarded Pat speculatively. "You *say* you saw Sassoon, Pat—" he raised a hand as Pat's face flushed a deep red— "now don't get sore. I'm a cop, and I have to look at all the angles. I know you, Pat Donnelly, and I know how far you'd go for a friend. I don't hold it against you. It's swell to have friends like that. But the law is the law, Pat.

And everything points to Barney. If you hadn't been out of town for almost a year, you'd have heard the stories about Wanda and Kline, like everybody else. They've been running around together for quite a while, and you know what Barney thinks of Kline. You can just imagine him when he found out about them."

Breitwell shook his head, sighed. "I'm sorry, but I've got to go and take Barney in—"

"Wait a minute, Leo," Pat begged. "Before you do that, let's look this up a little further." He swung to Sligo, who had remained outside the Dutch door, watching them.

"Who's the hat check girl that works here, Mike? You know her?"

Sligo nodded slowly. "Daisy Filene. She and another girl have an apartment down the street. I don't know the number, but it's next to the garage. I—"

Pat seized Breitwell by the arm. "Come on, Leo."

He dragged the detective out, and down the street. There was beginning to be a little light now, and the street lamps were out. The dawn looked grey and bleak. Here and there a man was hurrying on the way to an early job.

Breitwell grunted, almost running to keep up with Pat's swift pace.

The house next to the garage was a four-story brick that had seen better days, but was now converted into one- and two-room apartments.

Pat found a bell in the vestibule which carried two names: Filene and Miles. It was marked: "1A."

He tried the outer door, found it locked, glanced at Breitwell, who said:

"Hell, go on and ring it."

Pat put his thumb on the button, kept it there for almost five minutes. They could hear the raucous jangle of the bell in an apartment on the ground floor, and after a while the buzzer sounded quite

viciously. Pat pushed the door open, and started down the hall with Breitwell after him, and a door at the rear was pulled open.

A woman in pink pajamas peered out at them, demanded irritably:

"What's the big idea? Who the hell are you?"

Breitwell flashed his badge. "You Daisy Filene?"

She stared at the badge suspiciously, keeping behind the door. "What if I am?"

"Get some clothes on and let us in. We want to talk to you. I'm Detective Sergeant Breitwell from homicide."

She glanced from Breitwell to Pat Donnelly's tall, slim figure, and said:

"I got enough clothes on. You can come in."

She stepped aside, pulled the door open.

Daisy Filene was a blonde. Her hair was done in little curls all around the back of her head from ear to ear. Her complexion was creamy, and she was well made up. She stood in the middle of the room, put her hands on her hips, and let them look at her in her pajamas. Her eyes flashed to Pat, and she smiled invitingly.

"You're 'Lucky' Pat Donnelly, ain't you?"

Pat nodded.

She sighed. "Gee, I wish you'd make a couple of bets or something for me. I could use money. Look at this dump—"

Breitwell interrupted her impatiently. "Never mind that. Where's your roommate—the girl who shares this place with you?"

Daisy Filene hesitated a moment, then said: "She ain't here. She's staying at her mother's tonight. What'd you gents want—her or me?"

Breitwell walked past her, pushed open the bathroom door, peered in, then came back.

"Do you remember who checked a hat with you tonight at the Club Paradise—and didn't claim it?"

She nodded. "Yeah. It was number nineteen. I left it hanging there, figuring he'd come back tomorrow to get it." She glanced at Pat. "It belongs to your friend, Barney Rayman."

Pat stepped close to her. "You sure Barney checked that hat with you?"

"Sure I am. He came in about four o'clock, just floating around, I guess, after closing up; said something about being taken over by 'Lucky' Pat Donnelly for thirty-two thousand, and breezed into the bar. About ten minutes later he came out, all hot and mad, and he didn't even stop for his hat—just barged out of the place, talkin' under his breath. I called after him, but he didn't even hear me."

BREITWELL let out his breath in a long "Whew!" He took the hat out of his overcoat pocket, where he had stuffed it, and showed it to her.

"This the hat?" he asked.

"That's it!" she said. "That's the hat. But what's the idea? Did you wake me up in the middle of the night to identify a hat?"

Pat Donnelly turned away from her, looked around the room. The bed was disarranged, the pillow mused, as if it had been slept on. The second pillow, next to it, was fresh and untouched. On a chair near the bed lay a little pile of feminine garments. A pair of long tan silk stockings hung on the string of the shade; drying in the open window. Everything seemed natural enough.

But his eyes swung back to Daisy Filene, and he studied her smoothly made-up face, her neatly curled hair.

"Were you sleeping, Daisy?" he asked softly.

She threw him a startled glance. But she smiled at once—acidly.

"Yes, Hawkshaw, I was sleeping. Take a look at the bed!"

Breitwell said wearily: "That's all, Pat. I guess you can't put up any more arguments." He jerked his head at the woman in the pajamas. "You, Filene! Don't leave town. You'll be wanted for the Grand Jury in a couple of days."

Her eyes opened. "Grand Jury! Why, what—"

Pat laughed harshly. "You knew damn well what it's about. It's about murder—the murder of Steve Kline. And by what you've just told Breitwell here, you're practically strapping one of the whitest men in the world into the electric chair." He brought his face close to hers, and she half drew back at the fierceness of him. "You've put the finger on Barney Rayman for the murder of Kline. And if I find out you're lying, Daisy—" his voice sank low, became deep with restrained emotion—"God help you!"

He swung away from her, headed for the door. "Come on, Leo. Let's get out of here!"

For a moment his body hid the door which he had pulled open, and his long supple fingers flicked in and out, pressed the safety-catch button which controlled the lock. The door could now be opened from the outside by merely turning the knob.

Daisy Filene didn't notice his swift motion. She followed them to the door silently, her eyes sullenly fixed on Pat Donnelly's back. When they were both out in the hallway, she slammed the door.

Pat manipulated the catch of the vestibule door too, without Breitwell's noticing it, and they passed out into the street.

The detective sergeant said mournfully: "It looks like I lose that bet, Pat. The girl certainly didn't kill Kline. Her old man did. I owe you a hundred."

Pat said tightly: "What are you going to do, Leo?"

Breitwell shrugged. "What can I do? I'm going to take Barney in. The evidence is all here."

Pat planted himself in front of the sergeant. "Listen, Leo," he said desperately. "That Filene dame wasn't telling the truth. She wasn't sleeping when we rang the bell. My bet is that there was some one in that room with her, who climbed out the window when they heard us. She made a quick change into pajamas, and messed up the the bed so it's look like she slept in it." He poked a long finger into Breitwell's chest. "I bet you further, that if we go back now, we'll surprise that party in her room again—he's probably come in through the window again."

Breitwell shrugged. "What'll it prove, Pat? It's her apartment. She's got a right to entertain anyone she likes—even at five in the morning. If you find anyone with her, it won't change her story any."

Pat subsided. "All right," he said, dully. "Go ahead. I suppose you've got to act according to the evidence."

"Coming along?" the detective asked.

"No. I couldn't stand seeing Barney booked for murder. I'm going to look up a couple of angles of this thing. By the way—have you got any handcuffs on you?"

Breitwell nodded, looking at him suspiciously. "What do you want cuffs for?"

Pat grinned slowly. "Maybe I'll run into the real murderer tonight." He put a hand on the other's arm as Breitwell gestured impatiently, started to walk away.

"I'm asking you to lend me your handcuffs, Leo. You turning me down on a little thing like that?"

"Oh, hell!" the sergeant exclaimed. "Here, take the damn things!" He yanked them out of his back pocket, thrust them at Pat. "Go chain yourself to a lamp-post!"

Pat watched him go down the street and get into the car which he had left before the Club Paradise, watched him drive away.

Then he turned, walked swiftly back into the brownstone house where Daisy Filene lived.

CHAPTER FOUR

Too Many Confessions

PAT DONNELLY kept close to the wall of the hallway as he approached Apartment 1A. From behind the door he heard the hum of subdued voices—a man's, and a woman's.

He put the handcuffs in his pocket, eased the Webley out of its clip, and with his left hand turned the knob slowly. He got the door open an inch, heard the voices louder. And suddenly the conversation inside stopped dead.

Pat flung the door wide, thrust into the room, and slammed the door behind him.

Daisy Filene was sitting on the bed with her legs crossed and smoking a cigarette. She had been in the middle of taking a puff, and she sat there frozen like that, staring at Pat, holding the cigarette at her lips. Smoke was coming from her nostrils, and suddenly she choked on it, began to cough.

Near the kitchenette stood a man whom Pat knew. He had his hand at his armpit holster, and a gun was halfway out. There was a snarl of fury on his face, and he was crouched forward, his knees slightly bent. He didn't move as Pat's Webley covered him, and slowly he let his hand come away from the holster—empty.

Pat said tonelessly: "So you're a double-crossing murderer, Smoky!"

Smoky's voice was husky. "God, no, Pat. I didn't kill Kline!"

"I say you did, Smoky. A guy who could double-cross a white boss like Barney, could be a murderer." Pat laughed

shortly. "So that's what Barney gets for trusting you! Supposed to be his body-guard! I wondered where you were, when Barney showed up before with only Vic, and not you!"

Daisy Filene's coughing spasm was over. She got up from the bed, eyes blazing. "Smoky's no murderer!"

Pat laughed again. "Maybe not! But he's the one that brought you Barney's hat to hang in the coatroom. He's the one that coached you to say Barney'd been there." He spoke to the woman, but kept his eyes on the man. "You gave Smoky the check for that hat to give to the murderer—if he didn't kill Kline himself."

Smoky said very low: "You're crazy, Donnelly."

"Then what are you doing here?" Pat asked flatly.

Smoky lowered his eyes, but the woman said sullenly: "Smoky's my husband."

"I get it," said Pat. He reached behind him, pulled the door open a little, and shot the catch that operated the lock. Then he slammed the door closed again, stepped across the room toward Smoky.

Smoky's eyes were on the Webley, fascinated, and he made no move to resist when Pat reached in and took out his automatic, dropped it in his own pocket.

Then Pat put away the Webley. "All right, Smoky," he said pleasantly. "We're going to have a little talk, you and I, as man to man. You're going to tell me the whole story of what happened tonight—and you're going to tell it fast."

Daisy Filene said quickly: "Don't talk, Smoky. He's nobody. He's only a gambler that thinks he's a big shot. He's got nothing on you, and he's bluffing. We got a right to be here. All I got to do is yell for the cops, and we'll be okay."

Pat stood loosely, arms at his sides, and grinned at Smoky.

Smoky shuddered.

"If you think she's right, Smoky," Pat said silkily, "you can act accordingly. If she calls out for help I give you my word that I'll shoot you right between the eyes. Barney is my friend, Smoky, and you know I always keep my word." His hand moved up swiftly, and the Webley reappeared. "What do *you* think, Smoky. Will I kill you if you don't talk?"

The woman bared her teeth, stepped closer to Pat. "You're crazy! You kill Smoky, and you'll fry! He hasn't even got a gun on him now. It'd be murder. You'll fry, I tell you, you'll fry!"

"All right," Pat said. "I'll fry. But it won't do Smoky any good, because he'll be dead."

Daisy Filene looked at him unbelievably, said: "Nobody's nuts enough for that," and opened her mouth to scream.

Pat's face was white and tense. His fist swung in a short arc, caught her on the chin, sent her toppling back onto the bed, unconscious.

Smoky had taken a step forward, but he stopped as Pat's gun swung to cover him again, and Pat asked coldly: "Well?"

Pat's hand was steady, but the collar of his shirt was wet with sweat. His face was a set mask, and his finger perceptibly tautened on the trigger.

Smoky exclaimed hastily: "I'll talk!"

"No," said Pat. "You'll write!"

WITH Pat Donnelly standing grimly over him, Smoky wrote in pencil on a cardboard taken from a laundered shirt—the only thing they had been able to find in the room that could be written on. Smoky's left hand was cuffed to the chair, and he wrote awkwardly with his right.

Daisy Filene was still unconscious on the bed, and Pat left her so, watching the laboriously shaped words take form under Smoky's pencil. Smoky sat at the table, with Pat just behind him, facing the door.

Pat had locked the window and pulled down the shade.

The statement was:

"I, Sam Miles, also known as Smoky Miles, state that I was employed as a body-guard by Barney Rayman. That I am legally married to Daisy Filene Miles, who works as a hat-check girl at the Club Paradise. That Daisy was approached by an unknown man who offered her a thousand dollars if she would get me to take Barney's hat and bring it to the check room last night. I did so. This man also made Daisy call up Miss Wanda Rayman at her home and tell her that there was trouble between her father and Steve Kline at the Movieland Cabaret, and that she better go there at once if she wanted to stop some one from getting hurt. We didn't know what was in back of it. We thought some one was being framed or something, but we didn't think it was murder. We only found out about that afterward, when the same man came back and gave us an extra thousand and told us that we better keep our mouths shut or we'd burn, because some one had been killed at the Movieland, and we'd be accessories."

Smoky stopped, looked up.

"All right," Pat said. "Now the name of the man."

Smoky wiped sweat from under his eyes. "I swear to you, Donnelly, I don't know who it was. He never give no name."

"Do you know Sassoon when you see him?"

"No. I came from Chicago and got the job with Barney after Sassoon left this town. I never seen him."

"What did this man look like?"

"He—"

Smoky stopped, glanced toward the door. Some one had rapped on it discreetly.

Pat whispered: "Find out who it is."

Smoky called out: "Yes?"

A voice said: "Is Daisy Filene there?"

Pat recognized the voice—even over a lapse of more than a year. It was the cold, unemotional voice of "Monk" Sassoon. Pat stooped, unlocked the cuffs.

Then he whispered some instructions in Smoky's ear, snatched up the confession from the table, and stepped behind the curtain of the kitchenette.

Smoky called out: "Who wants her?"

"This is the man who talked to her last night. Open up. I've got to see you. It's important."

Smoky said: "Okay," and went to the door, opened it.

Pat applied his eye to a crack in the curtain, and his mouth set in a grim line as he saw the hulking form of Sassoon come into the room, followed by two more men—the same men that Pat had seen in the car earlier in the evening.

"Monk" Sassoon's thick features were wreathed into something like a smile. He jerked his head at one of the men who had come in after him, and that man shut the door, stood with his back to it.

Then Sassoon turned, surveyed the room, towering over Smoky. His eyes lit on the form of Daisy Filene on the bed. She was coming to, and moaning a bit. There was a blue mark on her jaw.

Sassoon smiled crookedly. "Having a little spat, eh? Couldn't figure out how to divide all that money, I bet."

Smoky said nervously: "What can I do for you, mister?"

Sassoon asked genially: "Had any visitors yet? Cops or such?"

Smoky hesitated only a fraction of a second, then said quickly: "No. No one's been here at all."

"That's fine," Sassoon purred. "Because I've been thinking that maybe you or Daisy might be tempted to talk about things. That's funny, though, because the night watchman over at the Club Paradise tells me that a man named Donnelly was there to see him, together with a detective, and that they said they would stop in here too."

"Oh yes," Smoky said lamely. He wasn't much of a liar. "They did come

here, but I lammed out the window. Daisy talked to them. She told them the story you told her to tell."

"So? That's very nice. Just as I figured it. Did the detective have a hat with him?"

"Yes."

"Fine. Now I just want to make sure that you and Daisy don't talk any more about this thing. You see, she's identified the hat, and that's all that'll be necessary."

"We won't talk, mister," Smoky assured him. "We'll keep mum."

"I'm very sure you will," Sassoon said softly. "Quite sure."

HE nodded, and suddenly the two men behind him moved forward, and guns appeared in their hands; guns with ungainly silencers on the muzzles. Their eyes glittered as one stepped toward Smoky, the other went toward the bed on which lay Daisy Filene.

Smoky exclaimed huskily: "Say! What you gonna do?"

"Just make sure," Sassoon murmured, "that you don't do any more talking."

Suddenly panic seized Smoky. He turned wildly, clawing at his empty holster.

And Pat Donnelly stepped out from behind the curtain.

Sassoon saw him, and froze. But the other two men had their backs to him, and he had to attract their attention by coughing. Sassoon's face was twisted into a mask of hatred as his hand streaked to his coat pocket. He shouted hoarsely:

"It's Donnelly! Take him!"

The two men whirled just as Sassoon got his gun out. Pat fired first at Sassoon, then twice more, swiftly, at the other two men. None of them fired a

single shot. Pat's first slug had caught Sassoon in the arm, and the big man had dropped his gun, face contorted with pain.

Pat's second and third slugs hurled the two men backward into the window, where they crashed against the shade, carrying it back against the pane and smashing the glass. They were both dead, with bullets through their hearts.

There was a commotion outside, heavy steps sounded in the hall, and Detective Sergeant Breitwell fairly hurled himself into the room, service revolver in his hand.

He stopped short just inside the door, goggling at the dead bodies, at the figure of Sassoon who was trying to get to his feet and to hold on to his wounded arm at the same time. "Hell, Pat," he said. "I figured you were up to something here—so I hustled over."

Pat said to Breitwell: "Here's the murderer of Kline, Leo. Meet Mr. Sassoon!"

Sassoon growled: "You're nuts. I don't know what you're talking about!"

Breitwell glanced at Pat, and suddenly started to smile.

"What the hell are you grinning about?" Pat demanded.

"I'll tell you, said Breitwell. "First Wanda Rayman claims she killed Kline. Then I go down and release her and take Barney Rayman in custody, and he seems tickled to death, and claims *he* killed Kline. It's a relief to find some *one* who denies he killed Kline!"

"Sassoon," Pat said quietly, "was always modest." He took the written confession from his pocket. "This statement, written by Smoky just before he got here, will put him in the headlines—and send him right to the chair. . . ."

THE END

DEATH BALANCES THE BUDGET

by GEORGE BRUCE

WHEN Miss Mears appeared on the street children cringed away from her. After she passed they whispered among themselves that she was a witch. The parents of the same children whispered that Miss Mears was a miser and hid herself in the curtained depths of the Mears' Mansion, and spent



For so many years she had lost track of them Miss Mears had lived in her great house—all alone, entertaining no one,

shunned by her fellowtownsmen. . . . Then one night the chief of police got a call. . . . A ghastly visitor had come to the lonely Miss Mears. . . .

She could feel hands reaching for her. . . .

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her days and nights counting her gold, fondling and caressing each piece.

The Chief of Colesville's three-man police force said that Miss Mears was a damned nuisance, a chronic crank and kicker, because as many as ten times a month the telephone in his office summoned his official attention, and he discovered Miss Mears to be on the line, reporting the fact that a tramp was prowling about, or that children were annoying her by throwing stones at the house, or that she was sure robbers were trying to get in.

And each time the Chief went out to Mears' Mansion to investigate personally and found that the children had fled, if there had ever been children; and that the robber, trying to force an entrance, was nothing more than a tree branch rubbing against the side of the unpainted house, moved by a gentle wind; or that the prowling tramp was Joe Phillips cutting across the Mears property on his way home from the filling station.

Time after time the Chief came back to the office to complain to his force: "I swear to goodness, that Lizzie Mears will be the death of me yet. Getting a man out at all hours of the day and night. . . ."

And the force would nod in sympathy and say: "Cracked, that's what. I always said she was cracked. Been cracked for years, ever since her pa's death. Just look-in' at her will tell a person she's cracked—of all the outlandish creations. You shouldn't pay her no mind, Chief."

BUT Lizzie Mears was neither a witch, a miser, nor was she cracked. She was merely a fifty-five-year-old spinster lady who lived alone in the tremendous emptiness of what had once been the "Mears Mansion". When she looked at herself in the mirror she saw a tall, spare body, stern-faced, cold-eyed, with the skin pulled tightly over the cheekbones, like

dried parchment. She saw a long, thin nose, and a thin-lipped mouth which never smiled. She saw the angularity of her figure, so pronounced that the ends of her shoulder blades seemed to push themselves stiffly against the material of the rusty black, ancient costumes she affected. Her throat was thin and the cords of her neck stood out under the flesh. She had midnight black hair, with traces of iron grey, which she wore combed down tightly against her head, almost in the manner of a characterless wig, and parted dead center.

When she walked on the street she was like a black-garbed spectre from another generation, returned to the scene from which it had been snatched, and doomed to walk alone.

Her black skirt touched the earth on all sides of her and gave off a dull rustling sound as she moved—like the night wind blowing through dead branches. She seldom glanced right or left, but walked with her face straight to the front, her eyes seeming to see nothing, to recognize nothing. When she went out, it was for one of two things: to order groceries or necessities, for which she paid cash, speaking no word, excepting to declare her wants; or, to church, once on a Sunday, appearing at exactly the same minute each Sabbath, just before the services began, to walk down the aisle completely unaware of the existence of other worshippers. She would sit bolt upright in her seat, never moving until the collection plate was passed, and then reaching out her hand to deposit a quarter on the plate. . . .

When people whispered concerning Miss Mears' money, they spoke indefinitely, as of fabulous sums. Long years ago when Old Man Mears had come to Colesville and built the Mears Mansion, people had spoken of the Mears wealth in the same manner. The tremendous house with its twenty rooms. The only "draw-

ing room" in Colesville. Blooded horses, carriages, servants. Servants, bad ones, hired from the village, coming home each night to spread exaggerated tales concerning the wonders and magnificence of Mears Mansion.

But Old Man Mears had been a prodigal spender. It seemed that he was intent upon ridding himself of his money. People said that he was a big New York broker, who wanted to retire to the country, away from the misery and din of the city—retire with a fortune. The direct antecedents of the Mears family were lost, and no one bothered to inquire concerning them. It was enough that Great Wealth had come to Colesville. Money was the Open Sesame in Colesville, as it is everywhere else in the world.

Just Old Man Mears and his daughter, Elisabeth. All alone, in that house. Once or twice young men cast longing eyes toward the daughter of Old Man Mears, but that was all. It was difficult for the boldest of the village lads to attempt the storming of the castle single-handed. And no outside suitors came for the hand of Miss Elisabeth Mears . . . so the years rolled on, and it seemed that Old Man Mears would live forever, and the people of Colesville were very sorry for Lizzie Mears because she was fairly good-looking—and rich. The women of the village could not understand why any girl with those two attributes did not somehow get a man.

BUT it seemed that Lizzie Mears was born to be the handmaiden of her father—nothing more. And when he died, well, she was very much like the Lizzie Mears of the present. The life seemed to have been drained out of her. The beauty was gone. Youth was gone. She was stern-faced, and as if under self-discipline, sere, and possessed of that agelessness which marks the spinster in the later phases of life.

If romance had ever touched her, no one in Colesville knew of it. If she harbored a secret sorrow, excepting the death of her father, no one had heard of it. In fact, no one knew about anything connected with her. She had lived practically all of the years of her life among the two thousand souls of the village—and she was an utter blank.

And in her later years it came to pique those two thousand souls that she was a blank, a mystery, an enigma and a Sphinx. For of all things, Colesville hated a mystery, or something that was not common knowledge.

It came to be in the later years that the people of Colesville passed the Mears Mansion quickly and with a little feeling of hackles rising between shoulder blades, particularly at night. The unpainted, weathered, grey blob of the house was forbidding in its aspect. The gaunt, weary, tenuous-armed elms crowded into the yard were like ghost figures standing in the night. The heavily curtained windows seemed to make a crypt of the house. There was a feeling, that if one opened the front door a sudden rush of heavy, dead air would strike one in the face.

And the house was always dark, excepting for one burning lamp in the room in which Miss Mears happened to be, for in spite of the fact that electricity had arrived finally in Colesville, it had never been wired into Mears Mansion, and Lizzie Mears still lit her way in the night with old-fashioned oil lamps. Sometimes the people of Colesville, passing the house at night saw the feeble yellow illumination of the lamp moving about from place to place in the house as Miss Mears barred the doors and inspected the window locks on her way to her solitary bed. And the moving luminosity was eerie—like the phosphorescence one sometimes sees over a fresh grave in a cemetery at night.

Sometimes, when they saw that light,

people muttered to themselves: "Lizzie Mears—counting her gold . . ." and hurried on feeling invisible hands plucking at them from the shadows behind the trees, and feeling little shudders of dread in the pit of their stomachs.

But there were things about Lizzie Mears no one in Colesville could have understood or credited. For instance, Miss Mears hated, with a soul-filling, overburdening resentment, the house which had entombed her throughout the years. She had always hated it, even from the first, when it was new, and bright with paint. As it grew old, and the joints separated and the stairs bred whispers and creakings, and when the shutter hinges rusted and gave off deep sobbing groans when even gently stirred by the wind, she hated it still more, and the hatred was mixed with a suffocating fear.

SHE had all of the sounds in that old house catalogued. She knew the creaking of the shutters, and the sound of the wind moving the slates on the roof, and the gurgling sound of the water in the kitchen sink being sucked down into the sewer—the sound of a throat, flooded with blood, being choked by powerful hands. She knew the sounds made by the creaking stairs, and of the warping floor boards. She knew the low hoot of the owl that lived in an elm on the lawn, even the rustle of the high grass in the back yard. She knew them all. As one knows the ghosts which inhabit his mental existence. She had lived with them for years, behind the shaded windows, along with the covered-over furniture in the rooms she never used—queer looking objects under the white dust covers, looking like the wraiths of victims dead or broken by torture, and huddling together in silence.

And she could not leave them—there was no place in the world Lizzie Mears could go. For in spite of the whisperings

of Colesville concerning the legendary goldpieces she caressed and hoarded, Lizzie Mears was practically penniless, and had been penniless for years. No one in Colesville knew that Old Man Mears had died leaving nothing but his insurance and the house—and very little insurance. That the prodigal spending, even on the Colesville scale, had sapped the source of his wealth, and that silly investments had made him a pauper.

