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TWELVE STORIES!



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# DETECTIVE

12  
STORIES

# TALES

15  
CENTS

*TWO SMASHING  
CRIME-MYSTERY NOVELS*

**SEE YOU AT  
MURDER MANSION!**

*by* **WILLIAM R. COX**

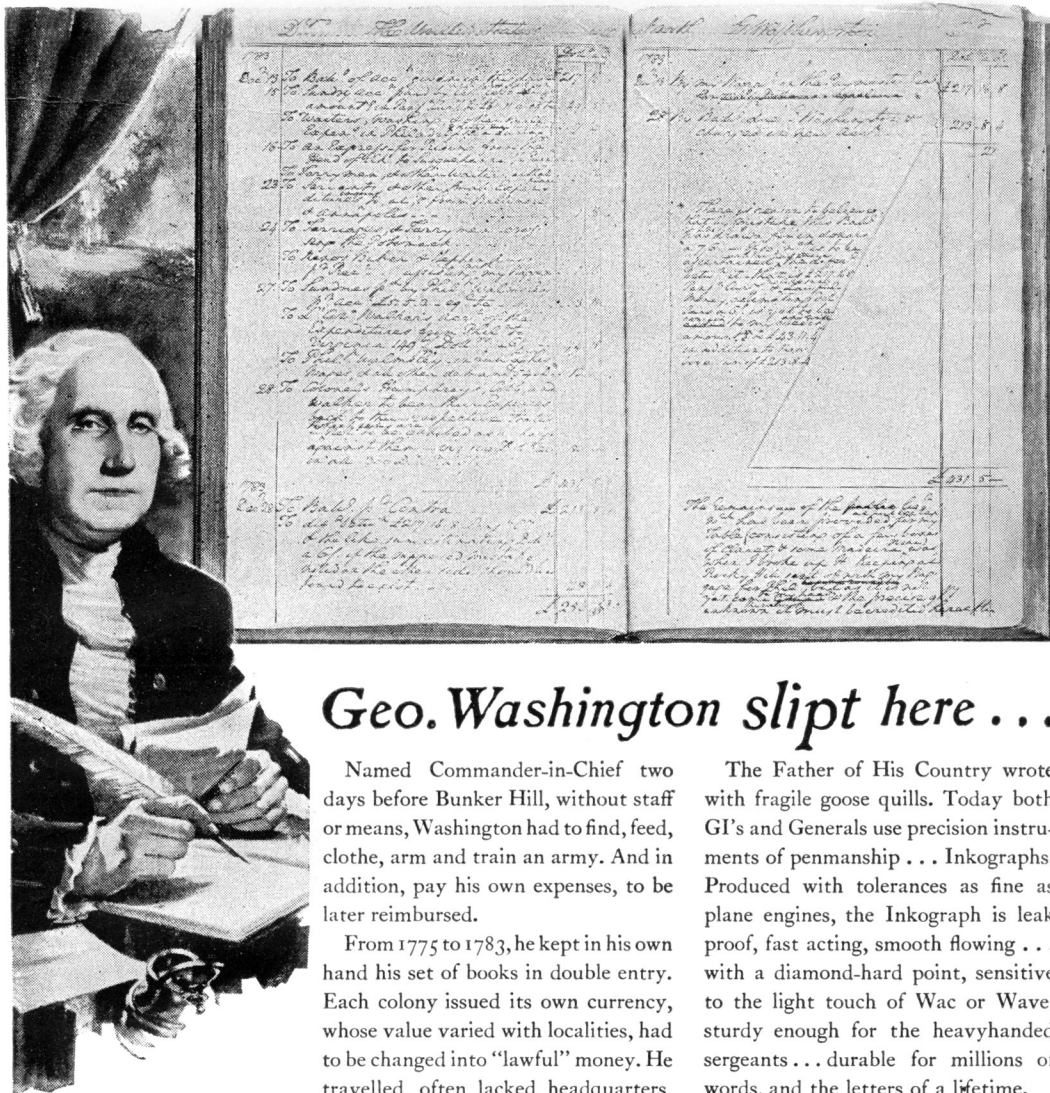
**THE LITTLE DOLL  
SAYS DIE!**

*by* **JOEL TOWNSLEY ROGERS**

**FLEMING —  
ROBERTS  
PLUNKETT  
ALLAN  
NORTON**







## Geo. Washington slept here . . .

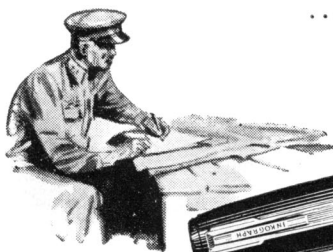
Named Commander-in-Chief two days before Bunker Hill, without staff or means, Washington had to find, feed, clothe, arm and train an army. And in addition, pay his own expenses, to be later reimbursed.

From 1775 to 1783, he kept in his own hand his set of books in double entry. Each colony issued its own currency, whose value varied with localities, had to be changed into "lawful" money. He travelled, often lacked headquarters, spent days in saddle, nights in the field.

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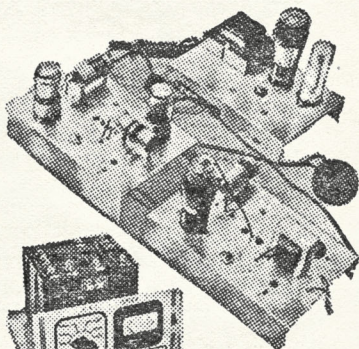
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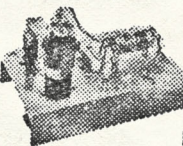


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# DETECTIVE TALES

April Issue  
Published February 28th!



VOL. TWENTY-NINE

MARCH, 1945

NUMBER FOUR

## *Two Startlingly Different Crime Novels*

1. **THE LITTLE DOLL SAYS DIE!** . . . . . **Joel Townsley Rogers** 10  
Major Herbert Creedy brought back the little devil-god from Vella Lavella, never dreaming its inscrutable smile meant that the woman he loved must die!
2. **SEE YOU AT MURDER MANSION!** . . . . . **William R. Cox** 74  
Somewhere in that murderous country estate lurked the invisible killer who'd shot Dan Trout's boss—plus a fortune in diamonds, and a flaming end to Dan's manhunting career!

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THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU



AGAINST REPRINT FICTION

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# THE CRIME CLINIC

THE "nice man" had been very good to little Gracie. He'd given her candy and told her stories, and they'd had a wonderful time. But when Gracie's daddy came home, everything changed. Daddy didn't like the nice man.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

The man had smiled. "Never mind who I am," he'd said. "Just listen—and look." He'd taken a long, sharp-bladed knife from his pocket, grabbed Gracie's arm. Gracie started to wail, but he paid no attention. "You're going to clean out the vault in the bank where you work, Moore," he'd said cheerfully, "and you're going to give me the money. If you do that, you'll get the kid back safely. If not—" He'd walked toward the door, holding Gracie firmly, the keen knife in plain sight of the staring, white-faced John Moore.

And then Gracie and the man had gone to get some more candy. . . .

Frantic with fear, John Moore had done as he was told. He'd walked out of the bank with two hundred thousand dollars in his briefcase. He'd turned it over to the fat man. And then he'd given himself up to the police, sealing his lips to all their questions until the deadline the fat man had set. But when the time came, and he made sure that Gracie had been returned safely, things took an unexpected turn.

State's Attorney Crawley made a steeple of his fingers and looked over the peak at Moore. "Tell me this. If this man wanted a twelve-hour start on the law, why should he stay around to return the child this morning?"

Moore's head began to throb. He hadn't thought of that. "I don't know," he admitted. "But what I've told you is the truth."

An assistant placed a sheaf of pictures on Crawley's desk. He spread them into a fan. "All right, Moore. Which if any of these men is the one?"

Moore sorted through the pictures, then pointed to one labeled Jack Kelly. There was no mistaking his evil, scarred face. "There he is. That's the man!" he exulted.

Crawley's face was red with rage, and the faces of those others—even Moore's best friend, Bill Merton—were cold with disbelief. For Jack Kelly, the fat man with the scar, had been executed for murder at San Quentin more than five years ago!

Baffled, the police let him go when bail was anonymously posted for him next day. John Moore went home, trying desperately to sort out the bloody tangle in his own mind. What if his wife's death had snapped his

mind? What if there had been no fat man?

He closed the door wearily and slipped the latch without bothering to turn on the light. Even without Gracie to welcome him, it was good to be home again. . . . His tired mind wavered and the short hair on the back of his neck began to tingle. He distinctly smelled cigar smoke. And either he was mad, or there was someone sitting on the sofa in his unlighted living room. Then a cigar-tip glowed red in the darkness and a man's voice chuckled softly:

"That's right. You've got company, John. Surprise."

"You," Moore gasped. "You!" He wanted to throw back his head and scream. He wanted to run. He couldn't. His mouth was cotton-dry. His feet refused to move.

The man got up from the sofa, chuckling. "Yes. That's right. Me."

With a tremendous effort of will, Moore backed away, the pounding of his heart shaking his slender body. He knew who had bailed him out. He knew why the man was here. He knew what was going to happen.

The bathroom door at his back, he raised his arms before his face. "No!"

"But yes," the fat man insisted. Then his powerful hands reached through the dark and fastened around Moore's throat. . . .

The ambulance intern labeled John Moore's body "Dead On Arrival," and the cop called it "suicide". That, as far as they were concerned, was that. But Herman Stone, ace detective on the Homicide squad, had other ideas—ideas that involved a tow-haired, candy-loving little girl, a haggard ex-strip-teaser, and a dead man who came back to kill!

Day Keene's long novel, "Dead On Arrival," will appear in the next big issue of DETECTIVE TALES!

Also in the April issue, a suspenseful crime novel by W. T. Ballard, plus novelettes and short stories by Andrew Holt, Henry Norton, William R. Cox, and many other detective-fiction favorites!

The April issue will be published February 28th!

—THE EDITOR





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INDEX

### Look at this Partial List of Things You Can Make and Do!

**MAKING**  
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—Combined Cabinet and Bookshelves  
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—Rose Pergola  
—Greenhouse  
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**Converting Spare Room into Workshop**  
**Workshop**  
**Choice and Care of Tools**  
**Wax Polishing, Fuming, etc.**  
**Choice of a Lathes**  
**Sheet-Tin Work**  
**Bent Wire Work**  
**Etching on Brass**  
**Copper and Steel**  
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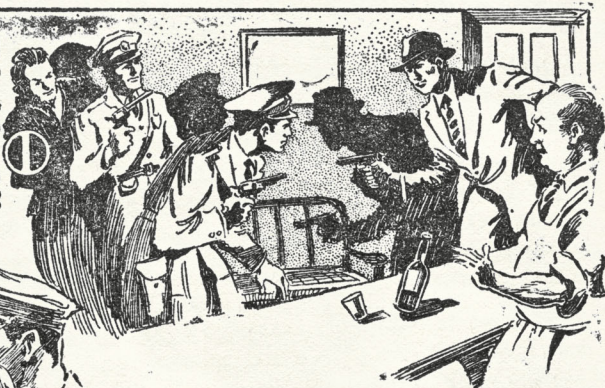




# WHEN GANGDOM RULED

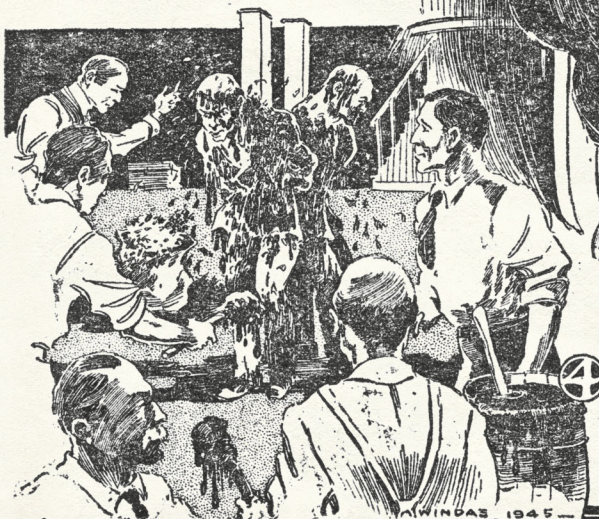
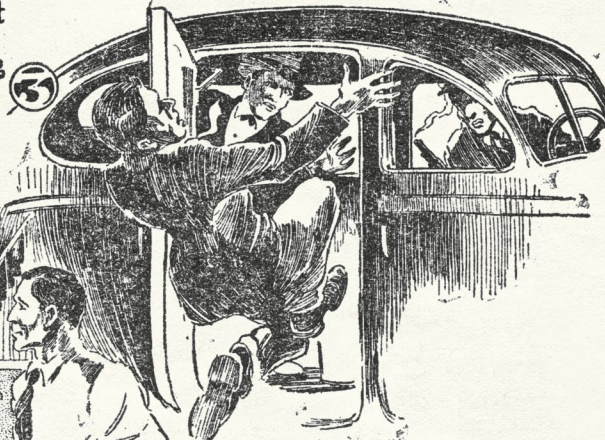
AN ILLUSTRATED CHRONICLE OF THE TURBULENT TWENTIES *by* WINDAS

When Organized Crime reached out with greedy tentacles to pilfer profits from state and city funds, graft and corruption reached an all-time high. 'Big Boy' Jeffers robbed Boston of untold thousands till arresting officers cut him down in a big speakeasy duel.



Ed Hornung preferred to muscle in on Seattle paving contracts. He also preferred blondes ... but he double-crossed one of them. She promptly spilled information which led to Ed making little ones out of big ones at the Washington State pen.

Working on the theory that you can't keep a good badman down, Jo Hindman crashed the street-lighting racket in Cicero. Bennie Lutz objected to this violation of his own pet graft, and took Jo for a oneway ride.



When the city fathers of Oroville were warned to "come across... or else," they countered courageously by tarring and feathering Rufe Stein and his bodyguard. It wasn't legal, of course, but it worked, for Oroville has never been troubled by racketeers since that time.



# GET INTO RADIO ELECTRONICS & TELEVISION NOW!

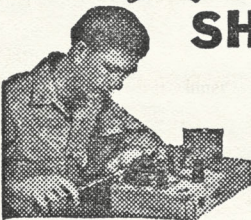
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*A Novel of  
Spine-Chilling Mystery*

# THE LITTLE DOLL SAYS *Die!*

## CHAPTER ONE

### *The Lady Was a Witch*

HERBERT CREEDY found his Park Avenue apartment deserted, windows closed in the summer heat, filmy dust over everything. Madeleine's picture stood on the piano in the living room, blue-eyed and smiling, with golden hair and wistful mouth, mocking him with its tender, dreamy look. She was not there herself, however, though he called her name once or twice automatically.

He had arrived home in New York this morning, after catching an Army bomber back from Tulagi unexpectedly and an airline seat from San Pedro to LaGuardia Field, two months before he had expected to have his series of battle films completed and sit down to wait for a slow boat.

He took his kitbag into the bedroom and dropped it on his bed. Looking in her closet, he saw that there was a number of empty dress hangers on the rod, and that her morocco traveling bag which he had given her last Christmas was missing from the top closet shelf, and perhaps a hatbox or some other bag. Her jewel case, which she ordinarily

kept in their deposit vault at the bank, was standing on her bureau with its lid open, empty.

There was no particular reason why he should have expected to find her home, since she hadn't known that he was returning. Still, he felt a little disconsolate. He had pictured this moment of reunion all the way across the Pacific—Madeleine's look of incredulity as he appeared in the doorway, then her gay little trill of joy as she rushed into his arms.

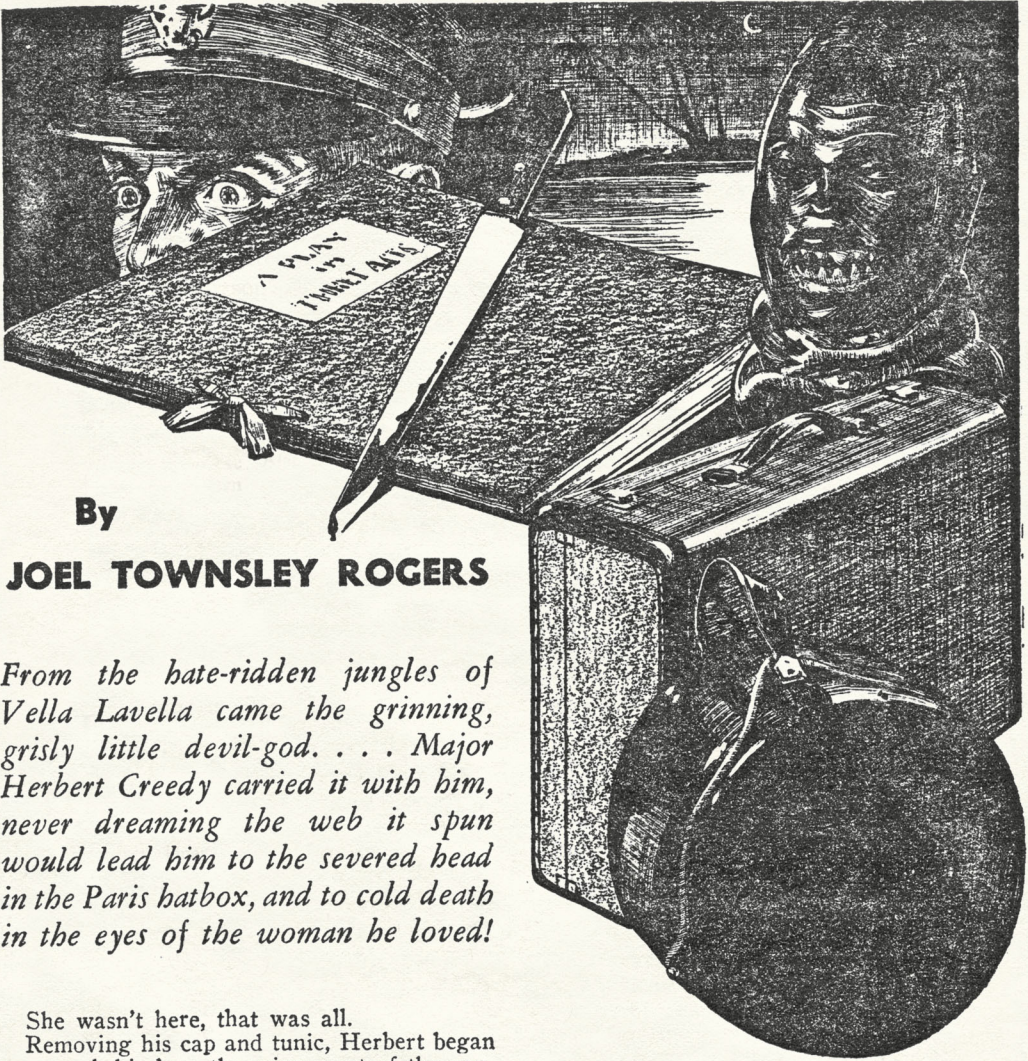
"Oh, Herbert, I can't BELIEVE it's you! Oh, darling, you look WONDERFUL!"

He was a phlegmatic man, Herbert Creedy: heavy-faced, stolid and middle-aged, with a small judicious mouth and small inexpressive eyes; he did not look at all sentimental. Still, he was. This was a disappointment.

She had no family whom she might be visiting, and no friends with summer places where she might have gone. She had few intimate friends. She liked New York, too. The country or seashore had bored her and made her restless before very long, whenever they had gone away together.

But it was futile to speculate where she had gone, or how long she might be away.





By

**JOEL TOWNSLEY ROGERS**

*From the hate-ridden jungles of Vella Lavella came the grinning, grisly little devil-god. . . . Major Herbert Creedy carried it with him, never dreaming the web it spun would lead him to the severed head in the Paris hatbox, and to cold death in the eyes of the woman he loved!*

She wasn't here, that was all.

Removing his cap and tunic, Herbert began to unpack his bag, throwing most of the contents—the canvas jungle boots, the faded chino slacks washed in swamp water, the shirts spotted with leech-suckings of his blood—out onto the floor in a mildewed heap. At the bottom he found the carved black devil-god, and set it upright on Madeleine's spinet desk, beside the phone, where it swayed like a drunken totem pole.

"Here you are, Oscar," he said, with a smile at its menacing look. "America country belong me, belong you now. Sorry mary fellow belong me no stop. I give you to her when I see her."

Its name wasn't Oscar, of course. It was something like Esoboro, the Crocodile God, at a guess, one of the boys on Tulagi who made a pretense of knowing something about such things had told him. It was about ten inches high, and made of some very dark, hard wood,

which at times seemed extraordinarily heavy—although when he had tested it in water, he had found that it would float.

It was carved in the shape of a man sitting with his legs crossed underneath him. Its head, which occupied about half its length, was long and pointed, with deep pits of eyes, a corrugated forehead, flat nostrils, and rows of pointed teeth in a curled and sneering mouth. Its tiny arms were folded across its narrow chest. Its buttocks and crossed legs were disproportionately heavy, its thighs and ankles intertwining, forming a kind of rounded base on which it rested, like those celluloid toys with round, weighted bases which are called teeter-totters. Its balance, though, was not so perfect as a toy's; any slight irregularity of surface, or at times a breath of air too



small to be perceptible, would set it to rocking meditatively.

**H** E HAD picked it up on Vella Lavella. On a northwest corner of the island where the PT boat in which he and his cameraman were riding down to Tulagi had put in for minor repairs. Finding a trail going in from the jungle shore, he had ventured up it to stretch his legs.

A dark and steaming way, sprawling up over slippery ground among the roots of the giant trees, with the screaming of unseen parakeets and the horrible cut-throat gurgling of the lizards all about him. A quarter- or a half-mile up, the path had ended at the ashes of a burned native house, covering a twenty-foot circular space in the jungle.

The fire had happened some time ago—the charred smell had evaporated, and jungle vines and grasses had already begun to grow riotously over the blackened ground. There was a human skeleton lying at the edge of the burned place, with an arm stretched out towards the center of it, and its skull split down the back. But whether the skeleton of a native or a Jap, or even man or woman, he wasn't anthropologist enough to know.

It had been a tambu house, probably, he thought, because of its secluded location and its size. Ten feet in from the edge of the burned ground, following the direction of the skeleton's outstretched arm, he had seen the little god upon the ground.

It was nodding. Its sinister smile was on him. He had stepped towards it.

The fire which had consumed the house had left no marks upon it, unless part of its blackness was due to fire. It had felt surprisingly heavy for its size when he had picked it up.

It had obviously been abandoned or forgotten here for some weeks, and perhaps months. Whoever owned it might be dead. Still, Herbert had a highly-developed sense of property rights. Upon reflection, he had pulled out his purse and notebook. Extracting a ten-dollar bill, he had written on a page of the book:

To whom it may concern:

Am taking god as souvenir, and leaving bill in payment. Trust is satisfactory.

H. Creedy, Major, AUS

Battle Films Records

Special Service Div.

(Temporary)

That was simple enough. Anybody could understand it, who could read. He looked for a place to leave the note and money. The best place seemed to be beneath the outstretched hand-bones of the skeleton, where they might be visible, yet not drift away. Squatting, he

slid them, neatly folded together lengthwise, beneath the dead man's bony fingers. He had arisen, with the idol in his hand, feeling that he had completed a transaction.

"Now you belong me," he told it.

He had heard no step behind him, but something had made him glance over his shoulder. There was a native in a lava-lava standing motionless just behind him, with white-limed hair like sugar frosting, and white lime streaks painted on his face. His hands were behind his back.

For a long moment he had stood looking over his shoulder. The devil-god in his hand seemed to have grown terrifically heavy.

"What name belong you, big fellow?" he managed to articulate, slowly heeling around. "What thing belong hand belong you?"

The black man grinned, without reply.

Then, suddenly, his face had contorted as Herbert turned to face him. He had stared at the thing in Herbert's hand with gaping mouth and expanding eyeballs. With a wild screech, he seemed to leap six feet backwards. He turned and fled like a shadow among the trees, flinging out his hidden right hand, with a sharp-edged bolo in it.

The parakeets and lizards stopped a moment, and then resumed their screaming and gurgling. Herbert stood, gripping the devil-god, a little shaky yet. When strength was back in his knees, he went hurrying and sliding back down the slippery trail to the beach.

The PT boys had laughed at him when he narrated the incident of the sinister native with the hidden bolo. They all carried bolos as a farmer carried a jackknife or a mechanic carries a screwdriver. They all whitened their hair and painted streaks on their faces, too. The guy had probably been a deacon of the church, who had been terrified out of his wits by Major Creedy's own look of menace, thinking the major was going to attack him.

"The fact is, Major, I'd be scared myself if I saw you glaring at me," said the cocky young skipper with a grin. "You just have that kind of a face."

The skipper had admired the little carved idol, though, and had offered five dollars for it. When Herbert told him he had left twice that much in payment for it, the young skipper said that he had paid plenty. A native could live the rest of his life on ten dollars, and send all his sons to college. He could always carve himself another devil-god.

**H** E HAD brought it back to give to Madeleine. She had come into his mind at once when he had seen the thing nodding among the ashes, with its malignant grin. She had a childish pleasure in fantastic and weird things which had often amused him, with his realistic mind.



He remembered how at times she would tell him, when she came hurrying in a little late for dinner, that she had been at the Museum of Natural History over across Central Park again, spellbound among the vast cases of devil masks and demon gods, assembled there from all over the world. She would talk about them, breathlessly and with little shivers, as she hurried to get dinner together out of cans.

"They actually stare at you, Herbert! I saw their eyes MOVE! They were LOOKING right at me!"

"Soup again, witch?" he would say patiently, watching the labels on the cans she was opening to put on the stove, and feeling his stomach turn over a little inside him. "How about going out to eat this evening?"

"Oh, Herbert, you don't think I'm a good cook!"

"Sure," he would say. "Sure, you're wonderful. But let's go out tonight to some swell joint and make a party of it. You can tell me all about those funny faces at the museum and how they looked at you, without having to think of the dishes afterwards. If they did look at you, who can blame them? Your own fault for being so beautiful, witch."

"Witch" was the name he had always had for her. Bewitching was the word for Madeleine.

She had never been a good cook, though, God bless her. The domestic arts were beyond her dreamy mind. That had not prevented her from having fits of trying to be the efficient little housewife, though, preparing delicacies for her man, as domestic as hell. And he had suffered accordingly—until Dr. Burghwaite had put him on a special diet that last time, and insisted that he eat only in first-class restaurants thenceforth, otherwise he might not last long. . . .

He had actually taken the prognosis of the young medical fool seriously, and had been alarmed about himself. Which showed how much doctors really knew. The things he had eaten during these past months, from New Guinea to the Palau! Some of it would have turned the stomach of a turtle. Yet his indigestion had completely cured itself. He had never felt better in his life.

He would like to have Madeleine see him, so healthy and strong. She would be amazed and delighted by the improvement in him. But there was no way of knowing where she had gone.

**T**HE little black demon was continuing to nod enigmatically. Its look of smug omniscience was a little too much to bear. He put his hand on it a moment to stop its wobbling. But when he took his hand away, it began again.

"All right, Oscar," he said, as he took off his tie. "If you know so damned much, spill it. You savvy where my fellow belong me stop? My fellow with gold hair, her picture in other room on box-you-pound-him-he-cry? Let's see you do your stuff, Oscar."

It was ridiculous. Only a damned carved wooden thing. Still, as he watched it, the little black demon was nodding, it seemed to him, rather definitely and emphatically towards the window beside the desk.

The window opened out on a court of the apartment building, facing the identical window of the apartment across the hall. As he looked out, he saw a woman standing at the window opposite, hoisting the shade to the top, with a flabby white arm lifted—a fat gray-haired woman in a flowered house-dress, with a fat, good-natured face. Having hoisted the shade, she turned and waddled off.

He remembered who she was—a Mrs. Blennerhassett, the wife of a regular Army colonel, who had moved into the apartment across the hall with two poodles a month or two before he had been ordered into service. He had seen her in the elevator or hallway once or twice—a good old sport, painted and frizzed and dressed like gay sixteen, with fat hands covered with diamonds, and a roguish, hilarious eye. Fifty years old if she was a day, and not letting it worry her. She had seemed to like the company of young people, he remembered—had always been having a young crowd in for cocktail parties, perhaps her nieces or nephews and their friends.

Madeleine had rather an aversion to making women friends, ordinarily. She liked to go around to the museums and art galleries, the movies and other things, alone. She didn't care for afternoon bridge, which most women were always playing. He remembered, however, that she had struck up something of a friendship with Mrs. Blennerhassett, and had mentioned a few times having spent the afternoon with her.

Perhaps Mrs. Blennerhassett might know where she had gone. Perhaps, even—the thought suddenly struck him—she had merely moved across the hall to stay with the old girl, to keep each other company. She might actually be over there now. . . .

Rebuttoning his shirt, he went out to Mrs. Blennerhassett's door across the hall, ringing the bell—half-expecting Madeleine to appear in person.

But it was only the old girl who opened the door, her billowing featherbed bulk uncorseted in her flowered house-dress, her fat amiable face unpainted and shiny at this hour of the morning, her gray hair in steel curlers. She looked at him good-humoredly but blankly, while her poodles beside her sniffed across the threshold towards his knees.



"Yes?" she said.

"I'm looking for my wife," he explained. "I'm Major Creedy. Mr. Creedy, from across the hall. I just got back, and find she's away. I wondered if she told you where she was going?"

"The little lady across the hall?" she said placidly. "I thought she was a widow. No, I don't know where she is, I'm sorry. I didn't know she was away. You're looking for my sister, Mrs. Blennerhassett, I expect. She's gone away for the summer. I'm Mrs. Horkins, her baby sister, from Perth Amboy. She asked me to stay in the apartment to take care of the doggies."

"Then you don't know where she's gone?" he repeated.

"Emily? Oh, you mean your wife. No, I've never met her. I don't know a thing about her. Would you like to come in for a cup of coffee?"

"Thanks. Not now," he said. "Sorry."

She smiled at him amiably, with her fat vacuous face, as he made his apologies and withdrew.

"You aren't so very bright, Oscar," he told the little demon, back in his bedroom.

He had been an idiot to act as if its swaying head might have meant anything. It didn't know where she was any more than a door-knob. Of course, he hadn't really supposed that it might know. . . .

## CHAPTER TWO

### Pursuit of Murder

**I**T WASN'T the window at which it was nodding, however, he realized—just to be fair to it. Rather, it seemed obvious as he observed it that it was nodding at something beside it on the desk. Indicating the telephone, perhaps.

It didn't mean a thing. But he was reminded that he should call up his office and let his secretary, Grace Meadows, know that he was back. She might know where Madeleine had gone.

He picked up the phone, called her.

"It's Major Creedy, Grace. Mr. Creedy. I just got in."

"Oh, Mr. Creedy!" she exclaimed, her cool impersonal voice warmed for the moment. "This is a pleasant surprise! I've had all sorts of nightmares about something happening to you. Quite silly of me, of course. Are you all through now—back for good? I feel like celebrating. I'll have to go out and splurge myself to a double chocolate soda, or something like that."

"How have things been going, Grace?"

"Very well, Mr. Creedy. Or Major, as I suppose I'll have to call you from now on.

'One Man's Poison' is still a sell-out. 'You Slay Me' opens next week. Lieber feels that you did a wonderful job with it, and that it's bound to be a hit, too."

"Good," he said.

"You came back just in time," she told him. "Sam Lewis has just sent in three mystery scripts, and there's another batch from the Associated Producers in this morning's mail. They must have both forgotten you were away. They ask for a quick word, if you would care to take on any of them. I was going to see if I could cable you."

"I'll be in after lunch, and look them over," he told her. "By the way, do you happen to know where that little witch of mine is? She seems to have gone someplace."

"Mrs. Creedy?" she said, her tone aloof and cool. "No, I haven't seen anything of her. She did call up last week, asking me to send her next month's household check in advance. But she didn't say anything to me about going anywhere. Tomorrow is your wedding anniversary, by the way, Mr. Creedy. I have it on my calendar. You wanted me to order flowers."

"Yes, I know," he said a little heavily. "That was why I stretched it to make it back. But she isn't here. Well, that's that. Never mind the flowers now. I'll take care of them myself when I've found her. Thanks. I'll probably be in by two o'clock."

So Grace didn't know where she was, either. Strike two for Oscar, he thought, hanging up.

The swaying little demon had worked over, in its teetering, towards the desk edge. As if it hadn't been the phone that it had meant at all, but something else that it was trying to bring to his attention—Of course it was crazy—

He picked up the three or four envelopes lying on the desk. The first-of-the-month light and phone bills, still unopened. An empty lilac-tinted envelope addressed to Madeleine in deep purple ink, in a small rounded hand, and smelling of lilac perfume. A circular letter from the Children's Charity addressed to him. His last V-mail letter to Madeleine, written from New Britain—he remembered the leaky tent in the rain, with the sickly sweet smell of powder and death around him, and chiggers tunneling underneath his hide.

He put the opened bills and the charity appeal to one side, and dropped the envelopes, together with his own letter, into the wastebasket beside the desk, while the little demon on the desk edge rocked more violently.

There was nothing else on the desk except the blotter. He lifted it, but the space beneath it was bare. Still there was a feeling tingling ridiculously in his spine, like in a childhood game, that he was getting hot.



He jerked open the doors of the two cubby-hole compartments at the back of the little desk, with some force. But there was only a bottle of ink in one, and in the other a melange of pins and pen-points and rubber bands, bits of string, some last year's Christmas seals, a half-filled paper packet labeled Rat Poison, and a little horse-chestnut figure with a comical clamshell face and stick limbs.

He recognized it, with a smile of sentimental memory. The little funny-face which he had got for Madeleine at the Pharmacy & Gift Shoppe in Quahaug when they had been at The Breakers on their honeymoon, while she had been shopping at the drug counter for other things. He remembered how childishly pleased she had been with it, the sparkle in her eyes, her exclamatory laughter.

"Why, it is positively DEAR! It DOES look so dreadfully comical! I am going to name it HERBERT!"

He hadn't known that she had it still. He took it out and looked it over, smiling. It did have his face, somewhat, when one looked for the resemblance, with the small pursed mouth, the small eyes, and the clam-shaped heavy jowls.

There was a pin stuck through the center of its small horse-chestnut body, for no good reason that he could see. He pulled it out

with his fingernail. Inside, the nut was only green fusty dust. He dropped it into the wastebasket, along with the bits of string, the rat bait, and the old Christmas seals.

"Well, Oscar—"

The teetering little demon fell over, and plunged headlong down into the wastebasket.

HE BENT and lifted it out. On the bottom of the basket, beneath the envelopes and debris which he had thrown away, he saw a glossy, large-sized circular-booklet lying. It had become wedged against the basket's sides, as such large flat booklets sometimes do, and had remained on the bottom when the basket had last been dumped out.

He read: "THE BREAKERS."

He set the little demon back on the desk, and fished the booklet out.

That must be the answer to her whereabouts now. It was so obvious, if it had only occurred to him. She had gone back up there to the Cape to spend their anniversary alone. A place where she could feel herself nearest in thought and remembrance to him on that day, though separated physically by the greatest distance possible on earth.

He realized how little he had really known her, with all her seemingly light and transparent nature. A man may love and live with

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a woman, and still not know her. The date, the place had meant no less to her than to him.

Enclosed between the glossy leaves of the booklet, when he opened it, he found a letter from The Breakers.

Dear Madam:

Replying to your inquiry of recent date, our rates for single room and bath, American plan, are from \$9.00 to \$14.50 per day, depending on location, etc., with ten per cent reduction by the week.

Trusting to be able to make reservation for you, we remain. . . .

The little demon sat motionless, surveying him with its carved crocodile smile.

"You win, Oscar," he said. "You all time smart fellow."

He forced a laugh. The reason it had been nodding before, of course, was because the desk surface where he had first placed it had been imperceptibly not quite level. The reason it had stopped nodding, with its smug look now, was because the spot where he had replanted it was geometrically plane. Naturally. There was nothing in its head.

So purely by accident he had learned that she was at The Breakers.

**I**T WOULD have spoiled it if he'd phoned her, asking her to return. The only thing was to join her there, continuing the surprise. Calling up Grand Central, he learned that the daily Chicopee express left at 11:09, in little more than an hour. No reservations available on it, but he could take his chances of getting a seat in a coach.

He packed the little demon for Madeleine into his weekend bag, together with slacks, swim trunks, and other beach vacation accessories, and took a cab to his office, a block from Grand Central, to pick up the scripts from Associated and Sam Lewis. The office was closed. Grace had gone out to celebrate his return, no doubt, with her double chocolate soda. He could not wait for her. He filled his briefcase with the playscripts, and left a note for her, telling her that he had been in and taken them, and would be in again with a report on them not later than next Monday.

He expected to arrive around six or seven, in time for dinner with her, with perhaps a bottle of champagne to celebrate his return; and making an amusing ceremony of presenting the little demon to her.

His train from New York was delayed, however, by a freight derailment on the line; following which the last bus from Chicopee to Quahaug Beach broke down along a lonely stretch of the salt marshes—marooning him,

the only passenger, for hours in the night mist, while the hatchet-faced driver tried to shore up the broken rear-end with various ill-assorted pieces of driftwood, before finally walking back miles to find a phone.

As a last straw, when the replacement bus which was ultimately sent brought him into Quahaug around midnight, he found the village dead and dark, with a five-mile taxi drive ahead of him out to the Inn. The Cape still went to bed at ten o'clock, it seemed, with a profound and vegetative slumber, come war or wide water, as it had when Madeleine and he had spent their honeymoon at The Breakers six years ago.

Standing on the dark, narrow street in front of the post office where the rickety little bus had debarked him, he watched it skittering back up the road, half regretting that he had not stayed on it. He might have found some accommodation in Chicopee for the night, getting down to the business of the work in his briefcase, and making the trip again in the morning. Madeleine would be asleep when he reached The Breakers now, anyhow. However, the tail-lights of the bus were receding, and it was too late for that.

Across the street from him there stood the silver-shingled, ramshackle old movie hall, with the Quahaug Pharmacy & Gift Shoppe next to it, and a dim light in the front office of the taxi-garage a few doors down. Carrying his bags, he crossed towards it.

The old movie shed had a sign above it, "Fish Pier Theater." In the glass case in front there was a crudely lettered poster announcing some forthcoming amateur play called "Horror"—and probably well named. He was reminded that in the past two or three seasons Quahaug had become something of an amateur theatrical colony, a Mecca for budding poetic playwrights and other would-be dramatic geniuses. He had a professional's discomfort and dread at the thought of amateurs. He would do well to avoid them, if any were at The Breakers.

The Pharmacy & Gift Shoppe window contained its remembered tall glass urns, filled with red and blue water, flanking an assortment of clamshell necklaces and other souvenir novelties for the tourist trade.

The shell necklaces and little figures were primitive enough to have come from the Solomons themselves, he thought, though even more crudely done. They showed the link among people throughout the world. There is something of the primitive and simple savage hidden in even the most civilized men, he reflected. Even in himself, perhaps, to some remote degree.

Voodoo and medicine—they were well allied in the window that way. Those big jars of colored water typified the numbo-jumbo



which still surrounded the medicine man's profession, he thought. He had been off doctors ever since young Dr. Burghthwaite had told him portentously, more than a year ago, that he would probably die in a short time of gastroenteritis, unless he watched himself carefully. Now, after six months of the hardest kind of living out in the South Pacific, he felt infinitely more fit than when he had left.

He passed on from the drugstore to the taxi-garage—to discover that the door was padlocked, and there was no one in the office. Only a night-light burning inside, above the office safe.

Except for that one light, the village was absolutely dark. There were no translucents of tourist homes, and no other taxi places, nor any way to locate a driver and arouse him.