Only Miss Mears knew that. The insurance money came to her. It came when she was plunged into the absolute void of isolation from all things—when she was completely alone in the great house. And she sat down, and figured for days on paper, and found, that if she spent just so much daily, the money would last so many years. At the end of those years—nothing. And she was afraid. Afraid to go away from this house she hated, away from this town she hated, with its prying people and their pseudo-friendliness. She was afraid to go out into a world she did not know. Afraid that something would happen to the money, and she would be alone, without shelter, penniless.

No—she must stay close to the house! She must! Even with the draped furniture, and the horror of having seen her father's body lying in its coffin in the drawing room, dead, like marble, with closed eyes . . . and his face strange in the mask of death. It was her sanctuary and refuge. There was no other world.

So she saved and scrimped and suffered over those dollars which came to her, and her soul was jagged with the fear of them coming to an end. And to make them last longer she ate only one meal a day, and when she put the quarter on the collection plate on Sunday she ate nothing that day.

Sometimes the complete silence of her existence seemed to scream in her ears. Sometimes she told herself that she would

hire someone from the village to stay with her, a young girl perhaps—that Hilda Gatty—who was not so flighty as the other girls. And she would have someone to talk to, and someone to share the silences, someone to see. And then she remembered: if she did that, the whole town would know that Mears Mansion was an empty shell, rotting to ruin, and that she could eat but one meal a day, and that she hadn't had a new dress in twenty years. And mentally she could hear the buzzing of Colesville gossip, and could feel the suddenly narrowed eyes of the townspeople on her back, and her safety being ripped away from her.

As long as she lived in Mears Mansion, alone, she was safe. But the moment the world came in—even in the presence of a single individual—her secrets would be flung out into the street like the gnawed bones of a chicken, to be mulled over—and her safety was gone.

SHE never got anyone to stay with her, and the hate and fear of the old house grew up within her, through the years, until it rode her like hags seated on her back beating her with switches. A moving shadow—and her heart raced and a feeling of faintness came over her. The sound of a footstep on the boardwalk which served as a sidewalk, and her knees became rubber, and her breath stopped in her lungs.

The days went on like that for Miss Mears. And she wondered how long it took to die—and a panic would shake her at the thought that she might not die before the money ran out—that she would sit someday in the silence, dying a little at a time from starvation, and that after days and days, someone would break into the house and find her skeleton on the floor, emaciated, cold, stiff.

But of course, the people of Colesville knew nothing of those things. The chil-

dren said: "She's a witch." The adults said: "She's a miser and fondles her golden money." And the Chief of Police cussed and called her an "infernal nuisance."

* * *

IN the late hours of her last day of life, Miss Mears put on her old black coat over her old black, age-streaked dress, and put on her old black hat and tied the black veil, which went over the top of her hat and under her chin, firmly in place. She stood looking at herself in the mirror. It seemed that a yellow mask looked back at her out of a heavy black frame. She looked at her hands. They were still beautiful, almost as they had been when she was a girl.

Then, with almost a trancelike step, she went to the bookcase in the living room, moved aside a heavy one-volume encyclopedia which had been current in 1895 and from behind it took an age-polished cigar box. She walked with the same trancelike step to her rocking chair, sat herself stiffly upright—she always sat as if a steel brace supported her spine—and slowly opened the lid of the box. Her eyes were bright with a queer fever. Her hands shook a little. Her mouth was white and dry. She felt in the box with her hands, without looking down at the contents of the box. She seemed to know exactly what the box contained—each piece, paper and metal.

After a long time she looked at her hands. She took three old, limp, one-dollar bills from the box, smoothed them carefully on her knee as she might have smoothed a square of silk. Then she picked up with her fingers three half dollars, and put those on top of the three one-dollar bills. One by one she picked up the remaining pieces of money in the box. A quarter, four dimes, two nickels and four pennies.

She sat there for a long time, her face

expressionless, looking down at the money carefully balanced on her knee, and piled up according to size.

Her mouth moved. She seemed to be repeating something she knew acutely from memory. No sound come from her lips, they merely formed the words: "Five dollars and twenty-nine cents."

She put the money back in the box, carefully, with the hands which shook slightly, and there was something akin to nameless terror in her eyes. She picked up one of the half dollars, and one of the quarters and one of the dimes. It seemed that she had to force her fingers into picking them out of the box. She held the three pieces in her hand, in the palm of her hand, for a long time, looking at them. Her throat worked as if a dry sob was trying to force passage.

Then she closed her eyes and closed the lid of the box, and put it back behind the encyclopedia, and arranged the books to seem undisturbed.

There was a burning sensation in her stomach. It had been there for hours—since the day before. It was hunger—but the burning sensation was being lost a little in a strange numbness, and every now and then Miss Mears' head swirled dizzily and she had to hold onto the edge of a table, or lean against the wall until her head cleared.

She looked around the room. She walked to the front door, took down the chain, turned the key in the lock, locked the door carefully after her. She walked down the ruined pathway to the front gate, with the weeds and tall grass fighting each other for existence, out through the once proud gate in the fence, onto the boardwalk—toward Ben Sutter's Grocery and General Store.

She had to pass the filling station. There was a car parked there. A man was sitting in the car, lounging. He needed a shave, he looked unkempt, burly. He

wore an imitation leather coat, a khaki-colored woolen shirt, and the legs of his trousers were caught up in boots. He lifted his head and looked at her as she passed. When she was by the car she heard little snatches of Joe Phillips' voice pinging against her ears. Joe always made friends with his customers. He had a book: "How to Succeed with Your Personality." And the book stressed cheerfulness and courtesy and such things. So he always conversed with his customers as he filled tanks or put air in tires, or poured oil in a crankcase.

"... Old Lizzie Mears ... lives in that big house ... Mears' Mansion ... hell of a looking sight now ... should have seen it when the Old Man was alive ... sure—lousy with dough ... everybody knows Old Lizzie is a miser ... always dresses like that ... never been any different since I been born. ..."

MISS MEARS walked out of earshot. It seemed to her that she could feel the eyes of the man in the car looking after her, focused between her shoulder blades. A queer, grim smile moved the corners of her mouth. It was the first time she had smiled ... so long ... she could hardly remember. Her brain said slowly: "lousy with money. ...". That had called forth the grim smile. Lousy with money—five dollars and twenty nine cents—no ... not now. Now there was exactly four dollars and forty-four cents in the box ... four-forty-four. It marched through her head in crazy cadences: four-forty-four ... four-forty-four. ...

There were some children in front of Ben Sutter's. An impulse stopped her. She stood looking at them, her eyes strange, with a queer starved light. She took a step toward one of them. They ran, scattered, across the street, down farther on the same side of the street,

then stopped like frightened kittens, then turned around, and stared at her.

One of them did not run. A little girl . . . two or three perhaps, she stood rooted, looking up at Miss Mears. Smiling up at her, the late afternoon sunlight falling on a tangled mass of blonde curls.

One of the children shrieked: "Run—Amy—run. . . ."

But Miss Mears did not hear the cry. Neither did the child. She still stood, looking up, smiling. And something moved within Miss Mears like a glacier tearing itself away from the anchorage of a century, and she went down on her knees on the sidewalk, and put out her hands to the child, almost in supplication, and the child stood without moving, the smile on her face—and Miss Mears kissed her gently on the forehead. And then—moved by the same irresistible impulse, Miss Mears opened the palm of her hand, and quickly took up the dime, and pressed it into the child's hand. She climbed stiffly and hurriedly to her feet, and fled into the store.

But before she came in Ben Sutter had time to witness the scene in company with several of his female customers, and to marvel.

"Well, I never hoped to live to see it. . . . Miss Mears—noticin' a child." There was a little hushed note in his voice. And he said: "And she gave her a dime. . . . Yes, sir—she give little Amy Mitchel a dime!"

"Hmph!" said one of the ladies. "It's a wonder it didn't break her heart. It's the first dime she ever gave away since I've known her—and it'll probably be the last. . . ."

Sutter said: "Shhhh! Here she comes."

There was a silence in the store. Then Ben Sutter said: "Evening, Miss Mears . . . a lovely day." And he looked search-

ingly at her face and it seemed to him that her cheeks were wet.

Miss Mears said: "Good evening Mr. Sutter. I needed a few things. . . ."

"A pleasure Miss Mears. . . ."

So she bought seventy-five cents worth of foodstuffs, very carefully, and went out, the packages under her arm. And she could feel the eyes of the people within the store staring after her.

She walked up the street, her black skirts stirring the dust at her feet. And the children were strangely silent and strangely awed, and followed after her at a respectful distance. They were saying in subdued, excited voices: "She give Amy a dime. . . . She give Amy a dime. . . ."

She looked at the trees. She looked at the sky. She looked at the houses along the street. And she thought . . . "four-forty-four . . . four-forty-four. . . ."

MISS MEARS looked up quickly. There was a sense within her that eyes were burning her—someone looking at her so intensely that the very touch of vision against her burned. And she saw that the man she had noticed before at the filling station was still sitting in his car, talking to Joe Phillips, and that Phillips was chattering away, hands on hips—and that the man's eyes, covertly, were watching her every step.

A little chilling sensation ran along Miss Mears' spine. It began at her hips and ran in ripples up to the base of her brain. Her flesh felt prickly, and a nervous pulse beat within her chest.

She walked on, turned in at the gate. It seemed that she had to get into the house immediately. To fling herself right through the door and to bolt the door after her. Halfway up the steps the urge became an actual panic. Her heart was pounding, and her breath fluttered in her throat.

Inside the house, with the door bolted and locked after her, she drew a great breath. A little shudder shook her. It seemed that she could see the man's eyes peering at her out of the half darkness of the hallway—eyes, lurking under great bushy brows, above that unshaven brutish face.

She almost forgot she was hungry. She took off her coat, and hurried to light the lamp. She put the lamp on the table. She sat down, opened a box of crackers, ate them—dry. She would have liked to have brewed a pot of tea—she needed it. But going to the kitchen, through dark halls and past empty rooms! So she sat, huddled within the circle of yellow light and munched on the dry crackers, making each of them last as long as possible, until her throat and mouth were dry and mastication was not possible.

The clock ticked. Ponderously, loudly, monotonously. It said with its wooden works: "Four-forty-four — four-forty-four—" endlessly. Until the beat and cadence was pounding on the top of Miss Mears' skull.

She looked about her. Little by little that terrible house had driven her back, from one line of entrenchments of defence to another. Little by little it had choked her off, relentlessly, implacably driven her toward a corner from which she could not escape. Little by little, it had driven her from itself, a room at a time—closed off, abandoned to the emptiness, the dustiness and the smell of stale air. Driven her—until she had this living room, the kitchen, and her bedroom—all that remained to her of the great house.

All the rest was filled with the thick, brooding silence, and the noises—and the isolation.

She sat there and rocked herself in the rocker—back and forth, mechanically, held by a queer, self-hypnosis, born out of the crush of fear and dread against her brain.

The rockers of the chair creaked and kept cadence with the sound of the clock: forty-four—forty-four—forty-four. . . .

After a long time, when it was pitch dark outside the yellow circle of light from the lamp, and the walls of the room were completely lost in the surrounding blackness, she became aware that she was cold. Her body was gripped by a chill—seemed frozen into tiny particles of ice adhering to the flesh. The floor under her feet was cold. The air about her. She shivered and tried to shrug the old black dress more securely about her body—but the cold continued.

Her hand reached out toward the base of the lamp. She got up from her chair, very slowly. The boards of the floor creaked under her feet as she took a step. She wished she had made the tea. It would have warmed her. Winter was coming—it was in the air—and she would be cold, for there was nothing to burn in the stove. And there could be no coal for the heater—not even in the twenty-pound sacks such as she had bought last winter because they did not take so much money. She would not be able to have even that spark of fire she had kept in the heater. And the cold would come into the house. . . .

CHILLS ran over her body. She held the lamp above her head, and the circle of light moved slowly before her as she walked toward the stairs. The steps creaked. It seemed that the cold was coming to meet her. Suddenly the house was alive with voices. With rustlings, creakings, squeakings, groanings, gurglings. She stopped, listened. Her hand was shaking. The yellow pool of light trembled as a result.

She went up another step. Her heart thumped. Somehow she could not forget the furtive, covert eyes of the man at the filling station. It seemed that his eyes

were just ahead of the fringe of light on the stairs.

She halted at the top landing, breathed deeply. She opened the door of her room. The light danced crazily, smoked in its chimney. She shielded it with her hand. The cold rushed at her. She stood, transfixed, her body suddenly gaunt, like bones wrapped in yellow paper.

Her eyes turned slowly, looked at the room. Her big bed with its old fashioned curtains. The two chairs. The chest of drawers and the old-fashioned dressing table she never used, and the bureau with the mirror. The closet built against the wall. The window. . . .

The window!

Her hand clutched at the lamp—it shook in her hand. Her knees seemed about to buckle, her eyes, staring, wide, looking at the window. It was open. It hadn't been open in twenty years. It had always been locked. She looked at the lock. It was wrenched away . . . the screw torn out of the wood by a powerful force, the inside half of the lock half hanging from the window frame.

And the cold—the cold air which had chilled her, was coming in through the opened window. . . . And outside, the limbs of the elms were moaning in a queer, ominous ecstasy, and the leaves were whispering to themselves, chuckling. And the creaks in the house were suddenly alive, living. The shutter hinge, with its grating groan was the sound of her nerves, and the floor board under her feet with its cracking was the sound of her bones.

It seemed that she could not hold the lamp, that her fingers had lost the power to grasp. Her head whirled. The terror which she had kept under restraint all through the years in this house, was unleashed, rioting, chattering within her. The sounds were attacking—driving her, and the eyes of the man she had seen at

the filling station were leading them—urging them on.

The curtains, masking the top of the bed stirred just a little. Her eyes leaped to the spot, and her heart, and her nerves. She stared. They moved a little more, rustled. Her eyes went to the mirror over the old dressing table. A breath whistled through her teeth. Eyes . . . that man's eyes . . . looking at her out of the mirror . . . touched by the light from the lamp . . . narrowed, deadly, staring at her.

A scream rose out of her soul, battered up through her thin throat, assaulted her teeth—and she forced it back.

He was there. She knew it. If she could only get to the stairs. If she could only telephone . . . anyone — Curt Davis. . . .

SHE turned slowly. She went out of the room. The cold air seeped after her, touching her back and her neck with icy fingers. She heard a sound, the creak of a floor board. She heard it again. It came out of her room. No sound like that belonged in the house. She knew every hideous sound the old house made. This was another sound—feet, coming after her.

She forced herself to walk slowly, as if she did not know, as if she was going down the stairs for some simple thing she had forgotten; and in the darkness, out of the yellow circle of the lamp light, the sounds came after her, very slowly, very slowly, but very surely. The sounds halted when she could not move her legs. They began again when she could force another step.

The distance to the stair head was miles long. It was not more than twenty feet, but it was miles . . . and miles . . . with torture slashing and pounding at her along every inch of the way. She put out a foot, took the first step down . . .

and with it there was a terrific impulse to run. To drop the lamp—to scream out her horror and terror—and to run, blindly—anywhere, to escape the sound of those following footsteps. . . .

She could feel hands reaching for her. Hands, powerful, with hair covering them. She could smell death curling and writhing and twisting in the stale air of the hall. She could hear it breathe, lurk, creep about her—out of the reach of that yellow circle of light.

She forced herself to go slowly. Her mouth was closed, the muscles of her jaw were set.

She stepped off the last step. The old fashioned telephone was on the wall of the entrance hall. Her hand went out, turned the crank. It seemed to take her hours and a tremendous effort to lift the receiver. She felt breath on her neck—breathing, pulsing.

A voice said: "Number please. . . ."

Miss Mears' voice said in a hoarse husky scream . . . Number One Please. . . ."

And then, her brain exploded in a red smear. Erupted inside her skull. She fell, her hand grasping the receiver of the telephone, tearing the cord loose as she went down.

* * *

CURT DAVIS said pettishly. "Hello—hello hell!" There was a pinochle game going. This was the night for pinochle. Ben Sutter and Ollie Marks and Clifton Harkness always came around to the office on this night to play pinochle. It was a tradition, a ritual.

The operator came on the line. "I'm sorry, Chief," she said. "I had a call for you Miss Mears she sounded scared, almost yelled at me when she gave the number. Then, she went off the line and left the receiver off the hook. I'm trying to get her for you. . . ."

"Old Lizzie Mears!" said the chief of police to the pinochle players in general. "She calls up a couple of times a week, gets me out there—for nothing. She's probably got the jim-jams again. . . ."

"I'm afraid something is wrong," said the operator. "I can't get Lizzie Mears to answer me. . . ."

"Oh, hell!" said the chief. His face was marked with disgust. He put on his coat and took up the tools of his trade. "You boys come on and walk over there with me see what I have to contend with—probably a cat sitting on her window sill. . . ."

So they walked over to Mears Mansion with him, and waited while he knocked and knocked and got no answer. They helped him to break down the front door. There was darkness. The first ray of the chief's flashlight showed them Lizzie Mears, on the floor, clutching the telephone receiver, her head crushed dead. . . .

Later, in the living room, they saw a cigar box on the floor, its lid wrenched off, as if by fury. They saw scattered on the floor, three one dollar bills, two half dollars, a couple of dimes and nickles and pennies. They seemed to have been thrown there in contempt. The room was torn apart, the result of a hasty search—a blind panic. . . .

Chief Davis looked at the money: "Four dollars and forty-four cents," he said slowly and solemnly. "Whoever robbed Lizzie, after all these years, and did—that to her—didn't want to be bothered with no small change. Wonder how much he got?"

And Miss Mears crumpled at the foot of the stairs, under the telephone, looked up at the ceiling with wide-open eyes from which dread was absent for the first time in years and with the corners of her mouth drawn up, just a trifle, in what seemed to be a grim smile.

SAFE IN HELL

by **CRENDON ALZEE**

(Author of "Carfare to Hell.")

In his ears the chilling wail of the prison's siren seemed to sound the death-knell of hope. He thought he knew of a trail that none could follow—but a man's fate needs no path to reach him. . . .

THE penitentiary siren's long hoot filled the moonless night with terrifying sound. It wailed along Sioux River's dark flood below Jack Flint and surged against Bigby Cliff's thicketed face looming blackly above him. The youth shuddered closer to the damp, earthly leaf-mold over which he crawled. He inched forward, snarling, as creeper thorns snatched at his sleeve of drab prison shoddy.

The jailhouse hooter crescendoed once more, broadcasting the warning that a convict had escaped, closing the roads, flinging about Vail Valley an armed cord-

White, blinding glare pinned
Flint to the rock.



on through which no one had ever broken. A searchlight beam smashed the valley's single road into being, swept away from it to probe the almost vertical precipice with its gigantic finger.

In the east, where the heights curved to leave only a narrow flat between them and the river, the blackness was suddenly spangled with the clustered lights of startled Vailsburg. One of those tiny yellow oblongs marked the window behind which Flint had more than once cowered as a youngster, while in imagination he was out in the ominous night with some nerve-shattered wretch whom morning would see back between the high, grey walls from which he fled.

More than once! Had even then some premonition come to him that one night he would be crawling, quivering with fear, seared by desperation, through this tangled underbrush while the forces of the Law chevried him from covert to covert like a scared rabbit? Was that why he had sworn Ben Trotter to secrecy when, exploring this very cliff, they had come upon a vine-screened cleft where a man might lie undiscovered for weeks? A split in the mossy face of a huge boulder whose sides were provendered against hunger by lavish blackberry bushes, whose floor was watered against thirst by a clear, cold spring.

Distant, growling thunder was the motor-roar of squad cars packed with merciless guards setting out to run Flint down. They would scatter their cruel-jawed passengers along the river bank, along the valley road, to commence the slow, painstaking beat through the woods that must inevitably flush him into the open. Other cars were darting to the ridge far above him. Though it was five years since Jack Flint had left Vailsburg, he still knew every move of the game. He still knew that the one gap in the closing net would be that made by the unscalable rock face along whose base he crawled.

Unscalable! But Ben and he had scaled it in the old days. Driven by desperate need he could climb it again. He *must* climb it! Even though blackness veiled every handhold, every inch-wide corrugation to which their toes had clung. From here. From this jutting spur for which he had been searching.

He groped blindly, fiercely, up the wall of ancient stone, clutching at a niche here, clinging to a gnarled root there. He dragged himself up, always up, hanging on by an eyelash, by the digging in of brittle fingernails, by a prayer that twisted in his throat and found vent only in a choked, low whimper. Inch by painful inch he lifted himself toward the sanctuary where he planned to hide till the hunters returned, baffled, to their lair, and the way was clear at last for his getaway.

File-harsh stone flayed Flint's clawing fingers, his forehead—rasped the raw and bleeding flesh. A tendrilled briar burned a fiery slash across his cheek. From far below came the appalling thresh of heavy bodies prowling through the underbrush, searching for him, searching . . .

A dislodged pebble clattered down to them. White, blinding glare pinned Flint to the stark, coverless wall of the cliff. He froze, his heart rapping a tattoo of alarm against his ribs. Eternally the searchlight beat against him, stripping him of concealment, blazing terror into his every nerve. Blackness enveloped him again, merciful blackness as the light-shaft scythed away. The hunters had not thought to look up to that impossible place.

THE beam left behind it a glow above him, the yellow glow of light from the CCC camp on the hillside sloping back from the brow of the cliff. It was that camp that had brought Jack Flint back to the vicinity of his boyhood. It was for assault on that camp's brutal top-sergeant that, a month ago, the steel clang of the

prison gate had closed him in It was sky-glow from that camp, aroused by the long-drawn, terrible howling from the prison, that silhouetted now a grotesquely distorted tree signalling to him that he had reached his goal at last.

His fingers tore at the small ledge he knew must be there, dragged him up to it. On hands and lacerated knees he crawled along the narrow shelf. Dew-wet leaves slapped him as he pushed through a hanging ivy-curtain, and he sprawled, his lungs gasping in torturing air, his sweat-drenched body shivering in the dank chill of the roofless cavern he had battled to reach.

Safe! Safe at last Flint jerked up to his knees, his scalp tightening, his burning, dilated eyes staring into the stygian gloom.

It came again, the low, anguished moan from just ahead. Chill prickles scampered up his spine. Someone was there. Someone from whose constricted throat unendurable pain wrenched yet another groan.

Jack Flint managed to get a shaking hand to his pocket, managed to fumble out one of the precious matches with which he had provided himself against his attempted escape. Light, he knew, would not show through the concealing, thick vines. A small flame crackled into being. Its light tangled in the luxuriant foliage of the berry bushes, reached to the cleft's farther end. The yellow radiance danced over the awkwardly twisted form of a youngster in Boy Scout khaki, his eyes closed, his hollow-cheeked face pallid and distorted with long agony.

His face! The match dropped from Flint's nerveless fingers and a name popped from between his cold lips. "*Ben!*"

It was Ben Trotter's countenance the momentary flame-spurt had lit, the face of the chum who had once been closer, dearer to him than a brother. Just as it

had been when they said good-bye, long ago, as Ben had boarded the southbound local and left Jack to pace the station platform till the train for New York should come.

But—the image that lingered on his retina was that of a boy in his early teens and Ben must be twenty by now Flint squirmed across the few feet separating him from the lad, groping before him with shaking, fearful hands. He touched harsh cloth, a thin, sunken chest. His fingers were wet, suddenly, with a viscid moisture that could be only one thing.

Flint contrived light again, saw the dark red of blood slowly seeping through earth-smearred fabric from the youngster's side. His gaze slid, terrifiedly, to the face that had shocked him so.

Lord! He was staring once more at Ben's pointed chin, at Ben's thin-walled, straight-bridged nose, at Ben's kinky, russet curls plastered against a forehead moist with the cold sweat of pain. The tiny, livid lips moved

"Budge," they moaned. "B u d g e. Why?"

The quaint word plumbed Flint's brain, woke memory. Budge! Why that was the name by which Ben's six-year old kid brother used to call him. That's who this was. Not Ben! Ted! Ted Trotter

Little Ted must have been wandering along the clifftop, must have fallen down here, had been lying here God alone knew how long. If Flint hadn't found him he must have died here. Ben's brother! Maybe he *was* dead No! Faint, almost imperceptible, there was yet a fluttering pulse in the scrawny wrist.

His wound wasn't bleeding any more, but he must be taken care of. Right away.

THE prison siren still howled. Somehow it seemed closer, somehow more ominous than before. And from above a

hoarse, excited whisper husked. "Spread out, you guys, and keep your eyes peeled. Good chance the son-of-a-gun climbed up here through the gap at the west end of the valley."

Dry grass rustled, and footfalls padded away. The bushes made it a bit easier, Flint recalled, to worm up out of this pit than to scale to it from the road below. *What was he thinking of doing?* He couldn't get help for the kid without walking straight into the arms of those who were waiting for him.

But life ebbed low in Ted's frail body. An hour—two—and it would be gone beyond recall. A sob tore Flint's throat and then he was ripping his own shirt into long strips, was twisting the strips into a rope, was lashing the boy to his back so that his hands might be free for the torturous ascent

Jack Flint reached more level ground, stood spraddle-legged, bowed under the lad's weight, panting to gain strength for the yell that would bring men to take Ted to a doctor—and himself to the pen

High up, the camp lights were clumped on the hill, but a squarish black bulk blotted half of them out. The old Mercer house! A faint new hope glimmered in the chaos of Jack Flint's brain. Sooner or later it would occur to someone to search that long-abandoned dwelling. If he left Ted on its porch, the kid would be sure to be found there. He might possibly have a chance to get back to the cleft; for the moment the hunt seemed to have drifted away from this spot.

Flint never knew how he managed to reel to his objective. His stumbling exhausted footsteps pounded on the decrepit porch

Rusted hinges screeched, and a voice fell flatly against his dulled ears. "Put 'em up. I've got you covered."