There was nothing to do but to set out to walk it to The Breakers, along the dark sandy road, beside the monotonous slap and hiss of the night ocean, past fog-veiled pine woods and beach-plum thickets, with the infrequent summer cottages that he passed looming vague and dark, and his bags growing heavier with every step.

**A**N UNGODLY hour to be arriving. He had missed Madeleine's look of dreamy blank surprise, the sudden little trill of recognizing rapture as he appeared in the door. He had missed the humorous ceremony of presenting the little demon. The champagne which they would have drunk together, would not now be drunk. Not in the same way, nor at that time, already past. She had been long asleep by now. It would have been better if he stayed over in Chicopee until morning.

The inn's low-spreading wings were dark, looming solitary on the dune edge overlooking the sucking ocean. He passed the beach-plum thicket edge of Rotten Bottom marsh, and was on the inn grounds. Only a dim light showed from the downstairs lobby as he went up the drive.

A station-wagon, lettered "The Breakers," was parked in front of the veranda steps, with its luggage tailboard down. For the transportation of guests, probably, to and from the bus terminus in the village. If he had known of it, he might have phoned from Quahaug.

His bag felt like two hundred pounds. For the moment it did not seem to him that he could carry it the last few feet up the steps, not possibly, after carrying it so far. He set it down to change arms again, as he had done periodically during the long walk.

One of the snaps had sprung open. He closed it, and the other one sprang open. He closed them together, firmly. He picked bag

and briefcase up again, and carried them up the steps and in.

The cozy lobby, flower-wallpapered, broadloom-carpeted, and chintz-divaned, had only a couple of lights lit in it as he shouldered in—a pewter wall-bracket just inside the door at his right hand, and a gooseneck lamp on the white desk-counter across the room.

In the fireplace a wisp of smoke wafted straight up, motionless and pencil-thin, from a foot-deep pile of wood ashes. The potted palms and rubber plants in their china jardinières looked dead. A green-and-yellow parrot sat chained on its perch at the foot of the green-carpeted white staircase, with its head beneath its wing. There was a dim bulb lit above the landing turn of the staircase.

Two or three bags were stacked at the left side of the door, a morocco bag and a couple of striped linen ones, with cardboard tags tied to their handles—luggage of some of last evening's arrivals which had not yet been carried to their rooms, or of some of tomorrow morning's early departures which had been brought down in readiness to carry out, he thought. He set his own bag down inside the door, but on the right-hand side, beneath the light, separate from those others.

Behind the desk an ancient clerk sat sleeping on his stool with his withered bald head resting forward on the register, beneath the gooseneck lamp. His veined hands twitched like sleeping salamanders on the counter beside his head. His breath gurgled as he slept.

"Good evening," Herbert said, standing at the desk.

**T**HERE WAS a little nicked push-bell on the counter. After a moment of waiting, he pressed it. The old man lifted his head with a jerk, with a blink and shake of his blurred watery eyes.

"Hey?" he said.

"Good evening," Herbert repeated. "Have you a—"

He had been going to ask, "Have you a Mrs. Herbert Creedy of New York registered?" But it was unnecessary. A belated recognition had functioned in his mind. The morocco bag stacked with the others by the door, waiting to be carried up or out, was here. His retina had photographed the gilt initials stamped on it, "M. X. C."—X for Xanda, the numerological name which she had taken for her middle one, with her childish love for the weird—and the room number tag on it, "215."

He would not want to wake her at this hour. She loved her sleep so, the little witch. It would spoil her day tomorrow.

"A room?" he said.

"We're filled up," said the old man queru-



lously. "We're filled up to the brim. How many times have I got to keep telling everybody that?"

"That's all right," Herbert said.

"It's not my fault," said the old man. "Don't go a-blaming me. I never see so danged many people wanting a beach vacation. It must be all the war workers. I haven't even got a room to sleep myself. I've got to double up on a danged army cot with George, the day clerk, in the attic, and he leaves everything stunk up with lilac water. At my age, it's not right."

"That's too bad," said Herbert. "It doesn't really make any difference about me for tonight. I have some reading I should do. I merely thought if you had—"

"Maybe in the morning," the old man said, relenting. "Maybe somebody will die, or something. What time is it, anyway? Gosh all blazes. Two o'clock. I didn't know it was eleven yet. It's danged near morning now. Maybe someone will check out in three more hours or so. There's sometimes one or two of them that leaves to catch the five-thirty bus at Quahaug, to make the New York express at Chicopee. You can't tell."

"How about room two-fifteen?" said Herbert. "Has that just been taken, or is it checking out?"

"Two-fifteen?" the old man said. "Single room and bath, ocean side, rate ninety-one forty-five a week, you mean? I think there's a lady has it."

He turned the register around.

"Yep," he said. "Mrs. Herbert Creedy of New York. Registered two days ago. I kind of recollect her. Quiet young lady with blonde hair, kind of dreamy-faced. No, she's not leaving that I know of. She paid up for the week. Seems to me she said something she might stay for the rest of the summer."

"I see a bag of hers there by the door, is the reason why I asked," said Herbert. "I thought perhaps she had just arrived, or was going out."

"George must have brought it and them others down," the old man said. "I'm too old for porter work. Maybe they want to have them put in the storage-room out of the way. Maybe they want to send them back home by express. No, two-fifteen is staying, far as I know. But there may always be someone else. It's not my fault I haven't got anything for you now."

"That's all right," Herbert said again. "I like to work at night, anyway. Perhaps in the morning I can arrange for a cot to be set up, if nothing more. If you don't mind my sitting?"

"Help yourself."

With his briefcase in hand, Herbert turned from the desk. He selected a big club chair

near the wall-light by the door, pulling it up beneath the double bulbs.

He laid his briefcase on his knees. He drew up a standing ashtray beside him. Extracting his cigar-case, he selected an Invincible, clipped the end and applied a match to it thoroughly. He opened his briefcase, pulling forth one of the play-scripts.

The old man behind the desk across the room watched him for a few moments with blurred eyes, then let his head sink gradually down again.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Scenario for Death

HE HAD meant to get some of his reading done on the train. But the coach had been crowded and noisy, filled with grime, aisle luggage, nestling lovers, paper lunch-boxes, and sticky-faced clambering children—two of the latter, with their billowing mother, sharing the same seat with him.

And even more than that, there had been the tingling anticipation of seeing Madeleine again, touched with the small but nagging possibility that she might not be at The Breakers, after all—that she might not have got accommodation on her arrival, or might have found it too nostalgic there without him, and gone elsewhere; or might have stopped off somewhere else en route; or might have suffered some illness or amnesia, and have got to no destination.

He was not an imaginative man, Herbert Creedy. His professional skill demanded of him the antithesis of loose imagination. He was realistic, judicious, and pragmatic. Still, it was too easy to think of Madeleine helpless, lost, or hurt. . . . with her wistful, tender smile clouded in vague mists before his eyes . . . with the sound of her gay, exclamatory voice rising and fading with the rumbling of the train wheels, running on and on with words that he could not quite understand. . . .

It had been like the time when he had felt so ill, lying in the hospital where young Burghwaite had brought him after his collapse, and seeing her face near him, hearing her voice that way, through a thick grey veil. An elusive intangible smile, the sound of words which she was saying to him or Burghwaite which he could not understand, though he struggled to. That had been a hellish experience.

Anyway, he had her located now. She was close to him, beneath the same roof, in her room upstairs in room two-fifteen with bath and ocean view, with the lulling hiss and suck of the sea through the open window beside her, sleeping in the deep middle of the night. She would awake, if at her usual hour,



about nine or ten o'clock, whatever the time she had gone to bed, stretching her arms and yawning. She was a little cat for sleeping.

He would go up and surprise her then, standing in the doorway while she stared at him with blank incredulous eyes, with her hand motionless over the yawn that she was patting, not believing it was he. Then springing up with her trill of joy and rushing into his arms.

"Oh, Herbert, DARLING! This is the most WONDERFUL thing that ever HAPPENED! On our ANNIVERSARY, too! Oh, HERBERT!"

And, "I've brought you a present, witch," he would say to her then.

"Oh, Herbert! WHAT?"

"Guess."

"Oh, Herbert, don't TEASE me! Let me HAVE IT!"

"This. I call him Oscar."

"Oh, HERBERT! HE IS WONDERFUL! Oh, Herbert, I LOVE him! It was so SWEET of you to GIVE HIM to me!" . . .

But that would be all of seven hours from now. Maybe eight. There was quietness in the meantime. He could give all the scripts a preliminary reading. Perhaps he would have time to read three or four thoroughly, if they seemed worth it. Associated Producers wanted a murder play badly, they had said in their letter which he had read at his office. And Sam Lewis wanted one.

**H**ERBERT flicked the ash from his cigar, with an open script in hand. He glanced up.

The thin wisp of smoke still rose straight and motionless in the fireplace from the heap of dead ashes. The potted palms and rubber plants looked dead around the walls. The old man still slept with his head on the desk counter across the room, beneath the goose-neck lamp. At the foot of the green-carpeted white staircase beside the desk, the green-and-yellow parrot still slept with its head beneath its wing. But a sense of something moving, drifting, or creeping. . . .

That was it! On the landing of the staircase facing him, halfway up, beneath the dim landing bulb, was standing a slight grey-clad young man with dark hair and a pale face, and shadowed eyes.

He was carrying a striped linen suitcase. For the instant he had paused with it, descending. He stood looking at Herbert Creedy, sitting by the door.

Herbert put his cigar back in his face, and sucked in smoke.

"Good evening," he said.

"Good evening, sir," said the young man on the staircase. He descended a step tentatively.

"It's all right," Herbert said good-naturedly. "He's asleep."

The young man came on down, with his eyes on Herbert. He came across the carpeted floor, walking on the outside edges of his feet, a little skittishly, carrying his bag in his off hand, looking at Herbert. He set his bag down with the three others stacked on the other side of the door, with his eyes on Herbert.

His dark hair was glossy and a little long, with a triple wave in it. He smelled somewhat of lilac. His pale face was in shadow, outside the light of the wall-bracket above Herbert's head, but the shadows were intensified under his eyes. He looked about twenty-one.

He paused there by the door, uncertainly. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said. "I didn't just understand your remark. Did you say something about being asleep?"

"The desk clerk," explained Herbert good-humoredly, blowing smoke. "I thought you were doing a bill-skip. I used to be a young fellow myself. I've had to try to get out with my bag, if I could, in more places than one."

"Oh, no, sir." The young man laughed dutifully. "I'm Mr. Sutts, George Sutts, the day clerk. I work here. I was just bringing down a guest's bag."

His pale face was a little damp. There was purple ink on his index and middle finger as he lifted his hand to smooth his rippling hair.

"Are you staying here long, sir?" he said.

"I don't know," said Herbert with a helpless chuckle, giving the answer expected of all American males. "You'll have to ask my wife."

"I mean, sir, are you sitting here long?"

"I've sworn an oath by all that's holy to sit here till I've found a good play," said Herbert. "One that knocks me right out of my chair."

"Oh, are you a playwright, sir?"

"Not a playwright. A play doctor."

"What's a play doctor?"

"Most playwrights don't see their business perfectly," explained Herbert, a little bored, for he had explained it too many times before. "They are men of creative imagination. They leap off into the clouds without realizing it. They have a man ride a horse onto a stage, and then forget to take it off again. Or they ride off on a high horse, when there was no horse on. They write dialogue that looks good on the page, but that would be mush if spoken. They put in some business that sounds swell, but that nobody could possibly get away with. They are the imaginers. It's hard for them to stick to mundane things."

"I have no creative imagination myself,"



he explained. "I can't think up characters. I can't think up plots. Any dialogue that I do is dull, if solid. But I have an exact sense of reality. My feet are planted on the ground. I know what can be gotten away with, and what can't. So I'm a play doctor, revising and making foolproof the ideas of more imaginative men. It may sound like a very trivial profession. It is, however, an essential one, I believe I may say, saving many good plays from failure, and keeping bad ones from being attempted at all."

He knocked the ash off his cigar and picked up the play script again, dismissing the youth. He had thought him somewhat amusing as a picture of Bill-Dodger Descending the Staircase. But a youth of that sort could amuse him just so long. He sucked on his cigar. He would have done with George Sutts.

"What do you charge for doing it, sir?" young Sutts said.

Herbert Creedy lifted his brows above his small inexpressive eyes. The youth had sunk down to a seat on the stack of bags. He had his hands locked together between his knees. There were little beads of sweat on his pale, shadowed forehead.

"Twenty-five per cent of royalties is my usual arrangement," he replied. "Provided, of course, that I think the thing is worth my attention."

"I've always been interested in writing plays myself, sir," George Sutts said, making a swallowing sound. "There's a play I'd sort of like to have you analyze for me, whether it could be gotten away with, or not."

**H**ERBERT CREEDY shuddered. He should have been on guard. The Fish Pier Theater assemblage of aspiring amateur dramatists. He had forgotten their existence momentarily. Probably every hotel clerk, taxi driver, and restaurant waitress within twenty miles was an embryonic playwright. They would swamp him in no time, if they started in on him.

"Send it to my office sometime," he said. "I'll give you my name and address, if you want."

"I'd sort of like to outline it for you, sir," George Sutts said, lacing his thin hands tightly, with the sweat upon his brow. "So long as you're going to be sitting here all night, anyway. It won't take long."

"What kind of a play is it?"

"It's a murder play."

"A formularized type," said Herbert Creedy. "A murder is committed. A menace is loose. There's a love theme between the lovely heroine and the stalwart, upstanding, unjustly suspected hero. For two acts. Act three, there's the solution, the killer's caught, the

lovers clinch. I'm inclined to think the genre has been overdone. You can hardly have anything new to offer."

"But this one's different, sir."

"How so?"

"In the first place," said George Sutts, "there's the young fellow who's the hero. He's not just an ordinary type. He's a very good-looking and superior type, very sensitive and intelligent and charming. I call him—well, I call him Gordon. It's a good substantial name, simple and manly. He's a promising young playwright."

Herbert Creedy smiled. Most amateurs make their heroes playwrights or novelists, depending on whether they are writing plays or novels.

"Go on," he said.

"Well, there's a rich old girl who falls for him. I call her—well, I call her Mrs. Breed. Her husband is in the Army overseas. Say in the South Pacific, or maybe France or Italy. It doesn't make any difference. He doesn't come into it, anyway. He's just a colonel or something overseas."

"Leave him out of it, if you don't intend to bring him into it," Herbert Creedy suggested. "Confine yourself to the characters of your play."

"Yes, sir. Anyway, he's got dough, and she doesn't just have to live on his allotment. She's got a swell little apartment on—well, say Fifth Avenue in New York. All kinds of money to spend on a good time. Jewels that would knock your eye out. She's old enough to be Gordon's mother maybe, but she goes off the deep end for him. Bang, like that. He's an awfully attractive guy, naturally. All the women fall for him."

"Does he respond to her passion?" said Herbert Creedy, drawing on his cigar.

"Oh, he doesn't really respond, naturally. Who could fall for the old hen? She's as old as the hills and godawful. But he acts sweet to her, so as not to hurt her feelings. They have some parties together and good times. She doesn't support him, though. He's not a gigolo. Anyway, she thinks that men should have jobs. She just slips him a fifty now and then when he happens to mention he's broke. Naturally, being a gentleman, he takes them."

"Where's your love interest?" said Herbert Creedy.

"Well, then *she* comes in. She's young. A honey. What did I call the old dame—Mrs. Bless?"

"Mrs. Breed."

"All right, I call the girl—well, say Sue. She's just a knockout. Gordon goes off the deep end himself for her. There's nothing he wouldn't do for her. And she's just as crazy about him. It's love, just bang-up love, between them. Of course, he doesn't let Mrs.



Breed know about it. He doesn't want to hurt her feelings.

"Well, there you are. The guy, Gordon, takes a job out of the city for the summer, where he can do some playwriting and not work too hard. He pretends to Mrs. Breed that he's going out to get an aircraft job in Wichita or Portland. After he's started on his job he gets Sue to come and join him. Everything is rosy. And then, bang, who do you think pops on the scene? Mrs. Breed. Just out of a clear sky. God knows how she happened to come to the same place. It was just blind accident.

"You get the situation? There she is, on the scene before Gordon knows it, and she catches him and Sue together. Well, she starts in to talk nasty and to say she'd like the money back right away that she has loaned him, and that he is just a gigolo, and other things like that. And he just kind of gets annoyed at her, and kind of strangles her."

"He kills her?"

"Well, she kind of falls down limp on the floor, and doesn't breathe any more. She's dead, anyway."

For the moment George Sutts rubbed his thin palms together, swallowing.

"You have a rather unusual power of understatement," said Herbert Creedy. "Most amateurs overstate. That strangling scene could be very moving, played with restraint. I can feel it." He drew on his cigar.

"Yes," he meditated. "When your Gordon strangles Mrs. Breed, and she kind of falls down limp—a very effective scene."

"Oh, nobody sees it happen," said George Sutts. "That would kind of ruin it. I mean it

—it'd look kind of horrible. No one would like to see it. It's just something that has happened. Off the stage."

"What's the new angle that you spoke of to your play?" Herbert Creedy inquired.

"I want Gordon to get away with it," said George Sutts.

For the moment he shivered, sitting on the stack of bags. Rubbing his palms together, he regarded Herbert Creedy with his dolorous shadowed eyes.

"He's got to get away with it," he repeated. "He's the hero. He's an intelligent, good-looking young guy, with all his life ahead of him. He didn't mean to choke the old buzzard to death. He didn't mean to do it so hard, anyway. She had a lot of money and jewels with her, too, that he could use. He wants to go on having a good time. He's got to get away with it."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Madeleine No More

HERBERT CREEDY drew on his cigar, rubbed his jowels and meditated.

"Unusual," he said. "The critics might go for it. I don't think the public would like it at all, however."

"To hell," said George Sutts, with the sweat on his brow, "with the—I mean, just let's figure it out from that angle. How he can get away with it. So long as you are sitting here anyway, sir. Of course, if you want to get up and go, I don't want to take your time."

"That's all right," said Herbert Creedy.





"You have posed a dramatic situation, and how to meet a technical problem. Does anyone besides Gordon know that he has done the murder?"

"Sue," said George Sutts, swallowing. "She knows it, naturally. She had to—she had to help. She and Gordon are just nuts about each other, though. So that's all right."

"How many people know about his previous relations with Mrs. Breed?" said Herbert. "They would bring him at once under suspicion, realistically speaking, as soon as she is found dead."

"Nobody," said George Sutts. "Nobody knows at all. The old buzzard was cagey. She was head over heels with him, but she kept him under wraps. She didn't want her husband to hear about him, when and if he came home."

"What is the location of your murder scene?" said Herbert Creedy. "Some place outside of New York, you say, where he has taken a job for the summer and has had Sue join him, and where Mrs. Breed arrived unexpectedly. But in another city, or in the country? How long before the body will be discovered? What police are there to investigate the crime? What chance is there to conceal it completely? All those questions are a part of the scene, and must be considered, you understand."

"It's a kind of a place where it happens—" said George Sutts—"well, it's a kind of a place like here. A kind of a beach hotel like The Breakers, and a kind of a place like around here."

"A hotel like this," repeated Herbert Creedy. "Then of course the chambermaid comes in each morning. She will discover the body in the course of her duties, inevitably, even if no one happens on it before."

"Yes, sir," said George Sutts, straining. "That was one thing I was thinking of. I was wondering if it would be smart for him to lay her on her bed and put a bottle of sleeping tablets beside her, to make it look like suicide?"

Herbert Creedy shook his head.

"Very poor," he said. "They would analyze the stomach contents. It's murder obviously enough, anyway, with the broken trachea and other medical indications of how she had died. There are the finger marks alone, showing conspicuously in her flesh. They would be measured against the hands of everyone conceivable, including Gordon's, presumably. And there you are."

"Yes, sir, I thought of that, too," said George Sutts, swallowing. "That's why I gave the sleeping tablets up. But what if she was found out in the ocean? The marks on her throat might be only rock bruises then. And maybe it would be days or weeks, and there

wouldn't be much at all." He swallowed again.

"If you had your murder taking place beside the ocean, yes," said Herbert Creedy. "Though an ocean is difficult to stage. Since for reasons of your play, however, you have had it happen in the hotel, then you would have to get her down to the ocean. You can't go lugging dead bodies around. The desk clerk or people in the lobby might see you carrying her out."

"I thought of that," said George Sutts, rubbing his thin hands. "I thought perhaps he could kind of walk her out as though she was kind of drunk. You know, just kind of stumbling along, with his arm around her."

Herbert Creedy smiled.

"It's been used at times in movies or on the stage," he said. "However, it is always highly unconvincing. A dead body is not a living person. It is either rigid, or very soft. You can try using it as a device, of course. But nobody would believe you."

"I was afraid of that," said George Sutts, swallowing. "Then I thought maybe of putting her body in a trunk and shipping it to California."

"It would be discovered en route," said Herbert Creedy. "Such things are only an additional advertisement, and an additional challenge to the police. Unless Gordon is extraordinarily powerful physically—which I have not understood you to conceive him to be—then someone would have to help him with the trunk. Regardless of that, he must deliver it to an express office or an expressman, and sign for the valuation. The trunk itself must have been procured someplace. They know his face, they have his signature, and in any situation he can be traced. He had better jump into the ocean and drown himself than try anything like that."

"I figured that out myself," said George Sutts, swallowing.

**H**ERBERT drew on his cigar. It had gone dead. He chewed it.

"I find the situation dramatically interesting," he said. "The technical problem. You have a gift of creating character, undoubtedly. You have made it very vivid. Much more so than the ordinary play. I can almost see Gordon. I don't think the public would like it at all. But just as an intellectual problem, I'd like as much as you to figure out how he could get away with it."

"Suppose—"

He chewed on his cigar.

"Suppose you had him cut the body up and put it in some ordinary luggage bags," he said. "He could carry them out one by one, without being noticed at all. Suppose there's some place nearby like Rotten Bottom Swamp below, that dogs and even cows used to be lost



in, before it was fenced off. Then you could have him take the bags down there and heave them over the fence, and that's an end of it. Of course it would take several bags, and you might have some difficulty fitting in the head. But it's the way to do it."

"That's the way I'm doing it," said George Sutts. "With a hatbox for the head."

Herbert Creedy nodded appreciatively.

"The hatbox is a nice touch," he said. "Yes, that makes it perfect. Nobody knows that Gordon ever knew Mrs. Breed. Maybe nobody knows that she has come to his hotel. She has just disappeared. He's got her money and jewels, and his girl. The girl is in it with him, and she'll never squeal. He's got away with it."

"God!" he said, using an expletive which he seldom used. "It's the damndest play I ever heard of! What ghastly people!"

George Sutts had arisen. Sweat was on his face. He looked at Herbert Creedy with his hollow, shadowed eyes. He swallowed.

"Would you mind moving your chair, sir?"

"Moving my chair?" said Herbert Creedy.

"You are blocking the door," said George Sutts in his soft, dead voice. "Didn't you know it?"

Herbert Creedy looked around him, with a surprised and baffled face. It was, he saw, a fact. In drawing up the big club-chair under the wall-bracket, he had let three or four inches of it protrude over the door edge.

His bag on the floor, too, he had pushed over, and it was right in front of the door.

"Why, I beg your pardon!" he said, arising and pulling at the chair. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I thought you were sitting here on purpose," said George Sutts, swallowing. "When you said you weren't going to move till you found a play that knocked you over, I thought you meant it. Thanks."

He picked up the bag he had brought down, and tucked it under his left arm. He picked up one of the three stacked by the door, and caught it up under his right arm. He did it rather swiftly. He stooped and picked up the other two bags in his hands. With his foot he shoved Herbert Creedy's bag out of the way, and caught a hooked finger on the doorknob and opened it.

In the fireplace ash-buried embers caught, and began suddenly to blaze. The dusty palm-trees in their pots seemed to shiver and stir green, like jungle trees after a drenching rain. The gurgling of the old man sleeping at the desk was like the gurgling of cutthroat lizzards within that timeless moment. The parrot sleeping on its perch at the staircase foot lifted its head and screamed.

The snaps of Herbert Creedy's bag had sprung open as George Sutts kicked it, spill-

ing forth its contents. From amidst the melange of shirts, socks, swim-trunks, beach-robe and toilet-case, the little black demon rolled forth, and stood nodding on the floor, leering at Sutts with its crocodile grin.

George Sutts gave it one terrified glance, with eyes dark as dead coals, with face as white as paper. Clutching and gripping his load of bags, he went rushing out the door.

**H**ERBERT CREEDY clung to the arm of the chair which he had pulled out of the way. His blood was like water.

That play had gripped him, damn it. It had been so horrible—the murder of that poor woman, the wife of a man serving overseas, by a cheap Lothario, while perhaps his little slut of a sweetheart watched and cheered him on. It had been so vivid, his scheming how he could dispose of her body, planning how he would use her money and her jewels.

Madeleine, he realized, was thirty years old now. She might seem like an old hag, he didn't know, to a pin-feathered boy like that. Her household allowance, her nice but simple little jewels, though no more than his moderate prosperity allowed, might seem like vast wealth to George Sutts.

The purple ink on the fellow's fingertips, like the purple ink on that empty envelope, lilac-tinted, which he had found on Madeleine's desk!

And the fellow had taken out her morocco bag, too!

Oh, God! Madeleine, with him away, turning blindly for affection where she might find it, to become the victim of a ghastly hyena like that! . . .

He didn't know how he had got up the stairs. But he was standing in the green-carpeted corridor, in front of one of the white doors which had the numerals 215 on it, pounding on it with something that he had in his hand. He gripped the knob and lunged again at it, and pounded and lunged again.

"What on EARTH do you WANT? Who on earth ARE you?"

*Madeleine's voice!*

What a fool he had been!

His limbs felt about to collapse with sheer nerve exhaustion. He looked down at his hand—at what was in it, that he had been using to knock on the door. It was the little devil-god. He must have picked it up from the floor. He smiled at it weakly.

He must be calm; not show her what an emotional, excited fool he had been. "Hello, witch," he said. "It's Herbert."

"HERBERT!"

"Sorry to wake you up at this ungodly hour," he said. "It's really me, though. I got back. Can you let me in?"



"Oh, Herbert, DARLING! I can't BELIEVE it!"

She was turning the bolt. The door opened. She stood there. With her little trill of joy, she rushed against his breast as he stepped in.

Her blonde hair was tousled and damp beneath his chin. She had on a bathrobe.

"I wasn't REALLY asleep," she said. "You can SEE I haven't been to bed yet. I had just finished taking a BATH. I felt so STICKY. Oh, Herbert, I must have had a PREMONITION you were coming! I felt it in my BONES! How ON EARTH did you find me here?"

"Just a hunch, witch," he said, keeping his voice calm. "Came home and you weren't there. I had a hunch you must have come up here for our anniversary."

"It IS our seventh anniversary, ISN'T it?"

"The sixth," he said. "Since midnight."

"Oh, Herbert, you always get things so STRAIGHT. You seem AGITATED, darling. I can feel your HEART beating."

"I just had a play told to me by a would-be playwright," he apologized. "A youthful Ancient Mariner who got hold of me. It certainly was a ghastly one. It scared me."

SHE drew back from him, with her hands upon his breast, looking up at him.

"Really?" she said. "What WAS it?"

"Nothing," he said. "Forget it. I brought back something to give you, witch. Do you like it?"

He lifted his right hand, with the little demon in it. The devil-god leered at her, as it had at Sutts, and before him, at the lime-smeared black man on Vella Lavella with the murder-sharp bolo in his hand. . . .

Madeleine opened her mouth to scream.

In that instant, across her shoulder, he glanced again at the hatbox sitting on the bed. A hatbox with "E. B." on it. He had seen it the instant he stepped in. Emily Blennerhassett, without any doubt. Mrs. Blennerhassett, the poor blank-brained gay old sport, with her fondness for young people, with her cocktail parties and her frizzed hair and paint and her sixteen-year-old clothes. With her money and her diamonds. Mrs. Blennerhassett had been Mrs. Breed. Her poor old painted face in that bag now. . . .

*This was young Sutts' Sue standing before him—Madeleine.*

He thought of his illnesses, of the soups which Madeleine had fed him, of young Dr. Burghwaite's gravity and alarm. He thought of the rat poison he had found.

And he thought of the little horse-chestnut figure with the clam face which he had bought her on their honeymoon, while she had been shopping for something at the drug counter

of the Pharmacy and Gift Shoppe, perhaps already buying rat poison. The little figure which she had named Herbert, and which she had stuck a pin through. . . . He thought about Madeleine, up long past her usual bedtime, having just taken a shower. . . .

He thought of littler and lesser things. Of her coming rushing in so often and so late, saying that she had been at the museum again. He knew that the museum closed at five o'clock. He thought of many things.

But perhaps he had thought of them before, in the back of his mind, and for a long time. Perhaps he had thought them over thoroughly, and to the last bitter dregs. Perhaps he had been thinking of them when he had picked up the little devil-god there on Vella Lavella to give her. He had been thinking of her, yes. And the black man had had a look at his face, and had been terrified.

She had tried to murder him from the first, for what money he had, for his insurance. She had deceived him with everybody. He had been almost twice her age when they married. He should have known.

Anyway, he had brought back the demon to give her.

*This was Madeleine! This was Madeleine, his lovely Madeleine, with her tender, wistful smile, her golden hair, her wide, innocent eyes. But soon it would be Madeleine no more. . . .*

Even in that moment, with his realistic mind, Herbert Creedy knew that he could get away with it. He hadn't told Grace at the office where he was going; she would assume he had merely taken the scripts to read at home, and by law between them he was not to be disturbed while reading. When he brought them back, read, she would be willing to swear to his alibi, with conviction.

But even that was not necessary. No one would remember him on the crowded train. The hatchet-faced bus driver, half asleep, and the other half of his mind without wits, would not be able to identify him. Nor the sleepy old man downstairs, to whom he had not given his name.

Only George Sutts would remember him. But George would remember him to his regret. She would have love letters in her baggage from George Sutts, undoubtedly, and this thing could be pinned very easily on George.

Yes, he could get away with it, he knew, with his realistic and pragmatic mind. He knew it without question. Perhaps he had thought it all out before. But he didn't know if he wanted to get away with it. It made no difference to him now. Nothing did.

*This was Madeleine. But Madeleine no more. . . .*

THE END



# MEET A BODY—

By FRANCIS K. ALLAN

*Step right in, Joe kid. . . . Get the beer-glasses ready, set out the pretzels, and don't forget to dust off the body in the back room. . . . But never mind putting on your bar jacket—for that new shroud fits like a glove!*



Joe looked down at a fat hand  
. . . a white, dead face. . . .

**"I**T'S time. I've got to be going, Jean." the boy said reluctantly.

"I know." A moment of silence passed. "I don't know why Ring makes you work like this. He knows it's your night off."

"It's ninety cents an hour," the boy reminded her. "We'll need that." Then he added, "Someday." He wondered suddenly how many times that word had passed between them. Once it had held a swift, close promise; *someday* had seemed so close then . . . . Now it was a quiet word, touched with anxiety, asking reassurance.

"I know, Joe," the girl said. And Joe wondered to himself: How long could *someday* wait? How long before the time came when—

He rose abruptly. It was no good to think about it. He crossed the room, slipped into his worn brown coat, and put on his hat. He stood there looking at her. They were young.



His eyes were blue, hers grey. She was blonde, while his hair was dark and curly, and his face bore a gaunt weariness that was older than his years.

The girl came toward him and touched his shoulders. "Joe, we—we can't let it get us, see?" she whispered. "I feel the way you feel—like spinning wheels inside. But we can't let it get us."

"If there was something I could do," he said.

"There isn't anything. We can wait." She reached on tip-toe. "Good night, Joe."

He kissed her, swiftly, hungrily. "I'll see you tomorrow, Jean."

"Tomorrow." She smiled at him.

He opened the door and stepped into the narrow hall. Down the three flights of stairs he hurried, for it was almost midnight and Ring Bellows would be mad. . . .

He left the hallway-lobby with its scent of garlic behind him. He rolled up his collar as the swirling snow drove about him. The wind needled through the worn coat, and Joe's teeth began to chatter. He trotted, partly to hurry, partly to keep warm.

The echo of his muted steps came back to him from the dark and vacant doorways of lower Second Avenue. In the distance an elevated train rumbled and faded away on Third. It left the night silent, and the snow kept swirling down.

"Here, now, what's the hurry?" a rich Irish voice called. Joe paused. Out of Fifth Street sauntered the bulky figure of Kelly, the cop. His ears were muffled. His round face was a flushed blur above his dark coat. "And what a night to be walking, Joe!"

"Yeah, I'm doing a late shift for Ring," Joe explained.

"Ah, how the poor must work," Kelly laughed. "You and me." Then his face sobered. "Your mother—Mrs. Gavoni tells me she is bad again. Is that right, Joe?"

"She had an attack this morning. The doctor said it was going to be all right this time."

"Sad, sad," Kelly sighed. "You have a hard job, my boy."

"Sure. Well, I've got to be going," Joe said quickly. He liked Kelly, but he didn't want any sympathy. He knew the words: "That's Joe Dennis. You've seen him with the Casey girl. Yes, a long time they've been going together, and once he was in business-school, too. It's his mother. Her heart. . . ."

Joe said goodbye hurriedly and walked off, leaving Kelly standing there in the falling snow, watching him. . . .

Two minutes later he rounded the corner into Houston Street. Only two lights were burning in the entire block. Not a soul was moving—nothing but the silent, steady snow.

He hurried on toward the red neon sign, *Ring's Bar—Liquors, Beer*. He set his shoulder against the door and pushed.

The bell tinkled above the door. The odor of the room rolled toward him—beer and ale and smoke. It was warm, and the radiator hissed softly in the rear corner. Smoke lingered under the ceiling and curled about the antlers of a mounted deer-head.

The bell jangled again as the door closed, and Joe glanced about the room. Its silence gathered in his ears—a curiously deep and waiting silence.

There was only one customer—a man at the rear table beside the radiator. He was bent over the table, with his head resting on his folded arms, and his face toward the wall. His hat had slipped off, revealing his thinning blond hair. A glass of amber liquid was perspiring on the table before him. He did not stir.

Joe pulled off his coat and moved toward the rear of the bar.

"Okay, Ring, I'm here," he called.

There was no answer. He stepped into the dark doorway that led to a catch-all storeroom at the rear of the narrow building.

"Ring?" he called again. The silence deepened in his ears.

He frowned. But Ring had probably gone to Sam's for cigarettes, he told himself. He felt his way past the broken chairs and tables, the mops and brooms that littered the dark storerooms. At the very back of the building was a tiny dressing-closet. He snapped on the light, slipped into the white bar jacket, smoothed down his curly hair, and snapped off the light again. He started back.

His left foot went down. There was an almost inaudible soft crushing sound. His foot turned on the yielding mass. He jerked and clutched at the wall to regain his balance. "Damned rat!" he gasped. "Give you the creeps, so soft and—"

HE DIDN'T know just why his words faded, unfinished. Perhaps it was because he heard no squealing from the floor, no scratching of tortured claws. The room was heavily, achingly silent. He felt himself turning cold. His fingers were suddenly searching for a match.

The crimson flame broke, throwing angular thin shadows up the walls and ceiling, casting its glow over the dirty floor.

And Joe looked down at an open palm—a fat palm, white and limp, with its fingers parted. He saw a fat white wrist, and the dark end of a sleeve. He felt himself kneeling, saw the match-light stretching out into the darkness under a broken table.

There in the light was the face of Ring Bellows! There were the tiny bright eyes,



mirroring the match-light. There were the loose fat lips, the black hair, and the multi-chinned throat. Over the entire expanse of white shirt and jacket-front was a muddy brown stain, and in the center of the stain was the deeper, darker stain that was the blood of Ring Bellows.

As if he were another person, Joe watched his fingers reaching out to touch that stain of blood, then moving up to the lax fat lips. A sensation near to nausea swirled upward from his stomach as he felt the cold, fleshy softness. His fingers jerked back. He stumbled to his feet, his body cold, his breath fast.

He hurried to the door of the barroom. The telephone—telephone the police, his mind shouted. But Ring had never installed a telephone. . . . Sam's Cafe, Joe recalled, there was a telephone booth there.

He glanced at the sleeping man at the table. Only the shoulders of the man rose and fell to his deep breathing. Joe started toward the door. At that moment it opened and the bell jangled. A sleekly-dressed tan-faced man entered. He smiled, showing a double row of gold teeth. "A glass of ale, Joe kid," he ordered jauntily. He unbuttoned his double-breasted overcoat and straightened his tie. "Well, are you working or dreaming?"

Joe pulled himself awake. Slowly he picked up a glass and drew the ale. He slid it along the counter and made change. The man grinned at him curiously. "How's little Jeanie?"

Joe looked at him steadily. He waited an extra moment to answer. "She's just fine," he said softly. "Thanks, Harry."

The man's pale eyes glittered. Joe glanced back toward the dark door of the storeroom. His fingers opened and closed indecisively. Seconds went ticking by on the clock above the bar, and Harry's cigarette-lighter made a raw snapping sound as it spun. Joe felt perspiration clinging to his chin. He brushed it away and wondered when Harry would leave. He wondered what to do. Anyone but Harry Lodi. . . .

He glanced through the front windows, out into the snow-filled darkness. "What's itching you, anyway, Joe kid?" Harry demanded.

"I need some cigarettes," Joe said abruptly. "I'm running over to Sam's." He hurried to the door and flung it open.

It was only ten feet to Sam's Lunch Shop, occupying the other half of the building with the bar. The scent of coffee and onions met him. The radio was giving a newscast. The cafe was empty save for bony-faced bald Sam Ragley who was reading a battered newspaper at the cash-register.

"Hey, what's the big rush?" he said.

"A nickel, Sam! Hurry! I've got to make a call, fast!"

"If you're thinking of using that telephone, just forget it," Sam said laconically. "Some smart guy came in here a while ago, and damned if he didn't jam every slot with off-size slugs. You can't get nothing." He spat complacently on the floor and rubbed his bony chin.

"But I— Damn it, I've got to make a call! Everything else in the block is closed! Sam, you've got to get out and find Kelly! Kelly, the cop!" he repeated into Sam's dull face. "Tell him to hurry like hell to the bar—understand?"

"In this snow, and you ask me to go find a—"

"I'm not asking, I'm telling!" Joe raged. "Hurry! Tell him it's Ring—something's happened to Ring!" He grasped the man's bony shoulders and pulled him off the stool. Interest was dawning in Sam's grey, lined face. He wet his lips.

"Ring? What about him? I seen him an hour ago. He was okay—"

"But he's not any more! Hurry!" Joe half-dragged Sam to the door and outside. "He was on Second Avenue when I saw him last," he said. "Now hurry, Sam, for God's sake!"

THE man grumbled and set off, his long white apron whipping about his waist. Joe hurried back to the bar. Just as he opened the door, Harry glanced around sharply. His brows were arched strangely in his tan forehead. There was a gleaming speculation in his pale eyes. His handkerchief was in his hand. Joe slowed his steps and tried to breathe calmly as he moved around behind the bar. With every step he felt the unblinking stare of Harry follow him.

Joe glanced at the dark rear door. He looked at the sleeping man at the table. He rubbed his hot hands against his jacket and felt for a cigarette. He had to say something. "You want another drink, Harry?" he asked.

"I guess I will," Harry said softly. "Give me another glass. No, I'll keep the old one, too," he said.

Something in the tone made Joe glance down to the glass, down to the white handkerchief that Harry was holding—holding in such a way that it was spread out for Joe to see. And there on the white cloth was a dull, dark stain.

Joe's hand jerked, and ale spilled over the glass. He looked at the handkerchief again, then his eyes traveled slowly up to Harry's. The man was watching him icily.