The open door was a rectangle of deeper black in the shadow-shrouded clap-

board wall, and a vagrant light-beam glinted from metal. "Don't shoot," Flint said. "I surrender. But I can't put up my hands because"

"Jack!" the voice cut him off. "Jack Flint, by all that's holy." And then hands were pulling at him, were dragging him through the gaping door. He heard it shut behind him.

A lamp, turned low, spread dim light inside a dank-walled room. Tattered quilts over the windows kept that light from showing outside. Ted was on a pallet of blankets in a corner and, quite unbelievably, *Ben Trotter* bent over him, chafing the white hands.

"THE kid was bringing me some grub," Ben was saying. "Trying not to be seen, he must have tumbled down the cliff. He'll be all right for a little while, but you'll have to get a doctor for him damn quick."

"You," Flint muttered. You go"

"I can't. I'm on the lam for a holdup rap, been layin' up here till it can be squared. Means twenty years if I'm caught before the heat's turned off. Not the first time I've used this hide-out"

Jack Flint wasn't conscious of having made a sound, but Ben straightened and whirled to him. His lips went white. "Gawd! I didn't Those are jail togs you're in! Jack! You—Don't tell me it's you that damn siren's howling for? You"

Jack Flint nodded, found his tongue. "Yes, Ben. They put me in for five years. I got a break, got out, made for that old cave we found, meaning to hide there. That's where—Ted was."

"And you took a chance—for him!" Trotter pulled the back of his hand across his brow. "But—Jack!" It was almost a groan. "You—you were always the

Sunday School kid. What did you do . . . ?"

"Nothing . . . I was in the CCC outfit up on the hill. I was down in town Fourth of July to hear the speeches, stayed late. Coming back, I heard a yell in the woods, made a dash for where it came from, tumbled over our top-sergeant, knocked out. His head was bloody. I thought he was dead, went down on my knees alongside him to make sure. My hand touched a bloody stone—and our captain hopped out of the bushes.

"Everyone knew the sergeant had been riding me, that I'd shot off my mouth about getting even. I didn't stand a chance . . ."

Ben was laughing. A shrill, mirthless cackination came from him, somehow horrible. Abruptly he stopped. "Holy Jupiter! It was I threw that rock, Jack! Your sergeant was prowling around, spotted me out taking a breather. I had to conk him or he'd have turned me in . . . I did it, Jack, and you took the rap for it. I did it . . ."

"That's interesting." Flint whirled to the flat, grim voice from the door. A blue-uniformed prison guard was coming in, his sawed-off shotgun lifting to cover them both with its menace. "That's very interesting."

"Go to Hell!" spat Trotter. His arm jerked up with the gat he had never set

down. The keeper's weapon erupted orange-red flame that jolted Ben back, then down. The keeper's weapon erupted dead before he struck it.

IT was only after he had been freed by the testimony of that guard, and another who had appeared from behind him, as to what they had overheard at the door of the apparently deserted house that Jack Flint remembered that no surprise had showed on Ben Trotter's face at the instant of that fatal interruption. That was when the undertaker turned over to him the shot-ripped garments in which Ben had died. Going through them at Ted's request, Flint had found the return half of a railroad ticket in a vest pocket. A ticket stamped as having been bought in Jacksonville, six hundred miles south, *on July sixth!*

He recalled something else, too. He recalled how acute Ben Trotter's hearing had always been, in the days when they used to play hookey together, to go swimming or to explore Bigby Cliff. So sharp that he could hear the truant officer sneaking up on them long before Jack had any warning of the enemy's presence.

Ben had been outlawed anyway, hunted and hopeless. And there are worse things than dying quickly—painlessly—for the man you've just learned has risked his own life, to save your brother's . . .



SURE FIRE STORIES

Ared White

3 BIG NOVELETTES BY

Theodore Roscoe

W. E. Barrett

Short Stories and Serials By

Gordon Young

Clyde Wantland

Anthony Rud



In the
January



Out
December 10

*A Stirring Novelette of
Organized Crime and
Lone-Handed Courage*



SPRING WASEY was back. He strolled through the lounge door of the Hotel Arlton; and three reporters at the bar turned and gaped. Spring Wasey was something to gape at. From black Homburg and perfectly fitting dinner jacket to gleaming patent-leather pumps he was a figure on which De Pinna's would have been proud to stake their reputation. He handed his hat, stick, and gloves to the hat-check girl and paused in front of the three reporters, eyeing them superciliously, with an elevated left eyebrow.

The three reporters began to breathe heavily, but they said nothing.

Wasey's eyebrow went a bit higher. His expression was that of a lordly Great

Dane surveying a trio of lap-dogs. Then, as the three reporters began to give signs of an imminent explosion, the eyebrow slowly lost its elevation. The grey eyes twinkled.

"Hello, guys," he said.

The three drew deep breaths and rushed.

"Spring Wasey—you shifty, crazy sharp-shooter!"

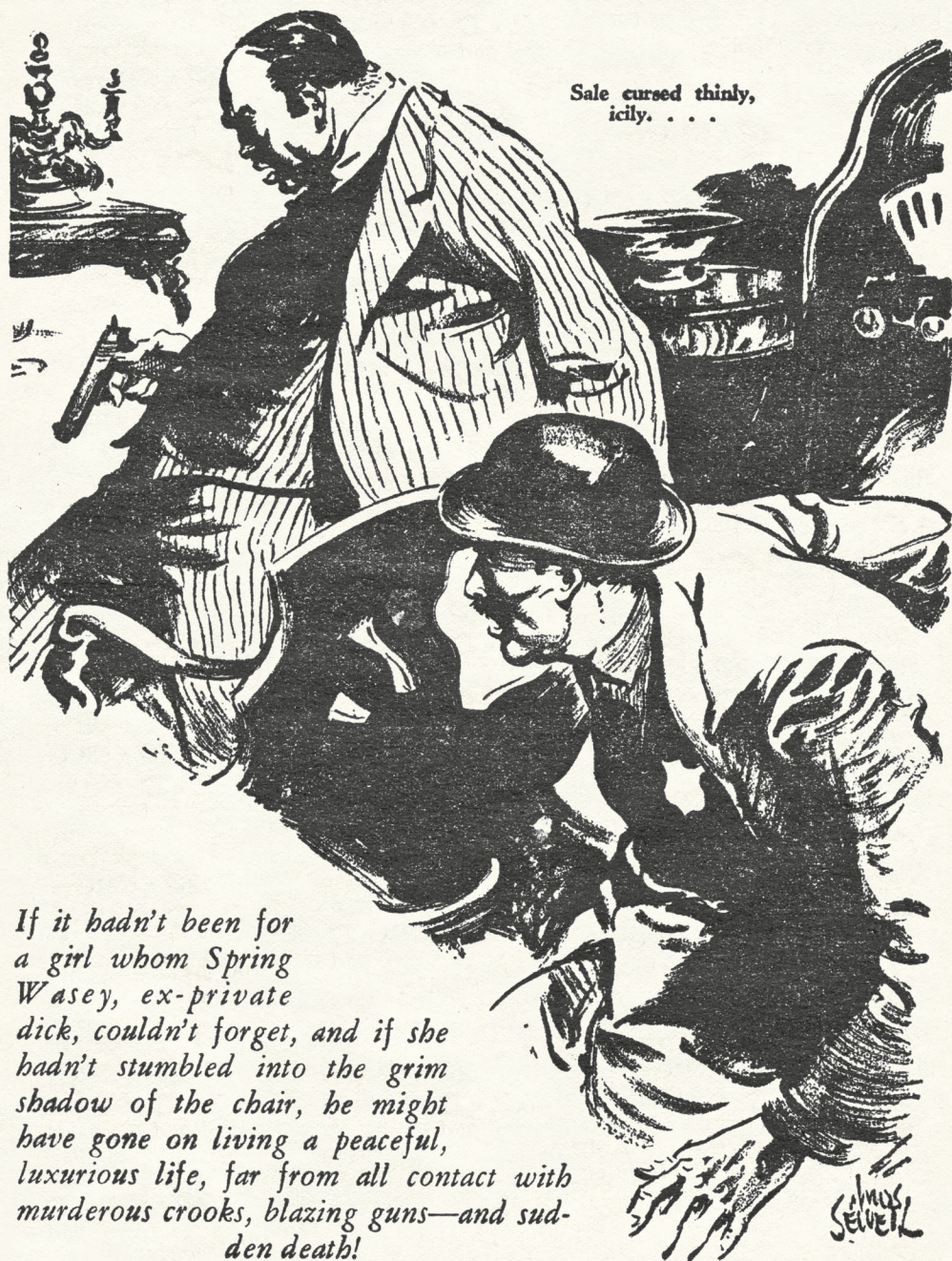
"Jeez, we'll have news now that Spring's back. The best dick New York City ever saw—before he invented the goofy kitchen dingus, cleaned up a million and took a trip around the world."

Spring Wasey tried to pump the hands of all three, failed, and made up for it by putting his arms around them.

HIS CLIENT— THE KILLER!

by PAUL ERNST

(Author of "Living Shield," etc.)



Sale cursed thinly,
icily. . . .

If it hadn't been for
a girl whom Spring
Wasey, ex-private
dick, couldn't forget, and if she
hadn't stumbled into the grim
shadow of the chair, he might
have gone on living a peaceful,
luxurious life, far from all contact with
murderous crooks, blazing guns—and sud-
den death!

"You damn cotton-brains," he said affectionately. "You news ghouls. Have a drink."

"What kind of cases will you work on now, Spring?" said one, as glasses were set on the bar.

"You hophead," said Spring Wasey. "Why would I work when I've got enough to keep me in cream for the rest of my life? I'm a loafer now."

The three newshawks hooted in chorus.

"Spring Wasey—who has pulled some of the fastest tricks in the business—retiring! That's a laugh—"

"I'm through," said Spring. "I mean it. For twelve years I've been a dick, and a fair one. But its a hell of a life. I'm glad enough to give it up—"

"Spring!" came a hail from across the room.

Spring turned with a catlike swing of his body.

"Cy! Cyril Street! It's swell to see you again."

"Spring—this is an answer to prayer. Give me a minute alone?"

Spring nodded, noting that Cy's cheeks were mottled and that his taffy-colored hair was rumpled in a way which, in the valet-slicked life of the rich man's son, meant positive dishevelment.

He went to a nearby table with Cy. The two sat down.

"God, it's good to see you," Cy said fervently. "Spring, I've got a case for you—"

"Oh, no!" said Spring positively. "Oh, no!" Nothing like that, Cy. I'm not forgetting all you've done for me. You staked me for patent applications on the silly kitchen gadget that made my money for me. You financed a friendly suit that cinched the thing against outlaw promoters. But I've taken the veil, mister. No more detecting. . . ."

He stopped. Cy was biting his lips. Spring had never seen him look quite like he was looking now.

"It must be pretty bad, fella," he said slowly. "Personal?"

"I can't talk now," said Cy, gazing swiftly around. "But I'm asking you—begging you—to take a case for me. You're the one man in town who might put it over."

Spring's fingers drummed on the table. "Are you the case?"

"No. . . . Take a walk with me, will you, Spring?"

SPRING sighed. He got up, waved to the trio at the bar, and went to the door. Cy walked beside him, chin up and out, looking like a man reprieved from a death sentence. Spring got hat and stick and gloves from the check-girl.

"We'll take a cab," said Cy at the door.

They got into a cab, after Cy had whispered to the driver. The cab went around two blocks in a figure-eight twice. Then it slid to the side entrance of the Arlton.

"Quick—and keep your head down," said Cy.

Eyes narrowed, Spring followed his friend through the side door and to the stairs near the elevator shaft. They went up to the fourth floor. There Cy produced a key and opened the door of a rear room.

"In here."

"Just what," said Spring as the door closed behind him and he faced Cy in a standard first-class hotel room, "are you —"

There was a soft move behind him. He whirled as the dressing alcove door opened. But at the sight of the person who stood on the threshold his wariness left him.

A girl stood there. She was a tall girl, with sea-blue eyes and a cascade of dark brown hair. Her face was more than beautiful, it was candid, intelligent, heart-catchingly honest. And, at the moment, it was apprehensive.

Slowly some of the color drained from Spring's face, but his voice was quiet as he said: "Claire! I hardly expected to see you this trip."

"I know, Spring," the girl nodded, wincing a little. "You didn't want to very much, did you?"

"You know I always want to—"

"Don't be polite! I couldn't stand that! I let you down. You loved me, and I married Dick Carver—"

"Do we have to go into that?" said Spring. He smiled and took her hand. "By George, you look lovely! Come and tell me all the news. Cy. . ."

But Cy, Claire Carver's brother, was just sliding out the door to leave them alone. Spring frowned, then shrugged. He sat on the back of his neck in an easy chair after Claire had seated herself on the bed.

"The news?" Claire said. "There's a lot, I suppose. But only one thing of real importance. That overshadows everything else. The murder of Corny Andrews."

Spring nodded. "Read about it at breakfast yesterday. First day off the boat. But I can't say I'm surprised that some one bumped him off. I always told the bunch of you that Corny was a professional gambler. That's how he made his money for the country place and his horses—and women. The friendly bridge games he won so regularly were only part of it. He had a regular faro and roulette layout in another part of town."

"I know that now," sighed Claire. "None of us would believe before that he got his money like that. He was supposed to have inherited it from his father. But it all came out that he got nothing from the estate, and made his money at crooked gambling. I didn't have to learn that in the papers, though. I began to understand a month before he was. . . . before he died."

Spring sat a little straighter in the chair.

"I don't get you," he said very slowly.

"I learned it in his apartment," said Claire, with her eyes seeming to turn a deeper blue than ever.

"You? In his apartment?"

"Yes."

Spring looked at his fingernails. But his voice was a shade harder when he said: "Well, I guess quite a few women went to Corny's apartment. So there must have been no law against it. It's none of my business—but how often did you go?"

"Half a dozen times before he was murdered. Once since."

"Once *since*!" Spring stared at her. "Didn't you know any better than that? You might have got yourself tangled up in the damn murder case."

Claire drew a deep breath.

"I am tangled up in it," she said. "Right now. I'm wanted for murder, Spring. And if they ever catch me—it's the chair!"

CHAPTER TWO

Dividend of Fame

SPRING paced up and down the hotel room. He moved softly, with the alert soundlessness that was an outgrowth of the days when he had made his living in a hair-trigger profession.

"So *you're* the case Cy talked about," he said.

"I'm the case," said Claire. Her face was paper white. Her eyes followed him as he paced.

"You're in a jam, so you come to me," Spring said. "After giving me the gate for a guy not fit to wipe your shoes. . . ."

He paced more swiftly. "Sorry. What did you go to Corny's apartment for?"

Claire said nothing. She bit her lip, and for an instant color suffused her pale face.

"Skip it," said Spring. "Give me the dope. Corny was shot. Twice. Once in the

shoulder and a second time through the head. From the roundabout way Cy led me here, I take it the police believe you did the shooting. Why?"

"Because," whispered Claire, "I did."

Spring whirled. "My God! You did murder Corny?"

"I didn't say that. I said I shot him. Once! My shot was the one that wounded him in the shoulder. Then I dropped the gun and ran."

Spring caught her by the shoulders. She winced as his fingers sank in.

"Don't you lie to me!"

"Did I ever lie to you, Spring?"

"No," said Spring, slowly releasing her. "You never did. The idea is this, then: You went to Corny's in a jealous rage. You'd been a little—indiscreet with him, and you suddenly found out that the man had a devoted lady friend for every day in the week, with two shifts on Sundays. You took a gun with you. You lost your head, shot at him, winged him in the shoulder, and dropped your gun. Somebody else came along in the next few minutes, picked up your gun, and finished the job you started by getting Corny through the brain. Is that it?"

"About the gun, yes," said Claire, moistening her lips. "The rest of it, why I shot him, doesn't matter."

"And I suppose the cops have your gun, with your prints all over it, and a bullet to fit which they dug from Corny's skull?"

"Yes," said Claire.

"And they know now that you were in the habit of visiting his apartment?"

"I . . . Yes."

"Which," nodded Spring, "makes it perfect. My God, if that isn't a ticket to hell I've never seen one. But what am I supposed to do about it?"

"Get the real murderer," said Claire. Then she broke. Sobs tore at her body. She clutched at his shoulder. "Spring,

I didn't kill him. I swear it! I was going to get—something he had at the point of a gun, and he laughed at me, and my finger moved of itself. But I didn't kill him—"

There was a sharp knock at the door. Spring's hands clenched.

"It's Cy, I guess," said Claire dully.

"No! Cy had a key—"

"Open this door," came a deep, muffled voice. "In the name of the law."

Claire screamed. Spring swore, then calmed. He went to the door.

"Don't open it, Spring! Oh, my God—"

"Might as well, before they break in," said Spring. "You can't get out. There's no fire escape, nothing. They've got you, my dear."

HE unlatched the door and opened it. Two plainclothes men walked in. One of them scowled at Spring.

"Spring Wasey! The smart-aleck private dick!" he grated unpleasantly. Then his heavy brows drew together. "And with the gal who's supposed to have put the bee on Corny Andrews! That's interesting!"

"Sure," said Spring. "I once threatened to kill Corny because of a filthy deal I found out about. And now he's dead and I seem to be mixing in. And you've been aching to get me for something because I used to get in your hair. But I'm just off a boat, Harris. You can't nail me for this."

"I'm betting you docked *before* Corny was killed," Harris shot out. "Want to take the bet?"

Spring kept silent. He had docked before the murder.

Claire bit her lips as she stared first at the detective, then at Spring. She said huskily:

"Spring—I didn't know. Forget what we said. It was rotten of me to ask you

to help, anyway, under the circumstances. Now, with a chance of your getting badly tangled yourself—keep out of it!”

“I’ll say he’ll keep out of it, if he knows what’s good for him,” said the detective.

Spring smiled at him. It was a smile that drew blood to the man’s heavy face.

“Don’t knock over the apple-cart, eh?” Spring said. “You have a swell suspect on an unbeatable charge, and your quick work wins promotion. Let well enough alone. Is that your idea?”

Harris gritted his teeth. Then he shoved his hat on the back of his head and grabbed Claire’s wrist.

“We’ll be going,” he snapped to her.

Hardly seeming to move at all, Spring got around the two men and stood between them and the door.

“Harris,” he said, quietly, dangerously, “you and your pal will walk through the Arlton lobby without even touching Mrs. Carver. You will conceal the fact that she is under arrest and save her humiliation. You will take her to headquarters in an ordinary taxi—”

“And if we don’t?” blared Harris.

“Sweetheart,” said Spring softly, “I happen to have a little over a million in the kick. And money talks in this town. How it talks! With the Street dough and mine, and my knowledge of where to put it so it’ll do the best work, I could do the most unpleasant things to you.”

Harris slowly unclamped his hand from Claire’s wrist.

“I’m going to get you some day,” he said thickly, “and get you right. . . .”

“Aw, come on,” said the other detective.

“Chin up, Claire,” said Spring, as the three went out the door.

Then, after a moment in which his face took on a bleakness of look that no one who knew the insouciant ex-detective would ever have recognized, Spring went out the door and to the lobby.

Cy got him there.

“Spring—they got her! They just took her away—”

“I know,” said Spring.

“You’ll help her out, Spring?” Cy pleaded. “I know how you must feel. She went to that cheap lady-killer’s apartment more than once, and has no decent explanation for it. And you used to be crazy about her. . . . But you’ll do it?”

Spring shrugged. “I don’t know what I can do. The trail’s many hours cold. Any clues in Corny’s apartment have been found and filed long ago by the police. And they’ve got the gun that killed him and it’s Claire’s gun and her prints are on it.”

Cy gnawed at the back of his hand.

“Then the answer is. . . No! My God, I—I. . . .”

He choked and could not go on. Then he turned quickly and walked unsteadily away from Spring, toward the bar.

SPRING went out the main doors to the street. A cab came to the curb. It was a private cab, belonging to none of the accredited companies, as Spring noticed when he had opened the door to step in.

“Hold it,” he said. “I don’t want this cab. I’ll take another—”

“You’ll take this one,” a voice sounded from the black depths of the cab.

Spring’s face went blank. He stayed where he was, one foot on the running board.

“Get in, Spring Wasey,” the voice said.

Spring saw a dark figure now that the lights of the lobby no longer blinded him. And he saw a glint of light on steel. A gun barrel.

“An invitation as pressing as this,” he said, “should be accepted with pleasure.”

“Get in or I’ll blast you right here, so help me!” grated the voice.

Spring got in. The cab drove off. And a street light at last rested on the man’s face, and told Spring who held the gun.

It was Speck Morton, first lieutenant and chief killer for Alex Sale, gambling baron of the city. . . .

Alex Sale was a man six feet in height who weighed two hundred and thirty and didn't show it. His face was as set in expression as a map of Wyoming.

He was in a gaudy house robe with undershirt and checked pants as Spring was ushered into the living room of his swanky, overfurnished apartment.

"Hello, Spring," he said.

Spring looked around. Sale stood near a davenport—but out of line of all windows. On the davenport sat a girl with shallow grey eyes, too-red lips, and a green negligée.

Speck Morton closed the door behind Spring and stood to one side of Sale. With the door closed, Morton took his hand from the bulge in his coat pocket.

"Hi, Sale," said Spring. He was smiling a little. The smile lifted his upper lip so that his teeth showed and his mustache moved like a cat's whiskers. "I take it you wanted to see me?"

Sale stared at Morton. "Yeah, that's why I sent Morton after you."

"Don't do it in here!" shrilled the girl on the davenport.

Spring's eyes went her way.

"Why, hello Sue," he said. "Beautiful as ever. And just as sentimental as you used to be. Sentimental Sue—never likes the sight of blood in her own home. It's a weakness in you, my dear. But perhaps you'll be spared."

"Yeah, I think she will," said Sale emotionlessly. "Because I think you'll listen to reason, Spring. 'I'm talking about the Corny Andrews business, Spring. I'd rather you wouldn't take that case.'"

SPRING'S smile didn't vary a line. The only thing that might have betrayed

his inward start at the words was the slight hesitation that preceded his answer.

"I could ask you how you knew I was even considering the thing, but I won't. I suppose Morton trailed Claire, or Cyril Street. Why do you care?"

For perhaps a minute Sale's dull eyes bored into the ex-detective's.

"Look," he said. "I'll lay the cards right on the table—"

"Expose yourself in front of Sentimental Sue?" murmured Spring.

Sale went on: "Something kind of funny has happened, Spring. I've done plenty, as you know. But I've always managed to keep my skirts kind of clean. Now—I'm in a spot where I may get my neck out a little for something I *didn't* do."

"You mean the Andrews thing?"

"I mean the Andrews thing," said Sale heavily. "Funny. I was at Corny's an hour before he was bumped off. You see I'm splitting wide open to you? Far as I know I didn't leave anything behind. But I *might* have. You know—a print near the door or something. And that might come out if you or anybody gets to snooping around."

"Which would be embarrassing," conceded Spring. "Let's see. Claire Carver is hooked for bumping Carney, and she'll get it if nothing's done. You want nothing done so she *will* get it, and save you the annoyance of telling when and why you were there?"

"You get it," nodded Sale.

"And if I go ahead on the case?"

Sale's face remained impassive.

"You're filthy with dough now, Spring, so I won't offer you any to lay off. But if you lay on—"

"I won't live long, eh?"

"That's the idea, Spring. I'd like to hear you say you'll keep your nose out."

Spring stared at him with genuine curiosity. "That's a crazy one, Sale. You want me to promise not to mix in. But you get the promise at the point of a gun! What's to keep me from saying I'll keep out, then changing my mind later?"

Sale shook his big head.

"You do as you say you'll do, Spring, even if you're made to say it against your will. Your promise is good in this burg."

Spring sighed. "That's a swell compliment. Too bad it comes from a rat."

Sale's small eyes smoldered.

"Keep your hand away from your pocket, Morton!" Spring flamed. "You too, Sale."

MORTON'S hand stopped. "Nuts!" he said. "You ain't got a rod on you." "How would you know that, darling?" said Spring.

"You could see a bulge in your tux if you had a rod."

"That's right," said Spring. "You could, couldn't you? Just the same, keep your hand out of your pocket."

Spring backed two steps so that he could see both Sale and Morton.

"Speck made a mistake when he took his hand off his gun," he said to Sale. "That put us all on an even footing. It means that whoever can draw quickest will live longest. You get the picture, don't you, Sale?"

Sale swore. "We could burn you down before you got us," he said.

"Sure you could," Spring said. "But I wouldn't go after 'us.' I'd go after you. No matter what you two do, I should be able to kill you before either you or Morton gets me. That is, if I'm not stale on the draw. Want to try it, Sale?"

Sale licked his lips. Spring backed toward the door. He reached it, stepped back through the threshold, paused with his hand on the door.

"It seems a reputation is handy now

and then," he mused. "My answer to you is, I'll do as I damn please. And Morton was right, Sale. I have no gun!"

He slammed the door and sprinted down the hall. Behind him, Morton leaped to the door but stopped at Sale's command. The big man stared at the door, then he went to the phone and called four numbers.

CHAPTER THREE

Circulars and Petals

SPRING was completely disgusted with himself. As he soundlessly opened a rear window of Corny Andrews' apartment, reached from a cornice, eight floors above hard cement, he found himself getting a distinct thrill.

"Damn fool," he muttered to himself. "You've got enough in the kitty to loaf on. You have everything to lose and nothing to gain by this prowling."

He stepped inside the dark room the window opened onto. He had come here after returning to his hotel to change from his tuxedo to more practical attire, and now he was in the apartment where Corny had been killed. All right, what next?

Sale's little talk still had him considerably puzzled. The big shot didn't want any more investigating done on the Andrews murder because he had visited this apartment and was afraid he might have left a finger print or two around. That didn't make sense! Sale's mouth-piece had sprung him from jams lots worse than that. Sale must have left something pretty damning up here. . . .