"That was on my first glass, Joe kid," he said in a half-whisper. "I got a hunch it's blood, kid."

Joe did not speak. He felt his cheeks grow hot. His fingers opened and closed. Suddenly



he hated Harry; hated the taunting mockery of the pale eyes, and the soft voice. "What makes you think it's blood?"

"Because I just took a look in the rear room where you was coming from. And my old friend Ring Bellows is kind of dead, Joe kid."

He sat still. Neither of them moved.

Harry smiled thinly. "And don't go feeling behind you. I took the gun away from that drawer down there. It's in my pocket, and we're going to wait for a cop to come walking by." Harry smiled again. "You see, Joe kid, me and you both knew what Ring was doing tonight, on account of he was doing it with me. I know he had dough on him. I guess that's what we'll call the motive, huh?"

"What in hell are you talking about?" Joe exploded. "If you think I killed Ring, you're crazy! I found him like that!"

"Sure. That's the way. Just like that." Once more the smile flirted over the thin lips. "Joe kid," Harry added.

Joe didn't think, didn't have to. His fist looped up and over the bar. Harry had just time to start a cry, then the knuckles crushed his lips and he jackknifed backward off his stool and slid along the floor until he reached the far wall. He seemed to sigh gently. His knees relaxed, and he lay still.

Joe's eyes widened. He looked at his clenched fist. Harry wouldn't take it, he knew. You didn't chill a bookie and laugh at him tomorrow.

Suddenly he was afraid and cold. Something in him screamed at him to run. The snow-filled night was his haven, its darkness a curtain for hiding. The sweat streamed down his cheeks as he stared out the window. He felt himself moving. Then he stopped and gripped the bar.

"I *didn't* kill him! I won't run! I *won't*!"

**H**HE FELT for a cigarette in his pocket. He struck a match. He rubbed his knuckles where they had smashed into Harry's mouth. He watched the door and waited, and it seemed that time had never passed so slowly.

And then they came, Kelly first—red-faced and panting and wet with snow. Sam trotted at his heels, his apron about his waist, and his bare thin shirt clinging damply to his sunken frame.

"It's back here, Kelly," Joe said simply and with relief. He led the way, then stood aside for the cop. Sam edged in curiously, his raspy breathing filling the room. Kelly struck a match and moved forward.

"And what would I be hunting, Joe?" he wondered slowly.

"Ring! Over there, see? He's dead—" The words evaporated. Joe felt his jaw get long and loose. "But he— He— It was there

in—under—" He plunged forward and knelt on the floor. "It was here, Kelly! I swear it was—the body! Ring was dead, and his body was right here!"

"But lad, a body! A body can't move!" Kelly exploded. He stared at Joe. Footsteps sounded from the front room, and the swaying figure of Harry Lodi appeared in the doorway.

"You damned little rat! Get— Oh, Kelly," he said more quietly. "About time you got here. That damned little beer-jerker put a slug in—" Then Harry's words vanished into an astonished wheeze. "By God! The body! It's gone!"

"Now, get calm and easy!" Kelly roared. "Tell me what goes on!"

"I'll tell you what goes on," Harry said bitterly. "Joe-kid came out of here with blood on his hands. I got it on my ale glass. Then he ducked out, saying he was going to Sam's. Then— Hey, that's what he did! He ducked around into the alley and pulled Ring's body out that window! See, the window's open! He didn't know I'd find any blood! He was trying to get the body away from here and—"

"That's a damn' lie!" Joe raged. "I did go to Sam's! Sam can tell you I did! And I was trying to call the police!"

"That's what he was doing, Kelly," Sam said.

"Making himself look honest—that's what!" Harry snarled.

"Get calm and easy!" Kelly roared again. "First, we got to know where the body is." He strode to the narrow window that opened onto a loading alley. The snow was sifting in through the opening. Kelly pulled up a chair, stood on it, and played the beam of his flashlight up and down in the darkness outside. He grunted and drew back. "Not there," he reported.

"It's plain as hell, Kelly," Harry argued furiously. "I can practically give you the play-by-play on the deal. Ring was getting into a big poker game tonight—five grand set-in, see? We were going together; that's why he wanted off. Okay, maybe he tells Joe kid, or maybe Joe kid finds out himself. Anyway, he knows Ring's got at least five grand in cash on him. So he knocks him off and—"

"That's a lie!" Joe almost strangled on the words. "I knew he was going to play poker tonight, sure, but I didn't kill him!" He raked back his tumbled hair and turned on Kelly. "You believe me, don't you? You know I wouldn't kill a man? You— Well, *don't* you?" he asked as Kelly kept staring at him soberly.

"Joe, it was a long time ago when I quit knowing things," he said wearily. Then he looked at Harry. "And where were you when



all of this was happening?" he asked abruptly. Joe watched Harry laugh.

"Not me, Kelly," he said confidently. "In fact, I was buying ale for your friend, Detective Murphy, at Sloan's Bar on 44th; that was about thirty minutes ago, and you know how long it takes to get down here. No, thanks. Not me."

"It's a very good alibi, Harry," Kelly said. He frowned heavily and rubbed his chin. Sam kept wheezing excitedly. Joe felt tight, drawn-up inside.

"First there is a body," Kelly brooded. "Now no body. Somebody had to take the body. So . . . I think I better call the station," he decided.

"**H**HEY! Hey, there!" an excited voice shouted. The bell at the entrance tinkled violently. A white-faced, roughly-dressed young man with a cabbie's cap stood there. "Hey," he sputtered again as Joe and Kelly appeared in the door. "This is Ring Bellows' bar, ain't it? Ain't it?" he demanded. Scarcely had Joe nodded until the man's words rushed on. "I—Jeez, I hate to say it, but something awful's happened. What I mean is, I found a man at the curb, up a block at the corner of Second and Houston. Right there in the snow with nothing on but his pants and shoes, and his pocketbook says he's Ring Bellows! And if he ain't dead, I miss my—"

Kelly exploded into a torrent of profanity as he started toward the door. Suddenly he turned. "You—all of you! I know who's here, and they better be here when I get back," he roared. He vanished.

Joe sucked in a thin breath. His eyes met Harry's. Silently the lips of the thin hookie curled. Joe walked past him and leaned down at the end of the bar.

Sam edged out of the rear room and mopped his damp lips on his sleeve. His throat was twitching. His long bony face was grey. "Joe, maybe you better draw me a

beer—I don't feel so good now," he said.

Automatically Joe complied. He stared fixedly at the sleeping man at the table. Apparently he had not stirred.

Suddenly the bar with its odors of beer and ale and smoke, with its dull-brown walls, its musty deer-head and autographed pictures . . . all of it was suddenly alien and hostile to him. It was a place he had hated for as long as he could remember. Even the dead man—yes, he hated him, and he wasn't sorry. He was just afraid. He was broke, and where did you get if you were broke? He thought of Jean. He thought of his mother; he thought of the doctor. He felt his mind spinning with fragmentary glimpses of things past: the business-school, a show he'd seen with Jean, his dad's funeral. . . .

He lost track of time. And then the bell was ringing at the door. It was opening and Kelly was back. With him was a thin quiet-faced man of about fifty whose grey eyes swept the room. "Sit down," the man said calmly.

They obeyed silently. Kelly stood in the background while the older man twirled his gold watch-chain. "I'm Detective Lacey," he began. "And you—" He faced the cabby first. It took hardly a minute to get the man's story. Lacey took the man's name and address and let him go. Next he stared at the blond man who continued to sleep at the table, then he faced Sam. "You're Sam Ragley, owner of the cafe next door, I understand."

"Part-owner," Sam corrected breathlessly. His adam's-apple bobbed furiously as he swallowed. "And what I know about this is just nothing, honest. Joe came over to call the cops—police. I told him my telephone was jammed, and he sent me out to find Kelly and—and that's everything I know, sir." He mopped his lips again with his sleeve and looked at Lacey anxiously.

The detective asked him a few questions. No, Sam hadn't heard a shot, but he usually kept his radio going loud. No, he couldn't

Scratch your head\*  
and if you find . . .

You've got dandruff  
on your mind . . .



\*THE FAMOUS  
FINGER- NAIL  
(F-N) TEST



GET **WILDROOT**  
**CREAM-OIL**

GROOMS THE HAIR — RELIEVES DRYNESS  
REMOVES LOOSE DANDRUFF



see who entered the bar from his place. And it had been an hour since he'd seen Ring; before Joe arrived, he meant. Ring had come over to get a pack of cigarettes.

**L**ACEY let Sam leave. He looked at Harry, and Harry smiled engagingly. Yes, Harry would help all he could. The fact was that he and Ring had been going to The Sport Club for a poker game; a five-grand set-in, to be exact. Yet, the money had to be cash. . . . That was about all he knew, except the coincidence of the blood on the glass Joe had served him; that made him suspicious, and he'd investigated.

Would there have been time to slip the body out the back window and dump it at Second and Houston while Joe had been gone? . . . Well, Harry guessed there would have been time. Yes, they could reach him at his hotel anytime. He left.

Joe's eyes met the grey calm eyes of Lacey, and the man said softly, "That leaves you and me, Joe." He leaned forward, settling his foot in a chair, and propping his chin in the heel of his palm. "I want you to tell me the truth, son," he said. "Kelly's been giving me a little background on you, and—well, just tell the truth."

"You mean, he told you my mother's sick and I'm in debt. He told you I've been wanting to get married for three years and couldn't make it. He told you I needed five grand. That's it, isn't it?" Joe pulled his tie loose. He felt hot, caged-in.

Lucey smiled indulgently. "Don't get mad, kid. Just tell me the truth. That's easy."

"This is it." Joe leaned forward. His voice was tight and low. "I knew about the poker game, but I didn't know what the stakes were going to be, or care. Ring just asked me to relieve him at midnight. I did . . . I mean, I came at midnight and found him dead. That guy was the only person in here. Then Harry came in. I'd touched the body and got the blood on my hand. I didn't notice. I served him an ale and went to Sam's to call the police. I sent him to find Kelly and I came back here. And that—that's everything I know. I swear to God it is."

"Ring doesn't have his five grand any more," Lacey said. "And that brings up another question: Why was the body moved from here to the corner of Second, and why were the shirt, tie, and undershirt removed and carried away?"

"I don't know," Joe said immediately. He swallowed.

"Did you ever own a gun, Joe?" Lucey asked. Joe opened his mouth to answer, but before he could speak—

"Yeah. Damn fool said he liked Java. 'At's what he said—liked Java!" The thick, mum-

bling words broke into the room. Joe jerked around nervously. Lacey glanced up. The yellow-haired man had aroused and was staring bleakly about the room, a moist, vague smile on his lips and his hair falling over his forehead. Laboriously his eyes focused themselves on Joe and he grinned.

"You know that, pal?" he asked huskily. "Know he liked Java? You know that?" He shook his head slowly. "'At's what he said, and I tell you, I been there! Nobody likes it! But 'at's what he said and . . . then he yelled. Yeah. . . Yelled he was hurt. . . Back there, see?" He pointed uncertainly toward the rear room. His head started back to the table. He pulled himself awake again and fumbled for his glass. "You think I need another drink, pal?"

"As I was saying, Joe," Lacey began patiently, "Do you have—"

"No, wait! Listen, Mr. Lacey!" Joe exclaimed, rising from his chair. "This guy—he knows something!" He moved to the man's table and shook his shoulders. "Listen! Can you hear me, mister?"

"Hear? Sure I hear you. Whatcha want, bud?"

"You said you heard a man yell?" Joe asked intently.

"Yeah. I . . . I was in the can. Heard him."

"And before that, what did he say?" Joe asked breathlessly.

"He said—said he . . ." The man frowned. "Oh! Said he liked—"

The thundering roar smashed against the low ceiling, echoed and hammered against the walls. A thick, choked scream spilled from the lips of the blond man, and he doubled backward, clutching at his spine.

In the next instant the room was plunged into darkness. Again the man's agonized cry raked against Joe's ears. Lacey and Kelly were cursing. Kelly's flashlight flashed on.

"Stand still! Stay where you are, Joe!" Lacey shouted. Then furious footsteps pounded into the rear room. There was the crash of overturning tables, chairs, falling brooms and mops; there were other curses. Joe stood like a man frozen for an instant. Then, suddenly, he bolted for the door.

**H**E PLUNGED through the snow, wrenched open the door of Sam's Cafe, and hurried toward the back storeroom. Just as he reached the doorway, the soft whisper touched his ears:

"Don't you move, Joe. Don't you say nothing!" And into the dim margin of light crept the gaunt, bald figure of Sam Ragley. His face was streaming with perspiration. He wiped it away with his left sleeve. The right hand held a gleaming automatic.



"You— You— That java! You took Ring some coffee! He always called it java!" Joe exploded. "He—"

"You shut up!" Sam whispered furiously. "I'm getting out. I ain't staying for no cops! And you' gonna help me, Joe! I don't want to die! They ain't going to get me!"

Joe couldn't move. Sam was trembling violently. His lips worked grotesquely; his throat convulsed. Joe heard feet running in the alley behind the building; heard other feet moving back through the bar.

The gun dug into his ribs. "Hurry! We got to hurry!" The gun trembled. Joe watched the man's twitching face with a terrified fascination. Then he walked back through the warm coffee-scented cafe, with the gun against his spine. Sam snapped off the light. The wide street became half-distinct in the misty glow of snowfall. They stepped outside, and the cold silence wrapped itself around Joe. Never had the street seemed so long and so lonely.

"I've got to make it, got to make it," the man chanted frantically. "I—I got to—I—I never knew anybody was in that toilet. I just heard Ring telling somebody to bring him five grand. He was using my telephone, see? And—I got to thinking about—about how I hated Ring. About how I needed five grand!"

"You can't make it, Sam. You're not smart. Even the smart ones get caught. Don't you see," Joe argued harshly. "Give up!"

"No! I got to make it! I'm not going to die! I—I didn't think about really killing him, see? It was just the money—needing it, knowing he had it. I had a gun and I took him some coffee. I—I reached out, like to hand it to him, then I—poured it on him. It was hot. I shot him while he was excited and— and then the coffee was all over him and I got to thinking maybe. . . Joe, you hear anybody behind us? Seems like I hear somebody!"

He gasped harshly. "I can't see, but— Get in that alley, Joe!" he choked. "I know I hear somebody!"

**J**OE turned into a narrow alley. The gun kept forcing him on. Then they stopped. The silence was broken only by Sam's ragged breathing. He seemed to be crying, too—very softly.

Sam kept talking. "After I—shot Ring and the coffee was there, I got to thinking the coffee would show it was me, maybe, but then you came in and I—I went down the trap-door into the basement. It has another trap-door up to my place, see? I went up there. I had to think before something happened. Then you sent me after Kelly. First I went back to my place and went down into

the basement again. You was fighting with Harry when I dragged Ring out that back window and pulled off his clothes with the coffee on them. You see, Joe? I had to do it! I didn't want to do any more. I wished I hadn't done anything then, but I had to go on. I—I drug his body up there. I went that way because there wasn't any snow against the buildings on that side of the alley. Then I left him. Joe, you hear anything?"

"I think I do, Sam," Joe lied softly. "Footsteps. Coming along that street out there. Sounds like Kelly, a little."

Sam choked softly. And Joe's mind hurried on. I think I can make him crack, his mind chanted. I think I can—I can—I can get his gun. He's a murderer. There'll be pictures in the paper—a big story about me. Funny things happen when you get in the papers. They'd tell about me quitting business school. About Mom and her heart. People fall for that stuff. If I can get his gun—I think I can—I think I—can—kill him!

"Joe? Can you hear it now? You still hear it, Joe?" Sam whimpered.

"They're coming, Sam. Listen—" Joe drew a deep breath.

"Look out, Sam!" he shouted harshly. "Be careful!"

He could feel the thin man jump and tremble. In the same split instant Joe spun and threw his fist. He grabbed for the gun. The blow missed, but his left hand found the bony wrist and twisted. Sam screamed in pain. Then the gun hit the snow, and Joe grabbed it. He came up to see Sam backing away. He could see Sam's eyes gleaming in terror, his face working convulsively.

"You— Don't kill me!" Sam screamed. He turned. He began to run in a stumbling, clumsy gait. He fell. He dragged himself up and stumbled on, screaming as he ran.

Joe lifted the gun and sighted. He drew a bead on the gaunt back. He waited—and waited—and waited. . . .

And then he closed his eyes. Slowly his hand fell. The gun hit the snow. A wave of sickening relief poured into Joe's throat. He stared into the snowfall as the hopeless figure fell and rose again and finally vanished.

Joe did not even follow. He knew it would be only minutes—certainly no more than an hour until Sam was caught.

Money, Sam had cried. It would be in his face—that twisted hunger. And Joe knew he would see his own face in the face of Sam. He knew it would never happen now. Never could it happen now. But without tonight, perhaps. . . .

"Without tonight, it could have been another guy," he whispered. "Someday it might have been—"



# QUEEN OF THE MAYHEM

By KEN LEWIS

**A** BIGAIL STONE hummed *Rock of Ages* in a flat contralto as she crossed the back pasture from the Jones place after prayer meeting. Brushing a sprig of lank grey hair from above her tired eyes, she rounded the corner of the barn and started toward the house, glancing instinctively at the lighted window of her husband's first-floor bedroom.

What she saw made her stop, then hurry forward faster—her breathing shallow and irregular, her high-buttoned shoes clicking like castanets on the cement walk—though it was only a shadow. . . . The tall, thin shadow of a man outlined on the bedroom wall opposite the window.

*My land! she thought. What's Jeremiah doin' out of bed at this hour o' the night?*

It was then that she started screaming.

For it suddenly occurred to her that her husband hadn't been able to get out of bed under his own power since that stroke two years ago!

By the time she reached the window the shadow had whisked away. And its going seemed to leave a strange and ominous darkness in the room inside, though she could tell from the glow that the reading lamp still burned behind the bed.

She stood there a moment, pulse racing, staring into the window. From this angle neither the bed nor the hall door were visible. In fact, nothing was visible but the perfectly blank expanse of wall where the shadow had stood a few seconds before.

At last she turned and stumbled toward the back steps, fumbling in her pocketbook for the keys. As the lock clicked open, a door slammed at the other end of the house and heavy footsteps pounded down the front walk, going away.

She did not follow them. Her first thought was of her husband. She found him in the bed, much as she had left him—except for the dead, staring eyes and the dark bruises discolored his wrinkled throat. Then she saw that the pillow had been half pulled from beneath his head, and she put trembling fingers under it, found nothing.

It's no more than I deserve, she thought bleakly. Humorin' Paw because of his sickness—lettin' him keep our money under his pillow that way. . . .

She straightened, moved determinedly to the phone in the hall, told the operator to get

Deputy Jim Stebbs on the wire. She made certain that that veteran officer was in full possession of all the details, before she replaced the receiver.

Weak, giddy, emotional women were abhorrent to Abigail Stone. The severe bun into which her gray hair was knotted, the stiff, unrelieved sobriety of her calf-length black dress, the stubborn tilt of her sharp bony chin, all indicated a personality which would stand up defiantly under any buffeting life might hold in store.

But surely she could be permitted a brief faint, now that the important thing had been taken care of. . . .

**T**HE pounding on the door continued a full minute before Sheriff Pat Casey's black lashes fluttered and slender fingers crept from the cover to snap on the bedside lamp.

"Yes"—yawn—"What is it?"

Then the drowsiness evaporated as Jim Stebbs shouted at her through the panel. Quivering a little, the wartime sheriff of Riverview County tossed back the covers, slipped out of a filmy lace nightgown and into a brown wool business suit, and paused before a dressing-table mirror long enough to pat black curls into place and touch lipstick to a small, firm mouth.

It's come, Patricia Casey thought. The thing I've been dreading ever since I agreed to fill out Frank's term: My first murder case!

But it was excitement, not fear, which caused the tightness in her chest as she hurried into the little office below to listen to Jim Stebbs' story.

"Found Billy Derkin runnin' along the road right after Abigail phoned," the gaunt, grim-faced deputy finished. "He's been farmin' the Stone place on shares since Jeremiah's stroke—got a little shack between their place and mine."

"He still had the money on him. Claimed he didn't know nothin' about the murder—that he'd just been out for a moonlit stroll and found the money in the road!"

He snorted.

Pat considered that. "Have you seen Mrs. Stone yet?"

"No'm. She said there wasn't no question but what Jeremiah was dead, all right. And I figured you'd want to handle the investigation yourself, with election comin' up next week."

Pat nodded. The county commissioners had



appointed her sheriff *pro tem* when her husband resigned the job to enter the Army. The move had been largely political camouflage. First, it meant nationwide publicity for tiny rural Riverview County, proud possessor of the state's first "lady sheriff." Second, certain commissioners had figured their rakeoffs from such rackets as pinball and slot machines and black markets would be bigger, with an inexperienced girl in the seat of law enforcement.

But Pat had disappointed them. Aided by half a dozen veteran deputies, she'd taken an

*Alone with a corpse  
and a killer, Pat  
Casey must solve the  
deadly riddle of a fat  
man who cast a thin  
shadow—and knew  
how to get away with  
murder!*



Pat turned the switch. . . .



active interest in seeing that the duties of her office were carried out to the letter of the law. The situation soon flared into open feud. The corrupt county machine started a whispering campaign based on the incompetency of a woman in a man's job, and some of the commissioners had hinted publicly that perhaps they'd been a little hasty in appointing the wife of the former sheriff to handle his job until he came back.

Pat accepted the challenge. Already, she'd announced her intention to run electively for the position. Now, if she could clear up her first murder case promptly. . . .

She nodded thoughtfully. "We'd better get out to the Stone place right away, Jim. And we'll take Billy with us. Seeing Mrs. Stone might refresh his memory."

Billy Derkin was blubbing brokenly as Jim shoved him out of the cell. His small, bloodshot eyes peered strickenly from between his pudgy fingers and every layer of flesh on his fat, flabby body seemed to quiver individually beneath the faded jeans. Handcuffs would have been ludicrous under the circumstances.

Pat stared at him with a queer letdown feeling. Like most mystery story addicts, she'd always had a certain awe, a secret horrified respect for the cunning and audacity it must take to commit murder.

But now that she was face to face with the real thing—a shaking fat man who covered his doughy face and whined like a grammar-school bully suddenly confronted by one of his victims' big brothers—a slight quiver of revulsion passed through her.

Jim Stebbs laid a steady hand on her shoulder. "They're all like this at first, ma'am," he said grimly. "The fat, soft ones, I mean. Till they break. . . ."

**A**BIGAIL STONE stood on the back stoop and watched the car grind to a stop in the drive. Her grey hair had been freshly combed and rearranged so that it covered the small lump at the back of her head. If she hadn't just tripped over the hall carpet back there—if she had actually fainted—nobody was ever going to find out about it!

She recognized the sedan as Jim Stebbs', but the moonlight showed Billy Derkin's round, trembling form emerging first, and she wondered momentarily what Billy was doing with the deputy. Then she saw Pat's slender outline following him, and her lips compressed in a thin, straight line.

She noted with grudging approval the warm sensible clothes the girl wore, and the firm, intelligent look of her young face in the moonlight. She appraised the sober determination in the level black eyes as the trio trooped into the kitchen. And then what Abigail regarded as her better judgment asserted itself.

"If I'd wanted a sheriff in petticoats pokin' around here, Jim Stebbs," she said acidly, "I'd have called her myself!"

Pat stiffened, her face flushing. Then she smiled. "Here's the man who murdered your husband, Mrs. Stone," she said quietly.

Abigail Stone turned to stare at Derkin's quivering, downcast face and for a moment the grey eyes narrowed. Then slowly, positively, she shook her head.

"No'm," she said flatly, "it ain't."

Pat's eyes darkened. "What makes you say that, Mrs. Stone?"

"Because the man who kilt Paw was a skinny feller, built more like Jim here."

"But—I thought you didn't actually see him!"

"I didn't. But I saw his shadder. I paid partic'lar attention to that shadder, young woman. It was 'way too narrow for Billy."

Pat's thoughts swirled. Was Billy Derkin innocent, after all? The change that had come over him now was almost cataclysmic. He stared at Abigail a moment, fat jaw wobbling, as though he hadn't heard right. Then a new look came alive in his muddy, red-rimmed eyes. Built a grateful look, but an exulting one.

She swallowed and wondered how Frank would have handled the situation. He'd have found some way to get around old Mrs. Stone's assertion, all right. But Frank was somewhere in the South Pacific, now. She turned bewilderedly to Jim Stebbs.

The long-faced deputy cleared his throat. "Look here, Abby," he protested. "I found Billy runnin' down the road with your money still on him." He paused to place the roll of bills on the table. "He's been close to you and Jeremiah for two years now, farmin' your land. As such, he'd know the one time you left Jeremiah alone for an hour or so. As such, too, he'd have plenty of chance to find out about the money Jeremiah kept under his pillow—"

He broke off futilely. Abigail Stone's face remained impassive, like an old-fashioned schoolmarm listening impatiently to the fantasies of an imaginative child. Billy Derkin's eyes had begun to gloat.

"You see?" he demanded in a high, breathy voice. "It's just like I said. 'Course I didn't kill Jeremiah, Abigail! I was walkin' by the house when I seen someone bust out the front door and start runnin' down the road. A tall, thin guy, like you said—I figured he didn't have no business in there in the first place, so I took out after him."

"I seen him drop somethin' down there in the hollow, and when I stopped to pick it up he got away from me. It was the money. I was just gettin' ready to bring it back when Jim come along and arrested me!" The reedy



voice broke off, waited hesitantly for her nod of approval.

It didn't come. Abigail looked at him sharply, but her thin lips remained tightly compressed.

Pat groaned inwardly and took up the battle. "You can see how absurd Billy's story is, Mrs. Stone," she said. "It must have been a terrible shock, seeing that shadow in your husband's room. And sometimes, under stress, the mind—the eyes—play strange tricks on a person. In view of everything, do you think you'd be willing to testify in court that Billy Derkin couldn't possibly be your husband's murderer?"

Abigail unclamped her lips but the grey eyes remained unyielding. "All I know," she said tartly, "is that God never yet made a fat man who could cast a thin shadow. It just ain't in the nature of things."

PAT'S thoughts darkened. She had suddenly realized what was wrong. Abigail Stone was not a woman to be lightly contradicted. Life had taught her to rely on the evidence of her own senses and the interpretations of her own mind, and she firmly resented any tendency in others to doubt what she had seen or heard or decided.

But she was fair. That was shown by her refusal to accept the ready "proof" of her statement offered by Billy Derkin's story. No amount of abstract theorizing would ever change her conviction about that shadow. But if it could definitely be proved that she was wrong, she'd probably be the first to admit it, regardless of the cost to her pride.

And, Pat realized, it was up to her to discover that proof and present it unmistakably to the old lady. Because all the circumstantial evidence against Billy Derkin would be worth little in court, with Mrs. Stone's direct testimony to refute it.

She nodded. "Very well, Mrs. Stone. Perhaps we owe Billy an apology. But the evidence did certainly seem to point to him, till you told us about the shadow. May we see the—your husband's room, now?"

Abigail nodded silently and led them through a door to the right. Pat noticed that Billy Derkin had lost much of his new-found assurance as they stepped forward. He hesitated on the threshold as though he thought the killer might still be in that bedroom, waiting to pounce on him now.

But Jim Stebbs shoved him forward, and he glanced in terror at the wall to his left. Then, miraculously, his confidence seemed to flow back. Pat followed his gaze, and understood.

*Billy Derkin had been afraid of his shadow!*

The fear had been groundless, however. Magnified by oblique light from the reading lamp at the head of the bed, the shadow cov-

ered a good twenty-five square feet of wall space. Certainly it was hard to understand how anyone could mistake it for one cast by a thin man.

Pat paused inside the door to impress the scene on her mind. "The room's just as you found it, Mrs. Stone?" she asked gently.

Abigail nodded. For the first time some of the pain and grief brought by her husband's death found an outlet in the grey eyes. "I—I pulled the sheet over Paw's face," she said woodenly. "That's all."

Pat nodded. She noticed that the electric wall-switch beside the door registered "off." Besides the bed and the glowing lamp beyond it, the room contained an ancient marble-topped dresser in one corner, a second reading lamp, unlighted, beside a platform rocker at the bed's foot, and a hooked rug.

She catalogued the items mentally—and suddenly her breathing caught and her heart began to pound. She tried to keep the crescendo of excitement from her eyes and voice as she spoke.

"Frank always said to get the facts down as quickly and definitely as possible," she murmured. "The room will have to be photographed, of course. But without a metric camera, photographs sometimes fail to indicate distances accurately. . . ." She paused.

"Mrs. Stone, I wonder if you'd take Jim outside now and show him just where you were when you saw the shadow? Meanwhile, Billy can help me measure the room. I know he wants to do all he can to get this thing cleared up. Especially since he's our only suspect so far—"

Derkin's muddy little eyes jerked, then dropped quickly. "Sure," he mumbled. "Sure, I wanta help."

Jim stared at her sharply, caught the barely perceptible lowering of her lids. He nodded. "All right, Abby," he sighed. "Might as well get started."

Abigail scowled. "I don't know what you're tryin' to get at, young woman," she sniffed. "But I spose I'll have to be a party to this tomfoolery, if you say so."

Pat stifled a grin, concentrated on looking cool and efficient till she heard their faint footsteps on the walk outside. Then she turned to Billy.

"I want the room exactly as it was when Mrs. Stone found her husband dead," she said crisply. "If you'll just go over and turn that sheet back while I untangle this tape-measure—" She fumbled in her handbag.

Billy Derkin eyed her furtively. His chins were quivering again.

"What's the matter, Billy? Afraid?"

"Why—why, no, ma'am. I ain't afraid. Why should I be?" He crossed reluctantly to the bed.



And just as he bent to pull back the sheet, she snapped the wall switch. Sudden radiance poured from the lamp at the foot of the bed to fuse with the light already filling the room, and from somewhere outside a cracked voice cried faintly:

*"That's it! That's it, Jim! The same shadow I seen when I come up the walk tonight!"*

Billy Derkin stiffened. He stood there a moment, pudgy fingers rigid, fat face immobile save for a nerve plucking insistently at one corner of his flaccid lips. Then he whirled.

"Jim!" Pat shrielled.

Her fingers clutched in the handbag, came up with the small flat automatic Frank had given her. She pointed it at the splotchy face hurtling toward her, squeezed the trigger. Harder.

Nothing happened.

It wasn't until sweaty fingers had jerked the gun from her grasp and a moist arm had bowled her into one corner like a cartwheel that she remembered the safety catch. Frank had said the gun wouldn't go off till you released that!

And by then it was too late. Waving the gun, Billy Derkin had disappeared into the hall. She heard his heavy footsteps pounding toward the front door, heard Jim's lighter ones racing frantically around the house outside.

Abruptly, the footsteps in the hall wheeled, thudded back toward the rear. She heard them crash through the kitchen, heard the back door screech open.

There was a gasping, high-pitched curse, a sodden thump, then silence. Silence through which Abigail Stone's flat contralto called impatiently, "Well, here he is! You goin' to come get him, or do you want me to lug him in myself?"

**SHAKILY**, Pat pulled herself from the rug. She reached the back door just as Jim Stebbs rounded the corner of the house from the left. Both halted, gaping.

Arms akimbo, Abigail Stone bent above the prostrate figure crumpled on the sidewalk at the base of the steps. "Figured he'd come out this way," she said sourly. "Car was nearest the back, and he'd need that car to get away in. . . . He ain't hurt bad. Hit his head on the cement when he fell."

She sighed. "Good thing I never give up hightopped shoes. I mighta got a nasty bruise, stickin' my shin out that way to trip him as he busted through the door."

Jim knelt to turn Derkin's unconscious face to the light. "By George, Abby," he muttered softly. "You're a better man than I am. and that's a fact."

Abigail ignored the compliment. "I wanta know about that shadder, young lady!"

Pat smiled weakly. "I thought I had the answer when I noticed that second lamp," she said. "Both of them must have been on when Billy entered the room to kill and rob your husband. And he never thought about turning them off till he heard you coming up the walk outside. Then he flicked the wall-switch on his way out, hoping to plunge the room in darkness and make it impossible for you to identify him if you did get inside before he escaped.

"But the lamp at the head of the bed wasn't connected with the switch—you must have had it installed later because of your husband's illness—so it continued to burn. And you never thought that maybe the other lamp had been on, too, when you'd seen the shadow?"

Abigail Stone shook her head stubbornly. "What's that got to do with Billy's shadow bein' sometimes fat and sometimes thin?" she wanted to know.

Pat smiled again. "You see, Mrs. Stone," she said, "there *is* one time when a fat man may cast a thin shadow—or seem to, at least. That's when *two* lights are shining on him from different angles, just as they were on Billy when he bent above your husband's bed.

"That way, each light eats into the far edge of the shadow caused by the other one, diminishing it but leaving a narrow darker strip in the middle, where the two shadows overlap and neither light penetrates directly. You've seen it happen hundreds of times—everyone has—but just never thought anything about it before."

Jim Stebbs whistled. "Ain't hard to guess who our next sheriff'll be, once this gets around," he grinned.

Abigail sniffed. "Why in tarnation didn't you explain all this in the first place, young woman, 'stead o' makin' Jim and me go outside and give Billy a chance to git away?"

Pat stifled the impulse to grin. "I thought it might be more—convincing—Mrs. Stone," she said gravely, "if you discovered the truth for yourself, without any coaching from me."

Abigail's eyes lost some of their sternness. "You did some right smart figurin', all right," she said softly. "But a lot of good it come near doin' you. Billy Derkin would be on his way to Canada right now, if it'd been left up to you. Let that be a lesson to you, Missy. Catchin' criminals is no job for a woman—" She broke off in midsentence as the significance of what she herself had done occurred to her. She stared down at Billy Derkin's limp form, saw the gun still clutched in one puffy, outstretched hand, and her grey eyes widened. Her thin lips parted hollowly.

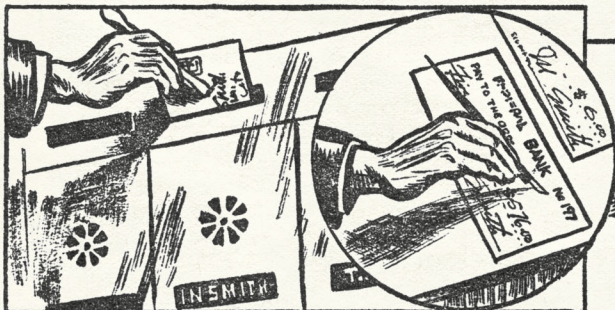
"Oh!" she gasped. "Oh, my goodness!"

And for the second time that night, Abigail Stone fainted dead away.



# ODDITIES IN CRIME

by JON L. BLUMMER



One gang of forgers recently caught was so expert that in three years they netted over \$250,000 and were even able to obtain over \$13,000 from the FHA. They obtained signatures by stealing envelopes of cancelled checks received by depositors from mail boxes, copying the signatures, resealing and returning the envelopes to the mail boxes. The forged checks were sent by hired messengers to the banks to be cashed so that no bank employee could ever identify any member of the gang.



The unusual crime of peonage was admitted by a wealthy Arkansas plantation owner recently and netted him a two and one-half year sentence. He kept eleven persons in thrall by juggling their accounts, and by threats of violence for ten years.



Positively identified by a number of eye witnesses that he was the slayer of a man in a bar-room brawl except that his hair was a deep brown, undoubtedly his blond hair dyed, the suspect's assertions of his innocence were of no avail until the judge ordered a shampoo and the wash water was analyzed. There was no trace of dye and the judge directed a verdict of not guilty.

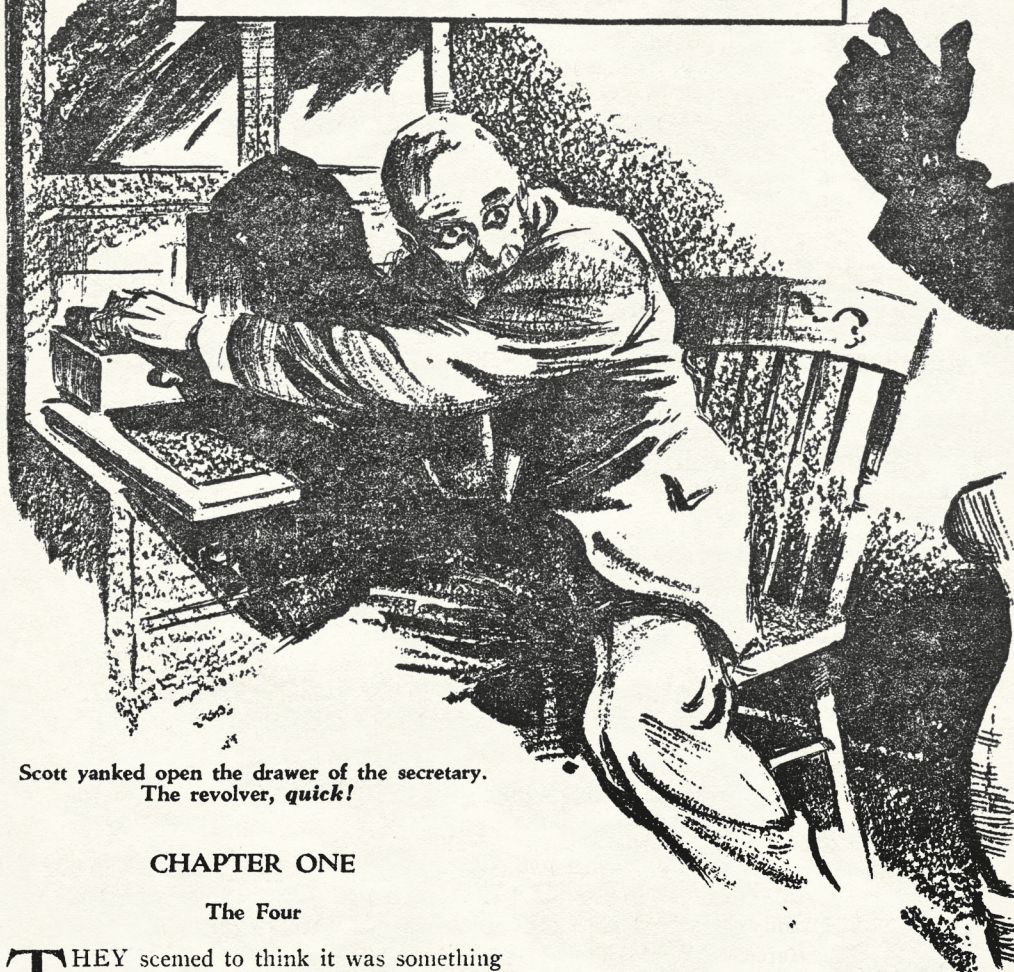


The only clue the FBI had to the identity of a wanted swindler was a twenty year old photograph. By a strange turn of fate the wanted one had obtained a position as salesman with a hair dye firm and used the product on himself. It gave him such a youthful appearance that the FBI men had no difficulty in tracing him.



# THOSE WHO PLAYED *God*

By  
G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS



Scott yanked open the drawer of the secretary.  
*The revolver, quick!*

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Four

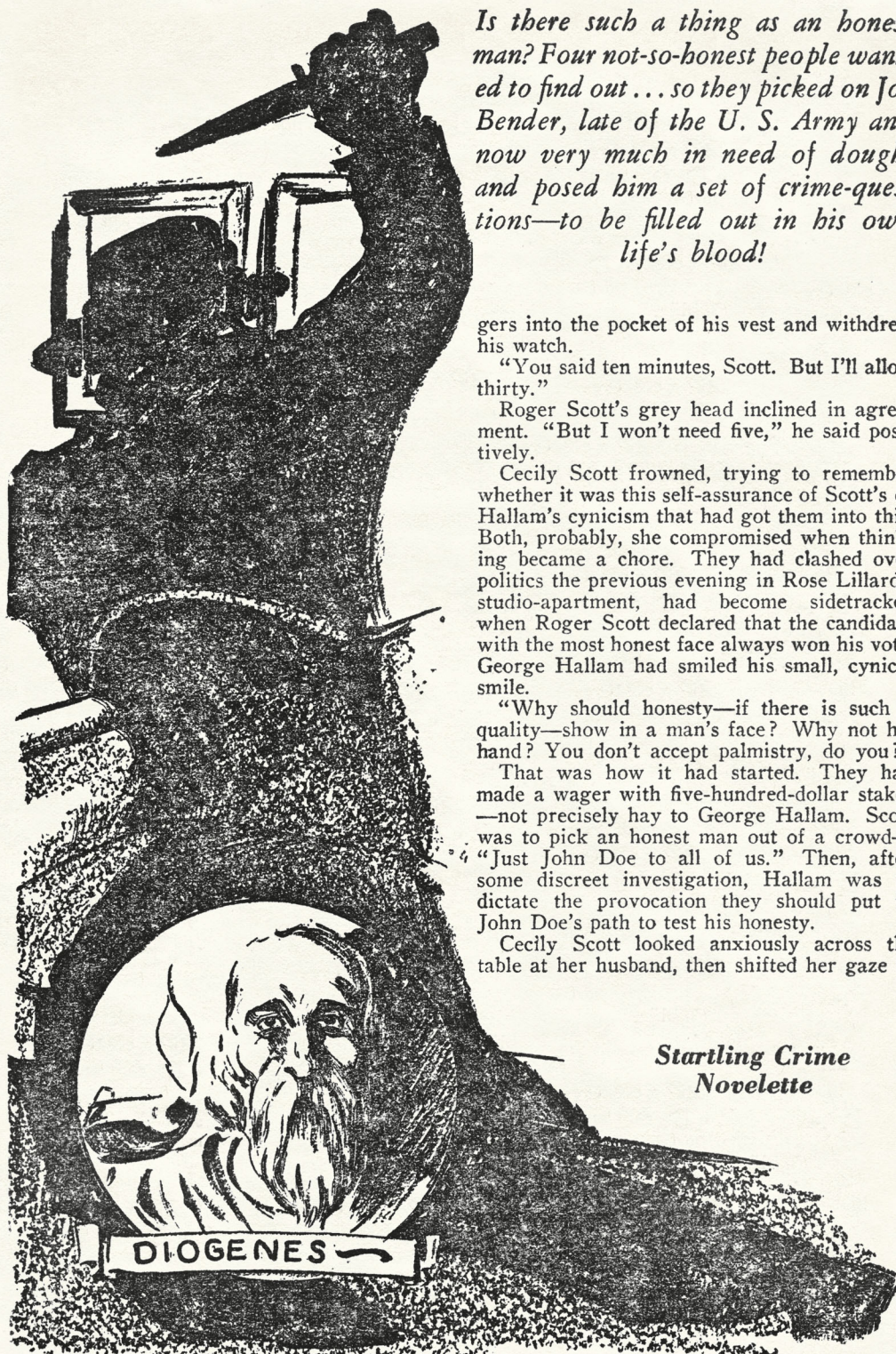
THEY seemed to think it was something you could turn on and off like water from a faucet. Of the four, not one of them mentioned that it could lead to murder. They were too intent on playing God to consider the possible outcome.

To look at them, no one would have supposed they were up to anything. They were simply two couples sitting at a table in a smart

cocktail lounge on Monument Place. Well-dressed, well-bred people on whom the veneer of civilization was tightly joined and smoothly varnished. Four nice people who looked casually out into the bright October afternoon in search of a victim.

Hallam, the artist, thrust slim bronze fin-





*Is there such a thing as an honest man? Four not-so-honest people wanted to find out . . . so they picked on Joe Bender, late of the U. S. Army and now very much in need of dough, and posed him a set of crime-questions—to be filled out in his own life's blood!*

gers into the pocket of his vest and withdrew his watch.

"You said ten minutes, Scott. But I'll allow thirty."

Roger Scott's grey head inclined in agreement. "But I won't need five," he said positively.

Cecily Scott frowned, trying to remember whether it was this self-assurance of Scott's or Hallam's cynicism that had got them into this. Both, probably, she compromised when thinking became a chore. They had clashed over politics the previous evening in Rose Lillard's studio-apartment, had become sidetracked when Roger Scott declared that the candidate with the most honest face always won his vote. George Hallam had smiled his small, cynical smile.

"Why should honesty—if there is such a quality—show in a man's face? Why not his hand? You don't accept palmistry, do you?"

That was how it had started. They had made a wager with five-hundred-dollar stakes—not precisely hay to George Hallam. Scott was to pick an honest man out of a crowd—"Just John Doe to all of us." Then, after some discreet investigation, Hallam was to dictate the provocation they should put in John Doe's path to test his honesty.

Cecily Scott looked anxiously across the table at her husband, then shifted her gaze to

**Startling Crime  
Novelette**



Hallam's dark, sardonic face. Hallam smiled.

"You're not serious, are you?" she asked. She turned to Rose Lillard, her sister. "Are they really going through with this?"

Rose had an easy, purring laugh. "Roger is always serious."

Which was true enough. A sober, grey man, Roger Scott, stooped at fifty under the responsibilities acquired as manager of a local credit corporation. Just a big, dull man with a soft, inside-out mouth. In the lazy wool-gathering that frequently went on inside her lovely head, Cecily sometimes speculated on putting one of those big oompah horns to Roger's lips. She was sure the result would be a very low note. . . .

**T**HEIR table was next to the window so that Scott could watch the passers-by.

"I've been doing this for years," Scott said, chuckling. "First as a credit investigator for thirty a week. It isn't a matter of eyes, or noses, or mouths—"

It was, of course, purely intuitive, but the instant Scott set eyes on the tall young man in the baggy topcoat, he knew that there walked honest John Doe. He stood up, knocking over his cocktail glass in his excitement.

The young man on the sidewalk noticed the sudden movement beyond the window, looked in their direction as he passed. His battered felt hat was turned up in front so that they got an unobstructed view of his face. His skin was sunburned—not bronzed like Hallam's—and his thick pale eyebrows stood out like wads of cotton on a Santa Claus mask. It was a lean face over big bones, all knobs and valleys, with a pleasantly wide mouth. His eyes were bright blue with fine laugh-lines etched at the corners.

Hallam asked, "Is that John Doe, Scott?"

Scott nodded. "Yes . . . Yes, I'll take him. Come on. We've got to tag him, find out where he works, all about him." Then he was on his way with Hallam following close behind.

Rose Lillard, watching their backs, laughed softly. "Two gods descending from Olympus."

Rose was the one with the red hair whose short, blunt fingers designed those incredible hats—Chapeaux by Lillard. She was forty and dumpy, but it took a woman's eye to discover it. Her Oxford glasses never dangled the conventional black ribbon, but picked up a dart of color from her costume; this afternoon the ribbon was green.

Her sister had beauty enough for the family—Cecily, a man's woman, with her lazy, smoke-blue eyes, her full ripe mouth, her velvety tan complexion and honey hair. Cecily, of slower perception than Rose, looked over her shoulder at the glass door now swinging empty behind the two men.

"They've gone after him," she realized aloud. "It seems wrong somehow. He hasn't done anything to us. We don't even know him. He's just John Doe. Yet they want to get into his life with—" she word-groped a moment and gave it up, "with both feet and make a mess of it."

Rose drew on her cigarette, her cheeks hollowing. Her green eyes were faintly amused. "Don't worry too much, darling. You have your own troubles. Your own delightful little mess, as you'd put it."

There was a deepening of color in Cecily's cheeks. Her lips became less full, her eyes less lazy as she built about herself a wall of restraint that dissolved in the waiting that followed. Nothing Cecily accomplished had permanence.

Half an hour went by before Hallam and Scott returned. Scott looked greatly pleased and Hallam wore a lopsided smile.

"Scott is better than a detective," Hallam said as they sat down. "We've learned something about John Doe already."

Rose said dryly, "My guess is he's a farmer."

Scott shook his head. "We followed him around the corner to the office of the Brinker Alarm System. He's their service man. I talked with a Brinker salesman. Not about John Doe, mind you," he pointed out with pride, "but about burglar alarms. I implied that I wanted one of their systems in my house but doubted if the war had left any competent men to install it." He shrugged with his big pink hands. "It all came out, eh, Hallam?"

"Right," Hallam agreed. "John Doe's real name is Joe Bender, recently discharged from the Army. He was in the Signal Corps. . . . Now, Scott has to have a burglar alarm installed in his house."

Rose Lillard's eyes rested maliciously on Cecily. "I can't think of anything Roger needs more for his home than a burglar alarm." She looked away, avoiding an open clash with Cecily's glance. "But have we decided how to tempt our John Doe?"

Scott said, "Hallam has a plan."

**H**ALLAM had a plan—a trap with velvet jaws and well-oiled springs. But it wasn't until the following Monday night that it closed soundlessly on Joe Bender—on Joe Bender's neck. . . .

Roger Scott came home late on Monday night. That had nothing to do with the plan, it was merely incidental. He had served as toastmaster at a political rally banquet; had done such a good job of it, in fact, that certain of the powers-that-be were talking of Roger Scott for mayor, two years hence. Which accounted for the buoyancy in Scott's stride as he approached his house.



The door was locked. Impatiently, he rattled the knob a couple of times before using his latchkey. He strode briskly into the yawning hall.

"Cecily, darling!" he called. "Cecily—!" He broke off, stifling elation with dignity. He mustn't behave like a confounded schoolboy who had won the oratorical contest.

There was a light burning in the living room. Scott crossed quickly to the cased opening, entered onto a carpet so thick it absorbed even his heavy tread. The big, luxuriant room was deserted—except for the fly. That, Scott reflected, was the one disadvantage in automatic heat. There was always one fly left from summer, buzzing around half dead, half alive, and if you didn't get it—

He batted clumsily at the fly and didn't get it. It went off somewhere, its small sound contributing to the heavy silence within the house.

Scott's eyes toured the room and were baffled. The fireplace, the wing chairs on either side, the Lawson sofa, the Chippendale table, a photograph of Cecily on the table. . . . He moved over to the table. There was a scrap of paper torn from the margin of a newspaper, wedged between the glass and frame of Cecily's picture. On the paper was written in pencil, in Cecily's carelessly flowing hand:

*Knew you'd be late. Have gone to spend night with Rose. Didn't want to be alone if John Doe called.*

Scott remembered then—the trap. It dulled the sharp stab of disappointment occasioned by Cecily's absence. But then she needn't have worried about John Doe. John Doe—or call him Joe Bender—was as honest as the day is long. That open face the face of a thief? Absurd!

But to prove how wrong she was, how wrong George Hallam was, Scott crossed to the mahogany secretary that was the trap. He

had taken great pains to play fair with Hallam, which had meant that he had taken pains to put the money in the not-so-secret drawer while Joe Bender had been working on the burglar-alarm system right in the living room.

He dropped heavily into the chair in front of the secretary, opened the slanting front. He pulled on the small carved pillar that flanked the left side of the center pigeonhole. The tiny drawer slid out. He thrust thick soft fingers into the opening, waggled them on emptiness.

An utterly blank expression crawled across Roger Scott's heavy face. It was gone. The bait was gone! John Doe had double-crossed him, had taken the money. John Doe, the honest man—

Scott's back stiffened perceptibly and there was about him an animal-like pricking-up of the ears. A faint draft, a quiet footfall, a shadow moving within the shadows, and Scott knew that he was not alone in the big room. And if John Doe would steal, why not—

Scott slammed the front of the secretary, yanked open the drawer directly beneath. The revolver, *quick!*

But swifter than Scott was the shadow, and swifter still the bright blade that leaped high and darted to bury itself in Scott's arched back.

Death was the sharp stabbing pain, and disillusionment the ache. . . .

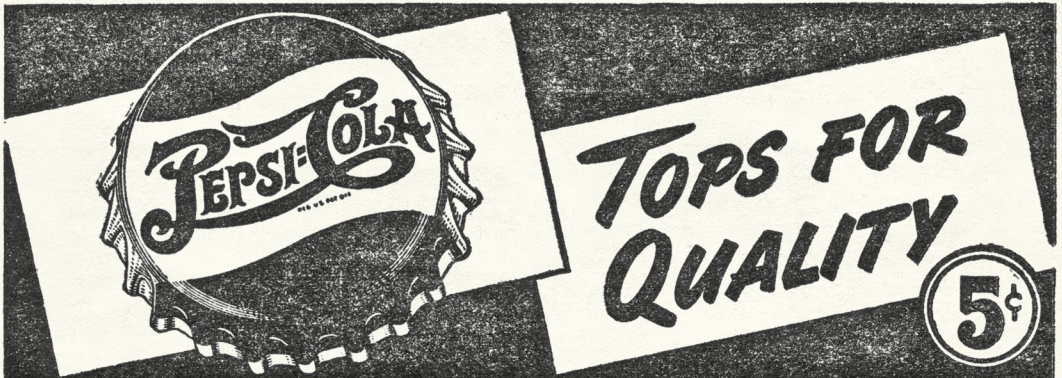
## CHAPTER TWO

### Towhead in Trouble

HE WAS not a half-bad-looking boy in a gangling, red-faced, towheaded way. When he had first come into Hinky's Dinky Hamburger House, Sue Peters had smiled at him from behind the lunch counter.

"Hello," she had said brightly, friendly like somebody you might meet on the courthouse square back home. "Getting chilly, isn't it?"

But that was when he had first come in. . . .





Now he was the only one left at the counter, and the clock crept around toward closing time. The clock, Sue decided, didn't have hands. It had aching feet. She concentrated on an invisible speck on the counter, scraped at it, frowning.

*Seven hamburgers. Nobody could be that hungry. But it's not so much what he's eating as what's eating him!*

He was having trouble with his hat again. The brim wouldn't stay down. His fingers trembled a little, trying to crease the brim down over his eyes. But it always snapped up, showing his funny yellow-tufted eyebrows.

*Why does he keep trying to see on all sides of himself at once?*

The steamy door opened and a man entered, preceded by a blast of cold air. Sue Peters' arms were bare in the green pinafore. She hugged herself briefly.

"Getting chilly, isn't it?"

"Right," the newcomer agreed. He wore a black wrap-around topcoat and no hat. His black hair was slicked straight back from a high forehead. His face was all planes and angles, like Caesar's on a Roman coin. A bronze Roman coin. He ran sharp, black eyes over the colored menu cards suspended on a wire over the back counter, then sat down on a stool one place removed from the nervous, tow-headed boy.

Sue Peters noticed that the towhead had both hands up to his hat again, creasing down the brim.

"A hamburger," said the newcomer. "Rare. And coffee." He had a deep, resonant voice that would better have fitted an order for filet mignon.

Sue stepped to the service hatch and called to Hinky in the kitchen, "Hold one down short. Draw one." When she turned from the white blur of Hicky's apron, she caught the eyes of the towheaded boy on her again. But they slipped away like quicksilver.

*Shy, she thought, reaching in front of him for the mustard pot. His eyes meet those of a kinda not bad-looking girl, and right away they got to go somewhere else in a hurry.*

But was it shyness? She remembered that other quiet, nervous young man who had come in one night last month. He had hung around eating hamburgers until he gagged. And after closing, when Sue had left, he was outside, waiting. . . . She remembered the sound of his footsteps in the dark; how they had quickened when hers had. She remembered the swift reaching of his hand, their touch, her scream. . . . She had kicked and fought away from that one, and for a week after had slept with her bureau across the door of her furnished room.

This one was bigger, stronger. . . .

"Hey, Susie, comin' up!" Hinky's voice

was jagged with impatience. She turned to the service hatch for the order and Hinky's voice became something else—intimate, presumptuous.

"How you doin', honey?"

**S**HE took the order away with a yank, slapped the thick mug and plate down in front of the man with the Roman-coin face. She'd quit tonight, she decided. Her daytime job—running a drill press at Waring Gear—took care of her living and then some to send home to Buddy who was studying to be a doctor. Waiting on the counter until she was dead on her feet, feeding incessantly-chewing faces, quick-stepping under the lash of Hinky's voice one minute and dodging his forward passes the next, running from footsteps in the dark—they ought to print all that on a tag and hang it on the fur coat. Because that was the real price. And it wasn't worth it.

"May I have a fork, please?"

"Huh?" she looked down at the Roman-coin face. The man was occupied with his coffee, shaking a few crystals of something out of a glass vial into his cup. He stoppered the bottle, returned it to his pocket. He looked up at her, one black eyebrow lifted, smiling on one side of his mouth.

"A fork," he repeated. "One of those implements fingers were made before."

She got him the fork, watched curiously while he ate the meat patty from the bun with his fork. He didn't eat the bun. She sent a glance at the big towheaded boy. He was hunched over the counter, his elbows close to his sides, his jaws working.

*Stalling, she decided. He's just like the other. Between Hinky and this big quiet wolf, I'm in for a fine large evening!*

The man with the Roman-coin face left his bun on his plate, drank his coffee hurriedly. As he put the mug down, he took a long, slow look at the big towheaded boy on his right. Then he got up and went to the door, to let cold air in as he went out. Sue shivered. She was alone with the towhead and Hinky.

Her ears caught the unmistakable *skeet-skeet* sound of Hinky scraping the griddle in the kitchen. Her eyes fled to the clock. Midnight. She looked away, toward the service hatch, saw Hinky's apron go flying by as he threw it off. It was always a race between Sue and Hinky. She had learned to put on her coat right over the green pinafore, just to get away before Hinky could waylay her.

But tonight there was Hinky and this other one. . . .

She took a sidling step that brought her in front of the big towhead. She noticed his hands, with knuckles large as walnuts.

"We're closing now." Her voice was faint. "Ninety cents."



HE RAISED his head. His eyes rested personally on her face. He said, "All right." He stood off the stool, crammed one of those huge hands in a trouser pocket. When he brought out his roll, Sue noticed how big it was. That was what he wanted her to notice, no doubt. Wanted to dazzle her with the money. To make her think he wasn't such a bad catch when he caught her.

"Keep the change," he said as she whisked the bill from his fingers. Her, "Thanks," was mechanical. She turned to the cash register, feeling the draft of his departure on her back. It was then that she noticed the bill he had given her was a twenty.

"So you're a millionaire in disguise!" she said scornfully into the now-empty room. Then, head on one side, she listened for the scurry of Hinky in the kitchen. There wasn't a sound. But she still had time to beat Hinky. Hinky had to come for the cash, didn't he?

She dashed to the closet for coat, hat and purse. She pulled the hat on without regard to its proper angle. She jammed clenched fists into the sleeve-linings of her coat and ran for the side door. As she went out, she heard the door latch behind her.

In front, dim in the shadows of the night, was the figure of a man. Hinky. She knew by the white blur of his face, by the smell of onion and grease. There was an extra-special smell for tonight, too. Whisky. He moved forward.

She said dully, "Get away, Hinky. Get back."

Hinky laughed. "Aw, I'm not such a bad guy, honey."

"Go tell your wife," she said. She stamped at his foot, trying to catch his instep with her heel.

"Don't go high-hat, baby. We could go places and do things."

"Sure!" she scoffed, because scoffing kept up her courage. "We could go to a roller-skate rink and play tag! Susie, the girl with the cast-iron arches! . . . *Don't you touch me!*"

He closed in, pressing her back against the latched door. His face lowered to hers. His arms went around her. She kicked. She slammed a small right fist into his face.

"Wanna get rough, huh?" Hoarse and close to her ear, breath laden with liquor. "Y' can't treat your boss that way, kid!"

Her heel caught his instep this time. He backed a little, but not far enough. And then she saw it wasn't just Hinky. The other one—the towhead with the big, powerful hands—was standing beyond Hinky.

*Please, God, don't let them gang up on me!*

Hinky came in, hands clutching blindly. Over his shoulder she saw the other one. She felt strength draining out of her, through her

legs, down into the ground. She screamed, and suddenly Hinky's weight was gone from her. The towhead had jerked Hinky back, and Hinky was blustering, "Whatcha hornin' in for? This is a private party!"

"Is that right, Miss?" The voice of the other man was cool.

She laughed stridently. "What do you think!"

Then the knuckles that were as big as walnuts slammed into Hinky's face. Hinky went reeling back, his hands up across his face. There were other blows, but she only heard them, for she was running toward the sidewalk.

SHE kept running until she reached the end of the block. There she stopped, looked back toward the hamburger house. Right in front of the building, in the full light of the neon sign, was the big gangling towhead. He wasn't following her or even looking in her direction. He was just standing at the curb as though waiting for a bus. Only buses didn't stop in the middle of the block.

Northbound along the street came a car. Two bright white headlights and one red one bore down swiftly. In the onrushing glare from the police car, she saw the boy in the baggy topcoat stiffen, saw him turn swiftly back across the sidewalk to disappear in the shadows on the south side of Hinky's place.

She knew what was wrong with him now. He was in trouble with the police. All that money—

The police car went careening by, the back-drag from it tugging at Sue Peters' skirt. She saw the tall, gangling figure emerge from the shadows, then wander slowly south, away from her.

She started to run again, but towards the boy. He jerked a glance over his shoulder, as though he might start running, too. She waved an arm upwards, called to him to wait. He came to a stop, fumbled his hands in under his topcoat to get them into his hip pockets.

Sue came up breathlessly. The light from the boulevard lamp illuminated his face. His blue eyes were soberly fixed on her face. She tried to make her laugh sound light, but that was hard to do with hardly any breath.

"I—I didn't thank you," she got out.

He shuffled one foot, looked down. "That's okay. He wasn't much." He put a hand up to his hat, tipped it without looking at her.

"Well—good night."

"Wait." She caught his arm, felt him start. "Would—would you mind walking with me to where I room? I—I guess after that trouble with Hinky, I'm a little scared." She was afraid, but differently. This was his fear, and she shared it. He was trembling perceptibly.



She said, "Why, you're cold!"

"Huh-uh," he denied. "Just shivering. Which way do we go?"

"That way." She nodded back. "What are you shivering for?"

"Nothing. I'm okay."

They started to walk, Sue holding onto his arm.

"Just nerves, I guess," he said. "I get keyed up when I get in a fight."

"That's not it. You were nervous before you punched Hinky." She waited for him to say something, but he didn't. He just kept walking, taking one step to her one and a half. "You're in trouble," she got out finally. "Aren't you?"

He still didn't say anything for almost a quarter of a block. Then his words came tonelessly, as though his throat was stiff.

"I guess I will be. Tomorrow morning. That must be why I keep trying to hang onto the night."

"With the police," she said. "It's over that big roll of bills you've got?"

"Uh-huh. I don't know what to do with it, now that I've got it. I don't want it."

"Where did you get it?"

He made a gagging sound. "Stole it."

### CHAPTER THREE

John Doe, Killer

**J**OE BENDER looked down at the girl who was walking beside him. She was still clinging to his arm, but a little ahead of him and turned slightly so that she could watch his face. Her steps skittered along lightly. She wasn't a pretty girl, unless Walt Disney's Bambi was pretty. She was like that—trim, alert, graceful even about something like wiping a lunch counter. Her eyes were brown and soft and seemed to understand. She had a funny little face—funny in a nice way—with freckles bridging a pert nose, and a small knob of a chin.

She was some one to talk to, who'd understand.

Joe hadn't been in town long. He had just dropped off on his way home from Fort Dix, New Jersey. This job had been open with the Brinker Alarm people, and he'd thought it would be a way to use some of the training he'd got in the Signal Corps.

But he didn't know anybody he could really talk to. He couldn't feature himself going to his boss, Mr. Ruckle, in the middle of the night and saying—

"You know that Mr. Scott, where I'm installing that alarm system out on North Meridian? Well, he won some money gambling, at least that's what I heard him tell somebody over the phone. And I saw the

money and where he hid it. And you know when Western Union caught me at the shop this noon and phoned a message? That was from Dad. Mom has to have an operation right away and Dad needed five hundred dollars. So when I got back on the job at the Scott house this afternoon, I fixed one of the windows so I could get in after dark, and, Mr. Ruckle, I lifted that roll of money right out of Mr. Scott's secretary, and he'll know as soon as he comes home that I took it, so what the hell am I going to do, Mr. Ruckle? It isn't as though it was really Mr. Scott's money, if he won it gambling, and yet it's just the same. So what am I going to do?"

No, he couldn't talk that way to Mr. Ruckle. He could talk that way to this Sue girl, though. He could tell her the whole thing. She drew him out of his shell, and that was good because, locked up inside himself as he was, he was slowly going nuts.

"It's funny," he went on to Sue, "as soon as I got away from the Scott house, I knew I couldn't use the money. I remembered something Mom used to say about ill-gotten money never doing any good. So I got the notion if I sent her the money for her operation, she'd—she'd die."

Sue nodded. "I know how you feel." She stopped in her tracks, turned, put both hands on his arms, shook him a little. Listen, why don't you just take Mr. Scott's money back? Right now."

He considered that hopefully, shook his head. "He'll be home by now."

"How do you *know*?" she argued. "But suppose he is? You go to the front door and knock." She tapped his chest as though he were Mr. Scott's door. "You say, 'I came to bring your money back.'"

He shuddered. "I couldn't. Not enough nerve."

She shook him again. "Look, you can't get into a mess like this. You just *can't*. . . . Joe, you look at me!"

"I'm in a mess already." Then he looked at her, at her funny, cute face, misty in the lamplight. When she talked, her voice sounded like his throat felt. Her eyes shone.

"Okay," he said. "You win."

**H**E DIDN'T like dragging her into his troubles. But, as she pointed out, he couldn't stop her from boarding a public bus at the same time he did. Anyway, she was sort of an accessory, she said. Because she knew about his taking the money and she hadn't gone to the cops. That made her share his guilt, didn't it?

Standing in front of Mr. Scott's door, Joe Bender was glad she was there. There was something foreboding, even terrifying in the silence that followed the chime of the bell.



"See?" Sue's voice was hushed, small in its triumph. "I told you. He hasn't come home yet. All you have to do is slip into the house through the same window as before and put the money back."

"Suppose," he speculated, "he comes in while I'm there?"

"He won't." She snatched at his coat-sleeve and shook it. "Joe, you're always hanging crepe. Where's the window you got in through?"

"Around here." He led the way off the pillared portico, around to the living room at the side. He crowded through shrubbery to the window he knew was unlatched. He took out his knife, got it open after three attempts. "Don't you come in here, see?" he warned her. And then, feeling blindly in the dark, he shoved the knife-blade in under the lower rail of the sash and pried it up far enough to get the tips of his fingers in under it.

Heavy drapes hung across the low window.

face if he hadn't come to his senses in time to catch her under the arms and lift her through the window.

"He's not hurt. He's dead. Murdered! We've got to get out of here! We can't put the money back. We can't!"

They couldn't put it back because Scott was all over the front of the secretary. He was sitting in the chair, his torso crumpled forward against the closed slanting front, behind which was the secret drawer in which the money had been hidden. There were stab-wounds in his back, through the back of his dinner jacket. Blood puddled the satin cover of the chair seat, congealing, falling in slow, stringy drops to the carpet.

Joe looked away and down at Sue. He was holding her in his arms. She was clinging to him. Her eyes were wide, her lips parted.

He said hoarsely, "For God's sake don't scream!"

She shook her head. "I won't. Why should I? I never saw him before. He—he's just a

### KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE INFANTRY—THE DOUGHBOY DOES IT!

**Sure, the lads who fly the planes, run the tanks, bring our fighting men to shore are doing a grand job of softening up the enemy. . . . But don't forget, it's the slugging, dogged U. S. Infantryman—the doughboy—who really carries the ball. He's the lad who gets in there and fights it out. . . .**

Joe raised the sash slowly, cautiously. Everything was still except the beating of his heart.

"Now," he said, nerving himself. "Now—" Then he vaulted up to rest his hips on the sill, his feet kicking out into the bushes to make a crashing sound which—it seemed to him—ought to have been heard six miles away. He brought his knees up, gripped the window-frame to pull himself around, straightened his legs, dropped his feet to the floor. His hands spread the drapes wide, and he stood up.

"God!" he whispered, staring across the room.

"Joe!" Sue's anxious voice. "What—what's wrong?"

"Everything. He—he's in here. He's—" He let the curtains fall, then suddenly twisted around to face the window and spread the drapes again. "Here, you stay out!"

She'd rested her hands on the sill and jumped. She'd landed on her tummy across the sill, her arms swimming. Her brown, shining eyes were staring across the room in the direction of the secretary.

"Joe, help me! He's hurt—" She caught at his helplessly dangling arm, yanked herself forward. She would have fallen on her

dead man. They're all over the world—dead men—and everybody's not screaming. I won't scream." She was telling all that to herself. To him, she said, "Joe, we've got to move him—it. You've got to get the money back. Especially now."

She crossed to the secretary. He saw her fight off the revulsion that twitched her shoulders as she dropped a hand on the dead man. The strength of her nerved Joe.

"Here—" His strides brought him to the other side of Scott. "You get back." He seized both dead shoulders, drew the limp, heavy figure back into the chair away from the front of the secretary. He gloved his fingers with his handkerchief, opened the front of the secretary, opened the secret drawer. Then he took the money from his pocket, put it back where he had found it.

"Joe!"

He turned. She was pointing down at the beige carpet, almost at his feet. There on the floor was the murder weapon. A screwdriver with a slim shank and a cross-hatched insulating rubber handle. Blood stained the shank to within an inch of the handle.

"That," he said tonelessly, "is mine." He got down slowly on his knees. Full realiza-



tion of what this meant crept up on him, reached with icy fingers to clutch his heart. Because of the cross-hatching on the screwdriver handle, there wouldn't be any fingerprints for the police. Nothing to prove Joe Bender hadn't wielded the killer tool.

He said, "Don't you see? Don't you get it?"

"But you didn't—" She broke off.

He uttered a short laugh. "No, I didn't. But it won't make any difference. Not now. You've got to get away. You've got to go somewhere and forget you ever saw me."

"What's that on the handle?" She hadn't been paying any attention to what he was saying. She was stooping over him, hands on her knees, arms braced.

There was a fly on the black handle of the murder weapon. Joe batted at it. The fly lifted into the air, circled his battered hat drunkenly, and returned to the screwdriver handle.

"A fly," Sue said. "It's like in that old nursery jingle, *Who Killed Cock Robin*. Remember? 'Who saw him die?' 'I,' said the fly, 'with my shining eye, I saw him die.'"

**H** E SNORTED. "This isn't any nursery jingle." He batted at the fly again. It became a zig-zagging speck against the light carpet and the pale walls, but returned to the screwdriver handle. It was queer, though, that with all that blood around, the fly preferred hard rubber.

"Joe," she said. She dropped a hand to his shoulder, her fingers digging into his coat. "Joe, don't you see what we've got to do? We've got to find out who really killed him. We've got to do it before somebody finds the—the body. Before somebody finds the body and your screwdriver."

He stood up. He rammed his hands into the baggy pockets of his topcoat, stared at her, at her alert, eager face.

"Are you crazy?" he asked bitterly. "How would we do that?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. But there must be clues. There've got to be. Doesn't Mr. Scott have a family?"

"A wife," he said. He jerked his head to indicate Mrs. Scott's picture on the table. "That's his wife."

"Well?" Brightly. "Where is she? Why isn't she here? That's a clue, right there."

He made a sour mouth. "We can't do it. We're not cops."

"But we're as smart as cops," she insisted. "Smarter than some, I bet. Cops solve murders."

"And sometimes they don't."

"But we've got an advantage, Joe. Listen. We know you didn't do it. It's so obviously you, that the cops won't look any farther."

He nodded.

She went over to the table and stared at Cecily Scott's picture. She said, "Joe, there's a note here. Listen. 'Knew you'd be late. Have gone to spend night with Rose.' Who's Rose, Joe?"

He didn't know.

"And there's more. Listen to this, Joe. 'Didn't want to be alone if John Doe called.' Joe!" She wheeled toward him, eyes bright. "There it is, right there! John Doe must have done it. Don't you see? Mrs. Scott didn't want to be alone if John Doe came. She was afraid of him. John Doe killed Mr. Scott!"

He stared at her, face wooden. "John Doe? There isn't any such person. He's just sort of a—a—term, I guess, for anybody, like Richard Roe."

She shook her head. "No, silly! There must be a real John Doe. She wouldn't put the name in a note to her husband if there wasn't." She was so sure of it that she picked up the telephone directory in its tooled leather cover and looked under "D" for "Doe, John". Joe Bender watched her face fall and as suddenly brighten.

"No, it's not in here," she said. "But Mrs. Scott must know. All we have to do is find the address of this Rose and then go talk to Mrs. Scott."

"How," he asked dismally, "are we going to find the address when all we know is the first name? We can't. We haven't got much time. Sometimes these things take months, years."

"No," she said sharply. "Don't talk like that, Joe. We can't, or we're licked from the beginning. Look in the secretary. They must have an address book listing the addresses of their friends."

So they moved the dead man a little farther back from the secretary and went through every drawer and pigeonhole without finding an address book. But in the back of the last pigeonhole they found something else. It was a promissory note in the sum of five thousand dollars, made out to Roger Scott two years back, and bearing the signature, "Rose Lillard."

"Now we've got something!" Sue crowed, cramming the note into her purse. "That's Rose Lillard, the hat woman. She has an exclusive shop downtown. Originals. Prices to knock you over."

Joe said, "Then she's got to live somewhere. Look in the phone book for Lillard."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Fly Saw Him Die

**R**OSE LILLARD stood just within her door, one hand on the inner knob. She wore a white chenille robe over her night-



gown and a wide mesh net over her red hair to protect her permanent. She looked dumpy and forty. Her face shone with cream. Without her glasses, her eyes appeared small and weak.

She said, "Why, no, Mrs. Scott isn't here."

Sue Peters stood close to Joe Bender, clutching his arm. "But she *was* here," she insisted.

"Yes, and left about an hour ago. She left at one, probably for her home." And Rose started to close the door.

"Wait," Joe checked her.

"Well?" Rose Lillard inquired coldly.

"Do you know if—if Mrs. Scott has a friend named John Doe?" he asked.

The small green eyes narrowed a trifle, amused. "Now you're joking. And I think it's rather a bad joke, too." She slammed the door.

Joe's shoulders sagged. He looked down at Sue. "See? That John Doe business is hokey, like I said."

"Shhh," Sue whispered. Her large brown eyes were intent upon the door, as though she could see through it. Her head was cocked, listening.

It must have been that Rose Lillard's phone was very near the door of the apartment, because they could hear her working the dial. Sue took a light step forward and plastered an ear to the panel.

"Give me Mr. Hallam's rooms, please," Sue heard Rose Lillard's voice say after a moment. *Hallam*, she thought. *I must remember the name.*

"George? Rose. You might tell Cecily John Doe is interested in her. . . . No. Right here. No, of course not. Well. . . . No, it doesn't matter. I thought I ought to tell you." Rose Lillard laughed quietly. "All right. 'Night, George."

She turned from the door. Joe said, "What—"

"Shhh—" She took his arm, led him back along the hall of the apartment, around a turn, and stopped. "Joe, who's Cecily?"

He frowned. "I think that's what Mr. Scott called his wife. Why?"

Sue nodded. "That's what I thought. Mrs. Scott is with somebody named Hallam. A George Hallam. And—and they *all* know who John Doe is. I heard what Miss Lillard said on the phone. You've got to find this George Hallam. He won't be in the phone book, though, because I heard Rose Lillard say, 'Give me Mr. Hallam's rooms.' That means he's somewhere in an apartment hotel with a private exchange. You'll have to go somewhere and start calling apartment hotels until you find one that has a Mr. Hallam. Mrs. Scott is there."

Joe jerked out his watch. Two-thirty.

He groaned. "That could take all night."

"Maybe not. Not if you hurry. Maybe you'll get a break." She gave him a little shove in the direction of the elevator. He took two steps, stopped, looked back at her.

She shook her head. "We've got to work this two ways. I'll take Rose Lillard. You take Hallam and Mrs. Scott. They all know something. We've got to make one of them talk. Hurry, Joe."

"That's right," he said sourly, "we haven't got all night, have we?"

She watched him go striding off, then turned, ran back along the hall to Rose Lillard's door. Her knuckles pattered on the panel. She heard the hushed footsteps of Rose Lillard's slippered feet. The door opened. Rose Lillard stood there frowning and formidable, though she was scarcely taller than Sue.

"Well?" she demanded. "Well, what it is now?"

"I—I've got to talk to you," Sue said tremulously. She took a breath, steadied her voice. "I'm coming in, Miss Lillard!"

Rose Lillard thought differently. She tried closing the door. She did close it, on Sue when Sue was halfway into the room. Even when she saw she couldn't get it shut, she kept trying. Sue flattened both hands against the outside of the panel and shoved. The door gave suddenly and Rose went reeling back. Sue came into the room, slammed the door behind her, leaned against it, breathing hard.

**I**T WAS a big room, furnished with low, Chinese modern furniture with pastel covers and bleached mahogany frames. There was a big square table in the center of it, littered with sketches of hats, with hats, with hat trimmings—feathers, bits of silk, ribbon, plastic ornaments. Sue looked from the table to Rose Lillard.

Rose said loftily, "How dare you break into my apartment this way! Go immediately."

Sue shook her head. "That boy who was with me—he's fighting for his life. No, you don't understand. You *wouldn't*. Listen, Miss Lillard, we know that Mr. Scott has been murdered."

"Murd—" Rose flung the back of her right hand to her mouth. When it drew away, her mouth was an ugly smear. "You know. How do you know?"

"It doesn't matter how I know," Sue hurried on. "But I know. One of two people killed him. Somebody who is really named John Doe, or—or *you*. . . . No, don't deny it. You've got motive. That note for five thousand dollars. You borrowed money from Mr. Scott. If you killed him, you wouldn't have to pay it back. I've seen the note. I—I've got the note. Do you want to know what I'll do with it unless you tell me who killed Mr.



Scott? I'll hand it right over to the police."

Rose Lillard's dumpy body stiffened. She turned majestically, floated over to the big table in the center.

"I haven't been out of my apartment all evening, but that might be difficult to prove," she mused. She looked at Sue through a moving veil of cigarette smoke. "You say that you have the note? How, pray, did you get hold of it?"

"Never mind," Sue said. She crossed the room to stand face to face with Rose Lillard. "Are you going to tell the truth?"

Rose shrugged. "But my dear child, I haven't the slightest idea who killed Roger Scott. Not the slightest." Her hand dropped to the table, slid in under some rough sketches. "This John Doe—I haven't the remotest idea what you're talking about."

Sue slapped her hand across the face. Rose's eyes blanked. She stared open-mouthed.

"You—you talk!" Sue said through clenched teeth. "I heard you calling on the telephone. You tell me—" Her eyes dropped from Rose's face to Rose's right hand. Rose had taken a pair of long, gleaming shears from beneath the sketch on the table. Her short blunt fingers turned the shears over and over. As cold, as sharp as the blades of the shears, were Rose's green eyes.

She said, "Where is the note, my dear? You'll tell me, won't you, without any more of this silly talk about a John Doe?"

Rose . . . The shears. The screwdriver. With the screwdriver she'd killed Mr. Scott. And now, with the shears— Sue took half a step back. She said, "You—you want to kill me."

"Not necessarily. Where's the note? Just tell me that." Rose sounded almost pleasant. "I haven't got it," Sue lied desperately.

"But you have, of course. You said that you had it. My guess is that you have it on your person right now." Rose stood up, the shears in her hand, the blades closed like a knife. "And I'm going to find out." She took firm steps towards Sue.

"You—you killed him!" Sue cried. "You killed Mr. Scott!"

"I didn't, of course," Rose said calmly. "Stop shouting, you silly little fool, and give me the note."