Spring set out to find it.

There were bedroom, living room, library and kitchenette in the apartment. Spring counted out kitchenette and bedroom. Men smart enough to live by their wits, as Corny had, didn't hide incriminating evidence in sugar bowls or hollow

bed posts. And Spring was beginning to believe that what Sale feared was damaging evidence—a death threat or something—which Corny had secreted somewhere. Otherwise, if it were an object carelessly left behind from a visit, the police would already have turned it up, or Sale would have stolen in himself to recover it.

His calculations left library and living room to be looked over, with the odds on the library.

The library was the murder room. In here Corny had been killed. Spring looked at a dark stain on the carpet, and another, larger one, near the desk. He could see Claire Carver standing in the doorway, gun in hand; could see the gun belch flame and Corny stagger back with his hand to his shoulder, while spurting crimson made the smaller blot. Then. . . .

Well, then, Claire said, she had dropped the gun and had run. Who was the second person that had fired her gun? Sale? Or had Claire lied. . . ?

Secret compartments in the desk? No. Anything like that would have been discovered at once by the cops. That was the sort of thing you couldn't hide from their calipers and lenses.

Sighing, Spring started to open the middle drawer of the desk. All he could do was search through evidence already combed by the police, and see if he got stories from it that they hadn't.

But he didn't open the drawer for a moment. Something had caught his attention on the floor under the desk. He stooped down and picked it up in gloved fingers.

"What the hell?" he scowled.

The thing was a bit of flower petal. Faded, pressed flat in book or flower press, it crumpled in his fingers like the fragile wing of a butterfly.

A flower petal! In the rooms of Corny Andrews!

SPRING put the petal in an old envelope from his tux pocket. Then he opened the top drawer of the desk.

It was filled with a miscellany of things that had come through the mail, scattered by the pawing hands of the police. A mess of advertising circulars, unopened; a stack of bills. But these *had* been opened, by the cops if not by Corny. Bills can tell much about a man.

Spring opened the first again. A bill from a florist for roses. . . .

A sound came to his ears. He snapped out the fountain pen light and whirled. He cursed as he strained his eyes to pierce the darkness near the door, where the sound had come from. For months he hadn't carried a gun; hadn't one now. And he wished to God he had!

The cops at the door? Sale's men? No matter. Either were poison to him in a spot like this. He started toward a window, though he knew no hope of escape lay there. It wasn't the right window.

Light flooded the room.

"Put your hands up. . . ."

Turning toward the doorway, Spring did so. But as he stared at the man who held a gun on him, his eyelids flickered. For he was neither a cop nor a crook.

"Dick," he breathed. "Dick Carver. What the devil are you doing here?"

The man in the doorway, with the gun trembling in his hands, came toward Spring.

"I might ask you the same question," he said in a shrill, almost hysterical voice. "What are you doing here?"

"Trying in my blundering way to give your wife a lift," said Spring, voice easy though inwardly he was cold. If there was one thing he was afraid of in this mundane existence it was a gun in the hand of a man not used to pointing them at people. "I suppose I can put my hands down now that you've seen who I am?"

He started to lower his hands, then

jerked them up as Carver shrilled: "Don't you try any tricks on me, damn you!"

Fine sweat came out on Spring's forehead. The muzzle of Carver's gun was swaying like the mast of a ship at sea. But at this range it could hardly miss—and Carver's finger was trembling noticeably on the trigger.

"Be reasonable, you lug," he said. "Why are you keeping that gun on me?"

"Why?" A look of cunning came into Carver's face. "Because a lot of things suddenly seem tied together by your sneaking visit here. That's why! You threatened Corny once. I heard you. Everybody else did. Suppose you were the one who killed him, and left something behind, and now came to get it so you could continue to go unsuspected while Claire goes to the chair?"

"And suppose your aunt wore pants and smoked cigars. Would that make her a man? For God's sake put down that gun before you shoot yourself with it."

"You haven't told me what—"

"I'm here for the same reason I assume you are, as I said. Trying to help Claire."

Once more a sound came, where sound had no business to be. It came from the front of the apartment somewhere, along with the click of an electric light switch.

Carver's mouth dropped open.

"Turn out the light, you fool!" breathed Spring.

A VOICE came from the front. "We looked over everything, Harris. There wasn't anything dragging this guy, Wasey, into it. . . ."

"Turn out that light!" Spring breathed.

"Hey, there's a light in the back!" a voice blared which Spring recognized as that of Detective Harris. "Come on!"

Spring leaped. Carver had turned his head toward the door. Spring got to him before he could squeeze the trigger.

"Let me go!" he screamed, as Spring's

hand clamped over his gun wrist. "Damn you—don't you hurt—"

There was only one answer. Spring's right fist cracked against Carver's jaw and Carver sagged. Spring leaped over him and out the door.

Two guns cracked, in the hands of two plainclothesmen. Spring caught a flash of Harris's grim face, then he was in the bedroom, with the door closed and bolted.

"Open that door!" bellowed Harris, kicking it. "I saw you, Spring!"

Spring jumped for the window. It was the one he had come in from the cornice. He heard a quavering voice: "Yes, it was Wasey. I had him at the point of a gun and he knocked me down. *He killed Corny Andrews—*"

Spring heard the door splinter. He leaned out, caught the cornice.

As he did so, he paused a moment in a blasphemous uncertainty that almost made him fall to his death.

The uncertainty was caused by his sudden remembrance of something he had left behind.

The envelope in which he had so carefully thrust the crushed flower petal.

"With name and address conveniently written on it," Spring cursed. "Just to prove that I really *was* there, rummaging around after Corny's murder!"

He *had* to go through with this now. And, he told himself stubbornly, that was the only reason he *was* going through with it. Claire? The pleading white stillness of her face—a face he had had to work so hard to tear out of his heart—had nothing to do with it! He'd have dropped the affair as soon as he learned its real complexity. But now he was forced to go ahead with it, to save his own neck.

That is what he was telling himself, at any rate, as he came out on a dim side street. Under the lamp he saw a burly,

blue-clad form. Beyond the cop he saw a lone taxicab.

Spring bristled as he saw that cab. There was no reason for it, only instinct. But instinct can be powerfully developed in a career where instinct alone is often the difference between life and death.

THE cab was drawn quietly beside the curb. The driver sat with his head down a little. The motor was running.

Spring's every impulse was to break into a run. But he couldn't outrun a taxicab. And he couldn't duck back into the areaway because any moment, now, Detective Harris and the other dick might show up there.

He reached for his shoulder, swore as he found flat emptiness. Then he tilted his hat at a foolish angle and staggered toward the patrolman.

Beyond, the motor of the cab purred just a little faster. And Spring now saw a dark form in the obscurity of the cab body.

Spring reached the circle of light directly under the street lamp. The cop was watching him suspiciously.

"Lo, off'cer," said Spring gaily, teetering on his heels as though about to fall. "Nice night."

Behind him Spring could hear a faint commotion. He would not have picked it up had his ears not been strained for it. Harris was about to catch up to him.

The cop stared.

"Where the hell did you get such a load?"

"Load? Load?" hiccupped Spring. "Haven't had thing to drink. So help me."

"All right, but beat it now before I run you in."

"Wanta know what time is it," said Spring. He wavered again, almost fell, clutched at the cop for support.

"Get out of here," said the cop, thrusting him away, "or I *will* run you in."

"Yeah, but tell me what time—"

The faint commotion from the building Spring had just left burst into open clamor. Harris's voice bellowed: "Hold that man, officer!"

The taxicab crawled nearer.

Spring's wavering stopped. He ran. Toward the cab.

The patrolman swung after him, goaded into uncomprehended action by Harris's voice. "Halt in the name of the—"

His pompous words broke as he reached for his holster. They changed to an infuriated roar. "By God! The dirty—*He pinched my gun!*"

THE taxi tires screamed as the cab leaped forward. Through an open side window a hand came out with a gun in it. Spring threw up the Police Positive he had taken from the patrolman's holster. It flamed as the gun from the cab exploded.

But Spring kept on running, while the hand in the car window uncurled slowly and limply, like some sort of ugly flower, and dropped the gun.

Spring hit the running board of the cab and pressed the gun he held to the head of the stupefied driver.

"Beat it," he said.

The cab bolted down the street, reeling past a fiery gauntlet from the guns of Harris and the other detective. It hit Broadway, flashed across, and turned toward Central Park while Spring eased himself in through the door and onto the seat beside a still, huddled form.

He grasped the head of the form by the hair and lifted it so he could see the face. It was that of one Fingers Clifton, well known gun-about-town.

"With the compliments of Sale," nodded Spring, recognizing him. "Sale certainly doesn't want me to nose in on this case. What *did* he leave in Corny's apartment—and where the hell could it be?"

The driver was making furtive movements with his shoulders, naively telegraphing the intention, now that danger was past, of trying something rebellious.

Spring leaned forward enough to let the man feel the cold muzzle of the police gun on the back of his neck. But he did it absent-mindedly. Something was trying to break through. He almost had it. . . .

Then he did have it!

"I know where it would be hidden—if it exists!" he exclaimed aloud. He stared at the dead man in the cab with him. "Fingers, old man, we've got it. We're smart. Where would a man like Corny hide something he didn't want found? In a place so obvious that it would be overlooked by searchers, yet one which the chances are never would be opened. And is there any place like that in Corny's apartment? Oh, is there! A dozen of them. The advertising circulars in his desk!"

He pressed the gun against the driver's neck a little more firmly.

"Backtrack," he commanded.

"Huh?" said the driver.

"Back. To the spot where we were so unceremoniously introduced."

"Hey! What—? Jeez, we can't go back there. Us with a dead guy in the cab, and you with the bulls after you—"

"Your sympathy is appreciated," said Spring, "but you turn back just the same. . . . Come on, or I'll let you have it in the top of the spine!"

Spring settled back as the cab turned.

He had it and he knew it. The advertising circulars! But that didn't lay a previous perplexity. The crushed flower petal! Who was responsible for that in Corny's apartment? Sale? Spring snorted as he pictured Barney treasuring crushed petals! Claire? Perhaps. Yet that wasn't in Claire's character either.

"It means something, Fingers," he breathed to the dead gunman. "But I'm hanged if I can figure out what. . . ."

The cab was within a block of the building now. He tapped the driver's neck with the gun muzzle.

"I'll be leaving you, sweetheart. And don't tip the cops about my return."

CHAPTER FOUR

Sentimental Clue

THE police were taking no chances of the dead man's apartment being ransacked a second time! A patrolman sat in the living room, next the library.

And in the darkened nearby room Spring gathered all the advertising circulars, selecting them by feeling for unopened envelope flaps, and thrust them in his pocket.

He stole back into the hall, freezing as he heard the cop in the living room move, going on again when he heard nothing.

He swung from the convenient bedroom window, and entered the bedroom of the apartment next door. It had looked empty.

In the dark room, he took out the circulars and examined them under his small light. And a glitter came to his grey eyes as he saw slight traces that three of the advertising envelopes had been opened—and sealed again.

He slit open the first, and a long, slow sigh came from his lips.

"Claire. . . she's innocent of one thing, anyhow," he whispered. "That is, of coming to see Corny because she was in love with the damned blackguard. God, I'm glad!"

He stared again at the contents of the envelope: I O U's from Richard Carver to Corny Andrews totalling over a hundred thousand dollars. Then he put them in his pocket and opened the second envelope.

"And by God, she's innocent of the murder too," he breathed.

In the second envelope were more crushed flower petals, and a letter in a sprawling, uneducated hand. "... saved these from that day we went to Heine-man's roadhouse, honey. God, I love you. Sue."

Almost indifferently, Spring glanced at the contents of the third envelope. A page from an informal account book that told a plain tale. Corny Andrews, permitted to indulge in his gambling dexterities by Sale, the gambling baron, had held out on the take recently. He had gypped Sale of about twenty thousand dollars.

Spring hummed as he went toward a telephone on a night table.

"Headquarters?" he said. "I'd like to entrust somebody with a message for Detective Harris. Yes, I know he's out—he's somewhere around the building in which Corny Andrews was killed, so he ought to be easy for you to find. Tell him to meet me at the following address and I'll turn the real murderer of Corny Andrews over to him—"

"All right, all right, I'll tell you who I am. This is Spring Wasey talking. And the address Harris is to come to right away is 124 Twenty-Third Street. The name on the bell there is. . . ."

He grinned a little at the phone.

". . . is Alex Sale," he concluded.

IT was a quarter of three in the morning. Sale's gaudy robe covered pajamas now as he went to the door. Sue's green negligee covered. . . well, Sue.

"Who's knocking," Sale rasped.

"Open up," came a voice even more truculent. "Harris, of headquarters."

The girl in the green negligee gasped. Sale patted her shoulder.

He opened the door. Harris and two other detectives came into the room.

"Where is he?" Harris snapped.

"Where is who?" said Sale, blinking.

"Spring Wasey. He phoned from somewhere and said to meet him here."

"Here?" exclaimed Sale, with his impassive face almost expressing amazement. "Why—" He stopped abruptly.

"Yeah, I know," snapped Harris. "You are after him yourself—"

"I'm not saying a thing."

"You don't have to, Sale. I got the cab that left here to rod Spring, and found Fingers dead in it. Your man. And I see Buck Fenniger and two other mugs hanging around this building on the chance Spring will show up. Your men. Just the same, Spring said he'd be here. And," he added grudgingly, "the guy usually does as he says he will."

"I don't know what Spring had in his hat," said Sale positively, "but you'll never see him *here*! So you might as well—"

Steps sounded in the hall. A man came toward the door. He was dressed in blue serge that was expensive but bulged in places. He had a grey felt hat pulled low over his face.

"Well, well," said Harris, eyes narrowing to slits. "Buck Fenniger joining our party. I thought I saw you outside, Buck."

Sale snarled: "You ape, what're you doing up here? You saw this dick come in, didn't you?"

"Sure. That's why I'm up here," said the man in the blue serge suit, lifting his head so his face showed beneath the hat brim.

"Spring. . . ." said Sale, in a strangled tone.

"In person," nodded Spring. "If you will guard your castle so well, visitors must sneak inside in the borrowed uniform of one of the guards. I don't think Buck Fenniger is enjoying the suit I traded him for, however. He was very much out when I left him."

As he spoke, Spring stared at the girl. And after a minute of it Sue said thinly: "I don't like this guy, honey."

"Neither does honey," said Spring,

nodding at Sale. "Nor the law." He gazed at Harris and the two accompanying detectives. "Which makes it unanimous. But I'm a gentle soul. I—"

"Cut the comedy," grated Harris. "Shoot your piece. Then I'm hauling you in on the Andrews murder."

"As accessory? Or chief character?" said Spring. "But no matter. My little tale should straighten things in what you're pleased to call your think-pan."

HE handed the three advertising envelopes to Harris. His voice was different when he went on. It was crisp, authoritative.

"Gaze at these things while I talk, and see if your idea doesn't check with mine."

"Corny Andrews is dead, and Claire Carver is supposed to have killed him, or maybe me, or maybe both together. But there were a lot of folks who wanted Corny dead."

"There was Sale here. . . . Hold it, Sale. You wouldn't slaughter me with the law looking on, would you? Corny had held out twenty grand on Sale, and Sale caught on and was sore."

"There was Richard Carver. Corny had his I O U's for more than Dick could dream of getting from his father. And if said father ever got wise to Dick's big-time gambling he'd throw his boy out in the snow with no mention in the will. So Dick would have loved to see Corny dead, if it meant he got his I O U's back."

"Then, there was Sue, here. Sentimental Sue—"

"That's a lie!" shrilled the girl, clutching her negligée at the throat.

"There was Sue," Spring said calmly. "She was crazy about Corny, and when girls are crazy about men and then find out they're only number two or four or six on the string they're apt to get sore."

"Make him shut up, Sale," pleaded Sue.

"Try and make him shut up, Sale," said Spring. "You'd better listen, mister."

You'll probably hear things you didn't know about before." He turned to Harris.

"There you have the ones who want Corny dead," he went on. "Now what happens? Claire Carver finds out about the I O U's. She knows Dick will be forever sunk if they come out, and Corny will bring them out if they're not paid! So she goes to his apartment."

Spring's lips were thin.

"Game kid, Claire. She knows what Corny is, and what will probably have to happen before she gets what she wants, and she goes anyhow, trampling on everything she holds decent to help the nitwit she's married to. But Corny doesn't come through. She goes a last time to get the I O U's at the point of a gun. She shoots Corny and wounds him. Then she runs."

"She probably almost bumps into another girl as she leaves, but she's too much up in the air to see her. The other girl is Sue, here."

"Sale has tumbled to Corny's gyp on the gambling take. He talks of bumping Corny off as a salutary example. Sue perhaps surprises him by volunteering for the job; perhaps she doesn't. Anyhow she volunteers. Probably says she could get into Corny's place easier than any of Sale's apes. Sale lets her go."

"Sue finds Corny nursing the hole in his shoulder, sees Claire's gun, and uses it. She hits the head, not the shoulder. Then she beats it, and we have our case: Corny Andrews killed by Claire Carver in a jealous rage! Bunk and fiddlesticks!"

Harris grunted. "And Claire Carver is so noble she won't even split about her husband's I O U's to save herself from the chair?" he growled. "Nuts!"

Spring shrugged. "It won't do her any good to say she went to Corny's place for I O U's instead of love letters or what have you. It's a murder rap either way. So she says nothing. And sweet Sue, who really killed him, lets it ride."

"Listen you," began Sale dangerously.

"Listen yourself," Spring snapped. "You sap. You know Sue killed Corny. But you think she did it for you. Felt pretty swell that you could get a dame so crazy about you that she'd kill for you, eh? That's why you wanted to get me off the case. You weren't afraid of what I'd find that might drag you in. But you were afraid for Sue. Well, you're wasting your time."

"Sue killed Corny because she was nuts about *him*. Not you. She was two-timing you, and she found out Corny was two-timing her. It's all in that love letter Harris has. She threatened to kill him. . . ."

"I did not!" shrilled the girl, her shallow grey eyes wells of fear. "You think I'd put *that* in a letter?"

"But you did put the love stuff in the letter to him! And flower petals to remind of the day at Heineman's roadhouse!"

IN Harris's face, grimness was overcoming enmity to Spring.

Sale was breathing heavily and glaring at Sue.

"Two-timing me with Corny, huh?" he said to her. "And me busting a gut to cover you because I thought you did it for me—"

In the midst of the most violent emotions, there are instinctive guards over a man's tongue. Such a guard stopped Sale now. But stopped him disastrously late! He had already branded himself and the dangerous bit of fluff in the green negligée.

"*Watch—*" said Spring.

That was as far as he got. Sale had a gun out, beating Spring to it because Harris had joggled his arm as he, too, started with the gambler's dive for his pocket.

"You five-thumbed fumbler," grated Spring to Harris. "What were you trying

to do—find your gun in my pocket?"

"Shut it," said Sale bleakly. He was backing slowly toward the bedroom door. His gun fanned slowly over the four men. "If one of you makes a snatch for his rod, he gets a slug in the belly."

"Abdomen to you, Sale," said Spring.

Sale cursed, thinly, icily.

"I can't get you all before one of you gets me," he said. "So I won't try it." He was at the bedroom door now. His eyes and his manner told as plainly as words that there was some way out of the apartment by way of that room. "But I'm going to get you, Spring! *And that damn jane—*"

He leaped backward through the door, gun spitting as he did so.

But there was nothing impeding Spring now in the uncanny swiftness with which he could get a gun in his hand.

Barney screamed as Spring's bullet spanged his gun from his shattered hand. Even though Spring hadn't taken time to pull his gun from his pocket, but had shot through his coat, his bullet was a shade late. Sue was writhing on the floor with carmine welling down the front of the green negligée. . . .

The two plainclothesmen took Sale, raving, away. Harris strode from the dead girl, who had gasped a confession before passing out, to Spring.

"Okay, Spring," he growled. "You put over a fast job, and I'm admitting it. But I don't like your insides any better than I did before. And some day I'm going to. . . ."

"I know, darling," said Spring. "But that's some day. Let's stick to the present. Let's go down and spring Claire Carver out of her cage," his face softened with her name; hardened with the next name; "and turn her over to Dick Carver, her puppy husband, who is damn soon going to find himself a Reno bachelor—sure as my name's Spring Wasey!"

HOT LEAD PENSION

by **ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT**

(Author of "Hideaway in Hell," etc.)



The kid's knife slashed through the ropes.

Honest Ken Moore pounded pavements long after smarter, weaker men wore unmerited gold shields. But he still played the game square, still was more eager to help his wretched wards than to send them to the pen, still thought self-respect and kindly justice made a cop's life worthwhile.

PATROLMAN Ken Moore's flat feet thumped wearily on the hard pavement and his slow brain struggled with unaccustomed arithmetic. How many store doors had he tried in his twenty-three years of midnight tours? How many . . . ? A half-million, at least. Twenty-three years! Another door,

another, and another. There was only one on this block, that of Giuseppe Pallucci's grocery just ahead, down those three steps dipping into blackness. His gnarled fingers clutched his nightstick a little tighter as he went down into the lightless pool.

Ken Moore was not feeling sorry for

himself. The figuring was to keep him from getting jittery—from shying away, like a rookie, from every shadow, from every blind, unlighted window along his beat. Out of any one of these a tongue of orange fire might suddenly lick to sear him with the ripping explosion of murderous lead. The word was out to burn him down. It must be. Locked in his old brain was knowledge that “One-Eye” Luccio would never permit him to speak from the witness stand. And he was to testify tomorrow.

If he lived till the morning he Hell! Pallucci’s door yielded to his testing hand, swung inward an inch before he could check it.

Someone was inside there!

“Put ’em up!” he barked. “I’ve got you covered.”

He crouched in the cloudy shadow of a showcase, waiting, watching. The darkness held a whimpering gasp. Moore slipped his left hand through the leather thong of his club, fished out his flashlight. Its beam bored a white tunnel through the gloom, straight to the source of that sound.

An unpainted, drab counter leaped into existence. A weazened, shabby figure was haunched before it, dilated eyes staring out of an emaciated, pallid face. The intruder was a starved-looking boy, frozen by fright. Frayed sleeves fell back, wrinkling soggily, from uplifted, pipe-stem wrists; from clawed, bony, trembling hands.

A gourd of Gorgonzola cheese was at the youngster’s feet, a paper bag from which corrugated strips of vermicelli spilled; a white-powdered round bread. “D-don’t shoot, mister,” the lad chattered. “D-d-on’t shoot. I give up.”

Moore’s gun was steady; his face grim, appalling. “You’re starting early, Ted West. And caught early, too. You know what this means, don’t you?”

“Y-yes—I know—the pen.”

“No, Ted. Not the pen. They don’t send kids to the pen for six months. They send them to the reformatory till they’re twenty-one. Let’s see, you’re how old?”

“Six—sixteen.”

“THAT’S five years, Ted. Five years in that place, where they beat you if you so much as look cross-eyed. Five years, where they work you limp all day and hound you to sleep as soon as it’s dark. But you don’t sleep. You lie awake and you listen to the other kids whispering out of the sides of their mouths. You hear them whisper filthy things. And after a while, you whisper them yourself. And you learn things there, too, from the bigger boys: How to pick pockets. How to crack a crib. How to fool the cops. You come out a wise guy after five years, don’t you?”

“N-no sir.”

“Damn right you don’t. But you think you’re one, and you’re sour on the world. And then you go crib-crazy, Ted. You bang your head against steel walls that are going to be around you till you die, and you scream curses nobody pays any attention to, and the spit drools on the corners of your mouth, and”

“No! Oh God! No!” Terror stared from Ted’s big eyes. His scrawny arms came down, quivered in front of him, half-bent, as if to ward off an attack. “No!”

“Yes, Ted. That’s what’s going to happen to you just because your papers didn’t sell so good today and your mother and kid sister were hungry, and you thought Pallucci wouldn’t miss a couple of things because he has so much. And what’s going to happen to your ma and to little Mary while you’re away? D’you think your old man’s going to come back—he who went up the river before Mary was born—to take care of them? I never saw him, but I can tell you what he looks

like. I've told you already. What he looks like now, you're going to look like when you're as old as he is—and like him, you're not going to give a damn about ma and Mary—if they haven't starved to death by that time because you weren't around to help them. Or worse. Or worse, Ted”

The boy was down on his knees, now. His hands were stretched out towards Moore, prayerlike, and he was shaking all over as with the ague. “Please!” he whimpered. “I’ll never do it again. It’s the first time and the last time. Please don’t take me in. Please!”

“No, Ted, I’m not going to take you in. I couldn’t do that to you, or to your ma, who’s scrubbed her fingers to the bone raising you, or to Mary. But the next time”

“There ain’t going to be any next time.”

“There’d better not be. Beat it. Go on. Beat it home before I change my mind.”

The boy was gone. The old cop scratched his head. This was a nice mess. He’d have to report the break now. He couldn’t cover up the marks of Ted’s entrance. Nothing was stolen, but there would be a demerit against him on the books. Maybe a fine, for improper patrol.

“**H**HEY cop!” An urgent whisper reached Ken Moore. “C’m here!” Moore’s eyes slid to the figure in the unlighted embrasure of a closed shoe-store, slitted and wary. At two o’clock, there were still a few citizens hurrying along Morris Street, some who shambled leisurely with no reason to hurry. But he wasn’t taking any chances. He didn’t know the fellow who furtively beckoned him, but he knew what he was. His undersized, slight frame, wrapped in a wasp-waisted overcoat whose too-long skirts almost touched cocoa-brown suede shoe-tips—his lashless, predatory eyes glittering out of brim-shadow of a pulled-down derby;

his pasty, ageless face, gashed by a ruler-straight, lipless mouth—were a dead giveaway.