Sue turned in a panic and fled toward the door. Toward a door, any door. She was mixed. Three doors opened from the big room, and she didn't know which was the way out. She flung herself against a panel, seized the knob, twisted it, got the door open a crack. A bedroom. The wrong door. She turned, ducked under Rose's reaching fingers, tripped over a low ottoman, fell face-down on the floor. She turned over. Rose Lillard was above her, crouching, the shears raised. Then

Rose was on top of her, sitting on her. Rose's left hand streaked out, tangled in Sue's brown hair, hung on. She pinned Sue to the floor with her thick knees. She bounced Sue's head up and down against the floor.

"Tell me where that note is, you little chit! Tell me before I kill you." And every word marked a separate impact of Sue's head against the floor. And at every word the bright blades came closer until there was nothing but the glare of them in Sue's eyes.

"In—in my purse," Sue breathed faintly. "It's in my purse."

**JOE BENDER** got his break. The third apartment hotel he called—the Fine Arts—had a resident by the name of Hallam. Now, as he stood outside Hallam's door, he wondered what he was going to do and say.

Hallam opened the door. He wore trousers and a red satin dressing gown. In red satin he looked, literally, like the Devil, with his dark, angular face and those sardonic eyebrows. Joe Bender stared. He'd seen Hallam before. Hallam was the man in Hinky's lunch room. Hallam was the man who had eaten his hamburger with a fork. Hallam was—He got it suddenly, and his pulse started to do double-time. Hallam's face, the bronze skin, the stuff he'd put in his coffee at Hinky's, the fly that saw Roger Scott die—little bits like that swirled in Joe's mind like chips in a whirlpool.

He choked out, "You're Hallam?"

"Right." It was clipped and cold. "What is it, please?"

"Is—is Mrs. Scott here?"

Hallam frowned, as though puzzled. "Mrs. Roger Scott? No."

"You're a liar," Joe said flatly. He hit Hallam with his shoulder, driving him back, crashing into the room to slam the door behind him. He glanced around Hallam's room with its canvases on easels and stretching frames, with its soft, low chairs. Two high-ball glasses stood on a table in front of a divan, two cigarettes smoldered.

Joe said, "I got to think."

Hallam stood back from him, fingered his shawl collar. He smiled on one side of his thin mouth. "Must you? Must you think here?"

"I'd better start with my Aunt Beth," Joe said unsteadily. "I'll tell you about her."

Hallam raised an eyebrow. "Oh? Aunt Beth, you said. I suppose nothing I can do can possibly convince you I am not interested in your probably undistinguished family connections."

"Aunt Beth," Joe persisted, "was like you. She had bronzed skin, even though she didn't spend much time in the sun. And she put saccharine in her coffee, like you did at



Hinky's, because she couldn't have sugar. She couldn't eat starches either—just gluten bread—and you didn't eat that bun in Hinky's. My Aunt Beth had diabetes. So have you, Mr. Hallam."

Hallam shrugged. "Is that any reason to force your way into a man's apartment?"

"Let me tell you some more about my Aunt Beth. The flies used to drive her crazy. You get that, Hallam? They used to swarm about her when she was perspiring, because of the sugar content in her sweat. Glucose, they call it. . . .

*"That's why the fly in Scott's living room was on the handle of the screwdriver you used to kill Scott. The fly was attracted to the traces of glucose your sweaty hand had left."*

There was a pinpoint glitter in Hallam's eyes. He lowered his lids for an instant, raised them and looked beyond Joe to the front door of the apartment. The doorknob rattled. Hallam smiled.

"Ah, Rose—" he began, and started around Joe Bender. Joe caught and held him by the loose front of the lounging robe. He glanced over his shoulder, saw Rose Lillard entering the room. Her eyes, behind her Oxford glasses, flicked across the faces of the two men.

She said, "George, something's happened to Roger Scott."

"George knows," Joe said dryly. "He killed him."

Behind Hallam, another door opened. Cecily Scott stood there. Above her short black skirt, her blouse was buttoned crooked. Her blonde hair was disordered, her full mouth sulky. Hallam broke away from Joe, started toward her.

"Cecily, you shouldn't have—"

"Go 'way." She waved a limp left hand at him. Her right hand was behind her, concealing something. Joe thought she was more than a little high. She said, "Go 'way," to Rose as her sister approached. "Roger's dead. I heard it. Georgie murdered him."

HALLAM lifted his hands toward her, pleading. "Good lord, Cecily, you don't think—"

She was nodding him into silence. "You would," she said carefully. "You betcha!" She hiccupped delicately behind three fingers. "Because of me. My fatal beauty. An'—" she reeled a little, "an' it's got a practical point, too. Because now I'm rich. Rich and beautiful. She broke off, laughing. Or was she crying? You couldn't tell.

Rose said, "Cecily! Cecily, stop that!"

Cecily reeled into the room. Her right hand showed and she was gripping a small revolver.

Hallam said, "That gun's loaded!" He

started cautiously for Cecily. Her eyes dropped to the gun, raised to Hallam. "Is it?" she shrieked at him. "Is it really truly loaded?"

The gun went off, the bullet wild. Cecily dropped it instantly and threw both hands up to her face. Hallam swooped for the gun as Joe Bender crowded him from behind. He straightened, wheeled, stopped Joe for an instant with the threat of the gun.

"You three can stay here and behave like lunatics if you want," Hallam rapped. "But I'll take a little fresh air!"

Joe was moving in again, his eyes on the gun. "You're going back to Scott's, you mean. Because there's evidence on the handle of that screwdriver. *You think* you're going back."

His long, reaching left had the stuff to knock Hallam out on his feet, but it was hurried and clumsy. Hallam took it on the shoulder, rode it back to the wall. He triggered the gun wildly. Joe didn't feel the shot that tagged his right arm; it was simply that his right arm ceased to exist for the moment. But his left hand caught Hallam's gun-wrist, forced Hallam's arm down. There wasn't anything he could do but hang on and take Hallam's blows all over his face and body. Hang on to Hallam and Hallam's gun, and hang on to consciousness.

He was dimly aware of the sudden filling of the room, as though a dam had burst. Pelted footsteps, men's voices, a thin, sweet voice among them that cried out, "Joe! Oh, Joe, they've hurt you!"

And then there wasn't anything he had to hang onto but consciousness and Sue Peters. Other men were hanging onto Hallam—the police.

"Don't try to talk now, Joe," Sue was pleading with him. "You're hurt."

He talked anyway. There in Hallam's studio while a doctor was working on his wounded arm, Joe Bender told everything to the cops. Sue had her story, too—how Rose Lillard had fought with her over the promissory note and how Sue had come to in time to follow Rose to Hallam's and get the police.

"The telegram was part of Hallam's plot," she said to Joe later. "Something to force you into a desperate strait where you'd take the money and become the fall guy. He must have followed you into Hinky's to make sure you had the money."

"But there's one thing we've never got straight," Joe said.

She puzzled a moment. "You mean—"

"Yeah. Just who was John Doe, and how did he fit into it all?"

They never knew; but after all, it didn't matter.

THE END



# JUGGERNAUT



By  
**STEWART  
TOLAND**

*Screaming car wheels had ground Bill Janley's brother into a half-alive pulp. . . . Grimly, then, behind the wheel of his taxi, Bill set out to practice his own version of the Golden Rule: "Do unto killers as they have done unto you!"*

THE hospital was still with night. Long corridors gleamed empty, waiting—for death or for life. It was a terrible thing to stand in all that spotless silence, to stare at the closed door and wonder if maybe Dick was already gone.

Bill Janley closed his eyes. Even that couldn't hide the hate. It was in his face, in the tight-boned jaw, in the muscles grinding in his cheeks and temples beneath a mat of yellow hair.

The door opened quietly and a doctor came out. "Hello, Bill. We've done all we can."



"Will he live?" Just that, beating in his heart over and over. "Will he live?"

"We can't tell yet. He was pretty badly crushed."

Bill Janley's eyes were blue, too hard and cold for tears. "When can I see him?" he asked.

"Not for a while. Tomorrow, perhaps."

"Then I'll be going," Bill said. He turned away.

"No, Bill." The doctor grabbed his hand. "We've been friends a long time. I think I have a right to ask you to stay."

"You said I couldn't see Dick. I'd go crazy hanging around this corridor."

"You know that isn't the reason. A hit and run driver got Dick, Bill. There's no proof of anything else. Just a black Buick that didn't stop, and no one close enough to get its number."

"Just a black Buick that didn't stop!" Bill said icily. "And who drives a black Buick? Russ Connover! Who swore when my testimony helped send his brother to the death-house that he'd make me pay? Russ Connover! A brother for a brother, he said."

"Yesterday Pugs Connover was shipped to Sing Sing, today my brother's dying. And you say it was an accident!"

Nurses were poking heads out of doors, a white-robed intern coming from far down the hall. "Dick's dying because there are people like Pugs Connover, people who kill and kill and think they'll never get caught, and when they do, they can't take it. Well, one of them's going to get it!"

Dr. Myles motioned to the intern, brought a hypodermic needle out of his pocket. "I thought maybe you'd be like this, Bill. I can't blame you, I can't say you're wrong. But I'm not going to let you do anything foolish. This will keep you quiet until you get a grip on yourself." He reached for Bill's sleeve.

Bill was quicker. He let go a haymaker, a neat one that caught Myles clean on the button.

Bill Janley let the doctor down easy. He grabbed the hypo and he propped the sleeping medico against the wall. Then he ran. He made the stairs in nothing flat. There wasn't a chance of anyone's catching him, not with his cab out front and the engine tuned to start like a charm.

Only there happened to be someone sitting in the back seat. Janley had driven two blocks before he found out, before there was that faint squeak as the glass panel slid back to let Harry Best's head through. A round head, with a pepper-and-salt fringe and two pointed ears. Elfin ears.

"Hello, kid. Where's the fire?"

Best was big and fat, with a pushed-in nose and pushed-out teeth, like an English bulldog.

And he had a bulldog's habit of hanging on. Janley slammed the brakes and hit the curb with his rubber.

"What's the idea, Best? Sleeping it off in my cab, or do you want to go somewhere?"

"I kind of had the idea I'd stick with you this evening."

"Why?"

"Don't think it'd take a mind-reader to guess."

They sat there in the light of the dashboard, a young man with bitter, haunted eyes, and an older man, fingering a police badge.

"Look, kid. I've investigated and there isn't any proof against Connover. I even went over his car, there wasn't any blood on it."

"It could have been washed."

"Sure, in fact it had been, the tires were still wet. But there was nothing to hand a jury. If you kill him there'll be nothing to save you from the chair."

"Who says so?"

"I do. You aren't good enough, kid, to get away with murder. Nobody is."

"Who said anything about murder?" Bill Janley got out, held the door. "Thanks for the tears, chief. Now beat it."

"You aren't going about this the right way, boy. Get a cup of coffee, come with me and I'll stake you to a square meal while we talk it over."

"Beat it."

The cop stood there on the curb while Janley locked both back doors of the cab so there wouldn't be any more unwanted guests, and then rode away into the night. He didn't have a gun, wouldn't know how to use one, but he could drive a car. And that was the way it was going to be—Russ Connover crushed under the wheels of Janley's cab. Crushed as flat and red as Dick. . . .

**R**USS CONNOVER was a big man now, but he hadn't been born that way. He'd been a skinny runt in the Bowery and then he began using his mouth, stuffing in the food his hands stole, greedy hands grabbing at anything that came their way. Until they learned about jewels. How easy they were to steal, how hard to identify when handled properly. Russ showed his brother Pugs the tricks of the trade and together they grew in cleverness and power. Until Pugs made the mistake of being seen when he killed his last man on a jewel robbery. Bill Janley had seen the job from his cab—and testified. . . .

Connover relaxed into the great red folds of a leather armchair. He stretched pointed, polished toes toward the fire, and one languid hand hung down to caress the police dog at his side. Samson, the dog's name was, and he was the only creature, human or otherwise, that had ever reached Russ Connover's heart.



They were inseparable, these two, the smirking fat man and the watching dog.

Connover smiled. Outside the night was cold, and in here the fire was warm, and up along the river was his brother, sleeping in the shadow of the electric chair.

Black eyes, deep in their sockets, turned and twinkled, white teeth clicked together. Connover laughed—hearty laughter to wake all the echoes in that great book-lined room. Pugs slept in the death house and his brother laughed, because Pugs had not had too many brains, he'd been crude, and he'd become a nuisance of late. He had taken too heavily to the bottle so there was always the danger of his getting caught. Now he had been caught, safely, with no stain on Russ. Men could guess but they couldn't prove. And Pugs was out of the way forever.

Russ took a little book from his pocket. There were figures in it, two columns beneath a safety deposit box number. One column was headed by his own name and one by Pugs'. At the bottom of each was a sum, fifty thousand dollars. Very carefully Russ crossed out Pugs' name. He did it quite neatly and without a trace of sadness. And when he finished there was one hundred thousand dollars written beneath his own name. A pretty figure.

A hundred thousand dollars, with no one to ask a split. It was enough to last a man a lifetime, and that was what he was going to make it do. He wasn't going to end up like Pugs; Russ was getting out while his skirts were clean. He'd already bought a house out in the country, a house a man could be proud of.

The doorbell was ringing, loud, insistent. Samson got to his feet, growling. Connover watched the dog a minute and then he tested the gun in his shoulder holster. After that he opened the door.

"Why, hello, Best, are you still snooping around?"

The cop stepped inside, plunked into the red leather chair. "No. I've come to save your life."

Connover stopped. "What do you mean, wise guy?"

"I mean Bill Janley's out to get you, and I'm here to see that he don't."

Connover laughed. He sat on the edge of the library table and laughed till he was one mass of quivering jelly. "You touch me, Best, you touch me deeply. I didn't know you cared."

"Sure I care, but not about you. I just don't want to see Janley fry for something the State should do for him. Dick was a nice kid, Connover."

"Was? He's dead?"

"You should know." Best leaned forward, his eyes puzzled, probing. "Why'd you do it?"

I watched you at the trial and you didn't give a damn about Pugs, I'd bet you're even glad to see him go. Why the fancy revenge?"

"Why not? It's a point of honor. I warned Janley not to testify, you know how he answered. I don't let anyone put anything over on me."

"So you admit it was revenge. You're the one that ran over Dick?"

There was no answer, just a soft, mocking smile. They sat in silence, staring at each other.

Connover touched his spare pepper-and-salt hair. "You know, Best, it's a remarkable thing how much alike we are in shape and size. I never noticed before." He touched a glass paperweight on the table behind him, clear glass with red flowers inside. Connover leaned closer, his fingers tight now against that hard, cold knob. "If it weren't for our faces I might be taken for you, and you for me."

Best got it at that last moment, he read the murder in those black, terrible eyes. But it was too late. A lifetime too late. He leaped, tried to get his gun, but Connover was too quick, too strong. . . .

When Connover laid the paperweight down there was red on the outside of it, too. Not flowers, but a meaningless, spreading, blood-red sprawl.

**J**ANLEY walked openly into the apartment house and up in the self-service elevator. He knew what he was heading for but he wasn't afraid. Connover wouldn't be expecting him; no one in the world would think he had the guts to do this alone.

The elevator stopped and Janley waited a second more, while he got the hypo out of his pocket, the one he'd taken from Doc Myles in the hospital, the little bit of magic that would keep Connover docile until. . . .

Cautiously he stepped into the hall. There were maybe eight doors on that floor, but only one was open. One, to frame a pretty scene: firelight and a dog and Harry Best sitting in a red leather armchair.

Janley swore. "Best, I told you to keep out of my affairs! Can't you take a hint?"

He stepped over the sill. And then something struck him a blinding, paralyzing blow just behind the ear. He went down and down and never hit bottom.

When Janley awoke he was cold. That's all he could think of, he was freezing to death. He opened his eyes to a patch of stars, to black buildings blocking out the moon. And—

It was there, right beside him. A crushed pulp in the clothes of a man. With a taxi towering above and the wheels, God, those wheels with their treads soaked deep in red!

The other car had zigzagged in the middle of the road; the one with the red tires was



Janley's cab. And he could see the bloody tracks, where it had ridden over and over the body. A madman's tracks.

Bill got to his feet. He had to get away, he had to get that car away before someone came. People would be coming with the dawn, gaping, accusing. He reached the door, got one foot on the running board before he realized his keys were gone, they weren't in the dashboard, they weren't in his pocket. He half turned around, and that was the way the flashlight caught him.

It was one of those pictures press photographers get awards for: drama and pathos, life as some of us have to live it. Only it was a police photographer. The street was lousy with cops, mushrooming out of squad cars at either end of the block.

The jail wasn't nice. There was the smell, antiseptics and sweat and the rotting of men's souls. Maybe it was imagination, maybe people would claim you couldn't smell such a thing, but it was there.

Janley talked, fast. He said he'd planned to kill Connover but he hadn't. And after lying there beside that thing he was glad he hadn't. Of course they didn't believe him. They wanted to know what he'd done with the car keys, and when he said he hadn't had them they only smiled and sent a detachment out to search the sewers. But all in all the cops were pretty square. Harry Best didn't come to gloat, and when Janley asked for the picture they'd taken of him at the scene they gave him a copy. A big one.

For half a day Janley studied it, hunting for something that would bring him back from the brink of hell. Anything. . .

Dr. Myles found him, white and strangely triumphant above the glossy print. "Hello, Bill. I've come to take you out."

"Take me out?"

"It's only for a little while. Dick is better. There's a chance he'll live if he can see and talk to you. The police are willing to give him that chance. There'll be a police guard and you'll have to promise me on your honor not to escape."

"My honor?" Janley came closer to the bars. "Have you seen this picture, Doc?"

"Yes."

"And you believe—" He didn't finish and he didn't promise, because the turnkey was opening his door.

He waited until he'd said goodbye to Dick, and then out there in the hall he got the guards in the stomach. Both of them. And while they were doubled, he clipped them over the head. The nurse didn't scream, only squeaked a little.

"Listen, Doc, you've made Dick live. Will you give me a chance at life, too?"

"What kind of a chance?"

"A day of freedom, maybe two days. Will you come with me and be a witness of what I do? Will you get Harry Best's son and let me talk to him?"

**G**EORGE BEST looked a lot like his father, the same straight eyes, the dimples in the cheeks, only much younger, much thinner. He was a cop, too, and he didn't like what he was doing.

"Why am I here, Janley? Don't you know that nothing will stop me from taking you in?"

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March issue on sale February 2nd.



"I think this will." Janley laid the police photo on the bare hotel table.

"I'm sorry, George, I'm sorry to be the one to show you this." He turned the picture over and laid the street scene before their eyes. It was blown up, terribly clear. Two men leaned close, their breath hissing, and Janley kept right on talking.

"I guess none of the police had any doubts, even though they had scraped him up. The face, the hands, the teeth, they were memories, George. But there was one thing left. Look at the ear, George, one ear left untouched. One small, *pointed* ear."

George Best looked, and when he straightened his face was grey, his lips twitching. He said, "I don't believe it. I won't."

He ran from the room. For an hour they waited and then he was back, shriveled and hurt, standing in the door.

"I've been to the morgue. It's Dad."

"Did you identify him?"

"No."

"Why not?" Janley said eagerly.

"Because now I believe in you, because I don't want to tip off Connover. It has to be Connover who did it, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

George said woodenly, "When did you know the body wasn't Connover? Did you notice the ear right away?"

"No, it was hours before I saw that. I didn't like looking at the—well, I knew it wasn't Connover because there was no dog. Alive or dead, there was no dog. Samson wouldn't leave his master. And Samson is the way we're going to find him."

**J**ANLEY dyed his hair and changed his clothes and then the three of them canvassed the express companies, the railroads and the buses.

George Best, in a police uniform, made things easy, but it took time. It took six hours of questioning before they happened on a conductor in the Long Island Railroad.

"Well, now, there hasn't been any crated dogs on my train in quite a spell. But this morning on the five-ten I had a police dog on leash. An old lady led him."

"Where'd they get off?"

He thought and then he thought some more while the three men swore beneath their breaths. "I don't remember. Somewhere beyond Patchogue it seems, though I couldn't be sure."

Janley waited in the station while the doctor got his car. And after sixty miles of driving, somewhere beyond Patchogue, they found a station master who remembered the dog.

"Yes, sir, she came on the early train with an elderly lady, the old-fashioned kind with

a veil and black gloves and a lace choker. She waited a while like she was expecting folks and then struck off through the woods road."

That was where the search began. It wasn't simple, it wasn't easy at all. Asking directions, looking for newly-painted names on mailboxes, striking off down side roads, investigating false leads . . . But for three determined men, the hunt could have but one end.

The man in the great stone house was dark and forbidding as the night. He had coal-black hair and a black mustache and he wore dark glasses. He stood quite still when he'd opened the door to Bill Janley.

Bill stood alone on the top step. He was smiling. "Hello, Connover. I thought I'd come and let you know that Dick is going to live."

A fat hand twisted on the door knob, held so tightly that the muscles stood out thick and white, like angry talons. But the voice was gentleness itself. "Are you alone?"

"Yes, Connover. I'm alone."

"It's cold. Perhaps you'd better step inside while we try to find out where you want to go. It's late to be wandering about this country." He closed the door and locked it. Then he took off his glasses.

Bill smiled up into the hate he saw there. "I'm in the right house." He glanced about the great living room, to the far end where one of the curtains was swinging just a little. "It's a beautiful house you have here, Connover. 'Pity you have to leave it so soon.'"

Connover had brought out a gun, held it leveled on Janley's heart. "I'm not leaving," he said, and then he laughed.

"You're smart, I'll have to hand it to you. And yet you're foolish. I think you really are stupid enough to have come up here alone, to think you can handle me! What with, your empty hands? You haven't any proof. There isn't any."

"Oh, but there is. There's a man's own automatic motions, the little things he does without thinking. Like your taking the ignition keys to my cab."

For just a moment Connover's eyes flickered, his left hand touched his pocket even as his right slammed down on the trigger. But Bill Janley and George Best got there first. Bill with an uppercut to the jaw, and George with a shot to the shoulder from his hiding place behind the curtain.

Dr. Miles, who hadn't risked following Best through the window, came in the door like a gentleman to dress Russ Connover's wound. And Dr. Myles was very sure Mr. Connover would keep, long enough for the police to try out those car keys in his pocket. Long enough to meet the electric chair. . . .



# THE HOWLING DOG MURDER



By  
**WILLIAM  
ROUGH**

**O**RDINARILY, Sam Kitch stopped for a couple beers after punching out at the machine shop at five o'clock. Tonight, though, he wanted to catch the double feature at the Bijou, and he knew if he put down a foundation of beer and then his usual thick soup plus meat and potatoes, he'd get sleepy in the middle of the whodunit.

So instead of letting his old jalopy have its head and practically park itself in front of Mike's place, Kitchy pushed it on homeward.

Police have sent  
out a dragnet  
for the killer. . .

*A homeless dog  
keened Sam Kitch's  
funeral dirge on that  
night of violence and  
terror. . . . For Park Com-  
missioner Granvil lay dead  
in his own playground — exactly  
where Sam had sworn to kill him!*

It was lucky he didn't have any quick ones, at that: if the cops had smelled beer on him, they'd have called it drunken driving for sure.

Kitchy turned into Carson Street, slowed down to twenty, held his hand over the horn and cocked his foot on the brake. He knew what to expect, because the same thing happened every night, practically: the neighborhood kids would be having a softball game in the street.

Kitchy saw the shouting, scurrying little figures risking their scrawny arms and legs in traffic, and he started saying softly, "The lousy slob! The dirty son!" and like that. Kitchy was cursing Ed Granvil, not the kids. Granvil was Moxenton's Commissioner of Parks and Playgrounds. "And it's his fault those kids don't have a decent place to play," Kitchy muttered. "The creep!"

It was the same way every time. Every damn' night he'd start home this way, feeling swell: a solid day's work done, a hot meal and a cool night to look forward to. Then he'd see those kids playing in the street instead of the playground—and he'd want to choke Ed Granvil.

Since the City Council had wised up to the fact that there was a juvenile delinquency



problem in Moxenton, about six months ago, one hundred thousand smackers had gone through Ed Granvil's office.

The money was supposed to have been used to improve the playgrounds, yet the kids *preferred* the street!

Kitchy's light-blue eyes swiveled sideways, glittered angrily at the broken, useless swings and see-saws and carousels in the playground. "It ain't fit to raise hogs in!" Kitchy burst out.

The swimming-pool walls were cracked and leaky. The basketball courts, tennis courts, handball courts, and all the rest, were a mess. They'd been planned with about as much nicety as a slum. They got in each other's way, lapped over, ate up the baseball diamond. When the kids played ball, they had to use the street.

Kitchy was saying hotly to himself, "Somebody ought to grab hold of that lump of blubber, Ed Granvil, and massacre him!"

**T**HEN it happened. If the kid had been in the ball game, Kitchy never would have hit him. Kitchy was watching the players like a hawk.

But this kid wasn't in the game; he darted out from the sidelines. A grounder steamed down the third baseline and the third sacker missed it, and this kid on the sidelines got so enthusiastic he jumped out and tried to field it. He was only a little punk, ten years old. He was trying to show the big guys he could play good enough to be let in the game.

You couldn't say Kitchy hit the kid: the kid hit Kitchy. Kitchy's old jalopy was practically at a standstill. The kid just ran into it.

But it was one of those freaks. The kid *thwacked* on the fender and crumpled up on the street. He didn't yell, didn't move, didn't even twitch.

Kitchy's right leg was stiff as a gun-barrel. He had the footbrake pounded down just as far as it would go, yet he couldn't shake the uncanny sensation that the car was still moving and would roll over that scrawny figure.

Things happened fast then: cries and screams, people shoving up, brakes screeching as other cars stopped, a cop's whistle blasting.

Kitchy saw it all as if it were a slow-motion movie. He moved in it, too, in slow motion: getting out of the car, standing there trembling, watching people goggle, some of them pushing forward to get a better look, but none of them showing enough guts to get down and examine the kid.

And then after a while—years, it seemed like to Kitchy—a cop was crowding him back into the jalopy, ordering him to get on down to City Hall. An ambulance was grinding gears, siren blaring. People were pointing at

Kitchy. He could imagine their hot words: "He did it!" . . . "He's the guy!" . . . "Yeah, knocked the poor kid for a loop, killed him probably."

Kitchy could have cried. After being so careful night after night, sympathizing with those kids, trying to figure out how to get them off the street, *this* had to happen!

Kitchy said brokenly, "It wasn't my fault. Gee, I'd sooner stick my arm in a buzz-saw than hurt a kid."

"Tough," said the cop beside Kitchy. "I guess it was the kid's fault."

"Dammit, no!" Kitchy burst. "You know whose fault it was, same as I do! Ed Granvil's! If he'd spent half of the dough he says he did on these playgrounds—"

"Get going," the cop ordered.

Kitchy's plump pink jowls quivered. "I'll kill him!" he cried, voice raspy. "If that kid dies, I'll kill Ed Granvil with my two hands! I'll kick him all over that playground and push his face in it! I'll—"

"Pipe down," the cop yawned.

**K**ITCHY was in Mike's place, a little after eleven o'clock that night, when the flash came over the radio from the local broadcasting station. Kitchy had drunk a lot of beer by that time, but didn't feel it much: he was thinking of the kid in the hospital. He'd gone to the hospital twice and called a couple times besides, but young Jimmy Shevlin was still unconscious. The docs wouldn't say anything one way or the other, except that the kid had a very tricky concussion.

When Kitchy heard the radio announcer, he started feeling paralyzed. The man was saying:

"The body of Edward Granvil, Commissioner of Parks and Playgrounds, was discovered at ten forty-five tonight in the Carson Street Playground. Mr. Granvil had been stabbed to death. Patrolman Robert Dodge, who was attracted by a dog barking in the playground, immediately informed the homicide bureau. The Police Commissioner issued no statement, but usually reliable sources assert that the authorities at once threw out a dragnet for Samuel Kitch, a machinist who this afternoon had publicly threatened Mr. Granvil's life."

"Kitchy!" burst Mike, the bartender. "Holy Jeez, Kitchy!"

Kitchy felt dozens of eyes turn his way. A voice inside him began saying, "Run! Run, Kitchy! Get out of here! They're after you!"

But Kitchy couldn't move. The radio held him transfixed. His small, almost kewpie-like lips were parted. His light blue eyes stared fascinatedly at the little \$15.95 radio on the back bar, as the announcer continued:

"Kitch is at present under bail for running



down a ten-year-old child, Jimmy Shevlin, this afternoon, just opposite the Carson Street Playground. The patrolman who arrested Kitch stated that Kitch was highly incensed. The officer added, 'He swore it was all Ed Granvil's fault and he was going to kick Granvil all over the playground and kill him. I didn't pay much attention, but it looks like he meant it.'

"Jeez, Kitchy!" the bartender said again. Kitchy's knuckles were white on the edge of the bar. He turned sideways a little, bracing himself as if he expected the other customers to start closing in on him. Some of them put down their glasses, moved restively.

The announcer droned on: "That Kitch was still violently enraged, even after the formalities of being charged and posting bail, is attested to by at least a half-dozen officers. They agree that after being released on bail, at City Hall, Kitch ran for the stairs to Mr. Granvil's third-floor office, crying, 'Maybe you think I was kidding when I said I'd take a poke at Ed Granvil!' Police Lieutenant Flanders caught Kitch on the third floor and forcibly restrained him from assaulting Mr. Granvil who was just leaving his office for the day. So far as is known, Kitch has no criminal record, but—"

Somebody down the bar grated, "Grab him!"

"Not me," was a reply. "If he killed that louse, Granvil, I don't hold it against him."

"But he's a killer!"

"Look out! He's got a gun!"

**K**ITCHY watched the customers freeze suddenly. A second ago, they'd been closing in on him. Now, they were riveted in their shoes.

Kitchy shook his head dazedly, realized he'd dug his hand into his jacket pocket unconsciously and clenched his fist there.

Suddenly the radio announcer finished his spiel. Music blared from the radio. Then tension broke. And Kitchy moved.

He backed towards the door, hand still in his pocket, breathing heavily through his open mouth. Not a man moved, and for a second Kitchy felt like laughing. Two minutes ago, any of these guys would have sneered at him if he'd acted tough. Look at them now. You'd think he was a notorious killer.

Kitchy swallowed. Well, they *did* think that! They'd heard that radio baloney coming in just like big-time cops and robbers stuff. They couldn't keep their eyes off Kitchy's bulging pocket. They thought he had a gun there and would shoot quick as look at them.

Kitchy's head whirled. He felt the craziest sensation of power. He saw those guys drawing away from him, holding their breath, and he wanted to laugh at them.

Then he looked again. He recognized Jonesy, the insurance man, Timms, the butcher, Kaley, the plumber, and a half-dozen of the others. Why, they were his friends. And they were only reacting as he, himself, would have reacted if he'd been caught in a barroom with a killer.

At the same instant he turned and ran. Kitchy wanted to shout, "Why don't you stop me? No wonder guys can get away with stuff like this, when you *let* them!"

People like that couldn't be depended on. Why, the very fact that they'd let Ed Granvil get away with his graft proved them weaklings who couldn't be depended on in a show-down. "I gotta do it all myself!" Kitchy sobbed. He lurched towards his jalopy.

**H**E MUST have driven fifteen or twenty miles up and down side streets and alleys before the jumble inside his head straightened out a little. He realized he shouldn't be driving around like this, wasting gas and taking a chance on being seen, but he knew if he parked he wouldn't be able to sit still: he had to keep doing something with his hands. He had to *do* something.

When he cooled off a little, Kitchy began to fit together the things that had happened after he'd got a bail bond at City Hall and started for Granvil's office.

Abe Flanders and a couple other cops had been lounging around the stair-well on the third floor when Kitchy panted up the steps. Flanders grabbed Kitchy. "Hey, why all the steam, pal?"

Kitchy had played pinochle with Flanders a couple times at Mike's place and knew him for a tough but easy-going guy. He blurted out what had happened and what he intended to do. This, of course, was the scene the radio announcer had described. The radio

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announcer said that Lieutenant Flanders restrained Kitchy forcibly, and this was true. But what the announcer didn't mention was what Abe Flanders had hissed in Kitchy's ear.

"Take it easy, Kitchy," Flanders said. "Granvil's being taken care of by an expert."

Flanders then jerked a thumb at a tall blond man slouching against the banister.

"That's Johnny Vance, the mayor's special investigator," Flanders told Kitchy. "He's been shadowing Granvil for weeks now. I'd say Johnny is just about ready to hand over the goods on our fair commissioner. *That* will do more than a sock in the jaw, eh, Kitchy?"

And almost at that very second, Ed Granvil's sloppy-heavy figure had waddled out of his office and plodded into an elevator.

Kitchy looked for Johnny Vance. But Vance was gone. Abe Flanders chuckled, "You don't think Johnny Vance would let Granvil see him, do you, Kitchy? Johnny beat it down the stairs. He's slick. He'll tail Granvil cart-before-the-horse. Come on, I'll show you."

Flanders and Kitchy went downstairs. They stood on the broad stone piazza of City Hall, watching Ed Granvil puff into his big limousine.

"Was I right?" Flanders said. "There's Johnny, in *front* of Granvil." He pointed at Vance's cab which was pulling out.

"Yeah," Kitchy replied, a little awed at observing slick police technique.

"So you see that he's being taken care of, Kitchy. Now quiet down." Flanders stepped to the newsstand. This was why he didn't see the rest.

**T**HERE was *another* guy tailing Granvil. Down the street, a girl wearing a blue summer outfit and a floppy-brimmed straw hat jumped out of a taxicab parked at the curb. The cab jockeyed out into traffic, and in it was a wizened little man with mousy, inconspicuous features.

Kitchy saw the procession: first, Johnny Vance's cab, then Granvil's limousine, then the mousy man's cab.

At first, Kitchy thought he was mistaken, but another glance at the way the little man was bending forward, talking into the driver's ear and pointing at Granvil's limousine, settled it. This man *was* after Granvil too!

Kitchy whirled excitedly to tell Abe Flanders. But Flanders had gone back into City Hall. Kitchy started to follow him. Then he saw the girl in the blue outfit go into Hotel Alton. Before he knew it Kitchy was following her. Anything that concerned Ed Granvil concerned Sam Kitch.

Kitchy was right behind her when the desk clerk handed her a key and said, "No calls, Mrs. Mock."

The girl went upstairs then. Kitchy figured he'd done the right thing and went back to tell Abe Flanders. Flanders had gone out again. Kitchy decided to call him later, but hadn't got around to it. He'd started calling the hospital and worrying about the kid and drinking brew after brew at Mike's place, and he'd completely forgotten.

Until now.

Kitchy remembered now, all right. He *had* to remember everything that had happened, so that he could get himself out of this damned mess.

"Johnny Vance can vouch for me!" Kitchy blurted to himself suddenly. "He was trailing Granvil. He'd have seen anyone who went after Granvil, and he'll know it wasn't me."

Kitchy's heart stopped pounding, but only for a second. For he saw at once that Johnny could not have seen the killer. If Vance had, he'd have tried to prevent the murder, and the radio announcer would have mentioned it.

Or would he? Maybe they were keeping this quiet in an effort to disarm the killer. Kitchy blurted, "Yeah! That's what they're doing! Johnny Vance saw the killer, all right, and they know it's not me. They're just doing this to trap the guy. They can't *really* believe I did it!"

Hope rose in Kitchy as he tried to convince himself into believing this, but he had to make sure.

**K**ITCHY finally got up enough courage to stop at a side street drugstore and slink into the telephone booth. He found Vance's address and went over there. He didn't expect to find Vance in. He just figured it would be as good a place as any to wait.

Kitchy climbed the stairs quietly, not noticing that Abe Flanders was directly behind him. Kitchy knocked on the door gently.

A very weak, far-away voice said, "Come in." Kitchy jumped. He hadn't expected anyone to answer.

Then he jumped again as Lieutenant Flanders said, "Go ahead, pal. He said to come in, didn't he?"

Kitchy sputtered. Flanders frisked him, then turned the knob, pushing Kitchy inside. He grunted at the sight of Johnny Vance's blood-streaked blond head lolling on the floor.

Vance croaked, "Abe—get me a drink." He pointed to the cupboard.

Flanders clucked casually, but his long horsy face and dark eyes were hard. "You get it, pal," he ordered Kitchy.

Kitchy went to a cupboard and got out a bottle of whisky and a glass. He tired to pour a drink, but only made a rattling noise with the neck of the bottle and the glass. Flanders snatched them away and poured Vance a drink.



Vance gagged. "There's another key to these handcuffs in my bureau drawer. Imagine the little punk—using my own cuffs on me!"

"Little punk, h'm?" Flanders said. He nodded at Kitchy. "Was it him, Johnny?"

Vance looked startled, then his green eyes tightened on Kitchy. "I dunno, Abe. It *could* be. All I saw was a guy about his size coming at me fast when I opened my room door."

Kitchy looked at the blood on Vance's yellow hair. "It w-wasn't m-m-me!" he stut-tered.

"Stay away from the door, pal," Flanders warned Kitchy. He got the extra key from the bureau and unlocked the handcuff. Vance lurched to the bed, flopped, and put his head in his hands.

He groaned, "I put Granvil in at his house around ten o'clock, figuring he was set for the night, and came home here to change my clothes and go on a date. I opened the door, and this little squirt came at me with a sap."

"What did he want here, Johnny?" Flanders asked.

Vance laughed hollowly. "He must have thought I had something on Granvil, evidence or something I was hiding here."

Flanders said tersely, "Didn't you?"

Vance hunched his wide shoulders, "Hell, no! I wish I had. That damn' Granvil is slick. I haven't been able to get to first base."

Flanders wide, loose lips puckered and began a soft, monotonous whistle. "Maybe this guy that sapped you just wanted you out of the way while he killed Granvil. The fact that he cuffed you up after you were unconscious means he didn't want you roaming around."

Johnny Vance's green eyes popped. "Killed Granvil?" he burst. "Did you say *killed Granvil*?"

Flanders nodded ponderously. "After you put Granvil in at his house, somebody went and got him, took him over to the Carson Street Playground and shivved him."

"In the playground?" Vance cried.

Flanders said laconically. "Yeah. He was laying by the see-saws." Flanders sniffed. "See-saw, murderie daw." He whirled. "How about it, pal?" he barked at Kitchy. "You gonna own up?"

**K**ITCHY backed away till he met the wall. He could go no further, then, and he pressed against it, trembling.

Flanders rasped, "The guy that killed Granvil knew Johnny Vance was tailing Granvil. The guy knew Vance might get in the way, so he came here first and knocked him out."

Flanders stabbed a long, bony finger at Kitchy. "You knew Vance was tailing Granvil, pal. I told you myself, this afternoon. You had a grudge against Granvil. You said in so many words you'd

take him out to the playground and—"

"No!" Kitchy bleated. "I didn't! It wasn't me! I know who it was, though! I *saw* him! This afternoon I saw him! He was tailing Granvil, too! And I *think* I know what his name is! It's Mock, I think. The lady who was with him is registered as Mrs. Mock at the Hotel Alton!"

Kitchy broke off. Both Vance and Flanders were crouched a little, eyes riveted on Kitchy. Both of them were straining forward, breathing faster.

"Honest!" Kitchy yelled. "Honest to Gawd, it's the truth!" Then his voice broke. He sobbed, "You don't believe me! Oh, God!"

Kitchy's back was already against the wall, so when he started to run, he had to go sideways.

He wasn't going any place in particular. He was just scurrying. Nervous energy was bubbling into his muscles, constricting them, stimulating them. His reflexes jumped—and so did he.

He ran. An open door popped up in front of him. He went through it. Slammed it behind him.