The fellow’s arms angled stiffly out, drawing his pallid, long-fingered hands well away from his pockets, from a grab at a possible armpit holster. If the rat’s game was to blast him down, he would have done it from there without warning. One-Eye Luccio’s snakes never rattled before they struck.

“Come on over here. I ain’t got all night.”

Moore sidled guardedly to the show-window, looked into it as he growled, “What the hell do *you* want?” The plate glass made a perfect mirror. He could see in it the sidewalk behind him and the cobbled, debris-strewn gutter roofed by the sprawling structure of the El. No one could sneak up on him without his knowing it; no killer-car could roll up, silent and unseen, till it exploded in a lethal spray of Tommy-gun lead.

“You ain’t on no spot, Moore.” The low, almost inaudible voice slid out from between unmoving lips. “Not yet. Not unless you’re dumb enough to turn down the grand in One-Eye’s safe that’s got your name written on it.”

The policeman’s weather-worn face was bleak, masked, but a muscle twitched in one grizzled cheek. So they were going to try this way first! “Who are you?” he stalled. “How do I know you come from Luccio?”

“I’m just out of—from out of town. Call me Farrell. You don’t know me, but I’m talking for One-Eye all right. How about that grand?”

“That’s a lot of dough. What do I do to get it?”

“Talk right on the stand tomorrow. That’s all.”

“As how?”

“You didn’t see Abe Katz bendin’ over Sol Levi’s corpse. You copped him

around the corner as you run up an' you ain't sure which way he was goin'. Maybe he heard the gat-bark same as you did and was comin' to see what was up."

"What good will that do? The bullet in Solo's skull matched Katz's gun."

"Sure. But the bullet's gone now. Sergeant Corbin can't make out how it could have got out of the ballistics room, but it ain't there. Funny how them things happen." Farrell chuckled humorlessly. "An' funnier still—the deputy commish lettin' Corbin off with a reprimand!"

TINY light-worms crawled in the depths of Moore's eyes. "Which means it's up to me alone whether Katz goes to the chair—or whether he cops a plea by squealing on the mob. I get it. But why the sudden generosity? Wouldn't burning me down come a lot cheaper?"

Farrell shrugged. "Maybe cop-killin' ain't so easy to cover up. Maybe Luccio can use you. I dunno. I'm just sayin' what I been told to say."

"One-Eye can use me! Hmm! I never thought of that."

"Cripes! It's about time you did. Be your age, Moore. Here you been a cop since Broadway was a pup, and you're still poundin' concrete while guys that were still wet behind the ears when you started is sportin' gold shields. They call you Honest Ken an' pat you on the shoulder with one hand while the other's behind their back grabbin' Luccio's dough. What's it got you? You're retirin' in a couple years. You know damn' well who One-Eye is frontin' for. Play along with the Big Fellow, and your pension'll be half a lieutenant's pay. What do you say?"

"What do I say?" Moore murmured, slowly, musingly. Maybe he was a fool. Maybe the thousands of other honest cops were fools. The crooks were the ones who got the promotions, the easy jobs. The straight bulls got lead in their bread-

basket. If he said *no*, that's what he could expect, a bullet in his belly.

"What do I say?" he repeated, and his left hand lashed out, caught and clenched Farrell's coat collar, held it with a grip of steel. "Listen, you mug. What would I say if you came to me and offered me a thousand bucks for my wife? I ain't got no wife. I ain't got no kith or kin. Only the force. Twenty-eight years the force has been my wife, my daughter. The force, not a few slimy grafters that get into it now and then. Sell it? Sell the force? What do I say? *This!*"

Farrell's head went back to the impact of a gnarled, case-hardened fist on its jaw. The blow lifted him, slammed him down, pounded him into the pavement. He rolled there. And suddenly blued steel glinted in his hand. The stubby nose of an automatic snouted at Moore—spun clattering into the gutter as the cop's heavy toe crashed into the gunman's ribs. He squealed with pain.

"Not this time, Farrell. Not so easy. You'll have to do better than that to get me. But I'm not going to take you in. I'm going to let you go back to your boss and tell him he can't buy me."

A well-aimed kick sent Farrell's gun into a gaping sewer-hole. Moore strode stiff-legged away, shouldering through running, curious wanderers of the sunless slum. A jeweller's street clock caught his eye. Two-thirty. Five and a half hours yet to go. Five and a half hours to patrol the old, familiar course of his beat that now was a path through a night-shrouded jungle in whose every covert death waited, grim and certain, to ambush him.

KEN Moore's apprehension, the tense watchfulness with which he scanned every paint-peeled tenement vestibule, every veiled, black shadow, could not keep the creeping chill out of his old bones, the

clammy, breathless cold of that four o'clock hour when the tide of life ebbs lowest and the blood runs sluggish in mankind's veins.

He halted suddenly, the nape of his neck prickling. Had he caught a flicker of orange out of the corner of his eye? There it was again! A small red glow in a tenement doorway angling across the street, gone as soon as he glimpsed it. *Fire!* Fire in a slum hallway, getting a grip on tinder-dry wood to roar, in minutes, in seconds, up a stairwell that would be at once fuel and flue for flames. To cut off all escape in terrible, brief instants.

Moore plunged across the street. If he were in time—if he were only in time to stamp it out, to extinguish it before it got a start. Folly to send in an alarm, for by the time the engines came it would be too late for any help. He fairly threw himself up the high stoop, into the lurid vestibule. Dark silhouettes were all about him. An arm rose against the light of a blazing newspaper, swooped down. Rockets burst inside his skull, blinked out into inrushing blackness, into
. . . oblivion

* * *

Hot liquid seared Ken Moore's throat, burned down into his gullet. He soared up out of weltering darkness, choked, spluttered. The stink of rot-gut whiskey was in his nostrils, his mouth was full of it. Glass clinked against his teeth. He swallowed spasmodically, lifted a hand to bat away the bottle. *Tried* to lift a hand, and couldn't. His arms were bound to his sides, ropes cut into his ankles. Someone was bending over him, shadowy in the blackness.

"Come alive, huh?" Farrell's voice whined in his ears. "But I guess you got enough."

Water lapped greasily, somewhere near by, and a part of the night was angularly

solid. "What—what—?" Moore spluttered, choked. Garbage smell, the stench of putrid wood, told him he was up against a stringpiece of the Street Cleaning Department's pier at the foot of Hogbund Place. Queer. . . .

"Them ropes is pasted together an' they'll come loose after you're in the water a while. But you won't know it, Moore. They'll drag you up out o' the mud. You'll be in uniform; your gat'll be in your pocket, an' your belly'll be full o' hootch. Sneakin' down to the pier to booze, they'll say—got soused an' tumbled in! Honest Ken, foolin' us all the time! An' Luccio'll be in the clear. What d' you think o' that, wise guy?"

THE alcohol fumes were a sick whirl in Moore's brain, his stomach retched. What did he think of that? His name struck from the rolls of the force in disgrace, his memory an abomination to the bulls who had been his friends—the honest bulls who did their duty in spite of all temptation. Katz going free and One-Eye Luccio triumphant. What should he think of it? It wasn't the imminence of death in the filthy river that wrenched a groan from him.

"Over you go!" Hands tugged at his body, lifting him, rolling him up on the stringpiece. If only he could have gone out fighting A muffled thud at the pier's land end stopped Farrell's grunting effort.

"Hell!" he splurged. "Them guys was supposed to be watching." He held Moore poised on the brink of death, listening tensely. "If they run out on me. . . ." The sound came again, like a footfall. Moore's throat tightened to cry out, and Farrell rammed a rag into it, gagging him.

"I got to go see," the killer muttered. "You'll keep a minute." He was gone, a slinking shadow merging with the pier's

foul shadows. Moore writhed, tugged at his lashings. They gave, slightly. He could get loose of them if he had time to work. *If* he had time! He fought frantically for freedom, for life itself.

The runted silhouette showed briefly against the pale front of the timekeeper's shack, down there, and turned. He was coming back! He was coming back and Moore was still bound, still helpless. The last flickering hope was gone.

Then suddenly he wasn't tied any more! Rolling over, coming up to his knees, reaching for his gun, the cop was vaguely aware of someone at his side who had come over the stringpiece, of someone in whose hand glittered the knife that had sliced the ropes from him. But his gun-butt was jerking in his hands, orange-blue flame was belching from the pistol's muzzle, was spitting death-hail into the shadows, into the one slinking shadow that was Farrell, killer.

"You got him," his rescuer screeched. "You burned him down!" Moore's gun was empty and his fingers couldn't hold it any longer. It thumped from his hand and he toppled sidewise. "You ain't hurt," Ted West squealed. "You ain't hurt, mister." The kid's weazened face hung above Moore, pale, eyes shining. He clawed the rag out of the cop's mouth.

"No," Moore managed to whisper. "But how—who—?"

"I threw stones, an' he thought it was someone comin'. That gimme a chance to cut you loose."

"Good—kid!" A drop splashed on the old cop's cheek. Another. A sob gulped from the youngster's throat. "Why," Moore said, wonderingly. "You're crying. Why are you. . . ?"

But Ted's face wasn't over him any more. It was gone. The policeman rolled painfully, to see the lad drop to his knees beside the sprawled body of the killer, to see him lift the lax shoulders and press

them to his pinched, shaking breast.

Wondering, Moore pushed feeble palms down on the splintered wharf floor, shoved himself up. Just then, a launch headlight scythed the river night, flicked momentarily across the two faces. . . .

KEN Moore gasped. Death's hand, merciful for once, had softened the thug's visage, had smoothed away the deep-graven traces of crime and sinful living. Line for line, feature for feature, the boy's tear-wet countenance and the wax-white one pressed close against it were alike. Alike as only the faces of brothers could be, or the faces of—father and son!

Moore got to his feet, reeled to them, bent to put a comforting, tender arm around the youth's shaking shoulders.

"I killed him," the little fellow sobbed, as though that touch had released pent-up words. "I killed my own father. Ma saw him out the window; she couldn't sleep for worryin', an' she sent me down to call him. An' there he was in the hall with them other guys, an' I saw 'em snatch you. I had to help you, didn't I? I had to watch my chance an' help you. "But I killed him doin' it. My father!"

"Ted . . ." the cop managed to get past the lump in his throat, and stopped. What could he say?

The youngster said it for him. "Looka!" There was the shock of a sudden realization in his voice, and the hush of a great awe. "Maybe—it was meant. Maybe—it's the best thing I coulda done for him. 'Cause now he'll never go back—up the river—to stay for good. He'll never be—like you said in Pallucci's—crib-crazy."

"Never, Ted. . . ." The wetness on the grizzled, weather-beaten face of the veteran cop couldn't have come from under his eyelids. It must have started to rain. . . .

DEAD BEFORE DAWN

by J. LANE
LINKLATER

(Author of "Murder for Charity,"
etc.)



*"He'll be dead before dawn!"
the man assured his companion
as Felix sold him the news-
paper. And that grim promise
sent the little cripple on a
midnight journey which
changed the course of
three lives, and caused the
end of one!*

The man inside was
rising to open the
window. . . .

SOMEONE was going to die before the night was over. That was all Felix knew just then, except that the man behind the killing was Grover Cort. And Cort was the most powerful underground figure in that crime-ridden section of the city known as the Cauldron.

Felix hovered for a moment in the fog-filtered light of a street lamp. There were very few people about, and those few paid no attention to him. People rarely noticed Felix; he had the power of self-obliteration. His twisted face had the bland look of a child, in spite of his forty years. His ill-formed body was thin and small, his step noiseless. But Felix, without appearing to, watched everyone, and while he spoke seldom, he heard much.

And this evening he had heard, while

handing a newspaper to a customer, that someone was going to die. It was just a whisper that he had heard: "He'll be dead before dawn!"

The customer was a man who was with Grover Cort. And Felix knew that it would not be a natural death.

Felix started again, moved quietly down the street. He stopped near a small hotel. It was here that Cort hatched schemes that brought him illicit revenue and perpetuated his own power.

The clock in the lobby said ten minutes before midnight. Felix stood still. Without moving his head, he glanced down the street. A few furtive pedestrians were slinking through the darkness. It was a district that Felix knew intimately—far more intimately than others realized—a district in which human tragedies constantly stalked the boards.

Felix often played a part in those tragedies. But it was an invisible part. The police knew nothing of it. Nor did even the main actors. Only one person knew—and she was loyally silent.

Felix crossed the front of the hotel, squinted up at the south wall of the building. A room at the rear, on the third floor, showed a light; a narrow strip of yellow that edged the window beneath a drawn blind.

The uneasy noiselessness of midnight was in the dank air. Felix moved down the alley toward the rear of the building like a soundless shadow. He wanted to get up to that window; it would be an impossible task for most humans. But Felix could move over the face of a building with amazing agility.

It was one of the things that nobody knew about him.

Felix reached out a hand, lifted a foot. In a moment he was criss-crossing his way upward. And in a little while, his fingers were clutching the sill of the third-floor window.

He peered into the room.

Inside were two men. One of them was large, fleshy-faced; small hard eyes and thin lips. That was Grover Cort. A big hypocrite of a man—cruelty poorly concealed beneath the hearty flesh of good nature.

The other was younger, good-looking, wavy blond hair and evasive blue eyes; the face of a weakling who prides himself on a cunning he does not possess. Felix recognized him at once as Hap Bishop, brother of Lil Bishop, a girl who was worth ten of her brother.

They were sitting facing each other. Hap was smiling—the silly smile of the unconscious tool. Lips were moving, but the sound of voices did not penetrate the closed window.

Felix watched those lips intently. It was a name that Felix was watching for. And presently a name was mentioned, several times. The name was Jim.

Jim! Felix knew who Jim was. Vaguely, the conversation was beginning to mean something to him. Jim! That would be young Jim Rice, who was struggling along with a small garage—struggling desperately because he wanted to get married. And the girl he wanted to marry was Lil Bishop, Hap's sister!

Grover Cort was arising massively from his chair. A wave of his pudgy hand showed Felix what he intended to do. The air in the room was thick with tobacco smoke, and Cort was about to open the window.

Felix' fingers vanished from the sill. He slipped, like a flitting ghost, down the face of the wall to the ground.

IT WAS midnight now, or past. And someone would be dead before dawn! Jim's garage was three blocks away, an old one-story building that only ambitious youth would have used for a business. Felix reached it quickly. The front door was partly open. The small office in front was lighted. A young man and a girl

were there; Jim Rice and Lil Bishop. Their heads were close together but Felix could see them clearly; Jim's honest, rugged young face, and Lil's honest, soft one.

Felix hesitated a moment, then slipped through the door. Jim turned as Felix appeared at the door of the office.

"Hi, Felix," said Jim, cordially.

Jim was one of the few inhabitants of the Cauldron who always had a pleasant word for the little paper-peddler. Lil was another, and she was smiling at him now.

Felix nodded in his gloomy way. "Open late tonight, huh?"

"Business," Jim said cheerfully. "Can't neglect a chance to make an extra buck or two these days.

The girl spoke then, patting Jim on the cheek: "I'd better be getting along home now," she said.

Felix watched her as she kissed Jim goodnight and vanished through the door.

"How much later you staying tonight?" he asked Jim.

"About two o'clock, I guess," said Jim. "Got to wait for a man to come for his car—that green sedan back in the shop."

"What man?" said Felix.

"Name's Gould," said Jim. "Don't know much about him, but he says my place is handy for him. He's a liberal sort of guy, too."

Felix was silent a moment, then muttered a goodnight. In a few minutes he had reached a small lunch-counter. Two customers were just leaving, and the place was empty, except for the waitress.

The girl behind the counter watched him as he sat on a stool. She was pretty, in a way that a common-sense sort of face is sometimes pretty, and her eyes were alert. And she was the one person who knew that Felix ever did anything beyond peddling papers. She knew—and she helped.

She brought him a cup of coffee,

hovered near him as he sipped it. Presently he looked up, spoke very softly: "Cort comes in here sometimes, Myrtle?"

Myrtle moved her head.

"And Hap Bishop and his sister, Lil?"

She moved her head again.

"Cort kind of interested in the girl, huh?"

Myrtle's lips moved explosively, although she kept her voice down: "He's nuts about her!"

Felix spoke quickly: "Wait for me. Usual place."

He gulped the rest of his coffee. The girl watched him affectionately as he went out.

Down on the next corner, Felix stopped, leaned against a doorway. His intuition was working; working faster than any normal powers of ordinary reasoning. Grover Cort—a crafty, determined, utterly unscrupulous man—wanted Lil Bishop. And tonight he planned to do something that would bring her his way.

But what? There were two people to consider; two young men. One of them Cort wanted to control, the other to eliminate. That meant that Cort intended to put Lil's brother, Hap, completely under his power, so that he could use him to influence Lil. And it meant, as Felix had already guessed, that Jim Rice was the man who was to be dead before dawn!

QUIETLY, Felix pushed away from the corner, drifted down the street, made two or three turns and was presently back at Jim's garage. The front door was still slightly open. Felix could see Jim sitting in his office, reading.

There was no one else about. Felix slipped through the door, made his way quickly through the dim-lighted garage. A few cars lined each side of the building. Standing by itself at the rear, nose pointed toward the front door, was a green sedan.

Suddenly, Felix swung his head about.

Over the hush of the night came the sound of footsteps on the sidewalk outside. He stared at the sedan again for a moment, then climbed one of the cars against the wall, swung upwards, and in a moment was lying flat on a rafter, directly above the green sedan.

He peered out toward the front. The figure of a man had appeared at the front door. It was Lil's brother, Hap.

Felix lay quite still, watching. Hap stepped into the garage, walked into the office. For a little while the jumble of blurred voices came from the office. Then both Hap and Jim came out into the garage.

"I don't get it, Hap," Jim was saying. "But I guess it's all right. Mr. Gould told me he was coming for the car himself—"

"Sure," said Hap. "But he called me up awhile ago and had me meet him down on Spring Street, see? He said he couldn't make it—gave me a few bucks to get it for him and drive out to Hepper Bowl. He gave me that note for you, see?"

"Okay," said Jim. "But what does he want *me* for?"

"I dunno, Jim. But he said something about maybe there'd be another car to drive back. And he said he'd make it right for you—and pay you good for your time. We was to go to the Bowl, stop at the south end, get out and walk down the trail. We—"

"Funny," muttered Jim, "that he should want us to go to that hell-hole. But I can sure use the money."

They were getting into the green sedan. Jim was at the wheel. The motor was turning slowly.

Abruptly, Felix heard Jim's voice in a startled exclamation. The motor died again. Three men were coming through the front door. They were hurrying straight through the garage toward the

green sedan. In a moment they were standing against the front of the sedan, had yanked open the door. All three were holding revolvers.

"Get out, you guys," one of them said briskly. "Get out—and don't make any move you're not told to make."

Felix heard Jim's voice protesting: "What's the idea? Who are—?"

"Shut up," said the man. "And get out."

Felix, from the rafter above, saw Jim and Hap emerge from the car. One of the others slapped them about the body. "No rods on 'em," he said.

"Yeah," said the first man. "But don't take no chances. These dope peddlers always use the stuff themselves. They're nuts, and you can't figure what they'll do next."

"Dope peddlers!" said Jim. "You must be crazy. We're not—"

"Shut up" he was told again.

Jim and Hap were out of the car now. Two of the men stood just behind them, covering them. The third man got in the car, and Felix could hear him pulling at the seats.

This much was clear to Felix now. These men were officers. They really believed that Jim and Hap were involved in a dope racket.

And Felix was also sure that they would find evidence in the green sedan.

THEY were waiting in silence. The man in the car called out: "Here it is, boys! Big pocket under the back seat!"

He got out of the car again.

"But I don't know anything about it," argued Jim. "This car belongs to a man named Gould. He just uses my garage—"

"Yeah?" laughed the officer. "Gould, huh? And who's he?"

"I don't know. He just came in here and—"

"Where does he live?"

"He gave me his address. It's the Cosmoploe Hotel."

The officer turned to one of the others. "Go to the office there and check up on that, Harry."

The man spoken to walked away to the office.

Hap was talking now, and his voice was a whine: "It's a frame! I don't know nothing about it. I—"

"Yeah? Well, what are *you* doing here?"

"Why, this man Gould met me and hired me to drive the car out to him at Hepper Bowl with Jim tonight—"

"What do you know about this Gould?"

"Why, nothing. I—"

"Where did you meet him first?"

"Right here in this garage," whimpered Hap.

"Sure," said the officer. "Well, we were tipped off about this green sedan being used for delivering dope. And our tip said you two guys were in on it. Looks like it was a hot tip, all right."

The man who had gone to the office returned.

"No one at the Cosmoploe by that name, chief," he reported.

There was silence for a moment. Felix, listening and watching above them, got the picture clearly now. He knew what was coming, even before the brisk-speaking officer spoke again.

"Sure. It was a hot tip, all right. Well, it looks like—"

He was interrupted by the entrance of someone at the front door. A large man had stopped just inside. Presently he strode through the garage toward them. "Mr. Cort!" Hap cried hysterically. "Mr. Cort! These guys are—"

"Shut up!" barked the officer.

"Well, well," Cort said smoothly. "I was just on my way back home, saw the light here in the garage, heard voices, and

wondered what it was all about. What's the trouble?"

"Dope-peddling," said the officer.

His voice was courteous. It was plain that he had recognized Cort and respected his power.

"Dope!" said Cort, as if shocked. "I don't understand."

The officer explained in detail.

"Seems strange to me," murmured Cort. "I can't believe Hap would do a thing like that. And even Jim there—"

"We got the stuff," the officer pointed out.

"Yes, yes," said Cort. He seemed to be considering. "As I understand it, they were to drive the car out to Hepper Bowl. Why not do that? In that way, you may be able to nab the fellow who owns this car."

"Sure," said the officer. "We were going to do that. And—"

"I'll go along," offered Cort. "Hepper Bowl is a strange sort of place, and I happen to be familiar with it on account of my real estate interests. In fact, with your permission, I will walk down the trail with Jim!"

The officer hesitated. "May be dangerous, Mr. Cort."

Cort laughed softly. "I'll take care of myself," he promised.

The officer decided quickly. "Okay," he said. He spoke to one of the others: "You better stay here, Harry, and keep an eye on the garage."

Felix could hear them getting into the sedan. Soon the motor was turning again. The car started out. The officer who was to stay ran ahead to open the door wide. Lying on the rafter above, Felix heard again that whispering voice: "He'll be dead before dawn!"

THE green sedan was turning out into the street. The remaining officer was closing the front door. In a moment,

Felix knew, he would come back through the garage to test the small door at the rear.

With silent speed, Felix slipped off the rafter, climbed down the side to the nearest car, sidled along the wall to the rear door. It was bolted from the inside. Felix drew the bolt, swung the door open, stepped out.

There was a shout behind him as he started to close the door; the officer had glimpsed his shadowy figure vanishing through the opening. The officer fired just as he slammed the door shut. The bullet pinged into the wood.

Felix was in a yard behind the garage now. The officer was pounding back toward the door. But Felix knew every corner of the Cauldron; at once, he was over a fence, sprinting lightly down an alley, and out of sight.

Presently he stopped near a corner three blocks away. There was an old car at the curb. Myrtle was at the wheel. The car was an ancient model, the body apparently ready to fall apart, but only he and Myrtle knew the power of the motor under the rusty hood.

Myrtle had started the car before he had slipped into the seat beside her. "Hepper Bowl," Felix ordered shortly.

Myrtle looked at him quickly. "But," she pointed out, "you can climb down into the Bowl from a spot not far from here. It would save you time. It's a long way around by car."

"Gotto get around on the other side," Felix snapped, "so I can get a line on the lay of the land. Can't do that on this side."

Without a word, Myrtle turned the car about.

"Got to make time, Myrtle," Felix added. "Or Jim'll get bumped off."

The general outline of Grover Cort's scheme was clear enough to Felix. Jim was to be killed within the next few

minutes. The official explanation would be that some confederate in the dope racket had bumped him off for double-crossing. Hap would remain under arrest, and Cort would offer his friendly services.

In this way, Jim would be entirely removed as an obstacle to Cort's desire for Lil. And Cort would then use Hap's predicament to advance his own cause. Indeed, Cort's whole elaborate scheme was aimed at that one objective: to establish himself in Lil's favor. If that had not been necessary, he would simply have had Jim bumped off in some simpler fashion.

Myrtle swung the car suddenly east for a few hundred feet, then back north. Over a dark stretch of road the little car rattled furiously past a green sedan.

The total distance was about five miles, yet when they arrived at Hepper Bowl they would not be over a quarter of a mile from the boundaries of the Cauldron. The Bowl was a wide, deep gulch, the section near the Cauldron being almost impassable because of a steep cliff.

Soon they were approaching the Bowl.

"The farther end," Felix said.

As Myrtle slowed the car, they were looking down on the Bowl. It looked like a huge cavity in the earth for the dumping of human refuse, there in the center of the city. Decrepit hovels were scattered about its sides, and down at its bottom. There were people in some of those hovels, but only a few specks of light here and there were visible. It was a hole from which death had often emerged before.

Myrtle stopped the car against the side of an old building. For a moment they sat silent. Then Myrtle spoke softly: "Perhaps we had better go back, Felix. Cort is dangerous. You may be killed."

Felix said nothing.

"Anyhow, it will be hard to do anything

without being discovered," Myrtle went on. "You can't afford that."

Felix stirred. "Wait here fifteen minutes," he said, as if he hadn't heard at all. "Then drive back to the Cauldron. On the way—if you think its safe for yourself—stop and find out what happened."

Myrtle made no objections as he got out of the car, only watched him in the darkness, anxiously. He was on the rim of the Bowl now, slipping down a narrow, refuse-littered pathway into its depths.

HE came to a halt, presently, beneath the tumbling wall of one of the hovels. From here he could look up and see the edge of the road that rimmed the Bowl above.

From somewhere down here—perhaps the hovel against which he was now leaning—a shot would be fired within a few minutes; a rifle shot, probably, because of the distance.

There was no safer place for the work of an assassin who knew the ground. Felix understood quite well why Grover Cort had chosen it.

Above the stillness of the night came the sound of a nearing car. But where was the assassin?

Felix moved quickly. With the speed of a specter, he flitted from one hovel to another. And presently he stopped short.

He had come to a decaying shack in which there was no light; nothing but vague sounds within. There was a dark, glassless window facing up toward the rim of the Bowl—and an old door at the rear which was open.

The car up on the road was coming to a stop. Felix slipped into the rear door. In the darkness, he could see the dim figure of a man at the front window. His face was not visible, yet Felix knew at once who it was.

It was the man who had whispered:

"He'll be dead before dawn!" The man was holding a rifle, setting it in place on the sill. Felix stumbled. The man hurled about quickly. "Stick 'em up!" he barked.

Felix' hands went up.

"What the—?"

"Cort sent me," stated Felix.

There was a breathless silence. "Cort!" Scepticism was in the man's voice. "Why—?"

"I asked him," said Felix. "I want to bump that guy off myself! I made a special deal with Cort, and he sent me—told me to tell you."

The man laughed, a low angry laugh. "You're crazy," he snarled, "if you think I'm falling for that. Who are you?"

"It's the truth," pleaded Felix. He was taking in the situation swiftly. He realized that he had one big advantage: the man couldn't fire at him now without warning the officers in the car. And he couldn't continue to cover Felix and fire at Jim at the same time. "Honest to God, it's the truth. It's a cinch for you—and you ain't got much time. They'll be coming down the trail in a minute."

"But—!"

"You can keep me covered with your rod," Felix urged, "while I stand at the window with the rifle. You can't go wrong. And if I don't do just like you want me to—you got me!"

The man hesitated only a moment. The necessities of the situation were as clear to him now as to Felix. "Get up here!" he ordered.

He rested the muzzle on the sill, pointed upward, and stood aside a little. In his free hand, an automatic appeared and it was pointed at Felix.

Felix moved forward. As he reached the window, the murderer edged aside carefully, and plunged his automatic against Felix' back.

Felix took the butt of the rifle, stood looking out of the window, up at the

rim of the road. The murderer was just behind him, motionless.

Felix' gaze was fixed on the car, up on the road. The light there was shadowy; nothing much was visible against the car except a blurred group.

"You do like I say," whispered the man behind Felix, "or I'll blast your kidneys out."

They were silent for a little while. . . .

Two of the figures above were suddenly separated from the others. They were moving, slowly starting down the trail, side by side. One of them, Felix knew, was Cort; the other, Jim. But their outlines were far too indistinct for recognition.

Then, abruptly, a small light appeared in front of one of them, making it even more difficult to see them clearly. Obviously, a flashlight had been produced to light up the path.

Felix was still waiting, motionless—waiting for the man behind to give the order.

The hoarse, whispering voice spoke suddenly: "Aim about three feet to the left of the flashlight!"

Felix tensed. It was plain to him now that it was Cort who was holding the flashlight. And by firing three feet to the left, he would send a bullet into Jim's breast.

"Fire!" ordered the assassin.

Felix fired.

THE shot tore through the night. Up on the side of the Bowl, life seemed to come to a sudden standstill. Then something happened to the flashlight. Its rays were flung around in the air in crazy fashion, described an arc, nosed down to the ground and disappeared.

Felix moved before the man behind him realized what had happened. His fingers released the rifle and it slid to the floor. His hand darted under his coat.

The man behind him grunted harshly.

The automatic was jammed against Felix's back as if it would cut a circle in his flesh. "You drilled Cort, you damned—"

Felix' hand had closed on his own automatic. He fired backwards, through his coat, and threw himself to one side.

The shot meant for his kidneys ripped into the woodwork.

Felix turned. The assassin's knees were sticking out, like a toy doll's, his shoulders back, his head forward. He groaned as he went down like a collapsing accordion.

Instantly, Felix fled through the shack, out of the back door. His small, unshapely form weaved back through the Bowl, past the last of the hovels, until he faced the cliff on the edge of the Cauldron.

Not more than one man in a thousand could have scaled that cliff. But to Felix it was merely natural motion. Quick movements of fingers and toes, and he was going from one tiny ledge to another, until, in a little while, he was again walking the streets of the Cauldron.

Soon he was resting quietly in a doorway, waiting. A very old car approached presently, at casual speed, and stopped at the curb opposite him. Felix moved across the sidewalk to the car. Myrtle looked at him, her eyes shining. He waited for her to speak.

"Grover Cort was shot," she said simply. "Jim is safe—thank God."

"Is Cort—dead?" asked Felix.

"Not yet," said Myrtle. "He thought that he had been shot by the man who was supposed to shoot Jim—it made him crazy mad, and in putting the officers wise to the killer he cleared Jim of everything."

"But he's not dead?" repeated Felix.

"I heard someone say," said Myrtle, "that he'll be dead before dawn."

A fleeting smile lit Felix' child-like face. "Goodnight," he said.

Myrtle watched him walk away and vanish into the night.

WHILE THE CORPSE COOLS

by EMERSON
GRAVES

(Author of "Last Dance,"
etc.)



*Death struck while a lawyer
and a lawman looked on—
but the horror of it was as
nothing to Ruth Leavitt,
when she heard the words
that thrust her lover into the
shadow of the chair....*

*There was the sound
of an explosion.*

THE air of the library was as tense as a crouching cat.

Hugh Blaise, thin and blond, was unnaturally pale. He stared into the fireplace with bloodshot blue eyes. Paper and wood were laid there for a touch of the gas lighter to start them into flame. Beside Hugh stood Ruth Leavitt, lovely

as a picture by Titian, with her red-brown hair and dark brown eyes.

Across the room from the couple stood James Blaise. His face was impassive as he stared unseeingly at the small stained glass window beside the fireplace in the end wall. But the impassivity came from steely self control, not lack of emotion.

Near the door, with his slate-grey eyes enigmatic in his fat face, was Phelps, sheriff of Midvale, on the edge of which town the Blaise estate was set. He was watching the other three, particularly Jim Blaise.

It was town gossip that Ruth had been half in love with Jim, adopted son of Montgomery Blaise. Then Hugh, natural son, had come home from school—and soon afterward it began to be rumored that Ruth was engaged to him.

But Jim's face showed no emotion of any kind. He simply stared abstractedly at the small stained glass window.

"Here they come," said Phelps suddenly.

Jim Blaise straightened up. Hugh cried out softly. The double doors of the library rolled back.

In the doorway appeared a grey-haired man with a wasted body, in a wheel-chair. Pushing the chair was a middle-aged man with deep-set grey eyes under black brows.

The man in the chair was Montgomery Blaise, retired and living on the income from his investments. The man pushing the wheel-chair was Robert Greeley, Montgomery's lawyer and financial intermediary.

Montgomery Blaise's voice sounded authoritatively.

"Push me to the fireplace, Greeley."

The lawyer rolled the chair to the side of the fireplace.

"Light a fire," commanded Montgomery harshly.

"But, Monty," Greeley began.

"Light a fire!" snapped Blaise.

The lawyer shrugged, then went to the paper and wood in the fireplace. He tugged at the valve of the gas lighter, a tube slanting up under the wood. It didn't move, so Greeley held his match to the paper itself. It caught, and the wood started to crackle.

"Come here, all of you," said the invalid in the chair.

Hugh and Ruth stood side-by-side in front of him. Jim stood next to them. Phelps stayed near the door.

Blaise stared at them with sorrow and sternness growing in his eyes.

"You all know something of the purpose of this meeting," he said. "You know what is to go into those flames.

"James." He turned to Jim Blaise. "You are an adopted child. We took you from an orphanage and brought you up. And you were a joy to my wife and me while she was living, and to me since she died. You are a fine young man. The bank where you are employed tells me you will go far."

His eyes burned toward the other young man's white face.

"Hugh, you are of my flesh and blood. My own son. And you have been a bitter disappointment all your life. You were expelled from college, you have forged my name to checks, and you have run up gaming debts. Ten days ago, Sheriff Phelps had to report that you'd gotten drunk, stolen a car for a joy-ride, and smashed it. Money and influence barely saved you from jail."

Blaise's bitter eyes softened as they turned toward the girl.

"Ruth, my dear, you are hearing blunt facts. Once you seemed to care for Jim. Now you seem to prefer Hugh. Think well of your choice!"

There was silence. Blaise drew out a document, heavy with seals.

"I have been driven into taking a drastic step to make a man of Hugh," Blaise said grimly. "This document I hold is my will. It leaves a hundred thousand dollars to James, and all the rest of my estate to Hugh. This will is to be thrown into the fire.

"Greeley has a new will in his pocket. It leaves all my fortune to the Midvale

Medical Foundation. After the old will has been burned, I shall sign the new one."

HUGH'S breath hissed out. His face was mottled.

"The new will," Blaise continued, "will exist for a year. If in that time Hugh makes a man of himself, I shall burn the new will and redraft the old one. If Hugh does not reform, the new will shall be my last."

"But—Dad—" Hugh began hoarsely.

"Silence!" rasped Blaise. Hugh slunk back.

The old man turned to James.

"The new will cuts you out of your smaller share, too. The reason is that, to regain it, you must help Hugh straighten up. If he doesn't—you lose your inheritance also. That is ruthless, but a father can do ruthless things. You are strong and can help Hugh if you try. You must try, or lose your share of the estate."

Montgomery raised his hand. "Greeley, the new will."

Greeley's hand went reluctantly to his pocket. "Monty, don't you think—"

"The will, please! I will sign it now. Corrections of inventory of my estate can be made later."

"Please listen to me—"

"My mind is made up. The new will shall be signed, and the old burned."

Like a priest performing a rite, Blaise leaned forward. The old will fluttered from his hand to the flames.

With a snarling cry, Hugh darted forward. He hooked the paper out with his foot and stamped out the flames on it.

"Hugh!" roared Blaise.

Greeley walked to the wheel-chair, pale but determined.

"Monty, you won't listen to me as a friend. I demand to be heard as your lawyer and financial adviser."

"No!"

"Yes!"

The eyes of the two clashed. And finally Blaise shrugged.

"I'll listen to you," he said evenly, "but it will do you no good to argue."

Greeley turned to the others.

"Hugh, I wish you'd get my brief-case from my car at the curb. James, I'd like to ask you to phone Candler & Wicks, accountants, and ask them to deliver a duplicate of the last inventory of the Blaise estate to my office. Ruth, you can wait for Hugh in the music room."

Phelps started to leave with the others. Greeley shook his head.

"Stay, please, Sheriff," he said. "I'd like you to hear this and perhaps add the weight of your opinion."

The lawyer leaned over Blaise's wheel-chair.

"Old friend," he said gently. "You mustn't do this. You mustn't destroy your old will and sign this new one."

"Why not?" Blaise rapped out. "If it helps change Hugh—"

"You seem to have overlooked something," said Greeley. "You force me to put it bluntly—your health! You're a sick man, Monty. You may not live a year. Then Hugh would be beggared without trial."

"Hugh will have to take that chance."

Greeley shook his head.

"It isn't fair to make him. You offer him a year's probation, and then gamble on whether he'll have it or not! Now, in the brief-case Hugh is fetching for me, there is a third will. It sets the terms you wanted in this, but has a clause invalidating it and reinstating the old will in the event of your premature death. Won't you sign that one? Let Hugh think it's the harsh one if you like. But sign the compromise. Don't you think that would be more fair, Sheriff?"

"It sounds fair," evaded Phelps.

Montgomery Blaise was silent, weariness, pain and indecision in his eyes.

Greeley motioned with his head for Phelps to join him at a buffet at the far end of the room.

"Let him think it over," he whispered, pouring himself a drink and motioning the sheriff to do the same. "A minute or two will bring him 'round. He mustn't sign the new will—"

Suddenly there was the sound of a staccato explosion.

Like the backfiring of a car, it filled the room. And Phelps paled a little and whirled toward Blaise.

At what he saw, he ran to the wheel-chair. . . .

Blaise lay slumped in that chair. From a jagged hole in his cheek a crimson flood seeped down.

"He's dead!" breathed Phelps hoarsely. "Shot—under our very noses! By heaven . . ."

Greeley stared from the dead man to the charred document Hugh had saved from the fire.

"Dead," he murmured, "and the old will—is in effect!"

TEN minutes later, Sheriff Phelps faced the rest in the library. The wheel-chair had been rolled from the room, but the ghost of Montgomery Blaise seemed to remain.

Phelps repeated his statement.

"The murderer of Montgomery Blaise is in this room!"

"That's a strong statement," said Jim Blaise quietly. "You and Greeley can alibi each other. That leaves Hugh, Ruth and me. Ruth is scarcely capable of murder! It comes down to Hugh and me."

Phelps shrugged.

"You make the statement, not me. I let facts speak for me. And the facts are these:

"Blaise was killed by a bullet that entered through his cheek to the brain. The angle of the shot tells that the bullet must

have come from the fireplace wall of the room."

"The stained glass window—" gasped Ruth. Then she cowered back, looking from Hugh's face to Jim's.

Phelps' gaze rested on Hugh's weak but handsome face.

"Under the window," he said, "outside in a bed of flowers, I found something. A gun with one shell missing. It had been stamped deep into the soft earth—but not deep enough. The muzzle stuck up a little, and I saw it." He drew a handkerchief from over an object on the library table. "This is the gun."

All leaned forward. Then Ruth, as pale as death, breathed: "Oh, my God!"

Hugh cried aloud and lunged forward. Phelps' hand clamped over his wrist.

"That's my gun," Hugh whimpered. "Mine! But I didn't drop it out there—"

Greeley drew a deep breath. He said not one word; but the thoughts expressed in his eyes were the thoughts all had in the silence.

Hugh, with the rest, had known that Blaise was to throw his will into the fireplace and sign a new one. Hugh had realized that he was on the verge of losing some half a million dollars—forever, if his father should die before the year of probation was up.

His father's death would solve his problem neatly. . . .

"I didn't kill him!" Hugh screamed. "I didn't—"

Phelps lit a cigarette, eyes like drills.

"When was the last time you shot that gun?"

"A month ago," Hugh babbled. "Over a month ago! In the woods behind the house."

"Did you bring it back with one shot gone?"

"No, no! It was unloaded when I put it away. You've got to believe me . . ."

Greeley spoke. His voice matched the look in the girl's brown eyes.

"Hugh, I knew you were reckless and wild, but I wouldn't have dreamed you were capable of *this*! And I wouldn't have dreamed you could be such a fool. To commit murder, with an officer of the law in the very room! I'm a good lawyer, but I can do nothing for you in a mess like this. You're as good as in the chair right now."

Suddenly Jim Blaise's rasping breathing became audible. The ragged quality of it made first Phelps and then the rest stare at him.

"No," Jim whispered. His throat moved convulsively. "No!" he almost shouted.

He faced them, wide shoulders back, strong face grey but set with resolution.

"I can't have two lives on my soul. Mr. Blaise was old and ill anyway. That wasn't so bad. But two—no, no! Never two!"

Ruth's soft cry rang out. She clutched at his arm.

"Jimmy! For God's sake—what are you saying?"

Phelps' rasping voice cut hers short.

"Let him talk. He had time to do it while he was 'making the phone call' for Greeley. Just as Hugh had time while he was 'getting Greeley's brief-case.'"

Blaise's shoulders sagged. He moistened his lips.

"I never dreamed the gun would be found," he said dully. "I thought I'd stamped it out of sight into the dirt. I can't let Hugh go to the electric chair"

"I needed the hundred thousand dollars reserved for me in the old will. It will barely cover money I've been taking for years from the bank where I work. I'd planned to kill him anyway, and this proposed new will forced my hand. I shot

him, Phelps, and that's the truth, so help me."

HUGH stared. Greeley shook his head helplessly. But Ruth cried out and put her hand between his tense body and his arm.

"Jim, you didn't. You aren't capable of murder. It isn't in you! Hugh—yes. He could do it. But not you, Jim!"

Jim's voice droned out, hard and flat with suffering, but resolute as steel.

"I took Hugh's gun from his room before calling the accountants. I made the call, for an alibi, then ran out and shot—him"

"You—a murderer—" said Hugh slowly. "And trying to frame me. I'd never have believed"

Phelps spoke, his voice shockingly matter-of-fact and phlegmatic.

"Looks like we've got lots of murderers around here. But you haven't let me finish giving my facts yet. There are a couple more."

He stared broodingly at the little stained glass window.

"One of 'em is that that window is swollen shut. It couldn't be opened without using a crowbar, and there are no marks on it to indicate that it has been forced. I don't suppose the thing has been opened for years—it's no good for ventilation or anything else but ornament. So it looks like the shot didn't come from there, even if a gun was found under it outside.

"Another thing is the funny way the bullet went into Montgomery Blaise's head. I haven't seen a slug wound like that since I was a kid and saw how my grandfather's squirrel rifle sent lead into flesh. It wasn't rifled, and it sent a bullet into flesh end over end, tearing a hole just like this bullet did."

He took a bullet from Hugh's gun, careful not to disturb finger prints. He

drew out a horn-handled knife and began to cut at the cartridge case. Then he looked up.

"Would you all mind leaving the room?"

When the doors were drawn shut, Phelps strode to the fireplace. He bent down, and with the point of the knife arranged the still smoldering wood embers.

"All right," he called.

The doors opened and the four came back in, amazement and uncertainty large on their faces. Ruth still was beside Jimmy, and her position indicated that she'd not leave his side under any circumstances.

"I'm going to go through the murder again," said Phelps calmly. "We'll take our positions as before. Ruth and Hugh, here." Unwillingly, Ruth left Jimmy's side. "James, here. I'll stand where I was. But we want a man in the dead man's place."

Ruth caught her lip between her teeth.

"Sorry for the play-acting," said Phelps gently, "but it has to be done. Greeley, suppose you draw up a chair and sit in it as Montgomery Blaise sat in the wheel-chair."

"My dear man," said Greeley. "You ask too much! That's too gruesome—"

"You want to see justice done, don't you? Of course you do! Sit here—like this. That's right. That's the exact way Montgomery sat, and in the same spot."

Phelps went back to the place where he'd stood while the dead man outlined the stern procedure he'd drafted for the reform of his son.

"How long is this going to last?" said Greeley. "It's hot, here by the fire."

Phelps shrugged.

"I don't understand this, Phelps," Greeley went on. "What did you do with that cartridge you took from Hugh's gun?"

"Conditions under which Blaise was murdered had to be duplicated," said

Phelps. "That won't mean anything to anybody but the man who killed him." He stared at Hugh and Jim. "Got anything to say, either of you?"

Hugh shook his head. Jim said: "I've told you I killed him. This is nonsense, sheriff."

"All right," said Phelps phlegmatically. "It's nonsense. But we'll go through with it just the same. It must be very hot there, Greeley, by the way you're sweating."

"It is," said the lawyer, mopping at his face. "Get on with this quickly, will you?"

"Not too quickly," replied Phelps. "I make haste slowly . . . I think I told you the shot that killed Blaise didn't come through the window?"

"But that's manifestly impossible. The window is the only opening—"

"Oh, no, Greeley. There's the fireplace."

"You're talking in riddles," rasped Greeley, starting to get up from the chair.

"Sid down!" barked Phelps. "Talking in riddles, am I? Why are you so damned anxious to get out of that exact spot, Greeley?"

"Because it's hot, and this is a ghastly farce—"

"It isn't because of the cartridge I cut up, and the way that one ember is burning closer and closer to a certain spot, is it?"

"I don't know what you're talking about!" said Greeley. He was ash-pale. He twisted in the chair, leaning far to the side. Then he jumped up.

"I won't sit here!" he screamed suddenly.

"Why not, Greeley?"

"Because I—because . . ."

The lawyer's eyes were wild with fear. The flesh around his mouth was greenish.

"Jim, would you mind sitting there?" said Phelps softly.

"Of course not." Jim Blaise started toward the chair.

"Wait!" Phelps turned toward Hugh. "I'll have you take Greeley's place, instead."

"All right," said Hugh. "I don't understand any of this, but—"

"Yes!" gasped Greeley. "You sit here, Hugh! I'll stand—"

"On second thought," said Phelps, steel in his tone, "we'll keep on with the experiment as it is. Greeley stay where you are!"

"I won't!" The lawyer leaped from the chair and to one side. "You can't make me!"

Phelps turned to the two young men. "Hold him in the chair. One on each side".

Jim and Hugh grasped the lawyer's arms and held him in the chair. A growing wonder was in their eyes, but Phelps' tone exacted unquestioning obedience.

"Let me up!" sobbed Greeley. "Oh, my God—the fire—under the pipe *Let me up!*"

"Not till you tell me why you don't want to sit in it."

"You know! You fiend! You know! You put that cartridge in the gas lighter, with the ember under it—"

"How do you know about gas lighters, Greeley?" said Phelps. "Come on. The ember is hot, and the fireplace is warmer than it was when you calculated it before. Well?"

"I'll tell—Oh God! I'll tell! I killed Montgomery—just as I'll be killed myself if you don't let me out of here"

"**T**HE thing kind of solved itself," grunted Phelps to Jim and Ruth, who stood arm in arm with Hugh forgotten. "The shot came from the end wall, but not from the window, which hasn't been opened in years. The only other opening in the end wall is the fire-

place. What's in the fireplace? A fancy gas lighter, six inches of gas pipe backed by a gas-tight valve. That would make a good gun, though it isn't rifled and throws a slug end over end.

"What happened was that Greeley didn't want the new will signed, and knew in advance of the ceremony of tossing the old one to the fire. He put loose powder into the gas tube. On that he rammed a slug, probably already fired from Hugh's gun, which he stole on one of his many visits here to the house. When he started the fire he laid a stick of wood with one end in the flames and the other under the gas tube, like a fuse. The wood slowly burned along its length till it hit the tube, when the heat exploded the powder—"

"But how did you know *Greeley* did this?" said Ruth.

"Couldn't have been any one else," said Phelps patiently. "Who lit the fire, careful not to disturb the gas lighter with the powder and shot in it? Greeley. Who placed Blaise's chair in the exact spot for Blaise to get the slug in the head? Greeley. Who sent Hugh and Jim outside in opposite directions so neither could alibi the other? Greeley."

"But why would he do this? Why?"

"I can guess that too. Greeley was Blaise's financial man. If he'd stolen a lot of Blaise's money, an inventory of Blaise's estate which would have followed the signing of a new will would send him to the pen. Blaise's death would call for an inventory too, but not till the will was through the courts, and being a smart lawyer he could tie up the estate in litigation for years."

Jim smiled without humor.

"So when he sat in that chair, he thought you'd fixed the fireplace gun and he'd get killed as dad was."

"Right," said Phelps, stretching.

Ruth hugged Jim's arm.

FUGITIVE LOVERS

By **GEORGE ROSENBERG**

(Author of "Police Business Comes First.")

If Detective Carter didn't expose Larry Monahan then he, himself would have to take the rap for stealing that five grand. But Monahan had stolen more than the money—he had taken Carter's daughter, too. And that, curiously, tied Carter's hands!



John Carter lunged. . . .

"My God!" said the clerk plaintively. "Don't you ever sleep, Carter?"

A huge convention was swamping the hotels in Los Angeles, and for thirty-six hours John Carter had not slept. Moreover, for half that time his head had ached ferociously from being hit by a fist armed with brass knucks. The convention had attracted a host of pickpockets and

JOHNN CARTER, burly house-detective of the swank El Miramar hotel, grinned at the haggard desk clerk.

card-sharps. One of the wolves whom Carter had weeded from among the frolicking sheep, had fought back. Carter had rushed him off the premises with a minimum of disturbance; quiet, tactful, resolute. Carter made it as much his job to protect the customers' nerves as to guard their pockets.

"Sure, I could use some sleep," he admitted, with a quick, humorous smile that deepened the crow's feet about his keen grey eyes. "Call me in two hours."

Slowly he walked across the great lobby, tensed for fear he would stagger like a drunk; for his head throbbed agonizingly and weariness was a hypnotic in his veins. Outwardly, however, he showed no sign of his long vigil. His hair, thick and black, was unruffled, and his big frame, still youthfully lean of hip and massive of shoulders, did not slouch.

"Lord, I haven't seen Ruth since the convention mobbed us," he was thinking. "Wonder if the kid—"

Turning an angle in the corridor, he swore in sudden surprise. He saw the door to his own room opening.

A man was stealing out of his room! *A sneak thief!*

Furtively the prowler darted across the corridor and headed for the basement stairway.

Carter started to lunge after him—but as the sneak thief plunged down the stairs, a wall light shone full on his lean face.

John Carter froze in his tracks, thunderstruck.

"Good God, it's Larry Monahan!"

Down the stairs sped the young man, out of sight, out of hearing. . . .

JOHN CARTER did not follow. Heavily, one hand against the wall, he trudged to his room and entered. Switching on the light, he stood by the door, frowning, trying to make his aching brain

unsnarl a tangle of human destinies so abruptly, so crushingly flung upon him.

"I haven't known young Larry long," he warned himself. "I mustn't judge too quick. If Ruth has faith in him, he ought to be a good kid."

But what—*what* had his daughter's fiancé been doing in this room?

Carter was orderly by habit. Looking around now, it was plain to him that his room had been searched from carpet to curtain rod; for the leather armchair was moved from the radio, the humidifier on his dresser was too close to his brush set, and a drawer jutted out an inch. However, a hasty look showed nothing to be missing.

"Larry was in the smoking room when I talked to that soused polo player," Carter reflected. "I wonder. . . ?"

He went to his writing desk, taking a key from his pocket—but swore in dismay, in a profound and staggering fury, as he saw that the desk drawer had been jimmied open!

Hastily he yanked the drawer open.

"They *are* gone! He did take 'em, damn him!"