It wasn't the hall door, because Flanders had that covered. It was a bathroom door. Kitchy didn't realize it till he had it banged and locked. Then, with his back to it, panting, feeling the swift thud of Lieutenant Flanders' shoulder on the panel, Kitchy glanced wildly.

"You dan' fool, Kitchy!" yelled Flanders' voice. "I believe you! Don't make a fool of yourself!"

Kitchy croaked, "No! You *don't* believe me! You're just saying that!"

Flanders cursed thickly. His shoulder jarred the door again.

Kitchy spied the bathroom window and threw himself at it. Only luck saved him from going through the glass headfirst: the window was up.

There was a screen in it, though, and for days after Kitchy had little criss-cross marks on his nose.

Then Kitchy was on the fire escape, stumbling and staggering. But getting down! He was getting down! He hit the alley and ran for his jalopy. It was a crazy thing to do, because he'd parked in front of Vance's boarding house. But a guy has to have a little luck. Kitchy made it, gunned the motor. There weren't a dozen cars in Moxenton so old and wheezy that they couldn't have caught Kitchy's jalopy within a mile. But Kitchy wasn't going a mile. He was only going to the Hotel Alton, across from City Hall.

And he *expected* to be caught. He even *wanted* to be caught, once he got to Mrs. Mock's room and grabbed the wizened, mousy man who had killed Ed Granvil.



ON THE move now, the adrenalin in Kitchy's system transformed fear into rage. The guy he was going after was about his size, but Kitchy wouldn't have cared if the man was ten feet tall. He was going to pulverize him, choke the truth out of him.

And this was why the desk clerk at the Hotel Alton didn't hedge with Kitchy. Ordinarily, the clerk wouldn't have given out room numbers so readily, but when he saw Kitchy's chubby fists waving and heard that keyed-up note in Kitchy's voice, he blurted, "Mrs. Mock is in 524!"

Kitchy went up.

He started to pound on the door. It opened so fast that Kitchy's second blow swished the air. Mrs. Mock took one look and cried, "It's Earl! Something's happened to him!"

Kitchy's jaw dropped. The woman's nice, grey eyes were panicky. She was a slim, small-boned woman, just about the size the mousy man would have chosen for a wife. She was older than Kitchy had thought, and her face was getting chalky now. Her hair and eyes were dark.

Kitchy pushed into the room, stammering, "Earl? You m-mean your husband, Mr. M-Mock!"

"Yes, yes! Tell me, is he hurt? Did he get into trouble with that man he was following?"

"I— Why, I don't know," Kitchy gulped. "Isn't he here? I thought he'd be— Who is he?"

Mrs. Mock tightened swiftly. Seeing that it wasn't bad news, her panic changed to suspicion. She backtracked to a table, snatched her purse, dug her hand in it. She pointed a little gun at Kitchy.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

Kitchy took a step forward.

"Don't!" she warned. "I'm good with it!"

Kitchy's lips quivered. For a second, he didn't give a damn and was going to jump at her. Then he dug a fist into his thigh.

"Listen, I've got to find your husband," he said desperately. "I thought he killed Granvil, but maybe he didn't. But I've got to find him. He *knows* who killed Granvil. He—"

Mrs. Mock gasped, "Granvil? Is he dead? But Earl was hired to—" She stopped.

Kitchy's head whirled. "Hired? Did you say he was *hired*? Then he's a paid killer!"

"Stop it!" Mrs. Mock snapped. "Don't be a fool! Earl never killed anybody. He's a detective. And he wasn't after Granvil—not *just* Granvil, anyhow. It was somebody else, somebody who was mixed up with Granvil. Earl told me he knew practically everything to wind up the case. He said tonight might see it through. He'd already found documentary evidence, and all he needed yet was a picture of Granvil and the other man together in Granvil's house."

Kitchy's eyes popped. He had trouble getting his breath. His voice was sort of strangled when he managed, "Mock was after a guy who was mixed up with Granvil?" Kitchy swallowed. "But who was Mock working for?"

"I can't tell you that. I shouldn't have said as much as I have." Mrs. Mock circled around Kitchy towards the door. "You startled me," she said. "I thought Earl had been hurt, and that it was no longer a secret that he was on a case in this town."

"A secret?" Kitchy yelled. "Now I see it! Mock was hired to come here and do a secret investigation—"

Kitchy jerked. "Look out!" he screamed.

But it was no use. Mrs. Mock's back was to the door, and the man who opened it and jumped inside came too fast for her to spin and shoot. He was a big, rangy man, blond, green-eyed. He reached over Mrs. Mock's shoulder and chopped her little gun to the floor, pushed her roughly into the room.

"Johnny Vance!" Kitchy bleated.

Vance gestured. "Over by the window, you!" he ordered Kitchy. His green eyes glittered at Mrs. Mock. "Where's that microfilm? He must have given it to you."

Mrs. Mock held the back of her hand to her mouth. There was agony in her eyes, because this time she was sure. "Earl is hurt! He's—Oh!" she gasped. "He's—"

"Okay, so he is—dead!" Vance grated. "And you'll be, too, in a minute if you don't give me that microfilm."

VANCE scooped up the little gun from the floor. "You've got about thirty seconds to decide," he warned. "Abe Flanders will be here any second. Play ball and I'll let you live. If you don't, I'll shoot you with this gun and that dumb little Kitchy with my own. I'll say he killed you and I shot him when he made a break."

Kitchy yelled, "Don't listen to him! He'll kill us both even if you *do* give it to him! He killed Granvil! Your husband, too! Mrs. Mock, who was your husband working for?"

Dully, the woman said, "The mayor."

"That's it, then!" Kitchy cried. "That's it! The mayor didn't trust Johnny Vance because Johnny said he wasn't getting anywhere and he's supposed to be a slick investigator. The mayor hired Mock to check up on Vance. And Mock *did* check up, too. He got something. Microfilm, you said, Johnny?"

Vance sneered, "You're damn' right I'm a slick investigator. I wasn't on this case a week till I had microfilms of Granvil's books and transcripts of telephone conversations and private conferences—enough evidence to hang Granvil."

"But instead of turning it in," Kitchy



panted, "you used it to blackmail Granvil. It *must* have been that. And the mayor got suspicious when you didn't produce and hired Mock secretly. Mock found where you were hiding the microfilm and stole it. All he wanted then was a picture of you and Granvil together in Granvil's house.

"He tried to get that tonight when he followed you and Granvil. You caught him at it, killed him. But you didn't find the microfilm on him and you thought he'd already turned it over to the mayor. If the mayor had the evidence against Granvil, then Granvil would implicate you, so you killed him also. You heard me shooting off my mouth at City Hall and knew I'd be a swell suspect for the cops, so you dumped Granvil's body in the playground, then went home and slashed your head and handcuffed yourself to make it—look as if you'd been unconscious."

Vance's lips pulled back. "The mayor should have hired you, you little squirt!" He turned to Mrs. Mock. "Last chance—" Someone was running in the corridor.

Vance hissed, "I mean *last* chance! If I get that microfilm back, I can say it was never out of my hands and still the fair-haired boy."

**T**HUNDER sounded on the door. Lieutenant Flanders roared, "Open up!"

Vance set himself, lifted his heavy gun. Then he swore luridly, remembering if he shot Mrs. Mock with the big gun it would look bad. He took a step away from her, juggling the guns.

Lieutenant Flanders said later he thought an elephant had trumpeted in the room.

It was just Kitchy, though. And if he

wasn't as big as an elephant, he was every bit as formidable in that moment. A slug dead center wouldn't have stopped him. He was a little whirlwind. He flung himself headlong at Vance, and his chubby fists were whipping and slashing with all the force, if not the skill, of a finely-trained lightweight.

And a lightweight can knock out a heavyweight if he hits him hard enough—or often enough!

Kitchy did both. Maybe Vance could have taken it if there'd been only Kitchy, but there wasn't. There was Mrs. Mock, too. And she was a tigress.

When Lieutenant Flanders burst the door in, he blurted, "other of God! Is that Johnny Vance?"

Kitchy helped Mrs. Mock to her bed. "Do you have that microfilm?" he asked gently.

"It's in my purse," she sobbed.

Kitchy handed the purse to Flanders. He talked tersely, and he didn't sound much like Kitchy. He sounded pretty rugged.

"Now do you believe me?" he challenged.

"Hell, I always did," Flanders said. "You didn't think I figured a little punk like you would *kill* anybody, did—" Flanders stopped, looked at Johnny Vance's raw, unconscious face. "M-m-m!" he said.

Kitchy grabbed the telephone, called the hospital, inquired if Jimmy Shevlin had regained consciousness yet. He listened intently, then sighed. "He'll be okay, Well, see that he gets everything he needs. Just charge it all to the office of the Commissioner of Parks and Playgrounds. If the guy who takes Granvil's place won't pay, I'll punch *him* in the nose! This is Sam Kitch talking."

## "Let Me Warn You, Sir,

this is an unfriendly town and beastly things may be happening here," Dr. Rudd cautioned Luther McGavock. As if the Memphis shamus had to be told! His first evening in Hetherton and already two deaths had occurred—with an elusive undertaker's apprentice on the loose embalming the victims as fast as the killer could dispose of them! The latest in this perennially popular series by MERLE CONSTINER,

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# COME BACK TO THE KILL

*The girl I saw that day at Marco's, with terror in her dusky eyes, was the girl I had loved and lost five years ago. . . . Yet, according to the records, she was still dead—and I was still the man who had murdered her!*

*I'd come back, just as she asked me to—but not the way either of us figured.*



## CHAPTER ONE

### Where Are You Going, Johnny Lee?

The letter read like this:

Dear Johnny Lee:

It was my good fortune recently to learn of your return to civilian life. Why didn't you contact me? You must know I have news of great importance. Please come down to Briarhill without fail, on the afternoon of the tenth.

Thomas Marco

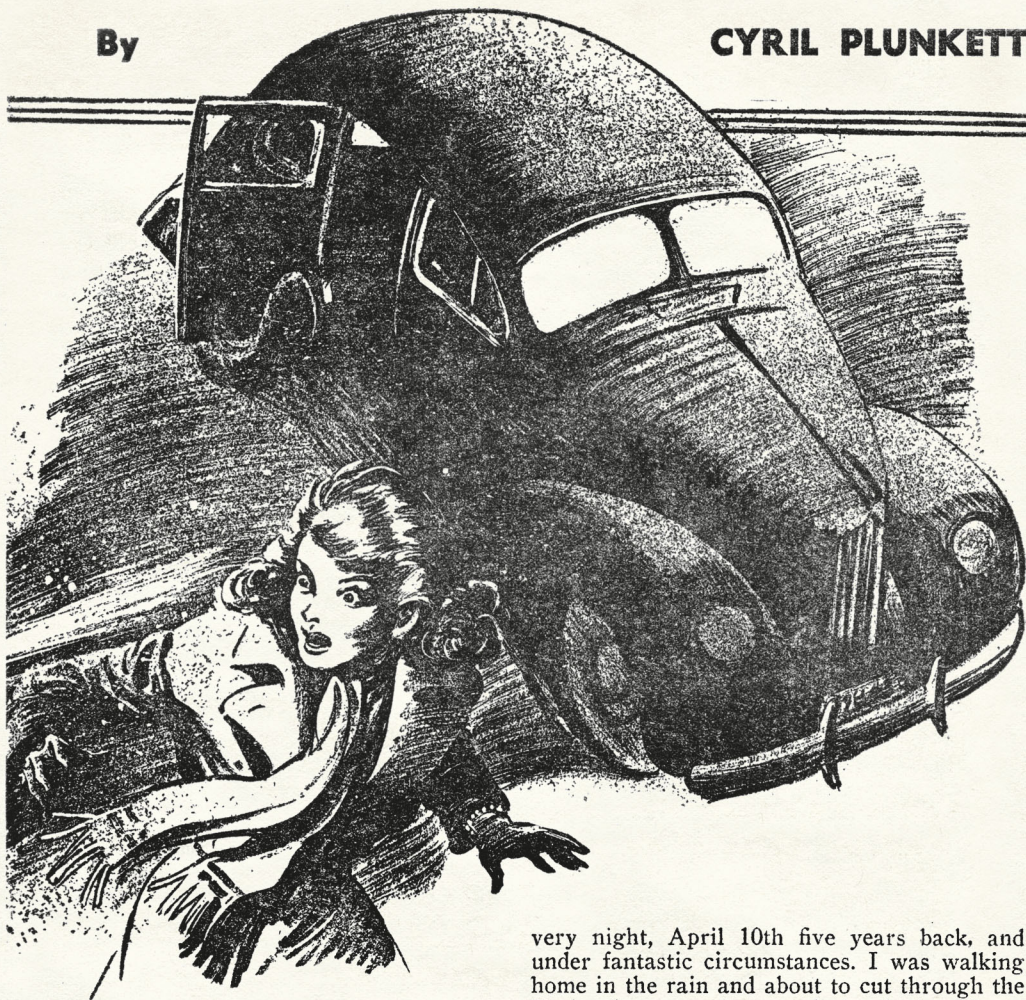
The so-and-so! The patriotic louse! Not one word from him while I was out of circulation; but then even men like Marco can wave

*Novelette of a Girl  
Returned From the Dead*



By

CYRIL PLUNKETT



the flag—or maybe it had been my G. I. salary, peanuts, fifty bucks a month. Marco's letter should have read: *Look here, Lee. Now that you're back in the money, payments must be resumed—or else.*

The past was exploding right in my face, like a blockbuster. I was nearly thirty now, again with Lessing and Klone, the banking house. A vice-presidency was coming my way soon; I'd almost forgotten that Johnny Lee—on a John Doe warrant, of course—had once been the object of a nationwide police search.

Remember five years back, the Morrison case? The girl who had been found in her Parkway apartment early one April morning, strangled? I was the dark, tanned, tall and mysterious man in the raincoat, Mr. X, with whom it was said Toni Morrison had had her last date on this earth.

The point is, I didn't kill Toni Morrison. I had scarcely known her. We'd met only that

very night, April 10th five years back, and under fantastic circumstances. I was walking home in the rain and about to cut through the Park when a taxi stopped ahead. A girl got out. Then the taxi rolled away again, and the girl turned into the Park and practically bumped into me.

She stopped. I stopped. An April rain—but not a fifteen-minute shower; it fell with steady, sleepy rhythm. "Good Lord, you'll get soaked!" I said. She wore, of all things for a night like this, sandals. And no hose. And no hat on her blonde head. She wore a party gown and a nun-like cape that fell in long, loose folds.

"Here, take my coat," I said. Belted, the first hint of the military in styles, the kind of raincoat so many men were wearing.

But she laughed. Amazingly she said, "I want to get wet. I like a night like this. I want to walk home in the rain."

"Yeah," I said, "and get pneumonia."

She laughed again. There was a queer high tone in her voice. "That might solve a lot of problems."



It seemed so natural that we fell into step. I learned she was a dancer, that her home was far off, some state in the west. She didn't mention her name, and I didn't ask her. She lived beyond the Park, not far from my own address, and when we reached her door she asked me in.

The elevator was above somewhere; we didn't wait. We climbed three flights of stairs. On the stairs we passed a man I knew, Tom Marco.

"Good evening, Mr. Lee," he said.

I said, "Good evening."

"Miserable night, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said.

What happened then, while I sat before the fire in a warm, snug room with Toni Morrison? The hour I spent with her, over cigarettes and coffee? I can't bring her back, so it doesn't matter what happened. She's dead, and hopes I had that night died too.

Her phone rang as I was saying goodbye. I waited as she answered it. "Yes," she said. Her breath caught, her whole body stiffened. "No, it's over. Talking won't help—"

A man; a metallic, hard voice. I could understand he wouldn't want to lose her.

"Yes?" she said. And then, "How soon?"

She put down the receiver, and that was all I knew of Toni Morrison, except—just before I left, her hand in mine, she whispered, "Johnny, kiss me, please." And she closed her eyes and I could feel her body trembling. "Come back sometime, Johnny Lee," she said.

The next morning I read about her murder.

**I**N THE morning, too, I read of myself, the tall, tanned man in the raincoat—the killer. *A resident of the building, Thomas Marco, passed them on the stairs. . . .* So ran the piece in the newspaper.

I didn't report at the office that morning. For a while I just sat, the paper on my knees, her picture on the front page smiling at me. I could see her in my mind, as she'd walked home in the rain, as she'd stood before the fire, as she'd lit a cigarette for me. *And she said, "Come back sometime, Johnny Lee."*

I meant to go to the police. After all, I had no motive for murder; and I did have evidence of a sort. Someone had phoned her, the man with the hard voice. Someone she knew. Someone she'd feared. It hadn't struck me as strange that Marco should have described but not identified me.

I didn't go to the police. Marco arrived, fat in a grey suit, pink-cheeked and beaming.

"Good morning, Mr. Lee," he said, when I opened the door.

I blinked at him. "Good morning," I said.

"Fine morning, isn't it?"

He did it deliberately, to recall to me our brief interchange of the previous evening. He

had a rosy bald head; he was fifty, perhaps. He wore spats and carried a cane. Once in the room, he walked to the window. You could see the park from there.

"Well—?" I said.

He turned, grinned, shrugged and said, "You're going to burn, Mr. Lee."

I looked at him. "On your testimony?"

"On what I *could* testify."

It sounded nasty. I said so. I said a lot of things. Yes, he'd seen me return home with Miss Morrison—but I wouldn't admit that. I was going promptly to the police, and to hell with him.

He lit a cigarette. His eyes were blue, bright, and almost hidden by puffy lids that lay close together, drowsing. "Oh, come now, Mr. Lee," he said. "Let me repeat, on what I *could* testify. Haven't you grasped it that I haven't yet identified you?"

Life was going on outside. I could hear it through the open window. Cars passed. A child began to cry.

"And that, if the price isn't forthcoming, I'll not only identify you, Mr. Lee, but maintain also that I saw you leave immediately after the precise time police have set, the precise moment of the murder?"

I hit him, not hard. I slapped him with my open hand. The blood ran from his face, and then crept back, but one cheek remained long white and quivering.

"For that, Mr. Lee," Marco said at last with icy calmness, "you'll pay double."

And I did, God help me, I did.

Five years. You can bury a lot of memories in that time. I'd hoped Tom Marco had forgotten, but I should have known better. Black-mailers never forget.

Now, on this April tenth, five years to the day that Toni Morrison had been murdered, I drove to Briarhill. On the way I smoked a lot of cigarettes, I did a lot of thinking. *Where are you going, Johnny Lee?* I asked myself.

It was some forty miles from the city to Briarhill, and already it was very late in the afternoon. So I drove fast, and I could see the villa in my mind, pink stucco nestled in a glen. Trees, a smooth lawn, smooth hedges—and the roses. Pink roses, like Marco's pink cheeks and his bald spot.

It rained as I skimmed through Briarhill Village, an April shower. I wound up the high road, grimmer with each curve, and at last the cleft appeared, and there it was, Marco's, just as I'd recalled it. Bright wet and pink in the evening sun. I pulled up in the driveway and walked across the terrace.

The door stood open.

I pressed the bell and waited. I pressed the bell again. "Marco," I called. But there was



no answer. He was working in his garden, perhaps?

Here, in the garden, the grass had been freshly cut, and it clung wetly to my shoes. Then a pheasant rose, startled, from the hedge behind me. I walked on, beyond the house. And stopped.

Marco was not working in his rose garden. Marco lay among the budding bushes, dead in the still evening, shot through one no longer blue eye.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Death Watch

THOUGHTS began to come. A wave, first, of almost savage exultation. My decisions had been made for me. No more would I need to fear the past and Marco. But that was just what I was feeling; I guess I really didn't think at all yet. Shot through one blue eye. . . . Blood, a drop or two, snaked across his fat, pink cheek—and it *wasn't dry*.

I touched his pudgy hand and found it still warm. I stared with sudden fascination at the tiny wound that had not yet stopped bubbling. Then my heart began to thump-thump in my chest, then in my throat, and I whirled at last, tense, listening as I looked around.

The early evening droned. Flies. A bee in a zig-zag search for honey. From far off and above, from the rim of the glen, I could hear a tractor motor. The rim, an open field, was being freshly tilled; and I could see, off to one side and high above me also, gables showing. A house beyond the orchard. But this silence here? Nothing here around me? I had the sudden feeling that from trees and hedge and shrubbery, I was being watched.

At that moment the unseen tractor backfired. I jerked at the sound, almost expecting a bullet. But nothing happened. The flies found Marco's eyes and stayed there.

I walked away, fast, through the wet lush grass again, to my sedan. I had not quite reached the car when new sound stopped me. Coming down the hill was a roadster.

I caught my breath. The roadster slowed. It swung in. There were two men in the seat, and the driver, the big man, called out a friendly, "Hello there!"

I said hello.

The two men got out. The big man, the driver, wore tweeds. "Marco in the house?" he said.

"No," I said. "I've just been to the door and no one answered."

"Hell," he said, "his housekeeper's away today, but he's here. Did you call out?"

I nodded and repeated, "No one answered."

The big man frowned. "That's queer," he said. "He called me. I just talked to him over

the phone." He turned aside, to his companion. "Not thirty minutes ago, Arnell, wasn't it?"

The dark man named Arnell was in his late thirties. He smiled and shook his head. "I don't know, Vic. I didn't hear the phone. I was upstairs."

Vic gnawed his full underlip, then introduced himself. Vic Rampole was his name, he said, and Arnell was his house guest. He lived in the gabled house up on the crag. Now he waved his hand at it, as though I hadn't seen the gables. Marco's neighbor these last several years, he said. "Damned queer," he muttered then. "Lee your name, you say? Never heard Marco mention you."

"No, I scarcely knew him."

"From Briarhill, are you?"

"No, the city."

"Damned queer," he muttered. His words were jabbing at me, like lefts thrown by a boxer. He worried me. What was queer to him about it? One the face of things, Marco simply wasn't home, and Rampole should have shrugged and gone again.

I STILL thought in terms of flight, you see, only in terms of getting out of this. Where was the killer? That was his business.

"Come along to the house, Lee," Rampole said, and so we marched across the terrace.

Arnell was saying, casually, "Haven't I seen you before, Lee?" He paused to offer me a cigarette. "Where could it have been?"

I didn't answer. The door was open, as I said, and Rampole marched in.

"Marco!" he called to the still room.

"Of course, I don't know the man," Arnell broke in, "but you mentioned his interest in flowers, Vic. Perhaps he's somewhere in the garden?"

"And didn't hear us? Nonsense," Rampole grunted. He walked to the front window. "Thing I don't like about this is that he wanted a gun."

My heart skipped a beat. "Gun?" I said.

"Called me on the phone. Knew I had guns lying around and asked for the loan of one." Rampole reached in his loose jacket pocket and removed a .32 revolver. But he didn't look at it. He looked at me. His glance found my shoes, the grass that clung to them, and stayed there a moment. "Looks like he expected trouble, Lee, doesn't it?"

He expected Johnny Lee. It rumbled through my mind at last, like tanks. It spread bursting TNT like a naval broadside. *His body lay in the garden—and his letter was in my pocket. "Mr. Lee, you've told the jury you went only to the front door, and then immediately back to your car, where you were first seen by Rampole and Arnell. But the terrace reaches to the stone driveway, and there*



*is no grass growing between where your car stood and the door. Moreover, the grass had been cut that day only behind the house, in the garden. How, then, do you explain the grass on your shoes?"*

"It seems to me," Rampole was saying now grimly, "this is a matter for the sheriff—"

He'd been looking out of the window. He paused with a curse. Then he flung the window open and bellowed, "Stop!"

The rear door of my car stood open. Running from it, down the driveway, was a girl. She turned her head at his cry. She looked back once, terror in her eyes; and although I had only that instant's view of her face, I knew her. Thunder roared in my head. Time spun back five years and crashed into place. The girl was Toni Morrison.

**S**HE didn't stop, and Rampole yelled again. His gun came up and his finger tightened on the trigger. I acted instinctively. The gun fired a bare second after I'd hit him.

He swung on me savagely. I hit him again, and the gun flew from his fingers. *Arnell*, I thought, and turned just in time to dodge the smaller man and trip him. Arnell sprawled, and now I had the gun. Now they couldn't stop me. I ran from the house, to my car, and the keys were in the lock. The car door slammed. Arnell's knuckles bounced against it. He'd tried for the handle, and missed. Then I was moving, fast, tires skidding.

The girl had disappeared from the driveway, but she couldn't have gone far. One-two hundred yards at the most. How much time had passed; a minute? I raced past the rocky cleft, out of the drive, onto the curving hill road, down, toward Briarhill.

There she was—slim, in a black skirt she'd pulled up for running; black tam on her gold curls; black jacket, open and flying behind her; black purse dangling from her arm. She turned again, as though to dart off to one side.

"Get in," I said, expecting any second to hear the roadster behind me.

She swayed, almost fell into the seat. Still no roadster behind us—but they weren't fools. I had the gun. They'd phone for the sheriff, to block off all roads. . . .

She was fighting for breath from her long run. She looked at me.

"Can we get away?" she whispered.

"Come back sometime, Johnny Lee," she'd told me.

"We can't get away," I said.

"I came up from the city, on the bus to Briarhill. People saw me. I walked out—all the way from town."

*Why?* I wanted to ask. But I knew why she'd come to see Marco. We'd reached a side road, narrow and gloomy, the one off-

shoot in this area. I swung into this road, to the right, and we climbed again, through a thickly wooded area.

"Did you hear the shot?" I said.

She shook her head.

A little hole in one eye. A little bullet, a .22 perhaps. I glanced down at her purse. A girl would have a gun like that.

She began to speak again. "Then I heard a car, and it was you. So I hid behind the hedge, and as you walked around the house, I hid in your car. I had to get away. . . ."

"What's your name?"

"Jo Ann."

"Morrison?"

Her head jerked towards me. "How did you know that?"

"I knew Toni."

She just stared. She should have said, "Oh, did you?" Eager, glad. "Oh, she was your friend?" Something like that. Her lips moved, and I remembered words Marco once had said, for the papers and police. Words that had painted my description. And these were the trembling words I read there, in her eyes and on her moving lips: *The man in the rain-coat!*

**F**UNNY how quick barriers can be lowered and then raised again. For years I'd thought Toni had been the girl for me. My dreams, all these years, had proved that. True, I'd doubted her a little. Not many girls would have walked with a stranger through a dark park—or asked the stranger to her rooms—or kissed the stranger quite so quickly, perhaps. I'd faced that, admitted it, explained it away after a fashion—and here was the difference in this girl, Jo Ann. There was none of that in her; none at all. Which made it doubly hard that I should see that accusation in her eyes. . . .

She said jerkily, "Will you—try to make the city tonight?"

I said, "I don't know yet."

"Then?"

"There was a man on a tractor, over the rim, plowing."

She didn't understand, of course. I turned to the right once more, and down this road there was a house and a farm, the farm the tractor had been plowing. I drew off the road, into a lane that ran into the woods, and hid the car.

"Wait here, Jo Ann," I said.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Girl Who Was Dead

**T**HE farm's white buildings were all freshly painted. The name on the mailbox was George Forrest.

I rapped at the house. There was no one



at home. But I could hear the tractor again, so I started off across the fields.

Suddenly the sound of the tractor stopped. I saw it the next minute as I rounded the barn, and I saw something else—a pheasant, dead, lying on newly-plowed earth. The driver of the tractor sat at the wheel, gaunt, heavy-browed and grim, watching me.

"Mr. Forrest?" I called.

He didn't answer; and now it was what I didn't see that became important. Farmers often carry guns with them to the fields; the law permits the shooting of destructive game birds. George Forrest had killed a pheasant in this field today, this afternoon or evening. But there was no gun visible on the tractor.

"Mr. Forrest?" I said again.

He spat. "What do you want?"

I put on a grin, apologized for the intrusion. I mentioned that his soil was black and fine here—

"Get to the point," he broke in sharply.

So I said, "Know Tom Marco?"

He looked at me. The color deepened in his leathery cheeks. "Some things," he said, "there just ain't any use denying. Last fall I bought this place. I fixed up the buildings. I built a line fence on this field." He scowled across the field. "Just down across the rim, it goes, down into the glen—and that's Marco's glen, he claims. Well, Marco razed the fence last fall."

"But you plowed the rim section today, anyway."

"That's right," Forrest said. "I plowed it."

"At what time?"

"I don't watch the clock, young man!" he snorted.

"All right," I said. "But you did plow the rim. And from the rim you could see Marco's house, his garden. Each time you came to the rim today, you must have expected some protest from him, some action—"

I stopped momentarily. Faintly, from far away, came the high wail of a siren. The sheriff's car, of course, on the curves in the hill road. I saw the knuckles on Forrest's hand whiten.

"So you saw Marco in his garden."

He said, too quickly, "Maybe so. I don't remember."

"And you saw something happen—"

He snapped, "Like what?"

"Murder?" I said.

"You the law? You got a warrant?"

I shook my head.

"Then, young man," he snarled, "you get off this farm before I lose my temper!"

I walked back to the road. What I'd thought, I guess, was that I would find George Forrest eager and excited, bursting to tell me what I'd *hoped* he'd seen. "Sure I saw down in the glen," I had hoped he'd say. "Sure I saw

the murder of Tom Marco—" But he hadn't . . . that was that.

Now I'd reached the road, where Jo Ann was waiting. Where she should have been waiting, that is. The earlier shower had laid the dust in the road, so I could see the imprint of my tires. A second set of car-tracks was superimposed on them. The signs were plain to read. This second car had stopped also, had pulled off to one side as I had, and then swung back on the hard road again.

I ran, calling in the gloomy lane, "Jo Ann!"

There was no answer. She'd gone. The imprint of her small high-heeled slippers in the dust was all that she'd left. She'd *stepped* down from my car; she hadn't been taken away; there were no other footprints, just hers and my own. She'd *walked* away, with firm, spaced, unhesitating steps. She'd walked to the other car and got in.

I backed my car into the road. The other car had gone straight on, past the farm of George Forrest, to the next crossroad. Here the tire-tracks swung right to the hill road, where they turned right again—back the way we had come!

I saw Vic Rampole's house, its high gables gloomy-black against the early night sky. I stopped and pulled off the road again, barely had my car hidden when lights flashed from ahead, from the curve in the hill road that led to Marco's glen.

Two cars. Vic Rampole's roadster, with Arnell driving and Rampole seated beside him. Close behind them was a big sedan, a red eye on its turret-top. A police car. Both cars swung into Rampole's driveway.

My heart began to pound. I vaulted a hedge and ran through the trees. Now I was in the yard, in its inky shadows.

"Unquestionably he'll make for the city," I heard Arnell saying.

The third man said, "They were working together, that seems to be clear. Your arrival frightened the girl and she made a break for it."

The door closed on them. Lights sprang on in the house, and then a window was opened. I stole along the shrubbery. I looked into a book-lined room, at the three men, through the open window.

**T**HE SHERIFF, Blaine, they called him, was accepting a glass. Rampole had a bottle in his hand. "A short one, Vic," Blaine said. "I'm on duty, you know."

Arnell chuckled. "Make mine a double brandy. Bit of a shock, this murder."

Rampole poured them, then one for himself.

He sipped from it, set the glass down, smacked his lips and lit a cigarette. "Except for the servants, I was alone at the time," he said. "Arnell was coming up for the week-



end, but he arrived only last evening. It was about three o'clock yesterday afternoon when Marco arrived. He'd walked up from the glen. We sat a while, had a drink or two, chatted." Rampole frowned, made sudden circling motions with his cigaret. "We discussed his trouble with George Forrest."

Blaine, glancing at his wrist-watch, interrupted gently, "The box?"

"Yes, I'm coming to it," Rampole said. "The point is, Marco and I were very close friends. As a matter of fact, I got him to move up here. I sold him the glen. So he knew he could trust me. Anyway, Marco had this small black metal box with him, in his coat pocket."

"Wait a minute," Arnell broke in. "Could the servants have overheard?"

Again Rampole shook his head. "I doubt it. Sheriff Blaine can question them, of course. But I don't see that it would matter much anyway what they'd heard. Marco didn't say what was in the box. All he wanted was to leave it with me, in my safe."

*I know what's in the box, I thought. I know, all right. . . .*

Rampole was dumping ash from his cigaret scowling as he added, "I was glad to do him that favor, naturally."

"He didn't say why he wanted the box locked up?" Blaine asked.

"You know," Rampole mused, "I wondered about that myself. He didn't mention it, though. Another spot of brandy, Sheriff?"

"No," Blaine said. "Thanks just the same. Just get the box for me."

Rampart turned to the wall. A book-lined shelf swung out as he touched it. A wall safe was revealed, and he busied himself with the dial. Presently he returned, the black box in his hands. He placed it on a table.

Blaine put the box in his pocket. "I'll examine the contents later, Vic. I'll let you know. It may be that Marco was forced before his death to tell that he'd brought the box to you. Just an idea, but better keep a sharp lookout tonight, Vic, just in case."

Rampole laughed grimly. "Don't worry. I shan't be twice burned."

The three drifted out to the hall, the front door, the porch.

I climbed softly through the window.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Welcome Home—to Hell!

THERE were velvet draperies at the windows, and velvet portieres to an alcove, and there was a full-length paneled cabinet. Its door was invitingly ajar. I drew Rampole's .32 revolver as I heard the front door close—but, surprisingly, only one man returned.

"Well?" I heard. A mocking whisper. "Well, where are you, Lee?"

Cold ran down my spine. It had come too soon, and not the way I'd planned it. I pulled the hammer back on the gun. He heard the click, I think. He chuckled.

"Behind the window draperies, Lee? Oh, but you won't find her!"

Cloth swished—the draperies—and I could hear him, his breath and his chuckle. Then he laughed. "The alcove?" he said.

The footsteps turned, as though to march on past my cabinet door to the alcove. But they didn't pass. The door was flung wide open.

He looked at the gun, then at me. One hand was in his jacket pocket, and a sneer was on his face. "I thought you'd pick up the scent and appear here," he said. "In fact I'd have been damned disappointed if you hadn't. The gun?" He shook his head at me. "You're a fool, Lee, precisely as I figured. Did you examine the chambers?"

I didn't need to look down now. It was his gun.

"One bullet," he drawled. "That's all I had in it—the one I shot from Marco's window at Miss Morrison. Isn't it a shame, Lee? But sit down! I've time to waste. . . . You're thinking of Arnell?" His eyes mocked me. "I sent Arnell on an errand. He won't be back until—"

I took a step. His hand flashed from his pocket. His gun was a heavy automatic.

I said, "It's a little too neat, Rampole. Marco came to see you yesterday, I guess—but not with the box. Marco was—Marco. He came to tell you Jo Ann was coming. Jo Ann, trying to reopen her sister's case, was a lever he could use. He threatened to sell Jo Ann the name of her sister's murderer unless you raised the ante for his silence! Marco was clever, but not clever enough. He'd bled you almost dry, and he didn't see he'd reached the limit."

Rampole's eyes were lazy, amused.

"You arranged for a house-guest," I said. "so you'd have an alibi. This evening you maneuvered Arnell to his room, doubtless on the wrong side of your house, and you went to your room, on the other, the side facing Marco's garden. You shot him from your upstairs window."

The lids of his button eyes flickered. *Restless, I thought. Not much longer.*

"Jo Ann had just arrived. The timing was perfect," I said. "Now all you had to do was dispose of the murder weapon, and lie. Say that Marco had phoned and requested the loan of a revolver; and then when you went over with Arnell, take these two guns with you to the glen. Then you'd kill Jo Ann and in the excitement, toss the other, the first gun, off



in the bushes as though she'd discarded it. In the house, you knew where to find Marco's black box—"

He broke in softly, "The story's too long, Lee." His finger lay tight on the trigger, and his eyes began to gleam.

I didn't throw myself at him. I waited. For the last five minutes I had seen movement, the top of a head at the window. I'd wondered how long this man would wait there. Now the head rose, shoulders became visible.

"Rampole, you've got a powerful lot of killing to do tonight," said the farmer, George Forrest.

**R**AMPOLE had guts. I thought he'd turn; his slightest indecision would have been enough for me. Rampole didn't move, kept his gun steadily trained on me. He gambled, and won, for George Forrest was unarmed.

Forrest climbed in through the window. By that time Rampole had backed away a few steps, enough to see and cover both of us. "Yes, sir," Forrest was saying, "I believe in the Lord and in justice—but when it looks like I might take the blame for a killing, why I start looking around."

He paused for breath. "Mr. Rampole, you can put that gun down."

Then everything happened at once. Forrest, gaunt and grim, took a firm step forward. The blast came. I had a flash-view of the surprise on Forrest's face, of the half-spin that he made. I saw the gun level once more from its sharp recoil, and spit once more, but already half out of Rampole's hand when the shot came. I had hit him.

Rampole's face went back, away from me, and I followed him. We went to the floor. The gun had dropped. My fingers had found flesh, his neck, and for five long years I'd dreamed of this one moment. I watched the fear spread in his eyes. I watched his eyes bug out. "For Toni—" I said. "You'd lost her, but you wouldn't leave her for another man."

Writhing frantically, he tore my hands away for an instant. "Yes!" he gasped. "She told me we were through—I couldn't take it. I didn't know what I was doing, Lee—"

I put my hands back where they'd been. They seemed to belong there. I felt the flip-flop of his hands all over me, jabbing, and they hurt, I guess; I don't really know.

"I changed things for you today. Marco hadn't mentioned I was coming. You'd put only one bullet in the .32, and when it was gone you had to let Jo Ann and me escape. Then you had to find the box, the proof that Marco had that you'd killed Toni. So you sent Arnell to the garden to look for Marco, so you could search the house. But you didn't

have time to examine the box there, and you hit upon a new scheme. You'd tell Arnell you were going to search for us, and then you'd take the box home, remove all evidence pointing to you, put the box in your safe—

"Then you saw our tracks—and Jo Ann in the car alone. There was your real mistake, Rampole. Because *she knew you were her enemy*. Only one thing would have made her go away willingly with you—a clue to Toni's murder. And so that was the bait you used—"

He began to gurggle, words that couldn't get past the barrier of my hands. Words that were like balloons, that swelled out into his flesh beneath my fingers.

I was conscious of a weight upon my shoulder. *No, it doesn't matter*, I thought. Blood dripped from somewhere above me, lit on Rampole's purple skin, his cheek and his forehead. Now I knew this weight belonged to the farmer, George Forrest. "Don't spoil it," he was pleading. "Don't spoil it!"

He hadn't strength to stop me, but his words did. "Don't spoil it. . ." Jo Ann might have said those words to me. Jo Ann who still lived, and who looked like Toni. I lifted both my hands, looked at them. I was glad then that no blood had touched them.

**T**HE wound was in Forrest's shoulder, bad but not lethal. The bleeding slacked off when I found the pressure point.

He was saying, as I worked, "I saw Marco lying in his garden and guessed he was dead. The trouble was, that was while you folks were in the house, apparently, *before* I heard the shot. It was Rampole shooting at Miss Morrison with the .32 that I heard, of course. The tractor wasn't running then. But what I didn't know was what kind of gun had killed Tom Marco. I had a shotgun with me on the tractor. Someone might have figured I could have gone down across the rim and blasted him. I plowed the shotgun under, to be safe—"

I left them, walked through the alcove; beyond was a door and a room. Dark, of course. I heard a little moan. I struck a match. Jo Ann lay on a cot, bound, gagged.

I stood stiffly a moment after I'd told her, after I'd freed her. Then I said, "She was a swell kid, Toni." Jo Ann still sat on the cot, and I said, "You look like her, Jo Ann—like Toni." The match had long gone out. I hadn't lit the room light lest she see what I was thinking. But she read it in my voice, I guess, because she reached up, found my hand.

"Thanks, Johnny Lee," she said.