Here in the drawer he had locked away five thousand dollars in banknotes.

Courtney Burris, a guest—who moved in the cinema-polo crowd—had given the money to Carter early in the evening, down in the smoking room. Maudlin drunk, Burris had had sense enough to give his cash into safe keeping.

"Hold it for me until morning, Carter," he'd whispered. "I don't dare ask the clerk to put it in the safe—I owe a big bill and they're dunnin' me. Sure, I'll pay it, but I can't use *this* money. It's my sister's. I got to pay a loan with it."

Carter had assented. Being tactful and confidence-inspiring was not only natural to him but part of his job.

And he had locked this money here. . . .

His big chest lifted to a slow, shaky breath. He lighted a cigarette and puffed deep—forcing back the savage, bitter anger ablaze in him, forcing himself to reason this situation out coolly. His daughter's happiness was at stake, and his own peace of mind, as well.

Should he tell Ruth? Or maybe—maybe arrange so that Larry Monahan would drop clean out of her existence? Have him jailed and sent up without getting word to her.

Pro and con he debated the matter, his brain an aching whirl of despair. Either way meant heartache for the kid.

"I'll have to tell her," he decided finally.

He knocked on the inside door to the adjoining room.

"Ruth?" he called, entering, switching the light on.

She wasn't in. Puzzled, his pulse suddenly hammering in his throat, panicky foreboding rising in him, he stared around. Edged into the frame of her bureau mirror was a sheet of paper. He almost ran to snatch it down. He read:

Dad,

When Larry finishes work at ten tonight, we're starting for Yuma to get it done in a hurry. We just can't file notice of intention and then wait three long days more before we can be married. Please don't be angry! We aren't silly; we're just so head over heels in love that we don't know noon from midnight!

Dad, I waited till nine, hoping you'd get off duty. Now I got to rush downtown and buy me some swell pajamas. Larry will pick me up downtown.

You'll celebrate with us tomorrow night, darling! Love from us both. . . . Ruth.

DAZEDLY, unbelievably, he reread the note. "Good God! They're getting married—married on money that that damned crook *stole from me!*"

"But he doesn't know I'm onto him. Maybe he'll come back with Ruth, and set up housekeeping with that five-grand for a back-log," Carter reflected grimly.

"Then I'll have to bust up Ruth's marriage—or go to jail *myself* for the theft of Burris's money!"

For he had no way of replacing the five grand! Larry Monahan had known it, but even that hadn't stopped him from the theft! He was vicious, *mean*—

"I'll wire to Yuma and have the police hold the kids!" Carter decided.

He hurried back into his own room.

But even as he picked up the telephone, cold dismay gathered about his heart. For he realized, by the time the Yuma officials bestirred themselves, Ruth and Larry would probably be already married! . . . Ruth would stick by Larry. She was like her mother. In spite of all hell, she'd stick. She'd never come home again. If Larry went to prison, she'd wait for him, enduring anything.

"Number, please? *Number, please?*" the operator rasped into his ear. He didn't hear her at all.

"*Good God!*" His big hands trembling, cold sweat suddenly beading his brow, he set down the phone. "I can't—I just *can't* risk anything like that happening to Ruth!"

But if he didn't expose Larry Monahan, and jail him—then he himself must take the rap for stealing five grand!

CARTER tried to get a little sleep on the sofa, but his aching brain poured a poison of restlessness through him.

He jumped as the telephone shrilled.

"This is Brennan, at headquarters," a voice rasped in the receiver. "Carter, we're looking for some banknotes. Thousand-dollar denomination. Here's the list of their numbers."

Carter penciled the numbers down as they were read off.

Abruptly a shout swelled in his throat.

The five banknotes which Larry had stolen from him were listed among these bills! He had the numbers in his desk.

"Brennan, wh-why you hunting these banknotes?"

"Remember that Jason Trust Company hold-up? These bills were taken by the thieves. They killed a watchman, getting away. So check with your hotel cashier. We're slapping a murder charge on any mug trying to shove one of these bills. Believe me," Brennan said grimly, "said mug will have to have damn good proof that he's innocent to save himself from getting hung!"

Long moments after he'd hung up, Carter stood staring at the phone, his face livid, haggard.

"Damn him! . . . Larry stole that money from me, likely, because he's low on cash. He'll try to spend some of it, making a splurge. And they'll grab him! To save from being hung for murder, he'll have to explain that he stole the money. And tell exactly *where*. That'll send him to the penitentiary. Serve him damn well right! But—Ruth—Lord, that'd break her heart. . . .

A sweet wedding present that would be for the kid! Having her husband jammed into prison!

HE could prevent that, Carter realized. He could take the midnight T.A. plane to Yuma. There, he could hire a car and start back to Los Angeles—he could meet the kids on the road, and take the money from Larry!

Hurrying to the lobby, he told the desk clerk to phone the airport and make a reservation for him. Then he rushed to the garage behind the hotel.

Driving his roadster out, he almost rammed another car just coming up the drive.

He recognized the car—and the girl who jumped out.

"Ruth!" he called, leaping out of his roadster.

She turned, saw him, and flung herself

into his arms. "Oh, Dad!" Bitterly she wept, in heart-broken humiliation.

"Shhh, honey," he whispered, stroking her dark hair.

From the other car, a tall, muscular man came slowly toward them. His lean face was white and tense, his brown eyes were shadowed and brooding. Seeing him, Carter's arms tightened convulsively about Ruth; he fought back a wild impulse to grab Monahan by the throat.

"Dad!" Ruth wept. "I *won't* marry Larry! He's mean, he's c-cruel! We—we went to buy a wedding ring, and he bought such an awful' *cheap* one! I didn't mind. But then he wired ahead for reservations in Yuma at the cheapest, filthiest hotel there. Our wedding night, our f-first night together, and he wants to spend it where the trains almost step on you as they scream past! I wouldn't mind that, either—if he hadn't any money to spare—but he's got *plenty* of money! I saw five thousand dollars in his wallet. If that's the way he's going to be *always*—"

"Shh, honey!" Carter said. "Come to my room, both of you."

They walked into the hotel, Larry following.

And then, nearing his suite, Carter started in surprise.

The door was standing open!

"Kid," he told Ruth, "you go on to your own room."

She hurried past, but Carter turned into his own room, and Larry followed. Carter's pulse skipped a beat as he recognized the intruders: the room clerk, two plain-clothesmen and—Lippy Jordan—Lippy Jordan, whom he had given a bum's rush from the hotel before he'd had a chance to pull off any cardsharpping tricks!

They were searching the room, these detectives! So busy at it they didn't notice him enter.

"Hello, Evans," he said, "Lo, Wayne."

They whirled. And Lippy Jordan yelled,

"There he is! There's the man who tried to pass one of those stolen thousand-dollar bills on me, yesterday!"

"Boys, Lippy Jordan is hopped up—"

"Hopped up, hell!" yelled the cardsharp. "Search this room! You'll find the money!"

"We got to, Carter," apologized Evans.

And then, amazing realization crashed into Carter's consciousness. Lippy Jordan and Courtney Burris were in cahoots! The deal was a frameup! Burris had given him five one-grand notes, *knowing* that they were stolen bills. That's why Lippy wanted them planted in this room! So that Lippy could bring cops in here to find the bills, and get him, Carter, hauled off to jail! What's more, Carter realized, if he tried to clear himself by yelling for Burris to testify—it would be discovered that Burris had checked out and left no address behind! There'd be no way for him to prove his innocence!

CAREFULLY the detectives searched the room.

"If they searched Larry, by God, they'd find that money!" Carter reflected. "Robbing me, he did me a favor. I'd be headed to the penitentiary right now if he hadn't stolen those bills. Not that I owe him any thanks, the sneakin' thief! . . . Maybe I ought to work it so that they *would* search him—so that he'd go to jail like he deserves!"

He was staring at Larry. And young Larry, tense, white of face, guardedly winked at him. *Winked* at him!

Carter nearly dropped in his tracks as now, at last, the whole truth crashed home to him. He grabbed a chair, steadying himself, and thinking, thinking. . . . Larry had never intended to rob him! He'd taken the money, yes. But not to spend it, not to keep it for himself! He'd taken it to put the kibosh on this frame-up against his girl's father. . . .

"Jordan," said Larry, stepping for-

ward, "at dinner, this evening, you and that crooked polo-player, Courtney Burris, were parked in a booth at Henry's. I was in the booth behind you. I overheard you and Burris planning to frame—"

"Jack 'em up! *Quick!* All of you!"

Swift as the blurred strike of a rattler, Lippy Jordan's hand swept from under his coat with an automatic.

Everybody's hands went up.

But Larry, as he jerked his arms up, struck out with his foot in a sweeping kick so hard that he knocked Jordan's legs sidewise out from under him.

Cra-ack! The pistol spat as Jordan fell.

Larry staggered; and the next instant John Carter, diving headlong, landed onto Jordan with all his bulk. His knees smashed into Jordan's midriff and one swinging fist smacked to Jordan's chin with a bang like a board against a barn. Jordan relaxed, twitching.

Hastily Carter scrambled up.

"Take him, boys! Larry, you hurt—?"

"Not much. Creased my ribs, that's all, sir."

Carter laid his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Son," he said huskily, "that was good teamwork."

The door was flung open. Ruth, her lovely face white and terrified, darted in. Straight to Larry she came.

"I heard a shot! Larry, y-you all right?"

He laughed and kissed her. . . .

The detectives left with Lippy Jordan.

"You know," Carter said thoughtfully, "I'd like to go to a wedding. In fact, 'I'd like it so much that I'd contribute a couple hundred dollars in good, honest money toward expenses.'"

Ruth's grey eyes widened. She looked at Larry. Larry looked at her. And both uttered deep, tremulous sighs.

"You know," said Larry, "you're pretty good at the old teamwork yourself, Dad!"

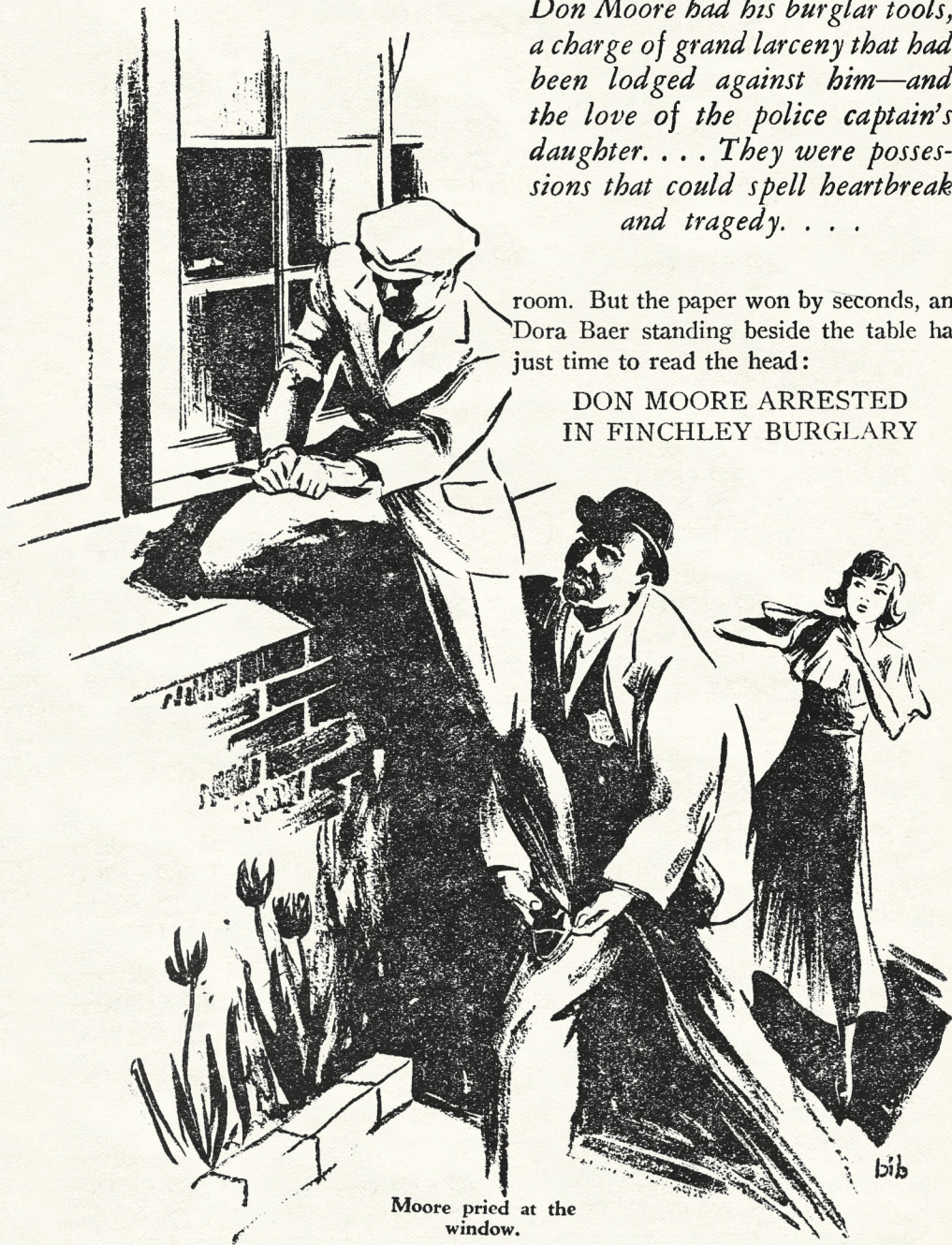
DANGEROUS TALENT

by ERIC TAYLOR

Don Moore had his burglar tools, a charge of grand larceny that had been lodged against him—and the love of the police captain's daughter. . . . They were possessions that could spell heartbreak and tragedy. . . .

room. But the paper won by seconds, and Dora Baer standing beside the table had just time to read the head:

DON MOORE ARRESTED
IN FINCHLEY BURGLARY



Moore pried at the window.

CAPTAIN ROD BAER of the Detective Bureau, the evening paper, and Mrs. Baer's good dinner arrived almost simultaneously in the dining

when her mother came in one door and her father the other.

Her face whitened until her lips were like scarlet lines drawn across snow. A

horrible nausea rose from her stomach. She couldn't get air down into her lungs, and for an instant she thought she was going to faint.

Her father gave her a startled glance, then seeing the paper, he nodded understandingly.

"You went to school with that fellow Moore, didn't you Dora?"

Her mother looked up with startled eyes.

"What's the matter with Don?" she asked tremulously.

"He's just n.g.," Rod Baer said flatly. "He worked in the Acme Safe Company's plant for two years and got to thinking he knew all about 'em. He took to running wild. We suspected him here, but he slid out of town before we could get anything on him. He got into trouble in other places, but managed to keep out of the pen. Six months ago he came back to town and went to work at Finchley's, driving their car. Now Finchley's jewelry's gone and Don Moore's in jail. He'll go over this time."

Dora Baer was so quiet through the meal and ate so little that her father glanced at her uneasily from time to time. But by keeping her eyes fixed on her plate she got through the meal without breaking down.

She followed her father into his den. He looked up at her curiously from filling his pipe. She closed the door behind her. "If it's about Moore, there's nothing I can do," he said grimly. Then his voice softened. "I know how you feel, Dora, but Moore's no good. He's had plenty of chances. It hurts when an old schoolmate gets into trouble. But there's nothing anyone can do. As soon as we turn up the loot, Moore will be sent up. You'd better try and forget him."

"But he's innocent!" Dora blurted. "He didn't steal the Finchley jewels."

Rod Baer laughed harshly. "Poor wronged boy! Innocent!"

"You make it so much harder. You'll never get the Finchley jewels from Don. He hasn't got them. He didn't steal them. I know it because I—" she burst into sudden tears—"I did!"

ROD Baer's mouth dropped open, and for a moment he was speechless. Then he gasped, "You—you—*what?*"

"I stole them, Dad. I didn't think Don would be arrested. Then—then—I wasn't going to say anything. But I can't let him go to the penitentiary. I can't!"

The captain was out of his chair. His thumbs were biting deep into her slim shoulders. She cowered against the door. Her eyes looked pleadingly into his, and dropped before the relentless hardness they saw.

"You—a thief! It's a lie. You couldn't have done it. How could you open a safe?"

"Minnie O'Keefe showed me the combination. I was over there to see her once when she worked for them. For a joke Minnie opened the safe and showed me how. She's seen Mrs. Finchley open it."

"She put you up to it! Where is she?"

"No-no! She didn't. That was all a joke. She just wanted to see if she could. She had nothing to do with this. Don't you remember? She married Tom Daley, that young cop, and they went west some place."

"You'll have to go to prison!"

In the two minutes she had been in the den, her father had aged fifteen years. His face was the color of wet ashes, his eyes were muddy.

"You wouldn't do that to me!" Dora whispered tensely. "You couldn't. You know you couldn't! Besides, it would ruin you. You've got to help me, Dad. You know you've got to."

He looked at her bitterly. "Girl, if

you're not entirely mad, will you tell me why you did this thing?"

Dora looked sullen. She was silent for a full minute, then burst out: "You won't let me work. You want me to stand at Mother's elbow all day learning to be a housewife. I'm twenty-one, but every dollar I need for stockings, every quarter for movies, I have to ask you for. You make me explain in detail where every nickel I spend goes. I wanted some money of my own. I wanted to be able to buy things without explaining to everybody. I wanted some excitement. Last night I thought about Finchley's safe. I got up and sneaked out of the house. I meant to take just one little thing, but when I saw—"

"Where is it?" the captain demanded angrily.

"The jewelry? I have it. I can give it back. I was afraid to bring it home. I mailed it to myself at Ford City, general delivery. I can take a train in the morning and get it."

The captain picked up the telephone.

"Hello, Chris, this is Baer. Is Hayden there? . . . Put him on.

"Hello, Tom, Rod speaking. I've got something different on the Finchley case. Yeh. I'll bring the stuff down tomorrow. Sure, all of it. Keep quiet about it. You can let that kid, Moore, loose. No, I don't know myself yet. Maybe I won't be able to get the guy; I'm bartering with a stool. But with a fellow like Finchley, the main thing is to get his stuff back."

Baer pushed the telephone away as if it were a loathsome reptile.

He looked at Dora. "I may change my mind yet!" he snapped. "Tomorrow, you and I go to Ford City. Wednesday, I'm taking you up-State to show you the woman's side of the Big House. Now get to your room!"

DORA locked her bedroom door, went quickly to a closet. In five minutes

she stepped quickly to the roof of a porch. She made no sound sliding down a post to the cement driveway.

A taxi took her to the jail exit at police headquarters. She stood there five minutes and began to wonder if Don Moore had already been released. Then he appeared in the doorway.

He caught her glance and followed her down Foote Street when she turned away. After going two blocks she stopped.

Don Moore caught up to her. "What a little thoroughbred you are to meet me!" he began. He saw her pale, strained face, the wet lashes, and glistening eyes. "Honey—"

Dora glanced up and down the deserted wholesale street. "Listen, Don! We've got to hurry. I'm not going to say one word about your broken promise now. I've got to get back home, and I've got to take the Finchley jewels back with me. To get you out, I had to make a—a bargain with Dad. The price is the return of the loot."

His eyes widened. Then he was leaning back against a wall shaking with laughter.

"What's the matter, Don?"

He shook his head. "I suppose I'll have to give myself up and spend the night in that lousy jail!"

"Don, be serious! They were going to put you over for a long sentence. You don't know what I had to do to beg Dad off. You must give them up!"

He became suddenly serious. "Just what did you do to make him come to that agreement?"

"I confessed. It was the only way I could get him to release you. I couldn't bear the thought of you going to prison. I told him I was the thief."

"It must have pretty near killed him."

"It did, Don. I felt like—like the lowest thing that ever lived. Now you know why you've got to give me the jewelry right now."

"But I can't!" He said desperately.

Dora ~~replied~~. "You mean you've sold it?"

"I mean you'd make a pretty big sacrifice for me, but you haven't got very much faith in me. I didn't do the Finchley job."

She stared at him unbelievably.

"I don't ~~blame~~ you for suspecting me," he said slowly. "But I've been there six months. You told me if I proved to you that I could settle down and behave myself by holding a steady job for a year, you'd marry me. Would I have risked that, sweet? Besides, I don't need money. You've cured me of my expensive habits and I don't need more than my wages. And what a snide caper for me to pull. Nobody but a policeman would think I'd be dumb enough to spring a job where I worked."

"Oh, I'm glad, Don, *glad*. . . But what on earth can we do?"

"Go back and tell your father the truth."

"I can't do that, Don. He wouldn't believe me now. He'd think we were in on it together. That it was all a trick to get you out of jail."

"And if you were able to take the stuff to him; that would brand you as a thief. There's a lunchroom a couple of blocks from here. Let's get some coffee and think. . . ."

It was two hours later that the worry creases left Don's forehead and he said brightly, "Go call your father—he knows by now you sneaked out. Tell him to be at the corner of Oakview and Hillton—alone—at one-thirty. Don't tell him any whys—just say, be there, and hang up."

WHEN the captain's small sedan pulled up to the curb on Oakview, two figures stepped from the shadows.

Baer saw his daughter with Don Moore and jumped from the car.

Moore held up his hand. "I think we'll

be able to explain everything in about five minutes, Captain. Follow me and don't make any more noise than necessary."

"Follow you!" the captain thundered. "You'll follow me—the pair of you—right back to—"

"Do you want the Finchley jewels?" Moore asked patiently.

In the semi-darkness they saw the captain's eyes snapping fire. "Go on!" he said grimly.

Moore led them down the street a block, cut across a lawn to the side of a big house. Its windows all were dark. He stopped near the back of the building and said: "Search me!"

The captain did so, thoroughly.

He found two small instruments, the possession of which constituted a felony, but made no comment. At last he stepped back from Moore with a satisfied grunt.

Moore pried at the window with one of the instruments.

"You can't do that! I'll not be a party—"

Moore laughed softly and raised the window. Baer moved forward and grabbed him by the leg just as he was disappearing into the house.

"Let go, Captain. There's nothing to be scared of. If anything goes wrong; you followed me here and were waiting to trap me. I'll not gyp you." He went on in, closing the window behind him.

The minutes dragged by with Dora and the captain breathing hard. At last the window above their heads opened almost without sound.

Don Moore leaned out. A lot of the confidence had gone from his face. He looked worried, jumpy.

"I didn't raise them. I'm going to be in here a few minutes; maybe you and Dora had better go back to the car."

The captain started to protest. Don Moore leaned farther out of the window.

"Maybe you'd better leave me your whistle."

"Give him his chance, Dad; he's trying to get us all out of a jam."

Reluctantly, Baer gave in to Dora. A second later they were crossing the lawn, moving quietly back toward their car.

Don Moore backed from the window, picked up a book from the library table, and crashed it through the glass. He went into the hall, crossed to the large drawing room, and hid himself in the thickly gathered drapes over its door.

For a moment silence followed the crash of glass, then a door on the upper floor opened softly.

Padding footfall sounded softly in the darkness. A robed figure moved past Don, went to the windows, and returned. The figure stood motionless for a few seconds within reach of Don's arm. It moved out into the hall.

Don's straining ears listened for the faint footfalls. He stepped from the drape, moved into the hall after the figure. Light shone from the library, a shifting light that bobbed up and down and around, and at last remained fixed in some position that permitted only a pale reflection to reach the hall.

Don moved into the library doorway. The robed figure stood before a bookcase. In his left hand was a flashlight. On top of the bookcase was a black automatic. He drew out a book, looked fearfully over his shoulder just as Don drew back from the doorway. He put the flashlight on the table, then book in one hand and gun in the other he went to the window. For a long minute he looked cautiously into the outdoors. He stepped back, drawing closed the window drapes, and returned to the table. Putting down the automatic, he opened the book.

It was a dummy volume, the insides of its pages having been cut out to form a hiding place. From it came a gleaming neck-

lace. At that instant Don Moore blew a long blast on the police whistle.

The necklace and book fell from shocked fingers. A bony hand darted like a snake at the automatic.

"It's no good, Finchley," Don said, "the police are at that window."

Finchley's taut mouth sagged. He seemed to lose a little of his height. They heard heavy feet running across the lawn. Finchley's hand drew back from the gun. Don Moore walked to the table and took it.

"That's why you hired a guy with a bad rep," he said. "You thought I'd look good in a frame. Come on—we'll let the captain in by the door."

THEY sat drinking coffee in an all-night restaurant.

"How'd you put the finger on Finchley, Don?" the captain asked.

"It was a guess. But when you see a guy spending all his spare time on the market pages, and the guy is getting thinner every day, more nervous every day, and half his callers are collectors, even if the guy is holding on to a big front, you can figure he's getting pinched. Then when his insured jewelry is hooked, and you know it's an inside job, and you're the only one beside Finchley who could have pulled it—why then it makes Finchley a pretty good guess, doesn't it?"

The captain nodded. "It was. But I admit I didn't feel comfortable when you sailed that book through his window to make him show his hiding place. Don, there's a couple of instruments you had in your pocket—if you've made your last prowl, you won't be needing them."