And suddenly it wasn't lonely, standing there like that. Suddenly I saw that life need never be lonely again. *I've come back*, I thought, *like I promised. . .*

THE END



# I'll Be Glad When You're Dead!

By  
**HENRY  
NORTON**



She'd been ashamed to come back after that, and so she'd gone down and down. . . .

---

*Dan Tabor knew he was going to die, but he meant to take his killer with him. . . . It was much too late when he discovered that, of the two, only he held murder in his heart. . . .*

---

**T**HIS particular morning, Dan Tabor woke up dead. To all intents and purposes, that is, because he knew that he was going to die that day—knew the place, and the hour, and the man who was going to kill him.

Not that he was clairvoyant. He knew no fortune tellers, possessed no crystal ball. As a matter of fact, Dan Tabor would have spurned such devices, for he was the most practical of men.

But Dan Tabor knew, just the same. The



man who was going to kill him had called up and told him so. And Tabor knew that if he lived one day, or ten thousand, he would not forget the grave solemnity of Austin Beatty's voice.

Eight o'clock last night, it had been. The telephone bell had tinkled softly in Tabor's apartment. He was dressing to go out, but he'd answered it without annoyance. It was the first time for a long while that he could remember answering a phone without any twinge or uneasiness. Everything was in order, for once—there could be no bad news. And then—

"Dan, this is Austin Beatty."

"Well, long time! How've you been, boy?"

"Dan, you're going to die tomorrow."

Like that. No anger in his voice, no hysteria. A simple statement of fact. As if he'd said, "It'll rain tomorrow." Austin had never been one for talk, but you could rely on what he said. Like collector's coins—it was the fewness of his words that gave them value.

Tabor hadn't known what to say for a moment, apart from demanding, and not getting, a reiteration of the words. It was a situation that hadn't been covered by polite usage. Miss Post had no chapters on "Greeting the Murderer." Tabor decided finally on ridicule. It was a weapon that had served him in the past.

"I suppose you think you're scaring me, Beatty. You spineless worm—you couldn't kill a short beer! Lay off the cheap theatrics."

"Tomorrow afternoon," Beatty had said, "you've got an appointment at the bank. You've got to be there, or go broke. The bank has only one entrance, on Wide street. When you come out that door between two-thirty and three, I'll be waiting, Tabor."

"What do you think I'll be doing all this time?"

"It doesn't matter." The voice didn't raise. "You won't escape. I'm telling you this now, just so you'll have a longer time to be afraid."

"You fool!" Dan Tabor raged. "Don't you know there are laws to deal with people like you? You won't get away with this! I'll have you put in jail, you—"

Tabor had stopped after a while, when he realized he was talking to a dead line. Beatty had hung up. That, in its way, was frightening, too. If it were only a bluff, he'd have hung on, trying to goad Tabor further and further.

And Tabor *did* have to be at the bank at two-thirty. If those notes weren't renewed, he'd lose everything; be stripped of all he'd worked and planned for all his life. He had to be at the bank—and there was only one entrance. Not much of a bank, but big enough for the town; a square box of concrete, with plate-glass windows on two sides and solid walls on the others. It'd been somebody's idea

of burglar-proofing, but to Tabor just now it looked like a death-trap.

Well, he'd been in traps before, and come out unharmed. He wasn't going to fall for one like this. Finally he called the sheriff. About nine o'clock after the idea had been plucking at his mind for an hour, there was some quality in his voice, reflecting the fear in his mind, that brought the Sheriff Lovatt to him promptly, even at that time of night.

LOVATT was one of those nondescript little men who through sheer absence of personality manage to get a great many things done. Where a more imposing figure might have been struck by political lightning long ago, Lovatt had gone on quietly being sheriff for twenty-six years. He was capable; no question of that. He knew the law and he knew his powers. Intently he listened to Tabor's recital in frowning silence.

"Don't sound much like Austin," he said finally.

"You don't think I'd make up a thing like that?" Dan Tabor demanded. "You don't think I'd call you out this late at night for some stupid joke!"

"Not likely," Lovatt admitted. "But supposing all this is so, what do you want me to do about it?"

"—Do about it! I want you to stop him!"

"How?"

"That's your business! Put him in jail—"

"He ain't done anything, yet," said the sheriff reasonably.

"Well then, force him to maintain the peace. Get out an injunction against him!"

Lovatt said sourly, "We c'n watch him, of course, if he really made the threat. But you know Austin well's I do. If he's gonna do somethin' he'll do it, regardless."

Tabor almost shouted, "You mean the law can't do anything to protect a man from being murdered?"

"Whyn't you stay home tomorrow?" the sheriff asked. "Call Chamberlain at the bank an' tell him you dasn't come."

Tabor colored. "He wouldn't believe it. I—I've given him quite a few excuses already for not coming in."

The sheriff nodded. "Pays to have a reputation for the truth." He picked up Tabor's phone and asked for a number. He waited while the line *brred* for a long time, and at length was answered.

"H'lo, Austin," Lovatt said. "Dan Tabor says you been threatenin' him—said you was gonna kill him tomorrow. Anything to it?"

He rubbed the mouthpiece on his chin, listening for a moment. Then he said, "No, that's all. Thanks, Austin. If I was you I'd be careful how I hung around the bank tomorrow. Might be better. G'bye."



"He's lying!" Tabor said.

"Hmmm," said Sheriff Lovatt. He stood up then, his brows caught in a web of thought, his cheeks sucked in. "I'll keep this in mind, Tabor. I'll sleep on it."

"Wait!" There was desperation in Dan Tabor's voice. He had come now to what he had wanted to avoid. But there was no other way now. He must make the sheriff listen, and to do so— "Wait," he said again. "He—Beatty has a reason—that is, might think he had a motive for killing me!"

Lovatt threw his hat on the table and sat down. "I wondered how long before we got to this," he said.

"It's nothing much," Tabor said rapidly. "About six months ago we had some words. He thought I'd done him a dirty trick in—well, kind of a business deal. He's had a grudge against me ever since."

LOVATT pulled his watch from his pocket, and pressed the spring that opened the face of the heavy gold hunting case. He said, "You've got just one minute to start tellin' me the truth, or I'll walk out of here and forget the whole thing."

Dully, Tabor said, "His wife ran away with me. Not many in town knew it; they just knew she'd left him. We went to a little town down close to New Orleans." He paused, licked dry lips. "Sheriff, it was mostly her idea, honestly it was. She wanted to marry me."

Sheriff Lovatt looked as if he'd bitten into a bad apple. "Did you get married?" he asked. "She was too set in her ways," said Tabor. "You left her there an' come home?"

Tabor's hands moved vaguely. "That's the way she wanted it. You know how women are, always looking for the next man. If you ask me, I did Austin Beatty a good turn, taking her away from him."

Lovatt seemed not to be listening. He'd grown smaller, somehow, in the last minute—a little man, drawn in upon himself, seeming only half to fill his chair. He stirred at last and reached for the battered, wide-brimmed gray hat he wore winter and summer.

Finally he said, "I suppose I'll have to be on hand tomorrow, just in case. But I'm not goin' to make you any promises. I'll uphold the law, but I'll do no favors, for you or anyone."

Sheriff Lovatt had gone out then, into the chilly dark, while Tabor stared after him with a look in which there was hatred and terror. Never before had he been forced to explain any of his actions, to tread so close to the somber deeds of his life. But then, never before had that life been declared so grimly forfeit.

Beatty had lied to the sheriff, denied his threat. And the sheriff would rather believe him than Tabor. So much was plain, Dan Ta-

bor reasoned. Plain too, then, that the sheriff would be no help.

Well, then, Tabor would do without his help. He'd take care of himself, and to hell with the sheriff. There was such a thing as self-defense.

There was a way to do this thing. There was a way to banish this brooding shadow, once and for all.

Let Beatty try. *Just let him try!*

Tabor had gone to his closet, unlocked a heavy suitcase, and prowled through its contents. He'd found what he wanted almost at once, stood looking at its dull shining compactness with fascination. It was unfamiliar and strange to his hand, an object of fear and attraction alike. But it promised the solution to this most pressing problem, as well as to many that might arise in the future. He put it on the table beside his bed, and went promptly to sleep.

AFTER Dan Tabor had breakfasted, dressed carefully, and thought things over, he felt better. It was an incredible thing he had been fearing. There was nothing believable about it, here in the brightness of a crisp morning, with familiar things on every side. Now he regretted having talked so frankly to the sheriff. True, he had left much unsaid, but he had said enough.

He was on time for his appointment at the bank. The street ran east and west, and down one side, to the exact middle, the sun had drawn a yellow wash of light. The bank steps were bright with it; the stone was warmed.

Tabor stopped a moment to survey the street. He was a handsome man, neat in well-fitting, modest grey; his dark hair brushed jauntily back beneath the edge of his snap-brim hat. His sharp eyes moved slowly along the principal street of Mill Center, flicking their scrutiny upon every living thing. Austin Beatty was not in sight, but across the street Sheriff Lovatt stood in shadow, his back against a building wall. The sheriff looked straight at Tabor, but made no sign of recognition. Dan Tabor turned and went into the bank.

As he came out, the clock above the door said three. He stepped from dininess into the full glare of the sun. For a moment he could see nothing, and he half turned to re-enter the bank, so swift was the panic upon him. Then he put his hand into his coat pocket, and confidence came surging back. He turned again, and stood facing the street.

The air on the sunlit side of the street had the quality of clear water. The few people along this side seemed to float in a golden flood. A man was crossing from the shadowed side, seeming to swim upward. His head came into view first, the face a blank, silhouetted with the sun behind it; then his body, then his



heavy, slow-moving legs. Tabor rubbed a shaking hand across his eyes and looked again.

Austin Beatty stood on the sidewalk below him, looking up the five steps directly at Dan Tabor. Beatty was short and solid, and the angle made him seem almost rocklike. His face was expressionless; his hands hung quiet by his sides.

It was Beatty who moved first. With a grave slowness he raised his right hand. There was a small camera in it. He brought the instrument to his face, turned the peepsight at Dan Tabor's head. Dan Tabor went back one terrified step. He snatched the small automatic from his pocket, held it at arm's length, and pulled the trigger. There was a single report, oddly muffled and distorted. The gun fell from Tabor's hand, and he fell upon it, crumpling stiffly like a puppet with its strings released.

SHERIFF LOVATT and Austin Beatty sat facing each other across the sheriff's desk. The desk was bare save for two objects; the camera, and the gun. Lovatt was looking at neither of these—he was looking at Beatty's calm face.

The sheriff said, "When I called you last night, and you told me he was gonna be killed, but you weren't gonna do it, I had to be on hand. But that isn't what he thought you said."

Beatty nodded but said nothing. After a moment the sheriff resumed. "Being a liar himself, he figured you'd lied about it. So to make sure I'd be there to protect him, he told me a few things."

A shadow of pain crept into the man's eyes, but he looked fixedly at the sheriff and kept silent. The sheriff said reluctantly, "About him, an' your wife."

Beatty said, "What did he tell you?"

"Why, he said they run away down South, an' after a while she left him for another man."

"It was the fifth of June," Austin Beatty said. His wall of reserve seemed to go out all at once; the words came spilling from his lips. "I knew she was going with him; she told me. She didn't lie about it, even if he did. She was honest—not awful smart maybe, but honest."

"Did you try to stop 'em?"

Beatty's face twisted. "I talked to her some, but she was a power younger'n me, and talkin' wasn't what she wanted. An' I wanted her to be happy, Sheriff."

There was apology in his eyes, the shyness of a good man who finds it needful to say something good about himself. The sheriff stared at the things on the desk top for a minute before he looked back at Beatty.

He said, "But she left him."

"That ain't the straight of it. He left her, an' she figured she couldn't come back. She had a

funny kind of pride. It'd keep her from comin' home to be scorned."

His dull and unemotional voice, by some alchemy of the spirit, contrived to paint the somber picture. A woman, deserted, betrayed, ashamed to come home, drifting to whatever means of living a roaring, war-swollen town could offer.

Lovatt sought carefully for the words he wanted.

"That was quite a little time ago. How come, s'pose, it was this long comin' to a head?"

Beatty fished out a worn billfold and took a clipping from it. He passed it across the desk to the sheriff. It was recent, brief. It told of the death of a woman in a roadhouse killing in the south. The very lack of detail made it more sordid. A favorite dog might have received a more sympathetic obituary.

The sheriff gave it back, and Beatty put the clipping away carefully.

Lovatt picked up the camera. "This's just a plain camera," he said. "Way it looks, you started to take his picture. Sun was in his eyes, an' he musta thought you was aimin' a gun at him. You c'n have this."

"I'm through with it," said Beatty.

"Oh, yes, an' we found some War Bonds in his suitcase," the sheriff said. "Your wife had endorsed 'em over to Tabor. You c'n have them back, too."

"Give 'em to the Red Cross," Beatty said. "I make enough money at the machine shop."

"Speakin' of machine shops," said Sheriff Lovatt. "Somebody'd sure worked this gun over. The barrel was plugged an' the slide action was filed so it was just about certain death for anybody tried to shoot it. Any ordinary man woulda noticed, but everybody knew Tabor wasn't no hand with guns and such-like."

Austin Beatty sat very straight in his chair and looked at the sheriff with unwinking eyes. Lovatt turned the little gun over in his hands. A steel plate had been affixed to the grip. It said, "*Austin to Louise, May 30.*"

Lovatt said, "When did you say you knew Louise was gonna run away with Tabor?"

"Sometime the last of May," said Beatty.

"Well," said Lovatt, in a suddenly harsh tone, "I told the coroner it was accidental death. That's the way it is, an' that's the way it stays."

Beatty stood up. "Whatever you say."

"That's what I say," said the sheriff.

He watched the solid, heavy form of Austin Beatty go out of the door, big shoulders drooping, the eyes full of loneliness and loss, but with something else there too—a grim, steadfast courage that ran too deeply for the ways of ordinary men. . . .



# SEE YOU AT

By  
**WILLIAM R. COX**

*Startling  
Mystery  
Novel*

## CHAPTER ONE

### Diamonds of Death

**T**O DAN TROUT it seemed an ordinary enough case. He said, "So this Horace T. Avery is a big-shot advertising man, very busy with winning the war and making a million bucks. His wife gets tired of sitting about and being on committees and stuff and steps out with a gigolo named Taps O'Toole. There is a wire between O'Toole and some gang and they knock off Mrs. Avery's diamonds. Now Horace wants us because he would not like the cops to nose into Mrs. Avery's little peccadilloes."

Oliver must have been shot from the woods beyond . . . how far could a bow carry?

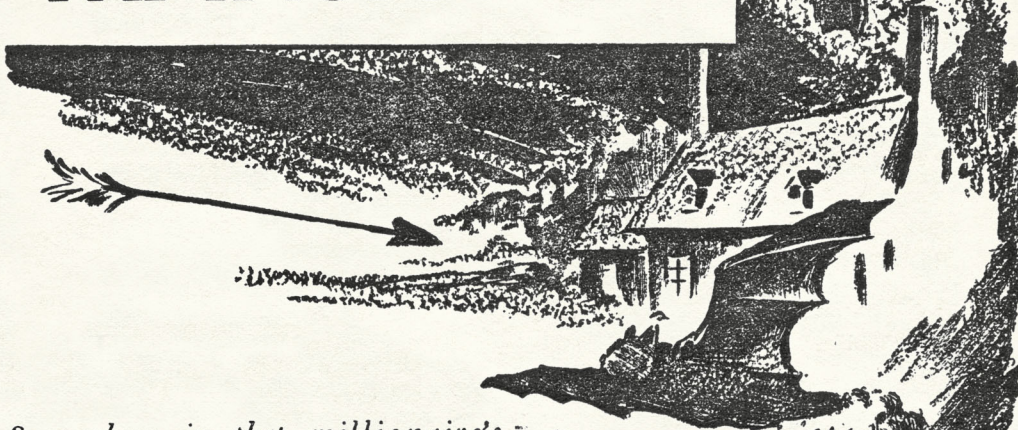
Oliver Carlson frowned. "It is not as simple as that. I know Avery. He has something on his mind—something big. I want you to work carefully on O'Toole. No rough stuff—at first."

Dan Trout surveyed his boss. Carlson ran a reputable agency. Dan had worked for him two years and never had Carlson handed him anything remotely resembling chicanery. There were other operatives, but Dan scarcely knew them. Since he had been discharged from the Navy, life had been a bowl of cherries with worms to Dan, and only the excitement of chasing down criminals and getting socked and socking back had kept him amused and happy. Carlson had provided him with these charades and he was grateful. But he did not know much about his boss.

Oliver Carlson was short and bald and stout. He had shaggy eyebrows which paraded up and down his face, and his eyes were like knives which he could throw at you. He was very rich. He was also very smart. He knew just how to use Dan's wide shoulders and long arms and legs and perfect reflexes which were unhampered by the alleged punctured eardrum. That was all Dan knew about Oliver Carlson.



# Murder MANSION!



*Somewhere in that millionaire's house of death lurked the mysterious, silent killer who had murdered Dan Trout's boss—plus a hidden fortune in diamonds, a beautiful, desperate girl—and a flaming end to Dan's grim manhunting career!*

Dan said, "I'll check this O'Toole. You said the Dubiel Escort Bureau? They're not listed."

"A new one," scowled Carlson. "War breeds gigolo agencies. Be careful, Dan. I'm going out to Avery's place. I have a hunch on this thing. I won't tell you about it yet because I want to see if you arrive at the same conclusion independently. You're a smart boy, Dan." His eyebrows dropped down and he peeped under them almost coyly. His voice became warmer. "You're the only really quick and clever man I've ever had here. If anything happened to me—I'd like you to run this place."

Dan said, "Well—thanks, Mr. Carlson." He was taken aback. He waited, but his boss did not say any more. Dan got up and ad-



justed a battered felt hat on his curly head.

Carlson said abruptly, "There's a girl named Mary Gill mixed up in it. I'm not sure about her. She worked as a model and Avery took her out once or twice. Remember the name."



"Mary Gill," repeated Dan. "Okay, Boss." He grinned, showing a large number of very white teeth, one or two of which had been placed in his mouth by a dentist, after fist-cuffs. "I'll be seeing you."

In the outer office Betty Boulder said, "How much today?"

"I'll file an account later," said Dan.

"It better be good," said the girl morosely. "Your hair grows on our time, all right, and so does your thirst, but haircuts and bar tabs are out."

Dan said, "I sure would like to kiss those ruby lips."

"That'll be the day!" she snapped. "Get out!" She had brown hair, bobbed long, and a figure out of this world and red, red lips, very full and alluring. But she was tough in her soul, Dan thought sadly. He went out.

**H**E HAD the address in his mind, where he carried everything he ever heard in a memory file like an elephant's, so he walked down to the subway and rode a few blocks, thinking about Oliver Carlson and Horace T. Avery and gigolos. The Boss had gone to Harvard with Avery, he knew.

Avery just sold advertising to big corporations until he had the top accounts of the industry. Then he got noble-minded and began helping run the country at one dollar per year. Dan had met Horace T. Avery. He still wondered how such a maestro of cliché could become the world's greatest adman.

However, this business of fortyish, plump, foolish Mrs. Avery was all that he needed to worry about. Her diamonds had been snatched cleverly while she was out with O'Toole, but she had not discovered the loss until he had got away. Then—no O'Toole, which was a hell of a name for a gigolo anyway.

Dan got off the train and went up into the light again and found a building in the West 40's. He rode the elevator to the eighth floor and entered an office marked "Dubiel Escort Bureau" in chaste letters. He closed the door behind him.

A man was staring at him from the inner office. There was no one else in the room.

The man was small and slight. He had dark hair, combed actor style, the kind of haircut that requires bi-weekly attention. He had very pale skin and a small black mustache and he was dressed like an Esquire ad, only neater.

"You wish something?" he said.

Dan said, "Hello, Dubiel. I'm looking for O'Toole."

"You think I am not also looking for O'Toole?" spat Dubiel. "You think I am hiding that dirty, filthy—"

Dan said, "You shouldn't hire soiled characters. Not in this business. It's shady enough."

"I did not ask you!" said Dubiel furiously. "In my country this business is perfectly respectable. It can be so here. What may I ask is your business, sir?"

Dan said, "I'm a private operator, working for Mrs. Avery."

"That woman!" shuddered Dubiel.

"She lost her diamonds," Dan pointed out.

"Did I take them?" Dubiel's shoulders were as expressive as Oliver Carlson's eyebrows. "I wish they were in hell!"

"Me too," said Dan comfortably. "Where did O'Toole live, when did you see him last—tell me something, Dubiel."

The Frenchman's shoulders went up and down. "He lived at 16 John, in the Village. I sent him out with the foolish Mrs. Avery two nights ago. I have not seen him since. He has flown. Mr. Avery was impertinent on the phone. I have told all I know. O'Toole had references."

"Lemme see them," said Dan.

Dubiel hesitated, biting his lip. He said, "I do not have them. They were stolen."

"Oh!" said Dan, raising his left eyebrow. He was catching that from Carlson, he thought, lowering it again. "You're in a hell of a fix, huh, Dubiel?"

"I—" Dubiel began indignantly. The telephone rang. He picked it up, listened, then looked at Dan and said surprisedly, "You are Mr. Trout?"

"Yeah," said Dan, taking the phone. He got a whiff of perfume from the Frenchman and shivered.

He said, "Hello?"

Betty Boulder's voice hammered at him. "Get out to Avery's quicker than hell. The Boss is in trouble. Avery called, himself."

"Right!" said Dan. He hung up the phone and stared at the Frenchman with hard eyes. He said, "I'll be back. You better find O'Toole, or his references, or something. The cops may be in on this yet." He threw a stab in the dark, a trick he loved. "Or maybe you better tell Mary Gill to get in touch with me!"

He saw the expressive shoulders twitch and thought he had scored. He rushed downstairs and got a cab. He said, "Westchester, and never mind the speed laws."

**T**HE CAB made pretty good time. They came to the high hedge which surrounded the brick-heap which was Avery's house. The afternoon sun shone down on a great deal of tailored lawn, a terrace gay with umbrellas and painted tables, a swimming pool adjacent to a tennis court and a house to match the rest of it. Dan paid the driver and leaped up a winding path to a colonial door which opened as he reached it.

Avery was a tall, cadaverous man with a lantern jaw. His blue eyes seemed recessed



for repairs and his mouth drooped at the corners. His voice was pontifical, even under stress. He intoned, "Trout, this is awful. Luckily the servants were away—Trout, we cannot cover this up."

Dan was already past him. There was a room off the terrace where Avery had a desk and some books, a large, sunny room. It held comfortable furniture and bright rugs. Through the French windows Dan could see the court and the pool and some trees beyond, a pleasant, verdant scene.

He stood in the doorway, staring at one of the chairs. In it sat Oliver Carlson. The eyebrows were still now. Oliver's plump chin nestled in the maculation of his shirt-front.

Protruding from Oliver's chest was a feathered shaft. His hands lay limply at his sides and his feet were crossed, barely touching the floor, for the chair was deep and his legs were very short, even for a stout man.

Avery chattered, "This just can't happen.

Dan said, "You're going to tell that story to the cops?"

"Why," said Avery, "I had not thought that far. The police!"

Dan said, "It's going to sound mighty thin." He made one step, scooped up the jewels and thrust them into his pocket. He said, "Because they are still missing, see? You haven't got them. And if you squawk, so help me, I'll throw Mrs. Avery to the wolves!" He thrust out his considerable jaw.

"I'll do as you say, of course," said Avery hastily. "Perhaps Oliver had a momentary lapse. . . . But the jewels, you must return them. They can't just wander around—"

"Oliver Carlson's name means more to me than these gewgaws," snapped Dan. "I'm keeping them for now. You can afford it. Don't even tell the cops I was here. Remember!"

He looked around the room once, then at the quiet, dead face of Carlson. Avery was

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Oliver couldn't be shot with *that* queer thing over my shoulder!"

Dan stared at the desk. The sunlight caught precious stones and threw off a glitter which seemed to testify to their authenticity. The bracelet, the wristlet, the platinum watch—all were there. Dan said under his breath, "How did he get them so quick?"

Avery went on and on. "This is all very queer, Trout. Imagine Oliver offering to sell me back my wife's jewels! Why, I went to school with Oliver!"

Dan got a grip on his emotions. He made himself look away from the dead features of the boss he had loved and respected. He said in a hard voice, "You mean to tell me Mr. Carlson came out here like any cheap black-mailer and wanted money for returning the jewels?"

"It was extraordinary," said Avery, passing a lean hand over the caverns of his eye-sockets. "I could scarcely believe it was Oliver. He was—tough. He said he needed money—more than a regular fee. He showed me the jewels. . . . Then the—thing—whistled past my ear. Do you suppose it was intended for me? I must have guards, Trout! I am not my own man. The U. S. Government has put trust in me!"

timidly reaching for the phone. Dan raised two fingers to his hat in a last salute to his Boss. Then he went out the French windows.

He went swiftly past the tennis court, the pool. He made for the trees, where the ground might be soft enough to show footprints. He was very careful of his own tracks. He looked back at the house and the diamonds jingled in his pockets. He wished he knew more about arrows and how far they would carry with accuracy.

He found nothing in the woods. He made his way out, and it was dusk when he got back to Manhattan.

## CHAPTER TWO

### I, Said the Sparrow—

**I**N A corner drugstore he made a package of the diamonds, using the telephone booth to disguise his movements. Then he called Betty Boulder's home address.

The girl said, "Dan! Where have you been? They're looking for you."

"Who, the cops?"

"Mike Corbally tipped me off," said Betty rapidly. "They got a tip you have the Avery jewels."



Dan said, "Did you hear about Mr. Carlson?"

"No. I left at five—what happened?"

He told her quickly. There was a silence. Then she said, in a very low voice, "He was a good man."

Dan said, "Avery doesn't think so. I've got the jewels, Betty. I'm going to mail them to you right now. Hide them."

She said, "Where?"

"Check them," he said. "I'm afraid they might have a ticker out and grab me with them."

She said, "What are you going to do, Dan?"

"Clear Mr. Carlson with Avery," he said. "Look, do you know where the cops got the dope I have the diamonds?"

"They didn't even know they were missing until four this afternoon," she said. "All Mike knows is that someone called. Mike is on our side. I think you can trust him."

Dan said, "Can I keep calling you?"

"I'll cover, but you'd better make it at night, here," she said. "Dan—what about things?"

"I still want to plant that kiss," he said. "So long."

He bought stamps and mailed the little box. He got into a cab, and in that moment knew he would have to go home sooner than he wanted. He was short of money. He swore under his breath, then said, "John Street."

He counted out change to the driver in front of a narrow Village tenement. Down the street, there were kids tumbling noisily about in a muddy gutter. He peered at dim nameplates and found "O'Toole, No. 14".

The front door was jaundiced yellow and unlocked. He went into a smelly hall and started upstairs. On the second floor he found number 14 and walked past it to the rear of the building. There was a window and a fire-escape at the end of the hall.

He came back to number 14, tried the knob. It was locked. He got out a master key and began playing with the catch.

He stopped after a moment. He thought he had heard someone moving inside the apartment. He had made some noise with the key, and that was bad.

He walked heavily to the stairs and made sounds of going down. Then, on tiptoe and silently despite his bulk, he ran back to the window off the fire-escape. He slid it up and in another moment was out on the spidery structure of rusted iron, peering back into the hall. He waited perhaps five minutes.

The door to number 14 opened. For a moment it remained empty. Then a slim figure slipped into the hall. Dan dropped back inside and said quietly, "Just a moment, Miss Gill."

THE girl in the grey suit stood like a statue. Dan came closer, and even the poor hall light could not hide the beauty of her. She had large grey eyes, tinged with violet. She had a strong, straight nose and finely arched brows and a well-rounded jaw. She was tall, statuesque, and not frightened. She said, "You must be mistaken. I am Mrs. O'Toole."

Dan said, "Fine! Let's go inside and talk this over." He flashed his private dick's badge, took her arm and moved her to the door. She was surprisingly resilient and strong, but after a moment she allowed him to have his way.

They went inside a dingy apartment. There was a small room with a couch which was obviously the bed, an alcove with a dresser, a kitchenette next to the bathroom. Dan said, "You wear awful good clothes for this neighborhood. Where's your husband?"

"I don't know," she said. Her voice was well-pitched and probably trained, he thought.

"How long have you been married?" asked Dan.

"Two years," she said evenly.

"Only two years and O'Toole goes off and you don't know where he is?" said Dan pleasantly. "You look hotter than that to me!"

She took a cigarette from her bag and snapped a lighter. She leaned against the table and said, "I don't quite understand this. Are you a regular police officer? We've done no wrong."

He appeared to be looking about the room. He said conversationally, "Your husband worked as a gigolo. Some jewels were stolen. He disappeared. Now a man has been killed—a friend of mine. I do not like it when friends of mine are killed." He spun suddenly and seized her left hand. He turned the plain gold band on her third finger. There was a stone set therein, which certainly proved that it was not a wedding ring. But, staring at it, he perceived that it was not even a woman's ring. It was a man's style hoop, with a square emerald which could be of some value, he thought.

He had his head down, looking at it, when she shoved him. She had amazing coordination, he thought, going backwards, trying to reach for the gun slung under his arm in its Berns-Martin special holster. He almost had the gun, too, when he hit what should have been the closed bathroom door.

The door seemed to be open. He went through and something hit him behind the ear. It was not, he thought out of his vast experience in being hit, a club. Nor a blackjack. Nor anything sharp. But it hit him so hard his sight blurred and he started floorwards.



Another shove, from behind, sent him into the living room again. He landed on his hands and knees, shaking his head. Again he was socked, this time on the chin. He flopped over.

He had a dim memory of the girl saying coldly, "You'd better make sure he is unconscious. He seems very rugged."

Someone made very sure. The blows shook him after he was out for the count. Away back in his subconsciousness those unnecessary poundings registered, over and over and over. . . .

He awoke, still tasting those blows. He got to his feet by crawling up the wall. He stumbled, blinded, into the bathroom. He ran the water for a long time before he could locate the basin with his face.

Later he looked at the damage. It was not too bad. His face was swollen and his ribs ached a good deal. But whatever they'd used had not had sharp edges. He was uncut. One eye would probably close tight. He worked over it with knowledge gained in many boxing rings. He found ice in the kitchenette box and applied it. He wandered about the place and looked at a clock. It was almost midnight.

He went through the apartment very carefully. There were some clothes in the closet but everything had already been ransacked. Mary Gill and her companion were far ahead of him.

He went downstairs thinking about Mary Gill and his next meeting with her. He had never beaten a woman, but he was going to love his first attempt. He was going to sock her right on that straight and lovely nose and see it twist.

He groaned, feeling of his ribs, and sought a cab. He counted his money and paid the fare on 89th Street, giving his last dime to the dissatisfied hackie as a tip.

He walked around to 88th Street, and sure enough, there was a detective lurking in a doorway. He lived in one of those brownstones which was linked to its neighbor. He prowled back to the rear, and there was another officer smoking a cigar.

He sighed and went back to 88th and walked boldly up the stairs of the brownstone boardinghouse on the far end of the row. He climbed steps and gave thanks when he saw the skylight which corresponded to the one in his own hallway. He rummaged about and found the ladder. He made very little noise and nobody seemed curious. He shoved his way through and got out on the roof. The stars peeked down at him as though nothing in the big world was wrong and Oliver Carlson still lived and work went on like always. He sat down a moment over on his own roof and debated.

HE HAD to have money. He had to be able to get around and avoid the police while he worked his own angles. He still had people to see—Mrs. Avery and Dubiel again. And he had to find O'Toole and Mary Gill, who were not married but between them seemed a battling team of suspicious characters. If he went down to his own room he was in danger—but there was a sinking fund of two hundred bucks in his drawer.

He got up and removed the trapdoor. He let himself down, swung a moment and dropped like a cat into the hall. He waited, listening, but there was no sound.

He tiptoed to his room on the second floor. He eased his key into the lock and opened the door. He stepped inside—and the light flashed on before he could reach his gun.

He said, "Dammit, I always was slow on the draw."

A husky man in a snap-brim felt hat said, "Well, Dan. Hello."

"Hiya, Corbally," said Dan. "You got a warrant?"

"Well, Dan," said Mike Corbally, "don't need one."

"You mean it's no pinch?" asked Dan hopefully. "Pal!"

"Well, the boys downstairs now. They'd pinch you," said Corbally. He had intelligent eyes, small, greenish. "I think different."

Dan said, "My boss got killed with a damn' arrow or something."

"Well, that's what I thought," nodded Corbally. "I mean, well, you wouldn't like that. You always leveled with me, Dan."

Dan relaxed, grinning at the cop. He said, "I already got beat up, see? Trying to learn something." He reached casually past Corbally and drew a bottle of Scotch from a cabinet. He poured two drinks, then went into the bedroom and ostentatiously blew his nose. He got a clean handkerchief and slipped the two hundred dollars into his breast pocket before he came back to the tiny sitting room. He said, "I'd like to tell you what I know, Mike. Off the record."

Corbally said, "I'm lookin' for something like that."

Dan told him, withholding only the part about Carlson and the diamonds. He could see no point in further secrecy. He said, "It all comes back to what Carlson said to me in the office: There's something bigger in this than Mrs. Avery's jewels. Now, can you add anything to it, Mike?"

Corbally tipped his hat-brim upward and looked like a grown-up choir boy. "Well, mebbe. Not much, though. Avery called the Westchester cops and we got the wire. Morgan went out there. It was an arrow, all right. So we got an archer to find. Then some lug called us about the diamonds about four and



we hadda check and Avery admitted they were gone. Missus Avery had hysterics. Now I know why. That Dubiel is a new one and I never heard of any O'Toole like you describe. Nor any Mary Gill. But in this town, who knows who? Well, maybe we ain't much help to each other yet. But I ain't pickin' you up."

Dan said, "Thanks. I'll keep in touch with you, Mike. I'm no shamus thinks he can clear up a big case all by himself. And anyway, what's in it for me—except that I'm going to get the guy who killed Oliver Carlson?"

"You got to get him," said Mike flatly. "Or help us get him. Or else you got to get out of the business, you know that. Well, Dan, you look beat up. Go to sleep."

Dan said, "Hell, I can't stay here!"

"Well, why not?" asked Corbally surprisedly. "I'm here to watch over you, ain't I? Those clunks downstairs won't come up so long as I'm here. Well, go to sleep! I kin sleep tomorra."

Dan said, "I'll be damned!" He went into the bedroom. In two seconds he knew the place had been searched. He fiddled about nervously. He took the money from his coat and put it inside his pillowcase. He looked into the sitting room. Corbally was happily pouring Scotch into a tumbler.

Dan lay on the bed. It occurred to him that he did not even know which way to begin tomorrow, except by going to Westchester. He would be very unwelcome in Westchester. . . .

Tonight he had collected one beating and only by grace of Mike Corbally's indulgence had not wound up in the pokey. He was turning out to be a hell of a detective, he thought. He groaned a little as his ribs creaked. Then he fell asleep.

**W**HEN Dan awoke, Mike Corbally was still with him. Fresh and interested, he was examining Dan's holster and gun. The detective said, "If this was a gun case, now— Well, guns are for me. This is a good outfit you got. Short-barreled .38 S & W in an upside down holster. Can't be seen, hauls out quick. Butt-end pointing down, makes it right or left hand draw. Only shoulder holster worth a damn. You ever shoot anybody with it, Dan?"

"No," said Dan. "Why?"

"I called Headquarters," said Corbally solemnly. "Well, now it seems they found this O'Toole. Dead. Shot with a .38, they think, over at 16 John Street, where he lived. A guy looks like you was seen over there, they say. Well, it was you, of course."

Dan said, "He was in the bathroom! In the tub! I thought I saw something when they were belting me!"

"Well," said Mike, "I steered 'em off you. This gun ain't been fired recently. Needed

cleanin'. I found some stuff and did it for you."

Dan said, "I sure owe you something, Mike."

"Well, it was good Scotch," said Corbally, unsmiling. "Now, about archery. I remembered somethin'. A magazine on guns. It's an article on evolution. September issue. Look it up."

Dan said, "I've been thinking too, believe it or not. The trees at Avery's are a hell of a long ways from that room. Past a tennis court, a swimming pool, a lawn. How good are archers?"

"Well," said Corbally, "I don't rightly know. But not that good, if two men were close together in a room. Not ordinarily."

"I'll call you," said Dan, "when I find out." He rushed into the bathrom and showered. His bruises were not as bad as he had imagined they would be. He thought curiously about the thing which had been used to beat him. Not a club, not a blackjack nor steel nor iron. . . .

He shaved, wincing, and did not look too bad. He came out and dressed in clean clothes. He slung his gun into place and wadded his money into his pocket.

"I'll call on you if I need anything," said Dan. "You're a great guy, Mike."

"Well—" the detective stood up and was as tall as Dan and as wide and probably heavier. His intelligent Celtic face screwed up and his green eyes glinted. "I'll tell you, Carlson helped me once when I wasn't such a good guy. Nor smart, neither. Nobody's goin' to make a crook outa Carlson, dead or alive."

Dan shook hands, hard. He said, "Can I get out of here?"

"I sent them clunks away," said Mike. "Told the boss I could hold it down alone. Westchester don't want you for nothin', so you oughta be all right out there. Call me."

Dan said, "Look, will you phone my office and tell Miss Boulder where I am and everything? I'll see you later today."

He rode a bus down to the Library and went in and found the magazine, and there was only a paragraph or two but it sounded authoritative. He read, "There is an authentic record that, before witnesses, in 1795, a member of the Turkish Embassy in London fired 482 yards with a Turkish bow. The Turk used a 12-inch arrow. To compensate for the difference between the draw of the bow and the length of the arrow, a grooved rest was used on his left arm. . . ."

It wasn't any quarter-mile to that grove of trees—but how accurate was the Turk who could shoot this distance? He read that in the 17th and 18th Centuries Turks allegedly could fire a bow from six to eight hundred



yards. . . . He turned to a chart which showed that the short bow was good for two hundred yards, the long bow of England for twice that distance.

**H**E TOOK the train out to Westchester. He rode a cab from the station, and the State Police were on the job. He showed them his badge and told them he had worked for Carlson, and they were sympathetic and allowed him into the house. He stood in the death room and looked over at the trees. About two hundred and fifty yards, he thought. He would have to pace it off.

Of course no one had searched the Avery house. No one would dream of such a thing. Avery was practically the U. S. Government. He had said so, many times. He was not, this morning, in evidence, and the friendly State cop thought he had flown to Washington.

Dan said ingenuously, "I'll see the Missus. She'll be expecting me. She and poor Mr. Carlson were great pals." He went up the stairs as confidently as though he had known where he was heading. He was halfway up when the cop said, "You knew they found the weapon?"

He stopped dead. He said, "No!"

"Mr. Avery's own bow—a souvenir from his trip to the South Seas," said the friendly cop garrulously. "Somebody was in the house, picked it up, stepped out on the terrace, behind Mr. Avery, of course, and shot Mr. Carlson. It's the only way it could of happened. An expert archer testified. Now, if you had any idea who wanted to kill Mr. Carlson, we could solve this case, Trout."

Dan said, "It must have been an enemy."

"Yeah," nodded the trooper solemnly. "But who?"

"That's what we got to find out," nodded Dan. He went on up, leaving the State man scratching his head.

On the landing he paused. He heard a petulant woman's voice say, "I won't see anyone. Not another policeman, do you hear, Fred?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Fred.

A door opened and closed. A short, ape-like man glared at Dan and growled, "Out, copper. Miz Avery don't want you."

Dan said, "Ah, Fred! But I'm not a cop."

Fred said, "You ain't no milkman. Out!" He advanced threateningly. He looked like a very tough character.