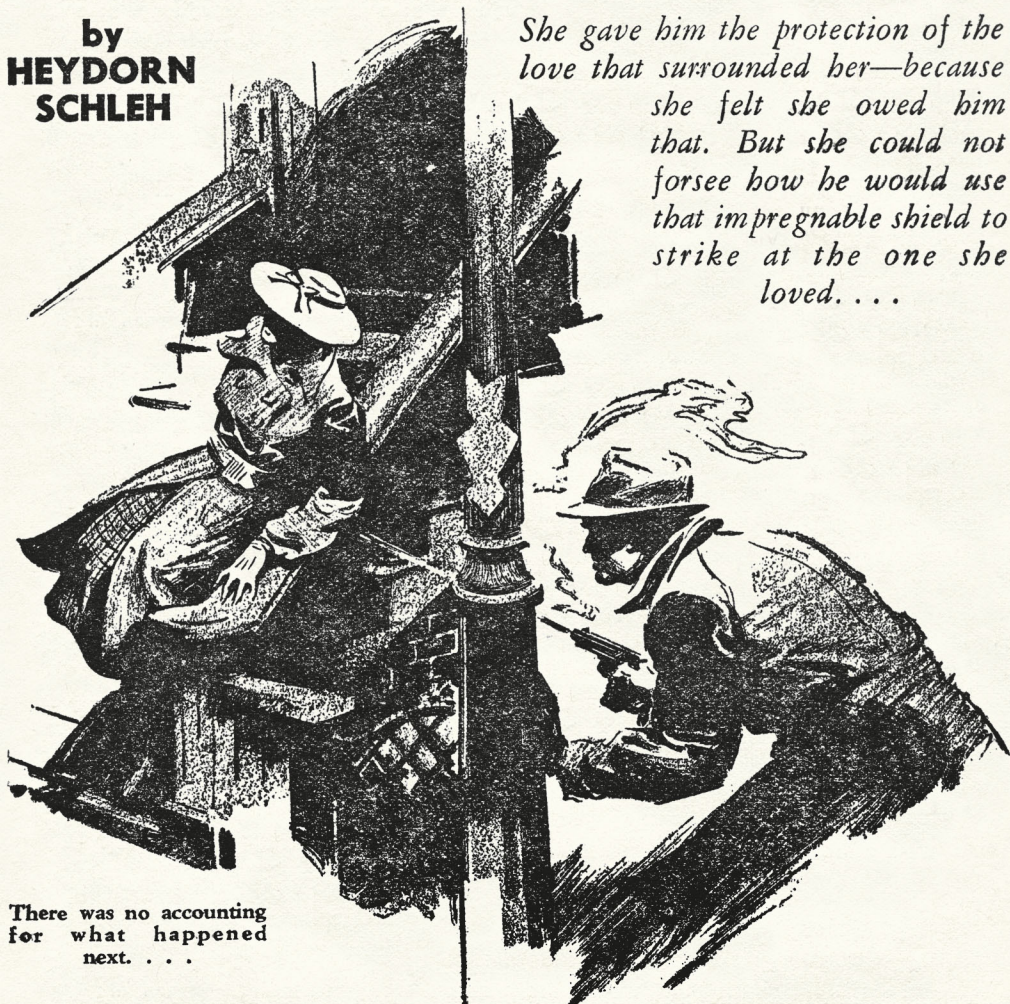
Don Moore grinned and handed them to the captain.

"I guess you'll be coming into the family now. I'd better keep those things in case you took a notion to help me out again some time."

FEMALE IMPERSONATOR

by
**HEYDORN
SCHLEH**

She gave him the protection of the love that surrounded her—because she felt she owed him that. But she could not foresee how he would use that impregnable shield to strike at the one she loved. . . .



There was no accounting
for what happened
next. . . .

UGLY purplish blue swelled under Ann's right eye, and beneath that a puff of sickly yellow. Bruises show up bad on blondes.

To the regular night trade at Bennie's that meant just one thing: Jimmy was home again. So there were no wisecracks. That night trade, just around the corner from Center Street, knew too much about life and heartaches and bruises on its own account to have much to say. Anyway, most of them knew the story, and those who didn't guessed it, for it was pretty much the usual thing. Jimmy was just another punk, and Ann just another girl

waiting for him to come back—from up the river.

Most of them liked Ann. Not that she was the angel of dark down-town nights, nor anything particularly glamorous. She was just part of the place—comforting, satisfying, like Bennie's coffee on a cold night. And dependable. It was Bennie's boast that she had never taken so much as an hour off since the place opened. She called them by name, and they called her Ann—night reporters, headquarters dicks, pressmen, truckers, and small-time punks like Jimmy. When they got to be big-time, they quit coming to Bennie's.

That is, most of them did. Moe Levick never quit. His big places uptown served caviar to suckers and had big names for front men; but every few nights Moe would be back at Bennie's, sipping coffee he didn't want while his little black eyes hungrily devoured something he did want—and never could have. They never spoke of that, he and Ann. For that matter, he never had much to say. Just feasted his eyes across that barrier of twenty-six inches of white porcelin until his coffee was gone, then slipped a nickel under the edge of the saucer and went away.

He and Ann's Jimmy had been small-time together, back when Bennie's first opened. But there was a difference. Jimmy had been tall and good-looking, in a boyish sort of way, with an unruly shock of yellowish hair; while Moe was hammered down too close to the ground, with hands too big for his wrists—and many suspected that even the name Levick had been sawed out of something complicated and unpronounceable. Then too, Moe had gone up-town, and big-time, during the golden prohibition era, while Jimmy stayed just punk. The latter difference didn't show on Moe; he was that kind. But the other he couldn't forget.

So there may have been some connection, as some of them whispered, between the bruises on Ann's face and the way some of Jimmy's best-planned jobs got bungled right afterward, and Jimmy would find himself saying "Hello" to the Warden again. Moe could stand seeing so much of that—some professed to be able to tell by the light in his eyes just how much—and Moe had more than a nodding acquaintance in certain high places. And then, when Ann would begin to look thin and hungry from waiting, somehow Jimmy would get sprung and come back.

And then again, maybe it just happened.

PURPLISH blue swelled under Ann's right eye. Moe might have stood that, sitting at the counter sipping his coffee, though he looked tired that night, and his eyes shown like little steel darts. But when she stopped suddenly, her hand going involuntarily to her side, and her face twisting in the anguish of pain she fought back—Moe stiffened and half got up from the stool.

"Hurt?"

It was a clumsy thing to say, clumsily spoken, as, somehow, all of Moe's words were. She gave him a startled look, as though she understood. Just that, and a forced smile for reply.

"Cheese on rye!" she called through the opening to the smoky grill. The boy over the range cocked his cap a little further to the side. Moe gulped his coffee in confused haste, slipped the nickel under the saucer, and fumbled for the check.

It was then that their eyes met across that white porcelin barrier, as though for the first time in all those years they had dared look *over* it instead of at it. Ann's eyes were big and blue and wide-open and sort of wondering; and Moe's, hard and piercing, were reading through them the depths of her soul and the flutter of her heart. For seconds they stood like that. Then, as though a wordless conversation were finished, a conclusion reached, Moe nodded a little.

"We'll cool that guy . . . tonight!"

Perhaps the truck driver sitting on the next stool didn't even hear it, he spoke so softly and was gone so quickly. But Ann swayed a little and caught the edge of the counter to steady herself a moment before she took the empty cup away and slipped the coin into her apron pocket. Perhaps she wasn't quite sure—of herself.

For the long hour that it took her to decide that, no one would have known. It was only when she was sure—then her face flushed feverishly hot, and her blue

eyes blazed. Then she took off her apron, folded it, and went to Bennie at the cash register.

"Bennie, I've got to go out! Right away—now! Only for an hour, Bennie! I'll be right back—"

Bennie was a big man, slow to move. He started to say something, then changed his mind and only nodded. And by that time Ann was back, pulling on her tight-fitting hat that covered the wrong eye and slipping into her coat. And a few men at the counter turned to watch her go.

IT WAS only two blocks. Ann almost ran. But Moe had moved even faster. As she stopped before the tenement doorway, a shadow moved in another dark doorway across the deserted street; and then she noticed the car parked without lights at the corner. Rat-trap, Moe would have called it. She raced up three flights of stairs.

Jimmy wasn't sober. There was a half-empty bottle of cheap liquor on the table, and the little room stank with it. Jimmy was swaying on the edge of the bed, struggling with his trousers and mumbling something about "Big job. . . Moe sent for me . . . somethin' big. . ." He didn't curse her; he didn't even notice her until she reached over him and turned out the light.

"Say, what t' hell—you—"

She took him by the hand, half dragged and half led him to the window, and raised the shade.

"Y' goddam li'l rat—"

He started to fall. She clutched him, held him, shook him. Then, sobered a little, his bleary eyes began to distinguish things. The man in the doorway opposite was smoking a cigarette, the red glow almost concealed by his cupped hand.

Ann, holding Jimmy, could feel it, as though it took minutes for the impulse to travel along deadened nerves and register

in his stupified mind. It ended in a scream—a chilling, ungodly, horrified scream like that of a cornered, cringing, frightened beast. He was sober then, staggering back, trembling, sobbing, pleading.

"They'll get me, Ann! For God's sake—don't let them kill me! Get me out of here! *Do something!* Y'gotta save me—"

And Ann knew he was right. She did have to save him. She couldn't have helped herself. Grotesquely enough, she thought of Bennie's. Things that had to be done.

She moved deliberately then. Mechanically, as though she were wiping spilled coffee from the porcelin counter-top or filling the coffee urn. It seemed an eternity to the cowering man, feverishly obeying her hushed commands. But he got into one of her skirts, and she helped him put on her coat, and fixed the tight-fitting hat on his head. When that was done, she started to turn away.

He hesitated only a moment—to reach under the pillow for his automatic. She saw that move, and tried to grasp it from him. They struggled in the darkness.

But it was a brief struggle, and silent, except for the dull thump of his big fist in her face, flinging her back on the bed. Then the door opened. She saw him in the sickly yellow light from the hallway, framed in the doorway—a figure in her clothes, with the face of a rat. She didn't get up. She just lay there.

The stairs creaked under Jimmy's weight. The shadow in the doorway opposite dropped the cigarette and stiffened.

There is no accounting for what happened in the next few seconds. Why the trigger man braced in the doorway held his fire. Or how Moe could leap from the car and cross the street like a flash of lightning. Or why, even as he grasped for the figure in Ann's clothes to drag it to safety, it turned on him, and flame spat

from an automatic full in his face. Moe thought of that, reeling back, before the darkness came. It wasn't his face or his head that hurt—it was something else.

A cop rounded the corner on the run. Jimmy saw him, fired once, then turned away. Another cop came from the opposite direction. Jimmy hesitated before their cross-fire, backed toward a doorway, firing twice more. Then suddenly he twisted, like a question mark silhouetted against the far street-light, and plunged forward.

The two policemen approached with smoking guns ready. But there was no need for that: Jimmy lay very still.

BENNIE, waiting through the night, couldn't understand. Ann had always been dependable.

Nor could the doctors at the hospital understand—the man with only a slight scalp wound and powder burns lying there dazed, mumbling incoherently, as though there might have been a concussion—nor the girl standing in the corridor just

watching that door, frightened, afraid to go in, yet watching. A nurse in white touched her, but she wouldn't move. It was all very strange, even to those who are used to strange things.

The men from headquarters hesitated at the door, gave the doctor a questioning glance. The latter shrugged his shoulders. They went inside. Moe lay there like one in a trance.

Shannon, the Sergeant, slipped into the chair and touched Moe's hand. "Just like that rat—dressed in woman's clothes—"

Moe straightened, blinked a little. "What—rat?"

"Why, Jimmy, makin' a get-away, dressed in the girl's clothes. But they folded him double—"

Moe was upright in the bed then. He tossed the white sheet aside.

"Hey! What th'—"

There was a table beside the bed—a table with a white porcelin top. Ann, waiting outside the door, heard the bottles clattering to the floor as Moe thrust it aside—the last barrier.

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THE CRIME CLINIC



WITH the appearance of the January Issue DETECTIVE TALES passed a mile-stone—the half-way mark in the first year of its existence. But—not to plume ourselves too heavily—we can honestly say that there has been nothing half-way about the expressions of approval we have been fortunate enough to receive from our readers.

It makes us just a little uneasy—this unanimity of praise—this fan mail-bag contains a few thorns with the roses, a resounding thump or two mixed with the pats on the back. Your editor's *sitz-platz*, in fact, has long since developed callouses from the impact of well-placed kicks. They do him good—keep him wide-awake and briskly on his toes with the assurance that there is still room for improvement. . . . But this situation really has him on tender-hooks. We aren't kidding ourselves—we know that there is no such thing as perfection. But it's easier to make improvements when our readers call attention to our short-comings in their customary loud and vociferous tones. We can take it, gentle reader; come on—how about a reverberating razz or two? Maybe we'll regret it, but we're asking for it.

In the meantime, just to demonstrate that we aren't kidding you, take a look at the following:

Dear Sir:

May I, in my humble way, offer my sincere congratulations and heart-felt thanks? I have been reading detective stories for years and thought I had read the best. I felt that DIME DETECTIVE and BLACK MASK were the *crème de la crème* in their field of fiction—Now I am not so sure.

I was looking around for something to read and bought DETECTIVE TALES more through curiosity than with the expectation of finding something worth while. No doubt about it—it's a winner!

By all means let's have more of the same. Please ask Mr. Franklin Martin to give us more of Malachi Gunn!

This is the first time in my life I have ever bothered a busy editor, but I simply couldn't help it. Each and every story is worth the price of a year's subscription.

Frankly, the stories were so darned interesting that I read the magazine through without stopping. Never a dull moment—but I'm sorry, now, that I was so greedy. Now I have a whole month to wait before I can get more of the same. Sorry to have bothered you but I had to express my appreciation. Thanks again—it's really tops!

(Signed) Robert Turra,

112 E. Superior, Chicago, Ill.

[Continued on page 127]

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(Continued from page 124)

That's very nice, Mr. Turra. We have already expressed to you our appreciation of this fine cordial letter. But in a way it depresses us a little, too. We are haunted by the fear that we can't keep it up—that we are due for a tumble. Our wife has noticed the recent corrugations that have appeared in our once ivory-smooth brow. Our answer to her anxious queries is simply that *all* our readers seem to like **DETECTIVE TALES**. This reply invariably confuses her. Somehow she seems to be of the opinion that it is a response that doesn't make sense. Recently we have noticed that most of her reading seems to be confined to books on abnormal psychology. . . .

Ah, well—sweetness and light are pleasant enough. Maybe it's just that we have had a long and bitter life fraught with disillusion stumbling blocks. Perhaps we have eaten humble pie and sandy spinach for so long that we have lost our taste for more palatable dishes. Whenever the Chief calls us in—as he does at increasingly infrequent intervals—for some small word of approbation, we stand on one foot and then the other, scratch the back of our neck and feel very uncomfortable. It's only when he clouds up in righteous wrath and rains all over us that confidence returns and we feel brisk and refreshed—ready for any problem and sure of being able to lick it. There are probably flocks of dizzy bats winging wildly about in our belfry—but that's the way we are. . . .

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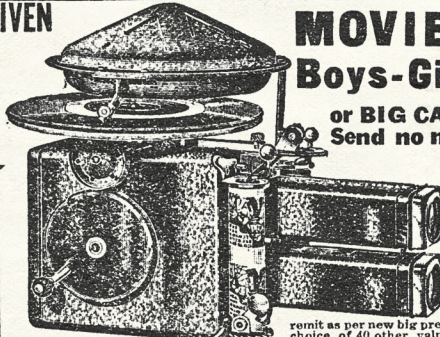
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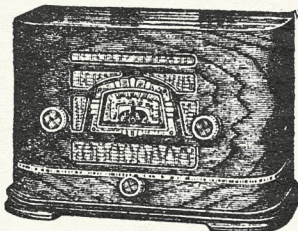
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money A combination Movie and Talkie Machine showing clear colored pictures of famous movie stars, etc., and sound. Variety of pictures and records available. What a show! What a sensation! Really remarkable - Amazing and practical. You can easily get one of these outfits by SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE beautifully colored art pictures with our famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE, used for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to your friends at 25c

remit as per new big premium catalog and plan book. Also choice of 40 other valuable premiums for selling only twelve boxes sale and returning only \$3. Our 40th year. For proof, write Tyrone Bank. Be first in your town. NOW! MAIL COUPON! WILSON CHEMICAL CO., INC., TYRONE, PA.



**Or
BIG
CASH**
Commission
known **WHITE CLOVE**
sores, etc., easily sold to
(FREE) and remitting per
for returning only \$3.
boxes Salve. **WILSON**

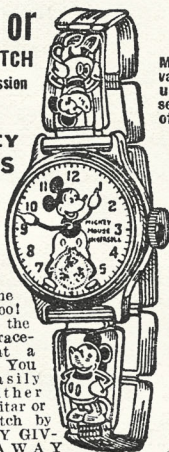


Big GUITAR or MICKEY MOUSE WATCH

Or Choice of Cash Commission

GIVEN
SEND NO MONEY
BOYS—GIRLS

Standard size Guitar, regulated—fretted ebonyed finger-board—pearl position dots. Just as shown. See Mickey Mouse on the Dial! In colors too! Mickey's also on the strap or link bracelet. What a



Many other valuable premiums in catalog sent with order of salve.

RADIO GIVEN

OR BIG CASH COMMISSION
Send No Money--Mail Coupon

Operates on either AC or DC; 5 tubes, picks up police calls, amateur and regular broadcast. Dynamic speaker, airplane dial. Long and short wave. Wonderful selectivity and sensitivity—one tone, compact. Shielded chassis and 25 ft. antenna. It's unusual! You can easily get one of these Radios by **SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE** beautifully colored art pictures suitable for framing with our famous **WHITE JOE VERINE SALVE** used for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you send to your friends at 25¢ a box (with picture **FREE**) and remit as per new big premium plan book! Get started with this plan - people are buying now. 40th year - **MAIL COUPON**

MAIL COUPON NOW

Date.....

WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. PP-91, Tyrone, Pa.

Gentlemen: Please send me 12 beautiful art pictures with 12 boxes WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE to sell at 25c a box (giving picture FREE). I will remit within 30 days, select a premium or keep cash commission as per new premium plan catalog sent with order, postage paid.

Name

R.F.D., St. or Box No.....

Town..... State.....

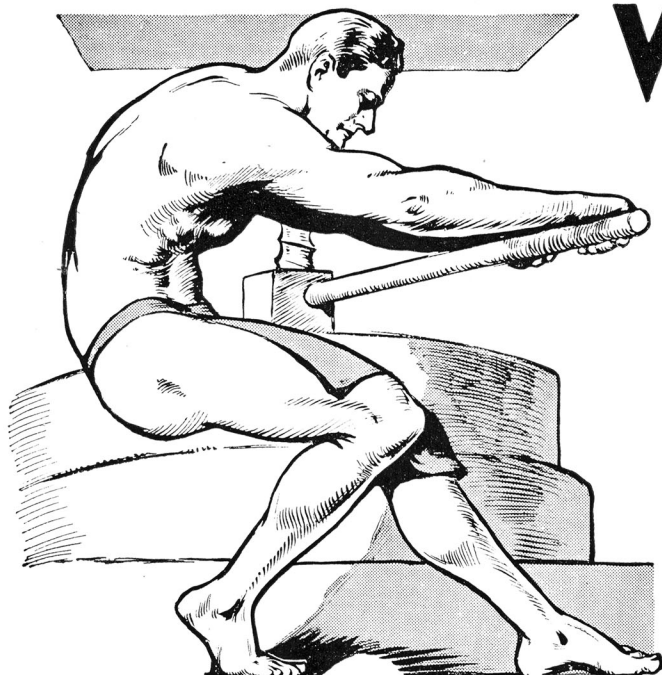
PRINT YOUR LAST NAME ONLY IN SPACE BELOW

[illegible]

Paste coupon on a penny postal card and mail today—NOW!

TRY - WILSON'S - COUGH DROPS - 5c EVERYWHERE

STOP YOUR Rupture Worries!



Learn About My Perfected RUPTURE INVENTION!

WHY worry and suffer any longer? *Learn now about my perfected invention for all forms of reducible rupture.* It has brought ease, comfort and happiness to thousands of men, women and children by assisting Nature to restore the natural strength to the weakened muscles. *You can imagine how happy* these thousands of rupture sufferers were when they wrote me to report results beyond their expectations. How would YOU like to be able to feel that same happiness—to sit down and write me such a message—a few months from today? Hurry—send coupon quick for Free Rupture Book, self-measuring chart and PROOF of results?

Simple and Efficient Support Assists Nature and Permits a Natural Strengthening of the Weakened Muscles

Surprisingly—continually—my perfected Automatic Air Cushion supports the weakened parts allowing Nature, the Great Healer, to swing into action! All the while you should experience the most *heavenly* comfort and security. No obnoxious springs, metal girdles or hard pads. No salves or plasters. My *complete* Appliance weighs but a few ounces, is durable, inconspicuous, sanitary and cheap in price. Wouldn't you like to say "goodbye" to rupture worries and "hello" to NEW freedom . . . NEW glory in living . . . NEW happiness with the help of Mother Nature and my *perfected* Air Cushion Appliance?

PROOF!

Read These Reports on Reducible Rupture Cases.

(In our files at Marshall, Michigan, we have over 31,000 grateful letters which have come to us entirely unsolicited and without any sort of payment.)

"Completely Recovered"

"This is to certify that I have completely recovered from my rupture after wearing your Appliance for one year. It has been two years since I quit wearing your Appliance and I surely feel fine and not bothered with the rupture at all."—Albert J. Cupps, 960 Dodge St., Dubuque, Iowa.

Likes Brooks Best

"I bought one of your Rupture Appliances in 1933, wore it day and night for one year and laid it aside last December. The rupture hasn't bothered me since. I used several others without success until I got a Brooks." J. B. McCarter, Route 2, Box 104, Oregon City, Ore.

"Runs and Plays"

"My son has not worn the Appliance for over a year. He wore one for ten years and I am very grateful now to think he has laid it aside. He is twelve years old, runs and plays hard like all boys and is never bothered about the rupture."—Mrs. M. George, Route 1, Box 103, Cumberland, Md.

SENT ON TRIAL!

My invention is never sold in stores nor by agents. Beware of imitations! You can get it only from my U.S. factories or from my 33 foreign offices. *And I'll send it to you on trial.* If you don't like it—if it doesn't "work"—it costs you NOTHING. But don't buy now. Get the facts about it FIRST! Write me today. I'll answer in plain envelope with interesting information *Free*. Stop Your Rupture Worries—send coupon. All correspondence strictly confidential.

Brooks Appliance Co.
173F State St.
Marshall, Michigan

CONFIDENTIAL COUPON for RUPTURE SUFFERERS

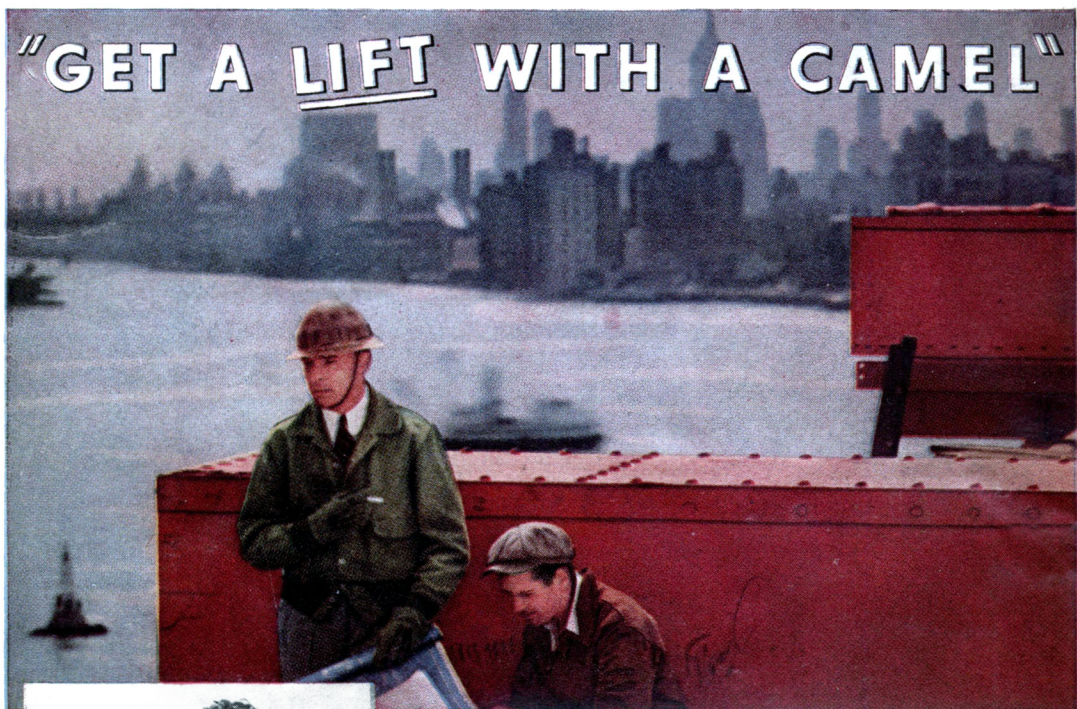
H. C. BROOKS, President
173F State St., Marshall, Mich.
Rush me your Free Book, self-measuring chart, proof of results, **all without obligation**, and in plain envelope.



C. E. BROOKS
Inventor

Name _____ State _____
whether _____
Street _____ for man, ☐
woman ☐
City _____ State _____ or child ☐

"GET A LIFT WITH A CAMEL"



"I AM A STEEL WORKER on the Triborough Bridge," says Ben Parsons (*above*). "When tired, I get a 'lift' with a Camel."

TUNE IN! Camel Caravan with Walter O'Keefe, Deane Janis, Ted Husing, Glen Gray and the Casa Loma Orchestra. Tuesday and Thursday—9 p. m. E. S. T., 8 p. m. C. S. T., 9:30 p. m. M. S. T., 8:30 p. m. P. S. T.—over WABC-Columbia Network.



WINTER SPORTS TAKE ENERGY TOO. Says Margaret Lynam (*left*): "When I feel exhausted from a long day outdoors, Camels renew my flow of energy."

- Camels are made from finer, **MORE EXPENSIVE TOBACCOS**—Turkish and Domestic—than any other popular brand.

(Signed) R. J. REYNOLDS TOBACCO CO., Winston-Salem, N. C.