Dan sighed with relief. At last he could plainly see an assailant. He took hold of Fred's wrist and pulled him in close, very quickly. He stamped hard on Fred's toes, then slammed his shoulder into Fred's gullet. Fred slumped a little. Dan hit him sharply behind the ear with the edge of his hand and dumped him on the stairs.

The State cop said, "Hey! That's no suspect! That's Fred."

"He smells like wood smoke," said Dan. "Clean him up a little. He's been playing with fire."

He went to the door of the room and tapped. Upon inspiration he removed his hat and smoothed back his curly hair. He was not, he feared, handsome enough, but he was very large. He said in dulcet tones, "Mrs. Avery? I'd like to talk with you. I'm Mr. Carlson's—er—partner."

The petulant voice said, "Oh, dear. Where is Fred?"

"He just fell downstairs," said Dan truthfully. "May I come in, dear Mrs. Avery?" He opened the door and went in.

Mrs. Avery lounged in a long chair and surveyed him with round, slightly protruding eyes. She was stout, but not too stout, at that, even without her girdle. She had been pretty and still would be, Dan thought, if she wasn't spoiled and petty and mean. She simmered a little and said, "Oh! You're Mr. Dan Trout!"

"You've heard of me?" he asked, coming close and holding her hand. Her eyes swam a little as she looked up at him. She did not try to release herself.

She said, "Mr. Avery spoke of you." She lowered her voice, "Are the jewels safe?"

"He told you?" asked Dan blandly, inwardly cursing Avery.

"He said you could get them any time," she whispered. "That O'Toole! I could kill him!"

Dan said, "My dear lady, someone did!"

She dropped his hand like a hotcake. She said, "Urk!" She turned deathly pale, making noiseless mouths. She finally managed to gasp, "Killed! He was—murdered—too?"

Dan said, "First Oliver Carlson. Then O'Toole. All over your diamonds."

"No!" she whispered and her plump face actually became gaunt. "It's not true. There was something else—"

Out behind the five-car garage, a wisp of smoke hung on the air. Fred had smelled of smoke. Dan did not like Fred. He wanted very badly to go down and poke into the charred embers of that fire. Instead, he said, "What else, Mrs. Avery?"

"I—don't know," she said. "I wish I did."

"What about Dubiel, the Frenchman?" asked Dan. He did not try to beat it out of her. She seemed dazed enough to respond without pressure. "Do you know him—or Mary Gill?"

Mrs. Avery said, "Dubiel seems a gentleman. He was always polite. He had a girl working for him, very beautiful. . . ."

"Yeah," said Dan. "Tough, too. I mean, what makes you think there is something



more than your jewels behind these killings?" "Mr. Avery," she whimpered. "I am afraid for him. We hired Fred to guard us. This Government work. There have been noises in the night. Phone calls from people who did not give names—"

"Well now," said Dan soothingly. "I'll take a look around and see you when you feel better. I'll try to fix things, Mrs. Avery. After all, we were employed to help you—"

"I know," she said. "My maid. Send me my maid—"

**H**E WENT out and down the back steps. If there was a maid he did not see her. He saw the trooper administering to Fred, who seemed quite ill. He went fast around the back of the garage.

Fred had been thorough. There was nothing left but ashes. Wood ashes. Dan sniffed them and cursed for a minute and a half because he was sure he had been too late. A little sooner and he might have discovered something he had expected to find. . . .

He ceased swearing over burned wood and went back across the lawn, past the swimming pool and the tennis court. He entered the woods again and stood staring at the house. Three hundred-odd yards. No shot at all for a Turk in the 17th Century.

He did not even know a Turk. He gave up and trudged to the nearby state highway. After awhile a bus came along. He rode it into Manhattan.

He called Headquarters from Grand Central. They told him Corbally was off duty and gave him a number. He dialed and Mike answered sleepily. Dan said, "The cops found a short bow. Mrs. Avery is scared. Mister's in Washington. They've got a tough guard out there. He's softer now—but he was tough, I guess. Mrs. Avery is a damned liar. She tells spooky stuff about prowlers and phone calls. But she hooked Mary Gill up to Dubiel for us."

Corbally's voice was awake at once. "Well, Dubiel skipped. Funny, he got that permit without showin' or bein' printed. And the F.B.I. is on the case. They don't want us messin' with O'Toole, nor lookin' for Dubiel or the gal."

Dan said stubbornly, "Somebody killed Oliver Carlson."

"Well, that's how I feel," said Corbally. "I got to sleep some more. Call your office. Say you're me and start flirtin' with the gal and the cop'll get off. He's readin' a good mystery."

Dan hung up and called Betty. He said, "Well, this is your sugar, Mike. How's about it, baby?"

A heavy voice said, "Aw Mike—lay off, will ya? I got one more chapter t' read."

Betty said, whispering, "I've been through the files. Mr. Carlson did not leave a single record of Avery's case—and you know how careful he always was about records. I saw his will, Dan. He—he left the Agency to—to you and me."

"Don't blubber," said Dan tensely. "This is important. We've got to get to Mary Gill and Dubiel. And Avery."

She said, "Why, Avery was here just now. Asking for the file on his case. He seemed worried to death when I didn't have one."

Dan said, "Betty—Where's he staying?"

"He was going home, he said. To Westchester."

"Let him get there," said Dan. "Then call him. Tell him I had the file. Tell him I'm coming out there tonight. Alone. Tell him I seemed emotionally disturbed. Get it over to him good. And put every man we've got on Dubiel and the woman. Corbally has got the cops on them, but the Feds are pulling the locals off."

Betty said, "I've got it." Her voice changed. "So long, Mike. Herman has finished his book and wants to play."

The heavy voice cut in, "Who you think done it, Mike? The guy wrote the book done it himself! It's a dirty gyp, Mike. The guy himself! He's inna deat' house, writin', see, waitin' t'boin. What a way t'write a book!"

"Well, stick it!" said Dan gruffly. He hung up.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Wanted, a Turk

**D**AN spent the day organizing his slight knowledge. First, Oliver Carlson had declared that there was more to the case than the theft of Mrs. Avery's jewels. He had not been sure of this when he talked to Dan at the office—but a few hours later he had been murdered.

Second, the mysterious Dubiel had some connection with Mary Gill, even more mysterious, who in turn had been in Avery's company. O'Toole worked with Dubiel, therefore all the people were connected together in one way or another.

Third, O'Toole had become a nuisance or had stepped out of line and had been eliminated—probably by Mary Gill or the man who had accompanied her to O'Toole's apartment and had beat up Dan so efficiently.

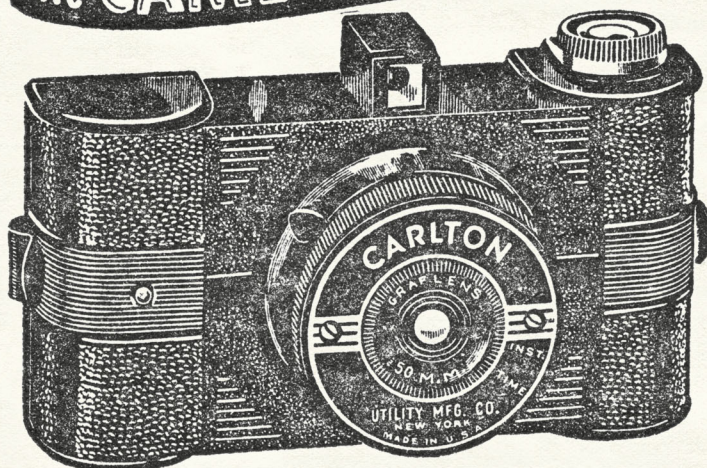
Fourth, someone had got Dubiel an escort bureau permit without the usual formalities and Dubiel never had references from O'Toole, nor required them.

Fifth, Avery had exclaimed that he would ask for guards at his home, but he already had Fred, the soft-boiled egg.



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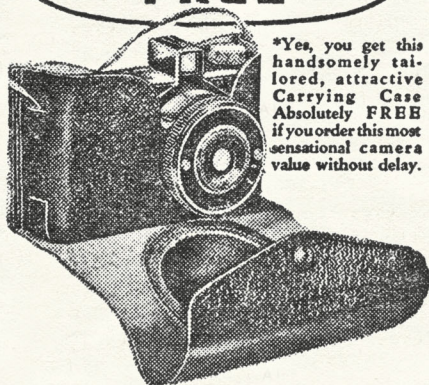
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## DETECTIVE TALES

Sixth, someone kept tipping the cops by telephone that Dan was a suspicious character.

Seventh, Oliver Carlson had not had the Avery jewels in his possession when he talked to Dan last, had immediately entrained for Westchester and therefore had not had time to acquire them, but there they were when Dan got out there and Oliver Carlson sat dead in a chair, his feet dangling pathetically. . . .

Dan's mind leaped into high gear. He said half aloud, "But that's it! Or at least the beginning of it! The rest of it may spell spinach, but that I know is a wrong note!"

He tore up the sheets of paper on which he had been scribbling reminders. He was in a third-floor room of the Bostwick, a hotel on a midtown side street. He called the office and Betty answered guardedly.

"Herman's got another book," said Betty. "He peeked at the end so he'd know it wasn't the narrator who was guilty and now he's mad because he found out who was, but he has to read it so it won't be a total loss."

Dan said, "How about supper?"

"Toni's," she whispered. "Back room." In her natural voice she said, "Not tonight, Mike. Got to see my sister in Jersey."

Dan hung up. He needed sleep suddenly. He lay down and had no trouble drifting off. It seemed only a moment when a hand was shaking him awake. He looked up at the mild features of Mike Corbally.

He sat up said, "You do get around where I am, pal."

Mike gestured at his companion, who sat on the only chair. He was a young man distinguished only by the fact that about him there was nothing distinguished. Mike said, "A Boy Scout, with a message. I hadda bring him here."

The young man said severely, "Ordinarily this would be irregular. However, in all justice, the time has come to be frank."

Dan swung his legs down and said, "You be Frank. I like bein' Dan Trout, chasin' murderers."

The Federal man said, "That is the point. This case in which you are involved has ramifications."

Dan fished gun and holster from under his pillow, looked at his watch and saw that it was almost seven. He said, "It also has a large, fishy smell."

"You must understand," frowned the agent, "that Mr. Avery is an important man in Washington. We cannot afford to let the newspapers know anything which would reflect upon him. Furthermore, there is a certain Jacques Dubiel involved. He is a Frenchman, and a secret agent."



## SEE YOU AT MURDER MANSION!

"With perfume?" demanded Dan. "Phoo-ie!"

**T**HE Federal man had patience. "O'Toole was a weak link, of course. Mr. Avery was using his wife's—er—little foible—to convey messages of importance to Dubiel. O'Toole succumbed to the jewels. When they are returned, that phase of the case ends."

Mike said, "Well, now, but Oliver Carlson was killed. O'Toole can be spared. But Mr. Carlson—you can't blow him off."

It gave Dan a chance to control himself, but he still had to say something. He got up and stood over the neatly pressed G-man. He said, "Okay, so war is war. But Oliver Carlson is dead. Somebody killed him. If you think I am going to stop trying to find that character—"

The Federal man said softly, "We can stop you."

"No!" said Mike Corbally suddenly.

The G-man smiled thinly. "And you, sir."

Mike said, "I got fourteen newspaper friends would love this whole thing. It would cost me my job, huh? Well, okay!"

Dan said, "I got a gun and two fists. If I get stopped, I'll be dead, and so will some others. And Mike can give that to the papers. I'm not blocking any war effort. In fact—" He shut his mouth tight. After a moment he said, "Let's see your credentials, Mister, just for the record."

The badge and identification were in order, he thought. He noted the name, "Jonas P. Smith". He said, "Smith, I'll call your office tomorrow. Until then, lay off me. Is that fair?"

The agent hesitated. Mike said, "Yeah, 'All right,'" said Smith stiffly. "But if you that's fair."

upset the delicate status quo with certain foreign interests—"

Dan said, "If one poor little private operator can do that, the interests are not in such good shape! I only want a murderer."

Smith said, "I've warned you. I have no orders to arrest you—as yet."

He walked out, his suit creased perfectly, his hat adjusted firmly at dead center, a severe and determined young man.

Dan said, "Anything on Dubiel or the Gill woman?"

"They took a train out of town," said Mike. "Half-hour ago."

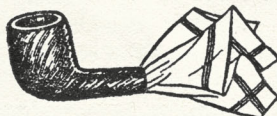
"To Westchester?" asked Dan.

"Couldn't find out," said Mike. "My guy slipped in the mob. The stations are so crowded you can't see yourself comin'."

Dan said, "Find out where Dubiel's gigolo permit came from?"



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## DETECTIVE TALES

"Well," said Mike. "High up. Beyond our department. If he's a De Gaulle agent—"

"Yeah," said Dan. "The Boy Scout said that, huh?"

"Well," said Mike, "this G-heat is tough. You gonna eat?"

"With Betty," said Dan. "At Toni's. Will you keep the bulls off me until I get out of town?"

"Well," said Mike. "I'll try. I hope you get him, Dan. I wish I could do somethin'." He looked distressed.

Dan said, "Forget it. Let's get out of this flea bag."

He left Mike on the corner and went into Toni's by the back door, past the kitchen and its odors of olive oil and pastrami and cooking macaroni. The little room was sacrosanct to Toni's friends. Betty was waiting on the edge of her seat.

She said sharply, "Where have you been? I tried to call you—"

"I had to keep out of sight—" said Dan—"I thought." He told her what had happened.

She sat looking at him for a long moment and he saw that under her rouge she was pale as a ghost. She moistened her lips with the white wine Toni had brought and said, "I found something."

"In the files?" asked Dan eagerly.

"In Mr. Carlson's office coat—you know, the one he always changed to when he had desk work. It was hanging in the closet and no one thought to look in it."

She shoved a crumpled piece of paper across the table. She looked as if she were going to weep.

**D**AN read the scribbled notes. It had been Oliver Carlson's habit to doodle while telephoning, writing short, pithy comments on the scratch-pad at his hand. They seldom made sense to anyone else, and he always destroyed them after clearer notes had been dictated to Betty and filed.

Dan read, "Free French hell!" The quick, blunt writing was jerky, unlike Oliver Carlson's usual style. "The devils. The dirty dogs! Avery's a fool! Always was. Collecting junk! Fix them! Urgent. Avery's mind a junk heap! Damn the Free French."

Betty swallowed hard and said, "Dan! Mr. Carlson was against De Gaulle. If he knew something about Dubiel and the connection with Mr. Avery and he thought he could bamboozle Avery out of it— What were Mr. Carlson's politics?"

"He was a Republican, but don't be misled. He did not want to kill the President nor De Gaulle nor anyone else," said Dan.

Betty said, "Mr. Carlson must have talked



## SEE YOU AT MURDER MANSION!

to Avery on his private wire just after you left. He stuffed this note into the pocket of his office coat, jumped up, made his mind up to go out, forgot about the notes in his worry and haste."

Dan spooned his vermicelli soup. "Junk!" he said. "Didn't we have an antique dealer once?"

"Mr. Antonelli," said Betty. "His wife disappeared."

"With a sailor from the Fleet," nodded Dan. "Look, baby, I got to go. Got some stops to make. Will you pick up a bundle at the window at the station and come out to Avery's place later? Say about ten o'clock? Where did you park those diamonds?"

"In a ten-cent locker at the station," she said. "What do you want me to get for you, Dan? Are you sure Mr. Carlson wasn't against the Free French or something? Oh, I wish I hadn't found that note!"

"Sooner or later someone would have."

She said, "Dan, what is it all about? Two killings—the jewel robbery—the Federal men coming in—"

"There's only one thing we're interested in," he told her, regretfully abandoning the spaghetti and meatballs. "That is who killed our boss. We've got until tomorrow to find out. Pick up my parcel and come out to Avery's, but don't come before ten."

He went out swiftly. He found Mr. Antonelli and listened to his tale of woe about the wife, who it seemed had returned, much to Mr. Antonelli's sorrow. Dan said, "We can't very well un-find her for you."

"No," said the antique dealer wistfully. "But what a fine idea! I can maybe do you something, Mr. Trout?"

"Yeah," said Dan. "You can maybe help a lot. I want a Turkish bow, 17th Century."

Antonelli said smilingly, "Me, too! Very valuable!"

"Okay, then," said Dan. "Show me a good picture of one and call me a mechanic who can work hard and fast and without questions."

Mr. Antonelli said, "Monkey business, ha?"

"Very," said Dan. "You want to play?"

"So with my wife a man can't have much fun," said Antonelli. "I will play!"

IT WAS tough to go up against these people without a real case, Dan thought, riding out to Westchester. It would be tough to go up against these people period, he added. His ribs still ached.

He got off the train and took a taxi and went out someplace which he thought near enough to the Avery manse. Then he tucked his package under his arm and walked. He was not a really enthusiastic pedestrian and he



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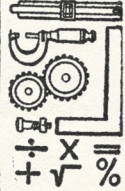
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## DETECTIVE TALES

did not know the terrain very well, but he managed to get to the edge of the grounds he sought. He went through a hedge, making too much noise.

The house was on top of the hill. The woody acreage was nearest where he had come in. That was what he had thought, and among the trees he felt safe. He unwrapped his package and put a piece of carved wood under his arm.

He knew there would not be any cops or guards, but he was cautious crossing the open space to the pool. He skirted the tiled edge and noted that the lights of the house were all on the second story.

Undaunted, he went around the wire at the end of the tennis court, thankful for a dark night. He prowled about the house looking for police cars, but there were none. G-heat had prevailed out here, he thought. He made his way close to the house.

He heard someone moving on the first floor in the dark, and waited. A bottle gurgled its contents into a glass and ice tinkled. Dan licked his dry chops. That would be Fred... it was Fred, a bulky figure in the kitchen.

Dan went forward, to the den in which Oliver Carlson had died. He slipped through the French windows. He carefully placed his carved stick behind some books.

He came out, pleased that he had been so quiet. A vine crawled up a pillared porch. He took hold of it and it seemed sturdy. He climbed—just like rope climbing in the Navy. His fingers caught the railing of the sun deck atop the porch.

The front room, he remembered, was Mrs. Avery's. Lights and a murmur of conversation came from the rear, where there was no convenient porch roof. He tiptoed over and peered through a lace curtain. Mrs. Avery was eating chocolates, stretched in her long chair, but she was not relaxed. She seemed to be listening.

He tapped lightly on the screen. She came erect, her eyes bulging. Dan whispered, "It's only me, darling!"

She could move swiftly, he found. In a moment he was inside the house, as easy as that. She said, "Have you brought the jewels?"

"Later," he promised her. "I have to see the others."

She said, "Mr. Avery? He doesn't trust you, does he?"

"Why should he?" Dan said boldly, giving her the eye.

She simpered. "He doesn't trust me, either. Letting me make a fool of myself over those jewels—"

Dan said, "I want to surprise them. Du-biel and the girl are here, aren't they?"



## SEE YOU AT MURDER MANSION!

She pouted, "They won't let me hear what they are saying. I think they're blackmailing him!"

"You ain't birdin'," said Dan. "I'll have your jewels here on the ten o'clock train. A girl will bring them. She is from our office and her name is Boulder—Betty Boulder. Remember that."

Mrs. Avery said, "You found them, then? Who—?"

"A secret," said Dan. "Don't even tell your husband. I want to surprise him."

"You're so capable!" she said. She was almost purring now. "I'll bet you wouldn't pay blackmail!"

Dan said, "Maybe I can fix that. How could I sort of slip over and hear what they are saying to your husband?"

She said, "Fred is out there—"

"Fred falls downstairs easy."

"Well, you could go through this room, then the next. Then you'd be in the room next to the upstairs den." She broke off and looked puzzled. She said, "That's where Horace has his junk—his trophies, you know? I don't see how anyone could have taken that bow and got downstairs without me seeing them. Or Fred."

Dan said, "It was strange, wasn't it? I'll see you later."

He was already at the first door. He went through it into a bedroom of noble proportions. He crossed to the second door and opened it carefully. The second room was in darkness, except that a sliver of light peeked from beneath the door leading to the den. Now he could hear Avery's pontifical accents, although he could not make out the words. The house was well built, he thought, with all that toothpaste and cigarette money. . . .

He went slowly forward. Avery still droned on. At the door to the final room Dan bent his head, listening with all his ears for another voice to break in on Avery's. He wanted very badly to know everyone who was in that room. He remembered too vividly the way he had been taken at O'Toole's and had no intention of letting it happen again. He loosened the revolver in his handy holster.

Time passed. Avery talked and talked, mumbling. Then, at long last, he paused. Dan strained his hearing.

There was no other voice. It took a moment for this to percolate in Dan's mind, so intent was he upon catching what he believed must be someone else in the room beyond. It took a moment too long.

The first blow took him in the wrist and knocked loose his gun. The second slammed behind his ear. It was the all too familiar gambit. He reached out this time, trying to

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## DETECTIVE TALES

grab something. He got a trousers leg, but it was not soon enough. Another blow knocked him flat on his back. He could not even get his hands over his head as his unseen assailant larruped him.

He heard Fred's voice, then, "Lemme have him!"

He went to sleep, most uncomfortably.

## CHAPTER FOUR

**Heat's On!**

**HE AWOKE** with his arms and legs tied and a gag in his mouth. He breathed with difficulty and could not move at all. The place where he was stored was pitch-dark and he was alone. He was not in the house, he thought after a while. The ceiling of this room was lower and the bed he was tied to had no air-foam mattress.

He thought of Betty Boulder, coming up on the ten o'clock train, and groaned through the gag. She would walk right into it with the jewels. And when they saw the magazine—If she only had sense enough to use the gun he had left for her. . .

But he had told Mrs. Avery about her. That was his colossal mistake. He would have kicked himself hard for that if he had been able to move a leg.

He was, he admitted bitterly, the world's worst detective. He knew he was right about this case, he knew he had it figured out almost to the last detail. He knew that it was of world-wide importance. Yet he had blundered up here alone, made one fatal mistake, and here he was—beaten again and ready for the kill.

He had no illusions regarding the ability of these people to knock him off and get away with it. They were big enough to call in the Federals. They were big enough to do away with Dan and Betty and—Oliver Carlson. They probably had some nice private crematorium to dispose of their corpses.

There was no point in thinking about that, so he stopped. He wondered how far they would have to untie him and if they would slip him a needle or something first. If they didn't, and he could get a hand-hold, he might manage some damage, he thought.

He lay there and thought about the case. Things had clarified a little, anyway. He was now sure of his assailant at O'Toole's. He was somewhat stunned to know his identity, but there could be no mistake. "Fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice, shame on me," he muttered.

What had Oliver Carlson always said when a case got tough and drastic action was in-



## SEE YOU AT MURDER MANSION!

licated? "You can't make an omelette without breaking some eggs." Dan had not broken enough eggs with enough speed, he admitted freely to himself.

He could not keep his mind from Betty. He had no idea of the time, but he thought she must be here soon. If they already had her, what were they doing to her? Torture?

He gritted his teeth. Mustn't think of that. Although, when they saw the magazine, they might think she knew, and in that case, they might work on her. . . .

He tossed a bit on the bed. There was no slack in his bonds, no way to get a purchase and strain loose the rope. His wrists bled a little, but he was so beat up that it was not important.

He was creaking away, getting nowhere, when something touched his head. He stopped writhing and lay perfectly still. This might be it. This could be the needle. . . .

**S**OMEONE removed his gag.

A voice whispered, "Dan?"

"Yeah," he croaked. "Some of me."

"Betty," said the faint voice. He could make out her figure, then, in the dark. Her face came close to his and in his ear she said, "I haven't got a knife!"

He said, "Try a knot. Bite it. Do something."

She was working on the knots. They did not give the least bit. She whispered, "It's no use. I've got the gun you left. . . ."

Dan said, "How the hell did you get this far?"

"I came on the nine o'clock," she said. "I saw them carry you up here. I thought it was best to prowl the joint first, and I was lucky."

Dan said, "You ought to hightail for town and call the cops. But I haven't got enough real evidence. Got a match, Betty?"

She said, "I'll burn you."

He said, "I'm already killed. Burn 'em off, baby."

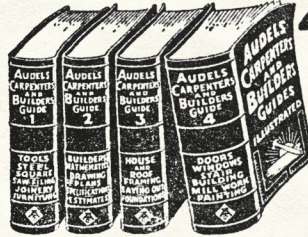
She had a cigarette lighter. She flicked it and the room came into ghostly relief. The shades were down, but the light could be seen if anyone looked, he thought. He held his wrists away from him and smelled burning flesh. He was beyond pain. He was as high as though he had drunk the Scotch Mike had put away. . . .

She said, "Oh— It's horrible. . . ."

He grunted. He wrenched his hands apart. They came loose and he stared at them. Amazingly, they still worked.

He reached down and tore the ropes from his feet and legs. From downstairs came noises. He got down from the bed and found that he could hobble. He had not been tied long

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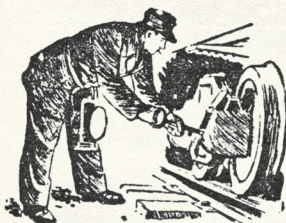
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## DETECTIVE TALES

enough to lose all his circulation. He made the doorway as footsteps climbed, paused. The door opened. Fred's ugly head thrust within.

Dan's fist went up. His hand caught Fred's throat. He shoved Fred against the wall and held him there, kneeling him for good luck. He muttered, "This is one guy I can seem to handle. Gimme those ropes, baby. I'll show you some sailor's knots!"

Betty said, "You'd better take the gun. What do we do next?"

Dan said, "I would love to take up where I left off. But these characters are very smart. They have taken me twice now. Let us go out and explore a little."

She said, "I don't know why I took that nine o'clock train. It was a hunch. Something Mike said—"

"You saw Mike?"

"He called me at home. I was changing. He said you were into something awful big. He got the F.B.I. man a little drunk, he said."

"Mike is too smart to be a city cop," said Dan. "Watch out for these stairs."

They went down into the yard at the rear of the house. Now the lights were on in the den where Oliver Carlson had been killed. Dan worked his fingers. He touched Betty's shoulder and said, "You're my luck, I guess. And remind me to tell you how smart and brave you are some day."

She said, "We're still not out of the woods."

"Woods!" he said. "Yeah—woods. Let's go around and see if we can crash this place."

He tried the rear door, this time. Fred had left it open. He put Betty behind him and gave her a last instruction. "If it gets hot, scream for the cops, or grab a phone and holler into it. This is dynamite and I don't mean maybe!"

She said calmly, "They killed Mr. Carlson, didn't they? Go ahead, I'm with you."

He went into the unlighted kitchen. He was extremely cautious this time not to make a sound. He found the hall and went forward, feeling his way. The door to the den was open and a stream of light came out. He heard Mrs. Avery say, "That is the way it has to be, Horace. You can't squirm out of it. We've got you and you know it and you've got to come through."

A sharp, insistent voice said, "There's someone in the hall! Is that you, Fred?"

"No," said Dan. He made two leaps into the light, the snub-nosed revolver in his hand. "It is I, Dapper Dan, the dumb detective!"

MARY GILL was smoking a cigarette, sitting on the edge of Avery's desk. Avery was behind the desk. Mrs. Avery was standing, her face hard and not at all foolish-look-



## SEE YOU AT MURDER MANSION!

ing. Dubiel was sitting in the chair in which Carlson had been when Dan saw him.

Dan stood in the doorway facing these far from dangerous-appearing people and waited. Horace T. Avery was trying to pull himself together. He had been completely deflated, but he was a man accustomed to putting a good face upon things. He said, "Really, Trout. This is unpardonable."

Dubiel slid out of the chair, coming erect. Mary Gill inhaled smoke, blew it through her nose. Mrs. Avery exclaimed, "Who is that girl with him? Damn it, she's not due yet!"

A whistle blew. Dan said, "The ten o'clock is coming in now. Miss Boulder decided not to take it."

Avery said harshly, "You were told not to intrude, Trout!"

"We don't stop for Uncle Sam," said Dan easily. "Not when it's a family affair. We didn't go to Harvard with Oliver Carlson, but we were fond of him."

Avery went pale. He said, "Now, Trout—"

"How are you going to explain Dubiel? And Miss Gill? What are they doing here? Not collecting blackmail because your not-so-silly fat wife danced with a gigolo who was not a gigolo."

"Not a gigolo, Dan went on. He was again shooting a bit wildly, but he was almost sure. "A British agent. That's why O'Toole got killed. He was beginning to close in. And he tried to keep you from planting the diamonds where you could accuse Carlson of hijacking you. . . ."

Mrs. Avery spat out, "We've got to stop this clown!"

"I didn't know about Mrs. Avery," said Dan. "Not until tonight, when she tipped off Fred to come and get me upstairs. But it had to be her, because Fred was deep in a drink and never saw or heard me come in—but he was ready in that second room. Mrs. Avery is plumb cute."

Avery said, "You can't come in my house and—"

"Don't be a lug," said Dan. "I did and I am. And why did you people hire such a clunk as Fred? Did you know he forgot to burn a most important part of—"

Mary Gill flipped the cigarette at him. He would have sworn she was going to do it, and for once he was right. Dubiel moved quicker than light.

Dan stepped back. He tossed the revolver behind him to Betty, who had not moved from the doorway where she could see everyone at once. She caught it deftly and held it steady.

Dubiel seemed to be attempting to stand on his head. But his right leg, stiff as a board, was swinging in a giant arch. His foot was

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## DETECTIVE TALES

pointed and his instep was aimed straight at Dan's head.

Dan ducked. He said, "That was what puzzled me until tonight. Then I smelled shoe-polish. You sure keep yourself neat, Dubiel, you little rascal of a *savate* artist!"

Dubiel had moved again. He was backed up, jabbing both feet out, rolling away from Dan's reaching grasp. He got his heels into Dan's chest and by sitting on the desk shoved Dan away.

"Nice defense," Dan said approvingly. "This is gonna be a great pleasure to me, Dubiel!"

Avery shouted, "Stop this! Police!"

MARY GILL made a swift move at her bag.

Betty, without changing her interested expression, fired one shot. The bag jumped off the desk. Mary Gill snatched back her hand. Her teeth showed between thin lips.

Mrs. Avery said, "Horace! Do something!" She was flat against the wall, her eyeballs rolling. In the tight spots she was not so hot, Dan thought. He sidestepped a quick kick and rolled inside. He caught hold of a heel as Dubiel kicked again.

He said, "Ah! How nice!" He heaved upward. Dubiel tried the standard retrieving maneuver. He was as supple and swift and quick as the greatest of athletes.

Dan shoved Dubiel loose. The force of the withdrawal was too much for the Frenchman's balance. He staggered two steps.

Then Dan had him. He had him by the front of his impeccable shirt. He lifted him into the air about two feet. He crossed his left almost lovingly. He smacked it against the waxed mustache of the master of *savate*.

Blood spurted. Mary Gill said, "No!"

"Oh, yes!" said Dan. He smacked again. Dubiel's lips split. Blood spurted from his mouth. Dan said happily, "Want to talk while you can?" Dubiel kicked at his knee. It hurt a lot, so Dan lowered his sights.

He landed on the button. Dubiel's head jerked like a marionette. He stopped kicking. He just hung, like a well-dressed doll, in Dan's grasp.

Dan put him on the desk and motioned Avery to his feet. He said, "The arm rest for the Turkish bow. Fred didn't burn it. Careless, that Fred. It's right here—behind those books." He got it out, showed it to them. "I'm afraid it's a murder rap for you, Avery."

"I didn't do it! I wouldn't kill Oliver!" said Avery.

"Well, he wasn't killed in here, where you said," Dan pointed out. "I know that. Because Oliver never would have sat in that



## SEE YOU AT MURDER MANSION!

chair. He was sensitive about his short legs. He would have sat in that straight chair, over there, with his feet on the ground."

Avery gasped. "I didn't do it. I—"

"Horace!" shrieked Mrs. Avery.

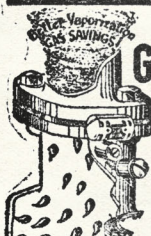
Dan wheeled upon her. "Your name was Heinrich before you married, wasn't it? Yeah—remembered that while I was tied and ready for the mortuary. Mr. Carlson mentioned it when he spoke of the case. Mr. Carlson also suspected something when he came out here, didn't he? About you?"

"So while he was out on the terrace, one of you gave a signal to our muscular friend Dubiel, down in the woods. He shot Carlson from there with the Turkish bow. Then he got out of town without being seen. Fred and Mrs. Avery put Carlson in here—Avery might have known about the wrong chair—and then you had your husband on two spots. You already had him fooled about the Free French—"

Avery said, "You can't say those things—"

"You mean I can't prove them? I have a magazine article about the Turkish bow. No doubt you read it. Dubiel is a man of parts. The arm-rest for the bow is here for the cops to find. The British are going to get nosy about O'Toole sooner or later and I was there when Dubiel kicked me to pieces and I'll swear

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## DETECTIVE TALES

I saw O'Toole's body in the tub. And of course there are Oliver Carlson's notes on the case—"

That was the shot he had been saving. Avery knew Carlson, knew his bulldog mind, his careful notation of everything. The cadaverous man wilted.

"It's no use," he said heavily. "I'm sick of it all. I was fooled into it. I disliked De Gaulle personally. I didn't know about the Nazi angle, Trout, until it was too late. You are right about everything."

The confession relaxed Dan. He was so happy about it, he almost lowered the gun.

**THE BODY** on the desk stirred, came to life, acted. The remarkable man, Dubiel, was kicking again. He kicked Dan in the belly and knocked him all the way across the room and into Betty. The breath went completely out of him so that he could not even say "Oof!"

Betty tumbled into the hall. Mary Gill dove for her pocketbook on the floor. Mrs. Avery grabbed at a drawer and produced a black automatic.

The French windows crashed. Mike Corbally said, "Well, now that'll do it. Never saw a fella kick like that. Hands up, everybody. Herman here likes to shoot people."

The two detectives crowded into the room. Herman was a huge, hook-nosed man with a gun in each hand. He gently nudged Mary Gill with one of them, knocking her weapon to the floor. Dan managed to fall back into Mrs. Avery and disarm her.

Mike said, "Well, Dan, you sure didn't have

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## SEE YOU AT MURDER MANSION!

too much on them. But it was enough. Herman took down Avery's confession. Herman is a stenographer."

Dubiel was crouched like a cat, looking wildly about for escape. Dan said, "I'm—sick of that—kicking fool."

Dubiel made a lunge for the door, his bloody lips foaming. Dan stepped forward. He swung his leg like in the old days, on the football field. He took Dubiel right under the chin. He lifted the Frenchman off his feet, turned him in mid-air and flopped him back on the desk. Mary Gill moaned and collapsed.

Herman said, "Geeze, that was purty. Betcha can't do it again!"

"I'm tired," said Dan. "I don't want to do it again. I want these characters in the pokey. I want electrocution."

"Well, now," said Mike reasonably. "We'll have to call local law. Herman and me are off duty, you know. Just thought we ought to take the ten o'clock and mebbe keep Miss Boulder company."

"I came early," said Betty. She was powdering her nose and refreshing the rouge on her wonderful lips. "I could ride back with you, though, Mike."

Dan looked at the girl. Then he looked at Mike. Then he looked down at his reddened wrists, his wrecked clothes. One eye was closing rapidly and he felt as though a mule had kicked him in the middle.

He decided not to tell them that the arm rest was a fake, rapidly manufactured by a mechanic friend of Mr. Antonelli's. It would clinch the case and if they did not call an expert no one would know the difference. And if they did, still no one would know whether this one had been used by Dubiel.

He decided to hell with everything. He said, "You can't make an omelette without breaking some eggs. Let's us get these characters in jail. I'm hungry and thirsty and while you two are riding to town I shall get plastered."

"Don't forget you're my partner," said Betty sternly. "Tomorrow there are three cases we have to decide about—"

"Yeah?" said Dan. "I decide about them now. The hell with them!"

He went out into the night. The stars twinkled at him. He thought about Oliver Carlson. He had been a good boss and a fine man. He had seen through the fake Free French. He had known that the gigolos were fake, that the whole thing was a plant to get Avery sucked into a deal where his influence could be used on the side of the Nazis. . . .

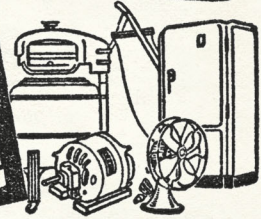
But Dan had no idea how his dead boss had done it. Dan was, he decided, too dumb to be a detective. . . .

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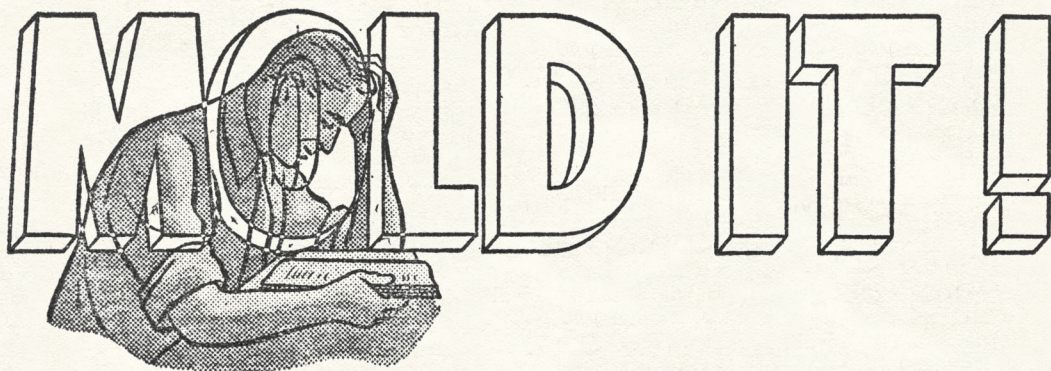
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry, Analytical                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Practical Telephony                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Welding, Gas and Electric                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry, Industrial                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegraph Engineering                               | <b>Radio School</b>                                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry, Mfg. Iron & Steel                           | <b>Internal Combustion Engines School</b>                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Electronics                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Certified Public Accounting                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plastics                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Technician <input type="checkbox"/> Aviation   | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio, General                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> City Letter Carrier                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pulp and Paper Making                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Diesel-Electric                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio Operating                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> College Proprietary                               |
| <b>Civil Engineering, Architectural and Mining Schools</b>                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Diesel Engines <input type="checkbox"/> Gas Engines | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio Servicing                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial                                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Drafting                                 | <b>Mechanical Schools</b>                                                    | <b>Railroad School</b>                                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Cost Accounting                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture                                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Aeronautical Engineering                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Air Brake <input type="checkbox"/> Car Inspector | <input type="checkbox"/> Federal Tax                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge and Building Foreman                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Airplane Drafting                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Locomotive Engineer                              | <input type="checkbox"/> First Year College                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge Engineering                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Flight Engineer                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Locomotive Fireman                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Foremanship                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building Estimating                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Foundry Work                                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Railroad Section Foreman                         | <input type="checkbox"/> French <input type="checkbox"/> Good English      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Engineering <input type="checkbox"/> Coal Mining | <input type="checkbox"/> Heat Treatment of Metals                            | <b>Steam Engineering Schools</b>                                          | <input type="checkbox"/> High School                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contracting and Building                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Engineering                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Boilermaking                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Higher Mathematics                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Highway Engineering                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Metallurgy                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Combustion Engineering                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Illustrating                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lumber Dealer                                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Drafting                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Engine Running                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Motor Traffic                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sanitary Engineering                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Engineering                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Marine Engineering                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Post Office Clerk                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Drafting                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Mold-Loft Work                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Electric                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Postal Clerk                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineering                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Patternmaking                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Engines                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship <input type="checkbox"/> Secretarial |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading Shop Blueprints                             | <b>Textile School</b>                                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish                                           |
|                                                                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheet-Metal Drafting                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Cotton Manufacturing                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenography                                       |
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